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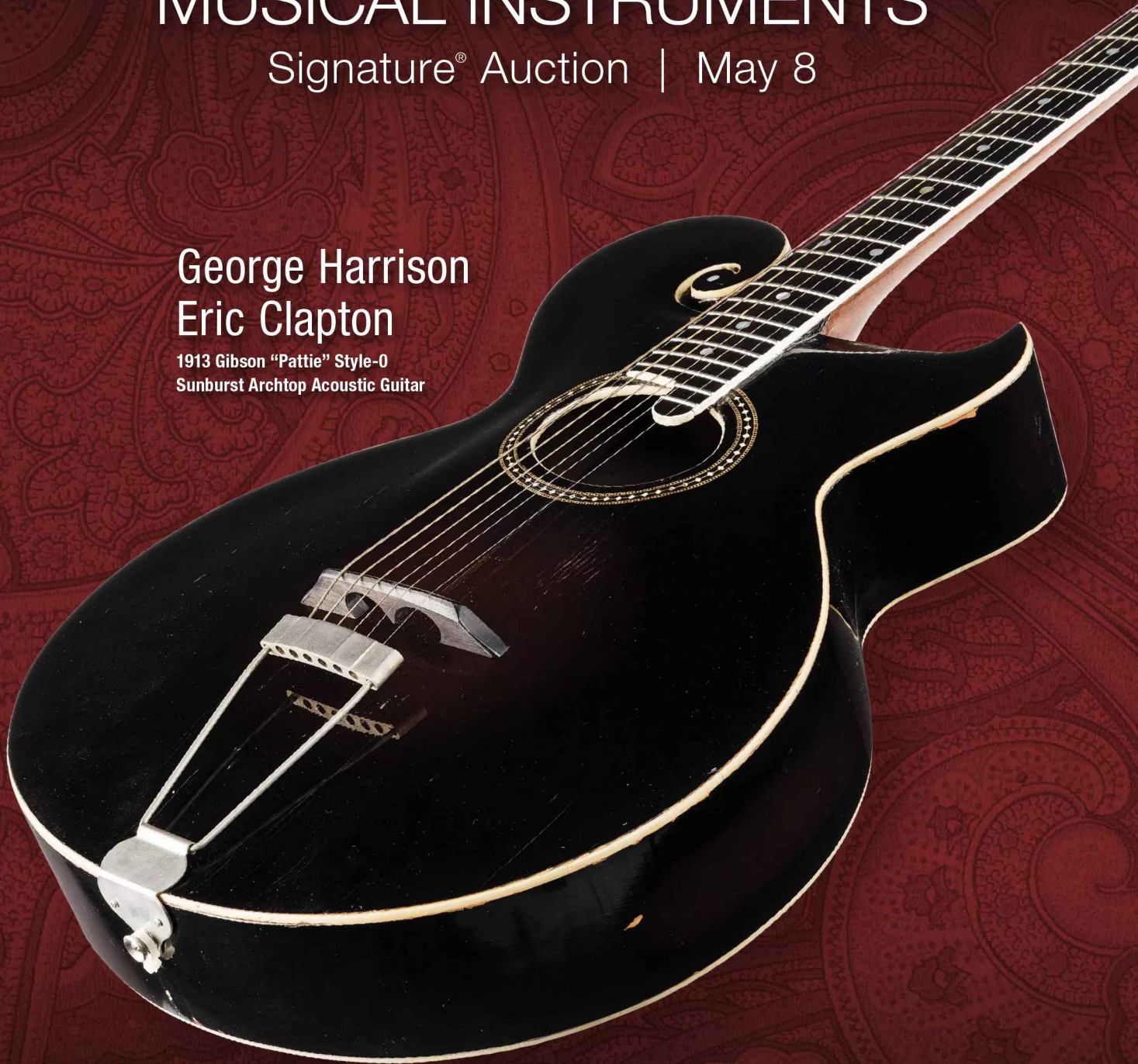


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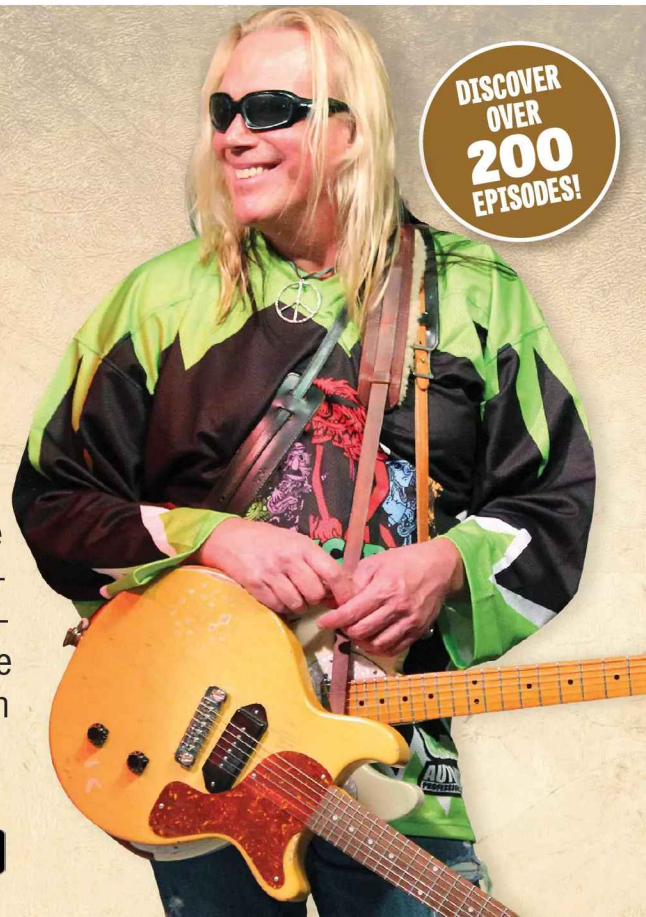
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READER MAIL

TINSLEY TALE

I worked at Dan's Fine Guitars and Rugs, in Atlanta, where Tinsley Ellis (VG, February '26) got his '59 Strat. I also arranged for Dan Baird to get Steve Marriott's old Esquire. The late '70s and early '80s were incredible times to be dealing vintage guitars, and Dan's entire inventory – an amazing selection – came from Norman's Rare Guitars.

What a pleasant surprise it was to see Ram Tuli become involved with *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide*. His VG "Buy That Guitar!" podcasts have been exceptional because his knowledge and unbridled enthusiasm are always fun. Finally, I want to thank VG for doing a lovely piece on my '61 Strat in the May '25 issue. Keep up the great work.

Jeremy Graf
Arlington Heights, Illinois

SHORT ON CROP, LONG ON ACE

Most months, the only complaint I have with VG is that it doesn't have twice as many pages and come out twice as often. But you seriously dropped the ball with the last two issues. When the February issue arrived, I was – as always – way excited. But then I saw a mere *one page* dedicated to the memory of Steve Cropper. Really? He was a truly great player in a truly great band; I can't count the number of great songs The Colonel wrote and/or played on, because there are just *too many*.

The brevity would be egregious enough by itself, but it followed an issue devoted to Ace Frehley – a truly mediocre player in a truly crappy band. I can't count the great songs Ace wrote and/or played on, because *there were none!*

You have a chance to redeem yourselves, and I eagerly await a memorial to the incomparable Mr. Robert Hall Weir. I'll settle for two full issues, but even that would be shortchanging his legacy.

Thank you, and keep up the (usually) excellent work!

Peter Gerlach
DeKalb, Illinois

Steve Cropper has 798 songs in his discography and was the most influential musician in making Stax Records successful during the '60s. While I'm glad Ace Frehley received eight pages of tribute (he deserves it), I'm surprised and disappointed that Steve only

received one page. Compare any measurement of musical achievement or influence, and I believe VG did not do justice to Cropper.

Dennis Devine
Heber Springs, Arkansas

(Ed. Note: Decisions regarding memorial features are particularly arbitrary. Considerations include how much and how recently we've covered the artist. In the case of Mr. Cropper, our October, 2024, interview dug into his life and career; it and our other features on him were cited in the piece and can be viewed at VintageGuitar.com. On the other hand, we had never done a retrospective on Mr. Frehley, who is, beyond debate, one of the most-cited influences amongst rock guitarists of the last several decades.)

FURTHER FLATTERY

VG does the best job in the business covering classic guitars, players, music, and new gear. As someone of a vintage age, I still learn something new from every issue, and there's someone or some piece of gear that qualifies, no matter what their age. Great stuff, keep it going!

Rob Jenkin
Walled Lake, Michigan

I love VG and much prefer the articles to equivalent magazines here in the U.K. Your content is more professional and informative.

Mitch Keen
Swindon, Wiltshire

I really like VG's mix of old and new content. The interviews are informative, and one of my favorite sections is the "Hit List" reviews. I've bought several albums based on your recommendations and you guys do not disappoint. Keep up the excellent work in 2026!

Robert Gamez
San Antonio, Texas

The magazine's title being *Vintage Guitar* would tell readers that it mainly deals with that subject matter, but there has always been a good balance between vintage/old and new/contemporary guitars and related topics. Stay the course – we guitar freaks are very grateful.

Joe Tammario
Jackson, Georgia

I've been a VG reader since the early days when it was on newsprint, and I think the

magazine is perfect. I anxiously await each new issue.

John Ragan
Denver, Colorado

I think you do a fantastic job of the whole magazine, and I really like having the "Price Guide" every month!

Kelly Alliston
Calgary, Alberta

Keep doing what you're doing. Thank you for your hard work!

William Correa
Indianapolis, Indiana

VG is the best guitar and gear magazine I have found. I enjoy it cover to cover.

Erik Carbiener
East Peoria, Illinois

VG is my go-to guitar magazine. I love to read in-depth articles on the original Gibson and other brands, as well as the features on more-recent models, amps, effects, and artists old and young. Thanks for a great magazine and keep up the good work!

Simon Neame
Irving, Texas

VG features a nice balance of music genres. I particularly enjoy the gear and music reviews, and the pics are first-class guitar porn. Great job!

Dana Nonnenmocher
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

About 15 years ago, I noticed VG began to focus more on younger players and the gear related to them. I didn't care for it, but then realized I had become an old guy. Now as I read the articles on young cats and their gear, I notice a large percentage of them actually draw influence from a lot of the old-guard players I look up to.

Geoff Wilcox
Fairfield, California

VG keeps content and advertising balanced; I learn a lot and am introduced to players and new stuff. And yes, the ads in the back third of the issue are still the best. I have bought many things – pedals, boutique amps, etc. – from your advertisers. Keep up the good work!

Joel Tannebaum
Plano, Texas

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

Founder/Publisher

Alan Greenwood

General Manager

Doug Yellow Bird

**Editor In Chief/
Gear Editor**

Ward Meeker

Ward@VintageGuitar.com

Editor At Large

Dan Forte

Editorial Consultants

George Gruhn, Seymour
Duncan, Walter Carter,
Dan Erlewine

Music Editor

Pete Prown

peteprown@icloud.com

**Regular
Contributors**

Willie Moseley, John
Heidt, George Gruhn,
Michael Wright, Dan
Erlewine, Peter Kohman,
Michael Dregni, Wolf Mar-
shall, Pete Prown, Dave
Hunter, Bob Dragich, Chip
Wilson, Rich Kienzie, Jim
Carlton, Oscar Jordan,
Dennis Pernu, Tom
Guerra, Rich Maloof, Bret
Adams, Bob Cianci

Advertising Director

Michael Naughton,
Mike@VintageGuitar.com

Global Accounts Manager

Donna Naughton
Donna@VintageGuitar.com

Subscription Manager

Martina Day
VGuitar@VintageGuitar.com
1-800-844-1197

Assistant Publisher

Dawn Greenwood

Editorial Assistant

Eden Greenwood

Online Consultant

Joe Greenwood

Online Coordinator

Cherry Carpio

Price Guide/Online

Wanda Huether, Ram Tuli,
Greg Martin,
Ray Cummins, Andrew
Hendryx, James Patrick
Regan, Tyler Morris,
Karl Markgraf

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Ben Montague and Norm Harris

TNAG ACQUIRES NORMAN'S RARE

Norman's Rare Guitars, the renowned Los Angeles vintage-instrument shop founded by Norman Harris in 1975, was acquired by The North American Guitar (TNAG), in a deal announced January 12. Harris (VG, May '25) is recognized as a pioneer in the industry and his shop was the subject of a documentary that debuted on Netflix in 2024.

The acquisition includes the shop's inventory along with Harris' personal and private collection. In a video posted online, Harris said the shop will retain its vibe and he will continue to work there.

"I've always known there would come a time when I needed the right long-term partner to carry Norman's Rare Guitars forward," he added. "I couldn't imagine a better steward for the shop and its legacy than Ben Montague and TNAG Global. The goal has always been to share my love of great guitars with the community, and this partnership allows that community to grow while protecting everything that makes the shop special. I feel a deep sense of comfort knowing the shop, its history, and its values will still be here for future generations of... guitar lovers around the world."

TNAG also owns Carter Vintage.

LACM, FG4K HELP L.A. GUITAR STUDENTS

The Los Angeles College of Music (LACM) and nonprofit Free Guitars 4 Kids (FG4K) welcomed 200 local students to LACM's Pasadena campus on December 6 for "The Sound of What's Possible," an event presented by Sweetwater and featuring LACM faculty and other pro guitarists.

Many of the 200 participating students lost homes, schools, and instruments in last year's wildfires in Altadena. Throughout the day, they were presented with new guitars provided by Sweetwater, given lessons/mentorship, and offered resources to continue learning.



JOE BONAMASSA

Fit For A King

When Joe Bonamassa terms *B.B. King's Blues Summit 100* an "insanely ambitious project, rolled out in less than nine months," it's not hyperbole. The prolific blues-rocker (50 studio, live, and video albums), co-producer/guitarist Josh Smith, and a raft of greats – Eric Clapton, "Kingfish" Ingram, Robben Ford, Jimmie Vaughan, Slash, Buddy Guy – cut 32 King songs, paying homage to the 100th birth anniversary of their hero and friend.

The 48-year-old, who opened for King at

age 12, says, "The whole community came together for him."

What was your first exposure to B.B.?

Like any good Roman Catholic in upstate New York, when you have your first communion, they throw you a party. I had about \$200 in family donations, and my parents let me go to the record store. The two records I bought, at eight years old, were Steve Morse's *The Introduction* and B.B. King's *Live At The Regal*. Once I put

that on, I was hooked. It was very much a life-changing moment. Arguably you could say it's B.B.'s greatest record, front to back; also, maybe *Blues Is King*, with the four-piece band.

First time I met him was May 24, 1990. I know that because he signed a blues calendar with the great Ernest Withers shot of him with the ES-5 and the shorts. I knew I was going to meet him because I was opening for him, and he signed and dated it. That really started a friendship that lasted 25 years.

I tried to think back of how many shows I've done with B.B. over the years. My best guess is around 120. Early on, he used to borrow our backline, and he loved this particular Twin Reverb I had – a 1970 silverface with mismatched Music Man speakers. Probably the loudest, punchiest Twin I've ever heard.

Did you ever ask him for advice?

B.B. would be like, "Son, you've got to watch your money, you've got to watch the women, and just keep doing what you're doing." The most interesting thing B.B. ever taught me was in 2005, his 80th birthday tour. I'd just gotten this thing called an iPod, and he showed me how to take songs off of a computer and drag them onto it. An 80-year-old man showing a 28-year-old. He was super hip. Just the way he would carry himself. I learned so much about how to tour, how to be a professional. He was a gracious, humble guy with this skill set that was devastating.

When did you decide to undertake a tribute album?

In September of 2024, a friend said, "Do you know B.B. King's turning 100 years old next year?" I asked around, "Who's doing something?" Nobody was. We couldn't let his 100th birthday go and not acknowledge it. So, in January of last year, Josh and I went to Sunset Sound and cut 23 of our favorite B.B. King songs. The first person we asked was Marcus King, because we'd heard him sing "Don't Answer The Door."

Obviously, file sharing is now the norm. Did you initially put down scratch solos and vocals?

Yeah, there's [unused] versions of me singing and playing all of these songs. We recorded the equivalent of four records, and did five tours in between all of it. So we had to do it via e-mail. We were having trouble pinning down "Thrill Is Gone." It would be diametrically opposed to reality if we didn't do it. You're in the kill zone. Either you get someone who's so young that they don't care, or you get two icons. When we pitched it to Eric and Chaka Khan, and both of them said yes. But Chaka said, "I want to hear what Eric plays so I can sing around it." Eric said, "I want to hear what she sings so I can play around that." So... I might have done my best Eric Clapton impersonation for Chaka to just get a gist of what he *might* do. She did say, "Eric's playing really well." (laughs) "Yeah, thanks." We had to do the place-holder for her to sing to, strip my bits away, then Eric played to what she sang.

Did you purposely dig into your Gibson collection?

I'm playing rhythm on most of the record. So if I wasn't soloing, I was on a 335 or Strat, and a bunch of the rhythm was an old Gretsch 6120. I sometimes used a tweed Vibrolux I had on the bus.

There are multiple generations – from Larkin Poe to Bobby Rush, who's 92.

It really brought it full-circle. You have Buddy and Bobby, who knew him when he was a kid. It's funny, when you talk to guys like D.K. Harrell, who really has gone to the B.B. King school of blues singing and playing, he's like, "Man, I always wanted to meet him." You realize how lucky we were to have rolled with him in the '90s. – **Dan Forte**



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IN MEMORIAM

MICK ABRAHAMS

A founding member of Jethro Tull, guitarist Mick Abrahams died December 19. He was 82 and experienced deteriorating health over the last 15 years.

Abrahams played on Tull's 1968 debut album, *This Was*, lending Eric Clapton-fueled chops to a cover of Cream's "Cat's Squirrel" and blues-based "My Sunday Feeling." His slide on "A Song for Jeffrey" further reflected his Chicago inclinations while his rig reflected the Slowhand influence – a Cherry Red Gibson SG through a Marshall stack during the band's career-launching residency at London's Marquee Club.

Even with a strong start, Abraham's Tull tenure was brief, as the guitar man preferred rockin' blues while singer/flautist Ian Anderson



Mick Abrahams

wanted to mix rising FM rock with Celtic folk, jazz, and Elizabethan minstrel flavors (which became Jethro Tull's '70s signature). By late '68, Mick formed Blodwyn Pig, a boogie outfit that echoed Fleetwood Mac, Cream, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, and



Joe Ely

other stalwarts of British blues. In 2018, he told *Prog* magazine, "From the beginning of Blodwyn Pig, I had a vision. Essentially, I've always thought of myself as a blues player but with a little country, jazz and other styles thrown in for good measure.

I never wanted us to be seen as performing one type of music or another."

Upon learning of Abraham's death, Ian Anderson said on social media, "Mick was vitally important to the early Tull formation out of the ashes of the John Evan Band and McGregor's Engine. We all offer our condolences to Mick's family and close friends, who can feel justifiably proud of his achievements and musical legacy."

Longtime Tull guitarist Martin Barre added, "Mick... was so nice to me and that is something I will never forget! What a magnificent guitar player who gave us so much! Rest in peace." – **Pete Prown**

JOE ELY

Joe Ely, the West Texas singer/songwriter who blazed a trail with powerful original songs and a diverse yet fiery sound, died December 15

of Parkinson's and related ailments at his home in Taos, New Mexico. He was 78.

After retiring, Ely released albums of previously unissued material, most recently 2025's *Love and Freedom*.

Amarillo-born, raised in Lubbock, he emerged in 1972 as one-third of the short-lived Flatlanders with Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock. After they disbanded, he began a solo career.

Ely's songs and voice were driven by a formidable band including pedal-steel great Lloyd Maines, guitarist Jesse Taylor and later, David Grissom. A 1978 tour with the Clash left both impressed. In the '90s, he recorded with Flamenco guitarist Teye and in 2017 was admitted to the literary-oriented Texas Institute of Letters.

"Joe started his band in 1973," recalls Maines. "I was lucky enough to be there from the get-go. Joe was such a dynamic artist onstage. I always felt empowered to play better than my best. He gave 150 percent at every show. We band guys had to rise to the occasion. He was a one-of-a kind artist and a great friend."

Grissom, with Ely from 1985 until '91, got his first PRS and vintage Marshall when he joined Ely.

"We were a true band of brothers having the time of our lives. Joe encouraged me to find my own approach, playing for the song by using dynamics, and showed me what it was like to kick ass every single night.

"He was an artist in the truest sense of the word... equal parts storyteller, performer, and spiritual guide with a wonderful sense of humor. He was a great friend and mentor to countless musicians and fans. Our lives are all richer for having known him." – **Rich Kienzie**

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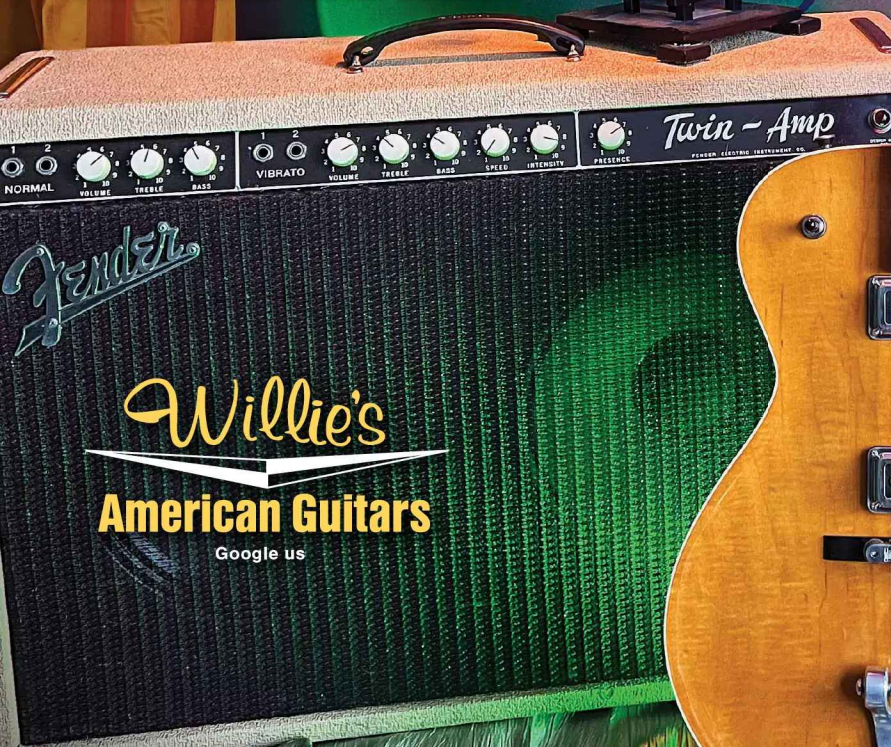
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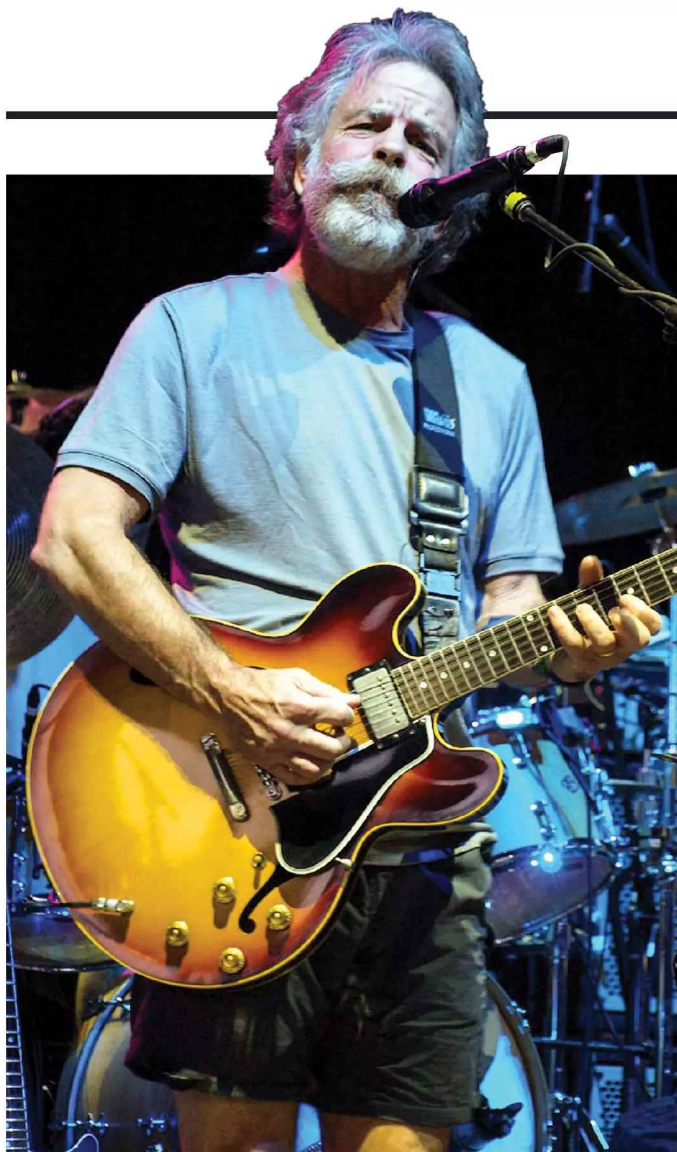
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BOB WEIR

1947-2026

The word “icon” is overused, but Bob Weir was the genuine item. If Jerry Garcia became the face of the Grateful Dead, then Weir played Robin to his Batman – a rhythm guitarist with a boyish face, quirky vocal style, and desire to break out of traditional chord forms. The well-loved musician was 78 when he died from cancer on January 10.

Originally called the Warlocks, the Grateful Dead burst out of San Francisco in 1966-'67 and built a global following based on jam rock and an unrepentant stoner lifestyle. The Dead's music stood apart with its vast improvisations, Weir, Garcia, bassist Phil Lesh, and others often jamming simultaneously. Listen to the 23-minute live cut “Dark Star” from

Bob was an integral part of that metamorphosis. His guitar playing defied traditional rhythm guitar as it existed prior and, although he and Garcia forged their styles together, their approaches couldn't have been more different, with Bob's parts invariably adding a sense of mystery and undefinable uniqueness to the music. Having played with Bob countless times through the years, I was always struck by his inimitable style and approach. When you combine that with the amount of great songs he wrote or co-wrote through the years – ‘Cassidy,’ ‘Jack Straw,’ ‘Estimated Prophet,’ ‘The Other One,’ and ‘Looks Like Rain’ – his place in the music pantheon is solidified.”

1969's *Live Dead* to hear Weir's loose rhythm and upper-fret chord workouts, always seeking new harmonic possibilities while complementing the musical whole. Later, he created work apart from the psychedelic legends, including projects with Kingfish, Bobby & the Midnites, RatDog, and the post-Garcia act he co-led, known variously as Dead & Company, The Dead, and The Other Ones; a Netflix documentary on Weir was titled *The Other One* in reference to his contribution to the Grateful Dead independent of Jerry Garcia.

Warren Haynes, who toured with the Dead in 2004, told *Vintage Guitar*, “[The Dead] learned and grew together and what they discovered, through psychedelic exploration and experimentation, led to the creation of a whole new genre of music.

For guitars, Weir was an omnivore, playing everything from Gibson ES-335, ES-345 and SG models to various Stratocasters and Telecasters, Martin flat-tops, a Guild Starfire IV, D'Angelico and Modulus creations, along with numerous customs. In a 2010 interview with *VG*, former Ibanez honcho Jeff Hasselberger remembered designing a new model with him.

“When I first went to see the Dead around '74, I didn't really know which guitars to show them,” Jeff recalled. “I kind of paired off with Weir; Bobby was full of ideas, [which] got my juices flowing. So I offered to make whatever he wanted. Bob liked the idea of a sliding pickup that could be moved to get different tones, but he also liked the idea of a couple of humbuckers. I suggested that we put a sliding single-coil between the buckers... that was kind of easier said than done, but I got it to work. Bobby played it like that for a year before he stopped moving the pickup around, so we made another guitar with the pickups fixed in position (*Ed. Note: this became the Ibanez Professional model*). Bob was also interested in a large headstock, so that prompted designs for the ‘Cowboy Fancy’ guitars Ibanez briefly produced in 1976.”

On hearing of Weir's passing, Phish's Trey Anastasio said, “I knew Bobby for many years, but it was in the lead-up to Fare Thee Well (the 2015 concerts) that we really became close. I went to his beach house and we spent three nights playing guitar, cooking scrambled eggs, listening to records, and walking on the beach. Bobby told me incredible stories about his life. He said that when [the Grateful Dead] were learning ‘Uncle John's Band,’ they were listening to the first CSN album and trying to harmonize like them. When they were learning ‘Help on the Way,’ they were trying to sound like the Mahavishnu Orchestra. I found all of that endlessly fascinating. Bobby was also allergic to compliments in the most endearing way. I'd say, ‘Man, that guitar riff you were doing sounded really killer,’ and he'd respond, ‘Well, I'm sure I'll f*** it up next time.’ I loved that about him.”

As proof of Weir's influence transcending musical boundaries, Julian Lage, one of today's most important jazz guitarists, recalled his impact.

“Bob is a huge inspiration to me,” Lage told *VG*. “The music he created has deeply impacted the world of improvisation, teaching us how to share, how to be inclusive, and how to spread light and love through sound. What could be greater? Thank you, Bob.” – **Pete Prown**



ERIC KRASNO

Musical Chemistry

Soulive is back with its first full-length studio album in more than a decade. *Flowers* is funky, soulful, juicy, and packed with the kind of blues-jazz guitar-and-organ-trio stylings that make the band so irresistible. Eric “Kras” Krasno is a busy cat, so *VG* was lucky to catch him standing still.

What’s new?

In January, we did the Concert for Altadena show to raise money for the victims of the Eaton Fires in Los Angeles. We had Stephen Stills, Jackson Browne, Aloe Blacc, Ozomatli, Everclear, Brandon Flowers, and Brad Paisley. Oh, and I’m playing with Taj Mahal, Dawes, Oteil Burbridge, and The Revivalists in New Orleans. That’s what my world is now, putting together all-star bands and being the captain of this big ship and trying to make it land.

The cool thing about being a music direc-

tor for these things is you get to work with so many heroes. It keeps things fresh. It’s a lot more work than touring with a band, but you get to work with so many cool people.

Does being a music director mean you don’t get to play?

Oh, I *always* play when I’m the music director!

Fans have been waiting for a new full-length Soulive album for ages.

It was a fun experience. We recorded it in Iceland. The studio was really amazing; it’s in one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever been – there are glaciers, mountains, and the ocean. It’s insane. The first thing I asked was, “Why are we going there?” We all have home studios. But I’m glad we went – it was very inspiring. I’d heard from other artists who’d been there, so we were like, “Okay!” It also gave us a reason to do a full-length album.

A lot of the material came alive in the moment, which is always our best work. We always have some sketches and ideas walking in, but the magic happens in the moment. We have a flow that works well with the three of us. I forgot Soulive was my first real touring band. I was in Lettuce before, but Soulive has this unspoken thing that happens when I’m in the room with [brothers] Alan and Neal Evans.

It’s been almost 30 years since we started. I’ve played with so many groups, but it’s nothing compared to when I walk into a room and we start playing. One guy hears this, another hears that, and it’s a telepathic thing. We’re all leaders, but we all listen, and we definitely have a chemistry after all these years.

What gear did you bring for the sessions?

We were in the middle of nowhere, but the studio had a bunch of vintage gear. I used a silverface Deluxe reissue – a really good one. I brought my pedalboard and my D’Angelico signature model. I pretty much used that to play on the whole record. It’s called a DC and has the semi-hollow 335 vibe, which is right for Soulive.

It’s perfect for “Three Kings.”

We came up with that years ago. We were in the studio in New Orleans the day B.B. King died, and we wrote that song as a tribute. While we were there, Brian Wilson and Sly Stone passed that week, so we wrote “Flowers at Your Feet.” Initially, it was instrumental, but it sounded like a Sly Stone thing. So we sent it to Van Hunt. He added a Sly-meets-Brian-Wilson thing to it. We didn’t intend to make an album of nods to the greats, but it naturally happened. So we named the album *Flowers*, as in giving flowers to the greats.

What was on your pedalboard?

My King of Tone, a PolyTune 3 Mini, an MXR Super Badass Variac Fuzz pedal, MXR Mini Phase 95, a tiny MXR Carbon Copy, and a mini wah. I love mini pedals because I’m traveling all the time. It’s amazing what you can pack into those little boxes nowadays. The fuzz is great because you can get a filtered sound. It’s a tone thing, not a super-fuzz sound, but I can make it do the big-fuzz thing, too. Oh, I’ve also had a Mooer Trelicopter Optical Tremolo for years.

What’s next?

I’m building a music education platform and producing master classes. It’s called On-semble, and I’m doing deep dives into what I do. When you absorb so many things over the years, it’s not easy to sit and explain it. So, I’m creating these master classes to help people. It’s a cool way to dig into what I’m doing. It inspires me to practice more. – **Oscar Jordan**



GLENN TILBROOK

Squeeze: Origins Resurrected

For more than 50 years, the British pop/new-wave band Squeeze has created superbly crafted songs like “Tempted” and “Hourglass,” written mostly by lead vocalist/lead guitarist Glenn Tilbrook and vocalist/guitarist Chris Difford. *Trixies*, the group’s first new album in eight years, consists of songs written in 1974 (when both were teenagers) and put on cassette as demos performed mostly on piano. A loose collection of stories/tunes set in a nightclub, it was influenced by concept albums and rock operas of the mid ’70s, and the 2026 version is performed by the entire band including producer/bassist Owen Biddle.

VG spoke with Tilbrook about creating *Trixies* and his underrated talent as a lead guitarist.

Had you and Chris talked about the *Trixies* songs over the years and thought about properly recording them?

When we wrote the songs, we were really

excited by it and all our friends liked it, but they were the only people who ever heard them. As a writer, you have to carry on. We didn’t have a deal, didn’t have anywhere for the songs to go. Even if we did, we couldn’t have played them properly; our experience as writers was way ahead of our ability as musicians. Now, we can apply our experience and knowledge to what we wanted the songs to sound like as a band.

But did you think the songs were good? Your friends thought so...

I didn’t have that sense of ourselves. We sounded good, and we *were* better than I thought at the time. The songs are some of our most-mature ever.

How much did you tweak the arrangements?

I’d say all except two are pretty much as we did them. The only real change was on “You Get the Feeling” to give it a more-skippy beat. It was very blues-based when I wrote it because that’s what I was listening to.

Was there other music that influenced you and Chris when you wrote the songs?

I can go through the track listing and [recall] my melodic sense of writing at that point; for almost every song, I can say, “That was influenced by that...” “Anything But Me” is a very Roxy Music-influenced song. On “Why Don’t You” and “Hell on Earth,” there’s a very big Sparks influence. On “The Place We Call Mars” there’s a massive David Bowie influence. I think you can see that. But, then again, (the songs are) nothing like any of those people. I don’t think we sound like them, but I can hear those influences come through loud and clear.

Why did you decide to do *Trixies* now?

The last album we did, *The Knowledge*, was in 2017. I remember talking to a friend on the record-company side, and he said to me, “*The Knowledge* is a great album, but what’s the story?” The story is so important. It’s a gift to have the songs [on *Trixies*], and for them to now be 51 years old... I can’t think of a better story. You couldn’t make it up.

Owen Biddle came to Squeeze from The Roots in 2020. Why did you have him produce?

His musicality and ears are fantastic. Also, Owen can look at us from the outside, and I think that’s great. I worked very closely with him and never heard him make a wrong call. It’s great to have someone who can bridge the gap between myself and Chris.

Squeeze is known for tight, catchy songs, but when you play live, you cut loose with extended guitar solos.

Jimi Hendrix was my gateway into guitar – the first person I was aware of who played so beautifully. His influences became my influences. That wonderful instrumental section he did at Woodstock – the Wes Montgomery octave playing and all that stuff – just hit me. I can let it rip live in a way that I don’t on records because my playing is still blues-based. That’s really where it comes from. From our second album (1979’s *Cool for Cats*) onward, there’s one or two songs on each where I would write the solo, learn it, and play it as part of the song – not an improvised thing. I liked playing the solos in “Another Nail in My Heart,” “Black Coffee in Bed,” and anything written as a part of the song.

Which electric guitars did you play on *Trixies*?

I used my black ’66 Telecaster; it has a B-Bender and I love that guitar to death. It’s been my main guitar since 1986. I also played a ’66 ES-345 and an ES-125. I leave the Tele at home now because the Fender Custom Shop made one for me with a B-Bender. I can’t tell the difference. – **Bret Adams**

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DAVID DVORIN

Hard-Boiled Guitars

On *Hard-Boiled Music*, composer/guitarist/professor David Dvorin and his group, Pocket Quartet, explore the sinister side of instrumental film noir through the lens of blues and spacious free jazz. Hollowbody guitars shape shift between the edgy and elegant, but it's Dvorin's mindful approach to composition that takes listeners on a spine-tingling journey.

There's a lot of freedom in your arrangements.

Form to me is a big deal. I always have to change it up because you hear so much of the same kind of stuff. I always have to have something odd in there.

You have a blues background.

I was taken to all the San Francisco blues festivals when I was a kid in the '70s and '80s. My dad wanted me to be a lead guitarist in a rock band, but I rebelled and went to music

school (laughs). I got into art music and composition, but the blues has always stuck with me; I love blues as a compositional vehicle. I love stretching it and changing it. Even in the chamber work that I write, there's a blues thing going on, and jazz, of course, which is a huge influence. I would never associate myself as either a blues or jazz guitarist, but they are important influences for me. I was obsessed with Jim Hall and Bill Frisell for a number of years.

How does film noir music influence your compositional style?

We have to find things to keep us motivated and do new things. Film noir was an obsession, and I turned out a bunch of pieces like that. My fundamental

principle is to do my own thing. I started playing guitar when I was eight. I value artists who express a unique voice, so from the get-go, I never wanted to emulate anyone. I wanted to go after whatever was interesting to me at the moment but keep adding to it to make it uniquely me. That's what I like about listening to music. That's been my guiding principle all along and the principle behind my compositional work.

The film noir thing started as a joke between me and our bass player, Randy McKean. We used to joke about some of the old gangster films and the language they used. So, I started writing music around some of the slang, and it grew on me. I read *The Big Sleep*. Raymond Chandler's writing is the thing that pushed it over the edge. He has a slang dictionary in the back of the book, which was great. That book influenced me the most.

There's beautiful grittiness on "The Shiv." Which guitar are you playing?

No one leaves a knife fight unscathed. For the entire album, I play a Bacon Belmont made by Gretsch. It's a fat archtop from the mid '50s with DeArmond Dynasonic pickups. It's an amazing guitar. Before KittycasterFX went out of business, they made the Groovy Wizard; I was looking for something where I could lower the Volume knob. I hate when fuzzes drop out. It gave me a driving sound even when the Volume was turned down. I'm cascading that into an Origin Effects DCX Boost, which gives me a little extra grit. It's a gnarly sound that reminds me of a Supro Valco Comet from the '50s. I love that gnarly clipping, and these pedals give me that. I love gain staging. There are endless possibilities.

What's on your pedalboard?

I'm using a two-tier Schmidt Array board. The effects I use depend on the guitar. The Gretsch is super clear and works well with a tiny bit of compression, so the first thing I hit is the ThorpyFX Fat General, which allows me to blend dry signal and makes my guitar sound punchy and fuller. That goes into the DCX Boost to get more grit. The next stage is fuzz, then into a Strymon Volante Echo Machine; I always have some tremolo and reverb. I like tremolo last. I use a Red Panda Tensor granular delay on "Low Low Low" to get glitchy, weird, pitch-shifting effects.

Which amps did you use?

The main amp was the Victoria Vicky Verb. It gets a really great sound. I swapped out the original speaker with a 12" Celestion Blue, which gives me the highs I want. On "Benny the Fink," I used an Analog Outfitters Sarge amplifier. The natural overdrive on that is amazing.

What do you tell students who are searching for their voice on their instrument?

I'm a professor of composition, and I build my classes around that. I teach a lot of electronic music and music technology. We learn by emulating others, but hopefully you move on and build on that. My courses are built around trying to find something unique in your voice or in your head, then trying to manifest it. Getting that original idea out in some way so it hasn't been altered or hasn't been influenced too much.

The reality is, when we come up with stuff off the top of our heads, it's usually a concatenation of things we've heard in our memories. It's us misremembering things or trying our best to re-create something we've heard before. Our brains mess it up, and that's an important thing to honor. I encourage that – it's intuitive writing. – **Oscar Jordan**



JAY HOOKS

Hot Shots

Jay Hooks is living proof that you can't keep a good Texas blues-rocker down. After playing in blues singer Lavelle White's backing band, the singer/songwriter/guitarist released three albums early in the 21st century – *Hooked Up*, *Jay Hooks*, and *Red Line*. *Tequila & Bullets* is his first in more than 20 years. A scorching collection of fresh songs, it was created with drummer/producer Matthew R. Johnson, bassist Brock Proctor, and a handful of guest musicians. Hooks spoke with *VG* about his return.

You took a long break. Did you even touch a guitar and, if you didn't, did your playing change?

I had been doing it since I was a teenager and I was about 35 and I had a lot of things going on. I always tell people there were a lot of extracurricular activities happening – drinking and a lot of things. Anyway, I stopped playing. I didn't touch it for a long time and every once in a while, I'd do a gig somewhere, but my playing was terrible. Six or seven years ago, I picked it back up. I had to re-learn. In

my mind, I wasn't rusty at all, but physically I couldn't keep up. I always joke; people say, "You play pretty well. How long have you been playing?" I tell 'em, "I've been watching Youtube for two weeks!"

I started watching Youtube, thinking, "I'm no jazz or country player, but I love everything." I'd take stabs at that stuff, but I've always played blues. I started getting into jazz, running scales and doing exercises to get me where I was playing good again. I feel like I'm playing better now than I ever have; I'm looking at things a little different, but playing the same. The jazz stuff's okay, but I like to bend and those guys like to slide.

Once you got back into playing, did you start writing the songs that became *Tequila & Bullets*?

I started recording things and almost had a full record in the can. I got together with my old manager and he was like, "We're not using any of this." So we ended up writing a whole new record and within a month were recording it. It came together very quickly. I'm more like blues-rock – Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Winter, Billy Gibbons. I've got that rock element and I kind of went really bluesy. We got to thinking, "Hey, let's put a little more rock into it." That's just what I am.

Why do you play a Firebird?

The Firebird story is kind of funny. I bought my red one – a '95 – in '99 or 2000. It didn't have one ding before I got it – looked brand new. A lot of people don't like Firebirds, and all I'd played was Strats because I hated Gibbons. I didn't want a humbucker anywhere near me (laughs). I had a '70s Strat with a four-bolt '58 Jazzmaster neck with jumbos on it.

Anyway, I couldn't play the Firebird, but I was gigging every night and forcing myself to play it. I was like, "I bought this guitar and I hate it." After about a month, I picked up the Strat and went, "Oh no, I'm done with that." I got used to those humbuckers. They've got a bit more meat to 'em. Once I really got into the Firebird, I never looked back. I played it on most of the new record.

Is it stock?

It is except for an old Seymour Duncan bridge pickup. It's just a hair hotter. My friend put it in 25 years ago and I've never pulled it out.

Which amps and effects did you use on *Tequila & Bullets*?

I used my white '61 Bassman with a '61 cabinet. I don't use any effects – straight into the amp. Now I play a Hot Rod DeVille, which has overdrive in it. Guys are like, "You don't have a pedalboard?" I'm like, "What for?" The tone's not in that pedalboard. It's in your hands. – **Bret Adams**



Shannon with his Heritage 525.

JOHN SHANNON

Home to Jazz

John Shannon's first album, *A Day in Tarifa*, is, in his own words, "a debut jazz record, a debut instrumental record."

Recorded live in a Paris studio, *Tarifa*'s moody original compositions reveal Shannon's command of mainstream jazz, seamlessly blending the traditions of Wes Montgomery and Kenny Burrell with the later concepts of Pat Metheny and Lee Ritenour. Using his early-2000s Heritage 525 and a '60s Deluxe Reverb, he recorded it with keyboardist Cliff Barnes and drummer James Johnson III.

"I love the organ trio format," he said. "There's a trance nature to the organ that I love, and writing songs for that sound, as well. Cliff is an incredible player."

Three songs, "Four-One-Two" (Pittsburgh's area code), "Liberty Bridge," and "Allegheny Current" honor his roots. The octave passages in "Four-One-Two" reflect admiration for Montgomery and the late Pittsburgh guitarist Jimmy Ponder, who also utilized octaves in his playing.

The title song was inspired by a visit to Tarifa, a coastal town near Gibraltar, Spain, and it blends swirling passages with straight-ahead interludes. "I was writing two different parts, and it was a reflection of that place," Shannon said. "I'm trying to come from all the greats and the language of the music but also explore into the future a little bit."

Born into Pittsburgh showbiz, his late grandfather was TV personality Paul Shannon,

beloved host of the long-running '60s/'70s kids show "Adventure Time." John grew up in the southern suburbs, obsessed with music from five years old; he'd "mess around" with his father's 12-string acoustic until an aunt gifted him a '90s Strat that he plugged into a Peavey amp.

Two albums particularly inspired him – Wes Montgomery's *A Day in the Life* and John Scofield's *Groove Elation*. Before high school, he studied with Duquesne University jazz guitar faculty including Joe Negri protégé Ken Karsh.

"I got the jazz harmonic stuff in my ears early, though it went away. I came back to it in high school."

Sitting in at Pittsburgh jazz venues, he got to know the scene and explore the city's jazz heritage. After graduating from Berklee, he led the Metheny-inspired Waking Vision Trio before freelancing in New York.

"That took me down different avenues. I was playing fusion, rock and roll, playing with songwriters, TV stuff. A lot of touring, a lot of studio work."

He returned home six years ago.

"I got back to writing in the genre and playing with other musicians. It just felt like the right time." In 2019, he and two partners opened the jazz club/restaurant Con Alma. "People love jazz here. The scene needed a center. It's a unique city for the world-class level of jazz musicianship."

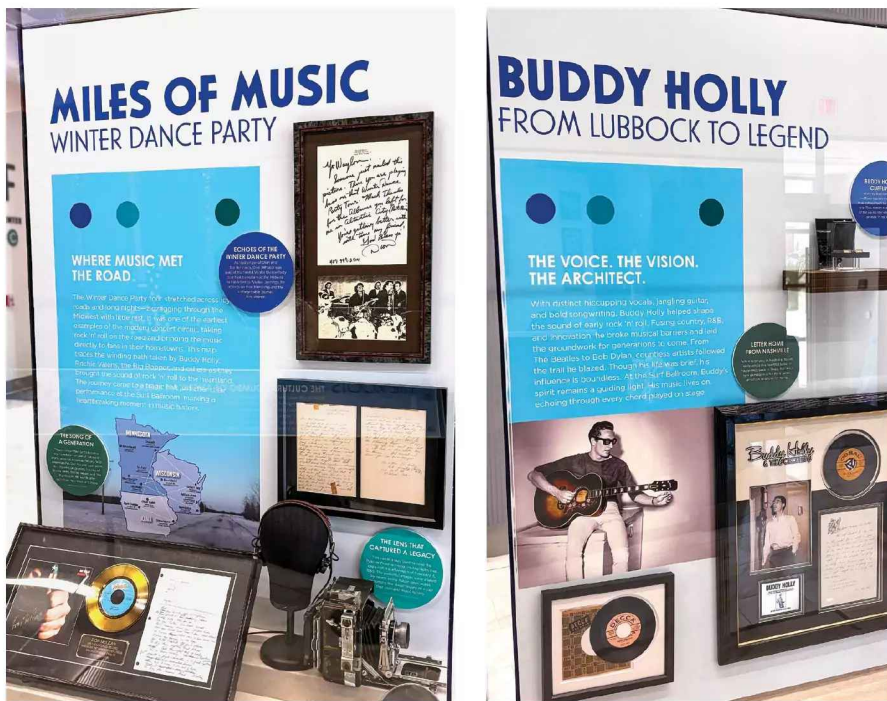
The Heritage 525 remains his main instrument, in part "...because it's like an old Gibson," but he also has an Eastman T64 that he equipped with humbuckers. "You never find a thinline 335-type guitar without P-90s, and I'm a humbucker person." His third guitar is late-model Epiphone Emperor, and when it's time to play rock, he grabs a Heritage Les Paul.

"I have some good old amps now – a Marshall JMP from '82 that I use for rock stuff, a '60s Princeton, and the Deluxe Reverb."

His strings are D'Addario. "I do flatwounds – an .011 set and I'll put at least a .012 on the high E, always with a wound third. I used to play heavier picks with lighter strings and lighter picks with heavier strings, but now I use a Fender heavy for jazz because I can get the tone of the strings better."

"I believe the majority of your sound is in your hands," he stresses, and uses effects to add a touch of wet, "...a spring reverb, a bit of delay. I'm an atmospheric player. There's a cool MXR pedal called Sugar Drive, but I don't use it to drive; I add low compression just to push the hollowbody through the speaker a little bit more."

He also likes ProCo's The Rat, calling it "kind of a rock thrash pedal [with a] knob that enables you to still have a round tone. It doesn't take you into sharp distortion." – **Rich Kienzie**



Displays document the 1959 Winter Dance Party tour, Buddy Holly, and more.



A signed Buddy Guy signature Strat and Les Paul's log prototype.

WHERE THE MUSIC LIVES

Surf Ballroom Opens Music Experience Center

Known to music fans worldwide as the venue where Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson played the Winter Dance Party tour stop just hours before their fateful plane crash in the early morning hours of February 3, 1959, the Surf Ballroom has been a vibrant music venue since it opened in 1933.

Tucked comfortably in its Midwest home of Clear Lake, Iowa, and replete with its original dance floor and '50s aesthetic, the building is one of only four music venues in the U.S. designated as a National Historic Landmark. Today, it continues to host performers playing rock and roll, swing, country, and contemporary music.

Last September, the North Iowa Cultural Center & Museum, a nonprofit that runs the Ballroom, opened the attached 10,000-square-foot Surf Music Experience Center to display artifacts including one of

Les Paul’s “Paulverizer” multi-track recorders, a prototype “log,” and guitars signed by B.B. King and Buddy Guy.

“Visitors will see some of the most pivotal pieces in the history of the electric guitar,” said Surf Ballroom marketing manager Pete Potts. “We have one of only two surviving prototypes of Les Paul’s 1937 ‘log’; the other is in the Smithsonian, and we’re particularly fond of his handwritten schematics and eight-track console, which helped revolutionize modern recording. The exhibit even includes a 1970 Gibson played by Les himself. The artifacts remind us how one innovator’s vision helped shape the sound of rock and roll for generations.”

All current artifacts are on permanent display and Potts says the facility’s collection will continue to expand as artists play at the venue. For more information, visit surfballroom.com – **Ward Meeker VG**



B.B. King autographed this Epiphone Lucille signature model for the Surf Ballroom.



LEGENDARY CONNECTION?

The Unique Story of a '63 Strat

— BYWARD MEEKER —

Any collector – be they gatherers of violins, motorcycles, cars, or pop memorabilia – dreams of owning a “holy grail.” Maybe it’s a Guarneri, a Cyclone, Ferrari 250 GT, or a Universal Superman lunch box. But in each niche, there are the top prizes.

If you’re collecting fancy happens to involve guitars, there are two types of grail. The most common – the relatively obtainable type – is the classic Gibson Les Paul Standard from the late '50s, a Fender “nocaster,” or the pre-World-War-II Martin D-45. The other type – the super-

rare – is a guitar played by (and identified with) an icon. Such instruments have an aura all their own – and, usually, names! Say “Woodstock Strat,” “Pearly Gates,” “Blackie,” “#1,” “Nancy,” or “Frankenstrat,” and guitarheads know exactly which instrument you’re talking about – instru-

ments of legendary status for having been played on a song, album, during a star’s career apex, or at a monumental concert. As collectibles go, they occupy sacred ground.



In mid 1965, an up-and-coming Jimi Hendrix stepped away from his gig backing Little Richard and began to secure work as a session player. He didn’t stay particularly busy, and so formed a band, Blue Flame. But he maintained ties with the studios, especially Juggy Sound, in New York City, where he first worked in 1965. Though studio logs do not list which guitars Hendrix used on specific tracks, it’s broadly accepted he favored white Fender Stratocasters made prior to 1966 – those like the aforementioned Strat famously wielded at the 1969 Woodstock Music and Art Fair.

Then there’s this one. A '63 model bearing serial number L14985, Olympic White finish, matching pickguard (with the renowned green hue), Fender’s “small” headstock, a maple neck carved to the company’s B shape, and a Brazilian rosewood fretboard, it once belonged to studio head Henry “Juggy” Murray and – the story goes – rarely left Juggy Sound except to accompany Hendrix to an occasional jam/

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recording session, or to his homes in Los Angeles or his father's home in Seattle.

One of those trips was key in tracing its history; in a signed letter dated June 28, 2006, Hendrix's younger brother, Leon, recalls seeing the guitar when the two lived together in 1968.

"It's a very unique guitar, because I don't remember seeing many Stratocasters with a lime-green guard," the letter says. "We both thought it was ugly and Jimi never liked the way it looked under the lights." Though nobody can say who did it, experts who have inspected it first-hand agree the finish – still in Fender's Olympic White or something very close – was applied some time ago and either covered or replaced the guitar's original sunburst.

Perhaps a stronger tie to the legend, though, is the guitar's shortened vibrato bar – Hendrix was known to do this to guitars because, being left-handed, he had to flip them upside-down, and the shorter bar offered less

interference. Better still, Leon points to a black mark made in the cavity carved to accommodate the vibrato block and springs. The surviving Hendrix recalls his brother was very capable of maintaining, tweaking, and fixing his instruments. "[He] would do his own work," he said. "If a connection had broke, or to make certain adjustments... if connections were not pure or perfect, Jimi would fix it himself."

While observing one such fix, Leon caught a glimpse of the mark. "I noticed work had been done in the [back]. It left a black mark inside, which I do remember seeing, because it is very unusual."

Though it bears no hole on its upper treble bout that would hint at the installation of a strap button for use by a lefty and its nut is very much that of a righty instrument, neither factor reduces the probability it was a Hendrix guitar; various photos show Hendrix early in his career playing guitars on which he employs the standard strap button, letting the strap cross the back of the neck. Certainly, it may have hindered his playing when it came time to get fancy, but he tolerated it. And of course, replacing a nut

is the sort of skill learned in Guitar Tech 101.

As the guitar changed hands, several experts checked the veracity of its story and backed their opinions in writing. Jesse Amoroso, whose shop, Cowtown Guitars, brokered the guitar, gave it a thorough once-over.

"It was really neat to be able to hold a piece of history like that in your hands," he said. "I had the chance to spend a couple days with the guitar carefully inspecting it and it all checks out. The black paint mark Leon mentions is present. Electronics are all '63 Fender and the pots date to the 46th week of that year.

"The guitar has tons of vibe," he added. "It is *so cool!*"

Another person who enjoyed some time with the guitar is Amoroso's partner in Cowtown, Mark Chatfield, a veteran of the vintage-guitar market.

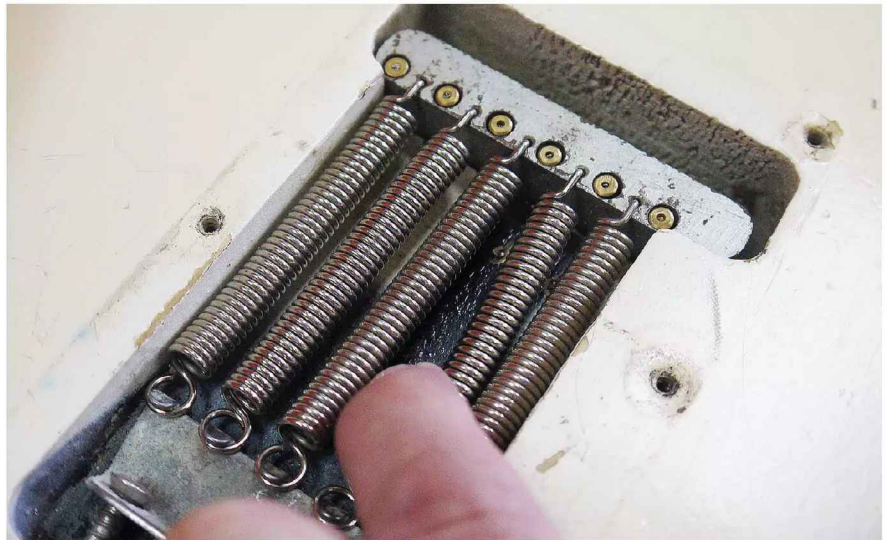
"It's once in a blue moon – if ever – that you get to play a guitar used by Jimi Hendrix. Not just that it was his, but it's a great guitar, to boot! It's probably one of the best



'63 Strat necks I've had my hands on – nice and fat! As is the sound!”

“Its condition is good – it has been refinished in white,” said Dave Hinson, owner of Killer Vintage and another industry vet who has held the guitar, and looked at it closely. “The documentation to support its being a Hendrix guitar is significant, and I saw no parts changed or mods beyond what Jimi is said to have done. It plays and sounds very good. As far as it being a real Hendrix guitar, DNA evidence would be the only thing left to prove it beyond doubt.”

When Hendrix completed the live *Band of Gypsies* album recorded to fulfill his obligation to producer Ed Chalpin, he apparently gifted the guitar to recording engineer Skip Juried as a show of appreciation for making Juggy Sound (which by 1970 was known as Sound Center) so readily available to him. Though he recorded albums in other places, Hendrix had a soft spot for the studio because it was smaller, more laid-back, and less high-tech. In March of 1970, some believe Hendrix used it to record the guitar parts on “Blues in 3/4” and “My Friend” for a Noel Redding solo album, *Nervous Breakdown*, which went unreleased.



Black paint under the vibrato springs is key to the story of this guitar once belonging to Juggy Sound and Jimi Hendrix. Jimi's younger brother, Leon, recalls catching a glimpse of it while his brother once worked on the guitar.

Juried kept the Strat the remainder of his life. After his passing in 1988, his will bequeathed ownership to a family member, who held it until 2005, when he sold it via

auction. It now resides in a private collection.

This feature was originally published in the March '13 issue. **VG**



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- '58 Sunburst "Lefty" 100% original in Near Mint, Perfect collector's piece.
- '59 Blond 100% original in Mint condition.
- '59 Red/Slab Rose neck Original custom color, 100% original.
- '61 Fiesta Red/Slab Rose neck 100% original. Near Mint condition.
- '62 Sunburst/Slab Rose neck 100% original. Near Mint condition.

- '62 Blond Refret, changed nut in "Beat-Up" condition, Player's dream!!
- '65 Sunburst 100% original, Near Mint condition, Mint-Green pickguard
- '65 Candy Apple Red 100% original, Excellent condition, Mint-Green pickguard
- '65 Olympic White 100% original, Excellent condition, Mint-Green pickguard
- '65 Olympic White 100% original
- '65 Olympic White "Tortoiseshell Pickguard" Gold Hardware 100% original
- '65 Olympic White "Tortoiseshell Pickguard" 100% original
- '66 Sunburst We have 2 Super clean gears in stock.
- '66 Sunburst 100% original in EX condition.
- '69 Blond/Rose neck 100% original, Amazing tone!!
- '70 Sunburst/Rose neck 100% original in Near Mint condition, We have 2 in stock.

- '70 Olympic White/4 Bolt Rose neck only refret, changed nut, Super clean!!
 - '71 Black/4 Bolt Rose neck only changed nut & SW, Amazing tone!!
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Dumble-modded Princeton Reverbs from '65 (above) and '66. Other than the plugged hole for the absent Reverb control, the '65 appears much like any standard Princeton Reverb of the era. In retaining its Reverb circuit, the '66 PR's control panel looks totally stock.

DOUBLE VISION

Dumble-Modded Princeton Reverbs

BY DAVE HUNTER

As the highest-profile creations of Howard Alexander Dumble – amplifiers made for Steve Lukather, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Johnson, Jackson Browne, Robben Ford, Sonny Landreth, Rick Vito, Carlos Santana, Joe Bonamassa, the late David Lindley, and others – have become the most valuable guitar amps on the planet, his lesser-known early work and modifications have also become desirable while casting a finer focus on how the tube guru got his start.

DUMBLE-MODDED 1965/'66 FENDER PRINCETON REVERBS

- Preamp tubes: three 12AX7s in '65, plus one 12AT7 in '66
- Output tubes: two 6L6GC
- Rectifier: solid state
- Controls: Volume, Treble, Bass, (Reverb on the '66) Tremolo Speed and Intensity
- Speaker: '65: Single 12" Altec 417B; '66: single 12" JBL D-123
- Output: '65 approximately 50 watts; '66 approximately 25 watts

The amps built by Dumble during the peak of his career were fetching tens of thousands of dollars well before his death in January, 2022, while inspiring several of the most-revered guitar stars. In recent years, we've featured an early custom build from 1971 called the Special 16 (April '22), and a modified Orange head done for Los Angeles guitarist Joey Brasler in the mid

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Fender '62 Strat '87, Blonde/gold hw, exc, \$2950
Fender Coronado Bass II '67, subset, exc, \$2750
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Traphagen BRC Model, '23 Exc, Brazilian \$10,500
Eugene Clark Flamenco '08, exc cond, \$9999
Tim Sheerhorn R-Body '96, mojo, playwear, \$5995
Clinesmith Square neck reso, '03 exc cond \$3500
Gibson AJ Luthiers Choice '01, BRW, exc+, \$7500
Grammer G-10, '69?, Brazilian RW, vg cond, \$2500
Kevin Muiderman OM '06, IRW, exc cond, \$4250

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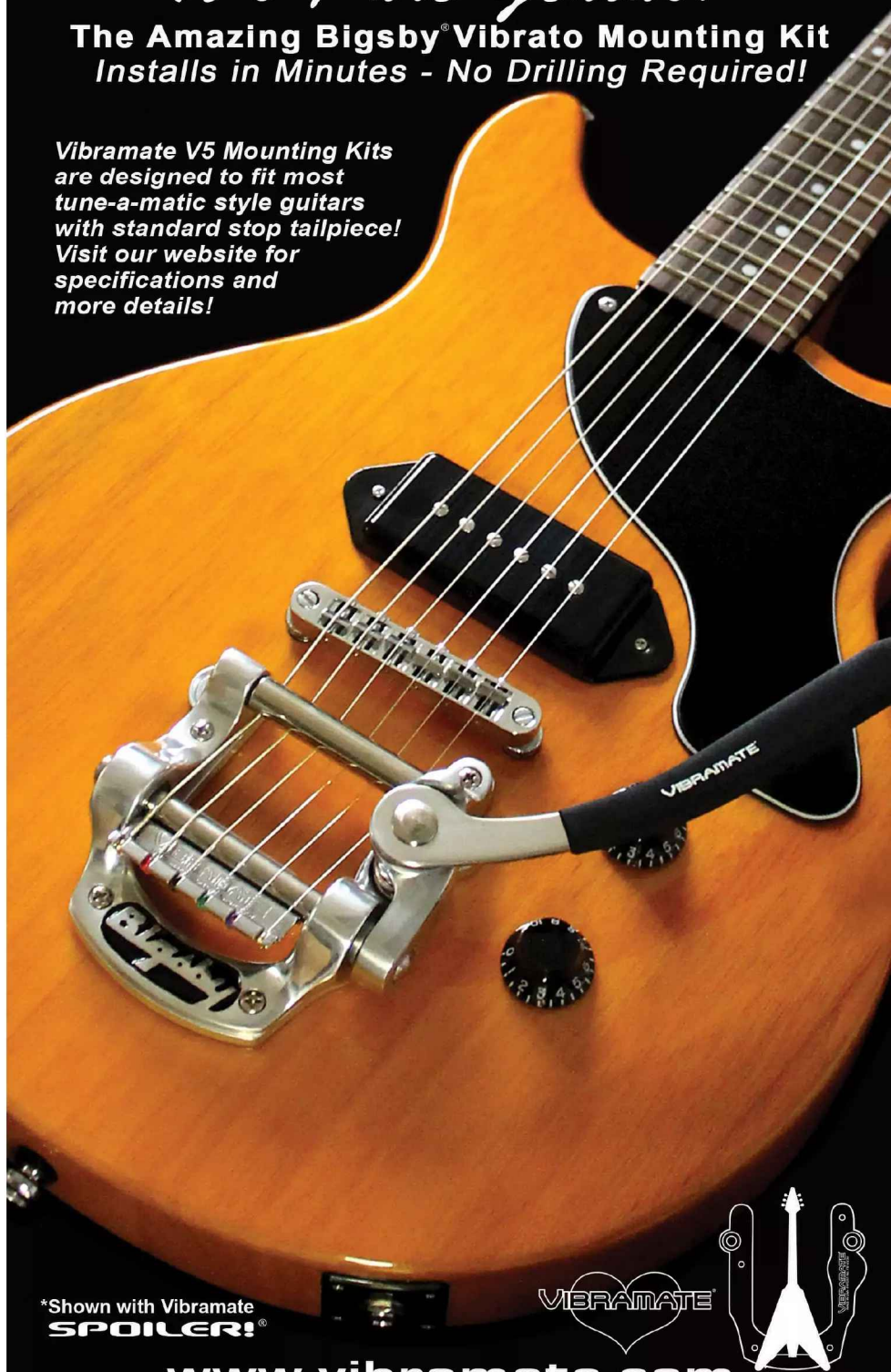
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them in his collection for nearly 25 years. Inquiries with Smith and the Boogie people revealed, however, that they were *not* his work, while further investigation pointed to the circuits of another groundbreaking California modder of the era.

“My research was extensive, involving countless e-mails and phone calls, hundreds of miles driven around California, hundreds of hours research on the web, pestering the guy who sold the amps to me, and cold-calling folks who knew Dumble in Santa Cruz,” Castro tells us. “After much detective work, I’ve determined that both are Dumble amps he reconfigured in 1969 and 1980. They span a decade, and the nature of the sound and technical alterations reflect this. This fact alone provides a wonderful context to share what Dumble did

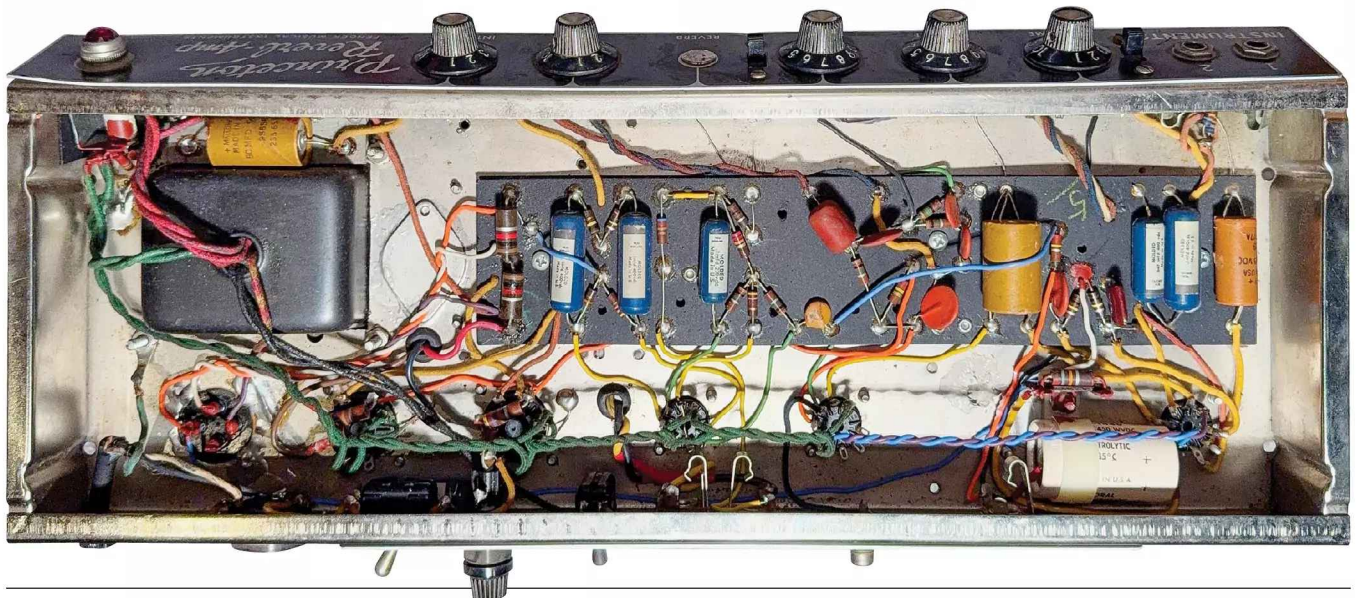
’90s (October ’22), while one even earlier hot rod and a slightly later sibling were languishing in storage, unrecognized as the master’s work.

Most VG readers know the story of how Randall Smith launched Mesa/Boogie by modifying Princeton Reverb combos in the late ’60s and early ’70s, so it’s no surprise this pair of Fenders – built in 1965 and ’66 –

were long mistaken for Smith’s work. Early Princeton Boogies are extremely collectible in and of themselves, of course, and this is what amp enthusiast Jonathan Castro believed this pair to be when he bought them for a not-inconsiderable price a couple years ago from a Bay Area vintage dealer.

That dealer acquired them in the late ’90s and, thinking the same thing, kept

The ’65’s large Altec speaker, one removed preamp tube for the deleted reverb circuit, and the large Bassman-style output transformer hanging beneath the power switch. The chassis of the ’65 shows that Dumble reused many original components, though the circuit was considerably reconfigured.



over time, and sheds light on the evolution of his earliest work, something that almost nobody talks about.”

To further test his hypothesis, Castro shared detailed images with three of the best-known Dumble-style amp builders working today – Bill Krinard (Two Rock), Tommy Cougar (Custom by Cougar), and Jelle Welagen (Welagen Amplification) – all of whom have spent considerable hands-on time with original Dumbles, confirmed their origins.

By dating some of the components and style of work, it appears the '65 Princeton Reverb was revamped by Dumble in '69, while the '66 combo appears to have been rebuilt around 1980. The former had its reverb circuit removed (the bias-modulated tremolo

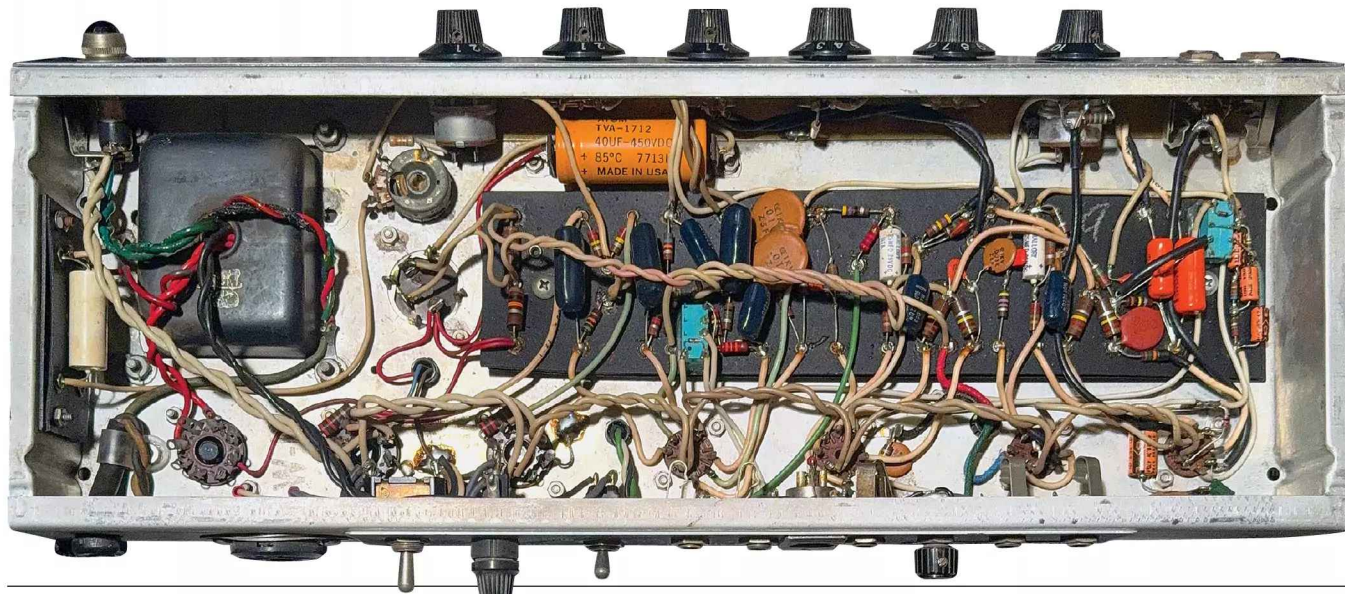
The '66 has the unusual microphone inputs and Level control, as well as a slightly smaller Bandmaster OT. On a circuit board that was also considerably reworked by Dumble, the rectangular teal-colored boxes at top-right and center in the chassis are relays for the footswitchable boost.



remains intact), while the latter retains both reverb and tremolo but is otherwise an entirely modified design.

Despite retaining much of their original looks and elements of their factory construction – including the control positions and functions for all remaining knobs (other than the '65's plugged Reverb control) – the preamp and output stages of both

amps are Dumble through and through. It's interesting to note that Dumble reused many of the original signal capacitors, as the internal circuit photos confirm, but both power (PT) and output (OT) transformers were replaced with larger units, and each circuit was reworked toward the legendary maker's vision of optimal clean-into-overdrive tone.



Dumble was often known to use stock Fender transformers in his amps, and the codes on both PTs tally with being upsized units intended for the 6L6 output tubes with which each amp is fitted. The OT on the '65 lacks any codes but is engraved "Fender" and appears identical to the transformers used in '60s Bassman amps. The code on the OT in the '66 indicates it was intended for a Bandmaster head. Both used 6L6s (or their equivalent), but the Bassman achieved a 50-watt output while the Bandmaster peaked at 35 to 40 watts RMS, a differential reflected in the girth of their respective OTs. Both have also had their tube rectifiers replaced with solid-state diodes (housed in a plug-in unit in the '66).

"This is one of Dumble's earliest known Santa Cruz-era amps and likely pre-dates all his branded work," Castro says of the '65. "It's the best-sounding amp I own, including an original high-powered tweed Twin, an original Mesa Mk IIC+, and others. It has a clear bell-like quality, is rich in midrange and will not distort until very high on the Volume knob. It's a bare-bones amp but does an excellent clean sustain thing that, with the vibrato set to moderate levels, will

really create some magical sounds. I liken this amp to the tonal nucleus of all later Dumble amps because without that great clean sound, nothing else works."

While the two look much the same other than their transformers and the elimination of reverb on the '65, the '66 is quite different inside and may represent a prototype of a later "standard" Dumble offering, if anything in Dumbleland could be called standard. By the mid '80s, Dumble's price sheet listed a model called the Hotel Hog alongside the better-known Overdrive Special and Steel String Singer. Unlike those, the Hotel Hog was, in fact, a full modification that Dumble applied to Fenders, revamping their preamp and output stages while also adding a footswitchable boost.

"If you look at Steven Rosen's interview with Dumble in *A Dumble Book* by J. Schwarz, Dumble gives a rundown of what the Hotel Hog amp is – a low-powered recording amp that has a big sound and can mimic an ODS," says Castro. "This description is apt for my Princeton Reverb, owing to its low/moderate output, the microphone inputs on the back with level control, and the XLR preamp-out on back.

Rather than tapping the cascading-gain overdrive stage for which many Dumble amps are famous, the Hotel Hog's gain is boosted by means of a relay that changes the values of the cathode-bias resistors and bypass caps in the preamp to achieve more drive from the same tubes. According to Castro, "That small boost in the front end can yield similar overdrive sounds to the ODS."

However you approach them, this pair of Dumble-modded Princeton Reverbs provides endless fascination for amp enthusiasts, and an invaluable window on the lesser-known work of the tube world's most-revered practitioner. In sharing them with us, their owner primarily seeks "to spread the word about what Dumble did, things that are not in the common lexicon of amp lore and are far from the oft-repeated clichés that one comes across on the internet." If you have a Hotel Hog or further information about these rare amps, please drop a line to VG.

To read VG's memorial to Dumble, go to VintageGuitar.com and search "Alexander Dumble 1944-2022."

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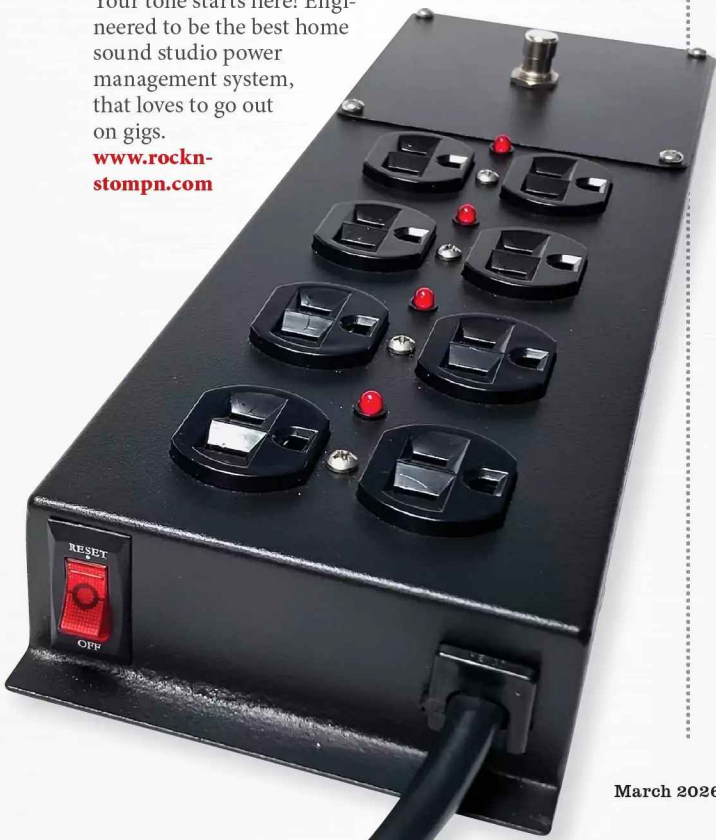
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Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli



1963
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Model 365

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
1960s	Airline Electric Hollowbody	Harmony H-76 copy	\$1,000	\$1,500
1966	Ampeg BT-15	50 watts, 1x15, ss	\$400	\$700
1971	Ampeg V-3 Head	55 watts, tubes	\$700	\$875
2003	B.C. Rich Body Art Collection	Various models	\$400	\$600
1986	Basic Systems' Side Effects	Triple Fuzz	\$100	\$150
2003	Boss Digital Reverb RV-5		\$90	\$125
1880s	Bruno & Sons Parlor Guitar	Brazilian Rosewood	\$2,000	\$3,000
1989	Charvel Fusion Deluxe		\$850	\$1,125
1998	Collings OM2HAV	Varnish	\$6,500	\$10,000
1935	Cromwell Acoustic Archtop	With '30s era pickup	\$1,500	\$3,000
1958	Danelectro Hawaiian Lap Steel		\$1,000	\$1,250
1992	D'Aquisto Solo/Solo Deluxe		\$95,000	\$125,000
1940s	Dickerson Oasis	1x10, pearloid	\$350	\$475
1984	DOD Delay FX90		\$85	\$150
2015	EarthQuaker Devices Fuzz Master General		\$100	\$140
1971	Electra Rock		\$550	\$800
1976	Electro-Harmonix Y-Triggered Filter		\$150	\$200
1968	Epiphone Crestwood Custom	Cherry or white	\$2,200	\$3,000
2000	Epiphone Explorer Korina		\$650	\$850
1963	Epiphone Olympic Double (Solidbody)	Double-cut	\$2,000	\$3,000
1961	Epiphone Windsor (1 Pickup)	Sunburst, mini-hum	\$2,000	\$3,000
1980	Fender 75	1x15, tubes	\$500	\$675
1970	Fender Bassman	Silverface 2x15	\$700	\$950
2007	Fender Champion 600 (later version)	1x6, two-tone, 6V6, 12AX7	\$225	\$300
1968	Fender Dimension IV		\$325	\$425
1988	Fender Esquire Custom (Import)		\$1,000	\$1,500
1999	Fender Jaguar '62	USA	\$1,800	\$2,800
1978	Fender Mustang	Antigua	\$2,000	\$2,500
1967	Fender Precision	Sunburst	\$6,500	\$9,500
2003	Fender Rumble 100		\$175	\$225
2000s	Fender Stage 1000 Dyna-Touch III		\$325	\$425
1973	Fender Stratocaster	Rare color	\$8,000	\$10,000
2009	Fender American Standard Stratocaster Limited Edition	Matching hdstk, Seafoam Green	\$1,500	\$2,200
1995	Fender 50th Anniversary Stratocaster Relic	Custom Shop	\$3,000	\$4,500
1962	Fender Telecaster	Rare Color	\$40,000	\$60,000
1970	Fender Telecaster Thinline	Natural ash	\$11,000	\$15,000
1997	Fender '60s Telecaster Custom		\$3,000	\$4,500
2019	Fender Jimmy Page Mirror Telecaster	White blonde, 8 mirrors	\$2,500	\$3,800
1963	Fender Vibroverb	Black, 1x15	\$5,000	\$7,500
2002	Fulltone Distortion Pro		\$125	\$175
1995	G&L Legacy	3-bolt, Alnicos	\$800	\$1,000
1965	Gibson Barney Kessel Custom		\$4,500	\$6,000
1965	Gibson Dove	Early '65	\$6,000	\$8,000



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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
2019	Gibson Eric Clapton 1964 Firebird I	COA, hand signed plate	\$6,500	\$9,500
2013	Gibson ES-335	Ebony or sunburst	\$1,375	\$2,000
1965	Gibson ES-345 TD or ES-345 TDSV	Early '65, wide neck	\$7,500	\$9,500
1985	Gibson Explorer XPL	Kahler	\$1,800	\$2,800
2001	Gibson Flying V '59 (Custom Shop)	Natural	\$4,500	\$6,500
1965	Gibson GA-55 RVT Ranger	4x10	\$650	\$850
1970	Gibson J-160E		\$2,500	\$4,000
1994	Gibson 1951 J-185 Limited Edition	100 made	\$4,000	\$6,000
1970	Gibson Johnny Smith/Johnny Smith Double	1 or 2 pickup	\$7,500	\$10,000
1960	Gibson L-5 CES/L-5 CESN	Sunburst, PAFs	\$18,000	\$22,500
1969	Gibson Les Paul Custom	Black, 1-piece body	\$16,000	\$21,000
1982	Gibson Les Paul Guitar Trader Reissue	Shaw PAFs, highly flamed	\$11,500	\$18,000
1998	Gibson Les Paul SmartWood Exotic		\$1,800	\$3,000
2004	Gibson Les Paul Studio	Platinum Plus	\$1,800	\$2,800
1993	Gibson Nighthawk Custom	ebony board, flametop	\$2,500	\$3,500
1986	Gibson SG Les Paul '62 Custom		\$3,500	\$5,000
1948	Gibson SJ (Southern Jumbo)	Script, Sitka	\$11,500	\$14,500
1966	Gibson Super 400 CN		\$12,000	\$15,500
1994	Godin Acousticaster 6 Deluxe		\$800	\$1,200
1960	Gretsch Chet Atkins Hollow Body (6120)	Single-cut	\$8,000	\$12,500
1950	Gretsch Electromatic Standard (6156) Lap Steel	Brown pearloid	\$450	\$575
1995	Gretsch Silver Falcon (6136SL) (1955) (T)		\$2,000	\$3,000
1980	Guild Bluegrass Special D-50	Indian rw	\$2,000	\$3,000
1969	Guild F-312 Artist 12-String	Indian rosewood	\$2,000	\$3,000
1970s	Guild Model One	1x12, ss	\$175	\$275
1966	Guild Stuart X-500		\$3,500	\$5,000
1982	Hamer Blitz	3-on-a-side peghead	\$2,200	\$3,000
1959	Harmony H-22	1 pickup, 2-on-a-side	\$1,375	\$1,750
2000	Heritage Millennium SAE		\$2,000	\$3,500
1966	Hofner Model 500/1 Beatle	RH	\$3,500	\$4,250
1999	Ibanez BTB Series	Various models	\$325	\$450
1970	Ibanez Model 2020	Strat copy	\$800	\$1,200

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2026

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND.	
			LOW	HIGH
1991	Ibanez Powerlead PL5 (SoundTank)	Plastic	\$25	\$35
1986	Jackson Soloist/ Solist USA	Ontario-built	\$2,800	\$4,000
1956	Kawai Acoustic		\$300	\$500
1960s	Kimberly Longhorn	S-style, 2 pickups	\$450	\$800
1987	Kramer Pacer Custom I		\$900	\$1,125
1977	Lab Series L5 Combo	ss, 100 watts, 2x12 piggy	\$400	\$500
1999	Line 6 DM-4 Distortion Modeler		\$90	\$165
1960s	Magnatone Model 432	Trem, Rev	\$700	\$875
1990	Marshall JCM 900 Model 4502 Combo	25/50 watts, 2x12	\$800	\$1,125
1973	Marshall Model 1967 Major 200-Watt Head	Large box	\$1,250	\$2,000
1969	Marshall Supa Wah		\$400	\$800
1911	Martin 000-18	Rosewood	\$13,500	\$18,000
1906	Martin 000-45		\$85,000	\$110,000
1965	Martin 00-21		\$6,500	\$8,500
1898	Martin 0-18	Brazilian	\$5,000	\$6,500
1991	Martin Custom 15		\$2,000	\$3,000
2012	Martin D-1R		\$1,000	\$1,500
1980	Martin D-41		\$4,000	\$6,000
2007	Martin Doobie-42 Tom Johnston	Indian & Englemann	\$5,000	\$8,000
2004	Martin HD-28VE		\$2,500	\$3,500
2001	Martin OM-15		\$1,500	\$2,500
1996	Martin SP000-16TR		\$2,000	\$3,200
1950s	McKinney Guitars Lap Steel	White pearloid	\$350	\$450
1985	Mesa-Boogie Studio .22		\$700	\$1,000
1966	Mosrite Combo Mark 1		\$2,500	\$3,800
1987	Music Man StingRay	5-string	\$1,750	\$2,500
1953	National Model 1109	2 pickups	\$1,500	\$1,875
2005	National Reso-Phonic Resoelectric Jr./Jr. II		\$775	\$1,000
1982	Ovation Classic 1663/1763	classical string	\$500	\$1,200
2008	Peavey 6505	Combo, 2x12, 60 watts	\$450	\$700
1981	Peavey Special 112		\$150	\$250
1996	PRS Artist III		\$3,500	\$5,000
2006	PRS Singlecut Artist 20th Anniv	Brazilian	\$5,000	\$7,500
1986	Rickenbacker Model 4003S		\$1,750	\$2,500
1958	Rickenbacker Model 345	Capri, thick body	\$9,000	\$12,500
1963	Rickenbacker Model 365	Bound Capri body	\$8,000	\$12,000
1957	Rickenbacker Model 650/Combo 650	1 pickup, 2-on-a-side	\$5,000	\$6,500
1996	Roland Blues Cube BC30	1x12	\$225	\$300
1906	Schulz Harp Guitar		\$1,500	\$2,500
1968	Silvertone Model 1422	40 watts, 1x12	\$500	\$650
1950s	Stella Flat-Top by Harmony	Student model	\$75	\$200
1964	Supro Big Star Reverb S6451TR	35 watts, 2x12	\$1,125	\$1,500
1997	Tacoma DM Series	Various models	\$300	\$500
2013	Taylor 614e		\$1,875	\$2,500
2007	Taylor GC-4	Sitka/ovangkol	\$950	\$1,250
1984	Tokai Goldstar Sound		\$800	\$2,000
1960s	Univox Thin Line (Coily)	6-string	\$500	\$800
2000s	Vox AC30 Reissue Model	Hand wired L.E.	\$2,250	\$3,000
1968	Vox Viper		\$1,200	\$1,800
1970s	Yamaha GC Series (Classical)	Mid-level	\$400	\$1,500
2013	ZVex Effects Super Seek Wah		\$150	\$195

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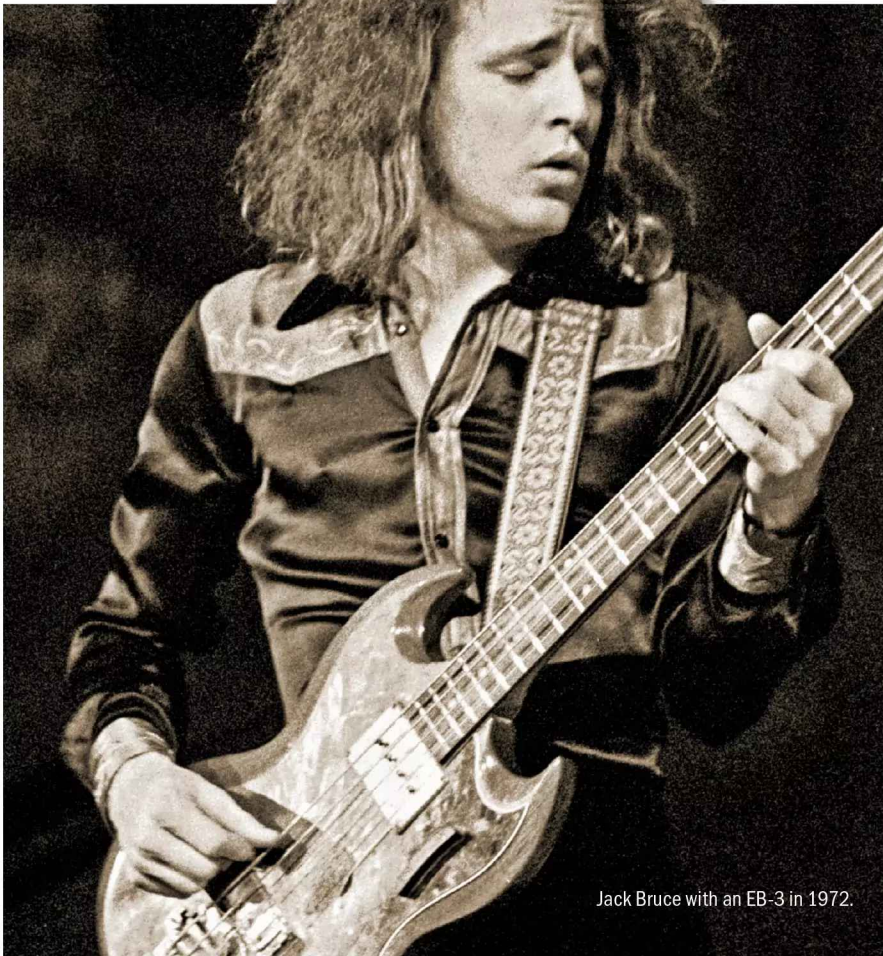
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Jack Bruce with an EB-3 in 1972.

BRUCE'S BASS TONES And Corrections in the Vintage Market

I don't recall ever reading how Jack Bruce got his sound. I think he used LaBella flatwounds on his EB-3, but does anyone know how he got his unique tone? I've been playing bass since I was 15 (I'm now 71), and am always amazed by his sound. Does anyone know what he played (and played through) on *Wheels of Fire*, *Disraeli Gears*, and then in *West, Bruce & Laing*? – Joe Dentice

I interviewed Jack (1943-2014) only once, in 1985, and because it focused on playing with Clapton, we really didn't talk about equipment. But, clues regarding his basses exist through photos from the Cream years. I've never pinned down exactly when his EB-3s were made, and it appears he had a few.

EB-3s made in '61 had knobs more spaced out than later models. At some point, Jack installed white knobs, which look distinctive; there are photos of him using it in the West, Bruce & Laing era.

The question in my mind remains: "How did he set the controls?" In all pictures I've found of him playing an EB-3, the Tone selector switch is set at position 2 (out of 4). That was the big deal, since that switch can have a wickedly profound effect on the tone thanks to its big ol' choke (inductor) like the EB-2 had. Pictures of the Volume and Tone knobs don't help at all.

Like most sensible EB-3 players, Jack removed that godawful mute and that annoying

metal thing that went over the strings just north of the treble pickup.

Strings? My bet would be flatwounds, which most bassists used back then. Which brand, I couldn't guess.

The late Buck Munger, who did artist relations for Sunn and then Gibson, told me that he had Cream on the hook, ready to be reeled in as endorser/users of Sunn amps. At the last minute, Clapton and Bruce requested JBL speakers. Sunn didn't do JBLs and wouldn't budge from using their own speakers, so the deal never occurred. Every photo you see of Hendrix with the Experience and The Who using or posing with Sunn amps was due to Buck's persistence.

In a lot of ways, I think it was the cranked Marshalls that did the heavy lifting for Jack's tone; open up the EB-3 and run your hand across the knobs of the amp – that's probably what was going on. – Tom Mulhern

I enjoy the financial analysis offered by the monthly "VG Price Guide" column and the annual book. I attended the Philly show in November, and left curious about the percentage drop during the most-recent corrections in the collectible market. – Dennis Russo

The last major correction saw the most-sought guitars (those in *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide's* 42-Guitar Index) decline of 20 to 25 percent from 2008 (final year of the market's largest-ever boom, driven by the introduction of hedge-fund money and Japanese buyers becoming more aggressive) to 2011-'12, which began the "lost decade" spurred by the global financial crisis. That was followed in 2021 by the effects of the pandemic, during which the guitar saw a major bump in popularity and the vintage market, specifically, affected by a cash infusion thanks in part to "covid checks." The most profound effect was a jump in values of the most-collectible guitars, which on average increased 91 percent over the following four years. Now, in early 2026, we are in the early stages of correction that so far is down five percent year-on-year. – Ram Tuli

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

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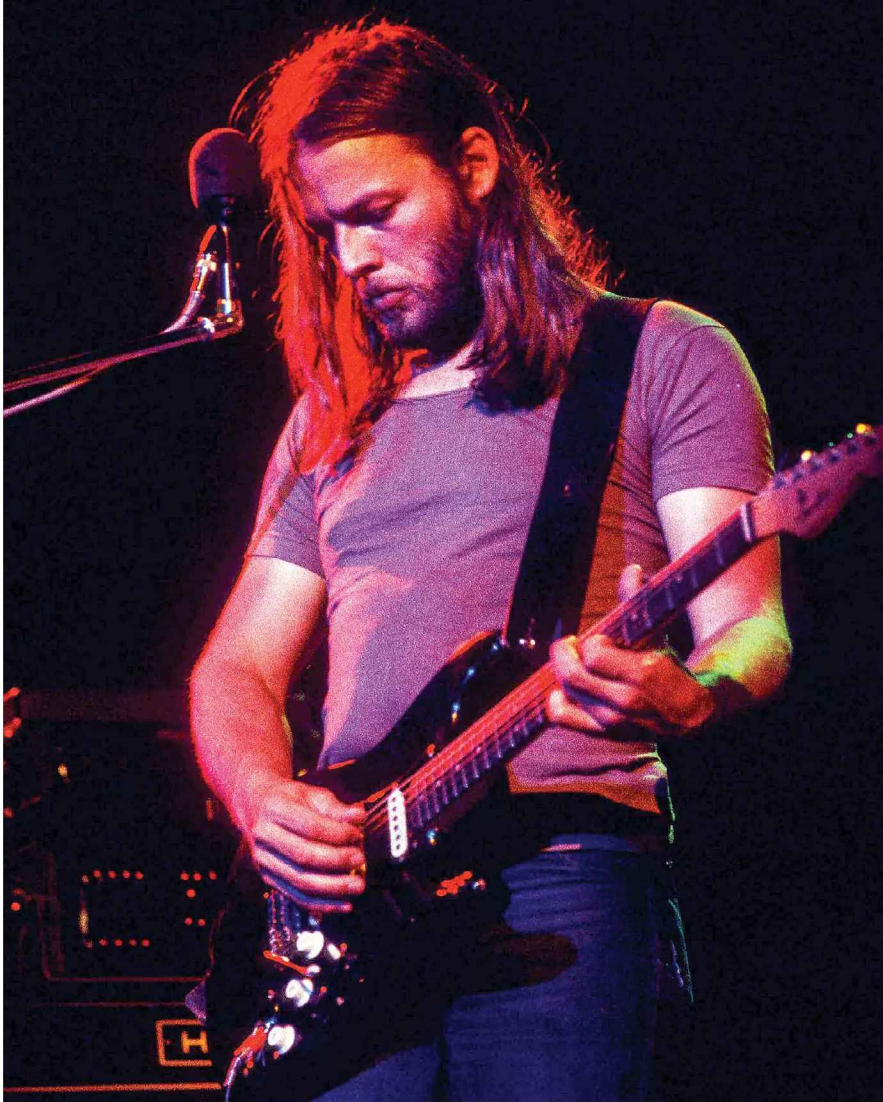
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STARSTRUCK

Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*

By Wolf Marshall

The ultimate concept album, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* is a multimedia suite blending rock timbres and textures with *musique concrete* and electronica; creating a Beatles/Hendrix-meets-Stockhausen/Cage impression rife with experimentation, it addresses sobering themes.

From birth, death, fear, and greed to divineness and madness, *Dark Side* transcends genre, style, and structure, yet is quintessential progressive rock in its art, technicality, and concept. Released March 23, 1973, the album reached #1 in America and remained on the charts for more than 800 weeks; to date, it has moved more than 45 million cop-

ies, making it the third-best-selling album of all time.

Pink Floyd's eighth record, *Dark Side* reaches back to rehearsals in '71. The band debuted six of the pieces at the Brighton Dome on January 20, 1972, and continued to hone them live before entering the studio. Recorded and assembled in sessions at Abbey Road Studios in May, June, October, and November of '72, as well as January and February '73, the quartet – Roger

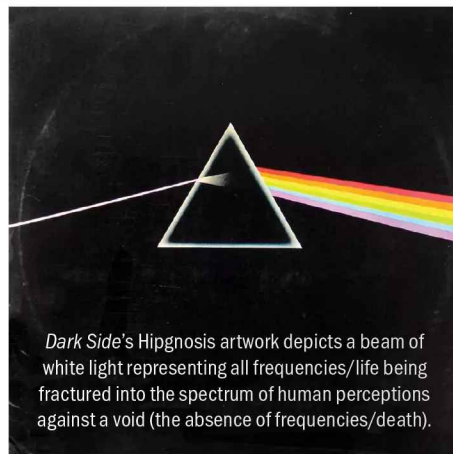
Waters (bass/vocals), David Gilmour (guitar/vocals), Rick Wright (keyboards/vocals), and Nick Mason (drums) enlisted 24-year old Alan Parsons (who engineered the last two Beatles albums as well as *Atom Heart Mother*) and Chris Thomas (mixing supervisor on the Beatles' "white album") to oversee technical aspects. Gilmour favored his black Strat ('69 body with '63 rosewood-board neck), a Bill Lewis 24-fret custom, and a Fender 1000 doubleneck pedal steel (in Open G6 tuning – D-G-D-G-B-E). His lead sound was colored with FuzzFace distortion, Binson Echorec II delay, and Colorsound power booster, then captured with Neumann U87 and U47 microphones positioned no closer than 18". Processors included EMS Hi-Fi multi-effects (distortion, phasing, ADT doubling, tremolo) and Valley People Kepex expander/noise gate. Gilmour used Hiwatt DR-103 100-watt amps feeding WEM or Hiwatt cabinets and Fender Twin Reverbs. He preferred to track with live effects and often recorded from the control room with a cable to an isolated amp.

Waters "gifted" composing credit for "Speak To Me" to Mason, its prelude a collage of sounds introducing thematic characters without lyrics, foreshadowing the album's premise. The music fades in with a simulated heartbeat (padded kick drum struck with mallet, processed with Kepex and EQ) coupled with a reversed piano chord, symbolizing nascent life and a human's first perceived rhythm.

The band incorporates clocks from "Time," cash registers for "Money," spoken word (Abbey Road doorman Gerry O'Driscoll), laughter (road manager Peter Watts) in "Brain Damage," helicopter noises (EMS VCS3 synth) in "On the Run," and screams in "Great Gig in the Sky." A reversed cymbal plus piano chord provides direct segue to the next track...

Originally named "Eclipse, Part 1," "Breathe," is a Waters/Gilmour/Wright collaboration expressing

birth, decay, and integrity on life's path. Gilmour enters with modulated (Leslie or Uni-Vibe) arpeggiations connoting an Em7-A7 Dorian vamp that serves as a thematic thread throughout the album. Over the half-time



Dark Side's Hypnosis artwork depicts a beam of white light representing all frequencies/life being fractured into the spectrum of human perceptions against a void (the absence of frequencies/death).

Slow Rock

F#m A

w/fuzz & echo

full

17

17

(17)

16

1/2

(16) 14 16 14

16

w/bar--|

0 19

1 1/2

(19) 19

full

E F#m Dmaj7

(19) 19 19

16

17

17/19

19

17 19 17 17

14

14

3

3

3

4

2/7

7 10/12 10

9 10

Amaj7 Dmaj7 Amaj7

3

3

w/bar--|

3

full

9

5

5

7

9

9

7

5

(9)

5

2/5

2

TAB

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"Blues bit with lyricism" distinguishes David Gilmour's solo in "Time." He knows when and where to apply pentatonic and blues-rock melodies, how to employ modal and arpeggio sounds, and, most significantly, how to avoid sounding calculated or clinical. This excerpt (4:12) is definitive. He relies on bluesy lines over F#m

and A chords in measures 1-4, replete with string bends and vibrato rendered with an aggressive hard-rock attitude, offset by a deliberate E arpeggio in 3. He changes mood to address pop-oriented Dmaj7-Amaj7 changes (4:26), favoring contrasting chord-outlining melodies with a more relaxed, spacious feeling.

rock groove enhanced by electric piano, he adds soaring slide overdubs on the Fender 1000 colored with volume swells, delay, and heavy reverb for an ethereal touch. Gilmour takes lead vocals and Wright conjures jazz influences in the sophisticated harmony (Cmaj7-Bm7-Fmaj7-G), particularly the Miles Davis-inspired D7⁹-D7b9-Em7 cadence (1:14).

Anxiety, deadlines, and panic are personified with overlapping sounds in "On the Run," an instrumental that combines panned footsteps, percussion, airport announcements, speaking, and modulated/filtered synth sounds (VCS3) over a synth ostinato. Composers Waters and Gilmour created the manic ostinato motif using an EMS Synthi

AKS to manipulate the sequence in real time. The heartbeat from "Speak To Me" (1:00) establishes tempo. Gilmour's guitar contributions are minimal – distorted backward effects articulated with a mic stand and part of the explosion at 3:03 (studio library effect combined with VCS3 and guitar). The piece was mixed by engineers and band members together, combining and adjusting their parts at the console.

A cacophony of ticking timepieces, alarms, and bells (recorded by Parsons at a watchmaker's shop) signifies awakening to the inevitable passage of time. The only song credited to all four bandmates, "Time" begins with a dramatic, spacious intro of sustained low guitar notes enhanced by Mason's Rototoms

and Wurlitzer along with Farfisa licks building to verse and chorus, sung by Gilmour and Wright respectively with four-part harmonies via session singers Doris Troy, Barry St. John, Liza Strike, and Lesley Duncan. Gilmour's Strat colored with Echorec and EMS Hi-Fli dominates verses with taut chording, slurred dyads, and bluesy fills. He claimed *Dark Side* contained his first solos of consequence, and "Time" is exemplary. His "blues bite with lyricism" (Strat with fuzz and echo) pervades the first 16 bars over F#m-A while his melodic, harmonically astute approach over the sophisticated changes at 4:26 reflects the singable quality of his style. Wright originally composed "The Great Gig in the Sky" as "The Mortality Sequence" for a live version of "Eclipse." Fear of flying and death are expressed in the brooding piano-driven piece, built on atypical chord changes revolving in and around G minor. Gilmour's atmospheric slide-guitar parts (0:18) and O'Driscoll's spoken-word passages give way to session singer Clare Torry's vocal (1:07). With minimal direction from the band, Torry assumed an instrumental persona and improvised an emotional wordless vocal solo over the Gm7-C9 Dorian vamp that reconciled gospel testifying,

and the wailing of Bourbon Street funerals.

Waters' denunciation of greed and materialism paradoxically resulted in unimagined financial rewards. "Money," the album's leading single, was Floyd's first U.S. hit and became their most popular number in concert. Waters later insisted it was about the "effect of money on people" leading to isolation and paranoia. The tape loop of cash registers, tearing paper, and coins took a full day to create, and its oblong 7/4 meter was used as a click track in the overdubs. A 12-bar blues progression in B minor with no IV chord (normally Em in bars 5-6), it mixed meters in verses. Gilmour doubled Waters' bass riff with palm-muted guitar, overdubbed tremolo chords, and sang

lead. He brought in longtime friend Dick Parry to provide the R&B-flavored tenor-sax solo, akin to a futuristic King Curtis flight, that precedes his own three-chorus guitar solo, which marks a milestone in Floyd's catalog. Each 12-bar-blues chorus, now in animated 4/4 time (with restored Em IV chord in the blues form), portrays a different sonic character reflecting Gilmour's goal to "sound a little off." The first features Gilmour's sustaining long notes, string bends, singing vibrato, and classic wet sound (Strat with ADT, fuzz, echo and reverb), the second is contrastingly rhythmic with short staccato phrases and very dry. The third chorus is played with his wet sound but on the 24-fret Lewis guitar, allowing access to the extreme high register. The track is further distinguished by Wright's Wurlitzer-with-wah comping, layered spoken-vocal phrases from O'Driscoll and Watts, Gilmour's guitar-vocal trading in the final measures and a cross-faded organ chord into "Us and Them."

Wright composed "Us and Them," the album's longest track and second single, as "The Violent Sequence" for the soundtrack to the 1970 film *Zabriskie Point*. When reintroduced to the band during *Dark Side* sessions, Waters began writing lyrics about war, civil liberties, class, race, and humanity. Wright presents the jazz-inflected chord progression (Dsus2-Esus2/D-Dm(maj7)-G/D) on Hammond RT-3 accompanied by Gilmour's arpeggiations (clean Strat with Uni-Vibe/Leslie). Floyd attains an ethereal mood in the ballad's intro/verses, complemented by Parry's sax fills. Gilmour is lead vocalist, joined by Wright and a choir of singers. Louder, animated bridges in B minor (2:36, 4:08) with distorted power chords provide dynamic contrast and the heavier rock

Moderate Rock (shuffle feel)

A
Bm7

w/distortion, delay & reverb

B
Bm7

no effects

C
Bm7

w/distortion, delay & reverb

Gilmour's lead work in "Money" is a fascinating study in contrasts, epitomizing his arranger's conception in crafting rock solos. This example presents opening phrases of each chorus. In A (3:06), he plays blues-rock pentatonic lines in Bm revitalized with his heavy attack, unpredictable phrasing

and wet lead sound. In B (3:47), he switches to a dry sound and space-conscious rhythmic approach, employing sparse economic licks. In C (4:28), he restores his wet tone and heavier approach, exploiting the high register for a dramatic climax.

factor in the arrangement. Wright's light piano solo layered with spoken-word passages forms an interlude to Parry's solo that exudes a melodicism associated with Stan

Getz, though Gilmour suggested he emulate Gerry Mulligan.

The improvisatory bent of "Any Colour You Like" (attributed to Gilmour, Mason, and

Moderately Slow Rock (half time feel)

Dm7 G7

w/Leslie effect

Dm7 G7 Dm7

G7

Dm7 G7

Gilmour's penchant for experimentation is at the forefront of "Any Colour You Like." This telling excerpt (2:05) over vamping Dm7-G7 changes finds him using a semi-clean Leslie sound.

He favors a combination of tight blues licks, Dorian modal lines (played with slurred phrasing on a single string in measures 2-3), double-stops, and emphasizes a funky lead/rhythm approach.

Wright) epitomizes British prog rock, made emblematic with droning organ/synth pads, and Gilmour's Leslie-processed guitar parts over a slow-rock Dorian vamp (Dm7-G7) reminiscent of "Breathe." The tight structure of *Dark Side* is loosened with this jam-oriented instrumental, dialog between synth and guitar acting as an important transitional pivot from "Us and Them" to "Brain Damage." Wright revealed it was his first try soloing on Minimoog (colored with echo) and Gilmour overdubbed

one of his most effective rhythmically driven improvisations (1:19). His solo of partial chords, double-stops, choppy phrasing, unison bends and simple modal lead licks bears a slightly brighter, dirtier Leslie sound inspired by Cream's "Badge." Jazz harmonies (C7#9) from "Breathe" are recalled in the segue to "Brain Damage."

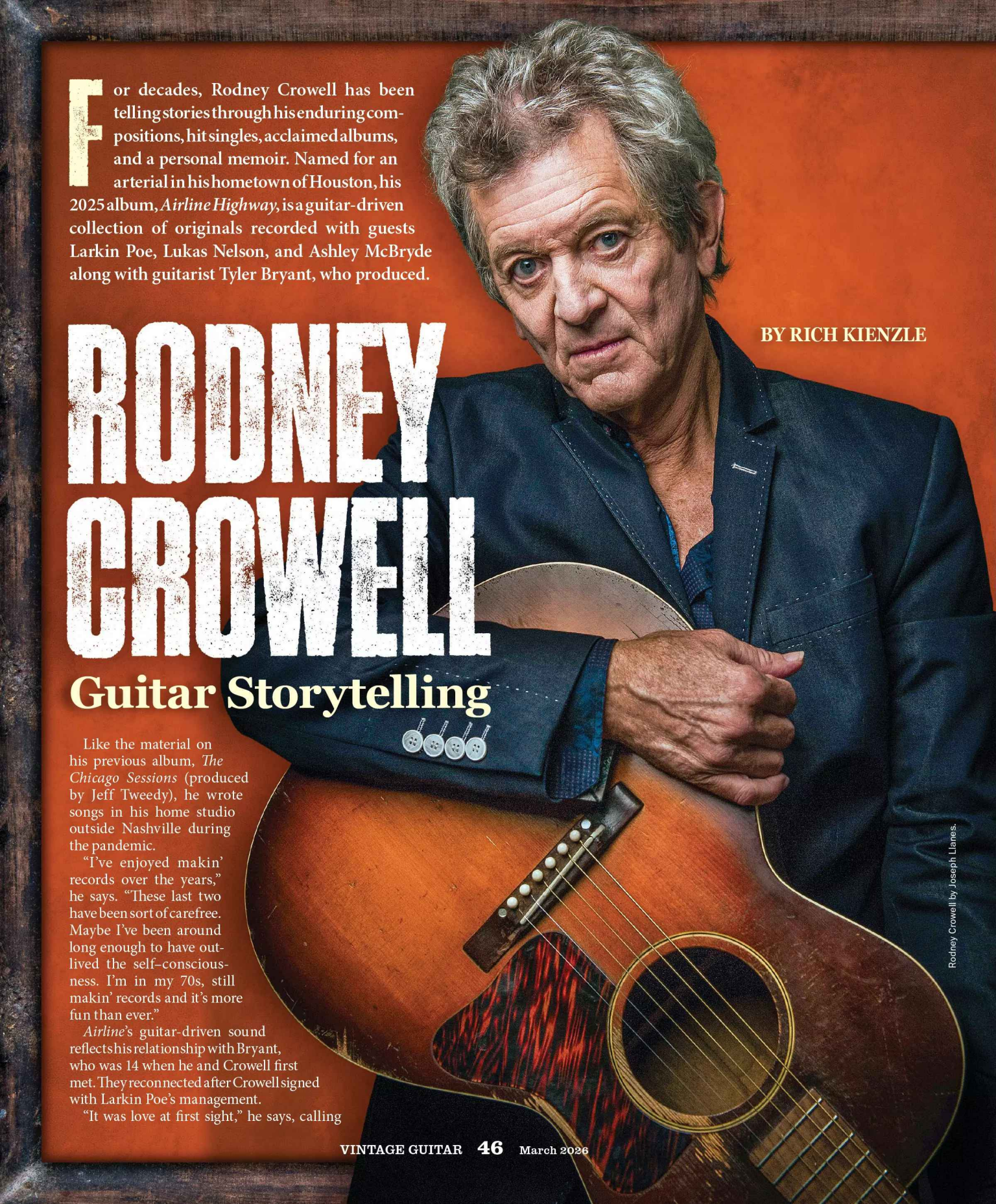
The spirit and specter of Syd Barrett loom large in the appropriately titled "Brain Damage." Barrett, a founding member of the band,

suffered drug-addled mental deterioration, became a tragic figure, and is "the lunatic" embodying moon/madness themes. Waters wrote the lyrics and music during the *Meddle* period and presented it as "Eclipse, Parts 5 & 6" at *Dark Side* sessions. He sings lead (and overdubs harmony) for the first time on the album, accompanied by Gilmour's flowing arpeggiated parts (on the Strat through a Leslie, panned hard left and right) and sparse high-register fills on the Lewis. The eerie rock ballad builds in texture and power to a louder bridge, where backing vocalists and Hammond organ fill the space. Wright's harmonized Minimoog parts contribute to the growing forces after the second bridge. Watts supplies maniacal giggling, spoken words, and laughter. Mason's thudding drum beat signals a transition to the finale, "Eclipse."

"Eclipse" is the culmination of *Dark Side*, intended to have the listener acknowledge everything and all, then return to a primal state depicted with the revisited heartbeat augmented by the album experience. Musically, it's the shortest piece – a rock *passacaglia* of a repeating progression/bass line in $\frac{3}{4}$ (D-D/C-B^b maj7-B^b maj7^b5-A7) wherein vocal and instrumental textures and timbres gather momentum, growing stronger and more elaborate with each cycle. Gilmour plays arpeggiations (two Strat/Leslie parts) and distorted lead fills (Lewis/fuzz) in the mix with full band, backing vocalists and keyboard layers.

The final 43 seconds are given to O'Driscoll's monologue over the fading heartbeat.

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 '80s. 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.



For decades, Rodney Crowell has been telling stories through his enduring compositions, hit singles, acclaimed albums, and a personal memoir. Named for an arterial in his hometown of Houston, his 2025 album, *Airline Highway*, is a guitar-driven collection of originals recorded with guests Larkin Poe, Lukas Nelson, and Ashley McBryde along with guitarist Tyler Bryant, who produced.

BY RICH KIENZLE

RODNEY CROWELL

Guitar Storytelling

Like the material on his previous album, *The Chicago Sessions* (produced by Jeff Tweedy), he wrote songs in his home studio outside Nashville during the pandemic.

"I've enjoyed makin' records over the years," he says. "These last two have been sort of carefree. Maybe I've been around long enough to have outlived the self-consciousness. I'm in my 70s, still makin' records and it's more fun than ever."

Airline's guitar-driven sound reflects his relationship with Bryant, who was 14 when he and Crowell first met. They reconnected after Crowell signed with Larkin Poe's management.

"It was love at first sight," he says, calling

Rodney Crowell by Joseph Llanes.



One of several guitars gifted to Crowell by Ernie Ball/Music Man president Sterling Ball, he calls this '32 Gibson L-00 "Black Betty."



This '32 L-00 (middle) was a gift from Doug Montgomery, while this '34 Gibson LC came from Sterling Ball.



Bryant "...incredibly talented with passion galore. He could probably be my grandson."

Bryant, Crowell, and David Grissom frame *Airline's* songs with sharp, tasteful guitar, occasionally enhanced by the lap-steel of Bryant's sister-in-law, Larkin Poe's Megan Lovell.

Crowell's respect for Bryant surged while recording the rocker "Taking Flight" live in the studio. As the song ended, Bryant uncorked a spontaneous Southern-rock lead break as Crowell's wife, Claudia Church, captured the moment on video.

A fan of the Allman Brothers, he views most Southern rock as derivative.

"That flat-seventh chord change would get old pretty quickly. When it was over, I told Tyler, 'You just rekindled my understanding of Southern rock.'"

On the guitar-heavy "21-Song Salute," Crowell played the beloved '32 Gibson L-00 he calls "Black Betty" through Grissom's tweed Deluxe, cranked up.

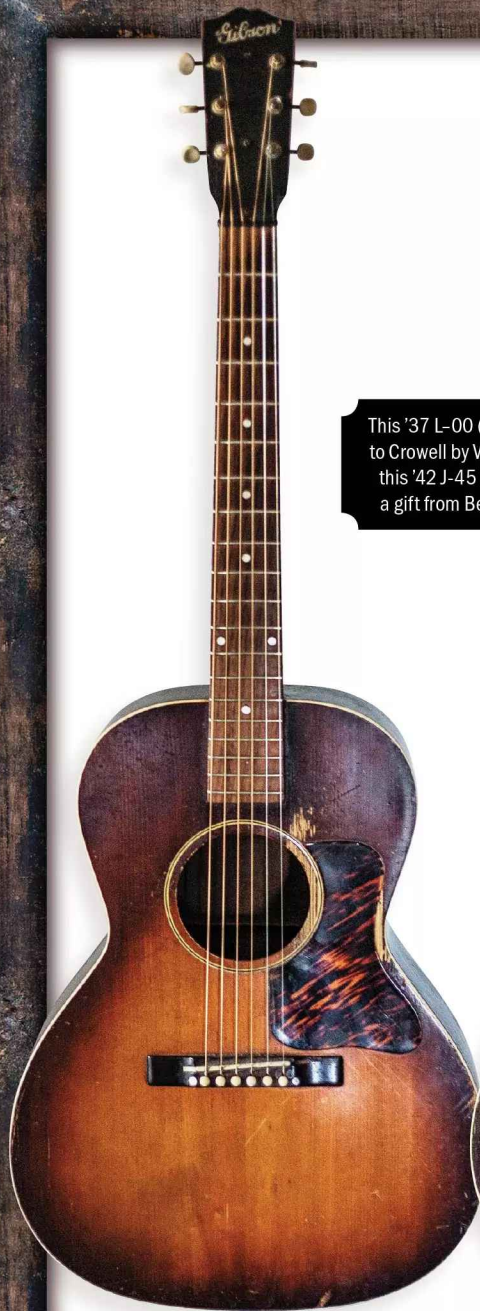
"I'm a really good composer of guitar parts," he notes. "But I'm not particularly good at [creating] them on the fly."

Lovell's lap-steel interludes also pleased him.

"She's as close as anybody to [getting the] sustain David Lindley would get. I've never asked her, but I would think Lindley was a big influence."

The Bryant/Grissom acoustic accompaniment on "Sometime Thang" involved Grissom using the Martin 00-18 that Crowell inherited from his former guitarist, Stuart Smith (see sidebar).

He lauds Grissom's amplified tremolo playing on "Heaven Can You Help," saying,



This '37 L-00 (left) was given to Crowell by Vince Gill, while this '42 J-45 "banner" was a gift from Ben Bullington.



One of two guitars Crowell owned when he moved to Nashville, this '71 D-35 was his primary songwriting guitar until 1980, after which a '61 00-21NY became his go-to.



"That overdriven distortion sets the (song's) apocalyptic tone."

Grissom used two PRS guitars along with, Crowell says, "...my 00-18 and the '37 L-00 Vince Gill gave me."

Gill, a longtime friend, confirms the prominent role of guitar in Crowell's music onstage and in the studio for more than a half-century.

"We shared a lot of stages," says Gill. "Rodney has had a great history of [working with] really beautiful guitar players – Richard Bennett and Albert Lee, and me and

Stewart – it just goes on and on, with Jedd [Hughes] and all."

Gill loves sitting in with him, calling it "...a great chair for a guitar player. [You] get to play with Rodney's band, be his harmony singer, play a bunch of take-off lead. There's nothing better!"

Crowell's story began with his dad, who led a Houston honky-tonk band and took his two-year-old son to see Hank Williams, Sr. in 1952. At 11, he began playing drums for his dad as he absorbed the music of Elvis Presley and Jimmy Reed.

"Some of the musicians I work with now say, 'Your right hand is like a metronome. What I say is 'I'm a right handed guitar player because I started as a drummer.'"

While the Beatles truly sparked his love of guitar, his earliest guitar influence was his father.

"He was a good rhythm player and a better singer, and would accompany himself beautifully. That early Beatles acoustic stuff on 'I Don't Want to Spoil the Party' was out of the strum rhythm my dad introduced me to. The first thing I could really play was the Chuck Berry rhythms."

Early on, Crowell played a single-pickup Gretsch solidbody through a Gibson Falcon amp. Later, he got an ES-125. After playing in Houston-area bands, he turned to songwriting and recorded an album of originals produced by Jim Duff. It remains unissued because Crowell says the songs weren't up to snuff.

When he moved to Nashville from Houston in the summer of '72, Crowell brought a '52 Tele and his "writing guitar" – a '71 D-35. He quickly connected with the local songwriting community.

"I was in a culture where Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, and Mickey Newbury were key figures, so I was really close-up in a salon that informed and enlightened me."

Jerry Reed signed him to his publishing company as a songwriter, and Emmylou Harris recorded his "Bluebird Wine" for her 1975 country debut, *Pieces of the Sky*. Sitting-in with her onstage led to becoming rhythm guitarist in what evolved into her legendary Hot Band with James Burton (replaced by Albert Lee), fiddler/mandolinist Ricky Skaggs, bassist Emory Gordy, Jr. pianist Glen D. Hardin, and pedal-steeler Hank DeVito. Crowell remained through the lead stint of both Burton and Lee; working with both was "intimidating and inspirational."

"I started being part of Emmylou's sessions, and it was a crash course in arranging because the musicians were incredible arrangers and could work so fast. It was an eye-opener, useful when I started producing Rosanne Cash records. Thank heavens I'd been schooled by really great arrangers."

In the late '70s, Crowell fronted a Hot Band spinoff dubbed Cherry Bombs. Gill and Richard Bennett played lead guitars with Gordy on bass, drummer Larrie Londin, and future Nashville producer/executive Tony Brown playing keyboards. He originally used his D-35, then for 10 years played a Collings C10 given to him by Sterling Ball before switching to Black Betty (also a gift from Ball).

His stature as a songwriter was enhanced by hits including "I Ain't Living Long Like This" (Waylon Jennings), "Til I Gain Control Again" (Crystal Gayle), "Leavin' Louisiana" (the Oak Ridge Boys), and "Shame on the Moon" (Bob Seger).

Crowell married Rosanne Cash in 1979 and produced some of her biggest records before focusing on his own music. Five of his late-'80s singles reached #1: "It's Such a Small World" (duet with Cash); four solo tracks – "I Couldn't Leave You if I Tried," "She's Crazy for Leavin'," "After All This Time"; and a cover of Buck Owens' early hit "Above And Beyond."

His storytelling skills emerge as he discusses his gear collection, a saga combining generosity and gains that followed two profound losses. The '52 Tele was stolen from the Hot Band's truck in Chicago, along with Harris' beloved J-200 and Lee's Tele. Harris and Lee got their instruments back, Crowell didn't.

"I sure hated for that Tele to go [and] it took me a long time to figure how to hold on to a good guitar."

The second loss, in '79, involved an iconic Johnny Cash mainstay.

"When Rosanne and I got married, it was my understanding her father gave me the 1942 herringbone D-28 he played on his television show. *She* thinks he gave it to her, *I* think he gave it to me. It's a toss-up."

At the time, they'd been recording in LA. and used the 28 on sessions.

"We got married in the middle of makin' a record. We'd been up all night mixing and were taking it on our honeymoon in Hawaii."

He checked it at LAX, but it never arrived. "Later, I found out that there was a theft ring, and I'd handed them the guitar..."

A 1997 gift spurred the gains. While producing Nashville songwriter Beth Nielsen Chapman's *Sand and Water*, Crowell worked with all-star side men including guitarist Dominic Miller (VG, August '23), who asked him to get a Strat for the sessions. Crowell offered a '62 that he'd bought from former brother-in-law Marty Stuart (who'd been married to Cash's daughter, Cindy). Miller promptly fell in love with it.

"In the middle of the session, he offered me \$10,000 for it. I said, 'Dominic, I can't sell you that guitar, but I can give it to you.' He broke down in tears, and said, 'Any time you see me out with Sting, I'll be playin' this guitar.' He was true to his word.

"Right now in my studio, I'm looking at six guitars given to me as gifts. In my locker upstairs are another four or five. I gave away one Strat, and in return I got upward of 12 guitars given to me, all of them vintage."

Black Betty was among them. Crowell had fallen in love with a '34 Gibson L-00 he borrowed from a friend who wouldn't sell it to him. But while visiting with longtime friend Sterling Ball (of Ernie Ball Music Man) at his son's wedding, Crowell was getting ready to sing a song he'd written for the occasion.

"Sterling said, 'Wait here for a minute.' He came back with the '32 tuxedo. I fell in love with that guitar. It changed who I am as a player – I became a lot more confident. The beauty of that little 12-fret L-00 is [that] the vibrations going up the neck woke up my left hand to a great degree. It gave me the confidence to say 'I'm a guitar player.' Before that, I always said, 'I'm a songwriter.'"

"I didn't really come to appreciate what I had until I got Black Betty. Because of my love for that guitar and understanding of how it made me a better player, it made me conscientious about the other guitars I had."

Betty's headstock was recently damaged when it was blown over while Crowell was performing during a cruise. Repaired by Joe Glaser in Nashville, it remains his primary instrument.

He has more than one L-00. "A friend found a '32 and gave it to me. You need two," he chuckled.

Gill later gave him a '37, then Collings stepped in.

"They [measured] Black Betty and built an exact replica, gave me one, and started sellin' them [under their Waterloo brand]. Bill Collings brought it to me.

"Sterling gave me a lot of guitars," he adds, describing a '34 Gibson LC Century of Progress, made to commemorate the World's Fair in Chicago.

"It's got the abalone neck and an L-00 body. It's a beautiful instrument that sounds really interesting, but it doesn't play like Betty or the 00-18."

Another friend gave him a '42 Gibson J-45 with a "banner" headstock, and an especially meaningful gift was a nylon-string built by fellow Texan and close friend Guy Clark, one of his songwriting heroes. Clark, who died in 2016, gave Crowell the instrument for his 54th birthday in 2004.

"Whenever we need a gut-string on something, we use it. It's really beautiful."

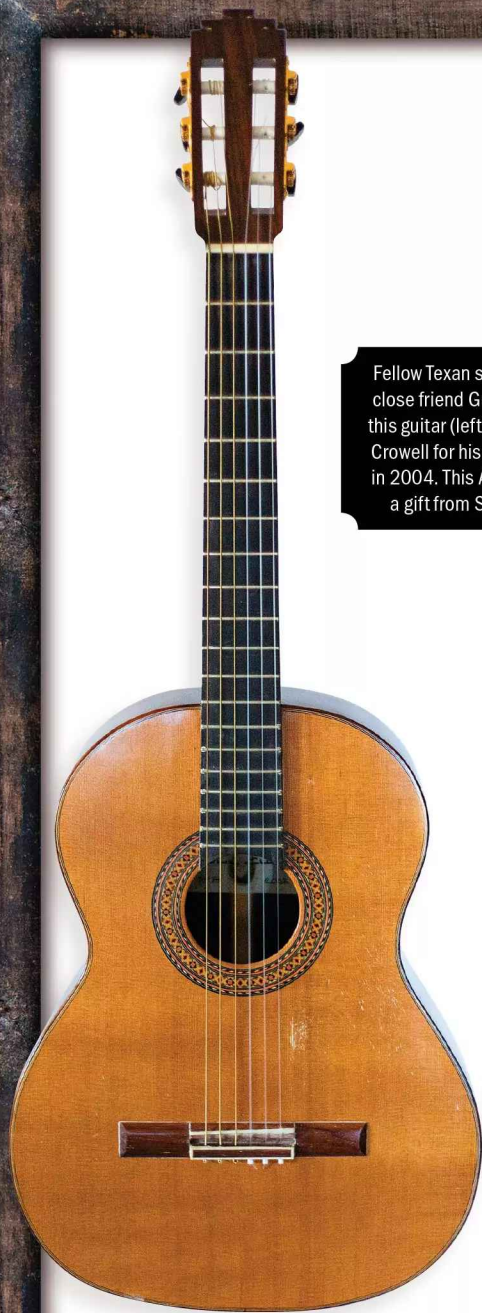
Harris and Crowell reunited in the 2010s for concerts and recordings as a duo. For the shows, Crowell used a larger-body Gibson he didn't particularly enjoy, saying, "Dreadnoughts haven't really appealed to me. I like the smaller body."

Another favorite songwriting instrument was a '61 Martin 00-21NY.

"From 1980 to 2000, I was writing on that. I carried it around without a case and used light silk and steel strings on it. That guitar was as beloved as Black Betty. My daughter, Chelsea, fell in love with it, so I gave it to her."

Another sizable set of instruments came his way through more-sobering circumstances when Smith, who retired in '25, received a Parkinson's diagnosis and bequeathed to Crowell all of the guitars he kept in Nashville except for a '56 Strat.

"He was one of my closest friends. From the time Steuart went off touring with the Eagles (in 2001), some of his guitars were here in my storage locker. When he realized he had to hang it up, he called and said, 'I'm giving them to you.'"



Fellow Texan songwriter and close friend Guy Clark made this guitar (left) and gave it to Crowell for his 54th birthday in 2004. This Axis Sport was a gift from Sterling Ball.



In 1980, Danny Ferington made this violin-sized version of an ES-125. "It's the perfect vacation guitar," Crowell says. "If an idea comes up, I've got strings to create a melody."



Gill, a close friend of both, applauded Smith's gift, declaring, "That's where (they) should be."

There's the '56 00-18, a Telecaster with an Esquire neck and pickups from one of Jerry Reed's early Teles, a six-string bass, a Danelectro electric, Music Man Silhouette and Axis Sport models, and a Paul Reed Smith.

"I will use his guitars, definitely, for recording," Crowell says.

Earlier, he set aside his longtime road amp, a Music Man 210, for a Vox AC15 given to him by Smith.

"With the new band, I'm going out with a '57 Custom Shop Deluxe that Fender gave me. I'm delighted with how it sounds. David Grissom pointed me in that direction. They're hand-wired and it smokes the AC15.

"My current electric guitar is a Music Man Axis I got from Sterling. I said 'I want one pickup, Volume and Tone - nothing else. It's designed specifically for me.'"

Not surprisingly, his string choices are Ernie Ball Paradigms. On acoustic, "I use the medium lights, .012 to .054. On electric, I use the standard .010 to .046."

His pick is a Dunlop .073, "...real limber on Black Betty, because I hit it hard."

Crowell is planning a follow-up to *Airline*. Bryant will again produce, but Crowell intends to do the bulk of the guitar work. "There's a particular tune I've written that falls under Tyler's plan to make a primitive record. I'm gonna trust him to help me make a *listenable* album based on the way I work in the home studio."

Reflecting on the many gifts in his gear collection, he quips that, "These instruments just keep comin' to me. Thank you, Dominic Miller!" **VG**

Reflections on Stuart Smith

Rodney Crowell and his longtime guitarist, Stuart Smith, were sitting at Crowell's kitchen table one day in 2001 when Smith's phone rang. It was Don Henley on the line.

"He hung up the phone and said, 'I just got offered a job with the Eagles,'" Crowell recalls.

The band had parted ways with Don Felder.

"He looked at me and I said, 'You gotta take it, brother. I'll never be able to offer you what they can.'"

Smith's career included extensive session work in Nashville with Vince Gill and a number of other A-list acts from Trisha Yearwood to Dolly Parton and Henley.

Crowell appreciated his skills.

"He was in my band. We recorded a lot together. He was one of my closest friends. [He] was an unbelievably dazzling guitar player, arranger, and a composer.

"The thing that's so compelling for me - we were on the road in the late '80s and early '90s - he would practice all day then come to the gig and blow my mind with how good he played."

For Smith's solo on "Wandering Boy" from the 2001 album *The Houston Kid*, Crowell said, "He composed the whole solo and punched it in and it was just a beautiful composition. It's my favorite guitar playing on any record I've ever made. But at the same time, he could rip a solo off the top of his head that was just blindingly good.

"After we came off stage, he said, 'I played like s**t tonight!' I said, 'That's not true... Don't practice so much. The reason you say that was you practiced all day long. You were brilliant!'"

"Amos Garrett could play solos from another planet. Stuart could, as well, but then there would be a piece of music that needed to be composed, almost like a classical composer on a guitar, and he was both.

"(He'd) rip the solo without thought,

then, when a song needed to be carefully considered, he would compose music to move the song along. That was always my favorite thing about Stuart."

Crowell fondly recalls the 1997 album *The Cicadas*, a studio effort teaming himself, Smith, Michael Rhodes, Vince Santoro, and Benmont Tench. "Stuart's playing on that record is exactly what I'm talking about, compositionally. We were doing this as a band and his mind was, 'I'm here to support you.'"

Gill, who was 19 when he met Crowell in 1976, views Smith's work with equal respect, including his contributions to Gill's records. Smith never performed on Gill's shows, but

the two worked together with the Eagles from 2017 until 2025.

"Steuart played on 'I Still Believe in You,'" said Gill. "He was always studious in the best way; I never saw anybody prepare and practice like him. He was always working something out, and it showed the beauty of making records. It's really the sum of its parts. All the parts have to matter and work together, and he was a master. If you just pulled up his part, you had a record. He was not a 'seat of the pants' player. It all had a purpose.

"Nine years with the Eagles was another great experience to reconnect with Steuart and watch him do for them what he's done for all of us," Gill added. "It's like you're there, jugglin', spinnin' plates, and playin' guitar at the same time. It was great, going into that band having a dear old friend onstage.

"I gotta tell ya' how much I leaned on him. All the fills were really beneficial to me in remembering where to sing, so I really counted on him. [He had] a great heart and a great mind for what *not* to do as much as what to do."

"He deserves all the honor in the world," Crowell declares. "I've worked with a lot of great guitar players, but he is truly my favorite (because of) his dedication."

- Rich Kienzie

After retiring, Stuart Smith gave several guitars to Crowell, including this Tele (with an Esquire neck and pickups from one of Jerry Reed's early Teles) and this '56 00-18.



Beautiful but misunderstood to the point of being maligned, archtop guitars made by C.F. Martin & Company have long been one of the greatest puzzles in the realm of collectibles.

Charles Friedrich Martin began making guitars in 1833 and, through the next century, his company expanded to making tipples and mandolins. In 1931, its first archtops entered a market dominated by Gibson. The C-1, C-2, and C-3 had the same 15" body as

its 000 flat-tops and the 14-fret neck used in 1929 on a guitar made for plectrum banjoist/flatpicker Perry Bechtel.

In '33, Martin made the R-18 part of its production run, followed by the mahogany-topped R-17 and R-15 in '34. Early 18s and all 17s had 00-sized bodies with pressed (rather than carved) tops identifiable by three-piece sound holes. The fancier F-7 and F-9 with 16" bodies were introduced in '35 – the same year most Gibson archtops increased to 17". The less-expensive F-1 and F-2 appeared in 1940. The C-1, F-1, and

This trio – a '40 F-1 (left), '31 C-2, and '36 R-17 – displays the variety of features found in Martin archtops; three body sizes, mahogany and Brazilian rosewood backs and sides, carved or pressed spruce and mahogany tops, round, segmented and non-segmented f holes, ebony and rosewood fretboards, 1³/₄" and 1¹/₁₆" inch nut widths, and headstocks with inlaid and decal logos.

The Enigma of Martin Archtops

By Brent M. Graves

Guitars and photo courtesy of Brent Graves.

all R models had mahogany back and sides, while almost all others were Brazilian rosewood. Sometime in late '31, the letters C and F were added to each side of the vertical "Martin" headstock inlay. In '32, the bridge changed from fixed to adjustable. Round sound holes transitioned to f holes in '33. In '34, scale length was shortened from 25.4" to 24.9".

Because of their markedly different construction, an ethos developed asserting that Martin did not understand archtops. Most builders used maple and carved an arch into the back, while Martin used mahogany or rosewood backs and *pressed* a slight arch. Also, Martin used standard body shapes without an elevated fretboard, which required the neck to be angled and the fretboard extension to be glued to the top.

Martin entered the archtop market "grudgingly," as characterized by Jim Washburn and Richard Johnston in their 1997 book, *Martin Guitars - An Illustrated Celebration of America's Premier Guitarmaker*. In a letter dated April 9, 1935, vice president C.F. Martin III said, "We have an idea that the preference (for archtop guitars) is sometimes based on appearance rather than on tone because we, too, think that the Flattop guitar has the true Guitar tone, richer in quality and more pleasing in many ways."

This reluctance to stray from flat-top production is further illustrated in a December, 1929, letter from retailer B.A. Rose asking C.F. III to produce a guitar for orchestra leaders akin to Gibson's archtops.

It implied that Martin

should use the construction techniques found on its carved-top mandolins introduced that year. In the late '20s, Martin still considered its flat-top guitars appropriate only for fingerstyle playing. Hence, C.F. III replied that archtops were nice for playing with a pick (like the more-popular banjo), but "the Guitar is able to stand on its own merits as a musical instrument and should not be crossed with other instruments that are intended for different purposes." Rose repeated the request, prompting C.F. III to bend a bit, replying that, "We are here to make Guitars for sale and it is up to us to find out what the players want." Whether or not C.F. III liked the sound of archtops, the Great Depression spurred new ways of thinking.

The Great Depression began in 1929. Demand for musical instruments fell, and manufacturers were going broke. Martin reduced its factory work week to three days and expanded on both ends of the price spectrum with the plain 17-series flat-tops as well as relatively expensive dreadnoughts. Another lifeboat that passed by Martin's listing ship was the new popularity of the archtop. Gibson had moved into Martin's territory with its first flat-top in 1926. Perhaps the Depression pushed Martin to reciprocate by entering the archtop market.

From 1929 to '35, Martin experienced a surge of innovation. President Frank Henry (F.H.) Martin had embraced ukuleles, Hawaiian guitars, and steel-strings as times and musical interests changed. At



Like the majority of Martin archtops, this F-1 (left) and R-17 (right) have mahogany backs and sides, while the C-2 is Brazilian rosewood.

the directors and shareholders meeting of January 19, 1931, F.H. said, "The guitar is now popular and the opportunity for a large business is here, but competition is keen and the manner of playing is changing so we are still obliged to experiment with new models." His son, vice president C.F. III, added, "At the same time we are under steady pressure to produce new styles and different models which tend to make the old styles obsolete." Indeed, archtop guitars were the cat's meow, and Martin needed to cash in on that popularity.

At the January 25, 1932, shareholder meeting, C.F. III said, "During 1931 a new model guitar, constructed with a carved top and a tailpiece,

was added to our line, and several small changes were made in the regular styles to meet the demand. Production of the new model began in summer with sales of about two hundred guitars in the last five months at a much higher average price than the old model."

Despite misconceptions that have lingered for decades, sales of archtops were very good the first few years and helped Martin survive the Great Depression. At the January 23, 1933, shareholder meeting, C.F. III noted, "The best demand was for large guitars with the tailpiece and the adjustable bridge for orchestra use." In 1934, C models outsold 000s 480 to 472, and in '35 Rs far outsold 00s, 635 to 344. As George Gruhn noted in a 1998 feature for *Vintage Guitar* on

the F-9, "...sales of Martin archtops were strong enough to contribute a significant portion of Martin's sales. During the Depression, the company needed every sale it could get."

DESIGN CHOICES

Three factors are likely to have influenced Martin's decisions about archtop design: 1) cost, 2) tradition, and 3) its market niche. Several features were seemingly chosen to control costs. People wanted archtops, but quality examples were expensive to produce. In 1935, shoppers perusing the Martin catalog might have considered an F-7 (\$175) or a D-28 (\$100), a C-2 (\$125) or 000-28 (\$90), an R-18 (\$55) or 00-18 (\$45), and an R-17 (\$40) or 00-17 (\$35). Few had money to spare during the Depression, and costs had to be kept down if buyers were to choose archtops. Martin also needed to compete with other brands; in 1935, an F-9 was \$250 while a Gibson L-5 was \$275. To this end, Martin retained some flat-top features such as gluing the fretboard extension to the top rather than elevating it, and using the same 000/14-fret bodies as OM models. Changes in the neck angle and pressing an arch into the back were not costly changes.

The second factor was Martin's desire to adhere to tradition. Certainly, it could have produced archtops with carved maple; in their 2009 book, *Martin Guitars: A Technical Reference*, Richard Johnston and Dick Boak men-

This '38 R-21S is the only 12-fret slothead Style 21 archtop ever made by Martin.

When introduced in 1935, the F-9 (middle) was the most expensive guitar in the Martin catalog at \$250, while the F-7 was priced the same as a 000-45, at \$175.





tion two 1940 F-5s, one '41 F-2, and a '32 C-3 made with maple. Additionally, inventory records show a finished maple C-2 in '33 and a finished maple C-3 in '34 that have not been previously reported. To cement the point, Martin made 2,556 mandolins with carved maple backs. It had used mahogany for lower-priced guitars, and rosewood for higher-priced guitars since 1906 – that was not going to change.

And certainly, it was not going to mimic the competition. A 1935 letter from the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company in Detroit asked Martin to make an archtop guitar like a high-end Gibson. The reply started with, “We appreciate the opportunity you give us to supply you with an extra fine guitar, similar in a general way, including price to the Gibson Super-400. This we will gladly do for you, using our own ideas rather than just make a copy of a competing instrument.” In his 2022 book, *Hutton's Guide to Martin Guitars 1833-1969*, Greig Hutton says Martin used “...a carved top to produce a ‘snappy chord’ while retaining a regular flat-top body, probably in an effort to improve the tone of the instrument.” Gibson fans might disagree, but to F.H. and C.F. III, this made their archtop sound more like a Martin.

A third likely factor is the target audience.



Players who bought Martin archtops were not necessarily the big-band jazz crowd.

Washburn and Johnston explain that while Martin originally viewed itself as serving the needs of classical and refined parlor guitarists, by 1930, its steel-string guitars had “moved down the social ladder” into “the hands of guys with names like Arkie, the Arkansas Woodchopper, and cowboy singers...” Martin flat-tops had become the guitar of the regular guy and gal, and its archtops were no different. In Martin’s archives and various books are pictures of musicians playing them; all are country, hillbilly, cowboy types except for one suit-wearing band that had a Martin

archtop, two Martin flat-tops, two violins, a bass, a mandolin, an accordion, and six singers – hardly a jazz orchestra. Given what is known of F.H. Martin’s personality, it seems unlikely he was in the jazz crowd.

While Martin occasionally referred to archtops as “for orchestra use” (actually, Martin called *any* guitar with a 14-fret neck an “orchestra guitar”), big band and orchestra musicians were probably not the primary buyers of its archtops. Of the 5,661 archtops that Martin sold, 53 percent (2,243) were R models, 40 percent (3,017) C models, and seven percent (401) F models. Eighty percent (4,506) had mahogany backs and sides, while 20 percent (1,152) were rosewood. Their market consisted primarily of amateurs who wanted a strummer but also wanted an archtop because archtops were trendy. Johnston and Boak said, “Today we think of archtop guitars as having been popular with players of early versions of jazz or swing. In 1930, though, dark-faced archtop guitars were also being requested by guitarists of all kinds who simply wanted their next instrument to be in the modern style.”

Of course, Martin was not oblivious to the market for big-band guitars. At the January 21, 1935, shareholder meeting, C.F. III said, “Several important changes were made in

construction and finish to make the guitar line more suitable for orchestra use. Other changes and developments are now under consideration." This probably referred to the switch from round sound holes to f holes, but may also have referred to the impending release of the 16" F series guitars.

Martin archtops do not sound like those made by Gibson, Epiphone, D'Angelico, or others.

"Martin's carving pattern was very well done on the exterior, but their interior carving and bracing was relatively crude, resulting in a top that was not nearly as well graduated as those by the archtop guitar specialists," said Gruhn. "Their work-

manship is fine, but the sound simply is not the signature Martin sound that propelled the company to fame."

Comparing an archtop in the Martin museum to published specs of Gibson L-5s, the Martin top was thinner. However, Gibson braces were approximately $\frac{3}{16}$ " diameter, while the Martin's were $\frac{5}{16}$ ".

Epiphone didn't even make guitars until 1928 and released its line of Gibson-esque archtops in '31, the same year Martin first made an archtop. Why was Epiphone able to mimic the Gibson design, look, and sound, but Martin could not? The most obvious answer is that Martin did not want to. It seems incredulous that a company which had been making some of the best guitars in the world for a century could not figure out how to produce the design and sound of jazzier archtops. What were F.H. and C.F. III thinking, who was responsible for the design of their archtop guitars, and who actually did the carving? According to Hutton, Martin's correspondence for 1930 and '31 is almost entirely missing from the archives and notes from the shareholder meetings do not discuss their strategy for entering the

archtop market, so these questions remain unanswered.

Regardless of their adherence to tradition, Martin's archtops are some of their most creative designs. When asked why the Martin Museum maintains an extensive collection of archtops, archives manager Jason Ahner said, "Martin's archtops illustrate that the company wasn't afraid to venture into unknown territory."

"What I take away from these instruments are the bold designs, particularly on the F-7 and F-9 models," added executive chairman (and great-great-grandson of the company founder) C.F. Martin IV.

In that regard, Martin archtops are the source of features such as the pearl headstock and fretboard inlay patterns now found on 40-series flat-tops, a $1\frac{11}{16}$ " nut width, and the F (a.k.a. 0000 or M) body. Also, archtops were Martin's first production models with a sunburst finish.

WHY STOP MAKING ARCHTOPS?

Martin ended archtop production in early 1943, likely due to a shortage of workers and materials resulting from World War II, production being devoted to flat-tops, and falling archtop sales. While there were 35 workers in 1935, that was down to 26 by 1940. Notes from shareholder meetings indicate that in '42 alone, nine employees were lost to the armed services and munitions plants, and not replaced. Similarly, there was difficulty getting materials. A letter to distributors dated September 10, 1942, stated, "Because of government restrictions... we cannot make enough instruments to fill our orders and we are now as much as 90 days slow in shipping some items." Use of metal was especially restricted and the tailpiece of archtop guitars was a bridge too far.

Overall demand for Martin guitars was way up, ironically, in part due to materials restrictions. Shareholder-meeting notes state that in 1942, "The demand for guitars rose sharply, largely because music dealers could not get other types of instruments the manufacture of which was stopped entirely."

In 1941, workers' hours per week increased from 40 to 45, and then to 50. Even with a shortage of workers, production increased 44 percent over 1940. Yet notes state that, "This demand, with the decrease in our production, made our deliveries several months slow."



It all added up to archtop guitars becoming a low priority.

The most-cited factor is declining sales, but there are several reasons to think that this may not have been primary. In the middle of the Depression, archtop sales were significant, with 1,046 archtops among the 3,595 total guitars produced in '35. By '42, only 194 archtops were made of 3,037 total guitars. Being relatively expensive, they still made up a significant part of revenue; in '42, archtops sales were \$16,062, while sales of 339 000s were \$27,585, and 441 dreadnoughts generated \$43,808. So, archtop sales were 58 percent that of 000s and 37 percent that of dreadnoughts. Why would Martin give up this source of revenue? The question is, were archtop sales down because of lack of demand or lack of production?

Martin is renowned for keeping meticulous production records. If sales were down due to lack of demand, then inventories of finished instruments would likely have increased. If sales were down due to lack of production, inventories of finished instruments would decline. Records show that inventory rose through the late '30s while archtop production declined (indicating declining demand). However, archtop production increased by 46 percent between 1940 and '42, while unsold stock declined, indicating that demand still existed, albeit at a much lower level than in the mid '30s.

Martin wasn't alone. The online "History of the Gibson L-5" shows that while Gibson made 166 L-5s in 1935, it made only 50 in '42. Two years later, 18 L-5s were made. Archtops were hip and cool in the 1920s and '30s, but by WWII, they were for professional jazz players – or your Dad.

After WWII, Martin did not get back into archtops because most musicians who wanted a big, loud guitar bought dreadnoughts. Also, professional jazz musicians no longer needed to fight to be heard because they had pickups and amplifiers. Though F.H. retired in 1947 and died the following year, Martin, then headed by C.F. III, was still too conservative to make electric guitars. Post-war America wanted Martin flat-tops and the factory could not keep up with demand. In fact, they were so busy that they quit scalloping braces! Why go back to making archtops, which they'd done primarily for the sake of surviving the Great Depression?

THE LEGACY OF MARTIN ARCHTOPS

Though caricatured as a failure, Martin archtops are recognized as having fine workmanship and excellent (if unique) sound. Society often judges events of the past by modern standards. Yes, vertically striped bell bottoms paired with a horizontally striped shirt seemed like a good idea in the '70s. Not so much now.

In modern times, archtop guitars are almost exclusively a jazz and swing instrument, but that was not the case in the '30s. Today, Martin archtops are said to lack the volume and cut for big-band situations. That may be true, but there is more to the worthiness of a guitar than volume.

Martin made relatively few archtops, and far fewer remain in existence in large part because it became popular to convert them to flat-tops. Those conversions now bring higher prices than unmodified archtops, especially among guitars with Brazilian rosewood bodies done by a top-tier luthier. Gruhn recalled two examples from the late '60s – a well-known F-7 converted by Matt Umanov for David Bromberg, and one done for him by Bozo Podunavac using a damaged F-9. But times have changed.

"These are not the greatest guitars, but they are rare and historic," Gruhn said. "The neck angle is such that refitting to a flat-top often ends up with a 13-fret neck. And most have 24.9" scale, so the neck is often not even used. If all you can save is the back and sides, why bother? Today's top luthiers are so good that they can make great flat-tops from scratch without destroying something that is rare and getting rarer by the day. The time to convert them should be over. If I think a customer is going to convert one, I won't sell it to them."

While often thought of as innovative and edgy, musicians can be stodgy when it comes to instruments, and often there is a "right" instrument for each style of music. But some break stereotypes. Look no further than Mother Maybelle Carter, "The Queen Mother of Country Music," and her 1928 L-5. On the modern folkside, David Rawlings is known for playing his '35 Epiphone Olympic and '59 D'Angelico Excel with Gillian Welch. In a 1983 column for *Guitar Player*, Gruhn said, "Martin carved-top guitars have

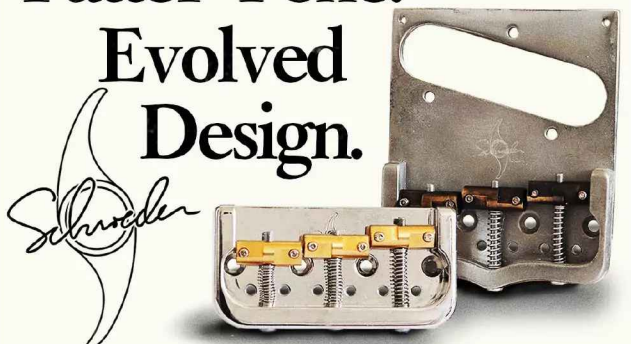
a fine sound which seems to combine the characteristics of flat-top and orchestral-type f-hole guitars." If it's time to develop your own sound, maybe it's time to consider an archtop. And that distinctiveness will be compounded if your archtop is a vintage Martin.

In the vintage market, archtops are generally less-valuable than equivalent flat-tops. This is even more true for Martins. *The Official Vintage Guitar Price Guide 2026* price ranges for 1939 guitars lists the D-45 (\$200 when new) at \$550,000 to \$675,000, while the F-9 (\$250 new) is \$20,000 to \$30,000. A less-pricey comparison would be the 000-28 at \$60,000 to \$80,000, while the C-2 is \$3,500 to \$5,000. Archtops allow someone on a budget to get into a pre-war Martin with the quality found in all such guitars, and there are some rarities in this realm. When Ahner was asked which archtop in the Martin Museum's collection was his favorite, he singled out the '38 R-21S.

"I love unique guitars, and it's the only style 21 archtop the company ever built," he said. "What's also interesting is that it is a 12-fret short-scale, which is very different for an archtop."

Just as in the '30s, a Martin archtop may be the guitar for a regular player. Perhaps it's time to appreciate Martin's pre-war archtops for what they are – beautifully crafted historic instruments with a unique sound. **VG**

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Upcoming Events

* Denotes a new or updated listing.

2026

FEBRUARY

BestGuitarShow, 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 adjin@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.

Chicago Vintage Guitar Expo, Sunday March 15, 9 am - 3 pm, at a new location: Marriott Hotel, 50 N. Martingale Road, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173. For more info contact R&B Productions' Beverly Bakes 847-931-0707 Bakesguitar@aol.com www.Chicagovintageguitarexpo.com

Amigo Guitar Show Nashville 2026, March 21, 10 am - 5 pm, March 22, 10 am - 4pm, at Williamson County AG Expo Park, 4215 Long Lane, Franklin TN. For more info contact Ruth Brinkman 817-312-7659 ruthbrinkman@gmail.com www.amigoguitarshows.com

Frantic Mid Atlantic Guitar Show & Swap Meet, March 27-29, at a new location: Delaware State Fairgrounds Exhibit Hall, 18500 S. Dupont Hwy Harrington, DE 19952. For more info contact 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

JUNE

Elmira Vintage Guitar Show, June 7, 11am - 4pm, at Woolwich Memorial Centre, Elmira, ON. For more info contact John Woods www.elmiravintageguitarshow.ca

Sarasota Guitar & Amp Show, June 5 (Dealer day), 10 am - 5 pm, June 6, 10 am - 5 pm, June 7, 10 am-3 pm, at Roberts Arena, 3000 Ringling Blvd, Sarasota, FL 34237. For more info contact Kevin Wood 941-993-3098 ktw@clevaone.com www.sarasotaguitarshow.com

If you have information regarding upcoming guitar shows or events, visit <http://www.vintageguitar.com/guitar-show-submission> or e-mail Mike at 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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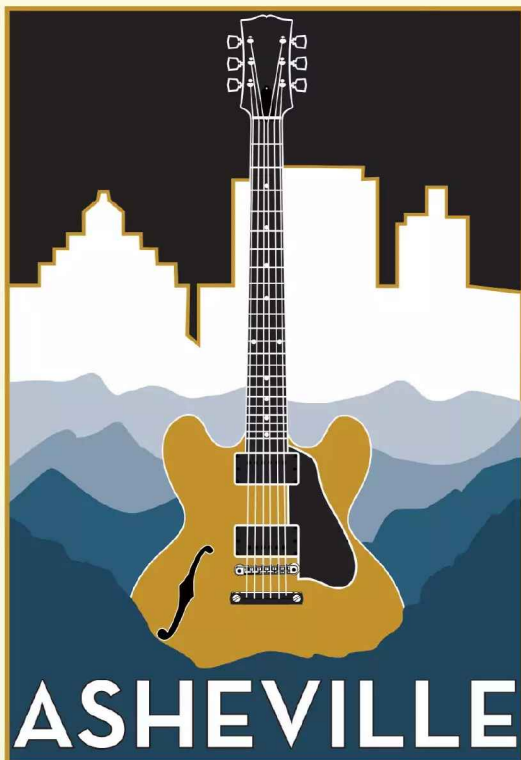
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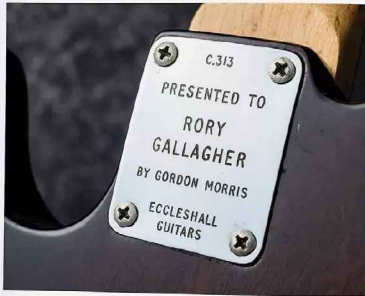
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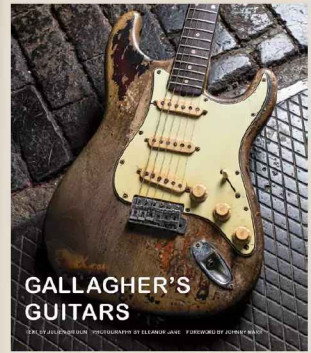
1980s Eccleshall T-Style Electric Guitar

This is the last guitar that Eccleshall built for Rory, and it was commissioned by a fan as a gift (the recipient reads, "Care! Presented to Rory Gallagher by Gordon Morris! Eccleshall Guitars"). And it's a really nice gift too: a tobacco sunburst Tele-style body with an ebony fretboard and two humbuckers. Rory called these "Gibson Fly's" in an interview.

so they could have been salvaged from a late-'60s/early-'70s Gibson, but he could also have been using the term as a generic way of alluding to a humbucker pickup. In fact, their cream color makes them look like Telecasters, perhaps the instrument that Rory would commonly have had access to at the time. As a nice bonus, the case (which is made of a beautiful piece of bird's-eye maple). This Tele-style guitar can be heard on the song "Continental '67" from the album *De Jander* (1982), where it sounds nice and fat with that typical '80s squall.



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GALLAGHER'S GUITARS

Julien Bitoun & Eleanor Jane

Gallagher's Guitars: The Rory Gallagher Collection

single-cut Fenders, notably a '66 Tele and a '59 Esquire. His brother and manager, Donal, says the Esquire was once run over by a luggage van at a Michigan airport, yet still played great at that night's gig!

Bitoun provides insightful backstories, while photographer Eleanor Jane serves pics that will make any red-blooded guitar player drool profusely. This book should come with a bib. — **Pete Prown**

BIB NOT INCLUDED

The sight of Rory Gallagher's worn '61 Stratocaster is one of the most glorious sights in solidbody history. The Irish blues-rocker bought the plank for less than £100 in '63 and played it throughout his career. That iconic

axe and many others are featured in this sumptuous coffee-table book showcasing Rory's collection. Gallagher died in 1995 and his gear was auctioned in 2024, with the '61 bringing a kingy \$1.14 million.

Writer Julien Bitoun delves into

the guitarist's early years, stint with Taste, and solo career, augmented by crisp images of each axe, pedal, and amp. Like a lot of '60s players in Ireland and the U.K., Gallagher used a Vox AC30TB (top boost) and a Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster. There are acoustics and mandolins; Rory also loved



Fat Produce Soulful Days

Soul-jazz from the '70s is where this Miami-based instrumental duo gets its inspiration. The

follow-up to 2024's *Fresh Squeeze* find sex-Soul Vaccinators guitarist Addison Rifkind and drummer Michael Duffy (The White Blinds, Jungle Fire) augmented by Nestor Del Prado's upright bass for additional funk quotient.

The set opens with "Gatur Bait" by pianist Willie Tee's '70s New Orleans funk group, the Gatur, with Rifkind interjecting single-note clusters to sweeping chords and rhythmic punches reminiscent of the late Steve Cropper. He populates Isaac Hayes' melodic "Hung Up On My Baby" with hip octaves and intros Toots and the Maytals' "54-46 Was My Number" with unaccompanied ascending scales and bluesy bends before adapting Toots Hibbert's vocal to the instr format.

"No Way" comes from acid-jazz guitarist "Boogaloo" Joe Jones — a catalog that needs to be mined more. Likewise "Texas Twister" by Melvin Sparks, whose early-'70s associations included Idris Muhammad, Hank Crawford, and Grover Washington, Jr. Original groovers like the staccato-picked "Stand Up" sit nicely alongside the Bread hit (covered by the Persuaders) "Make It With You," but Rifkind shines brightest on the crystalline-toned ballad "On Love." — **Dan Forte**



Various artists

King of Them All: The Story of King Records

In 1943, Cincinnati record dealer Syd Nathan launched King Records, with the slogan "King of Them All" inscribed on its earliest labels. Its first single, by the "Sheppard Brothers," was actually Merle Travis and Grandpa Jones

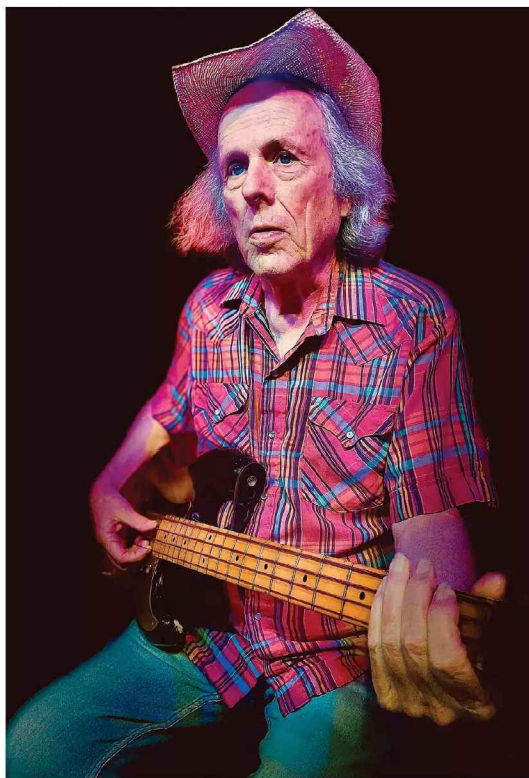
singing and picking. For more than two decades, King was a vital American indie label, launching Jones, Freddie King, the Stanley Brothers, Wynonie Harris, Hank Ballard, the Delmore Brothers, and its biggest star, James Brown.

This documentary, produced for PBS, details the label's rise and decline through archival footage, musical samples, interviews with historians and former King employees, including African-American producer Henry Glover and future recording executive Seymour Stein. An extended look at Brown doesn't ignore his complex relationship with the shrewd, eccentric Nathan.

Acts routinely covered each other's material in King's Cincinnati studio. Glover, heard on an old recording, explains how a riff from the R&B hit "The Huckleback" became the famous Zeke Turner guitar lick driving the Delmore Brothers' hit "Blues Stay Away From Me." The label folded after Nathan's death in '68, yet its

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SPEEDY SPARKS 1945-2025

By Dan Forte

Joe “King” Carrasco & El Molina, Texas Tornados, Sir Douglas Quintet, LeRoi Brothers, Texas Mavericks, Alvin Crow & the Pleasant Valley Boys, Roky Erickson, James Hand, the Bizarros, the Nortons, Teddy & the Tall Tops, Mystic Knights of the Sea, Pops & the Spirit Uncles, Rhythm Rats, TG BAD (Two Guitars, Bass And Drums), Lazy Lester, Koolerators, Gulf Coast Playboys.

That’s an incomplete roster of the Austin bands that featured Speedy Sparks on bass. It was common for him to simultaneously play with two or three and hold down residencies at different clubs. The Houston native was 79 when died on October 7.

During a memorial held at Saxon Pub, bandmates sang his praises, invariably with a laugh, often with a tear. Junior Brown delivered a letter, reading, “Thank you for the

boundless heart that you shared with everyone. Thank you for your generosity in helping me achieve my musical dream and for your belief in its success. We had so much fun sitting around the kitchen table dreaming up Dynamic Records. ‘Vocal with Cowboy Band’ on my 45 rpm is an example of how we laughingly turned that fantasy into some sort of low-budget reality. Tanya Rae and I will always cherish our mutual love, and the memories of our adventures will never fade.”

Drummer Mike Buck told me, “It would be hard to think of anyone more representative of the soul of Austin, Texas. He was a lifer – unrepentant rock and roller to the end.” Online, Saustex label head Jeff Smith described Speedy’s playing as “understated, groveful, foundational – elevating. He intuitively knew exactly what and how much to play, no matter the style.”

Miller “Speedy” Sparks moved to Austin in ’72, but his most visible gig – with Tex-Mex supergroup the Texas Tornados – didn’t happen until 1989, when he was in his mid 40s. His roommate on the road, drummer Ernie Durawa, points out that the Tornados had to back four bandleaders – Doug Sahm,

Freddy Fender, Flaco Jimenez, and Augie Meyers. “Trying to make four bandleaders happy at one time, we were a perfect rhythm section, their foundation. Sometimes I’d almost forget that Speedy was there – like auto pilot, that pocket, 35 years. Never any pull and tug.”

If it was roots music – blues, country, early rock and roll – Speedy could play it. In a video interview for Austin Music History, he declared, “When I was coming up, country music was redneck music. When I was 21, the only place to get a beer was at a redneck bar or a strip club. Felt safer in a strip club, believe me.”

An ’80s garage/psychedelic band, the Bizarros included Sparks, future music journalist/record producer Bill Bentley on drums, along with Ike Ritter and John Reed

on guitars. In ’84, he launched his own label, Dynamic Records, producing singles by Ritter, Erickson, and guitarist Chris Holzhaus, an 11-song EP by Two Hoots & a Holler leader Rick Broussard, and the first solo recording by Brown.

In the early ’80s, when Sparks was in a relationship with Kay Sexton, he was a surrogate father and strong musical influence on her two sons, guitarists Charlie and Will Sexton. At the memorial, Charlie choked up, stating, “He was the most important person in my life.”

Guitarist Eve Monsees represents another younger generation that worked with Sparks, in Eve & the Exiles and TG BAD. “Both on stage and off, it was all about the groove with Speedy,” she told me. “No stage was too big or too small. I learned so much from him and his calm, steady presence. I became a better rhythm guitar player because of him. I learned the importance of taking the time for a good meal on the road.”

For Speedy’s 50th birthday, Continental Club owner Steve Wertheimer secretly booked Sparks’ favorite group, Louisiana swamp-pop’s Cookie & the Cupcakes. Speedy was led in blindfolded just as the band began their hit, “Mathilda.” When the blindfold was removed, Wertheimer says, Speedy had tears in his eyes.

Sparks released only one solo album, *OK, Let’s Play*, consisting of fold-school rock originals and a cover of Buddy Holly’s “Heartbeat.”

“Guitar Grady” Pinkerton relayed one of countless humorous encounters.

“A singer was showing him her new song, and she said, ‘It starts on the C minor.’ He told her, ‘That don’t matter to me. That’s why they’re called minor chords. They’re not that important.’”

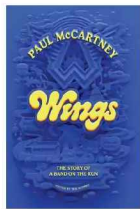
In the Austin Music History video, a wise but self-effacing Sparks says, “I still just play what I play. I haven’t really learned anything, because then I couldn’t play what I know. Once you learn too much, you risk being unemployed real quick, that’s for sure. When I play with a bunch of folks my age, you can see the magic. When I’m playing with like a lot of tourists, about 40 or 50, no magic. They don’t put any magic back.”

With a laugh, Durawa recalls a gig in Switzerland. “We were at a chalet and Speedy said, ‘You know, most people have to pay a lot of money to come here. Us three-chord idiots get to come here for free.’”

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HIT LIST REVIEWS

legacy stands. *King of Them All* explains not only how it happened, but why it still matters. – **Rich Kienzle**



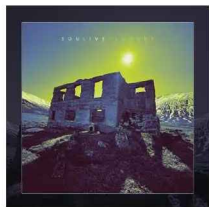
Paul McCartney & Ted Widmer

Wings: The Story of a Band on the Run

Fifty years ago, Paul McCartney & Wings was a huge act – six #1 singles and five #1 albums in the U.S., including 1976's triple-live LP *Wings Over America*. A remarkable feat given the Beatles' permanent shadow. This oral history features vintage and recent musings from Paul himself, plus late wife/keyboardist Linda, Wings bandmates, family, and friends.

Linda and Paul recruited ex-Moody Blues guitarist/bassist Denny Laine – the only constant member – while three lead guitarists and four drummers came and went. NYC studio man Hugh McCracken was initially offered the Wings chair, but turned it down. Henry McCullough stepped in, best-known for his one-take solo using a Les Paul goldtop for “My Love” (drummer Denny Seiwell called him “a Jimi Hendrix of Ireland”). Jimmy McCulloch replaced McCullough and was name-checked by McCartney in “Junior’s Farm” (“Take me down, Jimmy!”). Final lead guitarist Laurence Juber said, “Effectively, it was like my master’s from McCartney University.”

Paul lost interest in Wings after 1979’s *Back to the Egg*, his infamous 1980 Tokyo marijuana bust and jail stint, and canceled Japanese tour. Album summaries, discographies, tour dates, time lines round out the book, which is thorough – and essential for diehard Macca fans. – **Bret Adams**

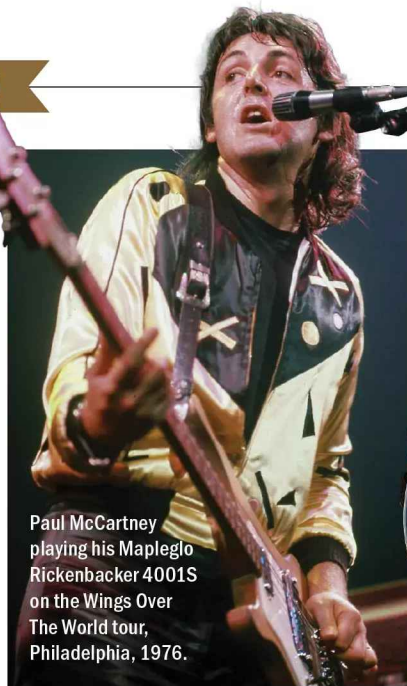


Soulive

Flowers

Soulive’s first full-length album in more than a decade was recorded at Flóki Studios on

Iceland’s Tröllaskagi Peninsula, the pastoral setting infusing a laid-back vibe. Ditties like “XL” and “Butter Rock” yield sounds closer to the ’60s lo-fi funk of Parlor Greens, The Meters, and Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio, then shift with the caffeinated “Baby Jupiter,” where ’60s organ trios merge Grant Green with James Brown-style drumming.



Paul McCartney playing his Mapleglo Rickenbacker 4001S on the Wings Over The World tour, Philadelphia, 1976.



Soulive’s Eric Krasno

Funk brothers Alan and Neal Evans on drums and B3, respectively, are in top form with guitarist Eric “Kras” Krasno morphing beyond his John Scofield extrapolations into pure guitar soul-craft. “Flowers at Your Feet” features singer Van Hunt and explores the cosmic synchronicity between Sly Stone, Brian Wilson, and Krasno’s funky wah work.

“3 Kings” is an homage to the passing of B.B. King; Kras channels B.B., Albert, and Freddie with semi-hollowbody goodness that’ll get full approval from the blues police. “Vines” is a Kras tune exploring the blues shenanigans of Jimi Hendrix over half-time funk, excellent wah filtering, and visceral gut-level soloing. “Widow Weather” blends acoustic and electric guitars for the perfect walk through serenity. *Flowers* is soulful, dreamy, and gushing with groovy delights. – **Oscar Jordan**



Jorma Kaukonen

Wabash Avenue

Like Jerry Garcia and Barry Melton, Jorma Kaukonen was an acoustic folkie before going electric and pioneering psychedelic rock in 1960s San Francisco. The sheer longevity and bulging catalog of his work with Jefferson Airplane and Hot Tuna, plus his instructional *Fur Peace Ranch*, are unmatched.

As consistent as his recent albums are, an archival find is a real event. In the case of these 19 solo performances, it amounts to buried treasure. Recorded in San Jose coffee houses in 1965, then mailed to himself as a

“poor man’s copyright,” the tapes were not unearthed until 60 years later.

Jorma has always credited the obscure college friend Ian Buchanan for teaching him Rev. Gary Davis fingerpicking, and he learned his lessons well. A bit of distortion is forgiven, as he confidently covers Davis’ “Twelve Gates To The City,” Jesse Fuller’s “San Francisco Bay Blues,” and a pre-Airplane version of his signature acoustic instrumental, “Embryonic Journey.” Another instrumental, “the contemplative closer, “Lullabye,” is followed by a present-day interview, offering historical context.

Particularly in the double-LP edition, the packaging is stunning. Black-and-white period photographs and purple vinyl are ideal accoutrements to this fascinating time capsule. – **DF**

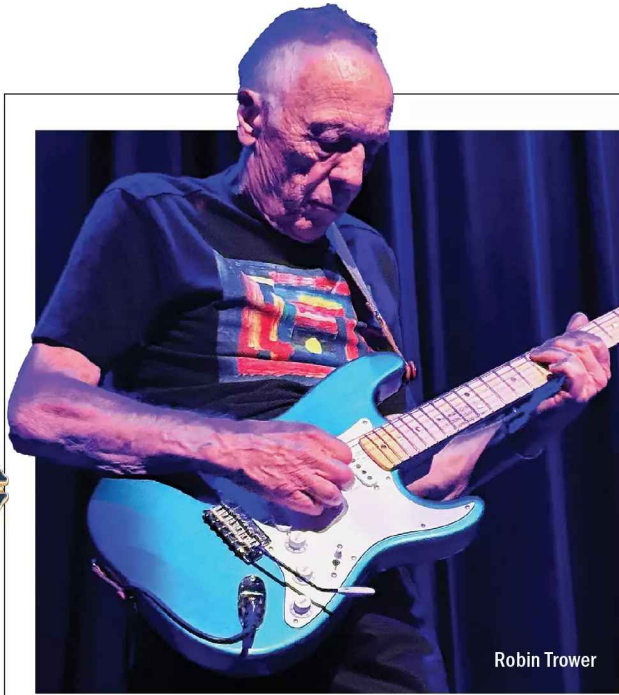


Yes

Tales from Topographic Oceans (Super Deluxe Edition)

After three hit albums, Yes got experimental in 1973 with this sprawling sonic adventure. *Topographic* is the quintet’s densest work, a double album with four long suites – though prog connoisseurs count it amongst their greatest work. This box set contains 12 CDs, two LPs, rare studio jams and live recordings, and new remixes by überproducer Steven Wilson.

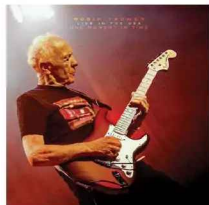
Per usual, there’s a straight remaster of the original albums, plus a crisper, more-detailed Wilson mix – pick your audio poison. Also



Robin Trower

of interest are instrumental mixes that let us dive deep into the craftsmanship of guitarist Steve Howe and bassist Chris Squire. They're fascinating, but the real Easter eggs are 2.5 hours of unreleased live material from 1973-'74. Here, you can hear complex, 20-minute epics like "The Revealing Science Of God," "The Remembering," and "Ritual" performed onstage – a bold, if not insane feat (and one reason why keyboardist Rick Wakeman quit soon after). Also look for guitar-intensive concert versions of "And You and I" and "Close to the Edge."

In retrospect, is *Topographic* still rambling and bombastic? Absolutely. But does this box contain essential prog-rock guitar? Yes! – **PP**



Robin Trower
One Moment in Time: Live in the USA

There aren't a lot of 80-year-old guitarists jamming with a passion reminiscent of their 20s, but Robin Trower is a notable exception. This live album compiles tracks from his 2025 tour, aided by the

letter-perfect Richard Watts on bass/vocals and Chris Taggart on drums.

For "Wither on the Vine," Trower deploys his patented slow-burn blues using a 50-watt Marshall, Fulltone pedals and – *what else?* – a big-headstock Strat. It's a wondrous piece of guitar understatement. On 1977's "Somebody Calling," funk-rock is on the menu, rife with wah and Uni-vibe colors. If you need a flashback, the pummeling version of "Day of the Eagle" is on point, fronted by Robin's furious Fender. Also, unlike some older gents, Trower has no need to slow down the groove – the man can still wail at 1974 tempos, no problem.

With fat audio fidelity and a killer performances, you'll want to grab *One Moment in Time* because the material isn't another xerox of ancient hits. Sure, "Bridge of Sighs" and "Daydream" are here, but so are deep cuts like 1994's "Rise Up Like the Sun" and 2022's "Birdsong." So many guitar heroes are gone, but thankfully, Robin Trower is still here and playing with fire. – **PP VG**

extra.
EXTRA



POCKET QUARTET
Hard-Boiled Music

Composer/guitarist David Dvorin explores the less-is-more approach to drums, bass, and jazz harmony through ensemble imagery that draws upon TV noir of the 1950s and beyond. Elegant and edgy hollowbodies feed off sax and vibraphone improvisations, inspiring spine-tingling melodies. Picture seedy nightclubs, concrete jungles, hipsters, and Henry Mancini. Highlights include "Flim-Flam Man," "Exit the Side Door," and "The Getaway." – **OJ**



KIM WILSON
Slow Burn

Undoubtedly one of the greatest harp players and blues singers, Wilson has flirted with crossover success with the Fabulous Thunderbirds, which he has fronted for 50 years, and turned out solid solo blues releases. Besides featuring guitarist Billy Flynn, onboard for some cuts are Canned Heat bassist Larry Taylor, drummer Richard Innes, and pianist Barrelhouse Chuck, all recently deceased. – **DF**



SQUEEZE
Trixies

These newly recorded songs were written in 1974, when vocalist/lead guitarist Glenn Tilbrook and rhythm guitarist/vocalist Chris Difford were teens. Influenced by concept albums and rock operas, the Bowie-esque "The Place We Call Mars" includes squawking guitar. A light, jazzy solo boosts "Good Riddance." The power-pop of "Why Don't You" and '60s time-warp

"The Jaguars" also display Squeeze's underrated guitar handiwork. – **BA**



DUKE LEVINE
Super Sweet Sounds of the '70s

Levine, who has worked with Bonnie Raitt and others, offers instrumentals from a beloved decade aided by first-rate sidemen including guitarist/lap steeler Kevin Barry. Duke creates well-executed acoustic and amplified interpretations of hits by Barry White, Elton John, The Band ("Whispering Pines"), Traffic ("John Barleycorn Must Die"), and Neil Young ("Only Love Can Break Your Heart"). – **RK**



MAMMOTH
The End

Wolfgang Van Halen continues to make his late father proud as a multi-instrumentalist and composer. With jackhammer riffs, passionate lyrics, melody, and a drummer's approach to guitar ostinatos and soloing, tunes like "Same Old Song," "The Spell," "One Of A Kind," and "I Really Wanna" illustrate that FM *rawk* is not dead. It's simply younger and heavier. – **OJ**



WILD HORSES
Standing Our Ground: Complete Recordings 1978-1981

These Scottish hard rockers are less important for their music than featuring Thin Lizzy's Brian Robertson and late Rainbow bassist Jimmy Bain. Without a charismatic frontman, Wild Horses didn't last, yet this six-CD box delivers incendiary Robbo leads, including the Lizzy-ish "Face Down" and ferocious live cover of Joe Walsh's "Rocky Mountain Way." Later, Robertson joined Motörhead and Bain co-founded Dio. – **PP**

✓ VG APPROVED GEAR

HERO ZERO

The Guild M-50 Standard

Before the era of dreadnoughts and jumbos, guitar sizes were measured in zeros – 0, 00, and 000. A step up from the parlor guitar, the 0-sized concert guitar was designed to provide enough volume to get a player out of the parlor and in front of an audience.

Guild's latest take on the concert guitar is the M-50, a spruce-on-rosewood affair with a big voice and a small footprint.

Light and resonant, this rosewood concert is bright and clear. Its mid-forward voice is just a little bit woody, with a hint of shimmer in the high-end. Bass response is restrained, but that's sort of the point here. The small body shape makes it comfortable to play on the lap, and the tamed low-end makes for a fantastic flat-picking experience. While Guild doesn't identify fret specs, they're "modern" – narrow, tall-ish, and comfortable – comparable to what Martin and Taylor are using, and different from the wide/jumbo frets common on current Gibson acoustics. Setup out of the box was good and fast, but the action was a bit low for someone who strums hard.

The M-50's specs fall in line for a concert-sized flat-top box: 1³/₄" nut width, 24³/₄" scale, standard C-shaped mahogany neck. The wood on the East Indian fretboard is particularly nice, and the fretwork is very well done. The Sitka spruce top has forward-shifted scalloped X bracing, and is finished in an august Antique Burst. Rosewood on the back is straight-grained and uniform, and the nicely executed Vintage Gloss nitro finish on the top, back, and sides sits between satin and gloss.

Appointments on the 50 are in line with other standard American rosewood models – unbound fretboard, white plastic binding on the top and back, and a modest rosette. The Guild open-back tuners, bone saddle, and bone nut are of good quality, and the straight bridge design gives the guitar a bit of vintage vibe.

Guild ships the M-50 in a better than average case complete with built-in humidifier. Overall, it's a nice package that compares favorably to others in its class. If given but one word to describe the M-50, it would be "fun." – *Michael Shirek*

Price: \$2,999
www.guildguitars.com



Price: \$199 www.peavey.com

HAIR PIECE

Peavey's VTM Preamp

Rather than aping generic classics like so many pedals, Peavey's VTM Preamp takes a quirky approach to the familiar amp-in-a-box (AIAB) theme by reproducing the distortion of the company's own high-gain VTM 60 and 120 amps of the mid/late '80s.

Designed by acclaimed Peavey engineer James Brown largely as an homage to modified Marshalls of the era, the VTM was distinguished by its array of eight DIP switches for tone and gain modification; those features are retained in this pedal alongside controls for Pre and Post Gain, and three-knob EQ.

Tested with a Les Paul and a Telecaster into a '65 Tremolux head and 2x12 cab, the VTM Preamp proved a fast track to the sort of tight-yet-saturated crunch and lead tones that helped define hair-rock, metal, and some of the heavier grunge of the era. Its foundational tones are wrapped in late-'70s/early-'80s distortion pedals that wore their fuzz-box origins proudly on their sleeves, which makes sense in context of the diode clipping used to push the original VTM tube amps (and modded Marshalls before them) into extreme gain.

There's an abundance of sizzle and fizz amid the thumping lows and searing highs, but also extreme versatility thanks to the DIP switches and three-band tone stage. On one hand, it's arguably a dated distortion sound, but it's still great, and applies easily to myriad styles today. – *Dave Hunter*



SINGLE MINDED

The Blackstar TV-10A Head and 1x12

Anyone at the recent NAMM show could've taken an early gander at Blackstar's new TV-10 heads, which run against type for the British maker known for the bells and whistles on much of its range.

Available in A (American, 6L6, which we received) and B (British, EL34) versions, the TV-10 offers straightforward Gain, Tone, Reverb, and Master controls, plus footswitchable Drive. A lone ECC83 (a.k.a. 12AX7) takes preamp duties and the single-ended output stage delivers 10 watts of Class A tone. As such, it's a "you like it or you don't" proposition, but single-ended classics like the Fender Champ have proven there's a lot to like (and in this case, significantly more volume).

Reverb in the TV-10 is a good-sounding digital spring emulation and the Drive "channel" is solid-state-assisted. Other features include a buffered effects loop with dual-levels switch, speaker-emulated DI, and outputs for 8- and 16-ohm cabs. The open-back TV-10A cab measures 21" x 16" x 10" and carries a 12" Celestion A-Type speaker (the B cab gets a 23" V-Type).

Testing with a Telecaster and an ES-335

revealed a bright sound that was a tad brittle at lower volumes, but filled out nicely as we wound up the levels, landing on a satisfying low-end response for an amp its size as the sweet spot approached. While it can be dialed-in well enough for lower-

volume playing, the TV-10 really came into its own with both Gain and Volume up to about 1 o'clock and beyond. As such, it delivered a toothsome and dynamic edge-of-breakup tone that

applied itself well to a range of rock and roll-based stylings, and enough volume to keep up with a reasonable drummer.

Stomping the footswitch for Drive induced a juicy overdrive that, while pre-set in gain, should prove suitable to many lead requirements, adding sustain and compression to the sizzle. While the accompanying extension cab is a good-sounding option for the price, the amp gained girth and tonal depths when patched into a larger open-back 1x12" with a Fane Crescendo Anniversary speaker and a closed-back 2x12" with Scumback M75 speakers. All in all, though, the TV-10 is an impressive little rig for its price, and surprisingly inspiring. — **Dave Hunter**

Price: \$749.99 (head),
\$499.99 (cab)
www.blackstaramps.com

GEARIN' UP



CORT KX600 INFINITE

Cort Guitars' KX600 Infinite has a basswood body, five-piece maple/walnut neck with a narrow C shape, neck-through build with sculpted heel, 25.5" scale, stainless steel jumbo frets on a 12"-radius fretboard, Graph Tech TUSQ nut, Fishman Fluence Modern humbuckers, Volume knob with push/pull to split coils, three-way selector, locking tuners, and hardtail bridge.

EHX PICO

The Electro-Harmonix Pico Intelligent Harmony Machine follows a player's single-note melodies to create diatonic harmonies in two or three parts. Its controls allow the user to set the harmonic key and choose from 10 interval modes; Dual mode adds a second voice, while Mix and Volume adjust wet/dry blend and overall output.



EPIPHONE MIKE DIRNT GRABBER G-3

Epiphone's Mike Dirnt Grabber G-3 has a maple body, 34"-scale, three-piece maple neck with ebony or maple fretboard, black-abalone dot inlays, and 20 medium jumbo frets. Other details include two custom-wired pickups with master Volume and Tone and three-way toggle, Leo Quan Badass II bridge, and open-gear tuners with clover buttons. It's offered in Silverburst or Natural finish.

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

PUPPY LOVE

The PRS Fiore HH

Building on the success of the Fiore signature model developed with Mark Lettieri in 2022, PRS and the Snarky Puppy guitarist return for an encore – this time with a dual-humbucker version of the guitar

originally offered in an SSH configuration (VG, February '23).

Unzipping the soft case, we were first struck by the test model's unique finish – a tobaccoburst called Sunflower, with a satin

nitro layer that leaves the swamp ash grain not only visible, but tangible. Hollow birds fly up the rosewood fretboard, and a flower designed by Lettieri's mom (*aww...*) decorates the truss cover. While the aesthetics are great, they're topped by ergonomics. A belly cut helps snug the guitar into playing position and the maple neck has a super comfortable carve, like a medium C at the nut progressing toward D shape by the 12th fret. Nice fretwork adds to the appeal, with frets that are generous but not jumbo – allowing a player to use a light touch for speedy runs or dig in harder on the left hand without pushing notes sharp.

Frankly, it's hard to put the Fiore down. Given its bolt-on design, 22 frets, and a 25.5" scale, the Strat lineage is pretty clear... at least until the electronics reveal their range.

Eight distinct switching combos are available, accessed via three-way blade and two push/pull Tone controls. While more commonly used for coil splits or cuts, these pots swap between series and parallel circuits for each pickup. Parallel settings subtract lower midrange, offering a tone close to a single-coil's reedy sound but with a fuller bottom. Series settings kick that midrange back in, with a great result for rich lead tones. Plump jazz chords and fat leads are available from the neck pickup, arpeggios chime in middle position, and the bridge can power a chewy drive or

bright bite. In all settings, the pickups (which are identical to the single hummer in

the original Fiore) sound articulate and elegant, with the rough edges sanded smooth.

The Fiore HH is as pleasurable under the hands as it is to the ear, with versatility, playability, and smooth tones remaining center stage.

Also deserving a nod are the locking tuners, a steel vibrato bridge that stays in tune, and an arm with weighted tip. Infinitely playable, the Fiore HH is available in a handful of satin and high-gloss finishes. – **Rich Maloof VG**



Price: \$2,649 (satin),
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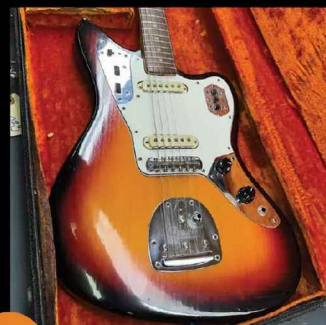
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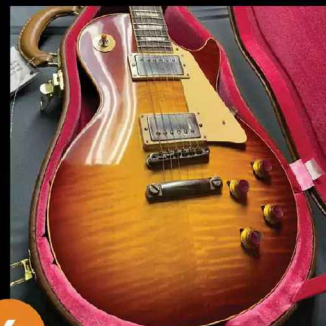
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01 Benjamin Lowgard is the only person he knows who plays a Veillette-Citron. He bought this one used in 1985 and added the Kahler vibrato in the '90s (a nod to Adrian Belew). "It has an amazing array of tones and a superb feel," he says.

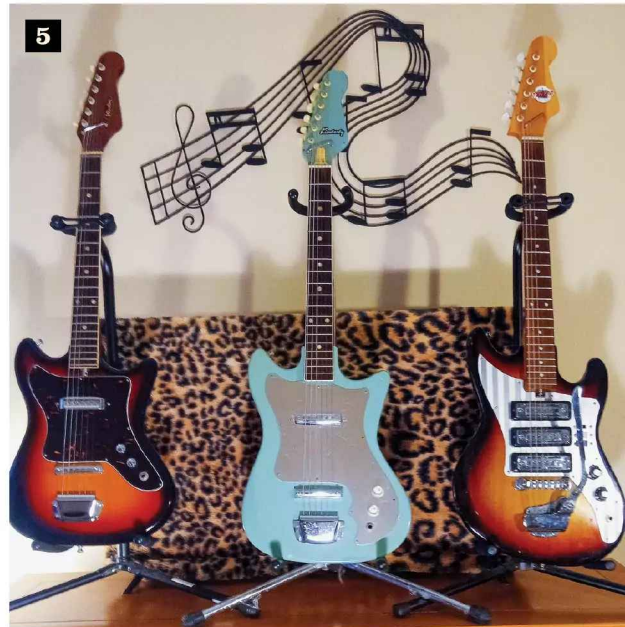
02 Paul Johnson dreams about seeing these two bits from his collection – a Gibson Historic Collection '57 Black Beauty and a PRS DG goldtop – dueling it out onstage. We'd definitely watch that!

03 While perusing an estate sale last year, Earl Bell found this '72 Harmony H-35 "Batwing" mando with a DeArmond pickup. "It sounds very clear and clean," he says.

04 While searching for a J-45, Howard Sugarman found this '46 Gibson Southern Jumbo he calls "...a true southern beauty. It plays like a charm, sounds fantastic with that vintage Gibson voice. It's sweet to hold and great to play, look at, and listen to."

05 Cliff Stone's collection includes this Winston, a funky Kimberly in a Seafoam-ish green with matching headstock, and a three-pickup Teisco Del Ray.

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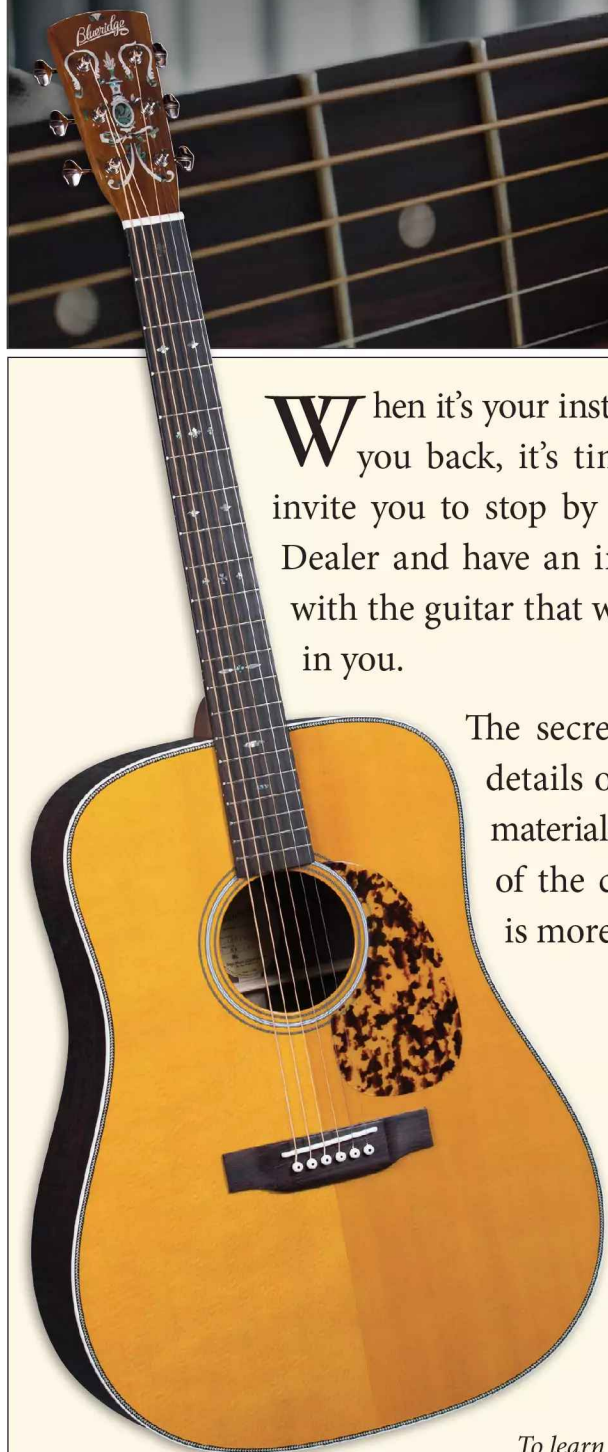
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