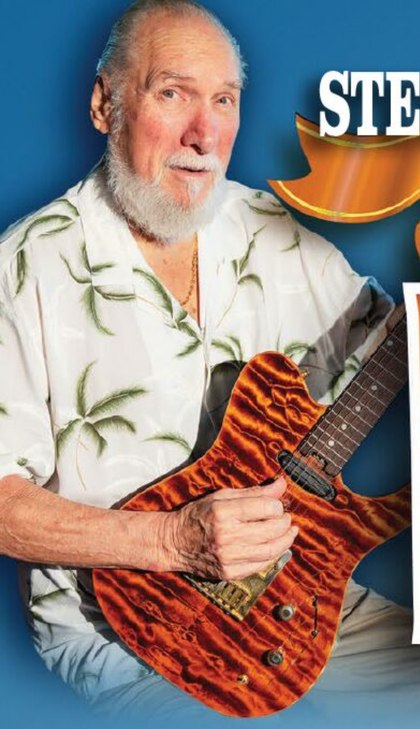
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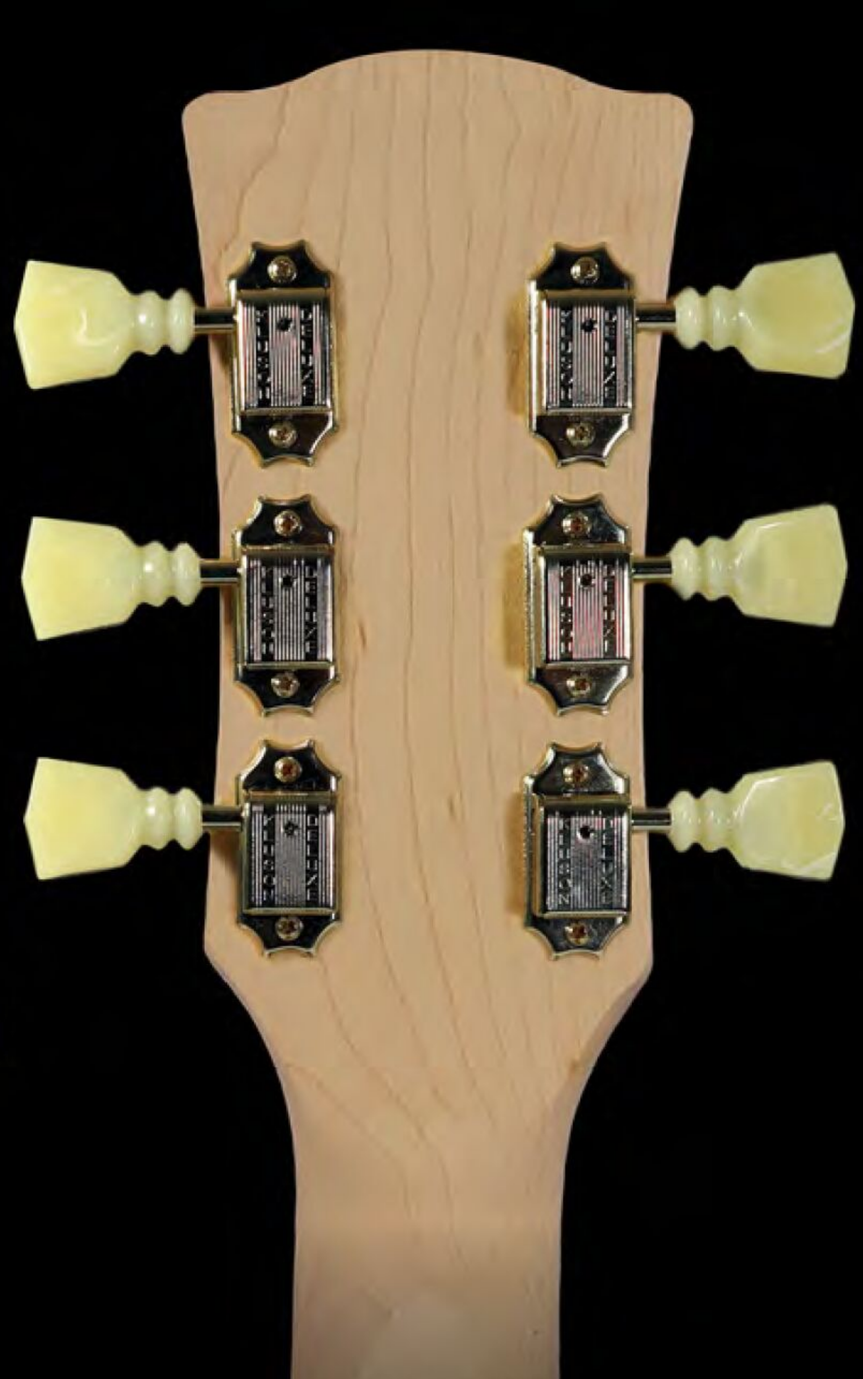
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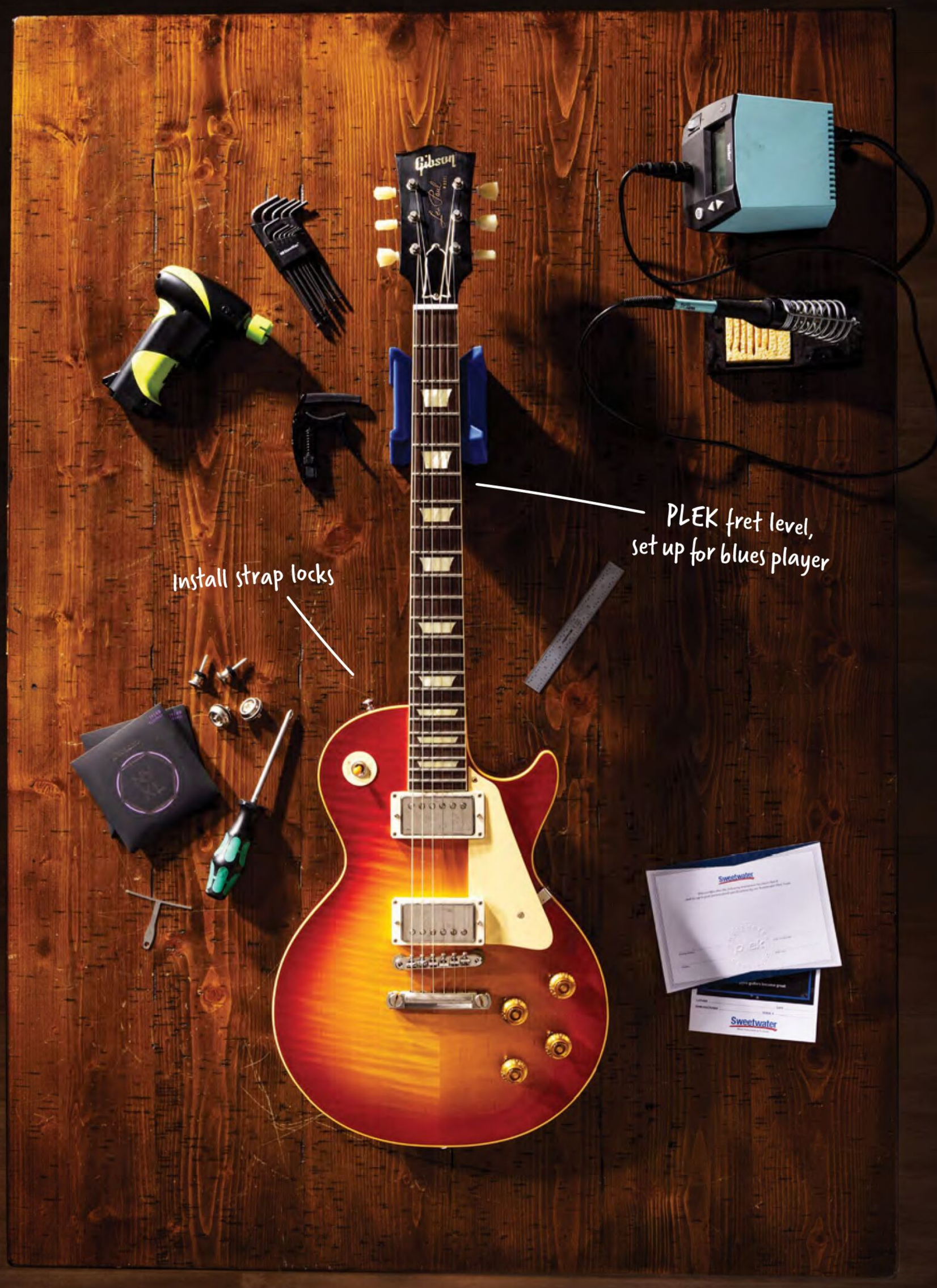


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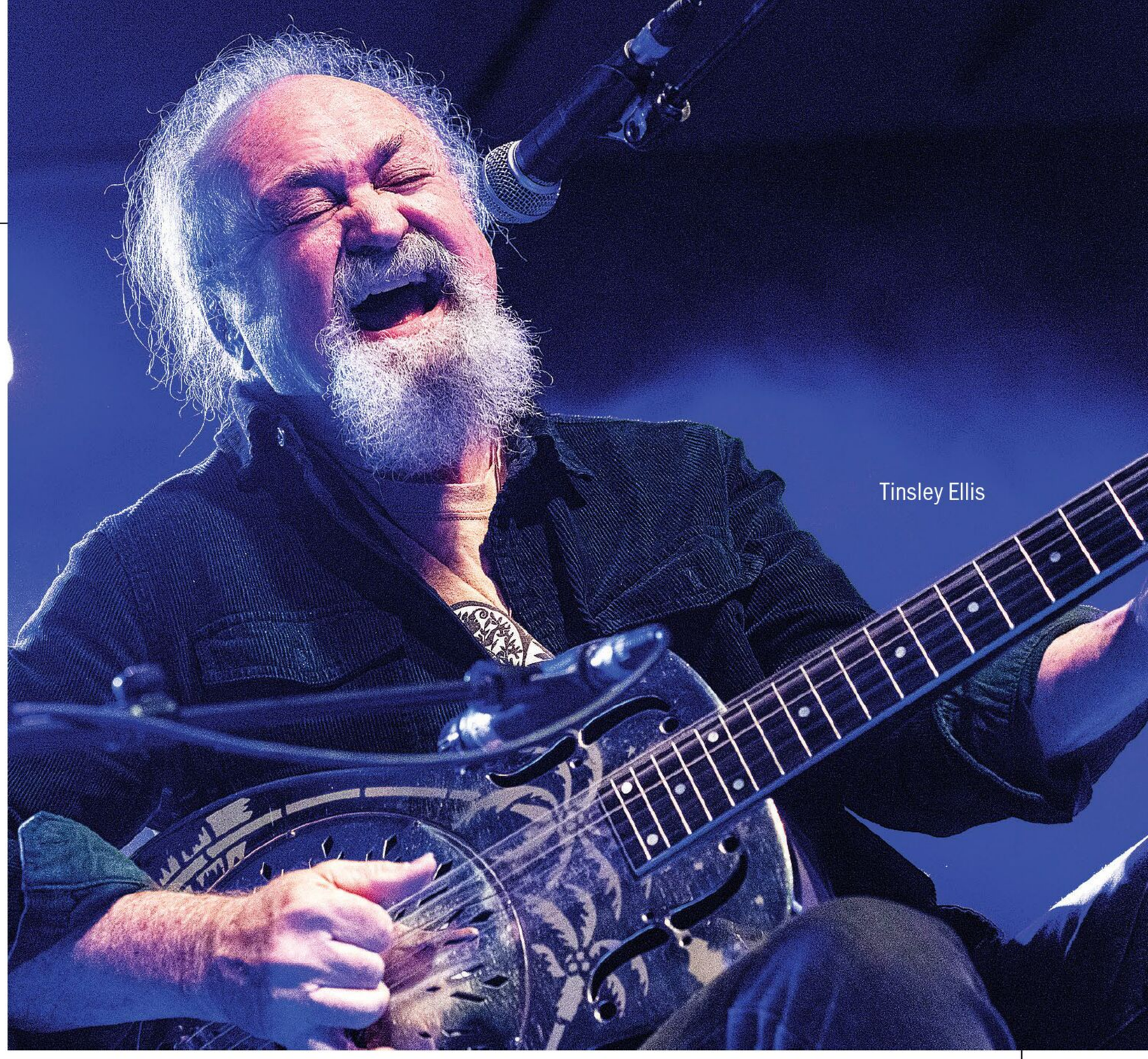
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Vintage guitars are central to modern music. In the first of a series examing how legendary electrics shaped history and drive modern songwriting, we examine Rickenbacker 12-strings. Two years after their debut in 1963, Roger McGuinn slung one across his shoulder – and gave rock music wings.
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| *By Ward Meeker*

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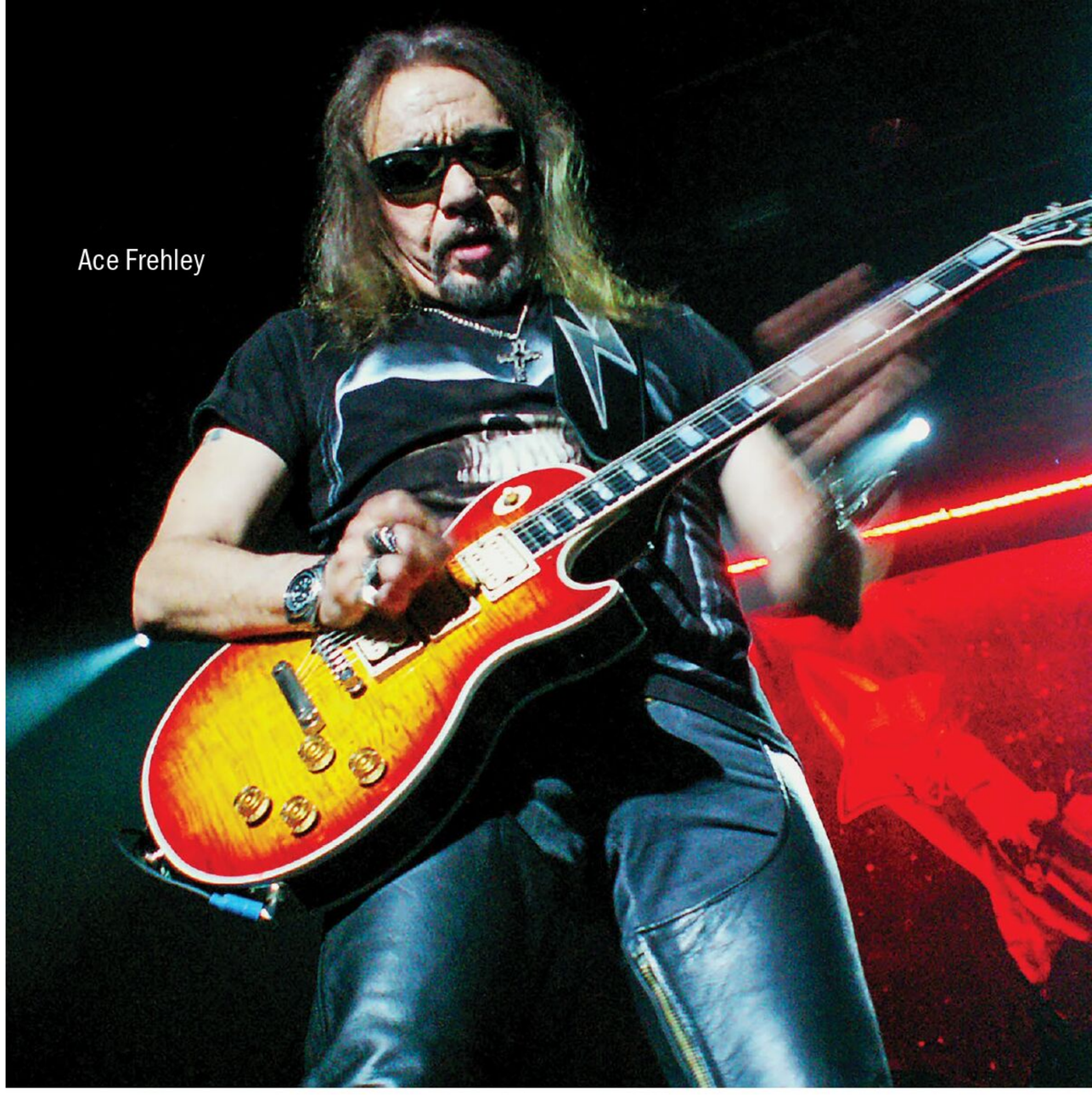
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READER MAIL


Ace Frehley

GREAT ACE

Thanks for the memorial to Ace Frehley (January '26). I am 60 and Kiss was the first band I fell in love with. Their TV performances were must-see events, and besides having their albums, I had their comic book, a wall clock made from the *Destroyer* album cover, and a six-foot poster.

Kiss was the reason I took up the drums to start a band in the eighth grade. Unfortunately, our band never made it out of the garage and it took me another 27 years before I got in a band, playing guitar.

I remember going to a department store in Brooklyn (where I was born) and heading to the record department to buy Gene Simmons' solo album because he was my favorite, but I bought Ace's album, probably because I had heard "New York Groove." I still have that vinyl because I *loved* it, especially the instrumental "Fractured Mirror." How awesome to hear that John 5 also loves that tune!

Ace didn't influence me to pick up a guitar like so many folks, but he was part of a band that brought me so much enjoyment and started my lifelong love of music that now includes playing guitar and performing. I will always be grateful to Ace, Gene, Paul, and Peter – The Hottest Band in the Land – *KISS*!

Joe Verga
Middletown, New Jersey

(*We're right there with you, Joe! Along with every heyday album on vinyl, our editor in chief had the same giant poster, the famed '76 U.S. tour "bicentennial" poster, Gene and Ace posters showing them posed with choppers, as well as a nearly complete set of Kiss cards* and *the point-of-purchase display box for them. Also on the wall were a handful of teen-mag photos and the double-page live shot from the band's 1977 concerts at Budokan, which his father carefully removed from an issue of* Playboy.)

VG: PAPER PARAGON

There is absolutely nothing that I don't like in *Vintage Guitar*. I look forward to receiving it every month and read it cover to cover because it has so much more than the other guitar mags. Thank you, one and all, for the great writing. Happy holidays!

Jacob Dehollander
Kalamazoo, Michigan

I subscribe to several guitar magazines, and *VG* is the best! Being "vintage" myself, I relate much more to it than any other guitar mag. Keep up the good work.

Stevie DeFoe
Forest Lake, Minnesota

Keep doing what you do, *VG*! I love the articles on artists I am not familiar with. You've introduced me to a lot of outstanding artists over the years; Muireann Bradley comes to mind.

Jeff Nance
Kaneohe, Hawaii

I love the magazine! Every month there's an article or two that doesn't interest me, personally, but for the most part, it's cover to cover.

Dennis Stegman
St. Louis, Missouri

I enjoy the whole magazine – some bits more than others, but I like the variety. I have bought gear on the recommendation/info from the articles.

Ted Howard
Sitka, Alaska

VG does a great job in all areas. I'm a guitar builder, so I'm more interested in the ads and new gear – amps, guitars, pedals, and hardware. Articles about repair interest me, and I'd like to see more on the status of the current guitar market, like who's buying the hundreds of thousands of guitars made everyday around the world? We really need attention to American-made guitars and get back to that instead of the offshore/CNC'd guitars with no soul.

Steve Weller
Edwardsville, Illinois

VG is a great magazine – very informative, fun to read, and I learn about music and musicians I'm not familiar with.

Richard White
Quakertown, Pennsylvania

VG provides information that others do not, and I look forward to every issue. The rare instrument and gear articles are great. I listen to classic country and classic rock most of the time, but also like blues and some jazz. It's interesting to read about bands that are not on mainstream radio and TV.

Ben Mitchell
Byron Center, Michigan

I am always blown away by the guitar repair articles in *VG*. Those guys are amazing! I never knew I needed this in my life.

Joseph Thum
Carson City, Nevada

VG does an excellent job of balancing new artists old artists, new makers, old makers.

Kurt Marion
Portland, Oregon

ARCHIVE DIVE

I like the interviews and reviews as well as the guitar and amp histories. I'd like to read more about the amazing guitars and amps made right here in the U.S. by companies like Dean, B.C. Rich, Kramer, and Hamer.

Rick Pizzo
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

(*Ed. Note: Thanks, Rick. Our archives run deep on brands other than the big three, so we'll continue to recirculate the important histories of those you mention and many others.*)

Ace Frehley: Tilly Antoine/Wilimedia Commons.

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ISSN 10672605 • USPS 009383

Vintage Guitar® magazine

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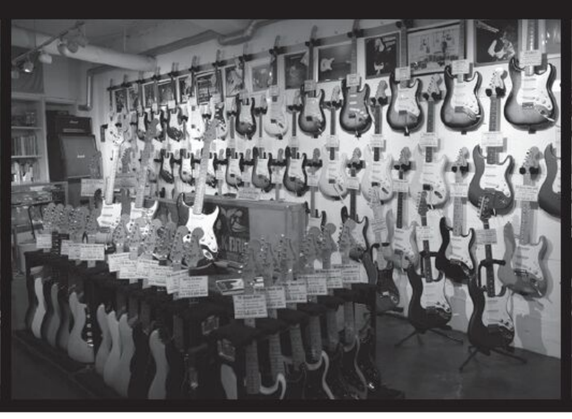
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FIRST FRET



Vicki Peterson

PETERSON CO-HOSTS SHE ROCKS AWARDS

Vicki Peterson, co-founder of The Bangles, will co-host the 14th Annual She Rocks Awards, January 23 at the Anaheim Hilton.

An evening of live music, stories, and celebration, the event honors artists, leaders, and innovators who are shaping the future of music. Peterson, a 2015 She Rocks honoree, will be joined by co-host Alecia "Mixi" Demner of the hard-rock band Stitched Up Heart.

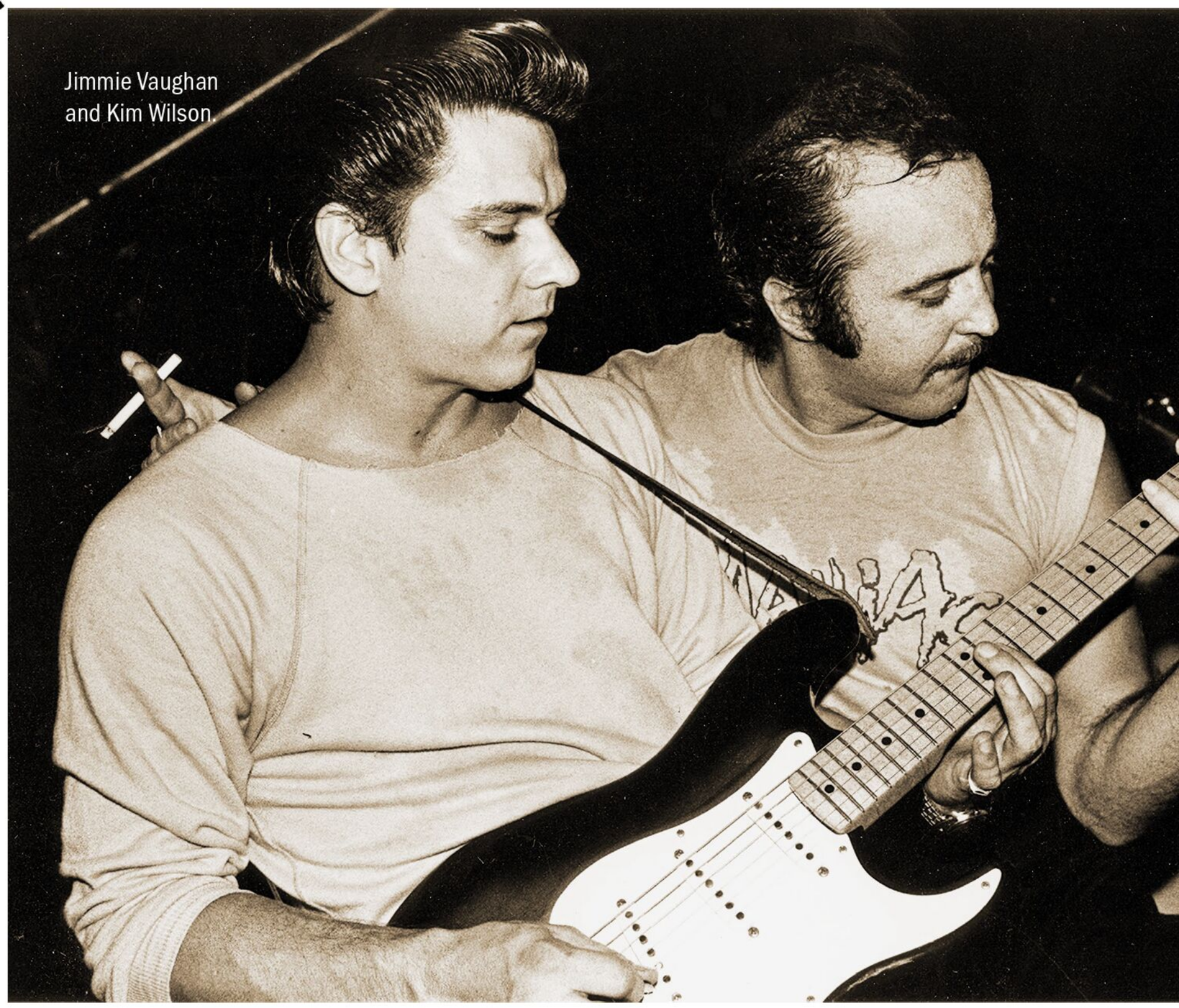
This year's event will honor 11 women including Judith Hill, vocalist, songwriter, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist known for her work with Stevie Wonder, Prince, and Michael Jackson; Rhonda Smith, renowned bassist celebrated for her work with Prince and Jeff Beck and her role as bassist for "Jimmy Kimmel Live"; and Sophie Burrell, an online personality known for creating accessible guitar education.

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Jimmie Vaughan and Kim Wilson.

JIMMIE VAUGHAN

T-Birds Reflection

The Fabulous Thunderbirds' new boxed set, *The Jimmie Vaughan Years: Complete Studio Recordings 1978-1989*, is as definitive as its title indicates – encompassing the seven albums Vaughan appeared on with the band he formed in 1975, crossover '80s hits "Tuff Enuff" and "Powerful Stuff," plus an unreleased 1978 set produced by Doc Pomus and Joel Dorn.

This month's "Check This Action" column discusses the boxed set and the period it covers. The December '21 "CTA" reviewed the previous boxed set, *The Jimmie Vaughan Story*, which surveyed some of the guitarist's T-Birds stint, his solo career, and collaborations with Albert Collins, Bonnie Raitt, John Lee Hooker, Doyle Bramhall, Little Milton, Lou Ann Barton, Billy Gibbons, Charlie Musselwhite, Denny Freeman, younger brother Stevie Ray Vaughan, and others.

While in his teens, Vaughan was a legend in Dallas, opening for Jimi Hendrix in '68 with his band, The Chessmen. The late Bill Campbell said, "He could play all that Clapton stuff, but better."

Moving to Austin, his band Storm backed Freddie King at Armadillo World Headquarters, with his economical approach flying in the face of the pyrotechnic '70s.

Having had quadruple-bypass heart surgery in 2022 and announcing he was diagnosed with throat cancer in March '24, Vaughan is now back touring with his Tilt-A-Whirl Band.

On a sunny day in Austin, the 74-year-old sipped his morning coffee while talking about how he formed one of the most influential blues bands of its era – which continues as a successful touring and recording unit

Jimmie Vaughan and Kim Wilson: Tracy Hart.

under the leadership of singer, songwriter, and harmonica player Kim Wilson.



How were the Thunderbirds formed?

For several years, I was playing all around with Lewis Cowdrey on harmonica and vocals. On Sundays at Alexander's, anybody could sit in if we would let them, like a jam thing. Somebody brought Kim, and he tore it up. That's where I met him. We played a few gigs, then I went to Minnesota and sat in with him up there.

It was several years before the band released an album.

I think we played five years before we had a record. We tried to do all that Louisiana style, like Lazy Lester. Keith Ferguson had a lot of records – his dad was a collector. One of the first things we did was "Sugar Coated Love." We didn't want to be just a regular Chicago-blues band, because that was popular at the time.

At Keith's memorial, you said when he joined the band, "It was like you had a battleship behind you."

Yeah, he was a badass bass player. He was from Houston and had his own style. He was fabulous. He was cool, and he played cool. He didn't want us to have a rhythm guitar.

Before Fran Christina joined, you had several drummers.

Fredde "Pharaoh" Walden, Andy Miller, Otis Lewis, and then Mike Buck. He was friends with Keith, and he had a lot of great records, too. He played great. We used to play the Blue Bird in Fort Worth, which was owned by Robert Ealey, the blues singer. Lou Ann used to play there, and so did Mike.

When did you start playing Antone's?

Clifford Antone started his blues club about the time we got together. He wanted to bring all these people to play there – Muddy Waters, and it seemed like a million people we backed up. Jimmy Rogers would come and play for two or three weeks. He might bring a couple of people from Chicago, like Hubcap, the drummer. We would open the show then back him up. The artists would say, "Don't do this, do this," showing us stuff. If there was anything we didn't know, they would tell us. It was like blues college.

A lot of people don't know that you play slide.

My hero was Earl Hooker. We used to do that song of his, "Blue Guitar" in D, and Kim would play chromatic harp. I was always trying to play the steel guitar, too, because of Hop Wilson. I couldn't figure out what he was doing, so I just tried to do my own thing.

Is it true that you learned harmonica by playing on a rack while driving?

Yeah, I did. Most of the time I would have a song playing on the radio or tape. I thought that was a good hands-free way to learn. And then you had to drive, so it's like playing guitar – know what I mean?

In those early days, did you make any money?

No, no, no. We didn't make much money, but we were dedicated musicians. We were determined to play the blues and play what we wanted to play. Everybody else wanted to do this, do that – other blues bands and record companies – but we were definitely individuals doing what we wanted to f***ing do. You couldn't tell us anything. We were just really into it. We were having fun, man! ***– Dan Forte***

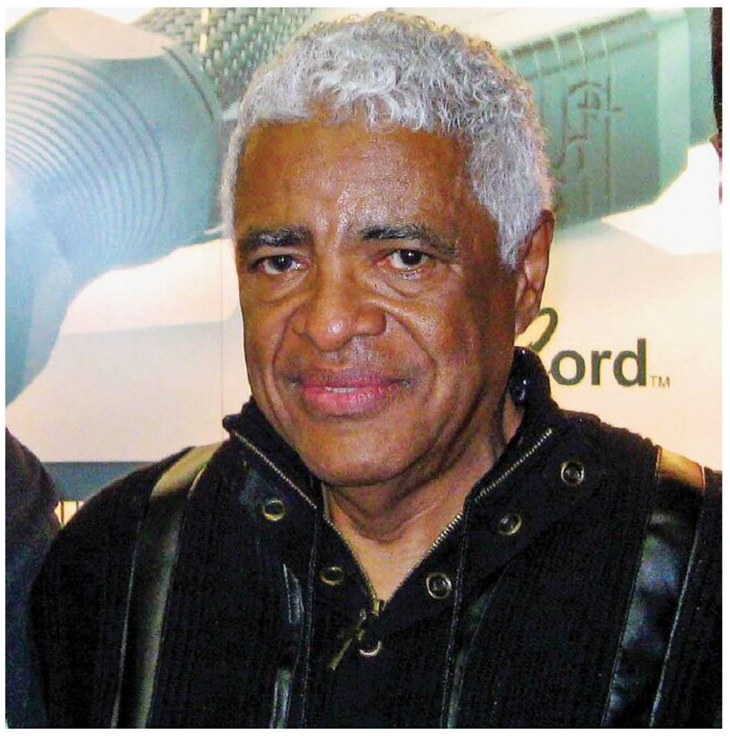




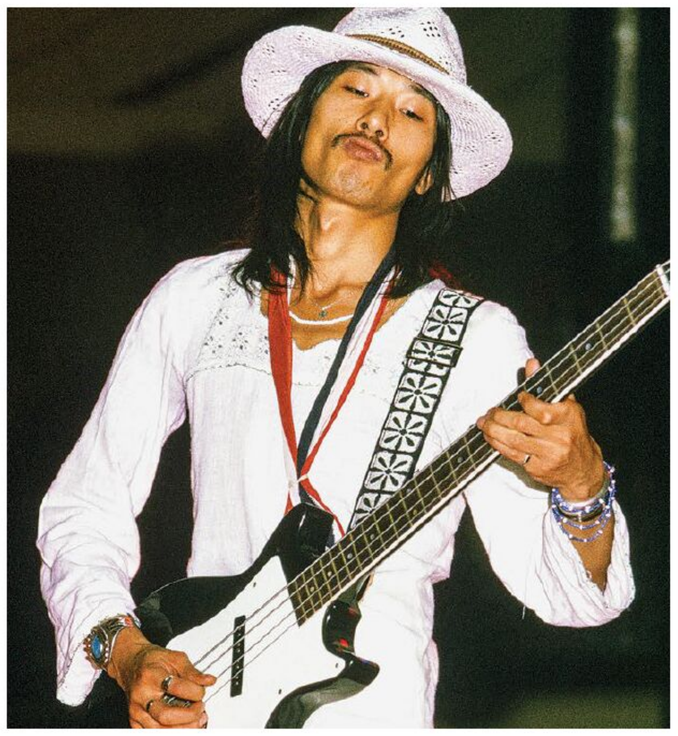
IN MEMORIAM



Raul Malo



Phil Upchurch



Tetsu Ymauchi

RAUL MALO

Raul Malo, lead singer and guitarist of the Mavericks, died December 8 of colon cancer. He was 60. Renowned as an emotionally powerful, versatile vocalist, his stage and recorded work with the band and as a solo artist made him a revered figure in the country and Americana fields.

The son of Cuban-born parents, Malo formed the Mavericks in Miami in 1989. They released a CD on a Florida label before joining MCA Records in '91. Their guitar-driven sound, often enhanced with horns, embraced Latin music, rockabilly, Bakersfield and Nashville-inspired country, and vintage jump-jive Vegas lounge music. Malo's solo career began after the group disbanded in 2000 and continued through their brief '03 reunion and permanent reunion in '12.

His formidable fretboard skills weren't fully revealed until 2023's 10-track instrumental album *Say Less*. Using a weathered '63 Jaguar on most tracks, he revealed a confident, solid style that echoed his eclectic approach by blending a variety of styles to create powerful, atmospheric performances; one standout is a cover of Paul Simon's "Sounds of Silence." The Mavericks appeared on three tracks, with Malo and guitarist Eddie Perez creating twin-guitar magic on "Peach Blossom Blues" and "Tsu-Chen." ***– Rich Kienzle***

PHIL UPCHURCH

Phil Upchurch, a fixture in blues, soul, jazz, gospel, and R&B for over half a century, passed away in Los Angeles on November 23. He was 84.

Born in Chicago on July 19, 1941, Upchurch was a self-taught guitarist who turned professional at 16, had a hit song with "You Can't Sit Down" in 1961, and recorded at Chess Records. He spent the mid '60s as a U.S. Army reporter in Germany and performed in local clubs, then returned to Chicago and found work as a session guitarist, performing with Etta James, Ramsey Lewis, Howlin' Wolf, Gene Chandler, and The Dells. By the end of the decade, he'd played bass with The Staple Singers, toured with Oscar Brown, Jr., played with the soul-jazz instrumental group The Soulful Strings, and recorded his own music. His relationship with Curtis Mayfield produced the soundtracks *Superfly*, *Let's Do It Again*, *Claudine*, and *Sparkle*, featuring Aretha Franklin. He later recorded with Quincy Jones, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan, Herbie Hancock, and many others.

Upchurch was the bassist in the avant-garde psychedelic-soul band Rotary Connection, which also featured Chess Records receptionist Minnie Ripperton, who sang "I Am the Black Gold of the Sun."

Upchurch played on Muddy Waters' *Eclectic Mud*, *Big Boss Man* by Jimmy Reed, George Benson's mega-hit *Breezin'*, Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman," Michael Jackson's *Off the Wall*, and the Donny Hathaway classic "This Christmas."

Respected by his peers, Upchurch's playing was saturated in funk, contemporary pop, classical, and the organ wizardry of Jimmy Smith. He played on more than 1,000 recordings, film soundtracks, and 27 albums as a band leader. At the time of his passing, he was writing an autobiography and had just overseen the reissue of "You Can't Sit Down." He is survived by wife. ***– Oscar Jordan***

TETSU YAMAUCHI

Tetsu Yamauchi, former bassist with Free and Faces, died on December 4. He was 79.

Born October 21, 1946, in Fukuoka, Japan, by the late '60s, Yamauchi was playing with Mickey Curtis & The Samurai. A free-jazz band, in the '50s it had helped popularize rock and roll in Japan, then later recorded its own music and toured Europe.

Yamauchi worked as a session musician in Tokyo and London. His first solo album, *Tetsu*, was released in 1972. He joined Free guitarist Paul Kossoff, drummer Simon Kirke, and keyboardist John "Rabbit" Bundrick in '72 for *Kossoff Kirke Tetsu Rabbit*, then replaced Andy Fraser in Free; hampered by Kossoff's drug addiction, the band recorded one final album, 1973's *Heartbreaker*, which includes the powerful rocker "Wishing Well." Written by vocalist Paul Rodgers, he gave songwriting credit to the entire band as a gesture to improve unity.

Also in '73, Yamauchi replaced Ronnie Lane in Faces. His first recording was a live version of The Temptations' "I Wish it Would Rain," the B-side of the single "Pool Hall Richard." The live album *Coast to Coast: Overture and Beginners* and single "You Can Make Me Dance, Sing or Anything" followed in '74. He remained with the band until they broke up in '75.

In '76, he released the solo album *Kikyou*, followed the next year by Tetsu & The Good Times Roll Band's *Live*. He issued more solo albums, worked as a session musician, and toured before retiring in the late '90s. He returned to performing in 2023. ***– Bret Adams***

Raul Malo: Bryan Ledgard/Wikimedia Commons. Phil Upchurch: Christopher B.E/Wikimedia Commons. Tetsu Yamauchi: Pictorial Press/Alamy.







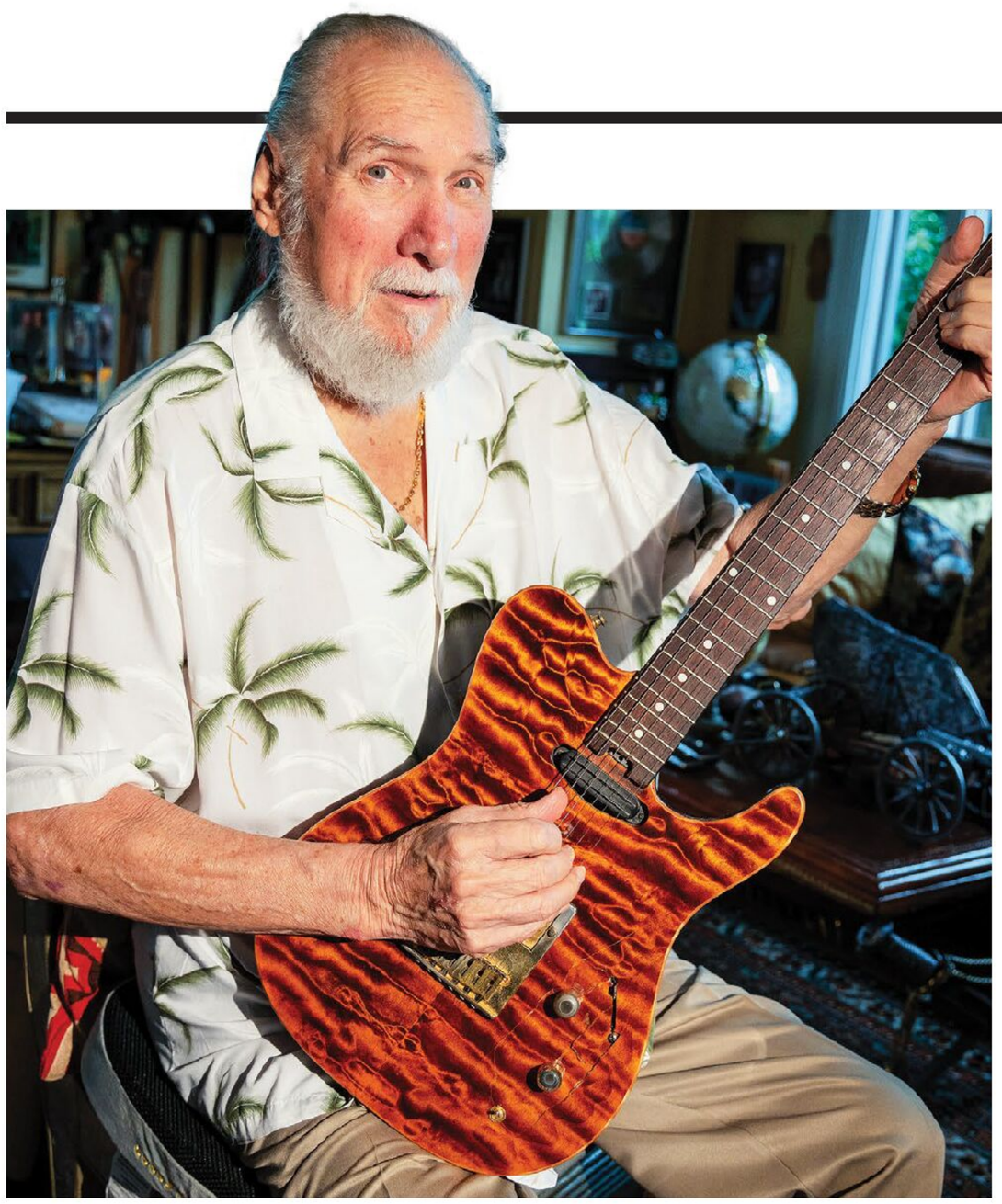


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STEVE CROPPER

1941-2025

Steve Cropper, one of the most influential figures in the history of the electric guitar and its music, died December 3. He was 84. Beyond his seminal work on guitar, Cropper was a songwriter and producer who helped shape soul music in the 1960s and '70s,

As a member of Booker T. & the MG's, Cropper used an early-'50s Fender Esquire (plugged into a Harvard amp) to record the renowned instrumental "Green Onions," which became a hit in 1962. He also composed and played the repeating lick to Sam & Dave's 1967 hit "Soul Man," on which singer Sam Moore famously shouts, "Play it, Steve!" in the second chorus.

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

"I remember my mother setting aside $17 and change, and when we ordered that Silvertone, they said they could deliver it for 25 cents," he told *VG* in 2024. "We told them, 'Forget that!' and I went to pick it up myself. If we'd had to pay that extra quarter, I'd never have been a guitar player," he laughed.

One of Cropper's first inspirations was Lowman Pauling, who backed the '50s R&B vocal group The 5 Royales, which Cropper watched at the Beverly Ballroom near Memphis. "Bo Diddley had the rhythm and Lowman Pauling had the notes," he told *VG*'s Michael Dregni in 2011. Other formative influences were Billy Butler, guitarist in organist Bill Doggett's combo, and Wayne Bennett, who backed Bobby "Blue" Bland.

As a student at Messick High School, Cropper bonded with schoolmate Charlie Freeman over their infatuation with guitars and music; with schoolmate Donald "Duck" Dunn on bass, they formed a group called Royal Spades, which then added saxophonist Charles "Packy" Axton, whose mother and uncle, Estelle Axton and Jim Stewart, operated Satellite Records, which became Stax in 1961.

As Cropper and his band were gaining steam, Memphis became a musical hotbed thanks in part to a recording studio run by Sam Phillips, whose Sun Records label was fostering the upstart careers of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins, who were making music that melded the blues trickling up from the Mississippi Delta with country from Nashville and hillbilly songs from the Ozark Mountains. By '61, Royal Spade had changed its name to The Mar-Keys and its members were backing singers at Stax. That year, they also scored a million-selling #1 hit with an original instrumental, "Last Night" (the song having no guitar part, Cropper played secondary organ). After morphing again, they scored a hit in '62 as Booker T. & the MG's with the instrumental "Green Onions," propelled by Booker T. Jones' organ melody and Cropper's razor-sharp licks, then on a Telecaster, backed by Stax A-listers Al Jackson, Jr. on drums and Lewie Steinberg on bass.

At Stax, Cropper spent the '60s backing star vocalists while co-writing Otis Redding's "Dock of the Bay," Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour," and Eddie Floyd's "Knock on Wood." All three were #1 R&B singles; "Dock of the Bay" topped the pop chart, as well, and in '69 won Grammy awards for best R&B song and best male R&B vocal performance. Cropper's website says that as head of artists and repertoire (A&R), he was involved in virtually every record issued by the label from the fall of 1961 through the end of 1970, his guitar melding with rhythm sections to create a sound easily recognized on the radio.

Cropper released two solo albums on Stax before leaving the label over a disagreement with management; the label closed in '75. After opening a studio in Memphis, Cropper moved to Los Angeles that same year, where he did session work before joining Levon Helm & the RCO All-Stars. He later collaborated with Jeff Beck, Muddy Waters, Roy Buchanan, Albert King, Robben Ford, and others. With Dunn, he was part the Blues Brothers Musical Revue, which backed comedians John Belushi and Dan Akroyd in what started as a skit/musical guest on a 1978 episode of "Saturday Night Live" but became an earnest musical project that recorded and toured until Belushi's death in 1982, and has re-formed with different personnel several times since.

Cropper and the MG's were inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in '92. In 2005, he was elected to the Songwriters Hall of Fame. He released albums with singer Felix Cavaliere in '08 and '10, and his final album was 2024's *Friendlytown*, as Steve Cropper & the Midnight Hour. That year, he appeared in the HBO documentary *Stax: Soulsville, U.S.A.*

On social media, Jimmie Vaughan recalled first hearing Cropper's guitar.

"I was standing in the kitchen when out of my mothers radio... came the song 'Green Onions.' I couldn't believe what I was hearing and I had to find out who those musicians were," he said. [Booker T. Jones'] organ and [Cropper's] guitar changed my life! Steve Cropper was such a huge influence on me. I was fortunate to get to play with him on many occasions and call him my friend. I will forever be grateful to his years of influence on my musical career and his friendship."

"It should go without saying that the passing of Steve Cropper, a true giant, is a huge loss," said ZZ Top co-founder/guitarist Billy Gibbons. "He shall forever remain a great guitar hero and the privilege of knowing him and working with him in the studio remains tops."

Cropper is survived by his wife and four children. ***– Ward Meeker***

Steve Cropper: Stacie Huckeba.



DUKE LEVINE

Super Sweet '70s

When not touring with Bonnie Raitt and other top singer/songwriters, Duke Levine works on his own hip projects. His latest aggregation is dubbed Duke Levine & the Super Sweet Sounds of the '70s, and its self-titled debut album delivers instrumental reinterpretations of Me Decade classics from Traffic, The Band, and Elton John to surprising covers of King Crimson and Barry White. Part of the cool factor is how Duke deploys great vintage gear throughout, including a gaggle of trusty Telecasters.

***The Super Sweet Sounds of the '70s* feels like a love letter not just to old-school rock, but the guitar.**

I wanted to start a new band/project with a fresh direction, but I didn't want to write a new batch of material. I felt we could have fun being inspired by the guitar sounds of the era, but play the tunes with our current sensibilities and bag of influences. The band name is kinda goofy, but the goal was that we would make some music that moves you in some way.

Playing vocal melodies on guitar is tricky, since it's harder to engage the listener without lyrics. Is there an approach you use to keep it natural, as on Elton John's "Border Song"?

Yes, that is the trick. My approach is to find something *guitaristic* to do with the melody, or sometimes a particular sound can get me there. There were a bunch of tunes I tried, but just didn't find anything special when it came to playing the melody. For "Border Song," I was inspired by using the chunky Les Paul-through-Marshall thing, but also found a place for country-style bending.

You played the muted melody sounds on "Whispering Pines" using a vintage Korg X-911 guitar synthesizer. Why that model?

It's an analog unit from late '70s/early '80s; you can just plug your guitar in and it tracks surprisingly well. That's an instance where I started working on the song, but wasn't finding anything special delivering the melody. That, combined with Mike Rivard adding synth-sounding electric bass and Paul Schultheis' Moog playing harmony with me, really transformed the song, which is what I'm after.

"John Barleycorn Must Die" has an effective guitar arrangement, moving from acoustic to electric.

This was one of the most fun and exciting things we did, a complete live take, switches and all. That's Paul Schultheis playing Moog for the solo, which happens in the part of the tune where [lap-steel guitarist] Kevin Barry, [violinist] Darol Anger, and I are all switching instruments on the fly, with Kev and I going from acoustic to electric. Kevin and I have been playing together for 30-plus years, and we've developed an almost unconscious musical rapport. Video of us recording is on Youtube, along with videos of all the cuts from the record.

"In the Court of the Crimson King" is a curveball, but works great. Was that a teen-aged favorite of yours?

I think that period of anyone's life, say age 12 to 17, is incredibly influential. The music you consume then has a lasting impact. It has for me. On that track, I found a chord-melody thing I liked for the verses. Kev and I also got a chance to jam on the spacey middle section, and we let drummer Dean Johnston loose on the big, fuzzy out-choruses.

Your spacious cover of Paul McCartney's "Ram On" could be on an ECM jazz record.

I played that with a pretty light touch and a fairly clean Tele sound, using delay, tremolo, and great studio reverb to help with that floaty thing. The song form is beautifully simple, so to have it go somewhere I made a reharmonized solo section for Kevin on lap steel that goes from half-time into a drum-and-bass thing.

What gear did you use on the album?

I used my '63 Tele, '53 Tele, '53 Relic Tele, '58 Les Paul reissue with a Dave Johnson make-over, and a '50 Gibson SJ jumbo. For amps, a Marshall JMP 2204 head and a Blockhead 18-watt head. Cabs were a '70s Marshall 4x12, a 1x12 with a Celestion Creamback 65, and 1x12 with an Eminence Cannabis Rex. Effects were a vintage EHX Small Stone, Thorpy FX Fallout Cloud, Jam Pedals' Harmonious Monk tremolo, Mad Professor Deep Blue delay, and Royal Blue OD.

Are you a fingerpicker or a hybrid picker?

Usually hybrid, especially for country picking. But for the acoustic on "John Barleycorn," I picked with just fingers, thumb, first, and second. For Travis- or folk-style on electric, I use just fingers.

Looks like you'll be back on the road with Bonnie in 2026. What's it like being onstage with her and the band?

Well, it's incredible because, ya know... it's Bonnie Raitt! That's a thrill in itself, but she's also at the top of her game, which is really impressive by any measure. Her band is amazing, so I feel lucky to be part of it all. This is the first time I've backed an artist who's also a lead player – and an iconic one at that. I love that dynamic, and Bonnie's slide playing is really inspiring – she improvises and takes chances at every show. ***– Pete Prown***

Photo courtesy of Duke Levine.



JOSHUA HEDLEY

All Swing

Country neo-traditionalist singer/songwriter Josh Hedley is honest about his guitar skills.

"I'm more a guitar owner than a guitar player, but it's a lot easier to lead a band with a guitar," he says.

Even so, guitars figure prominently on *All Hat*, his third album, a Western-swing departure from his two earlier retro-country releases, *Mr. Jukebox*, on Jack White's Third Man label, and 2022's *Neon Blue*.

It's a wide-ranging swing sampler recorded in Austin and co-produced by Hedley and longtime hero, Asleep at the Wheel co-founder Ray Benson. The musicians were a blend of current and former Wheel members including original pianist Floyd Domino.

Benson (using his Epiphone Emperor and Collings SoCo) and his son, Sam Siefert, handled rhythm. Dave Biller played lead guitar and non-pedal steel. On lap was Flavio Pasquetto, along with electric mandolinist-steel guitarist Jason Roberts. All added fire to the music, with Pasquetto bringing exuberant flourishes in the style of '50s Playboy steel man Billy Bowman.

Hedley, born in Naples, Florida, loved country fiddling when he began lessons at age eight and later discovered Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. 2000 was a pivotal year; at 15, he recorded a CD of Wills tunes produced by Nashville fiddler Buddy Spicher, and discovered Asleep at the Wheel through their just-released Wills tribute album. "I really got into jazz in high school," he recalls.

Settling in Nashville at 19, he began performing at Robert's Western Wear, the former Sho-Bud shop that has since become a clothing store and haven for traditional country.

As a Western-swing connoisseur, he developed an ear for the greatest guitarists, particularly Playboy rhythm-guitarist extraordinaire Eldon Shamblin.

"Eldon's rhythm... the way he comps rhythm is just so cool – that crawling rhythm with the jazz chords and bass notes. His hand's movin' the whole time, playin' inversions. That's the bridge between country and jazz, with bass and the drums playin' more-traditional stuff."

Hedley's retro country-jazz guitar passions aren't limited to Western swing. He loves the blazing '50s guitar-pedal steel interplay of Jimmy Bryant and Speedy West and the rapid-fire work Leon Rhodes and Buddy Charleton did with Ernest Tubb's Texas Troubadours in the '60s.

Benson was already a Hedley fan, having met him after the release of Mr. Jukebox.

"The guy's incredible. Incredible songwriter, great singer!" When the Wheel played a Florida casino, "I dragged him onstage and boy, he could really play."

Hedley had a clear goal for the new album. "I wanted to showcase the different sounds within Western swing. Hittin' those blues songs, and the fiddle breakdowns and 1-6-2-5 jazz stuff, I did my best to encompass all that Western swing is. It's dance music. I tried to hit it right down to a polka."

Hedley's originals revisit swing eras from the '30s ("Mean Mama Blues") through the '50s with the album's sole cover, Ricky Riddle's obscure, easygoing 1950 recording of "Boogie Woogie Tennessee." On that track, Benson used Pasquetto, Biller and Roberts playing steels in ensemble, a daring but not unprecedented idea.

"I said 'Well, let's try it. Can't go wrong – they're all great players.' At one time (singer/bandleader) Hank Thompson had two steel players. It worked out great. All eight-string non-pedal players."

All used the Fender Stringmasters Benson has in his Bismeaux studio, outside Austin.

The recording process impressed Hedley.

"So much just happened organically. It's produced by me and Ray, but just as easily could have had Jason's name or Floyd's name on it."

A fan of the famous Texas Playboy "electric string ensemble" blending steel guitar, guitar, and amplified mandolin, Hedley marveled as Roberts and Biller worked out their extended mandolin-guitar break for the Hedley-Benson duet "Stuck in Texas."

"That has a pretty long part – mandolin and guitar. Watching them, we sat in the control booth and the two of them worked it out. It took 20 minutes then they went in and recorded it."

Onstage with his band, The Hedliners, Hedley strums a customized Fender Paramount.

"I got them to darken the top a bit and put my moniker ("Mr. Jukebox") on the fretboard for me. It gets a good tone. It's fitted with an L.R. Baggs pickup and a Baggs DI. It gets a pretty good sound."

Benson is equally satisfied with the results, viewing Hedley's youth as a way of preserving this older style. "He's a Western-swing practitioner, which is incredible because that says 'Okay, he's gonna be around a while doing this.' It helps to have young people onstage."

Hedley, too, is satisfied.

"Western swing is jazz, really, but falls under that country umbrella. I just want to explore and show people that country can mean a lot of things." ***– Rich Kienzle***

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MARCUS DEML

Serving The Melody

Marcus Deml's latest offering, *Pure*, is a milestone in guitar tone and sound design. Embedding a bluesy feel within prog-adjacent rock instrumentals, Deml enlists thoughtful note selection with vintage gear and tasteful whammy usage.

***Pure* sounds like a labor of love – full of heart, soul, and attention to detail.**

Most of it is pretty much one take, but it took a while to develop the songs. I'm the producer, the record company, the writer, and the guitar player. So, it's always my decision as to what the best take is. I'm happy with the outcome, and hopefully it's better than the last record.

The sound design and guitar tones are breathtaking.

I only mixed it six times (laughs)! For the last few years, I've only been doing my solo stuff centered around my brand, and that's why it's tough. It took two years. When I started, I couldn't get into it. After the first three months, I deleted everything. Typical stupidity. Then, for whatever reason, it got quick. It went in phases. I wrote and pre-produced the whole album in eight weeks. I played everything and recorded everything. So I had a mediocre-sounding record. Then I handed it over to the band and went into a big studio.

Was there a theme you wanted to express?

It's all about melody. The melody of a tune has to be there without anything. I write the melodies in my head when I go for a walk or jog. When I get back, I try to play it on the guitar. Then I record it and build everything around it. My strength is melody, so I want to have these big melodies. On past records, I tried to force things with a lot of notes and virtuosity, trying to play like Allan Holdsworth. I was younger then. Now I try to have a beautiful melody that everyone can hum, which makes me happy.

I don't listen to guitar players anymore. I listen to Erik Satie and Claude Debussy. There are always these nuggets where I say, "Should I laugh, or should I cry?" My trip at the moment is impressionist composers of the 19th century. I sometimes borrow influences from these guys, but I use different chords and harmonic structures. But everything has to serve the melody.

Are you using a harmonizer on "Persecución"?

That was one of the few places where I doubled the guitar. There's a deeper octave with a Phase 90 pedal. My records are done like 1978 (laughs); great studio, huge room, old API console, and recorded like I was in Pink Floyd.

Those vintage Strats have personality you can't get with newer guitars.

There's no EQ on any of the guitars; well, there's a little on "Budapest," but that's it. For the 60-cycle hum, I turn the Volume down as quickly as I can. Live, I use a dummy coil in my Strats. I have two '63s and a '57 reissue that I got in L.A. and was my only guitar for 35 years. It's hum-canceling but not like a stacked pickup. It's not completely quiet, but it gets rid of all the ridiculous noise. It changes the tone slightly – you lose some of the glassy stuff.

Are you using any pedals?

I use two distortion pedals. One is the Angry Gorilla Distortion, the other is the Sweet Elephant Overdrive. I make them myself. So it's basically a guitar, an overdrive, a Marshall amp, a 4x12 cab, and one microphone. I have a late-'80s 100-watt Marshall Super Lead, a new 50-watt Super Lead, and a '69 Marshall Super Bass, which was the star of the album. I used that on "Budapest." It's blown up 30 times (laughs), but it's full of character. I added reverb and delay in the mix. It's super simple, but the components are exquisite. There's also a lot of natural room sound on the record. For the guitars I recorded at home, I ran it through a PA and recorded the room. It makes a big difference. Room sound is really important. Most players today are recording through plug-ins or in a box.

What's the story behind the Angry Gorilla Distortion pedal?

It came out of necessity. I have a tech who helps me in the studio, and we developed it as a mix of a Klon and a TS-9, but without the nasty midrange. When I do fly gigs, I bring a guitar and a couple of pedals. All I need is a good clean amp and the Angry Gorilla.

What's next?

I'm rehearsing with the band for a tour and finding out that my songs are harder to play than I thought (laughs). **– *Oscar Jordan* VG**

Marcus Deml: Sandra Hennies.

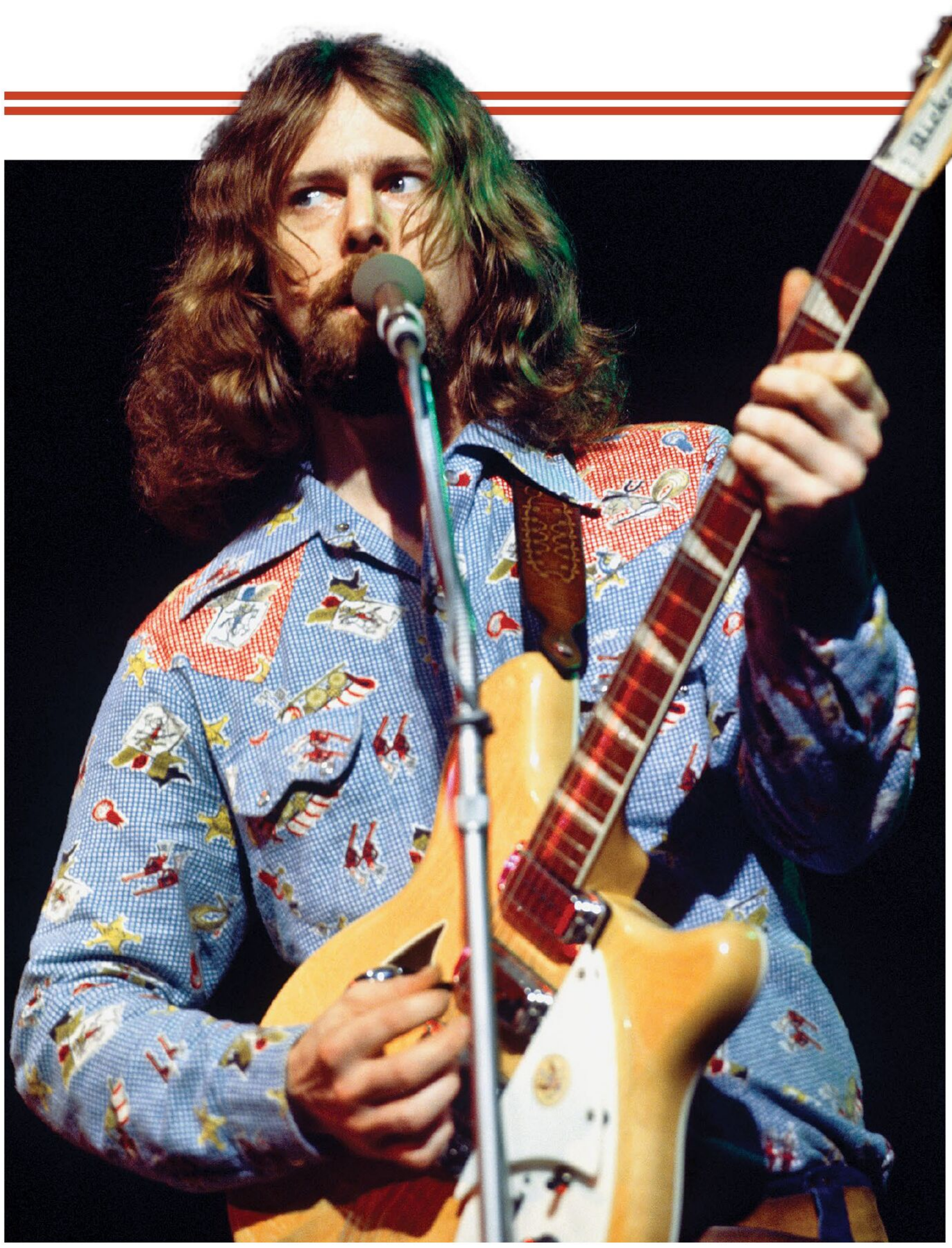
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Roger McGuinn and his second Mapleglo 370/12 with custom wiring, including a Vox treble booster under the pickguard. Rickenbacker made this guitar for him after his modified '65 360/12 was stolen in 1966.

TIMELESS TONES

Jangle of the Rickenbacker 12

BY MIKE MEIERS

The moment Roger McGuinn slung a Rickenbacker model 360/12 across his shoulder in 1965, rock music acquired wings. The bright, chiming sound instantly redefined how guitars could function in a band. Instead of thick power-chord rhythm or blues grit, the Rickenbacker offered air – a crystalline tone that invited melody to weave through the rhythm section like sunlight through stained glass.

That "jangle," as it soon became known, was unlike anything audiences had heard. The Beatles hinted at it on "A Hard Day's Night," but The Byrds turned it into a movement. The Rickenbacker 12-string was no longer just a guitar, it was an atmosphere.

BIRTH OF A SOUND

Rickenbacker's 12-string debuted in 1963 with the 360/12 — a sleek semi-hollowbody distinguished by its offset headstock and "reversed" stringing, where the fundamental note precedes the octave on a downstroke. That subtle flip gave each chord a micro-delay and shimmer, creating a natural chorus before chorus pedals even existed.

George Harrison was the first major figure to put the instrument on record. His parts on "A Hard Day's Night" – that iconic opening chord and the sped-up solo doubled on piano – introduced the world to its radiant chime. By '65, McGuinn had taken that sound to Los Angeles, blending Bob Dylan's poetic folk with the rhythmic drive of rock.

The Byrds' debut single, "Mr. Tambourine Man," became the sonic blueprint. McGuinn's heavily compressed 12-string transformed Dylan's introspection into pop transcendence, inspiring a generation of songwriters. From that moment, the Rickenbacker defined not only a timbre, but an emotion – something between optimism and yearning.

THE MECHANICS OF 'JANGLE'

The signature shimmer of the 360/12 came from both physics and production. The close spacing of doubled strings created phase interaction, meaning the strings vibrate in and out of sync with each other, while the reversed order introduced a slight delay between octaves. When run through compression, those differences became a sustained, bell-like chorus.

At Columbia Studios, engineer Ray Gerhardt famously chained two tube compressors (often cited as LA-2As) on McGuinn's direct signal. The result was near-organ sustain and perfectly even attack. McGuinn would sometimes overdub multiple arpeggios to create what he called a "12-string orchestra" – a trick later employed by Tom Petty and other studio craftsmen.

Jangle wasn't just about the guitar. It was about compression, intention, and repetition – an acoustic shimmer made electric.

Roger McGuinn in 1971: Gijsbert Hanekroot/Alamy.

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Tom Petty with a rare 1964-'65 Rose-Morris Model 1993 in Fireglo. The U.K. export version of the Rick 360/120S, it had specific features including an f-shaped sound hole (instead of catseye) and dot inlay instead of slash markers. One of the most collectible Ricks.

CAPTURING THE CHIME

Before plug-ins, engineers learned to coax beauty from the Rick's spiky transients. Recording direct kept clarity intact, while ribbon microphones like the RCA 44 or Beyerdynamic M160 softened edge on live takes. Onstage, McGuinn favored Vox amps for their crystalline top end, but in the studio his sound was often purely DI, sculpted with compression and EQ.

A touch of plate reverb extended the sustain without muddying articulation, and EQ lifts around 3-5 kHz brought out that sparkling presence. When layered with bass and acoustic guitars, the result hovered – light, persistent, unmistakable.

Even in today's digital workflow, that chain – strong compression, bright EQ, short reverb – remains the template for anyone chasing authentic jangle.

FROM FOLK ROCK TO HEARTLAND ANTHEMS

Tom Petty and Mike Campbell carried the jangle torch into the late 1970s; Petty's love of Rickenbacker guitars led to his own 660/12TP signature model, and Campbell's chiming parts became integral to the band's identity. While "American Girl" is often mistaken for a 12-string, Petty and Campbell have explained it's actually two six-string tracks layered to evoke that effect – proof of how arrangement can mimic the Rick's sheen.

On "Listen to Her Heart" and "The Waiting," that unmistakable sparkle sits right on top of the mix, locked to the snare and full of life. Petty's version of jangle carried McGuinn's freedom but added heartland grit – equal parts nostalgia and defiance.

By the '80s and '90s, that tone had become shorthand for sincerity. R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck drew directly from that lineage, using a 360 to craft the hypnotic picking patterns of "So. Central Rain" and "Driver 8." The chiming 12-string became the indie badge of honesty, a sonic cue that said, "This is real; this comes from the heart."

TECHNIQUE AND TOUCH

Much of the Rick mystique lies in how it's played. McGuinn, originally a banjoist, approached it with a flatpick plus metal picks on his middle and ring fingers. That hybrid technique delivered an even attack across all 12 strings and allowed rolling arpeggios impossible with a flatpick alone. He emphasized upstrokes on weak beats to create lift and rhythm. Many imitators miss that subtle syncopation – the difference between sparkle and stiffness.

McGuinn later collaborated with Rickenbacker to add built-in compression to his 370/12RM, acknowledging that electronics were as essential to his tone as strings or wood. The takeaway? Jangle is equal parts craftsmanship, circuitry, and human feel.

A MODERN REFRAIN

In the 21st century, the jangle hasn't disappeared, it has evolved. Bands such as The War on Drugs, Real Estate, and Alvvays still chase that luminous upper register. Even in film and television, producers reach for Rickenbacker-style textures when they need warmth or wistful optimism. Cue up nearly any streaming-era coming-of-age series and you'll hear a clean, compressed arpeggio somewhere in the mix.

Digital modeling has made the sound more accessible than ever. Plug-ins such as Waves' CLA Compressor or Universal Audio's Fairchild 670 emulation can mimic

CHASING THE CLASSIC TONE

Players chasing that iconic jangle don't necessarily need vintage gear.

Guitar: Any 12-string electric with single-coil pickups can get close. Rickenbacker clones from Danelectro or modern brands like Reverend offer accessible alternatives.

Strings and Setup: Light-gauge, round-wound strings emphasize shimmer. Keep action low and intonation precise, the octave pairs must ring in tune.

Compression: Essential. Aim for even sustain without squashing dynamics; a threshold around –20 dB with slow attack preserves pick articulation.

EQ and Chorus: Cut low mids around 300 Hz, boost presence near 3 kHz, and add a subtle stereo chorus or doubler to widen the field.

Reverb: Plate or small hall. Long tails blur the articulation that makes the jangle sparkle.

In a DAW, stack two takes panned L/R with slightly different compressor settings, one bright and crisp, the other smoother and darker. The interplay mimics what the 360/12 does acoustically.



1971 Rickenbacker 360/12 (left), a rare Model 360F/12 from the mid/late ’60s, and a ’65 Model 1993/12RM (Rose-Morris) built along the lines of the U.S. “old style” Model 360/12.

’71 Rickenbacker Model 360/12, 1970s Model 360F/12, amd 1965 Model 1993/12RM and : VG Archive.

the classic sustain, while chorus pedals or subtle doubler plug-ins re-create the shimmer of doubled strings. For purists, though, nothing replaces the tactile resistance of the 360/12’s narrow neck, the way octave strings fight back slightly, the satisfying snap when a down stroke lands perfectly across 12 vibrating wires.

IN THE STUDIO TODAY

Modern producers often deploy the Rickenbacker not as rhythm guitar, but as texture. Layered beneath acoustic strumming, it adds motion without thickness. A simple G-to-C change can feel cinematic when doubled with 12-string sparkle. In pop and sync work, the instrument’s natural brightness also leaves space for vocals and percussion, sitting neatly above low-end sounds.

Some engineers record it twice – once panned left with light compression and once panned right through a stereo chorus or automatic double tracking (ADT). Others blend it with a single-coil six-string an octave lower to reinforce fundamentals while preserving shimmer.

Even virtual-instrument composers have caught on, sampling classic 360/12s for use in digital libraries. The tone, once born of folk-rock rebellion, now underscores everything from car commercials to cinematic trailers.

WHY JANGLE STILL MATTERS

What keeps the sound relevant is its emotional honesty. The Rickenbacker 12-string suggests hope by turning simple chords into statements of optimism. That's why it resurfaces whenever artists need to bridge eras – the past's warmth meeting the present's clarity.

There's also a physical joy to it. The narrow neck and tight string spacing demand precision while also rewarding restraint. Play too hard and the tone collapses, play just right and it glows. It teaches touch, timing, and patience – qualities often lost in modern digital production.

A SOUND THAT SYMBOLIZED AN ERA

The Rick 12-string didn't just change records, it changed how listeners felt about what guitars could say. In the mid '60s, rock music was in transition, moving from danceable singles to something introspective and poetic. The jangle became the bridge. It captured the spirit of the open road, of restless youth searching for meaning, and art trying to grow up without losing its spark.

When The Byrds released "Turn! Turn! Turn!" or The Beatles played the opening chord of "A Hard Day's Night," those tones carried more than harmony, they carried optimism. The Rickenbacker was both futuristic and familiar, capable of echoing church bells or transistor radios depending on the listener's heart.

Even today, that emotion persists. When a modern show like "Stranger Things" or "13 Reasons Why" drops a cue that leans on bright 12-string arpeggios, it's not accidental. It's shorthand for innocence, memory, and light breaking through the fog of nostalgia. The instrument itself has become cultural vocabulary, the sound of yearning wrapped in clarity.

SONGWRITING LESSONS FROM THE JANGLE

The Rickenbacker also changed the function of the guitar in songwriting. Before its rise, most rhythm players strummed simply to fill space. The 12-string encouraged the opposite – economy. A single suspended chord could feel endless. Two carefully chosen notes could shimmer like a choir.

Producers quickly realized that fewer notes meant more emotion. On "Mr. Tambourine Man," McGuinn played almost no low strings; he left that space for the bass and drums, letting the jangle carry the top of the mix. That philosophy shaped everything from Petty's heartland rock to The Smiths' melancholic pop, clarity over clutter, melody over muscle.

For today's songwriters, that principle still holds. In an era of dense productions and stacked loops, the Rickenbacker sound reminds creators that simplicity has punch. One part, played beautifully, can define an entire song.



An Italian Eko/Vox Phantom XII from circa 1966. Modern alternative– the Danelectro '59X 12.

THE BUILDER'S LEGACY

Rickenbacker's decision to pursue an electric 12-string was audacious. At the time, most companies were competing to make louder six-strings, but Rickenbacker understood that tone could be identity. Their craftsmanship, narrow necks, compressed semi-hollowbodies, the reversed octave layout all served that singular purpose – harmonic shimmer.

That focus influenced generations of builders. The chiming high-end of later instruments such as the Fender Electric XII, Vox Phantom XII, and Danelectro 59X owe a debt to Rickenbacker's blueprint. Even modern boutique makers borrow from its DNA when crafting jangly, articulate instruments for studio players.

What's remarkable is how little the core design has changed in 60 years. The offset headstock, checkerboard binding, and crescent body outline remain, which feels fitting. You don't reinvent sunlight, you just find new windows for it to shine through.

A LIGHT THAT WON'T FADE

In the end, the Rickenbacker 12-string isn't just part of rock history, it's part of rock's language. Every time its strings shimmer across a mix, they reconnect the listener to a lineage that stretches from the Sunset Strip to the streaming age. That's why young players still chase the sound. They're not just after nostalgia; they're chasing the feeling that melody matters, that clarity, balance, and emotion can coexist in a single chord. The jangle remains proof that one instrument, played with intention, can turn rhythm into radiance.

Vox Phantom XII and Danelectro '59X 12: VG Archive.



Real Estate front man Martin Courtney onstage with a Fender XII.

Martin Courtney: Tore Sætre Wikimedia.

Half a century on, that radiance continues to echo, bright, eternal, and unmistakably Rickenbacker.

Mike Meiers is an Emmy-winning composer/producer and guitar-focused songwriting coach based in Nashville. Special thanks to Peter Stuart Kohman.



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HIGH FLIER

Gibson's Falcon GA-19RVT

BY DAVE HUNTER

Compared to those that came before, Gibson amplifiers manufactured after the early '60s garner little respect from players and collectors. But one player has discovered a fierce performer lurking beneath the tamed later Falcon model.

Gibson's amps were evolving fast and furious through the late '50s and into the '60s, with circuits and styling often changing year to year. One shift in cosmetics is often seen as a demarcation point between "cool" and "meh." In early '62, the company offered the final version of the tweed combos with rear-mounted control panels and ushered in the Crestline styling, viewed as more modern, with an upper-front (and slightly tilted) control panel and textured-vinyl covering. The change also brought a new chassis that was flimsier and with an awkward layout, though in truth the quality of the wiring and components didn't decline dramatically.

VG reader and amp collector Leon Chalnick has been plumbing the depths of the tweed-to-Crestline transition, focusing on how and why their tone changed in the process. It was all sparked by the observation that early-'62 tweed Falcons achieved a thick, juicy overdrive, while the Falcon Crestline GA-19RVT of later '63 sounded only so-so, with a cleaner and leaner tone that wasn't easily pushed into overdrive.

"My local shop, Truetone Music, had a tweed Falcon on consignment that belonged to Brian Ray, of Paul McCartney's band. I went to check it out and plugged in my '54 Les Paul reissue and immediately recognized the great clean sound and reverb of the Crestline version. As I turned the Volume up, though, on came this very rich, tweed-type overdrive – gobs of it! But unlike so many old tweed Fenders I've played, it held together much better. It was almost Valco-ish; not too toothy

1962 GIBSON GA-19RVT FALCON

- Preamp tubes: three 6EU7, one 7199 (6C4 in Crestline)
- Output tubes: two 6V6GT
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume, Tone, Reverberation, tremolo Depth and Frequency
- Speaker: Single 12" Jensen Special C12R
- Output: approximately 12 watts RMS

Amp courtesy of Truetone Music and Brian Ray, photos by Leon Chalnick.

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Tim Sheerhorn R-Body '96, mojo, playwear, $5995
Clinesmith Square neck reso,'03 exc cond $3500
Gibson L-00 '32, Black/white PG, reset/refret $6750
Gibson AJ Luthiers Choice '01, BRW, exc+, $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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or spiky and not too refined... but also not flubby. Goldilocks distortion! Plus, it had a beautiful reverb and strong, bias-modulating sine-wave tremolo."

As Chalnick discovered (and schematics bear out), while it's still the familiar tube-driven spring reverb in the broad sense, Gibson implemented the effect on the Falcon quite differently compared to most amps that followed. Aspects of the Falcon's reverb circuit also remained similar through the evolution, though there were alterations to accommodate a change of tube and other minor adjustments. It's also worth noting that Gibson included reverb in a combo amp some two years before Fender, as seen on the GA-19RVT from 1961. And for a few years, they offered a bonus feature, albeit one that compromised the performance of the effect.

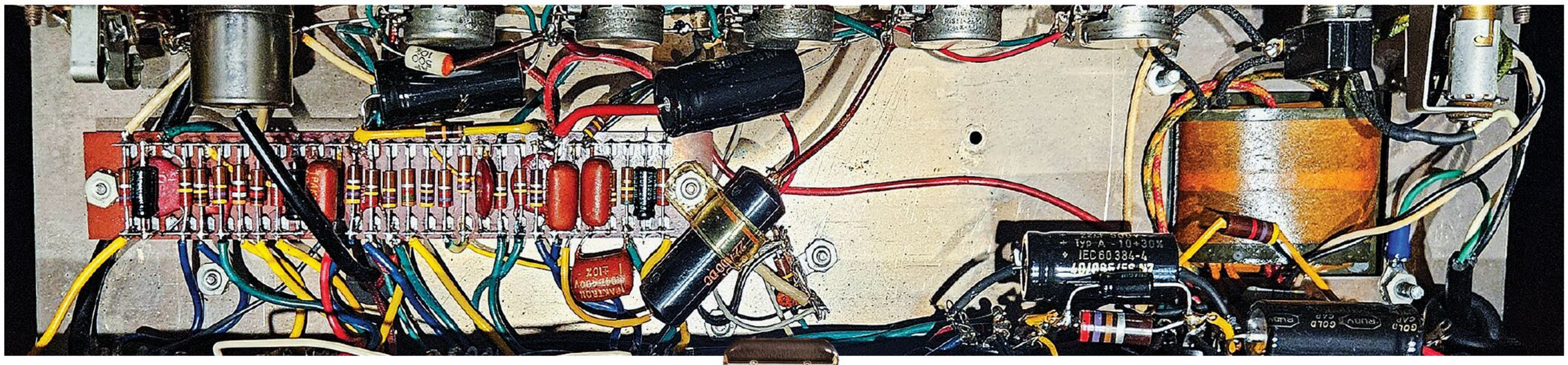
"Gibson designed the reverb circuit on Falcons so it could be used as a stand-alone reverb unit," Chalnick explains. "You use its Monitor output to connect it to the input of another amp, then turn the Volume down on the Falcon and set the Reverb level to taste. As a consequence of this design, the Reverb knob must be used differently; as you turn up the Loudness knob, you turn up the Reverb knob, too, in order to get the same level of reverberation at the new volume level."

While reverb and tremolo remained much the same, other aspects of the circuit changed in the tweed-to-Crestline transition, squelching the toothsome overdrive in favor of a cleaner sound with more headroom. Other than the cosmetics, one of the few outwardly notable changes was that the tweed Falcon used a 7199 preamp tube as the reverb driver, whereas the Crestline version used a 6C4 (after a short-lived early iteration in the new look that was largely unchanged inside). But this wouldn't have contributed greatly to a change in the tone.



However, a closer look at the two circuits reveals that the 2.7k-ohm bias resistors in the first two preamp gain stages were increased in value to 4.7k. An increase in bias-resistor value results in "cooler" biasing of the tubes, generally heard as less preamp gain, though this is relative to altered DC voltage levels resultant from a few changes in the power-delivery stage. In addition, the plate resistors are different in the two versions of the Falcon, and the later Crestline has smaller (lower-value) coupling capacitors between the first and second gain stages – .001uF versus the tweed's .02uF – which allows less low-end to pass. As significant as any of these, though, is the Sprague "T-filter," an all-in-one network of resistors and capacitors that bleeds off some of the signal to ground.

As has often been noted in these pages and throughout discussions of guitar-amp history, the



industry's goal in the early years was generally toward brighter, cleaner, louder amps, and the "de-overdrive-ification" of the Falcon circuit would appear to be a step in that direction.

"I think the Sprague T-filter – along with the simple changes to the cathode and plate resistors and first coupling cap – was a cheap and easy step into a cleaner, brighter sound," Chalnick said. "Little did Gibson know that decades later we'd be struggling to undo their good work!"

Many players have gone the route of untaming Crestlines from mid '63 and after by removing the offending components and replacing them with early-'62-spec parts (except for the reverb circuit).

Two other points worth considering are the preamp tubes and speaker. Many players groan when they see the three unusual 6EU7 preamp tubes, in addition to the 6C4 in the



Introduced in late '62, the Crestline Falcon presented a dramatic styling change, despite many similarities in its design and circuit.

reverb, two 6V6s in the output stage, and a 5Y3 rectifier tube. Despite its appearance in far fewer classic amps, however, the 6EU7 is an efficient, low-noise, nine-pin dual-triode preamp tube with characteristics very similar to the 12AX7 (or the ruggedized 7025 variation).

The early-'62 Falcon has a neatly laid-out circuit.

It's not a direct replacement because it uses different internal pin connections from the socket, but performs very similarly and is still available. If and when the 6EU7 becomes impossible to find, though, this tube's sockets can be rewired to accommodate 12AX7s.

The Falcon's original Jensen C12R will be familiar to vintage-amp fans, but as Chalnick discovered, these amps carried an unusual "smooth-cone" variation that performs differently from the ribbed-cone C12R in Fender amps of the era.

"These have to be two of the best-sounding speakers I've ever heard!" he tells us. "My God… fabulous sound, full tonal spectrum, lovely cleans – brightish but no sharp edges – and absolutely wicked overdrive with a bit of compression but zero squish! Just a fantastic speaker."

So, from the Falcon that roared to the Falcon that whispered, and back again, the Crestline is a little rock beast in disguise if you've got a few chops with the soldering iron to get it back into tweed-era form. **VG**

The thermoplastic handle is a stylish touch, with the Gibson logo printed on a swatch of tweed. The simple control panel accounts for one of the earlier inclusions of reverb and tremolo on a combo amp.



Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli



1959 Gibson Super 400 CES

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1968	Ace Tone Fuzz Master FM-2		$350	$450
1993	Alembic Epic	6-string	$2,500	$3,500
1959	Ampeg Model 835 Bassamp	35 watts, 1x15	$750	$950
1975	Big M 212 Cabinet	Plywood	$850	$1,500
2003	Collings 0001 ICC		$4,000	$5,500
1970s	Conn Strobotuner ST-12		$200	$350
2004	Damage Control Womanizer		$250	$350
1956	Danelectro U-1	Enamel, Coke headstock	$900	$1,400
1977	Dean Z Standard (U.S.A.)	Common finish	$2,500	$4,000
1970s	Dobro E-45 Lap Steel	6 string or 8-string	$650	$850
1982	DOD Stereo Flanger FX70		$65	$125
1999	Ehlers 16 SM		$2,200	$3,300
1981	Electro-Harmonix Echo 600		$200	$250
2003	Epiphone G 400 Tony Iommi		$900	$1,500
1976	Epiphone SC-350	Mahogany	$800	$1,200
1953	Fender Bandmaster	Tweed, 1x15	$4,000	$5,000
1993	Fender Blues DeVille	Tweed	$575	$750
1992	Fender Custom Shop Limited Edition Stratocaster	100 offered	$4,000	$6,000
1984	Fender Esprit Ultra	Japan	$1,800	$2,800
1984	Fender Gemini II		$200	$300
1974	Fender Jazz	Walnut 3-bolt	$2,750	$4,000
2016	Fender Special Edition White Opal Telecaster	Mexico	$700	$1,000
1958	Fender Stratocaster	Sunburst 3-tone, non-trem	$32,500	$42,500
1999	Fender '56 Stratocaster (Custom Shop)	Closet Classic	$3,000	$4,500
1960	Fender Super	Pink/brown, reverse knobs	$3,000	$4,000
1973	Fender Telecaster	Black, White	$4,200	$5,500
2019	Fender Tone Master Deluxe Reverb	Black	$725	$950
1960s	Flot-A-Tone Large Models		$775	$1,500
1987	Gibson 20/20	Headless	$1,125	$1,375
1965	Gibson ES-175 D	Sunburst, humbuckers	$6,000	$8,000
1959	Gibson ES-335N TD	Natural, bound neck	$150,000	$175,000
1995	Gibson ES-5/ES-5 Switchmaster Historic	Sunburst, humbuckers	$4,800	$7,200
1975	Gibson Grabber III G-3	3 pickups	$1,750	$2,250
1936	Gibson J-35	Mahogany	$15,000	$25,000
1993	Gibson L-20K, koa		$3,200	$4,800
2002	Gibson L-7C (Custom Shop)	COA, CS logo	$5,500	$8,500
2003	Gibson Les Paul Custom Music Machine	Quilted	$5,200	$8,000
1999	Gibson Les Paul Junior Lite		$900	$1,500
1958	Gibson Les Paul Standard (Sunburst)	Plain top, no figuring	$275,000	$350,000
1960	Gibson LG-2 3/4	Rosewood bridge	$2,200	$2,800
2006	Gibson Songwriter Deluxe 12-String	Rosewood	$2,800	$4,000
1959	Gibson Super 400 CES	Sunburst	$28,500	$37,000



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1968	Gibson Thunderbird II	Sunburst, non-reverse	$7,000	$9,500
1968	Grammer G-30	Ampeg era	$1,800	$2,800
1993	Guild GV-72	Herringbone, gloss	$1,100	$1,600
1982	Guild SB-202		$900	$1,125
1982	Guild X-701		$1,125	$1,500
1980	Hamer Standard		$8,000	$12,000
1950	Harmony Lone Ranger	Stencil on brown body	$300	$400
1954	Hofner Club Model 126		$1,300	$2,000
1980s	Holmes Pro Compact 212S		$150	$225
1990	Ibanez UV77MC Steve Vai Universe	Multi-Color	$4,500	$10,000
1983	Korg PME-40X Professional Modular Effects System		$150	$200
1968	Kustom K100-1 1-15L/ 1-15A-1/1-15J-1 Set	Color option, 50 watts, 1x15	$500	$625
2000s	Larrivee JV-05 Mahogany Standard		$1,800	$3,200
1960	Maestro GA-78 RVS		$2,250	$3,000
1973	Marshall Model 2061 20-Watt Lead/Bass Head	Black, aluminum	$1,750	$2,250
1927	Martin 5-15T		$2,000	$3,000
2005	Martin 00-41 Custom		$4,500	$6,000
1930	Martin 0-28K		$13,500	$18,000
2010	Martin D-45E Aura		$6,000	$9,000
2011	Martin GPCPA3		$1,200	$1,800
1997	Matchless Brave 40 212		$1,875	$2,500
1985	Mesa-Boogie Mark II C/ Mark II C + Combo	Hardwood cab	$5,500	$10,000
1980	Moonstone Eclipse Deluxe		$2,000	$3,500
1980	Multivox Big Jam Effects - Compressor, Phaser, 6-Band EQ, Wah		$100	$130
1970s	MXR Noise Gate Line Driver	Script logo	$85	$165
11968	Ovation Tornado 1260		$1,200	$3,000
1983	Peavey Encore 65	Tube combo amp	$250	$350
1974	Penco Electric	Thinline Archtop	$325	$500
1991	PRS EG II		$1,200	$1,800
1961	Rickenbacker Model 370	New Capri bound body	$8,000	$12,000
1972	Sho-Bro Resonator		$1,200	$1,800
1998	Soldano Decatone	Combo, 2x12	$2,000	$2,500
2014	Taylor 320e Baritone SLTD		$1,375	$1,750
1986	Taylor 910 (Brazilian)		$5,250	$6,500
2011	Victoria Cherry Bomb	40 watts, 1x15, t	$1,500	$2,000
2000	Yamaha SGV-300		$400	$1,000

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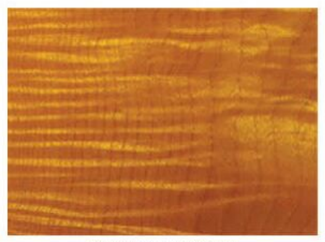
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FOLLOW-UP SHOCKER

The Jimi Hendrix Experience's *Axis: Bold As Love*

By Dan Forte

In February '68, the Jimi Hendrix Experience took the stage of San Francisco's Winterland playing "You Got Me Floatin'," from *Axis: Bold As Love*. His second album had been released in the States one month prior, just seven months after a burning-guitar set at the Monterey International Pop Festival and Fillmore Auditorium debut, where Hendrix moved from bottom of the bill to headliner above Jefferson Airplane before the weekend was out.

Though *Axis* was no sophomore jinx, following *Are You Experienced*? was a serious challenge. Released in America in August '67, the otherworldly debut had fans wondering who this American was, bursting onto the English scene and eclipsing Eric Clapton, Mike Bloomfield, and Jeff Beck in the guitar hero sweepstakes.

A new reissue of *Axis: Bold as Love* gets the deluxe treatment with a multi-CD or vinyl collection in stereo, mono, Blu-ray, and ATMOS, including 40 studio outtakes and live performances. It was produced for Experience Hendrix/Legacy by John McDermott and Eddie Kramer, who co-engineered *Experienced*, *Axis*, *Electric Ladyland*, and the posthumous *Cry Of Love*. Kramer rarely grants interviews but agreed to speak with *VG* about working with the legendary guitarist.

"In my estimation, is *Axis* equal to *Are You Experienced* and *Electric Ladyland*?" he muses. "All three are part of where his career was going, the musical journey that Jimi was taking.

"I never had the advantage of seeing Jimi live at that early stage," the 83-year-old reveals. "I was an engineer just coming up through the ranks, and obviously I was very aware of who he was. All the magazines and folks were talking about him, and hearing him on the radio, being thoroughly impressed – never realizing that I was going to be working with him in early January of '67. 'Hey Joe' had come out and maybe three or four cuts they'd already done for *Are You Experienced*. I think Chas Chandler and Jimi were not very happy with the studios they were working in. They'd obviously heard about Olympic, which was cutting edge, very independent, state of the art."

Recounting how good fortune fell into his lap that month, he says, "I'd never met the man. He was sitting in the back of the studio, a very cold day in January, huddled up in his raincoat. As Jimi's amp was being set up, I was running around like a blue-assed fly, figuring out what microphone we were going to use. Settled on one and stuck it in front of the amp,

Jimi Hendrix: Chuck Boyd/Experience Hendrix.


Eddie Kramer

and I stood back. Jimi walked over to the amp, and I must have been four or five feet away from the amp. He switched it on and hit a chord, and my life changed in a nanosecond. I'd never heard anything like that, and I don't think I'll ever hear anything like that again, but it changed the path of where my life would be going."

Then, he laughs, "I had to figure out how to record it. That was a wonderful challenge, and we were testing each other. He wanted to see if I could get him a sound, so I went back up to the control room and made sure the tape was running, and recorded a few minutes. I said, 'Jimi, come up and check it out.' I played it back, and he looked at me and went, 'Mm-hmm. Okay.' Now the game is on. He went back down to the studio and started fiddling around with pedals and tone, and I kept rolling tape. I wanted to expand upon what he was giving me and try to make it even better and give it another dimension. He came back up and, 'Oh, okay. You did that. Try this.' It was like we were trying to top each other. We finally settled on, 'I trust you, you trust me. We're on.' And from that point, there was never any looking back."

Prior to landing at Olympic, Kramer and Chandler worked at Regent Sound, which he calls "a demo studio" with no multi-track capability at the time.

"Chas was a great producer. It was his idea to rehearse there and make sure the arrangements were cool, so by the time we went to Olympic, we weren't going to waste time. The way Jimi and the Experience worked, with Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding, they were so quick to get it. By the time they got to recording the basic tracks for *Axis*, that stuff went down really fast."

Chandler's discovery of Hendrix in Greenwich Village is well documented, but Kramer agrees that he's underrated as a producer. One can contrast the level of experimentation on *Experienced* and *Axis* with the more raw-boned hits by the Animals, which Chandler co-founded as bassist.

"Absolutely. I really feel that," Kramer nods. "Just because he had a really concentrated attitude, that didn't detract from his musical ability as a bass player. But his use of the time and a healthy amount of focus on what was in front of him, and not to digress too much. Obviously, with Jimi, you had to leave him to his thing. But I think the fact that Jimi lived with Chas and they worked on the structure of the songs and were really tight was absolutely necessary. A very large part of Jimi's creativity was allowed to blossom under Chas' tutelage. Chas was the one who said, 'Hey man, you've got to write some songs. Let's not do these copies.'"

With the jazzy "Up From The Skies," classic-riff "Spanish Castle Magic," novelty "Wait Until Tomorrow," heavy "If 6 Was 9," delicate ballad "One Rainy Wish," and psychedelic "Bold As Love," Hendrix had upped his songwriting.

"'Little Wing' happens to be my favorite Hendrix song," Kramer offers. "Any time I hear it, just going back in my little brain, it's so complete. It's so much a summation of who he was and what his music meant, because it sort of runs the gamut of the beautiful part of Jimi, which was a very big part of him, and then it roars into life after the solo, and then it comes back. It takes you on this incredible journey, and it's got subtlety, and it's got power, and it's got elegance and beauty. The structure of the song is just fricking amazing."



Hendrix sometimes composed in the studio. "Certainly in those days – not as much as later on, as his career went on and we got into Electric Ladyland, and there was a lot of jamming and messing around, and working on songs in the studio – because Chas was producing and had his eye on the amount of time. Every minute was a dollar, bless him. I remember coming in at 7 p.m., we'd finish at midnight and have two songs done. Sometimes in two or three hours we'd have a couple. Jimi worked quickly in those days. He was prepared. He had an idea and knew what was happening. But as things progressed, particularly on *Axis*, there were all these rehearsals; there were little things that Jimi would mess around and say, 'Let me try this, try that.' Which is why you have all the lovely outtakes."

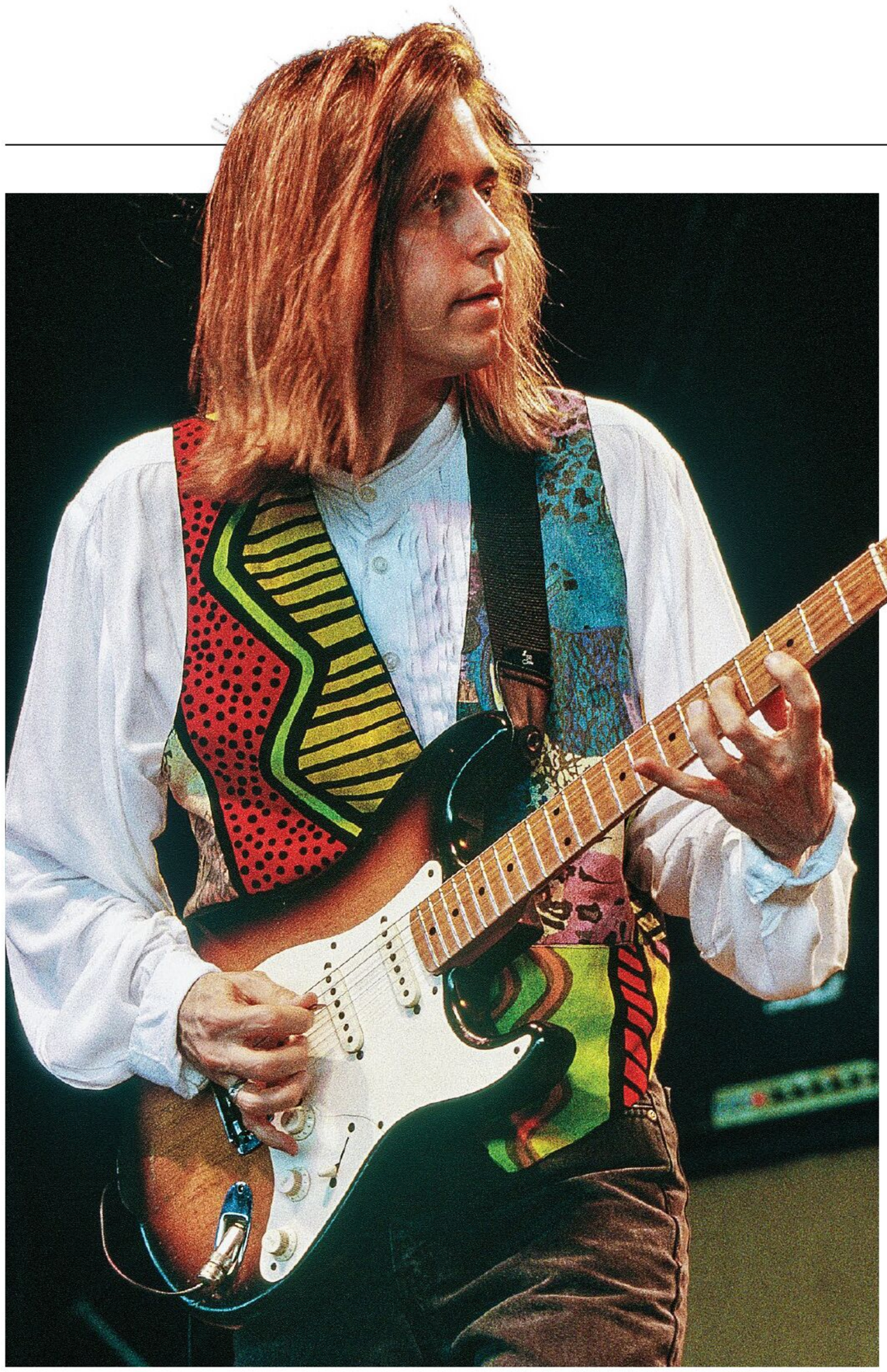
In some instances, Kramer would composite tracks by cross-fading guitar-solo passes, as opposed to Jimi punching in, which was rarer. After second-engineer George Chkiantz's flanging technique on "Itchycoo Park" by the Small Faces, Jimi made use of it on "Bold As Love" and "Little Wing."

Anyone who saw Hendrix live or heard him on underground radio was lucky, indeed. Today, several generations know him through covers. There are even online comments insisting that Stevie Ray Vaughan's version of "Voodoo Child" is better than the original.

"Uh, no?" Eddie laughs. "Certainly of the guitar players over the last 25 or 30 years, Stevie Ray was absolutely brilliant – no question about it, a fabulous guitar player. But even his great playing pales in comparison to what Jimi could do and did do."

"It took a lot of work," Kramer says about the new Dolby ATMOS mixes. "It's very difficult, but I'm very pleased. There's some fabulous gems in there. I urge people to dive in, play the vinyl if you have, if not, play the CDs – that's fine. But do get the Blu-ray, and I would urge you to find somebody with the 5.1 or Dolby ATMOS system. You will need to come with at least three extra pairs of underwear, because it is seriously f'ing great." **VG**

Eddie Kramer: Brian Petersen, courtesy Eddie Kramer.



SONIC SMORGASBORD

Eric Johnson's *Ah Via Musicom*

By Wolf Marshall

Eric Johnson was "the best guitarist you've never heard of" when his first album, *Tones*, debuted midway through a decade of guitar music distinguished by Van Halen, Morse, Malmsteen, and Satriani. His follow-up, *Ah Via Musicom*, transcended rock excellence. Stunning instrumentalist, imaginative composer, and savvy songwriter, Johnson channelled an array of styles, proving it artistically and commercially viable on a single opus.

Though his virtuosity was undeniable, Johnson's artistry was subtle. He blended fusion chops and blues-rock with jazz, country, psychedelic, folk, electronica, and world-music tangents – without artifice or contrivance. I recently reconnected with Eric to reflect on *Musicom* as he assembled a new record.

Musicom offered 11 originals – seven instrumentals and four vocal songs. With primary engineer Richard Mullen (of SRV fame), E.J. recorded between March '88 and June '89 at several Austin studios including Riverside Sound, Saucer One, Arlyn, and Studio Seven. He sang lead, played guitars, lap steel, and piano, credited other musicians as co-arrangers; his rhythm section of Tommy Taylor (drums) and Kyle Brock (bass) was augmented by guest bassist Roscoe Beck, keyboardist Steve Barber, percussionists Paul Bissell and James Fenner, and backing singer Jody Lazo. E.J. was involved in mixing with Mullen in Texas and Michael Frondelli at Sandcastle, in L.A., and mastering with Bernie Grundman.

"I worked hard on the album," he said. "It was during a time when you had to prove yourself and I was being pulled in different directions. I produced it myself with no previous credits; another producer might've done it in a week, but I took a year. I basically recorded the album twice, but I did a lot of demos that were developed along the way."

Eric's exemplary tone resulted from years of honing technique and refining gear. Reflecting his live rig, he employed Fender Twin Reverbs for clean tones (occasionally compressed), his Dumble Steel-String Singer for semi-clean, and three paths for distortion – a Marshall 100-watt stack with Tube Driver (primary lead), and a Tube Screamer or FuzzFace into the Dumble. Production involved experimenting with mic types and placement, as well as studio components. Surprisingly, he preferred a lower-tech Panasonic Ramsa board for distorted guitar tracking.

"It's comparable to a simple hand-wired tube amplifier that has a better, purer tone when pushed to the limit, for distortion but also clean. I recorded *Musicom* at Riverside Sound which had an MCI 16-track Ramsa 8816 console, Lexicon reverb, and cheap digital delay – that's it! I got better tone there than in fancier studios all over the world. Another factor was Richard, a great guitarist who really knows how to get a tone."

Released March 20, 1990, *Musicom* enjoyed heavy AOR rotation and yielded four Top 40 singles; "Cliffs of Dover" reached #5, garnering a Grammy for Best Rock Instrumental Performance. Eric reunited with Taylor and Brock to perform a live version of *Musicom* in 2019.
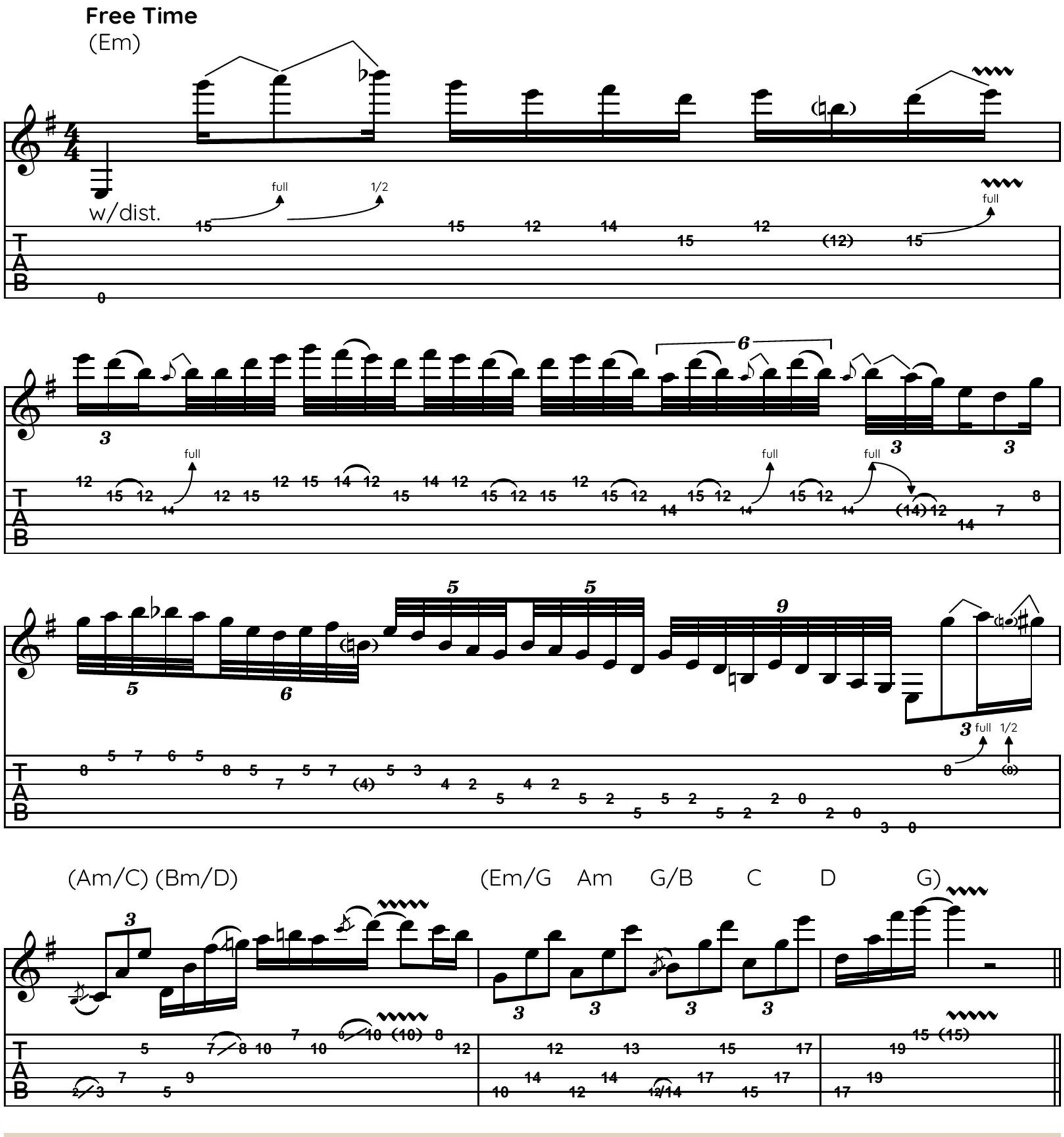
The title track, Johnson's Hendrix-inspired soundscape, places his guitar in a system of controlled chaos tantamount to yin-yang of Eastern philosophy. Underscoring sonic duality, E.J.'s fuzz-guitar yin segues directly into the singing, violinistic yang of "Dover."

"Once I decided 'Cliffs' was the opening song, I did the edit. It was a jam from midway in the sessions that happened to get on tape. I was looking for something to start the record – some kind of crazy sound effect. I flipped the tape over and started overdubbing on the reversed track. Some guitar is backward, some forward. Then, I took a short-wave radio and flew in different frequencies and people talking on the air."

"Cliffs of Dover" established E.J. with mainstream audiences. The landmark instrumental successor to "Zap" (*Tones*) had a bumpy start. Surprisingly, some of his most beloved lines like the pedal-tone theme (0:56) struck execs as reminiscent of a game-show ditty. "It's an older song I started writing before *Tones*. I recorded an earlier version but the consensus was to omit it. It matured over the years, got better in orchestration, and came to fruition by '88. An instrumental relies on inspiration; 'Cliffs' has a lot of improvisation and needed a very inspired take. The original version was not as convincing and didn't get much interest, except from Jeffrey Shane at Capitol, who loved the song and did everything he could to make it a hit. The mix was okay, though a little bass-heavy and dull, but Bernie made it sonically much better. It's a Karmic thing; the universe conspired to make it happen. I used my '59 sunburst ES-335."

The rest of the album was recorded with "Virginia," Eric's '54 Strat with sassafras body

Eric Johnson: Max Crace.



"Cliffs of Dover" is a definitive piece in Johnson's repertoire. Fusion-informed shred chops and blues-rock ferocity collide in the intro, a sort of Mahavishnu-meets-Hendrix affair. He develops hexatonic/pentatonic combinations in odd groupings characteristic of classic fusion and mixes them with blues-based licks distinguished by wailing string bends. The atypical open-voiced arpeggio shapes in measures 4-6 are utterly unique; played as lead licks that grow from his application of expanded harmony beyond conventional triads. The resulting wider spread intervals in addition to Johnson's singing, violin-like tone (overdriven Marshall with emphasis on bass/mid frequencies) epitomize extraordinary elements of his lead sound.

finished in sunburst with a DiMarzio HS-2 bridge pickup (stacked humbucker wired single-coil), and flattened fretboard with jumbo frets.

The first vocal tune, "Desert Rose," is a power-pop piece in the atypical key of Ab with distorted/clean guitar layering, a driving riff, and a solo with characteristically unique guitar maneuvers.

"That was written just before *Musicom*. I was writing a lot of tunes then and this was one of the strongest. We performed it before crowds and it always got a good response. I co-wrote it with Vince Mariani. I was in his group, Mariani, when I was 13. In fact, he turned me on to Wes Montgomery."

"High Landrons," a metaphor for higher consciousness, reached #31. Suggesting connections to Chaldean and Pythagorean numerology, the vocal rock number in Eb tuning boasts R&B undertones, colorful orchestration with sitar guitar, lap-steel, piano, unusual effects (extreme flanging), and a lengthy outro solo (3:24-5:40).

"That one just came to me. I wanted to do a 'House Burning Down' Hendrix-type thing. It was quite a chore; I was using two flangers crisscrossing each other and phase-cancelling at the zero point. In those days we didn't have a plethora of flangers, so I did a lot of adjusting. To preserve the settings, I didn't turn them off when I went home. I spent several days getting things right for the solo."

"Steve's Boogie" is an instrumental country romp on a 24-bar blues in A with guest Steve Henning and E.J. on a Telecaster. Its authentic Western-swing feel is enlivened with emblematic double-stop riffing, unabashed guitar twang, and hustling cut-time tempo.

"I wrote it during the sessions so Steve would play on it, and I borrowed the Telecaster from a friend. We did a lot of takes. Jerry Reed was a big influence – an amazing player ahead of his time with the chicken-pickin' stuff. Steve played the first solo, I'm second (1:34), and he's trading with me at the end. At the time, he was using a pedal guitar, a six-string electric with a big cord. You can hear the pedal pulling the strings."

The shuffling blues-rock instrumental "Trademark," reached #7. Bearing a particularly catchy theme of singable blues licks and partial chords, it contains Johnsonisms in the deft improvisations, interesting note choices, scale-blending, intervallic lines, inimitable phrasing, and gorgeous tone. Eric cites the solo (3:29) as a favorite guitar sound. Originally thinner and brighter, he and Mullen EQ'd the guitar to be cello-like, bigger and warmer.

"I had 'Trademark' a year before *Musicom*. It started as a melody we jammed on and developed organically, leading to other ideas for

overdubs. I cut the solo live. It has a big, fat sound that almost didn't fit the track – consuming all the other frequencies. During mixing, people wanted to thin it out. From an audiophile perspective, it might not fit 'correctly,' but that's part of its effectiveness; it sits on the track and is really thick. Vince named the song, saying, 'That sounds like your trademark.' He named a lot of my instrumentals, like 'Manhattan' and 'Cliffs of Dover.'"
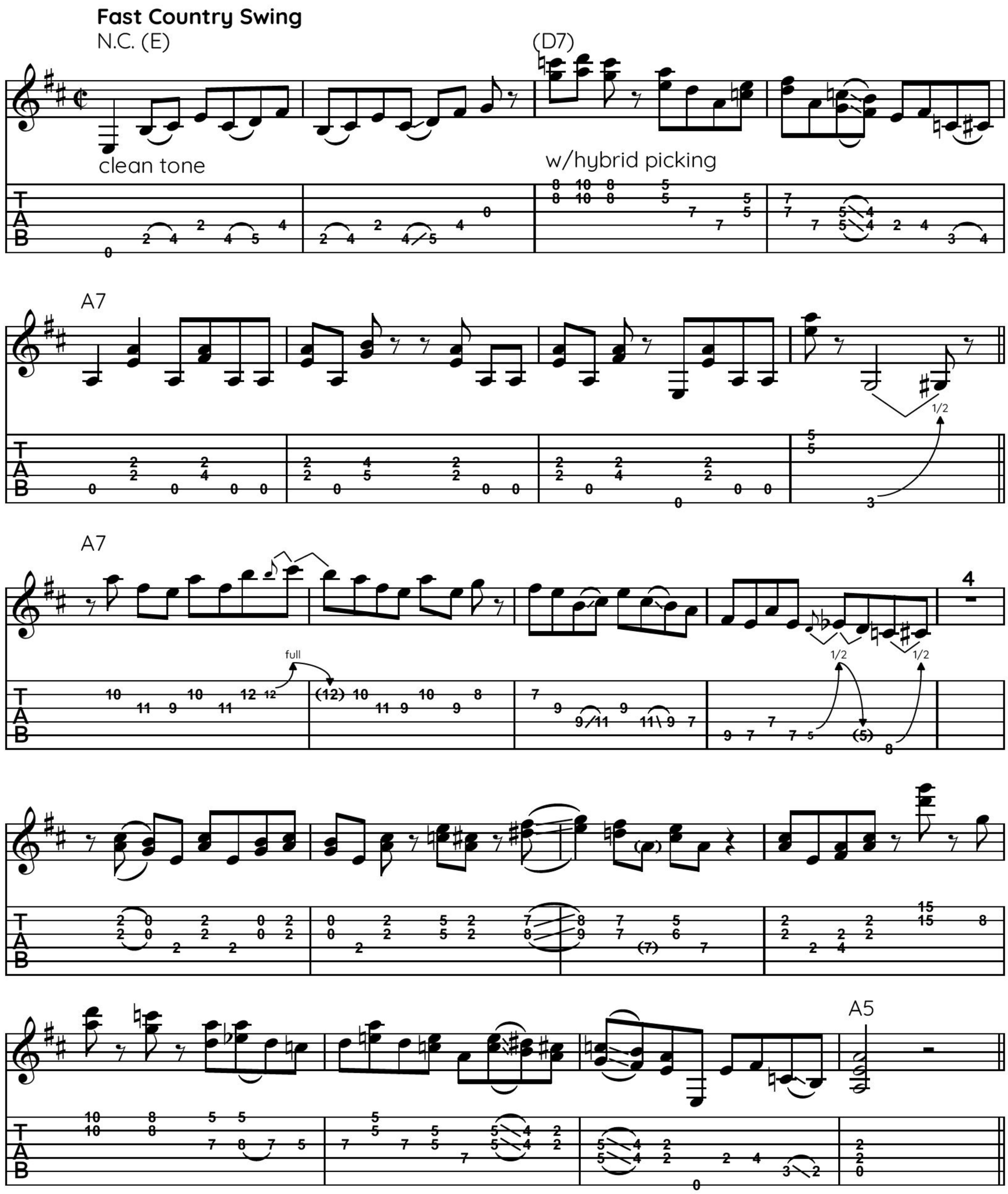
"Nothing Can Keep Me From You" is a pop-rock vocal song distinguished by an infectious intervallic riff and an inspired outro solo of feedback, whammy-bar antics, and complex single-note runs.

"I wrote it in the *Musicom* period. I had the tune and melody, but no lyrics. I wanted to write something with this idea of attraction, and Tommy suggested the title that led to words. The ending jam shifts gears. We used an 8-track Tascam tape from my practice house. It sounded good on the session take, but not particularly inspired. The demo really captured the moment and the excitement. While mastering with Bernie Grundman, I brought the two-track mix, which didn't sound good at all, and asked him to edit it into our professional recording. It's a testament to Bernie."

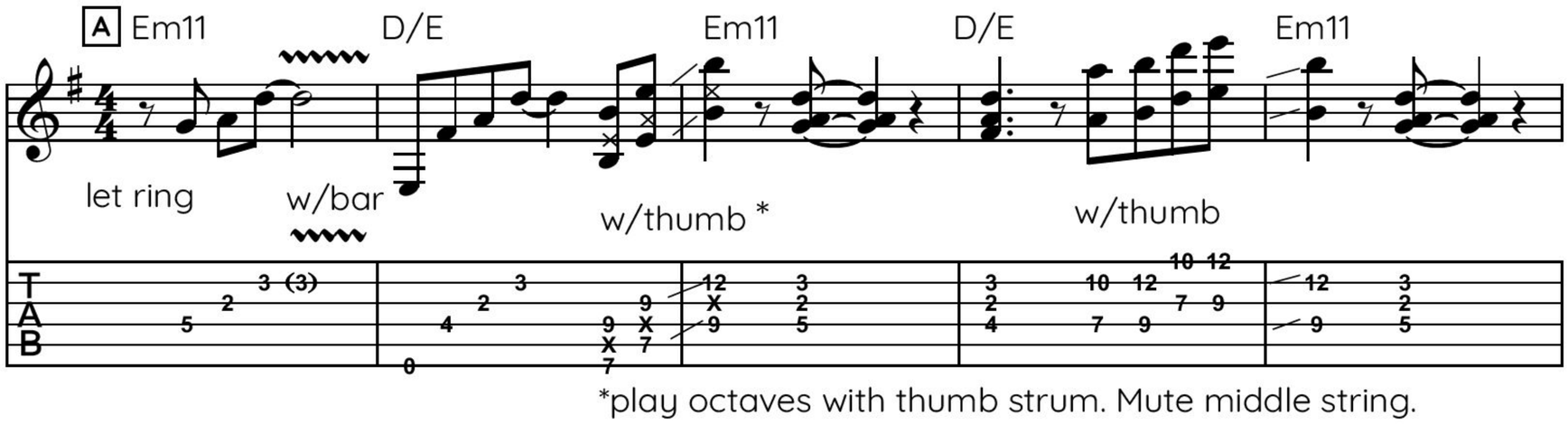
Eric's country-blues-folk solo acoustic instrumental, "Song for George," provides sonic contrast.
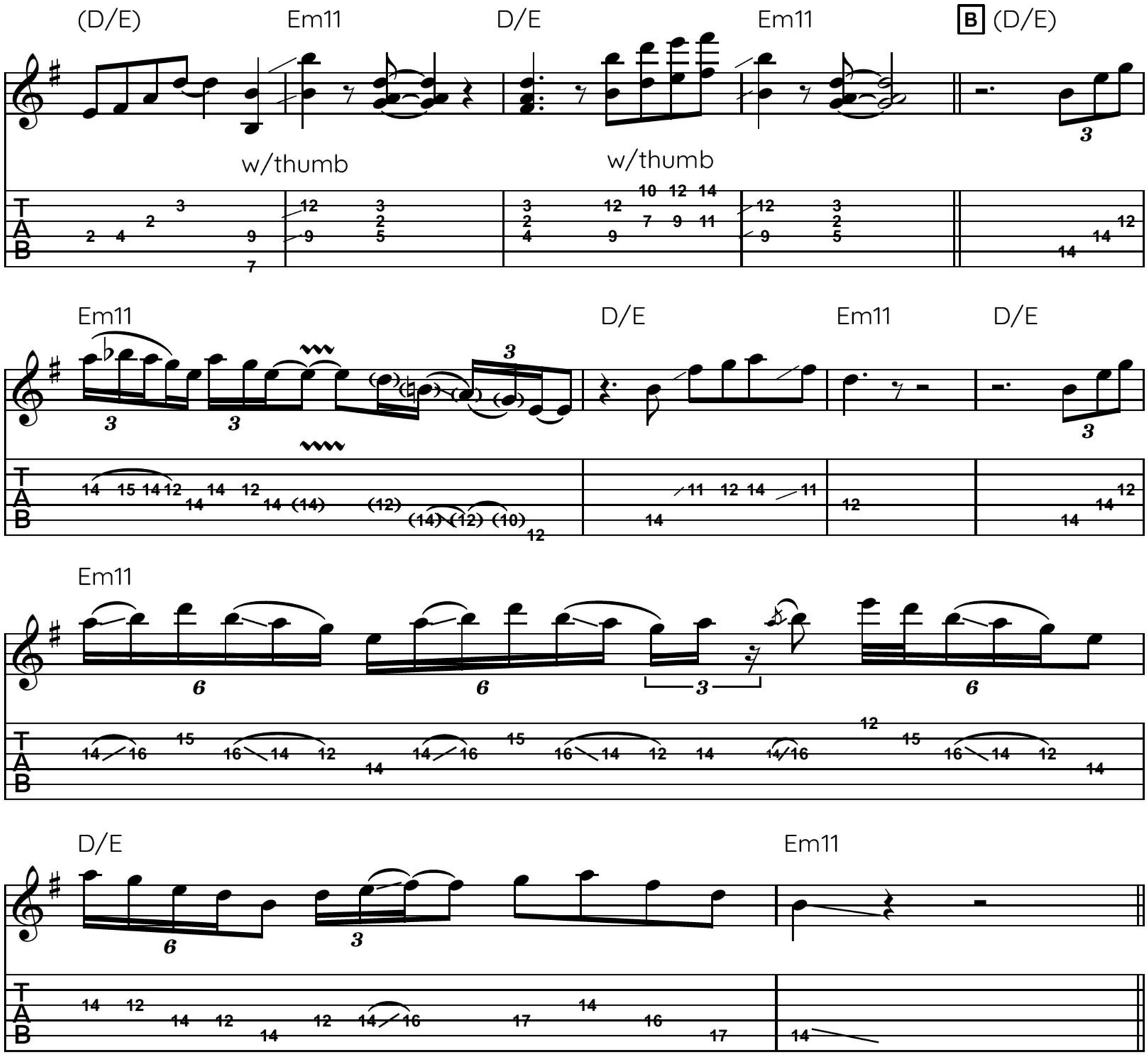
"George Washington was a family friend in Austin when I was little – wonderful man, a second father. I wrote the song on the road in an RV before *Musicom*. I'd stumbled into a St. Louis music store and bought this '30s resonator for $300. I recorded it with my Martin D-45 in my house on a 2-track. My dad got me that Martin when my equipment was stolen in the '80s. Steve Barber, who's a good guitarist, helped me with the sound by playing in my little booth while I adjusted console settings. Later, I just sat there by myself with a long cord and punched 'Play.' It was alright, sonically, but again, Bernie had to EQ it. The song is in drop-D tuning, but I hardly ever use alternate tunings. When I look at a fret, I hear that note on a string, it's so ingrained from standard tuning."

"Righteous," is an altered-blues instrumental that reached #8 and finds E.J. joined by bassist Beck and Wee Willie on harmonica.



"Steve's Boogie" reveals Johnson's country and Western-swing roots. His approach is beyond authentic in this uptempo cooker, yet presents an original expression. Hybrid picking technique, indigenous to the genre, coupled with judicious right-hand muting on open A notes and unmistakable Tele twang, supply the requisite snappy chicken-picked attack a la Albert Lee, James Burton, and Jerry Reed to the dyad-based main riff (measures 4-7). His solo in 9 sets the hayride aflame with fleet single-note lines largely of major-pentatonic character decorated with tasty string bends and slurs. He trades with Steve Henning in this section – indicated by the 4-bar rest in 13 – and closes with double-stop riffing and a spirited country cadence.





"East Wes" is an homage to an early influence, Wes Montgomery. The intro exploits a haunting two-chord modal-jazz figure composed of polychords Em11 and D/E (measures 1 and 2 in section A). Johnson delivers an elegant Wes-inspired theme in thumb-strummed octaves in 2-9, punctuated by chord jabs and imbued with a rich clean timbre that belies the fact that his Strat isn't an archtop jazz box. His solo (at B) is elegant and soulful. He plays jazz-colored blues lines in E minor, blending pentatonic, hexatonic, modal, and blues-scale sounds, and uses dynamics and ghost notes to deepen the improvisations' innate beauty.

The medium-fast rock shuffle redefines Texas traditions beyond ZZ Top with an irresistible heavy riff and two thematically linked solos (1:43, 2:36) replete with mutated blues-rock improvisation.

"I grew up on blues, blues-rock, and boogies, and wrote this in the *Musicom* period. It's unusual, being in F. To me, every key has a vibe, so I may write a rock song in F, like 'Zap.' Even though it's a wrist-burner for a bass player, it just feels right."

The haunting vocal number "Forty Mile Town" is often cited as E.J.'s best "mellow song" for its beauty and atmosphere, colored with percussion, synthesizer, and orchestral layered guitars (processed electrics, lap-steel, and backward parts).

"The title refers to smaller towns outside a larger city. A place like Galveston, near the ocean, where you get away and leave your troubles behind. The tremolo guitar part was on a borrowed PRS. The floating tremolo had that Chet Atkins Bigsby kind of sound, unlike my Hendrix Fender sound. I wanted something distinctly different."

"East Wes" reveals another facet of Eric's musicianship – his feeling for instrumental jazz. He cultivates a laid-back modal sound with suspended extended polychords and clean-tone approach akin to Wes Montgomery.

"Tip of my hat to Wes Montgomery. I love Wes' Verve/A&M pop period with the strings and all, as well as his straightahead Riverside jazz. *Down Here on the Ground* is one of my favorite records; it's perfect like *Sgt. Pepper* – commercial but perfectly done. I could listen to it my whole life and never get tired of it. That one and *Music of My Mind* by Stevie Wonder. I wrote "East Wes" for the album because I wanted something chill for the end."

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



Chris Collins, all smiles and ready to play his N-20.

CLASSICAL REHAB

Bolstering a Martin N-20

By Dan Erlewine

In the December issue we started resurrecting a '59 Precision Bass. A delay in the spray booth is holding up our progress, but we had something else show up that has proven interesting.

From 1968 until '92, Martin made two N-series classical guitars – the N-10 with Honduras mahogany back and sides, and the N-20 with Brazilian rosewood. I worked on an N-20 in the early '70s, but hadn't had one in the shop again until two months ago, when Chris Collins sent me his '69.

Chris tours the U.S. and Canada doing a John Denver tribute. Obviously, he loves Denver's music, but he also has a soft spot for Willie Nelson. So when a neighbor approached him wanting to know what her old guitar was worth, he was happy to take a look. Opening the case, he saw the N-20, beautiful except for its warped top. Hoping I'd have a solution, he sent a note.

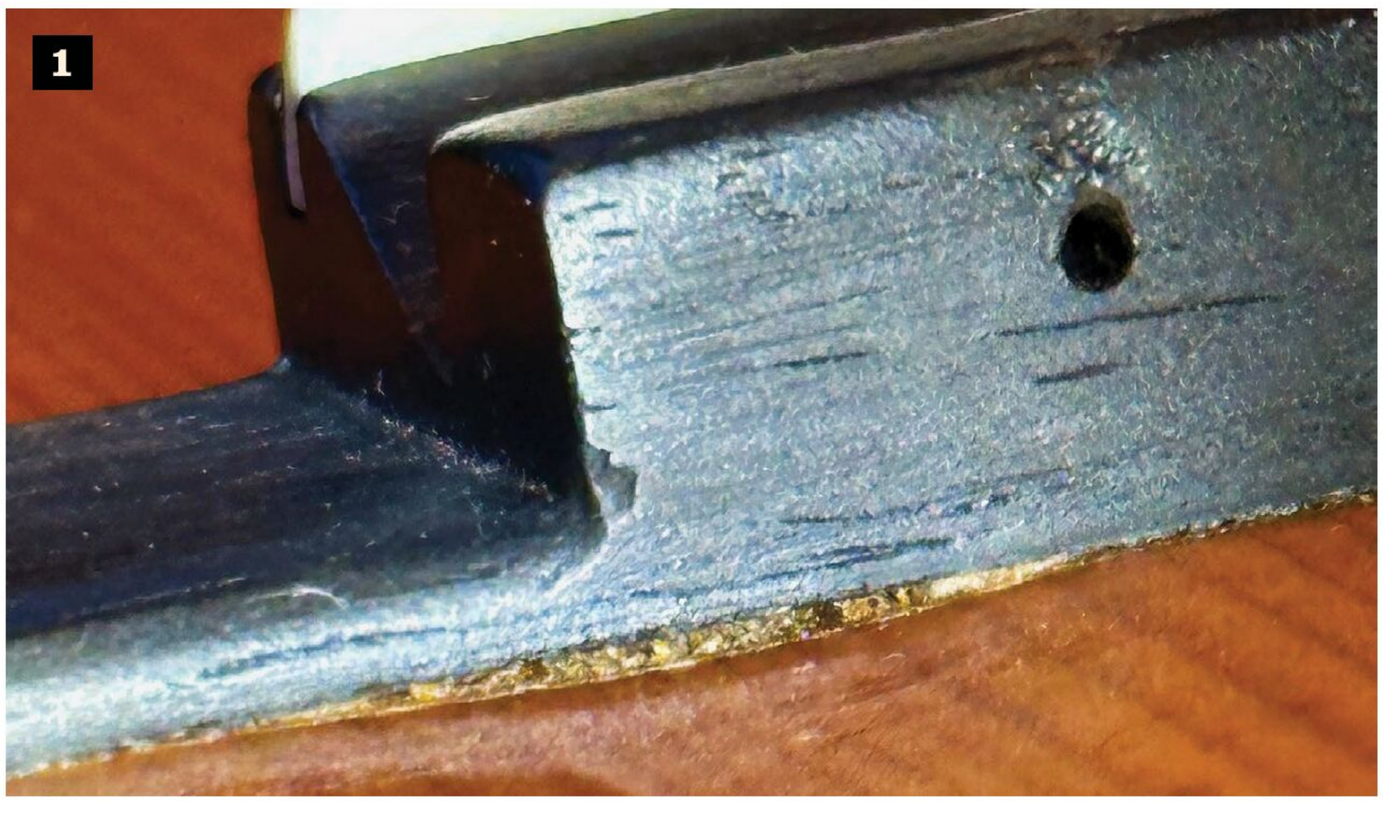
1) I had never seen a guitar top with waves like this. The bridge was also lifting on the back.

2) With the bridge removed, the top relaxed and flattened somewhat within a day. It makes me wonder if it was installed in unusually humid conditions, then, as the guitar dried, the top returned to where it had been in the day it was made. Strictly conjecture on my part, but if I pushed on the top, it moved a lot.

3) I called a guy who knows a *lot* about repairing N-20s – my cousin, Mark Erlewine (*VG*, November '17), who since 1976 has been the caretaker of Willie Nelson's "Trigger," the most famous one of all time. "I've worked on Trigger 50 times over the years, and I don't envy you fixing that top," Mark told me.

4) With the bridge gone, the top continued to flatten enough for me to make two lateral braces arched over the original fan braces. These held the top flat and strengthened it in the bridge area.

5) It was difficult to measure and calculate how to fit my new braces over the original seven. Ultimately, I put one in front of the bridge and one behind it. I installed one at a time, and each required all the clamps you





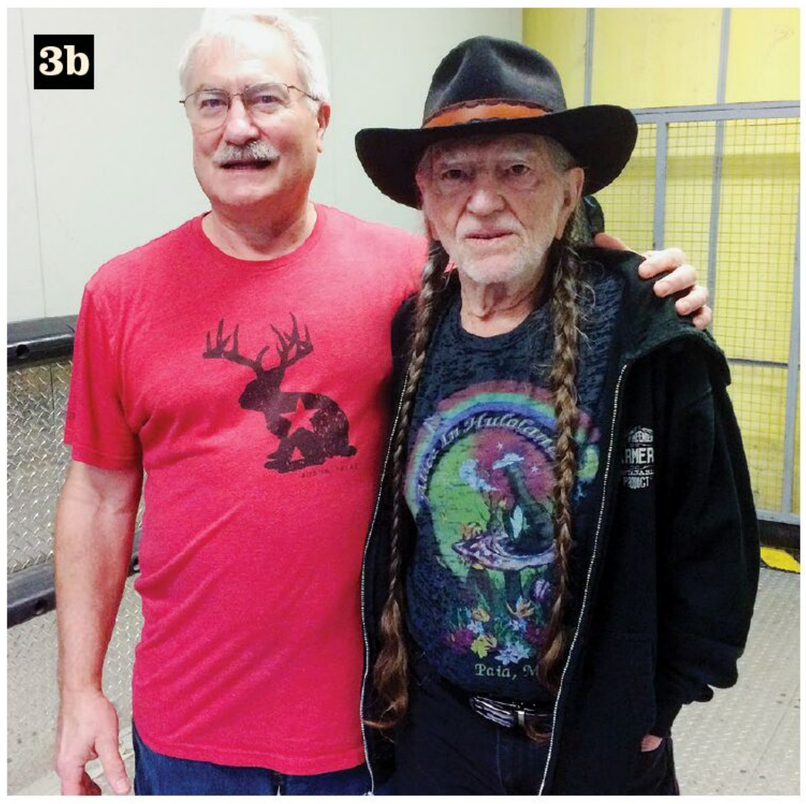
Photos: Kate Erlewine.

see here. I used low-tack paper on the top several times while laying out the braces, which worked well even if it wasn't the most beautiful piece of luthiery.

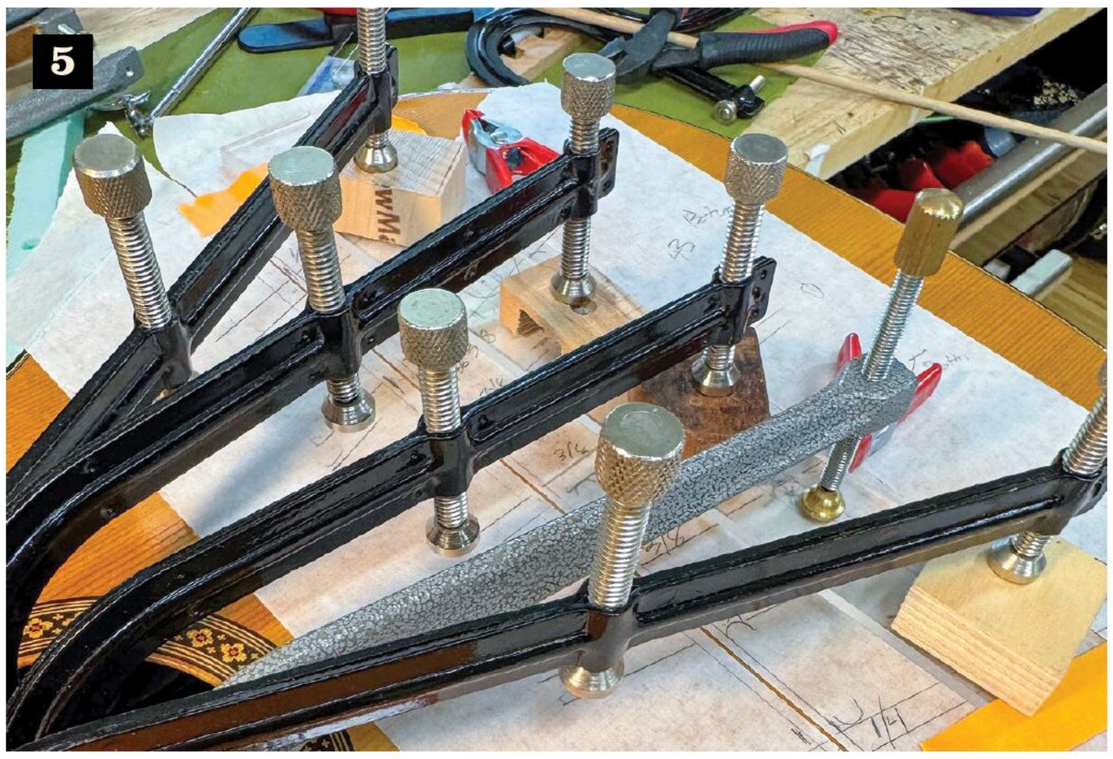
6) With the bridge reinstalled, the top looked almost perfect. For a week or so it went between quite flat and a little wavy before settling down.

7) The binding was pulling loose in two spots at the waist, so I made custom cauls to help glue them back in place. I placed low-tack double-stick tape on the finish, put





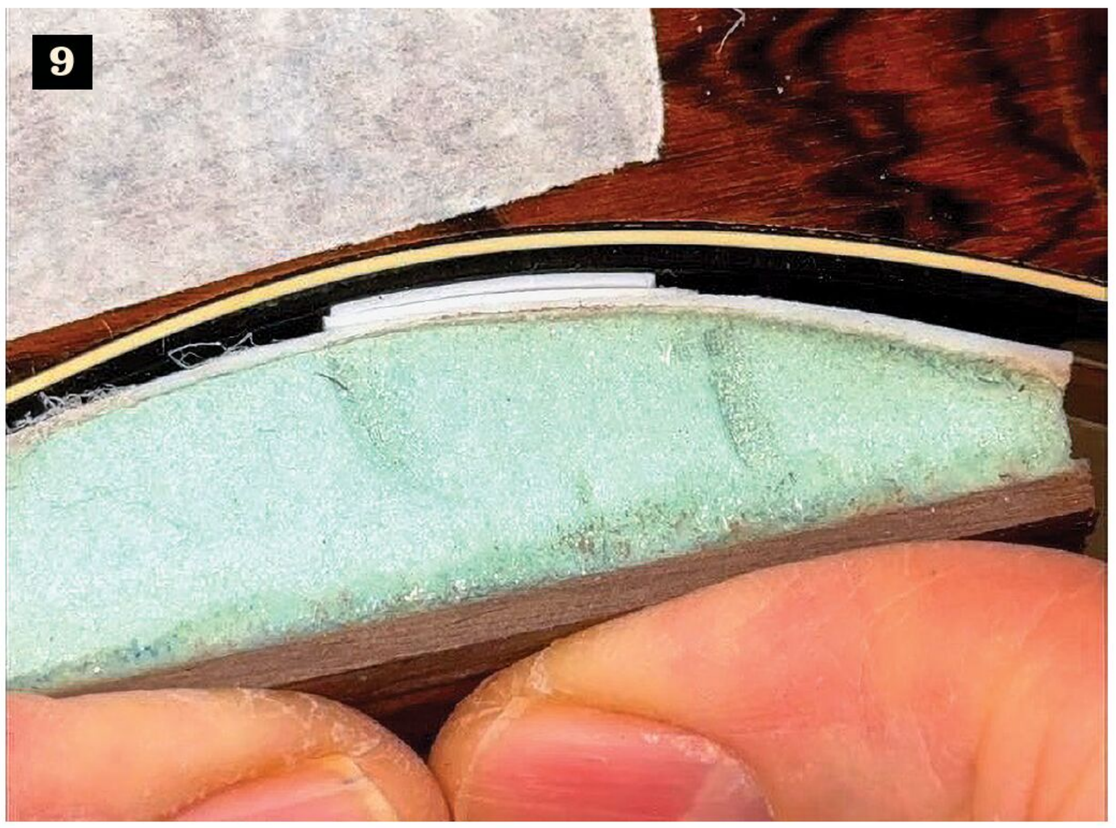












adhesive-backed sandpaper in the valley of the waist, cut two pieces of blue foam insulation, then sanded them to shape.

8) I glued wood on the flat side of the cauls, then attached a small layer of Teflon to the curved front.

9) The cauls worked perfectly to pull the loose bindings into place after I applied some glue.

10) I clamped one side at a time. Once it dried, the guitar was ready to go back to Chris.



To read more, go to VintageGuitar.com and search "Mark Erlewine's 40 Years with Willie Nelson's Trigger."

Dan Erlewine has been repairing guitars for more than 50 years. The author of three books, dozens of magazine articles, he has also produced instructional videotapes and DVDs on guitar repair. From 1986 through his retirement in late 2019, Erlewine was part of the R&D team, and company liaison for Stewart-MacDonald's Guitar Shop Supply. Today, he operates a repair shop in Athens, Ohio, as well as building replicas of the guitars he made for Albert King and Jerry Garcia in 1972. This column has appeared in *VG* since March, 2004. You can contact him at danerlewine@gmail.com.



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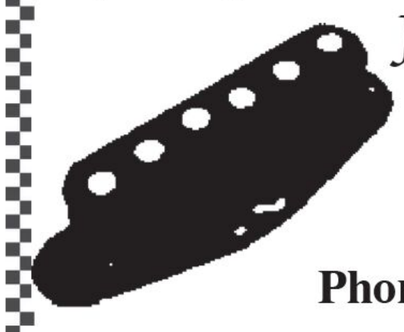
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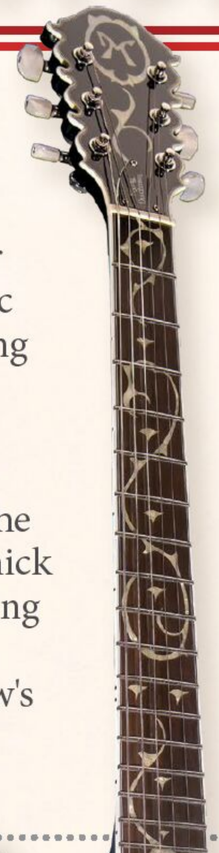


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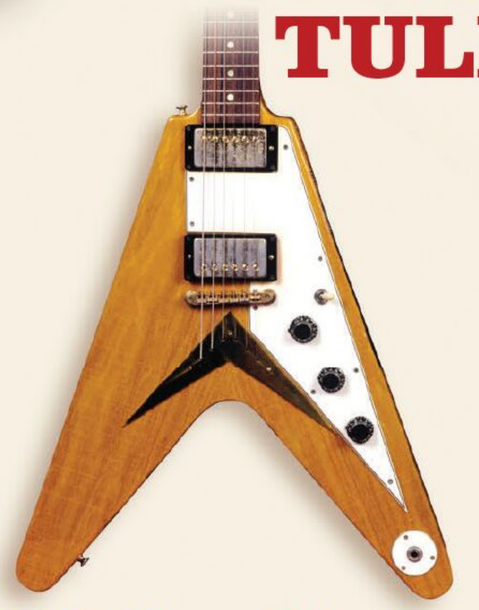
40 MOST VALUABLE GUITARS

Vintage Guitar is marking 40 years of publication, starting with an examination of guitars that, thanks to certain players, songs, and the laws of supply and demand, have become exceedingly collectible. Using data accumulated in the research for *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide 2026*, we offer this look at the 40 most valuable production guitars.

BY RAM TULI









2 Pre-War Martin Style 45 ($500,000-$850,000)

Style 45 guitars represent the pinnacle of pre-war acoustic craftsmanship from Martin, introduced through the 1920s and '30s as the brand's most-opulent offerings. Production was limited due to the Depression economy and material shortages during World War II. Only 91 D-45 dreadnoughts were made from 1933–'42, with even fewer OM-45 (Orchestra Model) variants. The D-45 was the king of vintage guitars until it was dethroned by the Explorer in 2015.

3 1958-'60 Gibson Les Paul Standard (sunburst, highly figured) ($450,000 -$850,000)

Affectionately known as the "'Burst," this is the "Holy Grail" of electric guitars, revered for its tonal magic and visual splendor. Introduced in mid 1958 as a replacement for the goldtop Les Paul, it featured a carved maple top with a translucent cherry sunburst finish. Production was low – only about 1,700 were made. Plain tops or late-1960 models with thinner necks typically sell for a bit less ($250,000-$400,000).

4 1958-'59 Gibson Flying V ($500,000-$750,000)

Like its futuristic cousin below, the Flying V's production was minuscule. Only 81 shipped in '58, followed by 17 more in '59. To say it (along with the Explorer) flopped, commercially, would be an understatement. Unlike the Explorer, though, the V was revived in the '60s with a mahogany body and evolved into a rock staple. Models sold in the late '60s sell for about 1/10 of the original, but that's still more than most guitars of the era.

1 1958-'59 GIBSON EXPLORER ($1,000,000-$1,350,000)

The Explorer, introduced in 1958, is one of the rarest and most iconic solidbody guitars ever produced. Its radical "korina" (African limba) body, a 22-fret ebony fretboard, asymmetric "hockey stick" headstock, and two PAF humbucking pickups proved unpopular when introduced in 1958; only 19 were shipped, followed by three more in '59. In 63, a small number were assembled with leftover bodies and newer hardware. Though just as rare, they sell for about half the price.







5 1948-'56 Bigsby
($250,000-$450,000)

Paul Bigsby pioneered the modern electric guitar. Starting with a 1947 prototype for Merle Travis, Bigsby's "Standard" Spanish-neck electrics had hand-wound pickups (often blade-style), birdseye-maple bodies (or walnut/mahogany variants), six-on-a-side headstocks, and semi-hollow construction. Only about 50 were built to order for stars like Travis, Butterball Paige, and Grady Martin.

7 Pre-War Martin Style 28
($150,000-$350,000)

Style 28 guitars epitomize the workhorse pre-war acoustics – elegant, yet understated. Introduced in the late '20s, Style 28 models (D-28, OM-28, 000-28) offered professional-grade projection and balance without the extravagant aesthetic touches of the 45 series. The D-28, which debuted in '31, revolutionized dreadnoughts with its forward-shifted X-bracing (evolving to advanced/rear X by '38) and V-neck profile. Production surged after the 1934 14-fret shift, but Depression/WWII limits kept totals low (fewer than 1,000 prior to the war). From 1930-'33, fewer than 200 OM-28s were made.

9 1950 Fender Broadcaster
($150,000-$250,000)

Introduced in October, 1950, the Broadcaster was the first production solidbody Spanish-style electric guitar with a brand name. Between 550 and 600 were made before the name was changed due to a trademark conflict with Gretsch. Many '51 Broadcasters shipped with the model's name clipped off the headstock label. These are affectionately known as "No Casters," and they sell for $85,000 to $125,000.

10 1958 Rickenbacker Model 325
($100,000-$250,000)

Part of Rickenbacker's new Capri series, this model marked the company's entry into semi-hollowbody electrics. Designed by German luthier Roger Rossmeisl, the compact, short-scale instrument had a maple body (initially 2" deep, slimmed to 1.5" by '59), maple neck, rosewood fretboard with dot inlays, three "Toaster Top" single-coil pickups, a white pickguard, and a Kaufmann vibrato tailpiece. Early prototypes stood out with a solid top (no sound hole), giving a solidbody-like appearance and brighter tone – ideal for the emerging Mersey beat. Total 325 production in '58 was minuscule – 30 to 40 units, with only the first six or so boasting the solid-top feature like John Lennon's. Examples with f holes are worth much less, $40,000 to $50,000.

6 1954 FENDER STRATOCASTER
($250,000-$350,000)

The Stratocaster revolutionized electric guitars with its contoured double-cutaway body, "synchronized tremolo" bridge, three single-coil pickups, and versatile five-way switching. The first production Strats (April/May/June) differ noticeably from those built in later '54, and command the highest prices.



1958 Rickenbacker Model 335: Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

8 1956-'57 LES PAUL MODEL (GOLDTOP)
($150,000-$250,000)

Introduced in 1952, the Gibson Les Paul Model – called "goldtop" for its signature metallic gold finish – laid the foundation for the Les Paul legend. This single-cut solidbody had a carved maple top over a mahogany body, one-piece mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard with trapezoid inlays, and dual P-90 pickups. By '55, Gibson refined it with the ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge and stop tailpiece for better intonation and sustain, replacing the wraparound design. The '57 transition to humbucking PAF pickups marked a sonic leap. Production peaked at fewer than 1,700 annually by '56. The goldtop era ended in '58 with the sunburst finish. Goldtops from '55 with P-90s and ABR-1 bridges sell for $80,000 to $100,000.



15 1956-'62 GRETSCH WHITE PENGUIN
($150,000-$175,000)

The Gretsch White Penguin was a dazzling solidbody representing the zenith of '50s luxury. Essentially a Duo Jet given special dress, no more than 40 single-cut versions were made from through '61 and perhaps 8-10 double-cuts in '62.



12 1950s Mary Kaye and Custom-Color Strats
($100,000-$200,000)

Fender's custom-color and "Mary Kaye" Strats represent the pinnacle of '50s personalization, turning the utilitarian Strat into a visual statement. Custom colors emerged in the mid '50s for an upcharge, allowing players to take the stage with a Strat painted to look like a car. These were rare (less than 10 percent of production). The Mary Kaye finish, a translucent white with gold hardware, became synonymous with luxury. Only 37 left the factory between 1956 and '64.

Through 1963, custom-color Strats remained rare. For every 25 sunbursts that left the factory, one might be custom-color, and most of those were White, Black, or Fiesta Red. For every 25 custom-color Strats, *one* might be Sonic Blue or Seafoam Green.

13 1960-'62 Rare-Color Stratocasters
($75,000-$200,000)

14 1934 Martin D-18 "Shade Top"
($140,000-180,000)

Martin Style 18 guitars were the "everyman's" pre-war acoustic. Unpretentious, yet potent, with simple black-bound tops, dot inlays, ebony bridges, and no frills beyond a three-stripe rosette. Introduced in the 1850s, the Style 18 evolved into dreadnought icons like the D-18 with Adirondack spruce tops, mahogany back/sides, forward-shifted X-bracing, and V-neck profiles. The D-18's 1934 14-fret redesign and rare optional "Shade Top" marked the Golden Era, with production at fewer than 400 annually amid Depression constraints. The more common D-18s with natural tops sell for $75,000 to $125,000.

16 1959 Gibson ES-335N
($150,000-$175,000)

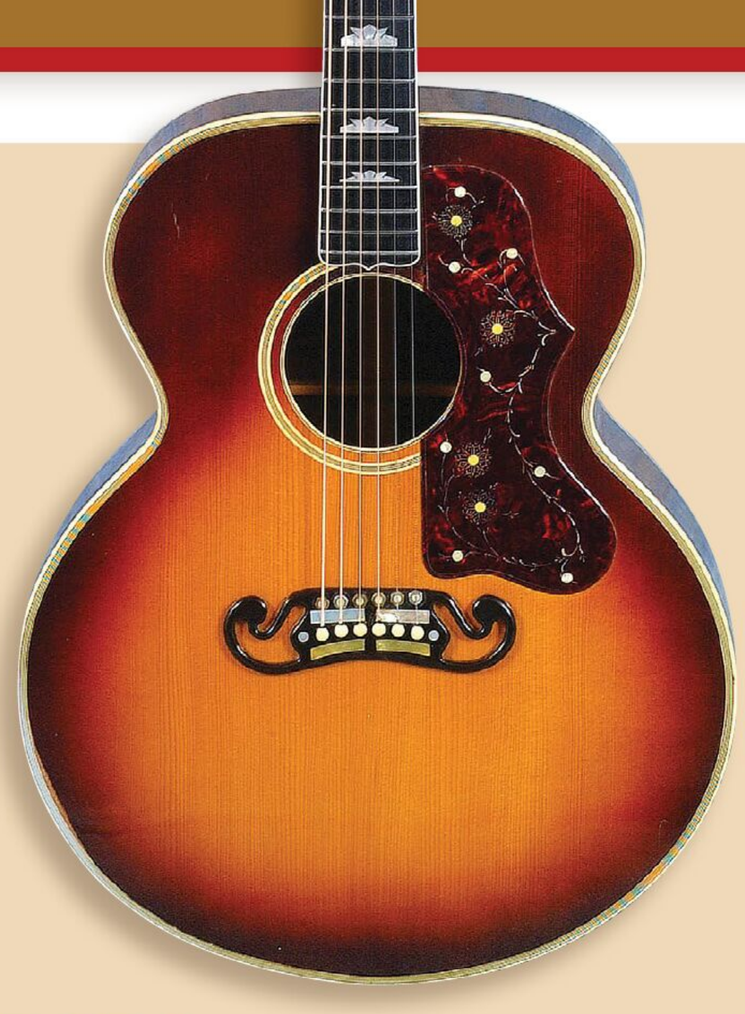
The ES-335 revolutionized semi-hollowbody electrics with its innovative design when launched in 1958. The natural finish first offered in '59 showcased the figuring of its maple top and stop tail. Today, it commands the highest price thanks to a thicker top and better neck angle. Cherry Red or sunburst 335s from '59 are soaring in value, bringing $100,000 to $125,000.

11 1958-'61 GIBSON EDS-1275 DOUBLE 12
($150,000-$200,000)

The EDS-1275 "Double 12" is one of the most iconic and visually striking guitars in rock history. Introduced in '58 as a custom-order semi-hollow, it is estimated that no more than 52 shipped from 1958-'61. By '62, the EDS-1275 transitioned to a solid SG-style body (as played by Jimmy Page), boosting production through '67, but still fewer than 110 were made; those sell for $40,000 to $50,000.







17 1938-'42 GIBSON SUPER JUMBO

($125,000-$175,000)

The Super Jumbo (SJ-200, later J-200) was the "King of the Flat-Tops" when it debuted in '38 as Gibson's response to Martin's dominance in large-body acoustics. With a massive 17" lower bout (wider than any Martin dreadnought), $4^{7}/_{8}$" depth, Adirondack spruce top with X-bracing, Brazilian rosewood back/sides (mahogany by 1941), ebony fretboard (rosewood after 1940) with pearl crown inlays, mustache bridge with individual saddles, multi-bound body/headstock, and fire-stripe pickguard. This jumbo powerhouse delivered unmatched volume and bass response, ideal for cowboy singers like Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Production was low; only 96 shipped prior to WWII.

18 1835 Martin Stauffer

($145,000-$165,000)

The 1835 Stauffer was one of the earliest instruments from C.F. Martin's American workshop – representing the dawn of the modern guitar in the United States. It blended Viennese elegance with emerging Spanish influences. Christian Frederick Martin, fresh from his apprenticeship under Johann Georg Stauffer, arrived in New York in 1833 and partnered with Schatz in Philadelphia. Under the brief "Martin & Schatz" banner (1835–'36), they produced a handful of these parlor-sized guitars.

20 Pre-War Martin Style 42s

($90,000-$150,000)

Martin Style 42 guitars made prior to WWII occupy a sweet spot in the pre-war hierarchy – opulent yet understated compared to Style 45. Production was extremely low – fewer than 113 000-42s, two OM-42s, and one "transitional" 000-42 in '34.

21 1990-'94 D'Aquisto Archtops

($75,000-$125,000)

James L. "Jimmy" D'Aquisto's late-period archtops (1990-'94) represent the culmination of his innovative genius, pushing boundaries with larger bodies, elliptical soundholes, and minimalist designs that prioritized tonal clarity over ornamentation. These carved masterpieces, built in his Huntington, New York, workshop, have Adirondack spruce tops, highly figured flamed maple backs/sides/necks, ebony fretboards/bridges/tailpieces, and custom Accutone adjustable bridges for precise intonation. Fewer than 100 were made in that span before D'Aquisto's death in '95.

22 2017 Martin D-200 Deluxe

($95,000-$120,000)

Martin's ultra-luxury tribute to its serial number 2,000,000, the D-200 Deluxe is a Style 45 dreadnought reimagined as a "watchmaker's guitar." It has a figured Engelmann spruce top and Brazilian rosewood back/sides/head plate. Only 50 were made.



1830s Martin Stauffer: Gruhn Guitars.

19 1957-'61 LES PAUL CUSTOM

($100,000-$150,000)

The 1957-'61 Gibson Les Paul Custom, a.k.a. "Black Beauty," is the pinnacle of Gibson's pre-SG Les Paul lineup, blending lavish details with professional-grade tone. Introduced in '54 as a "fancier" Les Paul, it had a solid mahogany body and one-piece mahogany neck, multi-ply binding (including the headstock), an ebony fretboard with mother-of-pearl block inlays, gold hardware, and ABR-1 Tune-O-Matic bridge. This version sells for $35,000-$50,000. In '57, it upgraded to three gold PAFs, but a rare two-pickup variant (fewer than 200 units) retained the classic dual-humbucker layout.



27 1951-'54 "BLACKGUARD" TELECASTER

($60,000-$80,000)

All hail the "blackguard." Built from lightweight swamp ash and finished in a translucent butterscotch blond that ages into deep honey and amber, they wear a single-ply glossy black phenolic pickguard that contrasts dramatically with the pale body. The biting single-coil pickups, a crude three-saddle brass "ashtray" bridge, and through-body stringing deliver that unmistakable glassy twang and snarl that define early country, blues, and rock and roll. Fewer than 10,000 blackguards were made, and fewer than half survive in original condition today.





24 1990s Monteleone Eclipse

($80,000-$100,000)

The Monteleone Eclipse archtop, crafted by John Monteleone in his New York workshop, emerged in the '90s as a pinnacle of modern archtop design, blending traditional New York-school aesthetics with innovative ergonomics for jazz and fusion players. Inspired by the golden era of D'Angelico and D'Aquisto, the Eclipse featured a carved Adirondack spruce top with multi-layered binding, highly figured maple back/sides/neck, ebony fretboard with custom pearl inlays (block or split-diamond), adjustable floating bridge, and options for custom pickups in a hollow or semi-hollow body. Debuting in '95 amid Monteleone's rising fame, the Eclipse was a custom-order. Fewer than 30 were built.

25 1950s Custom-Color Telecasters

($65,000-$85,000)

When's the last time you saw a custom-color Telecaster made before 1960? A honky-tonk workhorse, the Tele didn't need to look pretentious. Very few left the factory looking anything but humble. Rarer still is a custom-color Esquire from the era. If someone didn't opt for the $40 pickup, would they really pay an extra five percent to have it painted red?

26 1894-1902 Gibson Orville Gibson

($60,000-$85,000)

Hand-carved by Orville H. Gibson in his one-man shop in Kalamazoo before the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Mfg. Co. was incorporated in 1902, only 300 to 350 were been made before 1902, and fewer than 200 are known to survive today.

28 1963 Gibson Firebird III in Frost Blue

($60,000-$80,000)

The '63 Firebird III was part of the radical "reverse" Firebird series, marking Gibson's boldest attempt to rival Fender's offset designs, with a neck-through mahogany body with a distinctive reversed headstock and lower horn for balance, two mini-humbuckers, a bound rosewood fretboard with dot inlays, short Maestro Vibrola tailpiece, and 22 frets on a 24.75" scale. Optional Duco finishes were available and someone opting for the unmanly Frost Blue (or any pastel color) has a Firebird worth as much as a blackguard Tele.



23 1936-'40 GIBSON ADVANCED JUMBO

($95,000-$115,000)

The Advanced Jumbo was Gibson's answer to Martin's dreadnought during the Great Depression. Launched in the spring of '36 as the flagship flat-top, it had the largest round-shoulder body Gibson had ever built (16 7/8"), scalloped/ forward-shifted Adirondack spruce bracing, a dramatic red-to-yellow "pumpkin" sunburst, fire-stripe pickguard, and the first dozen or so had ultra-rare Brazilian rosewood back and sides (changed to mahogany for cost). The most luxurious flat-top money could buy, only 325 were made before wartime material shortages killed the model. Today, with fewer than 200 are believed to survive.

Monteleone Eclipse: Carter Vintage Guitars.



29 1959 Gibson ES-355 Stoptail ($60,000-$75,000)

Introduced as the flagship of Gibson's semi-hollow lineup, it elevated the ES-335 platform with deluxe appointments and innovative electronics. The "TDSV" designation signifies Thinline Double pickup, Stereo output, and Varitone (six-position rotary switch for tonal filtering) circuit borrowed from the 345. While most 355s shipped with Bigsby vibrato and stereo wiring, the factory stoptail variant (ABR-1 with stopbar, no Vibrola) was an ultra-rare special order, with perhaps 50 made in '59.

30 1923-'26 Loar-Signed Gibson L-5 ($60,000-$75,000)

Debuting as the world's first dedicated jazz archtop, the L-5 revolutionized guitar design under Lloyd Loar's visionary acoustic engineering, with a carved Adirondack spruce top with violin-style f-shaped sound holes (a first for fretted instruments), carved birch or maple back/sides (there are a few early maple rarities), elevated ebony fretboard with pearl dot inlays (20 frets, pointed end), snakehead headstock with slanted "The Gibson" script and flowerpot inlay, and optional Virzi Tone Producer (a suspended spruce disc fitted to fewer than 12 of the Loar-signed batch). Prototypes began shipping in mid '23 before as many as 300 shipped in '24 – Loar's last year at Gibson. All told, he signed fewer than 35 examples, the vast majority in '24.

31 1951 Esquire ($50,000-$65,000)

Fender began selling a single-pickup version of the Broadcaster right away. Isn't an Esquire pretty much the same as a Telecaster? Hell, no! Early Esquires are absolute beasts. Imagine how good your blackguard would sound if it didn't have any tone filtering between jack and amp, or alteration of the magnetic field from a second pickup.

34 1964 Gibson Firebird VII in Custom Colors ($45,000-$60,000)

Top tier of the short-lived "reverse" Firebird series, the Firebird VII epitomized Gibson's ambitious 1963 redesign, blending neck-through mahogany construction with deluxe features. Debuting in '63, when fewer than 20 shipped, production peaked the following year at fewer than 173; all told, fewer than 250 reverse VIIs were made through '65. Less than 10 percent of them were ordered in optional DuPont Duco custom colors, perhaps due to the $15 upcharge.



32 1955 GRETSCH WHITE FALCON ($50,000-$65,000)

Gretsch's flagship archtop launched in 1955, debuting as a dazzling showpiece conceived by sales rep Jimmie Webster for the '54 NAMM show, then fast-tracked into production after overwhelming demand, it boasted a semi-hollow laminated maple body (17" lower bout, 2 3/4" deep single-cut), carved spruce top with black/white/gold sparkle binding, ebony fretboard with engraved pearl block inlays, gold-plated hardware, raised pickguard, and two exposed DeArmond Dynasonic single-coils. The mono wiring and hand-applied 24k goldleaf-painted binding (replaced by plastic in '58) distinguished the "first edition" as the ultimate luxury archtop. Fewer than 70 shipped in '55.



33 1947-'59 D'ANGELICO NEW YORKER ($50,000-$60,000)

John D'Angelico's magnum opus was the "king of archtops" when it debuted in the late '30s as his flagship 18" f-hole jazz guitar. A hand-built masterpiece that bettered Gibson's L-5 blueprint with an unparalleled blend of opulence and tone tailored for big-band rhythm sections and soloists like Eddie Lang and Django Reinhardt devotees. Crafted in his tiny Greenwich Village workshop, it had a carved Adirondack spruce top with multi-ply ivoroid binding (quadruple on the body and headstock), highly figured flamed maple back/sides, ebony fretboard with split-block pearl inlays, a distinctive stair-step tailpiece (introduced in '43), and gold-plated hardware including an art-deco headstock inlay evoking New York's skyline. By '47, D'Angelico's production focused on the New Yorker and smaller (17") Excel, with output capped at fewer than 30 units per year.



38 2016 PRS SUPER EAGLE
($25,000-$40,000)

The PRS Private Stock Super Eagle (a.k.a. Super Eagle I) is an ultra-limited semi-hollowbody electric born from a collaboration between Paul Reed Smith and John Mayer. Designed for Mayer's use with Dead & Company, it's essentially a replica of his personal guitar at the time, built for Grateful Dead-inspired tones with modern versatility. Only 100 were made, making it one of the rarest modern PRS production runs.



35 1913-'39 Martin 00-44 Soloist / Olcott-Bickford Artist
($45,000-$60,000)

The Martin 00-44 Soloist, also known as the Olcott-Bickford Artist model (*VG*, July '22), was a bespoke parlor-sized (00 body) guitar created for pioneering classical guitarist and composer Vahdah Olcott-Bickford (1885-1980), who sought the tone woods of Martin's Style 45 series. Introduced in 1913 as Martin's first "signature" line, it reflected Olcott-Bickford's preference for plain aesthetics suited to classical gut-string play. Production was minuscule – only 32 Style 44 guitars were made across all sizes (17 in 0-size, six in 00 from '13 to '28, two gut-string 00 in '38, and scattered 000-44/2-44 variants through '39) – far rarer than standard OMs, with 00-44s comprising up to eight units, fewer than five of which are known to exist today.

36 1949 Stromberg Master 400 Cutaway
($40,000-$60,000)

One of the rarest and most-coveted archtops ever produced, the Master 400 emerged from the Boston workshop of Swedish-immigrant luthier Elmer Stromberg (1875–1955). An 18½" f-hole masterpiece designed for orchestral rhythm and big-band jazz, it has a carved Adirondack spruce top with a single diagonal "1 brace" (a transverse tone bar from upper to lower bout introduced circa 1940 for enhanced projection and sustain), flamed-maple back/sides in natural blond nitro finish to highlight its figuring, multi-ply ivoroid binding, ebony fretboard with segmented pearl block inlays, adjustable rosewood bridge, and engraved gold-plated "Y" tailpiece on a 25.5" scale. It prioritized functional elegance over flash. Production was meek – fewer than 150 Strombergs were made: fewer than 30 Master 400 examples, of which fewer than 10 had cutaways. From 1949 through '53, Stromberg made between five and eight guitars amid post-war material shifts.

37 1959 Fender Telecaster Custom
($35,000-$45,000)

Introduced in late '59 as an upscale evolution of the standard Tele, the Custom blended the Tele's twangy workhorse ethos with premium features including a double-bound alder body, three-ply "green guard," and slab rosewood fretboard. The most beautiful Telecaster ever made, custom colors are today a bit more expensive, even if sunburst pops best.

39 1965-'69 Rickenbacker Model 360/12 OS
($25,000-$35,000)

The 1965-'69 Rickenbacker 360/12 OS (Old Style) in Fireglo is the quintessentially jangly 12-string electric guitar that defined the sound of '60s rock. Debuting in '63, this semi-hollow became an instant icon when George Harrison wielded the second one made on The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*. After those Beatlemaniacs left the movie, many of them ordered one, but what arrived was the retooled New Style 360/12. You could special-order the OS until late '68, with the final Fireglo example rolling off the line that December. If you have one, someone special ordered it. It's very rare. Even the NS models are scarce.



40 1954-'55 GRETSCH CHET ATKINS HOLLOW BODY
($20,000-$25,000)

The 1954-'55 Gretsch Chet Atkins Hollow Body (Model 6120) marked the debut of one of the most influential semi-hollow electrics in guitar history. Developed in close collaboration with Nashville virtuoso Chet Atkins, it premiered as a premium country instrument but quickly became a rockabilly staple. This era's "Western" variants – adorned with "cows and cactus" motifs – capture the raw, transitional magic of Gretsch's Brooklyn factory, blending jazz-archtop elegance with innovative features. Production was limited to a few hundred units across the years (three batches in '55), it's the rarest and most-collectible 6120. **VG**

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

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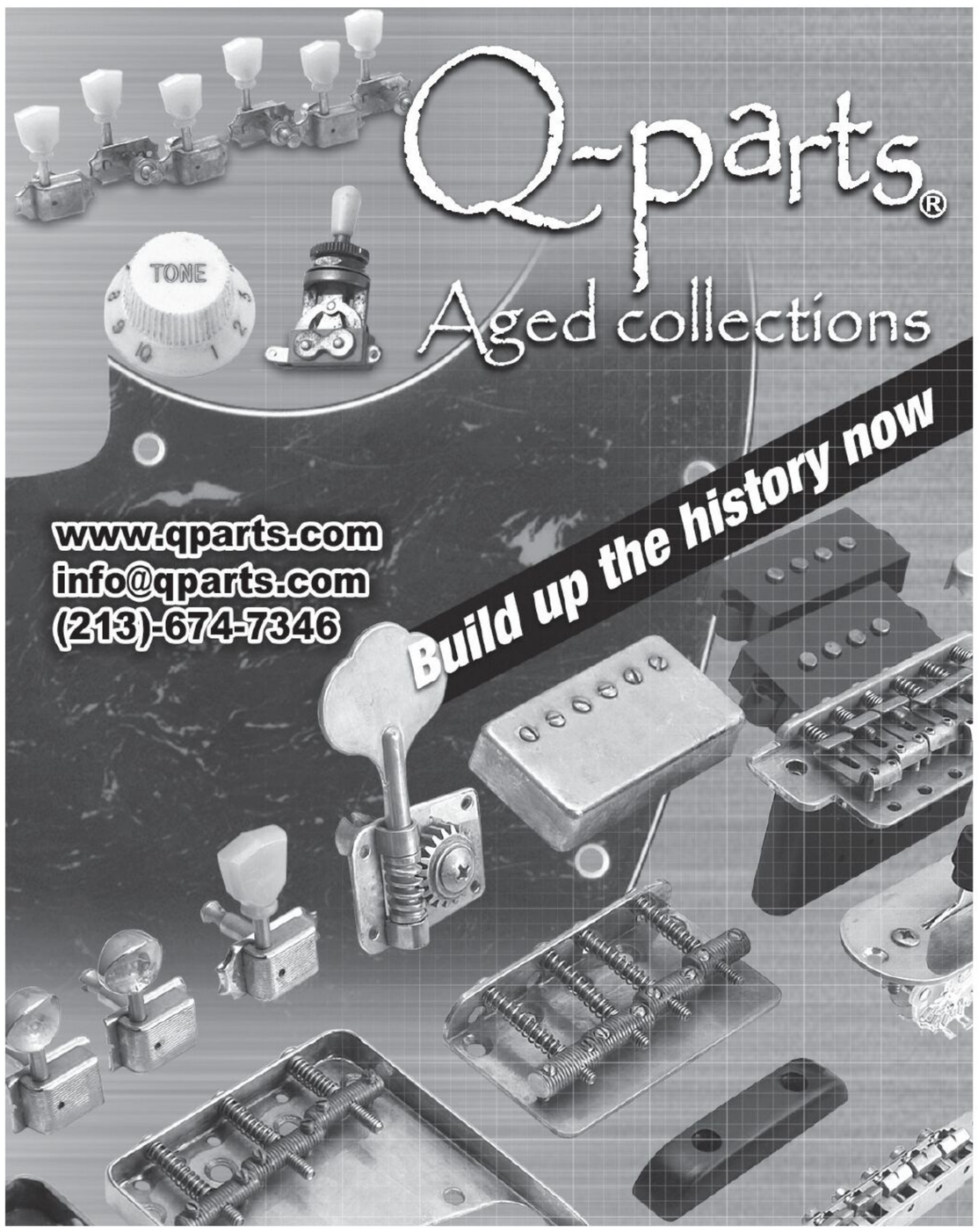


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Tinsley Ellis

Mississippi Muse

BY WARD MEEKER

PHOTOS BY LARRY LEAKE

For nearly 50 years, Florida-born Tinsley Ellis has been an electric-blues/rock specialist, running his guitars through a Marshall or his '67 Super Reverb. But his new album, *Labor of Love*, is the second on which he has dropped the flat pick and reached for his '37 National Style O and '69 Martin D-35.

The work digs deep into stylistic nuances of acoustic blues, inspired by a trip to Bentonia, Mississippi, where he was immersed in camaraderie and the local music; from spirituals and Hill Country to Delta blues via John Lee Hooker, Fred McDowell, Skip James, Tommy Johnson, R.L .Burnside, and Son House's "Clarksdale tuning," he poured it all into the new songs. The amalgam meant employing six open tunings



Ellis' 1937 National Style O is a well-cared-for road (and studio) dog.

One of three guitars used on *Labor of Love*, Ellis keeps his '69 D-35 tuned to open D.

and a few more instruments; along with the Style O and D-35, he relied on a '72 D-12-20 and – for the first time in his career – a mandolin. We asked him about it, but first dug into his musical beginnings.

You saw The Beatles on Ed Sullivan.

Yes, but there was music I loved before that night – the Ventures and Beach Boys – but the Beatles tied it together and held the door open for all those great bands that walked in right behind them. They ran the place until Jimi Hendrix reclaimed the crown for us guitar players.

Was there a certain song or album that made you want to play?

Well, *all* of the Beatles' songs. If George Harrison hadn't been in the Beatles, he would've been a guitar god like Clapton, but he was overshadowed by Lennon and McCartney's songwriting. Whenever someone tells me they don't think Harrison is a good player, I ask them to play the riff in "Help" (laughs). He took what Chet Atkins did and built on it. Slightly after, the Yardbirds came out, then Cream and Hendrix. So I was *way* onboard in my impressionable years, and I wanted to play the instruments they played, so I've always been a Fender and Gibson guy. I've never gotten away from those. Marshalls, too. I don't have a Marshall at the moment, but I've had one throughout my career.

What was your main amp?

A reissue 50-watt plexi. It was great and I constantly kick myself for selling it, but I hadn't used it in so long and a guy I know really wanted it.

What was your first guitar?

After seeing the Beatles, I *begged* my parents for one. They said, "We'll rent an acoustic for you." They hoped it was just a phase I was going through, but here I am





Stevie Vaughan with The Alley Cats in 1979 (left), playing Ellis' '59 Strat through his '67 Super Reverb. That's Preston Hubbard on bass and Chris "Whipper" Layton on drums. Vaughan with Ellis that night.

60-plus years later still in that phase (laughs). They rented it under the condition that I take lessons every week; I took five then released myself on my own recognizance and was self-taught (laughs).

What was your first electric?

It came out of the Sears catalog with a matching amplifier. I can't remember the brand, probably a Silvertone, but I *can* tell you that when I turned the amplifier all the way up, it gave that "Psychotic Reaction" guitar sound (laughs). I wish I still had that amp; it would be a great to record with.

What was your first step up?

I graduated up to a – it hurts to even say it – a Univox Les Paul copy (laughs), and then I worked all summer washing dishes and bought a brand new '72 Les Paul Deluxe at Hollywood Music, in my hometown. That was a hell of a guitar. In addition to being the *heaviest* guitar on Earth, it's the best rhythm guitar I've ever played.

Being a Strat/345 guy, some might be surprised your first guitars were Les Pauls.

Growing up in the Southeast, the Allman Brothers were our "local" band. I never got to see them with Duane, but I saw the other configurations and got to sit in with Dickey [Betts] and Gregg, and later, Warren Haynes and Derek Trucks.

There's a huge ABB connection to your sound...

Yeah, I played through a silverface Twin Reverb until the summer of '79, when I got my '67 Super Reverb from the Allman's harmonica player, Thom Doucette. He had two and told me that Duane and Dickey played through this one on Allman Brothers albums and gigs.

Derek used it when he was 14 and played slide on two songs – "Panhead" and "Wanted Man" – from my *Storm Warning* album in 1994, which is one of his first recordings. I remember he came in, turned the amp to 10 and just like that – *mojo*. Warren played through it, Doc Watson played through it, James Cotton played through it. It's got a *lot* of history and does it all.

Does it have the original speaker?

Oh, no (laughs)! When an amp is played hundreds of nights over decades, nothing lasts that long. A lot of parts have been replaced. Anytime I replace the speaker, though, I get a version of the original.

It looks like a road dog.

It lived in a road case for 30 years, getting dragged it all over tarnation. The grillecloth has, miraculously, not been completely torn.

You watched Stevie Ray Vaughan play through it at one of your gigs...

Yeah. In the '70s, Stevie played Atlanta quite a bit when he and Lou Ann Barton were Double Trouble, with Jack Newhouse on bass. One night in the fall of '79, Stevie walked into the Downtown Café, where my band, the Alley Cats, had a gig every Monday. My bass player, Preston Hubbard, had been in Roomful of Blues and was about to join the Fabulous Thunderbirds, so he knew Stevie from playing in Austin, and he told me, "This kid is incredible." Sure enough, he stepped onstage and I handed him the '59 Strat I had *just* bought, which was plugged into the Super Reverb. There were only 20 people in the bar, but everybody's jaw was on the floor. Then his band got up and did a short set, which was even more incredible. And you know what? For *years*, I didn't change the settings on that amp after he got up and set it; he turned the Bright switch off because a Stratocaster doesn't need to be any brighter, put the Volume on six, Treble on 10, Mid on six, and Bass on 3, then put just a touch of reverb on. With no pedals, he sounded like everything he ever did in Double Trouble. They say tone is in the bone, and he proved it that night. My guitars never sounded so good, and I've been chasing that sound my whole career.

Where did you get the '59?

I bought it in Atlanta from a guy who sold guitars and Persian rugs out of his house. He had a dozen '50s and early-'60s Strats, which in the late '70s were not really popular; most players wanted a Firebird or Les Paul until the Vaughan brothers put the Strat back on the map.

You have a handful of other vintage guitars.

Yeah, but all of my instruments are players. They've been dragged all over the planet for decades. They don't have many modifications, but they're beat up with a lot of wounds. Anybody who does this for a long time has committed crimes against vintage instruments (laughs), but they play great, they sound great, and come from the golden era.

You and singer/harmonica player "Chicago" Bob Nelson put together The Heartfixers when electric blues was on the upswing in the early '80s.

Yeah, we started at the right time and place. All of a sudden, record labels were looking for similar acts, just like the Beatles opened the door for all those British bands, Stevie Ray opened the door and all of us walked in right behind him.

What were The Heartfixers about?

Tinsley Ellis/Stevie Ray Vaughan 1979: Bryan Baum







To quell his Freddie King fixation, Ellis traded a '60s 335 and cash to get this '67 ES-345 in 1984. Purchased new with money earned by washing dishes, Ellis' '72 Les Paul Deluxe is "...the best rhythm guitar I've ever played." Ellis fields more questions about his Moderne than any other guitar he owns.







Well, we based it on Junior Wells' *Hoodoo Man Blues* album, which was a blues quartet with Buddy Guy on guitar along with bass, drums, and Junior playing harmonica. We didn't stray far from that sound; we'd do some rock and roll – Chuck Berry and New Orleans songs. We played six nights a week in Atlanta, then we'd play the seventh night at a country bar or we'd do the 688 Club. We were Atlanta's blues act and I was a purist at the time – my only effects were reverb and an Echoplex, which I still use. I've got a Leslie B-6 cabinet that I hooked in with the Super Reverb.

We worked almost every night before we started releasing albums and traveling up and down the East Coast from Boston to Key West. That's how I got with Alligator Records in 1988. That was a turning point of my career.

What motivated you to go solo?

Well, the bass player left, then Chicago Bob left and then the drummer left. After it became three different guys, I thought, "Why call it Heartfixers?" John Hammond, the great blues artist, once asked me, "Why would anybody start a band and not name it after themselves?" And I didn't have an answer. Plenty of people hide behind a band name for awhile, and if you're doing well, it behooves you *not* to change the name, but I don't think anybody in blues does so well that they can't step out.

How did you round up the first iteration of your solo band?

The bass player for the Heartfixers stayed on and we held auditions for a drummer and a keyboard player. I've had a lot of musicians, but people tend to stay with me for years rather than days or weeks.

Do you use your band to record?

I have on occasion. I think it's best if the

people who play alongside you are the same people who record with you, but that hasn't always worked out when there's a producer involved and they want to bring their own people. We hired Tom Dowd to produce what would become *Fire It Up*, and he wanted to bring Donald "Duck" Dunn, which we definitely wanted to do. It was great to spend time with him and Tom talking about the early days of Booker T and the MG's and the recordings they made with Otis Redding and Sam and Dave. I wish I'd had a tape recorder for the stories. It was amazing.

When did the '67 ES-345 come along?

That came with my Freddie King addiction (laughs). I wanted a guitar like he played. I started with a Cherry Red '60s 335, then found a 345 with the Varitone at Atlanta Discount Music in 1984. I loved the Varitone, so I traded my 335 and a few hundred bucks. Of course I wish I still had the 335.

Right now I couldn't tell you whether the Strat or the 345 is my main guitar. Both have made an appearance on every album and are the core of what I do. I'll take those and the Super Reverb to the grave!

Were there other amps you used on albums and tours?

I got one of these reissue Deluxe Reverbs, and used it on a lot of stuff because sometimes you just need that 12" speaker. It doesn't have a lot of power, but I've used that amp on big stages – put it on 10 and it does it all. The Super will do that, too, and a typical concert would involve both.
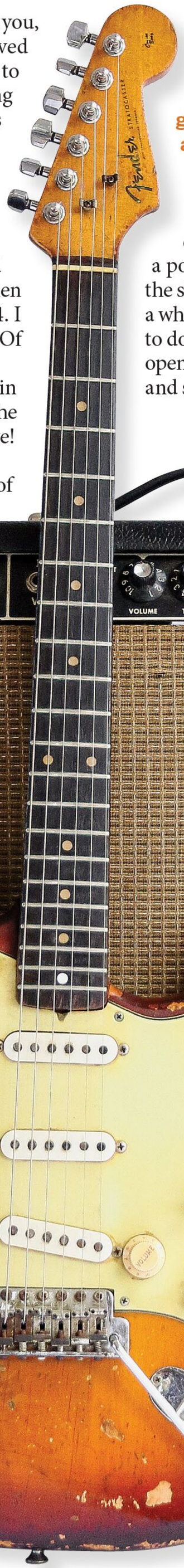
You've been around long enough to see the blues wax and wane. How would you describe its current status?

Well, there are some exciting new people on the scene – "Kingfish" Ingram, who can play anything – jazz, soul, rock – and stay true. He's very similar to Stevie Ray and is set to carry on what the masters did. Every city has somebody that's really good. Here in Atlanta, we have Eddie 9-Volt, who is really good. Jontavius Willis, from west Georgia, who I thought played only acoustic blues until I heard him play electric the other day and he knocked my socks off; he sounded like an old Muddy Waters album. I'm continually encouraged by the young people coming up.

Blues always bubbles under the surface until people come along now and then to push it up. We don't have anybody who is striking into pop culture like Stevie Ray did, but we're in good hands. I hope I live long enough to see that happen again. Eric Clapton did it the '60s, Stevie Ray in the '80s. We're due, right? It just requires youth and image, which means I'm screwed (laughs) but I'll gladly walk through the door if they'll hold it open for me again.

***Labor of Love* is your second consecutive acoustic fingerpicked record. Was the first an offshoot of the pandemic and having to isolate?**

Well, I've always done a little acoustic part in the middle of my shows. I'd do a bunch of rock and blues then sit on the stool in the middle of the show with my National and do a few songs then close with more rock and blues. It got to a point where I started looking forward to the acoustic part of the show more and more, and people would tell us we should do a whole album like that. The more they said it, the more I wanted to do it, and my good friends at Alligator agreed that I should. It opened a lot of doors for me to play in performing arts centers and similar venues. When it came time to make another album,





Ellis bought his '59 Strat from a guy who sold guitars and rugs out of his house. Most of its life has been spent running through his '67 Super Reverb.

I added more instruments and more percussion so it has more of an ensemble sound as opposed to solo acoustic blues.

The new one adds a Mississippi bent.

Yeah, I'm really into that. In my off time, I've been going to Clarksdale and the Hill Country, where that R.L. Burnside sound came from. I've also gone to Bentonia, which is where Skip James taught everyone to tune their guitars in strange ways. Skip tuned to D minor or C# minor based on something he learned from a guy named Henry Stuckey, who was also from Bentonia. Before the internet, a player in one town could have a whole different sound from someone 10 miles away. Things were very isolated, so the guitar players around Bentonia nowadays use D minor. Anyway, Henry Stuckey was in France during World War I or slightly after, and he heard soldiers playing in a strange tuning, which they showed to him. It's unclear where they were from, but some say the Caribbean because players there tune like that. D minor creates a real eerie sound and you can wrap your head around what Skip James was going for, and it allows you to play rhythm like you're in open tuning and lead like you're in standard tuning; anywhere on the neck, you can put one finger down on the G string and you're in a major key, like a barre chord. You have three strings that are on the same note and a lot of droaning. Jimi Hendrix proved that. So does Gary Clark, Jr.

Open tunings have that magic.

There's a lot of that around right now. It's hypnotic, and it comes from every continent, really – bagpipes in the British Isles, Asian music, which I really like a lot. I keep discovering new tunings, and it has reinvigorated me.

In Bentonia, you had a memorable day at Jimmy "Duck" Holmes' Blue Front Cafe.

Yeah, I got a lesson in Bentonia blues from Jimmy in the afternoon and performed that night with him at Blue Front, which is the oldest juke joint in America. Earlier, while I was playing a solo set, we heard an explosion. It was the Bentonia Fire Department burning to the ground. The audience, mostly people gathered around their pickup trucks in the street, watched the fire while Jimmy and I played on the porch.

How did you sort through instruments on the new record?

Well, most of it is the National steel and the Martin D-35, which are the guitars I take on the road. I started thinking, "I want to add some mandolin," but I had two problems; one is I don't play mandolin (laughs), and two, I didn't have a mandolin. So I borrowed my brother's Washburn... talk about a weird tuning. But I thought, "I'll put some mandolin on one song, just to double what the guitar is playing. And man, it really sounded good. So I did that on two more songs. "Too Broke" is mandolin and the 12-string in Drop D. There's not a single song on the album that's tuned standard. Also, except for the 12-string, I didn't use a pick. So I'm really determined to be obscure (laughs). It's all fingerpicking in open tunings, which is what I noticed in Mississippi – all those guys are fingerpicking.

Is it going to be a challenge to play the new music live?

No more than when I was making albums with horn sections and didn't have horns on-stage. In fact, it'll *sound* more like the album than almost anything I've done before. I did a show recently and what was most notably missing was the mandolin overdubs. I do "Sad Sad Song" on just my 1980 Washburn mando; it's the first song I've ever recorded that didn't have any guitar on it.

Are you working on banter for while you change guitars or tunings?

It does take a bit of time, so I tell some tall tales in-between. I did that the other day – started in open G capo'd up for a tune, then had to move it down to D-A-D-G-A-D, then open D Minor, then standard, and finally up to open E.

Are there any songs on the new record that have emerged as personal favorites?

Those I've enjoyed playing most are the open D-minor songs like "To A Hammer," which is in the Skip James tuning, "Low Land of Sorrow" which is open E, and "Sweet Ice Tea," which is open G.

Which guitars do we hear on those?

The Martin is my open D guitar, so that's what you hear on "To A Hammer." The National tends to be the open G guitar, so it's on "Lay My Burden Down." That's also what I tune it to for "Sunnyland" and "Hoodoo Woman," the opening track.

Though it's not on the album, your Gibson Moderne is also an open-tuned/slide guitar.

Yes, tuned to open D. I've used it on most of my albums and any time I play Elmore James.

Where did you get it?

I bought it at Clark Music, in Atlanta. It hung on that wall for two years and everybody thought it was the weirdest guitar, with its oversized headstock. My friend who owns the shop said, "You ought to buy this and just stick it under your bed," and he sold it to me for $675 – half of what it said on the tag – and I've been using it ever since. That guitar has gotten more chatter than any other, and it's 43 years old now, so I think it qualifies as vintage.

How are you feeling about your career and the state of the blues?

Well, it takes a lifetime to build a career in any type of roots music. If you play rock and roll and your hair falls out, you're out of business. If you play blues and your hair falls out, you charge another thousand dollars (laughs). So it's good to be older in blues. VG



Tinsley Ellis
Labor Of Love

Following the trajectory of 2024's unplugged *Naked Truth*, Mr. Ellis returns with another self-produced/all-acoustic offering with equal parts passion, grace, and artistry. Earthy, contemplative, and gut-bucket, Ellis sings the blues like he's lived it with tales of hardship, struggle, and ghosts. Drawing inspiration from John Lee Hooker, Son House, Skip James, and the spirits of the Mississippi Hill Country, Ellis wields old Martins, National steel, a mandolin, and a plethora of open tunings.

Thirteen tracks include "Hoodoo Woman," "To A Hammer," "Long Time," and "Sunnyland," illustrating Ellis' affection for R.L. Burnside and Jimmy "Duck" Holmes. Eschewing metronomic perfection, *Labor Of Love* leans into the humanity of wire, wood, poignant stories, and the voice. Foot stomps and a range of dexterous picking styles offset claw-style acoustic work.

On "I'd Rather Be Saved," Ellis' effortless counterpoint between bass, chords, and mournful vocalizing hits home. Same with "Low Land Of Sorrow," and "Lay My Burden Down." Listeners are transported to early-20th-century rural America. Ellis' vocalizing delivers old-world goodness without pretense or artifice. The lurching acoustic stomp of "Fountain Of Love," complete with classic Robert Johnson turnarounds and idiomatic vocal phrasing, is the real deal for lovers of the bona fide. – ***Oscar Jordan***

Upcoming Events

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2026

JANUARY

Amigo Bay Area World Guitar Show, January 10 - 11, at the Marin Civic Exhibit All, 10 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael, CA 94901. For more info contact Larry at 918-288-222 amigoshows@stringswest.com www.Calshows.tv

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

Greater Pittsburg Guitar Show, March 1st, 2026 11:30am till 4:00 pm, Venue CFS Bank Event Center, 111 Gallitin Rd, Belle Vernon, PA. 15012. For more info contact Scott Talarico at 412-716-8411 www.GuitarShowUSA.com

Great American Guitar Show (Carolina March Show), March 7th and 8th, WNC Ag Center - Davis Event Center Bldg., I-26, Exit 40, 1301 Fanning Bridge Rd. Fletcher, NC 28732. For more info contact www.bee3vintage.com

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

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

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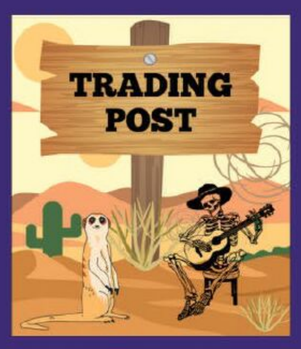


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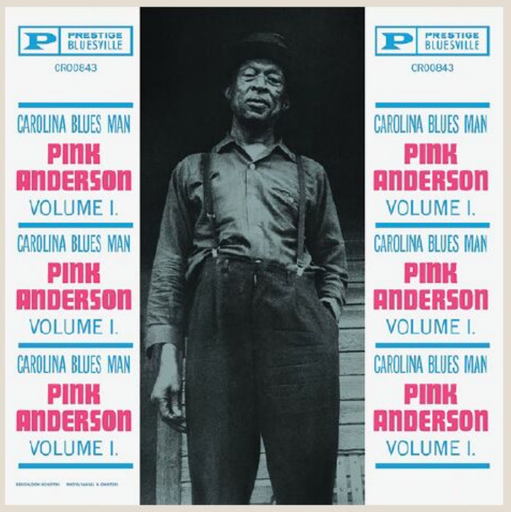
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Anderson and his son, "Little Pink," in the '60s.



Pink Anderson
Carolina Blues Man, Vol. 1

BLUES, RESURFACED

Born in 1900 and raised in South Carolina, Pinkney "Pink" Anderson wasn't as popular as fellow Tar Heels such as Blind Boy Fuller, and didn't benefit from the '60s blues revival as much as Carolina contemporary Gary Davis. After touring with medicine shows in his teens and cutting four sides for Columbia in 1928, he was largely inactive until Prestige's Bluesville imprint released three albums in the early '60s, the first of which has resurfaced on Craft.

He covers Big Joe Williams' "Baby, Please Don't Go," while "I Had My Fun" is better known as "Going Down Slow." On much of the album, his playing is closer to Delta blues than the Piedmont style of the Eastern Seaboard; for example, on "Baby, I'm Going Away," his bent notes shadow his vocal.

Anderson exerted a strong influence on his son, Little Pink Anderson (now 71). A facile guitarist and passionate singer with an album on Music Maker, he heeded the words of his father, who told him, "One day, you gonna pick up that guitar and you gonna take it serious. That guitar will feed you when nothing else will." **– *Dan Forte***

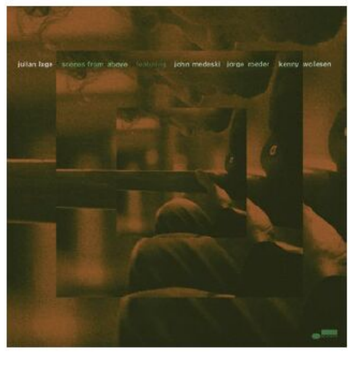


John Shannon
A Day in Tarifa

Shannon, co-owner of the Pittsburgh jazz club Con Alma, is a powerful new voice who blends the best of old-school jazz guitar with new and adventurous ideas. He delivers them in a classic organ trio setting with Cliff Barnes at the keys and drummer James Johnson III creating a full-bodied sound throughout.

Shannon spins hypnotic and finely phrased lines throughout "Sunrise," occasionally embellishing those lines with octaves and straight bop before turning things over to Barnes. On the title cut, which opens with twisting rhythms, Shannon moves between swirl and a straight $^4/_4$, harmonically and rhythmically. The moody, pensive "Liberty Bridge" (a shout-out to a downtown Pittsburgh landmark) reveals the guitarist's flawless minimalism, saying much with a few perfectly played notes and chords.

Shannon shows equal inventiveness on the lively "Shadow Catcher," while Pittsburgh's area code inspired the romping "Four One Two." Behind Shannon's single-string and octave work, Barnes (a powerful soloist) and Johnson enhance his work with their tight ensemble sound. On "Allegheny Current," his lines are confident and understated, never substituting fireworks for substance, as on his rich, harmonic "Star Travel." Rooted in the traditions of Burrell, Montgomery, and Benson, this dynamic debut bodes well for Shannon's future. **– *Rich Kienzle***



Julian Lage
Scenes from Above

The veritable Jim Hall of the 21st century, Julian Lage's latest is another rich six-string project. Working with piano/organ ace John Medeski and a rhythm section, he conjures jazz, Americana, and jam-band vibes. As usual, the guitarist avoids flash in favor of taste, good feels, and stellar tones, deploying electric and acoustic guitars at will. Still, "Red Elm" closes with lickety-split guitar chops that should surprise longtime Lage followers.

"Talking Drum" dips into jammy funk, dominated by Medeski's renowned organ vamps. Lage contributes a wiggy, wide-ranging solo that speaks to '60s organ trios and a bright tone that sits in contrast to the traditional muted sounds of jazz guitar. Julian grabs acoustic for "Havens," which is an uptempo, yet understated instrumental – his guitar work brings to mind Stephen Stills' melodic explorations on CSN's "Wooden Ships."

The ballads "Night Shade" and "Solid Air" display that gossamer guitar that is Lage's trademark. Conversely, "Storyville" has a fun free-jazz section that

Pink Anderson: Wikimedia Commons.

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The T-Birds in their original configuration. Clockwise from left: Jimmie Vaughan, Mike Buck, Keith Ferguson, and Kim Wilson.

EXTRA JIMMIES

By Dan Forte

A lavishly illustrated boxed set of the seven official albums of the Fabulous Thunderbirds when Jimmie Vaughan was in the band, plus an earlier, unreleased session produced by legendary songwriter Doc Pomus? Buy it!

That's my short review of the Fab T-Birds' *The Jimmie Vaughan Years: Complete Studio Recordings 1978-1989*.

After a college roommate from Texas told me about "progressive country" acts in Austin and an all-blues nightclub called Antone's, I first visited there in '76. Asleep At The Wheel's Ray Benson introduced me to two guys who had "the best blues band in town" – singer/harmonica player Kim Wilson and guitarist/bandleader Jimmie Vaughan, who famously told their manager-to-be, Denny Bruce, "We are all 27, handsome mother****ers that dress cool, and our music drives girls wild."

In advance of them playing the San Francisco Blues Festival, I warned Bay Area bands (good ones, mind you), "These guys are gonna kick your ass!" Their effect was immediate. Attempting Mike Buck's *thwack*, drummers mistakenly hunted for wooden snares; harp players shelled out for tweed Bassmans; bassists tried unsuccessfully to achieve Keith Ferguson's "roar in the right key"; and guitarists traded in Les Pauls and 335s for Strats and Y-corded two Super Reverbs.

When they played the Boarding House in San Francisco, comedian Bobby Slayton opened by surveying the near-empty room and joked, "My agent said this gig would be good for exposure. People die of exposure." But every stage they hit, every attendee was converted (I may have been the only person to notice that the man checking them out from the club's back corner was Bob Dylan).

Back home, however, they were earning a loyal following. As Buck writes in the liner notes, "The crowds kept growing at Rome Inn until at one point Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top was chartering a bus full of folks from Houston every Monday."

They were also the house band at Clifford Antone's club, where they backed dozens of blues legends, including Jimmy Reed, Walter Horton, Eddie Taylor, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, James Cotton, Jimmy Rogers, and even Muddy Waters.

On subsequent Austin trips, when I'd sing the praises of the band and Jimmie's playing, locals would tell me, "If you think he's good, you should hear his little brother, Stevie." When I took in Double Trouble, I could see what they meant, but to me and many musician friends, big brother was the real deal. Notey solos wouldn't make sense with the barebones groove the T-Birds laid down. And nobody played rhythm like Jimmie.

The band could handle Chicago blues and uptown feel á la B.B. King, but also mined Gulf Coast sounds of Slim Harpo and guitarists like Guitar Slim, Guitar Junior, and Lightnin' Slim.

It took until '79 for the self-titled debut, colloquially known as "Girls Go Wild," with old-school engineer Bob Sullivan and cheesy, wrestling-placard graphics. That the '78 session produced by Pomus and Joel Dorn couldn't find a label is mystifying, and it should be a selling point for even longstanding fans.

What's The Word?, with Vaughan stretching on the instrumental "Extra Jimmies," *Butt Rockin'*, and *T-Bird Rhythm* followed, with Fran Christina replacing Buck.

In an interview I did with Ferguson, he crystallized the Vaughan-Wilson one-two punch. "That stuff was the one thing they knew how to do," he nodded. "I wouldn't ask them to read Shakespeare for me or fix my computer, but they could play the s**t out of that one thing. No one could touch them."

But after a four-year gap, Ferguson was canned in favor of Preston Hubbard. Buck reflects, "I always considered Keith the true soul of the T-Birds."

Tuff Enuff marked a turning point stylistically and commercially. With Dave Edmunds producing, it was slicker than previous efforts, but compared to radio fare in the summer of '86 ("Papa Don't Preach" by Madonna, "Take My Breath Away" by Berlin), the Wilson-penned title track was akin to cavemen banging on rocks – and I mean that as a compliment.

Full disclosure: In '87, I moved to Austin and lived upstairs from Keith Ferguson. The line around town was that the band fired their junkie bass player to hire another junkie bass player. I'm not telling tales out of school; Ferguson was almost as well known for his habit as for his stellar playing, and in a 2000 article in *The Austin Chronicle*, one-time inmate Hubbard dubbed himself "a heroin-shooting, cocaine-smoking, hardcore junkie." He died in 2016, at 63. Ferguson died in 1997, at 50.

Back in '86, I booked a session and cut an instrumental version of John Lee Hooker's "Dimples" with Jimmie, Keith, and Mike. If I'm not mistaken, it was the first time in years that the T-Birds' original rhythm section played together. It was also the last.

A year later, I made the move that had been precipitated 11 years earlier by Ray Benson introducing me to that "best blues band in town."

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reveals the quartet's playful side. Lastly, "Something More" is a Southern-soul ballad laden with spare melodic lines of perfection. Like Hall, Lage is a mellow monster of jazz guitar. **– *Pete Prown***

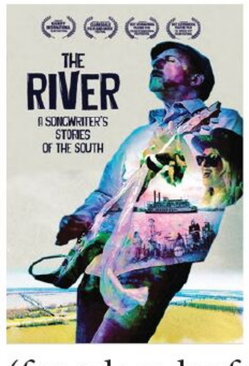


Tedeschi Trucks Band & Leon Russell
Mad Dogs & Englishmen Revisited (Live at Lockn')

In September, 2015, the Tedeschi Trucks Band joined the late Leon Russell at Virginia's Lockn' Festival for a tribute to Joe Cocker's classic *Mad Dogs & Englishmen*. Along with Russell, original Mad Dog musicians Rita Coolidge, Claudia Lennear, and Chris Stainton are featured. The 12-piece ensemble also included guitar aces Dave Mason, Doyle Bramhall II, Warren Haynes, and Anders Osborne.

Mad Dogs & Englishmen Revisited is a rockin' soulfest with stellar guitar playing, horns, backup vocals, and the incredible Susan Tedeschi. She's in the zone on "Let's Go Get Stoned," while husband Trucks unleashes an ungodly solo on "The Letter." Classics like "Feelin' Alright" and "Delta Lady" get the TTB treatment.

Coolidge joins Russell on "The Weight," while the Black Crowes' Chris Robinson accompanies Tedeschi on "Space Captain" and "With A Little Help From My Friends." Leon and Doyle are in great form on "Dixie Lullaby," while Mason and Osbourne perform an inspired version of "Feelin' Alright." Warren Haynes wails on "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window," complete with scintillating solo trade-offs with everyone. In all, this homage to Cocker, Russell, and their fabled 1970-'71 band is an updated blast from the past. **– *Oscar Jordan***



Coyote Motel
The River: A Songwriter's Stories of the South

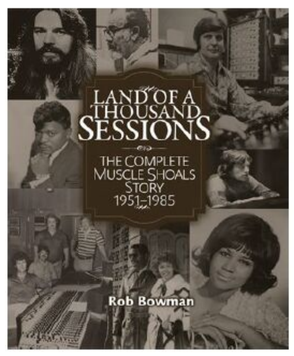
Ted Drozdowski should be a familiar name to anyone reading this, although it's likely due to his writing (four decades for various music magazines) more than for his singing, songwriting, and guitar playing. Coyote Motel, his eclectic Nashville-based quintet, has been called a cosmic roots band, which makes sense considering Drozdowski cites R.L. Burnside and David Gilmour as his biggest guitar influences.

The River is neither a concert film nor a documentary in the strictest senses, although the group – Ted on vocals and guitars, bassist Sean Zywick, drummer Kyra Curenton, Luella on vocals, guitars, and percussion, and Laurie Hoffma on Theremin and glockenspiel – performs 10 original songs. These are accompanied by hippie-era light shows and the Suspended Gravity Circus aerialists (think Cirque du Soleil on a much smaller scale).

Drozdowski's narration connects his ancestry and musical education to the Mississippi, Cumberland, and Tallahatchie rivers. "Black Lung Fever," referencing his coal-mining immigrant grandfathers, juxtaposes relaxed 12-bar blues with tales of strife and near-atonal slide bursts. The Fillmore-reminiscent light shows add atmosphere, but while the aerialists add a visual layer, they're a gratuitous distraction and don't let the music and stories stand on their own. **– *DF***



Julian Lage



Rob Bowman
Land of a Thousand Sessions: The Complete Muscle Shoals Story 1951-1985

Bowman, a six-time Grammy nominee, has written a stunning, nearly 750-page history about this tiny music mecca in northwest Alabama. It bursts with extraordinary detail (and countless photos) about FAME Studios and Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, the studio-musicians collective the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (the Swampers), studio owner/producer/songwriter Rick Hall, and more.

The story, covered chronologically, starts with the improbability of this area birthing some of the greatest soul/R&B, pop, rock, country, reggae, and jazz ever made. Obscure artists who went nowhere to an endless list of legends including Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Duane Allman, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Cher, Rod Stewart, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and others cut tracks in these studios. Racial dynamics are examined, including the general *lack* of tension; visiting artists were shocked to discover the musicians were white.

Plenty of session, recording studio, and business information is covered. Guitar stories include Allman's slide-guitar playing and use of a Fuzz Face with a partially drained 9-volt battery for overdrive, Keith Richards' setup recording "Brown Sugar," and Willie Nelson playing leads on Trigger (his battered Martin). For Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll," Forrest "Howie" McDonald recorded the solo on a Les Paul Standard – in just one take. **– *Bret Adams***



Guns N' Roses
Guns N' Roses Live Era '87-'93

Slash
Live at the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival



Love him or hate him, Slash is a household name who single-handedly made the Les Paul cool again in the late '80s. These two releases illustrate his badassery. Guns N' Roses Live was recorded between '87 and '93 with the original lineup. Containing four LPs and two CDs of wayback-machine gigs showcasing the band at its creative musical peak. Axl Rose's voice was superb, Slash played like a boss, and the rhythm section

Julian Lage: Hannah Gray Hall/Color Primary.



Slash

was a juggernaut. Highlights include "Nightrain," "Paradise City," "November Rain," and "My Michelle."

On *Live at the S.E.R.P.E.N.T. Festival*, recorded at the Mission Ballroom in Denver, Slash gets his mojo workin' covering blues, rock, and R&B classics like "Killing Floor," "Crossroads," "Oh Well," "Stone Free," and "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone." Heavy on the rock and light on the blues, Slash puts on a tremendous show with a killer band and underrated second guitarist Tash Neal, formerly of the London Souls. It's a raucous jam with solos galore and musicians who deliver a rockin' good time. Sure, it's a sonic slaughter of the blues with its overplaying and weedly-weedly fun, but Slash and his top hat reign supreme. **– *OJ***



Pink Floyd
Wish You Were Here 50

The 1975 space-rock opus cemented Pink Floyd's status as FM royalty, its tracks still in radio rotation today. While synthesizers predominate, David Gilmour's compressed Stratocaster has a major role, including infamously fretted-out notes on the "Shine On You Crazy Diamond" intro (*Ed. Note: Pink Floyd was partially named after bluesman Pink Anderson – see feature review*).

This 50th anniversary set comes in various editions, some with 25 unreleased studio takes and 16 live recordings. For the studio cut "Wish You Were Here (Take 1)," listen to Gilmour's immortal acoustic strumming with a rough vocal, while on an early version of "Crazy Diamond," you can still hear David's damn Strat fretting out. The real gold is the April 1975 concert material, largely because Floyd was the only major band of that era *not* to release a live album. Fire up "Raving and Drooling," which later became "Sheep" from 1977's *Animals*. Another keeper is "You've Got to Be Crazy," which evolved into "Dogs" and has a banger of a Gilmour solo.

So, is this box essential for Floydians? With fresh remixes, a hardcover book, and 33 bonus live and studio tracks, you'll wish it was here. **– *PP* VG**

Slash: Gene Kirkland.

extra EXTRA



JAY HOOKS
Tequila & Bullets

Hooks' first album in decades is loaded with explosive Texas blues-rock. The vocalist/guitarist's weapon of choice is a Gibson Firebird, and he spanks it like a man possessed. "Evinrude Boat Motor" is a rollicking opener and the title track shimmers with hot blues licks. "Lonesome" is straight-up R&B and, for ear candy, Jay wrings out a monstrous Firebird tone on "Mississippi Sheiks." **– *BA***



AMADOU & MARIAM
L'Amour à la Folie

The final studio album by Malian blind husband/wife duo Amadou Bagayoko and Mariam Doumbia melds their brand of West African blues with electronic textures and funky Afro-pop rhythms. Amadou, who passed away at age 70 in April '25, was influenced by Jimi Hendrix and John Lee Hooker. But rhythm is all-important, not soloing, and it's infectious. **– *DF***



JOCELYN GOULD
Solo

The Canadian jazzer delivers an intriguing album of solo archtop and vocals, blending standards and originals. "Just to Be" finds Gould taking chances with edgy, non-diatonic harmony, while "Easy Living" and "You're Sweet" showcase elegant chord melodies and single-note work next to her pure voice. Jocelyn's rig is a Benedetto 16B into a Fender '57 Custom Deluxe – unsurprisingly, sweet tones abound. **– *PP***



JOSHUA HEDLEY
All Hat

The Nashville traditionalist singer explores the Western swing he loves, produced by Asleep at the Wheel leader Ray Benson. Guitarist Dave Biller and ex-Wheel steel players Flavio Pasquetto and Jason Roberts tear things up. "Boogie Woogie Tennessee" features a three-steel solo. Biller's guitar and Roberts' mandolin supercharge "Stuck in Texas" and "Fresh Hot Biscuits," with tasty steel enhancing the instrumental "Hedliner Polka." **– *RK***



MARCUS DEML
Pure

Hamburg's Marcus Deml's latest is a tonefest of epic proportions. Pure contains blues-tinged instrumentals that border on prog and hard rock, and ballads that stir the soul. Deml's note selection, whammy usage on vintage Strats, and sound design are the stars, joined by excellent compositions and a killer band. Highlights include "Csárdás Blues," "Rise of the King," and "Budapest." **– *OJ***



WILLIE G. MOSELEY
Thunder Out of Texas: The Illustrated History of Robin Guitars

If you've ever played a Robin guitar, you likely haven't forgotten its killer neck carve and setup. Here, author Moseley offers a detailed history of the defunct Texas builder and endorsers like Eric Johnson and the Vaughan brothers. Photos of Robin's high-graphic superstrats, octave guitars, Wedge models, and doublenecks lavishly illustrate the book. Hipper still, Billy Gibbons wrote the introduction. **– *PP***

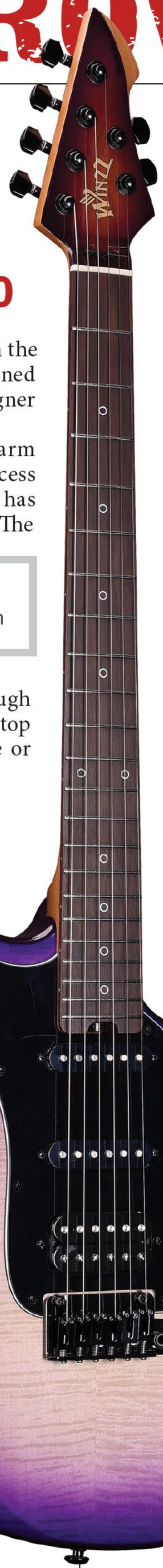
VALUE VICTORY

The Winzz WGS150 Gravity PRO

In an era when everyday prices are spiraling through the roof, this import Winzz solidbody is a surprise. Designed and built in China, its concept originates from a designer in Winz, Germany.

Dig the features – contoured, offset body, curved arm cut, and asymmetric five-bolt heel joint that allows access to upper frets. Its neck is roasted Canadian maple and has a 25½" scale along with a 22-fret rosewood fretboard. The medium stainless-steel frets and setup on our tester were satisfactory, and the white ring inlays and Luminlay side dots are ready to glow on dimly lit stages. Winzz calls the neck carve a "glider neck" blending C and D profiles, though feels more D-shaped. The WGS150 has a flame-maple top paired with an alder body finished in Maldives Blue or Cherry Red finish, or a mahogany body in Jungle Green or Midnight Purple. Other features include locking tuners and coil tap.

Price: $429.99
www.winzzguitars.com



For electronics, look for an Alnico V SSH pickup configuration, combining a medium-high-output humbucker with single coils. A push/pull Tone control engages series/parallel switching, delivering funky single-coil and fat humbucker tones. A two-point vibrato bridge with block saddles offers whammy fun, while a synthetic bone nut, locking tuners, and 4+2 headstock layout maintain stable tuning, even after intensive whammy diving.

Plugged into amp sims, the WGS150 proved a fun and spritely axe. If your jam takes you anywhere from the shred of Steve Vai and Govan Guthrie to the thud of Metallica and Tool, it's ready to go. The contoured heel, locking tuners, and vibrato let you crunch all day and night. The pickups sound menacing, particularly with heavy distortion, illustrating that the Winzz works best as a heavy-rock machine. The neck setup is above average for the budget class, as are the build, materials, and construction.

While not perfect, it's hard to argue with an attractive superstrat that offers so much for so little. **– *Pete Prown***



Price: $149.99 www.digitech.com

CRUNCH CONTROVERSY

DOD's Badder Monkey

Introduced in 2004, the DigiTech Bad Monkey was a Tube Screamer-type overdrive, at least until a controversial Youtube video comparing it to the vaunted Klon Centaur launched the box – and its accompanying vintage value – into the stratosphere. Back here on Earth, this new DOD Badder Monkey revives the pedal, adds groovy features, and delivers it with a wallet-friendly price.

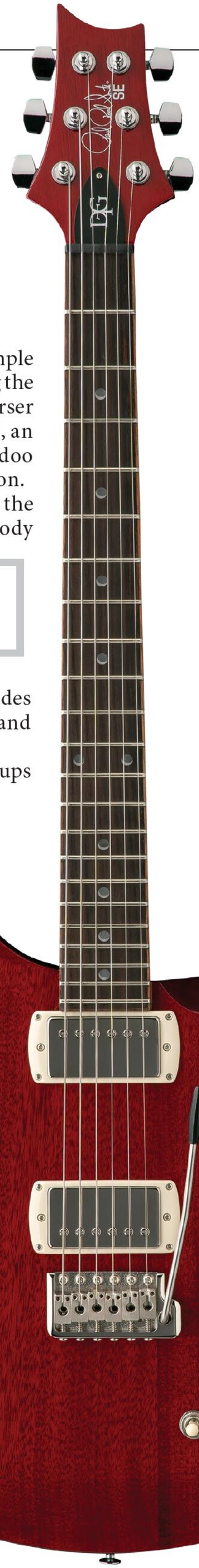
The Badder Monkey has standard controls like Bananas (gain), Curiosity (level), and Mood (two-band EQ). For fun, there are three overdrive circuits – Behaved, Bad, and Badder. You can blend them using the Barrel knob, which is shaped like a wooden barrel and has handy detents to nail drive combinations. The unlabeled mode toggle combines Behaved + Badder or an out-of-phase effect, as well as all three overdrives on simultaneously.

Using a '75 Strat into a modeling amp, the Badder Monkey offered a few personas including warm overdrive, psychedelic fuzz, and a punkier crunch. It's a surprisingly powerful and versatile box, great for dirt-tone explorers who want it all. One cool feature is the bottom plate, which is a rubber pad that can be flipped to reveal a hook-and-loop fastener pad. Why doesn't every pedal-maker offer this no-brainer feature?

The Badder Monkey is fun, flexible, and even ships with a toy barrel of plastic monkeys to play with between sets. **– *Pete Prown***

PLANK TO CRANK

The PRS SE DGT Standard David Grissom



Texas rocker David Grissom is known for the simple elegance of his bluesy riffs and licks, always putting the right note in the right place. He's long been a PRS endorser and their latest collaboration is the SE DGT Standard, an elemental plank that offers the Gibson/Fender voodoo on which the Maryland builder has built its reputation.

The SE DGT Standard puts a lot of features on the table, offering a multi-piece, carved-top mahogany body with a set mahogany neck and rosewood fretboard. The scale is the company's standard 25" – the sweet spot between a Strat and Les Paul – and the fretboard sports a 10" radius and moon inlays. Hardware includes DGT "S" humbuckers, PRS Patented Tremolo bridge, and reliable tuners.

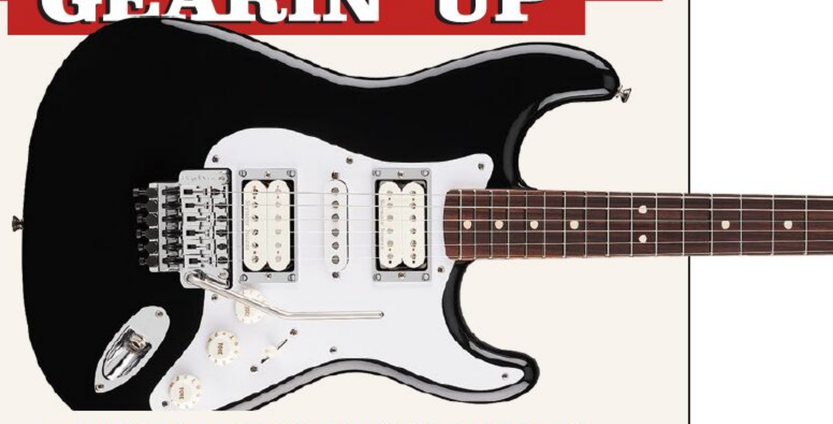
Price: $829
www.prsguitars.com

Knobs – two for Volume, one Tone – adjust the pickups that sound great. Pull the Tone knob up to *tap* the coils for single-coil colors, essentially giving six useful tones without the volume drop associated by splitting coils.

Notable tweaks are curved pickup rings and a neck carve that PRS says is like its Pattern Regular profile, but with "enhanced shoulders." In hand, this fuller, meaty shape might remind you of some Gibson SG models, particularly since you can wail all the way up to the 22nd fret. Neck carve is a personal preference, as SE models have slightly different profiles from USA PRS guitars, but you can't argue with the setup and all-important fretting attack.

Overall, the tone of the SE DGT Standard is impressive, with bold, ballsy pickups that conjure both a rockin' roar and sweet, quieter passages. Another asset is the DGT Standard's lightweight mahogany body – our tester was a spine-friendly seven pounds, three ounces. The vibrato works like a charm, but as is the case with certain other PRS models, reaching for a toggle placed behind the bar can be cumbersome. Still, the DGT Standard is a remarkable deal, bringing fine construction and tone together in an affordable (yet pro) package. Like the guitar hero himself, this David Grissom rocks. ***– Pete Prown***

GEARIN' UP



FENDER 50TH ANNIVERSARY DAVE MURRAY STRATOCASTER

Fender's 50th Anniversary Dave Murray Stratocaster has an alder body, Seymour Duncan pickups (JB TB-4, Antiquity Texas Hot, '59 SH-1N), compound-radius rosewood fretboard with medium jumbo frets, and a Floyd Rose R2 double-locking vibrato. It is offered in Black with chrome hardware, and vintage-style tuners.



REVEREND GREG NORTON ULTRABOMB

Reverend's Greg Norton UltraBomb bass has a solid korina body, five-piece korina neck, 34" scale, rosewood fretboard with 12" radius, proprietary high-mass bridge, custom-wound pickups, 42mm nut, and Hipshot Ultralight tuners.



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Spector's Limited Euro LX basses have alder bodies with flame-maple tops, three-piece maple necks with a matching flame-maple headstock, and maple fretboard. Tones come from a Spector/Darkglass Legacy preamp and EMG pickups. They're available in four- and five-string configurations and offered in Black Cherry, Ultra Violet, and Black Stain gloss finishes.

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VINTAGE MEETS MODERN

Fender's American Professional Classic Jaguar & Jazzmaster



There are many guitarists who desire a Fender that *looks* vintage but *plays* more modern. To thread that needle, the American Professional Classic series aims to give players what they want – old-school finishes and appointments, but with contemporary tweaks. Among them are a Jazzmaster and Jaguar.

Heroes of Fender's offset-body revolution of the late 1950s and early '60s, both keep traditional appearances but simplify the controls; there are no thumbwheels and the Jag gets just one on/off switch. The Jazzmaster has a traditional alder body, 25.5" scale, one-piece pickguard, and floating Mustang-style vibrato bridge with trem-lock. Tweaks include a Modern C-shaped maple neck that's full and fast, and rosewood board with 9.5" radius and 22 frets. The pickups are Coastline '65 Jazzmaster, which have stronger output than vintage spec, and ClassicGear tuners for quick string changes. Another mod is the passive Greasebucket tone circuit, which provides mud-free clarity and preserves bass frequencies when you roll off treble.

The American Professional Classic Jaguar has similar specs, but a 24" scale and three-piece pickguard array, along with Coastline '65 Jaguar pickups and a "strangle switch" to cut bass for a treble-only attack.

In hand, both are fun, quick-playing planks with a fuller neck carve and plenty of tone, bite, and fret-bending ease. The only debit is the Jaguar's overt girth, which logs in around nine pounds – in the territory of a '70s Les Paul Custom. Chiropractors, take note.

Price: $1,599.99
www.fender.com

Overall, though, the American Professional Classics offer what a lot of players want – vintage vibe with modern subtle tweaks and closer-to-earth prices. Sure, its still real money, but if you love pre-CBS finishes, these fun Fenders will get you there. **– *Pete Prown* VG**

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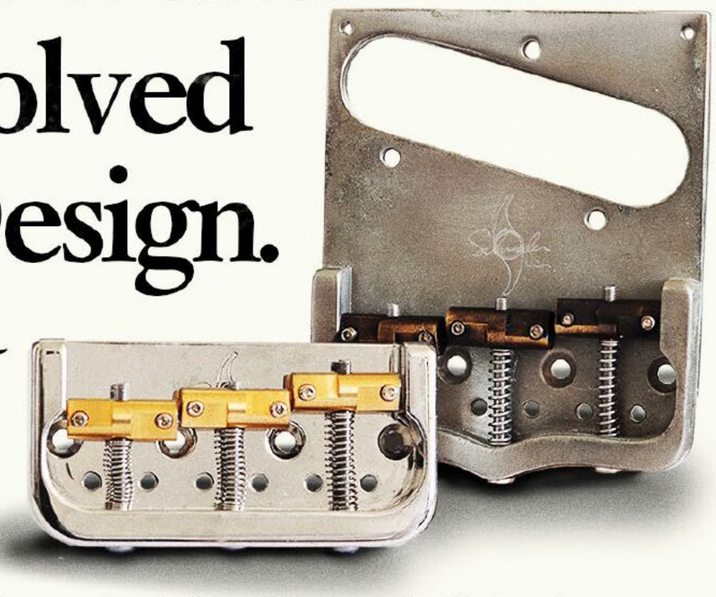
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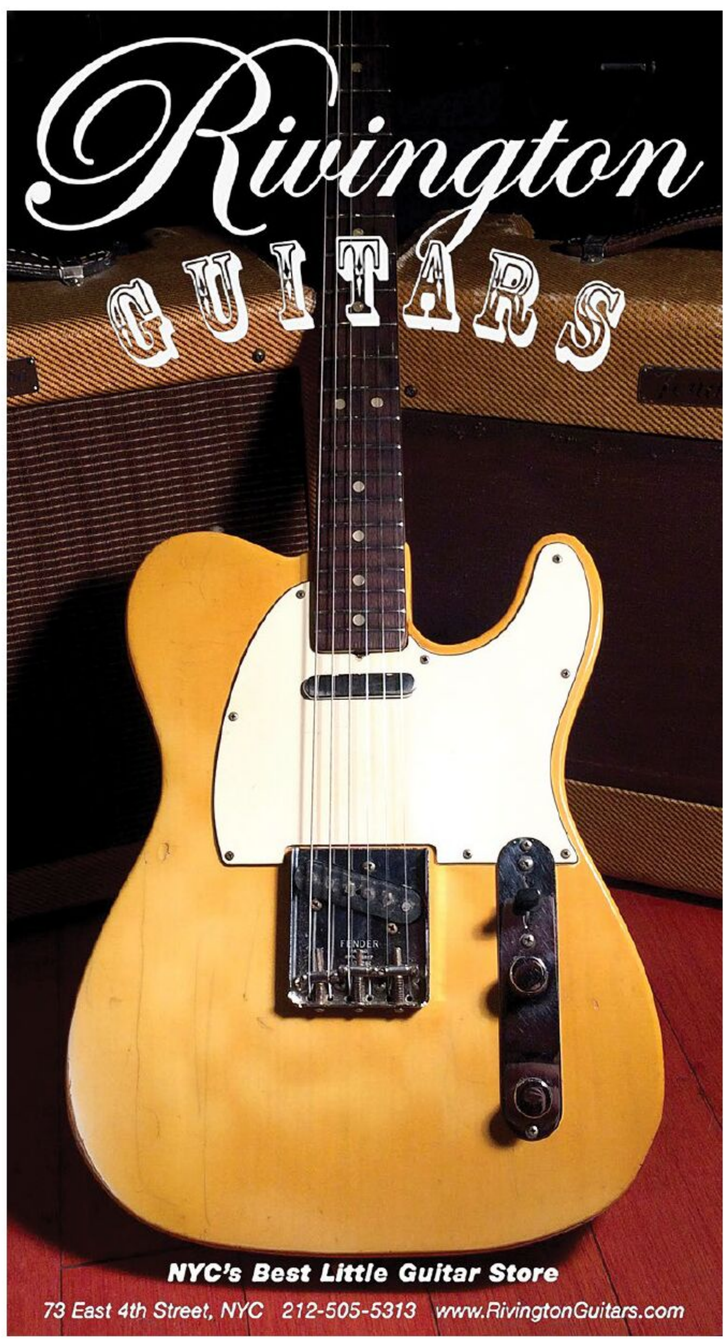
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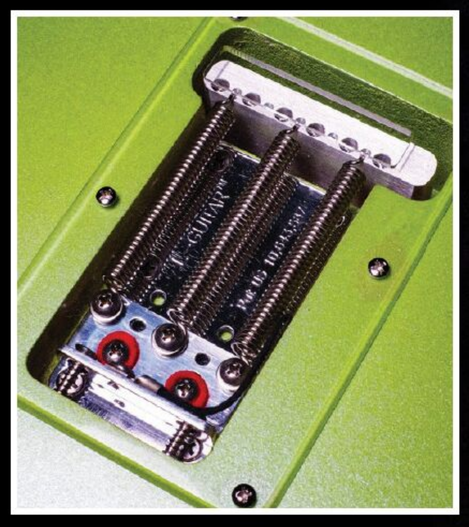
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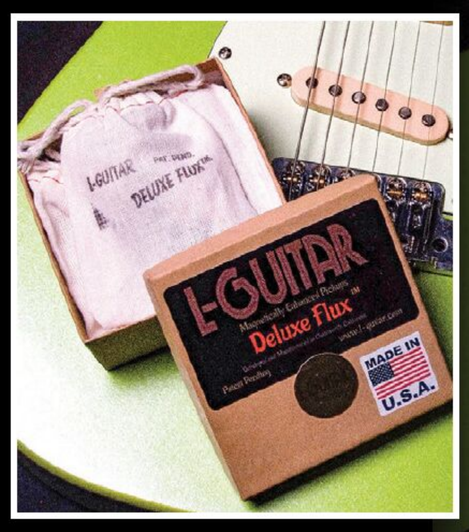
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01 Doug Brimmell carefully posed his guitars in groups for this shot. From left are a National Style 1 and Triolian; a Martin 000-15SM next to a 000-28VS and a 000-18MC; and a Gibson J-185 followed by an L-00 and J-45. In front are a Strat and Tele; a Rick 330 and 360/12; Gretsch 6120; and the Gibsons – a Les Paul, SG, and ES-335. "I've run out of couch!" he laughs. "Guess I have to stop buying now."

02 Low-enders will appreciate this gander at Gordon Winkler's Gibson Midtown, '73 Ripper, '78 Precision, and '93 Ibanez Iceman.

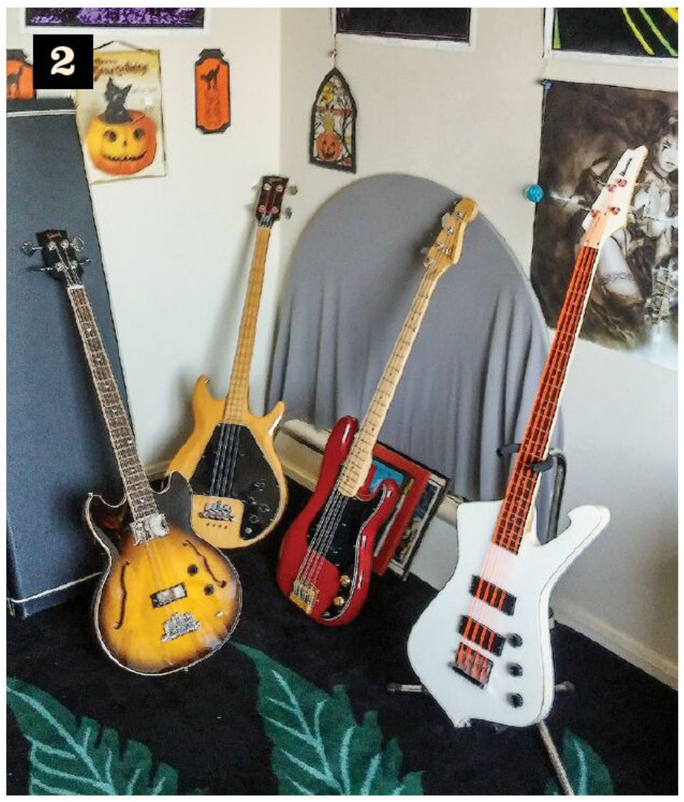
03 John Urbaniak's four Les Pauls are things of beauty. From left they are a Wildwood '50s Spec, a '90s Custom Shop '58 reissue, 2010 '54 goldtop reissue, and a Murphy Labs '55 NAMM Commemorative. The amps are a Divided by 13 FTR 37 and a Mike Clark-built JTM 45 with custom 2x12 cab.

04 Jay Kustka scored his mid-'60s Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman on a recent visit to Norman's Rare Guitars. It pairs nicely with his wall art, and especially with his Rickenbacker 360/12C63, '68 Höfner 500/1, and Gibson Custom Shop J-160E.

05 Larry Strickland's collection includes this '68 Thinline Tele, '67 Epi Riviera, and a '66 Tele his dad bought for $220 back in the day, now restored to its original Candy Apple Red finish.

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VINTAGE GUITAR® MAGAZINE (ISSN 10672605) (USPS 009383) is published monthly by Vintage Guitar, Inc., PO Box 7301, Bismarck, ND 58507. Phone (701) 255-1197. Standard subscription price for one year is $33.95 in the USA, $57.95 in Canada, and $87.95 in all other countries. U.S. First Class subscription is $69. All non-U.S. orders must be prepaid in U.S. funds by credit card or International Money Order only. Periodicals postage paid at Bismarck, ND, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to VINTAGE GUITAR MAGAZINE, PO Box 7301, Bismarck, ND 58507.

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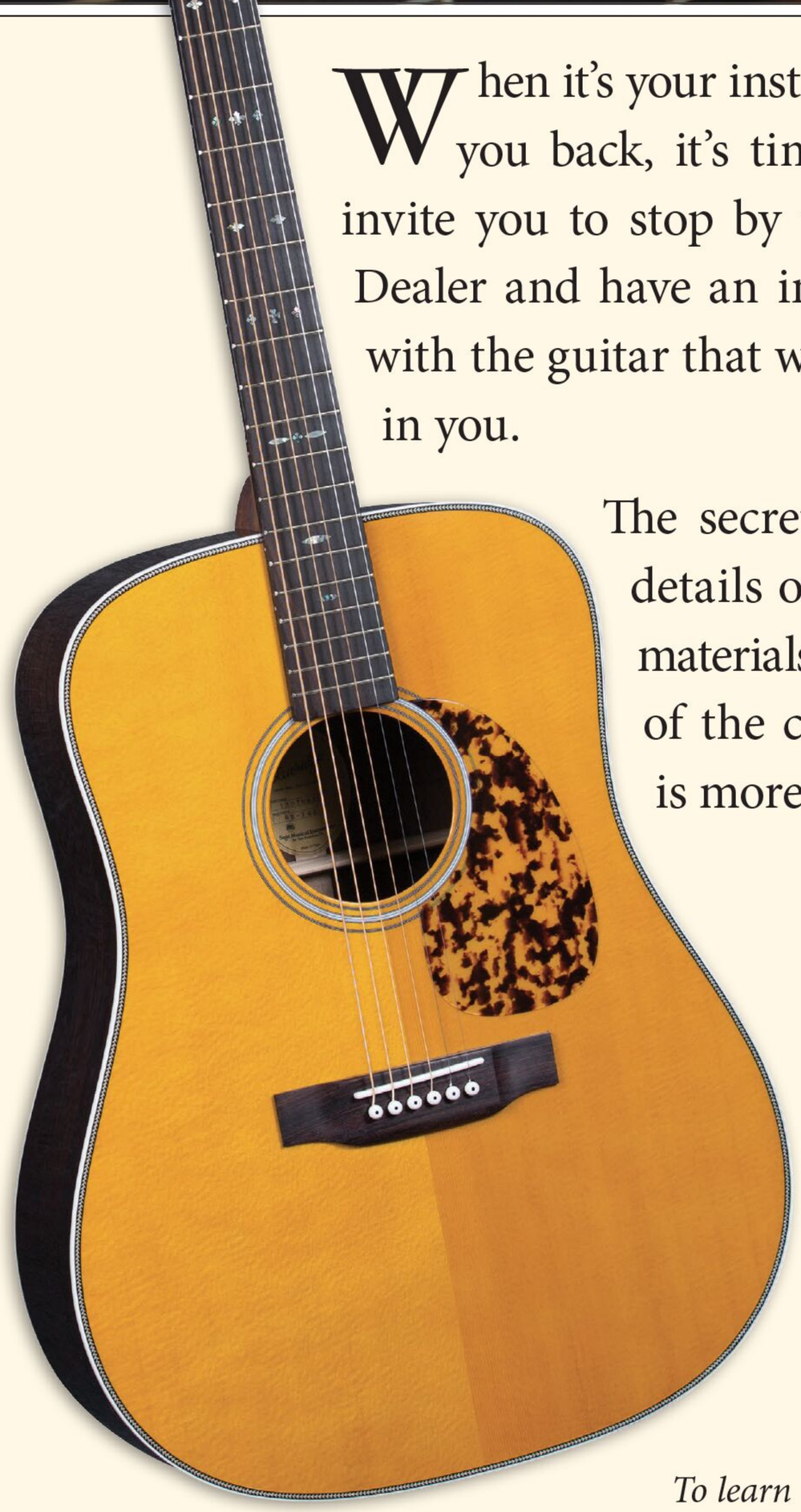
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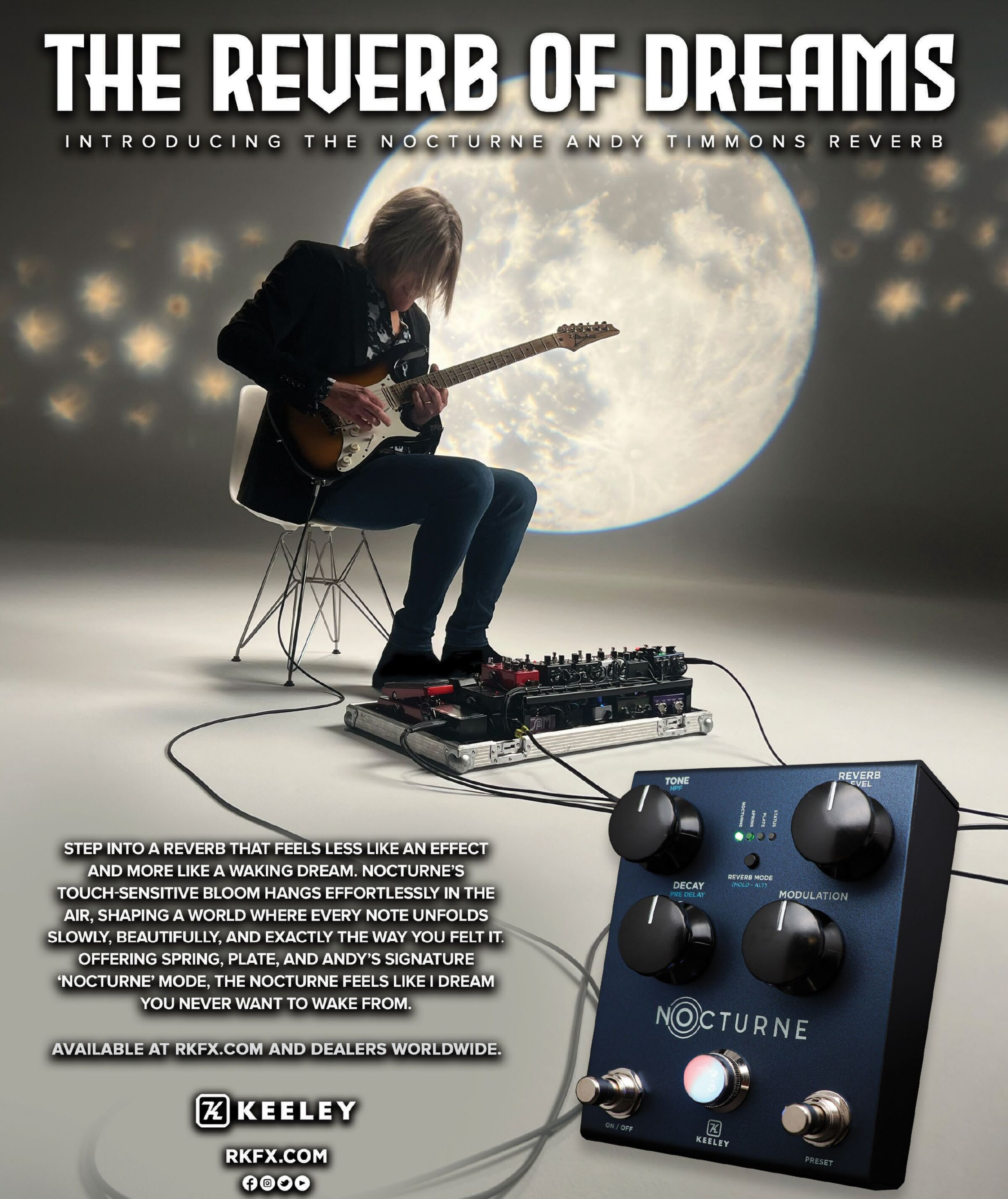
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