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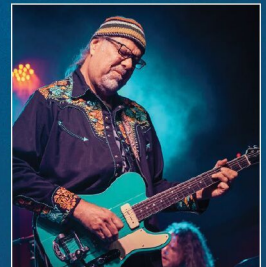
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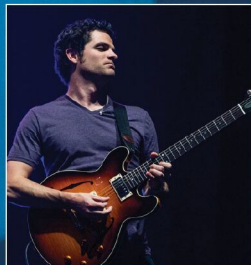
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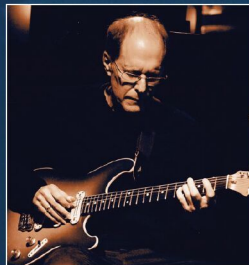
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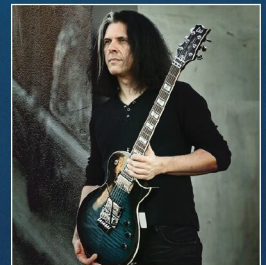
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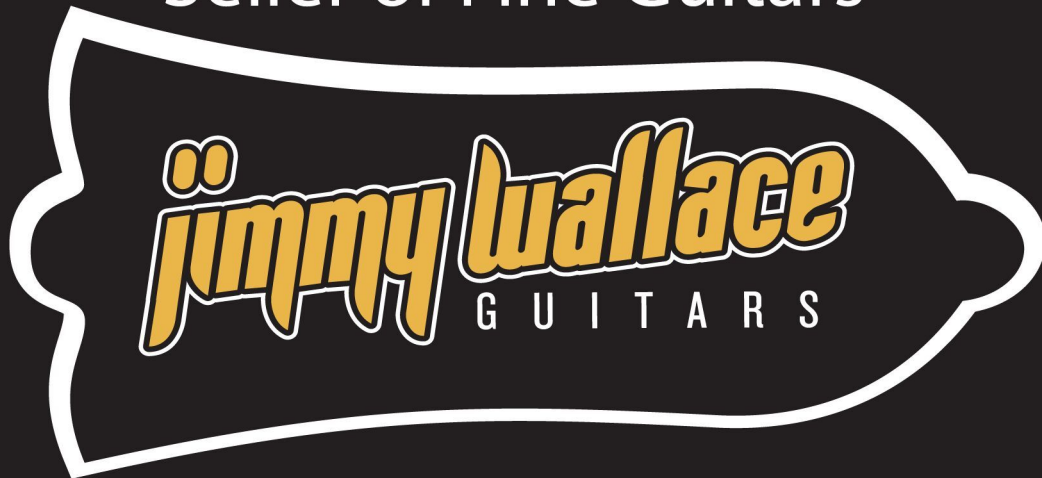
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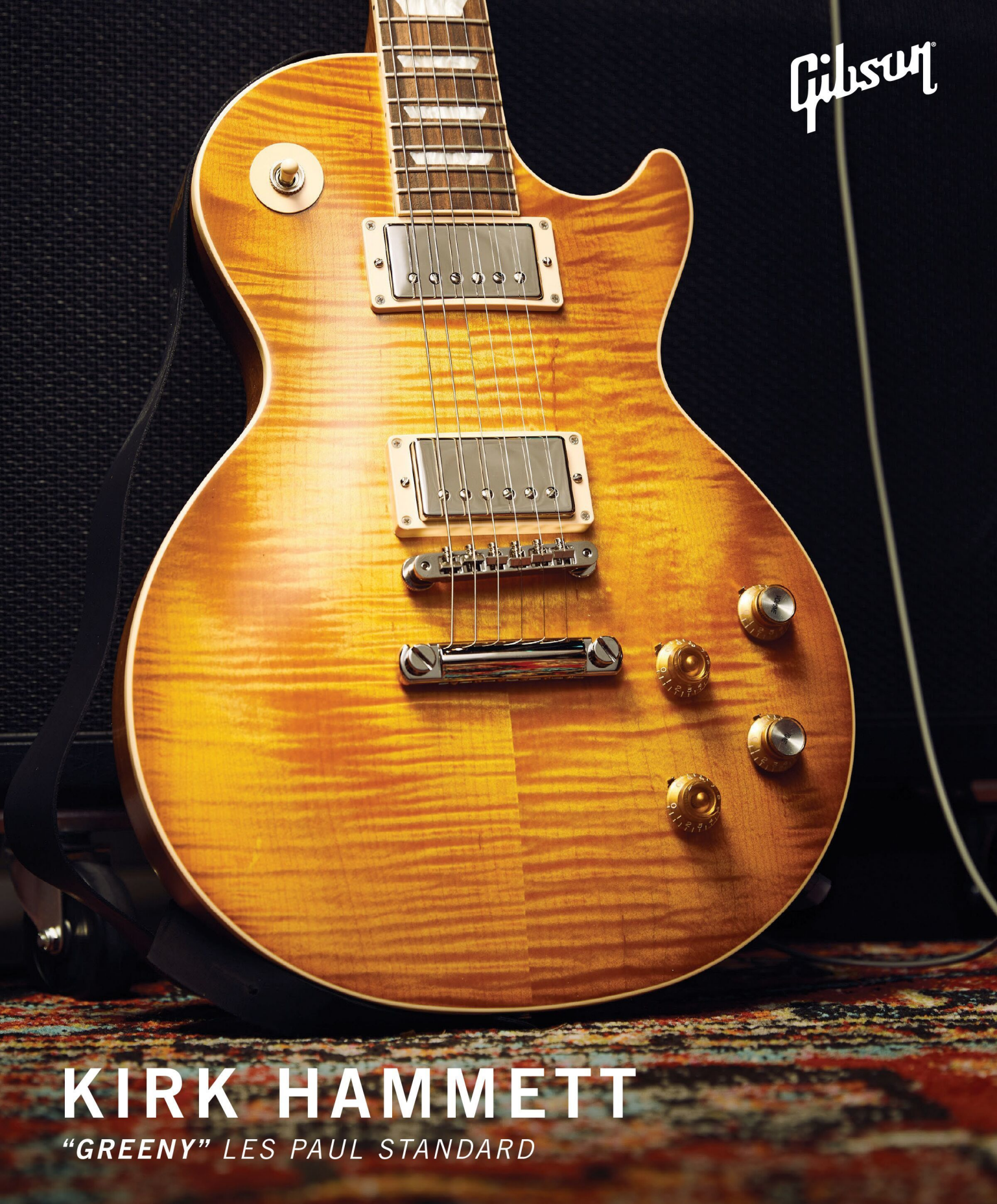
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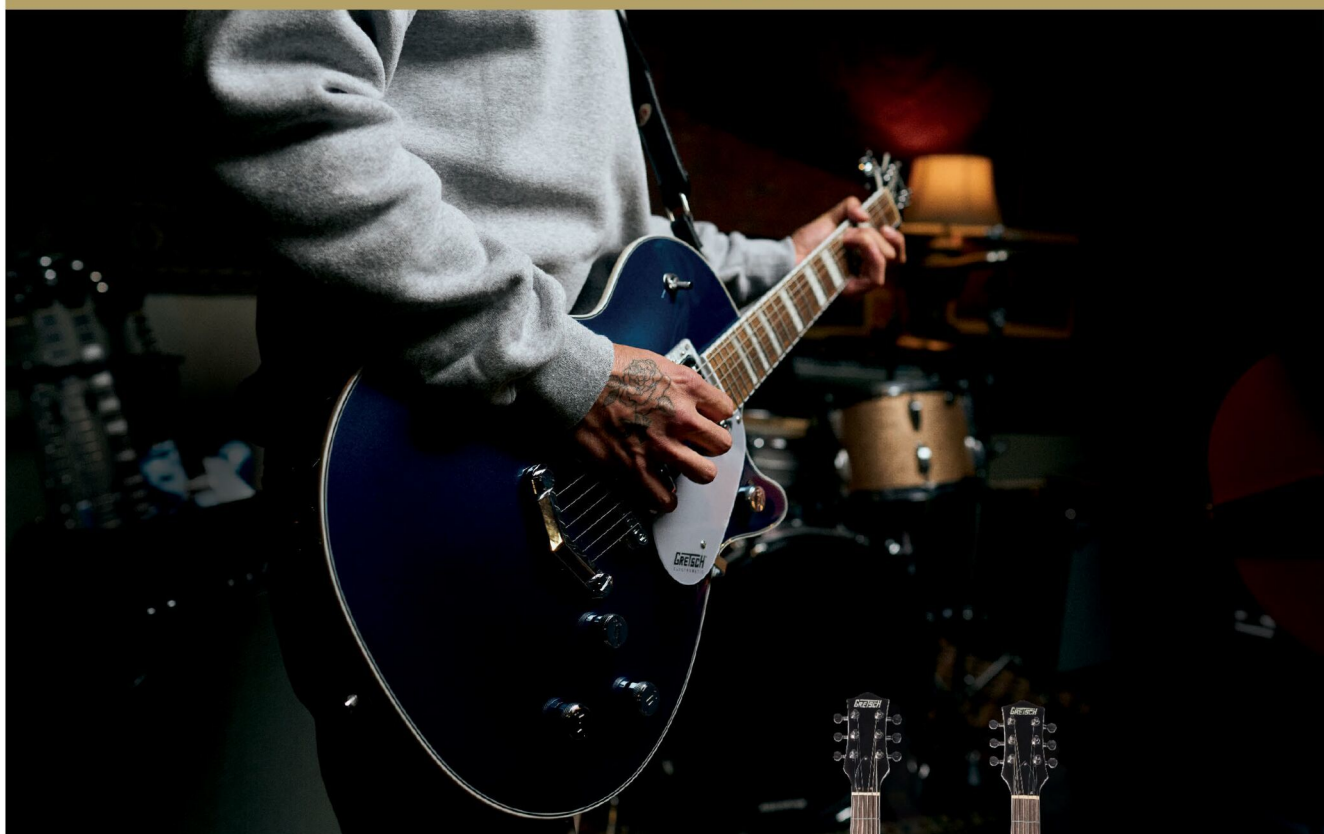


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READER MAIL

MORE MARTY

Thank you for the wonderful article in the April issue on Marty Stuart. Dan Forte described Marty perfectly as “a captivating story teller.” During a recent Superlatives concert in Clearwater, Florida, Marty told many beautiful stories. One was about his lifelong friendship with Johnny Cash, being in Johnny’s band, as Johnny’s best friend and next-door neighbor. He talked about sitting on Johnny’s front porch, playing and singing songs for him two weeks before Johnny died. Two was a story about Johnny’s wife throwing his wheelchair off a bridge after his funeral, perhaps to symbolize his freedom after being restrained by it for the latter part of his life.

The Superlatives are an amazing band. Every member is an incredible musician, singer, and talent and there is no ego involved. And, Marty played the Clarence White ’54 Tele. What a treat, and a memorable evening.

Thanks again for the great interview and photos. I really enjoy your magazine.

Karen Dam
Walnut Creek, California

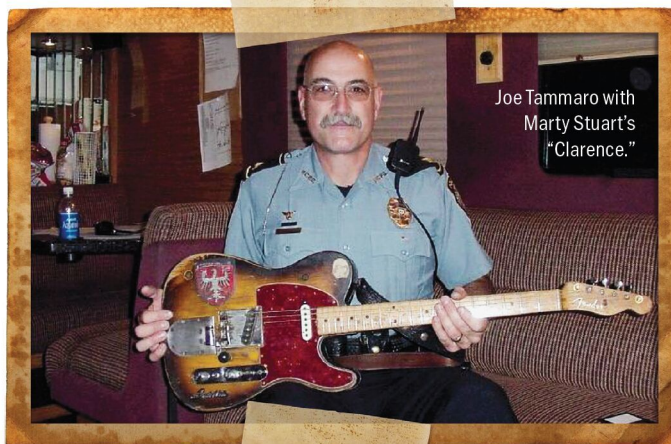
I was excited to see Marty Stuart on the cover again. In the early 2000s, I worked security detail at one of his concerts and was lucky enough to hang with him on his tour bus before the show. He was a true gentleman and a great host. He let me check out the Clarence White B-Bender Tele and other instruments.

We talked for a few hours about music and gear, then he and his band put on a stellar performance. All of us in the guitar community are very grateful for your coverage of such great artists. We hope you do it for a long time.

Joe Tammaro
Jackson, Georgia

CLASSICS CLUB

I love getting VG every month and have been a faithful subscriber for quite a few years. All of the articles, interviews, and pictures are interesting, fun, and informative, but I especially enjoy “Classics.” Every time I read a story about how someone obtained a guitar or even recovered one that “got away,” I’m moved to tears. That’s exactly how I felt after reading about Gio da Silva and Kim Simmonds’ Les Paul (April ’23).



Stories like this make me happy to be part of the VG community.

Joe Fluken
Lone Tree, Colorado

ROULETTE ROLE

After hearing Fred Roulette play live with the Charles Musselwhite Blues Band at the Attic in Eugene, Oregon, circa 1969, I purchased *Tennessee Woman*, which credits, “Fred Roulette, steel guitar” on the back. But I did not hear any steel guitar on the album. Disappointed, I filed it away until reading your (April ’23) obituary. While Fred is pictured on the back of the album, Larry Welker plays guitar throughout.

Chuck Risser
Portland, Oregon

(Ed. Note: Freddie’s role on *Tennessee Woman* was apparently limited, but if you listen closely you’ll hear his fills in the verses of “I Don’t Play, I’ll Be Your Man” and on the live track, “I’m a Stranger.”)

YAY, “HISS”

It was great to see the [May ’23 “Pop ’N Hiss” feature] on the J. Geils Band’s “Live” *Full House*. Outside of the Allmans’ *Fillmore East* and James Brown’s *Live At The Apollo 1962*, it’s the best live album ever made.

After making our first album, our first show as a warm-up band was with Geils in Omaha. We were so excited! Thanks for the memory.

Dave Hope
Destin, Florida

(Ed. Note: Hope is the co-founder/bassist in *Kansas*, and was part of the April ’23 “Pop ’N Hiss” feature on the band’s *Leftoverture* album.)

MARSHALL, STACKED

I was lucky enough to see the second Jeff Beck Group (“Fretprints,” March ’23) at the Hollywood Palladium in August of 1972, when I was 19. It was a great show; Argent and Foghat were the opening acts, and the JBG were astounding, with great interplay between Jeff and Max Middleton. The two albums they made are a couple of my favorites from that time. Thanks for the great magazine.

John Ringnell
Tucson, Arizona

Thanks for Wolf Marshall’s “Fretprints” on Kim Simmonds (April ’23). In my opinion, Kim is right up there in the pantheon of Brit blues guitarists, every bit the equal of Clapton, Beck, and Page.

I was lucky enough to open for Kim a couple of times, once with the last incarnation of Savoy Brown, and once during one of his solo tours. After that solo show, I mentioned to Kim that I was disappointed he didn’t do any of the acoustic fingerstyle blues he had recorded on his own label; he was a master of that genre, as well. He said that folks only wanted to hear the hits.

I was pleased when, six months later, a review of one of his shows later in that tour said Simmonds did a mini-set of fingerstyle blues and it was well-received. I hope that I was a small part of his decision to include some of that fine work. He will be missed.

Dennis Roger Reed
San Clemente, California

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Being on a fixed income, beautiful vintage Fenders, Gibsons, and Mosrites are the stuff of dreams. Just the same, I want to get in on the fun, and scouring flea markets, obscure music shops, and keeping my eyes and ears open makes it possible to find interesting guitars. Beating the bushes in 1996, I found a set-neck Gibson double-cut, a Memphis, a Sho-Bud Maverick, and a Vega archtop.

I appreciate what you do, so keep up the good work.

Joe Buckley
Attleboro, Massachusetts

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FIRST FRET



Gretchen Menn

MENN HONORED AT SHE ROCKS

The Women's International Music Network (WiMN) honored guitarist Gretchen Menn with its Inspire Award at the annual She Rocks Awards ceremony, April 13 in Anaheim, California.

Menn is a founding member of Zepparella and has performed as a solo artist throughout the U.S. and at guitar festivals in Switzerland and Germany. She has released two albums of original guitar-based instrumentals, and a third is in-progress.

SKYNYRD KEEPS ROLLIN'

Lynyrd Skynyrd band members and the estates of those involved for the past 50 years recently announced the band will continue to perform after the passing of Gary Rossington on March 5.

"Gary was always the first to say, 'Skynyrd's music is bigger than me or any one person,'" said Rossington's widow, Dale. "He made it known at every chance to express how timeless the music was, and it was always his goal to keep the music alive for his brothers because that was always their dream."

This summer, the band is doing a 25-city tour with ZZ Top beginning July 21 in West Palm Beach, Florida, intertwined with a series of festival and fair dates across the country.



ANA POPOVIC

Relentless

Rising victoriously after 14 cancer treatments, Ana Popovic continues to push the boundaries of blues-rock. Her latest album tells the tale of strength and perseverance. Full-throttle blues-rock guitar stylings intertwine with funk, R&B, and gospel – but *Power* is more than a guitar-centric tour de force; it's a call for brotherhood, empowerment, and love.

How did the process begin for *Power*?

Buthel Burns is my music director and bass player. He never wrote songs before. The way he talks is funny and incredible, and different. At some point, I thought, "He has some valuable sentences. Let me start writing them down." I explained to him how songwriting works, and we were off and running. I don't want cliché writers. I worked with Nashville

writers, and I don't want to hear sentences they use in other people's music. I want something new.

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was ready to put the whole thing on hold. That's when Buthel said, "We're writing. We gotta touch people with our music." So we scheduled a Zoom meeting and started writing that same day. We spent a lot of time on the road with the band, and there's no subject we can't talk about – from racial issues to homelessness. These are things that touch us. We love what we do and how we are toward life. We want to live our lives to the fullest so that one day we can look back and say, "Damn, maybe we didn't do it, but we gave it a good shot." All these thoughts are in these songs.

Your cancer diagnosis brought fire to this record.

The biggest thing was realizing that you might not be doing this forever; maybe I'll give myself this one record, then retire and see what I'm going to do. Approaching the record with that idea was like, "Oh my God! What do I want to tell the world? What is the message? What do I want to bring out?" Cancer treatments taught me that we have so much time on our hands and use so little of it.

Power goes from funk and R&B to blues. Then there's "Flicker & Flame," which is so heavy.

I wanted every song to be different. I wanted a rock tune – "Flicker & Flame" – like Hendrix. It's just bass drums and guitar and rocking out. It's about two people who can't live with each other and can't live without each other. I have friends like that, which is where I got the inspiration. They push each other's buttons. They live for years like that. So we went edgy and did it Hendrix's way.

There's also gospel music on the record. I discovered gospel in the Detroit church scene. They play so incredibly. I would move to Detroit in a second. We recorded many of the songs there with Chris Coleman, an incredible drummer who played with everyone from Stevie Wonder to Chaka Kahn. It's a rich musical place around Detroit.

Are you concerned about losing fans because you're stepping outside blues-rock?

If your fans are unwilling to evolve with you, they should look elsewhere. We just played a tour, and I've never seen such excitement about the new songs. They usually want to hear something from the past. Not this time. It's bluesy enough – the Detroit sound. It's the Stevie Wonder thing we all heard growing up. It's a big part of American culture. Maybe they didn't expect it from me, but so far, the feedback from the new songs fit right in – the soul, funk, and blues.

Was there a main guitar for Power?

I used my '64 Strat, my two reissue Strats, and a Les Paul, which is very unusual. I have to look into Gibsons. Robben Ford let me borrow his on the previous record. I love Les Pauls. I used a D'Angelico on a few tracks for some jazzy licks on "Recipe Is Romance." That track has a combination of the D'Angelico and a Yamaha nylon-string. Mainly, though, it's my '64 Strat.

What's your favorite effects pedal?

I love the original Tube Screemers. I have two and don't leave the house without them. I have an MXR Super Badass Distortion I use with them, and also like the old Boss chorus pedals, delay, and wah. I've played a lot of wahs in my life, but unfortunately, they have a short lifespan.

"Rise Up" is such a big song.

Kenny Wayne Shepherd wrote that. It has such urgency as far as lyrics. I made it into an anthem. I'm bothered by social issues and don't have the stomach for injustice. I raise my children to treat everyone right and be open-minded. We kept the lyrics and did something different with the music. It's my favorite bass line on the record. I wish I had written that song, but it was such a good match. – **Oscar Jordan**

John Teagle: Chris Butler.

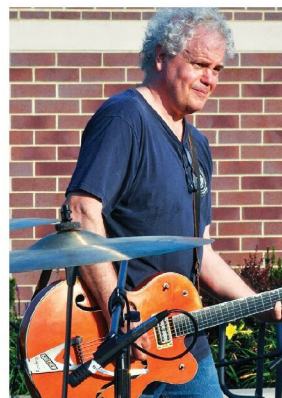


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IN MEMORIAM



JOHN TEAGLE

Guitarist, historian, and author John Teagle passed away March 26 in New York at age 66 after battling cancer.

Teagle recalled being "Born at the height of the original rock-and-roll era" in Akron, Ohio, and came of age in the late '70s/early

'80s "Akron Sound" era, working in music shops and venues, including running sound for local bands Devo and The Dead Boys.

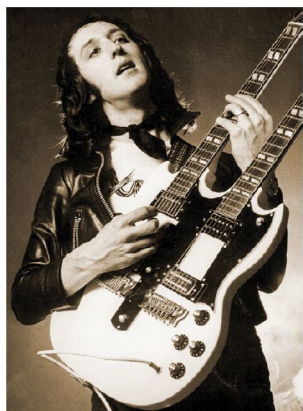
Teagle's first guitar was a '66 Gibson Melody Maker before he acquired the '59 Gretsch Model 6120 that became his lifetime companion. Seeped in early rockabilly, surf, and twang styles in the early '80s, he formed the Red Rocket Gang, which became Johnny Clamptett and The Walkers. The band built a local following and opened for the Stray Cats, Smithereens, and Los Lobos. Re-named The Walking Clamptetts in '85, they mostly covered '50s and '60s rock songs, but recorded original material in the late '80s for an unreleased album.

The group disbanded in 1990, when Teagle moved

IN MEMORIAM

to New York, working for a time at Chelsea Guitars, in Manhattan. A voracious collector of vintage instruments (especially pre-war solidbody electric guitars) and related catalogs and publications, he did groundbreaking research into the early history of the electric guitar and co-authored (with John Sprung) *Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years* and *Washburn: Over One Hundred Years Of Fine Stringed Instruments*. He also contributed to several magazines, including *VG*, and was gathering material for a book on the origins of amplified sound.

Teagle's later bands included the Vice Royals and Purple Knif, a surf/twang outfit. He is survived by his wife, Mary, a daughter, and three siblings. – **Peter Stuart Kohman**



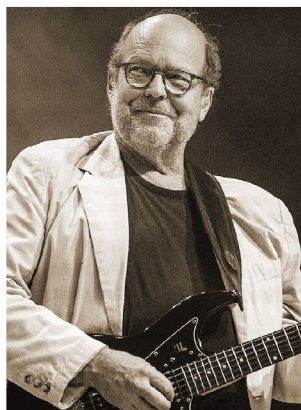
IAN BAIRNSON

Guitarist Ian Bairnson, a member of the Alan Parsons Project who played on the band's 10 studio albums from 1976 through '87, then on several Parsons solo albums, died April 7. He was 69 and battled dementia.

A Scotland native, Bairnson was working as session musician when he met Parsons, who was producing Pilot's 1974 debut album. Bairnson played on the hit "Magic," then joined the group. He also played on several Kate

Bush albums and her signature U.K. chart-topping single, "Wuthering Heights."

Other sessions included with Jon Anderson, Bucks Fizz, Mick Fleetwood, Kenny Rogers, Tom Jones, and more. Live, he played with Eric Clapton, Sting, and others. His highlight APP efforts include "I Wouldn't Want to Be Like You," "Games People Play," the hypnotic instrumental "Sirius," and the intro to "Eye in the Sky." Parsons credited Bairnson for having recognized the song's hit potential. – **Bret Adams**



LASSE WELLANDER

Lasse Wellander, longtime guitarist in ABBA and a renowned studio and solo musician, died April 7. He was 70 and briefly battled cancer.

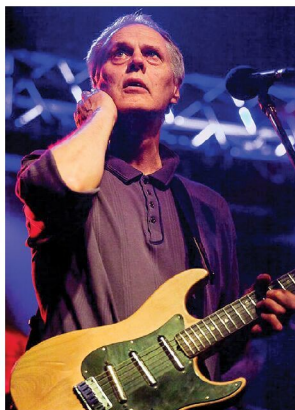
Wellander grew up in Nora, Sweden, and started playing guitar as a youngster in the '60s. After moving through a handful of bands, he joined a touring group that backed singer Ted Gärdestad for a summer tour in 1973; two bandmates were Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, who also had a vocal group that became ABBA with the release of its second album, 1974's *Waterloo*. A month later, Wellander was invited to become its studio and touring guitarist and he held the gig through the band's heyday while also

recording his own albums and playing on a host of other notable recordings in Sweden.

After ABBA dissolved in '82, Wellander continued working with Ulvaeus and Andersson, played in several bands, and played on the 1983 Agnetha Fältskog album *Wrap Your Arms Around Me*.

From '75 through '92, he recorded six solo album, two of which entered the Swedish Top 40 charts in the '80s. In '92, he had a radio hit with his instrumental version of the Chess song "Anthem." In 2004, he played on Fältskog's *My Colouring Book*.

In '05, Wellander received the Albin Hagström Memorial Award from The Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In '17, he resumed releasing new original music, and in '18 was presented the Swedish Musicians Union's Studioräven Award. In '21, he played on ABBA's *Voyage*. – **Ward Meeker**



TOM VERLAINE

Tom Verlaine, co-founder of the influential garage/new-wave band Television, died January 28. He was 73 and passed after a battle with prostate cancer that had metastasized.

Born Thomas Miller in Denville, New Jersey, he studied piano as a child, followed by saxophone in middle school, then guitar

after hearing the Rolling Stones. While attending prep school in Delaware, he met Richard Meyers and the two bonded over their passion for music and poetry. Eventually, they moved to New York City, where they wrote and published poetry under the assumed surnames of Hell and Verlaine. In 1972, they tried to form a punk band, but failed to find a second guitarist. The following year, they met Richard Lloyd and formed Television, quickly becoming part of the city's music scene. As musicians, Hell and Verlaine proved incompatible, and Verlaine kicked Hell out of the band in '75.

In '77, Television released its first album, *Marquee Moon*, followed by *Adventure* in '78. The music was marked by tightly structured chord-based riffs (played by Lloyd on a Strat, Verlaine usually on a Jazzmaster), countermelodies, and lead work put to use in songs that were more-fluid and lyrically nuanced than those of its NYC peers (and fellow CBGBs regulars) in Blondie, the Ramones, B-52s, and the Patti Smith Group.

After Television disbanded in mid '78, Verlaine continued to create music that was highly improvisational, keying on the sounds of a Jazzmaster or Jaguar running through Fender and Vox amps. By 1992's *Warm and Cool*, his repertoire also included a hollowbody Kustom, a Strat, a solidbody Framus with flatwound strings, a Vox solidbody, and a Danelectro.

From '79 through 2006, he released nine albums and one anthology, none of it with the intent of achieving fame or stardom. He also wrote film scores and occasionally performed with Smith. Television reunited in '92 and recorded a self-titled album, disbanded, then did occasional shows in the 2000s. – **Ward Meeker**

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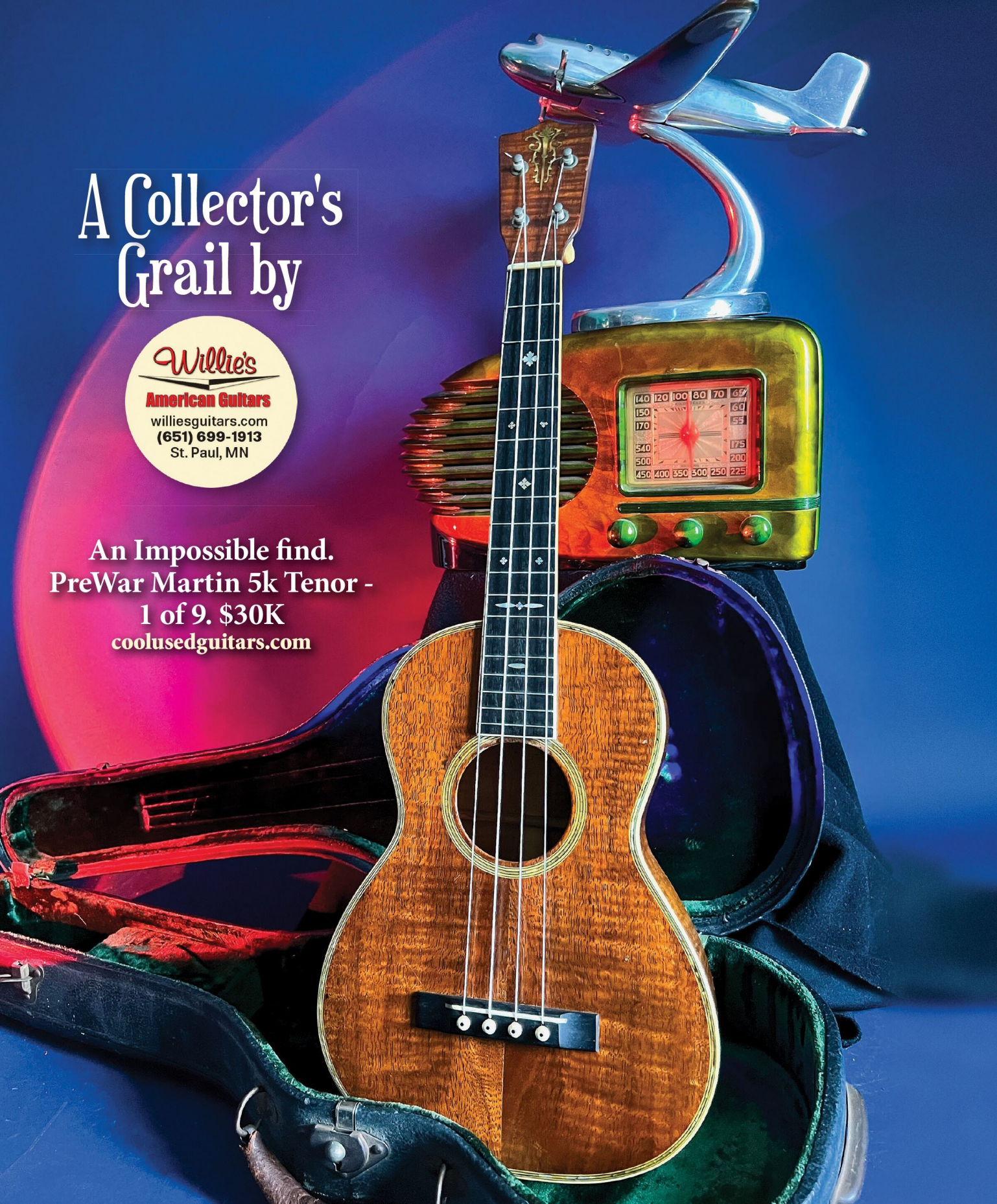
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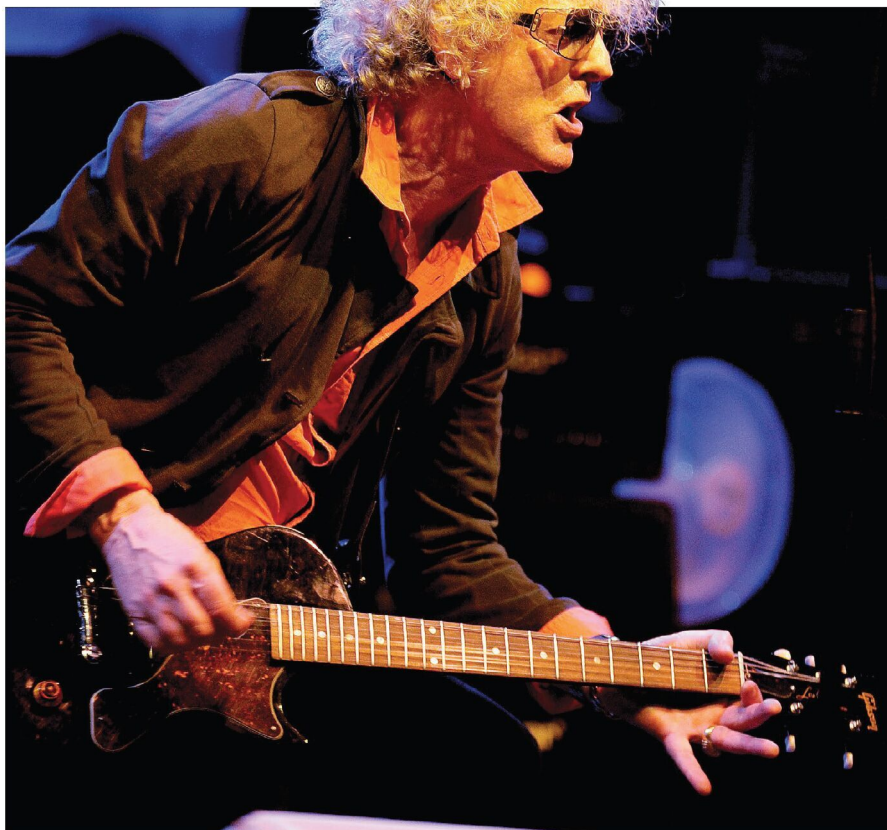
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IAN HUNTER

Defying the Odds

Taking advantage of the time off in the early days of the pandemic, Ian Hunter hunkered down in his Connecticut home studio to craft a few dozen new tunes. Initially unable to develop the songs beyond demo status, Hunter's friends and admirers around the globe joined the cause from their home studios, contributing to an album roster that reads like a who's who of modern music.

With collaborators including Ringo Starr, Slash, Mike Campbell, Todd Rundgren, Billy Gibbons, Jeff Beck, and a slew of others, *Defiance Part 1* might be the most star-studded original album ever recorded.

Your fans were thrilled when it was announced you'd written a cache of new songs. How'd they come about?

The pandemic fueled it. We did the Mott '74 tour in 2019, then four nights at City

Winery (New York City) for my 80th birthday. Shortly after, I woke up with tinnitus and Covid hit around the same time, so I was stuck in the house. I started writing. At the same time, I was talking with (friend and photographer) Ross Halfin, and he said, "Slash fancies doing a track, Billy Gibbons, too..." It just sort of fluked its way on from there. My manager, Mike Kobayashi, knows everybody in the business, and now I do, too. Some volunteered, some we asked. For example, Andy York and I were in the basement doing "Bed of Roses," and we thought, "Let's try for Ringo," and it went from there.

"Bed of Roses" has a great slide part from Mike Campbell that really has a George Harrison feel.

I had a smile on my face when Mike sent that track, which is mainly about The Star Club, in Hamburg, a great club.

Your guests did parts in their own studios, but there's a cohesiveness that sounds like a great rock and roll band performing together.

Part of that is sending the right tracks for the right people, to find what suits them, like, "This would be good for Todd Rundgren. This might work for Slash."

Were you writing on both piano and guitar?

I wrote two on my Martin and the rest on piano. On "Defiance," I tracked acoustic guitar then sent it to the engineer, and it came back sounding like a Les Paul. Then Slash did his parts for the tune, which sounded lovely against Dane Clark's snare drum.

Rock and roll has always been about the spirit of defiance. What does the word mean to you?

It means that I'm not supposed to be doing it at my age, so I'm doing it... and if you're going to call it that, it's got to be good (laughs).

Your new single "I Hate Hate" has a pumping, Jerry Lee Lewis feel, yet sounds very contemporary.

That's me playing piano, with Jeff Tweedy on guitar and bass, and Dennis DiBrizzi from The Rant Band on background vocals. Andy Burton also plays some keys.

Defiance Part 1 is on Sun Records. How'd that come about?

I wanted it real bad, and Sun got hold of my manager. As a kid, I didn't know what I was for until I heard Jerry Lee Lewis on Sun Records. I was in Nashville not long ago and I talked with Jimmy Van Eaton, the drummer on "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On." It was a big deal for me, because that's where it all started. So when I saw my name on that label, it was a huge buzz. Of course, we just lost Jerry Lee Lewis.

Speaking of musicians we've lost, "No Hard Feelings" might be the final recording of Jeff Beck, one of your favorite guitarists. Does he play both the solos and that great hook of a repeating slide riff?

The slide part is Johnny Depp – he knows how to play! Jeff plays the middle and end solo. *Defiance 2* will contain the last track Jeff played on, "The Third Rail." That record is about 60 percent done, but now that Andy York is back on the road with John Mellencamp, we'll have to wait to complete it.

Andy plays a prominent role as both musician and producer. Is he helping with arrangements, as well?

Oh yeah, we did them in my basement as demos, and he's very good to work with because he's hyper critical and doesn't let anything go. Andy came around with a computer and a little black box, and recorded all of these tracks. What you hear are the original demos, with others' parts added on, and it worked! – **Tom Guerra**

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JOEL HOEKSTRA

Road Warrior

The busiest man in hard rock, Joel Hoekstra spends his life touring, recording, and jamming with Whitesnake, Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Iconic, and pop icon Cher. In-between, he joined Revolution Saints, the power trio led by Journey drummer Deen Castronovo and just delivered the powerhouse effort *Eagle Flight*.

How did you land the Revolution Saints gig?

Well, Doug Aldrich decided he was stepping aside and basically recommended that I come [play guitar]. Luckily, I have a good relation-

ship with everyone at Frontiers Music, Deen Castronovo, and [Foreigner/Dokken bassist] Jeff Pilson, so the stars aligned. I've known Deen since I was in Night Ranger and we opened for Journey. Oddly enough, Deen, Jeff, and myself were on a tour together in 2011; I even ended up filling in for Mick Jones of Foreigner for a bit, so I've worked with Jeff, as well. That was a big tour – about 20,000 fans every night for months.

You and Doug seem to move in the same circles. Have you ever worked together, or do you just replace each other in bands?

(laughs) I guess people see the long blond hair and Les Paul goldtop, and figure we have similarities. Whatever the case, Doug's great and I think it's cool that we have a friendship, not a rivalry. Life's too short for that s**t.

How did you break into the sideman world? What skills did you bring to the table?

My philosophy is to work hard on a daily basis and see where everything goes; I've always had an open mind regarding what type of work I do with music. That's why I've worked with Cher, played in the pits on Broadway or with hip-hop and acid-jazz bands, and released my own albums. It just so happens that the thing that took off for me was playing the music that inspired me to start playing.

***Eagle Flight* is a guitar-intensive album, with lots of layers. How will you pull that off in concert?**

Kyle Gass is teaching me how to grow extra arms, like he did during the "Master Exploder" scene from *The Pick of Destiny* (laughs). For shows, I guess we'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Hey, Jimmy Page played lots of overdubs, as well – there's nothing wrong with stripping it down a bit live.

Obviously there's a musical connection to Journey's style of melodic hard rock. How do you convey a melodic, powerful vibe without sounding like Neal Schon?

My runs are really quite different from Neal's. I tend to use more legato, hybrid picking, and tapping as far as active phrases, while he alternate-picks quite a bit. Neal has always been an influence on me though as far as playing melodic hooks. I listened to Journey's *Greatest Hits* a ridiculous amount as a younger man. Neal is a phenomenal player and has been very good to me.

What gear did you use on the album?

I really only used my Les Paul goldtop, Jackson PC-1, and my Taylor Builder's Series for acoustic stuff. I tracked everything in my apartment, so it's modeling and plug-ins. On tour, I'll opt for real amps.

How many gigs do you play in a year? It can't be easy to be a touring musician and living out of a suitcase.

Well, it depends on the year. In 2019, I was on the road for 285 days. There were years when *Rock of Ages* was running eight shows a week on Broadway and TSO was doing eight shows a week on tour, so I had more gigs than there were days in the year. Recording, collaboration videos, and virtual teaching became more important after Covid, while touring fell back to more-reasonable levels. But in '23 I'll play about 125 shows. I'll also record five or six records, do loads of sessions, and teach about 20 lessons a week.

Describe the differences between your various gigs. How is your role in Cher's band different from, say, Whitesnake?

Every gig has different responsibilities. With Cher, the band is in the background, on the bandstand, for 95 percent of the gig. There are a few step-out moments with her or on my own that carry tremendous pressure. With Whitesnake and Trans-Siberian Orchestra, I perform visually quite a bit. Also, with Whitesnake I sing backing vocals and don't with the other two.

Seriously, what is Cher like?

Cher's great. Very professional and focused, yet sometimes does things like take everyone to the movies. So, there you are at the theater, standing next to Cher – who's waiting in line for popcorn! – **Pete Prown**

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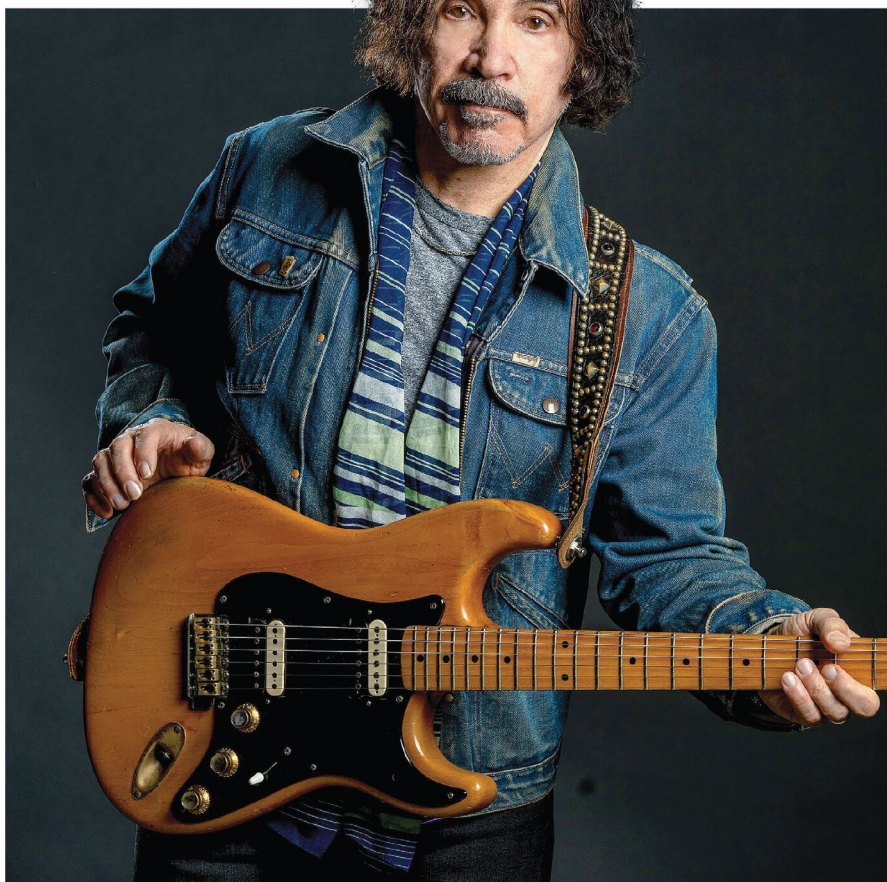
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JOHN OATES

Rhythm-Minded

From 1975 through '85, John Oates and Daryl Hall created a trove of era-defining R&B-influenced pop/rock hits on the way to being inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Singer/songwriter/guitarist Oates is releasing 12 new songs – one per month for a year – via digital outlets, with guest guitarists including Tom Bukovac, Guthrie Trapp, and Shane Theriot.

Why are you skipping releasing new music on CD or vinyl?

I have seven solo albums. If you went into my basement, you'd see a wall full of boxes of CDs that never sold. I think the modern world has moved beyond physical recordings. I don't think it matters that much anymore.

Are the songs new?

Some are totally new, and some are covers. A lot were written during the pandemic. Some were ideas I had sitting around in my digital files. I revisited them when I had time.

What is the guitar's role in your music?

I'm essentially a rhythm player. I use the guitar as accompaniment for songs and my voice. I've gotten a little better at playing leads over the years, but I'm not really a very good soloist. I don't think of myself that way. I think of the guitar as a rhythmic instrument, especially acoustic guitar; I like to play in a percussive style – I think of it almost like a drum. I want to be in sync with the feel of the drum and bass groove. That's a very central part of it.

I have a lot of acoustic guitars for different sounds and I'm very particular about choosing the right one for the right moment. When I

write a song, and I'm writing on guitar 99 percent of the time, I want to be able to perform that song on acoustic guitar. If I can't, I think there's something inherently weak in the composition and structure.

What are some of the especially interesting guitar parts in the new songs?

I wrote "Disconnected" in G tuning. That's why there's a lot of really cool modal overtones in it – open-string stuff. Actually, the tuning inspired the writing.

I recorded my version of a Timmy Thomas song, "Why Can't We Live Together," from 1972. I thought because it's an anti-war song written during the Vietnam War, it was perfect considering what's going on in Ukraine. It's a very timely message. I played a Coral Vincent Bell electric sitar I've had since the '70s.

"Dreaming About Brazil" is bossa nova translated through Philadelphia R&B! I played that on a '67 Gibson ES-125 with a P-90. That's Wendy Moten singing. She's one of my best friends and has toured with me.

She also was runner-up on "The Voice" two years ago.

"Reggae Maneater" came about because when I wrote the original chorus for "Maneater" it was written as a reggae song. When Daryl and I recorded it, it was his idea to change the groove, and I'm glad he did. It made it a much more accessible pop song. I always wanted to record it, and I have a very good friend who's a Jamaican producer and we talked about it. He said, "Let's go to Jamaica and cut it with the legends of reggae." I'm going to come out with a mini-documentary about the recording of this. It's fantastic.

On Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," that's the same '67 ES-125. I wanted to make that feel like a '70s R&B track, similar to what Daryl and I would've cut in the early '70s.

I'm using a Carter Family strum on "When Carolina Comes Home Again." It's something Maybelle Carter invented, but I'm doing it in double time.

Which other guitars did you use?

I played mostly acoustic using a few different ones, including a custom Martin 00-18. The Taylor GTe has been my go-to for live shows. Electrics were the 125, the '58 Strat I've been using since the '70s, and a John Suhr HSS that I really like.

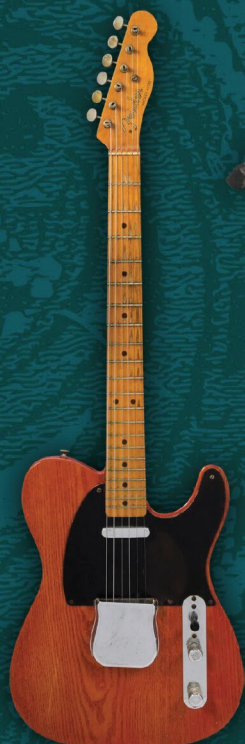
I'm not one of those crazy guitar collectors. I don't want to own a guitar just to own it. I have a lot of guitars, and pretty much every one has a function. It does something I'll use in some way, shape, or form. – **Bret Adams**

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JOE LOUIS WALKER

All-Original Blues

A member of the Blues Hall of Fame, Joe Louis Walker's music always has unmistakable blues elements. His latest album, *Weight of the World*, also brings vintage soul, funk, jazz, and even symphonic sounds inspired by a challenge from producer Eric Corne.

What spurred your approach to making *Weight of the World*?

Eric approached me a few years ago and

said, "I'd like to do a record with you, with all original material." Of the last 30 albums I've done under my own name, the first six or seven were all original, but I've done a lot of project albums and different things with jazz musicians and guests. It made me go back to square one and create something, get the band, come up with arrangements, do the harmony parts, and make it sound fresh. That was the real challenge.

Which track are you most proud of, guitar-wise?

I like "Hello, It's the Blues," because I play a nylon-string. Where a lot of people would play an electric guitar and sort of shred on the outro, I wanted to do something understated, where guitar was back and forth with the violins. It's an orchestration, and I really liked bringing it all together the way I heard it in my mind. It's different. If you're expecting the song to be a lot of shred, it's not. But I get a few notes in there (laughs).

What gear did you use on the album?

I used several amps, mostly a small Quilter and one from Italy – the DV Mark Frank Gambale model. I didn't use a lot of pedals; auto wah for one song, and a phase/flanger on the rhythm guitar once or twice. I think I used a little boost on one. I get most of my pedals from Dunlop; I've been working with them for years.

The guitars I used were mostly Zemaitis – my pearl-front and my pirate guitar with three pickups and swords painted on the front. It has a push/pull pot to get more oomph. I have a semi-hollow Zemaitis that has a unique sound. You can get feedback without getting out of control. I also used an Epiphone ES-355 B.B. King, and a Strat when I went to Eric's studio in L.A. You can hear it on "Bed of Roses."

How did you begin playing Zemaitis guitars?

I was in L.A., doing some shows, and I contacted their rep because I wanted to get one of those metal-front guitars. They put Filter'trons in one for me and that thing sounds so good. It's totally unique. I started looking at the wood – they use African mahogany on some of their higher-end guitars. And you'd think the metal front would affect the sound, but it doesn't in a bad way. Even with the pearl-front, they have some crunch, and I could get a bunch of different sounds.

How does the Zemaitis compare to a Les Paul?

To me, there's nothing that can compare to a Les Paul that's "broke in" right. You can copy a goldtop, but nothing is going to sound like it. You can get a '57, '58, or '59 copy from the Custom Shop and it may sound a little bit like it, but there's no shortcut for wood that's 60 years old. There's no shortcut for the blood, sweat, and tears that went into it. I have several really good Les Pauls, and I play them in the studio once in a while. But I'm getting older now and I cannot bear that crutch (laughs) – they are heavy, man. I've got one from the '70s – sunburst with the '60s neck – and it's so heavy it's like "Whew!" But it sounds so good. I took it out for gigs and played one or two songs then told it, "You're a studio guitar." – **Greg Prato**

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MIKE KENEALLY

Uncommon Knowledge

For 35 years, Mike Keneally has been a go-to sideman for icons like Frank Zappa, Steve Vai, and Joe Satriani, as well as a noted solo artist deploying monster chops on guitar, keyboards, and vocals.

Keneally has just released *The Thing That Knowledge Can't Eat*, featuring guitar guests like Vai and Devin Townsend.

This feels more like a song album, rife with layered acoustic and electric guitar parts.

Yep, pretty much exactly that – some of the songs were started prior to lockdown, but others were started from scratch in quarantine. I ended up working on mixes on the road in 2021 when The Zappa Band was opening for King Crimson's final U.S. tour, stealing time in dressing rooms and hotels. [Former XTC frontman] Andy Partridge was also very generous with his time during this period, giving me copious and excellent home-mixing advice.

The rocker "Celery" features your pal Steve Vai and offers a good comparison of your lead styles.

I recorded basic tracks and didn't listen

to it for about four years, but was pleasantly surprised when I found that thumb-drive. I did a lot of work on "Celery" in quarantine; I think it was the first recording I worked on at home once I got my recording rig together. That was when I asked Steve if he'd be willing to contribute. He responded quickly – and brilliantly – with the two solos on this song. I very much hope to play the song live with Steve someday.

There's a lot of whammy bar work on "Ack."

Most of the vibrato stuff is in Peter Tiehuis' solo – he's the guitarist for Holland's Metropole Orchestra. I played my Charvel koa guitar on that tune, which is equipped with a Floyd, but I don't touch the whammy that much on the track. By the way, I affected the introduction between Wayne Charvel and Guthrie Govan way back when, and think my custom koa Charvel may have had some influence on the instruments Guthrie went on to play. But maybe not!

"Lana" is a refreshing take on that drop-tuning crunch sound.

I used a Framus that Devin Townsend gave me for riff-oriented stuff, played through a Fractal Axe-FX. It's the open-C tuning that Devin uses on the majority of his songs (C-G-C-G-C-E). I was using that guitar on some tracks and all of a sudden the "Lana" riff popped out of it. All the crazy harmonized guitar parts were done on my Strandberg Boden Prog solidbody played through Universal Audio plug-ins, all in standard tuning. It's got four-part guitar harmony on some lines. No idea how I'm going to do it live (laughs).

What other gear did you use on the album?

Devin was insistent on our guitars being perfectly in tune with each other, so he hooked me up with Kiesel so I could get instruments equipped with Evertune bridges. The main composed guitar parts on "Celery" were played on a custom Kiesel Crescent, and my solo was played on a Delos, both through a Fractal. The beautiful green Eric Clapton Strat I've had since 1988 was called into service on "Big Hit Song," running through my Rivera Quiana amp; "Spigot" was played through another Rivera. My Taylor 514-CE came out for "Big Hit Song" and "Mercury in Second Grade." I also used an early-'90s Telecaster reissue.

Did Frank Zappa ever give you lasting advice about your guitar playing?

One day in rehearsal, Frank's band was running through "Big Swifty," which contained a long, improvised middle section. I hadn't been in the band long. On this occasion, Frank pointed at me to play a solo over this jazz-inflected setting, though I didn't possess the bebop-steeped harmonic grounding to play a convincingly authentic jazz solo. So I went entirely psycho instead and slammed out an aggressively avant-garde statement of some sort, not at all convinced that it was in any way convincing.

What did Frank think?

As soon as the tune finished, he came over and said, "Nice solo!" and actually meant it. I was surprised, and apologized for not being able to play a stylistically-appropriate jazz solo. His response was, "If you'd been able to do that, then I would have been worried." I took that to mean he was more interested in finding out what I could contribute that was authentically me, as opposed to a rote demonstration of what might be the "normal" thing to play in that kind of circumstance.

The reverberations of that moment stayed with me over the years as I developed a voice as a guitarist. My style seems to be boiled from all kinds of genres, without living solely in any one of them. Frank's vote of confidence helped make me peace with that fact. – **Pete Prown**



KEVIN COMEAU

Crowning Achievement

If you dig Rush, you may have heard of a duo from Canada that virtually channels the iconic trio. Known as Crown Lands, singer/drummer Cody Bowles and guitarist/bassist Kevin Comeau use time-honored progressive-/hard-rock building blocks to construct their latest album, *Fearless*, harkening to the FM sounds of the '70s.

We asked Comeau to explain how Crown Lands weaves its potent sonic magic with just two guys.

Fearless sounds like a long-lost Rush masterpiece.

Cody and I wrote the narrative story over music we were writing at the time. I had just purchased an Oberheim OB-6 and a lot of the

music for “Starlifter” was written the first couple days after we got it. The $\frac{11}{8}$ groove section “Interfacing the Machine” and “Overture” came from experimenting with the on-board sequencer. We wrote the song in a two-week period at Chalet Studio; in fact, we’ve written almost everything there.

How did you construct the 18-minute “Starlifter: Fearless Pt. II”? It’s an impressive opus.

Thanks, we are quite proud of it! The demo was about 21 minutes long. Our producer, David Bottrill, analyzed the harmonic movement, time signatures, and elements of the story, trimming everything that was irrelevant. We wanted to create something like “Close to the Edge,” but arranged for two musicians. I also love Phil Spector’s “wall of sound” production and the layered textures of

Queen II. We wanted to make our own kind of space-prog.

You were a teenaged punk rocker who stumbled upon Rush.

Bass is my first instrument. I remember hearing “Holiday” by Green Day on the radio; Mike Dirnt’s tone made me want to play bass. As I kept learning, I got into Primus and Les Claypool’s Fearless Frog Brigade, as well as Mike Rutherford of Genesis and Chris Squire of Yes. Then I learned Les’ favorite bass player was Geddy Lee.

What happened next?

It so happens that my parents’ least-favorite band was Rush. It felt forbidden and exciting! So, I downloaded a few Rush albums onto my iPod and the first one I played was *A Farewell*

to Kings. The bass was unlike anything I’d heard before; Geddy’s tone is so punchy and the $\frac{5}{4}$ breakdown in the bridge of “A Farewell to Kings” is pretty iconic to me.

What goes into nailing those timeless Lee and Lifeson tones?

Geddy and Alex made magic, and at the heart of it, tone is all in the fingers. Lifeson’s secret is a Roland JC-120 or a similar Roland chorus, especially on *Moving Pictures*. I love the high-end presence we got on my guitars thanks to Hiwatt heads and the midrange grunt of the Marshall Club & Country amps. Hiwatt’s sound clean, but in an angry way. There’s nothing else in the world that really sounds like that.

What other gear did you track with?

We got creative with the guitar signal chain. I double-tracked rhythm parts with two SGs – one with T-Top humbuckers and one with P-90s. The pickups on my ’69 SG Standard are so lively that I’ve used it on every album since 2016.

I used a Boss CE-1 chorus pedal into Hiwatt DR103 and DR504 heads, a Marshall plexi, and Leslie 145 cabinet, all simultaneously. I also triple-tracked the “Overture” section with a Rickenbacker 12-string, and used an Danelectro electric sitar on another. We put a lot of time into creating a huge 3-D tone with one guitar. I love the subtle movement that parallel modulation can do for a guitar.

For double-necks, you have a Rickenbacker 6/12, but play a different one in the “Fearless” video.

The new one is much lighter. It was built by luthier Brock Stoyko and we designed the doubleneck from the ground up. It weighs 11.5 pounds, while my Rick weighs 15 pounds – a significant difference when you have to play half an hour with it strapped around your neck. The new body is heavily contoured, like a Strat, so it’s very comfortable, and the necks are arranged at an angle, making it the most-ergonomic double-neck I’ve ever played.

You once jammed “Stairway to Heaven” onstage with Alex Lifeson. How did that come about?

We played together at a charity show a couple years back – a Christmas concert at Massey Hall, in Toronto. We played Zeppelin’s “Battle of Evermore” going into “Stairway.” Alex even lent me his ES-1275 for it! I played the 12-string parts and he ripped the solo. It was a magical moment. Alex is truly my hero and has influenced my playing more than anyone, and he’s the nicest guy! I’ve also been lucky to work with Skully McIntosh, Geddy’s guitar tech. As I’ve learned, Rush surrounded themselves with great people – that’s something we’re trying to emulate in Crown Lands. – **Pete Prown VG**



GIBSON'S EXPERIMENTAL ARCHTOP

— BY GEORGE GRUHN AND WALTER CARTER —

Orville Gibson invented the carved-top guitar in the 1890s, and his company refined the design with f-shaped sound holes in 1922, then brought the concept to full potential with larger-bodied archtops in the mid '30s.

While Gibson inarguably blazed the trail in the industry when it came to archtop design, that trail had at least one wrong turn, exemplified by this guitar – essentially an f-hole version of the company's 13³/₄" round-hole archtop L-3.

From a historical perspective – someone in 1930 looking back at earlier Gibsons – this guitar would seem a great idea. In the company's first catalog, published shortly after it was formed in October, 1902, all seven guitar models were offered in several body widths – 12¹/₂", 13¹/₂" and (except for the L-1) 16". The surviving models quickly settled into standard sizes of 13¹/₂" for the round-hole L-1 and L-3, and 16" for the round-hole L-4 and the oval-hole Style O.

In the early 1900s, a 13¹/₂" guitar was not considered small. Martin's size 0, for example, was 13¹/₂" wide and was in the middle of the range. An L-1 or L-3 was adequate for the way Gibson marketed guitars – as accompaniment instruments in mandolin groups – while professional guitarists gravitated to the larger and louder L-4 or Style O. Nonetheless, the L-1 and L-3 were still mainstays of Gibson's archtop line at the beginning of the '20s. Somewhere along the way, the L-3 grew slightly, to a catalog spec of 13⁹/₁₆" and to an actual size of 13³/₄".

With the guitar growing in popularity, Gibson discontinued the L-1 in 1925, replacing it in '26 with a pair of flat-tops – the L-1 and the L-0 – which used the same body size and shape with a circular lower bout. The L-3 continued through the '20s. Gibson tried to elevate its status by changing the round soundhole to an oval hole circa '27, but by the end of the decade it was clearly a model from a bygone era.

In the meantime, Gibson acoustic engineer Lloyd Loar designed a new archtop that used violin-style f-shaped sound holes. The "star" of the new Style 5 line was the F-5 mandolin, but Loar extended the f-hole concept across the mandolin family, which in Gibson's view included the guitar. The L-5, a 16" archtop with f holes, made its debut in '22.

The f-hole archtop was not an instant success, but by the late '20s, guitarists began to discover the cutting rhythmic power of the f-hole design. For many, the only problem with the L-5 was its price – at \$275, it was almost double the price of the roundhole L-4 at \$150. In '29, a new model appeared, called the L-10 and sporting the same 16" body and f holes as the L-5, but with a black finish that made it more affordable. When it finally appeared on

Photos: Eric C. Newell



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a price list in November of '31, it was \$175. At the same time, as evidence of changing preferences among guitarists, Gibson dropped the L-4 to \$100.

In order to extend the f-hole archtop line downward to an even less-expensive (and, hopefully, better-selling) model, Gibson would have to make a smaller guitar. The next size down was 13³/₄", which Gibson was still producing in the form of the L-3. In a last-ditch attempt to maintain interest in the model, Gibson fitted it with the fretboard extension found on the L-5 and L-10.

Curiously, Gibson was well along in moving its flat-top line upward in size, from 13¹/₂" to 14³/₄". In addition, Gibson introduced an even larger flat-top – the oddball 16" HG-24 with a round hole, four f holes in the top, and an inner baffle. Though

Gibson wouldn't "advance" the size of its archtops until '35, the movement toward larger, louder guitars was clearly recognized by Gibson and underway by 1930.

In addition to the sound holes, this guitar is distinguished from almost all L-3s by its fretboard extension; the L-3's fretboard was flush with the top except in its last year of production (1932).

Whether this guitar was a custom order or a factory experiment is immaterial. In the context of growing demand for louder guitars, a smaller f-hole archtop was a step in the wrong direction, and Gibson apparently recognized it as such, as its next archtop was another 16" f-hole model, the L-12.

In '32, Gibson finally introduced a smaller, more-economical archtop. Ironically, its L-50 model designation might have suggested a higher-quality guitar than existing models, but it ushered in an era of Gibson names that corresponded to list prices. It had an odd body shape with a width of 14³/₄" and a length of 17¹/₂" –

almost two inches shorter than the 14³/₄" flat-tops – which gave it a squat look. The standard specification called for a round soundhole, though a few were made with f holes. Within two years, Gibson lengthened the body, at which point f holes became standard. In '35, when all Gibson archtops "advanced" a step, the L-50 went to 16".

Gibson filled the vacated spot with the cheaper 14³/₄" f-hole L-30 and L-37, priced at \$30 and \$37.50 respectively. Though Gibson's primary competitor in the archtop market, Epiphone, was moderately successful in the early '30s with its 13" Olympic model, Gibson never again ventured below 14³/₄" when it came to f-hole archtops.

This article originally appeared in the October '11 issue.





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A Marshall 2100 Lead & Bass guitar amplifier. The front panel is covered in a tan-colored, woven fabric with a repeating geometric pattern. The word "Marshall" is written in a white, cursive script at the top. The amplifier has a black leather-like border around the fabric panel.

Marshall

ROCK BREAKER

The Marshall 2100 Lead & Bass

BY DAVE HUNTER

A descendant of the legendary “Bluesbreaker” combo that helped launch the cranked-Marshall sound into the annals of rock, the 2100 combo is also one of the rarest post-plexi models – and a fast-track to classic British tone.

It’s often said that “the Marshall sound” was officially launched in April of 1966, when Eric Clapton cranked up his Model 1962 2x12” at Decca Studios, warned the engineer he was going to play loud, and proceeded to set down the seminal overdriven guitar sounds on John Mayall’s *The Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton*. The plexi “stack” might be the image of Marshall tone today, but EC’s

combo worked in an age when engineers were hesitant to record loud guitars – and thereby disseminated that sound to the masses.

Marshall’s first combos arrived in late 1964 or early ’65, following the success of JTM45 heads and 4x12” cabs. Jim Marshall designed the larger 2x12 Lead & Bass (essentially a JTM45 chassis in a combo cab) specifically for Eric Clapton, saying the

1974 MARSHALL MODEL 2100 LEAD & BASS

- Preamp tubes: three ECC83 (a.k.a. 12AX7)
- Output tubes: two EL34
- Rectifier: solid-state
- Controls: Volume I, Volume II, Treble, Middle, Bass, Presence
- Speakers: two 12” Celestion G12H Greenbacks
- Output: approximately 50 watts RMS

guitarist requested an amp “powerful enough to play on stage but small enough to fit into the boot of a car.” Other accounts indicate Clapton encountered the Model 1962 *after* it had come into existence, and perhaps his praise stuck with Jim Marshall. In any case, it launched a legend, and its appeal remains to this day (and it’s worth remembering that many Marshall model numbers look like years, though they have nothing to do with the year they were released).

The so-called Bluesbreaker evolved through the late/mid ’60s, along with Marshall’s move from JTM to JMP (a.k.a. “plexi”) specifications, picking up EL34 output

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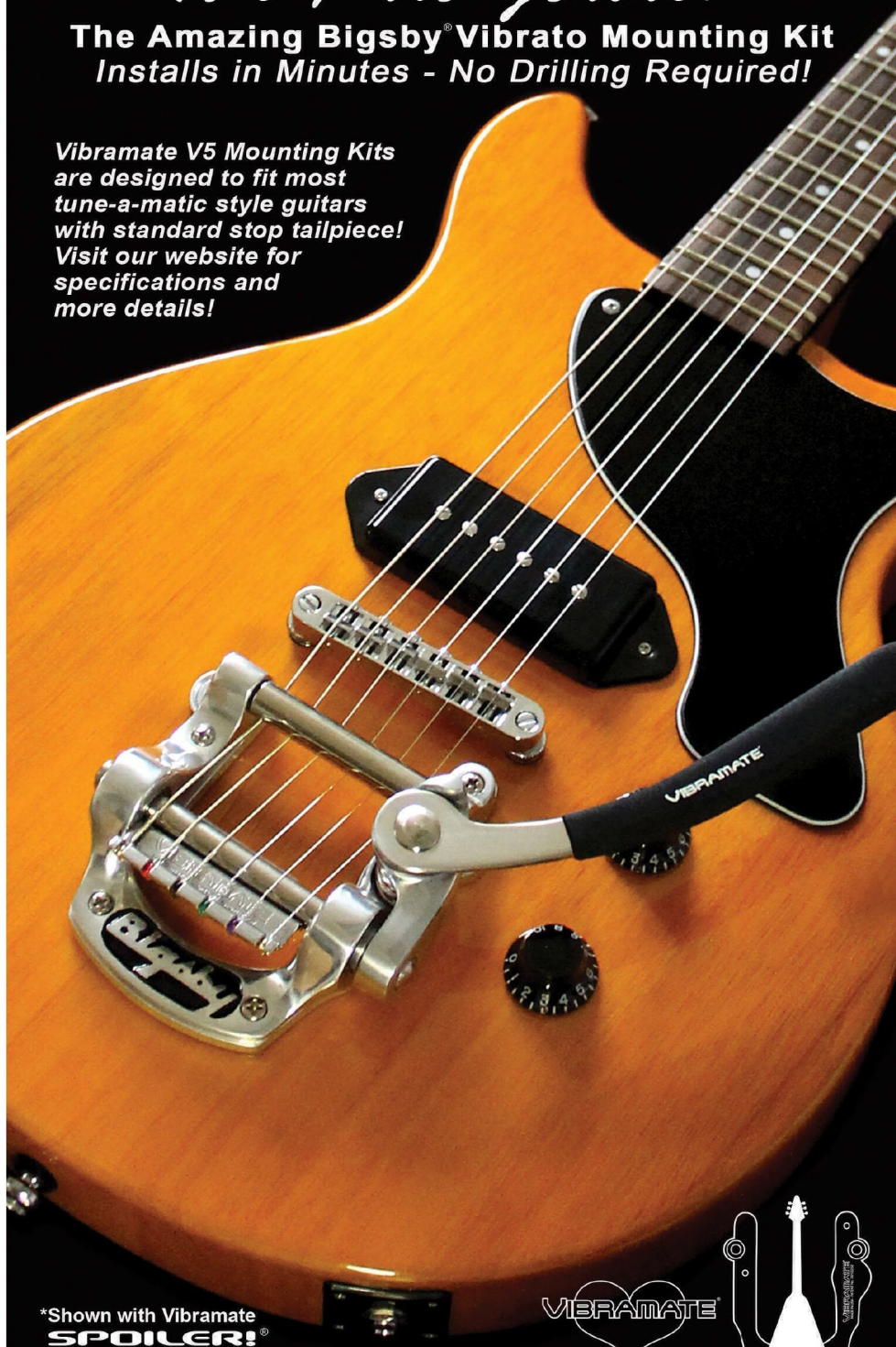
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tubes and circuit changes along the way. The replacement of plexiglas control panels with metal in '69 represented another stage in development, and the next big step came in '73, when the maker changed from hand-wired turret-board circuits to printed circuit boards (PCBs). Loaded with many of the same desirable components and hand-soldered to the traces, most players agree the early PCB models don't suffer noticeably for the

Despite its origins well into the '70s, the 2100's control panel still displays the classic four-hole/six-knob Marshall lineup.

change. That year also saw the arrival of the Model 2100 Lead & Bass combo, somewhat under the radar.

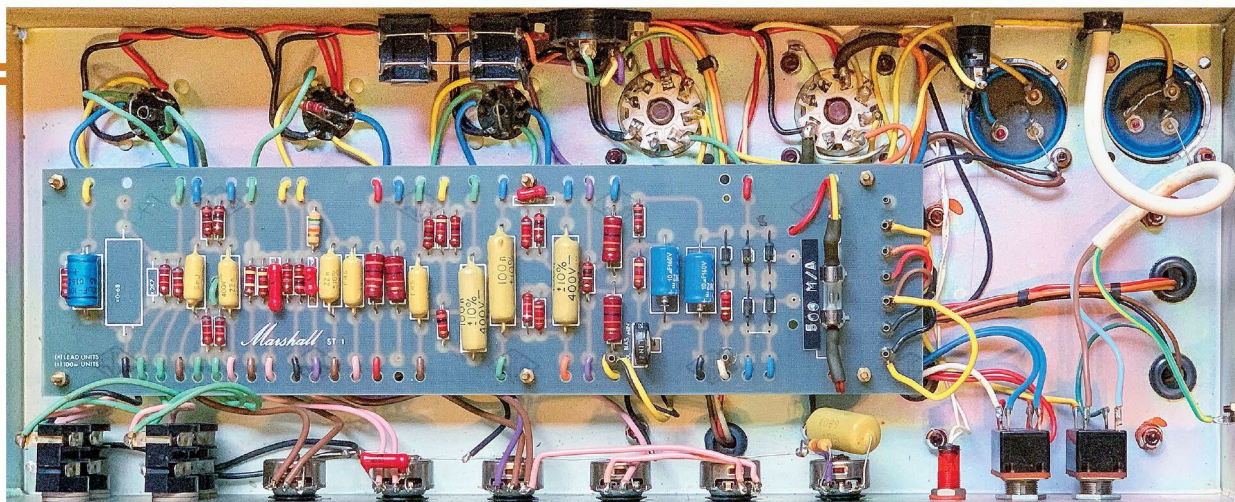
Manufactured from '73 to '76, the 2100 Lead & Bass was, oddly, only available by mail order, and only in the U.K., so examples are thin today as a result. It seems a surprising marketing move, considering it's a real meat-and-potatoes design in the classic Marshall mold rather than something packed with esoteric quirks or oddities. But its rarity makes it all the more interesting.

The 2100 combo and its sibling Model 1964 head are often described as combining

The labels have fallen off of the Greenback covers on a pair of original Celestion G12H "heavy magnet" speakers.

one channel of Marshall's Model 1987 Lead circuit with one of its 1986 Bass circuits to create the duality. And apparently the amp's roaring, crunched-up performance has rarely dissuaded owners from this belief, though the truth is the preamp circuit is far simpler. A look at the schematic indicates the 2100/1964 is, in fact, more closely allied to the 1986 Bass. That circuit already had a 500-picofarad capacitor (often referred to as a "bright cap")





and 470k-ohm resistor bypassing the input and wiper of the Volume 1 control, and this same network creates the so-called Lead channel in the 2100, too.

Regarding the rest of the essential gain/voicing circuitry, the 2100/1964 still has the 1986 Bass circuit's joined cathodes at the first preamp tube, which is biased with an 820-ohm resistor and a 320-microfarad bypass cap. Interestingly, though, a look inside the chassis shows that the PCB – adaptable to use with other models – has empty slots for the big .68-microfarad bypass cap and 2.7k-ohm cathode bias resistor of the Lead circuit proper, meaning these could be added easily and the cathode's made independent to create two genuine Lead & Bass channels (as determined by circuit topology, rather than the mere act of naming).

Regardless of the arguable misnomer, the 2100/1964 remains a sought-after amp, and few owners have found anything lacking in their performance. Indeed, many appreciate the trenchant, dynamic sonic glories found in

playing a six-string guitar through Marshall's Bass circuit, which can yield a fatter, richer, warmer tone with less fizz in the distortion when it starts to break up. It did the trick for Gary Moore, who occasionally used a 2100 combo, and the famously discerning Paul Weller has used one since moving on from the AC30s of his days with The Jam. Earlier iterations of the Bass circuit in other forms were often favored by Jimi Hendrix, Duane Allman, both Angus and Malcolm Young on occasion, and many others, so it's a well-established route to tonal bliss for a six-string.

The circuit also shows how much of the hallowed pre-PCB goodness remains; the board is packed with the desirable pale-yellow Mullard "mustard caps" that grace the most collectible JTM45s and plexi variations of several years before, along with the fat reddish-brown carbon-composition resistors of the day. Otherwise, it's pretty much classic, near-golden-age Marshall goodness through and through.

"I became aware of the Lead & Bass 50 via Paul Weller, who has exclusively used one live for

The early PCB carries a wealth of desirable hand-soldered components and displays an empty slot near the left end, where the big Lead circuit-bypass capacitor would go.

more than 30 years," says VG reader Colin Whitley, owner of this combo. "It took some time to track down an early example in the U.K., and I was not disappointed. It's an unusual combo because of its versatility – something Marshall is not particularly known for. The 2100 model has a surprisingly warm clean tone at low volume but delivers Marshall's famous saturated plexi sound when turned up. It goes from AC30 to AC/DC at the turn of the Volume knob. When jumping channels, it can snarl in all the best ways, and it's deafeningly loud."

Loud and heavy, today, a big 50-watt 2x12" combo isn't considered a "portable" option the way it might have been back when Clapton slung one into his boot. **VG**

The Lead & Bass 50 model name on the back panel was often absent from later combos, perhaps due to a scarcity of printed panels for the mail-order amp.



Classics

From learning a first lick to playing an entire song with friends, musicians thrive on motivations big and small. Growing up in Hempstead, New York, Bob Fener walked past Sam Ash Music every day on his way home from school, stopping to stare at Mosrites and Rickenbacker 12-strings in the window, a refrain from “So You Want to be a Rock and Roll Star” dancing in his head.

A kid when kids fell asleep to the subtle hiss of AM radio signals “skipping” from stations hundreds of miles away, he heard all kinds of music.

“A woman named Dorothy baby-sat me and cleaned the house, and she turned me onto Led Belly and blues music on WFIL,” he said. “From the time I first saw Ricky Nelson on TV, I wanted to be the cool guy in back, playing guitar.”

When he was 10, his parents bought a Harmony Monterey and put him in lessons at Ned Mahoney Music.

“My teacher, Hal Morrow, let me try a Les Paul Junior, and I was hooked. He also tried to get me to read music and play ‘Bye Bye Blues,’ but I couldn’t figure it out and quit lessons – I

wanted to fingerpick and play ‘Puff The Magic Dragon.’”

At camp that summer, Fener fell ill and was bedridden – and miserable – until a counselor named Victor Galveston brought a guitar to his cabin and showed him a Chicago-blueslick. The spark was reignited. “A couple years later, I was sitting with my guitar when the Young Rascals’ ‘Good Lovin’” played on the radio; magically, I stumbled on their D chord and it occurred to me I could learn by ear.”

As a freshman in high school, he

got a Hagstrom guitar and Epiphone Comet amp. Soon after, a schoolmate named Tony jotted chords on a piece of paper for him to learn. Then...

“We formed a band that rehearsed in my basement – Laurie was our drummer, Brian played a Farfisa, Tony and I were on guitar, and Dennis was our singer. My first satori came when I could tell we were all playing the same song at the same time, in the same tempo, all in tune – we were actually *making music*,” he laughed. “One night, we played a party next door and thought we hit it big when we were paid 20 bucks to do Spencer Davis’ ‘Give Me Some Lovin’” as an encore. We got to our first real gig by loading drums, amps, and guitars into a Volkswagen convertible driven by our drummer’s older sister.”

In 1971, Fener enrolled at George Washington University, where he studied anthropology. One Friday afternoon during finals week of his senior year, he and a friend, Bill Fletcher,

Photos by Paige Critcher, courtesy of Bob Fener.



Bob Fener's '51 Nocaster with a notarized 1975 sales receipt signed by Gatton and describing details of the trade.

went to a cafeteria on campus, where a country singer named Liz Meyer was doing a 5 p.m. set with her band. Backing her was a guy switching between guitar and banjo – and leaving Fener awestruck. Leaning over to Bill, he said, “That’s the best guitarist in the world.”

That player was Danny Gatton.

“I had no idea who he was, but I figured if that was a ‘normal’ skill level, then I really sucked (laughs). I hated my playing for awhile until I realized he was abnormally good.”

Later, two of Fener’s friends moved into a house in Oxon Hill, and a girl who also lived there was managing a band called Danny and the Fatboys; “Danny” was Gatton, and she introduced Fener to him and they connected while chatting about guitars and music. Before parting company, Fener hit up Gatton for lessons and advice about guitars, then made it a point to catch Fat Boys gigs.

“They were so together, especially with Dave Elliott on drums, Billy Hancock on bass and vocals, Dick Heintze on Hammond organ and Danny on guitar,” he said. “You knew you were watching world-class performances, even in the smallest clubs.”

Fener often chatted with the band, and one talk especially sticks with him.

“Proving how musically naive I was, I equated Danny’s song, ‘Harlem Nocturne,’ to Mozart’s ‘Lacrimosa’ in its ‘touched by the hand of god’ affect on me, only to have my soul crushed when Billy said it was a favorite tune among the city’s strippers.”

Later, Fener moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, where he caught up with Gatton whenever he played a local club.

“He and Mike Faour had opened a shop in Silver Hill, Maryland, and one night I asked if they had any Teles. He told me they had just one and it once had belonged to Roy Buchanan. Stuttering, I told him, ‘I’ll take it,’ and we worked a deal for \$700 cash, my Gibson L6-S, and my 1916 Washburn parlor guitar.”

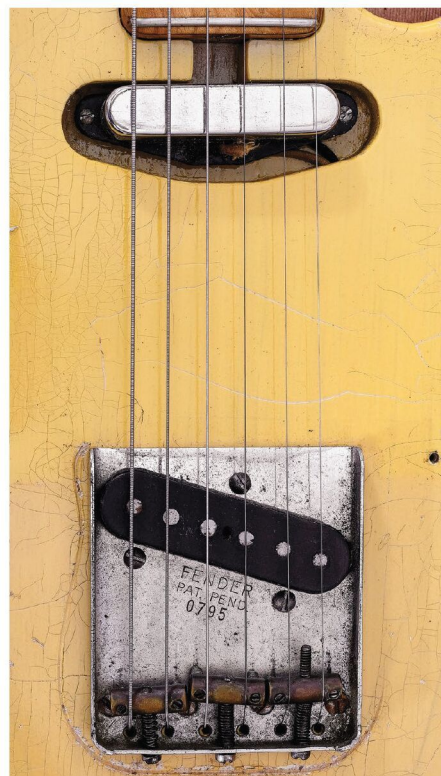
Well-worn top to bottom, the neck boasts a gorgeous flame.

Removing the pickguard reveals the excellent repair work by Dan Erlewine. The bridge is stamped 0795 – straight out of ‘51, in agreement with the neck date (2-51). The initials XA belong to Xavier Armenta (or Armandez); his necks are often narrower and thinner than most, with a soft V shape, which owner Bob Fender speculates was the reason Gatton sold the guitar. Fener cut the bent saddle screws because they gashed his hand when he went into Pete Townsend mode back in the day.

A few days later, Fener drove his ‘66 Plymouth Valiant to Gatton’s shop, and at first glance was underwhelmed with the Nocaster.

“It had been stripped and refinished a see-through dirt brown, and someone had used a screwdriver to chisel the neck-pickup rout and a wiring rout to a second pickup rout, sort of in the middle position,” Fener said. “But hey, it was the ‘70s; hot-rodding was the norm and I knew guys like Danny would take a guitar body and install a pickup from one guitar, a neck from another. I figured I was getting a guitar that had been ‘high graded,’ as they say in logging. It was a Tele like Danny’s, and Roy had played it.”

Before they finished the deal, Fener watched as Gatton worked on a customer’s guitar. After the guy left, Gatton locked up and started working on Fener’s guitar while



Fener and the Nocaster at a 1979 rehearsal with his band, Vicious Rumours. That’s Steve Gillies with a Danelectro U-1 bass, Steve White on drums.



The control circuit and pickup selector (top) appear to be original, as does the milled input jack.

they shared a joint. It wasn't the only time he'd witnessed Gatton's repair "techniques."

"To dress frets, Danny used a pad sander, like for wood or sheetrock," he said. "To slot a nut, he used a hacksaw blade, then tapered the edge on a grinder. On his own guitars, he'd pull the tabs from Volume pots and bend the wipers so there'd be less tension when he did volume swells like a pedal steel."

Finishing the tune-up, Gatton noodled one last time on the Nocaster.

"Danny knew I sucked as a guitarist, so he didn't have to do much to impress me," said Fener. "But he played this amazing, slow, horn-like line. I have no way to convey its beauty, but when I die, it'll be the music I hear."

Back at his home, the Nocaster brought more magic.

"The first time I plugged in, I played along with Roy Buchanan's 'The Messiah Will Come Again,' and to my ears, I sounded just like the record," Fener recalled with a chuckle. "Not bad for a boy from Long Island."

Like so many players in the era, Fener chased tones – a lot. During a 1979 road trip, a stop in Texas yielded a '30s Gibson lap steel he bought thinking

he'd use its pickup like Gatton did the ES-150 "Charlie Christian" pickup in his Tele. He sent it to Seymour Duncan to be re-wound for a hotter tone, then mounted it in the Nocaster using the surround from a Strat pickup.

In the '80s, Fener apprenticed with Paul Reed Smith and built a guitar as part of a resumé to get a job doing repairs at Left-Hand Guitars, in Springfield, Virginia. There, he met heavy-hitter lefties like Los Lobos' Cesar Rosas, Brinsley Schwarz, Elliot Easton, and others. He also gigged a lot with the Nocaster. By the '90s, he was back in D.C., doing repairs at the Guitar Shop, where he had a front-row seat as the vintage market began to blossom.

"With that going on, I figured the Nocaster needed a proper fix, so I sent it to Dan Erlewine, who did great work putting a block in the chiseled routs and re-lacquering the body. That finish is now 30 years old and looks like it's from 1951."

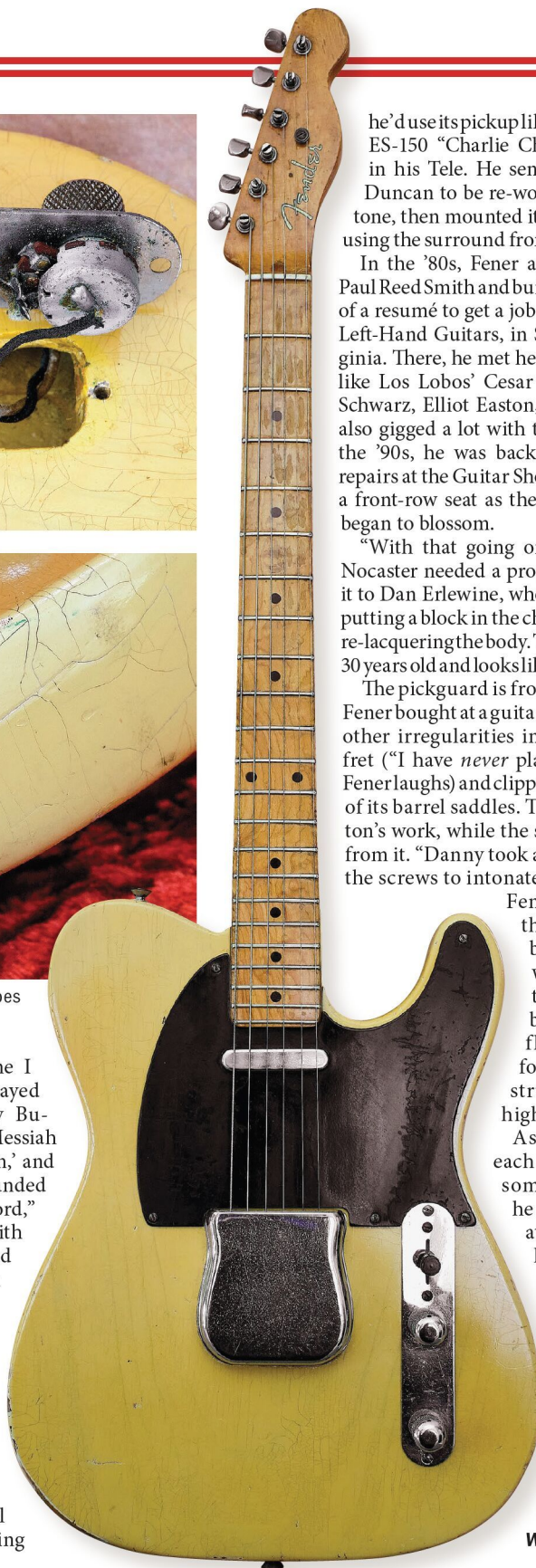
The pickguard is from a '52 Tele that Fener bought at a guitar show in '95 and other irregularities include the extra fret ("I have *never* played that note," Fener laughs) and clipped screws on two of its barrel saddles. The fret was Gatton's work, while the saddles resulted from it. "Danny took a pliers and bent the screws to intonate those strings,"

Fener said. Also, the headstock is bent slightly forward, "...because the guitar has been through a flood or because for years it was strung with a .014 high E."

As he reads VG each month, Fener sometimes thinks he should've kept at least a few of his old guitars through the years – the '63 Strat, '56 Les Paul, '61 Les Paul SG, and others.

"But then again, they bought my farm – and my life," he said. –

Ward Meeker VG





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By Alan Greenwood & Gil Hembree

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
1960s	Airline Tube Amp (Highest-End)		\$950	\$1,225
1969	Ampeg Dan Armstrong Lucite	Clear	\$2,100	\$2,750
1991	Ampeg VL-1001 Head		\$350	\$450
1989	B.C. Rich Mockingbird	Class Axe era	\$1,500	\$1,950
1965	Baldwin Exterminator	100 watts, 2x15, 2x12, 2x7, ss	\$625	\$800
1988	Blade R4		\$575	\$750
2010s	Carr Bloke	48 watts, 1x12	\$1,300	\$1,700
1919	Cole Eclipse	Dot diamond inlays	\$1,575	\$2,025
1968	Conn Acoustic	Various models	\$175	\$250
2008	Dan Armstrong Wood Body Guitar AMG 100 BLD	Blond swamp ash	\$625	\$825
1958	Danelectro U-2	Enamel, Coke headstock	\$1,950	\$2,525
1977	Dean V Standard (U.S.A.)	Common opaque	\$2,000	\$2,600
1942	Dobro Model 35 (32)		\$2,200	\$2,900
1967	EKO Ranger 6/12	Ranger 12	\$425	\$550
1966	Epiphone Casino (2 Pickups)	Various colors	\$4,700	\$6,250
1997	Epiphone Electar Tube 10	10 watts, tubes	\$110	\$145
1970	Epiphone Granada (Cutaway)		\$1,400	\$1,850
1961	Epiphone Rivoli (1 Pickup)	Standard tuners, sunburst	\$3,000	\$3,900
1955	Epiphone Zephyr (Cutaway)	Natural	\$2,250	\$2,900
1980	Fender 75	2x12, tubes	\$625	\$825
1992	Fender 1300sx amp		\$650	\$850
1965	Fender Bass VI	Rare Color	\$16,000	\$21,000
1998	Fender Bronco	Solidstate, 15 watts	\$115	\$150
2001	Fender Cyber-Twin (SE)	Combo	\$425	\$550
1958	Fender Esquire	Blond, backloader	\$20,000	\$26,000
2005	Fender Frontman 65R		\$80	\$105
1963	Fender Jazz	Rare color	\$21,000	\$33,000
1993	Fender 60s Jazz (Import)	Japan	\$700	\$925
1985	Fender Katana		\$850	\$1,100
2010	Fender Mustang '65 Reissue	Classic series	\$725	\$950
1974	Fender Precision	All colors	\$2,800	\$3,800
1994	Fender Rumble Bass	Cab	\$700	\$900
2012	Fender Squier Telecaster Special Vintage Modified Series		\$190	\$250
1965	Fender Stratocaster	Sunburst, white 'guard	\$18,500	\$24,000
2018	Fender American Original '60s Stratocaster		\$1,400	\$1,800
2020	Fender Time Machine 1967 Stratocaster Journeyman			
	Relic Custom Top	CZ Serial No.	\$2,800	\$3,700
1976	Fender Telecaster	Sunburst	\$2,600	\$3,400
2013	Fender 1972 Telecaster Custom Closet Classic		\$2,500	\$3,300
2008	Fishman Loudbox 100	100 watts	\$240	\$310
2009	G & L ASAT Classic Custom	2nd version, 4-bolt neck	\$1,100	\$1,450
2010	G & L SC-2	Reissue	\$650	\$850
1975	Gibson All American banjo	5-String	\$6,200	\$8,000
1962	Gibson C-4 Classical		\$775	\$1,000
1959	Gibson EB-2	Natural	\$5,600	\$7,300

Featured Survey Participant

Nate Westgor with Jimmy Page's lost '61 Gibson Les Paul Custom.



YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
1958	Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster	Sunburst, humbuckers	\$15,500	\$20,100
2013	Gibson ES-139		\$1,050	\$1,400
2015	Gibson ES-335 Government Series		\$2,100	\$2,700
2006	Gibson ES-346 Paul Jackson Jr.	Custom Shop	\$2,900	\$3,800
2008	Gibson Explorer Robot		\$1,050	\$1,350
1966	Gibson Firebird III	Polaris White	\$9,100	\$11,900
2002	Gibson Flying V Voodoo		\$1,275	\$1,650
1961	Gibson GA-79 RVT Multi-Stereo	Tweed	\$2,400	\$3,200
2009	Gibson Hummingbird Custom Koa		\$3,850	\$5,000
2013	Gibson J-45 Brad Paisley	Adirondack, COA	\$3,000	\$4,000
1919	Gibson L-3 (Archtop)	Round hole	\$2,300	\$3,000
1959	Gibson L-7 C/L-7 CN	Natural	\$4,300	\$5,600
2019	Gibson 1958 Les Paul			
	Standard CME Spec	Plain Top, VOS	\$3,600	\$4,700
1997	Gibson Les Paul Custom	Pilot run, Cust.		
	Ace Frehley Signature	Shop specs	\$7,100	\$9,200
1978	Gibson Les Paul			
	Jimmy Wallace Reissue	Kalamazoo, high flame	\$4,800	\$6,300
1968	Gibson Les Paul Standard	P-90s, small hds, no volute	\$18,600	\$24,200
2002	Gibson Les Paul			
	Tie Dye Custom Shop		\$2,500	\$3,300
2001	Gibson Nick Lucas Elite	Elite Custom	\$3,300	\$4,400
1942	Gibson Roy Smek			
	Stage Deluxe Hawaiian	Spanish converted	\$10,000	\$13,000
1989	Gibson SG Special (redesigned)	2 pickups, 3 knobs	\$800	\$1,050
1994	Gibson SJ-200 Centennial			
	Limited Edition		\$3,500	\$4,600
2009	Gibson Super Dove		\$3,000	\$4,000
1966	Gibson Trini Lopez Standard	Pelham Blue	\$7,800	\$10,200
1975	Gretsch Broadcaster (Hollowbody)	7604, Bigsby, sunburst	\$1,000	\$1,300
1966	Gretsch Duo-Jet (6128)	Sparkle, double-cut	\$4,300	\$5,625
1964	Gretsch New Yorker		\$925	\$1,225
1965	Gretsch White Falcon			
	Mono (6136/7594)		\$8,200	\$10,800
1999	Guild D-40	Mahogany	\$1,250	\$1,625
1960	Guild Granada X-50		\$1,600	\$2,100
1986	Guild S-285 Aviator	Deluxe	\$550	\$725
1965	Guild ThunderBass Quantum X	200 watts, 2x15	\$725	\$950
1960s	Haynes Jazz King II		\$400	\$525
1900	Howe-Orme Style 4		\$1,600	\$2,100
1977	Ibanez Model 2341 Les Custom	LP Custom copy	\$625	\$825
1979	Ibanez RG/RS Roadstar/			
	Roadster Series	Low to mid-range	\$300	\$425
1962	Kay K1961/K1962/			
	K1963 Value Leader	2 pickups	\$425	\$575
1980s	Kentucky KM-180 mandolin	A-style	\$255	\$330

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			LOW	HIGH
1983	Kramer Floyd Rose Signature Edition		\$825	\$1,075
1972	Kustom K150-2 Set	Color option, 150 watts, 2x12	\$400	\$525
2015	Larrivee L-03R-12	12-string	\$825	\$1,075
1959	Magnatone Model 111 Student	3 watts, 1x8	\$650	\$850
2010	Marshall JCM 800 Model 2203 Head	Reissue	\$850	\$1,100
1976	Marshall Model 1959 Super Lead	Black	\$1,250	\$1,650
1981	Marshall Model 2200 100-Watt Lead Combo	s.s., 100 watts, 2x12	\$525	\$675
1927	Martin 5-17		\$3,200	\$4,200
1945	Martin 000-21		\$15,000	\$20,000
2000	Martin 000C-16RB (Babyface)		\$1,700	\$2,200
1960	Martin 00-21		\$7,000	\$9,300
1947	Martin 0-17T		\$1,625	\$2,125
1934	Martin C-2T	F-hole	\$2,000	\$2,600
2010	Martin D-18 1955 CFM IV	55 made	\$3,075	\$3,975
2014	Martin D-28CW/CWB Clarence White	Indian rosewood	\$3,600	\$4,700
1994	Martin D-45 Gene Autry	Snowflake 'board option	\$20,000	\$26,000
2020	Martin D-X2E		\$475	\$625
1994	Martin HJ-28M	Mahogany	\$2,500	\$3,300
2001	Martin OM-16GT		\$1,000	\$1,300
1938	Martin R-21		\$4,300	\$5,600
1993	Matchless ES/EB Cabinet	2x10	\$550	\$728
1999	Mesa-Boogie Mark IV/ Mark IV B Combo	Custom hardwood	\$2,050	\$2,700
1979	Moonstone Eclipse Standard XII		\$1,425	\$1,850
1984	Music Man Cutlass II	Ernie Ball era	\$1,700	\$2,225
1968	National N800 Series	With Bigsby	\$700	\$900
1950s	Old Kraftsman Electric Solidbody	Various models	\$375	\$500
1996	Ovation Celebrity CC-63	Classical	\$275	\$375
1935	Paramount Style F	Plectrum	\$2,700	\$3,500
2016	Paul Reed Smith McCarty 594	Figured maple top	\$2,550	\$3,325
2000	Peavey Cirrus 4		\$800	\$1,050
1990s	Peavey Stereo Chorus 212	2x12, combo	\$245	\$325
1962	Premier Model 200 Rhythm Bass	1x15	\$800	\$1,050
1992	Rickenbacker Model 2060 El Dorado		\$1,300	\$1,700
1993	Rickenbacker Model 325JL (John Lennon)		\$2,700	\$3,600
1969	Rickenbacker Model 381	Various colors, some rare	\$4,500	\$5,900
2009	Rivera M-100 212 Combo		\$750	\$975
2009	Santa Cruz Firefly		\$3,000	\$4,000
1957	Silvertone Model 1333	1x12 vibrato	\$525	\$675
1920s	Sovereign Bent-Top		\$300	\$400
1980s	Sunn Beta Bass	4x12	\$675	\$900
1963	Supro Royal Reverb 1650TR	2x10 reverb	\$1,300	\$1,700
2012	Taylor 314ce-LTD		\$1,275	\$1,650
2019	Taylor 812ce		\$1,900	\$2,450
2011	Taylor GS Mini		\$325	\$425
1978	Tobias Signature S-4	Tobias-Burbank	\$3,200	\$4,200
1965	Univox Lead Model Tube	2x10 or 2x12	\$700	\$900
1960s	Vega Vegaphone Professional	5-string	\$875	\$1,125
2012	Vox AC30CC (Custom Classic)	30 watts, 2x12	\$575	\$750
1965	Vox Tempest XII	12-string	\$850	\$1,100
1920	Weymann Small Models/Standard	Brazilian	\$3,000	\$5,000
1977	Yamaha SR (Super Rock'n Roller) Series	Various models	\$475	\$625

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Alice Cooper onstage in 1973; Michael Bruce on his customized Les Paul, Alice, Glen Buxton with a Duo-Jet, and Dennis Dunaway on a white Jazz Bass that is currently displayed at the Musical Instrument Museum, Phoenix.

ON THE MONEY

Alice Cooper's *Billion Dollar Babies*

By Bret Adams

Alice Cooper was on a steady upward trajectory when *Billion Dollar Babies* topped the *Billboard* chart for one week in 1973. Propelled by the title track along with "Hello Hooray," "Elected," and "No More Mr. Nice Guy," it was their first #1.

Over five previous albums, vocalist Vincent Furnier (a.k.a. Alice Cooper), rhythm guitarist Michael Bruce, lead guitarist Glen Buxton, bassist Dennis Dunaway, and drummer Neal

Smith steadily perfected an image and musical style that mixed hard rock with clever, controversial lyrics presented in a theatrical stage show inspired by horror movies. Burgeoning success enabled the band to live and record much of *Billion Dollar Babies* in a mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut.

"We made it big thanks to 'I'm Eighteen' and 'School's Out,' so by the time we got to *Billion Dollar Babies* we were living in a mansion,"

said Dunaway. "And the theme was about a bunch of kids from Anytown, U.S.A., making this irreverent music and living in this giant house – we are the billion-dollar babies, the brats who really shouldn't be in there, and neighbors all letting us know that! The trip to the top of the glittering rock pile. *That* is what the album was about."

But, success also provided breathing room. "It gave us more freedom in the studio," Bruce added. "We had a little more money to spend, so we didn't have to rush and be done in two weeks. It took a lot of the pressure off."

Though he was a fantastic guitarist, Bruce said Buxton (1947-'97), had difficulties coming up with his own parts early in the band. Nearly everyone, in various combinations, was credited as a songwriter, but Buxton's musical input was minimal; health and personal issues also limited

Alice Cooper, 1973: Larry Berman.

his playing on *Billion Dollar Babies*. To fill in on lead, they brought in longtime friend Mick Mashbir, and producer Bob Ezrin recruited Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner.

"Glen was a unique guitar player," Bruce recalled. "In our early band, the Spiders, he was great at covering Page and Beck stuff – he could sound just like the records. But when we started writing our own songs, there was nothing to copy, and he was kind of floundering. I never focused on playing lead because when I started, I was a folk singer. Dennis was like a lead bass – he didn't play the traditional stick-with-the-drummer parts, and Neal didn't lay down a John Bonham-type of heavy, chunky groove. Somebody had to hold down the fort! For me, it was a natural thing. As we moved forward, I did sneak a lead in every once in a while."

Dunaway credits Buxton for the way his personality bled into the music.

"Even though Glen, unfortunately, didn't play much on the record, he did have a lot to do with putting the songs together, and the attitude of the songs. He was the genuine rock-and-roll rebel – definitely an influence.

"It was Bob Ezrin's decision that Glen simply not be invited to the sessions because his schedule was too tight. He had the clout to call that shot."

Ezrin's cerebral approach complemented the band's primal instincts

"We had bigger production, and that was right up Bob's alley, because he knew music theory and history," Dunaway said.

"We were rock-and-roll guys, below-the-belt players (laughs). He was an above-the-neck player. We combined that in a way where we weren't betraying our rock-and-roll roots, because the concept of the album was *grander*."

"Hello Hooray" was brought in by Ezrin, who presented a version recorded by Judy Collins.



The band put its stamp on it. "Elected" was a reworked version of "Reflected" from their 1969 debut, *Pretties for You*. "No More Mr. Nice Guy" came from a simple idea.

"We always wanted to have an intro to a song where the audience would instantly recognize

the song if they'd heard it before," Dunaway added. "We thought, 'What are some of the most exciting songs we know?' We came up with 'Substitute' by the Who; listen to that intro and then 'No More Mr. Nice Guy.' We copped it (laughs)! That was pure pop – the kind of song Michael excelled at."

"I wrote 'No More Mr. Nice Guy' during (1971's) *Killer*. Alice changed some lyrics," said Bruce. "It wasn't right for *Killer* or *School's Out*, but *Billion Dollar Babies* was tongue-in-cheek, so it fit. It went on to be a huge hit."

On the album, Bruce played a Les Paul Junior, custom Les Paul, and an SG; his acoustics were a Gibson and a Guild.

"I used to take 24 guitars on the road, and several amps," he said. "But I never played them all, and I started to feel like I was hoarding them. Now, I have five electrics and five acoustics."

Dunaway used two 1970 Fender Jazz basses – a white one covered with glow-in-the-dark stars, and a black one dubbed the Billion Dollar Bass, adorned with round mirrors. He recorded through a Bassman amp, but for the tour used a Sunn Coliseum that was so loud it usually wasn't run through the P.A. (which is why he had to re-record his parts for the 1974 tour movie *Good to See You Again, Alice Cooper*). On "Unfinished Sweet" and "Sick Things," he used a fuzz wah pedal.

Five decades later, Dunaway is happy that *Billion Dollar Babies* is so revered.

"I feel nothing but amazement and gratitude to fans who still remember the album," he said. "We didn't think that far in the future while we were making it. Everybody hopes their music lasts as long as possible, and we were knocking out a couple albums every year because the label was afraid that if we didn't, people would forget about us." **VG**

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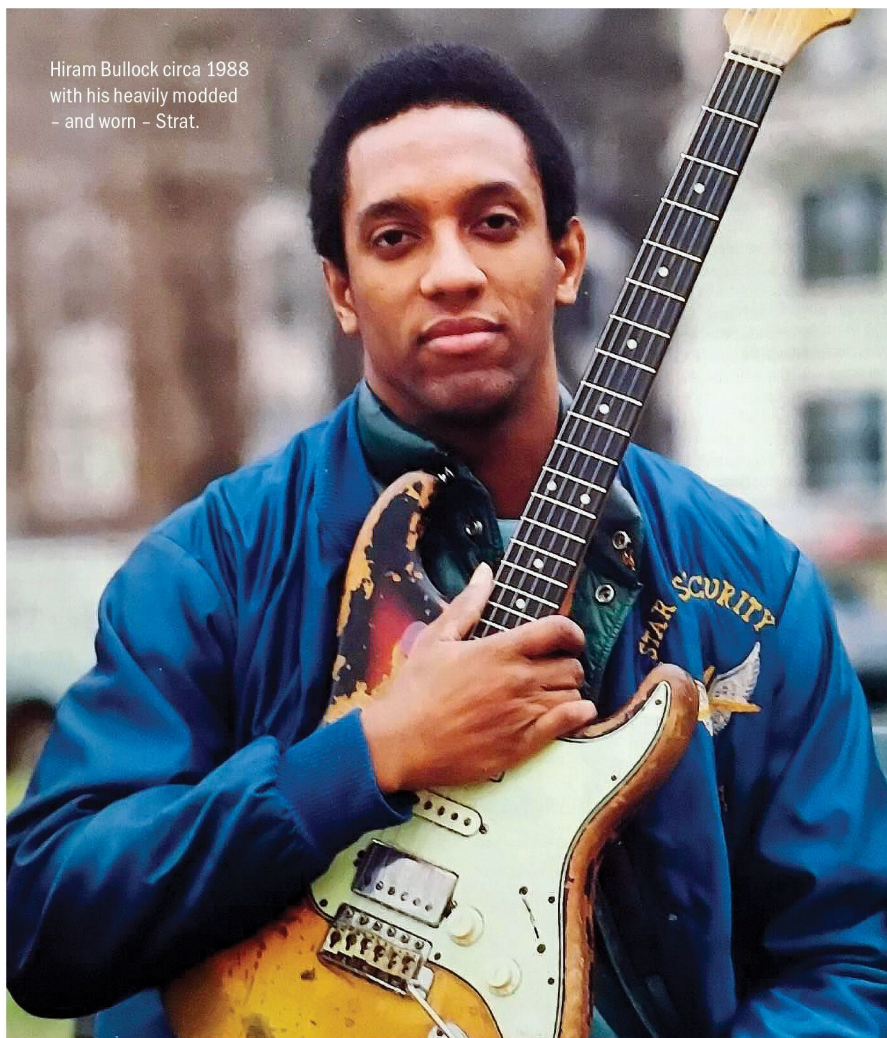


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Hiram Bullock circa 1988
with his heavily modded
– and worn – Strat.

HIRAM BULLOCK

Dangerously Funky Fusioneer

By Wolf Marshall

In the sonic constellation orbiting jazz-rock, Hiram Bullock traveled a separate trajectory. His work on “Angela,” the theme for “Taxi,” was heard weekly by the masses. A member of the original The World’s Most Dangerous Band on “Late Night With David Letterman,” he captivated nightly audiences with his flamboyant style and soulful grooving presence.

In the studio, Bullock was a double threat. His work with the Brecker Brothers, Dizzy

Gillespie, Gil Evans, Art Farmer, 24th Street Band, Jaco Pastorius, Spyro Gyra, Kenwood Dennard, John Scofield, Steely Dan, Carla Bley, Marcus Miller, and a succession of solo albums bolstered his credentials as fusion guitarist extraordinaire, while contributions to the smooth-jazz of David Sanborn and Bob James, along with pop outings accompanying Sting, Billy Joel, Paul Simon, Roberta Flack, Bonnie Tyler, Al Jarreau, Kenny Loggins, Pete Townshend, Burt Bacharach, Eric Clapton, Al

Green, James Taylor, Chaka Khan, and others established him as one of the world’s most sought-after session stars.

Hiram Law Bullock was born September 11, 1955, to military parents in Osaka, Japan. His family returned to Baltimore when he was two. He enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, gave his first recital at six, and learned to play piano, sax, and electric bass. At 16, he picked up electric guitar and gravitated to the blues-rock of Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix, along with the funk of James Brown (unapologetically honored in “Mr. Brown”). After high school, he enrolled at the University of Miami, where he studied guitar and interacted with Pat Metheny, Steve Morse, Jaco Pastorius, and Will Lee. Bullock played in local clubs and wound up working with R&B/jazz singer Phyllis Hyman, who brought him to New York and hired him for her ’77 debut album. In New York City, he caught the attention of producer Phil Ramone, who recruited him for other ’70s sessions with Billy Joel (*The Stranger*), Kenny Loggins (*Celebrate Me Home*), Paul Simon (*One Trick Pony*), Bob James (*Touchdown*, with “Angela”), Roberta Flack (*Roberta Flack Featuring Donny Hathaway*), Steely Dan (*Gauche*) and, most significantly, saxophonist David Sanborn. Bullock appeared on 10 Sanborn albums and was, as Dave put it, “the cornerstone of the band.” He also performed with Sanborn on his late-’80s NBC showcase, “Night Music,” and played in the house band of “Saturday Night Live.” In ’78, he formed 24th Street Band with Lee, Steve Jordan (drums), and Clifford Carter (keyboards), then released three albums from ’79 through ’81.

In ’82, music director/keyboardist Paul Shaffer inducted Bullock, Lee, and Jordan to The World’s Most Dangerous Band; Bullock stayed through ’84 while launching a solo career with *First Class Vagabond*, backed by Lee and Sanborn. He secured a contract with Atlantic in ’86 and released three albums – *From All Sides*, *Give It What U Got*, and *Way Kool*. He punctuated solo work with PDB (Pastorius, Dennard, Bullock) in ’86, and a live set from Indigo Blues in ’91. The following year, he appeared as one of the Bail Jumpers and wrote six songs for the Steven Seagal film *Under Siege*.

The next two decades saw him stretching, musically, with *World of Collision*, *Manny’s Car Wash*, *Carrasco* (Latin-tinged fusion), *Late Night Talk* (a jazz-based album with several standards), *Guitar Man*, *Color Me*, *Try Livin’ It, Too Funky 2 Ignore*, and *Plays the Music of Jimi Hendrix* (with Billy Cobham).

Bullock died of throat cancer exacerbated by drug abuse on July 25, 2008. He was 52.

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STYLE

Bullock's style was true fusion – a blend of rock, blues, jazz, pop, country, and funk governed and animated by groove. That mindset and superior musicianship allowed him to move in any direction as leader and seamlessly operate in the disparate worlds of his celebrity employers. Funk was a prominent factor in his equation, underscored by his emphatic proclamations in “Can’t Fight the Funk” on *Try Livin’ It* and telling songs like “Funky Broadway” and “Mr. Brown.”

An exceptional R&B rhythm guitarist, he orchestrated and layered parts over a funky central-chord riff, adding single-note and dyad counter lines and embellishments as well as clean and dirty lead playing to pieces like “Window Shoppin’” and “Try Livin’ It.” On solo albums, he pursued fusion aspirations in well-crafted compositions, arrangements, and improvisations while addressing pop concerns in equally strong, commercially viable vocal numbers like “Until I Do,” “Angelina,” “Another Night,” and “When You’re Lovin’.”

Bullock's lead-solo style was characterized by tight blues-based melodies over catchy funk and R&B grooves that purveyed an accessible pop quality. His blues-rock vocabulary was gleaned from Clapton and Hendrix (check out his take on “Red House” with Cobham) and flaunted idiomatic string bends and vibrato, pentatonic/blues-scale allusions, call-and-response phrases, and hard-rock ingredients like metal-tinged distortion for his “afterburner” solos, whammy-bar antics, dips and dives, and bidextral tapping. A “tapping novice,” he used his middle finger to create a “yodeling” effect, add trilled notes to flurries, and

Moderate Funk

B7#5#9 Em9

“Window Shoppin’” was the first track on *From All Sides*, Hiram's major-label debut. It established the funk and groove for which he is famed from the opening bars. A capsule view of his engaging rhythm style, it exemplifies his use of deceptively simple ingredients and feel to form a memorable statement. After an introductory fanfare on a B7 altered chord—strummed as 16th notes in the James

Brown fashion (“Brand New Bag”) – he launched into a well-pocketed chord riff defining extensions of Em9 chord. This pattern utilized parallel-third dyads and percussive muted string scrapes in a funky mix emphasizing syncopation and groove. Note his vibrato on the D-F# dyads in measures 2-4, single-note Em pentatonic fill in 3, and sustaining arpeggiation implying Em9 in 5, further coloring the riff.

Moderately Slow Rock

Bm Bbm Am C G F

Hiram's solo on Sting's version of “Little Wing” stands as one of his most-beloved session outings. This example presents his navigation through Jimi's chord progression. He outlines the Bm and Bbm chords in measure 1 with minor 9th arpeggios as a saxophonist would and adds half-step string bends as his guitar refinement. Note his use of the Em pentatonic as a modal extension through

Am and C in 2, and broken octaves to define G and F in 3. His final melody over D in 5-6 begins simply enough with a bluesy bend and an arpeggio outline of the D major triad but culminates in an intriguing pedal-tone melody that conveys a quasi-classical impression, proving Bullock's fusion didn't end with jazz-rock but encompassed a variety of influences without resorting to obvious clichés.

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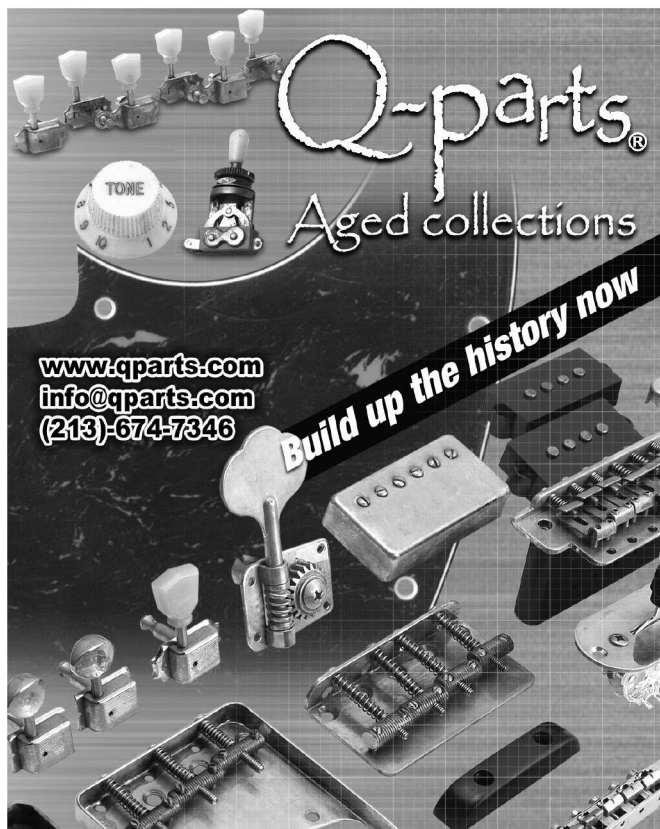
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produce wide-interval leaps while holding bends. His lead playing was further informed by jazz concepts resulting in articulate bebop lines and thoughtful chord-tone awareness and substitutions, as heard in solos like “Way Kool” where he implied ii-V progressions and altered-dominant (7^b9^b9) changes over a single chord. He similarly applied a jazzman’s approach when extending major chords; posing a B7 sound on the D[#] tone of an Emaj7 or using F[#] to produce a dissonant “Lydian” sound on Cmaj7(11), considering Dm7^b5 an F minor or playing A^b minor on G7^b5^b9 and Cm on F7. The latter three are minor-conversion strategies favored by Pat Martino and other modern-jazz cognoscenti. Moreover, on tunes like “Teen Town,” he used common-tone thinking to navigate unwieldy changes and jazz-oriented procedures such as free chromaticism and “side-slipping” melodies of wind players. Beginning with his earliest recordings, he enjoyed improvising over colorful chord changes that mixed extended and altered sonorities with progressions and syncopations typical of (but reaching beyond) the fusion sounds of Ritenour, Carlton, Ford, and Yellowjackets in the late ’70s. He continued to evolve in the new millennium, adding hip-hop and rap to his palette in *Ignore*,² and exploring post-pop in “After the Fall.”

Bullock's studio work exemplified the role of session specialist – a consummate rhythm player guided by the groove, and highly identifiable lead soloist. His chording included the requisite scratchy-funk strumming as well as sustaining arpeggiations, textural parts, and partial-chord fills (heard in Sting's "Little Wing"). His guitar sound was an identifier of his style. A teacher once advised him to stick with his Strat for jazz rather than the traditional archtop, and he built a personal sound and approach with the guitar. Known for clean, compressed Strat

Moderate Rock

The image displays three musical staves, each representing a different instrument: guitar (G11), fretless bass (F11), and another guitar (G11). Each staff includes a standard musical notation line and a corresponding fretboard diagram (TAB) below it.

- Staff 1 (G11):** The guitar part. The musical notation is in 4/4 time, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. The TAB shows fret numbers (10, 12, 13, 10, 10, 12, 9, 10, 8, 9, 10, 8, 6, 7, 8, 7) and includes a '10/12' marking.
- Staff 2 (F11):** The fretless bass part. The musical notation is in 4/4 time, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. The TAB shows fret numbers (6, 8, 5, 6, (6)(8), 6, 8, 6, 5, 8, 7, 5, 6, 8, 5, 5, 0, 5, 7, (7), 5, 7, 7, 9, 7, 9, 7, 9, 7, 6, 6, 9, 7, 7, 9, 7, 8) and includes a '5/7' marking.
- Staff 3 (G11):** The guitar part. The musical notation is in 4/4 time, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. The TAB shows fret numbers ((8), 7, 8, 8, 8, 10, 8, 10, 10, 7, 10, 10, 9, 8, 7, 10, 8, 8, 7, 10, 9, 7, 8, 10, 7, 8, 10) and includes a '3' marking and a 'full' marking.

“Cactus” was a signature Bullock track, bearing some of his most definitive fusion improvisation. This excerpt from his solo (1:51-2:10) is a case in point. Played over two enriched jazz chords (G11 and F11) given a repeating vamp treatment, it reveals much about his jazz-rock conception. He begins by outlining a G13 sound with a melody that is part arpeggio and part stepwise motion. Note the tritone leap (B-F) conveying the basic dominant-7th dissonance.

Over F11, he not only uses the Bebop Scale in measure 3-4 but also adds an important tension note B from C Melodic Minor to suggest F9#11. A similar sound is heard in 6, where C# is used on G11. His thematic development of a catchy rhythm pattern of one eighth and two 16ths is played throughout 6-7. His final phrase in F applies horn-based lines containing bebop chromaticism and the C Melodic Minor sound. He ends decisively with a blues bend into G.

tones in rhythm/accompaniment and lead playing as well as chord-melody, he often colored tastefully with chorus, phase, and echo effects, and used wah for slow sweeps and tone shaping in addition to the typical rocked effects. He frequently applied volume swells to melodies and chords (via the guitar's Volume knob), as in "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," from *Carrasco*.

ESSENTIAL LISTENING

Any Hiram Bullock album offers a motherlode of listenable fusion. Atlantic gathered material from his solo releases as well as 24th Street Band cuts on two compilations, *Hiram Bullock Best Grooves Selection* and

Real Grooves Selection. Also recommended are “Little Wing” from Sting’s *Nothing Like the Sun*, 24th Street Band’s three albums, and his work with David Sanborn.

ESSENTIAL VIEWING

Highlights include live performances of “Cactus,” “Window Shoppin’” and “Little Wing,” “Crossfire,” with Stevie Ray Vaughan, “Green Dolphin Street,” with Les Paul, an ’86 “Ohne Filter” appearance with David Sanborn, and his *Groove Music* instructional video. Worth searching for are reminiscences from Will Lee and other colleagues as well as a revealing online look at and demonstration of Bullock’s guitar by Jong-Jim.

SOUND

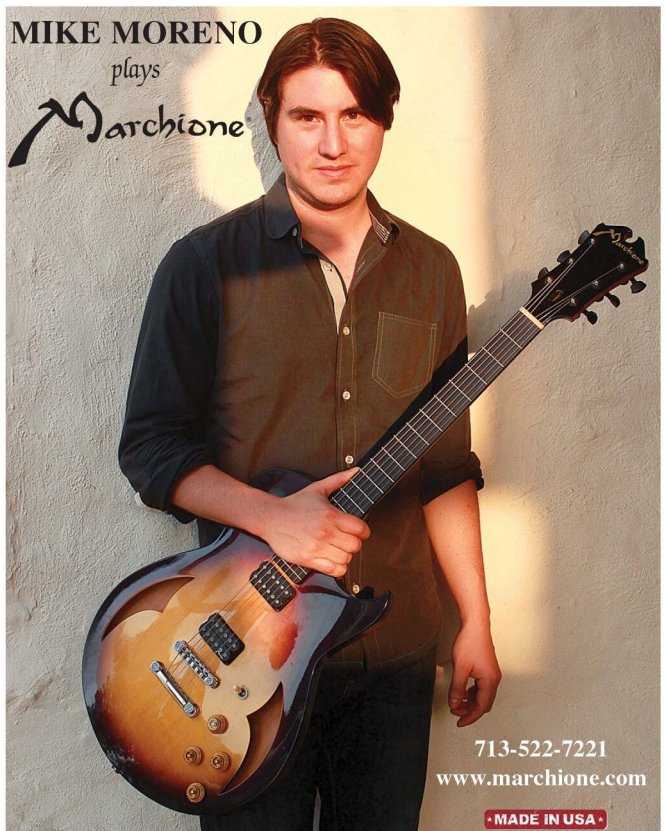
Bullock was closely associated with a battle-scarred, highly modified Strat ("the bastard") with a '61 rosewood slab fretboard on a '62 sunburst body, two Gibson humbuckers in nickel covers (neck and bridge, typically used for lead playing and power chords) and a Fender single-coil middle pickup (producing a different but appropriately hollow out-of-phase sound for alternate funk rhythm and chicken-picked licks), and unique wiring scheme (master Volume for humbuckers, separate Volume for middle/main rhythm sound) and five-position switch. In the early 2000s, Bullock began using signature-model Cort HBS and HBS-2 guitars with similar appointments and modifications, and occasionally used an Armas, made in Italy. He favored Dean Markley Blue Steel or DR Tite-Fit MT-10 strings. His acoustics included Yamaha and Armas models, and a custom-made German instrument.

He used various amps – a Fender Twin DeVille, Mesa-Boogie Tri-Axis preamp, Mark III and IV heads, and Marshall heads before settling on a Mark Guitar stack with stereo cabs.

His most-used effects were all Boss – a PS-5 Super Shifter, BBD-2 Blues Driver overdrive, CS-3 Compressor-Sustainer, DS-1 distortion, and OC-2 octaver. He put his Vox wah in front of them, and occasionally added a VHR relief overdrive, Line 6 DL-4 delay modeler and Pod, and vintage MXR M134 stereo chorus.

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 wolframmarshall.com.

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SAMANTHA FISH & JESSE DAYTON

BY OSCAR
JORDAN



ALT-BLUES SUMMIT

Blues is a language of many dialects, and when regionalisms collide, sparks fly. So it has been since Texas six-stringer Jesse Dayton joined Kansas City's slide maven Samantha Fish for *Death Wish Blues*, an album of edgy, guitar-intensive alt-blues. With histories that run the gamut from traditional blues to pop and heavy rock, the dynamic guitar duo entrusted their artistry to producer Jon Spencer, and the result is full of wicked stories, tongue-in-cheek escapades, greasy grooves, and hellacious guitar.

How did you guys get together?

Samantha Fish: I've known Jesse since I started going to shows when I was a teenager in Kansas City, where I grew up. We fell out of touch because he was in his circle and I was in mine, but we kept an eye on each other on social media. He came through New Orleans last year, and my manager, Rueben Williams, and I went to see him. We'd been talking about this side project I wanted to put together with another player for years – kind of a duets album with a certain vibe and aesthetic. But I hadn't found the right person. Then I saw Jesse, and I was like, "Oh my God! He's the guy!"

Jesse Dayton: Sam used to open for me in Kansas City a long time ago. Boy, have the tables turned, but in a great way. After my gig in New Orleans, she asked, "Do you want to do some recording together and write some songs?" I was like, "Absolutely!" Rueben asked, "What do you

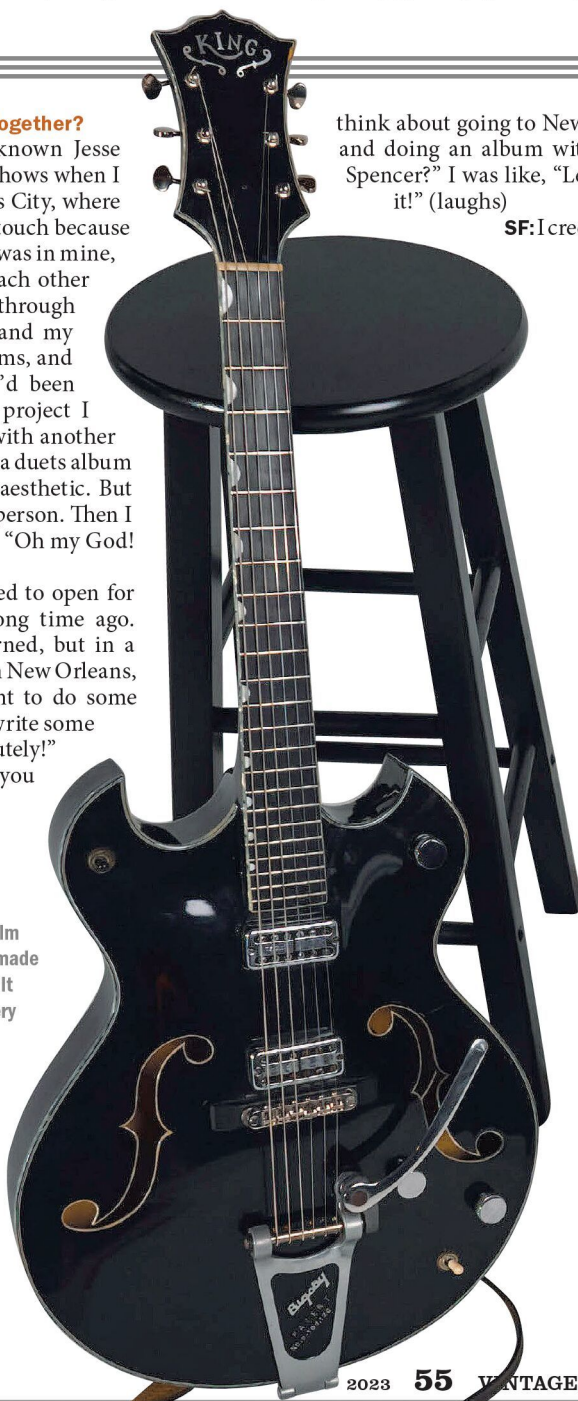
think about going to New York and doing an album with Jon Spencer?" I was like, "Let's do it!" (laughs)

SF: I credit Jon

a lot when I talk about influential albums. His R.L. Burnside collaboration was a massive inspiration for me, just for what he did for blues and rock and roll, head-on. For me, it was a big deal to work with him. He's incredible. Jesse and I started writing and wound up cutting an EP (*The Starlight Sessions*) that is the most-bootleg, raw thing (laughs). We didn't know we were going to record it; we got together to write and Rueben surprised us with, "Hey, pick a couple of songs. We're going into the studio." We were messing around trying to find songs that fit the vibe we were going for. We thought it was going to be social-media content, but then the label loved it. It came out as a teaser for the full record. Jesse and I brought our specialties

Jesse Dayton calls his King guitar "a Trini Lopez on crack!" Built in London by Jason Burns for Dayton to use onscreen in the Rob Zombie film *Halloween 2*, it's a prototype made before Burns started Blast Cult Instruments. It's heard on every song from *Death Wish Blues*.

Samantha Fish's modern SG has been her go-to for years and is heard on most of *Death Wish Blues*. Its pickups are stock and let her "approach things delicately [or] blow your hair back." Its low action, she adds, has made her a better slide player.



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together, then went to Jon's studio in Woodstock, which was Rick Danko's old barn.

Your resumé's make for a compelling album.

JD: We were trying to do something different with a genre that is so fertile and open for it. I'm excited about it. Jon Spencer was vital in getting the sound of the record. We knew if we worked with him, it was going to be different. He's the first producer I ever worked with who builds a song into a character. His way of making a record is fun, live, and surprising. He's always working on a way to do something different to the song. He loves guitar players, and he pushed us. "Come on! You've got another one in you!"

SF: I was nervous about meeting him because I was like, "What's he going to be like? Is he going to be nice? Is he going to be cool?" He was so nice – and creative. He's an incredible producer, and I can't say enough nice things. He has such an ear for production, and a surprising approach. There were songs I brought where I thought, "This is how the bass is going to go, and this is how the drums are going to go." I could see him walking around whispering parts to people, telling them what he was looking for. Then we'd start playing, and something surprising would happen, and it would work even better. It had a cooler vibe and was very musical. His approach to vocals was more like an acting thing. It became more conversational.

Death Wish Blues is like an edgy boy-girl record with lots of guitar.

JD: A lot of that has to do with Sam's style of R&B and blues. It's a great gumbo. The great thing about this project is our love for the blues shows up in everything we do. When I was a kid in Beaumont, we'd see Johnny and Edgar Winter at the Dairy Queen. So, I was aware of all that stuff, and it, too, played a big part with this record.

SF: Doing an album of duets might sound like it'd be sugary-sweet, but we wanted it to be tough, angular, aggressive, and

rock-and-roll. But, it's personal because you're singing to your partner. It takes you out of the solo performance, where the world interprets a singular point of view. Now, we have this chemistry, and we're singing and creating a story. Rueben kept throwing around the idea of an alt-blues version of "A Star Is Born," and we laughed, but it has that because there are a lot of love songs and songs about relationships and dynamics between individuals.

I knew we would be creating stories between us, but I wanted to keep it tough, rock and roll, and exciting. When we put the live show together, it might be some of the most bombastic work I've done with the levels of tempos and energy. I haven't played with another guitar player in years, and I'm excited about it because Jesse is such a great guitar player, and we have such different voices on our instruments. It's going to be fun.

There's great chemistry on the record.

JD: It's not a gender thing with guitar players, it's a human thing. She's a badass human being. I think about the way she plays guitar, and it's like, holy s**t, I don't know anybody who plays guitar like that, girl or boy. Her attack is amazing.

Jesse, you have a lot of rockabilly in your playing.

JD: Oh, yeah. James Burton and Link Wray. I'm really into that stuff, and I love the cinematic vibe of Dick Dale. It's so musical. Rockabilly and country are a big part of my playing, but also Keith Richards and Jimmy Page. Chrissie Hynde once told me, "I love the country in your rock and roll. It reminds me of Chuck Berry." I was like, "Oh, I can die and go to heaven now." The important thing between me and Sam is that she's great to write with. She's great for a lyric-driven writer. She comes up with melodies that are earworms (laughs).

Did you write separately or together?

SF: We did both. We would come together to write in person and then go our separate ways. We worked on Zoom when I was in Europe. I brought in one of my friends, Jim

McCormick, who wrote some songs with me and Jesse. We finished some songs in the studio, as well. Once you get into the spirit and energy of the session, it propels you to get creative.

JD: One night, I dreamt the song "Know My Heart." I woke up in the middle of the night, went into the bathroom, and hummed it into my phone so I wouldn't wake anybody. I sent it to Sam, and she finished it. I was like, "Holy s**t!" I can't believe we turned that into a song (laughs)!

SF: Jesse and I talked about making something so aggressive, and the very first song he sent me was the melody to "Know My Heart." We finished that first, and I was like, "Now I have no idea what kind of album this is going to be (laughs)."

"Trauma" is an exciting mix of cool guitar sounds and twisted love.

JD: When I was writing that, I was listening to a Tom Jones record and noticing how '70s-radio records sounded. I was thinking, "Let's put a big fat blues riff in there." If you listen to the choruses, it's like a Motown or Philly soul thing. We're making hybrids. Sometimes the verses are classic '70s blues riffs and rock stuff, and then we go for classic soul on the choruses. All my favorite bands when I was a kid were bands that dabbled in everything. If you listen to the lead track, except for the psychedelic part, it's just us doing Freddie King (laughs). The exciting thing for me is playing with another lead player who excites me with her choices. We're working on what Keef and Ron called "the ancient art of weaving."

Is that a bitcrusher on that solo?

SF: Jon had me running through a Hiwatt DR201 Custom 200 bass head and some kind of fuzz pedal. He brought in a Magnatone M15 combo that sounded pretty f***ing wild, too. We used so many different amps because the studio had everything – a couple vintage tweed Deluxes, a Kay, an Airline. My favorite was an old PA from Woodstock Elementary School. We got some crazy stuff out of that (laughs). A lot of the rhythm parts I cut were with a Deluxe.

Who did the solo on "Deathwish"?

JD: That's me. I was trying to do Freddie King meets Jimmy Page. Going out, I did these little double-stops. I like the way it turned out. We wrote that together with Jim McCormick. On "Deathwish," Sam sent me a voice memo singing the main riff. I was like, "Oh s**t! Yeah!" Then I wrote lyrics around it, then we brought it to Jim, who re-wrote the whole song, and that's how we got that.

Which guitar did you use for the solo?

JD: I used a King guitar – the first one that Jason Burns ever made. It's a big hollowbody. Everyone thinks it's a Gretsch, but it's like a Trini Lopez on crack (laughs). It's got the



Fish plays her Stogie Box Blues guitar on "Rippin' and Runnin'."

Bigsby and the TV Jones pickups, and I get a lot of tonal stuff you don't get out of a solidbody. I've been playing it more than my other guitars. I played it on every song on the record.

What were you plugged into?

JD: I used a '60s blackface Super Reverb cranked all the way up. It was direct, with no pedals, live, and no punching. It was cool to have that pressure on us to go in and cut it without doing any punches on the leads. I think it made us play a certain way to where things counted more. We also had a Champ, a Silvertone, and a '70s Mesa Boogie. Jon is really into changing amp sounds.

Samantha, what was your main guitar?

SF: I came in with an SG – my go-to for everything – so our voices are very different. It feels good in my hands. The pickups are stock, but versatile. You can approach things delicately, and it can also blow your hair back. It's a good, well-rounded guitar for me. Because it's set up with low action, it's made me an even better slide player because I have to go even lighter. It's all about making little adjustments in the moment.

You sing the hell out of "No Apology."

SF: I wrote that one on the road. I locked myself in a hotel and finished it. I like having albums with a bit of range. That one and "Know My Heart" are some of the sweeter songs.

Another great song is "Rippin' and Runnin'."

SF: I left my cigar-box guitar out of the last album, so I wanted to bring it in for at least one song. It's such a prominent feature in my live shows, and people dig that guitar. I worked up a riff I liked then built different melodic parts around it. The cigar box has melodic parts through the whole song. It

took me a little longer to get the lyrics because I start songs with a design and a certain instrument; if I start with a great melody and hook line, the song writes itself, but when you come in with specifications, the song is a little harder to write. I brought in Jim McCormick on "Rippin' and Runnin'." It's a song about not letting life pass you by. You have to work hard and get after it. It's a power anthem (laughs). That song was a struggle, but I'm glad it made it on the record. We've been messin' with it live, and it seems like people dig it.

What's the setup for your cigar-box guitar?

SF: I use a lot of pedals. My go-to is an original version of the Analog Man King of Tone. I also use a JHS Mini Foot Fuzz, a JHS SuperBolt, an Electro-Harmonix Micro POG, an MXR Carbon Copy Delay, and a Boss Super Shifter. The cigar box sounds like a chainsaw when you have it dialed in right. It's really aggressive. There's a juxtaposition between how it looks and how it sounds. It's this cute little guitar, but it's the most-aggressive guitar in my whole arsenal.

Who solos on "Settle For Less"?

SF: We split those. I took the first one; I might have been playing through

an Airline amp. Jon had so many cool amps – Supros and cool little vintage amps. We went with what sounded cool in the moment and moved forward. Jesse took the second half of that solo.

JD: She's playing the descending line, and I'm playing an ascending rhythm part with tremolo. It sounds cool when we weave it together. I used the King guitar and a Fender Champ on that.

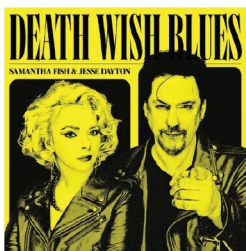
What's next on your schedule?

SF: Getting this project off the ground has taken all my focus. Last year, I put out a record called *Faster* (VG, December '21)

and toured with my band non-stop, so I think this year is going to be juggling a bit of both. I'm proud of this record and excited about what we'll be able to accomplish together. I want people to hear it; it's a piece of art. So this year, I'll be sharing it, executing it onstage, and going out and killin' it with Jesse.

JD: I just made a record with Shooter Jennings producing. He's coming off winning all those Grammys with Brandi Carlile and Dave Cobb. We made a cool record, but me and Sam are looking forward to a lot of touring (laughs)! **VG**

"I'm excited about [playing live] because Jesse is such a great guitar player, and we have such different voices on our instruments. It's going to be fun." – Samantha Fish





1968 Firebird I
in Cardinal Red.

Some guitars get no respect, at least historically. At the dawn of the '70s, Gibson's original (1963-'65) Firebirds were already being hailed as classics, while the versions that replaced them were denigrated as another example of the company's late-'60s decline.

BY PETER STUART KOHMAN

WHEN DOWN WAS UP GIBSON'S "NON-REVERSE" FIREBIRDS

Second-generation Firebirds are often cited as being "post-McCarty," but the fact is Gibson president Ted McCarty was fully in charge at their launch. With them came the labels "reverse" and "non-reverse" because the '63 "reversed" traditional (i.e. Fender) solidbody design with the larger upper bouts below rather than above the neck. While the Strat was laid out for ergonomic balance, Firebirds

were geared to visual flash. In '65, the layout was "reversed" to more-conventional orientation – a reverse of the "reverse" original, if that makes sense. Comparing the two was, as *Guitar Player's* Tom Wheeler wrote in the late '70s, akin to "confusing Errol Flynn and Elmer Fudd."

In Gibson histories, non-reverse Firebirds are glossed over, though they've risen in status

over the last 55 years. Designed to cut into Fender's market – a Gibson for the twang-and-surf crowd. McCarty hired industrial designer Ray Dietrich to devise the concept, but his elaborate neck-through design proved expensive and difficult to make, so in '65 they gave it a glued-in neck.

Reverse Firebirds also proved fragile, prone to breakage at the headstock. The neck-

Guitar photos by Peter Stuart Kohman.



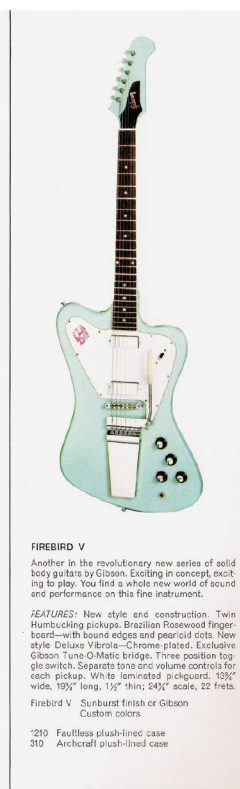
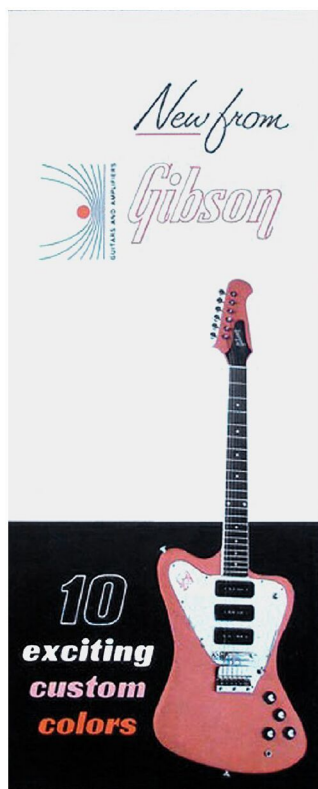
A '65 Firebird VII (left) with three mini humbuckers, slider switch, Deluxe Vibrola, and gold-plated Tune-O-Matic bridge, an early '65 Firebird III in Inverness Green with body-mounted P-90s and slider switch, and a '66 Firebird V-12 with mini humbuckers, and slider switch. Note the lack of Vibrola.

through required extra effort, from wood prep to assembly to shipping. Additionally, wastage was a problem; if anything went wrong with the neck or body, the entire guitar was scrap, as were damaged ones returned for

warranty repair. With high manufacturing costs, the series had to be priced well above those bolt-neck Fenders. The result was sales that proved disappointing for all.

Another concern came from Fender itself,

which made noise about a lawsuit claiming the body shape encroached on Leo's patented "offset waist" design. A letter dated February 7, 1964, shows Fender's patent attorneys prodding Leo to file suit against Gibson:



"...the question of Gibson's Firebird models should be reconsidered. When the Gibson catalog pages are held up to the light and looked at from the reverse side, the outline is very similar to a Fender outline. I am sure you are aware of this but I felt I should write this letter to remind us that the question should be reconsidered at a later date."

This was CC'd to Fender sales head Don Randall, and while it sounds like lawyers trying to drum up business, it resulted in discussions with Gibson.

McCarty, though, was dismissive.

"Leo always wanted to sue somebody... so Fender got their attorneys and we had a meeting... there were engineers and attorneys," McCarty said in Gil Hembree's *Gibson Guitars: Ted McCarty's Golden Era 1948-1966*. "Our presentation ended the discussion about a lawsuit."

Ironically, the non-reverse Firebirds look more like offset Fenders—perhaps McCarty's way of flipping off Fender!

While the re-engineered line was prepared,



two stop-gap variations of the I and III models with non-standard features were shipped into the summer of '65. These used inventory neck/body sections and were colorfully dubbed "platypus" Firebirds by Wheeler in his late-'70s "Rare Bird" column.

The revised line was announced in June of '65, in time for summer NAMM—the first evidence is Gibson's price list dated June 22, just before the show opened on June 25. That summer was the high-water point of the guitar decade, as the folk boom and Beatles' arrival

Offered across the Firebird line for a mere \$15 upcharge and shown in a stand-alone 1965/'66 brochure, custom colors were rarely ordered despite the temptation spurred by the 10-selection chart. Very rarely, a color not shown is found, including Burgundy Mist and SG-style Cherry.

in the U.S. pushed guitar sales to all-time highs. Magazines keyed to the show were bursting with guitar-centric promotion, but Gibson made no effort to promote the "new" models.

That June '65 price list made no mention of changes, simply showing significant price reductions on Firebirds, a sign the new version would be shipping soon. Early 'Birds had been priced higher than the SG, while the new one listed lower, and more in line with comparable Fenders.

The new Firebirds were still sleek, stylish, and unlike any other Gibson, but still more conventional, with a glued-in neck and thin one-piece sculpted mahogany body without separate "wings." It required labor comparable to the SG (which were also simplified

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at the time), greatly reducing production costs. The shape retained a fluid, sculpted feel, but with a Fender-like silhouette; the body was $14\frac{3}{4}$ " wide at the swooping lower bout, and (like the SG) a thin $1\frac{1}{2}$ " at the rim. Its waist was slightly offset, with curvy bouts emphasizing the impression, and the back has a Fender-like contour. Compared to an offset Fender, the treble-bout horn extends upward more than outward. Strap buttons were on the neck heel and (a fairly useless) one at the apex of the upper bout, perfectly placed for the strap to slip off and send the guitar to the floor.

The neck was considerably narrower at the nut compared to earlier Firebirds, but tapered noticeably toward the body. Nut width was changed across Gibson's line in '65; early Firebird necks were chunky – $1\frac{11}{16}$ " at the nut, while new ones were $1\frac{5}{8}$ ", which made sense to compete with Fender. Many experienced Gibson players did not like the slimmer nut, and tooling seemed to wander; many Firebirds made from '66 through '70 have nuts as narrow as $1\frac{1}{2}$ ". The flat headstock was very Fender-like, as well, reversed (again!) from the earlier design, and shedding its elaborate carved ledge and heavy banjo tuners – the shape first appeared on the Trini Lopez standard at the end of '64, so when people say the Trini has a Firebird headstock, it's actually the opposite!

The new Firebird used modular construction pioneered by Danelectro. Where early models had unique neck binding, fretboard inlays, and a pickup array that had to be tooled-in, with wood remaining between the pickups, second-gens were given an unbound/dot-inlaid fretboard and universal three-pickup rout under the pickguard. All could be assembled from a finished body, greatly streamlining production. Standard finish was a dark mahogany with sunburst on the top only.

The only specific hardware for the non-reverse



models was the large, white, laminated pickguard, which had to be cut to fit depending on pickup array. Lower models had single-coil P-90s, saving mini humbuckers for upscale models. The pickguard covered much of the guitar's face and, unfortunately, was prone to shrinking that over time has left many with cracks at the mounting screws.

All were initially fitted with a flimsy three-way slider switch for pickup selection, similar to Fender's Jazzmaster and Jaguar. Some later examples substituted a sturdier Switchcraft three-way, seemingly at the whim of the assembler. And at first, all used Kluson Deluxe strip tuners borrowed from Gibson-made Epiphone solid-bodies.

Another change was chrome-plated hardware in

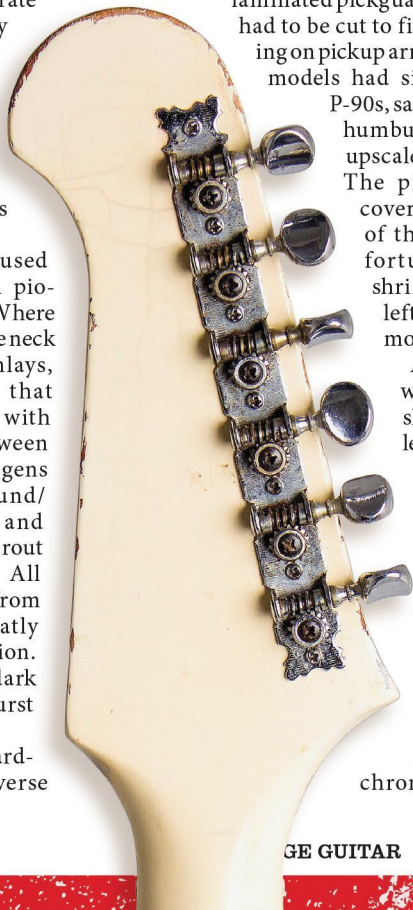
A '65 Firebird I in Polar White with body-mounted P-90s and first-version slider switch, and a '66 Firebird V with mini humbuckers, slider switch, Deluxe Vibrola, and Tune-O-Matic bridge. Many '66 and '67 headstocks were fitted with imported open-back strip tuners.

place of nickel. Many '65-'66 'Birds were given a mix of plated parts as Gibson employees used up the stock of nickel pieces alongside newer chrome. All '65-'69 versions had a standard "short" Gibson Vibrola or "long" Deluxe version depending on model.

A very few have been seen with a horseshoe Bigsby, which was not an official option.

Despite a chaotic serial-number situation at Gibson in the mid/late '60s, the progression in Firebirds was surprisingly orderly. The final reverse variation of the III ran in batches from serial number 289xxx to 324xxx. The non-reverse models show up around the 327xxx and become more common near 34xxxx. Very few randomly "off" numbers have surfaced. Quite a few non-reverse have numbers in the 00xxxx area, but that's a later series from '67.

Like '50s Les Pauls and subsequent SGs, Firebird trim ranged from student to "artist" level, increasing in price as features were added. Designated by Roman numerals instead of jargon like "Junior" and "Standard," the effect was the same. Gibson's '66 catalog and dealer one-sheets pictured the line in glorious color – a first for Gibson. But apart from this, Firebirds were largely absent from



The first non-reverse Firebirds, like this '65 III (top), shipped in Gibson's #1210 case or in the cheaper #310 case, here housing a '65 VII in Polar White.

ads and promo materials. The illustrations show a Firebird I in sunburst, the III in Cardinal Red, V in Frost Blue, and the gold-plated VII in Pelham Blue. Gibson did little else – if anything – to promote them.

This highlights a perk – custom colors offered exclusively for the Firebird line at just \$15 over list. A direct lift from Fender, some colors were identical but given different names. With hues christened Frost Blue, Cardinal Red, Inverness Green, and Golden Mist Poly, Gibson hoped “the kids” would flock to the six-string hot rods. The plan, though, encountered a deadly lack of enthusiasm from dealers, lore holding that the color brochure didn't help sell stock. “If you've got a red one, they want a blue one,” was the complaint, and whatever the truth, solid-color guitars are exponentially rarer than sunburst. It does seem that the non-reverse guitars have a slightly higher proportion of them, but just barely. Now, they're highly collectible.

The four 1965 variations were well-conceived. The Firebird I re-thought the model; intended as the “student” version, the original was clean-looking, with its single mini humbucker making a bold, modernist statement. But at \$215, it wasn't sufficiently appealing to 1964 buyers. Gibson expected the cheapest model in any series to be the best-seller, but the mid-priced III with two pickups and vibrato racked up the best sales in '63-'64.

Taking a lesson, the second-gen model I gave kids what they wanted – two-pickups and vibrato at a budget price. Fitted with black

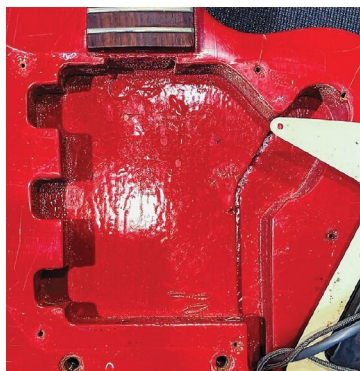
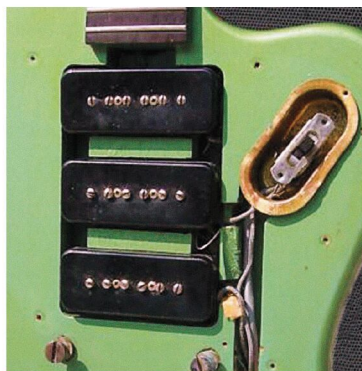


The original (and elaborate) body-mounted pickup arrangement with rout, and the later “swimming pool” rout (middle). Non-reverse Firebirds (and the SG line) had a universal control-cavity rout with copper shield.

P-90s instead of a mini-humbucker, and the “short” Gibson Vibrola with solid/stud bridge, it became the top seller, moving 1,164 units in '66 before belly-flopping to only 200 the following year, when the III sold more than twice that amidst declining overall Firebird sales. Many I models shipped in '65-'66 were likely sitting in dealer inventories, prompting

the resounding drop. Odd, really, as it was an excellent value – at \$199.50 in '66, it was \$25 cheaper than the similarly equipped SG Special, which at 1,870 units, outsold it by a wide margin. Fender's beginner Mustang obliterated both, with 17,788 sold at \$184 in '66.

The Firebird III brought another interest-



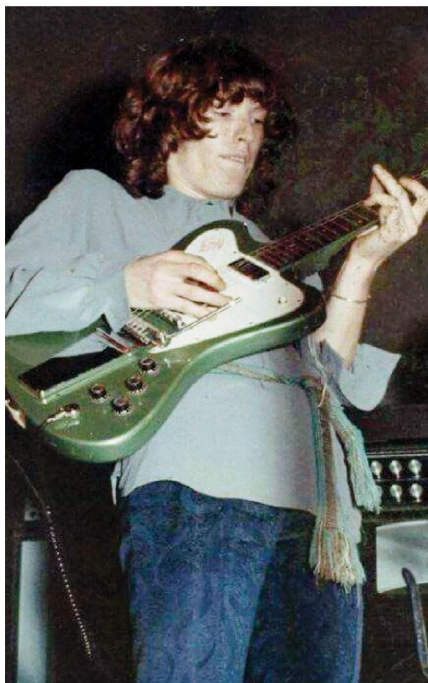


ing redesign. Equipped with *three* P-90s – a configuration unseen since the ES-5 of the '50s – it was wired in Gibson's usual three-pickup layout, with the center switch selecting bridge and middle out of phase, giving a "fat Strat" effect. Gibson typically used three pickups only on its top solidbody, so this mid-line application was a novel idea. The '65 price was \$259.50, which was lowered by \$20 in '66-'67. Still, the guitar struggled, selling just 935 units, then 463 the next year. Its closest Fender competitor, the Stratocaster (\$252) shipped more than 5,300 units in '66. Clearly, Gibson was not winning.

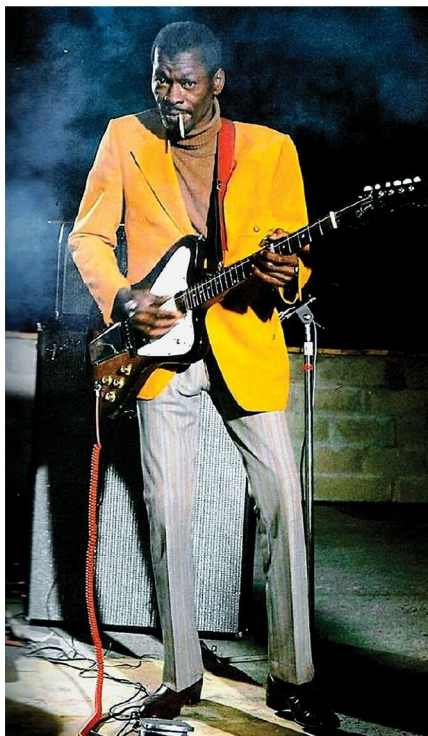
The Firebird V reverted to two mini humbuckers and a Deluxe Vibrola with the lyre-decorated tail, which looked snazzier but offered no functional advantage. It also fitted a Tune-O-Matic bridge. Since it had the same unbound body and dot-inlaid neck, the V's advantages over the I were the bridge and mini humbuckers, which Gibson valued at \$90. Even at \$289.50 (\$50 *less* than a Jazzmaster) the V sold poorly, likely not much more than 500 in the entire run. As the only second-gen Firebird with mini humbuckers and standard switching, the V is an underappreciated guitar.

The Firebird VII is the rarest stock variant. At \$379.50, only 79 shipped after '65 and listed total production that year was 110, at least half of which were likely reverse – that's a much smaller quantity than the reverse (around 250), non-reverse V-12 (272), and reverse I (more than 1,000).

Carrying three mini humbuckers and



gold-plated hardware, it's a great-looking instrument. Wiring was typical for three-pickup Gibsons, with neck and bridge alone and a bridge/middle in the center, giving a "Stratty" snap unique to the VII.



Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown with his Firebird V in its original configuration. He later gave it a stop tailpiece.



Brian Jones in '66, with his Firebird VII (left), Steve Winwood in Traffic circa '71 with his Firebird V in Inverness Green, and Paul McCartney recording with his lefty Firebird VII in '71.

The second-gen VII was built on the same body/neck assembly, again without binding, block inlays, or ebony like other high-end Gibsons. It was also far less fancy than the earlier version or top-line SG Custom, despite a price that went up to \$445. Today, a custom-color VII is the ultimate non-reverse collectible.

An especially ephemeral Firebird is the V-12, added to the line in '66. In '64/'65, 12-string electrics were hot, but by the time the V-12 was ready to ship in '66, the trend had peaked. Appearing in the '66 price list at \$309.50, the V-12 (which is how Gibson listed it, *not* the commonly used Firebird XII) is a nice design, mating the V body with a standard 12-string headstock. The slim nut wasn't convenient on a 12-string, but *was* the same size as on 12-strings by Rickenbacker and Fender. Thankfully, it was given a simple block tailpiece. Despite being an excellent solidbody 12-string, only 248 shipped in '66, followed by 24 stragglers in '67. Rare to begin with, some have since been crudely converted to six-string.

From '65 through '69, Firebirds saw minor variations in hardware. Many '66 and '67 headstocks were fitted with imported open-back strip tuners that also appeared on SGs of the period (Guild also used them). Whether due to a shortage of Kluson tuners or just purchasing economy is a moot point. Though

not the best quality, they were very light, arguably improving the guitar's balance!

From '66 through '68, some Firebirds appeared with Switchcraft toggles in place of the cheap slider. In '66 and '67, the body rout was altered to a single large "swimming pool" rout and the P-90s on the I and III hung from the underside of the pickguard, making them more adjustable. This was also applied to SGs in '66, as were amp-style "witch hat" knobs.

Like other Gibsons of the era, later-'60s Firebirds sometimes exhibit quality issues including sloppy fitting and indifferent finishing. Some have dubious neck angles resulting in strings not having enough break angle over the vibrato. This is especially problematic on stud-bridge models, particularly with very light strings. Some have wood inserted under their fretboard edges over the body (under the finish) indicating an attempt to achieve better angle!

The first non-reverse guitars shipped in the same oblong yellow-lined Gibson/Faultless #1210 case. The cheaper Archcraft #310 case was added, still in black tolex but with flimsier latches, hinges, and handle. Many sported a checked-cloth lining collectors call "picnic table fabric," while others use a

more-prosaic (but equally cheap) red. The 310 listed at \$31 in '66, while the 1210 was \$42. Money had to be saved somewhere!

After four years of diminishing returns, Firebirds were gone from the September '69 price list, though stragglers shipped into 1970. Sales were disappointing, though Gibson hardly helped with lackluster promotion. It seemed that even in Kalamazoo, there was apathy toward their avian offspring.

The 'Bird's most-visible original user was Rolling Stone Brian Jones, who received a sunburst VII from Gibson and was shown with it in the *Gibson Gazette*. The non-reverse VII became his main stage guitar in '66-'67, and he used it while the band mimed "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby?" on Ed Sullivan. Jones also acquired a new Firebird III and used it at Royal Albert Hall in September '66; the guitar is on the cover of *Got Live If You Want It*, released that December. Both guitars later cropped up in the hands of Mick Taylor.

In the early '70s, Traffic's Stevie Winwood bucked the "hippie natural" trend by playing a non-reverse in very rare Inverness Green finish. His likely dated to circa '67, with its Switchcraft selector. The guitar was stolen when Traffic played New York in '73. In

March '08, Gibson presented Winwood with a Custom Shop re-creation.

None other than Paul McCartney had one of the very few left-handed Firebirds – a custom VII with a blue finish, horseshoe Bigsby, and dark pickguard. He used it during sessions for *Ram* and, reportedly, his first solo effort.

Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera had a red reverse VII and a non-reverse three-pickup in '75-'76 modified from a I or III with the vibrato removed and three full-size humbuckers with individual selectors.

Blues fans will recall a non-reverse V as the main squeeze of bluesman Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, whose hugely worn guitar was dressed with a tooled-leather pickguard. He eventually removed the vibrato.

More recently, the non-reverse silhouette has been spotted with guitarist Gem Archer (Oasis), Gov't Mule's Warren Haynes, and indie faves The National.

While still not particularly familiar, second-generation Firebirds have gained a modicum of respect. After decades of disinterest, in the 21st century, Gibson finally reissued the model with Custom Shop renditions. Taken strictly on merit, Firebirds are unlike any other guitar in sound and feel – light, fast-playing, and stylish, they remain unrepentant hot-rod rockers. **VG**



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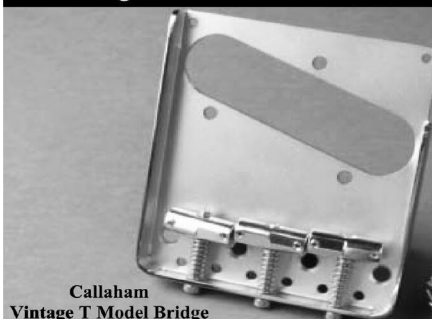
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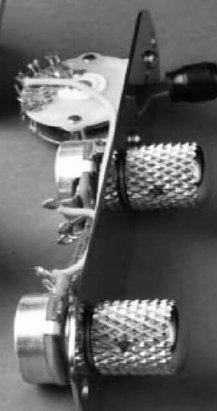


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Upcoming Events

Denotes a new or updated listing.

MAY

Dallas International Guitar Festival, May 5-7, 2023 at the Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N Stemmons Fwy, Dallas, TX. For more info visit www.guitarshow.com.

Jake's Guitar Show & Music Swap Meet, May 6-7 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

Eastern Kentucky Guitar Show, Sunday, May 7, 2023, 11:00AM - 4:00PM, Boyd County Convention & Arts Center, 15605 KY180, Catlettsburg, Kentucky 41129. Contact Jeff at 606-922-0626 or 606-923-4130.

Lake County Musician's Swap Meet, Sunday, May 14, 2023 at Renninger's Florida Twin

Markets, 20651 Hwy 441 Mt. Dora FL. Hours 8-3 For more info contact Allen at info@lcmsm.com, (352)735-0025 or visit www.lcmsm.com.

Midwest Music Gear Swap, Sunday, May 21, 2023 10am to 4 pm at 48 E. Bath Rd. Cuyahoga Falls (Akron) Ohio 44223 For more information, go to <http://www.midwestmusicgearswap.com> or call Corey at (330)753-5050.

JUNE

Northeast Guitar Expo, Sunday, June 11, 2023 at The Verve Hotel & Convention Center, 1360 Worcester St., Natick, MA. Hours 11-4. For more info call Peter Occhineri (860) 983-6774, email - Northeast-

Rockford Guitar Show

For more information and to reserve a vendor table visit: www.rockfordguitarshow.com

Saturday, September 23, 2023

Tebala Event Center
7910 Newburg Rd., Rockford, IL 61108
10 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. / \$5.00 at the door

GuitarExpo@gmail.com, website - www.NortheastGuitarExpo.com

Amigo SoCal World Guitar Show, June 17-18, 2023, OC Fair & Event Center, Arlington & Fairview St., Costa Mesa, CA. For more info call Larry at (918) 288-2222. amigoshow.com or stringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com. (See Advertisement on page 68.)

Summer Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, JUNE 25, 2023 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

Great American Guitar Show (Summer Philly), July 15-16, 2023, 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.

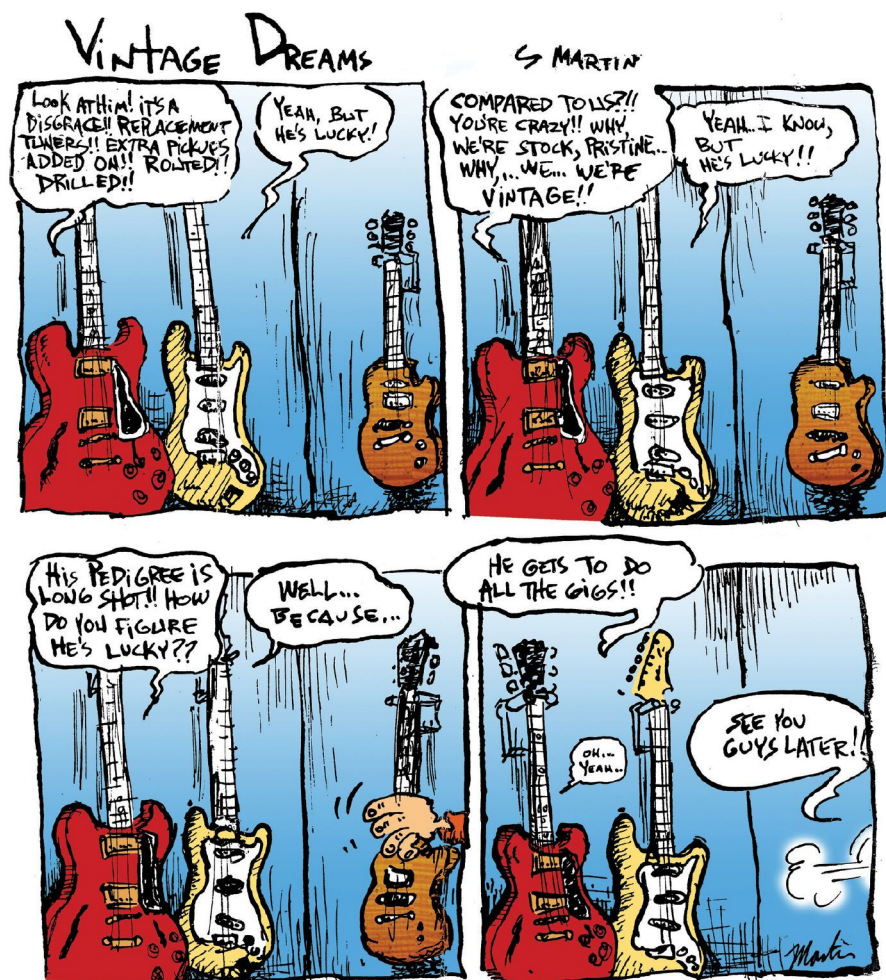
SEPTEMBER

Jake's Guitar Show & Music Swap Meet, September 16-17, 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

The Kalamazoo Music Instrument Swap, Sunday September 17th at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center, 2900 Lake St., Kalamazoo, MI 49048 from 10am - 4pm. For more information contact Shawn VanSteland at 517-410-6409 or at info@musicinstrumentswap.com

Rockford Guitar Show, Saturday, September 23, 2023 - 10am-3pm at the Tebala Event Center 7910 Newburg Rd Rockford IL 61108. \$5 at the door. More info at www.rockfordguitarshow.com (See Advertisement on page 67.)

The Indiana Guitar Show, September 23-24, 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



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Upcoming Events

OCTOBER

33rd Annual Chicago Vintage Guitar Expo, Sunday October 1st 2023 9am-3pm at the Holiday Inn, 1000 Busse Rd, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007. For more info Contact Beverly Bakes, R&B Productions at 847-931-0707 or Bakes-guitar@aol.com

Guitarlington 2023, October 21-22 at the Arlington Convention Center, 1200 Ballpark Way, Arlington TX. For more info contact Ruth Brinkmann (817) 312-7659 ruthm-brinkmann@gmail.com, Larry Briggs (918) 288-2222 larryb@stringswest.com, Dave Crocker (417) 850-4751 davelcrocker@gmail.com, Fax 817-592-3381 www.amigoguitarshows.com

NOVEMBER

The Ann Arbor Music Instrument Swap, Sunday, November 5th at Weber's Inn, 3050 Jackson Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 from 10am - 4pm. For more information contact Shawn VanSteele at 517-410-6409 or at info@musicinstrumentswap.com

Great American Guitar Show (Fall Philly), No-

vember 11-12 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.

2024

JANUARY

Winter Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, January 7, 2024 at the Makoy Center 5462 Center St, Hilliard, OH 43026 Show hours 11:30-5:00. For more info, contact Marc at (740) 797-3351. guitardigest@frontier.com, www.ohioguitarshows.com.

Amigo SoCal World Guitar Show, January 27-28, 2024, OC Fair & Event Center, Arlington & Fairview St., Costa Mesa, CA. For more info call Larry at (918) 288-2222, amigoshows@stringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

FEBRUARY

Orlando International Guitar & Music Expo, February 2-4, 2024 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

APRIL

The Greater Pittsburgh Guitar Show, Sunday, April 7, 2024. Printscape Arena, 114 Southpointe Blvd., Canonsburg, PA. Show hours 11-4. For more info contact Scott at (412) 716-8411, scotpro@comcast.net or visit www.guitarshowusa.com.

JUNE

Summer Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, June 23, 2024 at the Makoy Center 5462 Center St, Hilliard, OH 43026 Show hours 11:30-5:00. For more info, contact Marc at (740) 797-3351. guitardigest@frontier.com, www.ohioguitarshows.com.

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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REVIEWS



Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend
tear it up at Wembley.



The Who
The Who with Orchestra,
Live at Wembley

slashing, rhythm-heavy riffs and his patented short-solo bursts, reminiscent of *Live at Leeds*.

"Pinball Wizard" surges on Townshend's breakneck acoustic chords, punctuated by horn blasts. The orchestra provides the fleshy underbelly of "Join Together." A strong acoustic version of "Won't Get Fooled Again" reminds us of Townshend's brilliance as a songwriter. "The Real Me," "5:15," and "Love, Reign O'er Me" are potent *Quadrophenia* highlights, as the band and orchestra blend cohesively. While appeal to casual listeners might be limited, *Live at Wembley* is ideal for stalwarts seeking twists on several of rock's greatest anthems. — **Bret Adams**

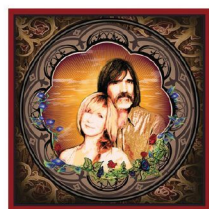
BOLD SONIC SPLASH

The raw power The Who displayed from their humble beginnings, nearly six decades ago, showed they didn't need enhancements. But this 2019 show at London's Wembley Stadium — their first there in four decades

— included vocalist Roger Daltrey, guitarist/vocalist Pete Townshend and their core band backed by a 50-plus-piece orchestra. The horns and strings embellishments add bold sonic splashes.

A semi-greatest hits set, this

one adds a few songs from recent albums *Endless Wire* and *Who*. Some are just the band, others are acoustic; the biggest chunk are from 1973's *Quadrophenia*, where Townshend unwinds on electric and acoustic, including



**Larry Campbell
and Teresa
Williams**
Live at Levon's!

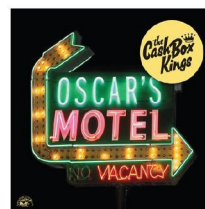
The term "versatile" is laughable when it comes to Larry Campbell. A handful of the artists he has recorded, produced, and toured with includes Bob Dylan, Cyndi Lauper, Keith Richards, Judy Collins, Jorma Kaukonen, Paul Simon, David Bromberg, and Rosanne Cash.

In this set featuring vocals by his wife, Teresa Williams, Campbell sings and plays guitar, mandolin, and fiddle (rumor has it he's also been known to blow sax). His Tele digs into Johnny Cash's "Big River," backs Williams with Piedmont ragtime-

y picking on a spirited rendition of Rev. Gary Davis' "Let Us Get Together," and delivers Stax soul and tremolo guitar on "When I Stop Loving You."

Pedal steel? No sweat, as evidenced by Louis Prima's boppin' "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah." Along the way, the duo hopscoches through Bill Monroe, Flatt & Scruggs, a touching reading of the Lovin' Spoonful's "Darling Be Home Soon," and excellent originals like the epic "Angel Of Darkness."

But it's Campbell's tour-de-force on "Caravan" from Duke Ellington's repertoire that's the dazzling head-turner — like a young Chet Atkins in overdrive. And this is all live, recorded at the Woodstock studio of another frequent Campbell collaborator, the late Levon Helm. Impressive stuff. — **Dan Forte**



Cash Box Kings
Oscar's Motel

For two decades, the Cash Box Kings have stood apart from the multitudes of "bluesbands" that focus on bar-band rock, not actual blues. Inspired by the 1940s-'60s Chicago sounds of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Little Walter, the Kings stay true to the roots, even on original tunes. Singer/harmonica player Joe Nosek, vocalist Oscar Wilson, and guitarist Billy Flynn (along with other musicians) create passionate, Chicago/Delta sounds free of sterile re-creation.

Flynn reveals his strengths behind Wilson's raw vocal on the rocking "Down on the South Side." Unlike many modern blues guitarists,

CHECK THIS ACTION



Freddie Roulette, with Deke Dickerson on bass.

BLUE STEEL

By Dan Forte

Freddie Roulette was one of the most amazing musicians I ever heard, knew, or saw – the absolute monster of blues on a Hawaiian lap-steel guitar. He passed away Christmas Eve at the age of 83.

He was truly one of a kind, not only for his choice of genre and instrument, but for the way he expressed his passion. There were a few other blues steel players before him, like Hop Wilson and L.C. “Good Rockin’” Robinson, but Freddie was far more sophisticated.

While living in Chicago, harmonica legend Charlie Musselwhite heard the obscure “Coast To Coast” by Bo Dudley (not to be confused with early rocker Bo Diddley). He couldn’t tell what he was hearing until one night when he found Freddie playing with Earl Hooker. At times, Hooker would play bottleneck through a wah pedal while Freddie played lap steel.

Musselwhite bassist Karl Sevareid recounts, “Charlie played that record for his new band in Berkeley in ’67. We thought our heads might explode. Then, in Chicago on our first road trip, he took us to hear Earl Hooker, and there was Freddie. A couple of months later, he joined the band.”

In ’92, Freddie told guitarist Randy Resnick, “Musselwhite sent for me when he was in Massachusetts, and our first gig was in Hartford, Connecticut, with B.B. King.”

Roulette was the inspiration for the late David Lindley to include lap steel in his multi-string arsenal. He told the story of his band, Kaleidoscope, being on a bill with Musselwhite at San Francisco’s Avalon Ballroom in the late ’60s. Hearing what he first thought was a saxophone, he ran from the dressing to find Roulette playing Hawaiian guitar and smoking a pipe.

In 1976, I interviewed Freddie for a “Pro’s Reply” column in *Guitar Player*. He talked about his love of country music, songs like Kay Starr’s ’50s hit “Wheel Of Fortune,” his A7 tuning, and explained that his technique was all in his right hand. And yes, his ability to pick with his bare fingers was something to behold, but the way he executed slants and reverseslants with a Nick Manoloff laminated bar was no mean feat. High to low, that tuning was E-C[#]-A-E-C[#]-A-A-G, with the low A strings doubled and the G an octave higher.

I saw Freddie sit in with Lindley’s El Rayo-X at Keystone Berkeley, where I also saw him play with the Fabulous Thunderbirds. As usual, he rose to both occasions and had the band and audience cheering and shaking their heads.

In 1980, Musselwhite alumnus Tim Kaihatsu invited me to be part of the Rat Band when they played a Christmas party at Larry Blake’s restaurant in Berkeley, and Freddie

was in the lineup. The ghostly fills he played through a Roland Space Echo weren’t obtrusive, but they were so inventive I almost lost concentration when it was my turn to solo.

“Being a steel-guitar player, I have to stretch that instrument way beyond its original intent in order to make it, which is what I do,” Freddie told Resnick. “So I have to be creative, which I am – not to a great success I would want to be, but, you know, I can get by.”

Years later, Kaihatsu called to tell me that Freddie’s only steel (a single-neck National New Yorker) was stolen while he was rescuing his belongings during a house fire. The instrument was his sole means of making a living. I called Lindley at his home in Southern California, guessing he’d help an old friend. He took down Freddie’s address, and the next day, Freddie opened his front door to find Lindley’s roadie handing him a double-neck National that David had driven to the Burbank Airport to be picked up by his roadie at Oakland International. Over the years, Roulette played with Harvey Mandel and the group Daphne Blue. He appeared with Mandel, Henry Kaiser, and Steve Kimock on *Psychedelic Circus*, and Kaiser produced Freddie’s *Man Of Steel* album, with Lindley participating.

Being primarily a sideman, Roulette’s recorded output doesn’t reflect his awesome talent, but the few examples are more than worth a listen. He played on Hooker’s *Two Bugs and a Roach*, was part of Musselwhite’s all-star Chicago Blue Stars in 1970, and played on the harpist’s *Memphis, Tennessee* album. Mandel produced his first solo album, *Sweet Funky Steel*, and Freddie released *Back in Chicago: Jammin’ with Willie Kent and the Gents* and *Spirit Of Steel*.

He covered everything from “Norwegian Wood” to Lee Morgan’s “Sidewinder,” the theme from *Endless Summer*, the standard “Honeysuckle Rose,” and even the novelty speedster “Holiday For Strings.” One of his favorites – and best – was his version of Ray Charles’ “In The Heat Of The Night.”

Sadly, in recent years he suffered from dementia.

The photo here is from Deke Dickerson’s Guitar Geek Fest in 2012. Deke recounts his version of the Santo and Johnny oldie “Sleep Walk”: “The choice seemed too mainstream, but boy, was I wrong. Freddie played the heck out of it, in his own inimitably weird and unique style, and tore the house down.”

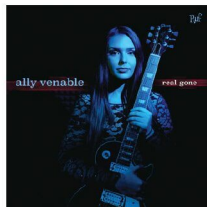
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Ally Venable

he knows when to stick with the ensemble and when to step out, as he does with a tangy, concise Albert King-inspired statement. His licks add flair and edginess to “Nobody Called It the Blues” and “She Dropped the Axe on Me,” both driven by authentic, syncopated Delta rhythms.

Muddy Waters’ “Please Have Mercy” reflects early-’50s Chess, the subtle guitar parts supporting both Wilson’s vocals and Nosek’s harmonica. Flynn’s sharp, Muddy-inspired slide emerges on the raw “Tryin’ So Hard,” his agile, strategically placed riffs adding color behind Nosek’s vocal on the shuffle “Hot Little Mess.” This is 20th-century blues in 2023, as gritty and alive as ever. – **Rich Kienzie**



Ally Venable Real Gone

Ally Venable has deep roots in blues-rock, but it’s easy to picture her as a festival headliner.

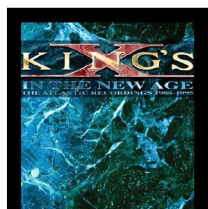
A legitimate triple threat – the writer of original songs, a powerhouse vocalist and a tough, tasteful guitarist who can go toe-to-toe with the boys – the 24-year-old Texan’s latest effort, produced by Grammy winner Tom

Hambridge, more than hints at a future beyond the traditional parameters of the blues.

The opening title track, a straightforward rocker with an urgent solo, serves as a prelude to an album’s worth of excellent guitar work. “Justifyin’,” a driving Buddy Guy cover, continues the trend, packing intensity and fury.

While appearances by Joe Bonamassa (“Broken and Blue”) and Guy (“Texas Louisiana”) add swagger to the proceedings, Venable serves notice she’s perfectly fine without the star power; “Kick Your Ass” features barbed riffs that underscore the song’s unmistakable lyrical message, and the ballad “Next Time I See You” shows her range, initially emphasizing space as the tune grows in intensity before delivering some of the most evocative playing on the album.

Call it blues, rock, or something in-between, the future is wide open for Venable. This provides the proof. – **Sean McDavitt**



King’s X In the New Age: The Atlantic Recordings 1988- 1995

Absurdly talented
– and eternally mis-

understood – King’s X was always on the cusp of stardom. This box set with bonus tracks deftly documents their blend of Beatlesque pop, Rush-like progressive, proto-grunge, and Christian themes showcasing frontman/bassist Doug Pinnick and drop-D maven Ty Tabor.

King’s X’s early albums are FM classics; listen to “Goldilox” for Tabor’s clean, flanged arpeggios and power chords. From *Gretchen Goes to Nebraska*, “Summerland” has a throaty Tabor solo over Pinnick’s chunky bass, while 1990’s “It’s Love” is radio-ready crunch with vocal harmonies. An extended “Six Broken Soldiers” brings an epic, soaring finale; “Lost in Germany” displays King’s X’s gift for the deep rhythm pocket, yet never loses the riffs.

King’s X also embraced funky alt-metal, as on the single “Dogman,” which was in heavy rotation on MTV. While still not a *hit*, it reveals the trio’s influence on ’90s rockers like Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam. A faithful cover of Hendrix’s “Manic Depression” closed the *Dogman* album, and this set adds a bonus live take on “Shoes.” While this box doesn’t break much new ground, it reminds us that King’s X was – and still is – an incredible band. – **Pete Prown**



Tommy Emmanuel Accomplice Two

On this rich, diverse collection of duets, Emmanuel and Billy Strings get right to it with an exuberant medley of Doc Watson’s “Doc’s Guitar/Black Mountain Rag.” Emmanuel’s free-flowing fingerstyle kicks things off, followed by Strings and his flawless flatpicking. He and Mavericks vocalist Raul Malo create a nuanced, reflective, rendition of the pop ballad “Faraway Places.” Yasmin Williams brings her distinctive picking skills to “Mombasa.”

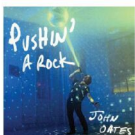
Jerry Douglas and Emmanuel create a gorgeous, ethereal interpretation of the original instrumental “Mama Knows.” The guitarist (who overdubbed multiple instruments on some numbers) and Jamey Johnson infuse Merle Haggard’s “Daddy Frank (The Guitar Man),” with a spirit close to Haggard’s 1970 original. He and Richard Smith create a breakneck duet on “Son of a Gun,” while the stately “Precious Time” features flawless interaction with bluegrass-mandolin star Sierra Hull.

Molly Tuttle joins Emmanuel for a burn-



DOM FLEMONS
Traveling Wildfire

American roots musician Flemons and his band offer 14 tradition-inspired originals and an obscure Dylan tune. He meticulously identifies each instrument, most notably a '67 Höfner 459 TZ that enhances the ballads "Dark Beauty" and "Traveling Wildfire." Matt Pynn's empathetic pedal steel dresses the country waltz "If You Truly Love Me," while "Rabbit Foot Rag" showcases Flemons' engaging ragtime fingerpicking. – **RK**



JOHN OATES
Various Singles

Half of the Hall & Oates hit juggernaut, the singer/songwriter/guitarist is digitally releasing an album's worth of songs individually – one per month. "Pushin' a Rock" is rich Philly R&B. "Disconnected" is fantastic pop/rock with soft acoustic-guitar strums and a just-right, easygoing electric solo. Jazzy guitar emanates from an upbeat arrangement of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World." Enjoyable tunes. – **BA**



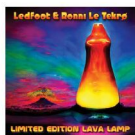
MATHIAS SANDBERG
The Captain

The Finnish bop ace swings through nine cuts, displaying improv reminiscent of the '60s Benson/Martino/Diorio school. "Screw in" is fierce trio jazz featuring complex lines and warm, old-school tone (using an Ibanez George Benson archtop). "Chicken Special" throws down a funky blues vamp while "F# Stay Sharp!" stretches out with ambling phrases. Sandberg's vintage post-bop is certainly recommended. – **PP**



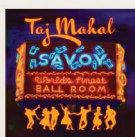
MIKE ZITO & ALBERT CASTIGLIA
Blood Brothers

Zito and Castiglia combine their superpowers on a gritty blues album that reflects the seedy underbelly of existence. Produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith, Zito and Castiglia are in the zone, uplifting their old-school guitar grooves with pure zeal. Highlights include "You're Gonna Burn" and the John Hiatt cover "My Business." – **OJ**



LEDFOOT & RONNI LE TEKRO
Limited Edition Lava Lamp

TNT's Ronni Le Tekro joins Ledfoot for their second release running the gamut from somber ballads like "You Should Know How Hard It Is" to Texas boogies like "The Ego In The Coffin." They're joined by fine musicians, but expect no classically influenced pop-metal or envelope-pushing guitar pyrotechnics. Instead, Le Tekro uses his superpowers to support acoustic singer/songwriter melancholia with electric ornamentation. – **OJ**



TAJ MAHAL
Savoy

With a jazz-arranger father and a predilection for genre-jumping, it's surprising it has taken this long for Mahal to dive into swinging jazz. Not surprisingly, he comfortably delivers "Mood Indigo" and "Stomping At The Savoy." On guitar is the ever-tasteful Danny Caron, a veteran of Charles Brown and Maria Muldaur – and the right man for the job. – **DF**



ERIC CLAPTON
Rarities 1983-1998
Streaming digitally, this deceptively titled set ("1983" is the year Eric started recording for Reprise, not actual track dates) collects miscellaneous recordings, like a live '86 "White Room." The earthy "32-20 Blues" and "County Jail Blues" are from a '93 gig; prime cuts include "Born Under a Bad Sign" and Eric's wild, Jimi-fueled "Stone Free." – **PP**



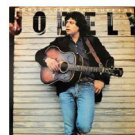
BEN BOSTICK
The Rascal Is Back
Georgia multi-instrumentalist Bostick shares guitar chores with Kyle Lalone on a program of catchy Americana originals, like the title song, reminiscent of Roger Miller and peppered with hot chicken pickin' and snaky bends. "Big Train" couples country with Stones-y riffage and bluesy bends. This is Bostick's fifth album, and it's likely to make you check out the previous four. – **DF**



SAVOY BROWN
Blues All Around
As cancer treatments muted the sense of feel in the hands of Savoy Brown's Kim Simmonds during the recording of what would be his final album, the late guitarist spoke with his slide. The borne-of-need approach adds grit and grime – and poignancy – to tracks like "Going Down South" and "Winning Hand," making this a bittersweet release from a British blues pioneer. – **SM**



KHYMERA
Hold Your Ground
Yearning for the melodic glam-rock of 40 years ago? This is for you! Similar to Dokken, Giuffria, and Night Ranger, vocalist/bassist/keyboardist Dennis Ward leads the charge as guitarist Michael Klein glazes the tunes with zesty, concise solos and tight rhythms, adding MTV-era accents on "Firestarter" and "Sail On Forever." While Khymera's sound is firmly about the '80s, they do it *extremely* well. – **BA**



JOE ELY
Joe Ely, Honky Tonk Masquerade, Down on the Drag
These reissues chronicle the iconic Lone-Star singer/songwriter kicking off his solo career. His self-titled 1977 debut and '78's *Masquerade* became Outlaw masterpieces, enhanced by Lloyd Maines' sharply focused pedal steel and acoustic picking by Nashville A-Teamer Chip Young, who produced both albums. On *Drag* ('79), Maines created the punch and texture with Ely's regular guitarist, Jesse Taylor. – **RK**

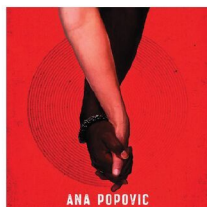


IAN HUNTER
Defiance, Part 1
Even at 84 years old, Ian Hunter is a rockin' badass. Here, he stomps on "Defiance" with Slash on guitar, while "Bed of Roses" sports ex-Petty guitarist Mike Campbell and fellow octogenarian Ringo Starr on drums. "No Hard Feelings" reminds us the clock is still ticking, as the late Jeff Beck delivers an otherworldly solo. Rock on, Mr. Hunter. – **PP**



Ana Popovic

ing, buoyant “White Freight Liner Blues.” Turning to flatpicking, he teams with the Del McCoury Band for a swinging take on Merle Travis’ ’40s hit “Sweet Temptation.” Unaccompanied, he and mandolin hero David Grisman dive headfirst into the Benny Goodman/Charlie Christian standard “Seven Come Eleven.” Many “all-star” collaborations offer more hype than music. Not this joyful, thoroughly substantive effort. — **RK**



Ana Popovic *Power*

Blues-rock barnstormer Ana Popovic’s latest is about love, perseverance, strength, and survival.

After rising victoriously from 14 cancer treatments in 2020, Popovic continues to push the envelope of her artistry by dropping her unique blend of searing, hot-wired guitar within the context of funk, R&B, rock,

blues, and pop. *Power* is the sound of a talented artist with a new lease on life; it’s also about the unifying power of love through music. On “Queen of the Pack,” Popovic lets loose on her Strat with an intense barrage of inspired Santana-isms supporting a message of empowerment.

On the upbeat blues shuffle “Strong Taste,” Popovic mixes single-note lines with wicked slide playing to significant effect as top-tier drummer Chris Coleman pushes the band with a relentless groove. Songs like “Ride It,” “Power Over Me,” and “Deep Down” is excellent ass-shaking music for lovers of fiery guitar solos. Popovic also gets mellow, but “Flicker & Flame” will shut down any rumors that she’s gone soft, with its saturated guitar tones and riffage galore. Hendrix is smiling somewhere, and “Rise Up” delivers a message of unity and brotherhood to the world. *Power* is a funky record. — **Oscar Jordan**

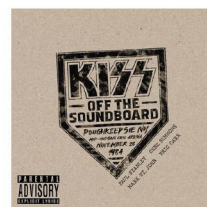


Arlen Roth & Jerry Jemmott *Super Soul Session*

Roth is well-known for his “Hot Licks” instructional videos and method books. But his career is far from academic, having toured and recorded with Bob Dylan, Duane Eddy, and John Sebastian, devoted albums to the music of Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, and the Rolling Stones, and reeled in the likes of Steve Cropper, Albert Lee, and Brad Paisley to play on his solo albums.

Here, however, the additional starpower is fellow Bronx native Jemmott, one of the true soul, R&B, and blues bass greats, having backed heavyweights like King Curtis, Aretha Franklin, B.B. King, and Wilson Pickett. Roth handles soul classics like “Since You’ve Been Gone” and “Dancing In The Street” as masterfully as country twang or acoustic folk, with pedal steel-esque bends on the latter. Jemmott easily earns his “Groovemaster” nickname on “Memphis Soul Stew” and “Chain Off Fools.”

Half the tunes are done instrumentally, half featuring vocalists Joe Louis Walker (“Shake,” “Thrill Is Gone”) and Mukamuri, who shows the blurred line between soul and country on “Drift Away” and “Good Time Charlie’s Got The Blues,” featuring Roth’s tasteful bends. The album closes with a slide treatment of “America The Beautiful” that’s *supersoulful* indeed. — **DF**



Kiss *Off the Soundboard:* Poughkeepsie, NY

This 1984 concert is the only known soundboard recording with guitarist Mark St. John, whose tenure is one of the briefest chapters in Kisstory.

St. John played on *Animalize* then developed a sudden case of arthritis and had to depart the group. On these live tracks, his style blends bursts of ’80s shredding, whammy bar dives, and distorted chords he injects to familiar riffs such as “Cold Gin.”

It’s fun to hear forgotten early-’80s songs like “Fits Like a Glove” and an incomplete “Young and Wasted.” Kiss’ 1984 hit “Heaven’s On Fire” misses the studio refinement but maintains its hooky power. His two-and-

a-half-minute “Guitar Solo” is showy, but erratic. His playing is grittier on the primal “War Machine,” a skittering solo delivers a bullet in “Love Gun,” and the band crushes “Black Diamond.” Gene Simmons’ bass is prominent in the mix – his “Bass Solo” thunders with memorable licks.

Occasionally messy (and diminished by Paul Stanley’s tour-blown voice), the Poughkeepsie recording is a valid historical document for soldiers of the Kiss Army. If you’re a more casual fan, stick with *Animalize* as the definitive Mark St. John statement. – **BA**



Crown Lands Fearless

This Canadian duo doesn’t disguise its Rush fanaticism. The obvious parallel is Greta Van Fleet,

and what that quartet did for Led Zeppelin, Crown Lands does for Rush. On the 18-minute “Starlifter: Fearless Part II,” guitarist/bassist Kevin Comeau and drummer/vocalist Cody Bowles time-travel to the *Hemispheres* era for a complex, spacey (and quite impressive) suite. The aggro-bass lines and soaring crescendo of “Context” are more evidence of their knack for evoking all things Lee, Lifeson, and Peart.

Both players execute long, dizzying pieces while handling multi-instrumental chores, such as bass pedals, synthesizer, and flute. Comeau – often using a guitar/bass double-neck – delivers chorus-heavy 12-string, fierce Rick-bass tones, and snarling solos throughout. Reminiscent of “Red Barchetta,” the cut “Dreamer of the Dawn” is another FM-ready anthem replete with arpeggio-heavy chords and Bowles’ treble-booster vocals. Conversely, “Penny” shows off Comeau’s open-tuned acoustic fingerstyle.

With Neil Peart gone and Rush unlikely to reunite, Crown Lands fills a niche for the prog faithful. While the twosome doesn’t quite possess the instrumental virtuosity of Canada’s greatest trio, you have to admire their skill, vision, and sheer bravado – they squarely nail it. Like the old cassette ad, “Is it live – or is it Memorex?” – **PP**



Rodrigo Y Gabriela In Between Thoughts, A New World

The Grammy-winning acoustic



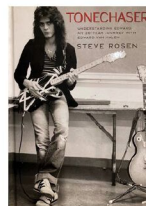
Rodrigo Y Gabriela

duo is back with a collection of consciousness-raising musical concepts, textures, and philosophies augmented by electronica and orchestral elements.

Rhythm is king as they slap, shred, groove, and showcase effortless melodic flair, acoustic fire, and joie de vivre. The first single, “Descending To Nowhere,” blends the aforementioned elements combined with electric guitar, addictive Latin syncopation, and arrangements that scream “crossover appeal.”

The opening track, “True Nature,” is a tour-de-force composition that journeys between Latin America, rock and roll, and Italian spaghetti-western soundtracks. “Egoland” utilizes an envelope-filter effect played on electric guitar, with atmospheric slide that glides atop a vibrant acoustic dance-club groove.

“Seeking Unreality” is strong on melody as the chord cycle careens like a glider flying through the Andes mountains. Rodrigo again whips out his electric for a catchy lead break on “Broken Rage.” Without a drum set in earshot, Gabriela holds down a savage groove with acoustic nylon-stringed fury as Rodrigo shreds with motific intention and an ear for tasteful composition. *In Between Thoughts, A New World* is an energetic record with lush peaks and valleys, and a clever guitar aesthetic that never gets old. – **OJ**



Steve Rosen Tonechaser – Understanding Edward: My 26-Year Journey with Edward Van Halen

Imagine having Edward Van Halen at your house, playing new Van Halen songs or listening to no-vocals cassettes of in-progress albums in EVH’s cigarette-smoke-filled car. How about jamming with the guitar icon? It all happened to veteran music journalist Steve Rosen.

This intensely personal book isn’t an EVH biography, though it started that way. Rosen met the legend-in-waiting at a 1977 gig at L.A.’s Whisky a Go Go and they developed a personal friendship coinciding with a professional relationship. Loaded with guitar stories, EVH brought newly purchased ’58 and ’59 sunburst Les Pauls to Rosen’s house in ’79. Other interviews get into the weeds of Van Halen’s guitars, including his original “Frankenstein” Charvel.

EVH hated interviews, but gave Rosen permission to record their conversations (with some off-the-record moments) and many are transcribed here. Still an opening act in ’78, a young Eddie told Steve, “When we started out with Journey and Montrose, we were brand new and I think our album was only out a week. Now we’re passing Journey on the charts... so they’re freaking out. I think they might be happy to get rid of us!” – **BA VG**

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1976 Gibson Flying V Limited edition. Less than 100 made. One of nine units in tobacco Sunburst. Badge serial number. Guitar has been in storage since 1984 all original. Includes all original paperwork, sales, slip, warranty, card, etc. includes a Gibson custom shop case. Contact: jhefner571@gmail.com

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tail piece and (3) volume/tone control layout. Outside of finish checking, it is in very good condition. Included in the sale: '84 Gibson price guide, a framed '84 Gibson ad featuring the USA Map guitar and a Coffin Case. For more info: djayst@roadrunner.com or call (315)-733-2311

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INSTRUMENTS WANTED

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2009 Gibson Jeff Beck Oxblood with all the case candy COAs etc. I had one #28 and I sold it during a Covid freakout, so want to replace it back in my collection.

AMPS FOR SALE

Amp Workshop Sale! Get'em before they're gone! BC Audio hand-made all-tube non-clone guitar amps. Octal preamp tubes, true point-to-point wiring. bcaudio.com 415-310-3087 bruce@bcaudio.com

1970 Ampeg SVT head, Blue Line-Linden NJ. Very good condition with original vinyl cover. Serviced only by Dennis Kager, \$1750. Gallien-Krueger 410GLX 4x10 bass cab. near mint, \$175. Pictures of both available. Not shipping, pick up only in Hudson County NJ. mgatt55@comcast.net

AMPS WANTED

Ampeg Goldenglow Reverborocket mid- 60s 25 watt tube combo amp. Copper control panel top, lucite back panel lights up, that's the one! contact: Willis/Delta Prince Music - deltaprince@cox.net (az.)

MISC FOR SALE

Ivory Guitar Picks - Handmade Alaskan fossilized walrus ivory & mastodon ivory, great tone, beautiful, cool, lasts forever, \$25. You won't play w/ plastic again. Guaranteed. Send check to: Mark Kostreba, 7661 Delridge, Anchorage, AK 99507-3015. mark-kostreba@gci.net (AK)

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STOLEN INSTRUMENTS

1966 sunburst Stratocaster, S/N 166140, rosewood board, shaved neck, replace pickguard & pickups. Hand-drilled route in pickup area. Stolen in Chicago, bought this new. Bruce 630-539- 2273 or igotabigmouth@gmail.com

Mid-60s Fender Tremolux Amp. Recognizable by its original Yellow color repainted BLACK. Head stolen from Malverne, Long Island, NY (Nassau County), circa 1975. Speaker Cabinet (stolen separately from Head) from Rye, NY (Westchester County), between October 1980 and January 1981. Miss my Tremolux Big Time. I have a pic of the Amp from 1974 to show, if required. Thanx. janbrittenowen@gmail.com

SWANK PLANK

Reverend's Rick Vito Soul Agent

Some guitars *look* great, while others *sound* or *play* great. With Reverend's Rick Vito Soul Agent, you get all three in one package.

With a chambered korina (white limba) body and solid-spruce top, our swank tester had a mint-hued finish Reverend calls Oceanside Green, with an asymmetrical pickguard, Art Deco bridge-pickup cover, Bigsby B-50 vibrato, and checkerboard binding. All told, it's one hep cat, and those chambers are a proven way to get an air-moving vibe without waiting 50 years for wood to mellow. The 12"-radius/25.5"-scale bolt-on neck is roasted maple with 22 frets on an ebony board, locking tuners, and Reverend's typically stellar fretwork and setup.

Electronics are a P-90 in the neck slot, humbucker in the bridge, master Volume and Tone controls, and three-way toggle selector. The Reverend's secret sauce comes from push/pull pots under each knob; pull up the Volume knob to invoke the "twang" circuit – a thinner, airier sound that almost conjures an archtop's woody tone – while the Tone pot deploys a subtler phase circuit. Together, they offer eight sonic combinations.

Plugged in, the Rev is a smokin' axe with a fast neck carve and loads of personality – you really sense that chambered-body vibe while playing your best British-blues licks or country twang. The Soul Agent's humbucker effortlessly handles heavy overdrive, while the P-90 cleans up nicely for jazzy runs. One quibble is the location of the toggle – tucked under the Bigsby. It would be easier to access on the fly if it was under the pickups or on the upper bout, like a Les Paul. Still, the Rick Vito Soul Agent is a superior axe, full of brash attitude, sweet tones, and excellent construction. File under "Highly recommended." – **Pete Prown**

Price: \$1,299
www.reverendguitars.com



Price: \$216
www.mayflyaudio.com

COME AS YOU ARE

Mayfly's Goddess Chorus

Chorus pedals have been around for decades and for many players are an integral part of their tone. But not all are created equally. Some tone purists swear by the sound of old analog designs developed back in the day; Trevor Mayfly, founder of Mayfly Audio, is one of them.

The Mayfly Goddess is an all-analog, stereo, dual-chorus pedal that uses NOS Panasonic chips to create old-school chorus effects. Two footswitchable modes (A and B) feature independent Depth and Speed controls along with a Blend in the middle, shared by both. The A side is designed for slow, dreamy chorus effects, B for faster Leslie-speaker sounds.

With a Telecaster plugged in and running the Goddess into a 1x12 tube combo, A side tones were rich, thick, and smooth. The B side was similar, but just much faster. Playing with the Depth and Blend controls opened a world of sounds that are musical and somewhat addictive. Overall depth and width of the effect can help make a small amp (even a cheap practice model) sound huge and inspiring, especially if running in stereo.

If you're bored and uninspired by thin, sterile chorus and love something that sounds like a pricey vintage box, the Mayfly Goddess may be your ticket.

– **Charlie Wilkins**



CRUSHIN' ON YOU

The Orange Rockerverb 50 MKIII Combo Neo

When Orange introduced its Rockerverb 50 MkIII combo in 2015, its versatility quickly made it a favorite among players. But it was also known for its back-breaking heft. The engineers at Orange took note.

The new Rockerverb MKIII Combo Neo is a 50-watt 2x12 with two 6L6s, a pair of Celestion Neodymium Creamback speakers, and a birch cab with thinner (15 mm/.6") walls. The changes allowed the amp to shed 15 pounds, though it still weighs in at nearly 69 pounds.

The two-channel Rockerverb is loaded with features. Its Clean channel has controls for Volume, Bass, and Treble, while Dirt has Gain, Bass Mids, Treble, and Volume. Reverb, effects loop, power attenuator, and a half-power switch are shared by both channels.

With a Telecaster and a Les Paul plugged in, the amp offered the meaty tones that have brought adulation to Orange. Its EQ is responsive and can sculpt a variety of tones from warm and fat to bright and twangy. Dime the Volume knob and the Rockerverb

glides beyond the edge of breakup, straight to grit.

The Dirty channel is the star of the show, with its super-thick, rich tone augmented by gobbs of gain and sustain. With Gain and Volume set to straight-up noon, the Rockerverb's slightly

fuzzy mid-gain tone morphs into classic '70s-rock sounds. Bump up the two controls a bit more, and things get dark

and mean, wrapped in a thick coat of fuzz. Stoner-rock tone at its finest!

Switch the amp to 25 watts output and you get earlier breakup along with a spongier, compressed tone that still stays loud and punchy. At bedroom-whisper levels, it maintains much of the cranked tone.

The Rockerverb MKIII Combo Neo is a fantastic workhorse that covers a lot of ground. The focus on lighter weight and control of its volume make it every bit as versatile as its heavier older brother. Do the neodymium Celestions and thinner cab walls change its sound? Doesn't matter, because this version of the Rockerverb is so good in its own right. — **Charlie Wilkins**

Price: \$2,699
www.orangeamps.com



GEARIN' UP



ELECTRO-HARMONIX LIZARD QUEEN

The Electro-Harmonix Lizard Queen Octave Distortion is a fixed-gain fuzz pedal with controls for Volume, Octave, and Balance. Octave blends the octave-up effect, while Balance sets the tone between the smoother Shadow setting and the biting Sun setting.



EPIPHONE CHRIS STAPLETON FRONTIER

The Epiphone Chris Stapleton Frontier is based on the Dove model, with a spruce top, figured-maple back and sides, mahogany neck with a Round C shape, rosewood fretboard with rectangular inlays, L.R. Baggs VTC electronics, and two engraved pickguards with lariat-and-cactus motif.



FENDER ADAM CLAYTON ACB

Fender's Adam Clayton ACB signature bass amp uses 12AX7s and a 12AT7 in the preamp with a pair of 6L6 power tubes powering an Eminence Neo 15" speaker. Its cabinet is plywood covered in black textured vinyl and an aged-silver grillecloth. Other features include chickenhead knobs on a chrome control plate and XLR line out.

ADAPTIVE DOUBLE-CUT

Vigier's G.V.Wood Hollow

Vigier Guitars rose to attention when it built a Strat-style guitar with an absolutely flat fretboard for Shawn Lane. Still known primarily for similar models, the company's new G.V.Wood Hollow signals a change of direction.

Semi-hollow with a bolt-on neck, the G.V.Wood's body is made from aged alder with a flame-maple top and neck made with maple that is naturally dried for three years. The company's "90/10" maple neck is reinforced with a carbon-fiber slab that eliminates the need for a truss rod. Sporting a comfortable D shape, its finish is gloss or matte depending on the color of the body. At its Teflon nut, the neck is $\frac{1}{32}$ " narrower than a Les Paul Standard, and the radius of the rosewood fretboard is just slightly rounder at 11.8". Action at the 12th fret is extremely low – 1.5 mm on the treble side, 2 mm on the bass side. The 24.8" scale is filled with medium stainless frets and a zero fret. Schaller locking M6-2000 tuners top the neck.

Through a 1x8" combo driven by an ECC82 power tube, the hand-wound bridge pickup was remarkably clear and open-sounding without the typical midrange bump. The neck humbucker was warm with surprising treble sparkle. The middle three positions on the five-way switch control the split coils; one notch up from the back lowers output from the bridge single-coil and smooths treble response from the humbucker. In position two from the front, the neck single-coil cuts midrange while retaining overall warmth. The middle position combines both single-coils and produces rhythm tones very close to an acoustic guitar.

A versatile instrument that can cover any musical situation, the G.V.Wood is offered in seven finishes. —**Bob Dragich**

Price: \$6,299 (list)
www.vigierguitars.com



Price: \$319
www.drybell.com

BIG DEEPNESS

DryBell's Vibe Machine 3

DryBell Musical Electronic Laboratory's original Vibe Machine (its take on the classic Univibe) was developed 11 years ago and received thunderous accolades. When the company celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, it also unleashed the V-3, an updated photocell-based version that updated its EQ function.

The pedal now modulates without changing EQ, making it sound roomier and with more depth, but only a subtle difference in intensity. Side-mounted trim pots can be used to adjust overall Volume, low-frequency output, and character response based on the guitar, but it's worth noting that Drybell's presets are spectacular. On top, mini-toggles select Chorus/Vibrato and a subtle EQ tweak labeled Custom/Bright/Original, while knobs control Intensity and Speed.

Enlisting a Marshall combo, Octafuzz, and a Strat, the Vibe Machine V-3 poured out the psychedelia with big deepness and chewy thickness. Offering less midrange in the modulation sweep than V-2, V-3 provides more depth and space on the Chorus and Vibrato settings. Being able to personalize levels and EQ for different setups is a nice plus, as is an input jack for an expression pedal or external footswitch for tap tempo or cancel function. The Vibrato adds girth as it throbs and pulsates, conjuring Trower, Hendrix, and Gilmour. More importantly, it's flexible, and a warm musical experience. —**Oscar Jordan**



SATISFYING SOUNDS

The Blackstar Amped 2

Blackstar's entry to the growing market of "all in one" compact amplifier/effects units claims to offer a high degree of usability built around famous tones – but don't they all?

With 100 watts of Class D output (adjustable to 20 watts and one watt), creating a sound with the Amped 2 starts by selecting one of three Amplifier voicings labeled USA, UK, and Classic (patterned on Blackstar's 6L6 amps with cascading gain). From there, a three-band EQ allows for tweaking to taste, aided by knobs for Gain and Master Volume.

Running the Amped 2 direct to a mid-sized PA, the unit proffered respectable base sounds with noteworthy touch sensitivity. The foot-switched Drive function brings Boost, Drive, and Fuzz with knobs to adjust Drive, Tone, and Level; Boost nicely bumps output for a solo that cuts or can be pushed to overdrive, Drive quickly becomes a distortion, and Fuzz delivers as much as you'll need.

While running the A2 direct to a PA is great fun, going to 1x12 cabs with a Celestion Custom 90 and H75 Creamback proved especially satisfying thanks to the Power Amp section's Response switch, which nicely models the feel (sag, tightness, etc.) that draws adulation for each tube type – EL84, EL34, and 6L6 – when playing through proper speakers. Fans of clean headroom may not appreciate how quickly all of the settings break up.

The unit's effects section is the two-thumbs-up show stealer. Under the Modulation header

is a toggle to choose Chorus/Flange, Tremolo, and Phaser along with controls to adjust Time, Depth, and Level. The Delay toggle selects Linear, Analogue, and Shimmer with knobs for Time, Feedback, and Level, while the

Reverb toggle selects Room, Spring, and Plate with knobs to alter Time and Level. All are very responsive and add obvious dynamics; Level is super-useful when bouncing

between Power Amp Response settings, and we *really* liked how the OLED display shows a numerical value while adjusting each effect, which are engaged with separate footswitches.

The unit's CabRig feature simulates cabinets, mics, and rooms, and functions much like it does on Blackstar's St. James amp. Each of three factory presets performs well as-is and can be modified and saved by using Blackstar's Architect app.

Other handy features include outputs for 8- and 16-ohm cabs, two outlets for powering outboard pedals, balanced XLR and 1/4" stereo out jacks, effects loop, four-channel USB out for connecting to a DAW, headphone/line out, MIDI compatibility, and a tuner.

Solidly constructed with high-quality components, the Amped 2 brings a lot at a reasonable price. It may not have diehards shoving aside their tube amps for live gigs, but it's also just 11.3" wide and weighs 4.3 pounds, and its sounds are highly satisfying. There's a place for it wherever portability and practicality are as important as good tone. – **Brett Jochim**

Price: \$649 (retail)
www.blackstaramps.com

GEARIN' UP



VOLA OZ 7T

Vola Guitars' OZ 7T has an alder body, maple neck, 24 medium-jumbo nickel frets, 25.5" scale, 48mm TusQ nut, Gotoh locking tuners and vibrato bridge, and push/pull pots on the Tone and Volume knob to split the coils of its Vola Flame bucker pickups at the neck and bridge. It's offered in four finishes.



REDDICK VOYAGER CS

Reddick Guitars' Voyager CS has a semi-hollow mahogany body with carved maple top, maple neck with asymmetrical C profile, Gotoh tuners and hardware, and interchangeable pickup/control modules that use Seymour Duncan pickups. It is hand-made in Georgia.



MUSIC NOMAD FRET SHIELD

Music Nomad's Fret Shield is designed to protect frets during polishing. Made from .008" (.20mm) stainless steel with smooth drop-down edges, it's offered in popular scale lengths ranging from 24.75" to 25.5".

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VALUE CITY

Donner's DST-700 Hyper

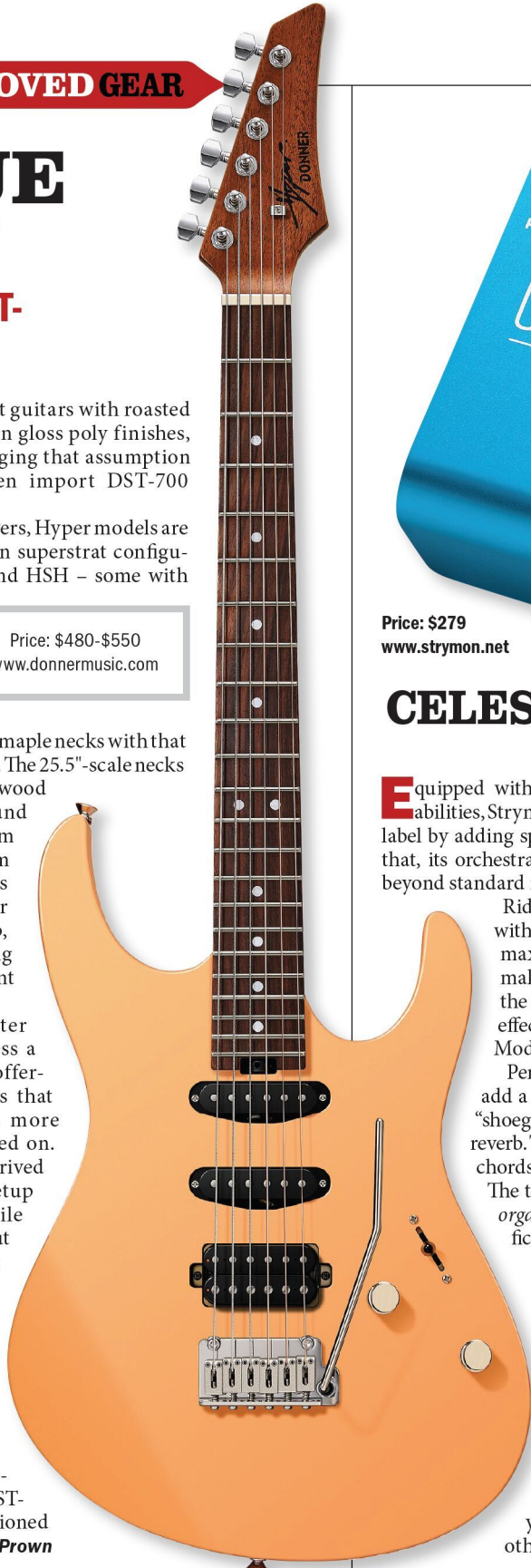
It's often the case that guitars with roasted necks cost more than gloss poly finishes, but Donner is challenging that assumption with its feature-laden import DST-700 Hyper Series.

Aiming for rock players, Hyper models are offered with pickups in superstrat configurations – HH, HSS, and HSH – some with push/pull tone pots. They have bodies made of basswood with matte finishes or mahogany in natural, and five-piece maple necks with that trendy “roasted” finish. The 25.5”-scale necks have 22 frets on a rosewood board and a compound radius that goes from 10” to 14” for maximum shredularity. There's also a truss-rod adjuster next to the neck pickup, Donner's 18:1 locking tuners, and a two-point vibrato bridge.

In hand, our tester HH did indeed possess a hard-rock attitude, offering mid-favored tones that sounded good with more volume and gain ladled on. Its comfortable neck arrived with a reasonable setup following a 7,000-mile journey from China, but as with any guitar that has traveled that far, it would benefit from a trip to a tech.

Like its popular effects pedals, Donner's latest aims to blow up accepted norms of guitar pricing and deliver jaw-dropping value. The DST-700 Hyper is well-positioned to do just that. – **Pete Prown**

Price: \$480-\$550
www.donnermusic.com



Price: \$279
www.strymon.net

CELESTIAL SEASONINGS

The Strymon Cloudburst

Equipped with powerful delay, modulation, and pitch-shifting abilities, Strymon's new Cloudburst stretches its “Ambient Reverb” label by adding space and depth to the conventional effect. Beyond that, its orchestral pad creates a dramatic effect that takes it miles beyond standard reverb.

Ridiculously easy to use, working the Cloudburst starts with its Ensemble switch, which selects moderate or maximum orchestral sounds – or turns completely off, making it closer to a conventional reverb. Decay sets the length of the effect, Pre-Delay determines when the effect arrives, Tone dials in darkness or brightness, and Mod adds a chorus-y wiggle to the tail end of the note.

Perhaps the most important knob is Mix, which can add a dash of ambient pad behind your guitar or go full “shoegazer” magic, taking you to Neverland on a cloud of reverb. The latter is a grand slam because you can play cosmic chords and arpeggios all night long and never get bored. The tones are delicate, gorgeous, and most importantly, organic. Nothing here sounds like a synthesizer or artificially filtered effect – it's living, breathing guitar tone.

The instructions provide cool settings to experiment with; using the separately purchased mini switch lets you control several functions, such as if you want to “freeze” the ambient chord underneath as you continue to solo over top. Other Cloudburst goodies include mono/stereo operation, MIDI, USB-C connectivity, and 1/4” jack for an expression pedal.

No matter how you set it, Strymon's Cloudburst conjures a natural, ambient pad without latency. If you're looking to add ethereal strings to your sound, it might put your guitar synthesizer and other celestial boxes out of business. – **Pete Prown VG**

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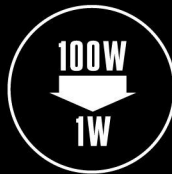
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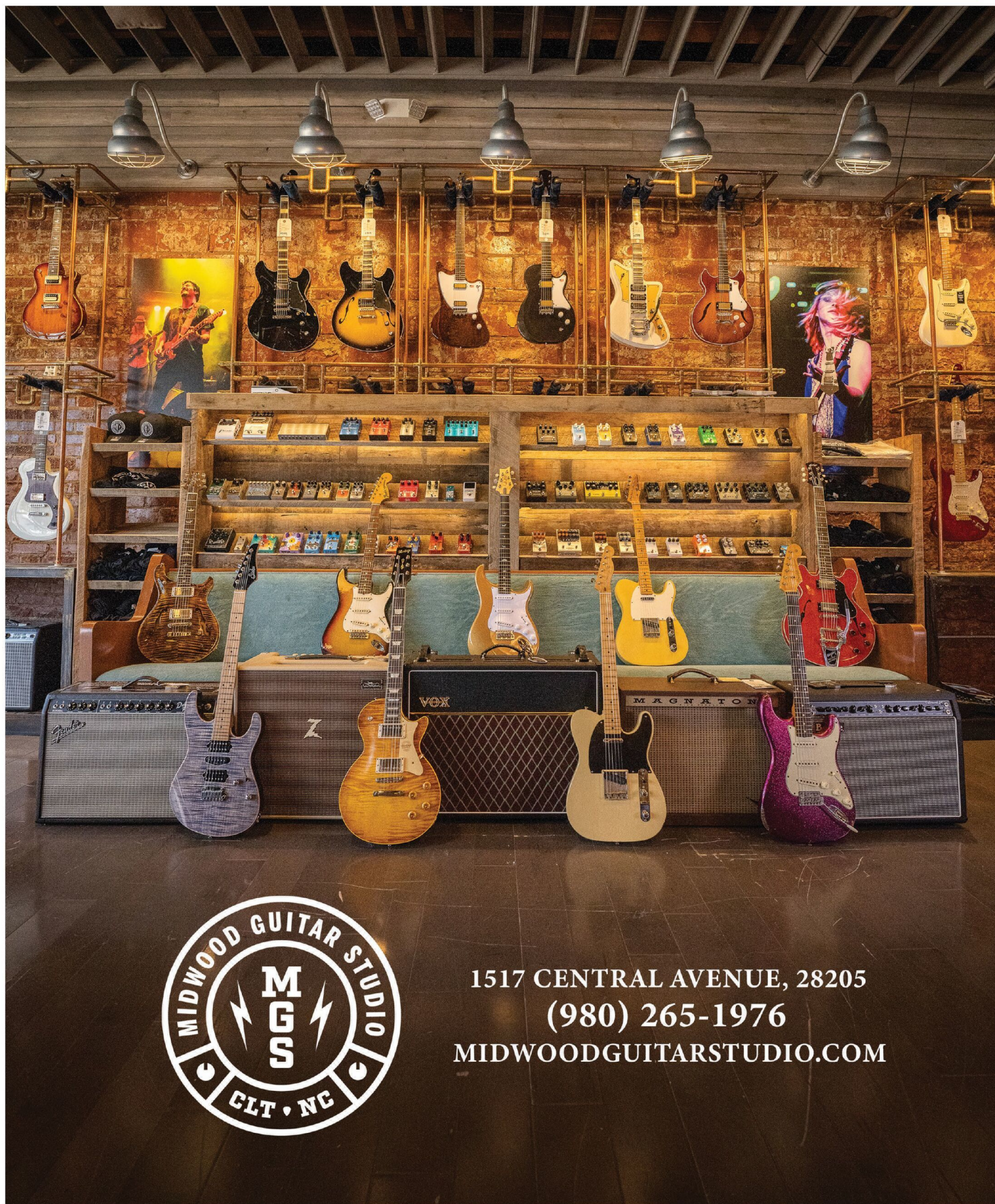
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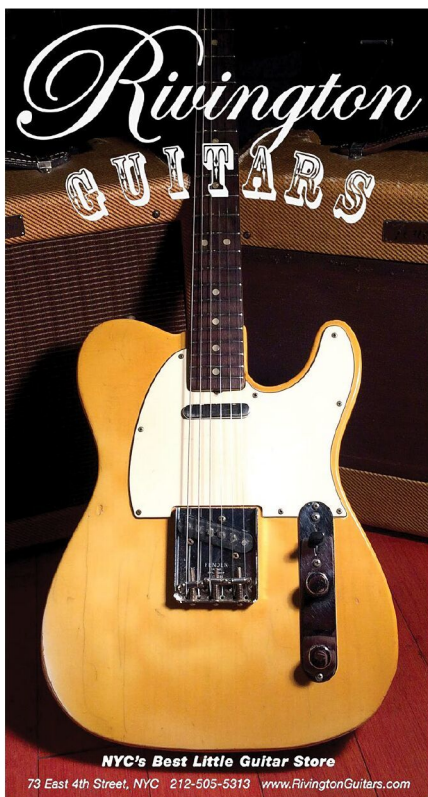


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01 Steve Hammer is a longtime reader who has “a few dozen geetars,” but says these five from the Depression era are his favorites. From left, they are a '37 Martin 0-17, '33 Gibson Nick Lucas Special, '31 Gibson Roy Smeck Stage DeLuxe (one of two made with a rosewood body), '31 Gibson L-00, and a '32 Martin 0-21.

02 “The new issue of VG is always a welcome distraction from a long day at work,” says Jody Taylor, whose playing – even in his country band – is influenced by Geddy Lee while his builds are Fender-esque but with chambered maple bodies and woods (except for their rosewood fretboards) harvested near his home. One has a Buck Owens-inspired finish, the other pays homage to the first-gen P-Bass.

03 Mike DeRossi's collection is a diverse mix of instruments ranging from a '51 Gibson BR-9 and a '71 Ovation Glen Campbell to a 2018 Santa Cruz Firefly, with pieces by Gibson, Collings, Lowden, Fender, Ernie Ball, and Taylor completing the family.

04 Kevin Danowski's collection is an impressive blend of vintage bits, including a sunburst '62 Strat, '65 Strat in Seafoam Green, a blond '72 Strat, '69 Tele, '72 Les Paul, '72 ES-340, sunburst '68 ES-345, '76 ES-175, and a '59 Vibrolux.

05 Dawn Cola loves Reverend guitars and the color pink. Here are her Greg Koch Gristlemaster in Orchid Pink, a Pete Anderson PA-1 RB in Mulberry Mist with flowers painted by Dawn, and a Sensei RT LE in Orange Sparkle. She runs them through her Carr Mercury V custom-covered in pink and cream.

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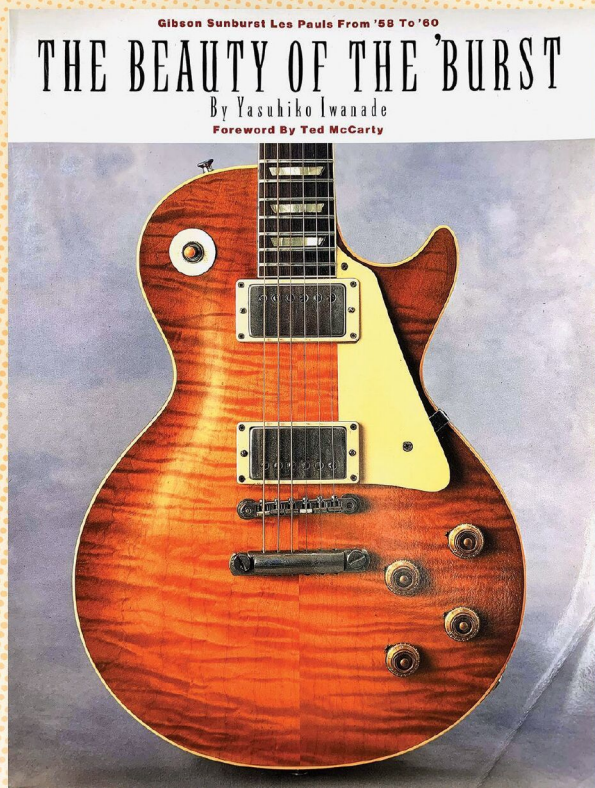


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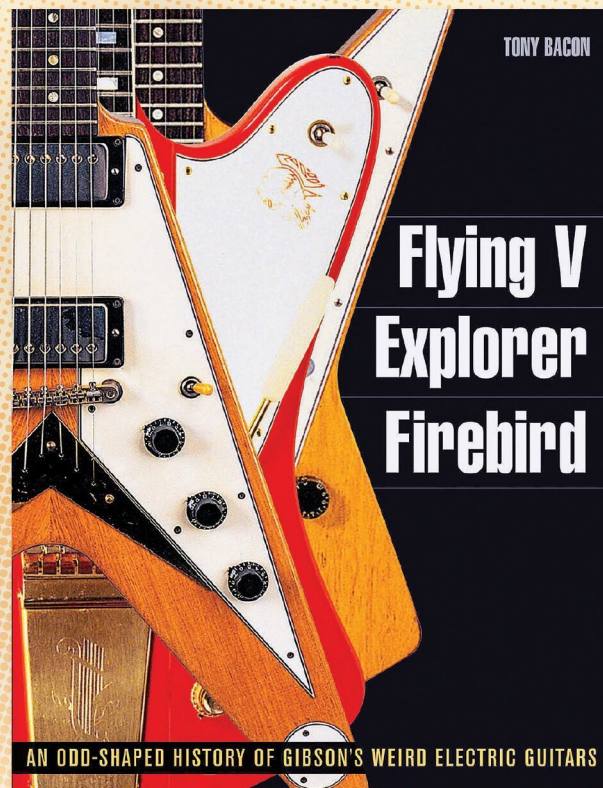
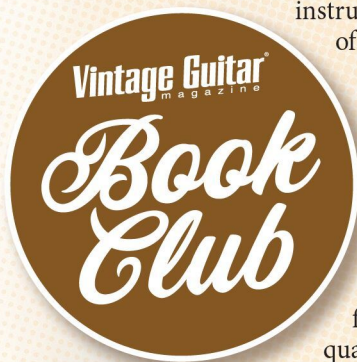
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The Beauty of the 'Burst Gibson Sunburst Les Pauls from '58 to '60

The Beauty of the 'Burst pays tribute to Gibson's magnificent Sunburst Les Pauls made between 1958 and 1960, the most highly prized solidbody electric guitars ever, the magnitude of their value directly related to their look (outrageous wood patterns, or "figured" timber). The book features lavish full-color photos of these beautiful instruments throughout; the guitars of famous players; a foreword by Ted McCarty; a bio of the author, world renowned collector Yasuhiko Iwanade; and the "Science of the Burst" section with over 30 pages of detailed reference facts on every facet of the guitar, including colors, wood figure, pick-ups, hardware and qualities of "voice." This may be the closest guitarists will ever be able to get to these incredibly collectible beauties! **Author: Yasuhiko Iwanade, Softcover, 216 pages, Trim 8-1/2" x 11", \$39.00**



Flying V, Explorer, Firebird An Odd-Shaped History of Gibson's Weird Electric Guitars

Until the launch of the Flying V and Explorer in 1958, electric guitars were supposed to look like...guitars. Suddenly, Gibson turned conventional design upside down, almost literally, by using straight lines and angular body shapes, changing the way electrics could look and, in the process, creating a set of rare future collectables. *Flying V, Explorer, Firebird* tells the story of those first peculiar instruments, describes Gibson's second attempt at nonstandard designs with the Firebird of the early '60s, and details their influence on guitar-makers such as Hamer, Jackson, Dean, Ibanez, and BC Rich, all of whom embraced Gibson's original weird-is-good design ethic. Interviews with players - including Zakk Wylde, the Edge, and Rick Nielsen - and makers illuminate the story of this fascinating assortment of electric guitar innovations, alongside specially commissioned images of every key model and brand and an enviable collection of guitar memorabilia, plus a gallery of leading guitarists photographed in action with their instruments. If it's weird and has strings, it's in *Flying V, Explorer, Firebird*. **Author: Tony Bacon, Softcover, 144 pages, Trim 8-1/2" x 11", \$24.99**

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A close-up photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a plaid shirt, playing an acoustic guitar. The image is framed by a white curved line that separates it from the text below.

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