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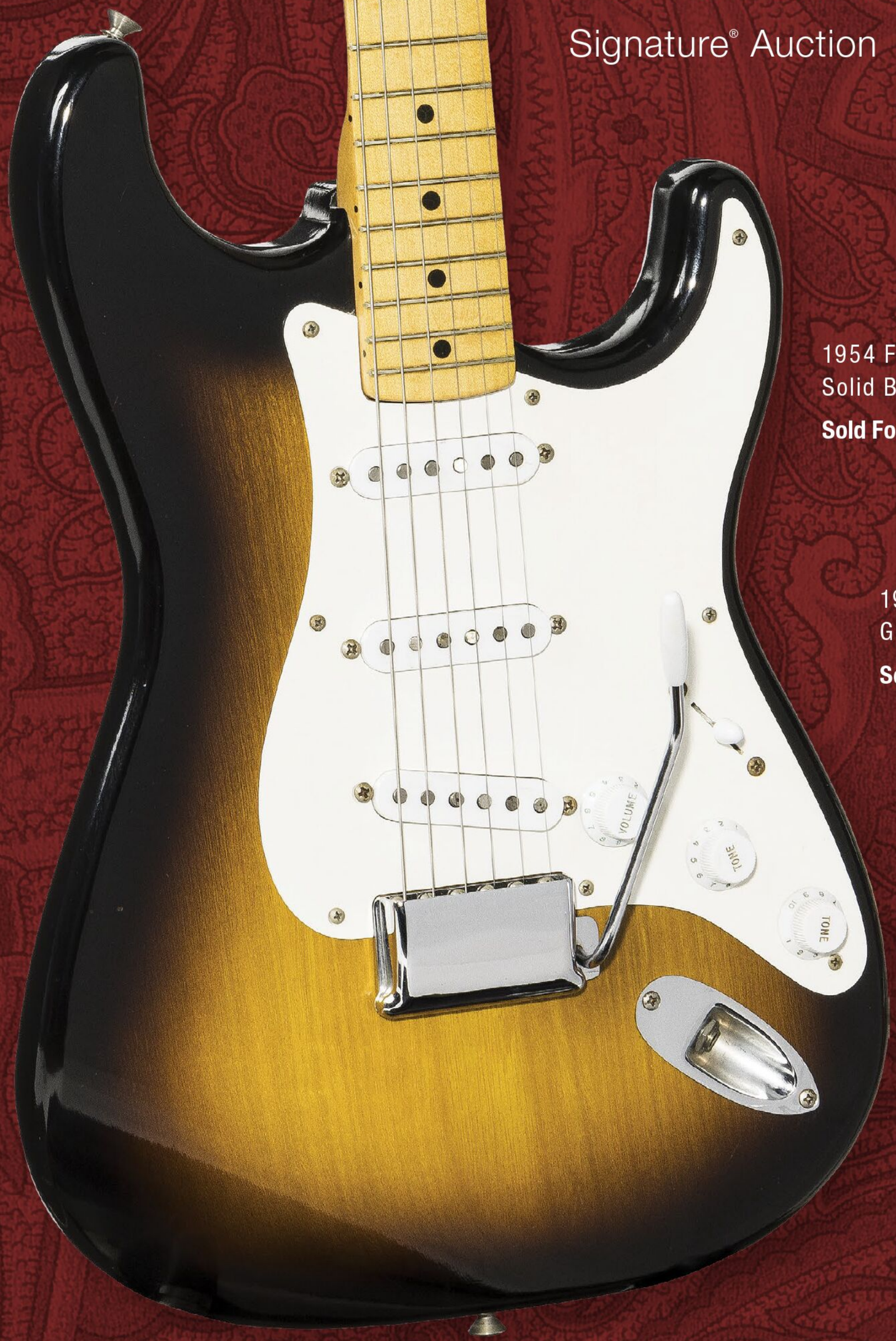

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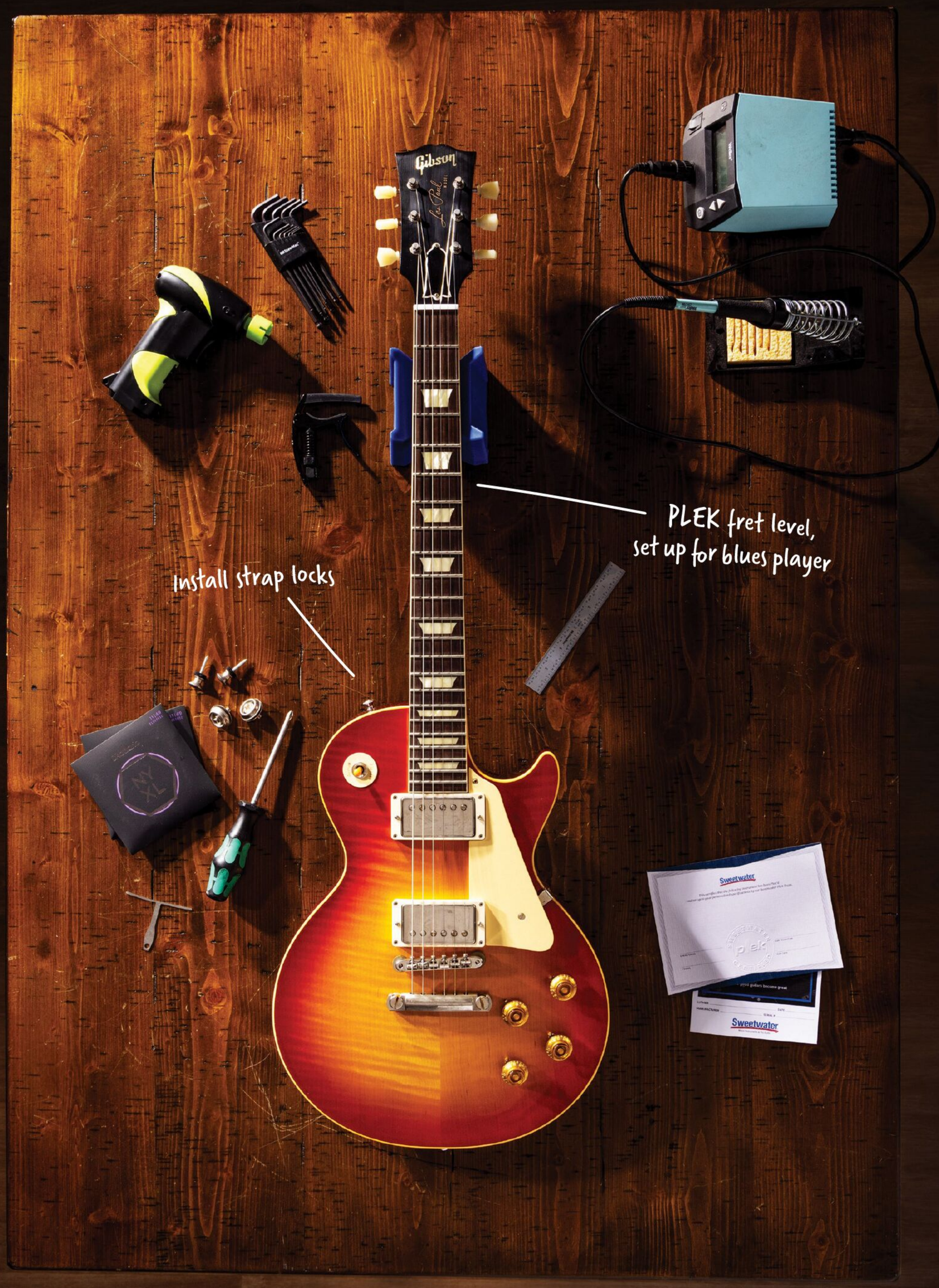

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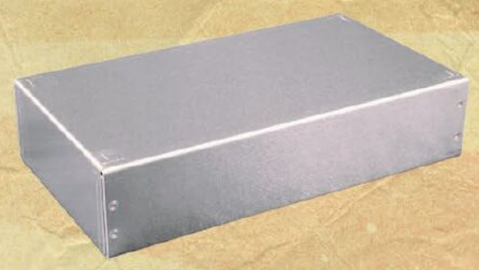

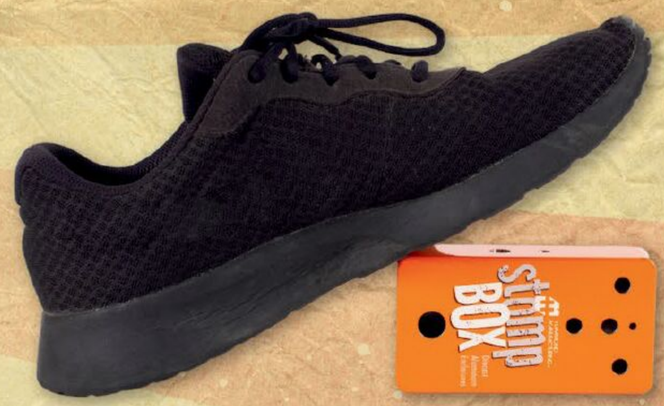

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When he stepped into Nalli Music one day in 1992, Ben Mitchell didn't know he was about discover a guitar that would forever affect his life. | ***By Ward Meeker***

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On a memorable summer day in 2010, Dave Hinson answered the phone at his Killer Vintage shop. On the other end was a local who told him about an odd Les Paul Junior for sale 150 miles away. A few minutes later, Hinson was on the way. | ***By Ward Meeker***

50 **ACE FREHLEY**
1951-2025
Replying to a newspaper ad, he became the final piece when Kiss was formed in early 1973. A pop-culture phenomenon, the band motivated countless young people to pick up an instrument – none more so than Frehley, who has inspired generations of guitarists. We recall his life and gather remembrances from players who revered him as a hero and friend. | ***By Bret Adams***

56 **PAEN TO A LEGEND**
There isn't a bigger fan of Ace Frehley than John 5, who at age seven played *Love Gun* on repeat, learned all the riffs, mastered Ace's solos, and later became close friends with him. Suffice to say, his passing hit hard.
| ***By Ward Meeker***

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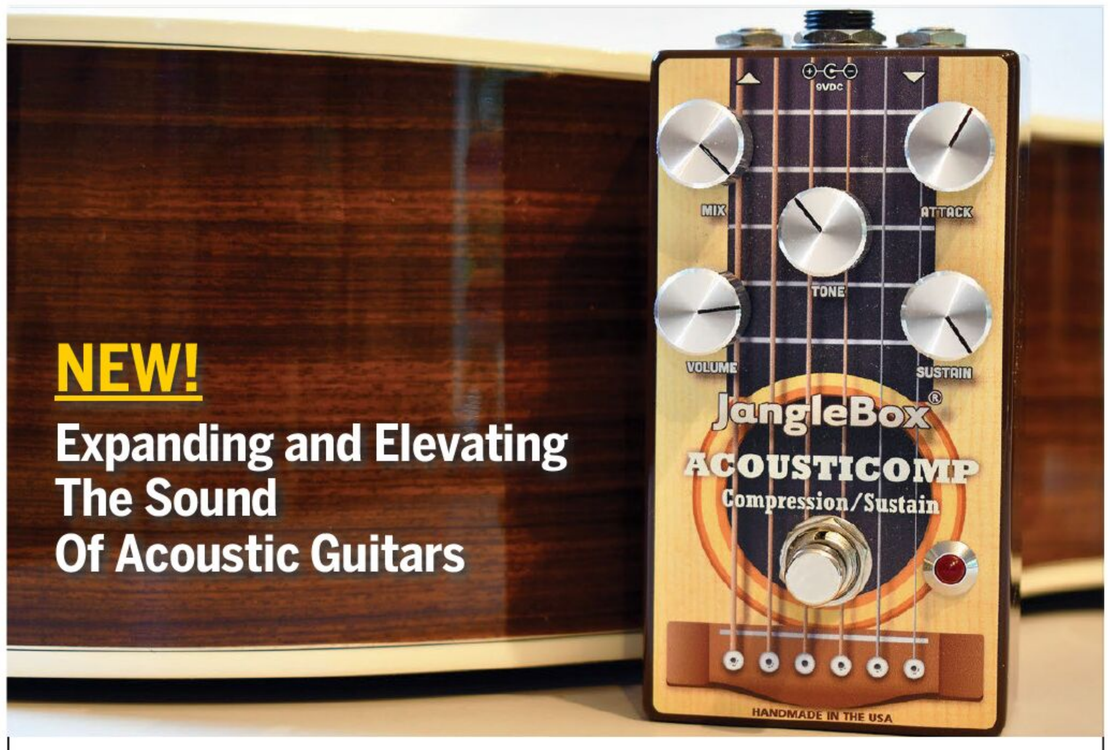

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READER MAIL

TRUE TELECASTER HERESY

I'm a huge fan of *Vintage Guitar*, but I have a problem with your coverage of the Tele masters.

In three features across two issues ("Titan Trax: 22 Licks Played on the Legendary Telecaster"/"The Wildest Tele Solos," October '25, and "Messin' With Perfection: 7 Heretics Of The Telecaster," November '25), you made no mention of Keith Richards' massive influence on the instrument. Not to have included him in the heretics piece was it for me. Listen to "Can't You Hear Me Knockin'?" or any other Rolling Stones hit, and Micawber is there as the sixth member of the band.

I'm old-school for sure, but you need to do something to right this massive wrong to one of the greatest Tele wranglers of all time.

Jeff Dagenhardt
West Allis, Wisconsin

(*Ed. note: Jeff, not including Keef – along with any of a handful of other greats – could rightfully be seen as a grevious omission, but as you know, the Telecaster has* so *many heroes. Thanks for keeping us on our toes!*).

Seven heretics and no John 5? Tsk, tsk!

Bill Miller
Union City, New Jersey

Keith Richards

VG: MASTERFUL MIX

I find myself picking up each new issue of *Vintage Guitar* and pretty much reading it cover to cover. Of course, some articles pique my interest more than others, but it is all good, solid stuff. I particularly like the music reviews and often use them to program my radio show on the PBS station (KCAW-FM) here in Sitka.

Ted Howard
Sitka, Alaska

(*Ed. Note: Ted, we're thrilled to hear that our work helps you sift through new music and share it with your listeners. A reminder that our monthly Spotify playlist includes a song or two from every review and artist featured in each issue.*)

VG covers all aspects of guitar music, staying very current. And of course I read it back to front. John 5 was in town on November 17, at Pianos 'N Stuff – where I got my 94 Les Paul Studio – and I let folks know he was on the cover of the December issue.

Jon Gelsdorf
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The interviews in *Vintage Guitar* are insightful. I especially enjoy articles regarding instruments, amplifiers, and their history. The reviews help open my ears to music and musicians that I might otherwise have missed. In my opinion, *VG* is the best music magazine on the market.

Gregory Gilkey
Clarksville, Indiana

Being in my 70s, I enjoy *VG*'s features on older gear as well as reviews and players of classic jazz, blues, and rock; the interviews and profiles are great. Sadly, the guys from the '60s are leaving us, but I stay informed of their passing in *VG*, and appreciate it. And of course it's a pleasure to read about young guys like Matteo Mancuso and Billy Strings, then listen to their music. Keep up the good work.

Rick Snidal
Oakville, Ontario

My main interests are vintage guitars and amps, so I always go to those articles first when the new issue arrives. The "Price Guide" pages are also great to help to stay informed. These features make *VG* stand out from the others. The features on established and upcoming artists are very good, especially with music notation like Wolf Marshall's "Fretprints" on the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Jimi's style was exceptional for blending rhythm and lead guitar as integral parts of each other rather than separate entities.

Ben Mitchell
Byron Center, Michigan

I love *VG*. I used to subscribe to three other guitar magazines, now it's the only one I read. I love the articles and interviews, and always look forward to the music reviews. I would like to see an article on Eastman guitars.

Dave Prink
Cave Creek, Arizona

As a longtime reader, I think *VG* is getting the balance right. Even with "vintage" in your name, you offer current news and reviews. After all, what is vintage now was once new!

Dennis Redman
Dallas, Texas

SEND LETTERS TO

Send letters to vguitar@VintageGuitar.com, or Vintage Guitar, Attn: Reader Mail, PO Box 7301, Bismarck, ND 58507.

Keith Richards: Machocarioca/Wikimedia Commons.

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FIRST FRET

Geddy Lee

LEE, TECH 21 DONATE IN HONOR OF NEIL PEART

Geddy Lee and Tech 21 teamed up to honor Neil Peart by raising $68,000 from the sale of 200 autographed MP40 Signature SansAmps offered on Reverb in October. Proceeds from the sales were split between Cedars-Sinai, Los Angeles, and The Neil Peart Memorial at Lakeside Park in St. Catharines, Ontario.

JUDAS PRIEST DONATES TO FIRE VICTIMS

Before their show at the Kia Forum on October 19, the members of Judas Priest donated $100,000 to the L.A. Fire Department to help people who suffered damage due to recent fires in the area.

SWEETWATER HELPS SONGWRITINGWITH:SOLDIERS

Sweetwater is partnering with SongwritingWith:Soldiers by donating guitars and other gear for 14 retreats scheduled throughout 2026. The organization brings together service members, veterans, and military families with professional songwriters to create songs wherein soldiers tell their stories, rebuild trust, and forge new bonds. For more, visit songwritingwithsoldiers.org.

VINCE GILL HONORED AT CMAs

Vince Gill was presented the 2025 Country Music Association Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award during "The 59th Annual CMA Awards," November 19.

On November 11, Gill appeared on the Grand Ole Opry for its Veteran's Day special, then on November 15 joined Joe Walsh at his annual VetsAid concert in Wichita.

STEVE MORSE

Three-Legged Dog

Despite leaving Deep Purple, the passing of his wife, and a severe arthritis diagnosis, superpicker Steve Morse continues his musical path with *Triangulation*. It's a sonic feast on which Morse delivers the fireworks.

How did the challenges you've faced affect the way you composed songs for *Triangulation*?

I'm only writing what I can do (laughs). As long as the melody is there, I'll find a

Steve Morse: Nick Nersesov.

way to play it. On "Tumeni Partz" are a few parts where I do a flurry of sextuplets. Rather than write according to what would be best as a composer, I wrote it for what would be best as a player. It's a really long tune at a fast tempo, but I was able to make it fall more easily onto the fingers.

Before your arthritis diagnosis, had you written things you couldn't perform?

"Tumeni Notes" is exactly that. I set the bar a little too high. It was really hard to keep up those chops. With evolving arthritis, I started having issues with the cross-picking parts at the end, which are 10 times harder than the first part. They became the weak link.

Most guitarists find *every* bit of "Tumeni Notes" impossible to play (laughs).

It's a good picking exercise (laughs), always has been for me because it involves a little bit of everything – linear picking in the first part, single-note arpeggio picking in the second, and a nice up-tempo solo. When I write now, there's more space. The only real change is that the fast reverse picking figures are limited in tempo to what I can do. With the fixed-wrist picking I do now, I can still play fast tempos and sextuplets. It just has to be arranged on the strings a certain way so I can get every note clean.

How do you process hardship?

The first time I saw a three-legged dog, I remember feeling sorry for the dog. But the dog was happy. He doesn't know there's a problem. He just plays. He can do anything. He couldn't win a race against a four-legged dog, but he could participate in life and keep on going. Whenever I get discouraged, I keep looking for ways. Just like the three-legged dog, you gotta make it work, and it does.

I'm on my way to an oncology clinic to get radiation for my arthritis. I've tried just about every cure, and I'm *still* trying. I'm finding ways to play. If there's music inside of you, you're going to find a way to express it with all the nuances we need in order to make the music appeal to people. The problem is practicing. When I do gigs, I go beyond the pain threshold. It's no problem because you're being motivated in a huge way. The problem is, what can you do daily to keep your chops up? If that involves pain, you're probably not going to keep it up for the rest of your life. I pretty much have to avoid pain when I practice and do what I can. To maintain super chops, you have to practice.

Hearing you and Eric Johnson play together on "TexUS" is such a treat.

He is such a great, immaculate player. When I first heard him in the '70s, we were playing gigs together. I felt there were kindred things happening, musically. I've always appreciated Eric's playing and his influence.

You and John Petrucci also have great chemistry.

When people heard him decades ago, it was obvious he had mastered the electric guitar. He keeps getting better in all areas. I heard him playing at his teaching camp. His command of the instrument has gotten better; it's hard to fathom *how* good he is. I've always tried to do what he's doing, but I never got to that level. I'm amazed.

Are you using any new gear?

I've been using my new Engl Signature 20 amp. I used my Engl Signature 100-watt with Deep Purple, The Dregs, my solo stuff, and Flying Colors. It can get pretty loud, so I wanted something that was small that I could carry around. I can switch it from 20 watts to five watts to one watt. I can play it through speakers, and it has a speaker emulator and a direct out. I can put it in my suitcase. I also use it for recording. It gives me a different sound than the 100-watt. **– *Oscar Jordan***

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IN MEMORIAM

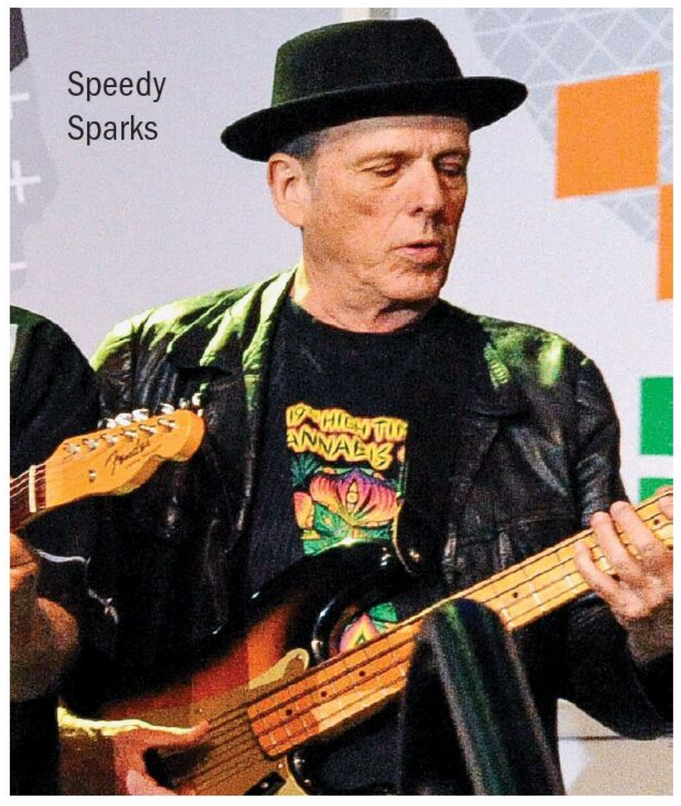
ANTHONY JACKSON

The bass universe lost a giant on October 19 with the death of Anthony Jackson, at age 73.

Jackson played on hundreds of albums by artists ranging from Roberta Flack, Buddy Rich, Steely Dan, and Chaka Khan, to guitar fusioneers Lee Ritenour and Mike Stern. His breakthrough was the intro bass lick to the O'Jays' 1973 hit "For the Love of Money," played on a Precision draped in echo and phase shifter; one can hear the crisp pick-style technique that helped make Jackson famous. He later championed the six-string, which he called contrabass (resulting in a signature Fodera model).

Jackson appeared on crucial fusion records by Al Di Meola, notably the track "Race With Devil On Spanish Highway," where he doubled Di Meola's guitar line with explosive picking speed.

Anthony Jackson


Speedy Sparks

Hearing of Jackson's passing, the guitarist said, "Anthony was one of the most-extraordinary musicians I've ever had the honor to play with – a true innovator whose genius on the six-string contrabass reshaped modern music. From *Land of the Midnight Sun* and *Elegant Gypsy* to countless unforgettable moments on stage, he brought a power and sensitivity that could move anyone who listened."

In a 2011 interview with *VG*, Jackson remembered the jazz-rock era fondly.

"How could I possibly forget working with Al? He and I forged a sensational creative relationship. Steely Dan's Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, meanwhile, are hyper-perfectionists and the only way to work successfully in their space is to be as whacked-out and anal as they are. If this condition is satisfied, then the world is a beautiful place."

When asked what advice he'd give bassists who want to jump to extended-range basses, the erudite musician responded, "You've heard all the expected answers: discipline, commitment, love. And remember the T-word – paraphrasing Chopin – "Without them, one would not be in good *taste*." ***– Pete Prown***

SPEEDY SPARKS

A true Austin institution, bassist Miller "Speedy" Sparks, died October 7 from lymphoma. He was 79.

Moving from Houston to Austin in '72, he famously played in dozens of roots-oriented bands. In addition to the super-group Texas Tornados, formed in '89 with Doug Sahm, Flaco Jiménez, Augie Meyers, and Freddy Fender, he served time with the LeRoi Brothers, Joe "King" Carrasco, Teddy & the Tall Tops, Texas Mavericks, Sir Douglas Quintet, Roky Erickson, Junior Brown, James Hand, and the Bizarros.

In a 2023 video interview for Austin Music History, he explained, "I noticed music was changing, getting splintered, but I just wanted to stay right where I started when I was about 10. I noticed a lot of people doing it, a lot of people still liked it. We were all disciples of Elvis and Buddy Holly and Little Richard and all that. To this very day, I haven't veered very far off from that."

"We played in the Koolerators – specifically formed so Speedy could play guitar – and the Gulf Coast Playboys, the Nortons, Lazy Lester, Eve and the Exiles, and many more," recounts "Guitar Grady" Pinkerton. "I really loved his ability to find the groove, in any style, and in life itself. He was always positive and in the moment. And he always knew where to eat!" ***– Dan Forte***

Anthony Jackson: Art Bromage/Wikipedia. Speedy Sparks: Manuel Nauta/NurPhoto/Zuma/Alamy.

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Hello Again… Again!

The Cars revved things up on their fifth album, 1984's *Heartbeat City*, which reached #3 on *Billboard* and sold more than four million copies thanks to the megahits "You Might Think," "Drive," "Hello Again," "Magic," and others.

On previous releases, the band (front man Ric Ocasek, bassist Benjamin Orr, guitarist Elliot Easton, keyboardist Greg Hawkes, and drummer David Robinson) had worked with producer Roy Thomas Baker, but this time they teamed with Robert John "Mutt" Lange, who'd had gigantic hits with contemporary hard-rock bands.

A new deluxe edition includes B-sides, previously unreleased tracks, alternate mixes, and a live show. We asked Easton to recall how the album was created.

Did you have an opinion of Lange before you started on *Heartbeat City*?

We were aware of Mutt and the sound of his AC/DC and Def Leppard productions, which was fresh at the time. Personally, *I* wasn't thinking about moving on from Roy, but Ric wanted to try another producer.

Mutt was really nice – very enthusiastic about working with us, which is always exciting. I don't think we were concerned about the style of the music that he'd produced before any more than we'd been concerned about that with Roy.

What do you recall about how the sessions evolved?

It was odd because Mutt built the record differently; he did drums last, which seems counterintuitive in some ways, but it made sense in his style. He would build the tracks on top of just a basic LinnDrum drum machine (beat). A month would go by before I was needed to do things. The record took *so* long to make.

FIRST FRET

How did you conceive guitar parts?

The way it usually worked was Ric would present the song to us as demos, just sitting with a guitar and playing them, or he'd have a demo cassette. They were very skeletal and basic – mostly clicking eighth notes on his guitar. Almost every song was like that, maybe with some power chord kind of thing. For Greg and I, our job as I saw it was to hang meat on those bones.

Like every other record, they got a basic track down and a guide vocal, then I would have the engineer make a cassette and I would take it home and work on parts and write solos. I'd come in pretty prepared. A song like "Heartbeat City" doesn't sound guitar-dominated, but we were using a lot of guitar synth for the first time on that record. There's some [Roland GR-300] that people might mistake for just synthesizer.

It's a synthesizer-heavy album, but your guitar is there. Much of it jumps right out.

That's right. Mutt had what I call a "widescreen sound." It was like watching a movie. For instance, for power chords, he wanted clarity, but he wanted balls at the same time. He'd record a pair of Les Pauls through a Marshall, left and right, that I would double-track. Then we would use a Telecaster with a cleaner, bitier sound and record a pair to add clarity to the Les Paul/Marshall sound. When you mixed it right, it sounded incredible. You can hear that in "Magic" and anything with big power chords. That's how he did it.

Which guitars did you play on *Heartbeat City*?

The guitar that turned out to be a real champ on that album was a Strings & Things St. Blues Custom Bluesmaster. Strings & Things, a shop in Memphis, made those guitars. Mine had a humbucker at the bridge and was transparent Cherry color over ash. It looked like a melding of a Telecaster and a Les Paul. I used it a lot, including the solo on "You Might Think"; it was a sleeper guitar.

I'm pretty sure I used my '77 Telecaster with a Bartolini Hi-A Firebird mini-humbucker at the neck. I also used a Strat that John Page at Fender made for me, a 30th anniversary Les Paul goldtop I'd just got, and my Fender Lead I on for the solo on "Touch and Go." I used that on *Panorama* and it had a great pickup.

The amps were Marshall JCM 800s and Fender Twins and Deluxes. I didn't have a pedalboard. I turned Mutt on to the Rockman, and some of the clean, chorusy, picked parts could be that. He loved it and used it a lot after that. He was very complimentary to me. He said that I was the most versatile guitar player he'd ever worked with. ***– Bret Adams***

Photo courtesy of Elliot Easton.

JOHAN BORGH

Soulful Slider

Based in Stockholm, Johan Borgh is a remarkable bottleneck player, conjuring real-deal slide licks from deep within his soul. His debut, *Island Blues*, presents a range of styles from raw-edged blues and Afro-Cuban rhythms to the unmistakable grooves of New Orleans. Borgh has also shared the stage with Gary Clark, Jr. and won an international guitar competition judged by Steve Lukather, John Scofield, and Joe Bonamassa. This young Swede is a player to keep your eyes on.

How does a guitarist from Sweden sounds like such an authentic American slider?

My dad is a player and I first heard slide by diving into his LPs, mainly Rory Gallagher and Muddy Waters. What really cracked my mind open was seeing an Eric Clapton show in 2006 when Derek Trucks was in his band. I was 12 years old and had no idea who Derek was, but he blew me away. I recorded his solos on my flip phone and listened to them while walking to school, and have been trying to play slide ever since. Later, Dad introduced me to Ry Cooder through his *Show Time* album, and that was *that*!

On "Santa Monica Serenade," you seem to be channeling Ry.

I wrote that on my '63 Epiphone Caballero with a Galletta pickup – the same pickup Ry uses. I was imagining him in his backyard, playing this thing while the sun goes down. The high notes you hear are slide harmonics, so they sound an octave higher than where the slide actually is.

Who are your other slide influences?

Duane Allman and Blake Mills, but I also love old-school guys like Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Weaver & Beasley, and Black Ace. I even picked up some licks from the ancient Swedish "kulning" singing style, which was used to call cows home. They have a very special way of releasing the note upward that is not very common in other styles.

How did you capture the nuances of a gospel singer in "Gudrun's Gospel"?

I think it has a lot to do with the ornamentation, being aware of the different ways you can arrive at a note, and those musicians are so good at that. For that style, I was influenced a lot by the sacred-steel player Aubrey Ghent and singers like Aretha Franklin and Whitney Houston.

Fingerpicking and damping techniques are critical for slide. Where did you learn them?

By watching videos of Derek Trucks; I started by trying to mimic the way his right hand looked. I never really did exercises, but a lot of transcribing and correcting my technique as I bumped into issues along the way. I also learned Cooder's "Paris, Texas" theme, which is a great lesson in muting in all its simplicity.

What are your preferred tunings and slides?

Mainly, open D tuning and various glass slides. Most of the time, it's the Dunlop 275 Blues Bottle, but I also have some vintage coricidin slides like Duane Allman used.

Which amps and pedals are on the album?

I messed around a lot with the tones, but mainly the pedals were an RC Booster, Vemuram Jan Ray overdrive/boost, Dunlop Echoplex, and Catalinbread Topanga reverb. For the first solo on "Raga Blues," I used the VoCooder from DanDrive, and on the "Boogie Blues" solo I used the Benson Preamp. For amps, the clean tone is my Princeton Reverb reissue and, for most solos, I had my '79 Fender Champ and Kalamazoo Model Two.

How about guitars?

The guitar I ended up using most for rhythm and melody is my beat-up '67 Gretsch 6120, which plays great and sounds glorious. I have a Japanese Mellow Tone with the original gold-foil pickups and strung with .012 flatwounds. For the other solos I had the Coodercaster I put together from parts, an old Silvertone 1448, and a super-weird three-pickup Guyatone SG-M03 hollowbody. The four-pickup plank on the cover is my Kawai S-180; I used it for the photo shoot because it looks so cool.

You won Lee Ritenour's guitar competition and played onstage in Stockholm with Gary Clark, Jr. What were those experiences like as a rising player?

Both were surreal. The Ritenour competition had some heavy hitter judges I really look up to, like Joe Bonamassa and John Scofield, so that was really cool. And I got to meet Lee.

Playing with Gary was perhaps the most fun thing I've ever done. It was totally unprepared; he saw me in the audience and asked me to come up and play on "When My Train Pulls In" with him. That's one of those things you dream about when practicing in your bedroom as a child. That kind gesture inspired me to do my own thing and believe in myself more. **– *Pete Prown***

Johan Borgh: Fabian Rosenberg.

MATT STUBBS

Stylistic Purity

Welcoming new singer Cody Nilsen, GA-20 is back in the groove with more blues than you can shake a stick at on their new album, *Orphans*. Producer/guitarist Matt Stubbs unleashes vintage heat, using little amps in big rooms, and he's swinging for the fences.

Orphans sounds so visceral.

It's a collection of songs we've been doing live that I wanted to record. That's why it's called *Orphans*. We recorded four with Cody and put them out digitally throughout the year; that's Side A. A lot of people were asking us to release it on vinyl, so we went back into the studio and recorded a few more that were on deck but hadn't been released.

It's a collection of tunes we like playing. We didn't go in to make a record, but fans wanted it all in one place.

"My Baby Sweeter" appeared on *Live In Loveland*.

We've been playing that for a long time, but wanted to do it live in the studio. Side A was recorded at this great studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts, called Rare Signals. Brian Charles is the owner and engineer. Side B was recorded at our studio here in Providence, Rhode Island, using our old gear and playing together in the room. There were no overdubs. It was recorded all old-school style.

How do you maintain your stylistic purity on guitar?

I've always loved traditional blues. My father is a guitarist, and I grew up in a house where I heard band practice and heard old rock and roll and blues. As soon as I started getting into music, he would take me to bars and theaters to see live blues. I've been searching for traditional blues since I was 13. It's what I love and what I listen to. There's a lot of country, soul, and funk bands making classic, old-school sounding records, but a lot of the records are leaning toward modern blues-rock, more influenced by British blues. I'm trying to make records that sound like the ones I listen to.

Your thing is '50s and '60s Chicago blues.

We're chasing those tones. Cody and I use vintage gear, for the most part. Getting a performance is the most important thing, so all the songs on the album are either a second or third take. We keep doing takes until it feels good. It can feel good but be a little loose. Sometimes there might be a mistake, but if the overall vibe and spirit is there, we often keep it. That's how those records were made.

A big part of the sound is having the amps and drums together in a room. There's a lot of bleed. Modern records are made with guitars, vocals, and other instruments isolated so they can go back and fix stuff. On *Orphans*, the amps were on the floor right next to the drums. If there's a big mistake, we have to re-cut the song. Live, we rock pretty loud, but in the studio, we use little amps – five to 10 watts. Our drummer, Josh Kiggans, has to play very sensitively, and we self-mix because the mics are picking up everything.

Did you play your Waterslide signature guitar?

I used it on three or four songs on Side B. On Side A, I mostly used my Silvertone 1454, which is a three-pickup hollowbody.

The Waterslide is inspired by my old Telecaster. It's a Telecaster with a big neck and Gold Foil pickups, which are DeArmond copies. It also has a Bigsby.

Have you taken your West Side signature combo amp on the road yet?

They made those for us and we took them on the road; we used them with a Bassman head and a 2x12 cab. I have a 1960 tweed Deluxe that I don't take on the road. My tech measured all the values and sent it to West Side, so they re-created that amp. They did a great job. It sounds just like an old amp.

What do you tell guitarists when they ask for recommendations regarding your guitar style?

Listen to *Hoodoo Man Blues* by Junior Wells, with Buddy Guy on guitar. For single-note overbending stuff, it's the best record ever made. I also love Earl Hooker, early Lonnie Mack, and Mickey Baker's *The Wildest Guitar*. It's quirky, weird, creative stuff. I get a lot of inspiration from those records. **– *Oscar Jordan***

Matt Stubbs: Elizabeth Ellenwood.

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GREG HOWE

Juice In The Boost

Greg Howe stays busy writing guitar books, moonlighting on prog-rock albums, maintaining ridiculous chops, and touring the world. On DarWin's *Distorted Mirror*, Howe's playing is unleashed over adventurous soundscapes and spellbinding grooves courtesy of drummer Simon Phillips, but it's his never-ending search for impeccable tone that drives him creatively.

"I have a ton of material for a new album, so I'm anxious to get that going," Howe says. "I'm feeling very creative. There are tons of ideas that were recorded. Some of it was recorded a few years ago."

We caught up to chat.

You wrote a book: *Creative Arpeggio Phrasing For Guitar.*

When people talk about my guitar playing, it's always flattering. There are so many amazing players out there, and I'm not sure why people like *my* playing, but I have always felt strong about my teaching ability. I've figured out ways to convey advanced ideas and simplify them. I've watched players sitting in front of me go from playing predictable pentatonic stuff to playing stuff where they say, "I can't believe I sound like this!"

I've always felt confident in my ability to convey ideas and teach, even more so than my playing ability (laughs). I feel good about the way I play, but I'm almost embarrassed by some of the extremely generous compliments I've received.

What's it like playing prog with DarWin?

It's been nothing but fun. I've grown to really know DarWin. We've been working together for about seven years, and I get his thing. In the beginning, he would call and give me the storyline of a solo and the message in the song. He would have an idea in his mind. Now he leaves it up to me and trusts me. I get the DarWin thing. His material is considerably different than the stuff that I write. In a certain way, that makes it more inspiring. For me, it's more inspiring to go into territory that's less familiar, and then try to find myself there.

Every time DarWin sends me something, it's like, "Wow!" Not only is he coming from a new and different place than I am, he's got Simon Phillips, who's producing it. Simon is super high-level. He's got a great ear and a great production sense. He's a great producer. He contributes to the arrangements, the ideas, and the feel of the songs. Anytime Simon gets his hands on a piece of music, it's inspiring to me.

When I played on [Simon's] fourth Protocol record, I wasn't sure I wanted to join because it was prog. He sent some material, and it reminded me of stuff I've written; his chord changes and rhythms are really cool. It wasn't mindless, with odd time signatures for no reason; it was really musical. So, with Simon on this DarWin thing, I feel that same inspiration. It's outside of my creative wheelhouse, which makes it exciting.

My albums always sound a bit different because I'm not inspired when I play the same thing over and over again. I have to go somewhere unfamiliar. When I play with DarWin, it's nothing but new territory.

Did you get any new toys?

I have a new signature guitar called the Lyra. I came up with the body design and a couple of new ideas. It's an offset double-cut, but it looks unique. I presented it to Jeff at Kiesel Guitars, and we ended up with a beautiful poplar top available in a variety of translucent colors.

I also started working with a company called VegaTrem, which makes replacement bridges for Strats and Teles. They'll make a floating bridge without doing any routing. The strings really resonate with it, giving it a thicker sound, and we implemented the VegaTrem bridge with the Lyra.

I'm also working with One Control, designing a cool pedal called Tilt. It's very transparent-sounding, like a boost but with a little more juice. I wanted to turn it into an overdrive pedal, but higher-gain. I'm also looking to do something with DigiTech. They know I'm into their Whammy DT. That thing is so much fun. I feel like a little kid when I get around it. You can do so many cool things with it.

What's next?

I'll be touring Japan and China, working on a new project I can't talk about, and playing live with DarWin. **– *Oscar Jordan* VG**

Greg Howe: Tiffany West.

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BOX OF CHOCOLATE

The ’62 Fender Deluxe

BY DAVE HUNTER

Offered as the uppermost of Fender’s “student range” of the era, the short-lived 6G3 Deluxe has long been recognized as a fierce and fiery performer capable of being heard way beyond the bedroom, basement, or garage. And this ’62 checks the right boxes for condition and originality.

Though often disregarded alongside the ’50s tweed and mid-’60s black-panel Fender amps that sandwiched them in the company’s design evolution, the brown-panel amps of 1960-’63 have become favorites of many. They may no longer be the sneaky buy they were a couple decades ago, but many sound as good as any vintage Fender, and plenty of players are happy to pursue them despite their latter-day price tags.

Unlike the shared Tone control of the 5E3 Deluxe, the brown 6G3 had fully independent channels, plus a tremolo effect that worked on both.

1962 FENDER 6G3 DELUXE

- Preamp tubes: one 7025, two 12AX7
- Output tubes: two 6V6GT
- Rectifier: GZ34
- Controls: Volume and Tone for each of two channels, tremolo Speed and Intensity
- Speaker: Originally a 12" Jensen P12Q or Oxford 12K5, replaced here by a JBL D120F
- Output: approximately 18 watts RMS

Amp courtesy of Steve Zakel, photos by John Eblen.

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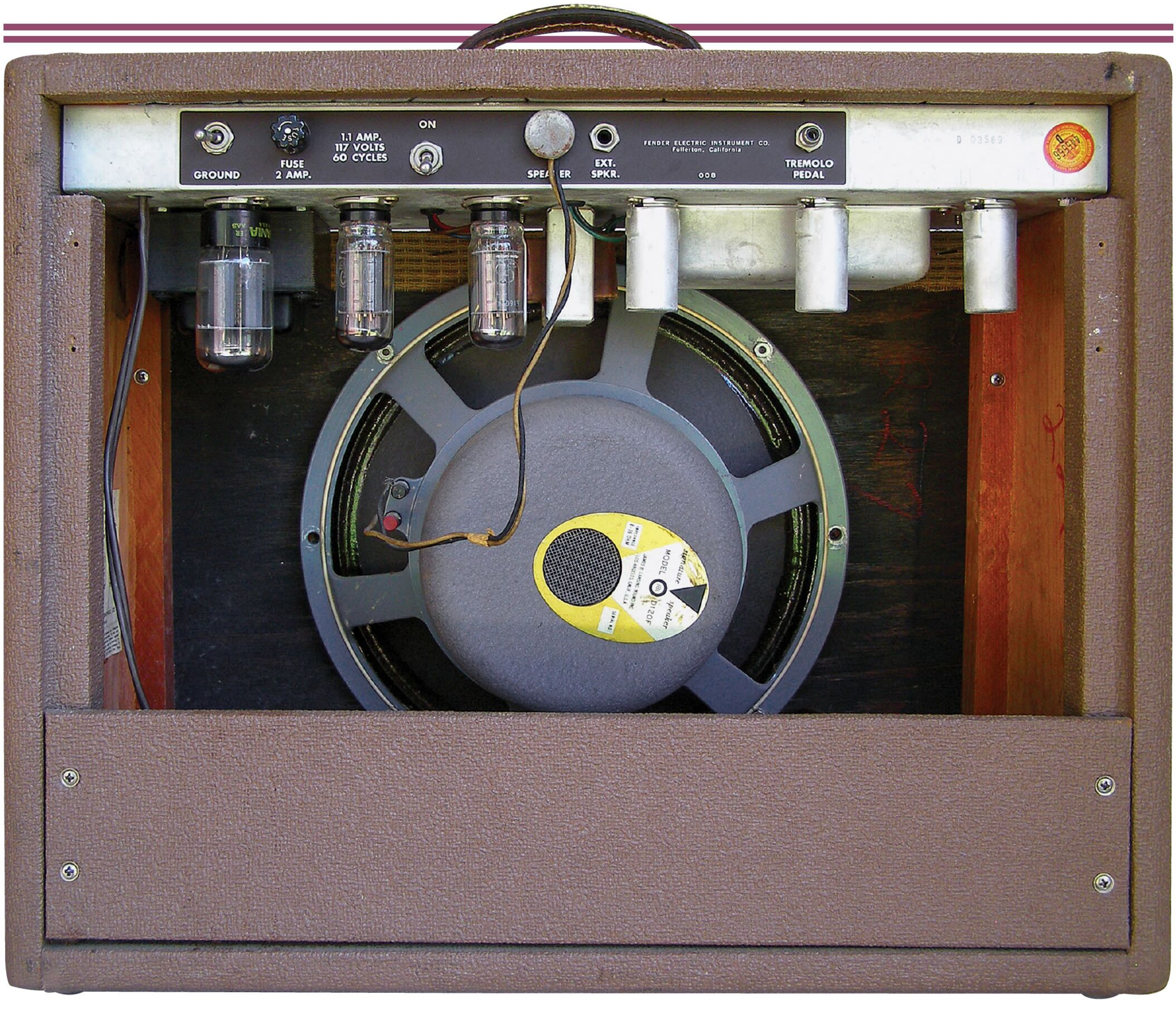


Three preamp tubes, two 6V6GTs, and a GZ34 rectifier drive a gainy circuit into a replacement JBL D120F speaker that would further enhance this amp's size and projection.

This extremely clean, original example was purchased 45 years ago by *VG* reader Steve Zakel, who acquired several great vintage Fenders well before prices soared.

"I bought the Deluxe in 1980 for $250," he tells us. "The seller also had a white Showman head he was selling, sadly I passed on it. In '82, I bought a 6G6 Bassman head for $250 from Dave's Guitars (*VG*, November '23). In '79, I bought a '66 Bandmaster amp and cab for $300 and a '74 Princeton Reverb for $165. Ah, the good old days!

"I saw the Deluxe for sale in the newspaper and didn't know what to expect. I had never seen or heard of the brown amps. I took my '57 Esquire to try it out and it was nothing like I had ever heard; the tone just amazed me. I'd played my Bandmaster and other black-panel Fenders, but the Deluxe was just so different, with amazing tone at breakup around 11 or 12 o'clock."

Plug into a 6G3 Deluxe today and you'll find that the "around 11 or 12 o'clock" setting that Zakel describes is also too loud for many venues, but back in the day it was considered a "practice amp."

"I took it to rehearsal, and it sounded great but my main amp was a 130-watt Musicman and we were all using 100-watt amps, so the Deluxe couldn't cut through. I semi-retired it; I hadn't discovered the magic of low-powered amps yet."

Zakel's not alone in his assessment of the brown Deluxe tone, and many players rave about the combo's ability to deliver higher headroom and more-robust lows than the tweed Deluxe that proceeded it, with more midrange grunt and a smoother breakup than the black-panel models that followed. Though commonly regarded as "half tweed, half black-panel," that's not entirely accurate.

The halfway-house assumption might seem obvious given the chronology, and the Tolex-but-still-brown-looks likely influence such impressions. But the majority of brown-panel amps and the blond piggyback offered alongside them are far closer to the black-panel circuits that would follow. For one thing, the bigger 6L6-based amps all gained long-tailed-pair phase inverters in place of the cathodyne inverters from the mid-sized models. For another, their preamps had the

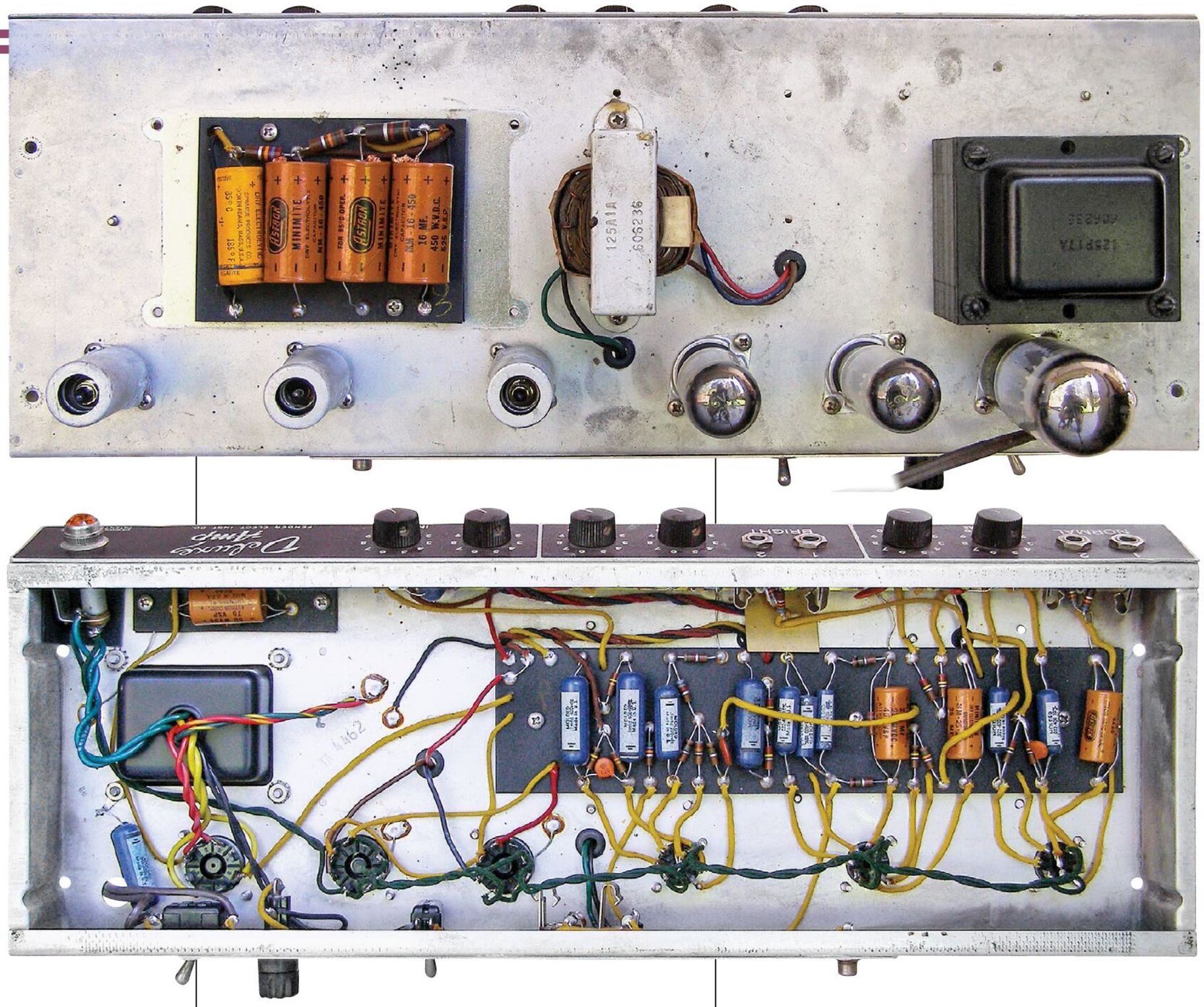
tone stages sandwiched between two gain stages – a topology that would carry on with the black-panel amps (and which entirely left behind the cathode-follower tone stacks that characterized the larger tweed amps).

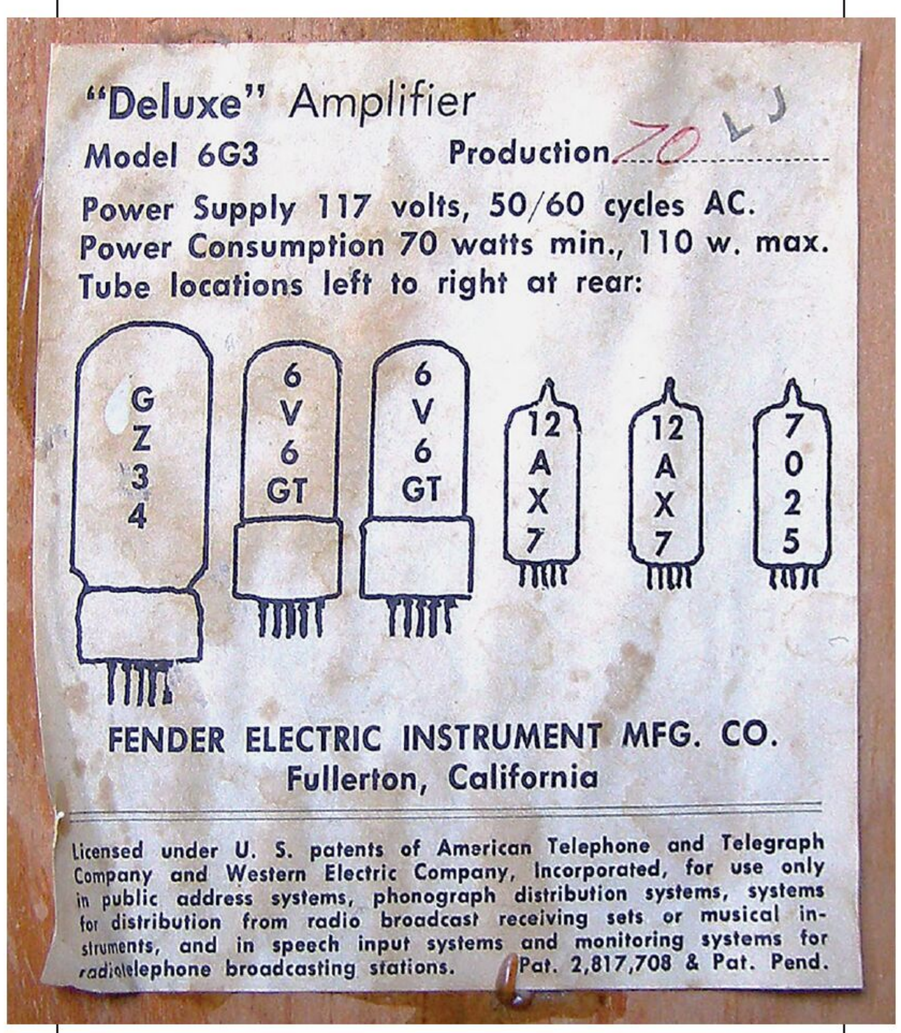
Yet the 6G3 Deluxe circuit presented a few unique qualities compared to amps below and above it, and was far more "other" than just "a larger Princeton" or "a smaller Vibrolux." It was a step toward the big-boy amps in Fender's range, with a GZ34 rectifier for stout voltage delivery with minimal sag, and the long-tailed-pair phase-inverter that only appeared on the final iteration of the Tremolux combo among 6V6-driven amps in the preceding tweed range. It also had a new fixed-bias network aiding the efficiency of its output stage. Even so, its 6V6 tubes were still powered by slightly lower DC voltage than in the black-panel versions that followed – approximately 365 volts versus 425 – and that lent a certain juiciness to the tone, and maybe a few less watts.

In front of that forward-looking output stage, the brown Deluxe retained a preamp that remained closer to its tweed predecessor, albeit with two fully independent channels, Bright and Normal, each with its own Tone control. Though some other non-reverb Fender amps to come would lose a little gain in their move to the long-tailed-pair phase inverter (which dispensed with the drive stage that preceded the cathodyne "split-load" inverter of the medium-sized tweeds), the 6G3's two channels fed into a further gain-stage comprising half of a 12AX7, keeping the signal plenty hot when you wanted to push it. The other half of that tube was used for the bias-modulating tremolo, a simple but warm and atmospheric version of the effect that operated on the output stage, and hence was available on both channels.

Also notable – and another factor in the 6G3's gain staging – was the use of a 12AX7 in the phase-inverter slot. This tube pushed the output stage a little harder than the 12AT7 used in the black-panel amps beginning the following year, achieving an easier overdrive from the 6V6s than in the non-reverb Deluxe that followed. Some guitarists in recent years have referred to the tone of the brown Deluxe as being in the "mini Marshall" camp, and that's a handy way of summing it up – a tactile grind when pushed, succulent midrange, and a singing lead tone when you dig in.

Some early 6G3s were equipped with a Jensen P12Q Alnico speaker, while many that followed carried an Oxford 12K5. Either would be representative of the full sonic picture of this desirable combo, although this example had a JBL D120F when Zakel acquired it; the "F" indicates it's the OEM version of the D120 made for Fender by JBL, though scuffing on the unused mounting-bolt holes indicates it's not original to this amp. Even so, it's a muscular speaker that would make an even greater beast out of the firepower in this juicy circuit. VG





The short-lived 6G3's circuit is impressively clean and original. Its tube chart shows how it retained some of the juicy overdrive of the preceding tweed model, with improved headroom and a more-robust overall voice.

Classics

Ben Mitchell's 1992 PRS Custom 24 Walnut and Custom 24 Zebrawood.

In his 20s, Ben Mitchell was like most musicians, grinding just to eat and pay rent. As a gigging guitarist, he'd owned his share of guitars including a Gibson Trini Lopez and a '50s Strat that slipped through his hands when he was 18 "...for peanuts because it was just a 'used guitar.'"

When he stepped into Nalli Music Annex in Ann Arbor, Michigan, one November day in 1992, he was just window shopping. Being a Fender and Gibson guy, he gazed at instruments until the salesman spotted him.

"He walked up and said I should take a look at something awesome that had just come in, then he led me to the back and grabbed a guitar I didn't recognize. He had to explain it was a PRS Custom 24 with a Zebrawood top. It had a dark-red sunburst finish, and he was right – it was awesome!"

The sales guy, Mike, let him strum it.

"I started improvising blues riffs then tried a swing/blues chord progression that I'd picked up from a guy I knew in college – I usually play it when I grab any guitar (laughs). Anyway, people say that when you find the right guitar, it speaks to you. As my fingers moved across the fretboard that day, I felt a fervid desire to be a *better* player. That guitar was *not* going back on the wall, even though it meant a substantial drop in my bank account."

A few weeks later, Mitchell was in Ann Arbor again, so he stopped by Nalli to chat with Mike about how much he was loving the PRS.

"He saw me come in and right away motioned

at me," he said. Again, we walked to the back, and there on the wall was another Custom 24."

Different from the one he'd just bought, it had a walnut top with bookmatched figuring and a subtle sunburst finish. Like the Zebrawood, it was expensive. As Mike handed it to him, Mitchell once again became enamored.

"I started to noodle while asking if the store had placed an order for custom tops, but he said they hadn't – both guitars were part of a regular allotment. I felt lucky to again be in the right place at the right time, and I bought the guitar (laughs). My luck went up another notch when Mike told me that Paul Smith, the builder, was scheduled to do a workshop there at the store in a few months."

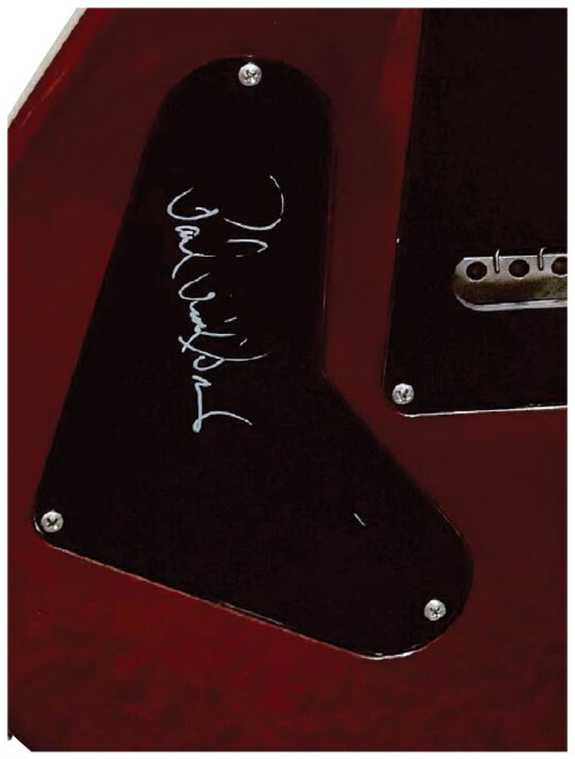
Mitchell took advantage of the opportunity to ask Smith about the guitars, and it turned out their origins were pretty simple – he'd been offered a selection of rare woods and decided to use them on a run of Custom 24s to test their market potential.

"I remember Paul mentioning five woods – zebrawood, walnut, cedar, lacewood, and redwood," he says. "At least one top was carved from each and not more than five of any were carved. A PRS employee later told me that there probably weren't more than 25 or 30 guitars made with exotic tops before they became a custom option."

Mitchell became a seeker; any time he visited a music store, spoke to a guitarist, or checked with vendors and people walking the aisles at guitar shows, he'd mention his odd PRS guitars.

"I got used to seeing facial expressions that told me nobody had ever heard about zebrawood or walnut tops," he said.

A ray of hope came with the 2005 edition of *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide*.



The control cover of Mitchell's Custom 24 Walnut is signed by Paul Reed Smith.

"I spotted a '92 Custom 24 (Walnut) 10 Top listed as two known to have been made," he said. "I wondered, 'Could one be mine?'"

After he corresponded with co-author Gil Hembree and provided pictures and the serial number of his, the *The Guide* was amended the following year to list three known.

The 2026 edition of *The Guide* shows those '92 Walnut guitars valued in line with "standard" Custom 24s made from 1990 through '95. But they surface so rarely there's no way to gauge broader demand.

Such concerns are not foremost on Mitchell's mind, because...

"They not only play and sound great, but look like beautiful works of art – worth every bit of effort and sweat I used to pay for them," he said. "I've bought and sold numerous guitars over the years, but I don't see these two going anywhere, and I've enjoyed the thrill of learning that two guitars I've loved for more than 30 years turned out to be seriously rare. That would bring a huge smile to *any* owner's face."

Jim Cullen, who has worked at PRS since 1997 as a sander, finisher, customer service rep, salesman, accounts manager, and (for the last decade) Director of Sales, said the early-'90s run Smith mentioned that day at Nalli in '93 were indeed an experimental batch the company called a Limited Edition. Today, PRS offers non-standard options from its Wood Library, a program offered to Signature Dealers for runs with woods not offered on catalog models. In November of '25 it reopened to in-person selection. – ***Ward Meeker*** VG

THE *VG* GUIDE TO PICKUPS 2026

Railhammer

The Railhammer Kyle Shutt Signature pickups were developed to power his signature Reverend. The bridge pickup has traditional output and clarity with smooth highs and a thicker tone. The neck pickup is a high-output humcutter designed to switch seamlessly between positions without having to re-adjust settings. A versatile pickup set for all your fat cleans, classic crunch, or high-gain riffing. **www.railhammer.com**

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TV Jones

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RS Guitarworks

Black Magic P90 set is designed with a vintage style neck pickup using 42 AWG enamel wire and Alnico V magnets. The bridge pickup is wound for a warmer and smoother tone. The classic tones you want with a little extra attitude and hum cancelling in the middle position. Available in black or cream soapbar covers or Dog Ear bridge position. **www.rsguitarworks.net**

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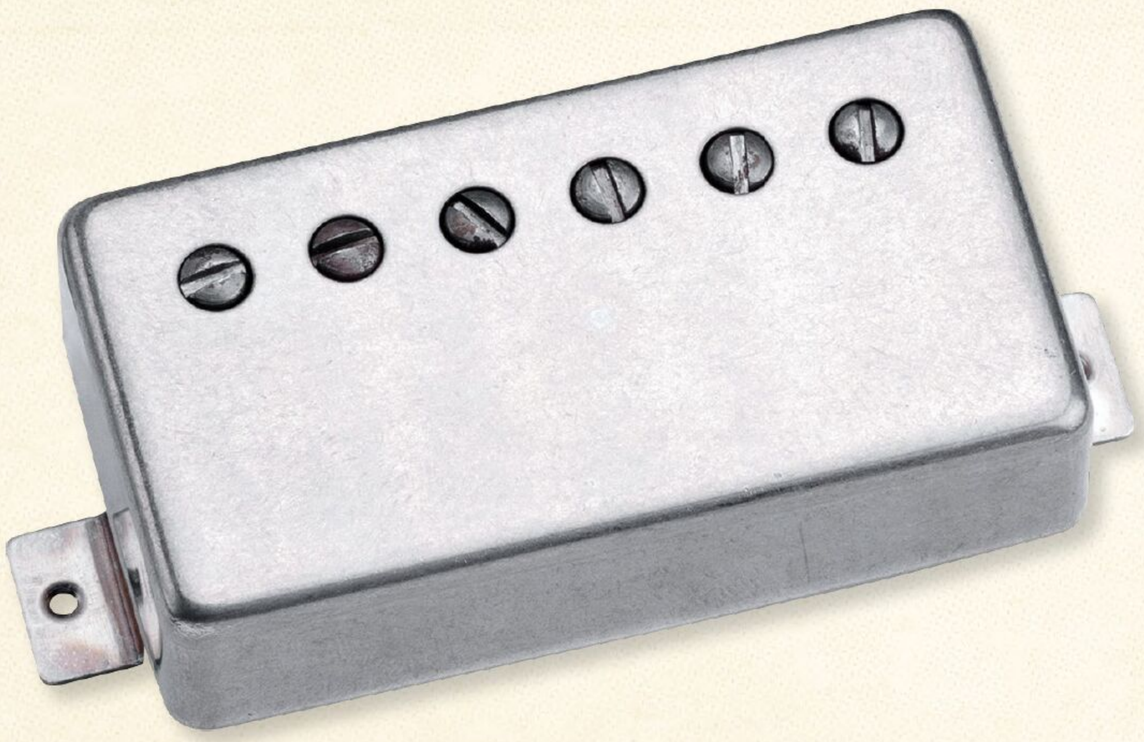

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Gibson Les Paul XR-1 '81, Goldburst, exc, $1850
Gibson EB-2D '67, exc cond, cherry red, $2995
Fender CS '59 NOS Strat, sbst, RW fb, exc, $3150
Fender '62 Strat '87, Blonde/gold hw, RW fb, $3250
Collings CL Dlxe '09, Braz FB, IT Burst, exc $5250
Suhr Modern Set-neck LTD '10, #27 Superb! $4850

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Traphagen Concert Model, '17 Exc, Brazilian $8250
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Clinesmith Resonator '03 exc cond $3500
Gibson L-00 '32, Black/white PG, reset/refret $6750
Gibson AJ Luthiers Choice '01, Brazilian, $7500
Grammer G-10, '69?, Brazilian RW, vg cond, $2500
Epiphone Triumph '46, Sbst, mini HB, exc, $2850
Kevin Muiderman OM '06, IRW, exc cond, $4250

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Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli

1964 National Glenwood 99

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1950s	Airline Electric Hollowbody	Kay Barney Kessel copy	$900	$1,200
1996	Ampeg B-50 R Rocket Bass (Reissue)		$225	$300
1989	Ampeg SVT-II Bass Head	300 watts, rackmount, all tube	$800	$1,000
1988	B.C. Rich BichSupreme 6-String (U.S.A. Assembly)		$3,500	$4,500
1967	Bartell of California Electric 12		$1,200	$2,500
1995	Boss Digital Delay DD-5		$90	$150
1930s	Bronson Student Hawaiian (Acoustic)		$400	$600
1990	Charvel Eliminator		$500	$650
2000	Collings OM1MH	Mahogany	$3,200	$4,800
1994	Crate Vintage Club Series	various models	$300	$550
1968	Danelectro Electric Sitar		$3,200	$4,500
1965	D'Aquisto New Yorker Deluxe (Cutaway)	Sunburst	$35,000	$45,000
1980s	Diaz Texas Ranger	Signed by Diaz	$1,000	$1,250
1990	DOD Classic Fuzz FX52		$65	$100
2010	EarthQuaker Devices Disaster Transport Jr.		$65	$100
1976	Electra MPC X340	Jacaranda	$900	$1,300
1976	Electro-Harmonix The Silencer		$75	$150
1961	Epiphone Crestwood Custom	Cherry, mini hums	$4,500	$6,000
1962	Epiphone Espana (Classical)		$950	$1,500
1997	Epiphone Noel Gallagher Union Jack / Super Nova		$1,200	$1,800
1965	Epiphone Wilshire	Custom color (3 options)	$4,000	$6,000
1960s	Farfisa Sferasound		$300	$400
1963	Fender Bassman	Smooth white, 6G6A/B head only	$1,500	$2,000
1993	Fender Champion 110	s.s. 25 watts, 1x10	$135	$175
1980	Fender Deluxe Telecaster (USA)	Common color	$2,200	$3,000
1964	Fender Esquire Custom	Custom Color	$30,000	$40,000
1962	Fender Jaguar	Rare Color	$13,500	$20,000
1998	Fender American Standard Jazz V		$1,000	$1,250
1969	Fender Mustang	Competition Orange	$5,000	$6,500
1980	Fender Precision	International colors	$2,000	$3,750
2003	Fender Rumble 150		$175	$250
2021	Fender Squire HH FR Strato-caster (Contemporary Series)	Floyd Rose	$300	$500
1972	Fender Stratocaster	Common color, 3-bolt	$5,500	$8,500
1996	Fender 50th Anniversary American Vintage 1957 Stratocaster	50th decal	$1,500	$2,200
1999	Fender 60s Stratocaster/ Time Machine 1960 Stratocaster	NOS	$3,000	$4,500
1997	Fender Jimi Hendrix Tribute Stratocaster	Fender logo upside down	$2,000	$3,000
1961	Fender Telecaster	Rare Color	$50,000	$65,000
1968	Fender Telecaster Thinline	Rare color	$20,000	$30,000
1971	Fender Vibrolux Reverb	Silverface	$1,500	$2,000
1970s	Fresher Solidbody Electric		$500	$650
1988	G&L L-5000	5-string	$1,000	$1,375

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1962	Gibson B-45-12 / B-45-12N	Square shoulder	$2,500	$3,400
2002	Gibson CS-336F (figured top)		$3,500	$5,500
1955	Gibson EH-620 Lap Steel	6-pedal, 8-string	$1,000	$1,500
1963	Gibson ES-330 TD			
	or ES-330N TD	Sunburst, blocks	$7,200	$9,500
1961	Gibson ES-345 TD			
	or ES-345 TDSV	Sunburst, Bigsby	$15,000	$20,000
1999	Gibson Explorer			
	Limited Edition (Mahogany)	Natural finish	$2,800	$4,500
2021	Gibson Flying V			
	1958 Mahogany		$4,000	$6,500
1960	Gibson GA-5 Skylark	Gold, 4.5 watts, 1x8	$525	$800
1999	Gibson J-150	J-150	$2,500	$4,000
1970	Gibson JG-0		$1,200	$2,000
1970	Gibson L-5 C / L-5 CN	Natural or sunburst	$5,000	$6,500
2007	Gibson Les Paul Classic			
	Tom Morgan Limited Edition		$3,000	$4,000
2002	Gibson Les Paul			
	Gary Rossington Signature		$8,500	$11,000
2008	Gibson Les Paul			
	Slash Signature	VOS	$5,500	$7,000
2011	Gibson Les Paul			
	Studio Joe Bonamassa		$2,500	$4,000
2015	Gibson Nick Lucas Koa Elite	50 offered, COA	$5,000	$7,000
1991	Gibson SG Junior	Various colors	$1,200	$1,500
2007	Gibson SG Supreme	Figured top	$1,250	$1,625
1965	Gibson SJ (Southern Jumbo)	Cherry sunburst	$3,600	$5,500
1970	Gibson Super 400 CESN		$9,500	$12,500
2012	Godin 5th Avenue Uptown	Humbuckers	$950	$1,500
1971	Gretsch Chet Atkins			
	Country Gentleman (7670)		$2,750	$3,500
1940	Gretsch Electromatic			
	Hawaiian Lap Steel		$450	$575
1963	Gretsch Sal Salvador (6199)		$2,000	$2,500
1975	Guild Bluegrass Jubilee D-40C	Mahogany, cutaway	$1,500	$2,200
1964	Guild F-212 12-String		$1,200	$1,800
1962	Guild Model 98-RT	30 watts, 1x12, reverb	$800	$1,125
1966	Guild Stuart A-500		$3,000	$4,500
1993	Hamer Archtop P-90		$1,100	$1,600
1963	Harmony H150 Student		$150	$200
1987	Heritage HFT-445	Mahogany	$1,500	$2,500
1964	Hofner Model 500/1 Beatle	RH	$5,500	$6,500
1987	Ibanez Bass Stack BS10		$450	$600
1986	Ibanez Metal Charger MS10		$100	$125
1991	Ibanez Phaser PH5 (SoundTank)		$40	$70
1980	Jackson San Dimas			
	Serialized Plated		$5,500	$7,500

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1960s	Kalamazoo Model 4		$115	$150
1960s	Kent 6104 Amp		$160	$225
2020	Kramer Night-V Plus	(Modern Collection)	$450	$600
1984	Lab Series G120 R-10 Combo	120 watts, 4x10 combo, ss	$400	$500
1970s	Leslie 16 Rotating Speaker Cabinet	1 cab	$750	$1,000
1960s	Magnatone Model 411 Estey		$1,375	$1,750
1990	Marshall JCM 900 Model 4100 Dual Reverb	4x10 or 2x12	$550	$700
1973	Marshall Model 1964 Lead/ Bass 50-Watt Head	$3,000	$3,500	
1987	Marshall Silver Jubilee Model 2556B 2x12 Cabinet	Straight	$1,250	$1,500
1906	Martin 000-18	Maple	$13,500	$18,000
2004	Martin 000-42SB	Sunburst	$3,500	$5,500
1931	Martin 00-18T		$3,000	$4,000
1948	Martin 0-17T		$1,800	$2,500
2016	Martin CS-Bluegrass-16		$3,500	$5,500
2000	Martin D-18VS		$2,800	$4,000
1998	Martin D-40DM Don McLean	71 made	$4,500	$6,500
2015	Martin DJr / DJrE	With electronics	$600	$900
1986	Martin HD-28SE		$3,000	$4,500
2009	Martin OM Chris Hillman	Sunburst, 21 made	$6,000	$9,000
1983	Martin Shenandoah Series		$1,000	$2,000
2001	Maxon AD-9/AD-9 Pro Analog Delay		$150	$250
2007	Mesa-Boogie Stilleto Ace	Combo 2x12	$1,250	$1,625
1965	Mosrite Celebrity	Sunburst	$800	$1,000
1993	Music Man Sterling	4-string	$1,500	$2,000
1964	National Glenwood 99	Green	$9,000	$11,500
1954	National Model 1103 Del-Mar		$1,000	$1,250
2010	National Reso-Phonic Estralita Harlem Slim	Maple (laminate)	$1,250	$1,500
1990	Ovation Celebrity CC-57		$250	$500
1982	Pearl Stereo Chorus CH-22		$100	$200
1992	Peavey Revolution 112		$175	$250
2003	PRS 513 Rosewood	Brazilian rw neck,	$3,500	$5,000
2011	PRS Signature (Private Stock)	100 made	$6,000	$9,000
1984	Rickenbacker Model 4001V63	Plain top	$3,000	$3,750
1965	Rickenbacker Model 340	Thinner body	$4,000	$6,500
1974	Rickenbacker Model 620		$2,500	$3,500
1995	Roland AC-90	2x8	$375	$525
1980s	Scholz Research Sustainer 200		$700	$900
1962	Silvertone Model 1413		$225	$300
1970s	Standel SM-60 Power Magnifier		$425	$550
1964	Supro Bantam S6411	Red cover	$450	$575
1975	Systech Harmonic Energizer		$1,000	$1,500
2013	Taylor 610e		$1,875	$2,500
2007	Taylor GA6-12		$1,375	$1,750
1979	Tokai CE-180W Cat's Eyes	Flat-Top	$300	$600
1970s	Univox Solid Body Electric	Effector	$600	$900
1985	Vox AC30 Reissue Model	25th Anniv.	$1,500	$2,500
1967	Vox V-807 Echo-Reverb Unit		$300	$400
1981	Yamaha G Series (Classical)	Various models	$150	$600
2006	ZVex Effects Seek Wah I and II		$140	$180

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Robert Plant and Jimmy Page onstage in 1975.

SWAN SONG

Led Zeppelin's *Presence*

By Pete Prown

While it wasn't Led Zeppelin's final album, *Presence* was its last *heavy* set. Even more than the iconic *Led Zeppelin II*, it's the hardest-rockin' disc in their catalog – no acoustic songs, no keyboards, and just one dark, moody ballad. Released in late May of '76, the album is marking its 50th anniversary.

Zeppelin's lowest-selling album, it was bred out of dire times: Robert Plant had been involved in a near-deadly car wreck in Greece (the singer's leg was shattered, his family injured), while hard drugs swirled around guitarist Jimmy Page. The wall of fame beginning to crumble, the music evolved into something more than another Zep LP – it became Page and Plant's defiant middle finger to the universe.

The music was born in two locations – California and Germany. In Malibu, Page and the wheelchair-bound Plant wrote new material with no input from drummer John Bonham or (crucially) bassist/keyboardist John Paul Jones, whose creative arrangements had always shaped the Zep sound. In hindsight, *Presence* was Jimmy Page's full-on guitar manifesto.

The November of '75, sessions took place in a Munich studio where Queen, ELO, Deep Purple, and other heavy hitters had also tracked. Looking back, Page told Fraser Lewry of *Classic Rock*, "It took three weeks to record and do overdubs. We did it in Musicland Studios and [coming] after us were the Rolling Stones. I called them up and asked if I could get a couple more days, because they were busy trying out various guitars, and they said, 'Okay.' The tracks were done and Robert's vocals were done; I was going to do what I had normally done, and still do – the overdubs and production. There was me and the engineer, Keith Harwood, and whoever woke first would get the other up, and we'd get straight into the studio and do the guitar overlays."

While the Zep faithful were thrilled to have a new LP just 13 months after *Physical Graffiti*, it wasn't packed with hits. In contrast, the overall tone of *Presence* was less than accessible, echoing furious earlier anthems like "The Immigrant Song" and "The Wanton Song." Stompers like "Hots On For Nowhere" and "Nobody's Fault But Mine" earned FM airplay, while "Achilles' Last Stand" was a Led Zeppelin epic on the order of "Stairway to Heaven," "Kashmir," and "The Song Remains the Same/The Rain Song." Oddly

Plant and Page: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy.

enough, the music didn't resonate the same with fans, who were busy listening to polished '70s sounds from Peter Frampton, Boston, Aerosmith, Wings, and Pink Floyd.

The critics also had mixed opinions. Writing for *Rolling Stone*, Zeppelin biographer Stephen Davis (*Hammer of the Gods*) lamented that the album had "few melodies, a preoccupation with hard-rock rhythm, lengthy echoing moans gushing from Robert Plant... (Give an Englishman 50,000 watts, a chartered jet, a little cocaine and some groupies and he thinks he's a god. It's getting to be an old story)."

Guitar wizard Steve Vai disagees, holding it in great esteem, particularly one track.

"I can hardly stand how cool 'For Your Life' is!" he exclaims. "It's one of those Zeppelin tracks that somehow feels like both a detour and a distillation of their heavy musical DNA. The atmosphere is swampy and hypnotic, unlike anything else on *Presence*. Jimmy Page famously broke out his Lake Placid Blue Strat, and the whammy-bar dive bombs are divinely menacing. As a teenager, they left me spellbound – I don't believe he'd done anything quite like it before, and when he does it, he owns it every time. The single-guitar riff in the intro leaves a cavern, letting the room ambience practically leap out of the speakers and smack you in the face. It's Led Zeppelin with their teeth bared – and somehow still serving it on a silver platter."

H.P. Newquist, executive director of the National Guitar Museum, points to another track.

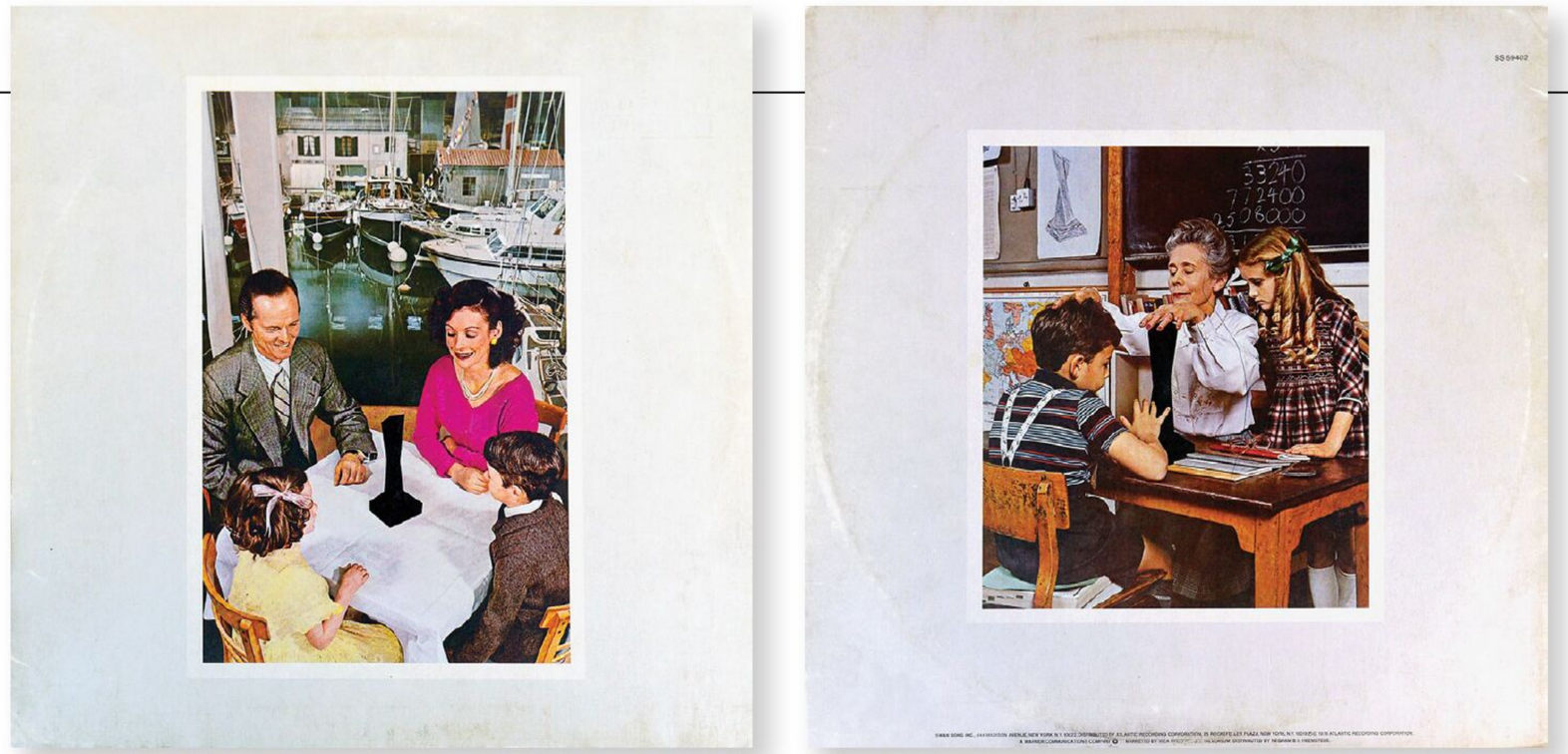
"The overall brilliance of Page's guitar here is represented by 'Achilles Last Stand.' There is no track in Zeppelin's catalog nearly as ambitious. At over 10 minutes long and with at least a dozen guitar overdubs, the song is a showcase for the possibilities of the guitar – his instruments start, stop, weave in and out of each other, intertwine, disappear, and re-emerge. Most of all, they never let up. 'Achilles' cements Jimmy's legacy as perhaps the greatest composer of music for the electric guitar."

For gear detectives, it's also fun to pick apart the tones Page derived from his "guitar army." In a nutshell, he used his two late-'50s Les Paul Standard 'bursts plus a doubleneck EDS-1275 and refin-brown '53 Telecaster (with a maple fretboard, later replaced by a rosewood/maple neck). A '59 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster appears on "Candy Store Rock" to help evoke a '50s Sun Studio feel.

There's also a dramatic amount of that Lake Placid Strat, particularly on "For Your Life" and the solo to "Hots On For Nowhere." According to Page's massive *Anthology* book, it's from early 1960.

Marshall and Vox AC30 amps were his probable backline. Lastly, John Paul Jones deployed his new Alembic eight-string on "Achilles Last Stand," using a pick for added propulsion – and creating a furious tone that directly influenced the '77 Heart hit, "Barracuda"; even with their diminished roles, Jones and Bonham's rhythmic firepower gave *Presence* a relentlessly heavy groove.

Joe Satriani is another huge fan of the LP. Prepping for "Best of All Worlds" 2026 gigs in Las Vegas (with Sammy Hagar), he summed it by telling *VG*, "*Presence* is such a unique album. It stands out in the Led Zeppelin catalog as having its own sound, vibe, and '70s funkiness. My favorite cuts are 'Achilles Last Stand' and 'For Your Life.' More than that, Jimmy Page is one of the most original guitarists on the planet and, on this record, he once again dug deep into his roots, yet pushed himself into the future of rock." **VG**



Nominated for a Grammy for Best Album Package, artwork for *Presence* was created by Storm Thorgerson, who told philosopher/writer Scott Calef its recurrent feature, "The Object," represented how Led Zeppelin was "... so powerful, they didn't need to be there."

TO FIX OR HANG?

Determining the Fate of a Vintage Kay Tenor

I stumbled across a guitar at a garage sale. It has no labels or serial numbers inside or out, but a little research helped me determine it's a 1931 Recording King Kay Kraft Venetian Tenor. I'm trying to learn more and wondering if it's worth restoring. – *Patrick Wilberding*

It is indeed a Recording King-branded Kay Kraft. These "Venetian-body" instruments were early products of Chicago's Kay company, just evolved out of the Stromberg-Voisinet firm by 1931. It dates to the early '30s, and the Recording King logo indicates it was made for sale via the Montgomery Ward catalog. That was their primary brand for stringed instruments, as Supertone was for Sears. The Kay Kraft Model A tenor listed at $25 in 1931; Ward's retail price was probably lower.

Kay were pioneers of using laminated wood pressed into an arched shape, which is how these were built with a spruce top on the mahogany body. The decorative stenciled gold scrollwork on top was used by several Chicago manufacturers.

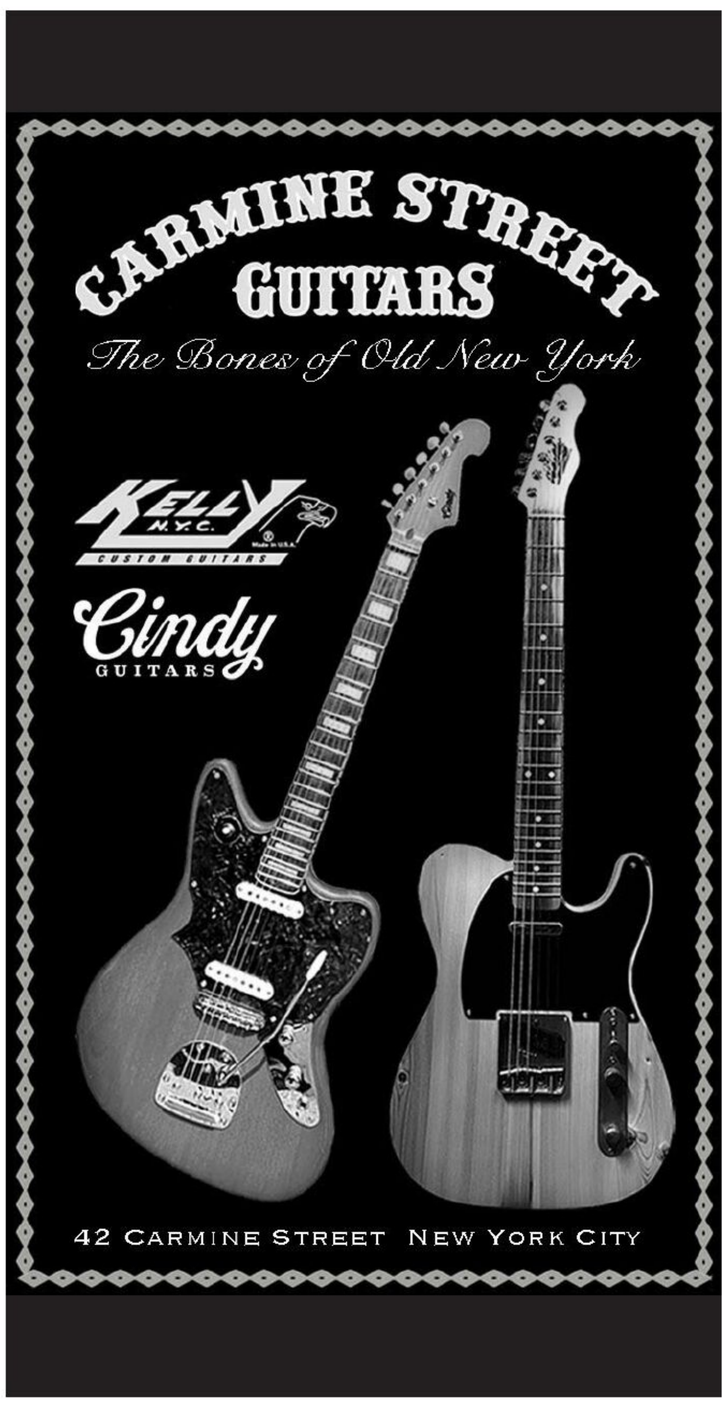
Four-string tenor guitars were popular at the time; the once-dominant tenor banjo was becoming passé and anyone who had played one could pick up tenor guitar without relearning the fretboard.

As to restoring it, that's difficult to assess without examination. It appears worn but intact and original except the poorly fitted nut and (probably) the floating bridge. The body looks solid, so the angle and straightness of the neck and condition of the frets would be the prime concerns. Many early Kay Kraft instruments had the neck angle adjustable via a large screw and wing nut accessed through the sound hole; if your guitar has this, that part is easy! The neck might also need straightening to play well. Any luthier with experience working on vintage instruments could assess this; I'd advise against any finish work as the original patina is nicely intact.

Most dealers would price this piece under $1,000 even in playable shape, as there is simply not much demand for four-string Kay Krafts, though they are almost a century old and look pretty cool! **– *Peter Stuart Kohman***

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**

Patrick Wilberding's '31 Recording King Kay Kraft Venetian.



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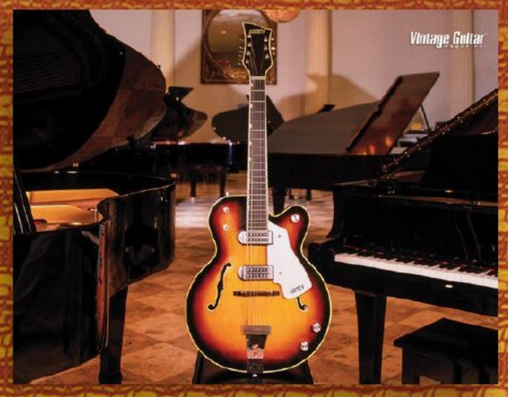

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JOE PASS
Unassuming Virtuoso

By Wolf Marshall

Joe Pass reached an unprecedented level with *Virtuoso*. While Kenny Burrell, Tal Farlow, and Johnny Smith foreshadowed the solo jazz-guitar medium, none defined it with such depth and fervor. An essential album, *Virtuoso* marked the pinnacle of solo jazz-guitar performance.

Had he not been plagued by drug addiction and incarcerations in the '50s – the era of Kessel, Burrell, and Montgomery – Pass would have been a prominent innovator. By 1960, he entered rehab and emerged clean and sober to redeem himself with his '62 Pacific Jazz debut, *Sounds of Synanon*, and follow-ups *Catch Me!*, *For Django*, and *Intercontinental*, largely in the combo format.

If jazz is America's art music paralleling European classical, then Bird is Bach, Trane is Beethoven, Tatum is Chopin, and Pass is Segovia. Improvisation, common to Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin, had all but disappeared from the classical genre. Pass rekindled its spontaneity, complexity, and harmonic sophistication in solo-guitar arrangements.

Virtuoso, Joe's first record for producer Norman Granz's Pablo label, was recorded on August 28, 1973, at MGM Studios in L.A. Just under 52 minutes, it personified Pass' dictum that a self-respecting guitarist should be able to perform solo for an hour. His repertoire consisted of 11 standards and one original, "head arrangements" were rendered on his D'Aquisto archtop and '63 ES-175 with medium flatwounds. The D'Aquisto bore a floating pickup yet Joe opted to play it miked without amplification, continuing a practice begun with "But Beautiful" (*Catch Me!*).

"Norman was a one-take man," Pass told *Guitar Player* in the '70s. "He put us in the studio, turned on the tape, and said 'Play.' I took a list of tunes into the studio and started playing without any pre-planning. I sweated, scuffled, and died. I'd say. 'But that was a bad bridge there,' and he'd say, 'No, that's it. What do you want to do, get it right?'" Nonetheless, they got it right. Released in December, *Virtuoso* outsold every other release issued by Pablo; establishing Pass as the solo-guitar avatar among jazz players. Glowing reception necessitated he continue as unaccompanied soloist (in addition to ensemble work) for two decades. He recorded numerous albums including Montreux performances and five more in the *Virtuoso* series – *I Remember Charlie Parker*, *Blues for Fred*, *Songs for Ellen*, *What is There to Say*, and *Meditation*. Moreover, Pass repurposed his solo skills in duets with Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, and guitarists Herb Ellis and John Pisano.

Joe's one-man show commenced with Cole Porter's "Night and Day." Played as an uptempo burner on *For Django*, Pass presents a potent acoustic reading transposed from E^b to the guitar-friendly key of D. Joe's presence is palpable from his opening lines. He sets the pace with every phrase, his approach exemplifying his theme statement, decorating the melody with varied textures, momentary reharmonization, chord fills, and single-note runs. At the bridge (1:06), he plays in tempo, applying plectrum strumming and chord-outlining bop licks in contrast to the opening unmetered feel. Rhythmic fluctuation provides interest and variety. He introduces interval-jumping melodies over an open E pedal point (1:30), maintains the idea in improvisations, and alludes to Oscar Peterson-inspired bluesiness with double-stops (1:50). He reaches a climax of familiar passages (3:08) comparable to stride-piano after extensive improvising, reconnects with the blues (3:15), plays a favorite voice-leading chord phrase (3:19) in the coda, and closes with chromatic "push chords."

"Stella by Starlight," beloved for its labyrinthine changes, haunting melody, long form, and odd key centers transposed to C, offers a canvas for Joe's soundscape. He maintains looser rubato feel throughout in contrast to the opener's rhythmic fluctuations ("When I solo, I'm thinking mostly about my own harmonies than the time feel," he said). This mindset informs the performance, punctuated occasionally by stricter time passages. Telltale elements include chordal textures juxtaposed with Tatum-influenced runs, arpeggiations, contrapuntal episodes, and tasteful balance of theme melody and significant melodic/harmonic departures from basic changes. Cycle-of-fourths/chromatic modulating sequences (4:28 and 4:38), idiomatic devices employed frequently by Pass for momentum and transition lead to his coda of single notes and upper-register dyads.

The Van Heusen standard "Here's That Rainy Day" is rendered on electric guitar. The only tune to receive Joe's warm ES-175 tone, possibly mated to his Polytone 102, he approaches it with a plectrum/hybrid-picking approach and free rubato feel, interspersing linear phrases with chord passages and arpeggiations. The alternation develops the familiar impression that he's accompanying himself, creating a dialog on one instrument that sounds like two – a Pass forté.

Joe Pass, 1974: Hans Bernhard/Wikimedia Commons.

Joe's opening phrases in "Night and Day" demonstrate his integration of single notes, attention to voice leading, plucked chords, quick runs, arpeggiations, counterpoint and pianistic textures. In most solo performances, he routinely mixes articulations, moving seamlessly from hybrid picking to plectrum lines and fingerpicked chording. Played in free time with great rubato feeling, he exploits many signature traits in this excerpt, including block-chord passages (measures 4 and 12), mix of bop and major-blues melody (7), voice-leading arpeggiations (9), diminished-scale patterns (12-13) and surprising octave leaps (14).

"My Old Flame," an oldie popularized by Mae West and covered by Pass hero Charlie Parker, opens with an impromptu intro ushering in a moody ballad treatment, atypically transposed to E♭ from G (0:16) for range and voicing. He plays a spacious prelude of chord melody as theme statement embellished with long, intricate runs progressing organically to a measured development section where he applies walking-ballad feel (2:40), double-time passages (3:19) and blistering runs. He reinstates free time for the melody recap, recalling elaborate improvised lines, and ends on a humorously abrupt V-I cadence.

Joe cultivates bebop aspirations in "How High the Moon," implying a double-time feeling throughout in statements of chords and fills, and building longer single-note phrases when changing to a steady tempo (1:03). Notable are pedal-point episodes (1:18), partial chords applied to the theme, and mix of bebop single-note licks with plectrum strumming effects in call-response (2:35), similar to the classic jazz of Dick McDonough and George Van Eps.

"Cherokee" spawned countless bop interpretations, and Joe provides an authoritative take. Harnessing melodic lines evoking horn players like Bird, Dizzy, and Clifford Brown (who informed his virtuosic blowing style), he sets the pace for the typically uptempo tune. He states the theme in block chords, freely incorporating stride-guitar motion answered by dense bop passage work, effectively balancing textures. Joe's long lines in steady time outline the chord changes and exemplify his internal metronome, felt during his improvisations in the piece. The modulatory bridge has presented improvisers with challenges met expertly by Pass. He plays the bridge chordally during the head and moves seamlessly from chord passages to single-note blowing while improvising.

Joe's piano influences surface in "Sweet Lorraine." Informed by pianistic approaches, Pass is never derivative. He transposes the song from F to G and begins with a rubato theme reading with ad lib trading of lines and chords decorated with stride-style chromatic passing notes and jazz/blues allusions. After a complex five-bar linear interlude, Joe changes to a slow-swing groove (2:03) maintained during improvisations. A long, descending diminished-scale line over D7alt (3:06) signals the theme return and earlier rubato feel. Joe adds a catchy tag of blues riffs and F13-F♯13-G13 chords (3:47) to complete his arrangement.

"Have You Met Miss Jones," a rite-of-passage tune, receives a theme rendering, albeit free rhythmically, in the standard key of F with block chords and embellishing runs. Joe establishes tempo (1:22) with a favorite E7-A7-D7-G7-Gm7-C7 cycle and replays the theme decorated with stride-guitar motion (1:34). He handles complicated bridge changes (thirds-related progressions that inspired Coltrane's "Giant Steps") with a mix of bop lines and

chord punches. A surprising modulation to G♭ via a chromatic progression (2:24) moves improvisation into greater single-note territory, where Joe mixes fast lines with chord jabs and block-chord passages. He returns to the original free time (3:19) to recall the theme, first in F then in G♭. He restores the bridge changes, plays the theme in F, and closes with a lengthy melodious cadenza.

"'Round Midnight," a Monk piece covered by Miles, Wes, and others, finds Joe addressing the atmospheric minor-mode composition in guitar-friendly E minor with an appropriately bittersweet attitude. The fluid harmonies and melodic possibilities are explored in Pass' performance, which occupies only one chorus and coda. Fittingly, he interprets and develops the theme as a highly decorated but tuneful chord-melody piece, freely inserting alternate sonorities, colorful arpeggiations, contrasting textures, counterpoint, sequential chord phrases, expository runs, and intervallic lines. His extraordinary single-note improvising and chordal variations are beautifully complemented by atypical broken-chord interludes (2:00) and dramatic pauses that serve to accentuate the musical events in his spontaneous arrangement.

Jerome Kern's show tunes are perennial jazz standards, and Joe covers two; "All the Things You Are" received enumerable interpretations including an R&B version from Michael Jackson! Pass establishes an up-tempo swing feel in the theme and strengthens the groove during improvisations (0:50). His procedure reflects a combo approach reduced to solo guitar, emphasized by his alternation of elaborate single-note blowing and chord comping. The climax stride-guitar passages (2:14) convey the momentum of a one-man rhythm section. He finally returns to the theme at the bridge (3:23) with a quick cadenza run and closes with free-time variants of the last bars, elongated and punctuated with block-chord phrases, simpler melodies, and two-bar tag.

"The Song is You" was another Pass favorite performed throughout his career, and demonstrates his affinity for challenging chord

The bopper's clarion call of "How High the Moon" inspired Pass to reach greater heights. This example depicts his balance of chordal textures and single notes. Following a stride-style cycle (measures 1-2), he develops an improvised call-response phrase structure of chord strums, united by common tones and answered by single-note melodies (3-9). Bars 10-18 exemplify his intricate single-note improvisation through changes. Virtually every phrase can be traced to origins in the bebop language. The final chord-outlining Gma7 run (19-20) is a Pass staple.

Jazz has enjoyed more than a century of symbiosis with the blues. Joe personifies that synergy in "Blues for Alican." Here the 12-bar form provides the framework, but Joe's free playing transcends its metric confines. Note his inimitable mix of major-blues, pentatonic and blues-scale passages throughout, occasionally expanded with bop sophistication in measures 6, 11, and 12. Joe's interspersed single notes and chord phrases are even more telling in the context of standard blues, as in 3, 5, 8, 11, and 13. His unmistakable allusions to country blues are heard in 14-16.

movements, which present an ideal palette for his advanced chord style, particularly in the modulatory bridge progressions. He maintains a tighter rhythmic feel and faster-swing tempo, momentarily lapsing into rubato to define arrival points or create space for intricate fills. His strummed fanfare (1:51) sets up a bop solo section of single-note runs with occasional chord punctuation. The heated improvisations overlap into an elusive theme return (3:18) until the "official" bridge (3:35), recalled as block chords and stride-guitar episodes in free time. Joe offers further refinement by restoring the fast-swing feel for his final phrases (3:57) and improvised tag (4:12) of bop lines and stride-guitar phrases.

Joe reached into the history of America's folk music for his only original on *Virtuoso*. "Blues for Alican" has hints of traditional blues married to modern jazz, effectively catapulting Lonnie Johnson into futurist dimensions without sacrificing soul. The slow blues in G (a favorite key) anticipates similar pieces, like "Blues for Basie" and those he created spontaneously in concert. Joe's ability to play complex melodies within intricate (but freely improvised) chord-melody episodes is unmatched and is accessible through the blues prism. He improvises a two-chorus "head" that defies 12-bar classification punctuated by chord phrases. A formal scheme is evident. He establishes a walking tempo (1:25), introduces riff-based chord figures (1:57) developed subsequently (2:30), moves to single-note blues licks and comping (3:02) building to riffs, double-stops and blues improvisation (3:34) and a Basie-like shout chorus (4:07). His last chorus contains syncopated figures, blues licks, chord riffs, modulating cycles, and a relaxed final cadence.

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 of credits can be found at wolfmarshall.com.

'59 and '60 Les Paul Juniors in factory black.

BEAUTIES IN BLACK

TWO RARE LES PAUL JUNIORS

Much like anglers, guitar dealers tell fish stories. There are those they "got" and those that got away. ■ In the summer of 2010, Dave Hinson, proprietor of Killer Vintage, St. Louis, took a call from a local customer who'd spotted an ad online describing a "Black Les Paul Junior" for sale in a town about 150 miles away. Hinson jumped to check it out.

BY WARD MEEKER

"The guy told me he got the guitar in the mid '90s from his uncle, who is a retired state patrolman," Hinson recalled. "All he really knew was that his uncle had acquired it in the '70s from a band in Arkansas."

Plans were made to meet.

"I knew at first glance it was real," he said. "It had a perfect neck set and no changes or repairs. It *does* look as if it had been knocked around more than played, but I paid his asking price and told him straight up that

Photos by Suzi Gorman.

it was worth more. But he wasn't a player and said he needed the money."

Made in late 1959, the guitar bears serial number 9 32517, and while Gibson produced its share of black instruments ranging from mandolins to the original Les Paul Custom (black was preferred by the man himself, Les Paul) to the Everly Brothers flat-top, for Hinson, this was a first.

"In 40-plus years of digging up and dealing guitars, I had never seen a black Junior," he said. "And when I showed it to several dealers and experts, such as Kurt Linhof, Dave Belzer, Dave Crocker, and a few more, they agreed it was real and none had ever seen one before. It was a reaction like 'I'll be damned!' Just slightly more subdued than 'Holy s***!' You get the idea... Basically, '*Wow!*'

"It's from the period

Headstocks of the '59 (left) and '60.

when the Epiphone Coronet was given a slab body, and most of those were black with white pickguards," he said. "So it may have been a special order – or a screw-up – who knows? But, since Gibson did Coronets in black, it made sense there could be more Juniors floating around. I had also heard rumors of a store that ordered a lot of black Gibson guitars. I have no evidence of that, but it's part of the folklore."

After the score, Hinson went about his business, proud new owner of a funky guitar he figured would hang as a unique piece in his collection. But just more than a year later, another guitar came calling.

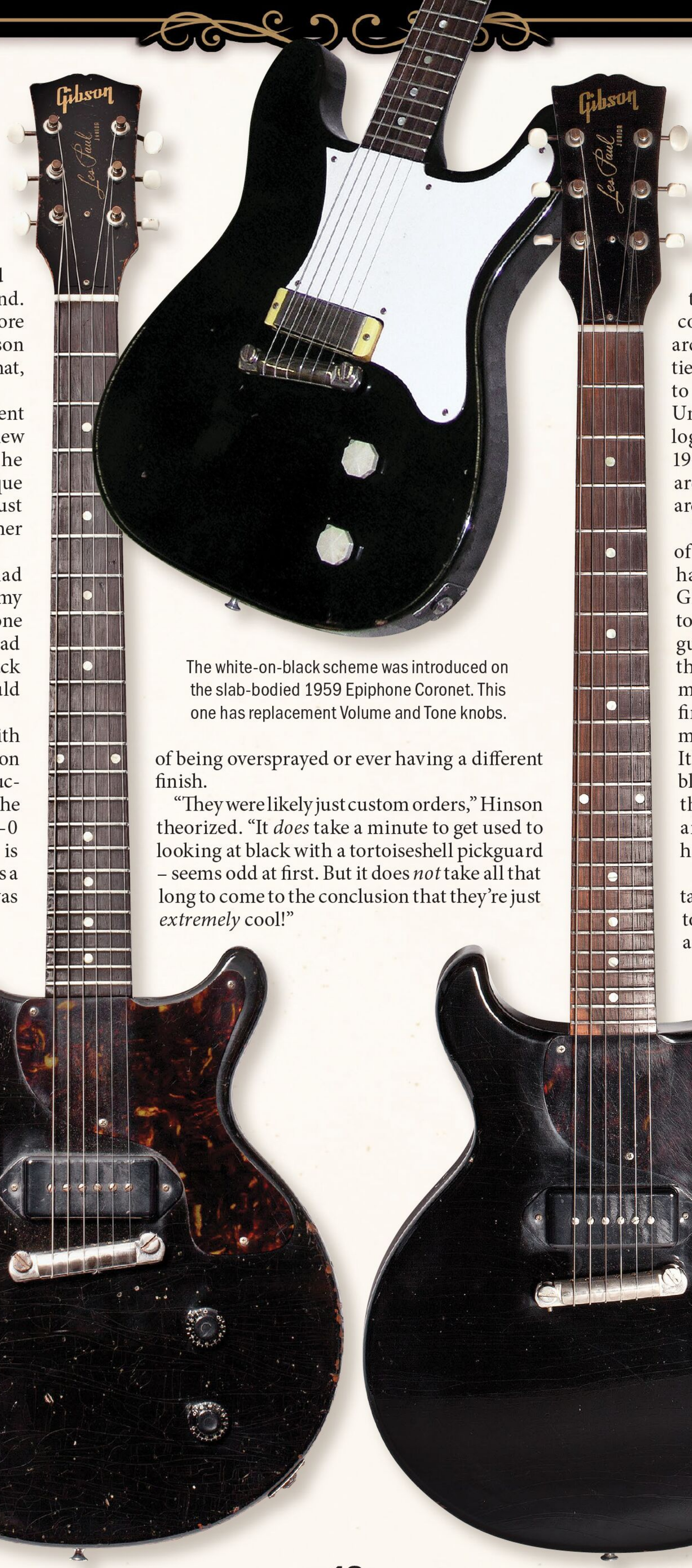
"A few months after I had shown him pictures of the '59, my friend Ken Daniels, at Truetone Music, called to tell me he had found a 1960 Junior with black finish, and he thought I should have it."

The '60 is "very clean, with minimal signs of use," Hinson said. "It's also late-year production, so like the '59, it has the extra digit in its serial number – 0 12051." And though its finish is in markedly better shape, it has a minor headstock crack that was professionally repaired long ago, with no touch-up paint.

"Even with the repair, I knew I *had* to have it."

Neither guitar shows any sign of being oversprayed or ever having a different finish.

"They were likely just custom orders," Hinson theorized. "It *does* take a minute to get used to looking at black with a tortoiseshell pickguard – seems odd at first. But it does *not* take all that long to come to the conclusion that they're just *extremely* cool!"



The white-on-black scheme was introduced on the slab-bodied 1959 Epiphone Coronet. This one has replacement Volume and Tone knobs.

VG contributor and author of *Gibson Guitars: 100 Years of an American Icon*, Walter Carter sees no reason to doubt the guitars' authenticity.

"Anyone who has ever dug into the company's production practices knows that you never say never when it comes to Gibson," he said. "The archives show all kinds of oddities, from an electric mandocello to double-pickguard flat-tops. Unfortunately, daily shipping logs from mid 1958 through 1960 are missing, so these guitars aren't documented in Gibson's archives.

"In addition to the possibility of a custom order, you always have to keep in mind that Gibson was a company trying to make a profit, and the fewer guitars they had to throw away, the more profit they would make," Carter added. "A black finish can cover a variety of mistakes or blemished wood. It's not at all surprising that a black Junior – or even two of them – would be discovered. If anything, I'm surprised more haven't turned up."

Today, Hinson says, both guitars are "...resting carefully, ready to be unleashed on any tube amp with pent-up vengeance for all those years they didn't get played!"

The original version of this feature appeared in the February '12 issue.

Epiphone photo courtesy of Albert Molinaro.

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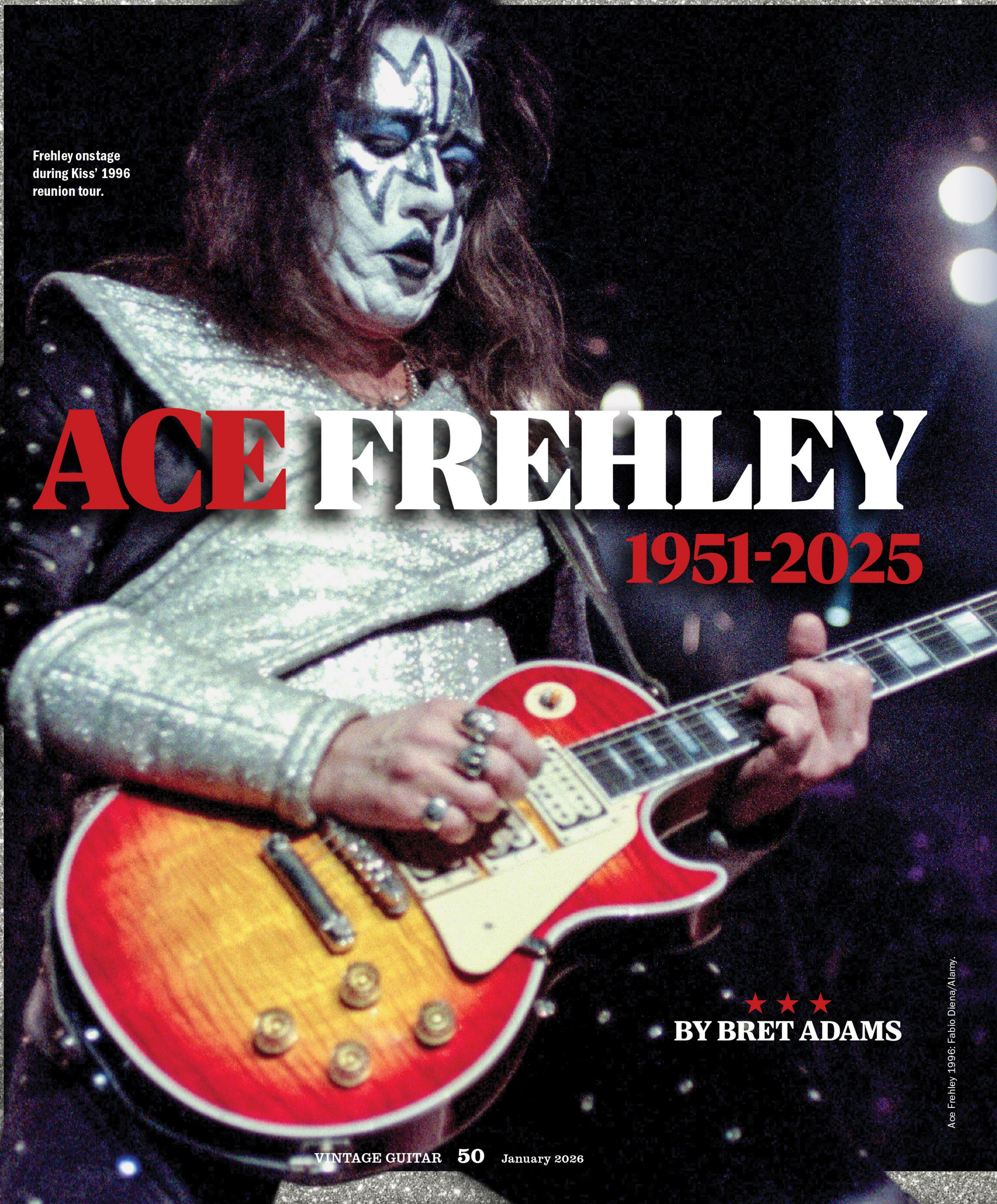


Frehley onstage during Kiss' 1996 reunion tour.

ACE FREHLEY

1951-2025

★ ★ ★

BY BRET ADAMS

Ace Frehley 1996: Fabio Diena/Alamy.

Frehley in 1974

Ace Frehley, co-founder and lead guitarist of Kiss, died October 16. He was 74 and suffered a fractured skull and brain bleed after twice falling in his studio.

★ ★ ★

Born Paul Daniel Frehley on April 27, 1951, he was the youngest of three children to parents who played piano and encouraged the kids to also play instruments. After receiving an electric guitar as a Christmas present in 1964, he taught himself to play while listening to Jimi Hendrix, Albert Lee, Buddy Guy, Jeff Beck, B.B. King, Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, and The Who.

Frehley spent the early '70s in small-time New York City bands before a friend spotted an ad for a lead guitarist in *The Village Voice*, which in late 1972 led to auditioning for what would become Kiss. His 2011 autobiography, *No Regrets*, describes how he went to the audition with his Firebird I and a 50-watt Marshall; his mother drove him to the group's downtown New York City rehearsal loft where he famously walked in and interrupted the proceedings by plugging in and playing while the band was auditioning other players, which led to being chastised by bassist Gene Simmons. When his turn came, he was asked to solo on an original tune ("Deuce") before they jammed for a half-hour. After Simmons, guitarist/frontman Paul Stanley, and drummer Peter Criss saw him play a gig with his own band, they invited him to a meeting and jam, after which he was asked to join the band.

After deciding to call themselves Kiss, all four members adopted stage names, Frehley opting for his longtime nickname, Ace, bestowed upon him during his teens due to his skill setting up friends with dates. The band rehearsed relentlessly and developed kabuki-style stage makeup, a pyrotechnics-dominated stage show, costumes, and personas – the Demon (Simmons), Starchild (Stanley), Catman (Criss), and the Spaceman (Frehley). They shared lead vocals and songwriting credits, though Stanley and Simmons dominated both. Best known for the hits "Rock and Roll All Nite," "Beth" (#7 on the *Billboard* Top 40), "Detroit Rock City," and "I Was Made for Lovin' You" (#11); "Beth" and "I Was Made for Lovin' You" were gold-selling singles.

Kiss' influence, musically and as showmen, cannot be overstated. Despite the fact they were not particularly nuanced instrumentalists, arguably the only band with more impact on budding musicians was the Beatles. A pop-culture phenomenon, Kiss inspired players across a range of genres to start playing guitar, bass, and drums; Frehley in particular motivated countless guitarists – so much so that he often said (with his trademark laugh) that if he knew he'd influence so many guitarists, he'd have practiced more.

Frehley's guitar sound started with a Les Paul blasted through a Marshall. Key to his style were double-stops, a wide finger vibrato, and use of the "kill switch" effect using the Les Paul's pickup toggle.

In his book *Ultimate Heavy Metal Guitars*, *VG* contributor/music editor Pete Prown analyzed Frehley's guitar sound: "A diehard advocate of Gibson Les Pauls, he was often seen with a pair of 1974 Customs and a '73 Deluxe, all modded with DiMarzio humbuckers. His pedals were kept to a minimum; video of his guitar solo from a 1976 concert display fuzz, phaser, echo, and octave effects..."

Simmons has said Kiss aspired to be the "heavy metal Beatles," but critics and fans dismissed its first three albums – 1974's *Kiss* and *Hotter Than Hell*, and 1975's *Dressed to Kill* – as primitive-sounding, though the songs were simple and catchy with memorable hooks and choruses.

While the albums didn't sell well, Kiss' live show was generating significant buzz and a growing fan base. Their label, Casablanca Records, wanted to capture the concert experience on a live album. Teetering on the brink of bankruptcy, Casablanca also keyed on the low cost of production. The gambit paid off handsomely; the double-disc *Alive!* was released in September of '75 and became a major hit thanks in part to the single "Rock and Roll All Nite," which reached #12 (the studio original had peaked at #68). Often cited as one of rock's greatest live albums, the band later acknowledged it was heavily overdubbed. In an April '19 feature on *Alive!*, Frehley told *VG* that long tape loops of crowd noise were run around microphone stands to provide three different cheering sounds.

Bob Ezrin, who had produced Alice Cooper's string of contemporary hit albums and would later co-produce Pink Floyd's 1979 masterpiece *The Wall*, came in to run the sessions for *Destroyer*. A strong collection of songs with Ezrin's sophisticated touches, it is widely regarded as Kiss' best studio album. In a sign of percolating trouble, Ezrin wanted to re-record Frehley's solo on "Sweet Pain," but the guitarist was absent (and allegedly increasingly unreliable), so Ezrin brought in Dick Wagner, who'd played parts on a few other songs. Frehley was incensed, and Wagner's role as fill-in was kept a closely guarded secret.

The next two studio albums were *Rock and Roll Over* and *Love Gun*. The latter, which included Frehley's debut as a lead vocalist on "Shock Me," became their highest-

Ace Frehley 1974: Jeffrey Mayer/Rock Negatives/MediaPunch/Alamy.

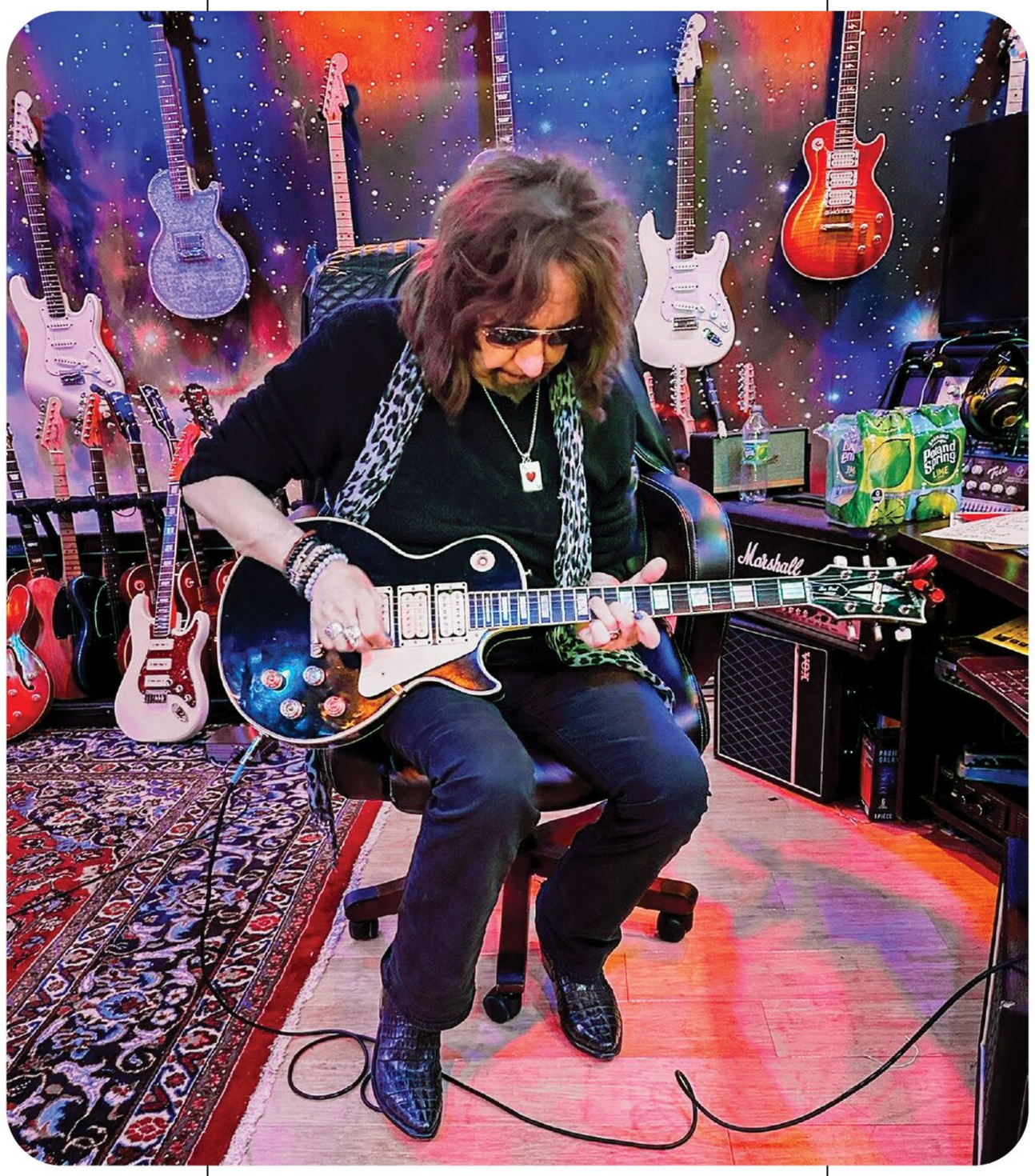
charting set when it reached #4. They were followed by 1977's *Alive II*, which was three sides recorded live (highlighted by "Shock Me" with an extended Frehley solo) and a side with five new studio tracks. Frehley played on only one studio track – "Rocket Ride" – which he sang and also contributed all guitar and bass parts. Other guitar parts were played by Bob Kulick, whose brother, Bruce, joined Kiss in the '80s.

Behind the scenes, Frehley made rumblings about a solo career, worried about Kiss losing its rock-and-roll edge (parents were bringing children to concerts) and the rampant merchandising. Instead, Kiss manager Bill Aucoin suggested all four members release a solo album – something that had never been done by a major band. They dropped on September 18, 1978, and Frehley's is widely considered the best; its cover of the Russ Ballard-penned "New York Groove" (first recorded by the glam-rock band Hello) became the only hit single (#13) and was added to Kiss' live set.

Dynasty ('79) had pop leanings including the disco-influenced "I Was Made for Lovin' You." Frehley sang lead on three songs – a cover of the Rolling Stones' "2,000 Man" and his compositions "Hard Times" and "Save Your Love." The pop direction continued with 1980's *Unmasked*, on which Frehley sang lead on "Talk to Me," "Two Sides of the Coin," and "Torpedo Girl." Next up was the '81 concept album *Music from "The Elder"* – soundtrack to a movie that would never be made. Frehley sang "Dark Light," and by this time, he had decided to leave the band. Though credited and pictured on 1982's *Creatures of the Night*, he did not play on it.

Frehley's solo career began in '87 with *Frehley's Comet*, followed by *Second Sighting* and the concert EP *Live+1*. He released five more albums – *Trouble Walkin'*, *Anomaly*, *Space Invader*, *Spaceman*, and *10,000 Volts*, along with *Greatest Hits Live*. He also issued two albums of covers, *Origins Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*.

In 1995, Frehley and Criss joined Simmons, Stanley, Bruce Kulick, and drummer Eric Singer to play a handful of Kiss songs on "MTV Unplugged," which fueled speculation that a reunion was planned. At the 1996 Grammy Awards, rapper Tupac Shakur introduced the band in full makeup and *Love Gun*-era costumes to thunderous applause. A year-long/192-show reunion tour started that June and grossed $43.6 million, making Kiss the top-drawing concert act at the time.



Co-producer Steve Brown captured this photo of Ace in his studio during the making of his final album, *10,000 Volts*. His Les Paul Black Beauty is a remnant of the *Dynasty* tour, and among the guitars behind him is a backup lighted "UFO" guitar and a Budokan signature Les Paul.

1998's *Psycho Circus* was a hit, but like the *Alive II* studio tracks, *Dynasty*, and *Unmasked*, did not include all original members, as Frehley and Criss played on only a few songs. Tommy Thayer, who ultimately joined Kiss full-time, played most of the lead guitar.

Frehley's last performance with Kiss was when he and Kulick played a handful of songs with the current lineup on a Kiss Kruise in 2018.

The original members of Kiss were inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2014 but did not perform at the ceremony. On December 7, the band received The Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime artistic achievement. Frehley was the third person to receive the honor posthumously.

★ ★ ★

One of Frehley's best-received solo albums was his final effort, *10,000 Volts*. Steve Brown, guitarist for the hard-rock band Trixter, was Frehley's co-producer and co-songwriter, also contributing guitar and bass parts. We spoke with him about his friend and the album.

"I went [to his home studio] and it was magic from the beginning," Brown said. "We had a chemistry; we wrote 95 percent of 'Walking on the Moon' the first day and one really cool thing about Ace is that he's very quick. He likes to capture lightning in a bottle – he's very spontaneous.

"After we got done, I said, 'I'll take this home and work up a version of it and then you can practice.' He looked at me and goes, 'Steve, I don't practice. You sing to me each line and I'll sing it.' Every couple of weeks, we would work on a different song."

Frehley had a unique sense of creativity, and Brown knew how to capture it.

"When you got him focused, he was very quick. He had a different sense of chord structure – very unorthodox," he said. "And you could tell going back to a song like 'Parasite,' or the '78 solo record – chord changes that I would never use.

"It's no secret he was a sloppy player to some degree. I would watch him [play] and had to figure out, 'How am I going to get him to record guitar solos?' Because he didn't like to sit there. Some of the stuff we worked out as we were doing it. Others, he would always just say, 'Just hit "Record" and let me play.' Then I would have him play through the whole song. As the song

VG asked guitarists whose work and lives were impacted by Ace Frehley to lend their thoughts on his life, music, and legacy.

★ ★ ★

Being a teenager on Long Island in the ’70s, falling headlong in love with the guitar while the whole world seemed to be vibrating with rock-and-roll energy, Kiss was pure sustenance and Ace was the cherry on top – a lightning bolt that made it all feel possible.

He wasn’t just a guitarist; he was a beacon for every kid staring into the mirror with a six-string and a dream. His tone was fat and fearless, and his vibrato was as unique and inimitable as his laugh. His whole persona screamed, “This is supposed to be fun, folks.”

In high school, my band, Rayge, was our own little rock-and-roll roving youth gang. We played at least seven or 10 Kiss songs, and every time those riffs kicked in, the room just exploded. For a few glorious minutes, we all got to be part of that larger-than-life fantasy that Ace helped create. His solos weren’t technically impossible, but they were magic, and that’s rare air to breathe.

Looking back now, with a lifetime in music behind me, I can see that Ace didn’t just play guitar, he liberated it. He gave permission for the instrument to be wild, to be fun, to be human. And that’s something that has inspired countless people to reach for that brand of magic ever since.

When I think of those days, sitting in my room with my first electric guitar, I can feel the same spark – that teenage sense that the universe just cracked open and said, “Go ahead, make some noise. You’re allowed to.”

Ace gave a whole generation of guitar players permission to chase that joy and make every note a little adventure. His music had a pulse, a wink, and a grin that told us not to take ourselves too seriously, but to love the hell out of what we do.

So, here’s to Ace – the Spaceman who landed on Earth to show us that rock and roll could be cosmic, cool, and full of heart. That’s Ace. That’s forever. **– *Steve Vai***

Ace Frehley and Bruce Kulick on the Kiss Kruise in 2018.

Jay Jay French with Frehley in 2013.

When I first heard *Destroyer* and then saw Kiss tour in 1978, I understood how powerful the band was, and how much Ace was a real guitar hero.

Working on the Kiss “MTV Unplugged” performance, I had quality time with Ace, working out how our acoustic guitars could best be adapted credibly from its electric parts. I was very excited that he spoke highly of my guitar playing. His playing was truly unique, with wide vibrato bends, and his solos used melodic and memorable riffs.

He played with a laid-back phrasing style that made the song better. I was impressed with “100,000 Years” because his solo parts have great syncopation patterns, and he still kept that Frehley swagger. His tone always had clarity and was never overly distorted.

Ace was truly a unique lead guitarist who connected with millions of fans, always representing some of the most “rock star” characteristics you would expect. **– *Bruce Kulick***

I first met Ace in late September or early October of 1972, when I responded to an ad in *The Village Voice* looking for a guitar player – the same ad that Gene and Paul had run that June when I auditioned for them when they were called Wicked Lester. Needless to say, I didn't get the gig and instead spent the summer in an Allman Brothers copy band. But that fall, I called again and was told by Paul that they’d found a guitar player. His

Rocco Monterosso with Frehley's "Smoker" '70s Les Paul Custom and the LED-topped guitar made from a '59 Les Paul Junior.

Frehley in 2024

progressed to the solo, he would get better and better. I'd listen and make notes about where he would play a couple great licks in the verse. Some might've been out of time, but I knew it was magic right there.

"I've been a producer and engineer for 35 years. You have to figure out *any* artist – see what works to get the best out of them. Very quickly, we had a solid schedule, and it showed.

"When we got done [the first day], he said, 'Steve, I want every song on this record to be great.' I said, 'I do, too.' And we hugged and shook hands. We were brothers right there. I looked him in the eye and said, 'If you trust my judgment as your co-producer, your co-songwriter, and as your friend, I promise you we will make your best record since '78.' I think we achieved that, and I think fans agree."

Frehley's guitar and gear on *10,000 Volts* was straightforward.

"He used a Les Paul Standard 1960 reissue on most of the record. He also used his blue-sparkle Standard and a Strat. For acoustics, we used his Ovation and a Guild 12-string. I set up some plug-ins – STL Tones, Neural DSP, and Aurora DSP. He was into it at first, then halfway through he said, 'I want to use my Marshall.' We used a solid state Marshall into a Fender Princeton cabinet with an old Jensen speaker that we had two mics on – a Shure SM57 and an AKG C414.

"(For pedals) he used one of his old phasers – an MXR Phase 90 that was really noisy, but he loved it. We got him the DigiTech FreqOut, and he loved that."

Brown sent several demos for a *10,000 Volts* follow-up, but Frehley passed before he got to work on them.

★ ★ ★

Rocco Monterosso served as Frehley's guitar tech on tour from 2008 until his passing, with a short break in 2010/'11. He'd previously spent nearly a dozen years as a repairman at the renowned Mandolin Brothers guitar shop.

"When the offer [to be Ace's road tech] was presented, I said, 'I never did road teching before, but how hard could it be?' So I figured, 'What the hell? I wouldn't mind working for Ace.' He had gone through a lot of techs, so he just wanted somebody that was reliable."

Frehley was known for the "Smoker" – a '70s Les Paul Custom routed and fitted with smoke bombs in the neck-pickup cavity, used during his unaccompanied solo.

"When he introduced me to the guitar and how it worked, my first thought was, 'What am I getting myself into here?' Because I'd been working on pre-war Martins, and now I needed to be some sort of pyrotechnician. It used a match fuse that connected to a nine-volt battery. There was a five-way rotary switch, and the first click turned on a light and opened up this trap door that covered the rout; I'd glue a picture of a humbucker over it. The second position triggered the match fuse."

Eventually, the smoke bombs were replaced by tiny fog machines that were improved over the last 15 years of Frehley's career.

Frehley's other notable special-effects guitar, the "UFO," had a top lined with embedded lights and he used it when performing his 1978 solo hit "New York Groove." It, too, evolved through the years.

"At first (the lights) were halogen bulbs on the perimeter," said Monterosso. "That wasn't a Gibson; it was custom-made with a board inside [and the lights mounted on it]. The battery was from a radio-controlled car. Eight years ago, he had one built with an entire top that lights up with LEDs and can be controlled in sections. It runs on two 9-volt batteries."

Frehley's regular guitars were signature Les Pauls.

"For the last 10 years, he used signature '59 reissues. When I started with him, he was using his [first] signature Les Pauls (with his classic makeup face on the headstock and lightning bolt fretboard inlays). We used his Budokan Les Paul Custom for a while," Monterosso added.

Frehley was using Marshall JCM 900 heads when Monterosso came onboard, but he ultimately switched to a JCM 2000. Ace's signal chain included a Line 6 DL4 delay with presets for "Rock Soldiers," "Detroit Rock City," and his unaccompanied solo. Later, Monterosso started using an Ibanez Tube Screamer TS-9 in the rig.

Today, Monterosso remains a gigging guitarist and has a shop, Red Mountain Guitar Repair & Restoration, on Staten Island.

Ace Frehley 2024: Jayme Thornton.

name was Paul Frehley and they really liked him, and as soon as they're ready to play out, he'd let me know. A couple weeks later, I got a call inviting me to The Loft on 23rd Street to hear the band, newly named Kiss.

So I walked into The Loft and saw the word "KISS" painted on a bedspread behind some Marshall amps, which was unusual because, in those days, American bands did not play Marshalls except for Jimi Hendrix and the Allman Brothers. It was still a Fender world, but you could tell that Gene and Paul had another idea in mind. They wanted to emulate the British bands like Slade, but much, much much heavier.

Anyway, I sat there with their producer, Ron Johnson, and my friend, Tommy, and listened to the Wicked Lester songs, Kiss-ified. I was so impressed by Ace's playing; he had feel, he had tone, he was playing a Les Paul through a Marshall. He had slow vibrato that reminded me, believe it or not, of Paul Kossoff. He carried himself like a rock star. He deserved that gig, and he was a great player.

Since then, we ran across each other half a dozen times in various social settings. I can't say that we were close friends, but Ace did come to see my band, Twisted Sister, on a couple of occasions playing at bars in Westchester, near where he lived. Do I credit him with creating rock stars around the world and inspiring young people? Absolutely, along with Hendrix and Van Halen. I don't think there's anybody who comes as close to being an American Keith Richards and inspiring so many rock-and-roll dreams. **– *Jay Jay French, author of* Twisted Business: Lessons from My Life in Rock 'n' Roll**

Paul Stanley asked me to come to what was Ace's third and final audition. He wanted my lead-guitarist opinion of this guy who was getting a hard look. Ace was late. Paul, Gene, and Peter ran through "Deuce," "Strutter," and "Firehouse," in that order and it was instantly obvious these guys could write songs, but their sound was kind of anemic. More waiting for Ace... 45 minutes late – to his third audition – he burst into the room with this odd off-kilter walk wearing one red Chuck Taylor and one orange one. He didn't seem stoned but he had one foot in another world. Anyway, he plugged in and, in an annoyed way, said, "Come on, let's go," as if he'd been the one waiting. Paul and Gene were distinctly unhappy. They did the same three songs with Ace, and the band sounded monstrous; the weird guy added a *ton* to their sound. He joined the band that night after being read the riot act by Paul and Gene.

My band, The Planets, opened for Kiss at the Hotel Diplomat on July 13, 1973. The makeup was crude but the band was strong. Ace fit like a glove. He and I had a mutual admiration thing going on after the show. Four weeks later, Kiss was signed to Casablanca Records.

The solo in "Dr. Love" is Ace Frehley doing *me*! Sounds absurd, but it's true. Corky Stasiak, the engineer who did my band's demo for Warner Brothers in 1976, was engineering what was to become *Rock and Roll Over*. My phone rang one morning, and it was Corky – a lovely bloke.

"Hey, Binky, I had to let you know... Last night, we were cutting solos with Ace. When we got to a track called 'Dr. Love,' Gene's instructions to Ace were, 'Do a Binky solo!' and Ace knew exactly what he meant. Wait 'til you hear it!"

A few months later, Gene came to one of my band's gigs. I asked him about Corky's story. He smiled and said one word, "Yes."

It's Ace's wildest solo, and my favorite of his, big-headed twit that I am. And he totally copped my s**t in one take. R.I.P., Curly. **– *Binky Philips, author of* Author of You're a Liar, Binky Philips!**

I will miss Ace's straightforward, aggressive rhythm style and his searing solo tones. And, of course, that laugh of his. R.I.P. Spaceman. **– *Joe Satriani***

Ace Frehley was one of those guitarists who truly defined a generation. Getting to tour alongside him and even share the stage many times for "School's Out" was an honor! His energy and the way the crowd reacted when he stepped onstage was unforgettable, and it was so cool getting to experience that! **– *Nita Strauss (solo artist, Alice Cooper)***

Ace was a marvelous human being and the absolute soul of Kiss. I've had the pleasure of playing with him and those are memories I will always treasure. **– *Michael Bruce (Alice Cooper)***

Ace inspired a whole generation to want to play guitar and that inspiration can still be felt today as new generations continue to discover Kiss and Ace's fiery playing. **– *Elliot Easton***

Ace was the heartbeat of Kiss – his energy, creativity, his solos, and his stage presence were truly out of this world. He'll be deeply missed, not just by fans, but by everyone in the music world who felt his impact. **– *Don Felder***

I met Ace a handful of times, mostly at NAMM shows or jams. Obviously, he was a huge influence on so many people. Kiss changed the landscape and Ace opened a very exciting door for lots of guitarists. Many of the musicians I've worked with either started because of Kiss or were hugely inspired by or even obsessed with the band – and Ace. His legend is pure rock and roll with all the bells and whistles thrown in. He was truly one of a kind and will be forever missed! R.I.P. Ace Frehley. **– *Jeff Pilson (Dokken, Dio, Lynch Mob, Foreigner)***

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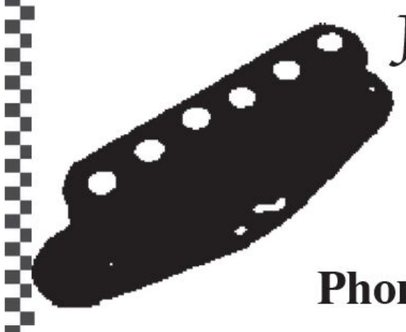

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A young John Lowery at an autograph session with Ace Frehley on a tour stop in 1986.

Frehley and John 5 backstage in 2017.

PAEAN TO A LEGEND

There isn't a bigger fan of Kiss – and especially Ace Frehley – than John 5, who at age seven coaxed his mother into buying *Love Gun*, played it on repeat, got a guitar and learned all of its riffs, mastered Ace's solos, created a stage persona heavily influenced by Kiss, and eventually became close friends with the legendary Spaceman.

★ ★ ★

Suffice to say, Frehley's passing hit hard.

"I was in Vegas when I was told he fell the first time, so I called him, very concerned," said J5. "He was in great spirits; the Kennedy Center Honors had been announced and he was getting ready to do some shows. He was in a really good place, joking and laughing; he told me, 'I went to the doctor. I'm fine,' and said he'd been fully checked over – MRI, CT, everything – and he was healthy.

"When I heard about the second fall and that they'd put him on life support, I was in a state of shock."

On the heels of our interview for the December '25 issue, we caught up again to ask about his hero.

When did you first meet Ace?

At an autograph session when I was 14. I think it was on his very *first* solo tour. He was great, and we hit it off. It was incredible. That first record, *Frehley's Comet*, is so, *so* good.

You became friends, hanging out.

Yeah, and we'd do the most ordinary things like go shopping or to the movies. We were *friends*, buddies. I was with Kiss when they got their stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. I was touring Japan with Marilyn Manson when Kiss was there, too, so we would go out.

Did you talk to him again after chatting about that first fall?

I didn't. And I couldn't go to the funeral. I just couldn't see him like that. He knew I loved him so much, but I just *couldn't* do it. I remember seeing my parents and my sister at their wakes, and those images never go away.

What was your first Kiss record?

My first was *Love Gun*. One day in June of 1977, I was walking in Sears with my mom. I loved Universal Studios monsters, and I loved music – the Rolling Stones and the Beatles especially because my older sisters played a lot of rock records. And when I saw the cover of *Love Gun*, I was like, "Wow. It's monsters with guitars!" and I begged my mom to buy it. It changed my life forever. It was like discovering food or water, and it's been with me every day since.

From that day, I became *obsessed* with getting a guitar, and that Christmas I got a Magnum Les Paul copy with a matching amp. I played and played and played that thing until it fell apart. I still have the amp. But with that guitar, everything fell in line for me.

You recently started offering tours of your collection of Kiss memorabilia.

Yeah, I do it when I'm not on the road. I walk people through and tell stories about the pieces. It's been a huge success, but the next one is going to be very special. Some of the stuff will be difficult to talk about.

Is there an Ace story you always share?

There's a great one about when I was playing at the Whiskey a Go Go [in West Hollywood] and he came to jam. He was living in San Diego at the time and didn't tell me he was going to be there. But he showed up and asked, "You got a guitar for me to play? I didn't bring one... I need a Les Paul." So I went and bought one at Guitar Center. That's *so* Ace (laughs), and it was great!

When I played my first show with Mötley Crue in Atlantic City, he and Peter Criss showed up. They both lived about two hours from there, and it was just so wonderful. The last picture they took together was at that show, and that's how I want to remember Ace.

What sort of Ace-specific memorabilia do you have?

There's a belt made by his mom that he wore very early on when they were playing clubs – *empty* clubs like the Daisy and the

Hotel Diplomat. It has lightning bolts around the whole thing.

I have the *Love Gun* tour costume he's wearing in the famous smoking-guitar poster. There was so much sweat in it, and stitched repairs. I also have his cape, costume, and boots from the *Dynasty* era, and the key to the City of Cadillac, Michigan, which he and the band were presented in 1975. In '77, each guy was given a giant Monopoly board with their faces painted in the jail square. Ace's hung in his house for a long time before he sold it to me.

How did he decide which pieces to sell?

Any time we were together, he would tell me stories and I'd sometimes ask to buy stuff after hearing about it.

Anyone who visits is likely a hardcore fan. They must lose their... minds.

I've seen a lot teary eyes as people look at these things they've been seeing in pictures their whole lives. And to be able to touch this stuff... it's emotional.

Frehley and John 5 in 2018 with the Eraldo Carugati painting used to create his 1978 solo album.

Speaking of emotions, you did a solo show a few hours after Ace died.

Yeah... I tried to talk about him and do some sort of tribute, but I broke down. I couldn't even talk. If someone had said, "I'll give you a million dollars to talk about Ace," there's no way I could've done it. Emotion just took over. At my gigs, people yell, "Play a Kiss song!" but I can't.

Do you have a favorite Ace solo or song?

"Fractured Mirror" just *kills*. It's brilliant. He knew how to write a great song, out of nowhere. He wrote so many incredible songs. He was like someone who had never swung a baseball bat but could walk up and hit a home run. He was a natural.

What will you remember about his outlook and attitude toward his life and career?

That he was humble, grateful, and not angry about *anything*. He will always be here in our hearts. He'll always be in our ears. We will always listen to his music. We'll never stop seeing or hearing Ace, or feeling the love. **– *Ward Meeker* VG**

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2026

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Big Als' Lake County Musician's Swap Meet, Sunday, January 11, 8 am - 3 pm, at Renninger's Florida Twin Markets, 20651 Hwy 441 Mt. Dora FL. For more info contact Allen at info@lcmsm.com, (352)735-0025 lcmsm.com

Amigo SoCal World Guitar Show, January 24 - 25, at the OC Fair and Event Center, Arlington and Fairview St, Costa Mesa, CA 92626. For more info contact Larry at 918-288-222 amigoshows@stringswest.com www.Calshows.tv

Orlando International Guitar & Music Expo, January 30 - February 1, Public hours Sat. 10 am - 5 pm, Sun. 10 am - 4 pm, at the Central Florida Fairgrounds, 4603 West Colonial Drive, Orlando, FL. For more info contact Britt Keen at 850-294-5537 orlandoguitarexpo@outlook.com Morty Beckman www.guitarexpo.net

FEBRUARY

Best Guitar Show, February 22, 10 am to 4 pm, at the Blair County Convention Center, 1 Convention Center Dr., Altoona, PA 16602. For more info contact Allen Jones at adjinv@outlook.com

MARCH

Cincinnati Guitar Show, Sunday, March 15, 10 am - 4 pm, at the Sharonville Conv. Cntr, 11355 Chester Rd, Sharonville Oh 45246. For more info call Denny 513-503-1072 www.cincyguitarshow.com and FB.

Frantic Mid Atlantic Guitar Show & Swap Meet, March 27-29, at New location - Delaware State Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall, 18500 S. Dupont Hwy Harrington, DE 19952. For more info www.MidAtlanticGuitarShow.com

MAY

Dallas International Guitar Festival, May 1-3, at the Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N Stemmons Fwy, Dallas, TX 75207. For more info contact 972-240-2206 info@JimmyWallaceGuitars.com www.GuitarShow.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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'62 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck 100% original. Near Mint condition.
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'65 Sunburst 100% original, Near Mint condition, Mint-Green pickguard
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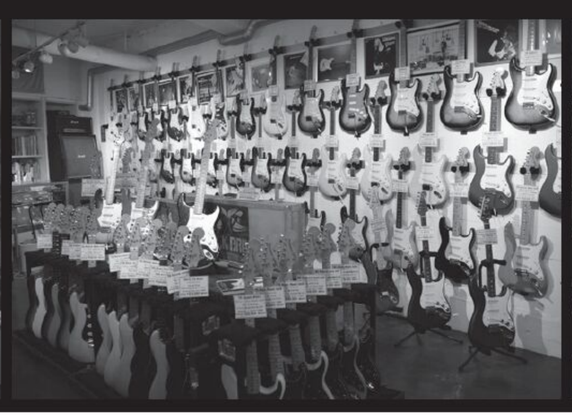

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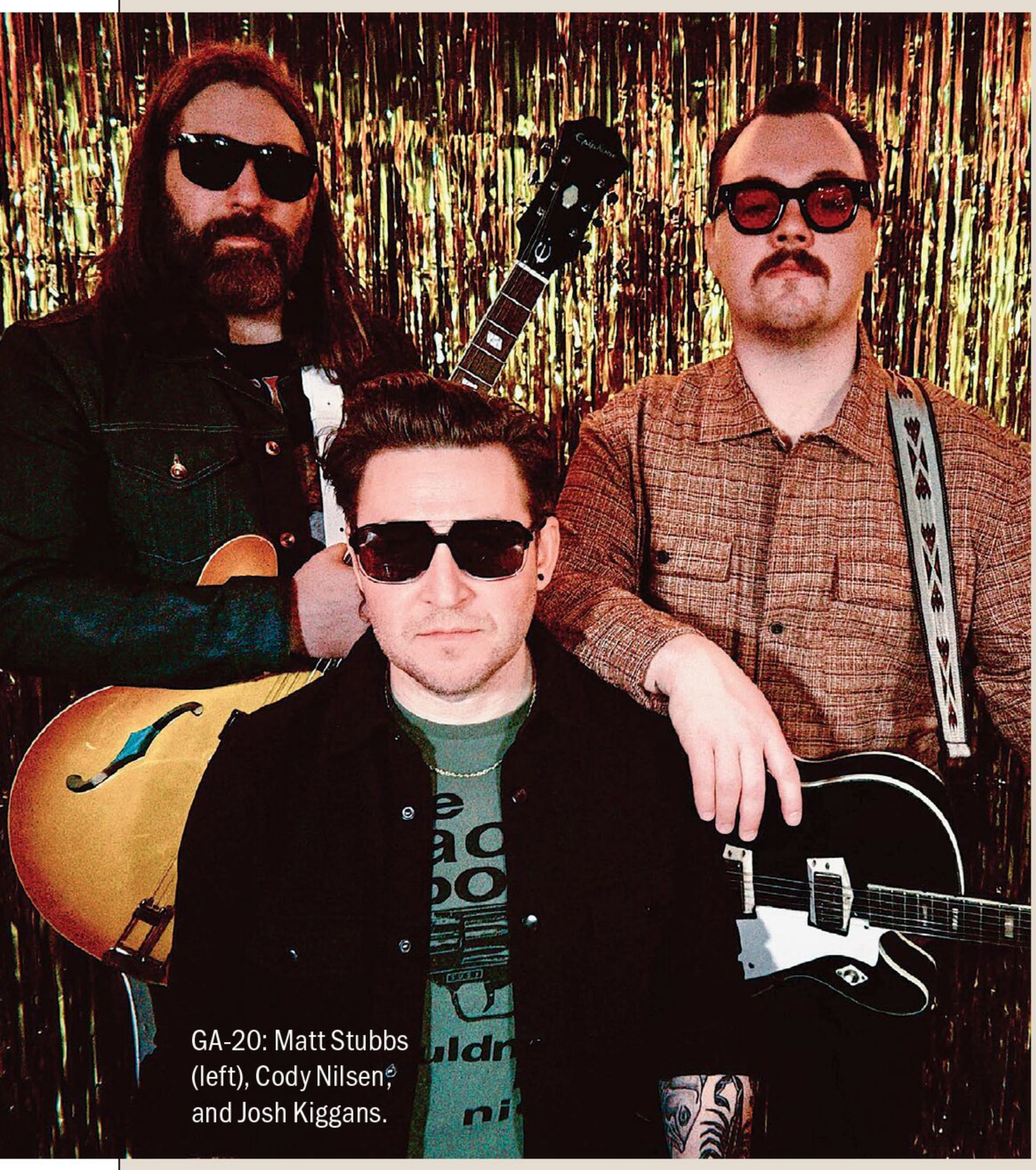

GA-20: Matt Stubbs (left), Cody Nilsen, and Josh Kiggans.

TOUGH BLUES

GA-20
Orphans

You gotta love a rough, tough blues album that runs just 20 minutes. But that's all the space GA-20 needs to deliver its signature sound, harkening to electric blues of the '50s and '60s. No fluff, no filler – just raw, rockin' blues. On *Orphans*, the trio – led by guitar man Matthew Stubbs – also says hello to new singer/slide guitarist Cody Nilsen, who replaces Patrick Faherty. Fortunately, GA-20 sounds better than ever on this brief album of covers and deep cuts.

For Billy Boy Arnold's "Cryin' & Pleadin'," the loping groove is a hip setup for the two-guitar trio, Nilsen's strong vocal complementing the one-chord rhythm and Stubbs' whammy-bar wiggles. Lazy Lester's "I Love You, I Need You" leans towards Jimmy Reed-style R&B, rife with sweet double-stops and chord slides; the solo is simplicity itself. For an all-instrumental take on Sam & Dave's "Hold On, I'm Coming," new-guy Nilsen's bottleneck delivers the vocal melody and chorus. Tone-wise, the sleazy, ambient guitar tones throughout suggest room miking, evoking Chess records from 70 years ago.

Though short, *Orphans* is a power-packed blues experience. *VG*'s solution to make it last longer? Play it twice! **– *Pete Prown***

Wes Corbett
Drift

At bluegrass festivals everywhere, acts on the main stage are just part of the fun. Before and after, picking parties sprout up around campsites and parking lots. For his sophomore album, banjoist Corbett assembled what could be the ultimate cast for such a jam.

Joining him are Sam Bush, Sierra Hull, and Casey Campbell on mandolin; Bryan Sutton and Chris Eldridge on guitar; Justin Moses on Dobro; Darol Anger, Bronwyn Keith-Hynes, Jason Carter, and Brittany Hass on fiddle; and Paul Kowert, Todd Phillips, Mike Bub, and Vickie Vaughan on bass.

Like Corbett, who spent time in Molly Tuttle's group, all are rooted in bluegrass but were affected by (and in some cases played a role in) the Dawg, newgrass, and new-acoustic movements of the '70s. The all-instrumental program highlights Corbett the composer as much as the picker. "The Tide Pool Jigs" is a lovely study in dynamics, shifting from pensive to lively. "Shapeshifter" is an apt title for the jazziest, most angular number, while the brisk "Salmon Run" could sit comfortably in a David Grisman set.

For "Hartford's Bend On The Cumberland," Wes brought a banjo that belonged to John Hartford himself to the festivities. **– *Dan Forte***

The Cars
Heartbeat City
Deluxe Edition

Propelled by punchy guitar riffs, The Cars lasted longer than most new wave acts. The interplay between guitarist Elliot Easton's power chords, to-the-point solos, and dirty riffs with keyboardist Greg Hawkes' iconic melodies and tones helped define their radio-ready music.

Hitting #3 on *Billboard*, 1984's *Heartbeat City* was co-produced by Robert John "Mutt" Lange and the band with microscopic precision. Now, it's been reissued in a four-CD/one-LP deluxe edition. The remaining CDs feature previously unreleased tracks, B-sides, remixes, demos, and a complete concert from Houston that September.

The singles "You Might Think," "Hello Again," "Magic," "Drive," "Why Can't I Have You" and "Heartbeat City" still sound powerful, though very Big '80s. Five versions of "Shooting for You," an outtake from 1980's *Panorama*, are intriguing, while two early "It's Not the Night" versions highlight the Easton/Hawkes interplay. The live tracks also sound edgier – the best are "Candy-O," "Good Times Roll," "Cruiser," and, with longer Easton solos, "You're All I've Got Tonight."

GA-20: Fancey Pansen.

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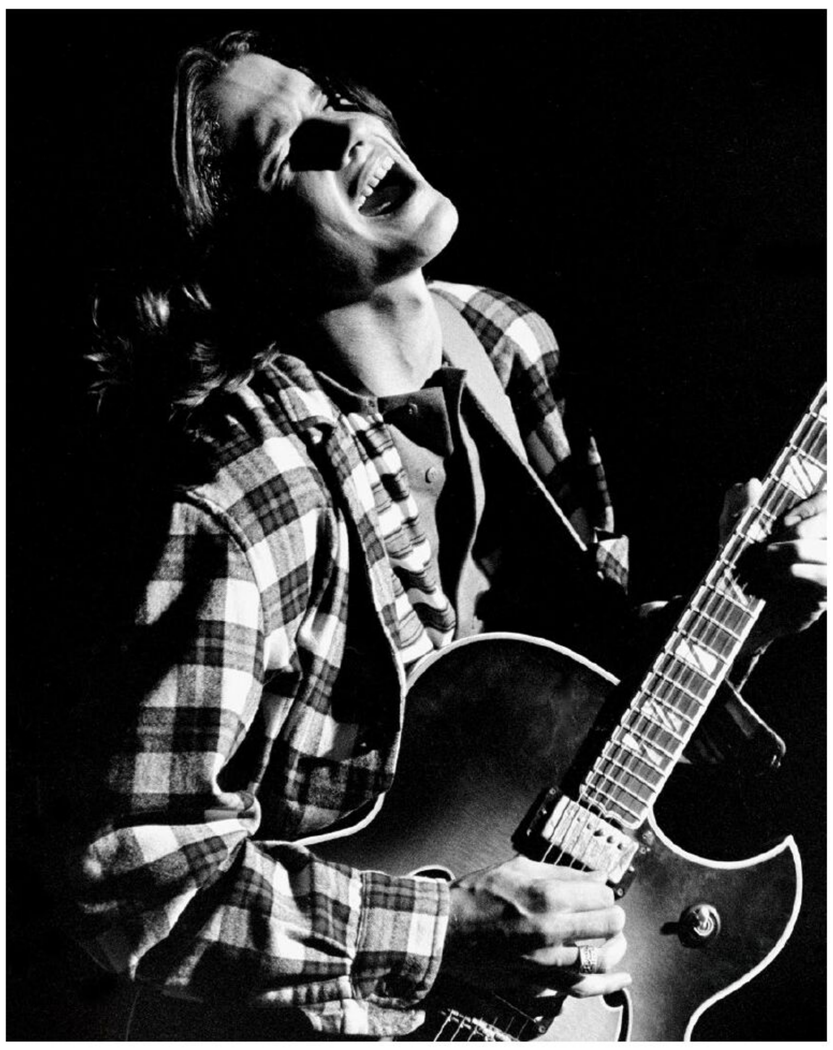

A HEAPING SPOONFUL OF BLUES

By Dan Forte

I've seen **Robben Ford** dozens of times in various formats and configurations, invariably interesting, often downright astounding. In the photograph shown here, esteemed music photographer Veryl Oakland perfectly captured Ford's soul and energy on a June night in 1973, and I was in the audience.

As part of the Newport Jazz Festival West (at Berkeley Community Theater and the Hollywood Bowl), the "Guitar Explosion" featured Jim Hall, Barney Kessel, Mary Osborne, the duo of Herb Ellis and Joe Pass, T-Bone Walker, Shuggie Otis, Kenny Burrell, and Roy Buchanan. You could hardly ask for a more impressive roster of jazz and blues greats, but when I saw the Berkeley show, Robben created the most excitement. Playing an original calypso in the Sonny Rollins mold titled "For You," followed by "Little Red Rooster" as a B.B. King type of shuffle, the only thing that could have slayed the audience more would've been if he'd started playing saxophone, too. And believe me, he could have.

Born December 16, 1951, Ford joined Charlie Musselwhite's band in late 1970, after the blues harpist had hired older brother, Patrick, on drums. A month after his 19th birthday, they were in the studio cutting Musselwhite's *Takin' My Time*, which featured one Robben vocal. When I saw the band shortly after, Robben sounded like a jazzier Mike Bloomfield, having saved his lunch money years earlier to buy *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band*. He also dueted with Charlie on sax, and on break he amused himself at the piano.

In early '71, the brothers formed one of the hottest groups in the San Francisco area. The *Real* Charles Ford Band (to differentiate from a pre-Musselwhite aggregation) enlisted bassist Stan Poplin and 18-year-old brother Mark, a harmonica phenom. I caught them almost weekly, and to this day I've never seen a band that could nail the Chess catalog and B.B. King, and then improvise over Brubeck and Coltrane jazz.

My first published article was an interview with Robben for *Blue Flame*, a blues fanzine edited by fellow teen Cary Baker. Sadly, the band broke up on New Year's Eve and recorded *The Charles Ford Band* for Arhoolie a month later, to document what had been. I highly recommend it.

Forming his own group, Robben learned that blues singer Jimmy Witherspoon, whom he favored via a compilation called *The Blues Box*, was coming to Palo Alto's In Your Ear club.

"I asked the owner, 'Hey, man, can I open for him?'" Robben recently recalled from his home in London. "He wasn't going to pay me, but I just wanted to do it. Spoon showed up with only a guitar player, so after our set he said, 'I want you guys to back me up.' We were like, 'Yeah!' I told him I'd play saxophone, because he had a guitar player. At the end of that first night, he said, 'I know you were just being nice to my guitar player by playing saxophone, but I want you guys to play with me next week at El Matador.'"

Witherspoon's week-long stint at the San Francisco jazz venue cemented the guys as his full-time band. The young white quartet (with Poplin, pianist Paul Nagel, and drummer Jim Baum) revitalized the career of the 52-year-old, who delivered a galvanic set at the Monterey Jazz Festival that September. As Ford took chorus after slow-blues chorus in "Going Down Slow," Witherspoon urged him (and the crowd) on. "He really sold me," Robben agreed. You can hear the result on *Jimmy Witherspoon featuring Robben Ford - Live At The 1972 Monterey Jazz Festival*, released in 2008.

Television performances – "One Of A Kind" and an installment of "Omnibus" – aired on PBS in '73, showcasing the Gibson Super 400 Robben got in trade for his L-5. The Witherspoon personnel evolved to Poplin, drummer Jim Chanteloup, future Yellowjackets pianist Russell Ferrante, and two saxes – three when Robben joined in – typically preceding Spoon onstage with excellent Robben-penned jazz tunes. That year, I landed an interview with him for *Guitar Player*, which got a foot in the door for the career I've had for 50 years.

His subsequent tenure with fusion's L.A. Express and 1974 tours with Joni Mitchell and George Harrison are well-known, yet the Witherspoon era is underrepresented – underutilized on *Spoonful*, smoking on *Live Jimmy Witherspoon & Robben Ford*, released in '77.

Unfortunately, there's precious little documentation of Ford's Witherspoon period, with producer Mike Vernon barely utilizing him on *Spoonful*. Subsequent unsanctioned albums confuse fans and exploit Robben's success. In '91, he was reunited with Spoon for *Live At The Notodden Blues Festival*, released in '92 on brother Patrick's Blue Rock'It label. But if some board tape shows up 50-plus years hence, with no money going to Ford, the bandmates, or Witherspoon (who died in '97), how is that not a bootleg?

Robben's first solo album, *The Inside Story*, was released in '79. Session work – oft-quoted "from Barry Manilow to Kiss" – collaborations with Larry Carlton, and stints with Jing Chi and Miles Davis followed, and he routinely racks up Readers' Poll votes in Blues, Jazz, and Rock categories. His website mentions "16-plus albums under his own name," with *Two Shades Of Blue* due in early 2026.

"Bad cat, man," George Benson told me in 2009. "Always has been."

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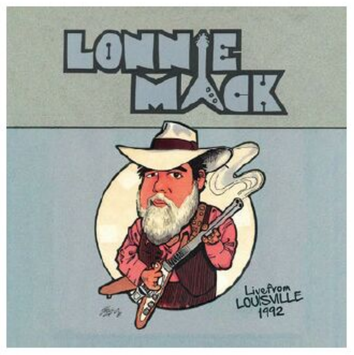
Robben Ford: Veryl Oakland.

Befitting an MTV-era album, there are gobs of synthesizers, but Easton's guitar work is more critical to *Heartbeat City* than, well... you might think. **– *Bret Adams***



Lonnie Mack
Live in Louisville, 1992

Despite several retirements and comebacks rooted in a love-hate relationship with the business end of music, Lonnie Mack (1941-2014) and his Gibson Flying V left an impressive legacy. His career gained a foothold with the 1963 instrumental take on Chuck Berry's "Memphis," while his work in the late '60s and mid '70s showcased his soulful country and blues vocals. An '80s comeback aided by longtime fan Stevie Ray Vaughan reaffirmed his command of the mighty V.

This Louisville concert is Mack at his best, though the audio is far from optimal (acknowledged in the liner notes). Joining him are longtime keyboardist/vibraphonist Dumpy Rice, drummer Jeff McAllister, and bassist Bucky Lindsey, who received a tape of this show from Lonnie himself.

Mack explores his career with a snarling medley of "Memphis" and "Wham!," then attacks "Satisfy Suzie" with pile-driver intensity. Explosive solos on a 10-minute medley of "Camp Washington Chili" and "If You Have to Know" include nods to Freddie King and other blues icons. A solo "Oreo Cookie Blues" reveals his solid command of Delta licks. That blues focus continues on an extended rendition of "Stop." These nine tracks are a powerful reminder of Mack's vocal and instrumental prowess. **– *Rich Kienzle***

Lonnie Mack with trademark Flying V.

Steve Morse with his signature Ernie Ball Music Man.

Steve Morse Band
Triangulation

On his trio's latest album, their first since 2009, Steve Morse is back with blistering counterpoint, muscular blues-rock lines, and stellar guests. Aided by long-time cohorts Dave LaRue on bass and drummer Van Romaine, Morse returns with hellacious licks, tone, and vibrato, though his picking speed has been diminished by chronic arthritis. "Breakthrough" showcases earmarks from past solo albums that made Morse a guitar legend.

"The Unexpected" displays Morse's penchant for combining baroque with Southern blues lines, but it's on "TexUS," featuring Eric Johnson, where he turns up the temperature. Steve and Eric trade harmonized violin-sounding rocklines that blow minds as expected. Dream Theater's John Petrucci joins Morse on the title track, where testosterone is high and riffing is face-melting, as the two shred over LaRue and Romaine's athletic grooves.

Harmonized guitar lines sound like electric bagpipes on "March of the Nomads," and Steve's son, Kevin, joins him on guitar for "Taken By An Angel," a moving tribute to the guitarist's late wife, Janine. No question, Morse has faced tough battles, but *Triangulation* shows him turning an artistic corner to bigger, brighter things. **– *Oscar Jordan***

Tony Joe White
The Real Thang

His songs have been covered by Elvis Presley, Tina Turner, Ray Charles, Dusty Springfield, Brook Benton, and B.B. King. He dueted with Eric Clapton, Emmylou Harris, and Mark Knopfler. Ironically, he may be best known for the McDonald's jingle for the McRib sandwich.

Whereas John Fogerty envisioned bayous and Cajun queens, Louisiana-born Tony Joe White could have *been* the "Jody" character of CCR songs. In 1969, as AM radio beamed "Sweet Caroline" and "Good Morning Starshine," White cut one of the greasiest tunes to reach the Top 10 – "Polk Salad Annie."

Once hidden by fads, 1980's *The Real Thang* gets a welcome expanded treatment. His harmonica and guitar are backed sparely by bass, drums, and organ, with Waylon Jennings joining on vocal and guitar on "Red Neck Women" and "Mamas Don't Let Your Cowboys Grow Up To Be Babies." There's also a reprise of "Polk Salad," while the reissue excavates the unheard "Alligator Stomp" with White's Lightnin' Hopkins-rooted guitar fed through fuzz, wah, and octave divider. "That's The Way A Cowboy Rocks And Rolls" is layered with acoustic and pedal-steel, and "I Came Here To Party," another Jennings duet, should have been an outlaw country hit. **– *DF***

Alex Skolnick Trio
Prove You're Not A Robot

On this trio's sixth album, thrash-metaller Alex Skolnick again trades his solidbody and monstrous cabs for a hollowbody and combo amp to create beautiful themes and irresistible melodies. Drummer Matt Zebroski and bassist Nathan Peck bob and weave with Skolnick for a set of sophisticated and meaningful chemistry.

The journey begins with the serene "Parallel Universe," escalating into an inspired fusion solo. Two highlights are

Lonnie Mack: Ebet Roberts. Steve Morse: Nick Nersesov.

Alex Skolnick with his ESP signature model.

interpolations of Steve Howe's "Mood for a Day" (called "Armondo's Mood") and Tom Petty's "Breakdown." Skolnick builds on Howe's melodic themes arranged for the entire band while also introducing Latin sounds by way of Chick Corea. On "Breakdown," Skolnick gives Petty's AOR staple the Dave Brubeck "Take Five" treatment. The trio swings in 5/4 and 3/4 to mesmerizing effect.

Testament fans will be impressed by Skolnick's ability to transform his sense of time and feel with a lighter, more contemplative touch. On the title track he unleashes excellent phrasing, superb bop lines, and silky tone, while "Guiding Ethos" showcases his work on acoustic. **– *OJ***

Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention

One Size Fits All 50th Anniversary

One of the great Zappa platters, *One Size Fits All* remains a sonic thrill a half-century later. This mother of a reissue is offered on vinyl or CD/Blu-ray with 58 tracks including studio outtakes, HD audio, and a full 1974 gig taped in Holland.

Opener "Inca Roads" is indisputably a masterpiece, and a platform for Zappa's compressed/wah-tinged solos in the Mixolydian mode (assisted by George Duke's sublime vocals and keyboards). For power chords and fuzz, crank up "Can't Afford No Shoes"; what sounds like bottleneck slide is Zappa wailing on a *fretless* Acoustic Black Widow solidbody. In the outtakes, several mixes of "San Ber'dino" sport ferocious fretwork, while at the Dutch gig, Frank delivers wah meltdowns on "Stinkfoot" and "Cosmik Debris" (both from the hit *Apostrophe* album). Another FM favorite, "Montana," sports a 12-minute jam with Dorian-flavored guitar solos, a la the Allman Brothers.

The audio is a treat for the ears – it sounds like you're *at* the 1974 gig. Sure, you won't need this box if you're a casual admirer, but for those who crave FZ, saddle up your pygmy pony and grab a copy. It's primo Zappa. **– *PP VG***

Alex Skolnick: Alan B. Evans.

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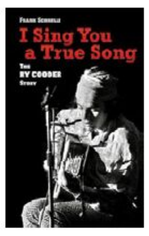


FRANK SCHNELLE

I Sing You a True Story: The Ry Cooder Story

This 468-page book is a super-annotated discography, delving deep into each album, soundtrack, and song Cooder's recorded. If you're a fan, it's the sole book available – and it's a good read, packed with info. Sadly, it doesn't delve into guitar gear or technique, areas where Ry has had the greatest influence on the musical world. Check out the author's corresponding Cooder podcast, too. **– *Michael Dregni***

JOHN SCOFIELD, DAVE HOLLAND

Memories of Home

Scofield and veteran upright bassist Holland interact flawlessly on this spare, elegant set of improvisations. Scofield offers impressive single-string and octave work on "Icons at the Fair," and "Not For Nothin'," He waxes thoughtful on "Memorette" and the relaxed, bucolic "Easy For You." His improvisations complement Holland's "Mr. B (Tribute to Ray Brown)," homage to the jazz bass icon. – *RK*

38 SPECIAL

Milestone

The AOR/Southern rockers, with vocalist/rhythm guitarist Don Barnes still out front, just released their first studio album in 21 years. *Milestone* updates their style at times, including "So Much So Right," which is tougher and rawer. Don't panic, longtime fans – 38 Special's hallmark melodic hooks are heard on "All I Haven't Said," "Long Long Train," and "Looking for My Life." **– *BA***

DARWIN

Distorted Mirror

This prog-fusion collective features Simon Phillips, Greg Howe, and bassists Mohini Dey and Matt Bissonette for a set of epic soundscapes, hard-charging riffs, and spellbinding guitar with vocals. High-level production meets imaginative compositions and dazzling musicianship. Howe's guitar shines gloriously and Phillips provides the intense drumming that made him a legend. Highlights include "33rd Century Man" and "Rising Distortion." **– *OJ***

THEE HOLY BROTHERS

High In My Balloon

Entering with a permutation of a Chocolate Watchband (and Them) riff is always a good sign. Songwriter Marvin Etzioni co-founded '80s cowpunk's Lone Justice, as their bassist; here, he also handles electric mandolin and guitars. With guitarist/keyboardist Willie Aron (Peter Himmelman, Balancing Act), the pair's harmonies recall the Who and Beach Boys. Don't expect histrionic solos; enjoy the twangy hooks. **– *DF***

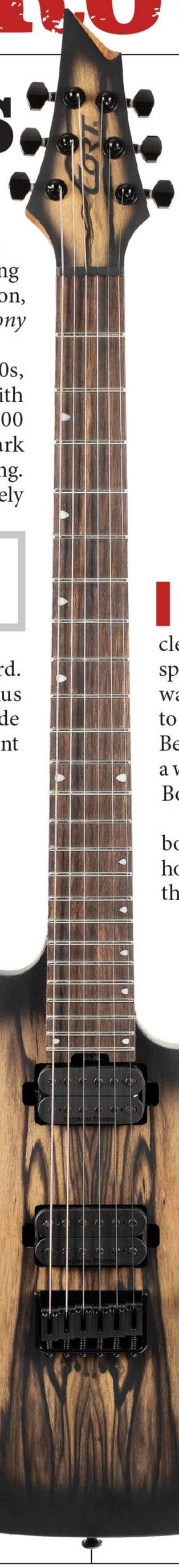
LARKIN POE

An Acoustic Companion Vol. II

This five-song EP includes stripped-down versions of tracks from sisters Rebecca and Megan Lovell's 2025 album, *Bloom*. The depth of the Grammy winners' songwriting, Rebecca's lead vocals, and Megan's harmony vocals suit the "unplugged" format perfectly. "Mockingbird" breathes with sweet acoustic guitar, a shimmering slide melody, and rich vocals. "If God is a Woman" is truly haunting, while "Bluephoria" loosely grooves. **– *BA***

EBONY EYES

The Cort KX500 Pale Moon



There's a definite niche for players who want an upscale look and premium features, without breaking the bank. Cort is on the case with its KX500 Pale Moon, a superstrat with an unusual (and rather swank) *ebony* top paired with other tone tools.

The superstrat, that wondrous invention of the 1980s, took the double-cut Leo shape and tricked it out with humbuckers and the quickest necks possible. The KX500 catches the eye with its Pale Moon finish, a smokey dark burst with a matte lacquer and heavy grain figuring. More interestingly, it's an ebony veneer, which is rarely used for solidbody tops, while the rest of the body is mahogany. Using a contoured heel, the bolt-on neck (25.5" scale) is a five-piece laminate of roasted maple and walnut topped with a Maccassar ebony fretboard. Among its perks are 24 stainless-steel frets, a flat radius of 15.75", teardrop inlays, black Graph Tech nut, and side inlays that glow in the dark onstage or in your basement jamatorium.

Price: $929.99
www.cortguitars.com

For electronics, the Pale Moon has a time-honored Gibson array with two humbuckers and a three-way selector. Cort loaded the KX500 with a set of Seymour Duncan Sentient and Nazgûl humbuckers, and no superfluous coil-tapping – just passive, high-output 'bucker tone. Master Volume and Tone knobs keep things simple.

Cranked up, the Pale Moon naturally gravitates towards heavier rock, from the classics and Satch/Vai/Petrucci shred, to all manner of 21st-century crunchdom.

In hand, the Pale Moon is a quick-necked beastie, with that nearly-flat fretboard and low-action setup. No surprise, the roasted neck has the shallower D shape that speedsters prefer, offering ample performance for high-tech picking and riffing. Locking Cort tuners and hardtail bridge ensure reliable tuning. Granted, the KX500 isn't a Telecaster and likely won't find a home with country and blues twangers, but if your jam is Metallica, Dream Theater, or Porcupine Tree, this ebony-topped plank delivers the goods in the under-a-grand bracket. Bring your own saturated-gain pedal of choice. ***– Pete Prown***

Price: $239.99 www.boss.us

SPIN CLASS

The Boss RT-2 Rotary Ensemble

In the vast universe of modulation pedals, some of the best were invented decades ago. Sometime in the distant past, a clever player plugged his guitar into a Leslie speaker – an amp/speaker designed for use with Hammond-style organs – and was rewarded with some of the sweetest, airiest effects known to mankind. You've heard it on classics like the Beatles' "Let It Be," SRV's "Cold Shot," and Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun"; it's a wobbling sound akin to a guitar amp dipped in a pool of water. Boss is now capturing that vibe with the RT-2 Rotary Ensemble.

If you're not familiar with a Leslie cabinet, it's a heavy wood box the size of a small chest freezer that houses a rotating treble horn and a spinning bass baffle that together effectively stir the sound they produce. The user/player can adjust the cones' rotation speed, which equates to the "Speed" knob on a chorus, vibrato, phaser, or tremolo pedal.

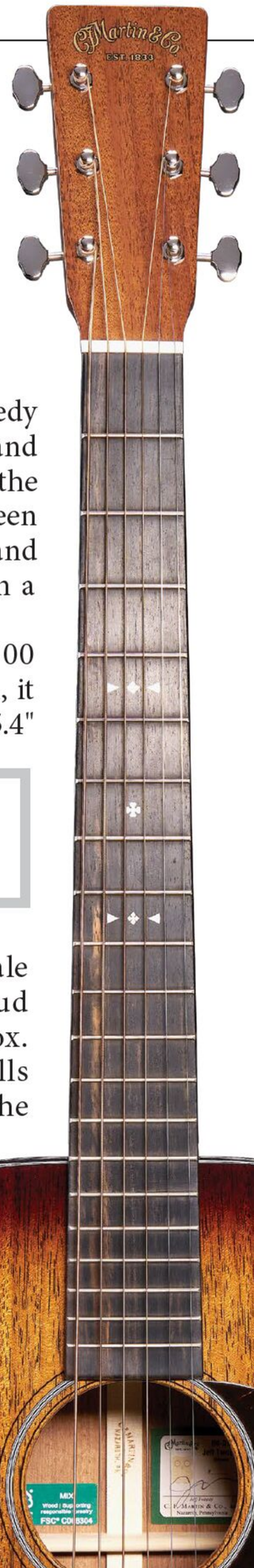
The brand-new RT-2 is a blissfully simple unit; there are controls for Level, Drive (a bit of grit), and two concentric Speed knobs to simulate the Leslie's two speakers. The Mode switch offers three flavors of Leslie – traditional, a more-spacious effect, and a modern variation. Additional toggles on the back allow further tweaking of the distortion and balance between the rotors. There's also a virtual rotor display, adding a groovy psychedelic effect for visualizing the speed, as well as stereo inputs and outputs.

For that classic Leslie lushness, reduce the drive to taste and push the two speed knobs up fairly high. Suddenly you have that epic sound that graced albums by George Harrison, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith, Peter Frampton, and zillions more.

Instead of hauling around a backbreaking 130-pound Leslie cabinet, Boss gives you all the rotating speaker you'll ever need with the RT-2. It's a modulation pedal definitely worth checking out. ***– Pete Prown***

HYBRID HARDWOOD

Martin's 00DB Jeff Tweedy



Straight out of the case, the new Martin 00DB Jeff Tweedy seems like a rather standard affair – a mahogany grand concert that traces back to the 00-15 and 00-17 models of the 1930s. But a bit of investigation reveals the differences between the OG and the newcomer – the DB stands for "deep body," and the new Tweedy model offers some dreadnought features in a concert package.

The 00DB Tweedy has the same profile as other 14-fret 00 Martins, but at 3⅝" deep at the heel and 4½" at the end pin, it punches a little more like a bigger box. Combined with a 25.4" scale length, it will feel familiar to pickers who spend their time on dreadnoughts.

Price: $3,599
www.martinguitar.com

With all-solid mahogany construction, the 00DB is loud and warm. Its bass response is remarkably punchy for the guitar's size, and the long scale provides enough tension to really dig in. The tester was loud and resonant, and its setup was flawless right out of the box. Sporting a 1¾" nut width on a legitimate V neck (Martin calls it Modified V), the Tweedy is a unique experience among the company's production models.

The appointments are subtle, and many are a nod to the past. The 00DB has a straight ebony bridge, with unique inlays on the ebony fretboard the company calls Foden style. Nickel open-gear tuning machines round out the classic look. The Tweedy Burst finish on top is a yellow-orange hue in the middle, blending to a dark mahogany on the edge – a great frame for the top wood. White-on-black binding matches the top to the sides, with a dark mahogany gloss finish on the back and sides.

Under the hood, scalloped spruce X-bracing provides the familiar, focused tone of the American flat-top box. Weighing in at 4.1 pounds, the tester looked and felt like a premium product. Inside the sound hole is a serialized label signed by Tweedy himself, along with a Forest Stewardship Council-certification sticker, indicating the guitar's woods were harvested sustainably, respecting environmental, social, and economic standards, and can be traced back to its original source.

The sole detracting feature of the 00DB Jeff Tweedy is the molded hardshell case that carries it. Many of Martin's U.S.-made guitars ship in one, and they feel utilitarian (maybe even a bit undignified) compared to the guitars inside. ***– Michael Shirek***

GEARIN' UP

REVEREND KYLE SHUTT MARK 2

The Reverend Kyle Shutt Mark 2 has a korina body, three-piece korina neck with medium oval shape, 12"-radius rosewood fretboard, and TOM bridge with stop tail. Its Railhammer signature pickups have separate Volume controls, Tone, and Bass Contour. Other details include custom Diver Flag fretboard inlays and gold hardware.

LEVY'S M26PD BLK-MAT STRAP

Levy's M26PD BLK-MAT is a 3"-wide guitar/bass strap with ¼" foam padding wrapped in garment leather with a matte-black finish. An XL version adds length for taller players or those who prefer a lower playing position.

SEYMOUR DUNCAN JB JR. FOR TELE

Seymour Duncan's JB Jr. for Tele is a single-coil-sized (side-by-side) humbucker wound for the bridge position of a Telecaster. Made in the U.S. and wax-potted to eliminate feedback, it uses ceramic magnets and has a four-conductor lead for series, parallel, and split-coil wiring options.

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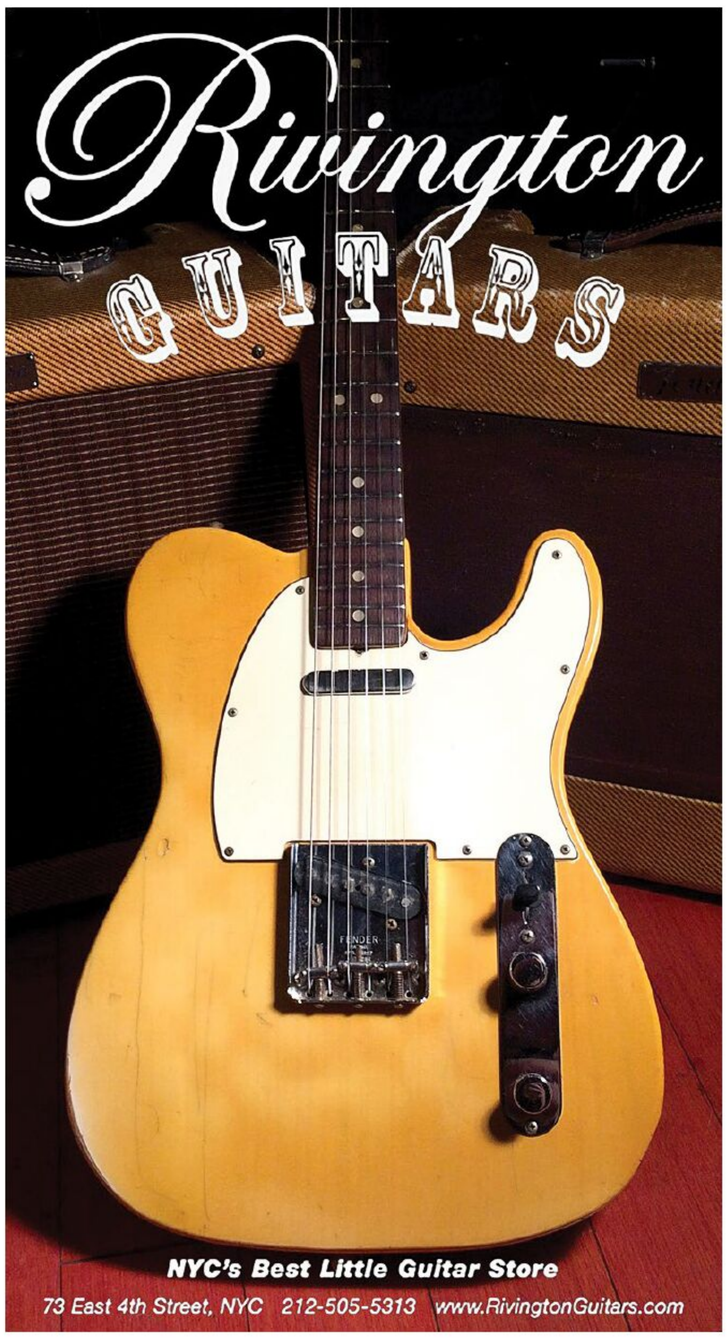
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01 Ed Putman has a fine gathering of guitars in many flavors. In front are a Martin 000-13e (left), an American Standard Strat, '52 Hotrod Tele, AS Tele, American Pro II Tele, Eric Johnson Artist Strat, Highway 1 Strat, and a 000-28. Perched on the sofa are a Jeff Beck Artist Strat, Les Paul Goldtop '57 reissue, ES-335, Les Paul Classic, and a Les Paul Junior

02 Greg Owens' collection includes these thinlines – a Gibson Custom Shop 50th Anniversary '58 ES-335 (left), a Tokai ES-138 SR he dressed in tribute to Alvin Lee, and an Ibanez JSM10 John Scofield.

03 Alan Van Velkinburgh's '54 Les Paul Junior is squeaky clean and all-original, down to its frets. "And yes, I do have its pressed-cardboard alligator case," he says.

04 *VG* music editor Pete Prown felt his '63 Jaguar was lonely, so he grabbed a '75 hardtail Strat to keep it company. "I've been looking for a large-headstock Strat for *years*, to scratch a Robin Trower itch," he says. "I like the quirky hardtail vibe and it's only 7.5 pounds, with a just-right carve and lively original pickups. They're already buddies."

05 John Butts is a longtime subscriber with an affinity for the Gallery. His stash includes (from left) a '50s Kay archtop from the Sears catalog, Grote thinline electric, a solidbody he made using an imoprt body, Strat neck, and Seymour Duncan Hot Rails pickups, and a Gretsch resonator.

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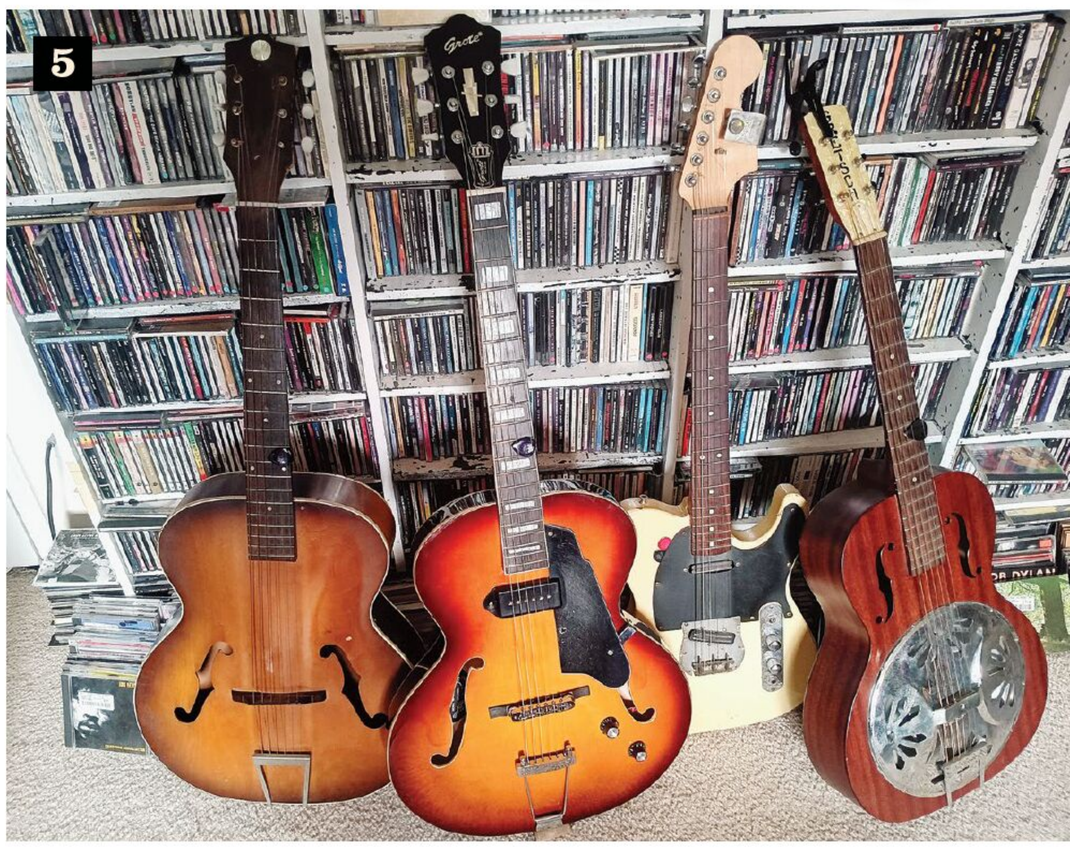
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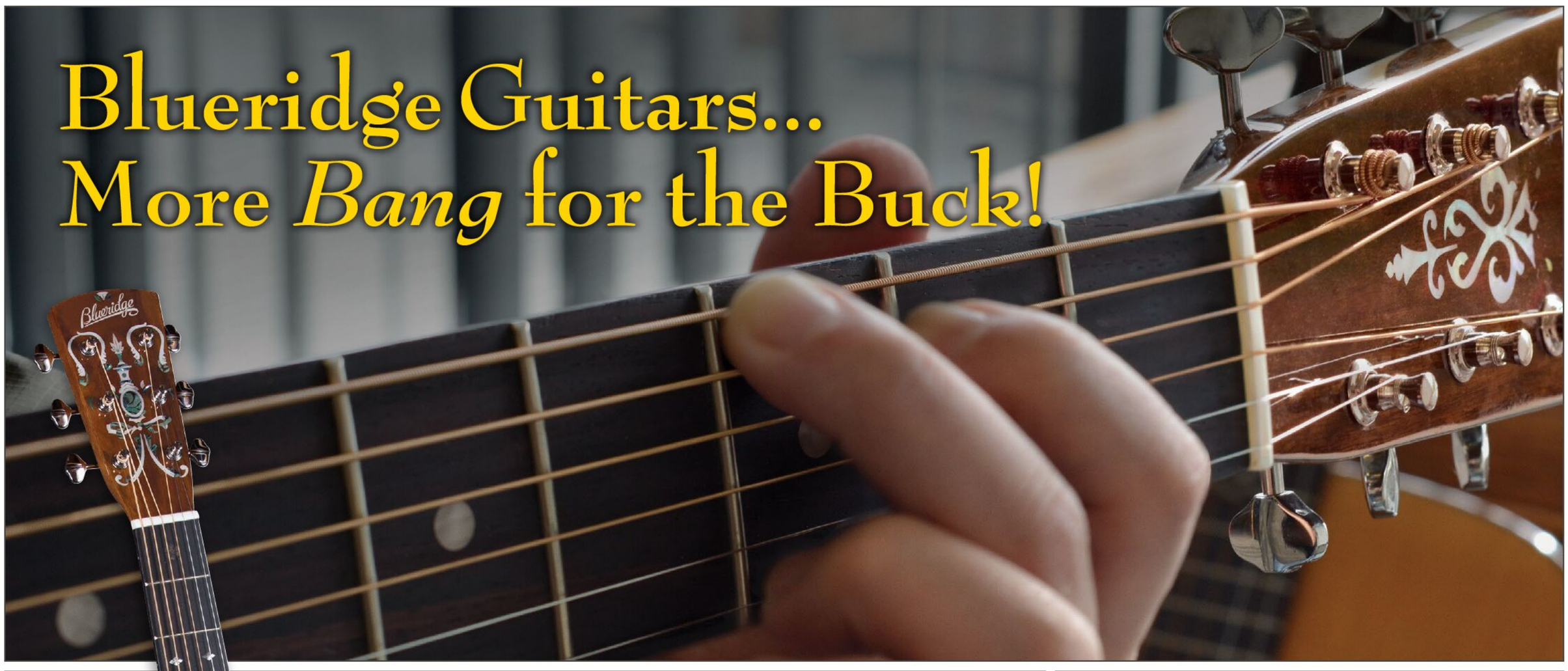

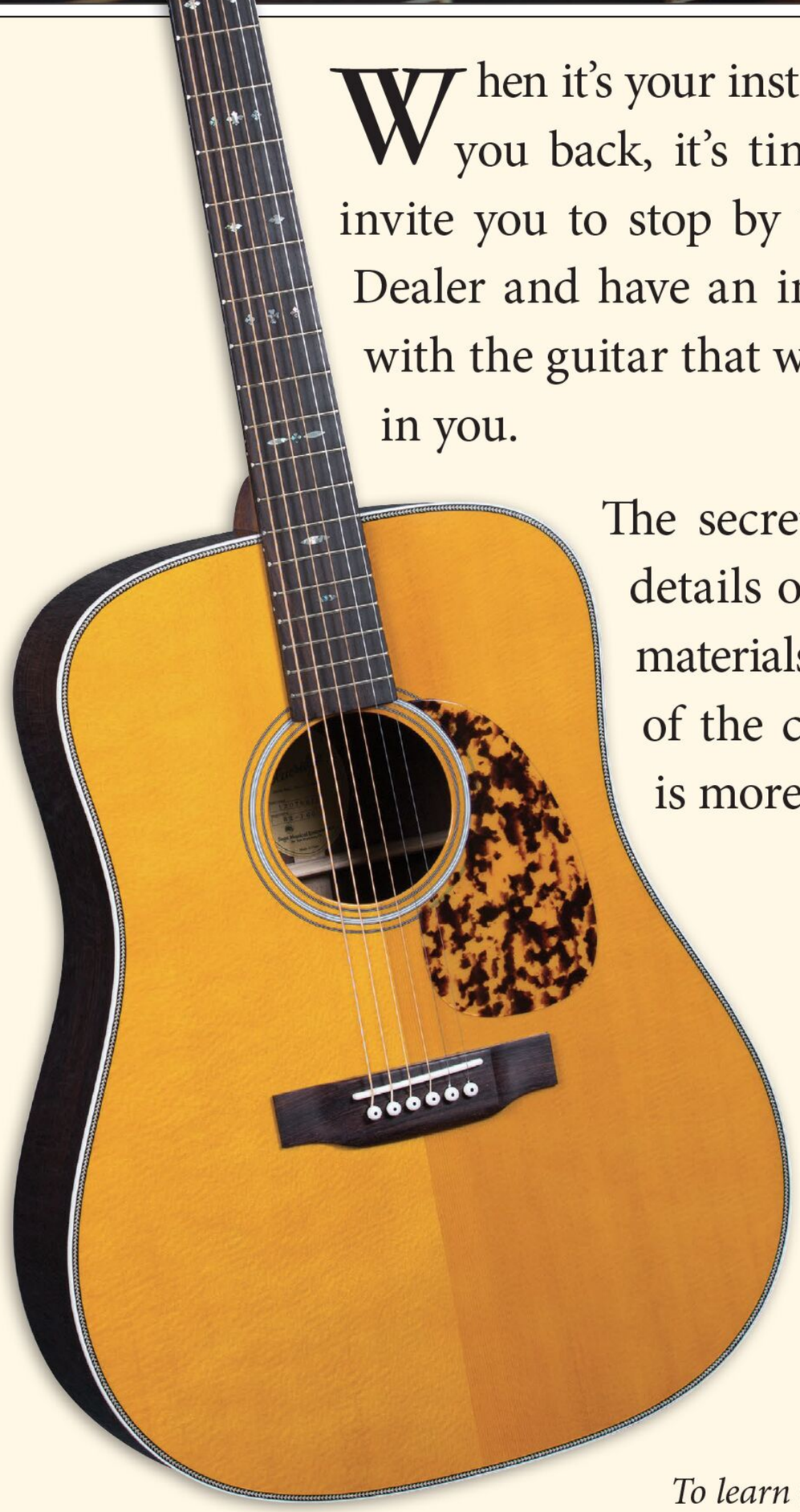

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