



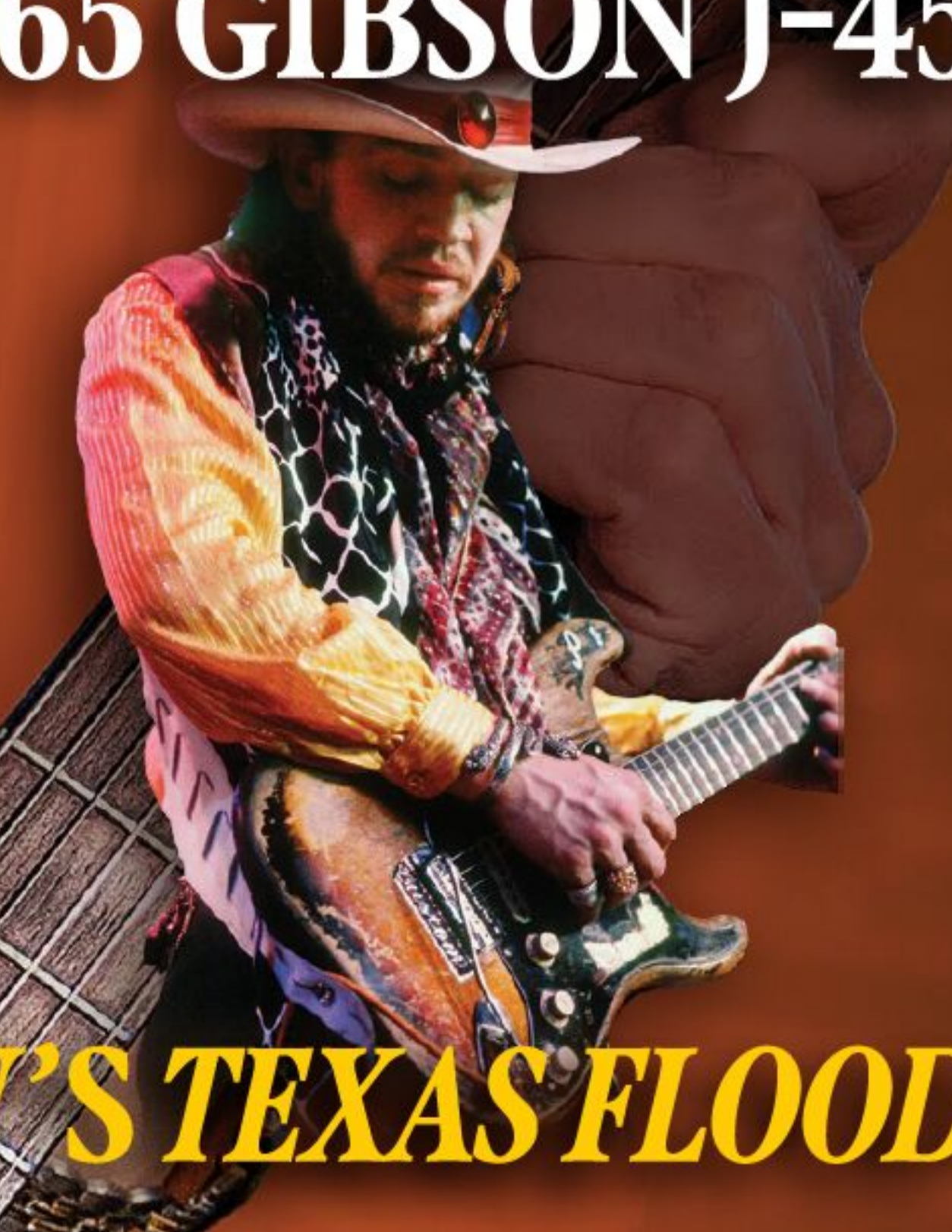
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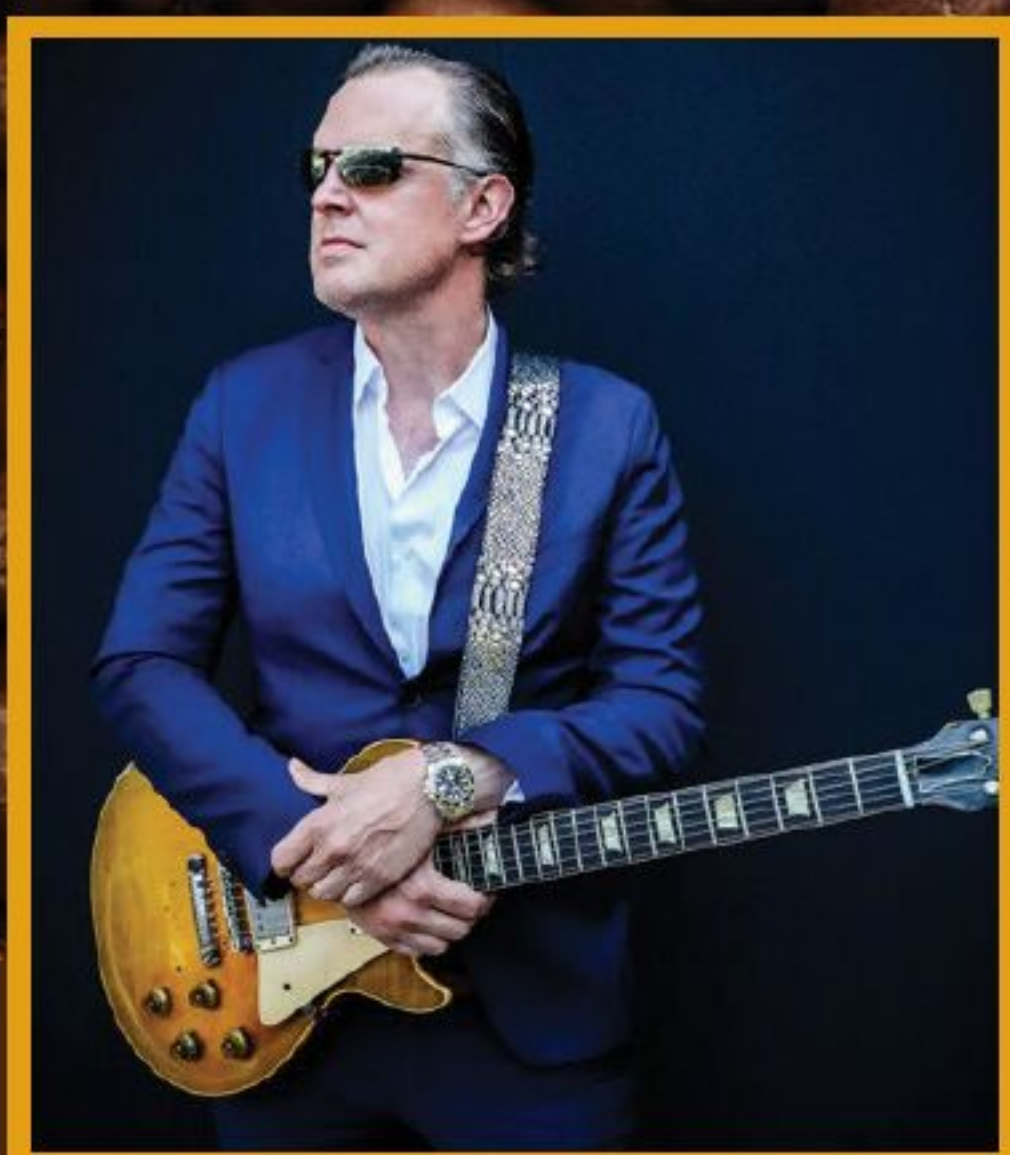
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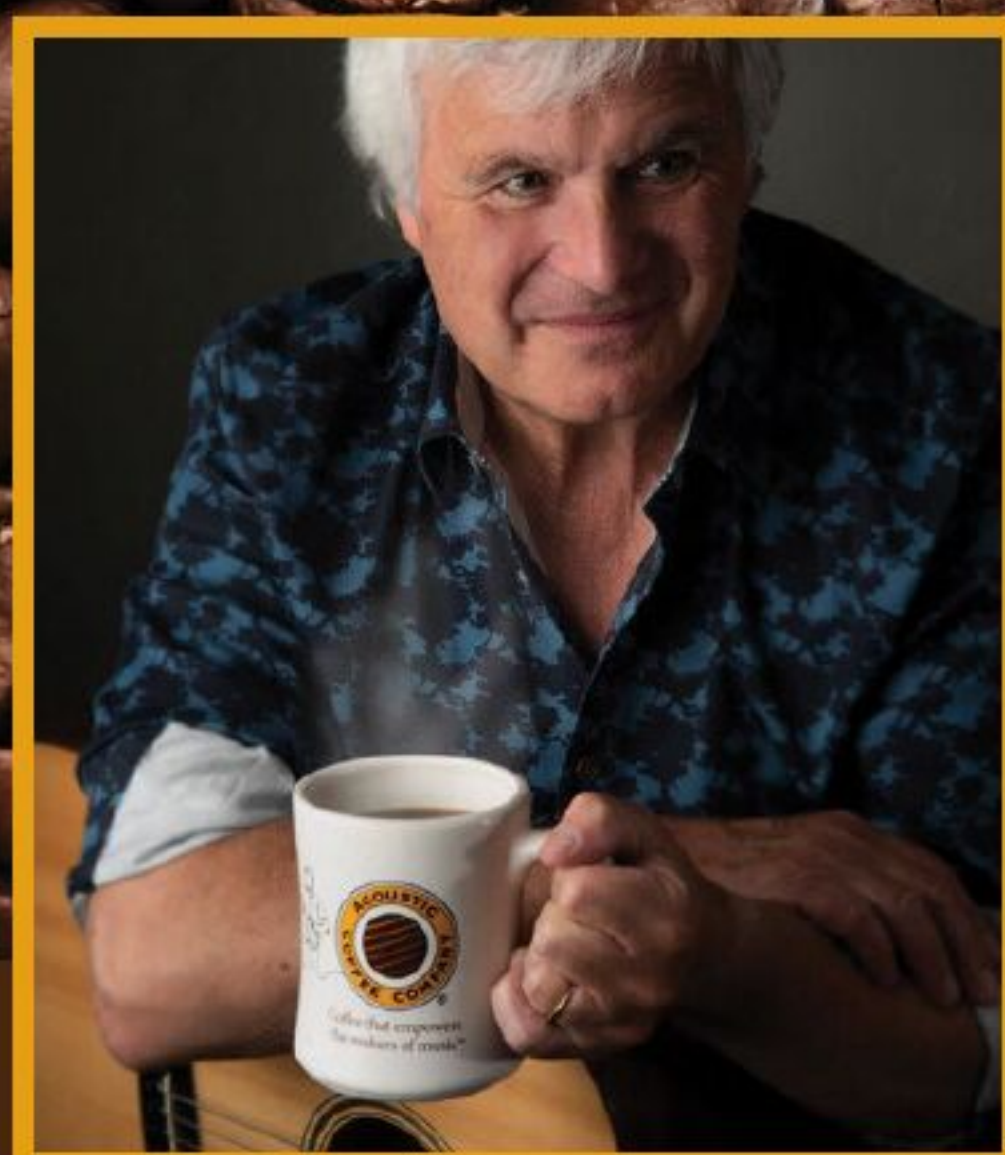
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Dave Alvin

32 SHOCK AND AWE

The Selmer/RSA Truvoice TV10

When the guitar-amp industry in the U.K. got rolling in the late 1940s, many households were powered by direct current. By the time this amp was made in '55, it *still* hadn't made the jump to AC. Models like this are interesting not only for their low-watt tones, but the risky "fun" of plugging them in. | By **Dave Hunter**

36 CLASSICS

Harold "Sonny" Wright and his '65 J-45 went to war, then created precious memories as life moved along. After the guitar was stolen, he found another. While it has also helped make his life full, memories of the original remain strong as ever. | By **Ward Meeker**

56 STEVE CROPPER

Friend, Legend

Even before he began to record seminal music using an Esquire plugged into a Harvard amp, Steve Cropper was the epitome of a team player. Sixty-plus years later, his new album, *Friendlytown*, celebrates decades of collaboration and the joy of the guitar tag team. | By **Ward Meeker**

60 TONY MATTOLA

Mr. Big, Guitar Pioneer

In a career spanning 50 years, he logged thousands of studio dates and made hundreds of concert appearances. A first call for dozens of artists, he was also revered as a pioneer for his compositions in the early days of live television. | By **Jim Carlton**



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READER MAIL

BLUE CHEERS

Thanks for the great article on Blue Cheer ("Pop 'N Hiss, Heavy-Metal Genesis: Blue Cheer's *Vincebus Eruptum*," August '24). It was spot on. In 1968, I was living on a ferry boat with friends in a band called Daisy Overkill, and Blue Cheer also practiced there. If you walked in front of them, you were brought to your knees, and it didn't matter if they were out of tune sometimes. Who cared? Leigh Stephens was also a fantastic classical guitar player. They are some of my best memories of the times.

Paul "P.J." Johnson
Citrus Heights, California

One afternoon in 1967, I turned on "American Bandstand" and watched in amazement as Blue Cheer transformed Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues." I was blown away by the power and attitude of their rendition, which to me at that time was the essence of rock and roll.

In the early days of this century, I saw Blue Cheer in a club with 200 people. I knew it would be loud, so I stood to the side of the stage with serious ear protection. When they started, my shirt was billowing from sound pressure, and after the first song ended, a young woman in the front said audibly in the dead silence, "Jesus, you guys are loud!" Dickie Peterson looked at her and said, "Yeah, ain't it great? 1, 2, 3, 4," and off they went.

Over the years, I've seen a lot of bands from that period, but nothing took me back to the age of 15 and the spirit of rock and roll like that performance. It was like seeing a dinosaur walk through your backyard, complete with Marshall stacks and multiple Ampeg SVTs.

Thanks for featuring them in your wonderful magazine – negative comments and all. These guys were in it for the long haul, and that says something!

Charlie Pastorfield
Charlottesville, Virginia

BLUE JEER

I saw Blue Cheer at Detroit's Grande Ballroom in 1969. Expecting to experience a West Coast wall of sound to compare with the legendary sonic onslaught of MC-5 I had witnessed many times, I must say I was supremely let down. They were an hour late (supposedly due to Leigh Stevens having vanished with a groupie) and when they finally hit the stage, they were badly out of tune, lackadaisical, and not *nearly* as loud as billed, despite the wall of Marshalls. MC-5 were second on the bill and *blew* them

away, being both louder and 10 times more menacing, as they were at *every* show.

While I was left unimpressed with Blue Cheer, I was content knowing Detroit rock and roll remained unstoppable.

John C. Hefty
Crestone, Colorado

BASS GOD(DARD)

I loved Willie Moseley's take on Paul Goddard ("The Bases of Paul Goddard: Southern Player Non-Pareil," August '24). ARS had it all – vocals, writing, arrangements, and musicianship; they were one of the better Southern-rock bands, and Paul was a big part of that.

Also, the feature on Blue Cheer was overdue. I saw them in a small club in Houston in the '60s; I had my fingers in my ears the whole show, but loved every earth-shattering moment. *Aces and Eights* is my favorite album of theirs. Thanks, Willie, for keeping the music alive.

Bart Wittrock
Houston, Texas

Vintage Guitar has been my travel companion since 1988, when I started my subscription. It was always in my carry-on or ditty bag, and once at my destination, it was like comfort food. To say I treasure every issue is akin to a kid saying they love Dairy Queen.

I've always enjoyed Willie Moseley's articles, regardless of subject matter. His features on basses give insight on how the instrument was conceived, its making, and various models and nuances – gearhead stuff I enjoy.

In the August issue, Mr. Moseley's deep dive into Paul Goddard and his choice of instruments was most cool. Goddard could groove with the best of 'em or sit in the pocket with the drummer, and his chops that leaned toward progressive rock were on the same level as Geddy Lee, Chris Squire, and (don't throw rocks) John Entwistle.

Keep doing what you're doing.

Randy Anderson
Forest, Virginia

ARIA ALRIGHT

It was awesome of y'all to feature the Aria Pro II ("The Aria PRO II PE-R80," by Michael Wright) in the August issue. Last year, I found one in a pawn shop for a \$100. It was one of the dirtiest guitars I've ever seen, but after I cleaned it up, it became one of the best guitars I've ever played. I'm surprised they don't get



Aria PRO II PE-R80

more recognition – it's really an amazingly built instrument. Thanks for a fun read.

Jon Bull
Columbia, South Carolina

VG PLEASES ME!

I am always happy to see VG in my mailbox. I enjoy reading about jazz personalities and the deep dives into instruments and manufacturers, and I especially enjoy the work of Dan Erlewine, George Gruhn, and Wolf Marshall. I've stopped all other magazines because you fill the space between what is and what once was.

Roy Curry
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Though I'm not always familiar with the artists interviewed in VG, I always read to learn about them. I also appreciate the respectful obituaries for fallen musical comrades and, being a gear head, I love the pics of equipment.

I only get one magazine and it's yours, so keep up the good work.

Gordon Chandler
Waldorf, Maryland

VG is excellent. Not every article appeals to me at first, nevertheless I find them interesting, especially discussions on instruments and equipment used by artists. I look forward to receiving my copy every month. Keep up the excellent work.

Greg Gilkey
Clarksville Indiana

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Vintage Guitar, Inc., PO Box 7301, Bismarck, ND 58507
Phone (701) 255-1197 www.VintageGuitar.com

Founder/Publisher
Alan Greenwood

General Manager
Doug Yellow Bird

**Editor In Chief/
Gear Editor**
Ward Meeker
Ward@VintageGuitar.com

Editor At Large
Dan Forte

Editorial Consultants
George Gruhn, Seymour
Duncan, Walter Carter,
Dan Erlewine

Music Editor
Pete Prown
peteprown@icloud.com

Regular Contributors
Willie Moseley, John
Heidt, George Gruhn,
Michael Wright, Dan
Erlewine, Peter Kohman,
Michael Dregni, Wolf
Marshall, Pete Prown,
Dave Hunter, Bob Dragich,
Chip Wilson, Rich Kienzie,
Jim Carlton, Oscar Jordan,
Dennis Pernu, Tom
Guerra, Rich Maloof, Bret
Adams, Greg Prato, Bob
Cianci, Sean McDevitt

Advertising
James Jiskra (Director)
James@VintageGuitar.com
Johnny Zapp
Johnny@VintageGuitar.com
Mike Naughton
Mike@VintageGuitar.com
Subscription Manager
Martina Day
VGuitar@VintageGuitar.com
1-800-844-1197

Assistant Publisher
Dawn Flanagin

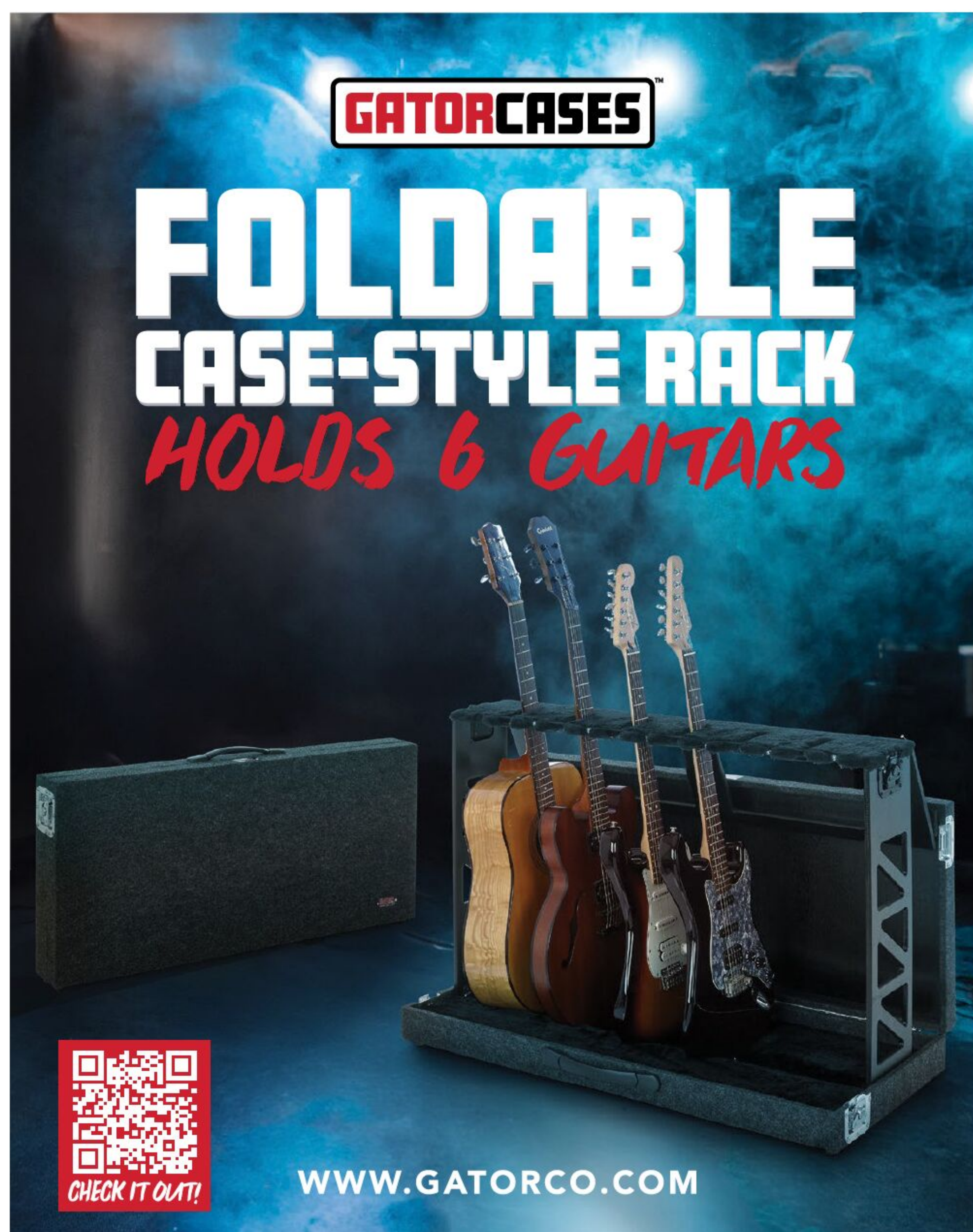
Editorial Assistant
Eden Greenwood

Online Consultant
Joe Greenwood

Online Coordinator
Cherry Carpio

Price Guide/Online
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Greg Martin, Ray Cum-
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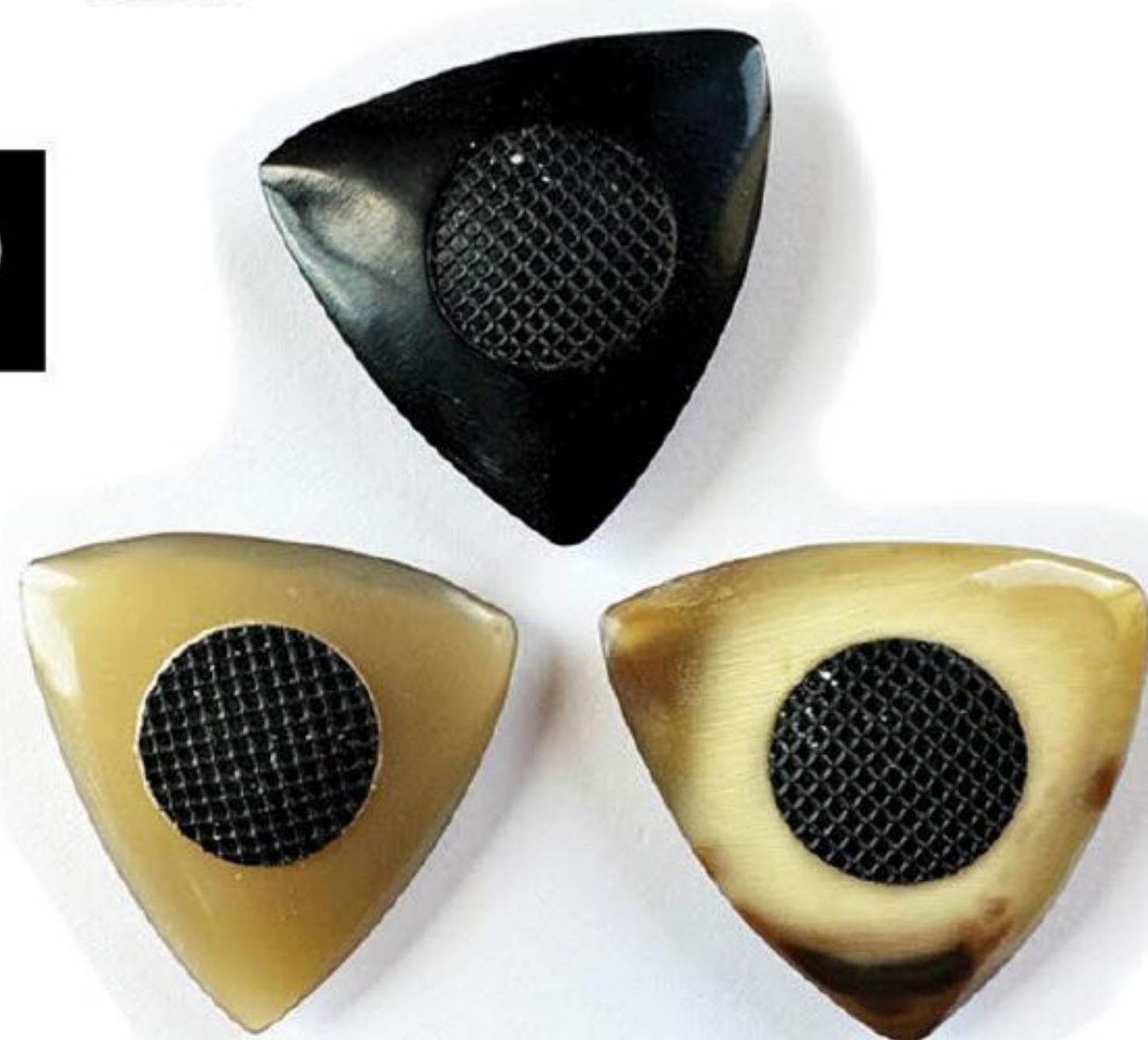
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SONGBIRDS EXPANDING MUSIC ACCESS PROGRAMS

Songbirds Foundation, the Chattanooga-based organization created to combat the decline in funding for public-school music programs, is expanding its Write to Rock program, which pairs elementary-school students with professional songwriters, producers, and performers for 10 after-school lessons that introduce students to the tools they need to write songs. Each class showcases the song it has written with a full band in front of friends and family. Songbirds is also implementing a traveling version of its Project: Guitar program, which teaches the science behind guitars, pedals, and amplifiers. Also, the Guitars For Kids initiative is being expanded to include more teachers in need of music curriculum and supplies. To learn more and/or make a tax-deductible donation, visit www.songbirdsfoundation.org.

METAL HALL OF FAME CD BENEFITS D.A.D.

Drummer, author, and drum clinician Pat Gesualdo, founder of the Metal Hall of Fame, recently organized *The Metal Hall of Fame All Star Charity CD*, and is donating proceeds from sales to the non-profit D.A.D. (Drums and Disabilities) organization, which teaches Gesualdo's drum-therapy techniques in schools, health facilities, and community centers.

A partnership with Deko Entertainment and Warner Music Group, *The Metal Hall of Fame All Star Charity CD* includes performances by Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, Rudy Sarzo, Chris Poland, Bruce Kulick, Tony MacAlpine, and others. The box set includes a CD/DVD, Metal Hall of Fame key chain, and artwork. The music/CD is available on streaming platforms and at www.dekoentertainment.com.



GRACE BOWERS

Truth of Youth

The word "prodigy" is overused in the music biz, but Grace Bowers is a real-deal young funkster. Just 18 years old, she melds R&B, feisty blues-rock, and gospel flavors on a vintage Gibson SG Special, crafting licks guaranteed to make you groove. For proof, cue up her debut album, *Wine on Venus*, to dig that guitar tone and smokin' band, The

Hodge Podge. Prodigy or not, Bowers brings the heat.

How did your career get going at such a young age?

I really got my start when I moved to Nashville at 14 or 15. Back then, I was playing out nearly every night with all sorts of

Grace Bowers: David McClister.

musicians. It didn't matter what genre it was – I put myself into every situation you can think of, which turned out to be a great way to learn. I've always felt like it was dozens of little moments building up, plus I've gotten some great opportunities.

The album has a very live vibe. Did you cut the rhythm section live?

The rhythm section was recorded almost entirely live, which was very intentional. I also insisted on having the band all in one room so everyone could make eye contact, which I think is incredibly important. We definitely tried to take a more old-school approach to it.

What did John Osborne (VG, February '24) bring to the production end of *Wine on Venus*?

I can't imagine making this record with anyone other than John. He really understood my vision and was able to work with me and the band to execute it perfectly. I think he really nailed that "classic" sound while still bringing something new to the table.

People describe you as a blues guitarist, but the funk runs deep in "Get On Now" and "Tell Me Why You Do That."

While I am blues influenced, I love, love, love funk. Some of the bands who inspire me are Funkadelic, Sly & The Family Stone, War, Kool & The Gang, Billy Preston, and so many more. Pulling inspiration from there, my rhythm chops are definitely something I have been working on. With this type of music, listening is the most important thing you can do, and a lot of times that means sitting back and letting the groove flow. My main guitar influences at the moment are definitely Leslie West, Santana, Eddie Hazel, and Jimi Hendrix.

There's a mix of slide, acoustic, and harmony guitars on "Lucy." Who's playing what?

Me and my other guitarist, Prince Parker, who played the slide. I wrote the solo and we played it together in harmony; I played all the acoustic parts on a 12-string.

Talk about your picking, which mixes pick and fingers.

I've always switched between the two. If I'm fingerpicking, there's still a pick in my hand. It's entirely subconscious and I don't even notice when I switch from one to another. You get completely different tones from your fingers versus a pick; I fingerpick when I want a softer, quieter tone, then pull out the pick when I'm really digging in.

With the SG Special, do you ever have feedback issues with the P-90s?

I actually have never had feedback issues. The guitar is from 1961 and I got it three years ago. It's definitely my favorite guitar, but I find myself playing it less these days because I don't want to travel with it. I would be wrecked if anything ever happened to it (laughs).

What do P-90 pickups give you that humbuckers don't?

I lean more toward P-90s because I feel like you can get more variety of tone out of them compared to humbuckers.

Which amps do we hear, and what else is in your signal chain?

Right now I've got a pretty simple pedalboard that I plug into a Deluxe Reverb. I used minimal pedals, but did use a wah, phaser, and fuzz on the album.

Which other guitars did you use?

A lot of it was recorded on John's 1960 ES-335 – I fell in love with that guitar. A few songs were on my '61 SG.

Your band, The Hodge Podge, is super tight and a natural for live work. How do you rehearse to sand out the rough spots and deliver a killer show?

Lots and lots of performing! This band relies on improv a lot, which I love since we never play a song the same way twice. It was interesting to go into the studio where we got to sit with these songs and notice the little details in them. For the most part, I have everyone do their own thing over it. I think that's what makes the Hodge Podge unique – we're not trying to sound like anyone else. – **Pete Prown**



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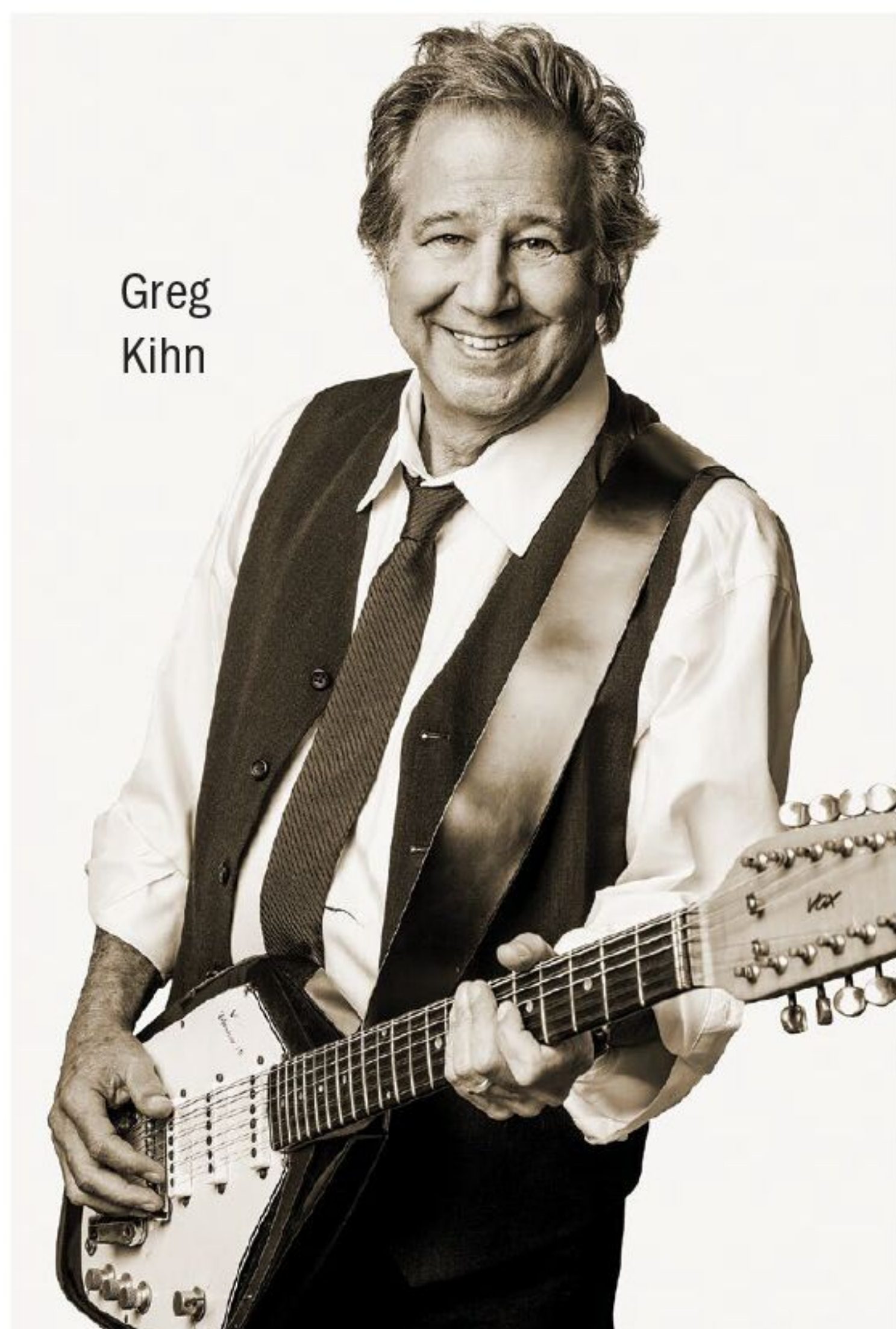
GREG KIHN

Greg Kihn, songwriter/guitarist and founder of the Greg Kihn Band, died August 13. He was 75 and battled Alzheimer's disease.

Born in Baltimore, Kihn started playing guitar as a kid, strumming Harmony and Kay acoustics before he found a Guild 12-string that became his main instrument writing and performing folk music as a teen.

In his mid 20s, Kihn moved to Berkeley, California, where he busked while painting houses and working at a record store. After shifting to play rock and roll, he was signed to the upstart label Beserkley Records and recorded his 1976 debut album with a four-piece band; his '60s-inspired melodic pop (dressed with the tones of his Rickenbacker 360/12 and Vox Phantom XII) became part of the label's identify. Over the next five years, Kihn (and starting in '79) the Greg Kihn Band released five studio albums and one live disc. In '81, they scored a hit with "The Breakup Song (They Don't Write 'Em)," which reached #15 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and finished the year as the #47 pop single. His second (and final) hit came with 1983's "Jeopardy" from the album *Kihnspiracy*. It reached #2 and was held out of the top spot by Michael Jackson's "Beat It." The following year, "Weird Al" Yankovic's parody, "I Lost on Jeopardy," reached the Hot 100 thanks in part to the corresponding video, in which Kihn made a cameo appearance.

The success kept Kihn busy touring, holding opening slots for the Rolling Stones, Journey, the Grateful Dead and garnering appearances



Greg Kihn

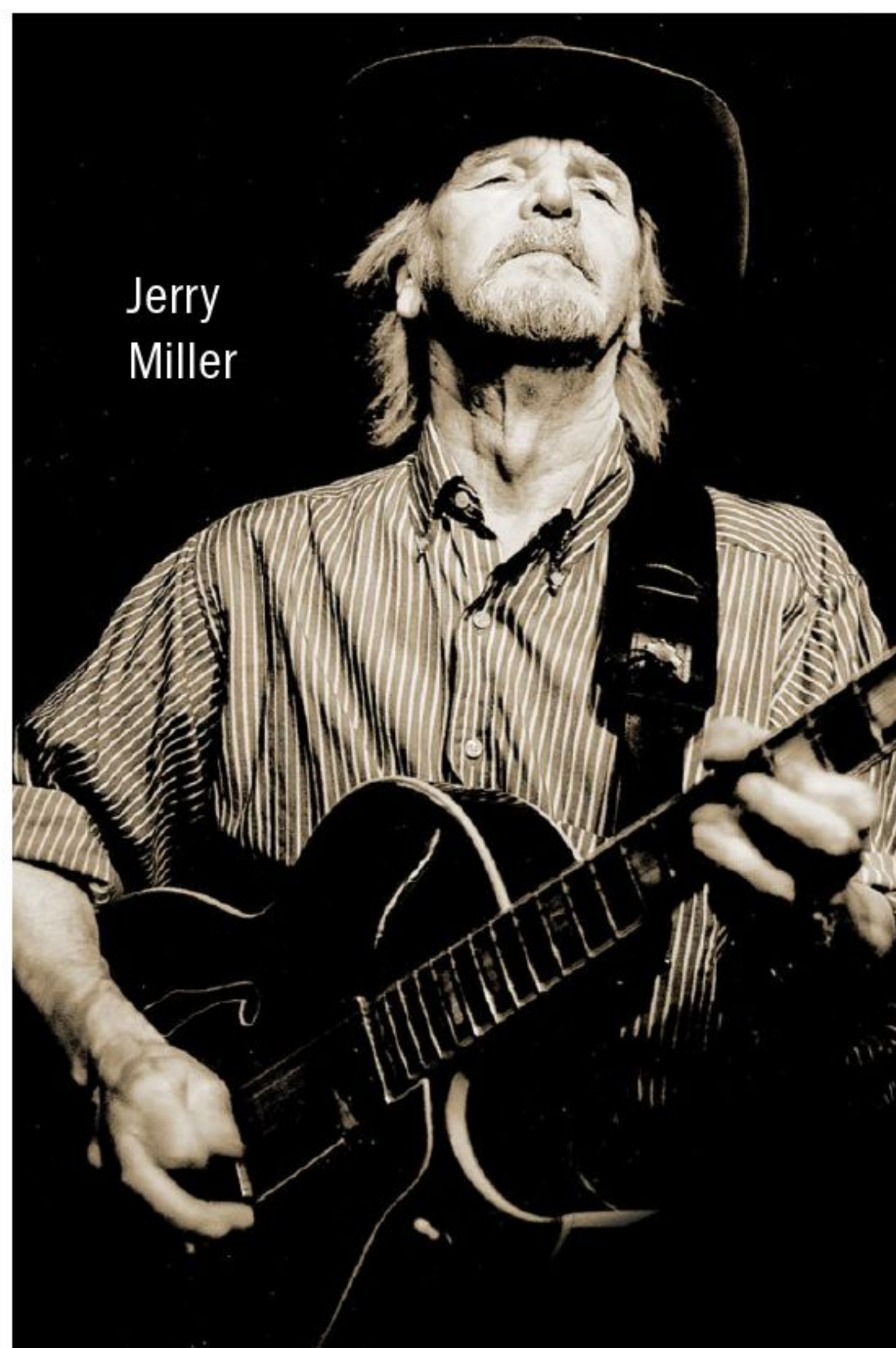
on TV's "Solid Gold" and "American Bandstand."

On tour, Kihn's workhorse guitar was a sunburst Telecaster with a late-'60s body and an ESP neck. At ChicagoFest in '83, guitarist Gary Phillips used it to defend Kihn from a man who jumped onstage and started running toward Kihn; having just grabbed the instrument while a string was being replaced on his own guitar, Phillips swung it like a baseball bat and knocked the would-be assailant out cold, then kept playing.

"The Tele stayed in tune!" Kihn laughed while telling the story to *VG*'s Bret Adams in 2018. "There's still a big nick in it from where the guy lost a tooth. You can brain a guy with [a Tele] and it stays in tune. Unbelievable!"

In the mid '90s, Kihn began a 17-year stint as morning-radio host on KOME/KUFX in San Jose and also released his first of six novels. He also hosted a nationally syndicated radio program and is a member of the Bay Area Radio Hall of Fame.

In 2007, Kihn was inducted to San Jose Rocks Hall of Fame. In '10, he was recognized by the Lymphoma



Jerry Miller

Society. He also donated time and helped raise money for Operation Care and Comfort, which sends care packages to deployed military units.

After his radio stint, the Greg Kihn Band returned to recording and performing with Kihn's son Ry, on lead guitar. Their final album was *Rekihndled*, which he discussed in the March '18 issue of *VG*. At the time, Kihn owned about a dozen guitars including Martin and Gibson acoustics, the Tele, Les Pauls, and a boutique 12-string acoustic he used for solo shows.

Kihn is survived by his wife, Jay Arafles-Kihn, son Ryan, daughter Alexis Harrington-Kihn, and extended family. – **Ward Meeker**

JERRY MILLER

Moby Grape was a key part of the '60s San Francisco revolution, melding psychedelia with the earliest vestiges of country-rock. Even Eric Clapton and Led Zeppelin were avid Grape fans. Despite the pioneering music, the quintet became more famous for its spectacular downfall than actual career.

On lead guitar, Jerry Miller – who died on July 20 at age 81

– proved a notch above many Bay Area players, his blues licks sounding more akin to British hotshots than oft-noodly locals. Miller's pre-Grape adventures found him working with singer Bobby Fuller (cutting an early version of "I Fought the Law"), The Frantics, and jamming in jazz-organ trios with his trademark Gibson L-5 archtop, which he dubbed Beulah. Young Jerry also befriended fellow Washington-state guitarists, Jimi Hendrix and Larry Coryell.

After relocating to San Francisco, Miller appeared on the Grape's acclaimed self-titled debut album and played the Monterey Pop Festival in June of '67. Album tracks "Omaha," the rockin' "Hey Grandma," and "8:05" remain classics, the latter rife with impressive acoustic fingerpicking. For rock and roll fury, "Fall on You" is lit by Miller's smokin' solo. Moby Grape also had a rare three-guitar lineup influenced by the Byrds. Jerry later told *puremusic.com*, "The Byrds were the first band that I heard that made me say, 'Hey, I could play with other guitar players.'"

A victim of its own bad decisions, mismanagement, and drugs, Moby Grape fractured and reunited several times; later, Miller played with the Rhythm Dukes and Jerry Miller Band. Describing his guitar work, Grape drummer Don Stevenson told Christopher Sandford of *The Seattle Times*, "Moby Grape was really bigger than the sum of its parts. Everyone was superbly proficient, maybe Jerry Miller most of all. There was something magnificent about both him and his music. If John Wayne had played the guitar, he would have sounded like Jerry did." – **Pete Prown**

THE GREG KOCH

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MIKE CAMPBELL

Little Movies

Longtime Tom Petty right-hand man Mike Campbell's new album, *Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits*, is a cinematic, guitar-heavy offering with irresistible hooks, gritty tales, and special guests. His third album as front man in Dirty Knobs, it recalls the hit-making craft of his past blended with the artistic resonance of superbly penned lyrics.

You've been peeling the onion with Dirty Knobs to reveal a unique sound.

I feel like I've turned a corner in terms of writing and my so-called singing, but I really enjoy it. I'm getting confidence and starting to feel it. Windows of songs are starting to open up for me, and it's a joy.

Did you have a muse as *Vagabonds* came together?

Well, I certainly have a muse. I don't know who she is, but I love her (laughs). When the light goes on and things drop in your lap, it's pretty magical. I didn't have any master plan; I took it song to song. If I get some inspiration, I chase it down and try to make a song out of it. I love writing lyrics now – I can explore characters and look at songs like little movies. I see what characters are doing and write it down. Most seem to be desperate misfits (laughs), but I like them, and the challenge is for them to find their way out of a bad situation. The Heartbreakers had a lot of songs like that too. It's a good writing tool.

Graham Nash's voice is one of those characters on "Dare To Dream."

I'm a huge Hollies fan and having Graham sing on it... I mean, Graham is a real singer.

I'm more of a stylist. I'm just so glad he did it. He brings something to the song; he came up with the "Dare to, dare to, dream" tag line. I'm so grateful to him.

On "Hell Or High Water," Lucinda Williams enters with that fantastic voice.

I'm very proud of that song. It shows some growth in the lyric writing. I finished the song with me singing it, but I did an interview with Lucinda and asked her to do it. There's a female character in the second verse, and it occurred to me that the right person could give it depth. She came in and put her soul into it. That voice of hers is undeniable – so full of soul and purity. That aching whine is so touching. I couldn't be more grateful for having her on there.

How did you record guitars?

I have a home studio, and guitarist Chris Holt, who is permanently in the band now, is an amazing player, so we played live on the floor 90 percent of the time with the solos in the track as they went down. I asked Chris to play the Broadcaster I used on the first two (Heartbreakers) albums, so he played that on a lot of the record. It's got a *sound* to it. He loved playing it, and it sounded great.

Which amps did you use?

I used an Ampeg Rocket on the whole record. It's a very easy amp, with beautiful overtones. Chris played through a Princeton. I like small amps, and that's the sound we got. You don't need a big amp in the studio. You just need a good room, a good mic, and a good-sounding amp.

Are there any other guitars on the record?

I used a Rickenbacker 12-string, a '59 Les Paul, and a Gretsch on one or two songs. I also used a '56 Tele that I stuck a B-bender on. There wasn't a whole lot of different guitars. Chris was thrilled to play my stuff because I have some nice guitars (laughs).

How about pedals?

I used a few boost pedals, but mostly we used just the sound of the amp. I have a Camel Toe by Way Huge Electronics, which is a semi-boost and loud boost. If the amp was a little too clean, we'd hit that. The guitars were pretty raw and basic. On my Rocket, I had a Sure 57 and an AKG 451 condenser mic in front of the speaker. My studio has a lot of wood, so when I use a Neuman U47 about 10 feet away, I get the sound of the room.

You and drummer Steve Ferrone were invited to play the national anthem for the Milwaukee Brewers back in June. What was that like?

The Brewers treated us like royalty. It was a little intimidating with just the two of us playing for 45,000 people in the afternoon, but it came off great. Everyone said it was well-done, and emotional. – **Oscar Jordan**

Mike Campbell: Chris Phelps.

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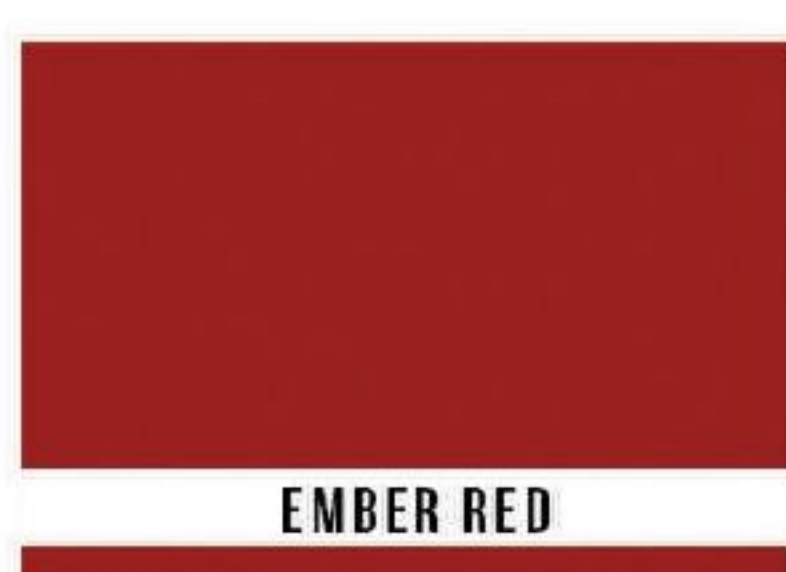
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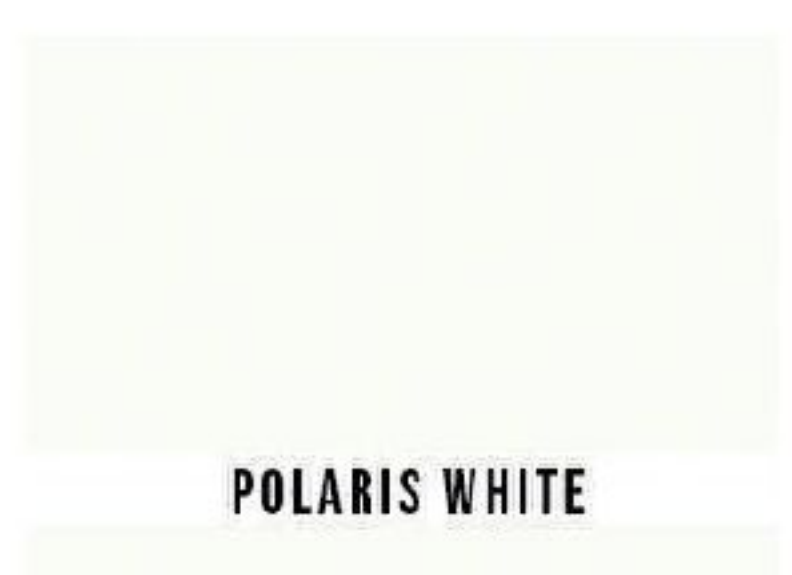
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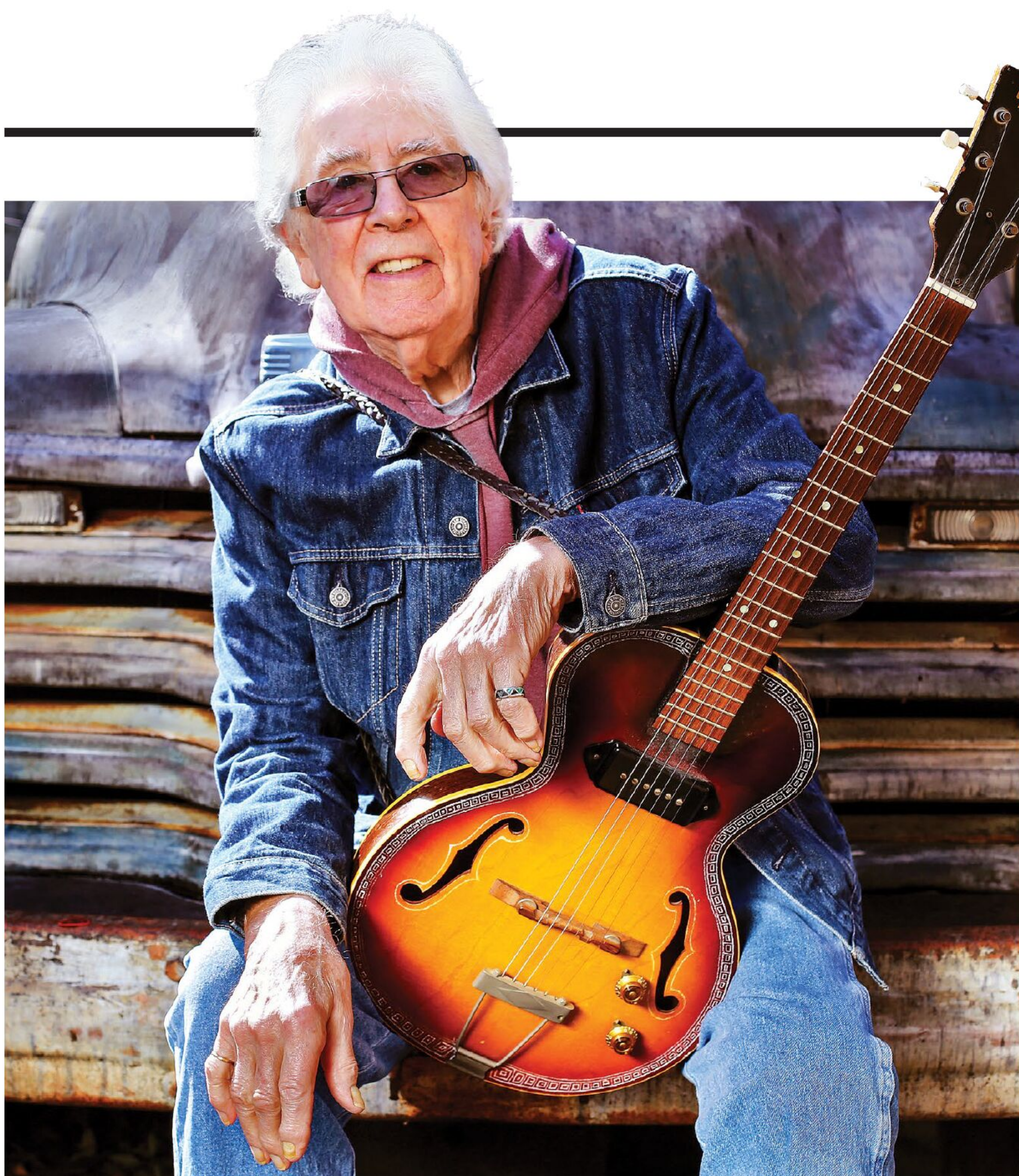
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JOHN MAYALL

1933-2024

Drummer Mick Fleetwood was only briefly a member of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, but that was enough to launch his platinum career. With the passing of the 90-year-old Mayall on July 22, Fleetwood reflected on the British bluesman's contribution to music.

"Still absorbing what John Mayall... did! He brought such hidden talents to the music world. Some of the greatest guitar players in the world would come out of his and my home country, England. He was a hidden pioneer that led to [saving] an art form known as the blues!"

Mayall possessed a high, quirky singing voice, besides playing guitar, harp, piano, and organ, but as Fleetwood noted, he's better known for the musicians he brought into the Bluesbreakers; the list includes guitar masters Peter Green, Mick Taylor, Harvey Mandel, Rick Vito, Coco Montoya, Walter Trout, Buddy Whittington, Rocky Athas, and most famously, Eric Clapton. Great bassists,

too – John McVie, Larry Taylor, Andy Fraser, and Jack Bruce among them.

Hearing the news of his loss, the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger commented, "So sad to hear of John Mayall's passing. He was a great pioneer of British blues and had a wonderful eye for talented young musicians, including Mick Taylor – who he recommended to me after Brian Jones died – ushering in a new era for the Stones." Ronnie Wood further chimed in, "John was historically, such an important figure in the English Blues scene. He was a walking encyclopedia of American and English blues, and a musical trailblazer for all of us."

Known as "The Godfather of British blues," Mayall's career lasted longer than six decades, yet his most indelible work remains a handful of LPs released in the late 1960s. In that era, the Bluesbreakers delivered the beloved "Beano" album with Clapton, as well as *A Hard Road* with Green, and pre-Stones efforts with Taylor,

including *Crusade* and *Bare Wire*. Standing in the shadow of his gifted guitarists, Mayall was a competent player and his solid riffing was apparent on 1967's *The Blues Alone*. For gear, he was known for using six- and nine-string guitars including a Burns Bison and Stratocasters carved into teardrop shapes, wildly modded and decorated.

After a stint in Korea with the British armed forces, Mayall worked as a window dresser before moving to London and turning to music. Substantially older than many musicians of the burgeoning British Invasion, Mayall became dedicated to the sound of American blues, which was gaining traction in the U.K. In 2014, he told *The Guardian* newspaper, "The blues [fit] with the early '60s, the social way of life at the time. Things were changing anyway – in fashion, art, political views. We in Britain had spent the 1950s listening to trad jazz... and this interest in the blues emerged from that jazz scene. In Europe – not just England – the black blues began to be heard by an audience that was not listening to them in America. We discovered Elmore James, Freddie King, J.B. Lenoir, and they spoke to our feelings, our life stories and that was it. *Hooked*."

With news of his death, tributes came rolling from around the globe. Noted guitarist and instructor Greg Koch recalled, "I was always a fan, poring over the Bluesbreakers album with Eric Clapton. Basically, I had all of John Mayall's records and studied. People might say, 'Well, the *real* blues ...' I always get tired of that bulls**t. Music is music and John Mayall was the introduction to [blues] music for a lot of folks, including myself."

"On John Mayall's 90th birthday last November, I had no idea it would be one of the last times I'd see him," added former Bluesbreaker Walter Trout. "As usual, he was funny, generous, and kind. He is, and will always be, my musical mentor."

Mayall's greatest disciple, Eric Clapton, offered a heartfelt video, saying, "I want to say thanks ... for rescuing me from oblivion around the age of 18 or 19 when I decided that I was going quit music. [John] found me, took me into his home, and asked me to join his band. I learned all I really have today, in terms of technique and desire to play the music I love to play. I did all my research in his record collection, the Chicago blues that he was such an expert at, and played in his band with Hughie [Flint] and John [McVie]. It was a fantastic experience. [John] was my mentor, a surrogate father, and gave me the courage to express myself without fear or limit. I shall miss him, and I hope to see him on the other side. Thank you, John, I love you." – **Pete Prown**

John Mayall in 2021: David Gomez.

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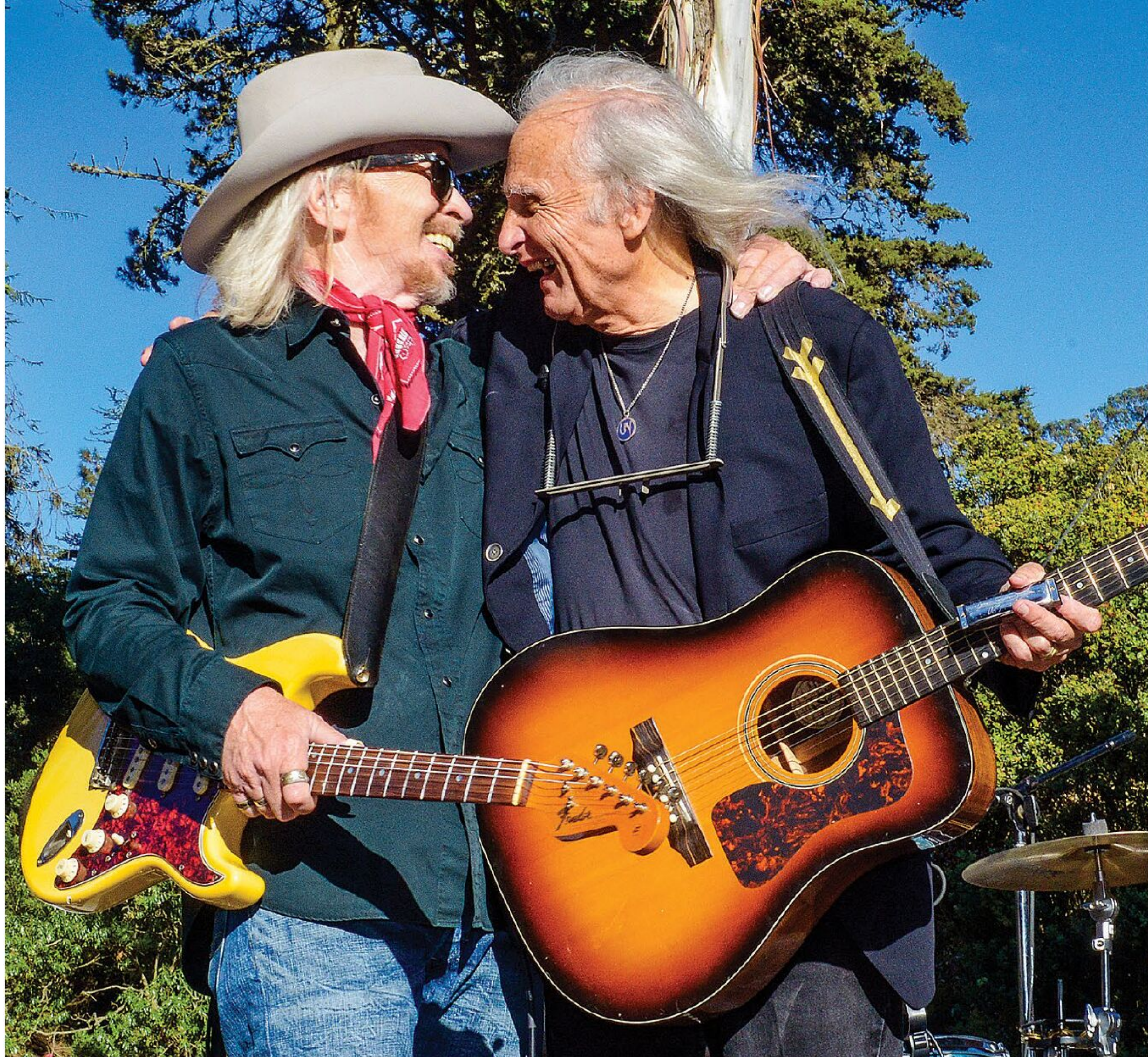
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DAVE ALVIN & JIMMIE DALE GILMORE

Southwest Survivors

T*exiCali* marks the latest chapter in the partnership of L.A. roots-rock vet Dave Alvin and revered West Texas singer/songwriter Jimmie Dale Gilmore – old friends who had appeared on the same shows, but never together. After Gilmore’s agent suggested they try teaming up, in 2018 they recorded *Downey to Lubbock*.

The alliance surprised some.

“Dave has fans that go, ‘Why are you playin’ with him?’ and my fans said, ‘What are you doin’? That guy’s loud!’” Gilmore laughs.

“We had a lot in common,” Alvin adds. “But things are different about our approaches to the same music that makes it fun and interesting. Jimmie is such an evocative singer – one of the great modern blues singers.”

In the ’60s, they both hung out at the Ash Grove, L.A.’s folk and blues club and became friendly with blues icons Lightnin’ Hopkins and Brownie McGhee. But they never met.

After *Downey to Lubbock* went smoothly and was well-received, they started discussing a follow-up. Then came the uncertainty of the pandemic, and Alvin was temporarily taken out of commission by Covid.

On *TexiCali*, they delve into the Southwest

mystique and reimagine some old tunes, backed by Alvin’s band, the Guilty Ones – guitarist Chris Miller, drummer Lisa Pankratz, and bassist Brad Fordham.

For their first session at The Zone, in the Texas Hill Country, Alvin didn’t bring an acoustic but used a Martin D-28 that happened to be at the studio and owned by legendary singer/songwriter Ray Wylie Hubbard. He later brought his road-favorite Martin DC Aura and used it on “Betty and Dupree.”

Having retired the venerable ’64 Strat he used with the Blasters, Alvin is now using his Dracocaster, a copy made by friend Drac Conley. It weighs 6½ pounds and they found a favorite set of Lindy Fralin pickups for it.

“I’ve got a ’91 Vibroverb reissue I’ve been using on my records since I got it in ’92,” he adds, shifting to amplifiers. “For some stuff, I had a ’68 Twin Reverb.”

While mixing in L.A., Alvin dubbed solos on “Death of the Last Stripper,” “Down the 285” and “Southwest Chief,” using a ’68 Deluxe Reverb and a Les Paul owned by engineer Craig Parker Adams, a “...beautiful ’68 goldtop with the original mini-humbuckers.”

“Borderland’s” atmospheric instrumental intro was recorded using the Vibroverb, and “Down the 285” “...was the Dracocaster and Les Paul through the Vibroverb. I’m in open tuning. You get the big, thick chords. That had a lot of reverb. But for the solo, I was playing the Les Paul through the Deluxe. I wanted guitar to sound like lights in the distance, drivin’ down a dark highway.”

Alvin praises Guilty Ones guitarist Chris Miller, who builds his own instruments. “There’s a Dave tone and there’s a Chris tone. They’re very compatible but very different.” Lauding Miller’s country skills, he notes, “He can use the same guitar and play soul or jazz. We’re trying to mix up these styles.”

For Gilmore, who is steeped in Delta blues and New Orleans R&B, Piedmont-blues legend Blind Willie McTell’s “Broke Down Engine” proved challenging.

“When Dave first played (the original), I thought, ‘I don’t think I can do that.’ But he said, ‘Yes you can!’ and I came to love it. There’s a melodious quality to (McTell’s) singin’ that I just love, but it took some work to find it, vocally.”

Alvin gave it a roaring New Orleans R&B arrangement and did likewise with country legend Stonewall Jackson’s “Why I’m Walkin’,” originally a gloomy ballad.

“Blind Owl” honors Canned Heat guitarist/vocalist and blues scholar Alan “Blind Owl” Wilson (1943-1970), who sang lead on “On the Road Again” and “Goin’ Up the Country.” Alvin knew several members of the original band. For the track, Miller played slide atop its boogie rhythms. Alvin calls the solo “my tribute to Magic Sam.”

Reverb comes courtesy of his amps and a TC Electronic Hall of Fame Reverb – his favorite pedal. “For overdrive, I’ve got a Keeley-modified Blues Screamer. For digital delay, I used to love Danelectro echo boxes, but they’re difficult on the road.” He now uses a TC Electronic delay pedal.

His string choices are well-defined.

“In the Blasters, I used incredibly heavy strings – .015, .016.” He now uses D’Addario EXL 116, .011 to .052. “They’re nickel-wound and the G string is an .018.”

Alvin and Gilmore are clearly content with their partnership, but for Alvin, *TexiCali* is deeply personal, especially the upbeat “We’re Still Here.”

“After going through three years of treatment, having stage four cancer at the same time Covid was going on, there were times I felt the world, for all us musician types, might be over. Many songs on this record – including one that flat out says it – we’re still here, have this underpinning of survival.” – **Rich Kienzie**

Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore 2022: Anthony Pidgeon.

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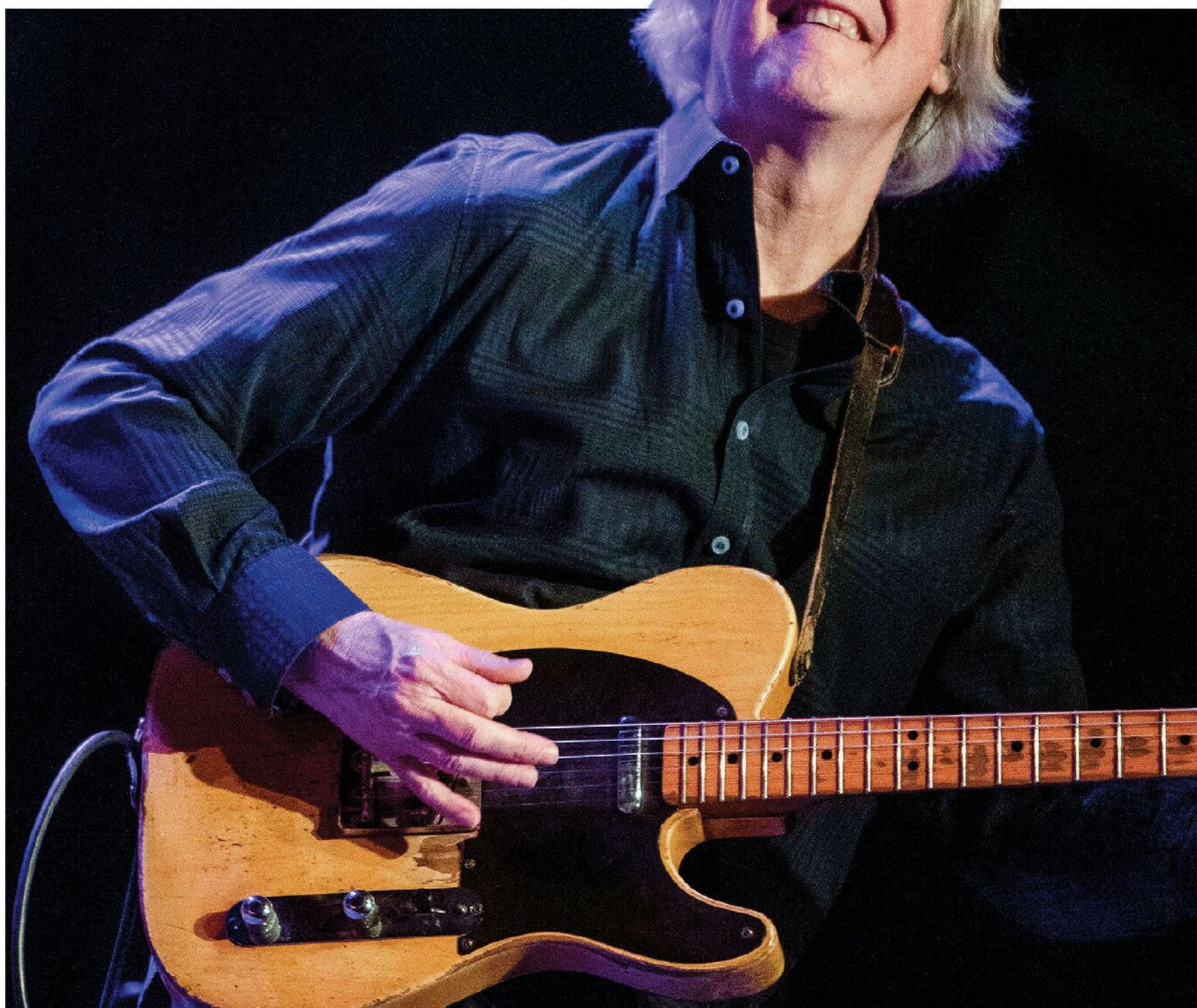
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JIM WEIDER

Telecaster Master, Camp Counselor

Ever dream of hanging out with a couple handfuls of guitar legends while breathing fresh mountain air and (mostly) unplugging from the world? If so, Jim Weider has something you'll dig – a summer camp for guitar-music fanatics to gather and bond.

Dubbed Masters of the Telecaster Guitar Camp and set for September 30 through October 4 at Full Moon Resort in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York, it's an educational seminar dressed in vacation clothes. The idea came to Weider as he watched his two related events grow in popularity – the Masters of the Telecaster concerts he and G.E. Smith have been hosting for a decade, and his Camp Cripple Creek, featuring players in The Band's orbit and attended by fans of roots rock.

Realizing that when it comes to music, there are plenty of diehard fans of any musical niche one could conceive – and they enjoy gathering with the like-minded – he teamed up again with the Music Masters Collective, a group of producers and artists who in the mid '90s began planning a home base for such interactive, immersive music events. In

2019, the group established a foundation that was granted non-profit status and adopted a more-formal mission of producing the events for people of all backgrounds, skill levels, and financial status.

While Camp Cripple Creek draws fans of The Band and similar roots rock, Weider says Masters of the Telecaster leans to players – though he emphasizes one does not need to be player to have a great time.

So, what can attendees expect at Masters of the Telecaster?

Along with hosts Weider and Joel Harrison, seminars will be taught by Albert Lee, Bill Frisell, Brent Mason, Larry Campbell, G.E. Smith, Jon Herington, Guthrie Trapp, Redd Volkaert, Adam Levy, Joe Louis Walker, Carolyn Wonderland, and Cindy Cashdollar. Classes

and concerts will touch on the styles of iconic players such as Danny Gatton, Roy Buchanan, Steve Cropper, Robbie Robertson, Roy Nichols, Ted Greene, and Eldon Shamblin, and also include potential topics such as studio tricks, hybrid picking, slide, chords, rhythm chops, tone, ensemble playing, and mixing jazz elements with blues, rock and roll, and country styles. Instructors may also delve into elements of their personal styles.

"Albert will be teaching Albert Lee tricks and techniques, and I know *I'll* be at his class, mostly to watch his right hand," Weider chuckled. "His picking is so perfect with that light touch, so it'll be fascinating to see how he plays."

"I'll teach a class on the roots of rock and roll, another on assorted Tele techniques," he added. "G.E. Smith's session is called 'Navigating The Fretboard: Make It Your Friend,' and Larry Campbell will teach his three-finger style."

After each day's workshops and classes, campers will have the option to gather in two rooms – one electric and one acoustic – where instructors and backing musicians will jam with them.

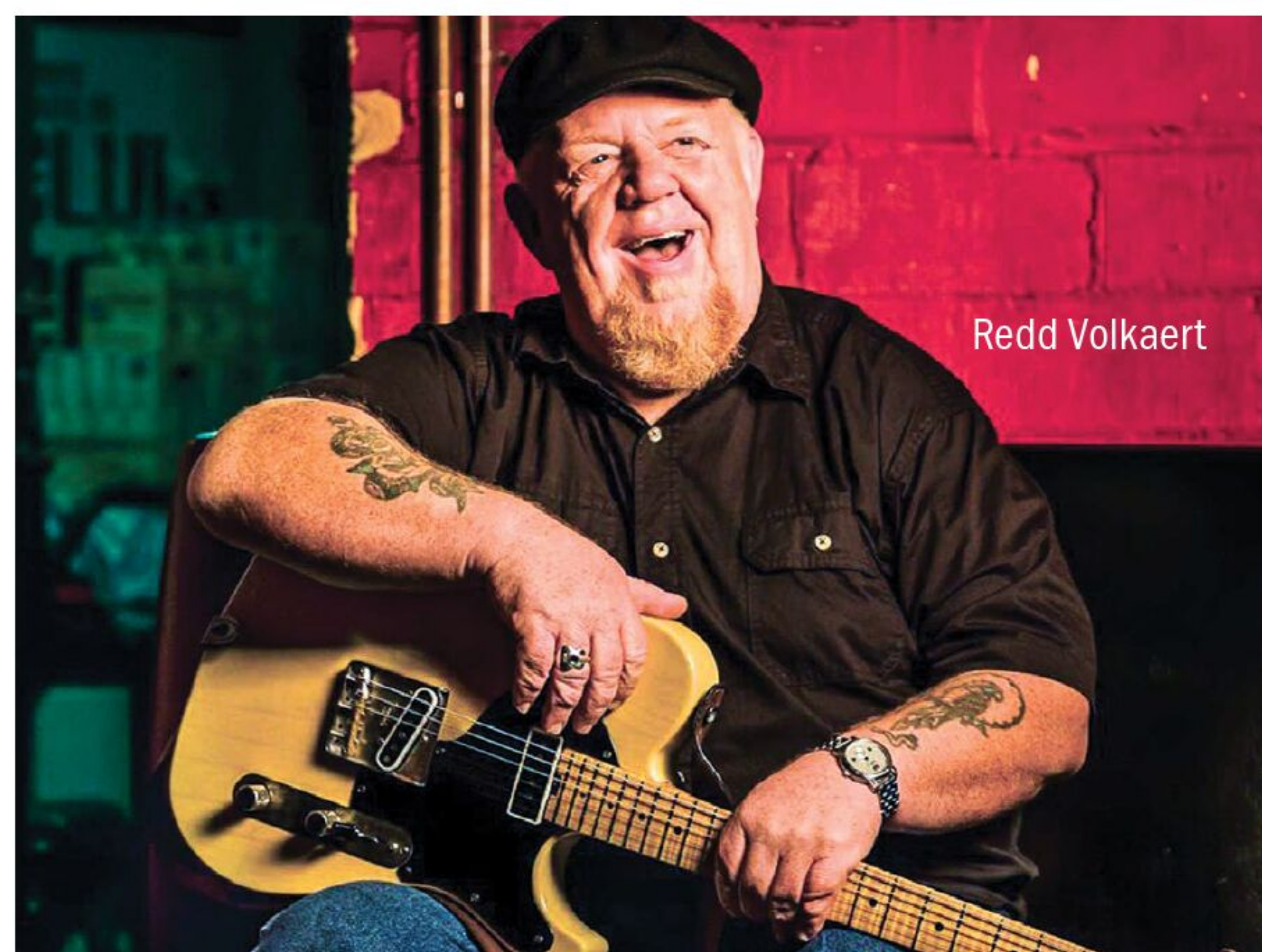
"Then, there will be a concert every night, each different," said Weider. "We'll get to play and hear some great music and crank up some tweed amps."

Beyond the fact this is the first such Tele camp and he has rounded up so many great players, Weider's inner gearhead is also excited.

"I'll have all of my vintage instruments," he said. "G.E. will bring some, too, and I'm sure others will."

"A Telecaster camp is something I've always wanted to do, and Full Moon Resort is such a beautiful place," Weider said. "To me, it's historic." – **Ward Meeker**

Learn more at mastersofthetelecaster.org.



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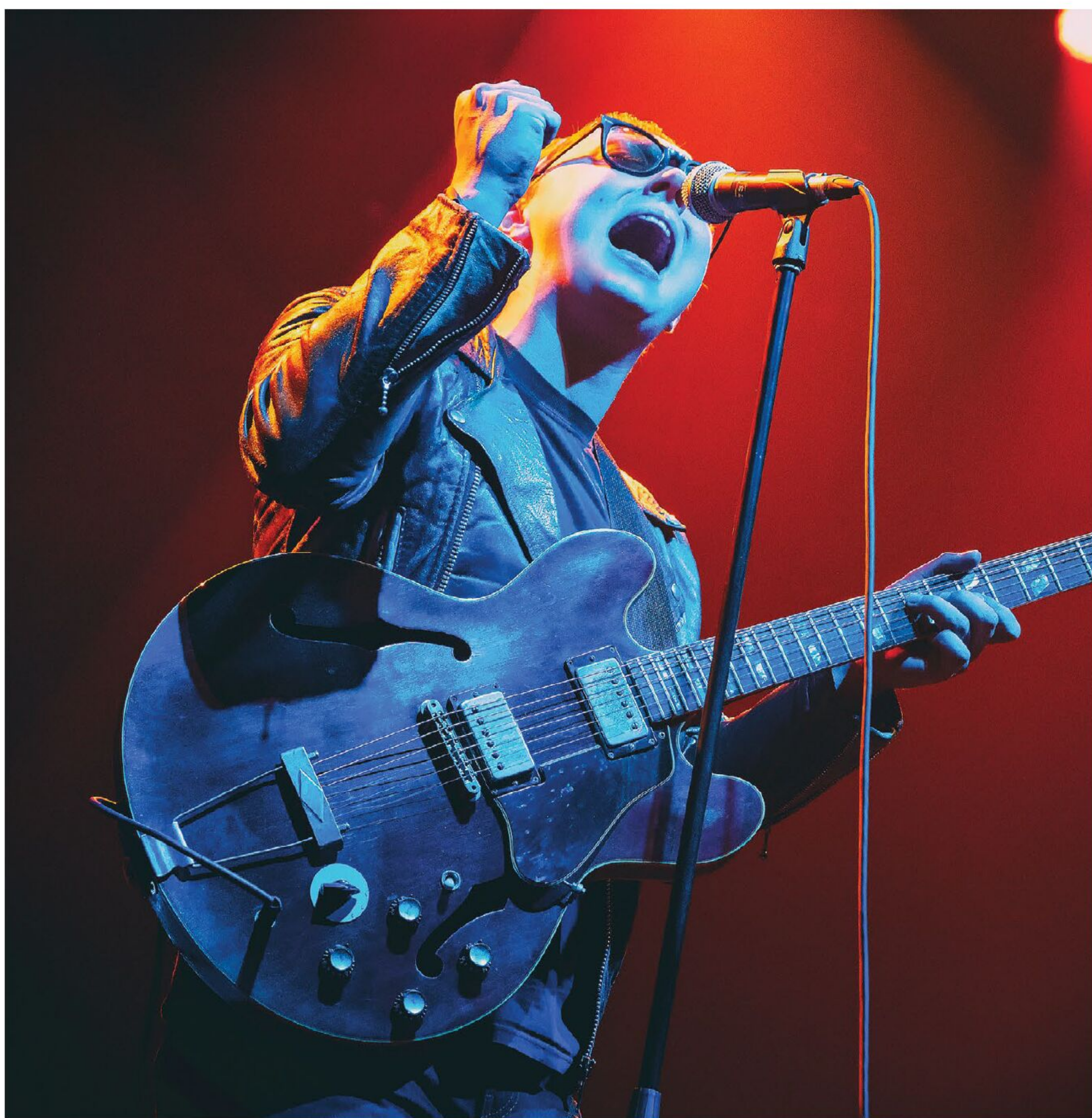
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McKINLEY JAMES

Payin' Dues in Rhythm & Blues

If you listen to early electric blues and R&B records, you'll often notice the original sessions were cut without a bassist. To recapture that 1940s and '50s vibe, McKinley James recorded his new album, *Working Class Blues*, with just guitar and vocals, backed on drums by his father, Jason Smay, who has played with J.D. McPherson and Los Straitjackets. The result is a joyous explosion of sound, captured over a weekend in the family barn. Even more, those fat guitar tones you hear are coming from James' '54 parts Strat and – no kidding – a solid-state Peavey amp!

What's it like to be in a band with your dad on drums?

Pops and I connect on a lot of levels, personally and musically. When we play live or are recording in the studio, it's always an easy flow. We set up close together in one room.

Which guitar players inspired you?

I listen to all styles, especially living in Nashville, where I'm exposed to a lot of killer players. But to narrow it down I'd say Magic Sam, Steve Cropper, Eddie Taylor, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Jimmy Reed. I live and breathe soul and blues, so it'll always come out in my playing.

For an album with so much guitar, the focus isn't on in-your-face solos.

I'm into songs as a whole and playing simple. To me, meaningful solos are just expressing a different aspect of the song, keeping it flavorful and trying not to lose track of what the song is about. I like breaks that say what they need to, and not get fancy with it.

What tremolo effect is that on "Just a Little Bit"?

That's a Fender Vibratone cabinet, which

sounds really killer. They're basically Fender's version of a Leslie. I wanted to keep the Leslie sound in the mix of tones when we went to a duo, so this was the best option. I've tried using the standard Leslies, but the Fender sounded the best with my guitar.

What's the story behind your '54 Strat?

It means so much to me. We were on the road in Detroit in May of '23, and a friend gave it to me, as he had it for years just sitting around. He got it from an old blues record collector in my hometown of Rochester many years ago, and that guy got it off the floor after a Cramps show in the '70s.

How did you get it back into playing condition?

When I got it from him, it had a one-ply pickguard and woodgrain I'd never seen. So a friend, Deke Dickerson, recommended we contact luthier AJ Peat. That July, I flew out to meet AJ in California and had him authenticate it; until then, I'd never heard of a sassafras Fender! Then I found period-correct repro knobs and a deep-C shape Allparts neck. My dear friend Matthew Bascetta, of House Of Tone pickups, made a killer set of true-spec '54 pickups with rounded-edge covers. I brought all the parts to my Nashville buddy, Spencer Connell, to assemble. As my second guitar, I also love using my '82 ES-335 in the duo. I prefer not to use pedals, though occasionally a reverb tank if I'm using an amp with no reverb.

Do you hybrid pick with fingers and a plastic pick?

I do. As a fan of Lightnin' Hopkins, I started using a thumbpick. For more of the blues-type songs, I'll lean toward the thumbpick and fingers, but for soul and rock-and-roll material, I'll go for standard Dunlop medium picks.

"Get to My Baby" captured some incredible guitar tones. Why did you use a solid-state Peavey Pacer amp?

The Peavey actually wasn't planned for the record, but I used it on a demo for "Always On My Mind" and liked how it can be clean and not too dirty at times – or it can get dirty quick! So I just went with it. We were pretty quiet while recording, but the amp can give the illusion that it's loud [and] achieve great thick tones at low volumes. I have messed around with it loud a handful of times – just for fun, though (laughs).

Your rhythm playing is locked in and groovin' throughout *Working Class Blues*.

I listen to a lot of different styles and genres of music and love listening to what the rhythm guitar is doing just as much as lead. Also, Pops and I really lock in together when we play, so that helps, as well. Working with Pops has always been a blast. – **Pete Prown VG**

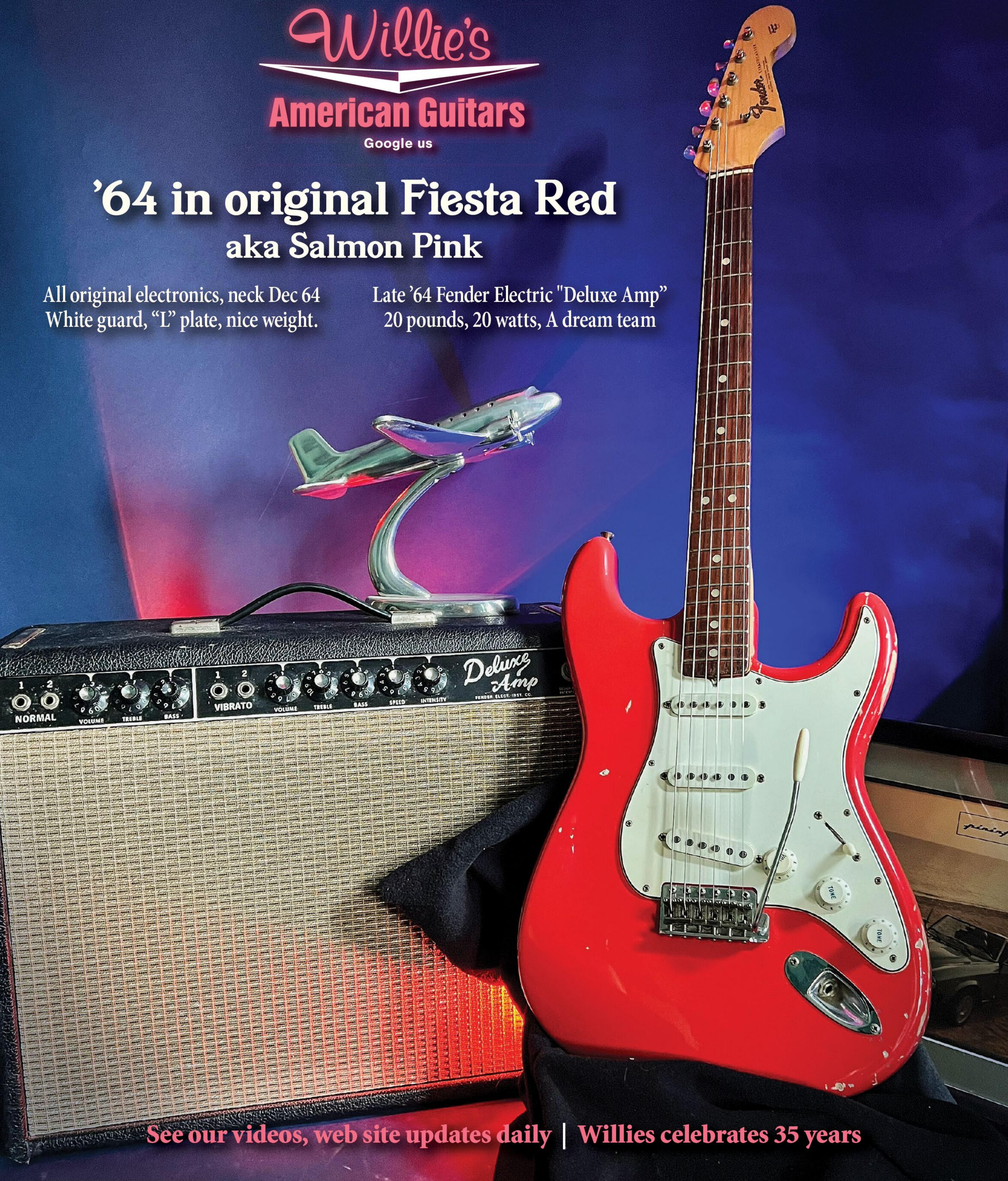
McKinley James: Alejandro Menéndez Vega.

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'64 in original Fiesta Red aka Salmon Pink

All original electronics, neck Dec 64
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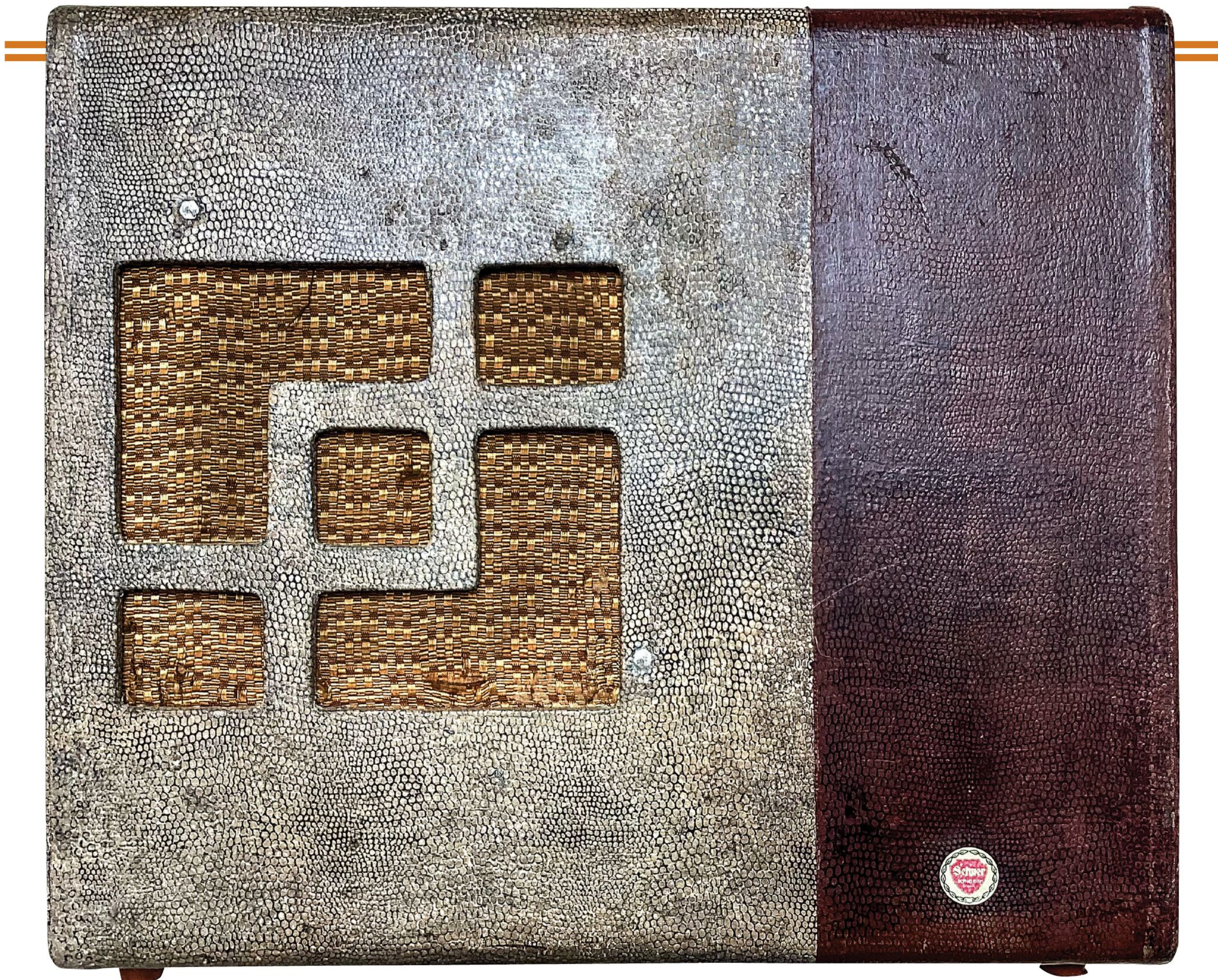
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SHOCK AND AWE

The Selmer/RSA Truvoice TV10

BY DAVE HUNTER

If the British market needed a couple of decades to decide what form the guitar amplifier would ultimately take, we shouldn't be surprised; well into the rock-and-roll age, the U.K. hadn't even decided what form of electrical current the country should run on, as we're reminded by this 1955 combo from Selmer.

We have examined early Selmer amps in these pages on previous occasions, and, among other fascinating details, they provide a window on the formative years in the industry. The U.K. boasted strong traditions in popular

music before the guitar took hold, even if some of the big trends gained momentum in the U.S. before crossing the pond. Amp manufacturing coalesced much earlier stateside, too, with the products of Gibson, Epiphone, the National/

1955 SELMER/RSA TRUVOICE TV10

- Preamp tubes: two ECC83
- Output tubes: two 19AQ5
- Controls: high impedance volume, low impedance volume, shared tone
- Speaker: one Goodmans 10"
- Output: approximately 8 watts RMS.

Supro/Valco brands, and an upstart named Fender "standardizing" the format shortly after the end of World War II. Meanwhile, the British equivalent was still very much in its infancy. To be fair, though, American manufacturers had the benefit of knowing which current their amps would run on – and more to the point, run safely on.

In the late 1940s, when the guitar-amp industry in the U.K. first got going, many households were still powered on direct current (DC). That's right, like the batteries. Promoted by that whiz kid of all things electrical, Thomas Alva Edison, a DC electrical

Amp and photos courtesy of Julian Marsh.

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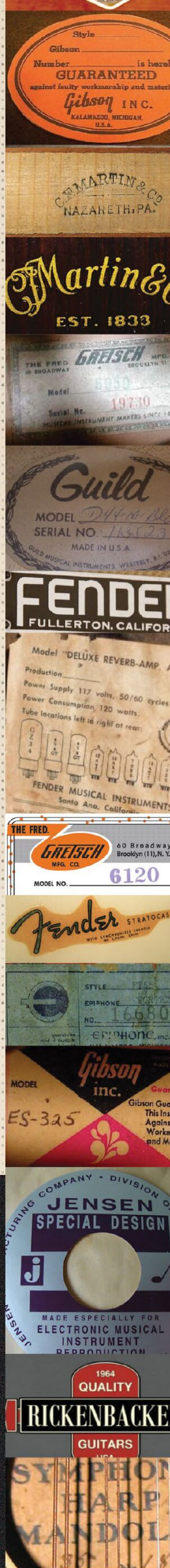
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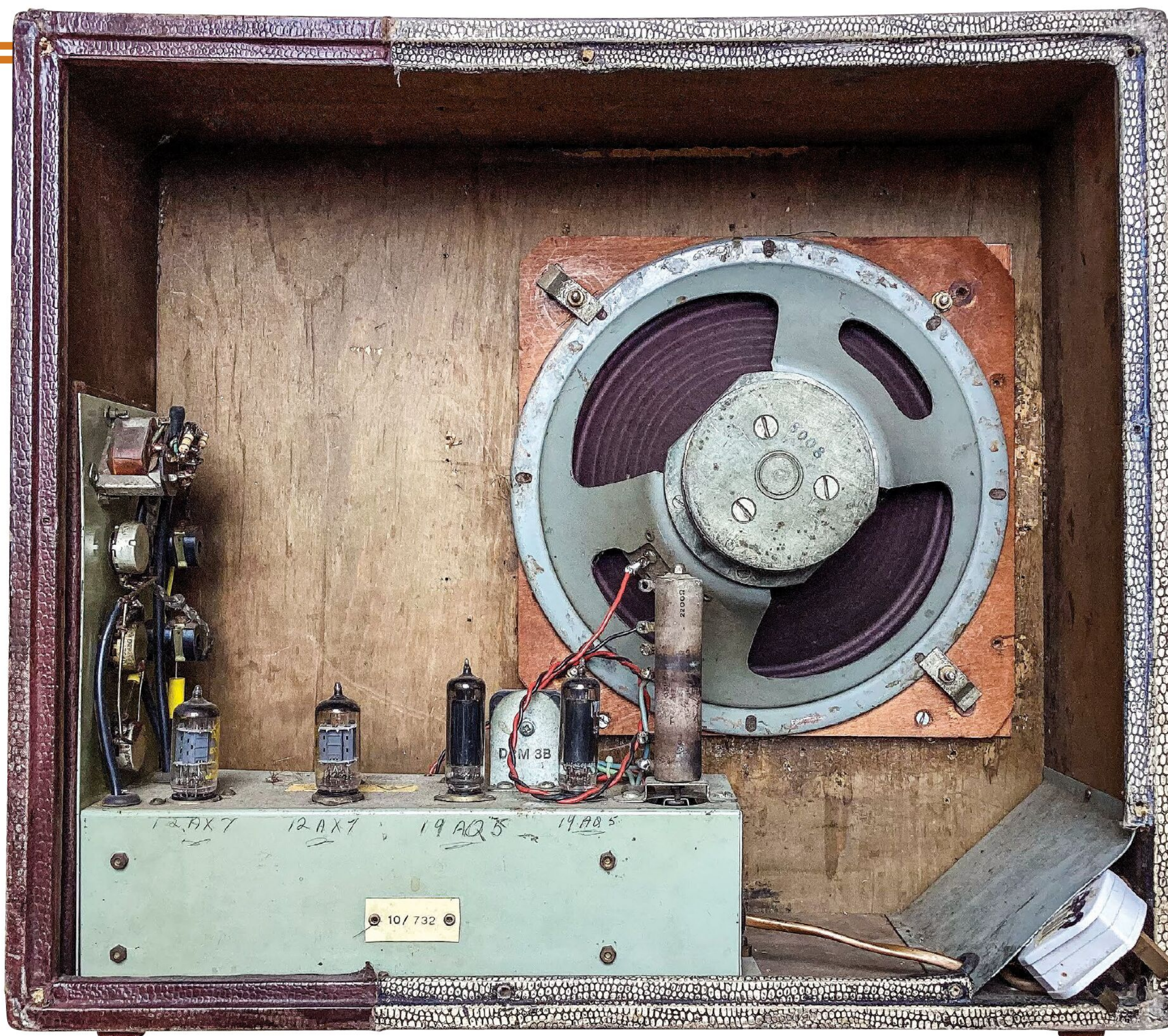


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distribution network was initially considered preferable to alternating current (AC), and there are still worthy arguments for its superiority within the home. Most electrical appliances the world over still do their thing primarily using internal DC voltage that's been converted from the AC coming out of the wall. But DC was first implemented when the biggest draw was electric public lighting with short transmission distances. Once the public's hunger for power grew – and it was needed to run heavy industry, transport, and lighting systems with far more current draw, and so forth – AC proved far more effective at sending high-kilowatt supplies from power plants across long transmission lines. The near-universal solution was to send the electricity from city to city and house to house via AC transmission lines, then convert it for use within individual appliances via built-in transformers, as we do today. Anyone who works on or has built a tube amp already understands this transformer-enabled conversion as a big

part of what makes them tick, but the same applies to most consumer appliances, albeit in a lower-voltage setting now that tubes don't power anything else.

For British guitar-amp manufacturers, the trouble lurking in all this was that, while the American consumer-power supply had sorted itself out by this time, many regions of the U.K. were stumbling along with DC well through the '50s and even into the early '60s in some regions. If you wanted to build a guitar amp that ran on DC internally, it made sense to take it straight out of the wall. So, manufacturers did just

The TV10's simple control panel boasts the "RSA Truvoice" logos, with nary a mention of Selmer.



The amp's chassis and Goodmans 10" speaker.

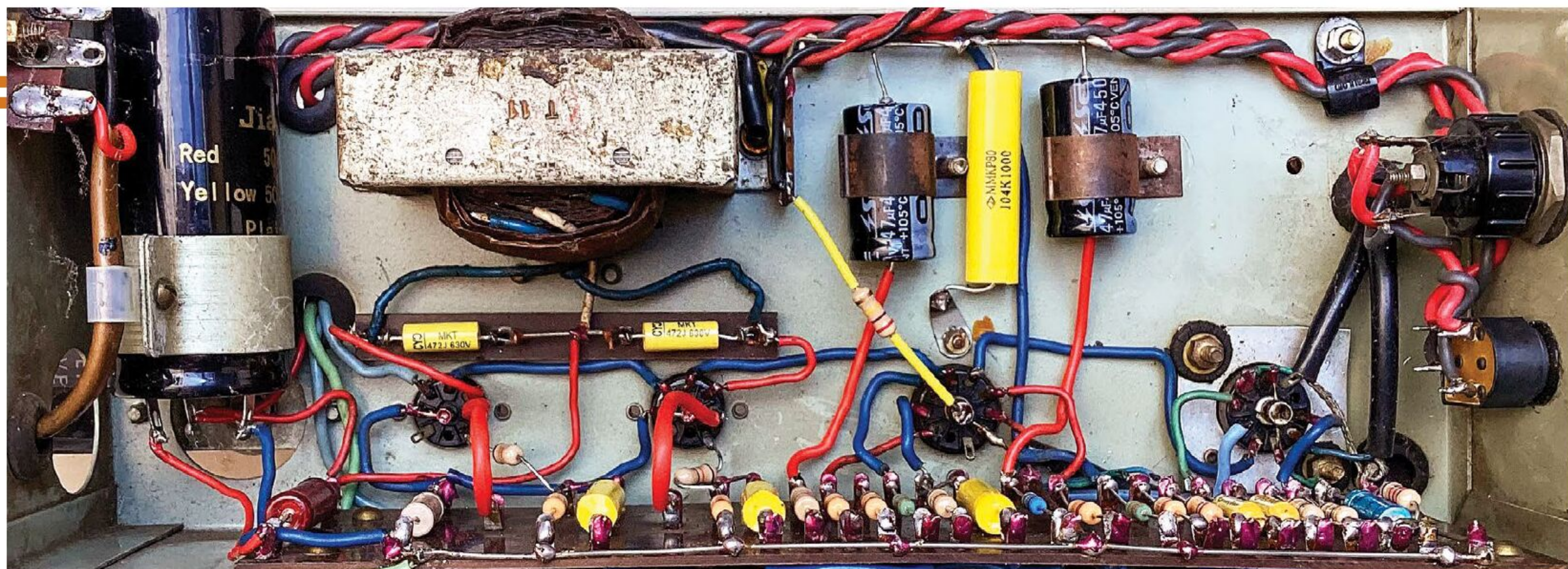
that. On many occasions this meant excluding a conventional mains (power) transformer and, along with it, all kinds of safety-minded stuff that kept the high-voltage current from running right up the cord, into the guitar, and finding a path to ground through the player's body.

This nifty art deco RSA Truvoice TV10 combo by Selmer is one such DC-powered amp, one of the last generation of such devices made before the industry consolidated an AC-powered standard. And it's a cool amp in its own right, an example of a transitional period in Selmer's approach to the market that still

displays its subsidiary's name more prominently than that of the parent company. It derives around eight watts of power from a pair of unusual seven-pin 12AQ5 output tubes – a lower-powered sibling of the better-known EL84. The two tubes in the pre-amp and phase inverter are specified as 12AX7s, unusually, rather than the British ECC83, though there's a pair of Mullard ECC83s in this example. And the rectifier tube? Ha! There isn't one, given this amp has no need to convert the incoming supply to DC, as guitar amps do today.

The Henri Selmer company was established in France in the late 19th century, with the London division founded in 1928 at 126 Charing Cross Road by saxophonist and entrepreneur Ben Davis. The company imported American-made amps when the electric guitar started to get a foothold in the '30s, and began manufacturing its own after moving up the road to 114-116 Charing Cross Road at the corner of Flitcroft Street in 1935 (an address with a long history in the London music industry, but which is now shared by a Chipotle Mexican Grille and a yoga studio). In 1947, Selmer bought the R.S. Amplifiers company (RSA), and used that wing to manufacture its amps under the Truvoice brand for several years, with "Selmer, London" often indicated only on a small badge somewhere on the combo.

For a time, Selmer held a virtual monopoly in the British guitar-amp market, and even by the mid '50s remained the biggest player, with Tom Jennings' JMI just getting into the game by selling his basic pre-Vox amplifiers at



The chassis' underside reveals the neat circuitry, with a few replaced components for general upkeep.

100 Charing Cross Road, and Charlie Watkins revving up toward his own manufacturing. In the early '50s, Watkins started buying DC amps from Premier Electronics, a couple blocks north on Tottenham Court Road, to sell under his own brand before the potential hazards of the devices hit home.

"I'd sold about 20 of them by 1952, when one day I saw a piece in the *Daily Mirror* about a pop-group guitarist getting killed," Watkins told David Petersen in an interview for *The Guitar Magazine* (U.K.) in May 2000. "Being a fatalist, I thought, 'It's bound to be one of my amps'; those AC/DC units were quite dangerous. I sent a telegram to the guy who was making them and got him to stop immediately. Somehow, I managed to recall all those I'd sold and replaced them with safe AC-only units."

The owner of this example, Julian Marsh, is a collector who knows how to play it safely, and finds a lot to like while doing so.

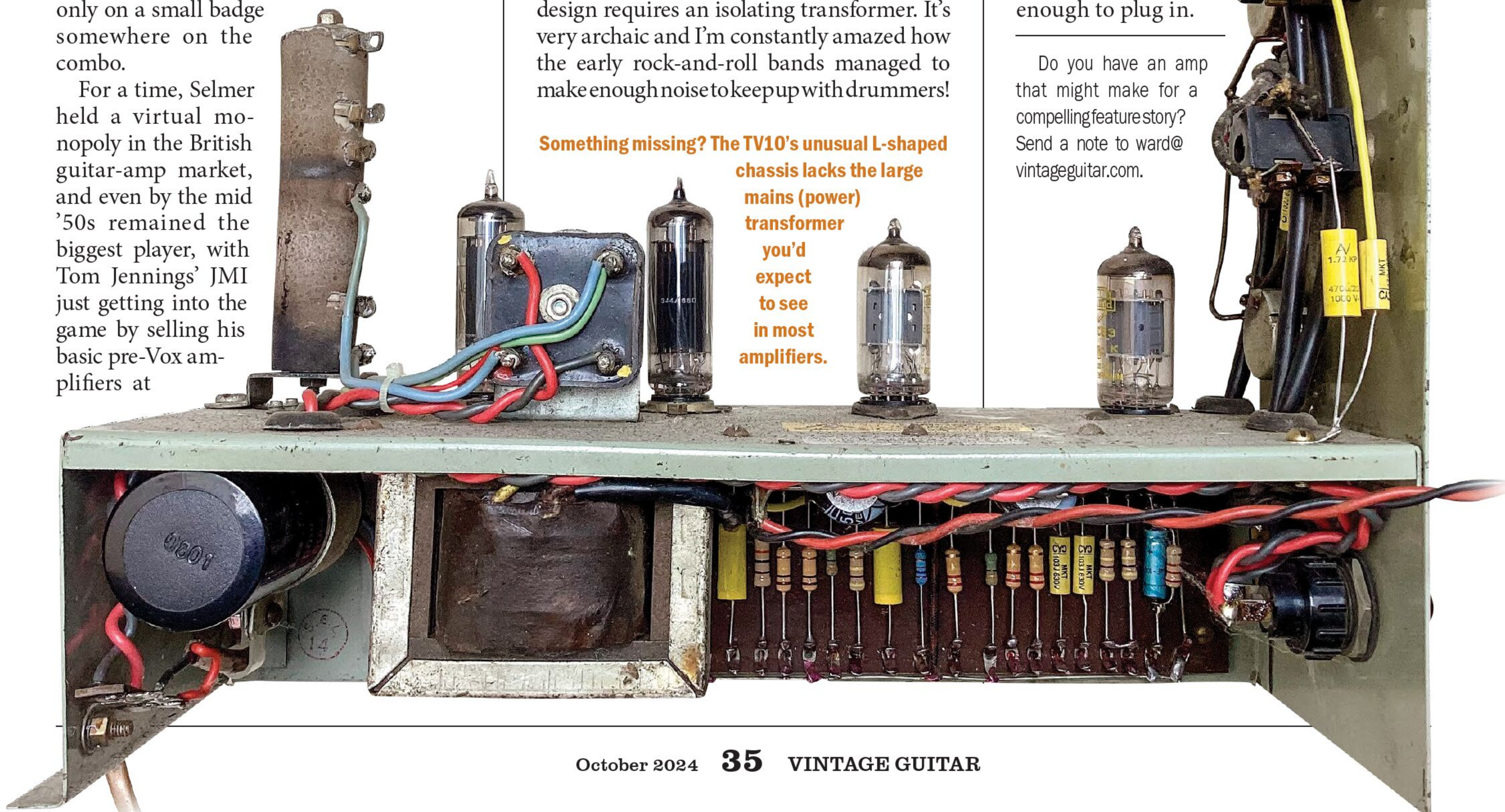
"This is an incredibly rare amp, but the DC design requires an isolating transformer. It's very archaic and I'm constantly amazed how the early rock-and-roll bands managed to make enough noise to keep up with drummers!

The sound is nice and warm, though, with tons of distortion – like all these early amps when you turn it up full. There's no hint of tinniness, but it's very much for bedroom volumes."

Not for the faint of heart, then, but with full awareness of the potential dangers and practices for safe usage, the two-toned, mock-crock 1955 RSA Truvoice TS10 offers a cool retro-mod window on the formative years of British guitar amplification, and some inspiring tones – if you're brave enough to plug in.

Do you have an amp that might make for a compelling feature story? Send a note to ward@vintageguitar.com.

Something missing? The TV10's unusual L-shaped chassis lacks the large mains (power) transformer you'd expect to see in most amplifiers.





Classics

Growing up 10 miles from Earl Scruggs' birthplace in North Carolina with a music-loving father and two older sisters who could impress on the piano, it makes sense that Harold Wright became a musician. And while he followed in the girls' footsteps by starting piano lessons when he was 12, after two years, he (and his parents!) realized it wasn't a good fit.

In 1962, "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" was still popular on TV, and young Harold (who family and friends called "Sonny") was fully tuned into Ricky Nelson singing while James Burton picked behind him. Toss in Duane Eddy's "Rebel Rouser" on the radio, along with Scotty Moore backing Elvis and tunes by the Ventures, et al. The guitar was starting to boom. Having sandbagged his way out of piano lessons, "I knew what I wanted to play," Wright recalls. "After much discussion and begging, my parents agreed to get a guitar for me, but only if I took lessons because they weren't about to spend their hard-earned money on something I'd throw under the bed and forget about."

He was happy to oblige, and a few days later, a shiny new Silvertone Model 1415 and 1471 amp arrived, courtesy of Sears mail-order. Sonny readily jumped into lessons, digging everything about it. After six months, the teacher said he was ready to fly on his own, "And I did," he chuckled. "I was on a roll, and popular with the girls since I was the only 14-year-old boy around who played an instrument of any kind. It was great!"

Submitted for your approval – the idyllic existence of a baby boomer teen. Then along came the Vietnam War.

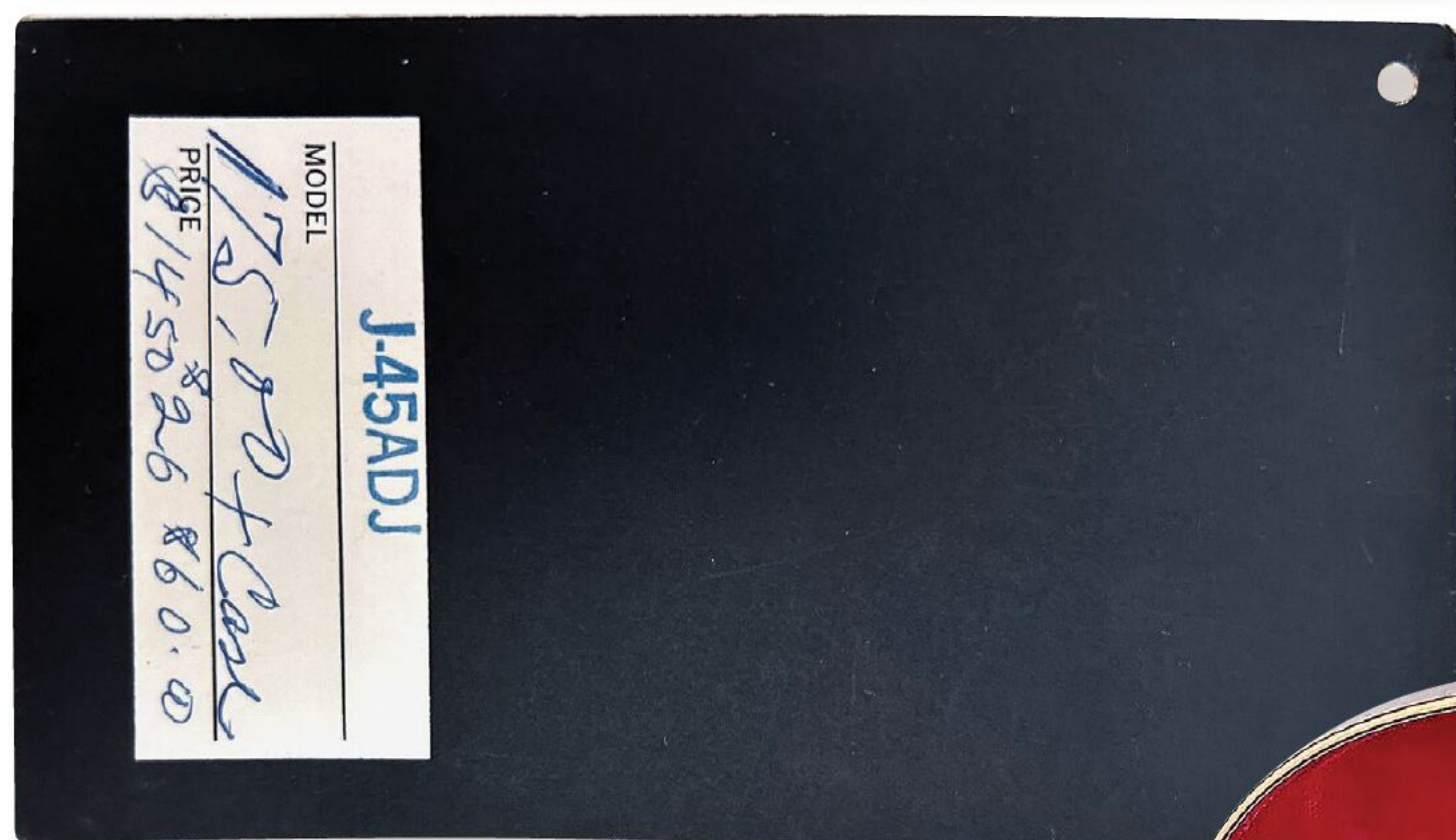
By 1966, Wright was an 18-year-old facing the draft. Preferring to have a say in his role, that August he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was shipped to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, followed by advanced training as a B-52 mechanic at Chanute AFB in Illinois. After a year at Warner Robins, Georgia, he received ship-out orders to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon. Given leave before the deployment, he went home to visit friends and family. One day, his dad, Allen, suggested that Sonny take a guitar along on his hitch, and offered to buy one.

"Of course I liked the idea, so I started checking the classifieds," he said. "A couple days later, I saw an ad for a Gibson J-45 for \$100. Dad and I went to see it, and the lady's five-year-old daughter brought the guitar from a back room, dragging it by a string (laughs). Picking it up, I noticed smudges of peanut butter and jelly on the front but it had been played very little. We settled on \$75."

A couple days later, he was off, J-45 in its chipboard case, latches taped to ensure they'd stay closed, ID tag tied to its handle, set to ride in the belly of a Boeing 707 as they traversed the Pacific Ocean.

Aircraft mechanic in Vietnam was a go-where-needed job, so Wright saw a lot of base-to-base travel, J-45 along at every stop.

All photos by Stacy Wright.



"If I was going by chopper, I had my duffle slung over my shoulder and the guitar in my hand," he said. "No pilot or crew chief ever refused to let me carry it onboard. In the barracks, I usually left it on my bunk; sometimes it would disappear for two or three days, but I never worried about it. It'd show up right where I had left it, sometimes with a note from another GI saying, 'See you back home' or just 'Thanks'."

Wright's tour ended a year later and he returned home safe and sound. Life returned to normal and he started dating a local girl named Judy Allen. The young couple often sat under an old oak tree in her yard, Harold playing the guitar and singing for her – everything from "Blue Suede Shoes" to "Long Black Veil."

When a co-worker asked him to show her some chords so she could play for young people on outings for her husband's church congregation, Wright was more than happy to oblige, and they started spending one lunch

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



hour per week practicing songs. One day, though, someone with bad intent saw him put the guitar in his car.

"I always locked it when we were finished, but when I left work later that day, the guitar was gone," he said. "Someone had stolen it."

Every bit as depressed as you'd think, he struggled to grasp why...

"I couldn't believe it. A guitar that had followed me halfway around the world and brought joy to countless GIs, then serenaded my future wife, was gone forever. The loss was terrible, and I've always thought it hurt Dad as much or more than me since he played such a big part in helping me get it."

He filed a police report, started checking pawn shops, and even wrote a letter to the local newspaper, offering a reward. Nothing turned up.

Several years later, he found another sunburst '65 J-45 and bought it from the family of its original owner. And while it's identical in every respect, "I've never had the same feeling when I play it," he said. "Does it bring back memories? Yes; when I look at it, I remember Dad smiling as I played 'Wildwood Flower,' 'Jimmy Brown,' or his favorite, 'Little Rosewood Casket' and him joining in on

harmonica. I see all the soldiers playing it and singing songs, and I see Judy smiling at me under that big oak tree, dreaming of our future together.

"Most players have a guitar that's more like a friend or loved one. The J-45 was that for me; Judy and I have been married 54 years and it was a huge part of our lives."

On the sunny side, the "replacement" has helped create its own share of memories.

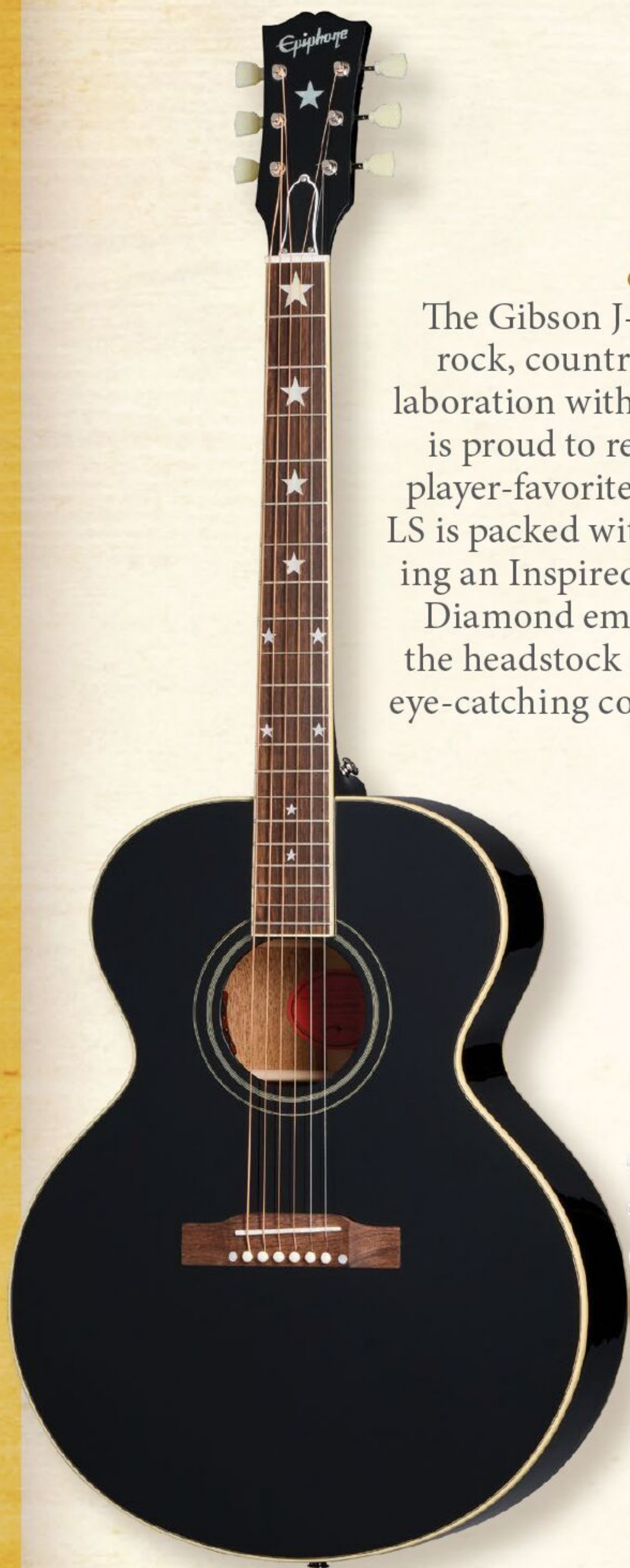
"For sure, it has provided countless hours of happiness to me and my family. It's been a part of weddings and – sadly – funerals for friends and relatives.

"In a way, each guitar has a life of its own. I'm just glad I was allowed to be part of the lives of two special guitars."

– Ward Meeker

Special thanks to Susan (Wright) Spencer.

Astonishing Acoustics Redux



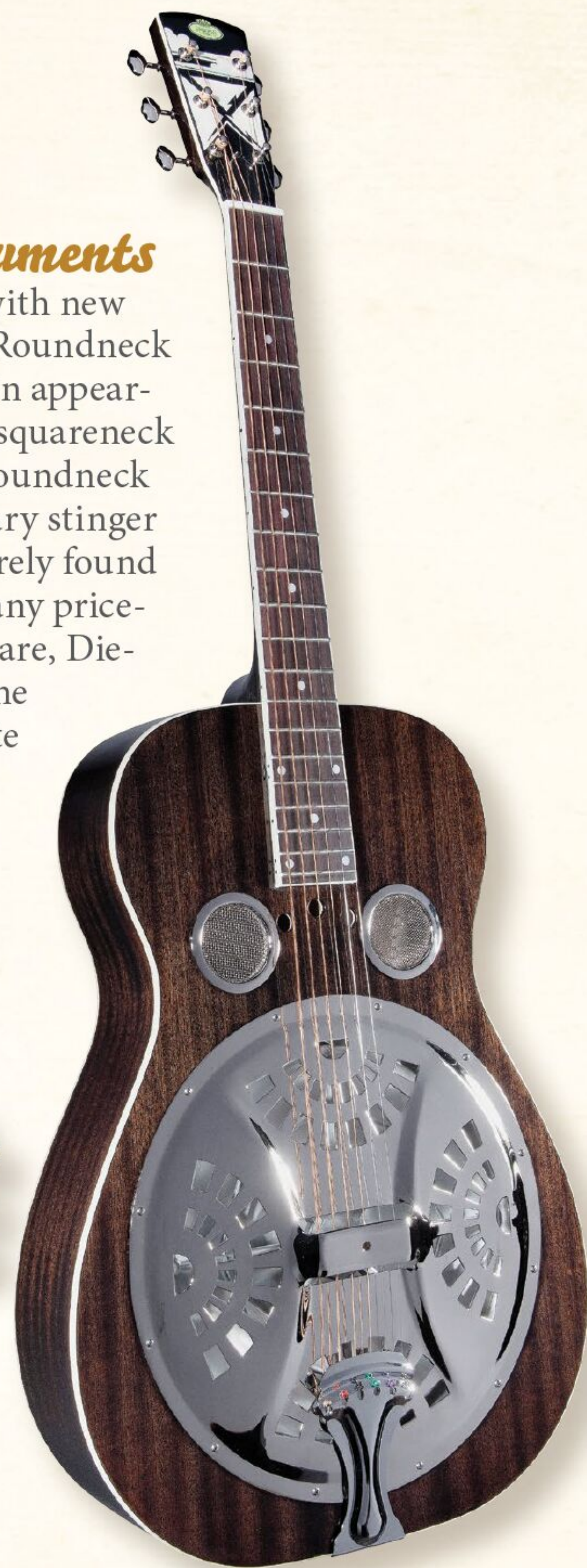
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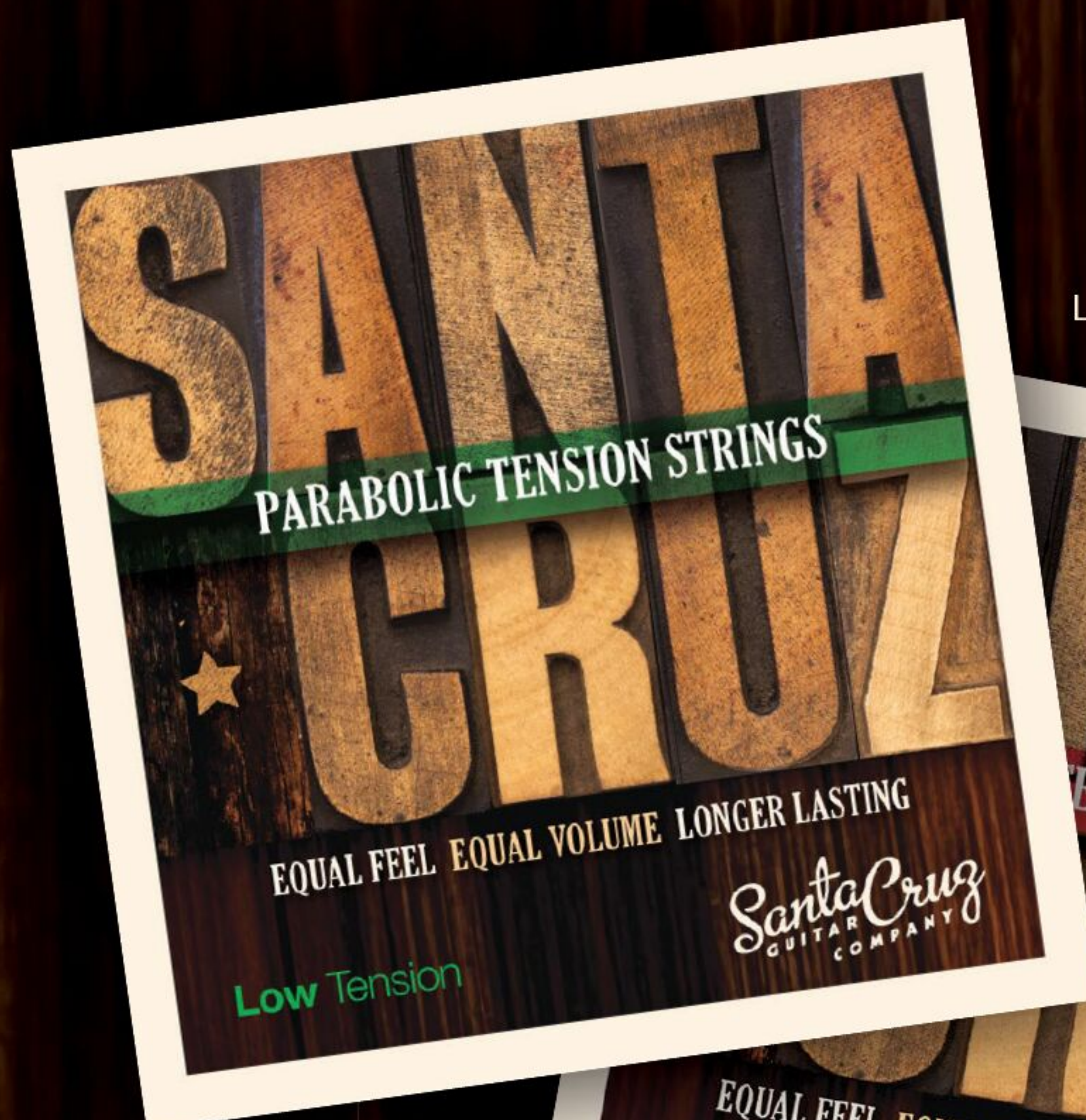
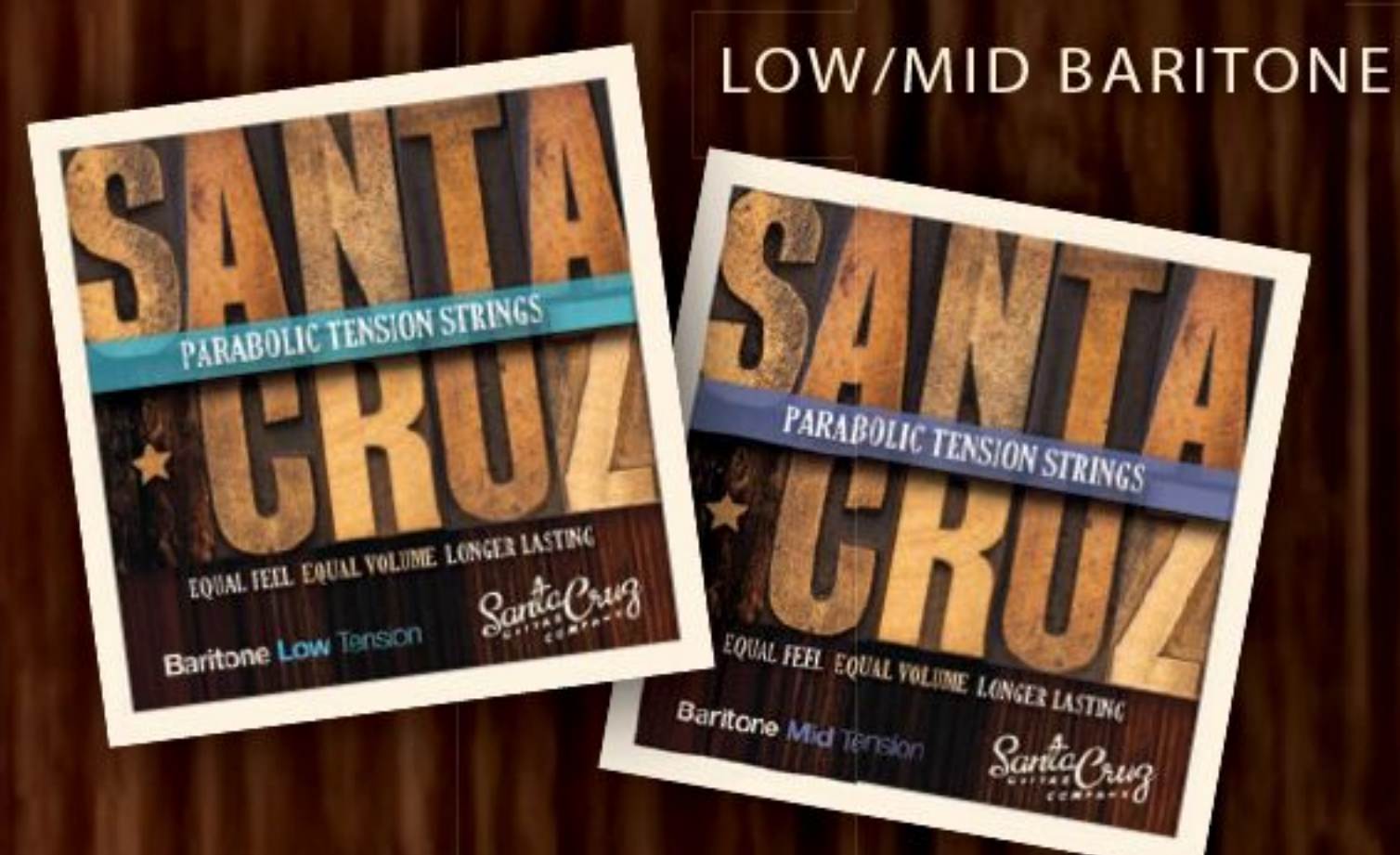
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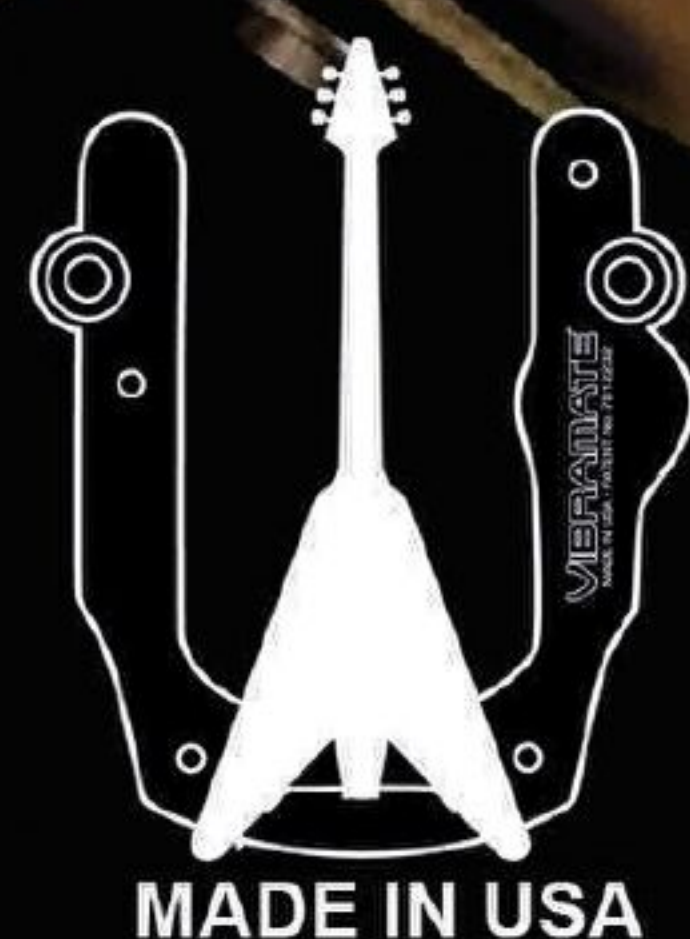
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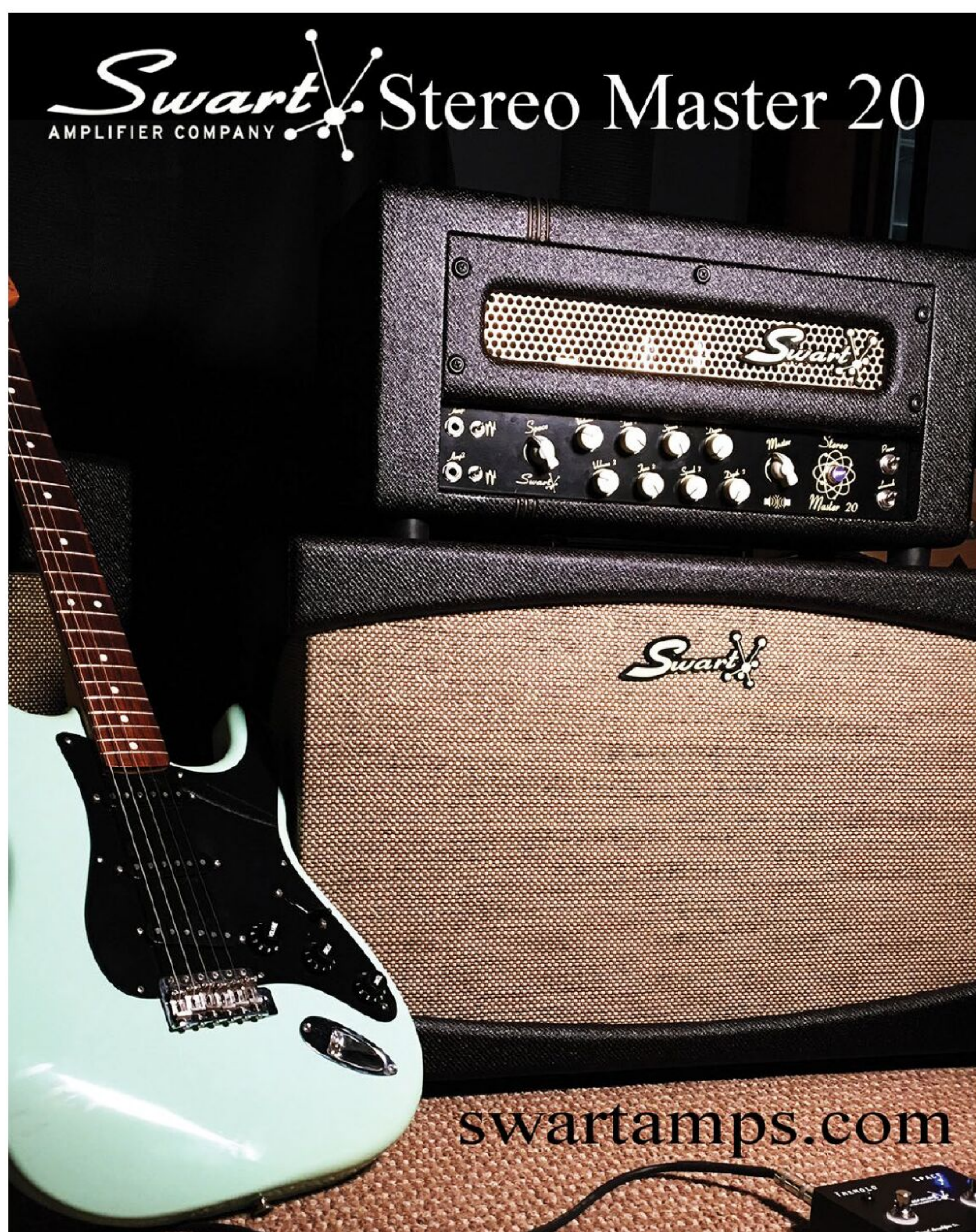
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October 2024 **41** VINTAGE GUITAR

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Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli

1964 Gibson
Firebird VII

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
1982	Ampeg Parametric Equalizer A-9		\$150	\$200
1965	Baldwin Nu-Sonic		\$750	\$1,000
1990s	Collings 0001 Stitka		\$3,125	\$4,000
1967	Danelectro Dane C Series	12-string	\$2,000	\$2,500
1982	D'Aquisto New Yorker			
	Deluxe (Cutaway)	Sunburst	\$37,000	\$48,000
1967	EKO Dragon	Single cut arch	\$1,000	\$1,500
1963	Epiphone Crestwood Custom	Cherry, mini hums	\$3,500	\$4,500
1959	Epiphone Rivoli (1 Pickup)	Banjo tuners, natural	\$7,500	\$10,000
2020	Fender Brad Paisley Esquire		\$950	\$1,250
1964	Fender Esquire Custom	Custom Color	\$37,500	\$48,500
1962	Fender Jazz	Rare color,		
		3 knob, curved	\$27,000	\$42,500
2016	Fender Standard/ Player Precision (Import)	Mexico, Custom Art Series	\$475	\$625
1992	Fender '60 Stratocaster			
	(Custom Shop)		\$3,000	\$4,000
1971	Fender Telecaster	Common Color	\$8,500	\$11,000
1998	G&L Legacy	4-bolt, Alnicos	\$1,125	\$1,500
1965	Gibson Firebird III	Sunburst, reverse, 2 P-90s	\$9,000	\$12,000
1964	Gibson Firebird VII	Sunburst, reverse	\$25,000	\$32,000
1988	Gibson Les Paul			
	Custom Lite (Show Case Edition)	Goldtop	\$2,500	\$3,000
1998	Gibson Les Paul Old Hickory		\$4,500	\$6,000
1985	Gibson Les Paul Studio			
	Roland Synthesizer		\$1,000	\$1,375
1969	Gibson SG Standard	Engraved lyre,		
	1-piece neck,		\$6,250	\$8,000
1935	Gibson Super 400	Late 1935, plain	\$11,000	\$14,000
1962	Gretsch Model 6153T			
	White Princess	6x9 oval	\$1,100	\$1,700
1962	Gretsch White Penguin (6134)		\$115,500	\$150,000
1962	Guild Nararre F-50/F-50	Pearl block markers	\$5,750	\$7,500
1980s	Heritage H-137	Sunburst or natural lime	\$1,250	\$1,625
1972	Ibanez Model 2370	ES-346 copy, sb	\$1,250	\$1,625
1970s	Kazan Kvaker		\$100	\$200
1981	Kramer Pacer Imperial		\$1,000	\$1,500
1991	Marshall JCM 800			
	Model 1959 Head	100 watts	\$1,350	\$2,100
1927	Martin 1-18T		\$2,500	\$3,250
1965	Martin 000-21	Last Brazilian rosewood	\$8,750	\$11,000
1939	Martin D-45	Late 1939, thin neck	\$400,000	\$500,000
2002	Martin Philadelphia			
	Folk Festival 40th Anniversary		\$2,750	\$3,500
2000s	MXR Wylde Overdrive ZW44		\$70	\$100
1975	Ovation Deacon 12-String 1253		\$1,250	\$1,625
1980s	Peavey Vegas 400		\$325	\$450
1939	Recording King Ray Whitley	Mahogany	\$12,500	\$16,000
1960s	Selmer Little Giant	Small combo, red	\$1,400	\$2,000
1930s	Slingerland May Bell Lap Steel		\$250	\$325
1980s	Tokai AST-62		\$825	\$1,000
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1986	Yamaha SG-7A 20th Anniversary		\$2,250	\$3,000

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SONIC STAMP

The Police's *Synchronicity*

By Bret Adams

"Going out on top" is a common sentiment among artists and athletes hoping to end their careers at their best – not fade away. In rock and roll, one blueprint is The Police and their 1983 masterpiece, *Synchronicity*.

The fifth album from vocalist/bassist Sting, guitarist Andy Summers, and drummer Stewart Copeland was a cultural phenomenon, reaching #1 on the *Billboard* album chart for 17 weeks and selling more than eight million copies in the U.S. The first single "Every Breath You Take" also zoomed to the top of the charts for eight weeks. Other hits were "King of Pain," "Synchronicity II," and "Wrapped Around Your Finger," all coinciding with a massive tour of sold-out arenas and stadiums... then, the band split.

For years, The Police had experienced high-profile creative tensions, but they rose to a boil while recording *Synchronicity*. From the start, Summers knew it would be their last album.

"I definitely did feel that," he said. "The intimations were that this would be the last one for Sting. There was a slightly strange feeling about doing the record – a shadow hanging over us. But we were signed up for five albums, the whole world was watching and expecting a great record. It was a strange mix of feelings."

The band typically recorded together, but *Synchronicity* saw them separated at the behest of engineer/co-producer Hugh Padgham. Summers typically played in the studio, Sting in the control room with his bass direct to the desk, and Copeland in the facility's high-ceiling dining room – linked via video with no sound.

"We got what they call 'perfect separation' – very much an engineer's thing. But I found it kind of weird; I would much have preferred to be playing in a room together with a bit of leakage. (Engineers) want [separation], but it cannot make up for natural musical excitement or cohesion in the playing.

"And, separation can be very detrimental, as I found out, particularly on what Hugh did to 'Every Breath You Take.' I had to correct what he had done to the guitar. In Montserrat (where we recorded), I had this incredible, thick, gorgeous sound. When I heard it, I was just so upset that he'd lost it. I worked hard with him to get it back. He's very guilty of that, I'm afraid."



Andy Summers in the early '80s.

Andy Summers: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy.

THE POLICE

SYNCHRONICITY



THE POLICE

SYNCHRONICITY



Summers' unique guitar sound is integral to the band's style. On *Synchronicity*, he played several including his trademark '63 Telecaster (modified before it was his), a '62 Strat, and a '58 ES-335.

"The overriding credo was, 'You can't sound like anybody else.' That was very important to me – and it was a natural thing because I wasn't a gigantic fan who listened to only rock guitar," explained Summers, whose resumé includes wide-ranging creative projects. "I came out of a jazz background and I've been to university in the U.S. I listened to all this music; I played classical guitar. I was fully fledged as a guitarist.

"I wanted to make the guitar parts different behind the vocal. I was never going to play a barre chord. I had a philosophy; I wanted to create The Police guitar sound – make it different than the standard 'banging it out.' I think the playing is all fairly elegant, actually. I was very conscious of having a signature sound, and I think it contributed hugely to the success of The Police."

While Summers is suitably proud of *Synchronicity*, it's not his preferred band effort.

"I think most of the tracks hold up really well, but my favorite album is the second one, *Reggatta de Blanc*, which was where we were still very fresh. We hadn't really made it and we were very keen to make a great record. We had enough recognition to go in and make a record and prove it. It was a chance to move up a step, and I really like the fresher, youthful energy in it.

"By the time we got to *Synchronicity*, we were ultra-famous – real rock stars. The record got more sophisticated in a way that I didn't necessarily enjoy as much as the rawer sounds on *Reggatta de Blanc*."

The Police were inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003, and fans were pleasantly surprised by their reunion tour in '07-'08.

Today, *Synchronicity* still shines. In 2019, "Every Breath You Take" surpassed The Righteous Brothers' 1964 classic "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" as the most-played song in radio history. The album has been named to the Grammy Hall of Fame. The U.S. Library of Congress added it to the National Recording Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" and worthy of preservation.

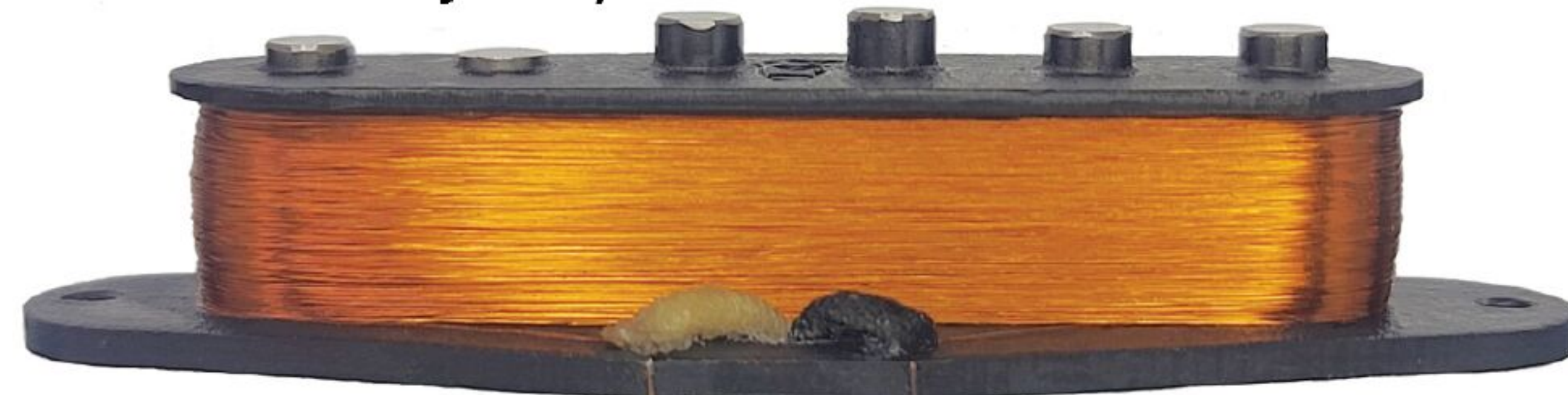
"What sold The Police was the chemistry in the playing. It was unique, never to be replicated by anybody. We definitely made our own style of music," said Summers. "We had a real signature sound and style, and we became conscious of our *thing* and we would try to make every piece sound like it was played by the three of us."

Reflecting now, Summers sees *Synchronicity*

(which was recently reissued with B-sides, demos, instrumentals, alternate takes, and a live performance from September, 1983) and the band's dissolution as a glass half full.

"We left at the peak of glory, if you like, which is a very ballsy thing to do. We didn't start declining and make records that got worse and worse. We left them wanting more, which is the oldest cliché in the book." **VG**

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Stevie Ray
Vaughan in 1982.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

Texas Flood

By Wolf Marshall

Stevie Ray Vaughan was unknown when he premiered at the 1982 Montreux Jazz Festival. Born and bred in Dallas, he'd played the Texas bar circuit as sideman in Blackbird, the Nightcrawlers, Cobras, and Triple Threat Revue before becoming a local phenom as frontman of Double Trouble.

Formed with bassist Jackie Newhouse and drummer Chris Layton in 1979, the definitive

Double Trouble lineup was established when bassist Tommy Shannon joined in '81. Producer Jerry Wexler, who'd coined the term "Rhythm & Blues" in 1949, had a nose for talent (Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Allman Brothers, Led Zeppelin), and sniffed greatness when he caught the trio in Austin; he recommended SRV to Montreux promoter Claude Nobs, saying he'd be ideal for their blues night. Concur-

rently, SRV manager Chesley Millikin sent a Double Trouble live video to Mick Jagger, who lamented there were no competent bluesmen on the contemporary scene.

Vaughan's notoriety spread among insiders when cognoscenti praised him following a Stones-arranged performance at NYC's Danceteria. Though he received mixed reactions at Montreux (boos from traditionalist attendees are irrefutable on the July 17 recording) SRV made two serendipitous connections – David Bowie and Jackson Browne.

Enamored with classic R&B, Bowie hired Vaughan in December '82 to lend his Texas-blues expertise to *Let's Dance* as he made a metamorphosis from glam and post-disco incarnations to modern pop icon. SRV's playing on the title track and "Criminal World" (touted as his finest solo on the album) provided grit that contributed to its novelty and success. It remains Bowie's best seller. Browne heard Vaughan in the Montreux Casino lounge, and, after jamming into the morning, offered him free time at his Down Town Studio, in L.A.

The music that became *Texas Flood* was recorded over three days during the studio's Thanksgiving holiday, November 22-24. Day one was mostly spent setting up, with minimal recording. Sessions commenced the following day; Browne's engineer, Greg Ladanyi, was disinterested and left engineering duties to Stevie's cohort, co-producer/engineer Richard Mullen. SRV played through two '64 Fender Vibroverb 1x15 combos and Browne's 150-watt Dumbleland Special. Mullen used two Shure SM57 mics – one for a Vibroverb's speaker, another for the Dumble 4x12 cabinet with EVs. His only effect was an Ibanez Tube Screamer. Stevie used three Stratocasters strung with heavy strings (.013-.058) and tuned down a half step. For most tracks, he favored "Number One" with its sunburst '59 body and '62 rosewood-board slab neck (bearing Dunlop 6150 jumbo frets) and a left-handed vibrato. He bought the guitar in the mid '70s at Ray Hennig's Heart of Texas Music and considered it inferior. Augmenting it was "Lenny," a maple-board '65 stripped to natural wood that he'd purchased at a pawn shop for \$350 in 1980, and "Yellow," a refinished rosewood-board '59 given to him by Charley's Guitar Shop (Dallas) owner Charley Wirz in '81. Lenny was heard on its namesake tune and seen during Stevie's *Live at El Mocambo* performance. Yellow, which was virtually a semi-hollow after having been routed to accommodate four humbuckers, was used for "Tell Me" and "Collins Shuffle" (at Montreux). Wirz installed a Strat neck pickup that accentuated its quasi-acoustic qualities.

Each track was essentially a live performance;

Stevie Ray Vaughan: Alain Dister/DAPR/Zuma Press.



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Tune Down 1/2 Step
Slow Blues

"Texas Flood" is definitive SRV – a simmering slow-blues lament that is as live as it gets. Recorded in a single take as the clock ran out on the final day, it became his personal anthem and theme song. The opening recalls Fenton Robinson's chordal intro, but given the SRV treatment with reinterpreted riffs in measures 1-2

leading to incandescent double-timed lines over the turnaround in 3-4. Note the unique G-A^b-G mordent embellishing figure that is an SRV identifier. In his solo lines of 5-8, a strong Albert King influence is felt in the strangled string bends, snapped string attack, singing vibrato, and terse rhythmic phrasing.

musicians faced each other in a circle and only two overdubs (for string breakage) were required. The impassioned, no-frills demo documenting the work of a genuine blues master impressed John Hammond, who'd discovered Benny Goodman, Charlie Christian, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen. He took the recording to Greg Geller at Epic, who shrewdly chose to release it, and arrange a record contract. The

10 tracks, with minor additions at Austin's Riverside Sound, were tweaked, remixed, and remastered at Media Sound and CBS in NYC. "Love Struck Baby" was an ideal album opener. Stevie's catchy altered-blues composition was dedicated to future wife, Lenora, and harkens to his Triple Threat days. The upbeat number is distinguished by a straight-four rock-and-roll feel, repurposed I-IV-V changes in A, and numerous Chuck Berry and

to Stevie via Angela Strehli, queen of the Austin blues scene and then-manager of Antone's. He was initially intrigued by Robinson's parts, learned the song with Strehli (at Antone's), jammed on it with King, and wound up owning it. It has become synonymous with his slow-blues style and has enjoyed many reprises in his catalog.

"Tell Me" found Stevie reinterpreting Willie Dixon's Howlin' Wolf classic. Opting

T-Bone Walker jump-blues and rockabilly mannerisms, prominent double-stop riffs, boogie comping, bent triads, and inserted jazz passing chords including chromatically ascending $\frac{6}{9}$ chords in the solo. SRV's first single, it was backed with "Rude Mood."

"Pride and Joy" was the second single. A 12-bar Texas-blues shuffle with a trademark comping riff, it reconciled stride-piano-inspired boogie-woogie bass lines with guitar-centric open-chord figures, country-blues strumming textures and groove-conscious soloing. Allusions to Johnny Acey's '62 song, "I Go Into Orbit" (including title lyric) are unmistakable, as are his turnaround figures that evoke Freddie King's "Hideaway." Both exemplify the living blues tradition of building on and moving past historic precedent. In SRV's hands, Acey's harmonica-driven traditional blues number organically became a heavier blues-rock guitar vehicle.

"Texas Flood" may well have been the tune that prompted Bowie to recruit SRV. Its blues power rivals Albert King's grittiest moments for sheer ferocity and conviction – top priorities in the blues world. The slow $\frac{12}{8}$ blues in G was a cover of Larry Davis' 1955 version with guitarist Fenton Robinson. SRV quoted Robinson's guitar intro before transforming the standard into his own statement, replete with excruciatingly soulful King licks. According to Clifford Antone, "Texas Flood" came



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for a different sound on the track, he chose Yellow for the medium-tempo shuffle in C that bears reverential allusions to Hubert Sumlin, particularly in the chromatic turnaround lick and A^b9-G9 cadence (from the original). Notable are Stevie's rhythm elaborations, backward-raked strums, staccato feel, and slightly overdriven tone. Its swinging solo brings Chicago-inspired triplet phrasing, serpentine blues-scale melodies, exaggerated vibrato, and tremolo-picked bent chords.

“Testify” is a resurrected soul number from the Isley Brothers, on which a pre-Experience Jimi Hendrix played guitar parts. It epitomized mid-’60s R&B with references to gospel “testifying” and acknowledgement of Ray Charles, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Jackie Wilson, and the Beatles in the lyrics, though SRV rendered it as an instrumental vamping groove in E. His version contains unmistakable nods to Jimi’s funky lead/rhythm riff style, with emphasis on the prevalent E7#9, and his energetic blues-based soloing, but also stands as one of Stevie’s finest extended improvisations.

“Rude Mood” was Vaughan’s virtuoso showcase. Named for Joe Gracey’s Rude Records label, it had been in his set for years and was originally recorded in ’79. Eternally relevant, the fast (264-plus bpm) shuffle with aggressive multi-textured guitar work served as a dynamic closer to his famed 1984 Carnegie Hall concert. The ear-catching instrumental in E juxtaposed contrapuntal riffing and percussive string scrapes, like a hyperactive “Pride and Joy,” with white-knuckle lead licks. Tantamount to blues shredding, it presaged “Scuttle Buttin’” on the next album. The emblematic chording and single-note runs suggest its origin as a supercharged take on Lightnin’ Hopkins’ “Hopkins’ Sky Hop” and indeed Stevie openly admitted as much in a clinic clip. The piece was Grammy-nominated for Best Rock Instrumental Performance in ’84 and used as background in the trailer for *Midnight Run*.

“Mary Had a Little Lamb” was Vaughan’s undisguised homage to Buddy Guy and the

Tune Down 1/2 Step

Fast Shuffle

[illegible]

“Rude Mood,” Vaughan’s supercharged instrumental boogie, applies many elements heard in other E-blues pieces, but delivers them at maximum tempo with relentless force and agility. This excerpt is exemplary; check the hints of rockabilly in the boogie-woogie bass lines (accompanied by his signature muted-string hits), particularly in measures

3-6. Also notable is the long string of eighth notes and its major-pentatonic melody in 9-12; these convey a swinging country-guitar attitude. The repeated-note fanfare in 7-8 is an attention-getting device of many guitar instrumentals, heard in B.B. King's "Just Like a Woman" and Chuck Berry's "Guitar Boogie."

influential '68 album *A Man and the Blues*. The R&B-inflected/altere-blues number in E played off a similar mid-tempo groove, alternating low-register riffs and chord figures (emulating horn parts), and reaffirmed Guy's playful nursery-rhyme story line. For many (including Hendrix and Clapton), Guy was the prototype Strat hero and preeminent second-generation Chicago-blues exponent, who exerted a powerful effect on blues-rock musicians. SRV remained true to the original version, preserving its call-and-response riffs and re-casting many of Guy's soloing ideas.

“Dirty Pool” was composed by SRV and Doyle Bramhall, a Nightcrawlers bandmate who’d known Vaughan since he was 12. The slinking, slow blues in Dm found Stevie cultivating his glassy Strat tone and judiciously balancing tremolo-picked chord figures (a

theme in the piece) and florid single-note runs. He maintained mixed textures throughout, blending sonorities with improvised melodic embellishments around the vocals, and exploited tremoloed triads and partials in his solo.

"I'm Cryin'" personified the unrequited-love angle of the blues and insinuated a slower version of "Pride and Joy" in SRV's stockpile. Also rooted in E, it flaunted similar open-chord riffs, comping patterns, improvisations, and turnaround figures. Hardly a retread, it had been a staple in Vaughan's set for years and an earlier version had even been recorded with Triple Threat. The track sported the only overdubbed vocal performance, recorded at Media Sound.

“Lenny” closed Texas Flood on a decisive-but-mellow tone. The haunting instrumental blended blues, jazz, soul and ethereal mood-

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music tangents. Performed on Lenny, it was dedicated to then-wife, Lenora, who'd scraped together funds for this birthday present and to whom it was composed in gratitude.

Distinguished by his crystal-line clean Strat tone, it evoked a panoply of influences – Hendrix, Curtis Mayfield, Pops Staples, Steve Cropper, and even soul-jazz glimmers of role model Kenny Burrell. Stevie varied chord and single-note textures in the exposition; mixing pentatonic melody and R&B double stops with colorful extended chords and uncommon shifting-major-6 sonorities. Moreover, his vocalesque whammy-bar vibrato imparted an atmospheric quasi-Hawaiian effect at key points in the cycling progression. His single-note guitar improvisations split the difference between jazz sophistication and traditional pentatonic blues melody over the hypnotic vamping E-A changes.

Released on June 13, 1983 – four months after *Let's Dance* – *Texas Flood* introduced a bold new player whose authentic influences were inescapable but not cloying. In the era of new-wave synthesizer domination, drum computers, and pyrotechnical shredding, it ignited a blues renaissance still palpable today. Strat-blues tones were never more pure, and blues-rock was never as suavely or persuasively delivered. The album garnered critical acclaim in blues and rock circles, reached #38 on *Billboard*, crossed over to rock radio, and eventually surpassed Double Platinum status. "Pride and Joy" peaked at #20 on Mainstream Rock charts and the album was Grammy-nominated for Best Traditional Blues Performance, "Rude Mood" for Best Rock Instrumental Performance. The 10-track program tells the tale authoritatively but is expanded on the 2013 Legacy Edition by one outtake – "Tin Pan Alley" – and nine live cuts from the period

Tune Down 1/2 Step

Slow Ballad

"Lenny" epitomized the gentler, introspective (but no less soulful) side of Vaughan's musical persona. More a meditation than typical slow-dance instrumental, it revolves around his unique usage of jazz sonorities and single-note responses exemplified in measures 1-4, where he plays colorful enriched voicings of E major and A major, reinterpreting the

I-IV of the blues as a vamp in a jazz vein. In 9-15, he subjects major-6 chords to unpredictable modulating key centers. The progression – B-D-G-B^b, all in parallel 6th chords, moves through the same unusual thirds-related sequence as John Coltrane's "Giant Steps," though SRV was hardly a bebop maven. Coincidence or not?

recorded at Ripley's Music Hall, in Philadelphia, on October 20, 1983.

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 latest book is *Jazz Guitar Course: Mastering the Jazz Language*. Others include *101 Must-Know Rock Licks*, *B.B. King: the Definitive Collection*, and *Best of Jazz Guitar*. A list credits can be found at wolfmarshall.com.

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Plus, a '60s Conrad 12-String and Converting a '65 ES-345TD-SV to Mono

I have a Fender Precision Bass with a 1971 neck date and serial number 296XXX, and I've always suspected the body was mahogany rather than the typical ash or alder. My luthier agrees, and noted that the finish is lacquer. I've looked, and it seems a few Fenders of that era were indeed mahogany. I'm hoping you can shed some light on how common these are, and if the value differs from a Precision made of alder or ash. – **Roger Hill**

The finish wear on your Precision appears to show mahogany, and the overall darkness of the finish (along with the grain pattern) are consistent with mahogany. The nitro finish, however, is a cause for concern, because the neck date of '71 is two/three years after Fender switched from nitro to polyurethane. That raises three possibilities; the body could be older with original nitro, it could be from '71 and refinished, or it could be a replacement body from a later date. A closer analysis of the finish might shed some light, and the pots and pickups may provide a clue to originality.

Regarding value, you have an example where the rarity of the variation may be offset by lower demand. In other words, yes, a mahogany body is rare, but would anyone prefer it over the standard ash? There is certainly a degree of curiosity and speculation that a mahogany body might sound warmer than ash, and a mahogany Precision might fill a hole in someone's

Jack O'Garraugh's Conrad 12-string.

collection, so a dealer might ask a bit more for it. – **Walter Carter**

I just acquired a used and abused Conrad 12-string from the late '60s. It's a quality instrument, and after I installed a tailpiece, it plays reasonably well with excellent tone. The top is spruce and the back and sides are, I believe, rosewood. I would appreciate any information you could discover. – Jack O'Garraugh

That's Conrad's 12-String Folk Guitar, and you're right, it's from the late '60s. Conrad was the house brand of David Wexler & Company, a distributor in Chicago. Music distributors back then assembled large inventories of all kinds of musical merchandise and sold them to retail stores. David Wexler began as a Victrola parts (springs for wind-up record players) salesman in 1920. According to a *Music Trade Review* notice in 1930, he also sold musical goods for Targ & Dinner, another large Chicago distributor.

Whether Wexler sold instruments under his own company name prior to World War II is unknown, but by 1946, David Wexler & Co. was selling American-made Wa-

bash budget acoustic guitars and Whitehall drums. Circa '58, Wexler was selling Goya guitars made by the Swedish company Levin.

Just when Wexler & Co. started importing guitars from Japan is uncertain, but they were doing so by '65. Most Conrad electrics along with a few classics and ukuleles were made by Kasuga. By '67, Wexler had a full acoustic "Folk" lineup that included the 12-String, which had laminated-mahogany back and sides. Since your guitar has a two-piece laminated Indian rosewood back, it would most likely have been made after '67. By '73, Conrad 12-strings had changed to three-piece rosewood/maple/rosewood backs.



Roger Hill's Precision Bass. Finish wear on the back gives a better look at the mahogany.



Jim Baker's '65 ES-345TD-SV.

It's not possible to date Japanese guitars from this era precisely because they did not have serial numbers. And it's almost impossible to determine who made this guitar; there were several quality acoustic makers in Japan during this period. Some would ally themselves with a trading company that handled distribution, exporting, and other business matters. American distributors like Wexler would contract for certain numbers of each kind of guitar and the trading company would distribute the order components to appropriate makers within its family network. If the American distributor had a house brand such as Wexler's Conrad, it would be applied.

Conrad guitars did not survive the '70s and the famous "lawsuit" that ended the copying of American guitar designs. Today, David Wexler & Co. and the Conrad brand name are located in Scottsdale, Arizona, and specialize in musical items and accessories for school music programs, not guitars or drums. – **Michael Wright**

I recently inherited a '65 ES-345TD-SV. I would like my kids and grandkids to play it, and I'm curious whether it would be advantageous to convert it to mono or to leave it as is? – Jim Baker

The only way to ensure the guitar retains its full market value is to leave it as-is; any modification will result in value loss and remove the instrument from consideration by serious collectors. Converting a stereo guitar like yours to mono would mean devaluation by as much as 20 percent, and while some mods are reversible, the work nonetheless remains detectable to the educated observer, so they are essentially permanent.

There is more than one way to modify a vintage 345. The most-expensive (which would cause the least loss of value) would be to remove the entire set of original electronics (pickups, potentiometers, switch, output jack, etc.) without breaking any solder joints and replacing them with modern components. This could be reversed with the least detectability. The least-expensive method (resulting in greatest loss of value and most detectability) would be to modify the wiring harness by cutting leads, re-soldering joints, and replacing the output jack. In either case, it's wise to properly store the original parts.

If you'd prefer to play it mono, all you really need to do is use a stereo Y cord and plug both outputs into the same channel on an amp. – **George Gruhn**

This column addresses questions about guitar-related subjects, ranging from songs, albums, and musicians to the minutiae of instrument builds, manufacturers, and the collectible market. Questions can be sent to ward@vintageguitar.com with "VG Q&A" in the subject line. **VG**





STEVE CROPPER

Friend, Legend

BY WARD MEEKER

Even before he began to record seminal music using an Esquire plugged into a Harvard amp – creating one of the favorite pairings in history – Steve Cropper was the epitome of a team player. Sixty-plus years down the road, his new album, *Friendlytown*, celebrates collaboration and the joy of the guitar tag team. With guests Billy Gibbons, Brian May, and rising country-rock singer/songwriter Tim Montana joining Cropper's band The Midnight Hour (lead vocalist Roger C. Reale, bassist Jon Tiven, and drummer/percussionist Nioshi Jackson), the disc is even more guitar-centric than his typical effort.

Steve Cropper: Stacie Huckeba.

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Cropper's fate was steered by a Silvertone when he was 14. By then, his family had moved from rural Missouri to Memphis, where local radio filled his head with gospel, R&B, and early rock and roll. After an uncle let him hold an old Gibson, the bug bit and he asked for a six-string of his own.

"I remember my mother setting aside \$17 and change, and when we ordered that Silvertone, they said they could deliver it for 25 cents. We told them, 'Forget that!' and I went to pick it up myself," he laughs. "If we'd had to pay that extra quarter, I'd never have been a guitar player."

Later, he bonded with schoolmate Charlie Freeman over their infatuation with guitars and music, and they formed a group called Royal Spades.

Memphis at that time was a burgeoning musical hotbed thanks in part to a recording studio run by Sam Phillips, whose Sun Records label was fostering the upstart careers of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins, who were making music that melded the blues trickling up from the Mississippi Delta with country from Nashville and hillbilly songs from the Ozark Mountains. By 1961, the band had changed its name to The Mar-Keys and its members were backing singers in the studios of the newly-dubbed Stax Records. That year, they also scored a million-selling #1 hit with an original instrumental, "Last Night" (the song having no guitar part, Cropper played secondary organ). After morphing again, they scored a hit in '62 as Booker T. & the MG's with the instrumental "Green Onions," propelled by Booker T. Jones' organ melody and Cropper's razor-sharp Esquire/Harvard licks backed by Stax A-listers Al Jackson, Jr., on drums and Lewie Steinberg on bass.

At Stax, Cropper spent the '60s backing star vocalists, along the way, co-writing "In the Midnight Hour," "Knock on Wood" and "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay." He has also collaborated with Jeff Beck, Muddy Waters, Roy Buchanan, Albert King, Robben Ford, and is one of the Blues Brothers. Cropper and the MG's were inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in '92.

In 2021, Cropper released *Fire It Up*, his first album of original instrumentals in more than a decade. The pandemic lockdown meant its tracks were recorded remotely (forsaking the feel and spontaneity of playing in a room together). Nonetheless, it earned a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Album. *Friendlytown* brought more old-fashioned studio interplay.

"Steve and I started to get together weekly to see if we had anything to say,

musically," said Tiven. "When we finished [something], we'd send it off to Roger to get words and a melody started. We came up with a half-dozen compositions in no time."

Early on, Cropper suggested they invite a guest guitarist to bring in different flavors.

"Brian May and I have been close friends for many years, and we had called upon him to work on Steve's *Dedicated* album [in 2011]," Tiven noted. "That had been fun for all involved, so I suggested to Steve that we try to convince Brian to write one with us and play on it. He was all for it, and Brian took no convincing, so I sent off one of the instrumentals for him to work on. I didn't hear anything for about a month, so I sent a nagging e-mail, to which he replied, 'I'm behind, I must confess/My apologies/Too Much Stress.' A chorus was born."

Hearing May's tracks, Cropper was delighted.

"I listened as a Brian May fan, and loved it," he said. "What he did with the track is incredible. His playing is super and his singing is great."

Around the same time, Tiven ran into Billy Gibbons while shopping at Trader Joe's. Having become acquainted when they appeared together onstage with John Belushi, Tiven mentioned the work he and Cropper were doing on a new album.

"His eyes lit up and he said, 'I've got a song for you,' to which I replied, 'It only goes on the record if you play on it.' He smiled, said 'That could be arranged.'"

"Two days later, he was at my house writing a new song with Steve and myself, and as we finished the first verse I implored him to leave room for Roger to write words. We had several more sessions, and we were all buzzing afterwards. Billy was particularly vocal about how much fun he was having, and after he left, I mentioned to Steve that Billy's enthusiasm might be opening a door. 'Why don't you ask him to join our group?' Steve suggested, which I did. Next thing we knew, we had a new member and a name – Steve Cropper and The Midnight Hour."

Tiven went to work coordinating schedules and studio time. "I wanted to make sure we jumped on this before anybody changed his mind," he said. "So if you're wondering how we got three of the greatest guitarists to ever walk the face of the Earth on one record... just lucky, I guess."

Loaded with radio-friendly hooks, *Friendlytown* also includes guest spots from Free/Bad Company drummer Simon Kirk and Rascals co-lead vocalist/keyboardist Felix Cavaliere.

To dig further, we chatted with Cropper.

What were some of the first songs you learned on that Silvertone?

I didn't listen to albums, but I listened to Top 40 radio all the time. Whatever was in rotation, that was my thing. But I didn't copy other records; I'd go in the studio and try to create something a little stronger, a little better.

Do you recall the first songs you wrote?

I don't, but they weren't all that good, so I threw them away. The first song I wrote for Stax was notes to "I've Got No Time To Lose" which Carla Thomas recorded in 1964. They tried forever to get her another hit to follow "Gee Whiz," and finally I told Carla one day, 'We wrote this song, you're going to love it.' I wrote it on piano, and I can't even *play* piano (laughs), but her brother, Marvell, taught me just enough chords that I could write with them.

With Stax, you famously used an early-'60s Tele, but was the Esquire heard on "Green Onions" your first good guitar?

Yes, it was an old one I bought for nothing and was beat up. I took the strings off and painted it. I went down to Western Auto and got some Candy Apple Red paint so I could spray the guitar. But I didn't prime it, so it soaked into the wood and left a purple hue (laughs). Everybody said, "Don't change it! That's good-looking." So I had a purple Esquire for years – only one in the world (laughs).

Do you remember what happened to it?

It used to be at Jimmie King's mother's house. For a long time I thought it went down with Jimmy and Otis [Redding] when their plane crashed in '67. Three months later, a friend was going to visit Jimmie's mom and I asked him to tell her how sorry I was. He came back, shaking, and said, "You know that purple guitar you used to use?" I said, "Yeah," and he said, "Man, it's on her wall." When he went back tell her the guitar belonged to me, she fainted right in front of him. She thought it belonged to her son. It and a pair of jeans he'd left for her to wash were all she had of his. After that, I said, "Leave it on the wall. It's worth much more to her than me." After she died, it was gone. So, *somebody* has that guitar, and probably don't know what they've got. My wife is kind of looking for it and says she'll find it (laughs). She probably can.

What makes you decide to start recording new songs or an album?

Usually, it's the record company (laughs). They tell you, "It's time!" Our A&R director, Stu Fine, and Jon Tiven put it all together; Stu did A&R on the last one, too – *Fire It Up* – and it was nominated for a Grammy. I hadn't had an album in years before that.

You released "Too Much Stress" as

the first single, with Brian May singing and sharing lead breaks with Billy Gibbons.

Yes, and it has done great so far. Brian hadn't had a record in nine or 10 years, so fans are eager to hear new music from him.

What was your connection with him?

Jon has been friends with Brian for years, and I met Brian when he and I were at the James Burton & Friends show. Jon told him, "Brian, we're making another album. You want to be on it?" But then we didn't hear anything for six weeks. So, Jon called and said, "What's going on?" Brian said, "I apologize. Just too damn much stress!" And Jon thought, "There's a song right there!" So he went in and cut it.

Speaking of, how does song creation work for you?

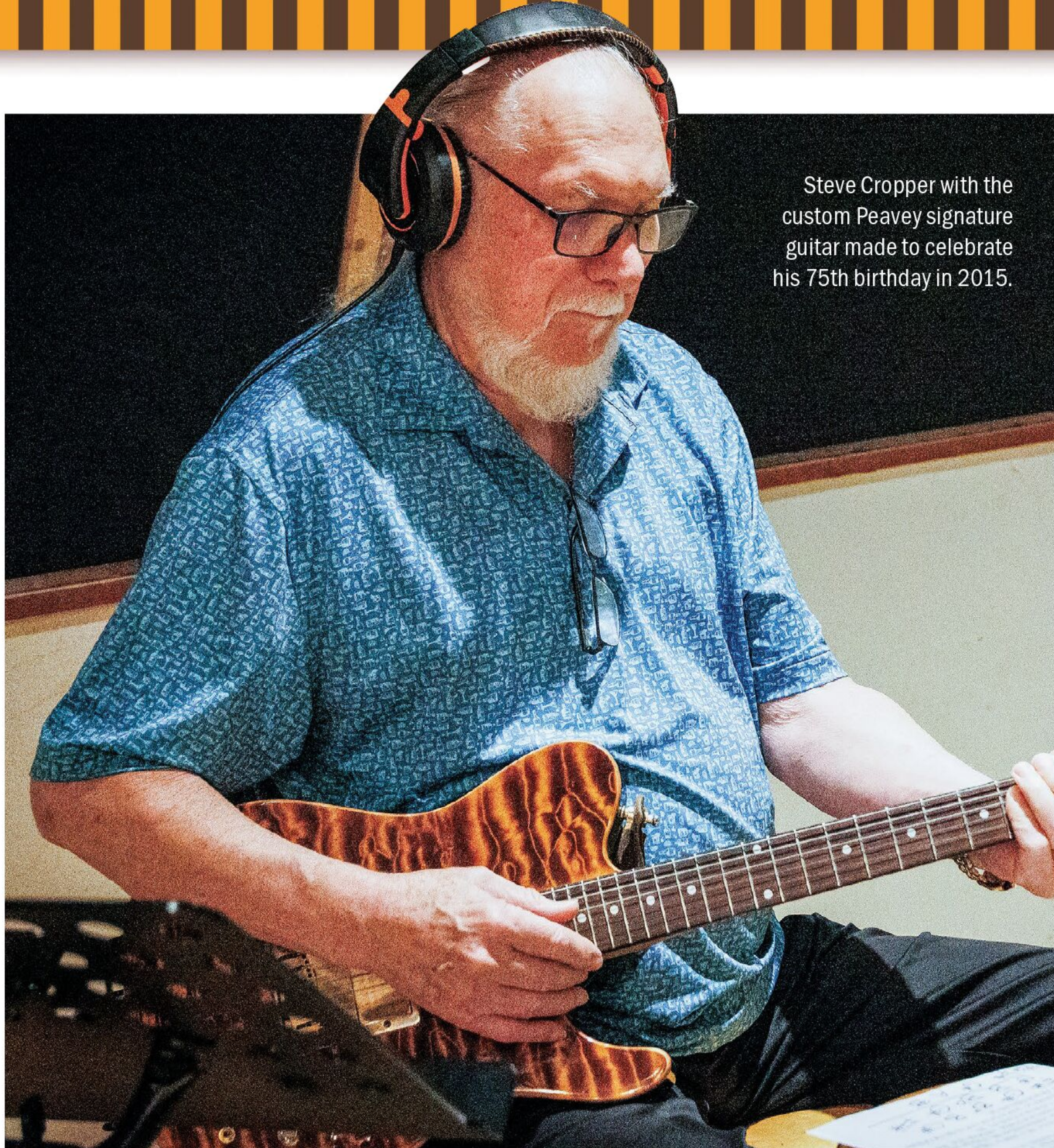
I co-write everything because I dislike my own writing. I love it when somebody says, "Man, that's good. Do that again." To me, that means *everything* in songwriting – working to come up with a good line: "What did you just say? That's a great line! Let's keep it." I love hearing that, and doing it with somebody else. If they write something good, I tell 'em it's good.

Is that how things came together for *Friendlytown*?

Yeah, Jon and I wrote with Roger, and it came together quickly. Roger wrote most of his lyrics at his home in Connecticut, and this was the first time we were in the studio together. We cut all the tracks in a day or two.

How did you connect with Tim Montana?

We had a little costume party, and he showed up as Steve Copper – had the beard and everything. I said, "Get outta here!"



Steve Cropper with the custom Peavey signature guitar made to celebrate his 75th birthday in 2015.

"I love it when somebody says, 'Man, that's good. Do that again.' To me, that means everything in songwriting." – Steve Cropper

(laughs). He looked more like me than I do (laughs).

Do you remember the first ZZ Top song you heard?

It was probably "TV Dinners." The thing I always wondered about Billy was how could three people get that much sound onstage at one time? Well, I found out he plays two parts at once. I tried that, and I'm not very good at it. With country music, the bass always follows the chords and becomes a tonic, and I like playing *around* the tonic – fifths and thirds. Maybe that's *my* sound.

How did your songs with Billy come together?

We met with Billy in the studio and he asked, "What do you got?" and I said, "Well,

I played a Bo Diddley rhythm on this one..." He started playing along and my engineer said, "That's good! Keep going." He played on eight or nine songs that day.

So it was all pretty spontaneous?

Well, the tracks were, but not necessarily the songs. Jon and I did the same thing we did *Fire It Up*. We'd write every Tuesday – two

or three tracks.

Once Roger had all the lyrics, the guys came together for one or two days and we got every track. When we cut 'em, it was just titles until Roger started singing. Then it came to life. It's about things you feel in life.

Which guitars did you use?

I mostly used the custom-made Peavey they built for my 75th birthday nine years ago – the one I ran over three or four years ago.

You drove over it?

Yeah, I was backing out of a parking spot when I felt a bump. I thought, "Oh, no! I didn't run over the guitar, did I? But yeah, I did. I figured when I unzipped the case I'd find nothing but toothpicks, but lo and behold, the tire had just pushed the controls in. I took the back off and hammered it back to level, then plugged it in. It played perfectly. My engineer later told me it sounded like it always did, so I took it down the road again with the Blues Brothers. The only thing I changed was one of the knobs.

Which amplifier did you use?

It's a Victoria, hand-made in Chicago. It's a lot like my Fender The Twin, which is what I like to use on the road. **VG**

Steve Cropper: Stacie Huckeba.



Steve Cropper, Jon Tiven, and Billy Gibbons at the desk during sessions for *Friendlytown*.

BILLY GIBBONS

Crop's Side Man

Like virtually every other guitarist, Billy Gibbons first heard Steve Cropper playing "Green Onions" on an AM radio in 1962. An aspiring 13-year-old, that tune and Cropper's work backing an array of Stax singers throughout the '60s were elemental in his musical edification.

"In the heyday of making records that jolted a range of artists into international prominence, like so many, I was magnetized with what Steve was doing

with his guitar and production sounds," Gibbons recalls today.

But until Cropper's new album, *Friendlytown*, they'd never been heard together on an audio

recording. Gibbons was gung-ho to talk about how it happened.

What was your reaction when Jon Tiven hit you up at Trader Joe's?

When Jon whispered the name "Steve Cropper," needless to say, I got fired up!

How did you and Steve first meet?

There was a fateful encounter in Memphis, at the infamous Molly's La Casita, down Madison Avenue between John Fry's Ardent Records and Steve's Trans-Maximus Studios. From that point forward, it has remained our mutual admiration of the mystique of guitars, guitars, and more guitars.

You share a lot of similarities and vibe.

There exists a mutual awareness of the challenge maintaining impact through simplicity. It might be fair to say Steve wrote the book on economy while staying focused on ferociousness.

He's so low-key while also being a legend.

Yeah, man – legendarily low-keyed with an up-front passion for tastefulness and tone. When seeing what is possible with the straightforwardness of a bare-naked Fender slab-body straight into a Fender tweed... better stand back for the attack.

Do you have a favorite Cropper song or album?

There are a *wealth* of tracks aimed at the faves list. The stand-alone starter that got things rolling, of course, is the all-time winner, "Green Onions." And not to be missed is the B-side sleeper, "Behave Yourself," where Steve injects a walk-down interlude that empirically states "R&B." Gotta squeeze in "Chinese Checkers"; the rhythm chops in stanza three are Cropper at his most-wicked.

What was it like to work with Steve in the studio?

One word when working aside Steve is "acceleration." The adrenaline works overtime, which is ironically balanced when creating laid-back guitar figures. The title track, current to this behind-the-scenes view with *Friendlytown*, slips a bluesy six-string smoothness

throughout, which paves the way for absorbing the record's feel.

How did you sort guitars and amps for your contributions?

Knowing Steve's prowess playing stridently Cropper-like on just about anything, we waited for his arrival in order to spy out which axe of his would be favored for session ignition. Lo and behold, Steve – in fine fashion – strolled in, had a look around, and of course grabbed the studio's classic 1960 Fender Esquire! Pearly Gates (Gibbons' '59 Les Paul Standard) was immediately put into service as a complementary tonal companion. Steve also held his twin-pickup Peavey for extra sass. Fender and Magnatone amplification made the collection of sounds blend together handily.

How did you work out guitar parts?

We positioned a sizable studio corner to allow that elusive element of providing a sense of space for everybody to enjoy a slice within each song. Steve's direction was invaluable, indicating moments within each arrangement where a slight sonic stab might be enough while still leaving room for everyone on the session. Brian May's injection dug in right, keeping the three-lane avenue wide open.

Did you get to interact with Brian?

Not face to face, but it was quite obvious we both were enamored with the opportunity to keep the invitation front and center. Ain't no doubt the joint enthusiasm accompanied the performances to a satisfying sense of Steve-approved style.

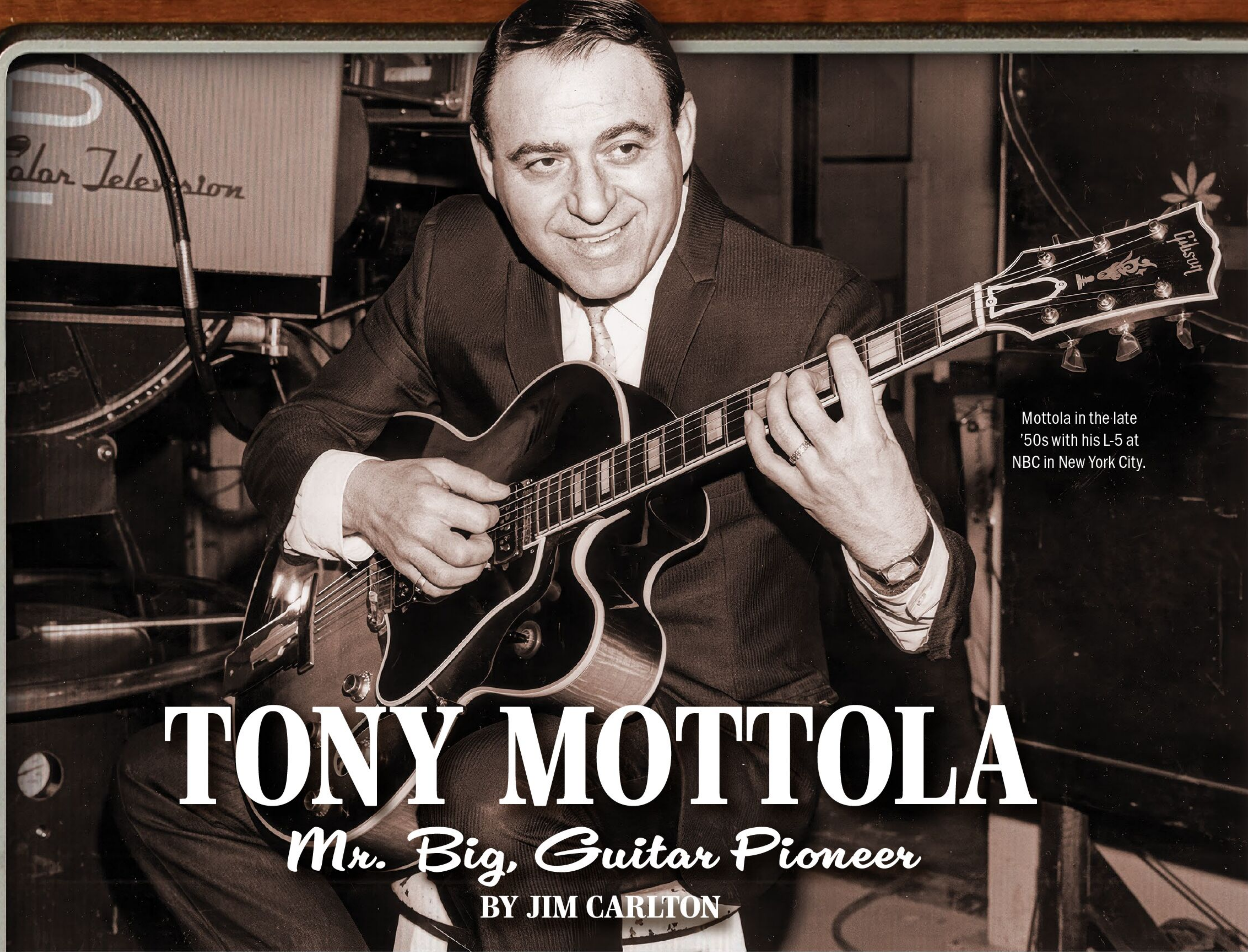
Did the experience have special meaning to you?

It kinda tops it off in soothing the soul.

Is there a way to describe Steve's importance to guitar music?

If ya' need further reassurance of the depths of Steve's importance, just take it from the well-known shout-out in the Sam and Dave hit, "Soul Man": "Play it, Steve!" says it all.

For Crop, every day is just another day in Groovesville. – **Ward Meeker**



Mottola in the late '50s with his L-5 at NBC in New York City.

TONY MOTTOLA

Mr. Big, Guitar Pioneer

BY JIM CARLTON

Some argue that Tony Mottola was more legendary than famous. In a career spanning 50 years, the guitarist logged thousands of studio dates and made hundreds of concert and television appearances. A first call for dozens of artists including Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, Johnny Mathis, Rosemary Clooney, Billie Holiday, Connie Francis, and others, he was also revered as a pioneer for his compositions in the early days of live television.

Case in point are his atmospheric creations for the groundbreaking CBS live-suspense drama "Danger"; the music he created for the show from 1951 to '56 is studied by serious players and avid students, and its long-out-of-print folio showcasing his licks, tricks, and worksheets is highly sought-after.

Thanks to his association with the audiophile label Command Records, Mottola

emerged as a popular artist in his own right in the '50s and '60s. His 50-plus albums were perhaps second in popularity only to those of Chet Atkins; his debut, *Mr. Big*, is a venerated classic of ensemble jazz guitar and his best-selling *Roman Guitar* received Silver certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

Mottola received an Emmy for his score for *Two Childhoods*, a TV documentary that

chronicled the early lives of U.S. Senator and Vice President Hubert Humphrey and writer and activist James Baldwin.

Curiously, young Mottola wanted to become a saxophone player, but circumstances conspired. Too young to take the bus to a sax teacher's house in Newark, his father instead tutored him on guitar; the repertoire being limited, he also taught himself by slowing the family's Victrola while listening to records by Eddie Lang, Nick Lucas, and Django Reinhardt. As his playing improved, a school teacher recognized the boy's talent and would showcase him at school board meetings, PTA assemblies, and any other occasion where he could demonstrate his gift.

At 12, Mottola won first prize in a talent competition at a local movie theater. It included a one-week engagement at the Brandford Theater and a check for \$125. That money got his father's attention, and

Tony Mottola late '50s; William "PoPsie" Randolph.



he took his son to the Epiphone showroom in Manhattan, where Tony was rewarded with an Epiphone Broadway.

Mottola continued to play throughout high school, after which he and fellow guitarist Al Caiola formed a group modeled after Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli's Hot Club Quintet.

His professional career began in earnest at age 18; a few years later, friend

Built for Charlie Christian in 1940 with maple back and sides, laminate-maple neck, and ebony fretboard, Christian passed away before he could take delivery of this Gibson L-5P, so it was shipped to Mottola. Likely the first L-5 cutaway with an ES-150 pickup, Tony Mottola, Jr. says it was returned to Kalamazoo at least twice for modifications; a bridge pickup was installed in the '40s then replaced by a humbucker in the '60s. A plastic ring was added around the original neck pickup. **Mottola had a close friendship with Gibson president Ted McCarty, who would sometimes seek his opinion of guitars. They discussed a signature model and this was the last version produced, a 355 fitted with low-impedance pickups and other electronics from the Les Paul Recording. A work in progress (note the masking-taped notes), he played it on his last album, *All The Way*.** In the '60s, Mottola began using this ES-355 as his main electric instrument for recording. He also used it while touring with Frank Sinatra in the '80s.



Carl Kress with Mottola in an ad for Gibson in the '40s. Kress is holding an early ES-300 with L-12 headstock inlay and double-parallelograms on the fretboard, Mottola an ES-250 with a Charlie Christian pickup and an early L-7 headstock and fretboard inlays.

he was not just taking up the slack, but making a name for himself by handling the shows' guitar chores with real aplomb. In addition, he soon became a charter member of bandleader Raymond Scott's CBS Orchestra. Shortly after, Mottola was tasked with creating the guitar soundtrack for "Danger," a show frequently

his first radio show. The two maintained a friendship, and from 1980 until his retirement in '88, Mottola toured with Sinatra and was regularly spotlighted by accompanying the singer in solo spots. The two performed at Carnegie Hall, the White House, and at a Command Performance for the Queen of England at Royal Albert Hall.

Theirs was a full-circle friendship, having first met as teenagers at radio station WAAT in Jersey City.

"I was 14 and Frank was 17," Mottola recalled in a 1997 interview for the Television Academy Foundation. "I was a regular on a Sunday morning show that featured young musical artists. No one got paid more than carfare, but it led to club dates with Frank. My career revolved around knowing him. Later, when I wound up my career, I spent my last six years traveling with him."

It was also on that show that Tony met his future wife, Mitzi.

From '58 until '72, Mottola was the guitarist for the original "Tonight Show" on NBC, where he was also on hand for other prime time programs including the "The Perry Como Show."

Curiously, the first time Mottola saw television was when he was on it. In the late '40s, he was advised by a contractor at CBS that the company was going to start an hour of experimental programming; Mottola inquired and was made leader of a trio (with singers Johnny Desmond and Shea Cogan) for a 15-minute show called "Face the Music." Mottola's on-air demeanor was likable enough for execs to feature him as a de facto host and give him scripts written by songwriter Bob Merrill, who penned "People" for Barbra Streisand, "Honeycomb" for Jimmie Rodgers, "My Truly, Truly

Fair" for Guy Mitchell, and "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" for Patti Page, then created the Broadway shows *Carnival*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and *Funny Girl*.

Mottola went on to work on the CBS offerings "Sid Caesar's Your Show of Shows," "Howdy Doody Time," the game show "Beat The Clock," and even the bizarre '60s classic "Sing Along With Mitch." In 1954, he emceed "Melody Street," a lip-sync show that required the guitarist to play intros to

and saxophonist George Paxton arranged an audition with George Hall's society orchestra in New York City. Soon after, the young guitarist was touring ballrooms around the country. His recording debut came in '39, with singer Dolly Dawn on her hit single, "Shine." After two years, playing in Hall's band had taken a toll and the young guitarist returned to New Jersey, where in '41 he landed a job as a staff musician for the CBS Radio Network. It was there that Mottola

was mentored by the two busiest studio guitarists of the era, Carl Kress and Dick McDonough. In addition to their popularity as a guitar duet, Kress and McDonough worked virtually around the clock for Burns and Allen, Kate Smith, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Groucho Marx, Betty Grable, and the cadre of CBS' radio and recording stars.

Mottola began by sitting in on rehearsals for Kress and McDonough and preparing their charts for various broadcasts. But soon,

directed by talents such as Yul Brynner and Sidney Lumet. The show also featured future stars James Dean, Lee Grant, Rod Steiger, Sal Mineo, and Eva Marie Saint. In addition, scripts for "Danger" were often created by extraordinary writers like Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling, Sal Mineo, and Eva Marie Saint.

At CBS, Mottola established a long-lasting association with Frank Sinatra, who requested Mottola fill the guitarist spot on



Mottola with his non-cutaway L-5 in rehearsal for "The Perry Como Show" in the '60s.

popular songs of a given era. He'd say a few words about the tune then play an intro that led to singers acting out a vignette of the song. Mottola may well have been the most-heard on-air instrumentalist at the time.

Among his peers, Mottola commanded tremendous respect. His longtime friend and colleague, Bucky Pizzarelli, admired him as someone who could read any piece of music.

"He'd interpret something and make it very 'Mottola' – put his stamp on it," Pizzarelli recalled. "His sound was very warm, tender, and expressive. And he never hit a bad note in his life."

In fact, his playing was so good that it once stopped a taping on Como's "Kraft Music Hall." One scene required Como, wearing a prop guitar, to pretend to serenade Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida while Mottola played a fiery romantic passage. The playing was so extraordinary that Como, instead of delivering his line, looked over his shoulder at Mottola and said, "Don't you ever make a mistake?"

Of course that was a tremendous compliment, but Mottola said, "I'd worked on that piece and had never played anything better in my life. Then I had to play it all over again."

His famous moody composition for "Danger" was the first guitar-driven television soundtrack, long before Mottola's friend (and West Coast counterpart) Bob Bain played the "Peter Gunn Theme" with Henry Mancini.

The "Danger" chord was an E minor Major 7th, and Mottola composed an eight-/16-bar theme for the central character and the show's heavy. He retained the motifs and expanded on them, saying, "I'd use a theme and its variations; bridges from one scene to another, and curtains to end a scene."

The opening chord complemented the noir visual, with a knife thrown into a fence; it became known as the "Danger chord."

Mottola also recalled a circus-themed show "The Killer Scarf," which was performed at Madison Square Garden while he remained in the studio. To approximate a hurdy gurdy effect, he used a pocket comb dragged across the strings instead of a pick for his composition "Carnival Time."

"I don't know why we just didn't hire a calliope player," he laughed.

However, his "Danger" folio is brimming with his creative soundtrack ideas. In fact, a few of his compositions were recorded later



Mottola's Jose Ramirez Workshop classical was used to accompany Frank Sinatra in duets and for his solo performances with Sinatra's orchestra. In '83, he used it with Sinatra on the single, "It's Sunday." **One of two L-5s Mottola bought in 1942 at Eddie Bell Guitar Headquarters on West 46th Street, New York, he used this '36 model throughout his time at CBS radio, on TV's "Danger," "The Perry Como Show," "The Tonight Show," and to record *Fun On The Frets* duets with Carl Kress. His main acoustic archtop for studio work, it is heard on many of his Command and Project 3 LPs. It was his rhythm guitar when he toured with Frank Sinatra in 1980 but felt it wasn't loud enough to cut through the large band, compelling him to order an archtop from Jimmy D'Aquisto.**

for his MGM albums. Actors including James Dean, Paul Newman, JoAnne Woodward, Basil Rathbone, Grace Kelly, and Anthony Quinn appeared on the show.

"Everybody was learning, and nobody was a star with the exception of Rathbone," Mottola recalled.

Friend Sidney Lumet, another director who frequently worked the show, recalled how Mottola also appeared on it, and remembers the interesting double duty. "He was so simpatico with the music, and so very intense," he said.

Mottola was amazed that Lumet remembered a motif he'd written on "Danger" and asked him to use it again to score his 1988 film, *Running on Empty*, starring River Phoenix and Judd Hirsch.

Mottola eventually recorded his *Danger* album on MGM and later worked as a sideman for producer Enoch Light's Grand Award label, which later became Command Records. That led to his recording *Tony Mottola and his Orchestra*, which also featured heavyweights Dick Hyman, Doc Severinsen, and Urbie Green.

"Because of that, I'd built a reputation on the easy-listening stations because, in those days, there were a lot of deejays playing that kind of music," he recalled. "This was long before the Beatles. Enoch Light sold that company to ABC Records and later formed Project Three Records, where I also served as an A&R man. So, if I had any reputation in the recording industry, Enoch Light was responsible for it. He was a true pioneer of stereo recording."

Mottola passed away August 9, 2004, leaving a palpable influence and impact on many of the music industry's finest players.

"My guitar teacher suggested I listen to Tony's *Roman Guitar* album. His



Mottola with his Ramirez classical and Frank Sinatra at the 1983 session for "It's Sunday."



Mottola (second from left) with drummer Terry Snyder, Al Caiola, Al Casamenti, and Bucky Pizzarelli in a New York City studio, 1959.



Mottola with his lifelong friend Al Caiola at Epiphone's showroom in the late '30s.

sound, phrasing, in-tune bends, and general technique and arrangements were exquisite," said studio legend Mitch Holder. "My own phrasing and melodic treatments were very influenced by him. He was a busy studio musician, and one of his close guitar-playing cohorts, Bucky Pizzarelli, told me, 'I never heard Tony hit a wrong note.' And, Tony didn't play it safe. He went for it, and his clarity and perfection in execution was a testament to Bucky's statement. Pure sonic and technical perfection. Look into what he left us. You won't be sorry."

"All creative types will tell you they host a variety of deceased heroes who sit on their shoulders and approve or disapprove of whatever's being attempted at the moment," added session veteran and Nashville producer Richard Bennett. "Tony is one of those for me, and he's forever shaking his head in disappointment. No surprise, how does anyone live up to that talent, his bell-like tone, all the years of demanding radio and television work, the thousands of record dates? What about his albums as a leader, particularly those on Command and, later, Enoch Light? They're quintessential examples of brilliantly recorded sound. In the middle of it all is Tony's exquisite guitar playing, arranging and tone. Never a glib note, always so listenable. Whatever you do, don't miss his 1955 MGM recording of the 'Danger' theme; guitar noir if ever there was. Yep, there's Tony Mottola, always on my shoulder, saying, 'You're doing it all wrong kid,' and me smiling back saying, 'Thank you, Tony.'"

Mottola was 86 years old when he passed away after battling double pneumonia and suffering a stroke.

Special thanks to Tony Mottola, Jr.

Mottola and Sinatra: Mitzi Mottola.

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2024

OCTOBER

Down and Dirty Musician's Swapmeet, October 5-6, 2024 at the Airtel Plaza Hotel 7277 Valjean St. Van Nuys CA. For more info contact Loni at info@ampshow.com or www.ampshow.com (See Advertisement on page 66.)

Chicago Vintage Guitar Expo, Sunday October 6, 2024, Holiday Inn, 1000 Busse Rd, Elk Grove Village, Illinois. 9am to 3PM. For More information Contact Beverly Bakes, R&B Productions 847-931-0707, Bakesguitar@aol.com or, Chicagovintageguitarexpo.com

Best Guitar Show, Sunday, October 13 from 10am to 4pm at the Quality Inn, 300 Tarentum Bridge Rd, New Kensington PA 15068. Contact Allen Jones 814-215-4087 or adjinv@outlook.com

Southern Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, October 13 at the Chillicothe High School Commons area Chillicothe, OH from 11am - 4PM. For more information visit www.sohioguitarshow.com (See Advertisement on page 69.)

Mesquite2024- formerly Guitarlinton, October 19-20 at the Mesquite Convention Center,

1700 Rodeo Dr, Mesquite, TX. For more info contact Ruth Brinkmann (817) 312-7659 ruthmbrinkmann@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 (See Advertisement on page 67.)

Ferris State University Music Instrument Swap, Sunday October 20, 2024 from 10am-4pm at the Interdisciplinary Resource Center (IRC), 1301 S State St. Big Rapids, MI 49307. Contact Shawn VanSteeland at 517-410-6409 or visit www.musicinstrumentswap.com

Saratoga Springs Guitar Show, Sunday October 20, 2024 from noon to 4pm at the Holiday Inn, 232 Broadway, Saratoga Springs NY. For more info call Peter Occhineri (860) 983-6774, NortheastGuitarExpo@gmail.com, or www.NortheastGuitarExpo.com

Sonic Sound Guitar and Records Expo, October 26-27 from 10am - 5pm at the Greenville Shrine Club 119 Beverly Road, Greenville, SC 29609. For more information contact Chris Hall at somicssoundexpo.official@gmail.com or visit www.SonicSoundExpo.com

Everything Rock & Roll Guitar Show, Sunday October 27, 2024 from 11:30am-4pm at the CFS Bank Event Center, 111 Gallitin Rd.,

Belle Vernon PA 15012. For more information contact Scott Talarico at 412-716-8411 or guitarshowusa.com (See Advertisement on page 69.)

NOVEMBER

Great American Guitar Show(Fall Philly), November 2-3, 2024 at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center - Hall A, 100 Station Ave., Oaks, PA. For more info contact Bee 3 Vintage at (828)298-2197 or visit www.bee3vintage.com. (See Advertisement on page 68.)

Ann Arbor Music Instrument Swap, Sunday November 3, 2024 from 10am -4pm at the Eastern Michigan University Student Center, 900 Oakland St., Ypsilanti, MI 48197. Contact Shawn VanSteeland at 517-410-6409 or visit www.musicinstrumentswap.com

Las Vegas Guitar Trade Show, November 8-10, 2024 at the Veil Pavilion, Silverton Casino, Clark County, NV. For more info go to LVGTS.com or lasvegascuitartradeshow.com

Big Als' Lake County Musician's Swap Meet, Sunday, November 10, 2024 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

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Chicagoland Guitar Show, Sunday, November 10th. 9am to 4pm at Atlantis Banquets 1273 N Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, IL 60004. Sponsored by Midwest Buy & Sell and Rock & Roll Vintage. Booths \$100. \$5 admission. For information contact mwbuynsell@sbcglobal.net or 773-545-2020.

Midwest Music Gear Swap presents its Fall Swap meet, Sunday November 17 at Emidio's Event Center, 48 E Bath Rd, Cuyahoga Falls, OH from 10am to 4pm. Contact Corey at midwestmusicgearswap@yahoo.com or 330-753-5050

2025

JANUARY

Amigo Bay Area World Guitar Show, January 11-12, 2025, Marin Center Exhibit hall, 10 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael, CA. For more info call Larry Briggs, 918-288-2222, amigoshowstringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

2025 Winter Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, January 12, 2025 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 or go to guitardigest@frontier.com, www.ohioguitarshows.com. Ohio Guitar Show on Facebook and Instagram

Big Als' Lake County Musician's Swap Meet, Sunday, January 12, 2025 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

Amigo SoCal World Guitar Show, January 25-26, 2025, OC Fair & Event Center, Arlington & Fairview St., Costa Mesa, CA. For more info call Larry at (918) 288-2222, amigoshowstringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

Orlando International Guitar & Music Expo, January 31, February 1-2, 2025 at the Central Florida Fairgrounds, 4603 West Colonial

Drive, Orlando, FL. Public hours Sat.10-5, Sun. 10-4. For more info contact Britt Keen at 850-294-5537, orlandoguitarexpo@outlook.com Morty Beckman www.guitarexpo.net

MARCH

Carolina Guitar Show - Asheville, March 8-9, 2025 at the WNC Ag Center I-26, Exit 40, 1301 Fanning Bridge Rd., Fletcher/Asheville, NC 28732. For more info, call Bee3 Vintage at 828-298-2197 or visit www.bee3vintage.com

Illinois Guitar & Gear Expo, Sunday March 9, 2025 at the Kankakee County Fairgrounds 213W 4000S Rd. Kankakee, IL 60901, 10am - 3pm For more info, visit: <https://www.illinoisguitarexpo.com>

Cincinnati Guitar Show, Sunday, March 16, 2025 from 10am - 4pm at the Sharonville Conv. Cntr, 11355 Chester Rd, Sharonville Oh 45246. Contact Denny 513-503-1072 - more info at cincyguitarshow.com & FB.

MAY

Jake's Guitar Show & Music Swap Meet, May 3-4 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

Sarasota Guitar and Amp Show, May 16th - 12pm - 5pm (dealer day), May 17-18, 9am - 6pm at the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium 801 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34236. Contact: Kevin Wood at 941-993-3098 or visit Sarasotaguitarshow.com

JUNE

2025 Summer Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday,

June 8, 2025 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 or guitardigest@frontier.com, www.ohioguitarshows.com. Ohio Guitar Show on Facebook and Instagram

SEPTEMBER

Amigo SoCal World Guitar Show, September 13-14, 2025, OC Fair & Event Center, Arlington & Fairview St., Costa Mesa, CA. For more info call Larry at (918) 288-2222, amigoshowstringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com. amigoshowstringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

Jake's Guitar Show & Music Swap Meet, September 20-21, 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

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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CINEMATIC PASTICHE

It's no shock the late Tom Petty's right-hand man and MVP on Don Henley hits like "The Boys of Summer" and "The Heart of the Matter"

would continue his superlative work. His latest with The Dirty Knobs is a pastiche of cinematic California roots-infused country and the tastiest guitar parts this side of Laurel Canyon. Produced by Campbell and George Drakoulis, Campbell shares guitar duties here with Chris Holt to create beautifully rugged music.

From the Beatle-esque sounds of "The Greatest" through a plethora of narratives drenched in the L.A. desert, Campbell sings with a Southern California drawl, as earthy acoustic strumming buoys electric rock and roll guitars with zeal. Graham Nash makes an appearance on "Dare To Dream," adding excellent

MIKE CAMPBELL & THE DIRTY KNOBS

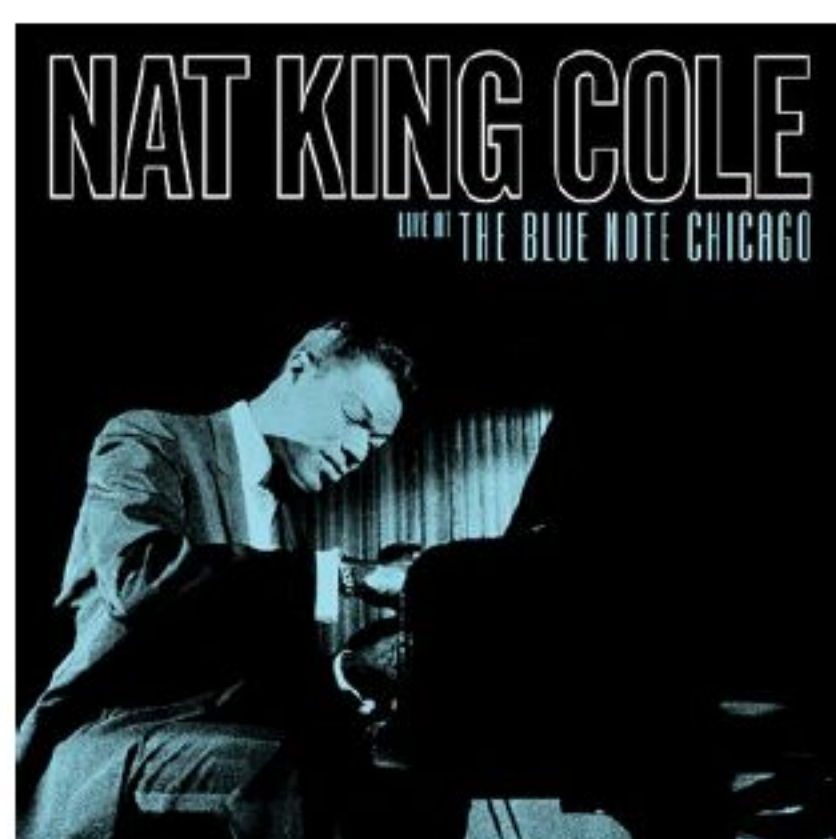


VAGABONDS, VIRGINS & MISFITS

Mike Campbell & The Dirty Knobs Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits

vocal contrast to Campbell's Tom Petty treatment. The slide work is killer.

"So Alive" rocks with ringing power chords and chunky riffs, while "Don't Wait Up" is perfect rock-and-roll cruising music featuring Chris Stapleton and Benmont Tench. The highlight is Campbell's duet with Lucinda Williams on "Hell or High Water," a tequila-soaked waltz that mixes electric and acoustic instruments. *Vagabonds, Virgins & Misfits* will induce repeated listens. – **Oscar Jordan**



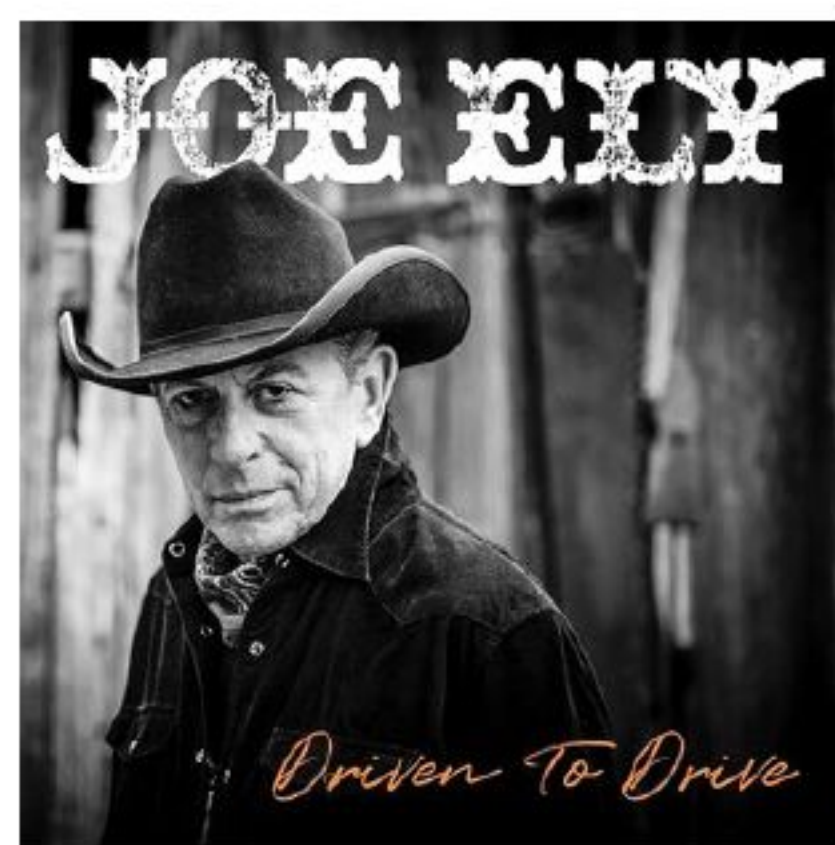
Nat King Cole Live at the Blue Note Chicago

Many Nat Cole fans, even diehards, are unaware that, in addition to his beautiful singing voice, he was among the greatest jazz pianists. Fewer still are aware of the world-class guitarists who played in his small combos. First was the great Oscar Moore, followed by Irving Ashby. But from 1951 until Cole's death in '65, the seat was occupied by John Collins.

These previously unreleased 24 cuts document a 1953 club date with Cole's quartet in top form. Favorites associated with Cole include "Unforgettable," "Nature Boy," "Too Marvelous for Words," and "Straighten Up and Fly Right," one of the rare tunes penned by Cole. Whether reeling off an uptempo solo on "Little Girl," mixing swinging rhythm with tasty fills on "Pretend," or injecting a restrained, melodic chorus into "Sweet

Lorraine," Collins shines throughout. His lush chord-melody is the sole backing on a medley of "Mona Lisa" and "Too Young."

Collins subsequently recorded with vocalists such as Peggy Lee, Carmen McRae, and Maria Muldaur, and revisited sessions he did with Billie Holiday for Diana Ross' *Lady Sings The Blues*. In '91, he accompanied Natalie Cole on her hit album of her dad's repertoire, *Unforgettable...With Love*. – **Dan Forte**



Joe Ely Driven to Drive

From the start of his solo career, Joe Ely's west Texas audacity and unpredictability has been an asset – an extension of his early days as part of the revered country-folk trio The Flatlanders (with Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore). *Driven to Drive* is an exercise in minimalism that feels like

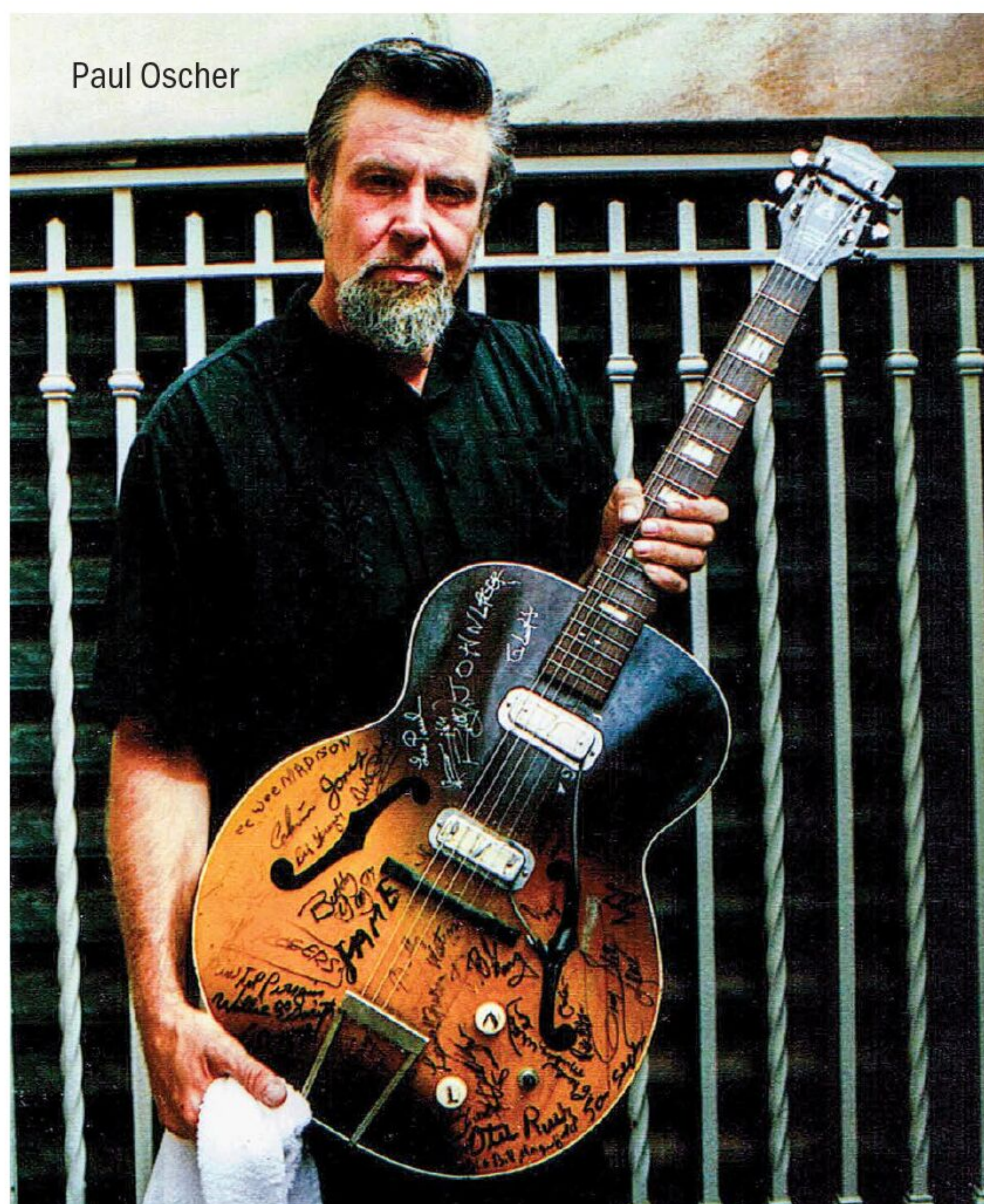
a field recording. Heavy on guitar-driven 12-bar originals, there's no bass, and it's neither needed nor missed.

Ely does much of his own picking, mostly acoustic, occasionally amplified. Sometimes he uses a drum machine. At times, sidemen add accordion, amplified guitar or mandolin. The blues motif dominates, yet each song is distinctive. Ely subtly, wittily jabs Music City on the acoustic "Nashville is a Catfish" and becomes more intense on "Gulf Coast Blues." Mitch Watkins' electric frames his vocal on the fervent "Ride Motorcycle."

He picks unplugged on "San Antonio Brawl," while longtime fan Bruce Springsteen sings along on "Odds of the Blues," framed by Jeff Plankenhorn's assertive amplified rhythm and slide. That same well-placed slide sharpens the country-flavored "Watchin' Them Semis Roll." Lubbock icon Buddy Holly's spirit emerges on "Driven to Drive" with more first-rate Plankenhorn picking. It proves that solid vocals, fine compositions, and just enough guitar are sometimes all that's needed. – **Rich Kienzie**

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Paul Oscher

THE BLUES WILL SET YOU FREE

By Dan Forte

We've all heard of blues in bars, but what about blues *behind* bars? That's what **Paul Oscher** had in mind in the late '80s, when he brought a world-class blues band to play for inmates at the Manhattan House of Detention.

Oscher, who was 74 when he died of complications from Covid in 2021, began a five-year stint as Muddy Waters' harp player in '67, appearing on Muddy's *After The Rain* and *Live (at Mr. Kelly's)*. Also playing guitar, he released eight solo albums while recording with Waters' son, Big Bill Morganfield, along with Johnny Young, Murali Coryell, Keb' Mo', Johnny Dyer, the Mannish Boys, and Hubert Sumlin.

With a big, full tone, he kicks off *Live At The Tombs House Of Detention*, NYC with two Little Walter harmonica instrumentals, eliciting shouts and whistles from the appreciative inmates. Bob Gaddy and Dave Maxwell share piano duties, while Gaddy alternates vocals with Rose Melody,

who delivers a turbulent "Stormy Monday," accented by Oscher's biting guitar. He closes with "Hide Away," renamed "Slideaway," which is appropriate since Freddie King's hit instrumental borrowed from slide man Hound Dog Taylor.

Shortly before his death, Oscher asked Louis X. Erlanger to oversee his catalog. The former guitarist with Mink DeVille also produced R.L. Burnside and performs as Sunny Lowdown. With jailhouse acoustics that were doubtless challenging, he does a great job bringing out the sound of the band as well as the boisterous atmosphere of the occasion.

Before his passing in '21, **James Harman** was one of the main cornerstones of blues in Los Angeles. The stellar harp player, singer, and songwriter released about 20 albums dating back to 1981. His biggest contribution may have been as bandleader of outfits that invariably sported top-flight musicians, from guitarists Hollywood Fats, Kid Ramos, Bobby Eason,

Kirk Fletcher, and Junior Watson to bassist Willie J. Campbell, pianists Gene Taylor and Fred Kaplan, multi-instrumentalist Jeff Turmes, and drummers Stephen Hodges and Jimi Bott.

That track record continued with *Didn't We Have Some Fun Sometime*, featuring guitarist Nathan James, who joined Harman at 19. He plays an electric washboard guitar of his own design (which explains his band's name, the Rhythm Scratchers), as Harman's originals impress with their freshness and authenticity.

The guitarist, who pulled double duty as engineer, told me, "The album was put together of mostly songs that James wanted to use for his next album, which we were working on just before he passed away. There are eight songs taken from livestream performances we made during the height of the pandemic and four studio recordings from various sessions of the past 11 or so years of his life."

Nathan digs in on resophonic bottleneck on "You Can't Arrest Me For What's On My

Mind," spikes "A Rut And A Groove" with distortion, and recalls Watson's reverby jump-swing on "Taking It On The Lam." The program ends poignantly with the title blues ballad. Cut in '09, it finds Harman in a reflective mood over James' tremolo and Taylor's triplets.

Doug MacLeod has played bass, led an electric blues band, and backed Pee Wee Crayton, George "Harmonica" Smith, and other legends. But he really found his niche when he returned to performing solo acoustic, as evidenced by his numerous awards in that capacity. *Raw Blues 1* topped the Blues Music Awards for Acoustic Album of 2024. Its follow-up, *Raw Blues 2*, bolts out of the gate with "Fine Lookin' Sugar," mixing humor and intensity.

In addition to his storytelling and onstage charm, one aspect that sets him apart is the fact that he only does original material. The spooky tale of "Horse With No Rider" features careening bottleneck; the steadily pounding "Goin' Down Country" displays John Lee Hooker's influence. On steel-bodied National or Waterloo flat-top, MacLeod's whomping and stomping conjure John Hammond's rhythmic drive, as on "Keep On Moving." A melodic side reveals itself on "All I Had Was The Blues," while "One Good Woman" is reminiscent of Brownie McGhee in its upbeat feel and sly, risqué lyrics.

In 2022, MacLeod's *Soul To Claim* mixed acoustic and electric, solo and band. It was named one of the best albums of the year by *Downbeat*, which called it a masterpiece – proving that he needn't sacrifice either side of his playing. In the late '60s Blues Revival, many older artists enjoyed second careers playing festivals, colleges, and nightclubs to rock and folk audiences. At Los Angeles' Ash Grove, younger players like Ry Cooder and David Lindley got to rub shoulders with the likes of Bukka White and Mance Lipscomb.

Thankfully, some concerts were professionally recorded, resulting in never-released shows by Lightnin' Hopkins and Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee now seeing the light of day. Dating from 1970 and '73, respectively, the fidelity on Liberation Hall's *Live From The Ash Grove* CDs is as outstanding as the music.

Products of the same revival, Oscher, MacLeod, Harman, and other white musicians helped revive a rich African-American art form that had gone dormant. Today, they, too, are rightfully respected as veterans.

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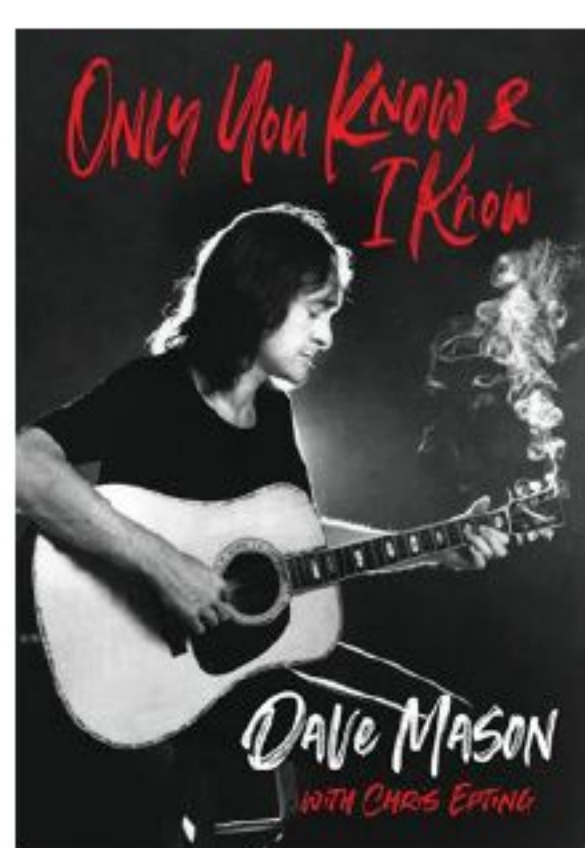


Grace Bowers Wine on Venus

It would be easy to dismiss this 18-year-old as a prefab gimmick, but Grace Bowers' guitar work ain't no hype. Armed with a vintage SG Special, she lays down real funk with her jam-band, the Hodge Podge, aided by producer John Osborne (VG, February '24). *Wine on Venus* is that amalgam of R&B, blues, rock, and gospel perfected by the Tedeschi Trucks Band and now inspiring a generation of young musicians – just like Bowers.

Grace can rip on her Gibson, but also lay back, as on "Tell Me Why U Do That," trading licks with co-guitarist Prince Parker. "Madame President" finds a Stax sweet spot, the kind of hands-in-the-air gospel so hard to capture on tape. Another part of the vibe is fine vocalist Esther Okai-Tetteh, and the whole band singing backups, reminiscent of Sly & the Family Stone. Speaking of Sly, Bowers delivers a crowd-pleasing (if predictable) cover of "Dance to the Music." The closer is the soul ballad "Wine on Venus," colored by Parker's sweet slide before easing off the heat for Grace's reverby break.

A talented, gimmick-free teen surrounded by expert players, Bowers is just getting started. Buckle up! – **Pete Prown**



Dave Mason with Chris Epting Only You Know & I Know

Guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Dave Mason has endured the familiar rock-star highs and lows in his unusual career, and several unique experiences are covered in this autobiography.

A founding member of the groundbreaking Traffic, Mason calls the band, "...an abstract idea – all gut and instinct." Traffic, he believes, along with the Band and Grateful Dead, pioneered the jam-band movement. He mentions playing 12-string acoustic on Jimi Hendrix's cover of Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" and singing/playing sessions for the Rolling Stones, Wings, and George Harrison.

Other anecdotes include Mason's first guitar being a Mayfair and how, to cut expenses in lean times, he reluctantly toured as an acoustic duo with bandmate Jim Krueger, who co-wrote "We Just Disagree."

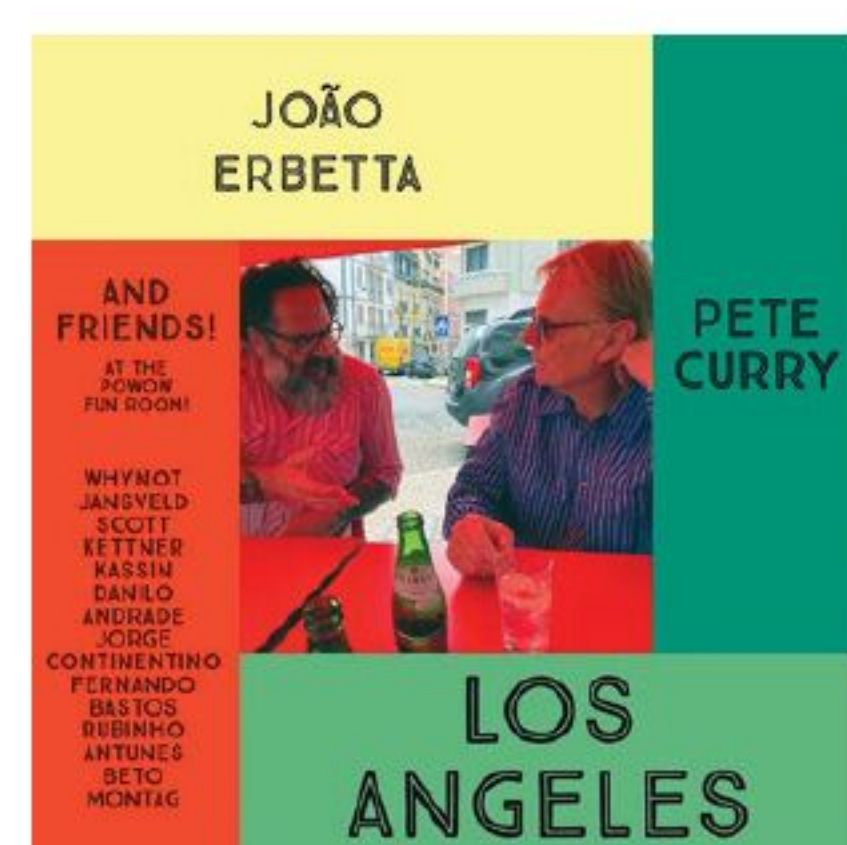
"What it did show was the old adage in the music business that it's all about the song,



Freddie King in
Amsterdam, July, 1973.

the song, the song... and this is what kept the audiences coming to see what essentially was just two people onstage," he writes.

Mason's matter-of-fact storytelling implies he could have gone into more detail; nonetheless, this is an enjoyable autobiography from an artist who Doors producer/engineer Bruce Botnick calls "one of the great and underrated guitar players of his generation." – **Bret Adams**



João Erbetta and Pete Curry Los Angeles

Guitarist Erbetta has composed and produced film scores in his native Brazil, while Angelino Pete Curry plays bass with Los Straitjackets and was the surf-rock Halibuts' lead guitarist. The two previously spearheaded the group Panamericans. Curry's first instrument was drums, which he handles expertly on 10 instrumentals written by Erbetta, who plays guitar, banjo, keyboards, and steel, as well as bass.

Don't even try to categorize this; it's unabashedly eclectic and more than a little bit quirky – not surprising, considering Erbetta previously titled a solo CD *Guitar Bizarre*. High-spirited "Bubbles" splits the difference between early jazz and '50s country. "Morning Song" wouldn't be out of place in an Austin Powers movie, while "Things I Like" leans toward soul-jazz, with Erbetta's bluesy Japanese Gretsch Country Club with Dynasonics and B-3 alternating center stage. "I'm A Loner" evokes a widescreen expanse, something like spaghetti western without succumbing to cliché, with Joao's short, overdriven solo lifting the feel two-thirds in. Other

axes include a '67 Gretsch 6120 and two N. Zaganin guitars from Brazil – a Blend model and JM Custom.

The ballad "Tomorrow Night," featuring Jorge Continentino's sax and Erbetta's minimal lines, is classic jazz with a touch of smooth. – **DF**



Freddie King Getting Ready/ Texas Cannonball/ Woman Across the River

A three-in-one reissue, this Freddie King package encompasses the LPs he recorded for Leon Russell's Shelter label from 1971 to '73.

On *Getting Ready*, King dodges sugary arrangements to deliver smoldering licks on "Same Old Blues," and turns the heat up for a remake of his classic "I'm Tore Down." "Palace of the King" has burnin' guitar – Jeff Beck was surely listening. Speaking of, Jeff swiftly covered King's "Goin' Down" and gleaned extensive FM airplay, but Freddie's version here is definitive, blurring the lines between electric blues and heavy rock. What a tone!

From the earthier *Texas Cannonball*, Freddie covers CCR's "Lodi" with feisty breaks, while blowing away any six-string competition on Lowell Fulson's "Reconsider Baby."

Woman Across the River explores more Tulsa tones thanks to Leon Russell's piano, bassist Carl Radle, and drummer Jim Keltner. "Hoochie Coochie Man" becomes a funky bayou jam, far from its original Chicago thump, but festooned with razor-sharp ES-345. "I'm Ready" continues the formula of hot guitar and vocals over a funkified rhythm section – for better or worse.

While this reissue isn't essential, for pocket change, you can pick and choose King's best songs from the era. A worthy investment. – **PP**



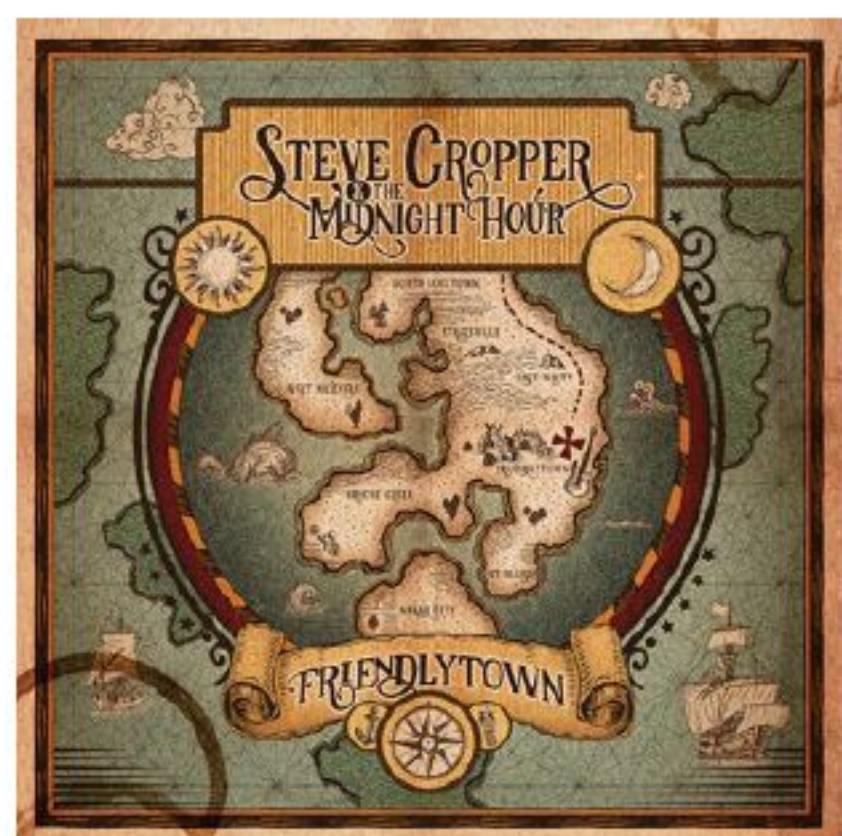
Jubu Smith Jubu

John "Jubu" Smith (Whitney Houston, Tony! Toni! Tone!, Raphael Saadiq) has joined with seven-string renegade Charlie Hunter for an instrumental album doing what he does best – playing ultra-clean, hip, defiantly soulful modern R&B guitar.

Produced by Hunter, *Jubu* features 10 tasty instrumental tracks that harken to the soul-guitar stylings of Cornell Dupree, David Williams, black gospel, and the new wave of '90s smooth R&B.

Jubu kicks it off with the toe-tapping "Hamster Wheel," featuring drummer Calvin Napper and Hunter on hybrid guitar. By the time "Carroll Drive" hits, one realizes this is not a typical instrumental-guitar album, but a compendium of funk, soul, and R&B with double-stop slides, chordal embellishments, signature whammy usage, and luscious volume swells. It's an ode to the clever backing guitarist that draws from the past and renews the present. His refined touch on "Jubu's Poem" is magic one can never glean from a book.

Eric Gales appears on "EG Is Here," a pristine, deep funk reimagining of "The Thrill Is Gone." The melodic interplay is flawless as Jubu and Gales weave Curtis Mayfield, jazz, intelligence, and virtuoso personalities. His gospel-tinged solo piece, "At Long Last," is absolutely sublime. – **OJ**



Steve Cropper & The Midnight Hour Friendlytown

From his earliest days in Memphis, Steve Cropper's virtuosity stemmed from his powerful mastery of rhythm and flawless sense of economy. Those assets stood him in good stead through the glory days as Stax Records, with Booker T. & The MG's, playing on Memphis' most-epochal soul records. That reputation has endured for six decades, from the Blues Brothers to his solo albums.

Unlike the previous album, *Fire Up!* (which was a remote/pandemic project), *Friendlytown* was live in the studio with the core band (The Midnight Hour) and guests Billy Gibbons, Brian May, and Tim Montana. Gibbons plays on 11 of the 13 tracks and occasionally solos. Montana solos on "You Can't Refuse," while May splits lead vocal with Roger Reale and injects guitar fills between lines in his verse, then plays a solo after one by Gibbons.

What of Cropper? He's not just in the background this time; his tight, focused lead and rhythm work are everywhere.

On "I'll Take Tomorrow," he plays all the guitars behind Reale's vocals. Cropper and Gibbons switch roles, Gibbons playing rhythm on "Talkin' Bout Politics." Cropper handles only rhythm on "You Can't Refuse," but his rhythm and lead guitar dominate "Rain on My Parade" and "Reality Check," though Gibbons solos on both.

The album is a real statement – one that affirms the enduring value of Cropper's revered, less-is-more approach. – **Rich Kienzie VG**

extra. EXTRA



THE POLICE

Synchronicity: Deluxe Edition

This 1983 hit factory is reissued in new configurations, notably a six-CD box set featuring 55 unreleased tracks with demos, alternate takes, B-sides, covers, and live recordings. Guitarist Andy Summers' textural skills stand out on instrumental versions of "Synchronicity II" and "Wrapped Around Your Finger." Other highlights include "I'm Blind (Demo)," "Goodbye Tomorrow," and the live jam "Can't Stand Losing You." – **BA**



DUKE ROBILLARD

Roll With Me

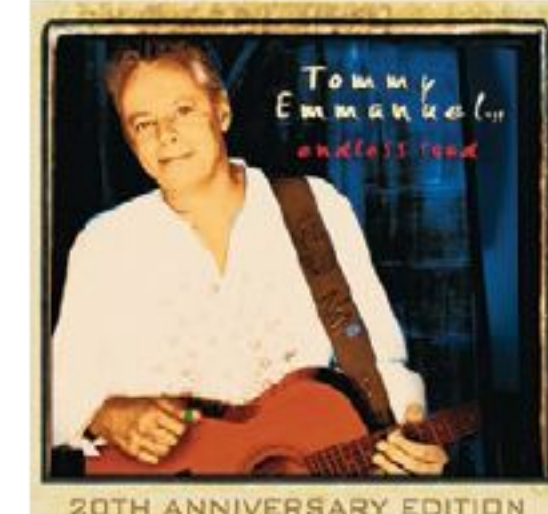
Robillard uncorks 11 originals and covers with gusto on this never-released 2005 collection. His guitar erupts on the originals "Give Me Back My Money" and "My Plea." Gatemouth Brown's "Boogie Uproar" becomes a jazzy instrumental whirlwind. Not only does he do justice to Brown's "You Got Money," his gutbucket picking on Howlin' Wolf's "Built for Comfort" would make Hubert Sumlin smile. – **RK**



THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS

Struck Down

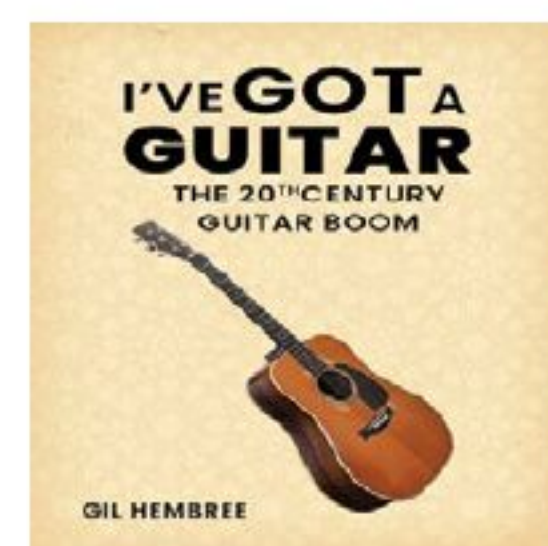
Vocalist/harpist Kim Wilson leads his blues-rockers on their first new studio album in eight years. Several A-listers sit in; Billy Gibbons' thick guitar licks trade off with Wilson's honking harp on "Payback Time," while the raw acoustic blues of Memphis Minnie's "Nothing in Rambling" features Bonnie Raitt, Keb' Mo', Taj Mahal, and Mick Fleetwood. "The Hard Way" is an earthy ballad. Tuff tunes! – **BA**



TOMMY EMMANUEL

Endless Road 20th Anniversary Edition

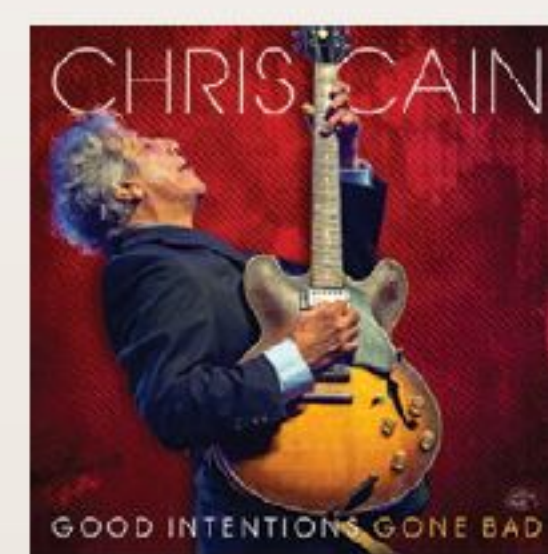
Emmanuel's 17-track tour-de-force revealed the true depth of his talent, already monumental, and his well-known influences. The 2004 album remastered holds up as is, as do the package's five added tunes, an alternative "Endless Road," live performances of "Morning Aire," "Mona Lisa" and his Atkins tribute "Mr. Guitar." – **RK**



GIL HEMBREE

I've Got a Guitar: The 20th Century Guitar Boom

Having authored a Ted McCarty bio and helping VG's annual *Price Guide* for two decades, Hembree knows the territory and excels as a researcher. An obvious folk devotee, he allots extensive space to the Kingston Trio, who precipitated huge sales of Martin acoustics. The 100 of its 250 pages listing *Billboard* hits seems tangential, and photographs of guitars and artists would've been nice. – **DF**



CHRIS CAIN

Good Intentions Gone Bad

Tone alert! Cain plays jump blues the way it should be, nailing that swingin' post-war vibe few can emulate. Also a powerhouse singer, he ignites "Too Little, Too Late" with ES-335 tone that's to die for. On "Fear is My New Room-mate," he delivers deep, searing bends, all dripping with emotion. Why isn't Cain the best-known blues guitarist in America? – **PP**

TWANG BANGER

Fender's Player II Series Telecaster

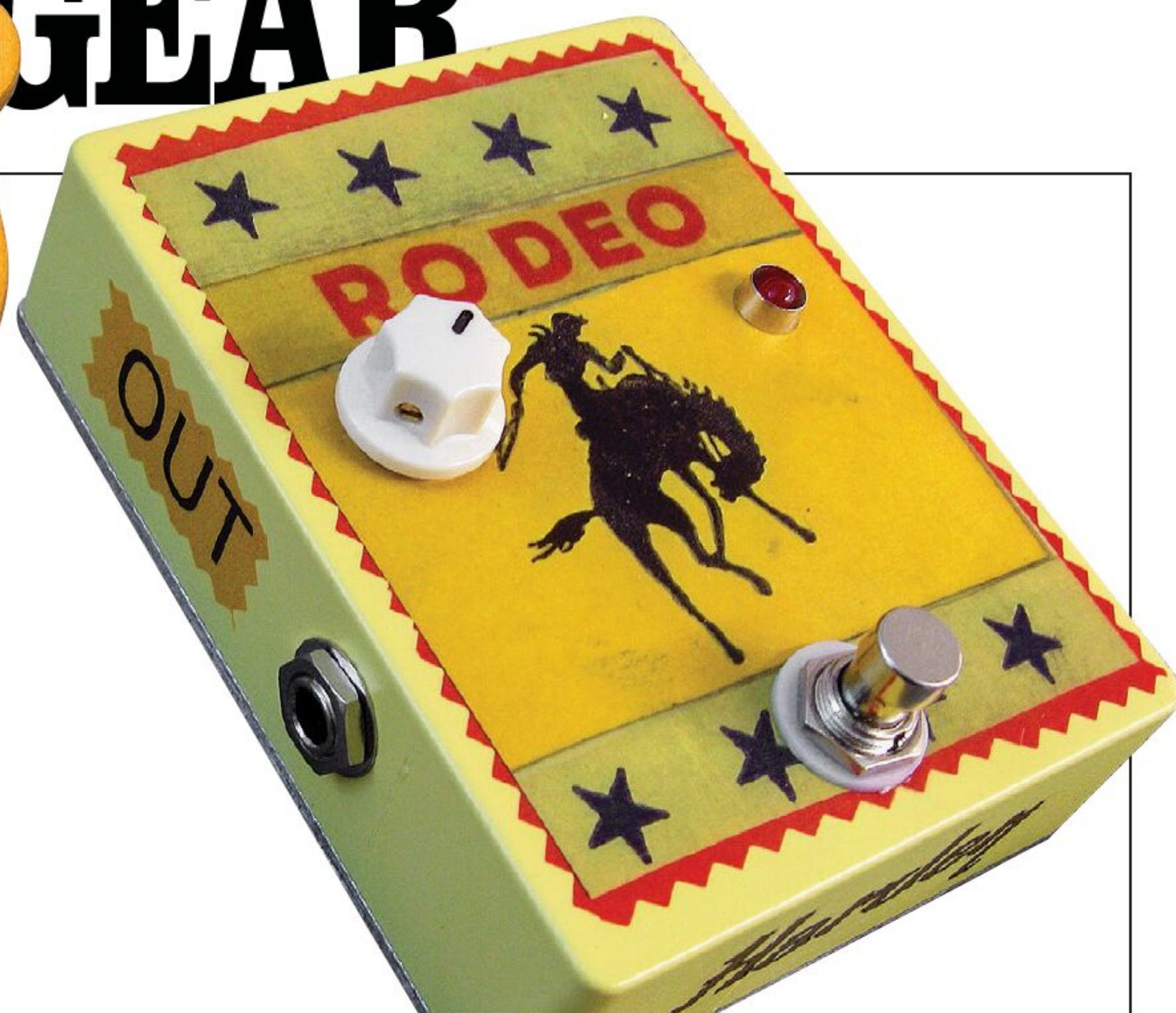
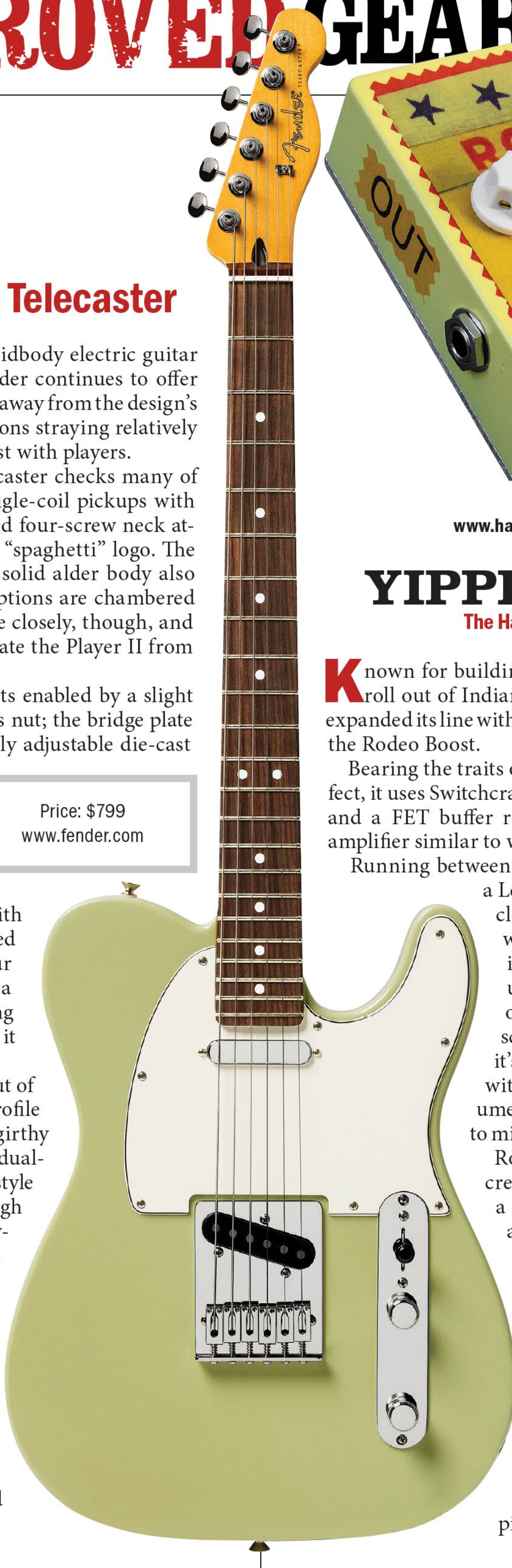
As the world's first mass-production solidbody electric guitar fast approaches its 75th birthday, Fender continues to offer variations on the theme. But the biggest takeaway from the design's diamond anniversary might be that variations straying relatively little from the original concept still fare best with players.

The Mexican-made Player II Series Telecaster checks many of these boxes with classic looks plus two single-coil pickups with Alnico V magnets, traditional controls, and four-screw neck attachment with iconic headstock shape and "spaghetti" logo. The maple neck with rosewood fretboard and solid alder body also align with many vintage versions (other options are chambered ash and chambered mahogany). Look more closely, though, and you'll find several modifications that separate the Player II from a vintage reissue.

The fretboard has 22 medium-jumbo frets enabled by a slight extension, with a headstock-accessible truss nut; the bridge plate has no sidewalls and carries six individually adjustable die-cast saddles; the neck pickup's height-adjustment screws are through the pickguard rather than into the body beneath it, and the vintage-look tuners have threaded ferrules rather than screws through the back. Eleven gloss-polyester finish colors are available (with satin polyurethane on the neck), some assigned maple fretboards and others rosewood, like our Birch Green review model – a color close to a rich foam green that is much more appealing in person than the pea-green impression it makes online.

The Player II Tele played very well right out of the box; its comfortable "modern C" neck profile will appeal to any player who's not hooked on girthy '50s shapes. Tested through a British-voiced dual-EL84 head with 2x12 cab and a tweed Deluxe-style 1x12 combo, it was certifiably Telecaster through and through, from clean to mean and everywhere between. Even at what we'd consider a reasonable price for a genuine Fender model, the Player II delivered the essential elements that have made the Telecaster arguably the most-versatile electric guitar available for three quarters of a century – spanky and chimey, yet meaty into clean tones, twangy and trenchant into edge-of-breakup settings, and inspiringly raw and expressive into overdrive. It's simply another great Telecaster from the company that invented the form. – **Dave Hunter**

Price: \$799
www.fender.com



Price: \$150

www.hardenengineering.com

YIPPEE-KI-YAY

The Harden Rodeo Boost

Known for building some of the coolest guitars to roll out of Indiana, Harden Engineering recently expanded its line with a low-gain overdrive pedal called the Rodeo Boost.

Bearing the traits of a hand-built/point-to-point effect, it uses Switchcraft jacks, an Alpha potentiometer, and a FET buffer running to a TL072 operational amplifier similar to what is used in the Klon Centaur.

Running between two guitars (a vintage Strat and a Les Paul Standard) and a Bassman clone, the Rodeo shined, especially when maxed, its Gain knob goosing the amp with pleasing, highly usable textures while adding none of the woofy midrange of a Tubescreamer or Klon. Clear yet gainy, it's the sound of a cranked Bassman with rich overtones, minus the volume. The tailored tones of SRV come to mind, with a pinch of Billy Gibbons.

Rolling off the control Gain increased clarity, but the Rodeo makes a great always-on *dirty* boost, allowing tonal flexibility and output volume to originate with the guitar's Volume control. Overall, it's a tight, smooth, gritty, warm flavor with enough compression to inspire blues-rock greatness. Running on a 9-volt adapter, it cleans up well, is utterly silent, and pushes single-coil or humbucker bridge pickups without sounding like an ice pick. – **Oscar Jordan**

TWICE THE TONE

The Danelectro Doubleneck

Jimmy Page. Don Felder. Even Elvis Presley. In fact, who amongst us hasn't drooled over a 6/12 doubleneck at one point or another in our musical lives? Danelectro knows this and is once again offering a viable option with its Doubleneck, an affordable spin that offers one guitar with two necks and potential for endless exploration.

The Doubleneck uses a modified Shorthorn body shape with a spruce frame, hardboard top, and a center block to defeat feedback. It's semi-hollow design keeps the weight in check (roughly 10.75 pounds – essentially the same as a '70s Les Paul Custom). Its bolt-on necks are maple with 21-fret rosewood boards, each with 14" radii carved into likable C shapes. Scale on both is 25".

For electronics, look for four Danelectro Lipstick pickups controlled by stacked Volume and Tone knobs. The front toggle is a pickup selector, while the back jumps between the six- and 12-string necks. Topping off the specs are fully adjustable bridges, 18 tuners, and aluminum nuts.

Plugged in, the Doubleneck is a big, yet functional beastie. The Korea-made instrument stays in tune surprisingly well and plays commendably. The pickups sound beefy, with terrific jangle on the 12-string; within minutes you'll surrender to the impulse and start playing "Stairway to Heaven" or "The Song Remains the Same."

Looking at the space between headstocks, you'll rightfully conclude that their proximity means tuning requires a bit of dexterity. As with any larger-bodied guitar, playing the Doubleneck requires adjusting wrist position when switching necks, dependent on whether you're sitting down or how high/low you adjust the strap. Be patient while you adapt.

At the end of the day, though, with the Doubleneck, Danelectro delivers a solidly built axe at a price in the reach of most. And for that price, you get double the fun. – **Pete Prown**

Price: \$899
(case sold separately)
www.danelectro.com



GEARIN' UP



ELECTRO-HARMONIX POG3 OCTAVE

The EHX POG3 Octave has six voices, capability to store 100 presets, and controls for POG and POG2 Attack, Filter, and Detune. There are also controls for Input Gain and Master Volume. A Multimode Filter controls Q and Envelope sweep. Other features include illuminated slide pots and buttons, and graphic OLED display.



FENDER JASON ISBELL TELECASTER PICKUPS

Fender's Jason Isbell Telecaster Pickup Set has plain-enamel wire coated in Formvar and wax-potted Alnico V magnets. The bridge pickup is based on the pickup in Isbell's '65 Tele, and the neck pickup uses a taller bobbin that allows for more winds to give it a touch of Strat character.



ORANGE ORIVERB

Orange's Orianthi signature Oriverb amp is based on the Rockerverb MKIII 50 NEO Combo but voiced for cleaner midrange warmth. It uses EL34 power tubes and two 12" Celestion Neo Creamback speakers and has footswitchable spring reverb, built-in attenuator, switchable power options, and valve-driven effects loop. The cabinet is 15mm birch plywood finished in an embossed white Tolex.

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

SIMPLE SCREAMER

The Epiphone USA Coronet

Single-pickup guitars are flat-out cool: think Leslie West, Keith Richards, Johnny Thunders, Steve Marriott, Johnny Marr, and Jimi Hendrix. Once fluffed off as a one-trick pony or a kid's guitar, simple pieces like the new Epiphone Coronet USA can be versatile – even great in the right hands – and they're undergoing something of a revival.

Introduced in 1958, the Epiphone Coronet was manufactured in Gibson's legendary

Kalamazoo factory, and has been reborn as the latest offering to Epiphone's USA collection, made in Nashville.

Constructed of mahogany, like its predecessor, the Coronet USA uses the same symmetrical body shape, three-and-three headstock with the "bikini" logo, and identical pickguard, but with updates including a wider 1.695" nut, a Slim Taper neck, a slimmer body (1.375") and a Gibson Soapbar P-90 instead of the infamously underpowered Epiphone New Yorker version. Purists may object, but these *are* improvements.

on our tester was flawless, and the cream-colored pointer-base Volume and Tone knobs are vintage-faithful. The wraparound bridge negates perfect intonation, but that has never stopped anyone. The tuners held tune nicely even after the guitar was subject to a lengthy run of slashing power chords and extreme string bends.

Plugged into a reconditioned vintage tube amp, the Coronet impressed with a clean, snappy Fender-like tone at lower volume, while the Tone knob proved truly versatile. Cranked up with a Klon-style OD added to the signal chain, the Soapbar P-90 came to life, snarling with abandon and offering no-holds-barred classic-rock tone beloved by so many (thank you, Mr. West).

Not everyone will be fond of the Coronet USA's Slim Taper neck, but its retro-cool design – with Vintage Cherry, TV Yellow, and Ebony finishes – and modern appointments will nonetheless make it



Price: \$1,699
www.epiphone.com

Weighing in at just over six pounds, the Coronet USA is well-balanced while both sitting and standing, with zero neck dive. The finish

a welcome addition for any player looking to implement a single-pickup axe to their arsenal. – **Bob Cianci**

BIG STEP

The Boss Katana Gen 3

The Boss Katana amplifier has a cult of devotees, many of whom have been waiting for a Bluetooth version that allows access to the amp's deep models and effects with the mere tap of a smartphone app. With the Gen 3 line of combos and heads, Boss has delivered, and we recently fired up the 1x12/100-watt version.

On the surface, this Katana looks much like its predecessors – a clean black box with top-mounted effects for easy access (especially if you put it on a stand). There are 12 amp types with tones ranging from shimmer clean to saturated crunch, and an Acoustic setting for your acoustic/electric guitar. Aside from standard Gain and Volume controls is an EQ with midrange variations (via the Contour button), a digital

effects section (Distortion, Modulation, Delay, Tap, Reverb, Wah, Octaver, etc.), and power settings for 100-, 50-, and .5-watt output. There are eight locations to save your own settings, while the Cab Resonance switch adds sonic variety.

Compared to the Katana MkII, which was impressive in its own right, the Gen 3 is a far livelier amp. The new Push model feature emulates a cranked-up tube amp that's

just breaking up and does so surprisingly well – this has long been an Achilles heel within this category of amps. Your ears

will tell you it simply has more vibe than the MkII. Coupled with the USB-C and/or the Bluetooth interface (selling separately for about \$60), you can edit your virtual rig on a smartphone or computer. Pick a virtual microphone and move it to adjust studio ambiance; change the order of virtual pedals; and tweak effects settings in an easy, visual interface.

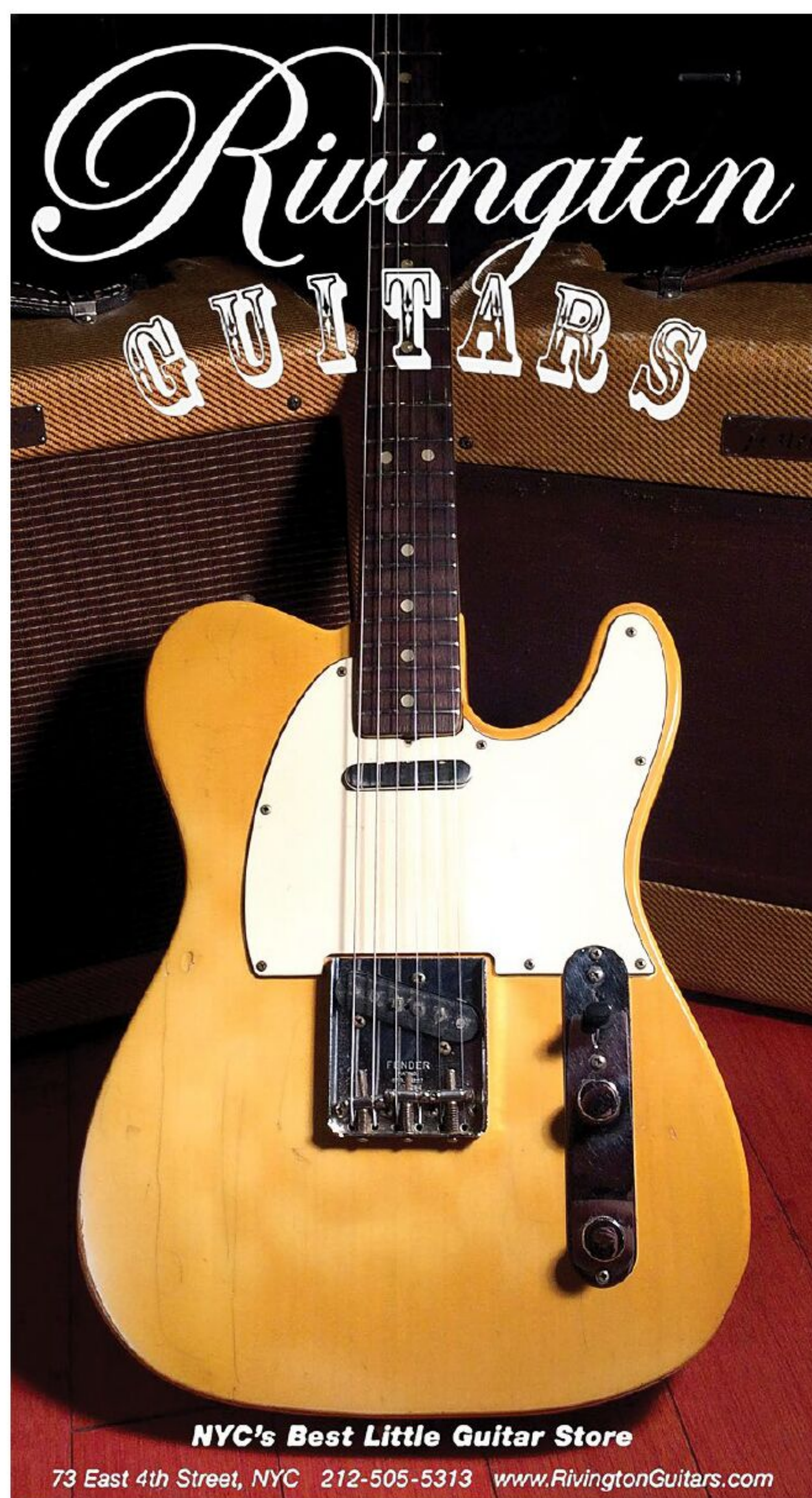
The bottom line is that Boss has made a big step forward with the Gen 3, retaining many of the no-brainer features but adding more audio sizzle, effects, and that all-important Bluetooth access. Weave in a killer price and the Boss Katana Gen 3 becomes an amp well worth checking out. – **Pete Prown VG**

Price: \$399.99
www.boss.info



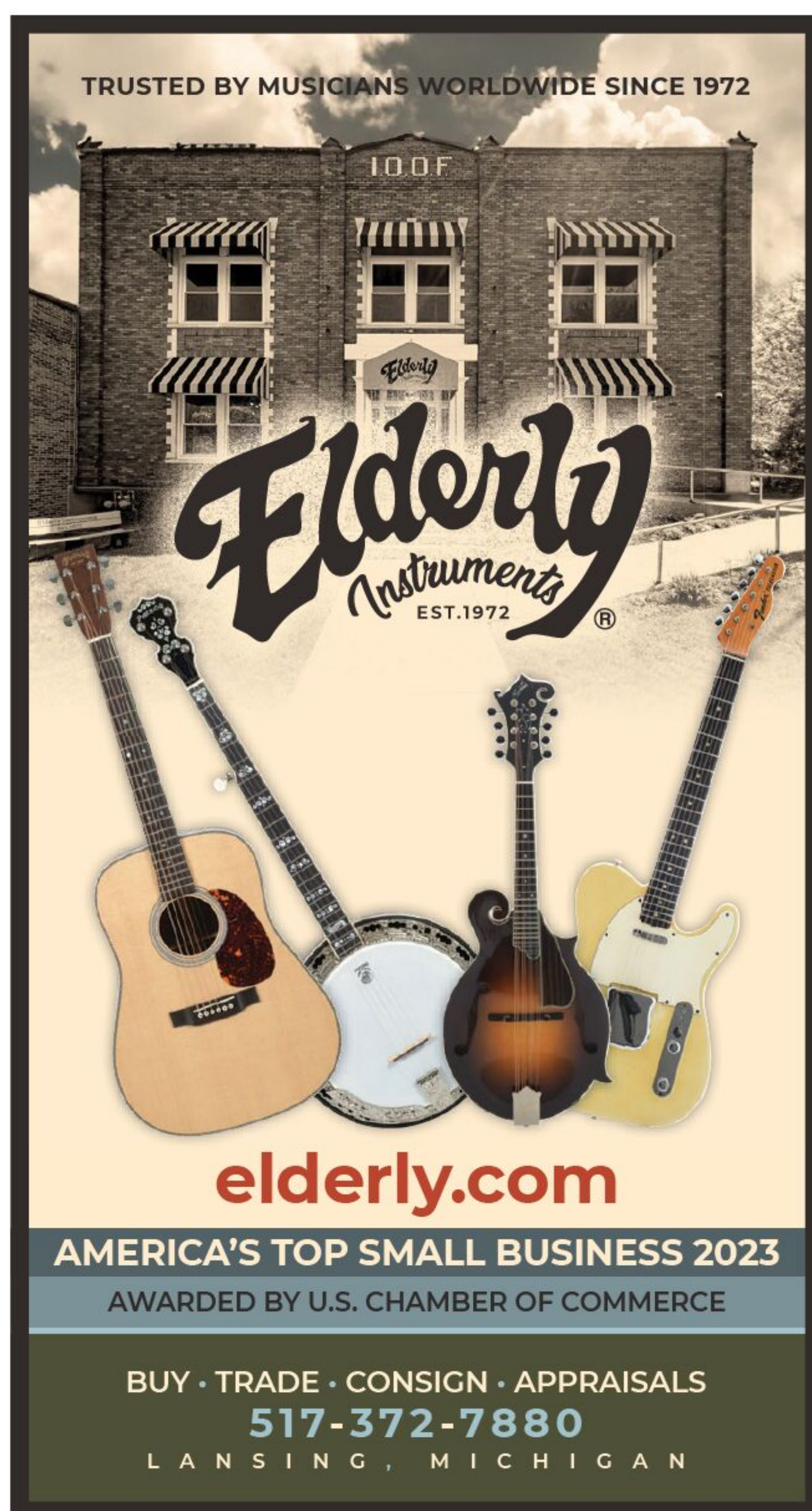
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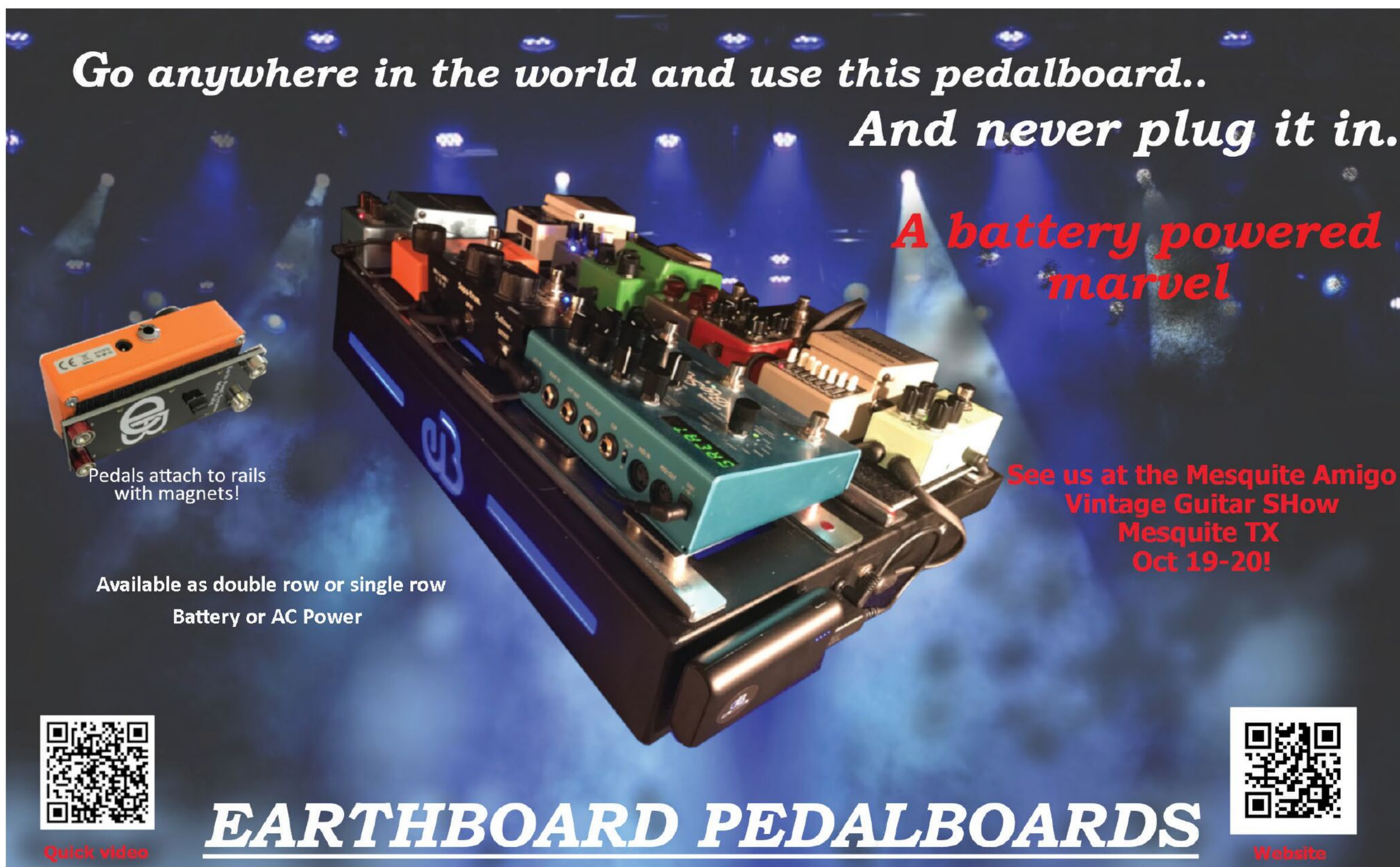
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01 Jeff Lisec's Flying V collection blends vintage and rare examples including a genuine '59, several from the '60s (covering all standard finishes), a few '71 Medallions, several from the mid/late '70s (two with pearl-block inlays), several rare custom-color models from the early '80s, and a handful from the Custom Shop.

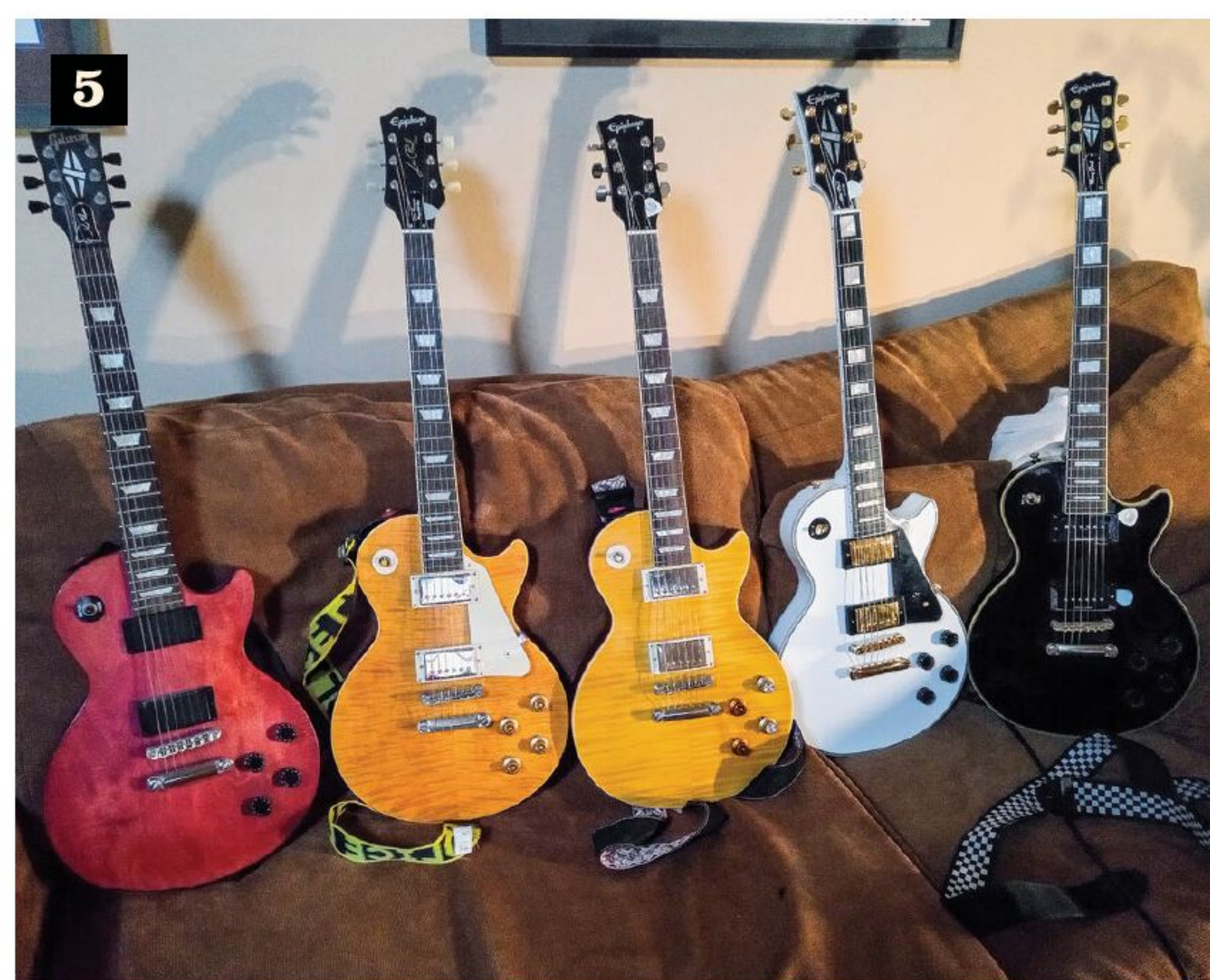
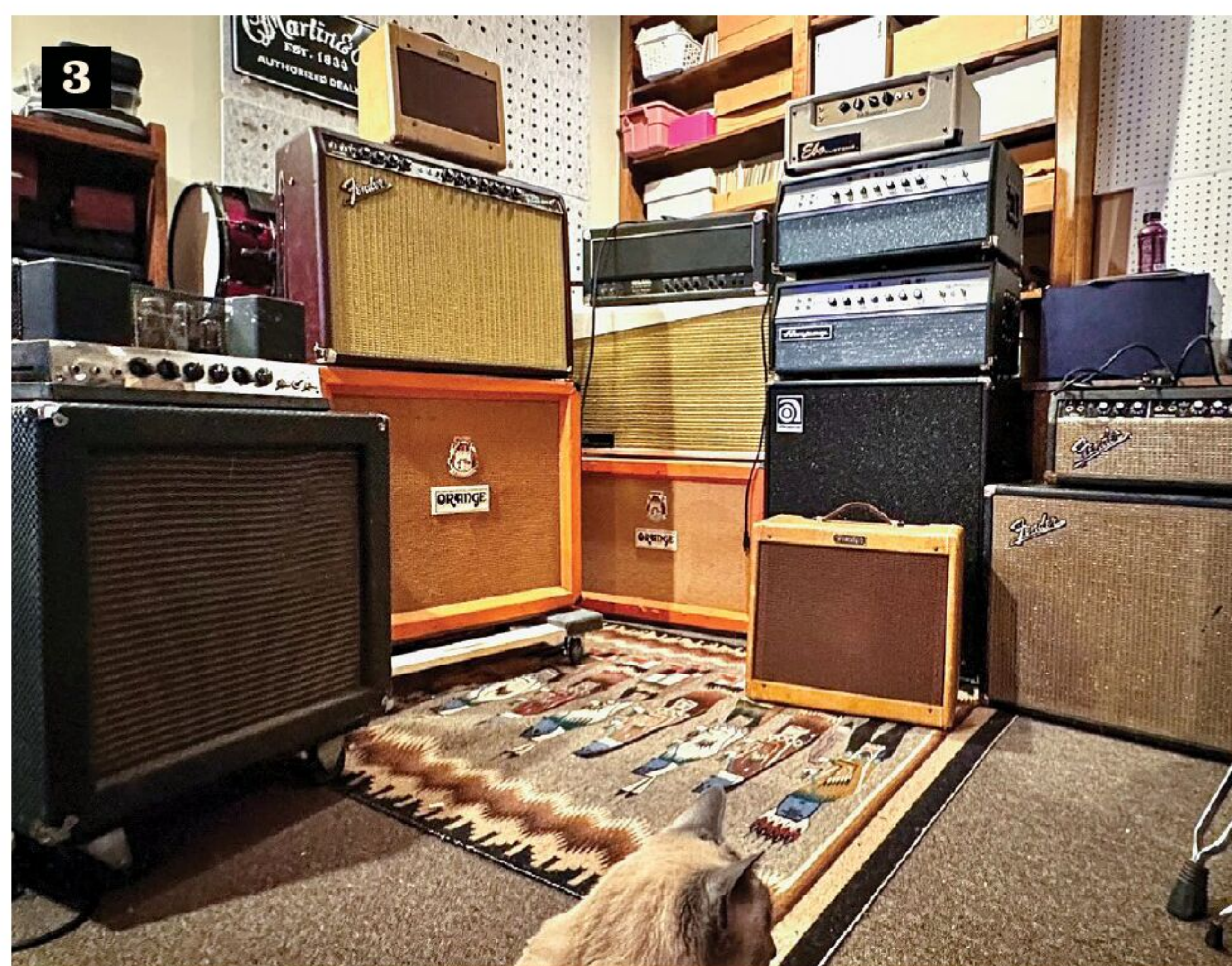
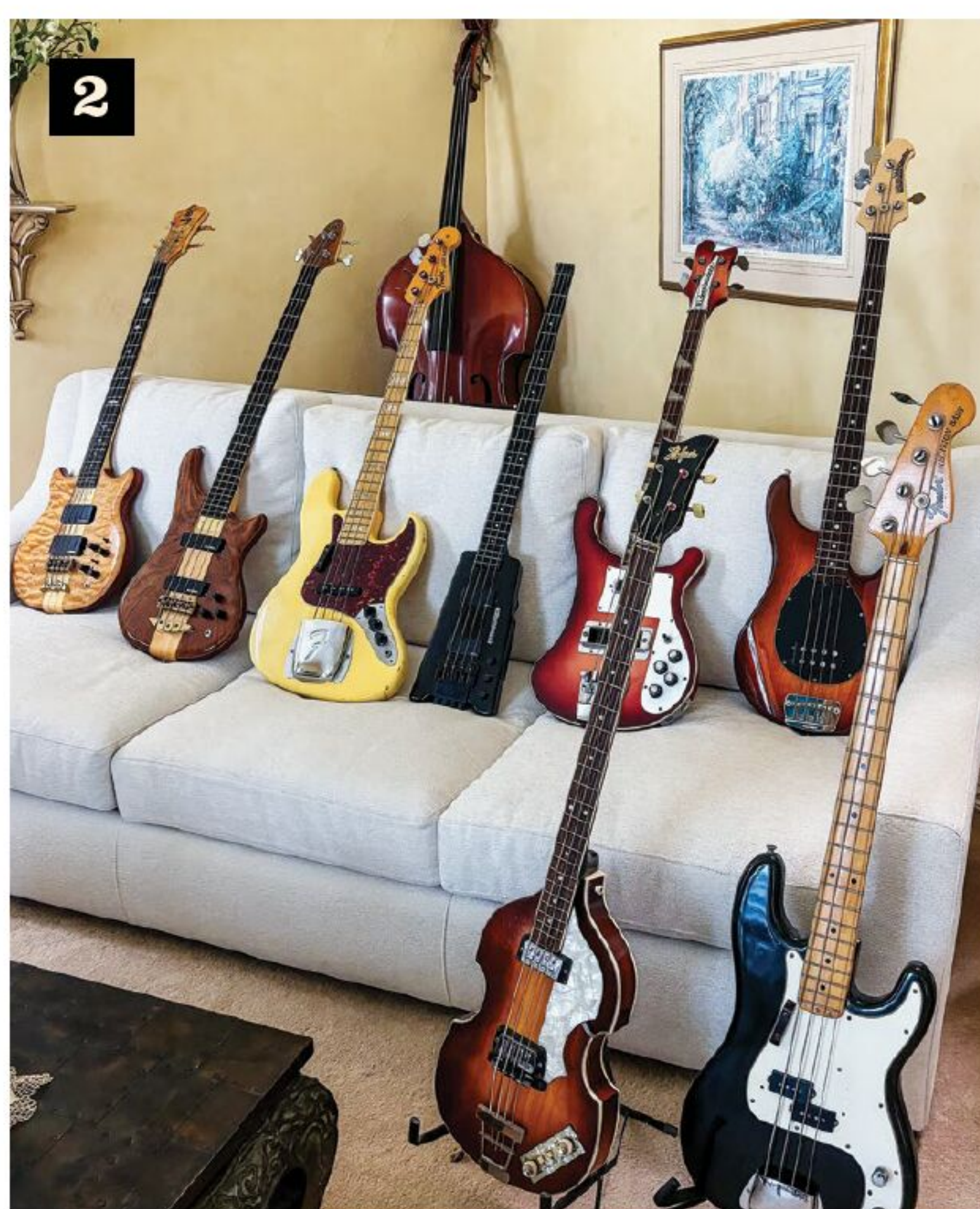
02 Long time subscriber Bob Moreland is striving to (eh hem) cover all the basses. So far, he has (from left) an Alembic Stanley Clarke Signature, Alembic Elan, '73 Fender Jazz in Olympic White, '84 Stenberger XL, '76 Rickenbacker 4001, Music Man Sterling, '64 Höfner 5001 "Beatle Bass," and a '74 Precision. Hiding in back is a double bass made in Germany.

03 August George's impressive wall of amps includes (from left) a '65 Ampeg B-15, Fender Twin (with oxblood grille), '70s Orange OR80 combo, Sovtek Mig 100, Ebo Fat Bastard cab and head, Orange cab, 50th Anniversary Ampeg SL Classic, Ampeg SVT-RV and Heritage 4x10 cab, '57 Fender Princeton, a '65 Bassman head and cab, and a '50s Champ 600.

04 Always prepared for a breakout of stadium rock, Larry Carter keeps his Flying V and Firebird ready to rip alongside a Marshall DSL 40 combo and vintage Sound City 120 head he runs through the Marshall 4x12.

05 Don Thomas' Les Paul-centric collection includes this 2013 LPJ and four Epiphones – a '21 Lazarus, '24 Greeny, '24 Custom, and a '17 Mary Ford.

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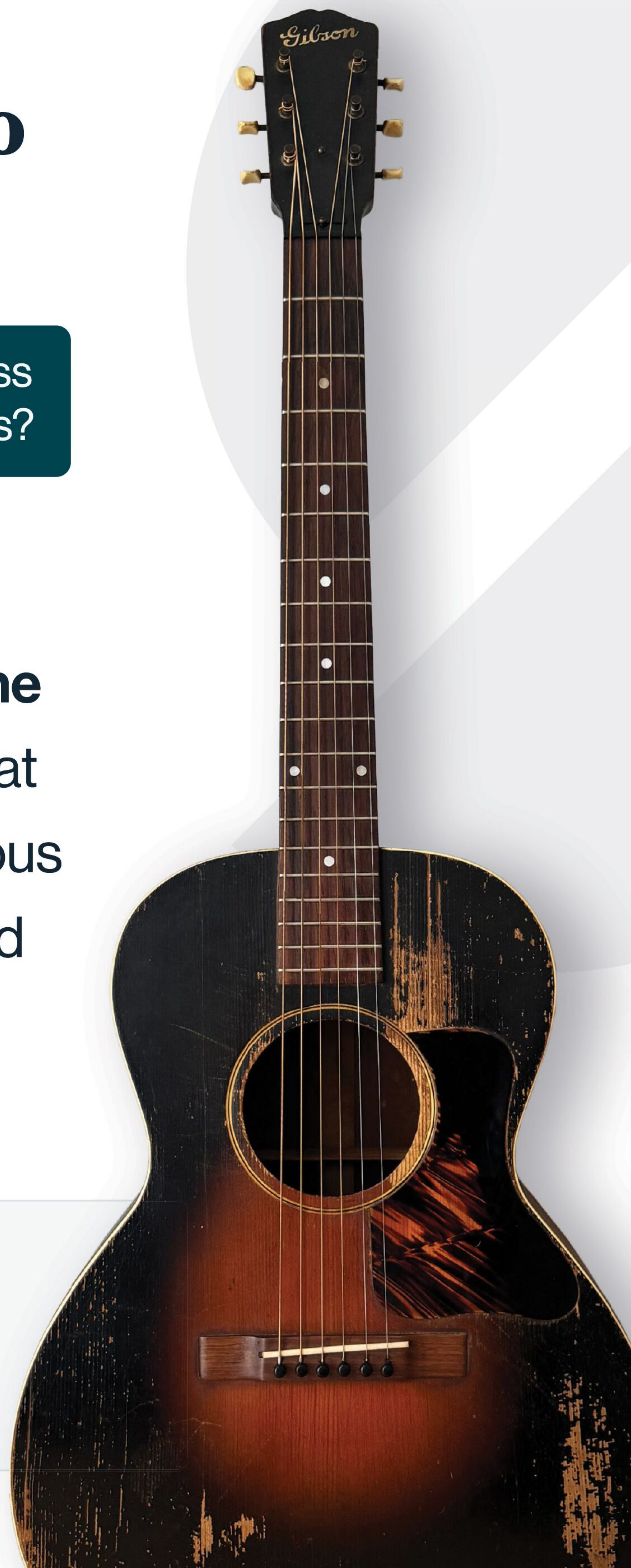
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