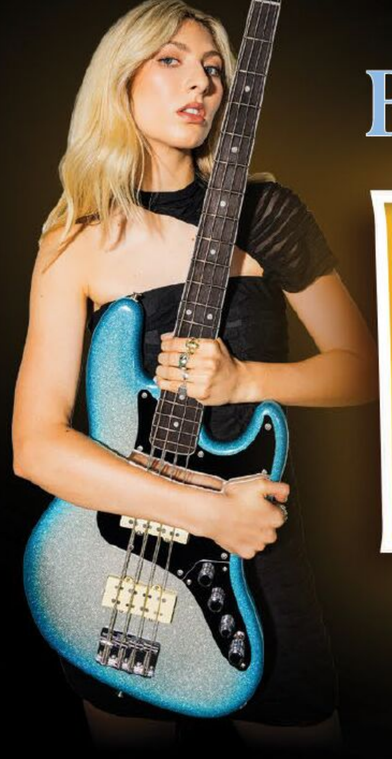

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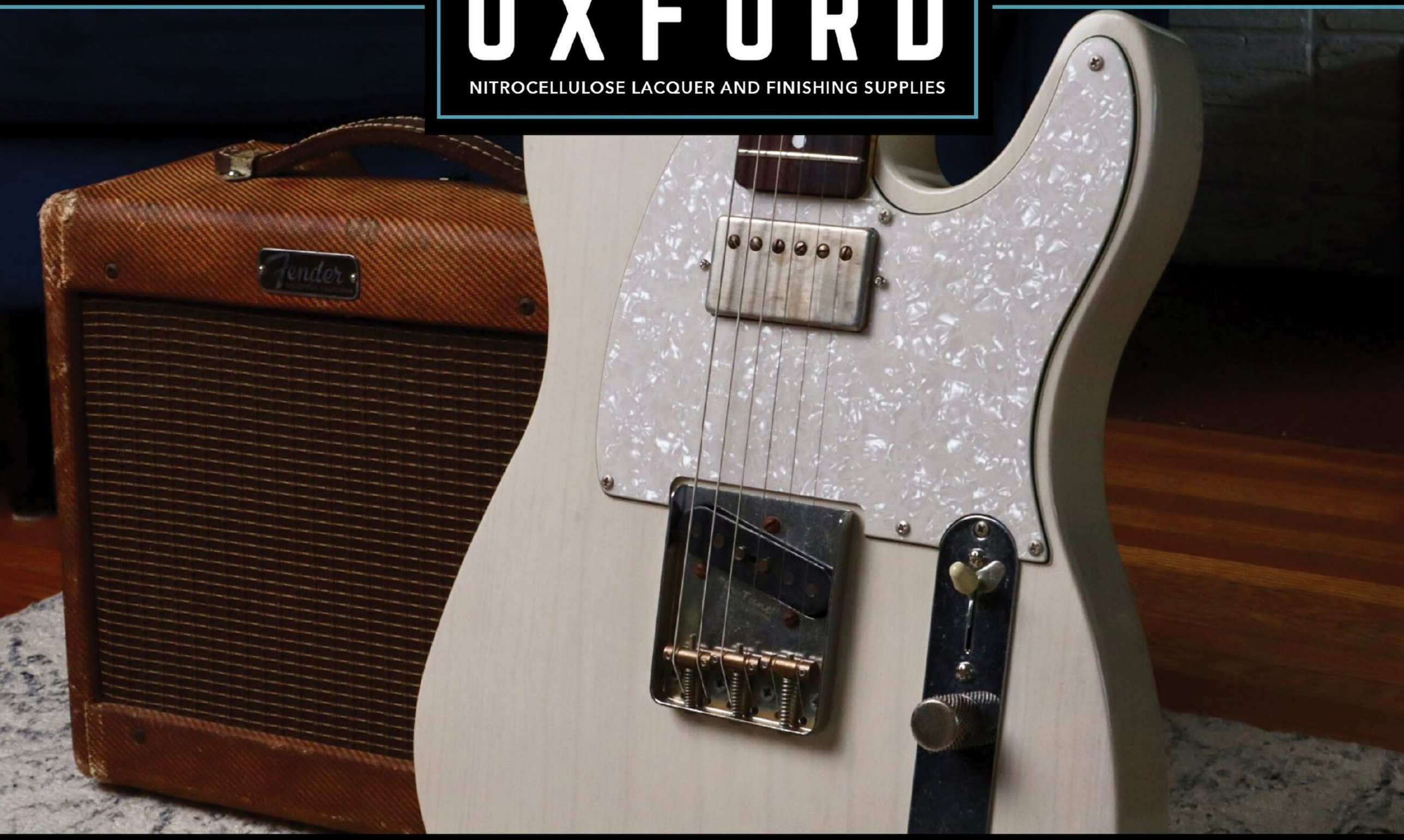

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Making music that bridges the gap between pop and jazz helped him sell millions of albums. His latest brings a new phase as he prepares to host a retreat where everyday players rub elbows with world-class musicians. He's also set to sell some of his most-cherished guitars. | *By Oscar Jordan*

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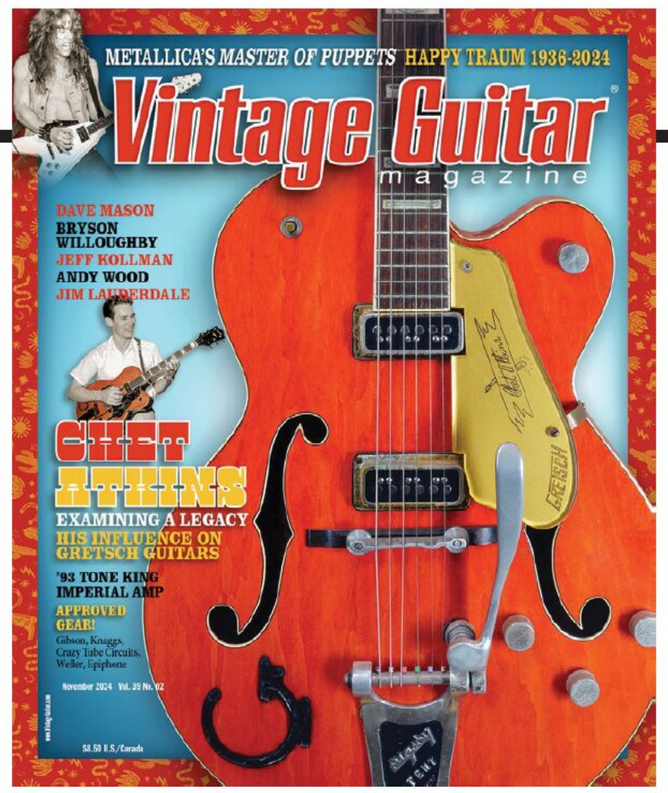

PARALEGAL PAUL

When I saw the photo of Paul Oscher ("Check This Action: The Blues Will Set You Free") in the October issue, I did a double take. Could that be Paul the paralegal I worked with at the Kings County District Attorney's Office from 1990 to '95? Yes, it was.

I remember Paul as a very friendly, polite, and humble person, but when I read that he played with Muddy Waters, it was his humble side that really came back to me. I remember him telling us that he played in a blues band called Brooklyn Slim, but he said it very matter-of-factly, as if he were simply sitting in with friends. I went to see him with his band at a bar once and I was very impressed, but since I wasn't a big fan of blues back then and hadn't begun to seriously play guitar, I didn't appreciate the music as much as I should have.

Now, I find out through *VG* that he was an accomplished musician who played harp with one of the greatest blues legends of all time. It makes me wish I'd sat and talked to him about music. Can you imagine the stories he could tell? His humble side probably never would have allowed it.

I found it honorable that he played a set at the Manhattan House of Detention, but I bet he never told the audience that he worked at the DA's office!

Thanks for uncovering a blues virtuoso who went undercover before me for five years. I will always remember Paul as a kind person who had every right to carry an ego considering his musical resumé, but always let his humble side shine brightly. Hopefully, Brooklyn Slim is back with Muddy, wailing away on his harp right now.

Joe Verga
Middletown, New Jersey

MC ID

Do you know the make and model of the guitar Mike Campbell is holding in the picture on Page 20 in the October issue?

Ed Shaw
Albany, New York

(Ed. Note: Thanks for reminding us that, even in short features, captions are sometimes a necessity. Anyway, that's a refinished mid-'60s Supro Super Seven and the amp is a late-'30s/'40s Epiphone Electar.)

END OF AN ERA...

That's what *Guitar Player* called its final print issue. Maybe for them, but not me. I had a hard time reading their small, light-gray font anyway. And, unlike *VG*, I only read about half of each issue. Granted, I'm old, but I spend a lot of money on guitar gear and read each and every ad in *VG*, usually twice. That won't be the case with *GP* online, where ads are more a nuisance while print ads double as content.

I hope *VG* is going to stay in print. I don't know what the ratio of ad revenue to subscription revenue is, but I'd be willing to pay a few more bucks a year to keep *VG* in print. Yours is a great guitar magazine – please keep it up!

Fred Rogan
Birmingham, Alabama

VG, POMPOUS-FREE

I really enjoy *Vintage Guitar* – the instrument profiles, lesser-known gear, and the interviews. I have been introduced to many musicians (new and old) and my Apple Music playlist has seriously grown since I became a subscriber! I like the questions asked by the interviewers, as they give a perspective about how an artist started, their influences, and (definitely!) their gear. Guitar and amp reviews are my favorites, and while there are so many pedals out there that it's hard to understand what differentiates one from another, it's still interesting to read about them.

Geoffrey Day
Berwick, Maine

I really love *VG*'s stories on musicians using gear that wouldn't normally be associated with them or a song, like a Danelectro and a Fender five-watt Champ or other similar gear.

Michael J. Vicchiarelli
Eastport, New York

I love *VG*. The interviews are great, "Hit List" is always fun in suggesting new music, and I agree with Pete Prown: Why isn't Chris Cain the best-known blues guitarist in America? I also love seeing all those beautiful instruments!

Curtis Dreiling
Lyons, Colorado

Vintage Guitar is a throwback to a long-gone era of periodicals written by experts and devotees (as opposed to pompous internet opinion-heads), and hits the mark with both journeymen and aspiring musicians. Great stuff – keep it up!

Jack Schultz
Benton, Kentucky

LOS LONELY FAN

I enjoyed the interview with Henry Garza (September '24). I was vaguely familiar with his band and now I'm exploring their music because of their influences. It's not the first time a *VG* feature or review has steered me to something new.

Also, thank you for including my bass in the October "VG Q&A" column. Of the three possibilities mentioned in Walter Carter's reply, a leftover '60s body makes the most sense. I know it was purchased new as-is, and has not been refinished. It doesn't have the original pots, but *does* have what I believe are the original pickups.

Walter's speculation about the tone of the bass is spot-on – it has darker/warmer tone, a little less snappy than a normal Precision. It's good for Americana stuff – country, blues, and rockabilly – with a good low grind.

I used to have subscriptions to three or four guitar magazines, but over the past several years I let all of them lapse except for *VG*.

The date codes on the pickups from Roger Hill's Precision Bass.

Roger Hill
Macon, Georgia

(Ed. Note: We circled back with Walter about your pickups, and he tells us, "Fender started using grey-bottom pickups in 1964. Their codes – especially the four-digit – are inconsistent, but could date both to the 46th week of 1970, which would be consistent with the 1971 neck date.")

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Vintage Guitar, Inc., PO Box 7301, Bismarck, ND 58507
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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 Kienzle, 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
Wanda Huether, Ram Tuli, Greg Martin, Ray Cummins, Andrew Hendryx, James Patrick Regan, Tyler Morris, Karl Markgraf

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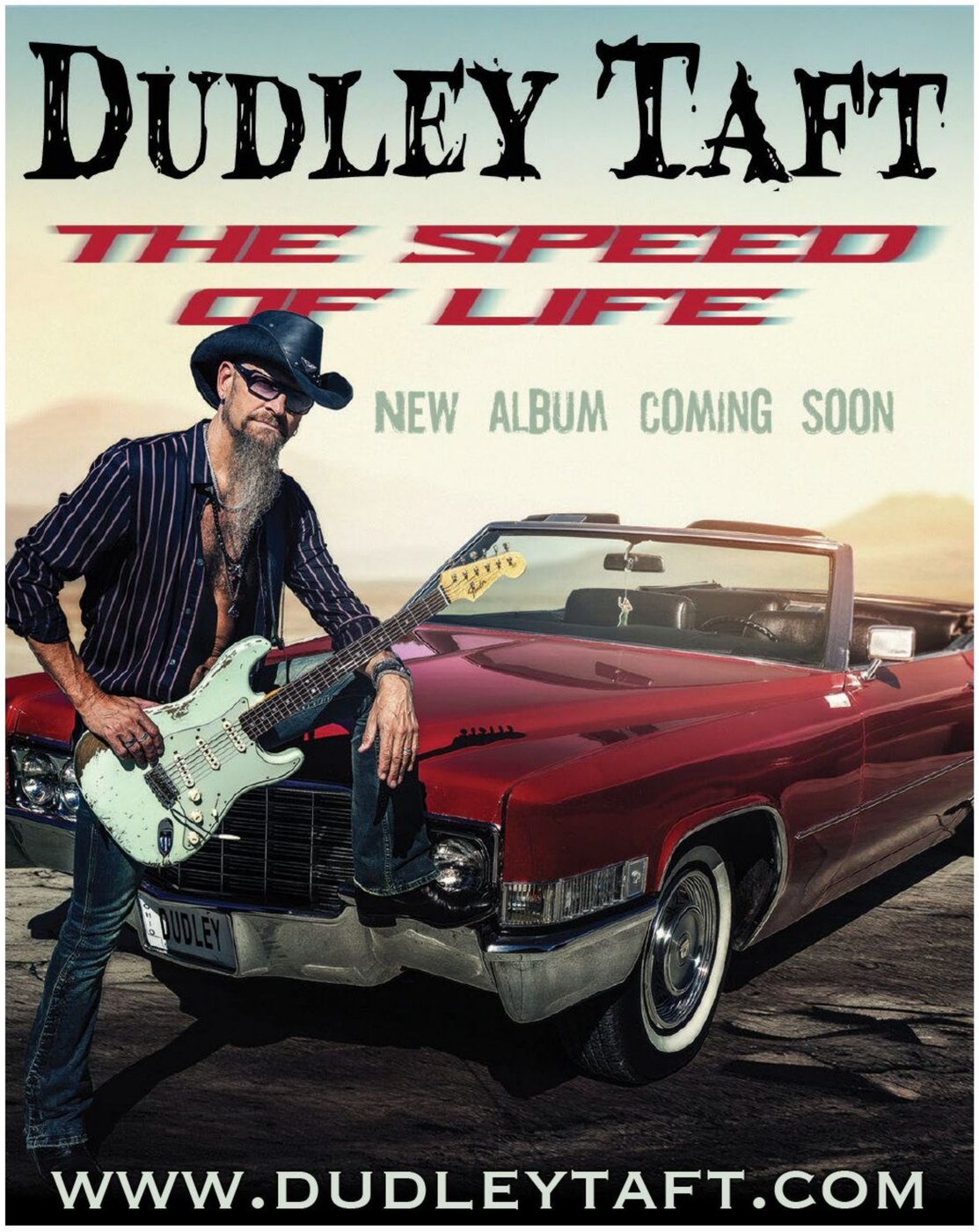

FIRST FRET

Jennifer Batten

BATTEN TO CO-HOST SHE ROCKS AWARDS

Jennifer Batten and violinist/artist Lindsey Stirling will co-host the next She Rocks Awards, January 25 in Anaheim. Presented by the Women's International Music Network (WiMN), this will be 13th annual staging of the event.

Batten is renowned for her ground-breaking work beginning in the 1980s, touring the world as part of Michael Jackson's band for 10 years and with Jeff Beck for three years. She has recorded three solo albums and continues to influence players with her instructional DVDs and master classes. Stirling has won two Billboard Music Awards and has 13.7 million subscribers to her Youtube channel. Learn more at sherocksawards.com.

NEIL YOUNG HEADLINES HARVEST MOON BENEFIT

Singer/songwriter Neil Young headlined a concert that raised funds for The Painted Turtle Camp and the Bridge School, October 5 in Lake Hughes, California.

Set against a backdrop of The Painted Turtle camp, the daytime concert also featured Stephen Stills, John Mayer, Lily Meola, and Masanga. The Painted Turtle Camp provides a no-cost camp experience to children with medical conditions. The Bridge School offers educational services to children with severe speech and physical disabilities.

RICHIE KOTZEN

Venn Master

If a Venn diagram reveals a surprising truth between overlapping concepts, Richie Kotzen is the Venn core of heavy rock, fusion, and soul-funk guitar. This multiple-threat instrumentalist plays almost all the instruments on Nomad, including drums, delivering a tour-de-force of rockin' funky jams. With strong writing, the album also showcases Kotzen's powerhouse voice and guitar work that ranges from sweet jazz to

Jennifer Batten: Kyle Mannoia/Audix. Ritchie Kotzen: Juergen Spachmann.

face-melting shred. Let's catch up with the Venn master and analyze his uncanny platter.

Funk, heavy rock guitar, and jazz-fusion aren't supposed to exist in the same song, but you do that naturally on "Insomnia."

I grew up listening to a lot of R&B, from Parliament/Funkadelic to Stevie Wonder. Stevie was my first concert, then I saw George Benson, so that's the root of my influence. After that, I got into heavier rock, and Kiss would be the first rock band that caught my attention, immediately followed by Iron Maiden. So, by the nature of what I was exposed to, my influences are in that wheelhouse.

The opener, "Cheap Shots," is reminiscent of a smokin' Kiss rocker.

Again, Kiss was a big reason why I got into rock and roll. My father made a Gene Simmons suit that I would parade around in through the house, so it's surreal as an adult musician to have met the band and be on friendly terms with those guys. It's very cool and something that I'm very happy about – I've always loved Kiss.

Your solo on "These Doors" starts with jazz over R&B lines – and then freaks out.

I like the way you describe that it "freaks out" because it *does* go berserk (laughs). I have a Leslie rotating-speaker simulator made by Tech 21 that lives in my RK5 FlyRig; anyone who purchases that Fly Rig can get that exact sound. It's the rotating speaker at full speed, and it gives you that wacky modulation effect.

Do you come up with any preconceived ideas for guitar solos?

I push "Record" and let it rip. My attitude is, "Let's see what happens," because that's the best of both worlds. You've got true inspiration happening in the moment, then if you decide to amend a solo you played as part of an improvisation, you compose a new guitar part.

Which pedals and amps did you use on *Nomad* – or did you record with software?

I would not be caught dead using software on guitar – I don't like the way it sounds. The amplifier on most of the recording is a Marshall Handwired 1959 100-watt head. If it's not that, it's a Fender Vibro-King. Sometimes, I plugged direct into an API mic preamp with an Anthony DeMaria Labs compressor for clean sounds. As far as pedals, mostly that RotoVibe-type setting in the Tech 21 Fly Rig.

What about guitars?

Most of what you're hearing is my signature Telecaster and signature Stratocaster. Occasionally, I use a Yamaha hollowbody that looks very much like a Gretsch; I've had that guitar for a very long time and you can hear it on the rhythm to "Cheap Shots."

"Nihilist" is a cool piece of vocal and guitar fusion that works great to close the album.

The funny thing is that "Nihilist" is the first song I wrote, and for me it's the most important song on the record. It's a true representation of me as a solo artist because it covers so much ground in one composition.

You've been recording and touring for 35 years, almost nonstop. Are you a musical workaholic?

I do love the creative process. When I have an idea and it comes out in the form of the finished song, that's absolutely my favorite part of all this. I'm aware that the impression on the outside is that I'm always working, the truth is I'm not; in fact, I was recently talking to someone about the extraordinary amount of time that passes when I don't touch a musical instrument. After the Winery Dogs tour ended in 2023, I didn't play for three months. Then I went on the Monsters of Rock cruise and did a show; it was exciting because I was on one hand worried about whether I was going to be able to play, but on the other hand, everything felt new again. Even though I'm not always active, I think that's what propels me moving forward. This way, I can put out a record and still get excited about new music. ***– Pete Prown***

IN MEMORIAM

FREDDIE SALEM

Freddie Salem, who joined The Outlaws as they were rising to headliner status in 1978, died September 23 from complications of cancer. He was 70.

Born in Akron, Ohio, Salem played in local bands while growing up and later became a session guitarist in Los Angeles studios, including playing acoustic guitar on a Barbra Streisand album. Replacing rhythm guitarist Henry Paul in The Outlaws, Salem brought a harder-rocking attitude to the group and became a third lead player, wailing next to original members Hughie Thomasson and Billy Jones when he debuted on the tour that spawned the double-live LP, *Bring It Back Alive*. The definitive portrait of the Florida Guitar Army, sadly, all three have now passed.

In 2021, Salem told *VG*, "Hughie and Billy wanted to push the envelope, and I brought a heavier edge to the group. I first met [them] in Los Angeles and we stayed in touch; about a year later they invited me to Tampa to jam. I didn't realize they were thinking of me as a new member until my arrival. We rehearsed for a week or so, hit the road, and my first gig was at Boston Garden."

Salem played on The Outlaws' radio track "You Are the Show" and their 1980 hit "Ghost Riders in the Sky," a cover of the Stan Jones 1948 cowboy classic. For gear, you rarely saw him without a Les Paul, including a refin tobacco-sunburst Standard, and white '74 Custom.

Discussing his youth in Ohio, he once told the *Akron Beacon Journal*, "Those were good times. I learned an awful lot at the Lion's Den [club]. Guys like Buddy Miles and Rick Derringer used to sit in on some of those after-hours, all-night sessions. I loved it." ***– Pete Prown***

Freddie Salem

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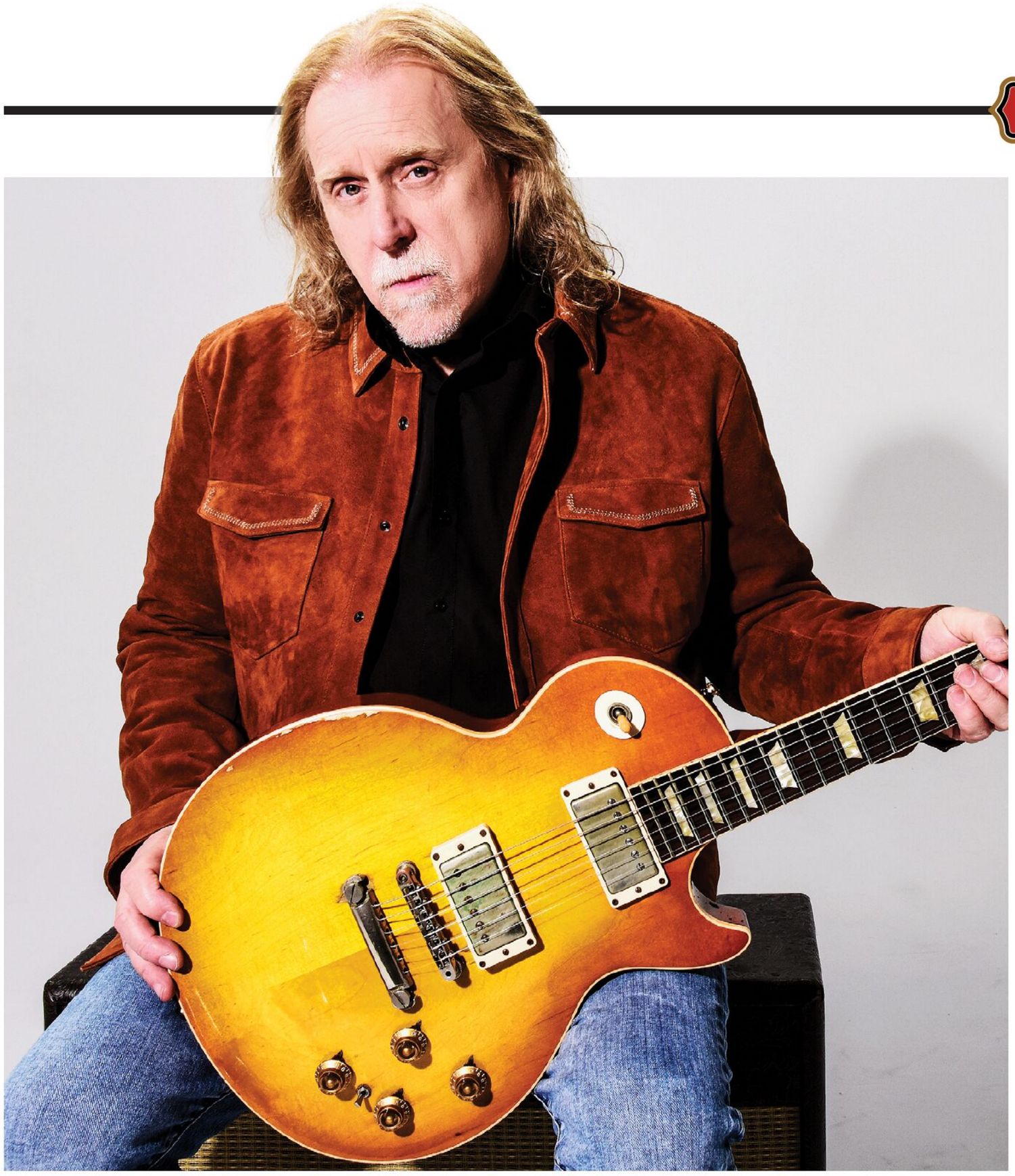

WARREN HAYNES

Better Music Through Chemistry

Warren Haynes' first solo record in nearly a decade brings themes of optimism, uplift, and hope with Haynes at the top of his artistic game, performing with a stellar ensemble. Guests include the incredible Derek Trucks and John Medeski, but the songs are the stars of *Million Voices Whisper*.

Keyboardist John Medeski and you share a melodic chemistry on the new album.

We've known each other for decades. The first time I sat in with Medeski, Martin & Wood was about 30 years ago, but for the last four or five years we've been playing together a lot, especially on The Last Waltz tours. We spent a lot of time on the bus, talking about things we could do.

I was really excited that John was able to be a part of this record. His personality is very much felt, as is everyone's. This was the first time the four of us – myself, Kevin Scott, Terrence Higgins, and John – played together. I'd played with Terrence, I'd played with Kevin, and I'd played with John, and we all knew it was going to be cool, but once we got into the studio, it exceeded our expectations. The chemistry quickly turned into this cool band where everybody's personality was ever-present, but here was also a *group* personality. That's what you strive and hope for, and was the case from the beginning. I'm very happy about that.

Having Derek Trucks weave in and out is the icing on the cake.

I was really glad that Derek was able to be a part of it, as well.

Why another solo record?

It's been over nine years since my last solo record, so I think it was overdue. Usually, the impetus for a solo record for me is if I'm writing a bunch of songs that seem to fit together but don't seem like Gov't Mule songs. Most of these songs are new within the last two or three years, but a couple go back to the Covid lockdown, so that's when the process started. I was writing so much during that time, but most of those turned out to be Gov't Mule songs. A couple that appear here, like "From Here On Out" and "Day of Reckoning," go that far back. The rest of the stuff is virtually brand new.

How did the record come together thematically?

It changed shape as we were making it because I went in thinking most of the songs were taking on a Muscle Shoals vibe that was somewhere between *Man in Motion* and *Ashes & Dust*. The more I continued writing, the more the soul side seemed to prevail, and it wound up going in that direction, which was cool. There's a jazz and funk influence, but I like the fact that all the songs are different but feel connected.

It seems to have come together organically rather than you imposing a concept.

I went in with some sort of vision of how it was going to sound. Some songs matched that vision, and some changed drastically – rightly so. I love opening the music to wherever it's going to go in the studio. Especially when working with wonderful musicians, it's always best to see everybody's interpretation of something before you lay out your own vision of it. In a lot of cases, being open to where the songs went caused them to change complexion a little bit. We were taking it where the moment led.

And lyrically?

Most of the songs are tied together, lyrically, by this overview of pursuing the future through a lens of positivity. It's embracing the things in life that are most important.

Have you picked up any new guitars?

I got this new Paul Reed Smith prototype I've been playing for about a week. It's very interesting. I'm also working on a few prototypes with Gibson; we're working on a signature Les Paul with P-90 pickups and a signature Firebird with three P-90s. Both are a little different for me. I'm more accustomed to humbuckers, but I love the way P-90s sound, so I'm also pursuing that a little more these days.

What's happening next at your day job?

2025 is Gov't Mule's 30th anniversary. We'll be playing a lot of cool stuff on stage and releasing recordings from the vault. We've been looking at all this unreleased studio and live stuff. Next year is going to be really exciting. ***– Oscar Jordan***

Warren Haynes: Shervin Lainez.

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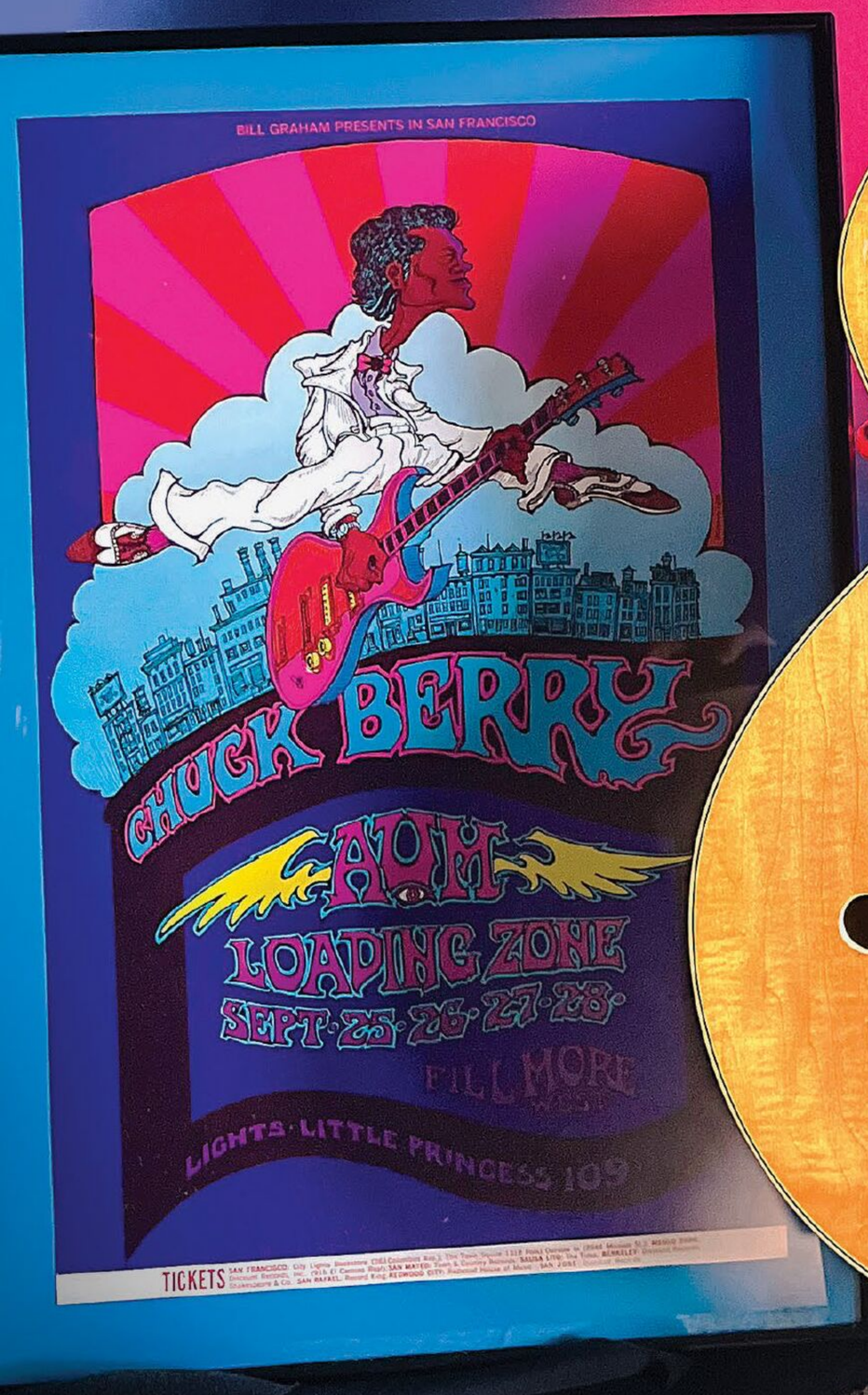

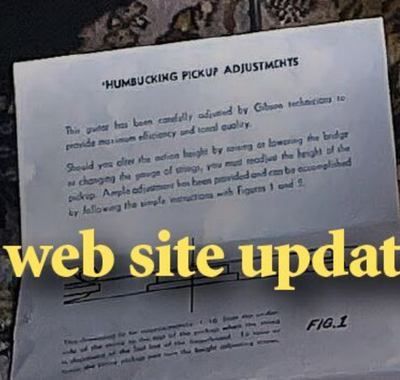

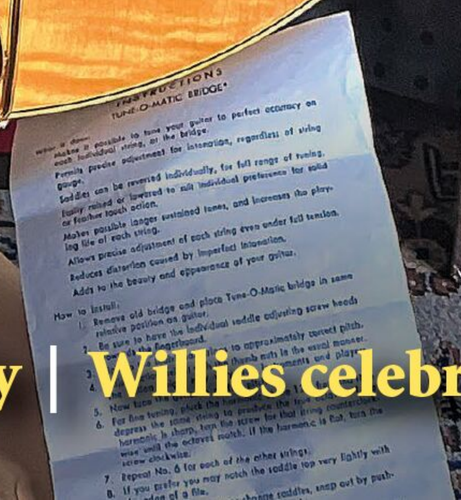

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BLU DeTIGER

Funk-Pop Pioneer

When she was seven years old, sibling rivalry spurred Blu DeTiger to get a bass so she could play along with her brother on his new drum kit. After honing her skills for a few years at School of Rock, taking lessons, and playing in high-school bands, she also became a DJ on the New York electronic dance music (EDM) scene, setting herself apart by plugging in her bass to jam along.

In 2017, DeTiger began releasing original music, using social media to spread the word about her funky, bass-driven songs that fit a wave of disco-influenced pop. Emblematic of how the business works in the 21st century, her following (including 1.4 million on TikTok) garnered attention from Fender, which recently launched a signature Jazz Bass that sets a precedent while bringing an array of cool elements (see this month's "Approved Gear").

You got into playing because your older brother, Rex, started playing drums when he was 10. How did you land on bass?

I wanted to try playing *something* and there are always a lot of people playing guitar, so I wanted to be different. I tried bass and fell in love with it.

What was your first?

A short-scale Gretsch, which was really cool. From there, I got a Fender Mustang, then a reissue Precision and a Rickenbacker. I did the rounds before I landed on the Jazz Bass as my go-to.

What sort of music were you into when you started?

Classic rock like Zeppelin, the Beatles, and Rolling Stones. From there I got into Bowie. Growing up in New York, I was always around cool music and that energy.

Did bass come easy to you?

It did *not* (laughs). I wasn't naturally gifted; I had to really put in the work the first few years. Being so young and the bass being a giant, heavy instrument, the physicality of it took a while to get down. My hands were small and I had to build muscle memory. That took a while, as did training my ear.

What led to your playing funk?

I started getting into that music; I did Victor Wooten's bass camp at Berkeley, and I did Grammy Camp. By then, I was fully focused on getting better. That's when I started learning to slap.

Were there certain slap parts that you really dug into?

"Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" was a big one, and "Hair" – I was in awe of all of Larry Graham's stuff. I remember thinking, "That's the coolest sound a bass can make!" "Glide," by a band called Pleasure, has an insane bass line.

In high school, you started getting gigs as a DJ.

Yeah, on the cusp of the EDM craze, one of Rex's friends was throwing a bunch of parties in New York and the guy told me, "You have to meet my friend. He's teaching people how to DJ. It's gonna be a big thing and you should learn." I thought, "You know what? That sounds really sick." I grew up hearing house music and stuff my parents played, and my dad had turntables at home. So, I got into it and started getting gigs. I'd bring my bass so I could play over songs.

When did you start writing?

Once I was in band settings. I had a band in high school and we'd write songs together in the room. I didn't start writing my own until I was 18 or 19, when I was recording and singing. I never really got into singing, but I realized that if I wanted to put out my own music, I'd need to sing.

How did you decide on the neck shape for your new signature Jazz Bass?

I did a lot of research and had help from Jerry Barnes, who plays for Nile Rogers and Chic. He has a huge collection of vintage basses – different styles including a lot of Fenders and other brands. I went to his studio and tried a bunch until I was like, "Okay, this neck shape is what I like the best." The signature model is more based on a Custom Shop Jazz we did a few years ago with the same finish.

What inspired the finish?

Aesthetically, I wanted something that fit my brand and my vibe. The blue sparkle came from wanting something that was different and unique. I like instruments that can stand alone as a piece of art – things that are beautiful to look at. And because performing is my favorite thing in the world, I like instruments that stand out onstage. My name being Blu, I *had* to have blue (chuckles), and we did a bunch of color swatches for the sparkles to make it right; the first iteration was too sparkly, so we went back.

What were you going for tone-wise?

I love the Bernard Edwards late-'70s funk sound. We discussed ways to get that, and they thought it could be cool to try the humbucker and active preamp, to keep it from losing mid-range or low-end because of the chambering. When they sent the first prototype, I loved it. We made a few tweaks to the bridge and some other things, aesthetically, and with the second prototype I was like, "This is perfect! It's getting every sound I want." ***– Ward Meeker***

To read an extended version of this interview, go to vintageguitar.com.

Jesse Ed Davis

Photo Courtesy of the Patti Daley Collection.

DOUGLAS K. MILLER

Revealing Jesse Ed Davis

Jesse Ed Davis was an unsung guitar hero – unless you were a legend like Eric Clapton, John Lennon, George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart, Conway Twitty, Taj Mahal, Jackson Browne, and countless others who played with him and revered his talent. The Oklahoma-born Davis became an L.A. session wizard who released three solo albums in the early 1970s. In '88, he died of a heroin overdose at age 43.

Douglas K. Miller, a former touring musician and current professor of Native American history, has written an engrossing biography, *Washita Love Child: The Rise of Indigenous Rock Star Jesse Ed Davis*.

You say this biography takes a "cultural narrative" approach. What do you mean?

I feel like I've got to tell everybody, "Don't skip the opening chapters." I've been guilty of that: "Just get to the part where they're making my favorite album and talking about the guitar they played!" I tried to explicitly say, "This is where Jesse comes from." Of course, everybody comes from their family and their ancestry and their geographic place. But you cannot understand Jesse Ed Davis without understanding what his parents experienced.

Davis always seemed on the cusp of widespread fame.

Even at his highest point, when he was playing with George Harrison and John Lennon, he's not a household name. The music intelligentsia knows who he is. Music fans probably know him from Taj Mahal records or some other affiliation. From the '80s up to the present, or at least the last few years, it's guitar aficionados who kept his legacy alive. If I talk to a guitar player, they know him as a Telecaster player.

With Jesse's story, there are a few examples where he just misses the moment or he's on the right path, then it falls apart. Often, it's through no fault of his own, though occasionally it's totally his fault. He joined the Faces for an arena and stadium tour early in summer '75 and by December they'd broken up. That had nothing to do with him.

He wanted fame and success, but when he'd achieve a taste of it, he almost seemed embarrassed.

Later in his too-short life, he would say to friends that he was disappointed that he didn't really get his due. And from what I've come to understand, not so much in an arrogant "I'm an incredible guitar player" way as much as just that he knew that he was good, he did a lot of work, and he *did* play with Bob Dylan, John Lennon, George Harrison, and Leon Russell. He might have attributed that to his own failings or his own illness with drug addiction.

He felt that he had achieved something that hadn't quite been appreciated. He wasn't a real showman – he didn't carry on with long, self-indulgent solos. He didn't use a lot of effects. He really played for the song. I think he understood that was what people wanted from him.

He was a sensitive player and a deeply sensitive person. There's also modesty. And then there's his Native American culture and upbringing. Among a lot of Native people, being loud and boisterous is not a virtue. Talking about yourself at length and flashing your talent isn't a virtue. He experienced a lot of racism and resentment growing up that probably had a deep effect on his psyche. There were probably times he knew he was a great talent and was succeeding, but there were voices in his head saying, "You don't belong here."

Davis' friends and family – even ex-girlfriends and ex-wives – still loved him and looked after him even when his addiction caused bad behavior.

I've researched Jesse for five years. I wrote a big book about him. The first draft was almost 600 pages. I have an unhealthy amount of knowledge about Jesse Ed Davis. People I interviewed, from family to Taj Mahal and Jackson Browne, said I was teaching *them*. They were more interviewing *me*.

There was something about him that was really magnetic, really powerful. People would never give up on him, no matter how bad he burned them. There had to be something special about this person, just to be in his presence, to play music with him, to share a meal, tell jokes, walk along Venice Beach, whatever it was. This was a powerful person who had a big effect on people.

You're also involved in other upcoming Davis projects.

I co-produced *Tomorrow May Not Be Your Day*, a new two-LP collection of 17 previously unreleased songs from 1970-'71. I'm also co-curating "Jesse Ed Davis: Natural Anthem," an exhibit at the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa.

– Bret Adams

KHALIF WAILIN' WALTER

DIY Blues

Blues guitarist Khalif Wailin' Walter now makes his home in Essen, Germany, but the sound that emanates from his fretboard is pure Chicago. Born in the Windy City, Walter keeps the blues alive in the old country while pushing the genre forward. On *Phoenix Risin'*, the blues veteran pays homage to earlier blues styles of Texas and Chicago and does it with originality and soul. Also noteworthy is that he produced, recorded, mixed, and played most of the instruments.

***Phoenix Risin'* feels like an homage to the blues of the 1950s and '60s.**

I was really into Albert Collins and his band's sound. But I'm an independent artist, so everything is up to me. Nowadays, you can't just be a guitar player. You have to have other skills, so I studied engineering and recorded everything myself including guitars, vocals, and bass. I love this stuff. I reached out to a few producers, and interestingly enough, they responded and invited me to sit with them and learn. A few of these guys had worked with people like David Bowie and Slash, and they were more than willing to answer my questions. It was a real education. I love working with mics and plug-ins, mixing, and trying different guitar, amp, and pedal combinations. Some of the songs were older, and some I wrote specifically for *Phoenix Risin'*.

In what order did you record instruments?

When my drummer, Barry Wintergarden, got off tour, we went into the studio. It was just him on drums and me on bass. Some of the basic tracks also had drums and guitar with me singing. That was just a scratch vocal so Barry could hear the structure. I ended up using only one of the scratch vocals. We laid it down and fixed things here and there, then I brought in a horn section. I used Martin "Tinez" van Toor and Tommy Schneller for the sax parts, and Chris Rannenberg and Paul Jobson play piano and organ. It was very improvisational. I would hear lines, hum them, and they'd play what I sang. I love horns on blues records, and I love big-band music.

You lean into the older blues styles but with a more-modern guitar tone.

I used my Vox AC30 and a few different plug-ins like the Neural DSP Mesa Boogie Mark IIC, Nembrini Audio Faceman 2 head, and the Nembrini Overdrive Special. I found that plug-ins sound best when you stack them. My favorite – the one I used most – was the Mesa Boogie.

It's a vibrant tone, like using Santana's rig on a Texas shuffle from the '50s.

Yeah. I also used some Fender tweed plug-ins, my Vox, and a Crazy Tube Circuits Unobtanium pedal. One side sounds like a Dumble, the other like a Klon Centaur. I sometimes stack them live, but I only used one side on the album.

How about guitars?

I like to modify my guitars. I used different Strats and Teles where I upgraded the pickups – I put humbuckers in a Tele, so of course it has an entirely different sound. I love Lindy Fralin pickups, so I put a set of his single-coils in my Strat.

The guitar tone on "The Streets" is very intense.

That was my tribute to one of my favorite guitar players, Carl Weathersby. I sent that track to him and said, "This is me trying to do my best imitation of you." He replied in an e-mail, "Uh-huh." That was all he wrote (laughs).

What's the story behind "Chi-Town Soundcheck?"

I wrote that a while ago. It was supposed to be a jam between me, Toronzo Cannon, and Mike Wheeler. I wrote a head for it and we were all going to take solos in the middle. When I contacted Toronzo's label, they told me it wasn't going to happen. When I spoke to Toronzo, he laughed and said he knew nothing about it but would have loved to play on it. So, I put it out myself.

What's your advice for guitar players who want to record their own music?

Have a plan and know what you want to achieve before you begin the work. Also, don't be afraid to ask for help. You'd be surprised at the number of producers who would gladly answer questions. Guitar players can be stingy with knowledge or giving up secrets. Not so with producers and engineers.

What's next for you?

I want to come back to the States and perform, but until then I'll be touring Europe, including Austria. I'm already working on a new album that has a Tedeschi Trucks vibe. I'm mixing it now. ***– Oscar Jordan***

Khalif "Wailin" Walter: Robert Ducat.

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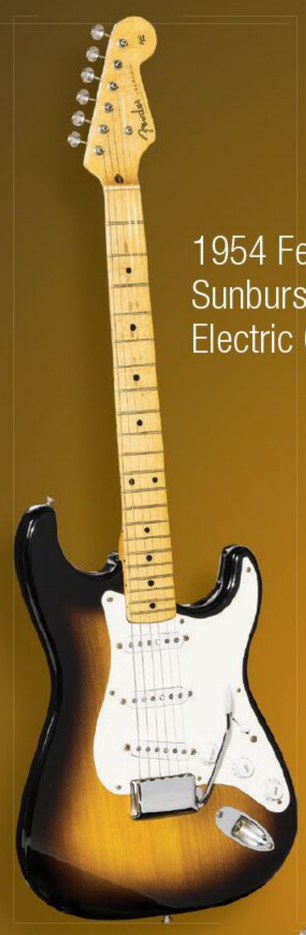

1954 Fender Stratocaster
Sunburst Solid Body
Electric Guitar

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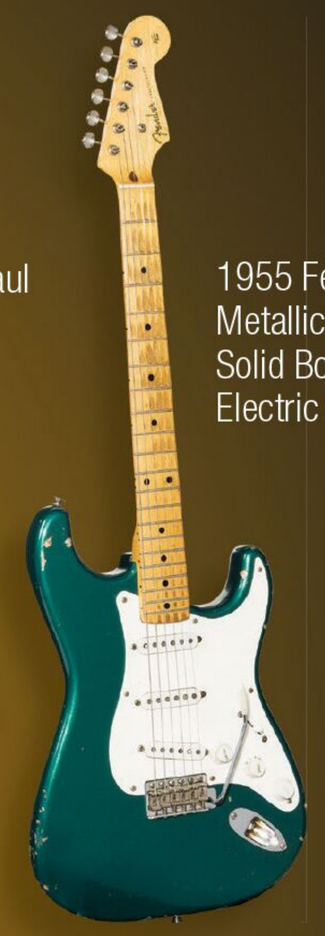
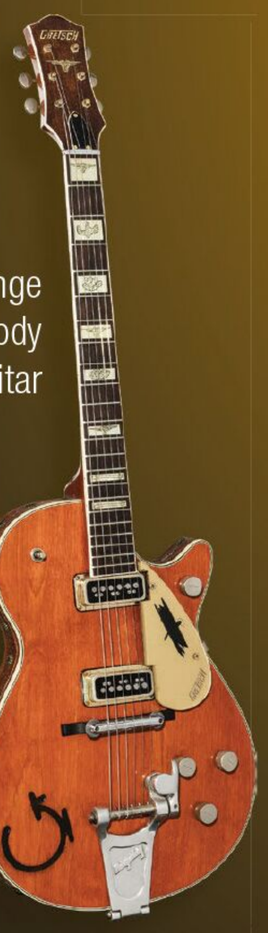


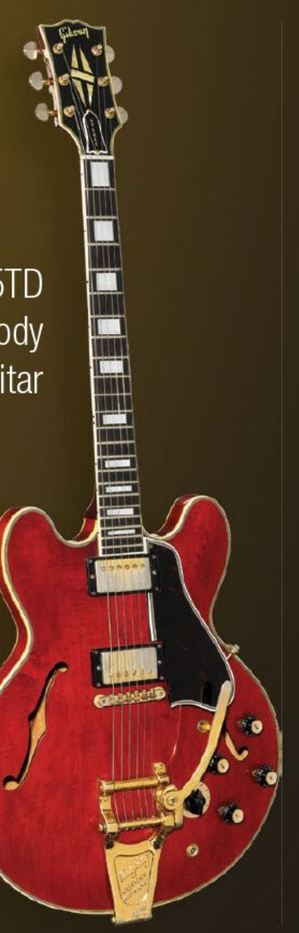
1955 Fender Stratocaster
Metallic Green
Solid Body
Electric Guitar



1955 Gretsch 6120 Orange
Semi-Hollow Body
Electric Guitar

1959 Fender Esquire
Blonde Solid Body
Electric Guitar

Tiny Moore's 1952 Bigsby
Electric Mandolin



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JERRON PAXTON

Country-Blues Scholar

Hailing from Los Angeles, Jerron Paxton is a remarkable bluesman, able to conjure sounds of the rural, interwar South through his voice and fingerstyle guitar, as well as banjo, harp, accordion, and piano. But don't fob him off as another Robert Johnson wannabe. Paxton is a scholar of country-blues and early jazz music, owing to his family's Louisiana roots and own experiences. All can be heard on his riveting Smithsonian album, *Things Done Changed*.

Country-blues music was a part of your upbringing. What attracted a young man to those sounds?

The natural beauty of the sound. My grandmother would play blues radio very loudly on Saturdays, and 98 percent of the music was electric blues. At the age of eight, I had learned enough that whenever I heard the eerie sounds of acoustic blues, I would run to record them off of the radio. Unlike the saturated popular sounds one is exposed to, country-blues was a direct line to my culture that I could hear as well as feel – unlike gangster rap or rock, which I don't ever remember hearing in my very black community.

The challenge of solo acoustic blues is that one musician is carrying all the parts – chords, bass line, and lead or slide jabs – as on "Things Done Changed."

As a musician who grew up without other people to play with, part of what attracted me is the ability of one person to sit with an instrument and create a world where nothing is missing. In the words of Fats Waller, "It's easy to do when you know how!" The "how" usually comes with practice and exposure. I've had plenty of both.

On "So Much Weed," you change up the thumb-bass lines and throw in those slide licks? What tuning are you in?

I tune the guitar in the way I feel best to play a certain song. "So Much Weed" is in Vestapol tuning, which is the primary tuning for guitar evangelists in my neighborhood. That changed with the generations, just as all church music in my community has changed from the sound of spirituals to a more popular-oriented sound with a large choir. In South Central L.A., you could still hear people who played like Blind Willie Johnson or Mississippi Fred McDowell, whose *Amazing Grace* album I'd listen to. Also, Sister O.M. Terrell, who lived until 2006.

Who were your primary guitar influences?

My primary influences were Bukka White, Scott Dunbar, Mississippi John Hurt, Blind Blake, Skip James, Robert Wilkins, Lonnie Johnson, Smith Casey, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Willie Brown, and Reverend Gary Davis.

"Mississippi Bottom" speaks to the ragtime sound of Piedmont blues, which is different from Delta and Texas blues. How did you develop a feel for all these different styles?

I don't really think of that as a ragtime tune. In rural black culture, playing a rag means going around the circle of fifths. Although there is a II chord in the song, there's also one in "Love In Vain" by Robert Johnson, which we certainly wouldn't call a rag. One develops a feel for different styles but doesn't get stuck in one. I wouldn't be much of a professional musician playing in one style for my [entire] set. For a true musician, the natural tendency is to explore and expand; only people who dabble stay in one style forever.

These are also sounds of my culture, and though there are slight regional differences, commonality between the cultures tends to be eroded by academic pursuits of regionalism.

What's your primary guitar?

I mainly play a Carson J. Robeson Kalamazoo by Gibson, and a Fraulini Felix. The big, booming Fraulini is best for accompanying other instruments while the Gibson is best for solo blues. When recording the title track, I was fortunate enough to switch between the two and found the Gibson made me better achieve the sound I was after.

Are some blues songs better suited to guitar than banjo, or vice-versa?

There are banjo songs and there are guitar songs. Certain songs exist for each respective instrument, but the nature of music is to experiment and see if things can be traded back and forth. The late Gus Cannon playing slide guitar on his banjo is an example.

What has been the reception to *Things Done Changed*?

The reception has been pretty good so far. Playing traditional music gives you a certain confidence. You play the song because you know it's good and made you feel a certain way, which you hope to share that with your audience. It's a little more intimidating when the songs are from your own pen and haven't been passed through the veil of time. ***– Pete Prown***

Jerron Paxton: Janette Beckman.

DON CULIG

Dream Finish

The Covid pandemic forced immeasurable change on humanity. Much of it involved temporary adaptation, but there were also plenty of new norms. And there's no shortage of people like Don Culig, who, after losing his, was given the opportunity to chase a dream.

Laid off in the summer of 2020, Culig pondered his options and decided to focus his energy on some element of the guitar-making process. But what, exactly?

"Finish work has always been my favorite part of the craft," he said. "And in Canada, we didn't have many options for good old-fashioned nitrocellulose lacquer."

To fill that gap, he started Oxford Guitar Supply in Windsor, Ontario. We asked him about the details.

Safe to say that from day one, you were giving your new company full-time effort?

From the get-go. With our first baby on the way, a mortgage, and my wife soon to be on maternity leave, I had just a few months to bring home the bacon. I respect anyone who can make a side-hustle work for them, but I've always had to throw myself into a project full-time.

What was your premise?

Our focus was specifically having the original custom colors, all available in nitrocellulose lacquer. Many colors, especially into the '60s, were an acrylic lacquer that was then top coated with nitro. We've formulated all our finishes in nitro, to best serve the instrument.

What were your first offerings?

We started with about 30 of the original Fender and Gibson colors – Surf Green, Shell Pink, Lake Placid Blue – and offered our lacquers in aerosols as well as cans of lacquer for finishers with spray equipment.

What guided your decisions as the business grew?

During the last three or four years, so many people fell in love with guitar for the first time or were diving further down the rabbit hole. There's been a host of new builders popping up as well as many people getting into repair work or DIY projects. To support that growing market, we expanded the line to about 60 colors along with finishing supplies such as tinted grain fillers, polishes, and dyes.

We've also partnered with Solo Music Gear, an online retailer that offers a catalog of parts, materials, and electronics for guitar builders and players. Ara Pekel and the team there have been vital in our growth. It seemed like the perfect fit for Oxford since it's a one-stop shop for anyone looking for parts and supplies.

How many people are on your crew?

We have a core of four including my wife, Jessica, doing admin and finance, Brendan does marketing, and Joel and Fred handle production. I handle R&D, shipping, and customer service.

How do you strive to set Oxford apart?

Well, you can find nitro at many big-box hardware stores, but most are a modified, modern product. We spent the first two years of our existence reverse-engineering and testing various blends that would ultimately become our Vintage Formula Clear lacquer. The solvent blend is based on a formula from the '50s that still adheres to today's guidelines. The lacquer is free of any plasticizers, and as a result, it dries very hard and thin. It's susceptible to finish checking if exposed to extreme temperatures, but it can also be preserved if well cared for – just like the finish on vintage instruments.

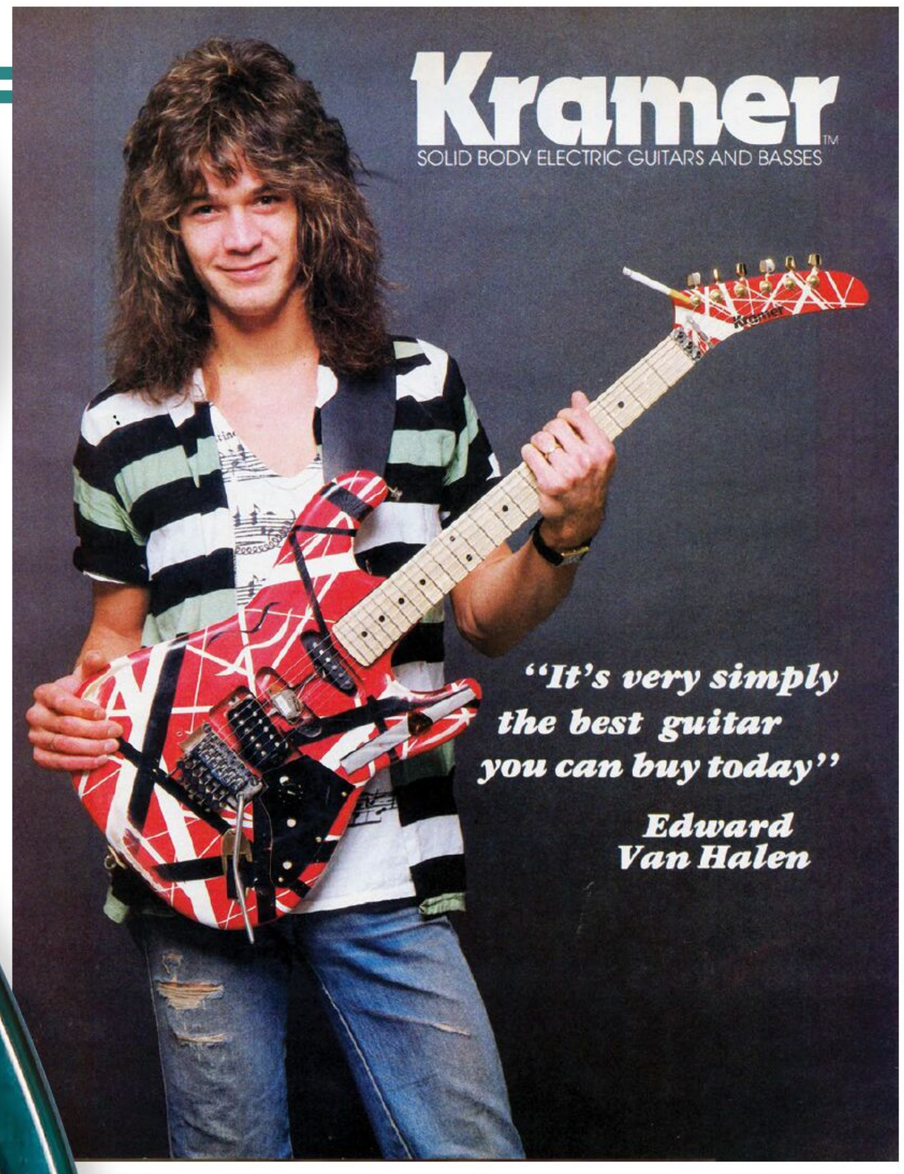
What are your hopes for the future of guitar building?

There's amazing work coming out of the boutique builder world. Some pay homage by crafting stellar examples of legacy designs, while others are developing unique body shapes with innovative hardware and runway-worthy aesthetics. Every city has at least a few up-and-coming builders, and we'll look back on this time as a golden age for innovation and creativity.

What are your goals for Oxford?

There are so many amazing opportunities with colors and finishes – flip through a color-swatch book at your local body shop (laughs).

I love the finishes we've come to know as the original "custom colors," but that's only about 50 colors if you total up all the brands and decades. I'd love to add to the palette and offer it in a nitrocellulose base, as I feel it's still the best finish for stringed instruments. There's a reason that manufacturers are still using it, decades later. – ***Ward Meeker*** VG



Edward Van Halen and a Kramer modified to look like his original parts guitar.

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The Kramer Pacer Deluxe

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT

On rare occasions, the zeitgeist – not some lucky designer – creates a guitar that captures hearts and minds. Such was the case in 1982, when tastes in popular music and the rising skills of players conspired to birth "superstrats" like the Kramer Pacer Deluxe.

Though he rose to fame playing a parts guitar with a single humbucker, young Eddie Van Halen was the ideological nexus of the superstrat. In 1978, he lit up the world with a new style that combined catchy melodies, blistering speed, fretboard tapping, and "divebomb" vibrato. By the early '80s, his play had informed a new style of hard rock and championed the locking vibrato recently pioneered by engineers such as Floyd Rose.

The idea of experimenting with traditional pickup layouts became increasingly popular in the '70s, when Gibson hired Bill Lawrence to devise hybrid guitars like the S-1 and Marauder, while Randy Curlee put a lead single-coil at the bridge and a neck humbucker on his S.D. Curlee models. By '79, Ibanez, Jackson, and Kramer were mounting twin humbuckers on Strat-style bodies, something that had never been seen.

This reflected the trend of guitar players becoming increasingly attracted to Fender-style aesthetics – the access (and image) of offset double cutaways – but with a beefy Gibson humbucker sound.

The first guitar company to synthesize the Gibson/Fender approach was Peavey, with its '82 T-27. From its introduction in '77, the T series (designed by Chip Todd) played with convention; the T-60 had twin humbuckers that converted to single-coils when the Tone control was rolled below 7. Conceptually, it was a step toward the

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superstrat, but the T-27 was the first production guitar to mount a lead humbucker with the middle and neck single-coils and a stop tail.

While it's possible the T-27 influenced other guitar makers, it's more likely that the humbucker/single/single was simply lingering in the ether. In '83, Dean Guitars introduced the Bel Aire, which builder Dean Zelinsky says came to him in a dream. He exaggerated the upper treble bout, bolted on an ESP neck, and mounted a DiMarzio humbucker at the bridge to accompany the two single-coils. The bridge was a floating ESP Flicker vibrato. Company literature at the time asserted the Bel Aire was the first h/s/s guitar, but in reality, Peavey had beat them to the punch. It *may*, however, have been the first with a fancy vibrato.

While Peavey and Dean were playing with the new form, changes were happening in Neptune, New Jersey, where Kramer Guitars landed on the scene with aluminum necks touted as an improvement of Travis Bean's idea. Gary Kramer had bankrolled Bean's operation, but when the relationship soured, he hooked up with Dennis Berardi, Peter LaPlaca, Henry Vaccaro, Sr., and luthier Phil Petillo to launch Kramer Guitars.

Kramer instruments were well-received but struggled to become profitable. Their largest dealer was Guitar Center, an ambitious chain headquartered in Los Angeles; in 1980, GC owner Wayne Mitchell purchased a controlling interest in Kramer. The connection put them in proximity with Rose and Van Halen, and by '82, EVH was ready to become an endorser. However, he wanted a guitar with a wooden neck, which prompted Kramer to begin a transition. For several years, they offered models both ways alongside new all-wood guitars.

The first product of the EVH/Kramer collaboration was 1982's Pacer line with Floyd Rose's double-locking vibrato system, billed as the "Edward Van Halen Tremolo."

The Pacer was essentially a Strat copy in every way except for the Floyd. The Imperial variant lost the pickguard and had two humbuckers, while the Custom was the same *and* offered custom graphics. The Special had a single humbucker, graphics option, and a new headstock that collectors now call "the classic" design. The Standard was the same but with a regular fulcrum vibrato.

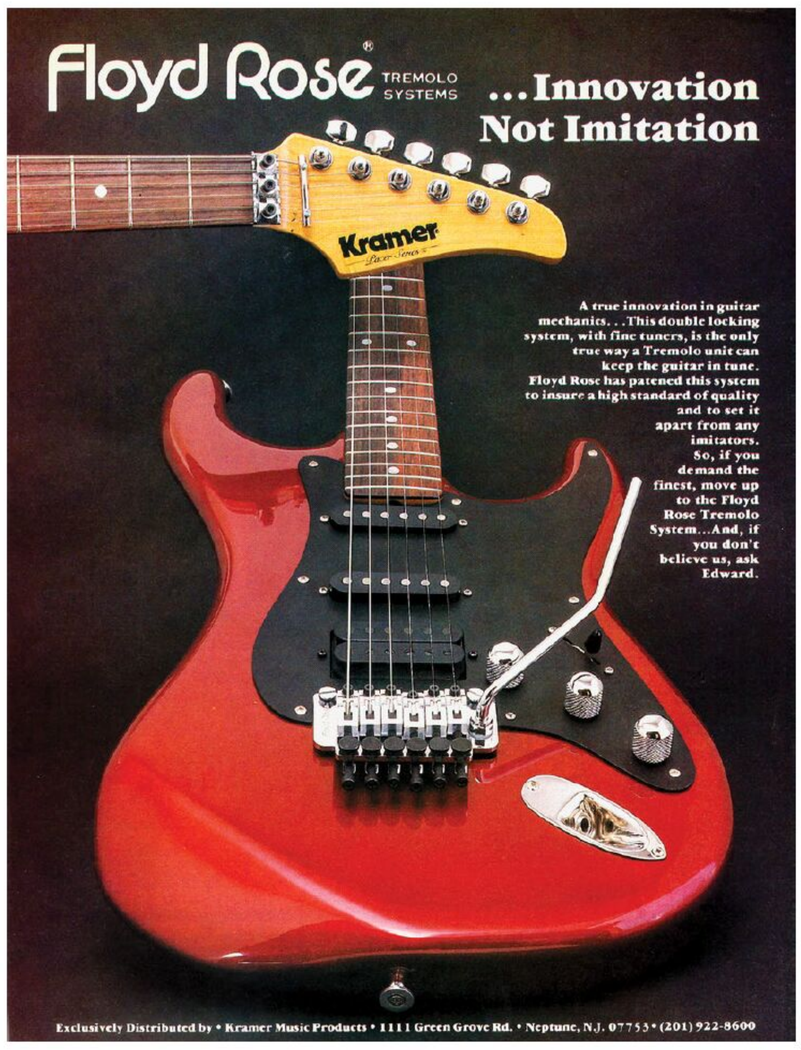
There were three basses – the Double J, Imperial, and Special, all with maple fretboards, while the all-black Carrera had ebony.

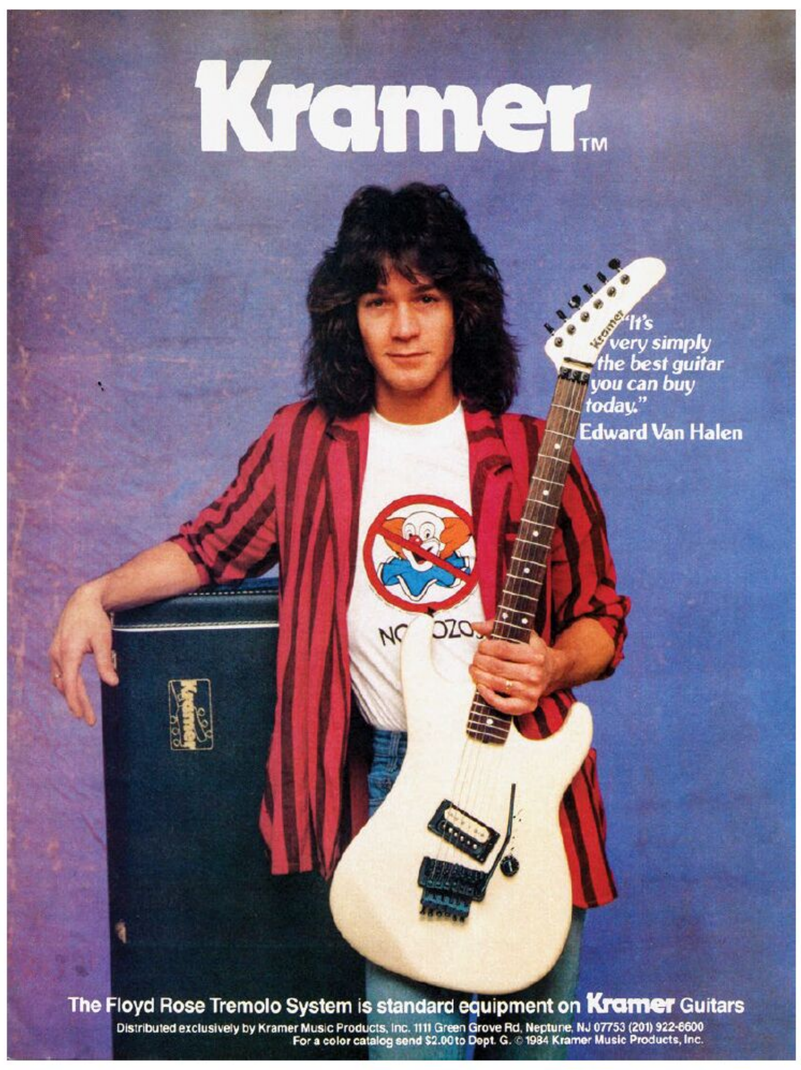
By '83, Pacers acquired thinner cutaway horns, the classic headstock, and rosewood fretboards. Controls included a five-way pickup select with a mini-toggle for coil tap and phase reversal – classic superstrat.

1983 Kramer Pacer Deluxe

The Deluxe remained pretty much unchanged through 1987 except for acquiring a new pointy/droopy headstock.

By '88, the Pacer was gone and Kramer (which was mostly importing by then) was in financial trouble. In 1990, the company entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy, followed by a flurry of failed attempts to inject cash, including a brief association with Michael Jackson. In '93, Kramer's trademarks were sold to Gibson, which introduced a number of generic Asian superstrats carrying classic Kramer names. In '97, Henry Vaccaro revived the aluminum-neck concept on a line of self-branded guitars that were produced for about five years.



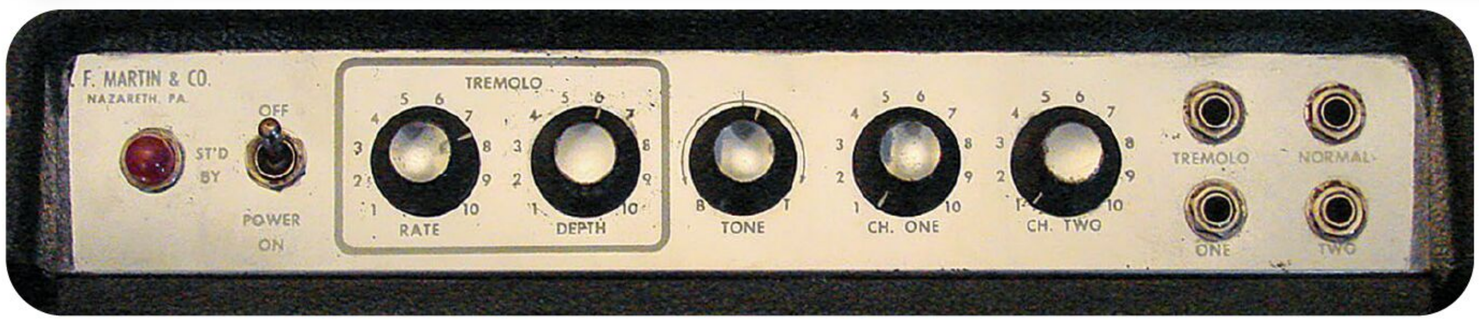


Throughout 1984, Kramer ads touted its guitars, the Floyd Rose "tremolo" (top), and Van Halen's endorsement. Here, he's holding a Baretta.

While the T-27 and Bel Aire became footnotes to guitar history, Kramer's Pacer was wildly successful, helping briefly make Kramer the largest American guitar company. More importantly, the trio established the superstrat, and practically every guitar company began producing the form, including Charvel, Jackson, Ibanez, Aria Pro II, and Westone. Eventually, even Gibson, Fender, and Guild tried their hands at it.

With the advent of "alternative rock" in the late '80s – and certainly by Nirvana's *Nevermind* in '91 – guitar virtuosity and the superstrat lost their dominance, though they never disappeared and have experienced a revival in recent years. **VG**

Kramer's 1983 catalog showed its array of models, some with aluminum necks, most with wood.



ALTERNATIVE '60s CLUB CLASSICS

Amps Beyond the Everyday

BY DAVE HUNTER

The "club amp" has been a perpetual best-seller since the dawn of guitar amplification, and several big-name '60s models are among the all-time classics. But what if you're looking for a *different* sound? Let's check out five fantastic small combos with nary a Fender, Gibson, Marshall, or Vox in sight.

Many tube amps of the 1940s and early '50s were club amps by default, given the technology, and required some evolving before they could deliver much above 20 watts of output. The category came into its own in the '60s, when myriad makers offered portable and great-sounding combos as "little siblings" to the big-stage amps that were king of the hill amid the volume wars. We might loosely define the genre as 1x10" or 1x12" combos – maybe a 2x10" at most – driven by a pair of lower-wattage output tubes, often with tremolo and/or reverb built in. In other words, the ultimate "grab and go" amp for venues of 120 people or less, where the amp and room cooperate to hit that tonal sweet spot that won't blow the doors off the club but can still keep up with a moderately dynamic drummer.

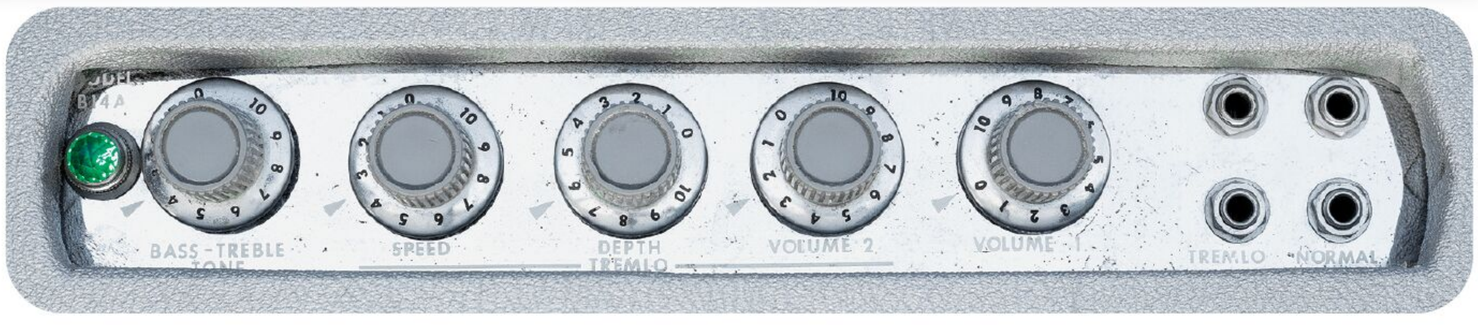
Most players perusing that definition will think "Fender Princeton Reverb or Deluxe Reverb," and they certainly qualify, as do the fabled Vox AC15 and Marshall 18-watt models. But let's indulge an opportunity to stray from the obvious and examine five less-appreciated '60s combos that offer great service in a club setting.

1961 MARTIN 112T

- Preamp tubes: three 12AX7
- Output tubes: two 6V6GT, cathode-biased
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume for each channel, shared Tone, Tremolo Rate and Depth
- Speaker: Jensen Special Design P12R
- Output: approximately 20 watts RMS

Ask "What's the best-sounding vintage 15-watt amp ever made?" and chances are that not many guitarists

'61 Martin 112T: Amp and photos courtesy of Tommie James.



'64 Rickenbacker B14A: Amp courtesy of Blackbird Vintage, photos by Eric Frank Pena.

will reply, "The Martin 112T, of course!" But the enthusiasm of those who do ought to tell you something – and just because they aren't the most common choice doesn't mean they're not the right choice.

This 1961 Martin 112T was manufactured in Toledo, Ohio, by Rowe Industries (the same company that made DeArmond pickups and effects) and was simply a repackaged version of the DeArmond R15T introduced the year before. If you investigate Martin's foray into electric guitars in '61, you'll find DeArmond Model 200 pickups on the F Series thinline hollowbody electrics, making the OEM company's new amp line a natural to co-opt as a partner for the full Martin electric set. Neither lasted long, which might partly be because the amps – as great as they sounded – were entering a new era looking more like something from the era that had just passed, as perhaps did the guitars.

Compare the schematic from a late-'50s 5E3 Deluxe to that of the 112T and you'll find the circuits extremely similar (the absence of tremolo in the Fender notwithstanding) other than a few subtle twists. But oh, what a difference those twists make. The use of a hotter 12AX7 (vs the 12AY7) in the first gain stage, tighter and brighter coupling caps, and heftier filtering in the power stages partnered by heftier power and output transformers all conspire to make the 112T a bold, stout, punchy sounding 1x12" – and the fact that so many players are now hip to this fact means they're quite pricey on the vintage market, despite being "alternatives."

1964 RICKENBACKER B14A

- Preamp tubes: three 12AX7
- Output tubes: two 6V6GT
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume 1, Volume 2, Depth, Speed, Bass-Treble Tone
- Output: approximately 12 watts RMS
- Speaker: Jensen P12Q

Even fans of the '60s Rickenbacker guitars that George Harrison and John Lennon, Pete Townshend, Roger McGuinn, Paul Weller, Peter Buck, and others plugged into their Vox, Fender, Marshall, and Hiwatt amps are likely to gasp, "What? They made amps, too?" Sure did, though in far fewer numbers than the guitars that boomed amid Beatlemania.

The Ric amp most likely to come to mind of a vintage-gear enthusiast is the hulking solid-state Transonic model of the late '60s, used on U.S. tours by Led Zeppelin, Jeff Beck, Steppenwolf, and others. When

we consider Rickenbacker's origins at the dawn of guitar amplification, however, the existence of this tasty '60s combo should seem less unexpected. In fact, Rickenbacker had its roots in pre-amplification efforts to make the guitar louder via the National Resophonic Guitars of the '20s, and key personnel from that venture morphed the acoustic-based approach into an electrified one with the release of the first Ric electric guitars and amps of the early '30s.

For all this, the first thing you notice about the Rickenbacker B14A combo is… hey, it's silver! Ricaficionados will recognize the shiny Tolex used on some guitar cases in the '60s, but it makes an even brighter impression wrapped around an amplifier. Inside, things are a little more pedestrian.

The flashy cab houses what would have been a traditional top-mounted chassis just a few years before, but would have seemed outdated by the time this amp was introduced in '64. The circuit and construction are a blend of Fender, Gibson, and Valco archetypes, with the rugged eyelet circuit board nodding toward the former and the plethora of smaller ceramic-disc coupling capacitors toward the latter. The engine room generates roughly 12 watts from a pair of cathode-biased 6V6GTs, with a 5Y3 rectifier and three 12AX7s at the front, enabling two channels with a shared Tone control plus Speed and Depth for the tremolo ("Tremlo" on the faceplate).

In use, the B14A might lack the compelling tweed-era grind of its earlier Fender counterparts, but exudes an appealingly toothsome clean sound with a hypnotic tremolo, all aided by an Alnico-magnet Jensen P12Q.

1963 GRETSCH 6156 PLAYBOY

- Preamp tubes: three GE 12AX7
- Output tubes: two GE 6973, cathode-biased
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume, Tone, Tremolo (speed, with on/off switch on pot and footswitch out).
- Speaker: Jensen Special Design C10R
- Output: approximately 17 watts RMS

While Gretsch was one of the great originals of electric-guitar manufacturing during the rock-and-roll boom of the '50s and early '60s, the company never manufactured its own amplifiers. Instead, this Gretsch 6156 Playboy model and its siblings were made by Chicago-based Valco, which also manufactured amps for National, Supro, Airline, and others. In fact, the models available from any of the third-party brands (and Valco's own house brands) at any era carried largely the same circuits and chassis with cosmetic alterations to suit the company's varying styles – and with that in mind, it's hard to argue against Gretsch as one of the coolest re-badgers of Valco products.

If the "Playboy" moniker given the Model 6156 doesn't quite stand the test of time, it certainly suited a swinging club-sized combo of the early '60s, and graces a surprisingly fierce tone machine despite its diminutive proportions. Even smaller than the '60s Princeton it was likely intended to rival, it nonetheless brings as much or more power and volume, along with a stout and original voice to boot.

Rather than the tall, narrow EL84 tubes they appear to be, the 6156 Play-

'63 Gretsch 6156 Playboy: Dave Hunter.

boy carries a pair of 6973 tubes, cathode-biased with no negative feedback, in largely the same circuit as the highly desirable Supro Model 24 and others of the era. Those tubes are a little thicker, meatier, and grittier-sounding than EL84s, but still with plenty of sparkle and surprisingly good low-end (through a bigger cab, at least).

As used in this design, they offer a furious roar when cranked up, but without the fart-out compression you'd expect from a little combo. What's more, they put out a genuine and robust 17 watts at full bore, which is more than an old Jensen C10R is going to want to see for very long. Unlike many Valco-made amps with similar circuits, however, the Gretsch employs a cathodyne (split-phase) inverter rather than an archaic paraphase inverter, which contributes to a bolder clean tone and throatier, less mushed-out overdrive. Add its throbbing bias-modulated tremolo, and it's one ferocious beastie of a compact club combo.

1962 MULTIVOX PREMIER 120R COMBO

- Preamp tubes: four 12AX7, one 6EU7, one 12AT7, one EL90
- Output tubes: two 6V6GT, cathode-biased
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: volume, bass, treble, reverb for each channel; tremolo speed and intensity
- Speaker: Jensen C12RL 12" (original)
- Output: 15 watts RMS

'62 Multivox Premier 120R: Amp courtesy of Marc McElroy, Gary's Guitars.

It might be the multi-colored control knobs that jump out at first glance, but the 1962 Premier 120R combo – "With Reverberation and Tremolo" (thank you very much) is unique in many ways. A year or more before even the earliest Fender Princeton Reverb and Deluxe Reverb models hit the scene, the 120R was offering both reverb and tremolo on each of its two channels, which also carried independent Treble and Bass controls.

Premier amplifiers were manufactured in New York City by the Multivox Corporation of America for East Coast distributor Sorkin Music Company, and arrived early enough to rival Fender's first serious efforts of the late '40s. The 120R is closer to the size of a late-'50s tweed Deluxe – about an inch taller and quarter-inch wider – and is laid out much the same. Channel Two, in addition to its "High" input, has something labeled "Two Chan Input." While we might assume this jumpers the two channels (as players will do with 5E3 Deluxes or many early Marshalls to achieve a beefier overall sound), it actually constitutes a stereo (tip-ring-sleeve) jack to receive input from one of the many stereo guitars that were popular at the time, and feeds the signal from each of those two pickups to its own individual channel… from whence it does not proceed in stereo, since it all ends up through the same mono output stage and single 12" speaker. Still, it's a thoughtful inclusion, and one redolent of an era when manufacturers – for a brief time, at least – must have figured everything had to have a stereo feature.

As with most Premier amps, none of the circuit stages are quite like anything seen in the rivals of the day, though they're also not particularly outlandish or complicated. Gain stages are provided by 12AX7 preamp tubes, with just one stage in Channel Two, but two in Channel One. The bonus triode makes Channel One a little hotter, and helps its signal better survive the insertion loss of having Bass and Treble potentiometers in-line, which follow after both gain stages, with the channel's Volume control last in line behind them before it all heads off toward the tremolo circuit. Output is a modest 15 watts from

a pair of cathode-biased 6V6GTs, with a 5Y3 tube rectifier in the power stage – all of which comes together in an unusual combo with a rich, compelling voice both clean and overdriven.

1962 AMPEG R-12-R REVERBEROCKET

- Preamp tubes: two 6SL7, two 6SN7
- Output tubes: two 6V6, cathode-biased
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: volume, tone, dimension (reverb), speed and intensity (tremolo)
- Speaker: Jensen Special Design C12R
- Output: approximately 18 watts RMS

Finally, our 1962 R-12-R Reverberocket makes the alternative-club-classics cut precisely because it's not a typical Ampeg, or at least not of the archetype envisioned by the company's founder and president, Everett Hull. According to the late tube-amp guru Ken Fischer (1945-2006), who worked as an Ampeg engineer long before founding Trainwreck Circuits, Hull felt "rock and roll doesn't swing – it never will." What did swing for Hull? Jazz, of course, so the company president – himself a piano and bass player – much preferred to cast his sonic pearls before the princes of the jazz world, and not the swine of rock and roll. As such, Ampeg amps of the '50s and '60s were bold, clean, clear, and rich, but they didn't grind, bite, or sting unless you really pushed them past their optimal parameters. There was one amp, however – and again, this is a Fischer-certified tip – that fell through the cracks – the early-'60s R-12-R Reverberocket.

Part of the key to this Reverberocket's rockability is its pair of 6V6GT output tubes. The amp went through several iterations from the late '50s into the '70s, and many were made with output tubes that just didn't break up much. We already know, though, that 6V6s give up the goods in plenty of other amps, and the rest of the Reverberocket of this era seemed predisposed to go along with it.

"That was Everett Hull's one effort to make an amp a little more Fendery," Fischer revealed in an interview shortly before his death, and while it might have helped an Ampeg finally appeal to a younger crowd, its playing against type doomed it to an early demise.

"You've got to keep in mind that Everett Hull hated rock and roll, he hated distortion – even when blues guys would play distortion," Fischer added. "Amps were not to be distorted. So those R-12-Rs had blue Jensens in them, 6SN7 and 6SL7 octals [preamp tubes], which are always nice, fat-sounding tubes. That amp would be a great indie-rock machine. Ampeg made it for a short while and all the jazz guys were complaining, 'What's wrong with the new Reverberockets? They break up too early!'

"So, Everett converted them back to 7591 [output tubes] because people were complaining. But if they had marketed them as a rock-and-roll amp they probably would have been very successful." Add the Reverberocket's lush tremolo and a reverb circuit often considered the best in the business, and it's the very definition of a do-it-all club classic. VG

'62 Ampeg R-12-R: Amp and photos courtesy of Chris Deitzel.

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Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli

1966 Silvertone Model 1443 Extra Long Bass

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1987	B.C. Rich NJ Series/NJC Series	Made in Korea	$500	$1,250
1960s	Binson Echorec	Tube	$5,000	$8,000
2008	Collings OMC2H	Brazilian, Herringbone	$8,000	$10,500
1970s	DeArmond Weeper Wah Model 1802		$110	$150
1977	DOD 6 Band Equalizer EQ601		$50	$80
2000	Epiphone Moderne	Black	$675	$875
1982	Fender Bassman 10	70 watts	$650	$875
1954	Fender Esquire	Blond, black 'guard	$40,000	$55,000
2012	Fender '53 Esquire	NOS	$3,000	$4,000
1966	Fender Stratocaster	Sunburst, dot markers	$18,000	$24,000
1959	Fender Telecaster	Blond, maple	$25,000	$32,500
1971	Fender Telecaster Thinline	Sunburst, 3-bolt, hums	$4,250	$5,500
2014	Fender Wildwood 10s			
	1969 Limited Stratocaster	Relic, Jimi Hendrix specs	$3,000	$4,000
1985	G&L Broadcaster	Signed by Leo	$2,250	$3,000
1946	Gibson ES-150	P-90 pickup	$3,000	$4,000
1962	Gibson ES-335 TD or ES-335N TD	Sunburst, dots, PAFs	$35,000	$45,000
1959	Gibson GA-80/GA-80T/Vari-Tone	25 watts, 1x15, vari-tone buttons	$1,850	$2,500
1949	Gibson J-45	Small 'guard	$9,000	$12,000
2000	Gibson Les Paul			
	Classic 1960 Mars Music	All black	$1,500	$2,000
1996	Gibson Les Paul Jimmy Page Signature	Moderate figure	$4,750	$6,250
1960	Gibson Les Paul Standard (Sunburst)	Late flat neck, minor figured	$275,000	$350,000
1966	Gibson Thunderbird II	Cardinal Red, non-reverse	$9,000	$12,000
1965	Gretsch Eldorado (6040 / 6041)	Natural or sunburst	$1,750	$2,250
1959	Gretsch Sun Valley (6010)		$1,250	$1,625
1980	Guild Custom F-512 12-String	Indian rosewood	$2,500	$3,250
1978	Hamer 12-String Short-Scale		$2,000	$2,500
1960s	Honey Baby Crying		$400	$500
1993	Ibanez Joe Satriani JS1		$1,500	$2,000
1960s	Kay K506 Vibrato 12	12 watts, 1 x 12	$500	$750
1975	Marshall Model 2204 50-Watt Head		$1,350	$1,750
1987	Martin 00-21LE		$2,500	$3,250
1896	Martin 0-28	Dark orange top (rare)	$8,000	$11,000
1939	Martin D-18	Early '39	$40,000	$52,000
1991	Martin D-3-18	L.E., 3-pc Mahogany back	$1,750	$2,250
1976	Mu-Tron Phasor II		$300	$600
1996	Parker Fly Supreme		$2,750	$3,500
2001	PRS Singlecut	Brazilian neck & board	$2,125	$2,750
1966	Rickenbacker Model 4005WB		$10,200	$13,200
1991	Rickenbacker Model 360WB	No vibrato	$2,500	$3,500
1994	Rivera Knucklehead 55		$675	$950
2001	Santa Cruz D/PW Pre-War	Various models	$3,250	$4,250
1956	Silvertone Model 1337 Wide Range Eight Speaker	8x8	$925	$1,250
1966	Silvertone Model 1443			
	Extra Long Bass		$900	$1,200
1941	Supro Clipper Lap Steel		$450	$600
1960s	True Tone Speed Master (K6533 Kay)	Kay Value Leader	$425	$575
1997	VooDoo Lab Analog Chorus		$100	$150

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BREAKOUT BLUES

Taste

By Willie G. Moseley

The '60s may have been the most musically significant decade in the history of popular music, but very few countries were represented then or in the years that followed. Fronted by Van Morrison, Them emerged from Ireland mid-decade and became popular in Europe, but were little-known in the U.S. Their countrymen in Thin Lizzy didn't assemble until January of 1970, and while Eric Bell recorded a handful of historic riffs, Ireland's first guitar hero was Rory Gallagher.

Lead guitarist in the Cork-based power trio Taste, Gallagher was just 15 when he began playing with the Fontana Showband in 1963 – the same year he acquired the used '61 Stratocaster that has since become a legend unto itself. In '66, Gallagher teamed with bassists Eric Kitteringham and drummer Norman Damery to form a blues-rock trio they dubbed Taste. They gigged for almost two years before splitting, after which Gallagher recruited bassist Richard "Charlie" McCracken and drummer John Wilson to create the band that released its self-titled debut album on Polydor.

Recorded in August of '68 at De Lane Lea Studios, London, *Taste* was produced by Tony Colton, lead singer for Heads Hands and Feet (whose guitarist was Albert Lee). No-frills to the point of sounding primitive, its music was nonetheless impressive – imagine the Who paying homage to American bluesmen. Songs like "Blister on the Moon" and "Born on the Wrong Side of Time" crank with anthemic power chords and snarling lead lines that cut through like a laser.

Greg Martin, co-founder and lead guitarist in the Kentucky Headhunters, grew up listening to rock and blues in the '60s, and recalls how Gallagher and Taste became an immediate influence on his style.

"What stood out to me about Rory and Taste was their rawness, aggressiveness, energy, and honesty," he said. "Even as a trio, they weren't merrily copying Cream or The Jimi Hendrix Experience. They had their own slant. I absolutely loved Rory's playing from the start; he was inspirational. Once I got the first album, I was hooked."

McCracken's playing style was equally notable. While most Fender players removed the

Rory Gallagher and Taste onstage in Germany, January, 1970, with drummer John Wilson and bassist Richard "Charlie" McCracken.

Taste photos by Herbert Weber/Wikimedia Commons.

chrome covers from their basses, McCracken used the middle one to rest his hand while picking near the neck joint or between it and the bridge, often switching back and forth during a song. On "Dual Carriageway Pain" and "Blister on the Moon," he plays rapid-fire riffs, often going note-for note with Gallagher.

Blues songs on *Taste* included a cover of Lead Belly's "Leaving Blues" (with Gallagher playing slide) along with heavy blues-rock renditions of "Catfish Blues" and "Sugar Mama."

Martin, a consummate tone freak, recalls the impression made by the raw sound of Gallagher's Strat.

"He was a *big* influence. His tone was amazing, and I loved his use of pinch harmonics. He may have been the first guitarist I heard do that, and I quickly grabbed it as one of my tools."

Also interesting is "Hail," on which Gallagher accompanies himself on acoustic, singing while picking the melody. The bombast of "Catfish" is followed by a whimsical cover of Hank Snow's "I'm Moving On" (with Gallagher on a resonator) that comes across like an afterthought.

After finishing the album – but before it was released – Taste opened for Cream durinw g its final concert at Royal Albert Hall on November 26, 1968. Others on that bill included Yes and Jon Hiseman's Colosseum.

Taste's second album, *On the Boards*, delivered a more-diverse set with blues, blues-rock, a bit of jazz ("It's Happened Before, It'll Happen Again" and the closer, "I'll Remember"), and timely folk-rock ("See Here"). Recorded in late '68, it wasn't released until January 1, 1970. In that gap, Taste gigged in the U.S. as an opener for Blind Faith. That August, they delivered a strong set at the Isle of Wight festival, after which differences in musical direction and managerial problems pushed them to dissolve by year's end. In '71, Polydor released *Live Taste* and *Live at the Isle of Wight*.

Gallagher went on to forge a respectable solo career that has influenced three generations of guitarists. A true "player's player," he died June 14, 1995, following a liver transplant. He was just 47.

"Rory radiated charm and charisma," Martin noted. "Watching video of him performing with Taste or solo, you could tell he absolutely loved what he did. There was nothing artificial or contrived in what he played; it was emotionally charged music at its finest. Any student of blues and rock guitar must listen to the first Taste album, then enjoy the journey through his entire catalog." VG

Whether playing a Precision or his three-knob Jazz, Richard "Charlie" McCracken often used the chrome pickup protector to rest his hand as he shifted picking positions from front (neck side) to back.

Gallagher's famously worn '61 Stratocaster, as it appeared in the 2020 "Play It Loud" exhibit hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Rory Gallagher '61 Stratocaster: Eleanor Jane, courtesy of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

DEFINING DOCUMENT

Gary Moore's *Still Got the Blues*

By Wolf Marshall

Throughout his career, Gary Moore was haunted by a prevailing assumption (in rock circles) that he was simply too good to gain mass popularity. An accomplished, soulful vocalist and genuine guitarist's guitarist, his versatility and technical mastery enabled him to move effortlessly from blues, rock, and power pop to metal, techno, hard rock, fusion, and Celtic, all while maintaining an uncompromising musical personality.

Largely ignored by critics and woefully unknown to the average listener, Moore changed his trajectory after two decades in hard rock and reemerged as the consummate blues-rock champion on his eighth solo studio album, 1990's *Still Got the Blues*.

The timing was ideal, as his style resonated with the public after a decade that saw the rise of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jeff Healey, the return of Robben Ford, and a renewed appetite for guitar-centric blues.

Still Got the Blues is a defining document. Moore and co-producer/engineer Ian Taylor gathered a who's-who of British rock luminaries and session players: keyboardists Don Airey (Ozzy Osbourne, Deep Purple), Nicky Hopkins (Jeff Beck, Stones), Mick Weaver (Traffic, David Gilmour), bassists Bob Daisley (Ozzy, Black Sabbath), Andy Pyle (Blodwyn Pig, Savoy Brown, Wishbone Ash), and drummers Brian Downey (Thin Lizzy) and Graham Walker. Horns adorned numerous tracks with trumpeters Stuart Brooks, Raul D'Oliveira, and Martin Drover, as well as saxophonists Frank Mead, Nick Payn, and Nick Pentelow. A string section led by Gavyn Wright complemented several arrangements. On guitar, Moore was joined by Albert King, Albert Collins, and George Harrison.

Tactically, he prized spontaneity, freedom, and humanity during the sessions. Despite the impression of a carefully crafted work, the album was largely recorded live with no overdubbing and "mistakes left in" (see if you can find 'em).

Recording took six weeks. Favoring the classic British blues-rock sound, Moore eschewed rackmount effects and superstrats and chose the reliable and definitive Les Paul-into-Marshall combination. He used a newly acquired '59 Standard (dubbed "Stripe," it bore serial number 92227 and was thought to be Ronnie Montrose's long-lost guitar) that soon became his main guitar, along with Peter Green's '59 Standard, "Greeny," which Moore had owned since 1970. Both had original PAF pickups. Strat timbre is heard on "Texas Strut," likely the same '61 Fiesta Red model he played at Montreux in '90. He plugged into an early reissue Marshall JTM45 head with 5881 tubes feeding a 1960B 4x12 stack containing Electro-Voice speakers. Additional saturation and sustain came via a Marshall Guv'nor overdrive pedal simulating JCM800 gain. Onstage, he often relied on Soldano SLO-100 heads (with Guv'nor or Ibanez Tube Screamer TS10 on the Clean+Crunch channel). He preferred Dean Markley 2504B (.010-.052) string sets and extra-heavy (1.14mm 351 shape) celluloid picks.

The program featured five Moore originals presenting facets of his eclectic blues vision, six standards, and a surprise contribution from Harrison. The results were inescapable. Released March 12, *Still Got the Blues* reached #83 on *Billboard* the following February and garnered Gold by November '95. It remains Moore's most successful album, having reset his journey as a reinvented blues-rock hero in the age of grunge, alternative, and nu-metal.

The opening track, "Moving On," is an artistic metaphor marking his departure from '80s pop-metal and commercial hard rock. A straightforward "road" travelogue cruising atop a groove-driven/riff-based arrangement backed by Weaver, Pyle, Walker, it's laden with Open A slide licks (which Moore played standard-tuned in live performances) reminiscent of Joe Walsh, Billy Gibbons, and Duane Allman. These attributes convey a simpler country-inflected blues-rock feeling, recall his slide playing with Thin Lizzy, and set the stage for the album's proceedings.

"Oh Pretty Woman" is a towering blues classic elevated by the participation of the legendary Albert King. Ostensibly recalling Mayall's Bluesbreakers '67 version (featuring Mick Taylor) with its four-piece horn section and Airey's B3, it's heavier and more aggressive, pitting Moore's saturated tone against King's cleaner, brighter twang. Moore feels his way through two ferocious white-knuckle solos offset by King's laidback chorus, then ends the tune with a virtuosic cadenza reminiscent of his fusion episodes in Colosseum II. The album's first single, it was released March 5.

"Walking By Myself" updates Jimmy Rogers' early-'50s Chicago blues. Weaver on piano and Frank Mead on harmonica sweeten the flavor,

Gary Moore, 1990: Roussel/DAPR/Zuma Press.

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'61 Dakota Red/Slab Rose neck 100% original. Near Mint condition.
'62 Blond Refret, changed nut in "Beat-Up" condition, Player's dream!!
'63 Sunburst Refret, changed nut in "Beat-Up" condition, Player's dream!!
'65 Sunburst 100% original, Near Mint condition, Mint-Green pickguard
'65 Candy Apple Red 100% original, Excellent condition, Mint-Green pickguard
'65 Olympic White 100% original, Excellent condition, Mint-Green pickguard
'65 Olympic White 100% original
'65 Olympic White "Tortoise Shell Pickguard" Gold Hardware 100% original
'65 Olympic White "Tortoise Shell Pickguard" 100% original
'66 Sunburst We have 3 in stock, Super clean!!
'69 Blond/Rose neck 100% original, Amazing tone!!
'70 Sunburst/Rose neck 100%original in Near Mint condition, We have 2 in tock.
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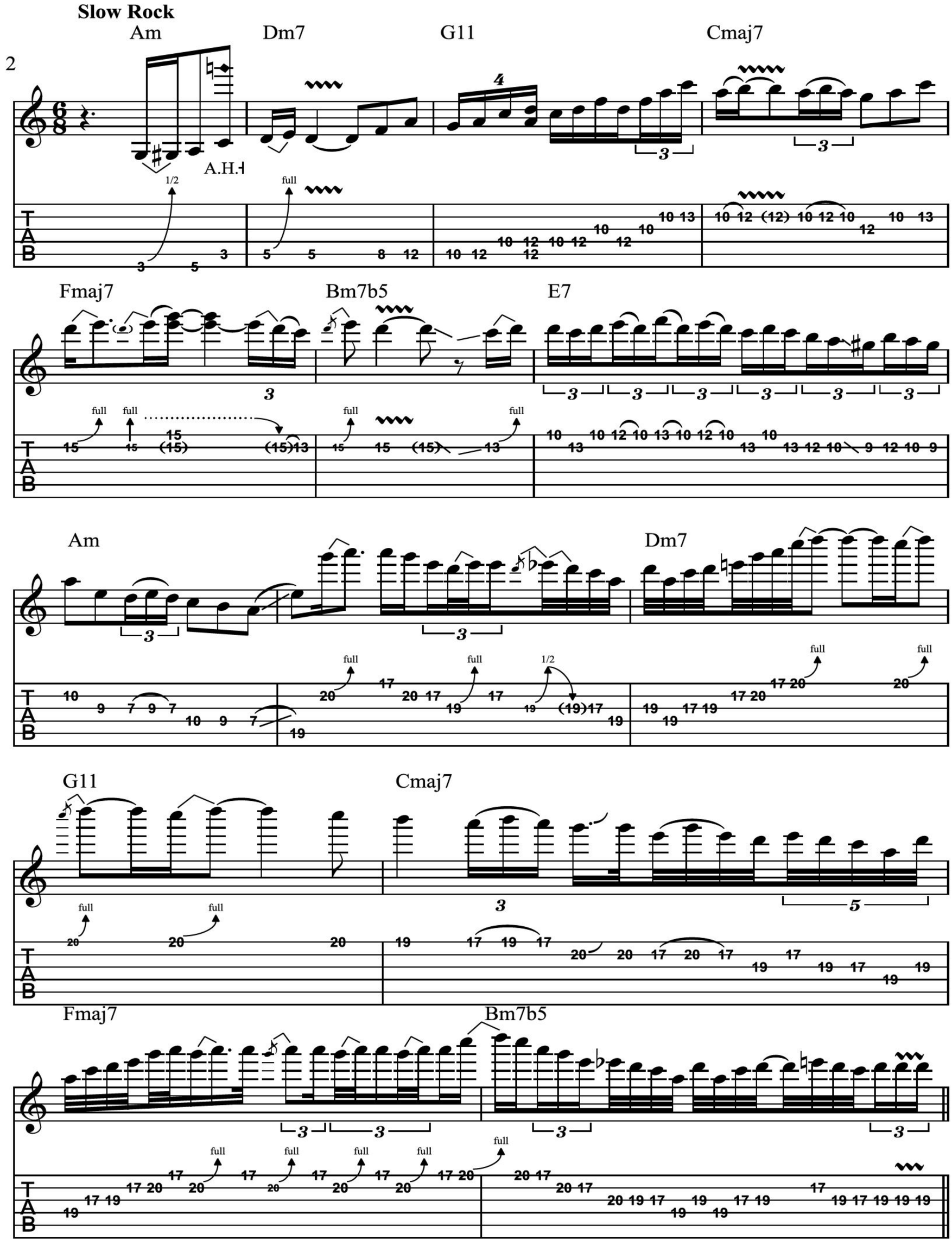
alluding to Otis Spann and Little Walter while Moore adds rock swagger and distortion to the mid-tempo shuffle. Notable are '80s tapping and quick technical flurries in his solo alongside a paraphrase of "Dust My Broom" mixing modern power rock with traditionally laid-back blues. It was released as the third single on August 6.

"Still Got the Blues," a masterpiece of sophistication and soul, embodied Moore's aspirations and tangents reexamined through the blues prism. The culmination of his nuanced melodic stye heard earlier in "Parisienne Walkways" and other pieces, the title track proved he could imbue any harmonic pattern (here the same well-used minor cycle-of-fifths progression heard in "Autumn Leaves" or "I Will Survive") with his emotional blues feeling and singing sustaining lines, much in the way Santana did in "Europa." The arrangement was complemented by Wright's lush string orchestration, Hopkins' piano, and Airey's keyboards. Gary's harmonically astute rock sensibilities were glimpsed in "Still in Love With You," "Empty Rooms," and "The Loner," but reached a zenith in "Still Got the Blues" – reconciling his jazz acumen with rock attitude while reaffirming claim to an uncharted sector of the blues-rock universe. The album's second single, it was released April 30, and was Moore's only single to make the U.S. charts (#97).

"Texas Strut" brings allusions to ZZ Top-fueled boogie including "how-how" field-holler quotes and a reworked turnaround straight out of "La Grange," along with SRV-inspired singing and overdriven-Strat sound. The mood is raw, loose, and serves as perfect contrast to the previous track's complexity.

From Moore's second solo in "Oh Pretty Woman," this lick illustrates his command and the way he modernized blues idioms. His minor-pentatonic and traditional blues scales and string bending are at the forefront, particularly potent in the major-third bend into the ninth tone in measure 8. Also noteworthy is the virtuosic double-timing in 3-4, 6, and 8-9. These flourishes are endemic to the shredder side of his persona and allude to his playing in hard rock and metal, which are highly effective into a blues setting.

"Too Tired," by Johnny "Guitar" Watson, is one of the genre's lesser-known (but indispensable) pieces, here given a powerful treatment with punchy horn-section accents reminiscent of Watson's '55 recording, Airey's piano, and musical sparring with Albert Collins, who sat in at the London studio while performing in town. The friendly-fire guitar dialog was achieved in two live takes and was the



"Still Got the Blues" demonstrates the range of Moore's style. Assuming a very melodic character, he's explicit in the vocalesque phrasing and thoughtful note selection, highlighting sophisticated harmonic sounds inherent in the cycling chord changes. Note the emphasis of sweet major-seventh tones – B and E over C major and F major in measures 4-5 and 12-13 from hexatonic sources and inclusion of G♯ and F over E7 in 7. These phrases convey a jazz-informed, sax-like sensibility while his pentatonic blues melody (as in the specific minor pentatonic lines in 14 over Bm7♭5) and idiomatic string bends are solidly steeped in blues-guitar tradition.

album's final single, released in November of '90.

"King of the Blues" was Moore's tribute to Albert King. To strengthen the requisite Stax connection, Moore adds a small horn section and Airey's Booker T-inspired B3 to the funk-blues groove; he begins with signature Steve Cropper double stops and progresses to King-inspired lead fills throughout verses. Also in character are a quoted piece of the "Born Under a Bad Sign" riff and aggressive soloing replete with stylistically correct wide bends. The ode is enlarged with lyric references to King's famous songs and titles. Hardly derivative or unimaginative, his approach suggests a modernization and reverence of the original blues formula, and its constituent parts, in an evolved form.

"As the Years Go Passing By," Albert King's moody minor-blues ballad from '67, is given an atmospheric treatment with light tenor/baritone-sax backing, Hopkins' tinkling piano solo and Airey's sustained B3 pads over the melancholy dirge-like pulse and quiet, introspective interpretation. Rock cognoscenti know this piece inspired Clapton's "Layla," but Moore breathes new life into it by returning King's soulful cachet. His solo delivers taut, space-conscious phrases colored with degrees of overdrive, dynamic shadings and attack, rhythmic placement, touch sensitivity, subtle bends, and ghosted notes offering gentle nuance in contrast to his signature aggressive rock approach.

"Midnight Blues" is smoldering slower blues/rock in the minor mode, distinguished by a haunting main ensemble riff, colored with strings and Weaver's electric piano. Gary cultivates a mildly overdriven tone and understated soloing to present another dimension of his improviser persona, echoing a storyline of loneliness and the blues' dark side.

Straddling the line dividing blues, pop, gospel, and jazz, he chooses distinctive colors from the pentatonic-hexatonic palette of blues melody, tastefully incorporating the hexatonic's evocative jazzy ninth extended tones as melody notes over Cm7 and Fm7, in strong contrast to the album's heavier mood.

"That Kind of Woman," originally written for Clapton, was given to Moore by Harrison. Though they were neighbors and friends, it was their first time collaborating in the studio. Recorded in Harrison's 24-track home studio – initially as a duo with only a Linn drum-machine guide track and dubbed guitars. Procedurally, it is the album's outlier – the only piece to build layered lead and backing vocals, rhythm, harmony guitars, and slide parts. The master track ultimately flaunted a four-piece horn section that colored and toughened the arrangement, lending an R&B feel to the Stones-influenced riff rocker. Accordingly, Stones alumnus Hopkins overdubbed supportive piano touches.

"All Your Love" brings the album full-circle to a life-changing moment in Gary's youth. Modern blues-rock began with the explosive opener by John Mayall with Eric Clapton that inspired generations of that included Jimi Hendrix, Tony Iommi, Brian May, Eddie Van Halen, et al. The experience was similarly stunning for Gary in '66, and with this he openly paid tribute. Sporting a similar Beano-approved quartet with Weaver's B3, Moore reignites Otis Rush's classic with an even heavier, more-saturated Les Paul/Marshall tone, heralding the continuing dominance of hard blues-rock.

"Stop Messin' Around" closes the opus with a reverential nod to Peter Green, the pivotal guitarist of Mayall's second Blues Breakers lineup. This piece comes from the '68 single, announcing the premier of Fleetwood Mac, Green's blues band formed after leaving Bluesbreakers. The quartet-with-piano arrangement is augmented by Mead's sax work and the cruising 12-bar shuffle provides a perfect backdrop for Moore's allusions to Green's singable call-and-response blues phrasing. Moreover, the tone captures Green's "out of phase" guitar sound and likely emanated from Greeny.

Slow Blues

An inspired performance, "As The Years Go Passing By" summarizes Moore's approach to slow minor blues. Understated, it's one of the finest and most emotional solos of the album. Like King's version, it's in C minor and largely exploits sparser pentatonic blues melody decorated with soulful string bends. He begins with a quote of the tune's famous opening lick ("Layla"), indulges in slinky double-timing in measures 6-8 that alludes to Peter Green's mercurial phrasing, and pursues an ultra-sensitive approach to dynamics, often varying touch and volume dramatically within a single measure.

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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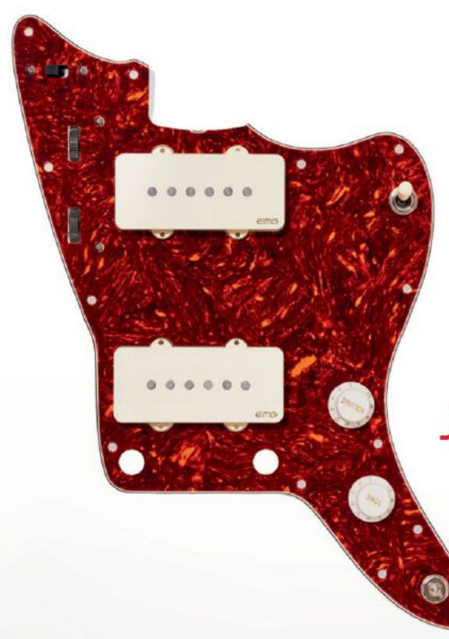

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FRET DIFFERENTIAL

And Examining Two Budget Archtops

Can someone please explain the differences between playing an instrument with jumbo frets versus one with smaller/shorter frets? – *John Mackey*

Until you master playing with tall frets, it's very easy to press the string too hard/farther than needed to create the note, because the flesh of your finger will push until it hits the fretboard and cause the note to go sharp. This is true even if you use low action (height from bottom of the string to top of fret) and the guitar has been well-intonated at the saddle.

Low frets don't have nearly the same issue, but touch/over-pressing a string is still something that must be mastered. – ***Dan Erlewine***

I recently picked up a '50s archtop with what looks like early Franz pickups. There's no logo on the headstock or serial numbers anywhere. Could it be from United Guitar, in New Jersey? There's not a lot of info on them floating around. It's well-played and needed a little binding repair, but man, it sounds and plays great, and came with what looks like the original pickguard and bridge, but also with an added Bigsby. – *Bill Brown*

Bill Brown's United Guitars archtop, straight from the '50s.

This is definitely a United Guitars product, made in Jersey City – the 17" single-cut archtop being close to their top-line model. And it's almost certainly from the '50s. Non-cutaway archtop electrics appeared in the mid '30s and, after a hiatus for World War II, returned in the late '40s.

Gibson is credited with introducing the single-cutaway hollowbody electric with the ES-350P in 1947. An immediate success, by the '50s, all makers were offering a version, and United continued making them as late as 1960. By that time, however, demand for thinline and solidbody electrics had far surpassed the bigbodies.

Little is known about United Guitars except they were an OEM manufacturer whose main customers were New York City distributors Peter Sorkin (Premier), Buegeleisen & Jacobson (S.S. Stewart), and Maurice Lipsky (Orpheum). United was descended from the Oscar Schmidt guitar company, itself preceded by the Menzenhauer Guitar-Zither Company (founded 1879), both also of Jersey City.

In 1896, Oscar Schmidt became a partner of Menzenhauer, then sole owner in 1900. Schmidt's company expanded quickly and was making a million instruments annually by 1903, and by '25 claimed to be the world's largest instrument manufacturer. Its own primary brands were Stella and Sovereign, but its bread and butter was making instruments for Sears and Montgomery Ward.

Brian Mckenney's '98 Guild Starfire IV.

Oscar Schmidt passed away in 1929. By '32, the company was in receivership, and when the bank failed in '35, assets were taken over by John Carver. In '37 or '38, brand names Stella and Sovereign were sold to the Harmony Company (which introduced its versions of Oscar Schmidt instruments in '39). Its guitar-making equipment was sold to a group of Italian luthiers who likely had been Oscar Schmidt employees and subsequently established United, which built guitars not much later than 1960, likley unable to withstand the assault of low-cost guitars from Japan.

Your guitar may have begun life as an Orpheum Symphonic, an S.S. Stewart Wondertone, or an early Premier. The logo plate being removed and the refin make it difficult to say, but the neck, back, and sides were probably a dark sunburst, the top perhaps sunburst.

That three-way switch replaced the pointer-knob pickup selector. It, along with the Volume and Tone knobs, would have been white Bakelite, as would the original pickguard. The bridge may or may not be original, but the Waverley tuners appear to be.

The pickups are likely original, though the neck unit looks to have been turned – pole pieces on both should face the neck. Made by the Fransch Electric Company in Queens, they were indeed sometimes called "Franz," and were also supplied to Guild and a few other guitar companies.

United Guitars are almost always better in quality than you'd expect. The company's luthiers were experienced, but, as OEM manufacturers, they were building for clients (job-

bers) whose niche was selling a few price points lower than premium brands. Picture the shop salesman: "Look, son... I understand that you can't afford this expensive Guild right now, but I have this other very pretty guitar that might just fit your budget."

Just because they weren't called "Gretsch" doesn't mean they couldn't be great-playing guitars, and now, they're genuine pieces of history. ***– Michael Wright***

I have a Guild Starfire IV with a serial number of AG1260. It's in like-new condition with no dings or scratches. Can you tell me more about the Starfire line, when mine was made, and an approximate value? – *Brian Mckenney*

Guild serial numbers in the mid/late 1990s were incomplete, but the last Starfire IV listed in '97 is AG937, so yours is likely from '98. In all-original/excellent condition, *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide 2025* puts the value at $1,500 to $2,000.

The Starfire IV, V, and VI were thin/semi-hollow guitars with a center block, similar to Gibson's ES-335, while their predecessor Starfire I, II, and III were fully hollow with a single florentine cutaway. ***– Jay Pilzer***

I have a Crestwood copy of a Gibson ES-175 that I believe is carved, not laminated. The fit and finish are top-quality and it's a joy to play, but I can't find any real information on it. – *Kit Kildahl*

What you have is a Crestwood-branded Ventura from the 1970s, made in Japan for Kaman Corporation's distributing subsidiaries.

The Ventura brand was central to a number of important developments. By '71, Kaman was enjoying success with its novel Ovation guitars and expanded its distribution channels by purchasing two distributors, Coast Wholesale Companies, in California, and C. Bruno of New York and San Antonio. Both were promoting high-quality Japanese guitars.

Most (not all) early Japanese guitar makers were OEM manufacturers who would put whatever brand the customer wanted on guitars, much like Kay and Harmony in the U.S. Ventura was one of the marks used by C. Bruno by '68, possibly earlier.

It's not known exactly when Bruno began importing an ES-175 copy it called the V-1007, but it wasn't in the 1970 Ventura catalog. Sellers today claim all sorts of dates beginning in the late '60s, but a good guess would be it first appeared in '73/'74 and was offered at least into '78.

Ventura guitars were from the "copy era," during which Japanese manufacturers dented the American market with "copies" of popular models. Ironically, the strategy coincided with a slide in quality control among the big American companies. As the Japanese got progressively better at duplicating, American makers became increasingly alarmed. By '76, Gibson's lawyers were sending threatening letters, and in June of '77, Norlin (the parent of Gibson) filed suit in Philadelphia Federal Court against Elger (the American partner of Hoshino/Ibanez), demanding they stop infringing on Gibson's "open-book" headstock design.

During its run, the V-1007 had two headstocks – open-book and later, a more-rounded crown without the dip. It's *probable* this change occurred to avoid the implications of Gibson's lawsuit, which would date the headstock to around '77. It's also possible the difference was completely random.

Venturas are typically thought to have been built in the Matsumoku factory, in Matsumoto, which opened in 1951 to make cabinets for Singer sewing machines as well as for audio and television makers. In '63, it began making classical guitars and violins, then ramped up to make electric guitars and basses, eventually producing some of the finest electric guitars of the '70s and early '80s.

The typical technique for making an archtop in Japan was to use heat and steam while pressing the wood into a curve. However, Matsumoku was an early pioneer in CNC technology, so the top could on yours could have been "carved" by machine.

Ventura guitars were distributed by C. Bruno and/or Coast, and we may never know how the Crestwood brand fit, historically. But we know it was used by a high-volume customer – maybe a regional chain or a smaller importer/distributor who ordered directly from Matsumoku. ***– Michael Wright***

From the same mother: Kit Kildahl's Crestwood and Michael Wright's Ventura V-1007.

Special thanks to Michael Newton.

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**

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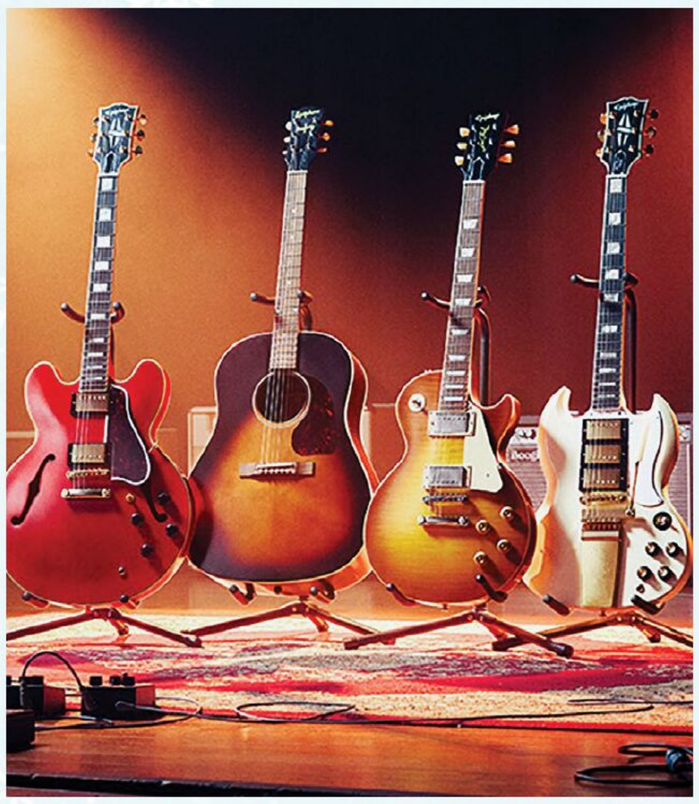

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Aragorn Guitars

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By Oscar Jordan

George Benson

Breezin' With The Boss of Jazz Guitar

Grammy winner and music legend George Benson has lived a guitarist's dream. Bridging the gap between pop and jazz helped him sell millions of albums and made him a figurehead at the intersections of several genres. Always forward-thinking, he's now entering a new phase in life, has a new album, and is preparing to host a retreat where everyday players will rub elbows with world-class musicians. He's also preparing to sell some of his most-cherished guitars.

Your new album, *Dreams Do Come True*, was recorded in 1989 but never released. What's the story behind it?

I happened to be with Quincy Jones. We had just finished the *Give Me The Night* album, which was very successful. I asked Quincy, "Who is the baddest arranger in the world?" It was an off-the-cuff question, but I wanted to know his opinion. He said, "Two names come to mind, but I think you would love Robert Farnon."

I'd never heard of him. He said, "I think he's from Canada, but moved to England." I happened to be going to England to do a concert, and I ran into a guy who was a very good friend of his, and he introduced me. What a meeting it was; he was a very kind and astute gentleman who knew what he was talking about. He was doing some things with the London Symphony Orchestra, and he invited me to a recording session. He then wrote 17 arrangements for me in about three days. When I heard that stuff, I said, "Man, maybe I bit off more than I can chew!" I tried a couple of songs while we were there and said, "No. I'm going to take these arrangements back with me to New York."

I worked on them for two or three weeks then presented it to the record company and they said, "George, we're

Benson with the prototype GB 45th SSR, with an adjustable tailpiece he designed.

George Benson: Matt Furman/Rhino-WMG.

This Ibanez GB10 spent the last decade serving as Benson's live/touring workhorse. This Ibanez GB20 is a one-off known in Benson's camp as the Green Monster. Benson's 1980 D'Aquisto.

Guitar photos courtesy of Reverb.

happy with the hits we're making. We don't need new ideas!" So, I put it away and I forgot all about it. Since then, Mr. Farnon passed away and that really made me forget all about it until I got a call from a guy in a warehouse who said, "Mr. Benson, we got some stuff here." I said, "Read me some of the titles." He said, "Robert Farnon, London." I said, "Man! Send me that stuff!" He sent it, and I was just as amazed as I was the first time I heard it.

I found a way to transfer it to a digital format and it sounded so good because one of the engineers was great and it was in pristine condition. I had to put it back together and get in touch with Warner Records. They were interested 30-some years later! It took almost two years to finish, and when they heard it, they loved it.

Your voice is velvet on "Pretend." It's like you're channeling Nat King Cole.

Oh, what a great era that was. But we also try to mix things up. That's my goal when I record. I say, "Well, they might not like this tune, but maybe they'll like the next one or the one after that." That's my idea. When I make records, I make it as if I was the listener; "Man, this is getting boring. Let me hear something else." "Okay, this is better!" "Oh, this third one is interesting!

Let me check it out!" That's what I think about when I'm recording.

Your music has always been accessible. There's no jazz snobbery or self-indulgence. You invite people to the party.

I like the words you use. Bring 'em to the party. That party thing is why people go out and why they do things. They're looking for the energy. They're looking for something that gives life that spice. Something that they didn't do yesterday. Something they were looking forward to, and now it's here. Let's jam!

They already know I can play... I *hope* they know by now. If I weren't able, it would be purely evident by now and I would be working in a jewelry store somewhere (laughs). People expect something else. The people who come to my music are diverse. It's not all the same vibe or people. Here's what I tell all my jazz fans – the guy who comes to my shows might bring a girlfriend who might not care about jazz. It would be safe to say she's looking to hear something more on the romantic side. I think that's why my records are so successful, because I never forget that part.

I'm happy for the guy looking for some adventure. I'd say, "Hey man, have you heard this?" Bam! "Well, you should try this!" Pow! I like that, too, because it gives life the spice that it needs to keep you going.

When you headlined at the Hollywood Bowl, people of every race, creed, color, and age were dancing in the aisles.

That's the way it was when I got to Europe. When I played London, the whole house stood up from the first song and never sat down. Even though they had very comfortable seats and the place was packed, when I played dance tunes or a love song, they loved it and were glad they came.

How intense was the ridicule in the '70s between being respected as a serious jazz guitarist versus being popular among mainstream audiences?

I've faced years of controversy about what I do. But as I look back, the thing that affected my life in a big way was when I joined Jack McDuff's band. I was 19 years old. I sat in with him the night before and he said, "Man, I like the way you play. You think you might like to join my band?" I said, "Oh, Mr. McDuff, I'm not ready for that. I'm a singer here in Pittsburgh, not a guitar player." He said, "I don't want no singin' in my band! I don't like singers! They take too much attention away from the musicianship!"

Somehow, I left town with him the next day. He called ahead and said, "I found this kid and I'm bringing him to New York!" I thought, "Wow, man. I'm really biting off a lot here!" But when he heard me play, he fired me the next night. He said, "I don't think you're going to make it with the band. But when we get to New York, I got a gig you're gonna love."

When we got to New York, he was thinking about putting me with a popular band called the Willis Jackson Band. But in Willis' band, they had a new kid – Pat Martino, who at 17 was the best guitarist I'd ever heard in my life! I said, "One thing

Benson's Gibson Johnny Smith is the guitar heard on the Grammy-winning song "Breezin'," which was recorded live in one cut. It spent some time at the Museum of Musical Instruments, displayed alongside the piano used by John Lennon to record "Imagine." From Benson's collection and bound for sale, a Gibson L-5 Wes Montgomery.

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I know for certain: I won't be taking his place!" (laughs)

The good thing that happened after all that craziness was the weeks it took to get back to New York from gigs in the Midwest. Jack McDuff's manager heard the new band with me in it and said to McDuff, "Did I hear you say you were going to fire this kid?" McDuff said, "Yeah, why?" He said, "You can't fire him. The band sounds better with him in it. I suggest we go into the studio and make a record."

That was the beginning of a new career for me. From that time on, I was struggling to play something decent. Jack demurred and stayed on my back about everything I did – *criticized* me for everything. He kept on me doing something that I'd never thought I'd do – practice every day! I practiced and practiced, and got into the habit. Every day. That's what made the difference. I made so much progress in two years that people started calling me a guitar player, and I got used to it.

They didn't know I sang because Jack said it was a no-no. "Don't open your mouth!" (laughs) So, I became known as a guitar player. If Jack gave you a solo and it was mostly blues, he'd give you 12 bars. If that first 12 bars was good, he'd allow you to play another 12. If that first 12 fell apart, he would say, "Alright... Saxophone!" It was like that the whole time I was with him.

I learned to strike up hot solos very fast because I had that mentality. If you ain't playin' good, 'bye! In New York, that became important because people would call me into the studio as a side man. All my solos were interesting to them because all the songs were three minutes and under. So, I became very popular and made a lot of interesting records with a lot of great people.

Speaking of education, you're hosting a musician's retreat in January.

There are some great cats on this retreat. I used to see most of those guys now and then, and they're all top-flight guitar players. And the guys I don't know as well, I'm certain they're the best the world has to offer. It's going to be great to see them all in one place. Usually, I'll see one guy in Europe, one guy in this country or another guy in that country. I'd see two or three of them in the United States or Australia. Now, they'll be up here with me in my territory. Lots of sunshine and beauty everywhere, and a few mountains here and there. There will be lots of space, and I expect this will be quite an event.

It's called Breezin' With The Stars, January 3 to 6 at the Wigwam Resort, in Phoenix. The list of instructors is mind-blowing – John Scofield, Tommy Emmanuel, Andy Timmons, Stanley Jordan, Isaiah Sharkey, and Rick Beato. Steve Lukather will be there. You've worked with him before.

"[I always hear] something off the cuff or off the left side that I don't expect to affect me. It makes me go home, pick up my guitar, and say, 'How come I didn't think of that?'"

Steve is a great guy and a great guitar player. He brought me a smash with "Turn Your Love Around." We went around over that song, but wound up putting it on tape. When he heard it back, he said, "Uh, well, maybe (laughs)." But there was no "maybe" in it. That song went straight to the top of the charts. I said, "I've been trying to tell you, man! This is a great song!"

Lee Ritenour will also be there. He's a big fan of yours.

What people don't know is that at the beginning of "Give Me The Night," Lee is playing one of the octave parts. I wondered why Quincy Jones called him. I couldn't imagine him just being a side man on something. Lee is a monster, and Quincy used him because he didn't particularly like my jazz-guitar sound. He wanted to get me out of the jazz routine. So, he had Lee tune me into a medium sound – something between rock and pop guitar. That's why that record sounded the way it did – because of Lee Ritenour's influence.

Is there an overview of what you're trying to accomplish at the retreat?

I've never done anything like it, but it reminds me of something I was getting ready to do before *Breezin'* came out. Howard Roberts came to one of my club dates and we talked about starting a camp in Portland. We were going to invite people from all over the world – like Kenny Burrell, Barney Kessel, and whoever was well-known at that time. I knew a lot of guitar players. It was a great idea, but never got off the ground because of *Breezin'*. I didn't need the money anymore (laughs).

But this is a continuation of that idea, but better. The quality of the musicianship is just as good, but they're more well-known, so we're in a good position.

Will you participate in the sessions?

Whenever I can, I will, because I want to learn something, too (laughs)! I never shut my ears down, and [I always hear] something off the cuff or off the left side that I don't expect to affect me. It makes me go home, pick up my guitar, and say, "How come I didn't think of that?" I always

add things to everything I learn. That's the way I think. I'm not an educated musician; I've been to music schools, not as a student, but as a guest. I've sat in on classes and met some very astute musicians. I've learned to listen, and this is the time to keep that going and get some new ideas.

You're an intuitive player rather than being a theory encyclopedia. Has that created a challenge communicating with musicians who are more analytical about music theory?

I've had invitations to teach at a few of the top music schools. I tell them, "Man, I can't teach guitar. I play mostly by ear." I have an understanding of simple harmony and theory, but I'm not educated; I don't know how to use where or what. I know what sounds good to me, and I know how to get it.

You're selling some of your guitars on Reverb.

A *lot* of guitars, and one of them is the *Breezin'* guitar, which is unique. It's the Gibson Johnny Smith that I bought on a whim, took to L.A., and the first time I played it was on that album. The first song I used it on was "Affirmation." Everybody was so knocked out. I used a Polytone amplifier and had never played with that amp before. All the guitar players knew me for one sound that was going on with all the CTI records I made, but this had an excellent mellow sound with resonance and sustain, so it became very special.

What are some other notables you'll be selling?

I have a D'Aquisto from 1980 that's a fantastic instrument, and a lot of guitars I took on the road. There's an Ibanez GB20 prototype, a lot of Ibanez GB10s that I designed over the years. Ibanez would send me things to wow me with their skills, and they *have* quite a bit of skill. They make guitars that last and don't break down, and that's why I signed with them. I used to drop guitars on the floor. You couldn't pick up most guitars and play them, but you could with an Ibanez, and wouldn't even have to tune it. You could pick it up and play!

Which guitar are you playing most right now?

I'm playing an old GB10 – one that Reverb will be selling. It's been on the road for 20 years, but they'll fix it up and make it look decent – but not *too* much! One time, I had a Wes Montgomery guitar with bullet holes in it! So, I had somebody fix it up, and everybody said, "Man, I wish you'd left the bullet holes in it (laughs)." Just to prove how old it is and what it had been through. So, I learned to not fix it up too much. Just make it workable and let 'em see the years and the wear on the guitar.

What's your favorite amplifier right now?

The Fender Twin has always been my favorite amp. You can't get the Polytone 104 anymore, and that was a great recording amp, but not a live amp. The Twin is versatile and always present. You can get any kind of sound out of it. If you don't watch it, it'll take over the show with all that high-end comin' outta there, and all that presence. But it does it cleanly, and that's the part I like.

Beyond the retreat, what's on your calendar?

When I was putting together *Dreams Do Come True*, I found other stuff – tapes from my old house in the Bronx. I listened to some of them and said, "Man! I don't think I was proficient at that time, but the music was there. Tasty stuff! So, I'm going through that now and seeing what's usable. This is all the trio and quartet stuff I recorded in my garage between 1968 and '75. The bands I had back then were magnificent. **VG**

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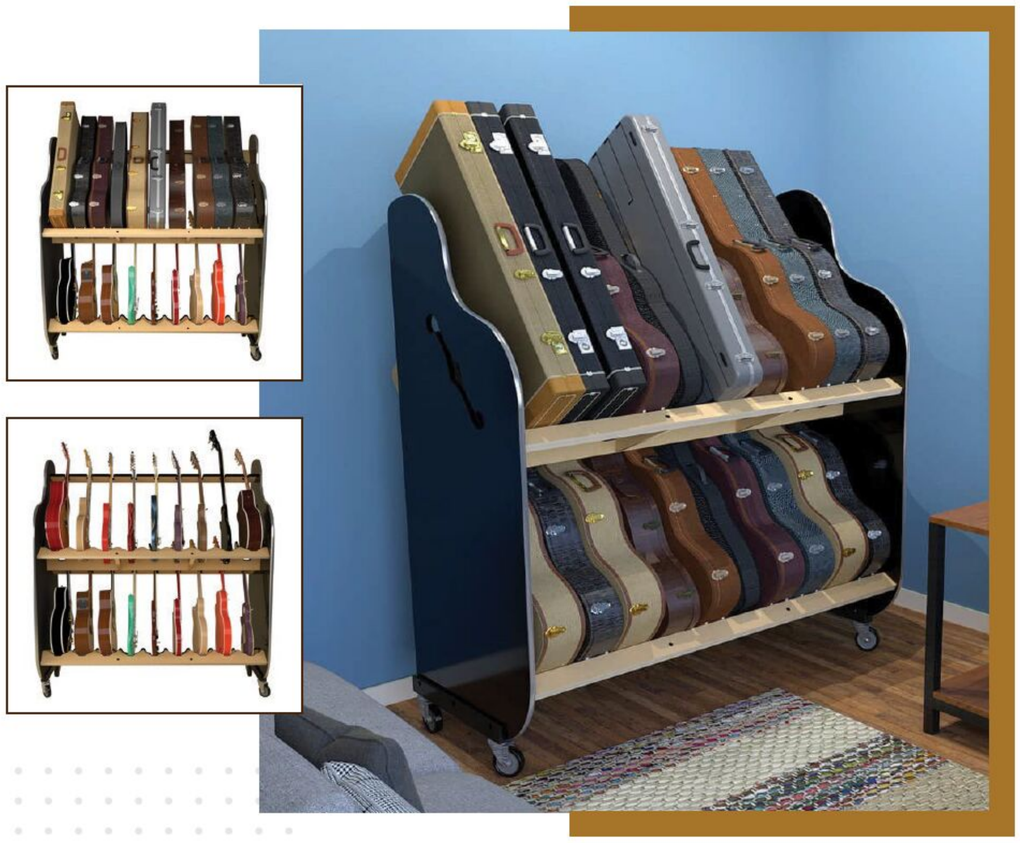

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NOVEMBER

The "American Guitar Show," at SHIBUYA Stream Hall in Tokyo. November 16-17, 2024. 11.16 sat. 2:00pm-8:00pm / 11.17 sun. 11:00am ~ 4:00pm. Contact Nobuyuki Hayashi at +81-3-6823-2385

Midwest Music Gear Swap presentsits 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

Rose Quarter Guitar Show, Sunday Novvember 24th, 2024. 10am-3:30pm Veterans Memorial Coliseum, 300 N Ramsay Wy, Portland, OR 97227. Contact: bruceadolph@mac.com www.westcoastguitarshows.com **(See Advertisement on page 64.)**

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, amigoshows@stringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

2025 Winter Ohio Guitar Show, Sunday, January 12, 2025 at the Makoy Center 5462 Center St, Hilliard, OH43026. 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, amigoshows@stringswest.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 **(See Advertisement on page 65.)**

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 –3 pm 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.

KC Guitar Show, Sunday March 16 from 11am t 5pm at the Embassy Suites KCI, 7640 NW Tiffany Springs Pkwy, Kansas City, MO 65153. Contact Mark at 816-520-8430 or visit kcguitarshow.com

Amigo Nashville Guitar Show 2025, March 22, 10-5 and March 23, 10-4. Williamson County Ag EXPO Park, 4215 Long Lane, Franklin, TN. For more info contact Ruth Brinkmann (817) 312-7659 ruthmbrinkmann@gmail.com, Larry Briggs (918) 288-2222, shows@amigoguitarshows.com, Dave Crocker, davelcrocker@gmail.com (417) 850-4751. www.amigoguitarshows.com.

APRIL

The Indiana Guitar Show, April 12-13, at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds 1900 E. Main St. Danville, IN. For more information contact Eddie at (317) 272-5222 or visit www.theindianaguitarshow.com

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, OH43026. 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

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Upcoming Events

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, amigoshows@stringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com. amigoshows@stringswest.com, www.amigoguitarshows.com.

Illinois Guitar & GearExpo, Sunday Sept 14, 2025 at the Kankakee County Fairgrounds 213 W 4000S Rd. Kankakee,IL 60901, 10am – 3pm For more info, visit: https://www.illinoisguitarexpo.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

The Indiana Guitar Show, September 27-28 2025, at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds 1900 E. Main St. Danville, IN. 10:00 to 5:00 on Sat & 10:00 to 3:00 on Sun For more information contact Eddie at (317) 272-5222 or visit www.theindianaguitarshow.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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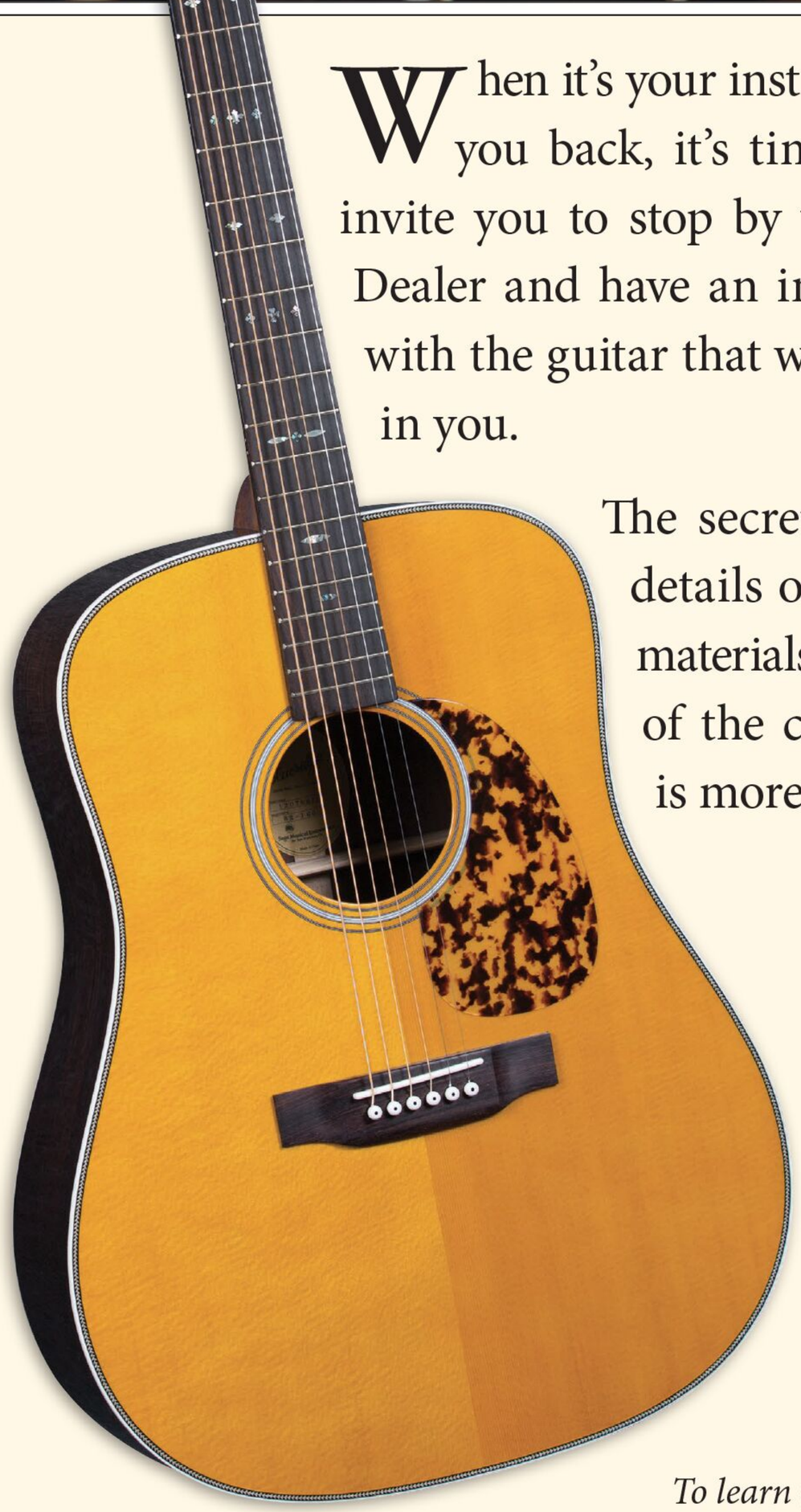

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HIT LIST REVIEWS

SPIRIT, CONJURED

Billy Strings
Live, Volume 1

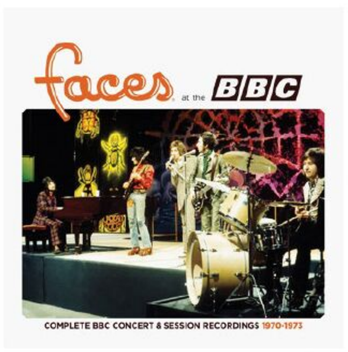
Billy Strings has travelled far from his days as bluegrass flatpicking prodigy, though that style remains a linchpin of his sound as he's kept moving, developing greater depth and range.

Strings' ability to seamlessly move between acoustic Appalachian virtuosity and complex, extended amplified improvisations (on the same wired-up Preston Thompson D-BA) has broadened his already sizable audience. So have collaborations with Willie Nelson, Jake Shimabukuro, and other heavy hitters.

This collection of tunes, recorded at various shows, explores that range in stunning detail. The traditional side is well-represented on the ballad "Hellbender," with the upbeat dope lament "Dust in a Baggie" showcasing his free-flowing flatpicking and unforced vocals. The jam tunes "Turmoil & Tinfoil," "Highway Hypnosis," and "Reuben's Train" reveal his full range, launching in semi-bluegrass mode before striking into uncharted territory, then circling back.

On "Heartbeat of America," the band – banjoist Billy Failing, mandolinist Jarrod Walker, fiddler Alex Hargreaves, and Royal Masat on upright bass – all shine before a fully amplified Strings launches into a solo heavy on Wes Montgomery-style octave work.

Bill Monroe and Doc Watson were innovators, but Strings is his own man. Yet on this remarkable collection, he and his musicians conjure their spirits. That's no small feat. ***– Rich Kienzle***



Faces
At the BBC: Complete BBC Concert & Session Recordings, 1970-1973

Rod Stewart & Faces were sloppy and raucous enough to make the Rolling Stones look like Air Supply. Okay, not really, but Stewart himself called them, "Five drunks who got away with murder under the guise of music." Of course, Faces were also great rock and rollers, so it's no coincidence the Stones hired Ian McLagan as keyboardist and conscripted Ronnie Wood after Mick Taylor's departure.

Rounded out by bassist Ronnie Lane and drummer Kenney Jones, the group cut some great albums, but they really excelled live. This eight-CD box is a fan's dream come true and a newbie's perfect gateway. There's Wood's slide on Big Bill Broonzy's "I Feel So Good," grimy distortion of "Borstal Boys," and balladry on Etta James' "I'd Rather Go Blind." Other recipients of their stamp include Elton John, Chuck Berry, McCartney, Hendrix, Dylan, the Stones, Temptations, and Sam Cooke.

Since leaving Faces nearly 50 years ago, Stewart has enjoyed solo success with excellent guitarists, yet there was always an element missing; call it collective personality, chemistry, or charisma. Faces had all of that and more, in spades. ***– Dan Forte***

Warren Haynes
Million Voices Whisper

Warren Haynes' first solo album since 2011 is an uplifting set that reflects am optimistic spirit of change and hope. With Haynes at the height of his superpowers on guitar and vocals, he leads a group of stellar musicians in this set of inspired songwriting. Gov't Mule bassist Kevin Scott handles low-end, joined by drummer Terence Higgins, keyboardist John Medeski, and former Allman Brothers Band cohort Derek Trucks on slide. Guitarists Lukas Nelson and Jamey Johnson round out the ensemble, but the songs are the stars of this album.

On the somber-but-poignant waltz feel of "These Changes," Trucks' unmistakable guitar artistry echoes. A horn section appears on "Go Down Swinging" with visceral guitar lines and Haynes' passionate vocal riding up top. Medeski's deep Hammond B3 permeates the record, adding resonant interplay on ditties like "This Life As We Know It" and the tantalizing groove of "You Ain't Above Me."

Harmony, vocal counterpoint, and opulent guitar sounds infiltrate this relaxed rock odyssey, which echoes The Band and whispers of Southern psychedelic soul. From funk to sensitive songwriter opuses, this is perhaps Haynes' most memorable record. ***– Oscar Jordan***

Billy Strings: Alysse Gafjken.

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Elvis Presley, 1956.

REAL GONE FOR A CHANGE

By Dan Forte

"Hold it, fellas." After languidly singing the first line of "Milk Cow Blues," Elvis Presley halted the proceedings. "That don't move me," he exhorted his sidemen. "Let's get real, real gone for a change."

And get real gone he did. Elvis strumming his '42 D-18, Scotty Moore on an ES-295, and upright bassist Bill Black kicked into a jumping tempo and cut the appropriately *retitled* "Milkcow Blues Boogie." It's been simplistically stated that combining blues and country music resulted in rock and roll and, at that 1954 session at Memphis' Sun Studio, Presley gave a vivid demonstration.

"Milk Cow Blues" dates back to bottleneck-slide guitarist Kokomo Arnold's 1934 recording, and was covered in '41 by Western-swing bandleader Johnnie Lee Wills, then by the Texas Playboys (led by his brother, Bob). Presley's version resembled those renditions lyrically and melodically, but the mood and effect were another world.

Elvis/Memphis collects all 111 recordings Presley made in his hometown, from the 1953 demos he cut at Memphis Recording Service (later Sun) to 16 tracks recorded at his Graceland mansion in '76.

The tracks for Sam Phillips' Sun Records are among the truly essential in rock history. Previous Sun artists included bluesmen Little Milton and Junior Parker, but Phillips was looking for "a white man who had the Negro sound and feel." After the 18-year-old truck driver recorded four syrupy love songs for his mother, Sun's secretary, Marion Keisker, urged Phillips to check him out. The producer then enlisted Moore and Black, and after various misfires, Elvis messed around with bluesman Arthur Crudup's "That's All Right." It clicked.

The subsequent selections reveal Presley's eclectic tastes and range as a vocalist, as well as the adaptability and seasoning of the older Moore and Black. There are covers of rhythm and blues (Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight," Arthur Gunter's "Baby, Let's Play House"), country ("I Forgot To Remember To Forget You"), and ballads (Lonnie Johnson's "Tomorrow Night," the Bing Crosby hit, "Harbor Lights"). Even more radical than "Milkcow," the flip side of "That's All Right" took bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe's "Blue Moon Of Kentucky" from a slow waltz to a hopped-up $^4/_4$.

Elvis didn't record in Memphis again until 1969, at American Sound Studio, where Reggie Young played the arpeggiated intro on "Suspicious Minds" and tasteful fills on the Dallas Frazier/Arthur Owen country-soul classic "True Love Travels on a Gravel Road." They played Hank Snow's country classic "I'm Movin' On" at a casual pace before John Hughey's pedal-steel shifted things into high gear. Later that year, James Burton joined Elvis' Las Vegas band after having played on Dale Hawkins' "Susie Q," being highly visible as Ricky Nelson's sideman, and logging numerous sessions including for Buffalo Springfield, Judy Collins, and Merle Haggard.

At Stax Studio in '73, Burton opened the sessions by ripping three gnarly choruses on "Promised Land" (with Per-Erik "Pete" Hallin on Clavinet) then adding Mu-tron phasing to understated bends on Danny O'Keefe's "Good Time Charlie's Got The Blues." Norbert Putnam's melodic bass established Tony Joe White's "I've Got A Thing About You, Baby."

Disc 4 presents the entire 1974 "Homecoming Concert" in all its bombastic glory, from the "Also Sprach Zarathustra" intro (the *2001: A Space Odyssey* theme) to the closing "Elvis has left the building" vamp. It's a mix of rockers like Ray Charles' "I Got A Woman" and Lloyd Price's "Lawdy, Miss Clawdy," country numbers like Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away," a gospel section, and oldies medleys. When the singer pulls out Crudup's "My Baby Left Me," with Burton's chicken pickin' replacing Moore's chords, he transports us back to '56.

In '76, Presley held sessions in Graceland's den, famously known as the Jungle Room, with the road band's Burton, bassist Jerry Scheff, and John Wilkinson on acoustic rhythm. His pseudo-operatic vocal on "Hurt" can't match the emotion of Timi Yuro's 1961 hit, while "Moody Blue" was his last Top 10 charter, albeit on Adult Contemporary. The grittier "Way Down" was recorded less than a year before his death at age 42.

The boxed set is replete with photos and liner notes by Memphis scholar Robert Gordon. With the exception of the Sun recordings, all tracks were newly mixed by Matt Ross-Spang, with overdubs stripped away.

There's been a lot of revisionist history about the beginnings of rock and roll, written by people who didn't experience it firsthand. Today, only those in their late 70s and 80s would have been consumers when Elvis hit the scene. He obviously didn't invent rock and roll, but the effect he had was like nothing the Eisenhower generation had experienced. Remarkably, after signing with RCA, "All Shook Up" and "Jailhouse Rock" reached #1 on the Pop, Country, and R&B charts.

Without Elvis, would there have been Buddy Holly or Ricky Nelson? Would Chuck Berry and Fats Domino have crossed over to white audiences? Would the Beatles have existed as more than a skiffle group? Suffice to say, Elvis' impact on music and culture was incalculable.

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Elvis Presley: ABG EPE IP.

HIT LIST REVIEWS

Richie Kotzen
Nomad

More than 30 years into a wildly eclectic career (hey, the guy played with Poison *and* bass god Stanley Clarke), Richie Kotzen is no longer that pre-grunge shredder. With *Nomad*, he again proves himself a multifaceted, nuanced musician with chops and a killer voice – and also plays slammin' drums on most cuts.

Kotzen's musical foundation is heavily in the funk/soul realm, and that infuses many tracks here, including "Insomnia." Behind the Philly Soul chorus there's an insane jazz-rock solo – Kotzen is genuinely a funky, hard-rockin', fusion-ready guitarist. Even so, this is only the tip of the iceberg. "Cheap Shots" could have been a Kiss anthem, deploying a hook-filled chorus and Ace Frehley-on-speed guitar solo. The title track has a slithering Lydian-mode theme, but also a dead-clean solo with sweeps and speedy runs, again revealing more versatility.

The best track is "Nihilist," which is so harmonically sophisticated it's hard to know where to begin. But again, it's a mistake to paint Kotzen with a simple brush; he can jump from fusion and funk to tasty jazz, and shred on a dime. Without doubt, *Nomad* is an impressive offering. Underestimate Richie Kotzen at your own peril. ***– Pete Prown***

Richie Kotzen

Mark Lettieri

Drenched in tasty guitar licks and passion, he unleashes masterfully controlled fury and pitch-perfect note selection on every cut.

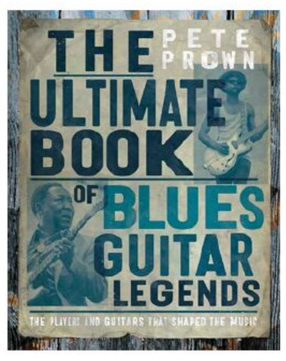
Juke-joint shuffles like "Connie-Lee," "Baby, Please Lie To Me," and "Big Bootyed Woman" are two parts reverence and one part humor that allow Walter to get down and dirty, displaying time-traveling chops that illustrate the universality of the blues. He leans into his rock-and-roll influences on the title track and "Chi-Town Soundcheck," uniting past with present. While also serving as producer and handling bass duties here, Khalif Wailin' Walter manhandles the guitar like the best contemporary bluesmen. ***– OJ***

Khalif Wailin' Walter
Phoenix Risin'

Spawned on the mean streets of Chicago but making his home in Essen, Germany, blues man Khalif Wailin' Walter has kept the blues alive by barnstorming festivals all over Europe and releasing music inspired by the rich legacy of the Windy City.

His latest album, *Phoenix Risin'*, combines the atmosphere of '50s/'60s Chicago and Texas with contemporary rock-guitar tones and gutbucket soul.

Vocalizing on heartbreaking songs like "I'm Through Cryin'," "The Streets," and "I'm Your Love Doctor," Walter offers an entertaining seminar in writing and performing crying-in-your-beer songs with visceral tones and hot-buttered soul.



Pete Prown
The Ultimate Book of Blues Guitar Legends

The blues is the foundation of nearly all American popular music, and this book by *Vintage Guitar*'s music editor covers the genre's giants, from the founders to present-day practitioners. Its emphasis is on electric blues since the days of T-Bone Walker and Gatemouth Brown, but it also touches on acoustic-blues men and women.

The introduction examines the blues' historical roots, including how it started in the South before Americans brought it north during the Great Migration. Prown then analyzes the form's evolution, including how players absorbed its essence and injected it to subgenres like Piedmont blues, Chicago blues, blues-rock, rock and roll.

One-page biographies skillfully summarize the genre's legends – from Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf to B.B. King, Buddy Guy, and John Lee Hooker – along with greats who've followed (Clapton, Winter, Vaughan, Raitt, and more) right up to the present.

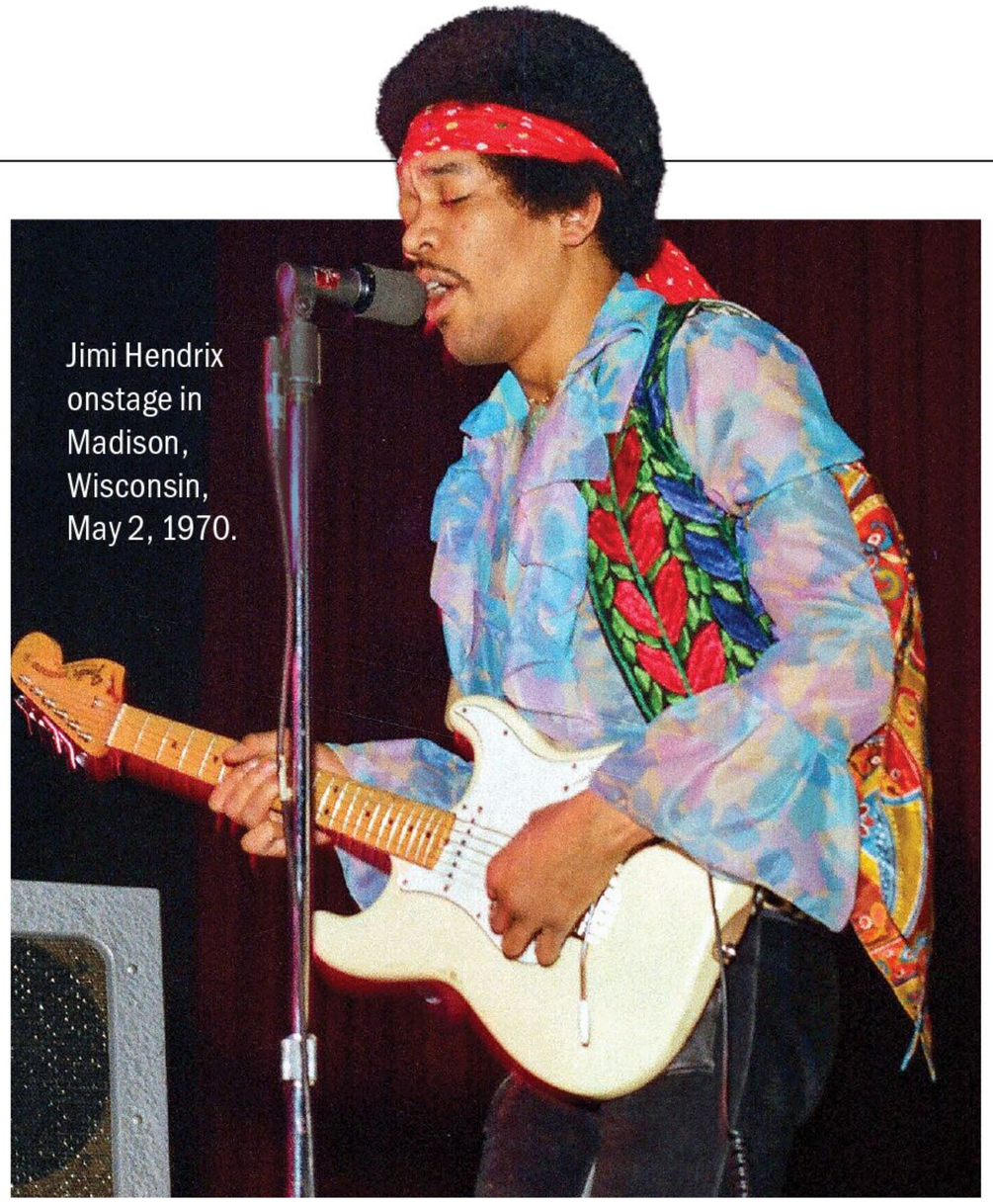
Loaded with great photos and many guitar/amp setups, this is an excellent primer, and a solid reference with its blend of overview and detail. ***– Bret Adams***

Mark Lettieri
Can I Tell You Something?

The Snarky Puppy virtuoso delivers a set of crisp funk-fusion, touching on everything from Steely Dan jazzisms to an '80s dance party. Part of Lettieri's charm is that he's an absolute beast on six-string, but never forgets groove and taste – even when melting the frets off.

"Dragonfly" has soaring, Lukather-tinged leads next to a baritone riff, while "Black Iris" turns down the heat for clean, extra-wobbly guitar. Lettieri's love of Jeff Beck is heard on "Blankworld" with El Becko-styled licks and burp-gun effects. Evoking a joyous MTV vibe, "Shimmy Tiger" has an overdriven melody over DX7-style synthesizer tones – a defining

Khalif Wailin' Walter: Robert Ducat. Mark Lettieri: J, Thibeaux / Wikipedia.



Jimi Hendrix onstage in Madison, Wisconsin, May 2, 1970.

sound of the period – while "Saturday Stuff" is a straight-up Prince boogie. On the debit side, there's yet *another* version of Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time," an '80s warhorse covered too frequently.

Grabbing his PRS baritone once again, Lettieri brings on the fat funk for "Neural Net," using the kind of crazy-tight rhythms that bring to mind Paul Jackson, Jr., David Williams, Nile Rodgers, and other compressor kingpins.

So... can we tell you something? Lettieri is a monster player, brimming with finesse, funk, and fury. **– *PP***

Jimi Hendrix

Electric Lady Studios: A Jimi Hendrix Vision

It's astonishing – and fortunate – that so much unreleased Jimi Hendrix material exists, given his brief recording career. It seems every time he picked up his guitar in the studio, the Record button was pressed.

The hook here is 38 of the 39 tracks are previously unreleased – different takes, alternate versions or mixes, and demos recorded from June through August of 1970 with bassist Billy Cox and drummer Mitch Mitchell helping form the new Jimi Hendrix Experience. Hendrix died that September, barely getting to explore his new state-of-the-art facility, which cost $1 million, and this set includes a 90-minute documentary on its creation with interviews and performance footage.

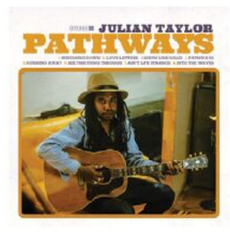
The subtle changes in the new JHE sound are evident throughout, largely thanks to Cox's R&B-grounded bass, but Mitchell's drumming evolved, too. "Ezy Rider (Alternate Mix)" is packed with Hendrix's groovy fills and solos cruising on Cox's funky bass. "Astro Man (Take 14)" rumbles with lots of heavy-duty rhythm guitar. Part of "Beginnings (Take 5)" is spacey, hard jazz-rock. The intense blues-rock fury of "Tune X"/"Just Came In (Take 8)" is staggering. Another goldmine for Jimi devotees. **– *BA VG***

Jimi Hendrix: Steve Braker/Authentic Hendrix.

extra EXTRA

JERRY DOUGLAS
The Set

Resophonic master Jerry Douglas' first solo album in seven years yields wisdom and artistry from this top session cat and Grammy winner. With backing by guitarist Mike Seal and violinist Christian Sedelmyer, Douglas plays old and new songs that paint lush landscapes and atmosphere. Highlights include "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," "Deacon Waltz," and "Pushed Too Far." **– *OJ***

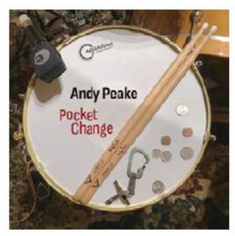


JULIAN TAYLOR
Pathways

Toronto folk singer/guitarist Taylor's rich voice and intriguing compositions immediately draw you in. He co-produced the album with Colin Linden, whose electric guitar lifts "Sixth Line Road." Linden adds crying Dobro to "Ain't Life Strange," and on "Into The Waves," his tremolo-laden guitar plays off the pedal steel of Jim Hoke, who elsewhere supplies accordion, harmonica, and sax. **– *DF***

PIPER & THE HARD TIMES
Revelation

The second-line groove of "Trouble Man" kicks off 12 originals showcasing Al "Piper" Green's big, guttural vocals. His Nashville-based trio has been together 20 years, and that seasoning shows. Guitarist Steve Eagon cites influences such as Muddy, B.B., Beck, Page, and Stevie Ray, adding a taste of rock energy. Check his throaty tone on the slow "Preacher Blues." **– *DF***



ANDY PEAKE
Pocket Change

Drummer Peake blurs boundaries on this rootsy set, aided by a slew of guitarists. Will McFarlane plays on most tracks, others sit in on individual tunes. On the '60s flavored "Samsong," Kenny Vaughan and McFarlane burn it up behind Peake's vocals. McFarlane and Terry Downing do likewise on "The Blues is Here to Stay," while John Prestia is particularly expressive on "Neighbor to Neighbor." **– *RK***

PETER BERNSTEIN
Better Angels

Jazz master Bernstein showcases his exquisite taste and harmonic skills on this appealing blend of originals and standards. The optimistic title song and swinging "Ditty for Dewey" reflect his compositional skills. A darker spin on trombonist J.J. Johnson's ballad "Lament" adds depth, as do exquisite interpretations of the standards "Born to be Blue" (unaccompanied) and "You Go to My Head." **– *RK***

BOB DYLAN & THE BAND
The 1974 Live Recordings

Dylan's 1974 tour with The Band signaled a milestone comeback. Dylan was (reportedly) not happy with the music, but that's tough to imagine while listening to the power and majesty of the original live LP, *Before the Flood*. Now, the floodgates have opened, and this box – with Robbie Robertson on lead guitar – features an incredible 417 unreleased tracks from the tour. Rejoice! **– *Michael Dregni***

VG APPROVED GEAR

LESS IS MORE

The Newman Guitars 5 String

Getting one's hands on a five-string electric like the one Ted Newman Jones built for Keith Richards in the '70s is a rare treat. Thanks to a partnership with the U.K.-based Cream T Custom Shop, adventurous players can now explore the road less traveled, as Keith has – that is, on an instrument built for open-G tuning.

Open G (G D G B D, low to high) is, technically, a banjo tuning, and isn't mandatory on the Newman. But once you wrap your head around it, you see why Keef said it unlocks "incredible resonations and ringing tones and drone notes." Cream T's custom pickups capture those airy resonances in Tele-like tones, with a crisp midrange voicing in middle position, notes that bloom in neck position, and a bridge pickup that delivers chords with a taut punch. And yet they are humbuckers, so you get the tight-and-bright Tele tang minus the harshness and hum.

Price: $2,999
www.newmanguitars.com

Newman's signature offset body, spec'd at under six pounds, has a deep cutaway that puts within easy reach every viable position of the guitar's 24 frets. The maple neck, with its satin finish and rosewood fretboard, is pretty dreamy, as well. The absence of a sixth string enables both a narrower nut and wider string spacing, and the carve is thick like a C shape but subtly flattened on top and bottom, like a D. The flatter edges also help the Newman tolerate a capo without blowing the intonation, which is unusual for electrics and useful for open-tuned playing. Aesthetically, it's handsomely understated, stand-out features being the distinct body shape, a nicely machined string-through bridge, and clean woodgrain lines under a Burnt Caramel finish.

Keith is right that a five-string guitar in banjo tuning opens new paths because "in a way, you're given another instrument to play and figure out." But frankly, we'd think twice before handing this uncommon beauty over to him in one of his biker jackets. Too many zippers. ***– Rich Maloof***

Price: $399
www.chasebliss.com

GLITCH NICHE

The Chase Bliss Onward

These days, there's a litany of "glitch" pedals on the market – boxes that deconstruct guitar signal into 8-bit bleeps and lo-fi bloops. Chase Bliss' entry is the Onward.

Unlike similar pedals, the Onward is remarkably accessible; just plug in and start twiddling knobs; Mix blends natural guitar tone with effect, while Octave adds synth-like high or low notes. Error is glitch central, and the coininciding Type switch chooses desired error. The Glitch footswitch activates the effect, while Freeze sustains the sound indefinitely. Add the highly useful, graphic manual – a *rarity* – and the Onward becomes a brilliant workstation for jamming or desktop recording.

What does it sound like? The box can evoke ambient sounds, synth textures, spacey harps, and robotic bleeping. If the top controls aren't enough, 16 DIP switches in the back add pinpoint tweaking. Also, hold both footswitches down to activate Hidden Options – another level of Chase Bliss madness.

In basic terms, the Onward is a "dynamic sampler," but more critically, it's a *musical* effect that's perfect for conjuring guitarscapes. It may not be for straight-up rock and roll, but if you dig sounds a la Radiohead or Townshend's synthesizer on *Who's Next*, it can deliver. ***– Pete Prown***

VALVE VARIATION

The Dr Z Octal Six 1x12 combo

Classic guitar amplifiers have made certain vacuum tubes household names (among gearheads) – 12AX7, 12AT7, 6L6, 6V6, EL84, and EL34. Working with various combinations of them along with carefully selected transformers and filter capacitors, amp builders tailor their creations to stand apart from the crowd. When Joe Walsh called Mike Zaite to discuss a custom build, he was intrigued by the twists suggested by the reticent guitar hero. The result is their fourth collaboration, the Dr Z Octal Six.

Price: $2,299
($1,899 as a head)
www.drzamps.com

Using 6SL7 and 6SN7 "octal" (eight-pin base) tubes that were commonly employed to power the amplifiers/speakers in old home-movie projectors (which have lately become the subject of trendy conversions to guitar amps) combined with a pair of 7591 power tubes, the Octal Six has two input jacks, controls for Volume, Treble, Mid, Bass, and Master volume. An effects loop is accessed via the back panel.

With a Les Paul and Telecaster going to Input I, clean tones through the Octal Six rang with warmth and clarity dressed by a touch of chime. Rolling up the Volume control added a healthy dose of gain, sustain, and crunch; notes thickened and compressed, yet low-end stayed tight while mids were clear and articulate. With the Master and Volume running full up, the amp exuded rich harmonic sustain with a singing voice that was simply captivating. It also cleaned up nicely when rolling off the guitar's Volume knob.

Input II was darker with less gain and presence, lending the sound even more character. Warm, melodic tones were coaxed with the Les Paul using the neck pickup, while the bridge delivered excellent classic-rock sound. No matter what it was offered, the custom-voiced Warehouse G12S/C speaker stayed warm, musical, and incredibly punchy, with a percussive response that made palm mutes and funky grooves particularly fun to play, especially with the Tele. The amp's responsive EQ allowed dialing-in everything from warm and smooth to bright and crunchy without degradation of natural character.

The Octal Six is a remarkable amplifier offering exceptional tone, feel, and versatility. Its design is a great blend of vision and creativity, and its execution is veritably flawless. Any player looking for a cool twist on their tone in a user-friendly package can confidently add it to their list. ***– Charlie Wilkins***

GEARIN' UP

FRIEDMAN JEL-50

Friedman Amplification's JEL-50 Jake E. Lee signature amp is a 50-watt/two-channel head with controls for Gain, Volume/Master and a Bright switch for each, along with global three-band EQ. It uses custom transformers and two EL34 power tubes. The ported 2x12 cab has matching red tolex, white piping, black grillecloth, and uses Celestion G12M-65 Creambacks.

CUSACK REBOUND

Cusack Music's Rebound Multi-Delay has controls for Time, Feedback, Parameter, Mix, Program, Trails, Level, and Tap Divide to dial-in eight programs and save to eight presets. Other features include an expression-pedal input, left and right Brake Up/Down footswitches, and stereo outputs with internally selected output options.

VOLA ZVA 5

The Vola ZVA 5 bass has an alder body, Modern C-shaped bolt-on maple neck, 9.5"-radius rosewood fretboard, 21 frets on a 34.5" scale, and a Duracon nut. Other features include nickel Gotoh machine heads and string-through bridge, Vola JS5 pickups, and the company's ATR-I active three-band EQ, which is engaged via mini-switch.

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

MOJO WORKING

The Harden Muddy Waters

Harden Engineering is a small Chicago shop that specializes in hand-made instruments in a variety of shapes and sizes and aims to bring a custom approach at affordable prices. Its Muddy Waters model is a single-cutaway with a body made of paulownia. Let's dig in.

The Muddy's medium-C shaped neck is maple capped by a 14"-radius rosewood fretboard decorated with catseye inlays and 22 jumbo frets over a 25.5" scale.

For electronics, look for two hand-wound Harden pickups. On the Muddy Waters, they're single-coils, but the bridge slot can accommodate any standard-sized humbucker (including Harden's own). Other details include a metal logo plate on the headstock, hand-etched metal armrest, and light relic'ing on the edges and back. The finish is called Distressed-Barn Brown.

Price: $1,250
www.hardenengineering.com

Amped up, the Muddy Waters impressed right off the bat with a combination of its light body and quick feel thanks to the neck carve and setup. In a word, it was "lively," with a bright persona emanating from the resonant paulownia and Harden single-coils. It's certainly not a traditional Telecaster, owing to the uncommon body wood and custom pickups, but it'll cover a lot of the same ground – rock, blues, country, and all combinations thereof. Clean, the Muddy Waters delivers lots of sparkle, while dirtied up, it cuts through a mix with its potent top end. No question, it likes to rock and roll.

Shipped with a hard case, the Muddy Waters is competitively priced and offers wicked custom touches in a guitar that looks old-school and plays like a modern plank should. There's plenty of value here and it would behoove any guitarist to check out Harden as an alternative to the tried-and-true solidbodies on the market. **– *Pete Prown***

LADIES' FIRST

Fender's Blu DeTiger x Player Plus Jazz Bass

With a quick glance and a dash of judginess, Fender's Blu DeTiger x Player Plus Jazz Bass looks like what you'd expect when a Gen Z TikTok influencer storms the design room. But boomer, check yourself! Because behind all that rizz is Fender's first signature-model bass bearing the name of a female player, and it's full of cool twists.

Yup, the unique Sky Burst Sparkle finish is flashy (esoteric?) and confident given the matching headstock, and the mirrored pickguard and chrome hardware speak to DeTiger's status as a stage-obsessed rising pop-funk star (and EDM DJ). This bass, though, has go to match the show.

Price: $1,399.99
www.fender.com

After donning sunglasses and grabbing hold, the DeTiger's next twist becomes apparent in how it doesn't feel so drawn to planet Earth. That's because its ash body is chambered – a first for a Fender signature bass, making it *noticeably* lightweight. Also, near the bridge is a Player Plus Active Meteora Fireball humbucker (custom-tweaked per DeTiger) engaged with a mini-toggle tucked next to a stacked knob; the 18-volt Player Plus preamp offers +/- 18 db of bass and treble boost/cut, along with +/- 12 db using the bottom Mid-range knob. Other controls are master Volume and a pan knob to blend the mid-mounted Player Plus Noiseless Jazz Bass pickup.

Strapped on, the DeTiger hangs like you'd expect, and there's familiarity in the 34" scale, vintage-tall frets, and 1.5" nut. The neck shape is based on a '61 Jazz, thanks to Blu (see our interview in "First Fret") having sifted through the collection of Jerry Barnes to find a shape that was just right. Here, it gets a modern satin finish and 9.5"-radius rosewood fretboard.

We sorted the DeTiger's sounds using two small, powered three-way PA tops and a 2x12 bass cab, the former flexing its midrange punch and snap, the latter letting it show off the full, round bottom of the Player Plus system. There's a lot to like about not only how the bound neck plays, but how, even in passive mode, the array of tones one finds using just the pan pot make it fun to experiment.

Jumping to active mode brings the vivacity. Turning up the stacked knobs inspired a run at "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)," where it deftly mimicked the trademark quack of Larry Graham's popped notes. One might nitpick at how the mini-toggle is tucked so tightly between knobs, but in a live setting it's unlikely you'd switch to passive mode.

No matter your style or sound, the DeTiger x Player Plus can provide anything from soft and mellow to punchy and aggressive, without breaking a sweat. **– *Ward Meeker* VG**

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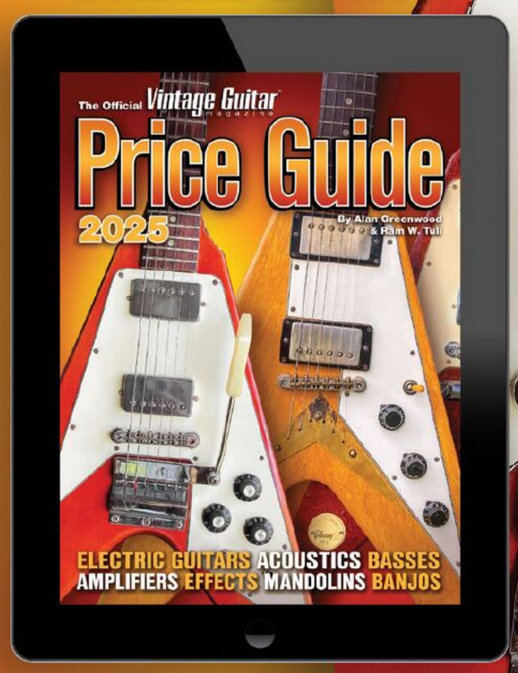

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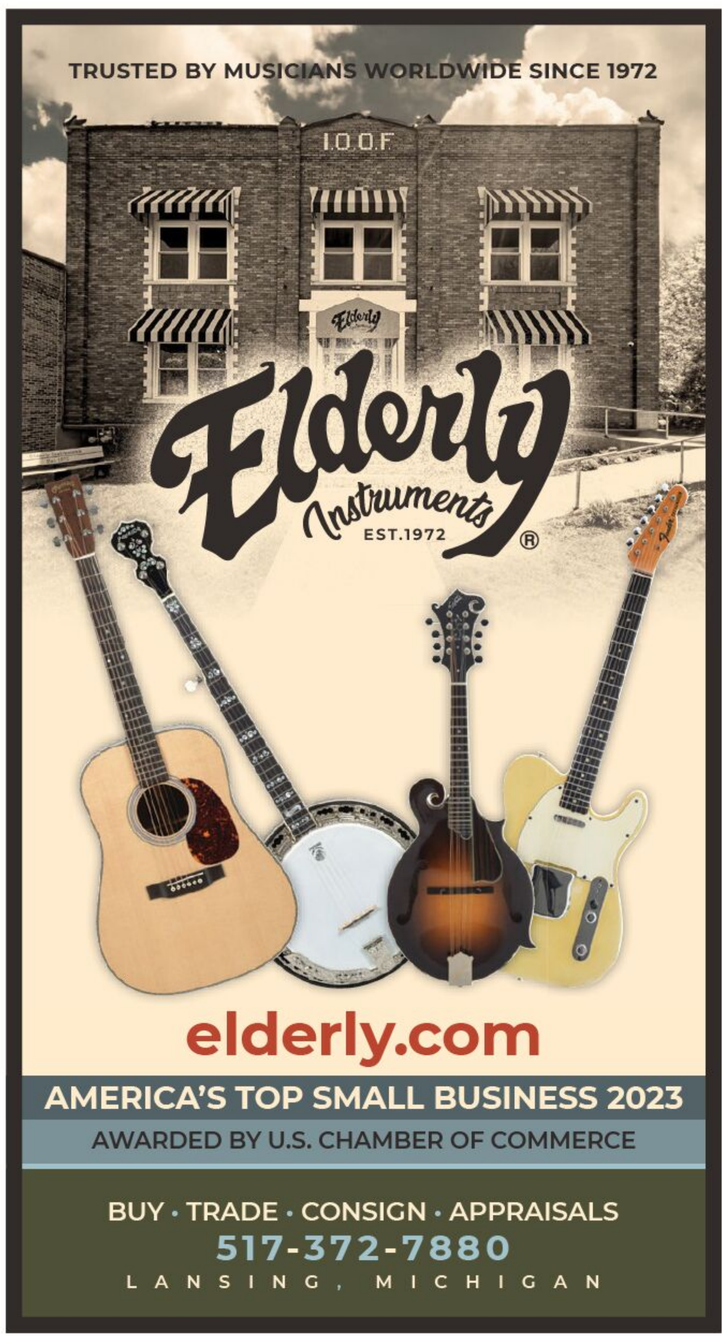

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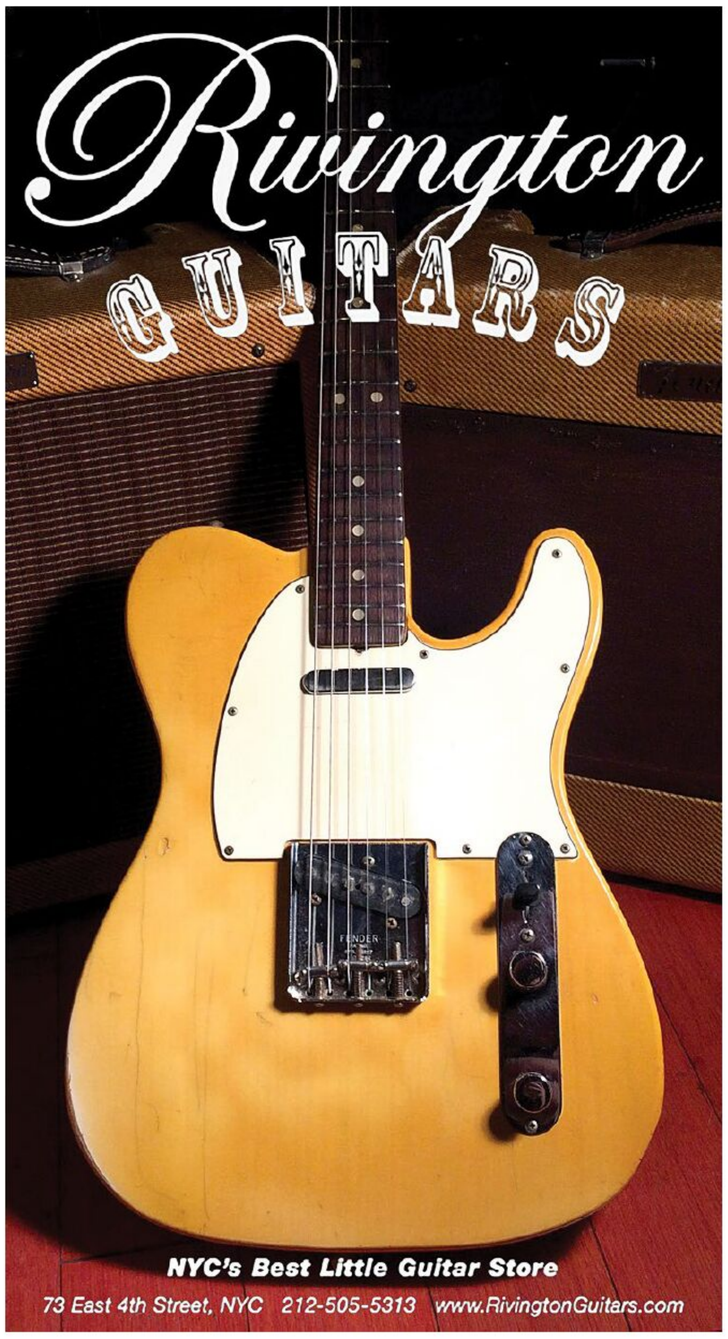

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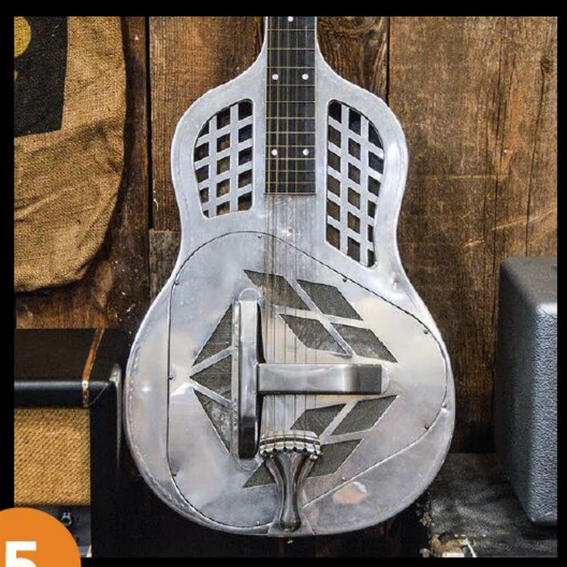

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01 Chiming in from Holland, Jan Meesters says, "I'm afraid I like everything with strings!" As evidence, here are his parts guitar, a Tele, and copies made by Tokai and Greco.

02 Cohn Rude shared this shot of his '65 Teisco ET-200 along with some memorabilia. "Teiscos have always been underrated," he says. "They're great guitars!"

03 Joe Wilson has been a *VG* subscriber for many years. "Here are my three favorite Fenders," he says. "That's a 15-year-old MIM Tele, 40-year-old Princeton Chorus amp, and a 12-year-old mix named... yes – Fender!"

04 Douglas Brimmell's growing collection of guitars and amps includes (from left) a Gretsch G6120TG Nashville, a Les Paul Standard '50s reissue, SG Standard '61 reissue, ES-335 Dot, American Pro II Strat, AP II Tele, Rickenbacker 330, and a Rick 360/12. His amps are a reissue Princeton Reverb, JCM800 SC20C, and Fender Acoustic SFX.

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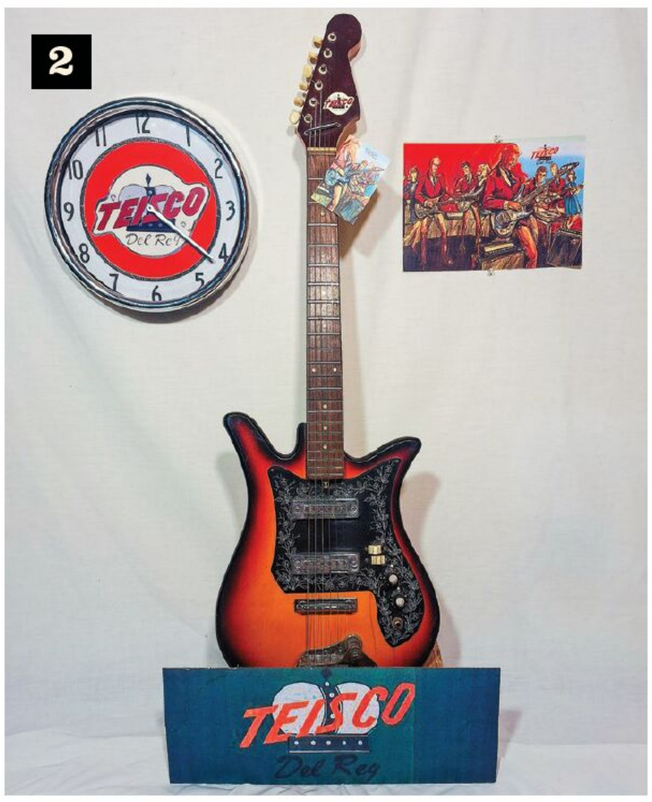

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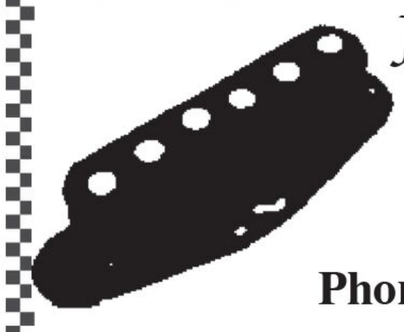

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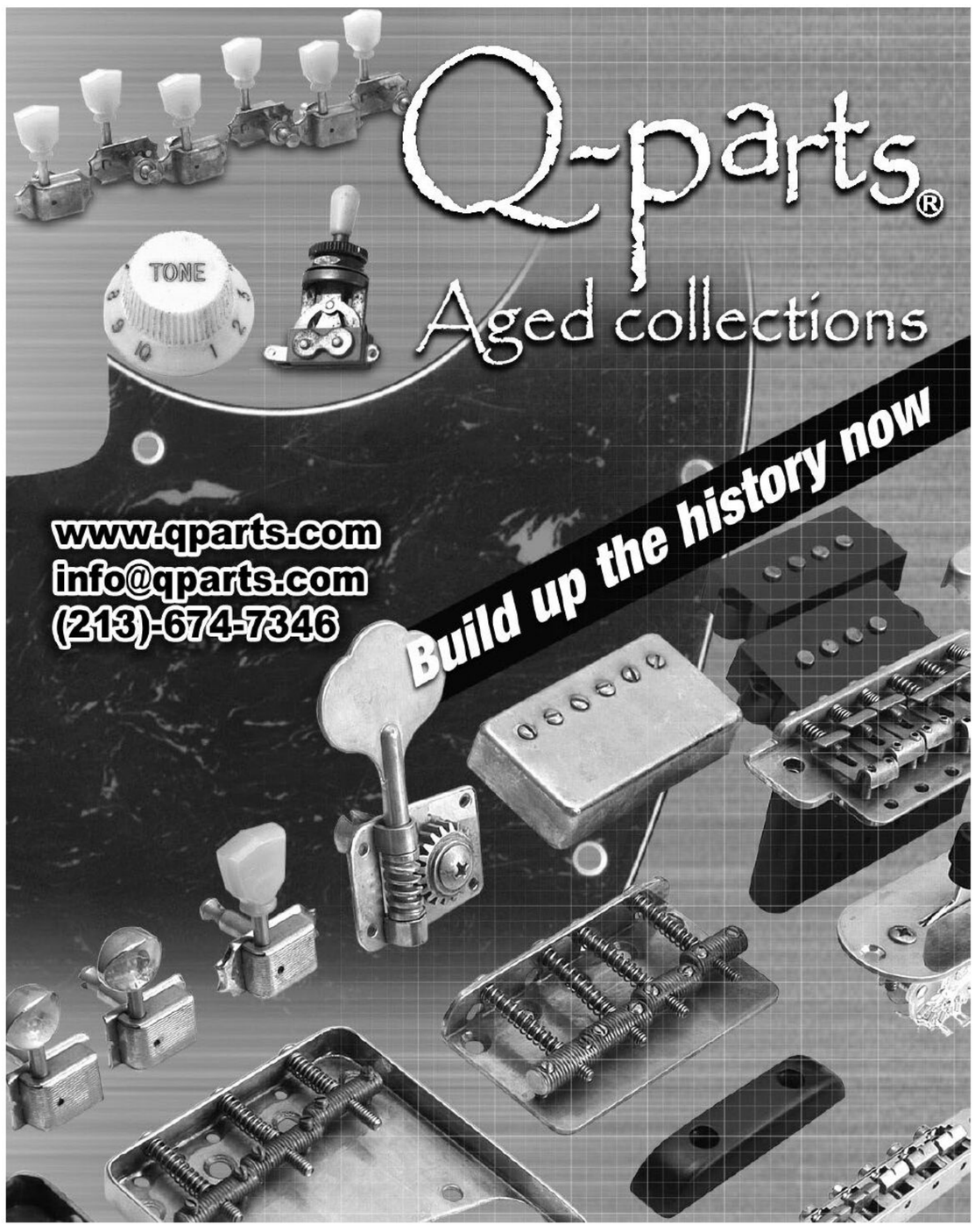

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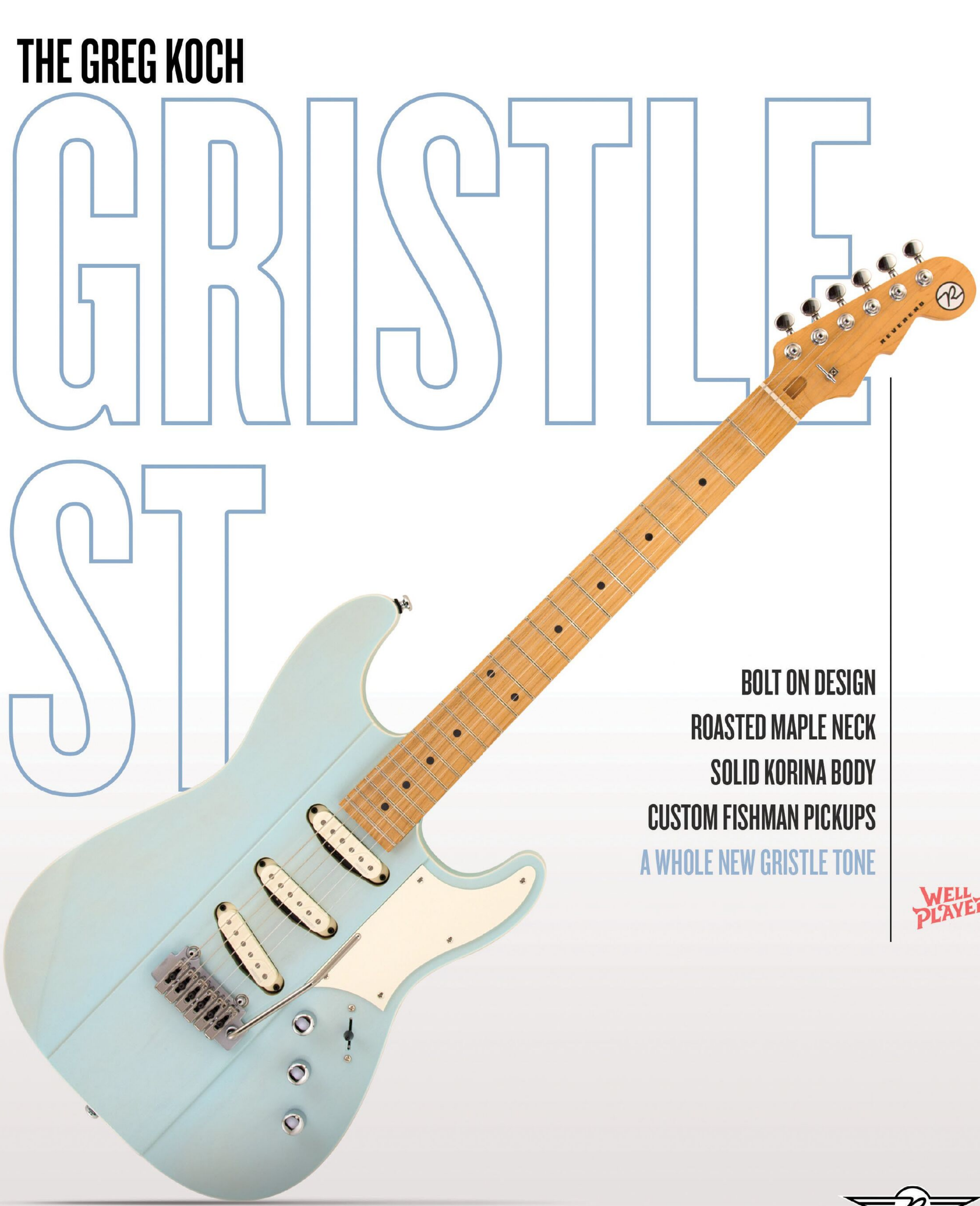

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