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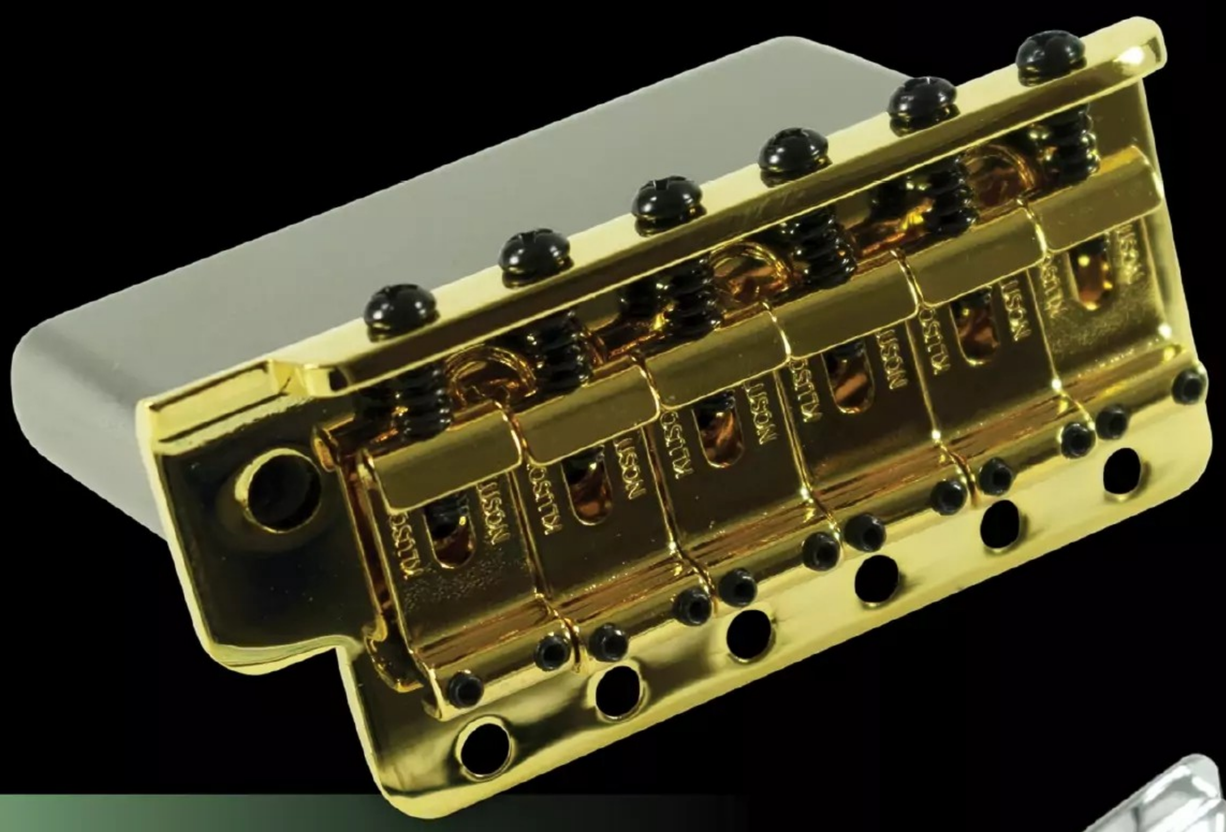

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CONTENTS

APRIL 2026 VOL. 40 NO. 07

FIRST FRET

12 **Reader Mail**

14 **News and Notes**
IFMA Honors Taj Mahal; Sho-Bud Acquires Mosrite; MIRC Opens 8th Avenue Guitar Works

14 **Paul Gilbert**
18th-Century Rock & Roll

16 **In Memoriam**

18 **Lil' Ed Williams**
Sweet Slide Chicago

19 **Past and Present**
KillerStar's Earl Slick and Rob Fleming

20 **Warren Haynes**
Return to Madness

21 **Mike Krompass**
Sonic Architecture

DEPARTMENTS

34 **New-Gear Spotlight**

38 ***Vintage Guitar* Price Guide**

60 **Upcoming Events**

70 **Showcase**

72 **Readers Gallery**

COLUMNS

42 **Fretprints**
Making a Masterpiece: Steely Dan's *Aja* | By Wolf Marshall

46 **Dan's Guitar Rx**
Deadhead Tribute: A Strat Turned Jerry-Style | By Dan Erlewine

REVIEWS

62 **The VG Hit List**
Duke Robillard, Lil' Ed & the Imperials, Asleep At The Wheel, Vince Gill, Mountain, Megadeth, more!

63 **Check This Action**
Guitar's Renaissance Man
| By Dan Forte

66 **VG Approved Gear**
Danelectro Pro, Taylor 260ce-K DLX Doce Doble, Harden Seahorse, TWA Source Code

67 **Gearin' Up!**
The latest cool new stuff!

Warren Haynes

22 **TIMELESS TONES, PART II**
The Gretsch Hollowbody Ring
When Chet Atkins strapped on a Gretsch 6120 in the mid '50s, the electric guitar became a statement of sophistication. From rockabilly flash to modern swagger, the hollowbody's chime still shakes stages and soundtracks. | ***By Mike Meiers***

28 **MICE THAT ROAR**
Five Low-Wattage Vintage Studio Combos
Fans of Clapton, Page, and other stars of the '60s and '70s assume they tracked on big Marshall, Hiwatt, or Fender amps. In reality, a lot of iconic tones were created with small "beginner" amps. Here are five that get the job done.
| ***By Dave Hunter***

32 **CLASSICS**
Brand curiosity spurred Chris Shelton to buy a G&L F-100. He instantly felt a difference between it and every other guitar he'd played. New-found fascination led him to acquire another; turns out, it's a rare example. | ***By Ward Meeker***

50 **FAREWELL TO G&L**
Storied Brand Closes After 45 Years
When news broke that G&L closed in September of 2025, guitar players and collectors worldwide expressed their appreciation for the brand. We revisit its history, dig into the reasons for its closure, and profile its most-notable instruments.
| ***By Ward Meeker***

56 **DAVE MUSTAINE**
Top of The World
Founder of the thrash-metal pioneers Megadeth, he announced last August that its 17th studio album would be its last. Their first to debut at #1 on *Billboard*, it's helping Mustaine and the band go out on top.
| ***By Bret Adams***

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COVER: Dave Mustaine: Ross Halfin. Paul Gilbert: Sam Gehrke. Warren Haynes: Shervin Lainez
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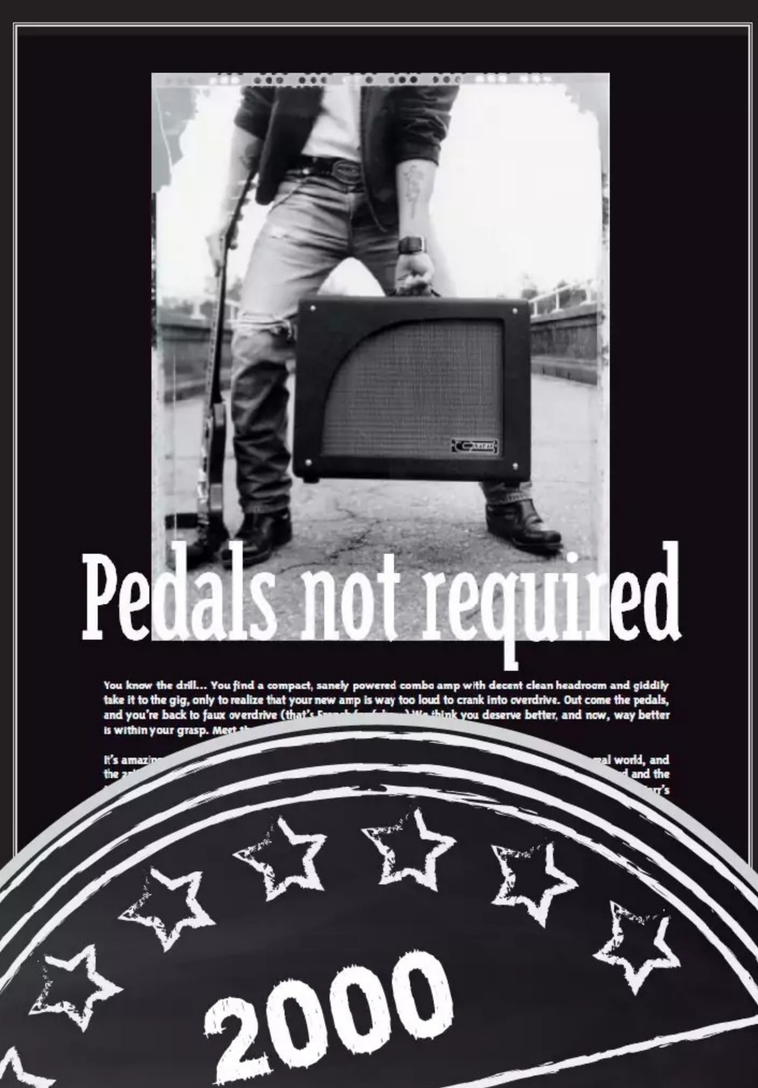

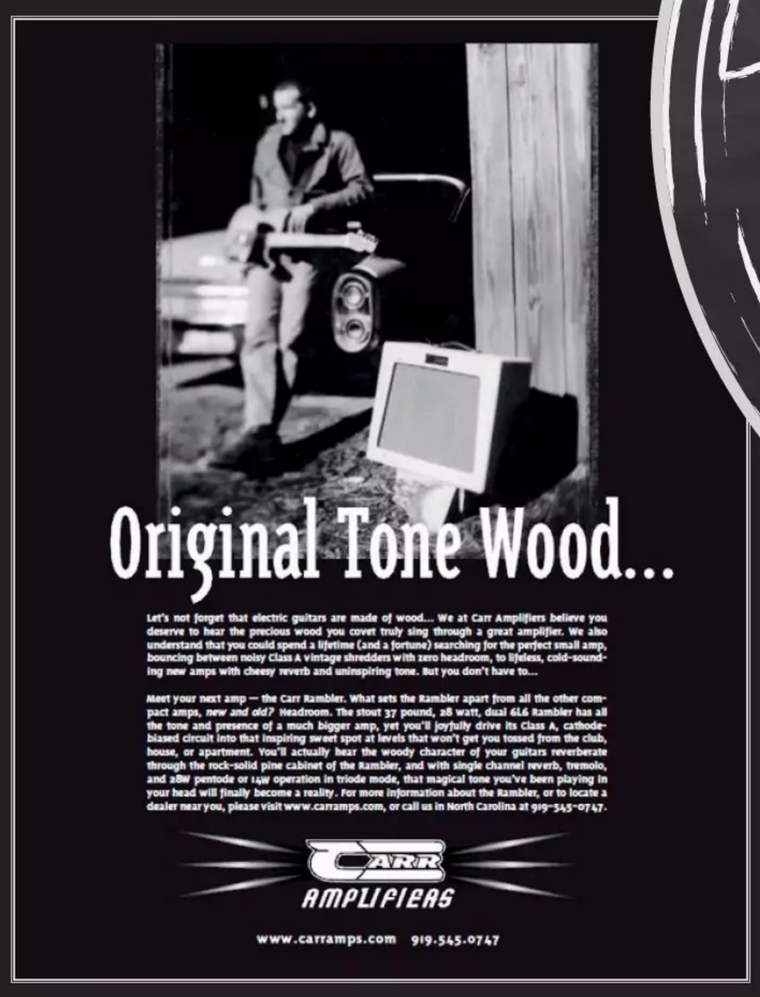

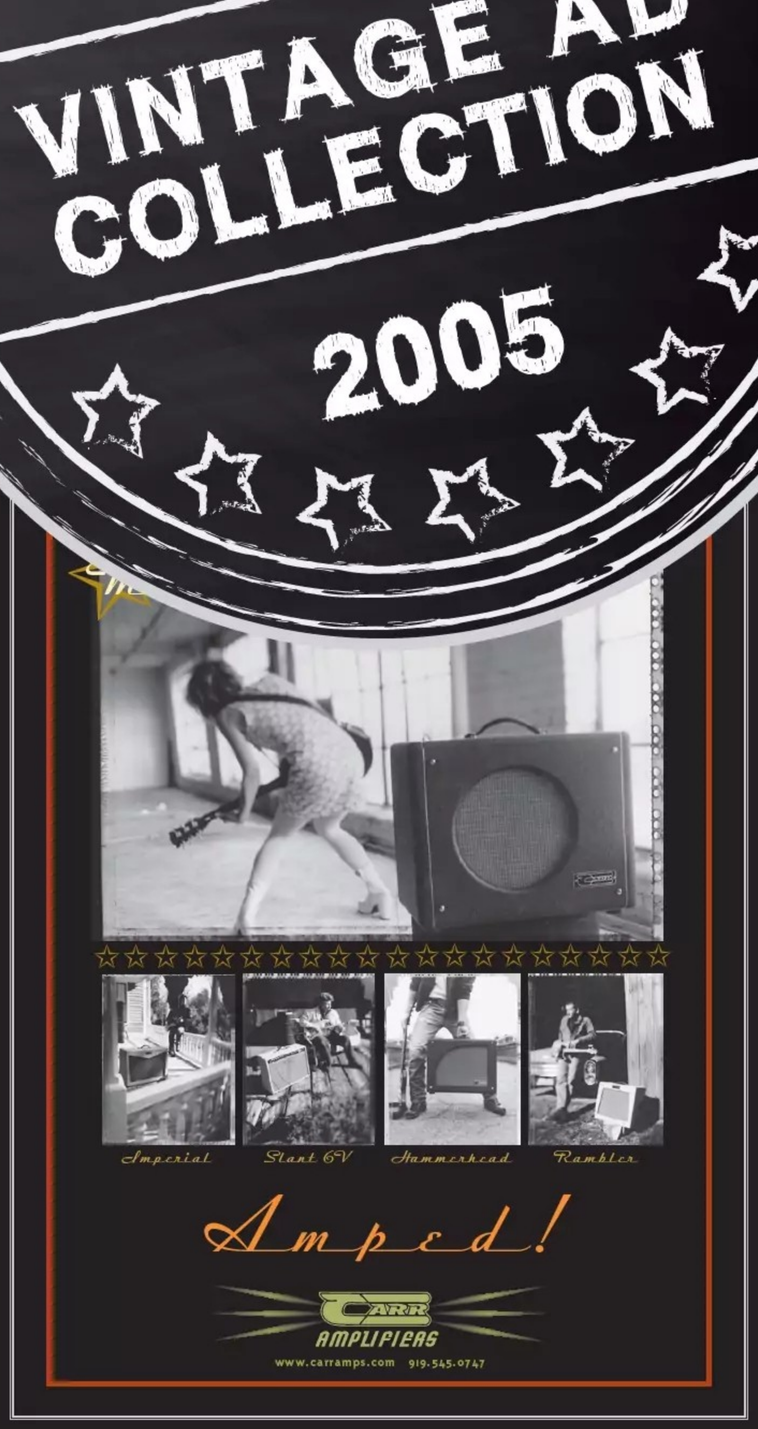

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READER MAIL

TWELVES TRIBUTE

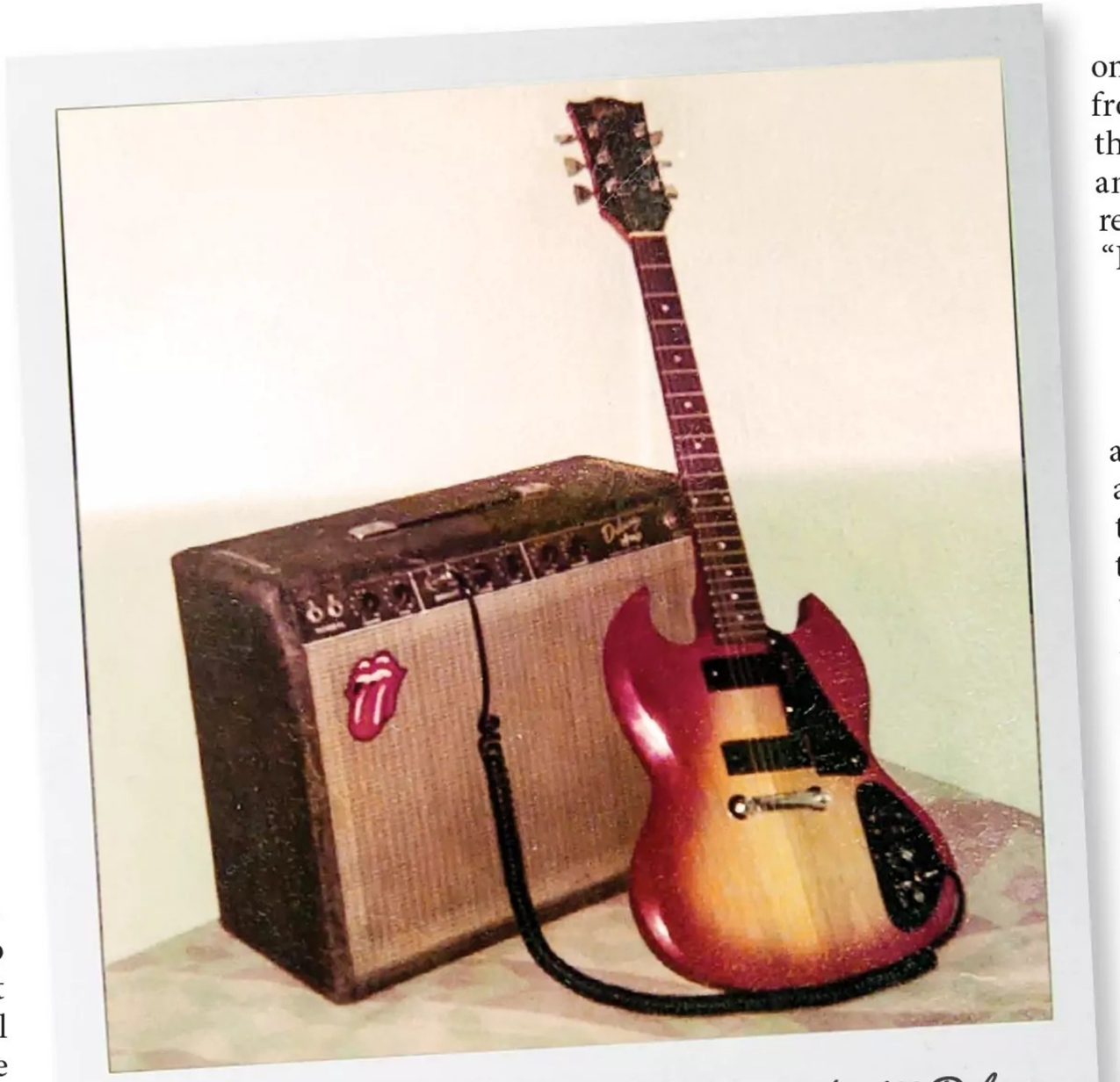
Reading Mike Meiers' feature on 12-string guitars in the February issue brought a smile to my face. I purchased my first 12-stringer – a Stella Harmony – in 1966 from a small music store in Bayonne, New Jersey. I needed it to create more sound playing solo, and the Stella did it for only 35 bucks!

I played that guitar through high school, college, and after. No one else could use it because it had a neck that was basically a 2x4, but I played *hundreds* of songs on it. In 1988, I upgraded to a Yamaha FG-12 because I could afford something better. Talk about a difference in necks, wow!

My final 12-string acquisition was in 2010, a Danelectro semi-hollow electric. What a great guitar. I still own all three but have relegated the Stella to inactive duty. I can't bring myself to getting rid of it, though – too many memories with that beauty.

Thanks for always taking the time to write articles that strike a familiar "chord" with your readers!

Dominick Trupia
Spring, Texas



Mike Ringnell's '72 SG III propped against his '62 Deluxe.

PHIL UPLIFT

Your Phil Upchurch memoriam (February '26) was a fitting tribute, but it did make me sad to see no mention of one of his most-loved performances, on "Raindrops" by Dee Clark. After that record starts with a giant thunderclap, the first thing you hear is Phil's guitar, which then proceeds to glue the whole record together so beautifully. I'm going to venture an educated guess that "Raindrops" was the biggest hit Mr. Upchurch ever played on, or certainly one of them. Dee later acknowledged that Phil was an uncredited co-writer on the tune; his beautiful chord changes are one of the things that make that record so indelible.

Dee Clark died a broken man, but that beautiful record and song that he and Phil Upchurch co-created does live on.

Marshall Crenshaw

FIRST-AMP FLASHBACK

Thanks to Dave Hunter for the profile of the brown '62 Fender Deluxe (January '26). That was my first really good amp, and I found it in a pawn shop. The tone is fantastic and the tremolo made a great "Bridge of Sighs" sound with my '72 SG III. Keep up the good work.

Mike Ringnell
Tucson, Arizona

PRAISE FOR THE PAGE

VG is my favorite magazine of any sort. I read it cover to cover and love learning about the gear that artists have used over the years. You offer great stories and informative articles.

Tom Van Effen
Wautoma, Wisconsin

There is something for everyone in every issue of *VG* and I have always enjoyed reading the magazine. The interviews are sometimes about artists I'm only vaguely familiar with, which is good. I really like articles about old amplifiers – I'd like to see a thorough feature on the original Kustom amplifiers from the Bud Ross era. He was the Leo Fender of the Midwest and has never received any real recognition. I also really like the "Hit List" reviews.

Randy Bacus
Burleson, Texas

Vintage Guitar is fantastic! As a bass player, I don't read every article related to six-string or the in-depth amplifier articles; they're interesting, but a lot of the electronics are way beyond my current knowledge. But it's a great magazine, like no other. Please keep it up!

Geordan McQuiston
Medford, Oregon

VG's interviews with artists have, for the most part, included thoughtful and provocative questions. I love the coverage of specific guitars and amplifiers. I also love the in-depth coverage of artists where the writer explores the history behind them. Keep up the great work. I look forward to every issue.

Will DeBouver
Hudson, Florida

I've been a reader since 2004, and you've always put out an amazing publication, introducing me to many artists I probably would not discover otherwise. I love the history lessons on old gear like the February piece on the Gibson Falcon amp, and I really enjoy the "First Fret" section, with its nice bite-size interviews.

Eugene Ames
Elkton, Florida

VG is still the best, and less-susceptible to commercial/paid endorsement influences from established brands. I trust your reviews much more than other guitar magazines, and love the historical articles, obituaries, and columns. I read it almost cover to cover every time. Kudos!

Jos Van Schagen
Seattle, Washington

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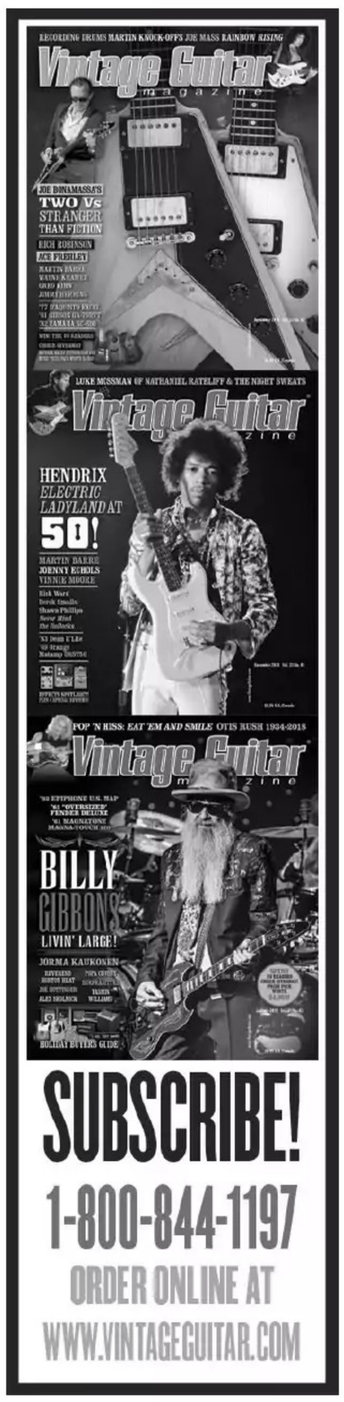

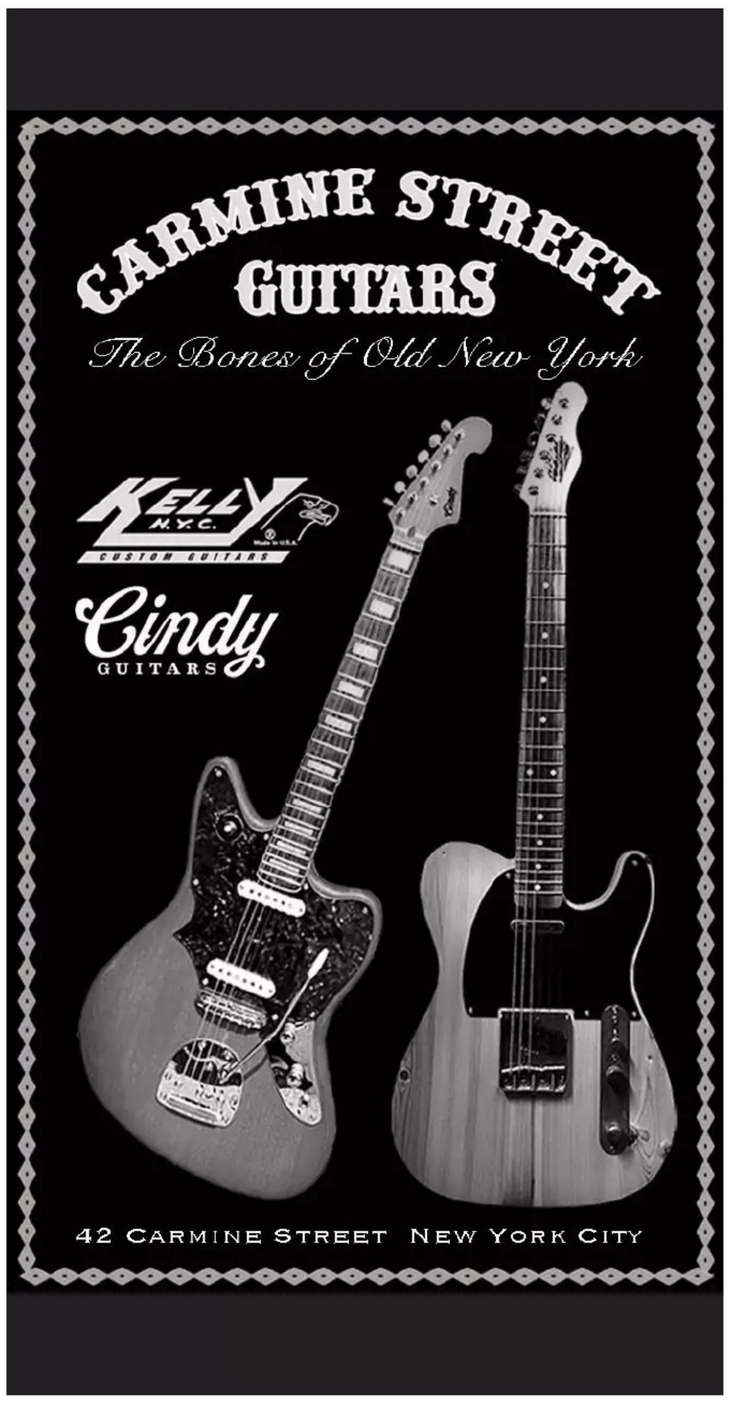

FIRST FRET

Taj Mahal

IFMA HONORS TAJ MAHAL

The Folk Alliance International honored Taj Mahal with its Lifetime Achievement Award during its Folk Music Awards ceremony, January 22 in New Orleans.

"I cannot tell you how much it's a pleasure to receive this wonderful award," said Mahal. "I've been enjoying making music for 75 years. As I approach my 84th birthday, I've still got a lot to go. I appreciate all y'all remembering that it's never in somebody's shadow, it's standing in their light."

Also recognized for lifetime achievement was zydeco originator Clifton Chenier.

SHO-BUD ACQUIRES MOSRITE

In early February, Sho-Bud, the pedal-steel manufacturer founded in 1955 by Shot Jackson and Buddy Emmons, announced that it had acquired Mosrite Guitars.

Sho-Bud is now operated by Jackon's grandchildren, Dawn and Will, who acquired the brand from Gretsch in 2024 and re-launched it with their father, David, and uncle, Harry, building instruments in their Las Vegas facilities.

MIRC OPENS 8TH AVENUE GUITAR WORKS

Musical Instrument Reclamation Company (MRIC), which refurbishes 30,000 guitars annually from over 100 brands, recently opened 8th Avenue Guitar Works, in Nashville. Visitors can watch technicians work while comparing necks, bridges, pick-ups, and other parts, which can inform their choices for mod projects and custom builds.

OOPS! DEPT.

The February feature "40 Most Valuable Guitars" incorrectly implied that Fender's Broadcaster preceded its Esquire. In fact, the Esquire was first offered in June of 1950, while the Broadcaster made the scene in October (or early November) of that year. *VG* apologizes for any confusion created by the error.w

Paul Gilbert: Sam Gehrke.

PAUL GILBERT

18th-Century Rock & Roll

Paul Gilbert's WROC is more than 250 years in the making – with help from the father of our country. Top-of-the-line power pop shred with humor, it offers lessons in civility and insane guitar virtuosity. VG pulled Gilbert aside to pick his brain, discuss his musical odyssey, and the tools of the trade.

What's the origin of *WROC*?

Before cellphones, I used to read a lot – I have bookshelves filled with books. Books about Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were my favorites; *Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation* was my favorite. There's a preamble that says "These are the rules that George Washington

used to make himself appear presidential." I thought, "I can't wait to read these! Maybe I can try them!" As I read them, I thought, "Oh, I can't do that one," and "Oh, I could never do that one (laughs)." So I thought, "I'm not cut out to be an 18th-century president." It's too hard.

After I finished the last Mr. Big show, I thought, "What am I gonna do?" I wanted to do an album of some kind. Lyrics are the hardest; I wish I had a Bernie Taupin to write with. Somehow, through the La Brea Tar Pits of my mind, I remembered *Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation*.

So I had AI take one of the rules from the book and turn it into a blues lyric. It was very cool, but I had to punch it into shape. I repeated lines to make a chorus, got rid of a few verses, and found something that sounded like a bridge with different phrasing. I used AI as a collaborator. Then I realized AI was lying to me. It was inventing rules. So I bought the book and tried to figure out if I could sing it. Just having a lyric as part of a melodic puzzle and forming it into a melody is a wonderful thing that can be built into a bigger song. Etiquette is something that rock and roll people don't sing about (laughs), but it resonates with me. And even though I fail at it, it's at least aspirational. If I can become two percent more civil, that can't be bad (laughs).

Cool lyrics can inspire melodies you wouldn't have come up with on your own.

It took me to places I would never have gone if I had only had a guitar in my hands. My fingers are so practiced in what they want to do that it's hard to pull myself away from that magnet of motor-skill habits and what I can visualize on the fretboard.

You quote the "Flintstones' Theme" during the slide on "Show Not Yourself Glad."

It's a useful melody (laughs).

Who knew George Washington could inspire such exquisite power pop?

(laughs) We recorded live in the studio, but we did a lot of rehearsals. The songs are very structured. I had the good fortune of having Timmer Blakely on bass and Doug Rappoport on guitar. He plays rhythm guitar, but he's a ripping soloist! Nick D'Virgilio was Mr. Big's drummer after Pat Torpey passed away, but he lives out of town, so I played drums on the demo and sent it to him. He has extremely good abilities. Day one in the studio was the first time we played with our drummer (laughs). I was pretty nervous, but Nick nailed it! There are so many good things about playing live. You immediately know if the take is good. You don't spend a lot of time building overdubs only to realize the vibe isn't there. It either sounds good or it doesn't, and if it doesn't, you do it over.

Talk about the gear you used for the record.

I used a Fender Vibrolux Reverb Custom from the '90s, a vintage one, and a Victoria Club Deluxe. For effects, I used an Xotic AC Booster. It's a leave-on pedal. Then I hit others in front of it to get more sustain for the solos, like the JHS Overdrive Preamp, which has a chunky, tight bottom-end. For slide solos where I wanted the high notes to sound thicker, I used the Mojo Hand FX Colossus, which is a fuzz. I really like it for slide. I also used the Jam Pedal Retrovibe, the MXR Stereo Chorus for arpeggiating chords Alex Lifeson-style, and the Homebrew Electronics Three Hound Chorus, which is set really fast, like a Leslie simulator.

How about guitars?

I used my vintage Ibanez Iceman, my Paul Gilbert FRM350, my PGM50, my vintage Ibanez doubleneck from the '70s, an early-'80s Ibanez RS530 for the whammy bar stuff, and a pink Ibanez PGM that looks orange on camera.

Are you taking this show on the road?

We're starting in the U.S. and have a lot of shows booked. ***– Oscar Jordan***

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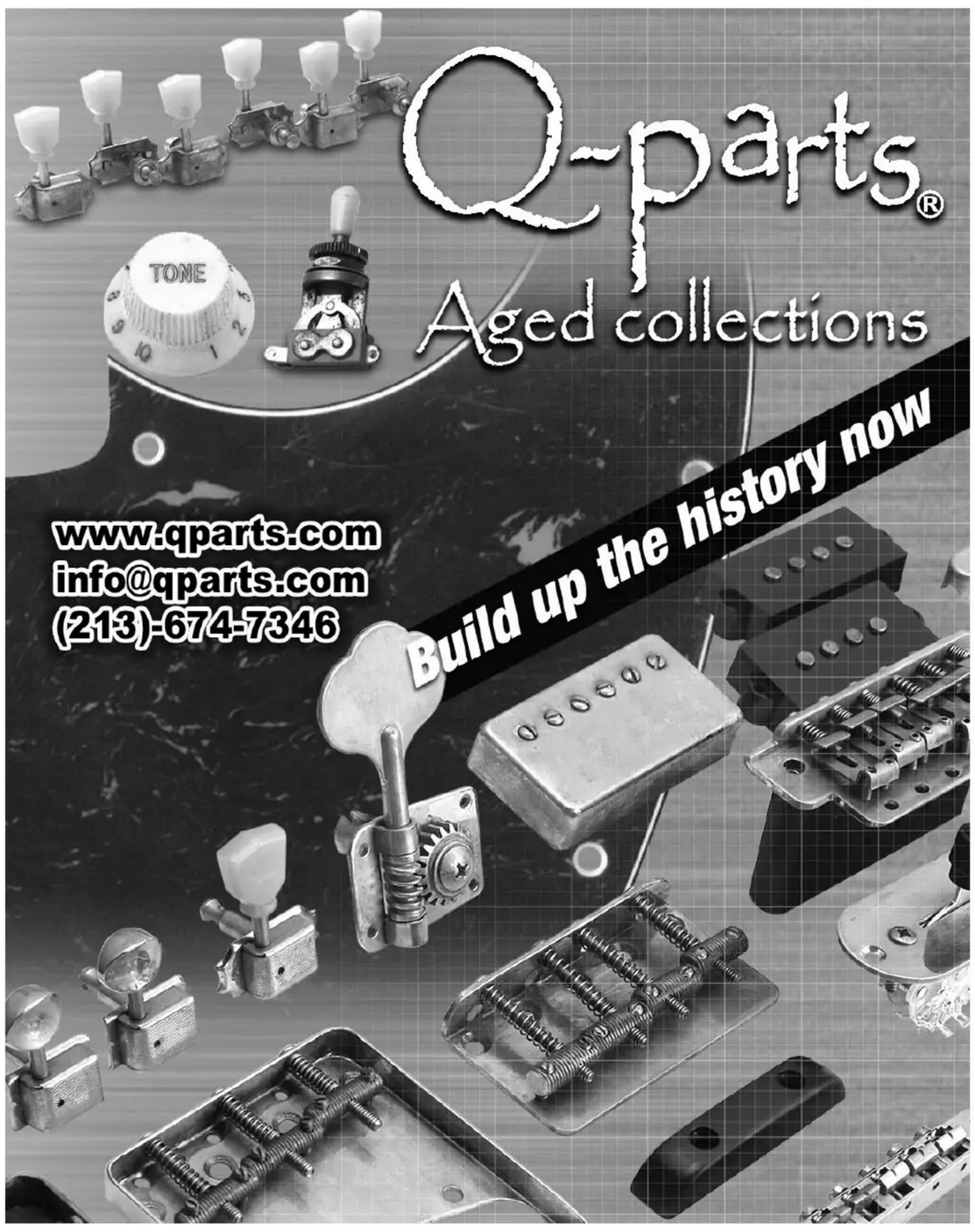

IN MEMORIAM

FRANCIS BUCHHOLZ

Francis Buchholz, longtime bassist in the Scorpions, died January 22 after battling cancer. He was 71.

Buchholz was born in West Germany and first played bass in public at age 15 in a band with schoolmates. After primary school, he attended university to study mechanical engineering and jazz. While a student, he joined Dawn Road, which included vocalist/guitarist Uli Roth. In 1973, they both joined singer Klaus Meine and guitarist Rudolf Schenker in Scorpions; their first album together was 1974's *Fly To The Rainbow*.

In '78, Buchholz started a live-production company called Rocksound, initially as a way to distribute loudspeaker cabinets he designed, but it also provided employment for the Scorpions' roadies when the band was not touring.

Buchholz remained with the band through its '80s heyday; his final album was 1990's *Crazy World*, which includes his only co-songwriting credit, on "Kicks After Six."

After Scorpions, Buchholz toured with Uli Jon Roth and recorded with Dreamtide before joining Michael Schenker in his Temple Of Rock band, with which he recorded two albums, the last being *Spirit on a Mission* in 2015. **– *Ward Meeker***

Francis Buchholz

JERRY KENNEDY

Producer and guitarist Jerry Kennedy, winner of four Grammy awards, died February 11 at the age of 85.

Kennedy was born and raised in Shreveport, Louisiana, and was motivated as a youngster by live performances by Hank Williams, and later, Elvis Presley at the legendary "Louisiana Hayride" shows at the city's Municipal Auditorium. He took guitar lessons from local player Tillman Franks and signed with RCA at the age of 11, recording in Dallas and Nashville. The music director on the Nashville sessions was Chet Atkins.

"It was very intimidating," Kennedy recalled in a 2007 interview in *VG*. "He was my idol at the time and I'd listened to as much of his stuff as I could get my hands on."

He later joined the Hayride's house band, playing alonside James Burton.

Moving to Nashville in March of 1961, Kennedy formed a close relationship with Mercury Records producer Shelby Singleton. He had already been using Telecasters, Stratocasters, dobros and a '58 Les Paul Standard, but his primary guitar for the many legendary hit songs on which he played was a '61 ES-335TDC. It can be heard on Roy Orbison's "Oh! Pretty Woman," Elvis Presley's "Good Luck Charm," Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man," and Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* album among other legendary recordings. Circa 1963, the guitar was modified with a palm pedal.

Working his way through the Nashville recording scene, Kennedy served as the head of Mercury Records' Nashville offices from 1969 to '84. His career's production credits include albums for the Statler Brothers, Roger Miller, Reba McEntire, and Johnny Rodriguez.

Jerry Kennedy

In 2007, Kennedy was honored as an inaugural inductee to the Musician's Hall of Fame in Nashville. That museum later named its theater in his honor. Among the noted musicians who attended the theater's dedication ceremony were Ray Stevens, Ricky Skaggs, and Steve Wariner.

All three of Kennedy's sons, Gordon, Bryan, and Shelby, became musicians in Nashville. **– *Willie G. Moseley***

RALPH TOWNER

Ralph Towner, a master of 12-string and classical nylon-string guitar, piano, and various horns, died at his home in Rome, Italy, on January 18. He was 85.

Towner worked as a solo artist and with acclaimed bands like Oregon and The Paul Winter Consort. Also a gifted composer, he wrote the much-loved "Icarus," described by *Village Voice* music critic Robert Christgau as "... kind of a classical/jazz mix but with none of the stiffness that suggests – inquisitive, contemplative, eclectic, peaceful."

Of his musical evolution, Towner told *Vintage Guitar* in 2023, "The beginning of my New York City years, starting in 1968, was a rich period to be writing and playing with musicians from all over the world. New bands were forming, like Weather Report, Miles Davis' sextet with Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Oregon combined instruments like 12-string and classical guitars, Indian tabla, oboe, and double bass."

Ralph Towner

Towner had a 50-year stint recording for ECM Records, including his 1974 solo masterpiece *Solstice* and *Sargasso Sea* as a guitar duo with John Abercrombie. Discussing the half-century relationship, he reflected, "I feel fortunate to have forged a friendship with [ECM producer] Manfred Eicher. Manfred's approach produces an atmosphere in the studio that is almost reverent. There was very little talk, few takes, and nearly always recording in one to two days, resulting in very spontaneous performances."

Sting's longtime guitarist and fellow ECM artist Dominic Miller (*VG*, August '23) spoke about the impact of that music: "Gosh, Towner, Abercrombie, and Metheny are absolute legends, and their ECM albums form part of my DNA. Ralph was a real inspiration to me; an incredibly original and creative guitarist and composer. We've lost a really special musician." **– *Pete Prown***

Francis Buchholz: MrPanyGoff/Wikimedia Commons. Jerry Kennedy photo courtesy of Gordon Kennedy. Ralph Towner: Svičková/Wikipedia Commons.

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LIL' ED WILLIAMS

Sweet Slide Chicago

Cue up *Slideways* and revel in the perfectly potent blues of Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials. It's the sound of electric Chicago blues featuring a killer band and raw energy of frontman Lil' Ed Williams. His combination of bottleneck, earthy vocals, and single-note riffs help listeners time-travel 60 or 70 years into the past, to when South Side blues clubs were rockin' every Saturday night.

Williams, along with his bassist and brother James "Pookie" Young, learned the ropes by watching their famed uncle, J.B. Hutto, one of the Windy City masters of the '50s and '60s. *VG* talked to Williams to get the facts on his new album, influences, and all-time favorite guitar.

Your slide approach is influenced by your uncle, but you have your own style.

My style was influenced by Uncle J.B., but at the same time, I was listening to John Littlejohn, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, and Elmore James recordings. I sit around with my guitar and try different ways of playing; over time I developed my own sound. You can hear that on the new record in "The Flirt in the Car Wash Skirt" because I wear the slide on my pinky finger. This allows me to play single notes as well as slide. I do wear one finger pick, but I don't use a regular pick because I get a more mellow tone with my fingers.

You've had co-guitarist Michael Garrett in the Blues Imperials for decades. What does he bring to the band?

Michael complements the music really well; that's what I noticed the first time I met him. In fact, that's why I hired him on the spot 30-plus years ago, because I knew he could blend with me and blend with our bass player, Pookie. Mike brings his own style and vocals, and he's a great asset to the band. We're not only bandmates, but family!

In the liner notes, you say that Alligator Records boss and producer Bruce Iglauer pushed you hard and motivated you in the studio.

Well, Bruce pushed me really hard because he wanted me to do things that I normally don't do, but that's what it was. He pushed me to play more single notes with my slide, and it worked out well.

You play many different brands of guitar – Gibson, Fender, National, and more. Which is your favorite?

To tell you the truth, it was a guitar I named "Pamela" – a Washburn Billy T model, and it was one of the best guitars and I owned it the longest of any guitar I've ever had in my life. That's the guitar that I put on display when I was inducted to the Blues Hall of Fame.

The other guitars I'm using right now are just try-outs; I'm liking the Telecaster because it's giving me a good sound. On *Slideways*, I played my Fender Blues DeVille amp and a reverb pedal, which I really didn't use much. For guitars, I played the Tele and also my Les Paul.

What kind of slide do you use and tuning do you play in?

(laughs) I like *any* kind of slide: bottleneck, metal, bone, glass. Over the years, people have been giving me different kinds of slides. Some look really cool, but don't sound so great, and some sound wonderful and give a different tone. For tunings, I play mostly in open D, but sometimes I play in open E – which I think makes me sound more like Uncle J.B.

Did J.B. or any other blues men give you lasting advice?

Well, there was a Chicago artist called Big Bad Ben Murphy. Ben influenced me and told me to keep on playing 'cuz he said I sounded good. But more importantly, Uncle J.B. set me down when I was first starting out with him and told me to develop *my own* style. Don't try to copy anyone else – not even him! And that's what I've been doing ever since.

What are your earliest memories of your uncle playing guitar?

My early memories are the times he would come to our family get-togethers and bring his guitar. All of us kids wouldn't be allowed in the living room with the grown-ups, especially while they were drinking, so I had to peek around the corner. My favorite memory was watching the lights reflected off of J.B.'s shiny silver slide – it was really sparkling! ***– Pete Prown***

Ed Williams: Jean-Michel Philippe.

Earl Slick

Rob Fleming

PAST AND PRESENT

KillerStar's Earl Slick and Rob Fleming

KillerStar is a supernova, and it shows on the all-star band's second album, *The Afterglow*. Co-founded by vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Rob Fleming and drummer James Sedge, the all-star aggregate includes guitarist Earl Slick, pianist Mike Garson, and bassist Mark Plati, known for their collaborations with David Bowie.

On their self-titled 2024 debut and *The Afterglow*, they create an intoxicating mixture of sonics both familiar and fresh. *VG* asked Slick and Fleming about KillerStar's distinctive music.

Rob, how did you bring Earl into KillerStar?

Rob Fleming: We thought the songs would fit Earl's style and benefit from his playing and licks. The songs already had Mike's piano and Mark's bass, and it felt like there was some synergistic magic at work to have the three of them from the David Bowie band reunited on new material.

KillerStar's style was conceived to balance classic and art rock with modern sounds. Did that happen naturally, given those involved, or was it harder to consciously make that happen?

Earl Slick: I prefer not to hear anything until I get to the studio. The first time around, Rob sent me a couple of demos to give me an idea what the project was like. He'll send me maybe a rough [mix], but normally I'll take the roughs and leave them alone until I go in and start recording. I do my best if I sit and listen, then start working out parts. I like the idea of walking in cold and that first emotion that comes out of my fingers. Even if I have to replay it once so it's not sloppy or messy, sometimes you just pop right in there, the first take.

When I hear something the first time, it'll hit me a certain way. I'll plug my guitar in and, without thinking, notes come out. Whatever hits me at the time, the emotional part, that's usually the right part.

I've worked with musicians and producers who overthink. I just want to run out – get my guitar and go home. I don't give a f**k because nobody else is going to, either. I'm a kind of a sloppy player, and my favorite thing is playing rhythm. I can play rhythm guitar in a band and be a happy camper.

One of the songs Rob sent, he wasn't sure about. He goes, "I don't have a vocal or anything yet." What hit me is I put slide on it and somehow everything I did worked. He wrote a vocal and worked around it. I had nothing to work with at all – just what I felt the track felt like.

Working with Bowie in the early days, especially when we got to (1976's) *Station to Station*, yanked me way out of my comfort zone, which is good. Now, I can almost hear David in my ear if I hear one of Rob's tracks and I go, "Alright, we need to go a little out of the box on this one." I definitely did some out-of-the-box stuff on both KillerStar records.

RF: It comes naturally. It's really a blend of the songwriting, who is playing, and the aesthetics of the mix.

Are any songs on *The Afterglow* leftover from the debut, or are they all fresh?

RF: They're all new. We had nothing left from the debut apart from some alternate versions, which we released as the *KillerStar Reimagined* album. We started writing just over a year ago.

Which guitars did you play on *The Afterglow*?

ES: I used one of my Strat-style Slick guitars that just kicks ass. I use it all the time. Any of the slide stuff is usually this one really cool Slick guitar, a Tele-style. It doesn't have a Tele bridge – it's got a Gibson kind of a bridge on it. I also played my Nash Wayfarer.

RF: On most songs, I played a guitar built by a luthier friend of mine in the U.K., modeled on a '59 Les Paul. Also, I played my original '65 Strat and a '62 ES-330 on a couple of tracks. On several songs, I also played acoustic to underpin the electric rhythm – a '50s J-45 that has a really nice, warm sound. On two songs there's a 12-string made by Auden Guitars, a really nice [Austin JM12] Johnny Marr signature model. ***– Bret Adams***

Earl Slick photo courtesy of E. Slick. Rob Fleming: Alice Plati.

WARREN HAYNES

Return To Madness

Warren Haynes is one of the most prolific songwriters in the business. So when he re-releases a remixed and remastered version of his first solo album, Tales of Ordinary Madness, people listen. Initially released in 1993, it displays Haynes basking in post-Allman Brothers greatness.

Everything old is new again.

I'm really psyched that we were able to include "Tear Me Down" this time. I always wanted that song to make the record, but we never finished it. So we finished it 30 years later.

Did you run out of room?

We had room. We were almost done, but we were over budget and completely out of time. So we decided to move on. Everything was there. I didn't re-do anything. We just hadn't put all the sections together. Randall Bramblett came in and played saxophone, and Bernie Worrell came in and played clavinet. There were some arrangement issues that needed to be dealt with. So we said, "We're over budget. We should probably drop a song." I wasn't psyched about it, but it was the right decision at the time. I'm very happy we brought it back.

The recording of *Tales of Ordinary Madness* was a pivotal time in your career.

I'd been planning on making that record since 1987 or '88. When I got the call to join Dickey Betts' band, I put it on the back burner so I could write a bunch of songs with Dickey, make a record, and go on tour. When that was over, the idea was that I would make my solo record. Then, in January of '89, I got a call saying they wanted me to join the Allman Brothers. They were re-forming and it was something I couldn't turn down. So I postponed my record yet again.

The next few years were a whirlwind. We did the reunion tour, did the *Seven Turns* album, then another tour, and then *Shades of Two Worlds*. The next thing you know, it was 1992 before I could find time to make this record. Things changed because I was continuing to write new songs. It was a crazy time.

While you were with the Allman Brothers, were you stockpiling songs?

When we went in to make *Tales of Ordinary Madness*, we were choosing between 28 songs. When I joined the Allman Brothers, I thought it was just for the reunion tour for one year. Then I was going to go back to what I was doing. But it was very successful, the music sounded fantastic, and everybody was getting along. So they said, "Hey, let's do it again next year!" None of us knew how long it was going to last.

At what point did you get the concept for Gov't Mule?

That happened in '94. I'd finished touring behind *Tales of Ordinary Madness* and Allen Woody and I had been talking about doing something together. That turned into Gov't Mule, but that was just supposed to be a side project. We were going to do a low-budget album, a short tour, and then go back to do what we were doing.

Describe the difference between your solo material and Gov't Mule.

It can cross over and go either way, but some of it belongs in one camp or the other. Gov't Mule was a concept – bringing back the power trio – an improvisational trio. It was meant to be a little heavier and exploratory. Once we decided to embark on that as an actual project, I started writing new material based on the sound of that band. We were doing a lot of jamming. No one was doing that at the time.

What was your philosophy regarding gear back then?

One or two guitars, no alternate tunings, and the same two amps because I was trying to establish my sound. Fast-forward a few years, that changes and you start finding some alternatives. I started writing songs in different tunings, which meant taking more guitars on the road.

Which guitar did you use for the album?

I was playing a red Strat, which was stolen in New York the following year, and "Invisible" was the Les Paul. In general, it was a Strat record, and that was a unique guitar. I really loved it a lot, but I was starting to grow out of my Strat phase and more toward Gibson. Losing that Strat forced the transition. I would love to have that guitar back. We've been looking for it for years.

Will you tour to promote the album and dress like it's 1993?

(laughs) Not immediately. I'm still trying to figure out what the next thing is going to be. We're re-releasing the first Gov't Mule record with a bonus disc of outtakes, and releasing a live record with a symphony orchestra later this year. ***– Oscar Jordan***

Warren Haynes: Shervin Lainez.

MIKE KROMPASS

Sonic Architecture

Multi-platinum pop producer/guitarist Mike Krompass follows his muse with the guitar-centric The Fell, a band that plays in-your-face guitar, cool tunes, and features superbassist Billy Sheehan. Krompass can unleash volatile guitar lines, but as producer, it was all about sound design, hooks, and the big picture for their new album, *Killswitch*.

***Killswitch* blends modern rock with shred. Was that the plan?**

We did whatever felt right. It wasn't a conscious effort. There was a lot of cool gear used, but it was an organic process. We almost recorded it as we wrote it.

Did you enter the studio with finished songs?

I had demos from eight years ago, but we refreshed things and added cooler amps. I got to revisit some of those songs and re-record some of it. The newer stuff had no pre-production.

Who are your guitar heroes?

Steve Lukather is one of my favorites. I'm also influenced by Nuno Bettencourt, Paul Gilbert... guys like that. I love Jimmy Page and Jimi Hendrix. I'm really influenced by drummers; I approach guitar percussively because I play drums and I love drummers – guys like Jeff Porcaro and John Bonham. I also love modern rock stuff like Bring Me The Horizon. I like funk and R&B, too. As far as production, I love the new Mammoth record – that modern rock sound with big drums. When I put on my producer's hat, I go for what I think is cutting-edge, but there's definitely a lot of throwback influences.

What's the story with your super cool superstrat?

That's built by Iconic Guitars, in Carlsbad, California. Kevin Proctor builds incredible guitars. I wanted something with a Union Jack because my mother was born in England. It's shell pink with a reverse headstock because I love the way the tension feels. It has a roasted flame-maple neck and jumbo frets. I'm using Pariah Pickups – Sean Christopher makes incredible pickups. Guys like Jason Hook and some really great players use them. Sean is Canadian, and I'm supporting the cause. He makes a hotter PAF, which is what I gravitate toward. The guitar is a basic '60s-style Strat, modernized with locking tuners. It's my main guitar.

I also play a Les Paul-style Saito guitar, from Japan. I saw Neal Schon playing one. I used that on some of the later songs on the album. I also used some reissue Gibson Explorers and some Paoletti guitars from Italy, which I use a lot for recording. Then there's the Jimi Hendrix Voodoo Strat I've had since I was a kid.

How about amps?

I used a '78 Marshall JMP, a '68 plexi, and Rick St. Pierre at Wizard Amplification built this incredible amp for me called the Wizard MCII. I use it on everything. I also have a couple of Marshall JCM800s, a bunch of EVH stuff that always sounds great, and a Mesa Boogie Mark VII. I use plug-ins for the clean stuff.

What did you use on the guitar solo to "Trippin'?"

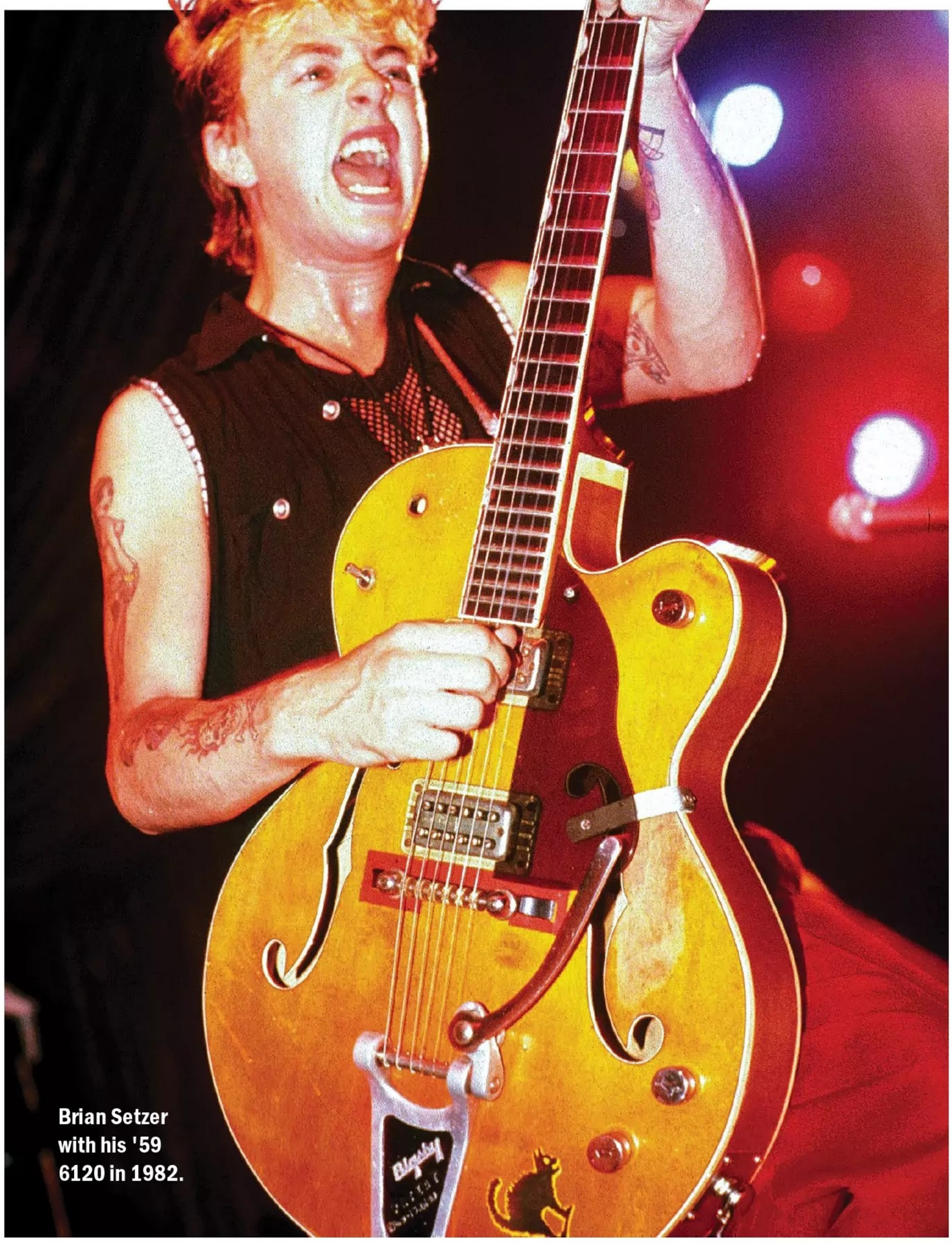
That's a Klon and the '78 JMP. For the rhythms, I used a JCM800, an EVH SA-126, and the pink Iconic for solos. In my studio, everything is out all the time. Whatever guitar is in the right tuning, I'll grab it, plug it in, and if it works, I'll use it. On some of the other solos, I used the Explorer. Any part that had a whammy bar was probably an EVH guitar. I think I did some things with an Iconic seven-string too.

How did you meet Billy Sheehan?

I had been producing a lot of pop stuff, and wanted to do a guitar record. I had a wish list of who I wanted on that record – Billy Sheehan. If you're gonna shred, you may as well call Billy (laughs). I sent him a Facebook message, and he showed up at my studio the next day. I played a song for him that had a bluesy Winery Dogs vibe. He stopped it after 15 seconds and said, "You wanna start a band?" I said, "Okay." (laughs)

It's a great feeling when people connect with your music, beause it's so personal. You bare your soul and people might hate it. Part of me worries about what people think because I was in Smash Mouth, but The Fell is about what I really want to do. It's great that people connect with it. Billy wants to prioritize this project. He was the big catalyst in getting this going and was really involved with the creative process. He's also the big draw, so it's good to know he'll be on tour with us. **– *Oscar Jordan* VG**

Mike Krompass: Travis Singleton.



Brian Setzer with his '59 6120 in 1982.

TIMELESS TONES, PART II

The Gretsch Hollowbody Ring

BY MIKE MEIERS

From rockabilly flash to modern swagger, the hollowbody's unmistakable chime still shakes stages and soundtracks alike.

When Chet Atkins first strapped on a Gretsch 6120 in the mid 1950s, the electric guitar became more than a rhythm instrument – it became a statement of sophistication. Its orange maple body gleamed under stage lights, its Filter'Tron pickups shimmered with clarity, and its Bigsby vibrato arm invited a subtle sway that transformed notes into motion. Atkins didn't just play melodies, he sculpted air.

That refined-yet-exuberant tone – equal parts Nashville polish and rockabilly grit, became known simply as the Gretsch sound. It wasn't the sustained roar of a Gibson or the glassy quack of a Fender. The Gretsch hollowbody existed somewhere in between, full of snap, sparkle, and unmistakable personality.

Over time, that tone would bridge eras and genres, moving from Atkins' country jazz precision to Eddie Cochran's swagger, George Harrison's early Beatles jangle, Brian Setzer's revival fire, and into the fuzzed-out riffs of The Black Keys and countless sync-driven modern tracks.

The Gretsch ring has always meant one thing: presence.

THE CHET ATKINS REVOLUTION

Chet Atkins was already a master fingerstylist when Gretsch approached him about building a signature model in the mid '50s. What emerged was the 6120, a fully hollow 16" maple-body guitar with two pickups and Western-style inlays. But its true innovation was sonic.

The 6120 had new Filter'Tron humbucking pickups designed by Ray Butts, who also built the EchoSonic, the first portable amp with built-in tape echo (Sam Phillips acquired one that Scotty Moore used on key Elvis recordings). Filter'Trons offered hum cancellation while retaining the brightness and attack of single-coils. Through a clean amp, their sound was articulate and smooth; through a tube preamp it shimmered with a natural compression that made every note bloom.

Atkins used that clarity to redefine country guitar. His hybrid picking style – alternating thumb bass notes with fingerpicked melody – demanded a tone that could separate low from high, attack from sustain. The Gretsch delivered exactly that on songs like "Yakety Axe" and "Mr. Sandman," which showcased the 6120's balanced response and resonance.

For players and producers, the Atkins sound represented elegance. It was proof that the electric guitar could be refined, not just rebellious.

FROM COUNTRY TO CHAOS: EDDIE COCHRAN AND EARLY ROCKABILLY

If Atkins gave the 6120 class, Eddie

Brian Setzer 1982: Ebet Roberts.

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KYSER

Cochran gave it danger. In the late '50s, Cochran took the same model and injected it with teenage defiance. Plugged into an overdriven amplifier, he turned up the slapback echo and unleashed a sound that was raw, rhythmic, and electrifying.

Songs like "Summertime Blues" and "C'mon Everybody" distilled rockabilly's DNA: quicksilver rhythms, percussive strums, and a voice that sounded like it might break free from the speaker cabinet. The hollowbody's natural resonance made it perfect for that bounce. With a single mic in a small room, engineers at Gold Star and Liberty Studios captured a tone that still feels alive, like a cross between a drum and a bell.

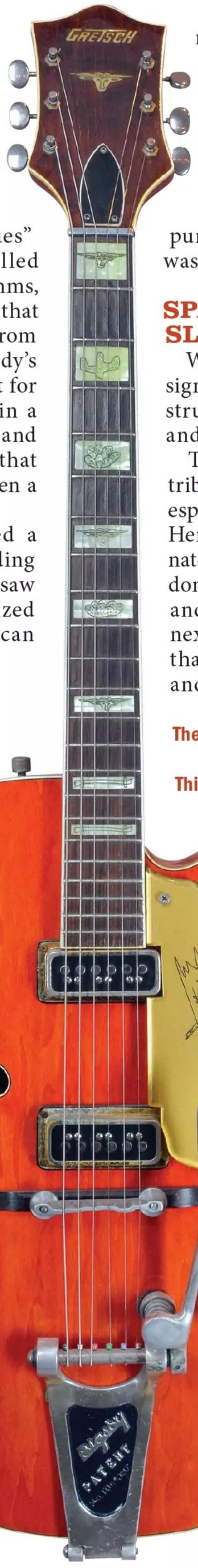
Cochran's 6120 later inspired a generation of British players including a young George Harrison, who saw photos of the guitar and recognized it as the ultimate symbol of American cool.

GEORGE HARRISON AND THE BRITISH INVASION GLOW

By 1963, Harrison was wielding a Chet Atkins Country Gentleman. Its dark walnut finish, dual Filter'Trons, and "closed" sound holes gave it a refined appearance, but its tone was still all Gretsch – bright, dynamic, and slightly unpredictable.

Harrison's Country Gent was central to the Beatles' early sound, shaping its live/studio era, cutting through primitive PAs and AM radio with articulate upper mids. Its quick decay made it ideal for rhythm work, producing tight, percussive grooves that pushed the beat forward without cluttering the mix.

As Beatlemania spread, the Gretsch became aspirational. Players around the world wanted that combination of clarity and punch, the sense that every chord was smiling through the speakers.



The legendary Gretsch Chet Atkins 6120. This one is from 1955.

SPARKLE AND SLAPBACK

What gives the Gretsch its signature ring? It's partly construction, partly electronics, and partly space.

The hollow maple body contributes natural acoustic resonance, especially between 200 and 400 Hertz. But because the top is laminated and the bracing minimal, notes don't sustain endlessly, they "bloom" and fade quickly, leaving room for the next phrase. The Filter'Trons capture that transient bite with tight low-end and brilliant highs, while the Bigsby adds gentle pitch modulation that turns static chords into living textures.

Then comes the slapback delay – the heartbeat of rockabilly. Originally created using tape echoes like the EchoSonic or Echoplex, slapback is a single repeat delayed by 80 to 120 milliseconds. That quick echo fattens the sound without blurring the rhythm, reinforcing the guitar's percussive attack.

Modern players can approximate this easily. Set a digital delay for one repeat at 90 milliseconds, feedback at 0 or 1, and mix around 20 percent. Add a touch of spring reverb, roll off lows below 120 Hz, and you're instantly in Cochran (or Setzer) territory.

Chet Atkins in 1954 with the 6120 prototype.

The combination of Gretsch tone and slapback rhythm remains one of the most recognizable signatures in recorded music – crisp, buoyant, and endlessly fun.

BRIAN SETZER AND THE NEO-ROCKABILLY REVIVAL

By the '80s, the Gretsch sound had faded from radio dominance, *until* Brian Setzer brought it roaring back. With The Stray Cats, Setzer resurrected the swagger of '50s rockabilly and gave it punk's adrenaline. His orange 6120 became a visual and sonic icon once again.

Setzer's tone was huge yet articulate, achieved by running the Gretsch into a Roland RE-301 Space Echo and a Fender Bassman cranked to the edge of breakup. The slapback was thick, the pick attack crisp, and the performance explosive.

What made Setzer's revival more than nostalgia was his precision. He played with big-band energy and jazz-level harmonic knowledge, but always through the lens of rock and roll. His 6120 could comp chords, play walking bass lines, or rip lead runs, all while maintaining that unmistakable chime.

'55 Gretsch 6120: VG Archive. Chet Atkins: Gordon Gillingham/courtesy of Grand Ole Opry Archives.

Gretsch, nearly dormant by the late '70s, took notice. Setzer's resurgence led to new artist models and, eventually, a revival under the Fender umbrella in the early 2000s. The modern Gretsch lineup, from the Players Edition 6120 to the affordable Electromatic series, owes much to Setzer's flame-fueled renaissance.

UNDER THE HANDS

What sets a Gretsch apart is how it reacts to touch. The laminate body is stiff enough to project brightness but flexible enough to vibrate beneath the player's arm. At stage volume, that resonance borders on feedback – a living reminder that this is not a solidbody built for control, but an instrument built for excitement.

Players describe it as "alive." The 2.75" body depth pushes air in a way no chambered guitar can. Notes leap forward, each carrying a ghostly echo of the chamber itself. The necks, often thinner than Gibson counterparts, encourage quick shifts between rhythm and lead, part of why Atkins and Setzer favored them for fluid hybrid styles.

Visually, the 6120 and its kin remain some of the most-striking guitars ever built. Western inlays, gold hardware, oversized f holes, and the eternal orange lacquer all say one thing: confidence. A Gretsch never apologizes for being seen or heard.

MODERN MUSIC AND SYNC

Today, the Gretsch hollowbody finds itself in unexpected places. Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys has long championed Gretsch guitars for their "unpolished perfection." On songs like "Gold on the Ceiling" and "Howlin' for You," that woody resonance under layers of fuzz creates a tactile, gritty texture, proof that sparkle can coexist with distortion.

Indie and alt-rock producers also lean on the Gretsch for its mix-friendliness. Its natural mid-scoop leaves room for vocals and synths while adding a high-end shimmer that doesn't fatigue the ear. In sync work, it's become a go-to for "retro but modern" vibes. Commercials for car brands, streaming-era series set in nostalgic Americana, and even upbeat food ads all rely on that same slapback-charmed rhythm.

There's something inherently cinematic about a Gretsch ringing through a plate reverb, it feels timeless, immediate, and slightly larger than life.

Eddie Cochran

MANAGING THE HOLLOWBODY

Recording a Gretsch hollowbody comes with unique challenges. The open chamber can feed back easily at high volumes, but that very sensitivity gives it depth and dimension. How do modern engineers handle it?

Mic: Aim a dynamic mic (like a Sennheiser e906) close to the speaker and pair it with a condenser about two feet back. The blend captures both the amp's punch and the room's bloom.

EQ: Cut lows below 80 Hz to prevent boominess. Boost gently around 2.5-3 kHz for pick clarity, and add a small lift around 8-10 kHz for sparkle.

Compression: Light ratio (2:1 or 3:1) with slow attack helps emphasize transient detail without choking resonance.

Reverb and Delay: Keep them separate, slapback delay first, then subtle plate reverb. Overlap them and the tone turns to mud.

In a DAW, double-track parts with contrasting pickup selections, one on the bridge for bite, one on the neck for warmth, then pan left and right to emulate the natural spread of a stage performance.

The result is a full, shimmering stereo image that retains the immediacy of a live take.

WHY IT STILL MATTERS

The Gretsch ring endures because it captures a contradiction, being both elegant and rebellious. Atkins' clean articulation, Cochran's danger, Harrison's charm, and Setzer's fire all coexist in the same maple body. Few

CHASING THE CLASSIC TONE

You don't need a vintage 6120 to capture that essence.

Delay Recipe: Set a single repeat around 90-110 ms, low feedback, and a mix near 25 percent.

Amp: Clean headroom is key. Fender-style circuits, modeled or real, keep the Gretsch's brightness intact.

Pickups: Use the bridge for rockabilly snap; blend the neck for smoother jazz or pop textures.

Touch: Play closer to the bridge for sharp attack or above the neck pickup for warmth. Let the hollow body breathe, sustain comes from air, not gain.

Even with plug-ins, it's the performance that sells the illusion. Slapback alone doesn't make it Gretsch; the dynamics and restraint do.

Eddie Cochran:Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy.

instruments can sound so refined, yet so wild.

Modern players value that versatility. Whether in a vintage-style surf track, an alt-rock groove, or a sync-ready cinematic cue, the Gretsch tone communicates energy and emotion before a lyric is even sung. It's the sound of confidence, a guitar that knows what it is.

For younger musicians discovering it through modern bands or vintage reissues, the revelation is the same one Atkins had 70 years ago: that sparkle and subtlety aren't opposites, they're partners.

George Harrison with his Country Gent.

THE SOUND THAT SMILES BACK

Every generation finds its way to the Gretsch for a different reason. For Atkins, it was control. For Cochran, rebellion. For Harrison, sophistication. For Setzer, joy. For today's artists, it's the blend of all four.

There's a certain humanity in its imperfection, the way feedback flirts at the edge of control, the way slapback seems to grin at its own echo. Plug one in and you understand why it never left the stage. The Gretsch hollowbody doesn't chase trends; it waits for them to circle back.

Half a century on, its ring still cuts through the noise, bold, buoyant, and unmistakably alive.

Mike Meiers is an Emmy-winning composer/producer and guitar-focused songwriting coach based in Nashville. The first part of this series appeared in the February '26 issue.

George Harrison: Photo-fox/Alamy.

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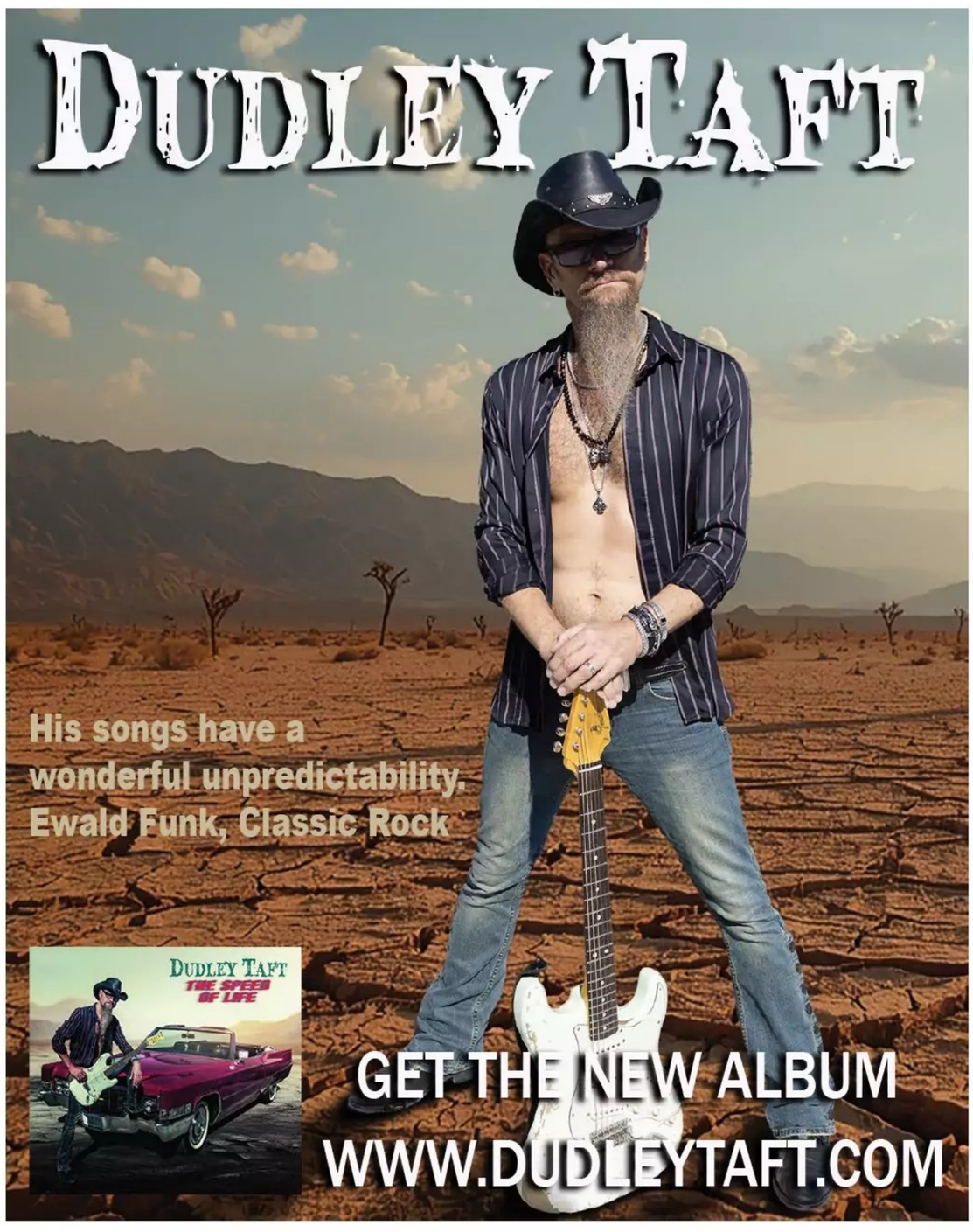

Melodious Old Trees

The main ingredient is old trees, feed the need for old wood with these selectees. **'58 000-28 Brazilian**, Unsold **'94 Martin D-45 12 fret Gene Autry**, mint. **Custom 0-42 tree -o-life** (magnificent). And something no one else has **'32 14 fret 0-17** in full body sunburst finish. Plus more. Visit us.

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MICE THAT ROAR

Five Low-Wattage Vintage Studio Combos

BY DAVE HUNTER

Many collectible amplifiers are unwieldy or inaccessible for the typical guitarist. But there are several smaller combos that are easier to get your hands on, and arguably more useful.

While many fans of guitar stars of the '60s and '70s assume they tracked on the same big Marshall, Hiwatt, or Fender amps that they used in concert, in reality, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Joe Walsh, and many others often created their iconic tones with small "beginner" amps. Tiny as they are, diminutive low-watt combos can hit tonal sweet spots at reasonable volumes yet still sound huge with a good studio microphone in front of them.

Here, we'll examine small single-ended amps – meaning they use only one output tube and are, therefore, by definition, genuine Class A circuit. In addition, there's very little between guitar input and speaker output to clutter the signal path. The Fender Champ of the '50s and '60s is one such classic, but here are five others that also get the job done.

1951 VALCO "EL GRANDE" COMBO

Valco made amps (and sometimes guitars) for brands like National, Airline, Gretsch, Oahu, Bronson, and others from the 1940s through the '60s, as well as for its own budget brand, Supro. Despite being a Valco creation, the full story of the "El Grande" badge worn by this diminutive four-watter is largely lost to time. Back when we first wrote about this amp (June '15), Valco repairman and collector Terry Dobbs (a.k.a. "Mr Valco") told us, "I've had several El Grande amps, and all were the single-ended 510-11 Supro Spectator [design] with burgundy and white covering. I would think some music store contracted Valco to make them… or possibly they were sold door-to-door and to schools for their music classes, like Oahu, Bronson, Dickerson, and other Valco-made jobber amps and lap-steels were in the late '40s and early '50s when lap steel was very popular."

The El Grande's engine room coalesces around a 6SL7 preamp tube and a 6V6 output tube, with a 5Y3 for rectifier duties. Roughly speaking, the octal-based 6SL7 has specs broadly similar to a nine-pin 12AX7, but a thicker tone – part of what gives single-ended Valcos of the early '50s their distinctive character. Of the three inputs – two labeled "Instr" and one "Microphone" – the latter is the hotter. It does fat cleans at lower volumes, but segues pretty quickly into a reedy, tactile overdrive that screams "vintage blues" as you roll up the Volume. Tasty stuff.

1951 VALCO "EL GRANDE" COMBO

- Preamp tube: one 6SL7
- Output tube: one 6V6GT
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume, Tone
- Speaker: 8" Rola speaker
- Output: 5 watts RMS

1955 WATKINS CLUBMAN

Often overlooked among amps from the better-known British makers of the early '60s to mid '70s, Charlie Watkins' creations were some of the earliest products successfully marketed to young British guitarists as the skiffle craze was segueing into rock and roll, and this 1955 Clubman represents his cornerstone student model just as the line was coming into its own. Loaded with a EF86 preamp tube and one EL84 output tube plus an EZ80 rectifier, the '55 Clubman was advertised as a "6-watt amplifier" but likely produced around four watts (at best) into its elliptical 9" Elac speaker.

Though it's shaped like the more-common nine-pin 12AX7, the EF86 has a single pentode amplification stage rather than

Valco El Grande/photo courtesy of Brad Schultz.

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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
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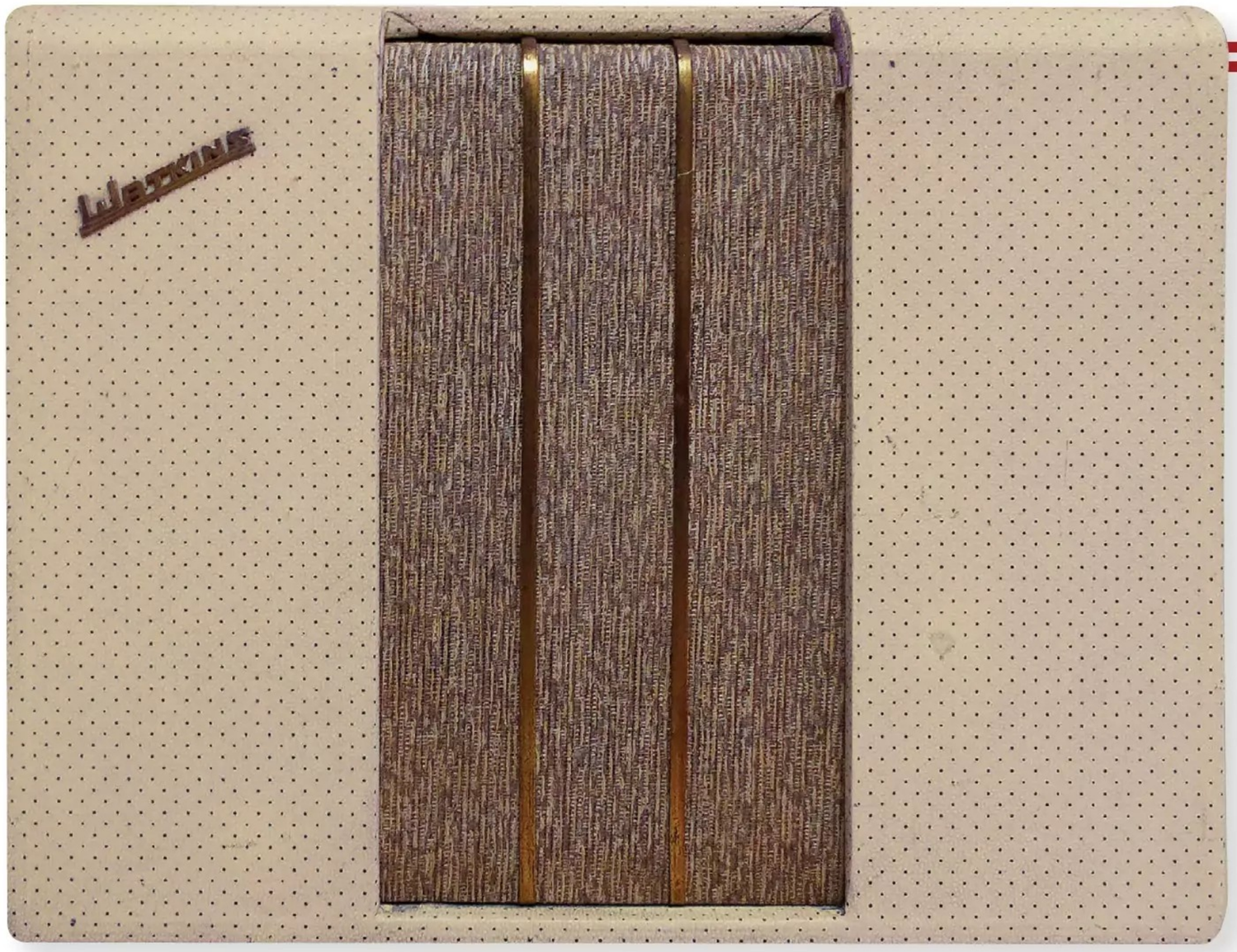


two triodes, and a broader-voiced sound as a result, with higher gain to boot.

"This Clubman sounds absolutely wonderful," its owner Julian Marsh told us. "It has a beautifully warm but punchy sound, with huge levels of sustain when cranked up."

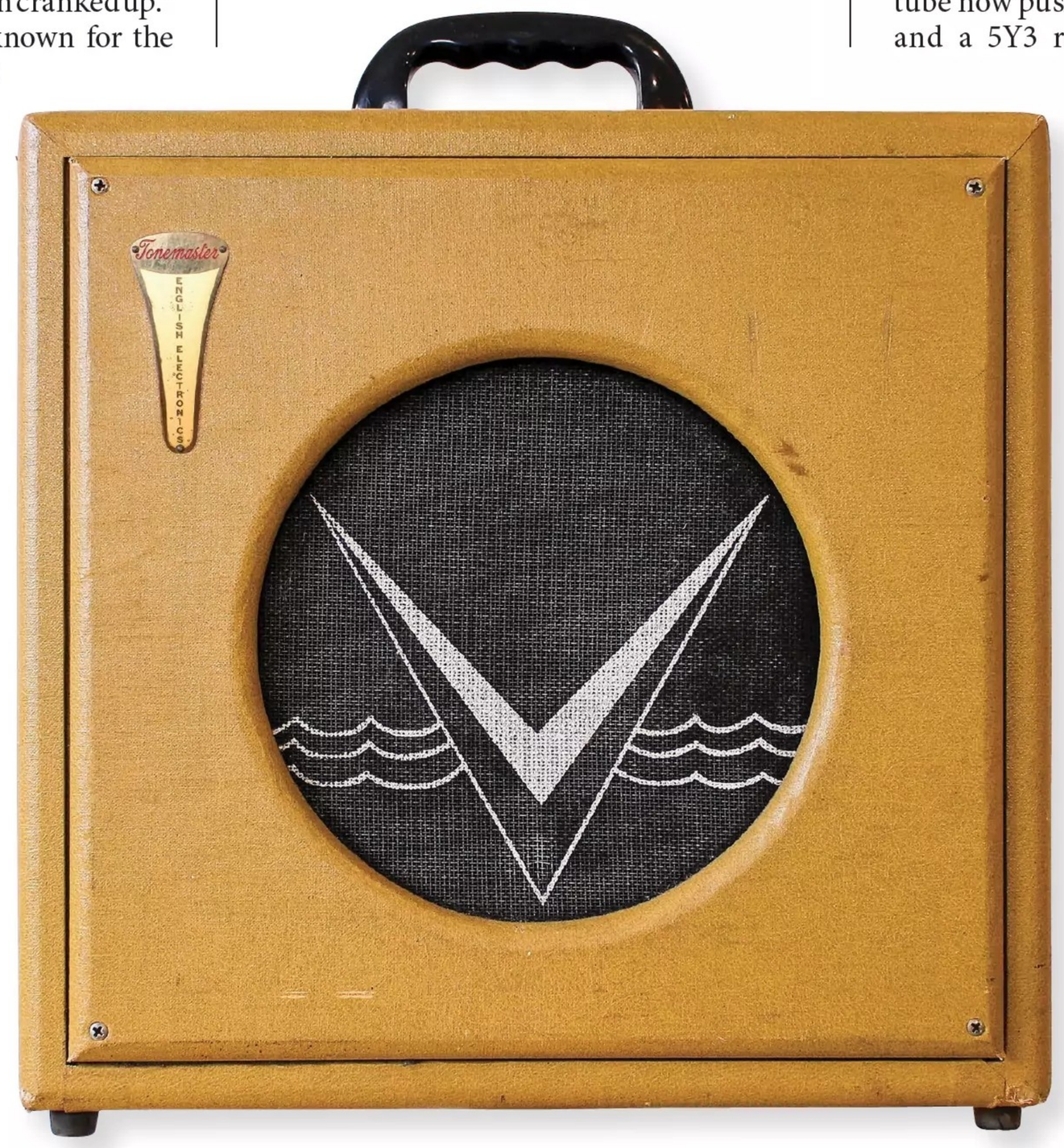
Watkins is arguably best known for the V-front Dominator amp that came out a couple years later, or the Copicat tape echo that followed shortly after that. The Dominator evolved into a more-standard 1x12" combo in the late '60s after the company's head had changed his brand to the WEM logo because it more closely resembled JMI's popular Vox brand. Though the quality of construction under either name rarely lived up to JMI products of the '60s, Watkins and WEM amps still present a great tone alternative, and this little Clubman is no exception.

1959 ENGLISH ELECTRONICS TONEMASTER COMBO

- Preamp tubes: one 12AX7
- Output tubes: one 6V6GT
- Rectifier: 5Y3
- Controls: Volume, Tone
- Speakers: one 10" Rola
- Output: approximately 5 watts RMS

1959 ENGLISH ELECTRONICS TONEMASTER COMBO

Before we get too excited about some lost lesser relation to British classics by Vox, Marshall, and others, it's worth noting that the Tonemaster was made by Valco of Chicago for the small line of amps and lap-steel guitars sold by teacher and entrepreneur Norman English and his English Electronics company of Lansing, Michigan. As such, the circuit and layout are much like Valco-made combos of the era made for other brands, including the Gretsch 6150 and Supro 1616. Where these Valco-made products differed, however, was in their style; the English Tonemaster is covered in a thin, goldish-tan luggage fabric with a brown faux-leather stripe bordered in tan string around its perimeter, with a Valco "V" afloat on waves of tone stenciled on the metal screen that comprises the speaker grille.



Under the hood, the circuit follows the basic single-ended premise as it had evolved eight years on from the El Grande featured above, with one 12AX7 dual-triode preamp tube now pushing one 6V6GT output tube, and a 5Y3 rectifier tube to convert the power. Like most other Valco amps of the era the build and componentry aren't necessarily top-notch, but the cheaper ceramic-disc coupling capacitors and consumer-grade wiring arguably contribute to the grit and character of the Tonemaster's, well… tone, which delivers surprising headroom for its size, and a toothsome crunch into the 10" Rola speaker when pushed hard. The end result? Boatloads of character for your Americana, garage-rock, or neo-blues tracks.

1955 WATKINS CLUBMAN

- Preamp tube: one EF86
- Output tube: one EL84
- Rectifier: EZ80
- Controls: Volume, Tone
- Speaker: 9" elliptical Elac speaker
- Output: around 4 watts RMS

1961 DEARMOND R5T

A musical-equipment arm of Rowe Industries, which made electric motors in Ohio, DeArmond is known to guitarheads as a manufacturer of pickups and early effects devices, but their short-lived amps were the company's finest

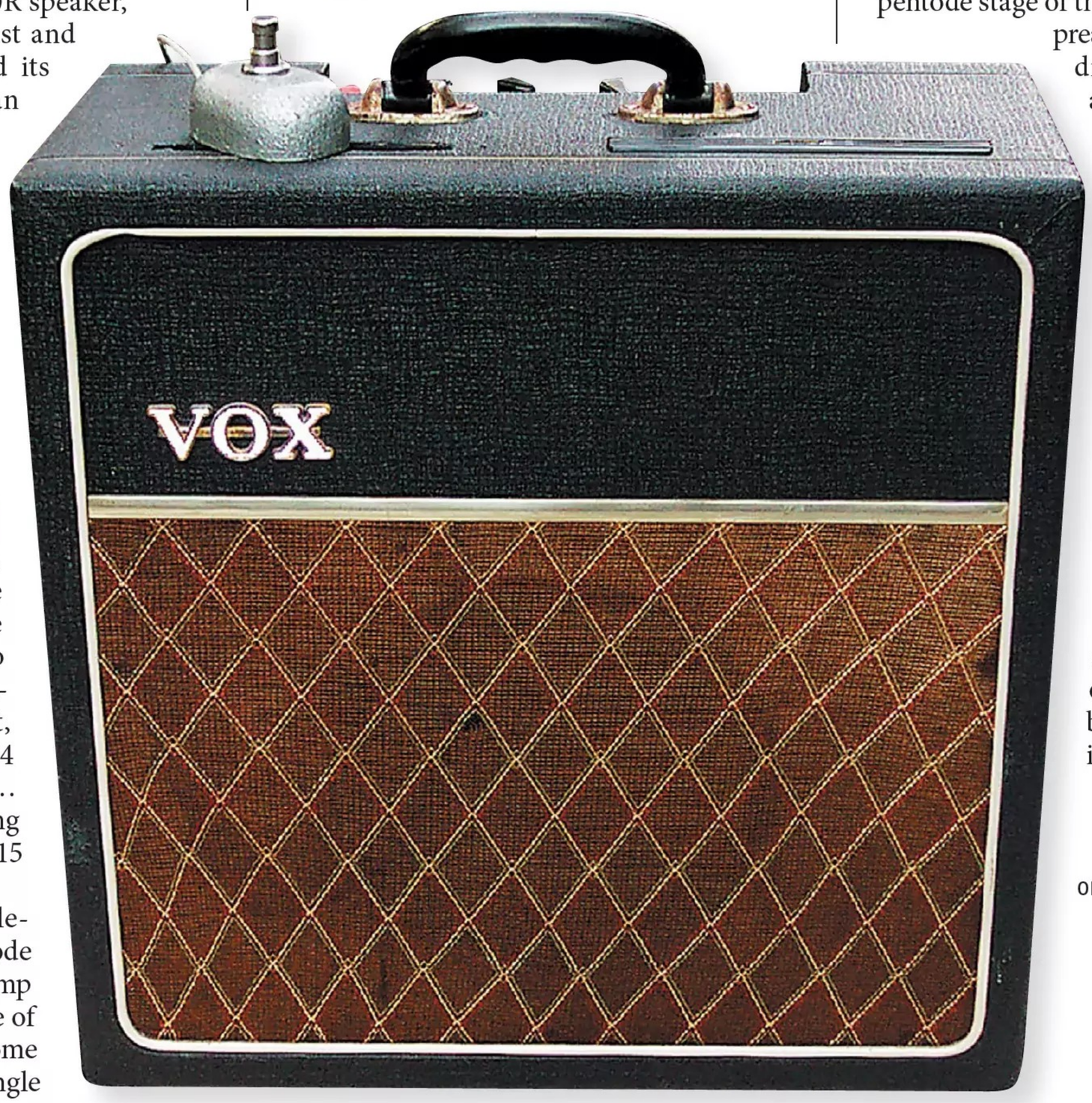
Watkins Clubman courtesy of Tony Miln/Soundgas, photo by Julian Marsh. English Electronics Tonemaster photo by Dave Hunter.

1961 DEARMOND R5T

- Preamp tubes: two 12AX7
- Output tubes: one 6V6GT
- Rectifier: 6X4
- Controls: Volume, Tone, tremolo Depth and Rate
- Speakers: 10" Jensen Alnico P10R in original production models
- Output: approximately 5 watts RMS

creations. The larger DeArmond R15T (also manufactured for Martin as the 112T) gained fame several years ago as a "tweed-Deluxe killer," but those who have played the smaller, single-ended R5T profess to its equally sweet tones, though obviously at lower volumes.

The owner of this R5T, Leon Chalnick, was searching for an R15T/112T, but when he shared his thoughts with guitarist Steve Kimock (solo artist /guitarist with Zero, Rat Dog, Phil Lesh and Friends, and others), "He told me… the little single-ended brother had the real magic." With two 12AX7s, one 6V6GT, and a 6X4 rectifier tube, the R5T uses a circuit that's not a mile off the archetypal Champ (plus tremolo, or without it in the R5). With its larger transformers, bigger cab, and larger 10" Jensen P10R speaker, it's altogether more robust and muscular sounding, and its seductive segue from clean to overdriven makes true believers of most who have played one.



DeArmond R5T/photo courtesy of Leon Chalnick. Vox AC4 photo by Dave Hunter.

1964 VOX AC4

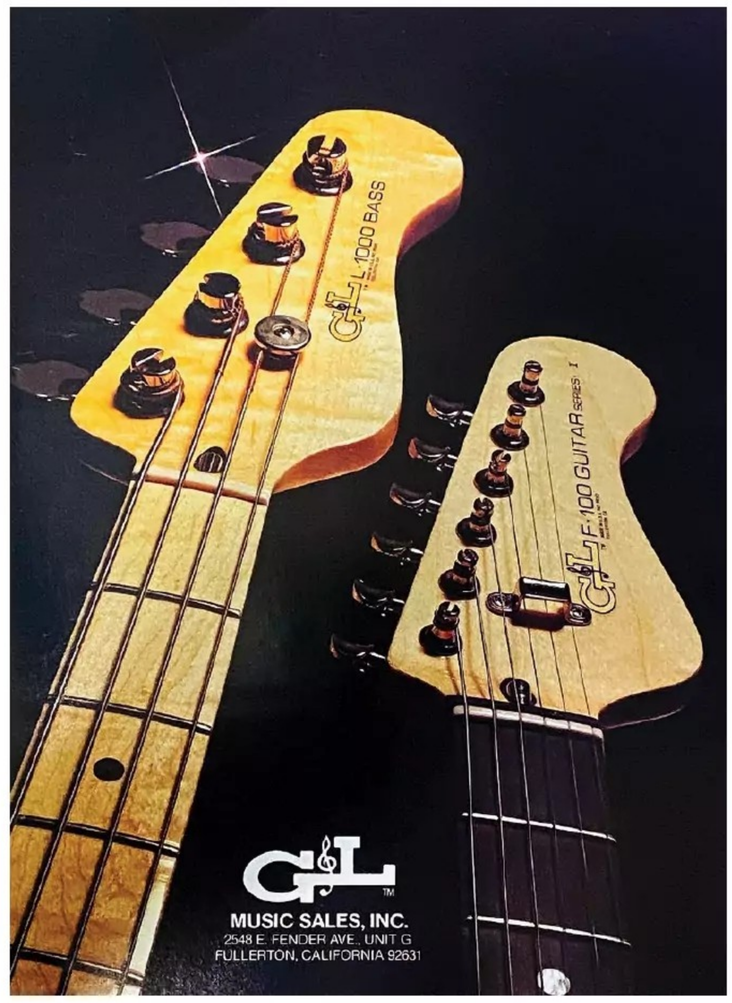
If the tube complement looks familiar, that's because the AC4 has a lot in common with the Watkins Clubman – although, hey, it's a Vox! It also has tremolo, but it's the fat-sounding EF86 preamp tube and chimey, rich EL84 output tube that convert an otherwise Champ-like formula to an archetypally British-sounding amplifier. That, and an early-/mid-'60s AC4 just looks so darn cute… entirely like the offspring of the vintage AC30 or AC15 that you can't afford.

Most American single-ended amps use both triode stages of one 12AX7 preamp tube (or a 6SL7 in the case of the Valco El Grande and some earlier amps), but the single pentode stage of the EF86 tube in the AC4's preamp is powerful enough to drive the EL84 output tube all on its own, and issues a thick, rich tone in the process. Though obviously different from its larger siblings in other ways, this aligns the AC4 with the '60s AC15 and the very earliest versions of the AC30 from 1959-'60, which also had an EF86 in one channel. Put a good microphone in front of its 8" Elac Alnico speaker and you don't have to pump all that much volume from an early AC4 to achieve stellar tones in the studio, and the throbbing built-in tremolo is the icing on the cake. **VG**

1964 VOX AC4

- Preamp tubes: one EF86; one ECC83 (12AX7) for tremolo
- Output tube: one EL84
- Rectifier: EZ80
- Controls: Volume, Tone, Tremolo (speed)
- Speaker: one 8" Elac
- Output: 4 watts RMS

Classics



Headstocks of the F-100 and L-1000 graced the cover of G&L's 1980 catalog.

The 1980 catalog's back cover offered biographies and a glimpse of Leo Fender, George Fullerton, and Dale Hyatt.

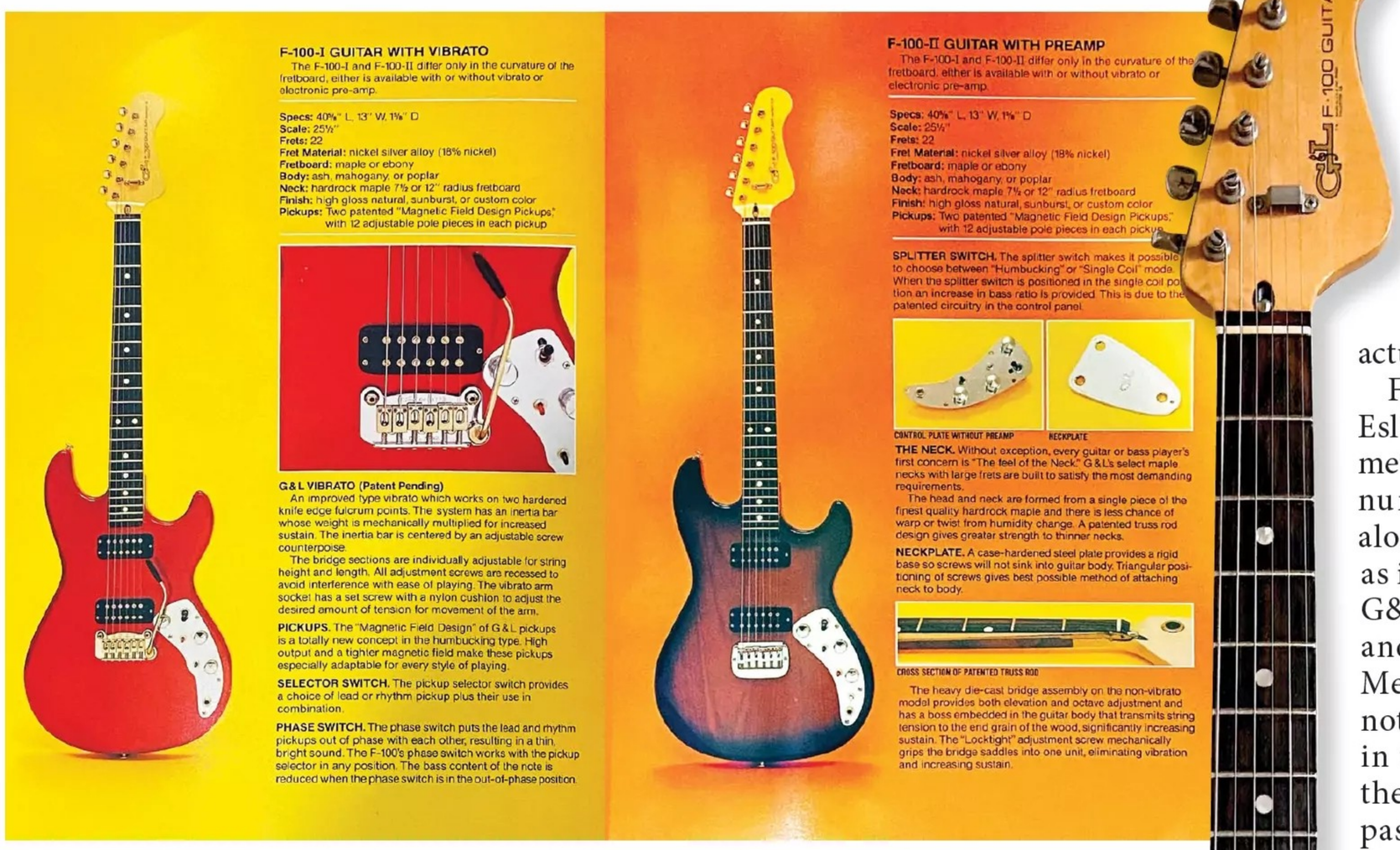
After his interest in guitars was sparked by music on the radio and his parents' records in the late 1970s and early '80s, Chris Shelton ended his fifth-grade flirtation with a saxophone and asked for a guitar. That Christmas, his folks obliged with a cheap red solidbody on which he learned to play "Smoke On The Water" on one string.

"For several years, though, that guitar was more of a curiosity than a discipline," he chuckled.

In the mid '90s, he began dating a girl named Angel, whose younger brother had a Stratocaster and could *play*.

"Watching him and hearing what he could draw out of the instrument rekindled my interest," he recalled. "By then, I no longer owned the red guitar, but was given a round-back Crafter acoustic and a Hondo II. Those were the guitars on which I truly began learning."

At the time, he and Angel were occasional concertgoers; their first show together was a 1996 tour stop by REO Speedwagon, Peter Frampton, and Foreigner. Later, they got up-close looks at performers while working as EMS medical providers at concerts in Nashville.



The F-100 and F-100-II (a.k.a. Series II) as presented in the 1980 catalog.

"We were backstage at shows by Lynyrd Skynyrd, Poison, Slaughter, and the Sex Pistols – bands I'd grown up listening to. Being behind the scenes reinforced how instruments and players shape music."

Through the years, Shelton's guitar collection grew to include a Yamaha RGS121 HSH and, in 2020, his first Stratocaster.

"The Strat sparked my exploration – buying, trading, and comparing guitars to better understand sound, feel, and construction," he said. "I became deeply interested in how they're built and why they behave the way they do."

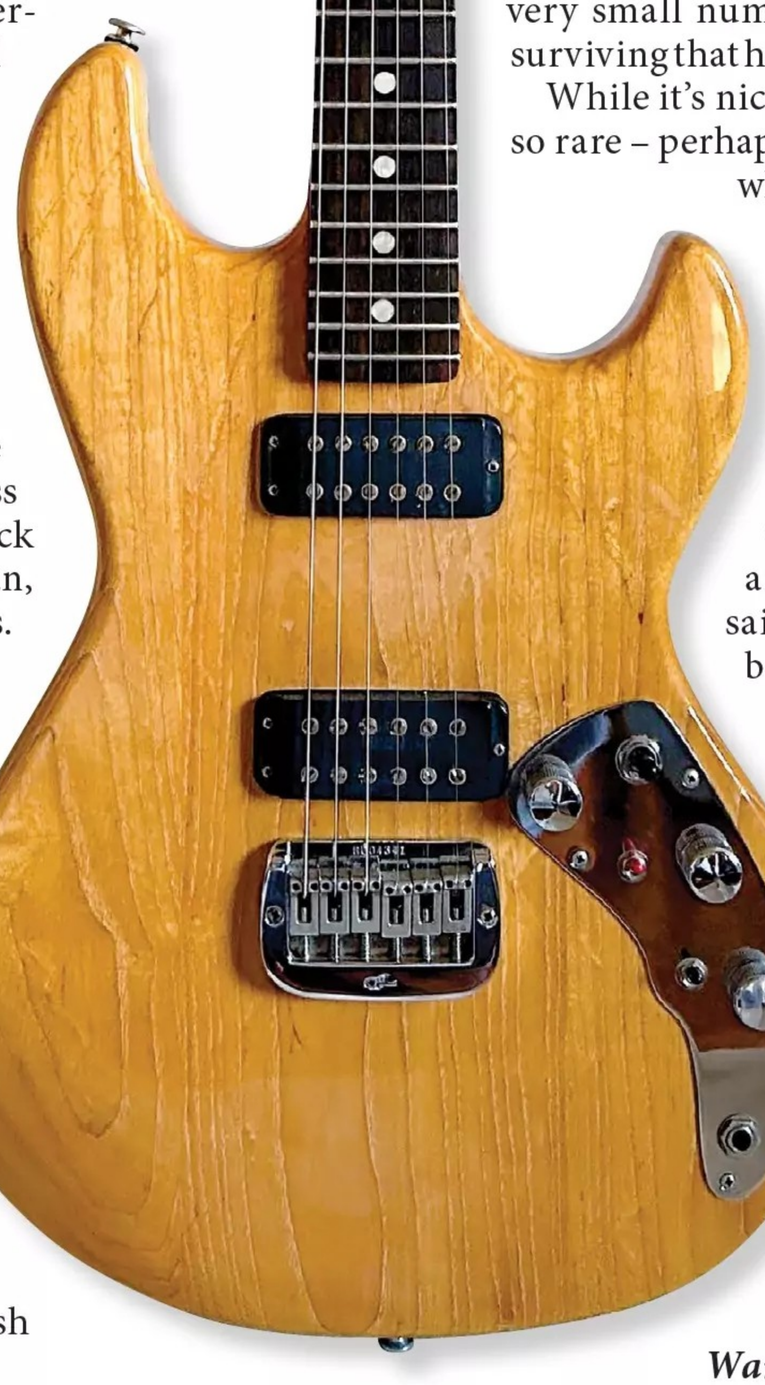
Though he'd heard of G&L, Shelton never laid eyes on one and was oblivious to the brand's connection to Leo Fender and George Fullerton – until late 2024, when he saw an ad online listing a handful of '80s models. Curious, he bought one – an F-100 Series II in a brown-sunburst finish with vibrato.

"From the moment I picked it up, I could feel the difference between it and the modern guitars I was playing. It felt custom – the quality was obvious, and it had soul. I couldn't believe what I'd been missing and couldn't grasp how that guitar could be so good, so different, and *not* better-known."

Over the next couple months he read up on the brand, then circled back to the same guy. After working a few deals, Shelton had himself an '86 ASAT, '84 Skyhawk, '84 S-500, an '86 SC-3, and an F-100 Series I with a hard tail and natural finish.

"At the time, it was mostly about having the pair of F-100s with different-radius fretboards," he said. "But I liked it much more than the Series II because it just felt more comfortable."

He soon learned that his Series I was a rare early version. Bearing serial number G004341, it was assembled in January, 1981, and its gloss finish is in excellent condition, with no weather checking. Hardware, including the Schaller "S" tuners, chrome Tone, Volume, and Bass knobs, and Saddle-Lock tailpiece are also clean, likewise the pickups. The CTS pots date to 1979/'80, and the switches (branded ALCO and C&K) were verified as original by G&L. The maple neck is date-stamped January, 1981, with with a streaked-ebony fretboard that corresponds to the Northern swamp-ash body dated December, 1980. Much like at Fender, G&L ordered serial-numbered bridges in bulk, did not use them sequentially, and randomly put them on Series I and II instruments, which explains why the serial number of this one is 548 higher than the Series I profiled in "Farewell To G&L" in this issue, but actually pre-dates it.



From 1979 through '85, Mary Kaiser/Eslinger, one of G&L's first employees, meticulously tracked serial and model numbers in hand-written records, along with descriptions of each guitar as it was shipped (in the mid/late '90s, G&L began using electronic records), and while G&L/BBE service manager Memo Romero scoured them, he could not find mention of Shelton's guitar in the logs. He *did*, however, confirm the January '81 assembly date. But its passive electronics and hard tail leave questions: Was it custom built? Dealer-specific?

"It's one of the earliest known hard-tail examples from the first production year," said Shelton. "To the best of our knowledge, this configuration of first-series F-100 was manufactured in very small numbers, with even fewer surviving that have been documented."

While it's nice to know the guitar is so rare – perhaps a one-off – that's not why Shelton is so drawn to it...

"My appreciation for early G&L instruments comes from their status as the final collaboration between Leo Fender, George Fullerton, and Dale Hyatt," he said. "They're built with boutique precision and embody American craftsmanship, representing Leo's design philosophy. To me, they feel more connected to him than any modern guitar, yet they're attainable, playable works of art. And I *do* still play this one, but much more gingerly than the others." – ***Ward Meeker*** VG

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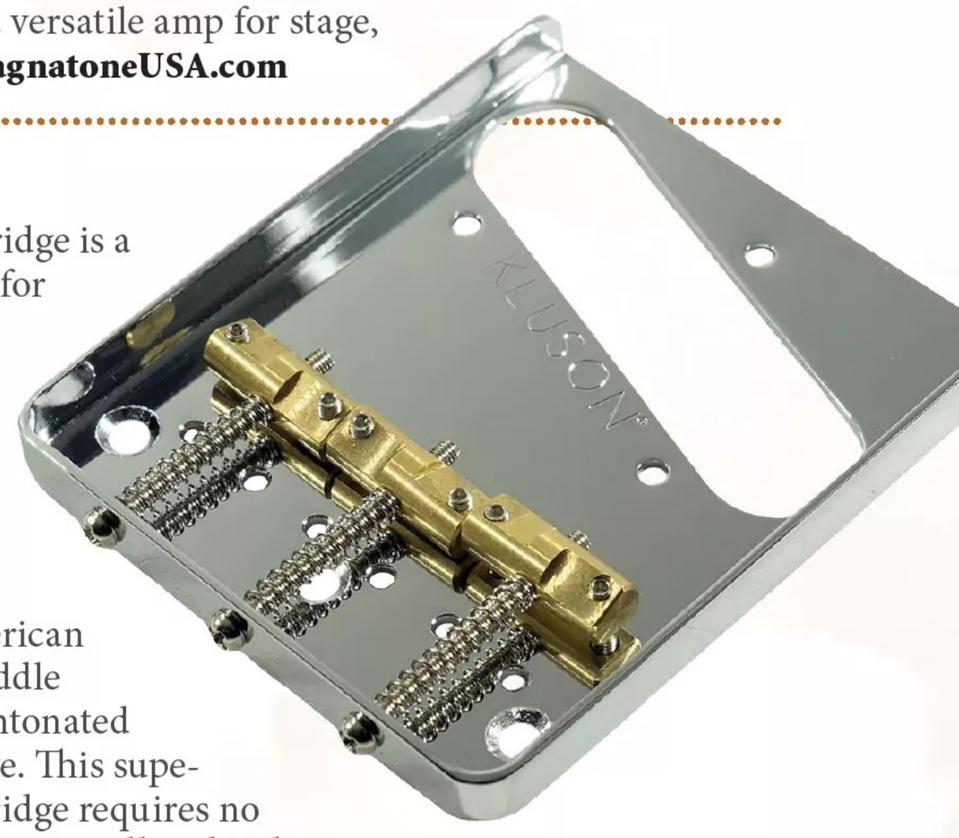

Varsity Reverb - Point-to-Point Collection

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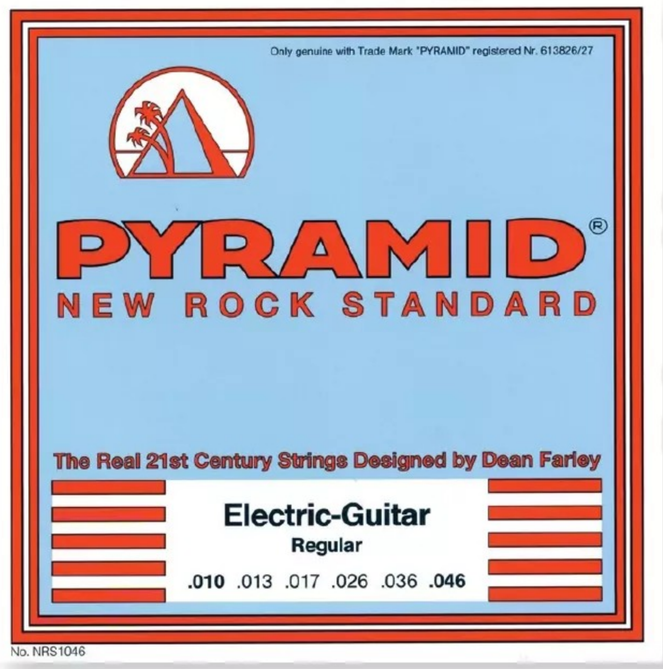

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Lil’ Viper - Slash Collection

Magnatone’s Lil’ Viper joins the Slash Collection as a lightweight, ultra-portable combo designed to deliver big tone from a compact 8-watt format. Developed with Slash and Chief Engineer Obeid Khan, it captures the Master Collection voice through a custom 8" ceramic speaker with High and Low gain modes, tone shaping control, speaker-emulated headphone output, and auxiliary input, all finished in Slash’s Purple Python cosmetics. **www.MagnatoneUSA.com**

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Magnatone’s Starlite Reverb 10 updates the original grab-and-go combo with a more powerful 8-watt Class A 6L6 design and a custom 10" ceramic speaker for enhanced clarity and projection. Hand-built in the USA, it includes Accutronics Digi-Log spring-style reverb, High and Low inputs, versatile tone shaping from black-panel to tweed voicings, switchable negative feedback, and an 8-ohm extension output for flexible home, studio, or stage use. **www.MagnatoneUSA.com**

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Price Guide

By Alan Greenwood & Ram W. Tuli

1983 G&L SB-1

YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1977	Acoustyx Image Synthesizer IS-1		$150	$200
1973	Ampeg B-115	Solidstate, 1x15	$400	$750
1990s	Ampeg SVT-120 Combo		$200	$250
1969	Avar Solidbody Electric		$400	$600
1965	Baldwin Model C1			
	Custom (Professional)		$500	$850
1995	Boss Blues Driver BD-2	Keeley modded	$225	$300
1960s	Bradford Electric Solidbody	1 or 2 pickups	$300	$500
1970	Chapman Stick	10- or 12-string	$2,500	$4,500
1986	Collings D2	Sitka, Indian	$4,000	$5,500
1967	Coral Scorpion S3V12	Black or red	$1,200	$1,800
1999	Danelectro DC-12/Electric XII		$500	$800
1990s	D'Angelico II Jazz Classic		$2,500	$3,250
2000s	Death By Audio			
	Supersonic Fuzz Gun		$125	$225
1984	Dobro Model 90 (Woodbody)/WB90G/WB90S		$800	$1,200
2016	EarthQuaker Devices			
	Acapulco Gold	Grandma Cyclops	$90	$120
1951	El Grande Valco Spectator	Volume, tone, 5 watts, 1x8	$400	$575
1978	Electro-Harmonix			
	Rhythm 12 (Rhythm Machine)		$150	$200
1963	Epiphone Classic (Classical)		$700	$1,200
1958	Epiphone Emperor			
	(Thinline Electric)	Natural, 3 NY pickups	$9,000	$14,000
1995	Epiphone Les Paul Studio		$400	$600
1965	Epiphone Triumph			
	Regent (Cutaway)	Sunburst	$3,800	$5,800
1960s	Estey Model T22		$475	$600
1995	Fender Bass VI Reissue (Import)		$1,125	$1,500
1995	Fender CG (Classical Guitar) Series	Various models	$100	$300
1980	Fender Deluxe Reverb	Blackface	$1,125	$1,500
1952	Fender Esquire	Blond, black 'guard	$45,000	$60,000
1990	Fender J.A.M.		$85	$125
1969	Fender Musiclander	A.K.A. Swinger & Arrow	$4,000	$5,500
1964	Fender Precision	Sunburst, late '64	$10,750	$14,000
2012	Fender Squier Stratocaster HSS		$250	$400
1968	Fender Stratocaster	Common color, poly body, nitro neck	$24,000	$32,000
2010	Fender '59 Stratocaster (Custom Shop)	Relic	$3,000	$4,500
1994	Fender 30th Anniversary			
	Guitar Center Stratocaster	Custom Shop	$1,500	$2,500
2017	Fender American Professional Stratocaster	Low-end features	$900	$1,200
2020	Fender Jeff Beck			
	Signature Stratocaster (CS)	Custom Shop	$4,000	$6,000
2004	Fender Robin Trower Signature Stratocaster	CS Artist	$3,500	$5,500
1957	Fender Telecaster	Blond, backloader	$30,000	$45,000
1968	Fender Telecaster Custom	Custom color	$25,000	$35,000
1968	Fender Vibratone	Fender logo plate through center	$700	$1,500

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1963	Framus Strato de Luxe 12-String	Model 5/068	$800	$1,500
1986	G&L L-1000		$1,250	$1,500
1983	G&L SB-1 Bass		$950	$1,250
1970	Gibson B-25/B-25N		$1,400	$1,800
1997	Gibson CL-45 Artist		$2,200	$3,500
1941	Gibson EH-125	1x12, 5 tubes	$1,125	$1,500
1941	Gibson ES-300N	Natural, 1 pickup	$5,000	$6,500
2013	Gibson ES-339 Traditional Pro		$2,800	$4,500
1985	Gibson Explorer 83 or Explorer (Adler)	Custom colors, limited run	$2,800	$4,500
1965	Gibson FJN Folk Singer		$2,000	$2,800
2008	Gibson GA-40 RVT Limited Edition	200 made	$750	$950
2010	Gibson Hummingbird Pro		$2,200	$3,200
1965	Gibson J-50	Late '65, slim nut	$3,500	$5,500
1935	Gibson L-5/L-5N		$9,000	$12,000
1999	Gibson Les Paul Bird's-Eye Standard		$3,500	$5,500
2006	Gibson '59 Les Paul Plaintop (VOS)	Custom Shop, very little flame	$3,000	$5,000
2010	Gibson Les Paul Don Felder Hotel California 1959	Aged, signed	$11,000	$14,000
1975	Gibson Les Paul Recording	White	$4,000	$6,000
2009	Gibson Les Paul Studio	Silverburst	$1,500	$2,500
1974	Gibson Midnight Special		$2,200	$3,500
2006	Gibson SG GT		$1,800	$2,500
1971	Gibson SG-250		$1,800	$2,500
1970	Gibson Super 400 C		$6,200	$8,000
1981	Gibson Victory Standard	1 pickup	$1,250	$1,625
1975	Gretsch Broadkaster (Hollowbody)	7607, G tailpiece, natural	$1,500	$2,000
1960	Gretsch Eldorado (6040/6041)	Sunburst, acou cutaway	$2,125	$3,000
1963	Gretsch Reverb Unit Model 6144 Preamp Reverb		$650	$1,000
1977	Guild B-302AF		$950	$1,250
1992	Guild DV-52S		$1,200	$2,000
1980	Guild Mark IV	Pearwood	$500	$800
1976	Guild Starfire VI		$2,500	$3,800
1970	Hagstrom Model III/ F-300 Futura/H III		$600	$900
1928	Harmony H1250 Roy Smeck Vita Standard		$900	$1,125
1986	Heritage H-204 DD		$1,200	$1,800
1961	Hofner Model 470SE2 Electric Archtop		$800	$1,200
1979	Ibanez Artist AR300		$1,500	$2,200
1993	Ibanez Joe Satriani JS6	Stained Oil	$1,500	$2,500
1981	Ibanez Parametric EQ PQ401		$200	$275

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YEAR	INSTRUMENT	FEATURES	EXC. COND. LOW	EXC. COND. HIGH
1994	Jackson PS Performers Series	Various models	$300	$500
1936	Kalamazoo KG-21	archtop L-30	$1,200	$1,500
2001	Keeley Java Boost		$225	$300
1984	Kramer Focus Series	Various models	$250	$800
1971	Kustom SC 1-12 SC	Black, 50 watts, 1x12	$325	$425
1978	Legend A-60	60 watts, 2x12	$575	$725
1950s	Magnatone Model 192-5-S Troubadour	18 watts, 1x12, 3knobs	$700	$875
1980	Marshall JCM 800 Model 4010 Combo		$1,625	$2,000
1984	Marshall Model 1960A/ 1960B 4x12 Speaker Cabinet	Rare color	$1,500	$2,000
1971	Marshall Model T1959 Super Lead (Tremolo) Head	100 watts, black, hand-wired, small box	$3,000	$4,000
2011	Martin 000-15SM	Solid mahogany	$1,000	$1,500
2003	Martin 000-40Q2GN Graham Nash		$3,500	$4,500
2008	Martin 00-18 Tim O'Brien Signature	Limited Edition	$3,500	$5,500
1980	Martin 0-16NY		$2,200	$3,500
1931	Martin C-3	Round hole	$6,200	$9,500
2001	Martin D-18GL Gordon Lightfoot	61 made	$4,000	$6,000
2013	Martin D-35 Seth Avett		$3,000	$5,000
2009	Martin DCPA1/DCPA1 Plus		$2,000	$3,000
1990	Martin HD-28BLE	Brazilian	$10,000	$15,000
1959	Martin Model 112T	1x12 tube combo	$4,500	$5,500
2014	Martin OMXAE Black		$500	$800
1995	Matchless SC-30 Exotic Wood Cabinet		$5,500	$8,000
2006	Mesa-Boogie Road King Dual Rectifier Combo	Series II	$3,000	$4,000
1979	Morley Volume Compressor VCO		$100	$150
2008	Music Man John Petrucci 6/JP-6		$2,000	$3,000
1935	National Electric Hawaiian Lap Steel		$725	$950
1962	National Val-Pro 80	35 watts, 2x12	$1,125	$1,500
1977	Ovation Adamas 1687	Sunburst	$2,000	$3,500
2000	Parker P Series		$400	$1,200
1974	Peavey Pacer		$75	$100
1978	ProCo Rat	Fringe Logo	$3,000	$4,000
1975	PRS Guitar	Maple	$15,000	$45,000
1963	Rickenbacker Model 4000		$12,500	$16,500
1970	Rickenbacker Model 330/12	21 frets	$3,000	$4,500
1961	Rickenbacker Model 460		$3,500	$4,500
2000	Rocktron Hush Rack Mount		$85	$125
1992	Santa Cruz Vintage Artist (VA)	Mahogany, Sitka	$4,000	$6,500
1954	Silvertone Model 1333	1x12, vibrato	$500	$650
1964	Standel A-30 G Artist 30 Guitar	ss, 80 watts, 2x15	$500	$650
1930s	Supertone Electric Hawaiian Lap Steel		$350	$500
2017	Supro Westbury	Island Series	$400	$500
1990	Taylor 514		$1,500	$1,875
2007	Taylor DNK (Koa)		$1,875	$2,500
1968	Tiesco Electric	Phantom	$800	$2,000
1971	Univox Model U1226 Head	60 watts, tubes	$550	$750
1963	Vox AC100 MK I		$4,250	$6,500
1961	Vox Stroller		$550	$900
1987	Yamaha APX Series (Acoustic-Electric)	Lower-end	$150	$400

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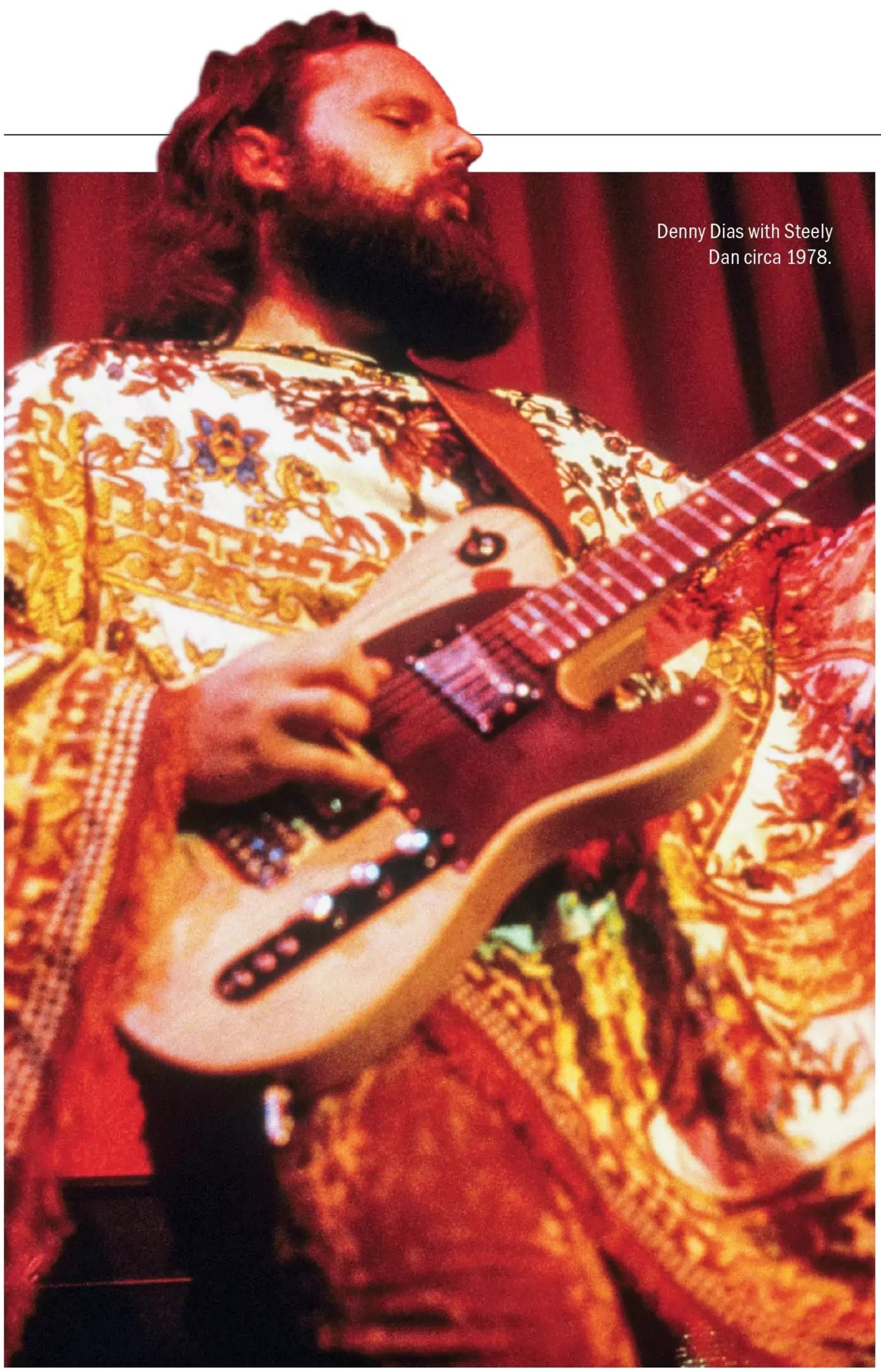

Denny Dias with Steely Dan circa 1978.

MAKING A MASTERPIECE

Steely Dan's *Aja*

By Wolf Marshall

A touring band led by songwriters Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, by 1974, Steely Dan had become a duo with a constellation of orbiting satellite musicians. After its final concert that July, the pair retreated into the studio to concentrate on composing and recording.

Their sixth album, *Aja*, is a complex multidimensional soundscape populated by mythic characters in ironic situations. Aja, a Korean woman who married the brother of Fagen's childhood friend, inspired the name, and "Asian" trappings extended to the minimal cover photo of Japanese model/actress Sayoko Yamaguchi and Eastern musical impressions. Gloriously uncategorizable, *Aja* blurred lines between jazz, blues, funk, pop, progressive, rock, and world music. Fagen's sneering lead vocals and gravelly timbre lent rawness for authentic delivery of their edgy lyrics, rife with insider wisecracks, offsetting the pristine recording, musical sophistication, high production values, and impeccable studio performances. Fagen/Becker's "black humor" made Frank Zappa a fan, while Paul McCartney praised their musical precision, as fusion officially crossed over to the Top 40.

Recorded at six studios in L.A. and New York City from late 1976 to July '77, *Aja* employed nearly 40 players from the session world, grouped in ensembles. Fagen (vocals, synthesizer) and Becker (guitar, bass) guided proceedings, aided by producer Gary Katz and engineers Roger Nichols, Elliot Scheiner, Al Schmitt, and Bill Schnee. Personnel included guitarists Larry Carlton, Denny Dias (the only original band member), Dean Parks, Jay Graydon, Steve Khan and Lee Ritenour, keyboardists Victor Feldman, Joe Sample, Michael Omartian, Paul Griffin and Don Grolnick, saxophonists Wayne Shorter, Tom Scott and Pete Christlieb, scores of wind/brass players and singers including Michael McDonald and Timothy B. Schmit, and drummers Paul Humphrey, Steve Gadd, Bernard Purdie, Rick Marotta, Ed Greene and Jim Keltner. Innumerable takes eventually captured ideal drum parts and master tracks, over which extensive vocal/instrumental overdubbing, experimentation and assembly followed to craft each song

Aja was their first Dan album to feature horns to this extent – five of the seven pieces employed horn sections, two had prominent sax solos – and the first to credit individual musicians. Released September 23, 1977, it's Steely Dan's best-selling album (Top 5 in U.S. and U.K.), their first gold record, yielding three hit singles. Nominated for best record, it won a Grammy for best engineering; emphasizing the album's audiophile predilections and notion that the sonics are "the star."

Fagen maintained "Black Cow" was a float (root beer/ice cream/chocolate syrup), not its boozy counterpart. A prop, it memorializes a deteriorating relationship; lyrics find a protagonist checking boxes in the complaints column of his internal monologue

Denny Dias: 1978: Jeffrey Mayer/Alamy.

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This excerpt (3:08) from "Aja" is one of Denny Dias' definitive moments. His clean-tone improvisations weave through meter changes, intricate harmonies, and floating-feel changes in the breakdown, conveying a more traditional jazz-guitar approach twisted to fit Fagen/Becker environs. His style revels in modern sounds (fourths, intervallic lines, modal melody, chromaticism) and has minimal overt string bending or common blues/rock references. Instead, he works with jazz phrasing in slurs, syncopations, legato lines, and motivic development. A student of Billy Bauer, he cites Wes Montgomery, Jim Hall, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis as favorites, all clearly reflected in his "Aja" excursion.

and citing an indiscreet incident at Rudy's Bar in Manhattan. The space-conscious arrangement and keyboard textures highlight Fagen/Becker's jazz, pop-rock, and R&B influences in the first song tracked. Feldman (Rhodes electric piano), veteran of Miles Davis and Cannonball Adderley groups, had played on every previous Steely Dan album, with Sample's-panned clavinet doubling bass lines, and Carlton's comping on a Gibson ES-335 into a tweed Deluxe develops a blues-adjacent riff in verses, over the funk groove of Rainey and Humphrey. Lush R&B-flavored backing vocals, Feldman's understated Rhodes solo (2:46), Scott's smart horn chart, and soul-jazz improvisations (3:57) complete the picture.

"Aja" begins as a Latin-tinged pop number before assuming suite proportions and a harder edge with expansive layering, rhythmic shifts, key changes, varied timbres, and multiple solos. Demos (the unfinished instrumental "Stand By the Seawall" in the middle section) were combined to produce the large-scale form. Hints of Asian imagery ("Chinese music," "Banyan trees," "Angular banjos") and modality are reinforced by Feldman on marimba, while Omartian (acoustic piano) and Sample (Rhodes) purvey modern-jazz harmony in urbane 11th chords, suspended modality, reflecting Fagen/Becker's Prestige/Blue-Note enthusiasm. Guitars enter lightly and build with Carlton (on 335 occasionally exploiting volume-pedal swells), Becker, and Dias sharing spaces in the arrangement. Dias' jazz-inspired solos (3:08, 4:14) over mixed-meter interludes mark his final performance and finest work with Steely Dan, alternating with Becker's bluesier string-bending over the chorus theme and full groove. Dias favored a Telecaster modified with humbucking pickups, while Becker preferred a single-coil sound and might've played the stripped '57 Fender Duo-Sonic seen in album photos, or his mainstay Strats.

Shorter initially rejected the invitation but was convinced of Fagen/Becker's jazz earnestness by mutual friend Dick LaPalm. His solo (4:35) over Gadd's drumming (a solo in itself over a seven-page chart recorded in two takes and composited) is considered by many to be the album's apex, though positioned early in running order. Overdubbed in two or three takes, after Shorter listened, played the chords on piano, analyzed the harmony, and wrote scale suggestions for himself, his innovative flight is unlike a typical bebop improvisation. Playing behind Shorter and in the coda (6:57), Gadd recorded the first drum solo on a Steely Dan record. Their work provided some of the genre's jazziest moments even though the apparent interaction was recorded at different times.

The second single, "Deacon Blues," recounts the semi-autobiographical tale of an aspiring music hero viewed through the lens of hipster aristocracy and orchestrated with a relaxed underscore. Fagen drew the "expanding man" imagery from sci-fi author Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*. Deacon referred to football player Deacon Jones, changed to "Blues" because it sounded good. The song, which runs 7:33, revolves around the chromatic sequence of descending major-seventh and Mu chords (Cmaj7-Bm7♯5). As was the practice for several Steely Dan studio cohorts, Carlton transcribed their demo (typically keyboard and bass) to produce band charts. Moreover, he functioned as music director/liaison in the studio and played on every song except "Peg." He delivers the main rhythm guitar and decorative fills over Feldman's Rhodes chording, augmented by Ritenour's phased, largely rhythmic, palm-muted lines (6:13)

and Park's textural acoustic strumming on a Martin D-18S. Becker plays bass and supplies a simpler part that grooves differently than Rainey's elaborate work with drummer Purdie. Christlieb, L.A. session player renowned for his jazz improvisation skills, played sax over Scott's horn chart and, within a half hour, created a standout solo (4:02).

Unabashedly commercial, "Peg" was the first hit single (#11), shortest song, and last to be recorded (NYC with Scheiner). Cynicism and dark humor converge to convey veiled allusions and sympathies to a porn actress story line. Marotta's high-hat and groove with Rainey's deep pocket and slapping chorus part ensured his playing on the master, over which Fagen/Becker forged a catchy-but-sophisticated pop-dance tune. The swirling intro of chromatic chords (Griffin on Rhodes, Grolnick on clavinet) flanged and panned and Scott's Lyricon riff presents an auspicious starting hook. Their Mu-chord progression decorated with Khan's funky muted figures expands to a straightforward 12-bar blues in verses that is, ironically, one of the album's least-bluesy moments. McDonald and Griffin provide choir-like backing vocals in choruses, emulating big-band horn sections with voices. Graydon's careening solo (1:46), played on a 335 with compressor into an overdriven Fender Bassman, was the last of many tries (including Becker twice, Carlton, Elliott Randall, Rick Derringer, and Robben Ford) and delivered the necessary reckless rock attitude. He reputedly worked on the solo for six hours to produce a satisfactory version. Carlton later borrowed the chord progression, with Fagen/Becker's permission, for his landmark instrumental "Room 335."

"Home At Last" expresses Fagen/Becker's yearning to return to NYC; hipster nostalgia melding blues travel themes and Homer's Odyssey, befitting their literary bent. Bolstered by a laid-back but funky groove built by Purdie and Rainey, the track cultivates a cruising jazz-pop atmosphere. The arrangement is further colored by Feldman's piano-driven "adult chords," vibraphone and percussion, Carlton's pocketed rhythm parts with Chicago-blues touches, and Scott's R&B horn chart laying the path for Fagen's pseudo-harmonica synth solo (3:10) over a syncopated interlude and verse groove along with Becker's blues/jazz solo (3:30) and improvisatory lead work over the outro verse vamp.

The ear-catching groove of Feldman's syncopated piano jabs and Monk-like sonorities with Greene and Rainey's shuffle lock provides a bed for Fagen/Becker's fragmented, hedonistic story line laced with innuendo, cynicism, and euphemism in "I Got the News." Written during Royal Scam sessions, it was rewritten for *Aja*. Again, the

Walter Becker was revered for his blues touch, inventiveness, and song-based conception. Inspired by Chicago blues, Buddy Guy, and J.B. Hutto, Becker provides a neat counterbalance to Dias' jazz approach in "Aja." He enters (3:30), favoring a slightly chorused, brighter tone, with imitative melodic string bends over the main groove. Like Dias, he exploits syncopation and rhythmic placement, but exudes a contrasting pop/rock-meets-jazz attitude. Points of interest include the Carltonesque string bend (meas. 13) and climactic extended arpeggio line (Dm11) (meas. 19).

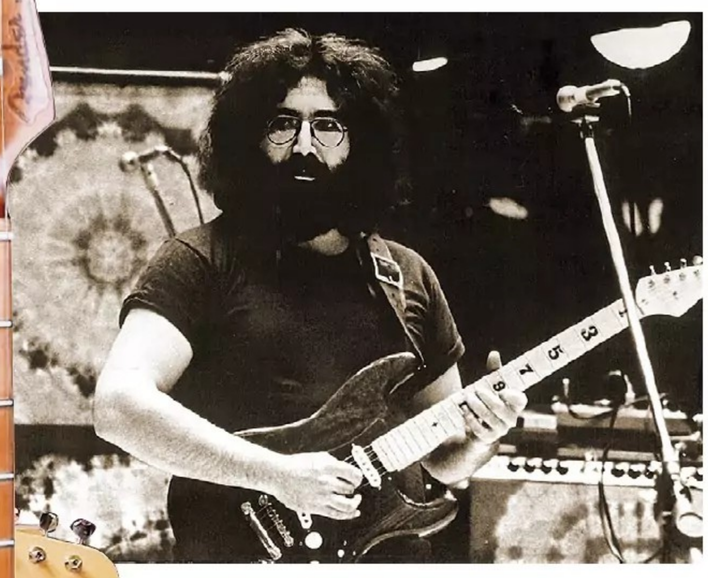
Jay Graydon was an L.A. studio star with a distinctive style and classic sound, created using an ES-335, Dan Armstrong Orange-Squeezer compressor plugged directly into the guitar, and overdriven Fender amp. He had a penchant for beautifully eccentric, highly effective rock solos, as heard in "Peg." The opening bars feature slurred thirds – a sonic trademark reminiscent of Hawaiian music. Scalar sequences and chromaticism mixed with a pedal point in measures 8-9, are the main event. The most unusual lick, a strong identifier that became thematic, is distinguished by diatonic and chromatic movement of third intervals interspersed with an open G string. An ascending flurry of notes in 10 leads to a high string bend in 11, an almost classical response phrase in 12, and concluding bends in 13-14 straight out of the Southern-rock playbook. In all, it's one of the most colorful and memorable solos in pop music.

groove is the focal point, purveying a mix of R&B, funk, disco, and "TV jazz" around which Carlton and Parks divide their accompaniment with staccato counterlines and sparse groove-conscious chording in verses. Feldman contributes vibraphone and percussion colors, McDonald's unmistakable vocals re-emerge in the double-time interlude and Becker adds a sprightly, incongruous blues/jazz solo (2:22) that momentarily defies the mood but winds up heightening it. The final section finds Carlton expanding his verse counter lines into a more rhythmic than melodic, over the piano jabs and shuffle groove.

The third single, "Josie" (#26) celebrates the homecoming of a local "bad girl" – from prison, college, or points unknown. Recorded with Schnee at Producer's Workshop, it bears a distinct L.A. sound, and is Aja's most conventional track. Parks wrote rhythm charts and played the iconic intro as two simple parts (transcribed from Fagen's demo), interlocking but slightly out-of-sync, using his 335 and Roland Jazz-Chorus amp miked in stereo. The arrangement and basic groove are straighter, less jazz-oriented, and texturally leaner, rendered as a quartet with Rainey, Keltner (playing trashcan lids with rivets before the solo) and Feldman, who doubled Parks' percussive strummed verse figures with Rhodes. As on other tracks, Rainey developed his interpretation from Becker's written bass part. The bass line is doubled by guitar in verses, interlude, and under the solo. Choruses receive a smoother, flowing feel and Scott's horn chart (entering in the second chorus) adds sheen to the arrangement. Carlton overdubbed harmonized fills at the interlude (2:18) and Becker provided another signature solo (2:31) that blends blues and jazz rendered with his unique touch and inventiveness, and affirms his close connection with the composition. In Steely Dan world, solos are never throwaways or indulgences, but important events serving songs. Becker's excursion is case in point and drives home the reason they were Fagen's favorites.

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

David, and Jerry Garcia (right) with their Stratishcasters. David's refinished 2000 Strat (right), modded with a stud tailpiece.



DEADHEAD TRIBUTE

A Strat Made Jerry-Style

By Dan Erlewine

I have a client named David who is a true Deadhead and several years ago bought one of my Jerry Garcia "Stratishcasters." I've made about 15 of them over the years, and each has had large rosewood numbers in the fretboard – except for David's. Like Jerry, David is not afraid to mod his guitars, so I wasn't too surprised when he sent me this 2000 Strat (that he had refinished in natural) to convert to hardtail in honor of a Strat that Jerry modded for the Grateful Dead's 1972 European tour.

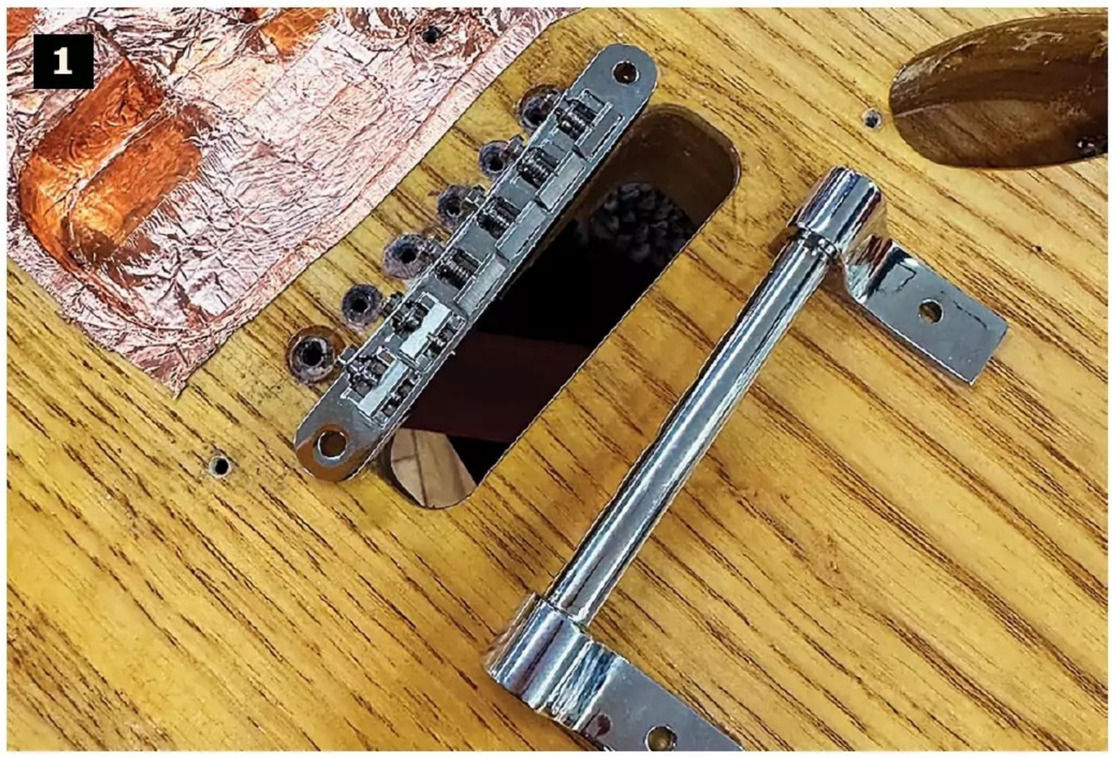
1) On the Stratishcasters, I use a Pigtail ABR-1 that is shorter from top to bottom. Pigtail custom-made these for me to use on the Jerry replicas because a standard ABR-1 is too tall for the geometry of a Strat and can't be set up as well as I like.

2) I started by routing the vibrato and bridge cavities, then plugged them with ash that matched the grain, on which I applied an oil-type finish made by LED Coatings that hardens quickly under LEDs. I mixed that with StewMac Colortone tobacco and amber stains until it matched the finish.

3) After the top was finished, I determined the bridge and tailpiece locations by stringing a stop bar on the strap button, installed the two E-strings, and put the bridge on locaters using a T.O.M. bridge kit from Gerhard Schwarz, a great guitar maker and ingenious tool designer in Germany. His kit has 6-32 felt-bottom thumb wheels soldered to 6-32 studs with hollow centers. With the two strings on, you slide the bridge into the perfect spot for intonation, then drill through the centers of the studs to start the holes.

4) Gerhard makes a number of great tools that make me think "Wow! Why have I never thought of that!" Next, I drilled holes and installed the tailpiece anchors.

5) With the bridge located, I drilled and installed 1½" x ½"



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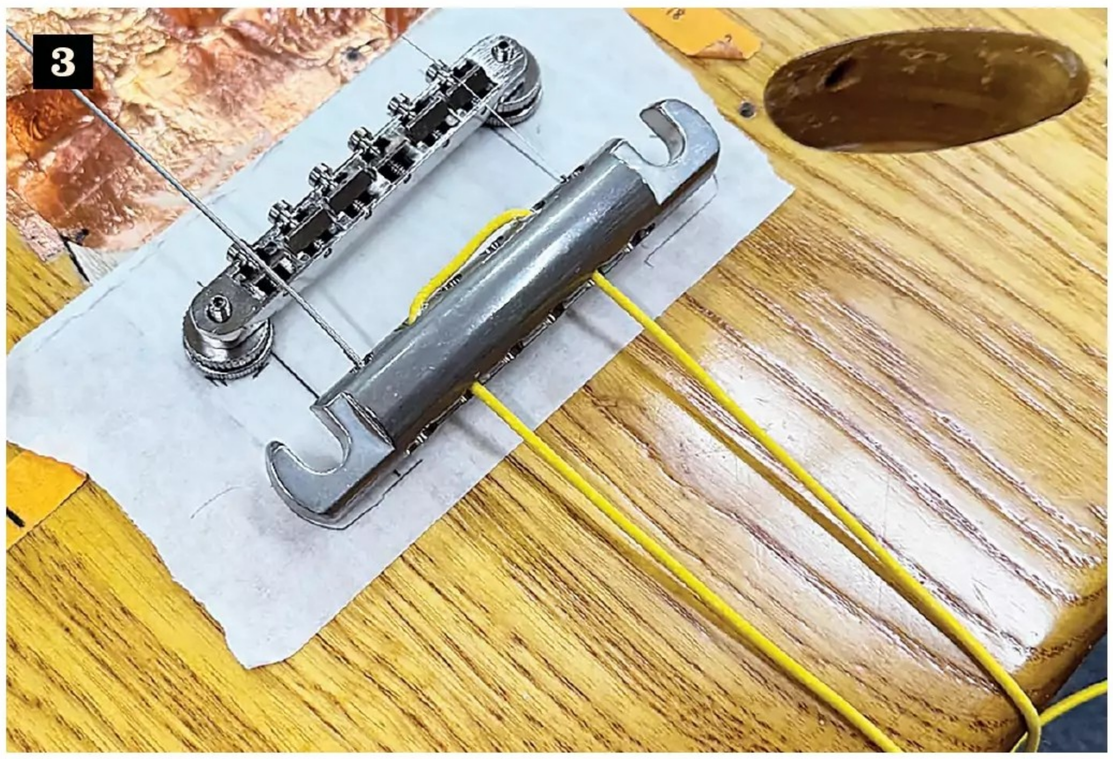
Jerry Garcia: Al Valusek, courtesy of Dan Erlewine.

brass rods threaded 8-32 to accept the round button-head machine screws for adjusting bridge height. Standard T.O.M studs and thumb wheels are 6-32 (significantly smaller), so I had to drill holes in the bridge to accept 8-32. My shopmate, T.K., made thicker, knurled thumb wheels to go with the heavier machine posts, for more mass and firmer coupling.

6) Once the bridge and tailpiece were installed, I clamped the body in a milling machine and bored 3/4" flat-bottom holes to allow the thumb-wheels and the tailpiece studs to sit just below the surface of the guitar, tight against the brass bar and the tailpiece anchors.

7) Here's my version of Jerry Garcia's coupling of the bridge and tailpiece to the body. People who have played this guitar tell me they're amazed by the sustain.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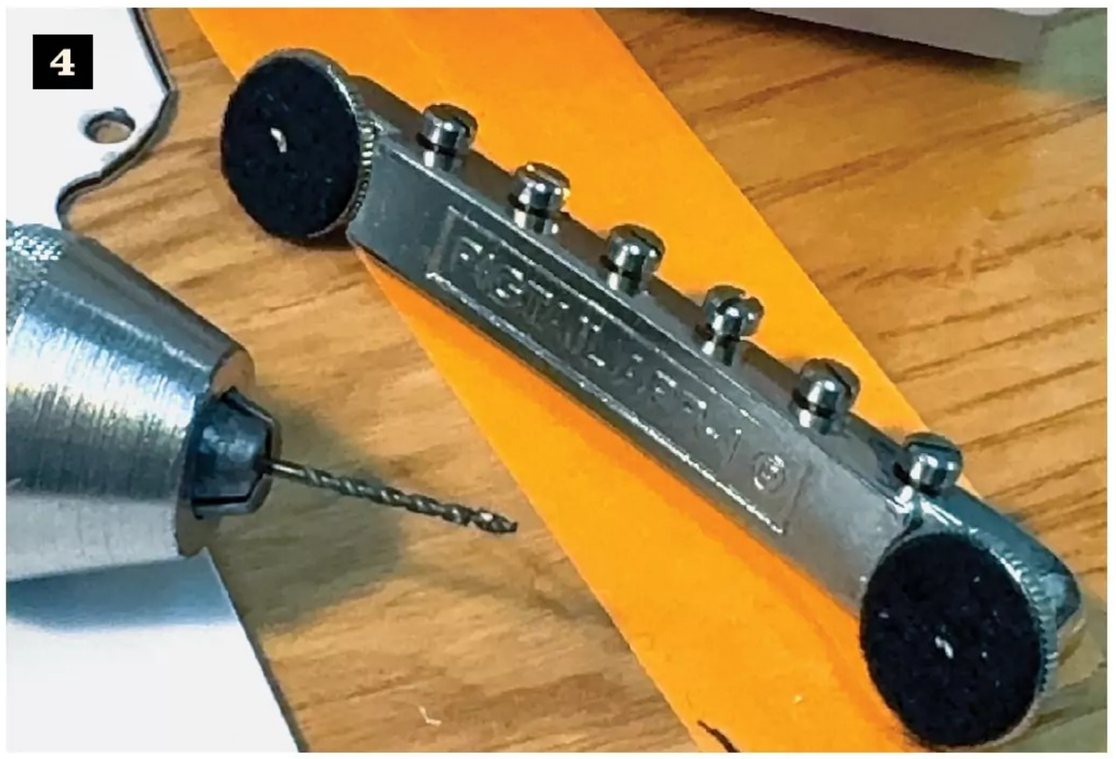
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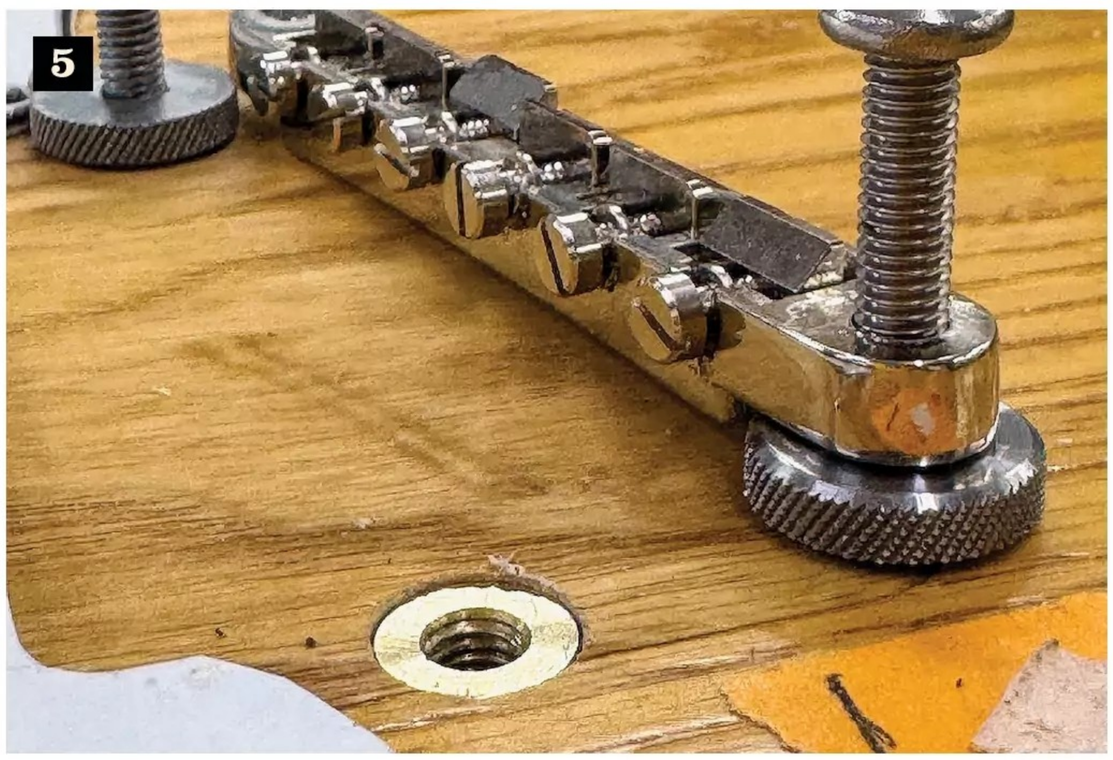
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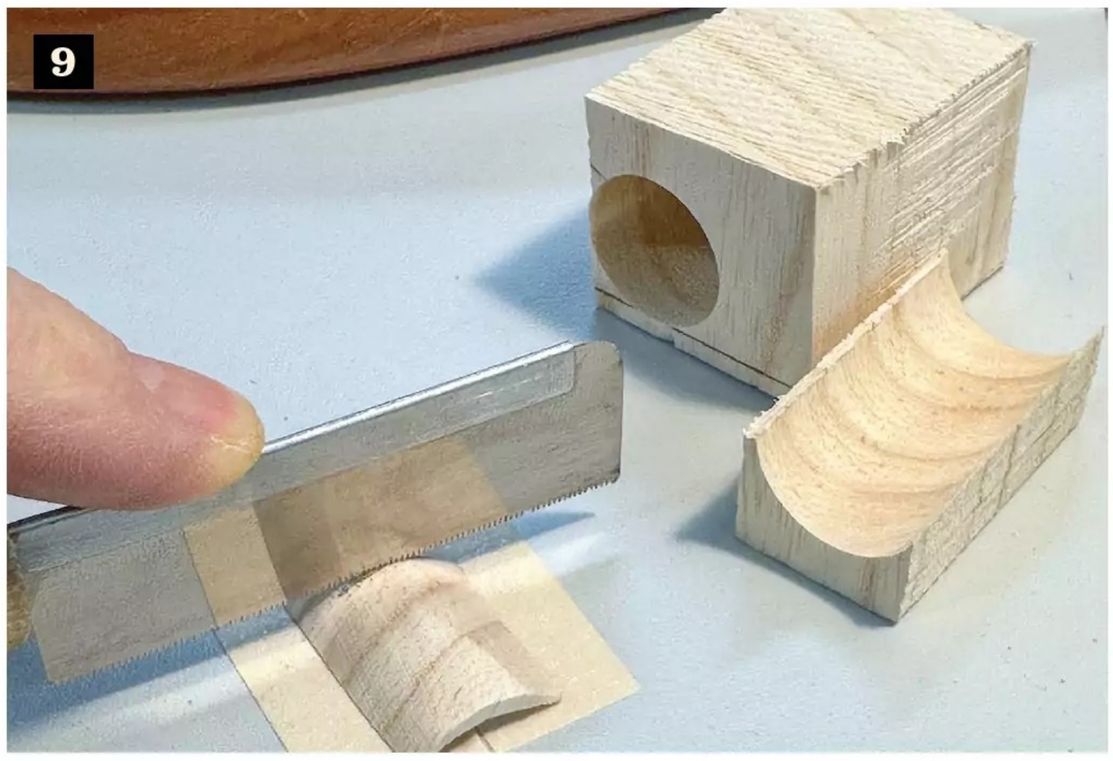
8) The guitar has a neck made by Rusch Custom Guitars, and while it's a great neck in all ways, especially sonically, it didn't quite fit the pocket. After all the work I did to get coupling and sustain, I needed to make it fit tighter.

9) I cleaned the pocket walls and lined them with thin strips of ash I cut then epoxied in place.

10) I also made radiused ash pieces and epoxied them into the back corners. The neck fit tightly into the pocket.

This was a very different and interesting mod, and now I'm thinking the next Jerry replica I make will have this, as I think Jerry would have loved it.

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



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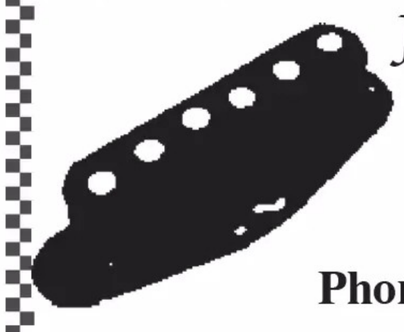

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FAREWELL TO G&L

STORIED BRAND CLOSES AFTER 45 YEARS

BY WARD MEEKER

When news broke that G&L Musical Instruments – the esteemed brand founded by Fender legends Leo Fender, George Fullerton, and Dale Hyatt in 1979 – closed shop in late September of 2025, guitar players and collectors worldwide expressed their appreciation for the brand. Fans were understandably saddened, and while casual followers may have been surprised at the shuttering, devotees were not shocked. Here, we'll revisit the brand's history, investigate its closure, speak to collectors and players, and profile its keystone models.

The contract for Leo's 1965 sale of Fender to CBS included a 10-year no-compete clause. In '71, his longtime plant manager, Forrest White, teamed with former Fender salesman Tommy Walker to form Tri-Sonix, with Leo as a silent partner; they soon after changed the name to Musitek, Inc., then in '74 to Music Man as they prepared to market Leo's new amplifiers, guitars, and basses. Within a few years, though, the relationship became strained and Leo turned to George Fullerton (who designed the Esquire/Telecaster, co-designed the Stratocaster and Precision Bass) and Lloyd Chewning to help launch his own brand. Leo also recruited his old friend, former Fender employee Dale Hyatt. Initially, Leo wanted to call the new venture Electric Stringed Instrument (ESI), but Fullerton's wife, Lucille, convinced Leo's wife, Phyllis, to push their husbands to instead use the straightforward "G&L"

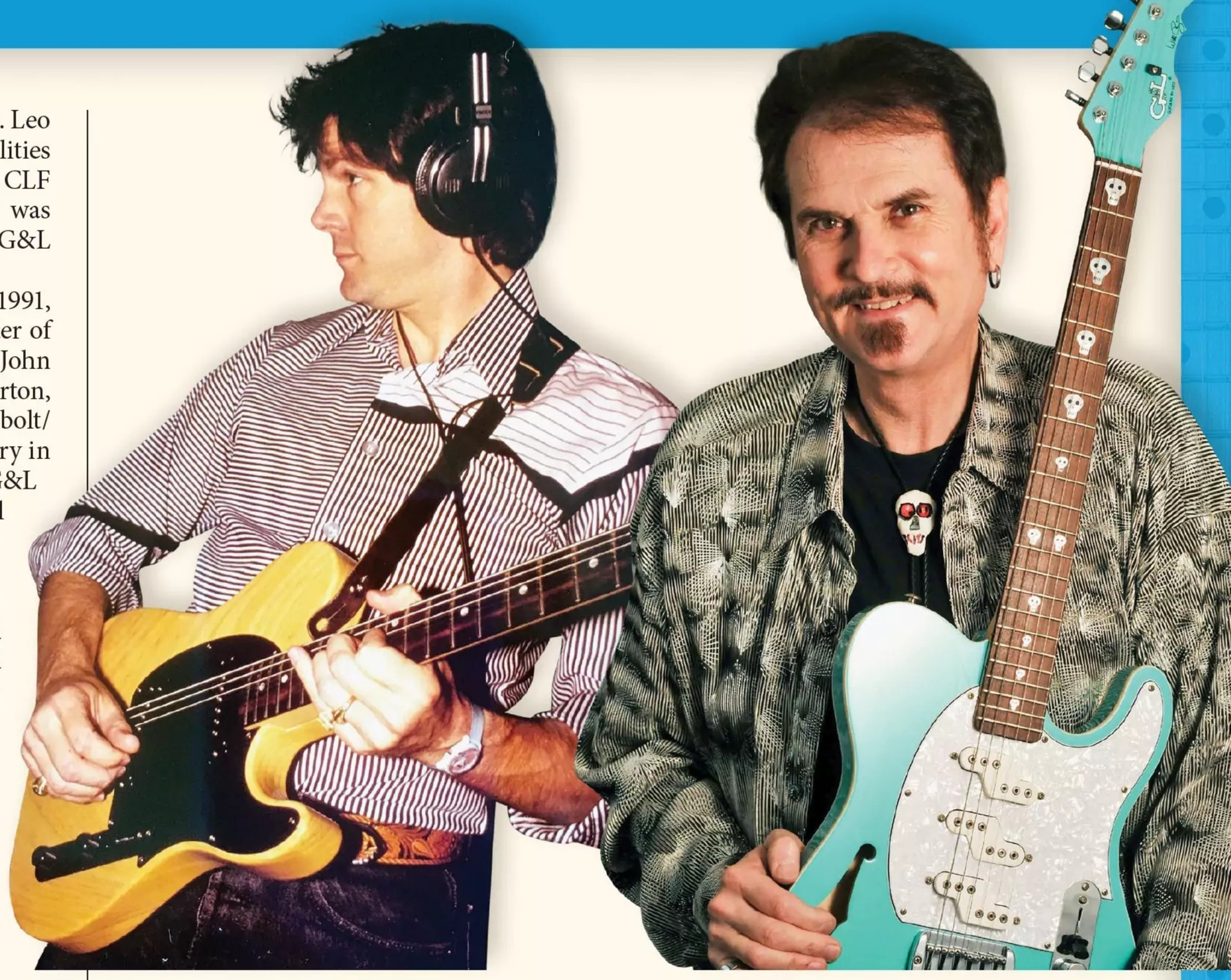
James Gay with a G&L Custom Shop Rampage 24K built for the 2025 NAMM show. It has a mahogany body and neck, cocobolo top, ebony fretboard, Kahler bridge, and a Seymour Duncan TB-4 pickup with a single push/pull pot to control Volume and engage series/parallel switching.

denoting the first names of its founders. Leo agreed and manufacturing began in facilities belonging to Leo's consulting company, CLF Research. G&L Musical Instruments was established as the production arm for G&L Musical Sales.

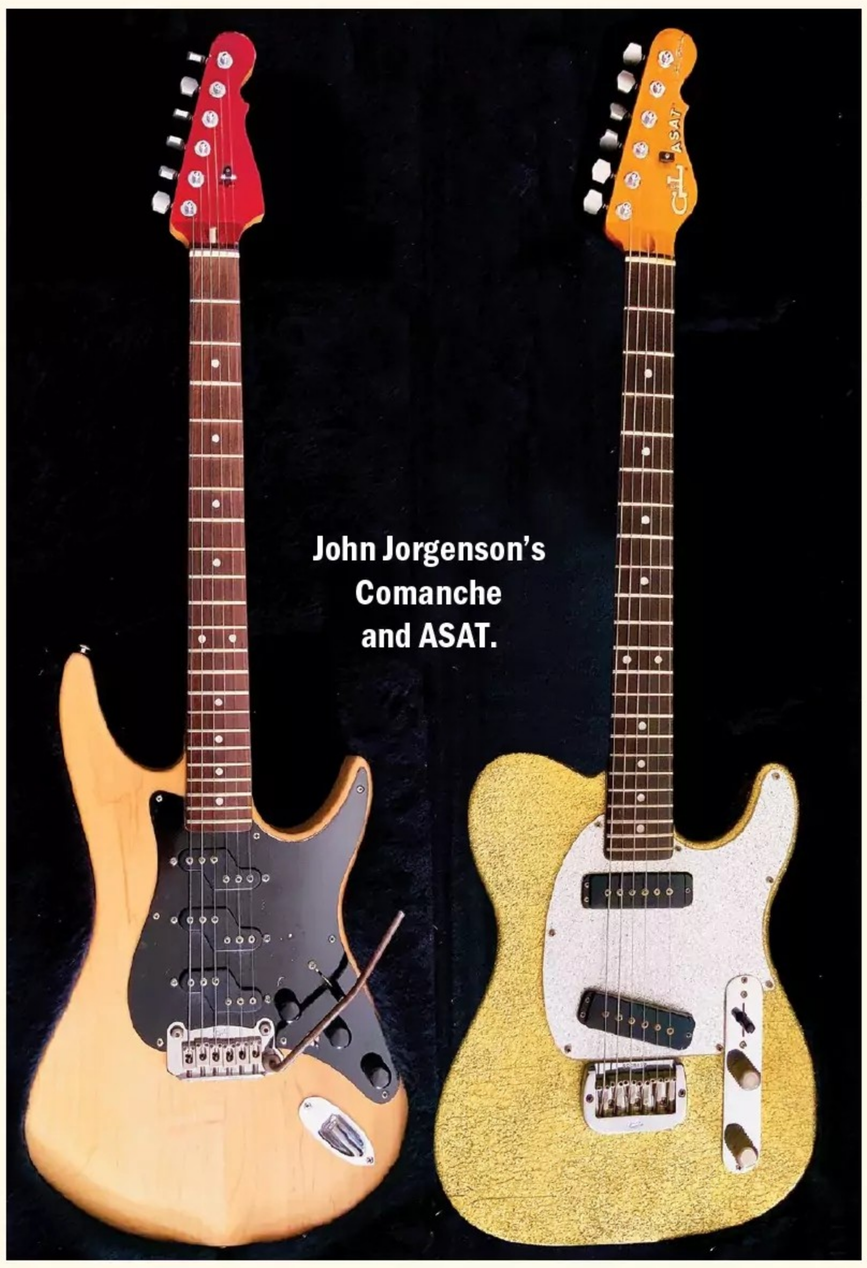
After Leo passed away in March of 1991, Phyllis became the majority shareholder of G&L. Later that year, she sold her stake to John McLaren and his BBE Corporation. Fullerton, who owned the patent for G&L's three-bolt/tilt-neck adjustment, had bypass surgery in the mid '80s, after which he sold his G&L stock and became a consultant until his death in July of 2009. As minority shareholder, Hyatt oversaw sales and production after Leo's passing; before he passed, though, Leo asked Hyatt to find a buyer for the company, and suggested McLaren. Hyatt retired in November of '91 while dealing with health issues and caring for his terminally ill wife. He died in March of 2013.

An authority on the brand and its history, Gabe Dellevigne was a close friend of Hyatt's, and is recognized as a custom guitar builder who also repairs G&L instruments. From its earliest days, he says the company faced many challenges.

"Dale did a great job of marketing the instruments during the pre-BBE era, but a limited budget and difficulty in getting the F-100 to resonate with the public kept him from early success," he said. "Dale explained to me that Leo was extremely fond of the F-100, but when he went out to sell it, it was practically impossible to get the dealer network he'd established excited about the aesthetic or the sound. Potential buyers similarly did not care for the F-100, and it was expensive, as well – a bad combination when trying to launch a brand from the ashes of CLF-Music Man, which suffered similar acceptance problems with the Stingray and Sabre.



John Jorgenson in 1987 (left) during the recording of *The Moon is Rising*, his duet album with Rose Maddox, playing his first ASAT (small logo/metal pickguard). Jorgenson and the guitar appeared on "Austin City Limits" later that year, and he eventually gifted it to Brad Paisley. Will Ray with his G&L ASAT Z.

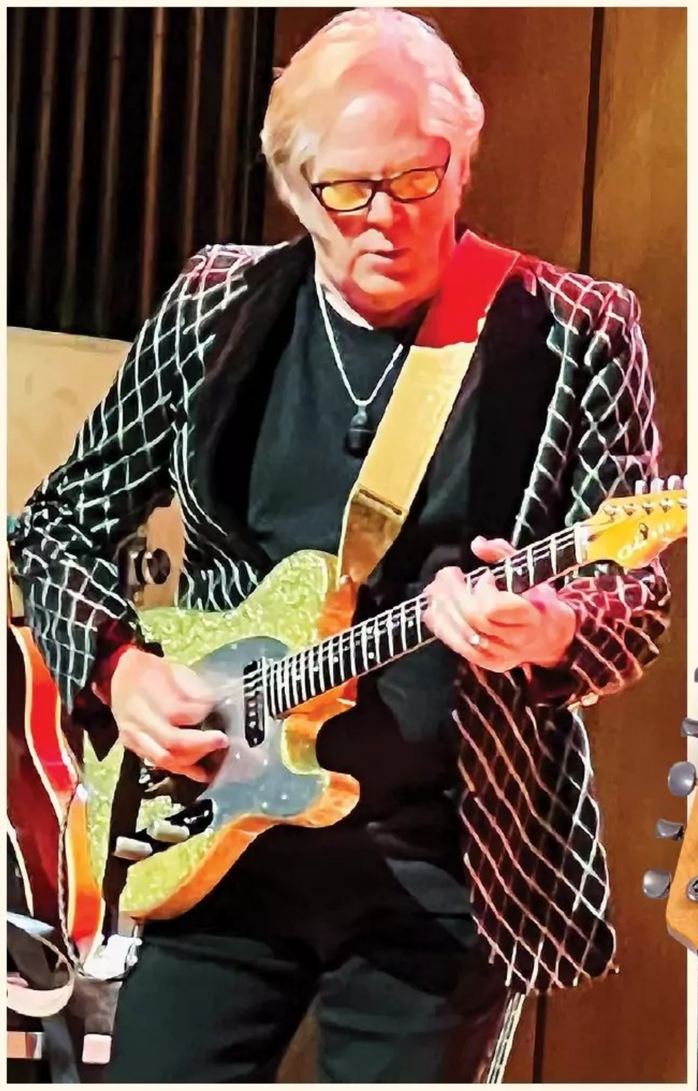


John Jorgenson's Comanche and ASAT.

"Guitars and basses are a super-saturated market, and one that's not particularly lucrative," he added. "Low-cost Asian instruments have a real impact on companies like BBE/G&L. Some will blame tariffs placed on the Tribute line, but it's well-known that keeping the doors open has been a struggle since John McLaren, Sr. bought G&L and tried to figure out how to fund and operate it. In the end, John's sons, Johnny and David, were simply the stewards of their father's purchase. They managed to keep it going for 34 years until the laws of cash flow put an end to it. BBE had a long run, but never was able to grow the brand or steal market share from Fender, their direct competition. Even after they had invested in CNC and other plant modernizations, the operations were simply too small to compete and scale cost-effectively in a state where electricity costs are three times the national average, labor costs are high, regulations and air-quality standards extremely strict, and facility rental, insurance, and taxes are prohibitively expensive. G&L needed an effective marketing strategy and a capable selling arm to generate the scale necessary for longer term success. That simply never came to fruition."

After its closing, G&L did not issue an official statement, leaving employees who'd been put on two-week furlough beginning September 15 to speculate about their jobs and futures. In the first days, questions arose amongst dealers who could not reach the company to check the status of orders. On September 29, workers on the floor were called to meet with management and told the factory was closing and the company being dissolved.

After the closure announcement, former employee Steve Araujo, a builder at G&L for nearly nine years, posted a video on Youtube describing events (including delays in payroll)



John Jorgenson playing his custom silver-sparkle ASAT in October of '23 during the Desert Rose Band's farewell concert at the Country Music Hall of Fame. Its finish has aged to look more gold than silver.

leading to his resignation in August of '25. Graphic artist Michael DiMattio, who'd done contract work for G&L since 1987, also posted a video in which he displays his final paycheck, noting it was issued by Headliner Holding/Fender Musical Instruments, adding to speculation that Fender had bought G&L. In the weeks the followed, it was reported that Fender's purchase was limited to intellectual property including Leo Fender's likeness and signature.

Further confirmation came in accounts from local players and guitar builders who literally jumped into dumpsters at the company's headquarters in Huntington Beach, California, to save parts and other materials from going to the landfill. On October 11, dealers and customers with instruments that had been sent to G&L for warranty or repair work were told that Musical Instrument Reclamation Company (MIRC), Nashville, was completing that work. On October 31, *The Orange County Register* reported that the California Secretary of State listed BBE Sound as having terminated its corporate status on October 28.

Another outspoken former employee was James Gay, who was hired in December of 2023 as manager and Master Builder at G&L's Custom Shop and today is a Master Luthier at Carter Vintage. In an exclusive interview, he described his first day, walking onto a factory floor in need of help.

"It was clear right away that they didn't have a foreman for the production side of the facility," he said, adding that in his first year, he did both jobs, working 60-plus hour weeks until one of his three Custom Shop builders was promoted to manage standard production and given a goal of building 10 to 14 instruments per day while dealing with "fallout" – instruments that had to be re-worked or repaired during production: "Things like a finish being burned in polish and needing to be re-sprayed, or chips in the paint around the neck pocket," Gay said.

Other challenges included outdated machinery along with shortages in materials and supplies ranging from sandpaper to wood to fret wire. Production, he said, was more often seven to nine instruments per day.

Once able to focus on the Custom Shop, Gay was charged with building approximately 10 guitars per month. When he started, he says there was a two-year backlog *not* directly due to shortages.

"The first thing I did was overhaul our spec sheet to reflect what was actually being built, then I went through open orders that went back to 2021. When I e-mailed those customers to confirm specs, several canceled out of frustration. I promised the few that kept their orders that they'd be built before the end of March, 2024. We met that goal, finishing all open orders from 2021 and '22, then I dove into the 2023 orders."

The three-person Custom Shop kept pace at eight to 10 instruments. But near the end, there was a reversion.

"About two months before the shutdown, the Custom Shop staffer who'd been promoted to foreman was shifted to a quality-control role, and I was asked to once again manage the entire facility. After having been forced to take a pay cut, I told them I wasn't willing to do both jobs forever because it was borderline impossible."

Former BBE/Sound CEO Dave McLaren says beyond the challenges of the guitar market in the 21st century, G&L and every other builder faced unprecedented times.

"Even before Covid, our business was picking up pretty well and we were investing to expand the factory," he said. "And then during the pandemic there was a period where *every* builder and manufacturer was selling all the guitars they could make because people were nesting and the economy was good. It was a surreal time. But then things started slowing down, and the artificiality of the Covid period caused some mistakes in our expansion. Coming through the other side was a painful thing, and we tried to right-size best we could."

Ultimately, he started to consider alternatives.

"I was making plans to purchase G&L from BBE Sound, using new investment," he said. "I think we could have accomplished a lot with a new structure."

But in late 2024, two employees who'd left the company filed a lawsuit claiming G&L had violated California labor laws. When the company was notified, all plans were put on hold.

"At the time, we were meeting constantly trying to establish a new structure

1981 G&L F-100 Series I (left) and L-1000.

'81 F-100 Series I: Michael Wright/VG Archive. G&L L-1000: John Slog/VG Archive.

for the business, but the lawsuit was completely disruptive," he said, adding that it also played a role in the company's silence following its closure.

"It makes me sick that it happened the way it did, and I know the employees were extremely disappointed. Some reacted very strongly when they were let go, but they weren't angry at *us*.

"I'm not done with the guitar business," he added. "Once this is settled, I'm looking forward to returning to the world and social media and talk about what's next. I would love to still be doing what I was doing. I love manufacturing – I love sawdust, I love paint, I love the people, all of it."

Historically, G&L's marketing was "subdued." Only a handful of players were ever granted signature G&L models – the highest profile being Alice in Chains co-founder Jerry Cantrell, who played a Rampage even before the band emerged in the early '90s. Others included early adopters Roy Clark and Carl Perkins, who played Broadcasters in the latter days of their careers, along with '80s artists like Quarterflash, Berlin, and Mark St. John, who was the lead player in Kiss for seven months in '84 before arthritis forced him out of the band just prior to a tour.

Also on the roster were Will Ray and John Jorgenson, renowned performers/session/side players who in the early '90s formed the superpicker trio The Hellecasters with Jerry Donahue.

"I was sorry to see G&L throw in the towel, but guitar making is a tough business," said Ray. "The people who worked at the factory were true craftsmen and professionals, and I was proud of my signature models; my ASAT Z had extra windings for the bridge pickup which tamed high-end and boosted volume in a good way. They also had Hipshot string benders and stayed in tune very well."

"As a young guitarist growing up in SoCal in the '60s, Fender was ubiquitous," Jorgenson added. "Over the years, I learned about the history of Leo Fender, the pre-CBS lore, and noticed his creation of the Music Man brand. In the mid '80s, my friend Jeff Ross told me about the G&L ASAT. Jeff knew Leo, Dale, and George for some time, as he'd been a field tester for them. In early '87, Jeff introduced me to Dale, who was G&L's sales manager, as an up and coming recording artist whose records [with the Desert Rose Band] were hitting the country charts.

"I liked Dale very much, and he presented me with a natural two-pickup ASAT with a black metal pickguard. I carried that on tour and would play it at sound checks but was hesitant to replace my 1983 '62 reissue Tele Custom onstage. One day I decided to try it, and never went back. Though I loved the way it sounded and played, I wanted something more visually impactful. Inspired by Billy Zoom's Gretsch Sparkle Jet, I requested a silver sparkle ASAT. Dale was reluctant at first, but surprised me with one a couple months later. I absolutely loved that guitar, and used it for the rest of my time with the Desert Rose Band and through the Hellecasters' first and second albums.

"I became an endorser for G&L and was featured in a number of ads, solo and with the Hellecasters. I brought friends to the G&L offices in Fullerton, and Will Ray and Dale Watson both became longtime devotees.

"As I lived in Anaheim, I would get called in from time to time because 'Leo has something he would like you to try.' One of those trials included three prototypes of what would later become the Comanche model. I begged to keep my favorite of the three even though it had no finish or logo, and ended up recording 'Passion' and 'Son Becomes Father' with it.

"When Leo passed away in 1991, Jeff and I were honored to play our ASATs at his memorial. I feel very lucky to have watched Leo, George, and Dale, who are such a huge part of the foundation of electric guitar. The friendship they shared was deep. I had lunch with them numerous times, and even when no one was speaking, I could detect an animated conversation going on between them. Sharing these memories, I feel humbled, grateful, and extremely lucky."

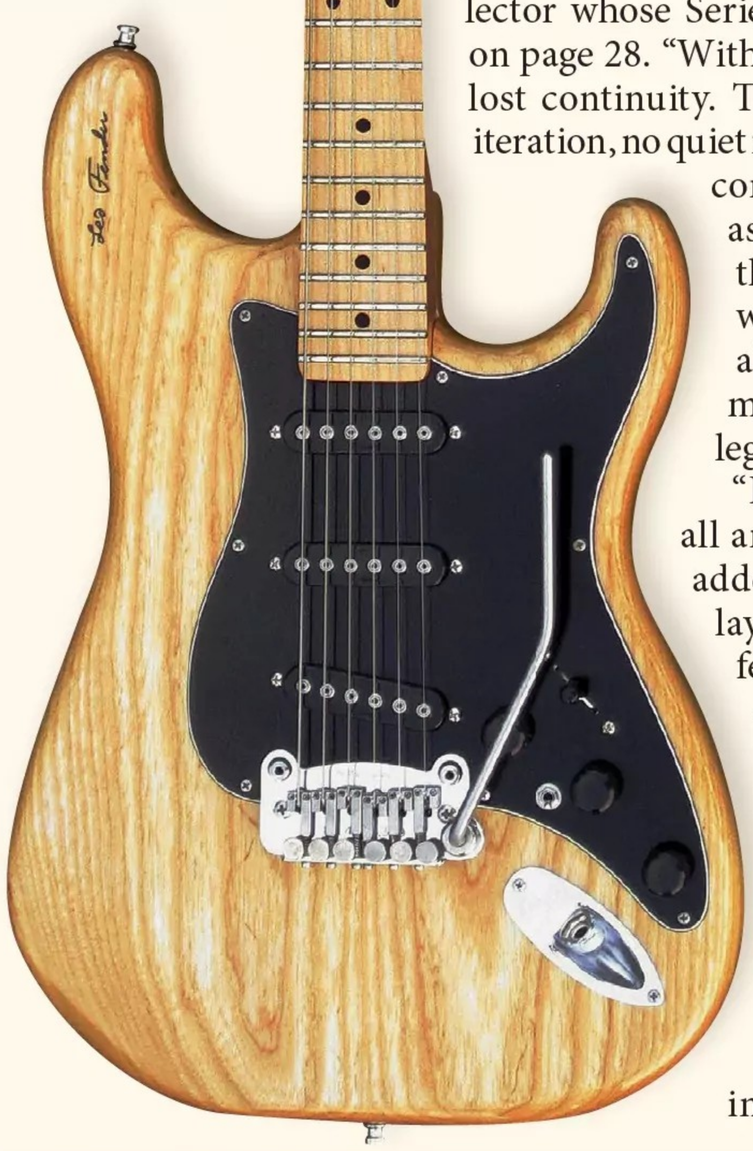
"In 1996, a friend lent me his G&L Legacy in Silver Metallic with Seymour Duncan-designed pickups, and I tell ya', that guitar Stratted like it needed to Strat – quacky, with a bell-like tone in the neck position," said Corey Terrell, a longtime fan of the brand and sales associate at Gruhn Guitars. "Thinking back, it was one of *the* best non-Fender Strats I've ever played. And let's give credit to the original designs developed by George, Leo, and Dale before BBE took over.

"Through the years, I have owned a pre-'94 Legacy three-bolt and two ASATs from the late '90s, and all lived up to Leo's name. Attention to detail at G&L has made players very happy since 1980."

"Early G&L instruments demonstrate a methodology rather than a stylistic lineage," added Chris Shelton, a collector whose Series 1 F-100 is profiled on page 28. "With G&L's closure, we've lost continuity. There will be no next iteration, no quiet refinement, no further correction. But as long as they are played, the thinking behind them will endure, and that alone stands as the final measure of Leo Fender's legacy."

"Leo's influence was all around the plant," Ray added. "His true genius lay in being able to get feedback from musicians on the front lines, then making improvements based on that feedback. I still love my G&Ls and would put them up against any other guitars out there. They're wonderful instruments!"

'81 S-500 (left) and an S-500 Signature model with changes introduced in '88 to make it look and feel more familiar.



G&L S-500: Michael Wright/VG Archive. G&L S-500 Signature: Greg Gagliano/VG Archive.

F-100

If guitars are in your blood – *really* in your blood – you can't walk away from them. That was certainly the case with Leo Fender, whose guitar brand is one of most-recognized in the collectible market. However, other names on the musical landscape are not so obviously the children of Leo Fender.

Even after Leo sold Fender Musical Instruments to CBS during the corporate feeding frenzy of 1965, he couldn't walk away, and his instruments at Music Man reflected what he saw as improvements on designs created at Fender. After Leo diverged from his partners, Music Man was sold to renowned Hawaiian guitarist (later, string maker) Ernie Ball before he partnered with Fullerton to found G&L. Their first instruments were the F-100 guitar and L-1000 bass introduced in 1980.

There were several variations on the F-100. While all had flat-sawn maple necks with 22-fret ebony or maple fretboards, 25½" scale, and a 1.625"-wide nut, the F-100-I and F-100-II (a.k.a. "Series I" and "Series II") were differentiated by their fretboard radii (7½" vs. 12"), an option Leo developed at Music Man. All had either the string-through Saddle-Lok fixed bridge or adjustable Dual Fulcrum vibrato. One – serial number G018385, made in '86 – left the factory with a Kahler 2300!

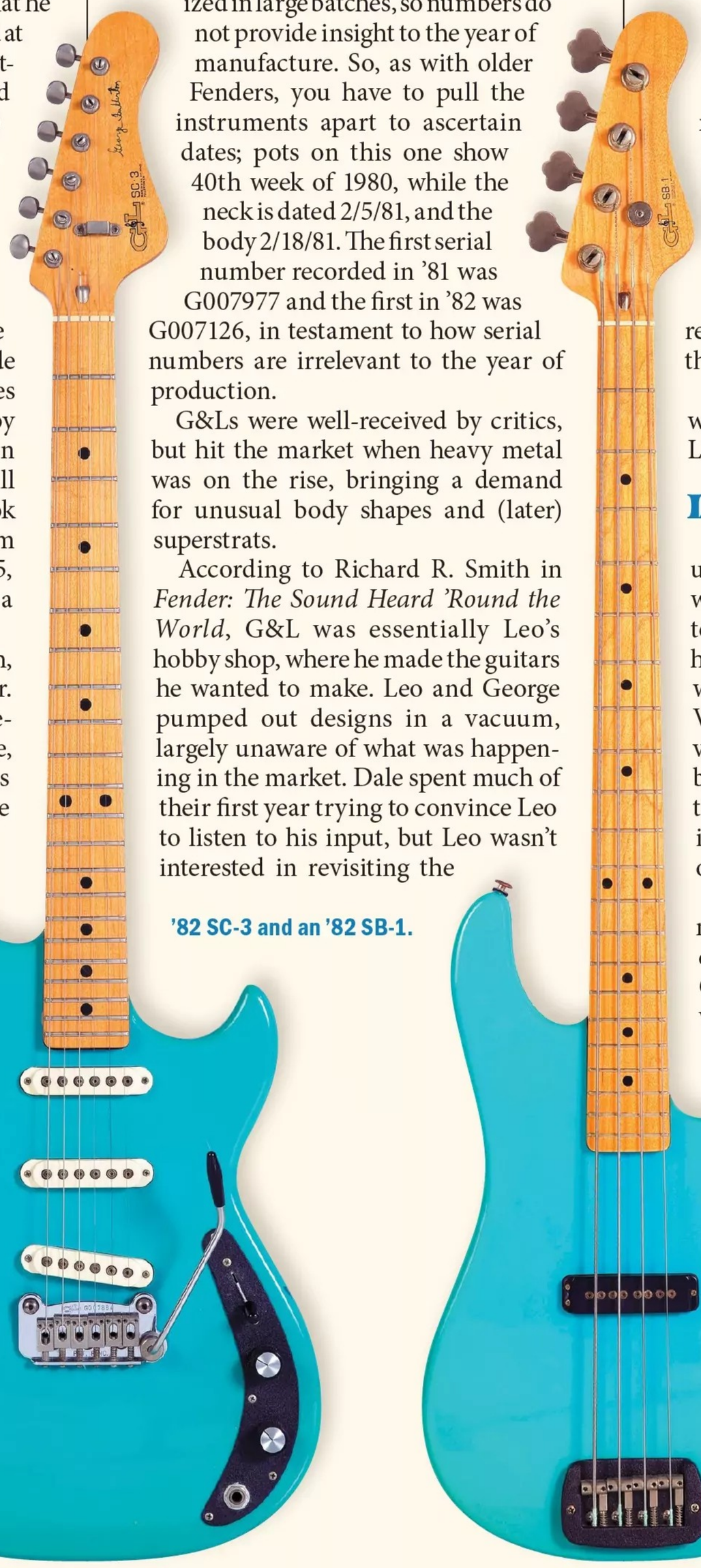
Body woods varied and could be ash, mahogany, soft maple, or (rarely) poplar. Finishes in 1980 included Natural, Three-Tone Sunburst, Black, White, Clear Blue, and Clear Red. For an upcharge, options extended to Metallic Gold, Candy Apple Red, and the rare Candy Lemon.

The biggest distinction, however, was in the electronics. All F-100s were given Leo's new Magnetic Field Design (MFD) humbucking pickups, created in 1979 with two rows of adjustable polepieces and ceramic magnets. They could be passive or active (the latter denoted by an "E" suffix) but all had passive master Volume, Treble and Bass tone stacks – a departure from the Music Man Stingray and Sabre guitars. The 9-volt preamp converted the pickups to low-impedance and offered a modest signal boost to drive long cords without the loss of treble response – not something the treble happy MFDs required, but Leo wanted on the widest possible frequency response, feeling the player could roll off high-end with the Treble control.

The F-100 shown on page 54 has serial number G003793, which is not in the company's logs; the first serial number recorded was G003869, on February 10, 1980. Early G&L serial numbers were random, based on when bridges (or later, the neck plates) were pulled from inventory. They were serialized in large batches, so numbers do not provide insight to the year of manufacture. So, as with older Fenders, you have to pull the instruments apart to ascertain dates; pots on this one show 40th week of 1980, while the neck is dated 2/5/81, and the body 2/18/81. The first serial number recorded in '81 was G007977 and the first in '82 was G007126, in testament to how serial numbers are irrelevant to the year of production.

G&Ls were well-received by critics, but hit the market when heavy metal was on the rise, bringing a demand for unusual body shapes and (later) superstrats.

According to Richard R. Smith in *Fender: The Sound Heard 'Round the World*, G&L was essentially Leo's hobby shop, where he made the guitars he wanted to make. Leo and George pumped out designs in a vacuum, largely unaware of what was happening in the market. Dale spent much of their first year trying to convince Leo to listen to his input, but Leo wasn't interested in revisiting the Telecaster or Stratocaster, and most definitely didn't see the superstrat as more than a fad. Hyatt was forced to channel feedback directly from test players and dealers before Leo began to revise the Stratocaster design, blending features of multiple prototypes but keeping the F-100 body. The resulting S-500 came to life in '82 and became G&L's first commercial success.



'82 SC-3 and an '82 SB-1.

How rare are early F-100s? Official records indicate 3,823 were made in 1980 and '81, and all told, 5,044 were produced between '80 and '90, when only two were built to order. The last F-100 was G026553, finished in black with a rosewood #1 neck and completed on May 21. The body of that guitar is in the possession of Dellevigne, its neck having been used on a custom guitar he built for G&L enthusiast Patrick Dempsey.

The active F-100E is considerably more rare (and attractive to collectors), reflecting the reality that few guitarists at the time saw the value of active electronics.

This F-100 is a cool artifact from a time when the love of guitars flowed through Leo Fender's veins. ***– Michael Wright***

L-1000

Launched in G&L's first year, the L-1000 used an MFD pickup designed by Leo with eight polepieces and a three-position toggle to select between three modes – humbucking, single-coil, or single-coil with bass boost. Its knobs controlled Volume, Bass, and Treble, making it more versatile than a Precision Bass. The three-bolt neck differed from the similar Fender truss-adjustment system, but both had the infamous "bullet" screw-end poking out of headstock.

The L-1000 shown on page 54 has a mahogany body in sunburst (the only color other than natural for basses on G&L's initial price list), maple fretboard with black dots, and chrome hardware all around. The slotted polepieces on its pickup were short-lived, replaced by adjustable poles. ***– John Slog***

S-500

When he started G&L, Leo had no intention of revisiting his Stratocaster or Telecaster designs. But at Dale Hyatt's urging, by 1981, he and George Fullerton began sifting through prototypes with double-cut bodies and three single-coil pickups. In March of '82, the S-500 was introduced.

G&L SC-3 and SB-1 Bill Ingalls, Jr./VG Archive.

The S-500 had roots in two near-production models – the F-150 and T-400. After feedback from testers and heated discussions between the three men, features were chosen for the new guitar – F-150 body, circuit, and Dual Fulcrum vibrato mated with the T-400 pickups and neck. The model was initially dubbed the F-300, but Dale Hyatt wanted to distance it from the F-100. In keeping with the alphanumeric scheme, he selected "S," and "500" to indicate the five-way selector.

The S-500's body measured 1.625" thick and was contoured front and back. Its three MFD pickups had rectangular bobbins and a ferrous metal plate similar to the surrounds Fender used on the Jaguar and Bass VI. These provided shielding from electromagnetic interference and directed magnetic flux to the pole pieces. Beneath the magnet was a brass-plated steel plate that altered the magnetic field and resonant peak of the pickup, and also provided shielding.

Leo mounted the pickups to the body using brass inserts, machine screws, and elevator springs. Routs were placed to account for the 22-fret fretboard (versus the Strat's 21) and Leo's preference in tone. He gave the bridge pickup an aggressive angle and poles in the bridge pickup were spaced to allow more winds on the bobbin, resulting in higher output.

Initially, the aluminum pickguard and separate aluminum control plate had a matte-black finish, but within a few months that was changed to a light wrinkle texture. Aluminum being close to the pickups diminished their resonant peak and attenuated high frequencies. Additional shielding was achieved by using coaxial wire for the hot leads on the neck and middle pickups.

Necks on all '82 G&Ls were one-piece maple with rear-mounted/curved truss rod retained by a walnut insert (a.k.a. skunk stripe). Fretboards were maple or a thin ebony, and tuning machines were Schaller M-6 with G&L logos. In '82, the neck had a 7.5" radius with 1.625" nut (the "#2 neck"). Other necks were available later, but anything other than #2 is rare.

Early S-500s had bodies made of ash, mahogany, maple, or poplar; maple was rarely used after '82. Poplar were given opaque finishes, and few were made. Early S-500s were finished in nitrocellulose lacquer with nitro sealer, but by the middle of the decade, polyurethane was used as a sealer. It retained the headstock shape of the T-400, and switching was handled by a five-way toggle providing a humbucking signal in positions two and four.

The model saw minor changes in '83, with the relocation of the serial number from the bridge plate to neck plate and the introduction of the Bi-Cut neck, which used a blank cut slightly lengthwise, slightly off-center with the truss channel routed in the larger half. The rod was inserted and the halves were glued together.

By '84, G&L stopped using mahogany bodies, by '86 it offered Sperzel locking tuners, and by late '87, ebony fretboards were replaced with Indian rosewood and the Leo Fender Fine Tuner Vibrato became an option.

Hyatt created the final version of the Leo-era S-500 in '91, with a shape much closer to a traditional Strat, reducing the size of the headstock and giving it a laminate pickguard. He also opted for traditional oval-bobbin MFDs (from the Skyhawk) with 50 to 100 more turns on the coil, and hung them from the pickguard rather than mounting them to the body. A new mini-toggle provided two additional parallel connections (neck/bridge or all three).

Demand for the S-500 was high, even as players and dealers often told Hyatt the guitar had become *too* Fender-like and they preferred the sound and looks of Leo's original. In response, the company offered both, and the S-500 became the longest-running guitar in the G&L catalog. ***– Greg Gagliano and Gabe Dellevigne***

Ca. 1983
EL Toro

SC-3 AND SB-1

Part of the S series introduced in late '82, the SC and SB series had bodies and necks made of maple. The 22-fret/three-pickup SC-3 had a 25½" scale while the 34"-scale SB-1 had 21 frets.

Neither was given body countours (though their edges were comfortably rounded) and their MFD pickups were controlled with single Volume and Tone controls regardless of the number of pickups.

Initially, both were offered in opaque Red, White or Blue; finishes on the two on page 56 have yellowed, making them teal-like.

Electronics on the SC-3 include pickups in Strat configuration controlled by a five-way toggle and master Volume and Tone. The white pickup covers are unusual, even rare; Paul Bechtoldt, author of *G&L: Leo's Legacy*, claims to have a hand-written note from Dale Hyatt saying only a few dozen guitars or basses had them.

Another curiosity is the guitar's serial number. According to Bechtoldt, the first SC was completed on August 31, 1982, but a list in his book indicates the number embossed on the bridge plate is from '81. So it seems that early on, G&L didn't use sequentially numbered bridges.

The one-pickup SC-1 and SB-1 lasted less than two years, but versions of both continued with evolving electronics and cosmetics. ***– Willie G. Moseley***

EL TORO

At the beginning of 1983, Leo decided to diversify G&L's bass lineup beyond the L-1000, L-2000, and the no-frills SB-1 and SB-2.

The first El Toro was completed that March and listed on an August 1 price sheet. Similar to the L-2000, it was passive with an optional preamp; the passive version was discontinued within six months. Its maple neck had a 34" scale with 21 nickle-silver frets and joined the body at the 16th on the bass side, 19th on the treble side. Fretboard options included maple, rosewood, and ebony, while bodies were mahogany, ash, or maple, and the earliest examples were slab (without belly or forearm bevels). The control plate, bridge, and neck plate are in the black "crinkled" finish of the era. The El Toro's body varied slightly from the L series, being slightly smaller and with contours that are more pronounced.

The El Toro was the first of two G&L basses to use the smaller humbucking MFD pickups with four adjustable poles for each string. The controls are for Volume, Treble, and Bass; the black-capped mini-toggle near the Volume selects pickups while the red two-position mini-toggle allows standard switching in one position, and in the other bypasses the selector and boosts both pickups – an unusual configuration, especially for a passive instrument

Like many early G&Ls, finishes on the El Toro were all over the map; some natural examples had black headstocks – an in-house designation for instruments displayed at a NAMM show.

The El Toro wasn't built after 1988, and fewer than 1,200 were made in total. It's an interesting, rare, and nice-sounding alternative. ***– Willie G. Moseley***

This feature includes content from the July '06, August '09, October '08, August '10, and October '14 issues.

G&L El Toro: Bill Ingalls, Jr./VG Archive. Instrument courtesy of Mark Luciani.

There's going out – and then there's going out on top. Thrash-metal pioneers Megadeth, founded in 1983 by lead vocalist/co-lead guitarist Dave Mustaine, announced last August that the January release of *Megadeth* would be the band's 17th and final studio album. Mustaine, co-lead guitarist Teemu Mäntysaari, bassist James LoMenzo, and drummer Dirk Verbeuren were determined to go out with guns blazing.

Dave Mustaine

TOP OF THE WORLD

BY BRET ADAMS

Mustaine onstage in 2025 with a signature Flying V. He has had seven signature Gibsons – a Les Paul, five Flying V RIPs, and a Songwriter acoustic.

Recorded at NOZ Entertainment in LaVergne, Tennessee, *Megadeth* debuted at #1 on the *Billboard* 200 album chart, making it the band's first chart-topping LP after nine reached the Top 10. The worldwide appeal of metal is also shown by the album reaching the summit in Australia, Austria, Finland, and Sweden, and the Top Five in the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, Germany, New Zealand, and the Netherlands.

Highlights include "Tipping Point," "Puppet Parade," Mustaine's heartfelt goodbye "The Last Note," and a cover of Metallica's "Ride the Lightning," which Mustaine co-wrote while in that band. *Megadeth* is the third consecutive album co-produced by Mustaine and Chris Rakestraw.

Dave Mustaine 2025: Bonnie Britain/SOPA Images/Zuma Press.

Mustaine's storied life and career have endured staggering highs and lows. Upon his firing from Metallica, he formed Megadeth and, starting with the 1985 debut *Killing Is My Business... and Business is Good!*, the band became a beloved metal institution. 1990's *Rust in Peace* was a creative landmark and 1992's *Countdown to Extinction*, its biggest-selling album, debuted at #2. To date it has sold more than two million copies.

Countless fans across the globe not only love Megadeth, but plenty of critics "get" the band, which has been nominated for 13 Grammy awards and won for Best Metal Performance for the title track from 2016's *Dystopia*.

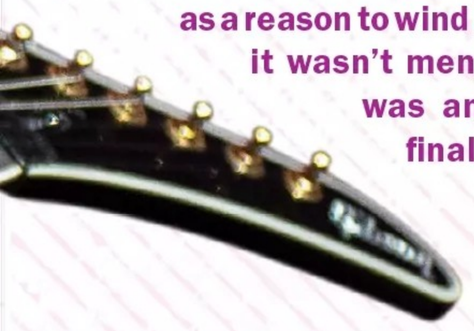
Through it all, Mustaine battled addiction, lineup changes, and health problems including throat cancer. Ultimately regaining his Christian faith, he is quite literally a survivor.

A Gibson endorser who played Custom Shop axes on the new album, he told *VG* about a variety of topics as he prepares to storm into the sunset on his own terms.

How does itw feel having *Megadeth* debut at #1 – your first in the United States?

It's very emotional. It's a joyful feeling after more than 40 years. I'm grateful for the hard work of the band and our record label and management and publicity team.

In a recent interview, you disclosed developing Dupuytren's contracture, which causes the fingers to curl toward the palm, as a reason to wind up the band's career. But it wasn't mentioned when *Megadeth* was announced as being the final album.



I had been alluding to that for a long time. I've been saying that my hands have been causing me problems and talking about the arthritis and the Saturday Night Palsy and nerve damage from my neck being fused together and so on. I didn't mention Dupuytren's by name because it was a lot of things and I didn't want to scare people. I wanted people to be excited for the record and the tour. And I think we're living in a society right now where people like to pile on people, not me so much.

We didn't have that conversation [about ending the band] until we were in the middle of the record. It had crossed my mind that I'm getting older and I had always said that when I get to the point where I can't play my absolute best, I don't want to play anymore because I want to go out on top. And I believe we made our best record right now, and I believe there's a lot of fans that are very happy. It's bittersweet for me, too, as well as a lot of fans. But yeah, it's good for me for a lot of reasons because once you make a record, the record's in the can and the proof of life or death with a band is any concerts that they do.

As long as we can do some concerts surrounding this new record for the next few years, I think that's going to be more than anybody could ask, and I'm happy to deliver. We've got a great tour coming up with Anthrax and Exodus in Canada, then we're going to South America and then touring with Iron Maiden, and it's just great.

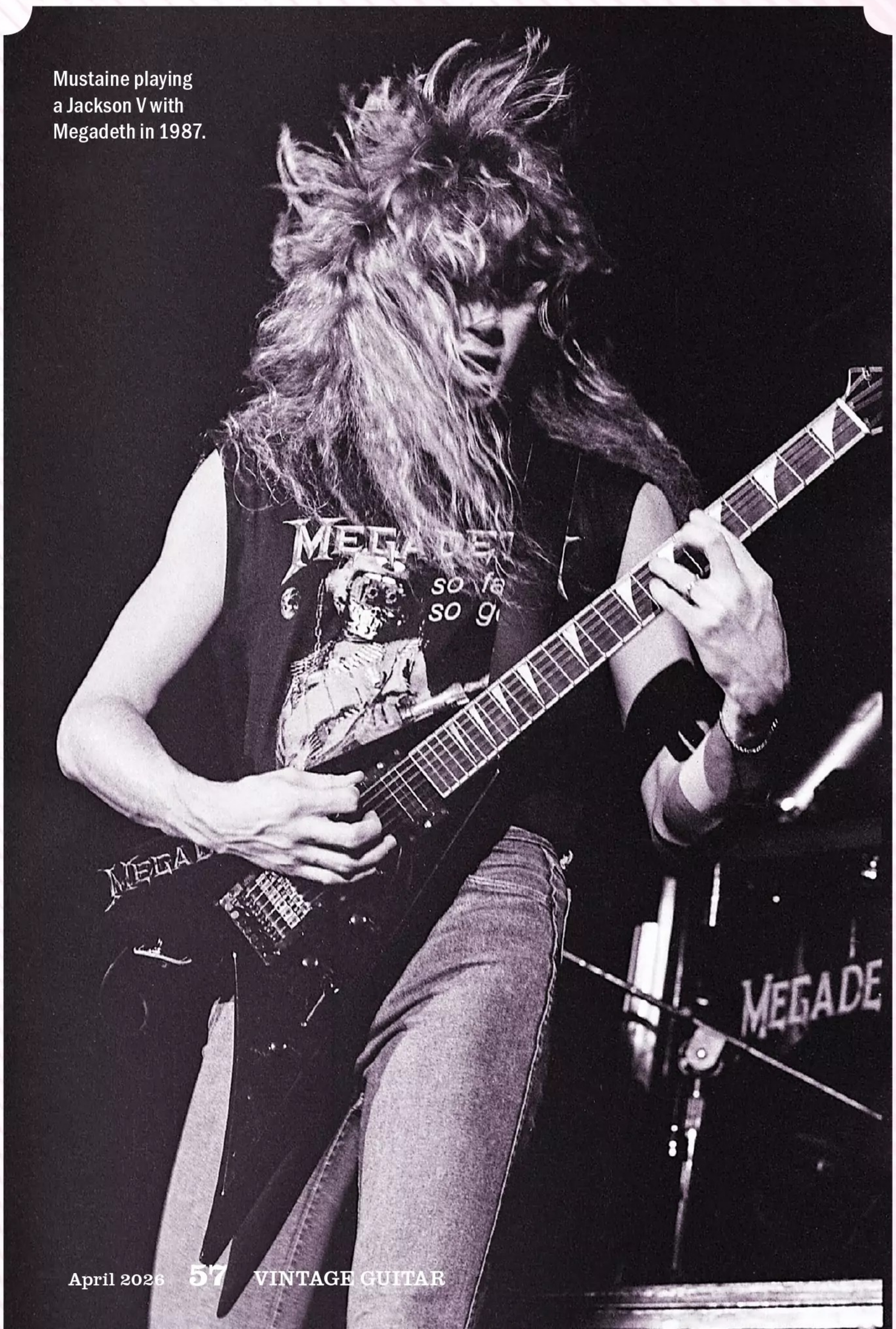
What was the mindset for the songs, knowing this was going to be the last album? For example, "Let There Be Shred" is like a statement of purpose. Throwing down a marker.

Well, I think you're right, throwing down a marker. I wanted to challenge myself as far as playing. I think that's why Teemu fits so well in the band, because he's just an incredibly great player and what he helped bring out in me, Dirk, and James. We all just started helping make one another better every day. The songs would get better.

Here's some insider information. Before we started working on this album, I had the guys listen to the entire Megadeth catalog – more than 200 songs. The new songs just had to be good.

"The Last Note" is about winding up your career. It must have been difficult, emotionally.

I found that the more honest I am in the song, the more difficult it is to be honest



Mustaine playing a Jackson V with Megadeth in 1987.

Dave Mustaine 1987: Christopher Helton/Zuma Press.

about what I want to say. Because, when you get naked like that and you're singing a part, that's really challenging. Or you're singing a part that lyrically what you're saying is challenging. That can really affect the outcome of an artist's performance. There are some words that, no matter how hard I try, I can't get 'em to work.

Did the rest of the band inspire and push you, like "Let's go all out and make this the best record we can"?

Yeah, it was like that. They were totally inspirational and made a huge difference in making the record for me. We would go home at night and have the songs we were working on in our head. A lot of the stuff, we would say, "All right, we need to let this percolate." And what I mean by percolating is we would go home with the song, listen to it in the car, and when we got where we were staying – the guys were in a bed and breakfast and I live [in Franklin] – we would listen to music once we got home. When I start making a record, I don't shut off until the record's done. I get up in the middle of the night, first thing in the morning, I'm listening to music and trying to write lyrics.

So, you're on 24/7?

Pretty much, yeah. I run out of gas every once in a while, but I've got a very supportive band and they encourage me to do my best.

How did you work out the lead and rhythm arrangements with Teemu, and was it different than how you worked with past guitarists in the band?

Teemu was more familiar with thrash, in general, and the band's catalog, and that made all the difference. There was no rhyme or reason on who played the solos. If the rhythm part is complicated, I'll take it.

There have been many band members over the years. Would you have preferred to have had one lineup for Megadeth's entire career?

I've certainly thought about that. I've also given a lot of consideration to what my favorite lineup is. And when Megadeth started, Teemu wouldn't have been alive! So, I've got to be realistic about that s**t.

At this point, are you more reflective on your inspirations – those who inspired you to pick up a guitar in the first place and really progress as a player.

Well, there's all kinds of different phases of how my playing improved. So, I would have to say Jimmy Page was one of my favorite guitar players, and so was Angus Young, and I loved Michael Schenker. That whole era had the most well-rounded offering for guitar styles that I could come up with. I think Jimmy's great for all of his guitar.

The guys in some of the Scandinavian bands like Mercyful Fate and some of the other European and U.K. bands like Accept, Motörhead, and Budgie were all very influential. Every once in a while, I'll mention a band that I like and people will lose their marbles because they'll go, "*That* band?" I do listen to all kinds of crazy stuff.

Mustaine in 2011 with a Dean Double Neck VMNT.

For this final tour, have you thought about the set list and possibly digging deep into the catalog for diehard fans?

Yeah, I was just actually speaking to Teemu this morning. I told him the record had gone #1 in Australia – our first #1 there – and several other countries had already gone #1, as well. While I had him on the phone, I said, "I wanted to ask you to brush up on 'My Last Words' because it's off of one of our older records (*Peace Sells… but Who's Buying?*) that's a little bit faster. It's a fun song to play, and we're just going to make sure that we are mixing up our set every night.

We do have our five standards – "Peace Sells," "Holy Wars… The Punishment Due," "Sweating Bullets," "Hangar 18," and "Symphony of Destruction."

So, not just an unusual set list, but mixing it up. Did the band members push you and say, "I like this one. Let's play it."?

Yes, they've done that a lot.

You've said you don't want to have any past members perform as guests on the tour. Is that a *firm* no?

Think about it. I know several of the past members have said some pretty horrible stuff about the band and about me. So why would I want to play with them?

You've got a second book set for publication. What are you going to talk about?

It's completely different – it is about my cancer journey. It talks about the day I was told by the dentist, "You've got to go see an oral surgeon." So, I go see this guy. He comes in, sees me, walks out. About 45 minutes later, I go, "Where's the doctor?" And they go, "He'll be right in. Sorry." So, he comes in, he goes, "Yeah, you've got the big C." And I thought, "What did you say?" I wandered out to my car and I was sitting there with tears coming down my face before I snapped out of it. I thought, "You're such a terrible doctor for your bedside manner."

I've had several people come up to me over the years since I went into remission, and they say really wonderful stuff like, "I had cancer too, and you gave me strength." What are we here for if not to help our fellow men?

That must be rewarding, too, as much or more so than being a musical inspiration.

There's all kinds of things that people say to me that would blow your mind. VG

Dave Mustaine 2011: Narcoticq/Wikimedia Commons.

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2026

MARCH

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 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

APRIL

The Indiana Guitar Show, April 11 - 12, at Hendricks County Fairgrounds, 1900 E. Main St., Danville, IN 46122. For more info contact: https://theindianaguitarshow.com/

Hub City Guitar Show, April 25, 11 am - 5 pm, at Live at Hub City Vinyl, 28 E Baltimore St., Hagerstown, MD 21740. For more info contact Kris Nigh knigh@sloanschoolofmusic.com - 240-217-4956

Central NY Guitar Show, Apr 26, From 10 am - 5 pm, at Phoenix Enterprise Fire Dept Hall, 457 Main St, Phoenix, NY 13135. For more info contact Perry 315-727-4979 elsinore99@hotmail.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, 11 am - 4 pm, 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 , 10 am - 3 pm, at Robarts 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@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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Duke Robillard

ORGANIC, AUTHENTIC

Duke Robillard, who co-founded Roomful of Blues before joining The Fabulous Thunderbirds and going solo, has long collaborated with jazz, blues, and swing luminaries. His most recent albums embraced classic blues and swing-era jazz that are free of the clinical approach that plagues some retro-oriented artists. *Blast Off!* reflects that same loose, organic authenticity, enhanced by singer/guitarist Chris Cote and first-rate horn men including Billy Novick.

Robillard sings only once, but acquits himself well on Louis Armstrong's venerable "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You." His guitar work, however, invigorates every track. On the Count Basie-inspired horn instrumental "The King," he adds a brief interlude a la Charlie Christian. The original "Feel My Cares" features snarling riffs that enhance Cote's vocal. He likewise slashes his way through a revival of the Rocking Brothers' obscure 1954 instrumental "Play Boy Hop."

Shifting to '60s mode, Robillard

Duke Robillard & His All-Star Band
Blast Off!

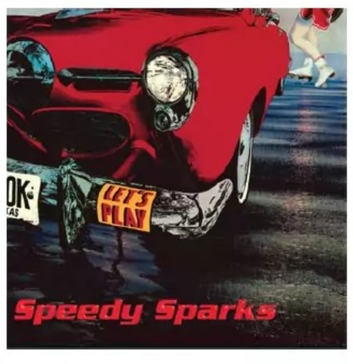
opts for economy on the instrumental title track. Steve Cropper-style rhythm guitar riffs enhance both Cote's vocal and guitar solo on Percy Sledge's 1966 "Warm and Tender Love," and he jumps headfirst into the '70s on the funk-driven "Galactic Grease." Artists who release steady streams of new material sometimes have difficulty maintaining quality, but that's never been an issue with Robillard. ***– Rich Kienzle***

Asleep At The Wheel
Live and Large, 1977

The torchbearers of Western swing have been active for 55 years, and frontman Ray Benson is still at the helm, with a more or less franchise band. Some very capable sidemen have come through the revolving door, but the 12-piece ensemble here (which Benson dubbed "The IRS Band") was easily the strongest, most versatile lineup, whose alumni later worked with Bob Dylan, Waylon Jennings, George Strait, Merle Haggard, and Paul McCartney.

The outfit included four fiddlers, two of whom doubled on sax, and four lead singers. With Chris O'Connell's strong rhythm guitar, Benson handles some lead, but pedal-steeler Lucky Oceans commands the most attention, as on the original "Miles and Miles of Texas." He and Benson trade nimble solos on accordionist Link Davis, Jr.'s Cajun feature, "Big Mamou." As the band steamrolls through swing, country, Louis Jordan jump, and more, special nods must go to saxophonist Pat "Taco" Ryan, piano master Floyd Domino, and O'Connell's vocal turn on "Song of the Wanderer (Where Shall I Go)."

Though the Wheel has released more than two dozen formidable studio albums, they were always best live. Dipping back nearly 50 years, this may be the best introduction for any folks still uninitiated to this American (and especially Texas) institution. ***– Dan Forte***



Speedy Sparks
OK, Let's Play

His first instrument was guitar, but it was when the late Speedy Sparks switched to bass in the '70s that he carved an indelible niche in Austin's roots-music scene. In a couple dozen bands, most famously the Texas Tornados, he exerted profound influence.

In 1994, he decided to cut a solo album (originally on cassette), even though he'd barely written any songs. What he came up with in a few weeks, however, holds its own a quarter-century later.

He reverted to guitar, playing rhythm behind John Reed's lead, then handed his '50s Precision Bass to Mike Vernon and added assiduous drummer Ernie Durawa. His old-school rock and roll melds '50s rockabilly and '60s garage – from kick-ass "It's Alright" to sensitive "Changes" – and Reed (a.k.a. Johnny X) lives up to Vernon's description in the liner notes: "...a lesson in West Texas double-picking and shimmering tone." With the melodicism he displays, it's no wonder Reed was the pick for Doug Sahm, Roky Erickson, Alvin Crow, and the Flatlanders.

Buddy Holly is a major influence, from originals "You're The One" and "These Days" to Holly's "Heartbeat," a bonus cut from a European tribute comp. ***– DF***

Duke Robillard: David Lee Black.

Hear all the artists in this issue on our FREE playlist on Spotify. Scan >>>

Jim Stringer

GUITAR'S RENAISSANCE MAN

By Dan Forte

I've always prided myself in having a backup guitarist in my band who was better than I. Never was that truer than with **Jim Stringer**. Any bandleader knows that de facto babysitter, cat-herder, and psychologist come with the job. In the two years Jim played with me in the '90s, besides next-level guitar playing, he contributed ideas, songs, and energy, but also was the most reliable, generous, problem-free member I ever had.

Though he had health issues in recent years, Stringer's December 15th death, at 77, came as a shock.

In 1997, Stringer produced and played on the country-jazz compilation *Travis County Pickin'*, featuring Dave Biller, Brian Hofeldt, Scott Walls, Lloyd Maines, and other Austin axemen. In Biller's words, "He championed lesser known players that he felt deserved recognition. He was a lot of things – great singer, producer, songwriter, bandleader – but above all he was a guitar player, and a special one at that. He had a very deep bag of influences across all genres, but the thing that always came to the surface was his love of the instrument."

Before he moved to Austin in '94, Jim had several careers. He scored 500 industrial films (including the kitschy *Shake Hands With Danger*), developed game-changing teleprompter software, backed jazz artists including Eddie Harris and Zoot Sims, and earned a spot in the Kansas Music Hall of Fame with Tide, one of his many bands there. Bassist and former wife Susan Hyde Holmes was in the eclectic Novellas and acoustic Stringers with Jim in Lawrence, Kansas. "He called me to sing on a film he was doing for John Deere tractors," she recounts. "All of the guitar boys took lessons from him and worshipped him. Tide was the hot band. They defied genre. Then he was playing country with Billy Spears, just great. He was one of the smartest, funniest, and above all kindest people."

I'm no fan of progressive rock, but Tide's sole album, *Almost Live*, might convert me. I've never heard a musician play so convincingly in multiple disparate genres – from intricate jazz-fusion to rockabilly, hardcore country, surf, blues, funk. Jim's wife of 25 years, Dana Stringer, explains, "The teleprompter business was how he supported himself so he could play whatever music he wanted."

On social media, drummer Lisa Pankratz posted, "Smart, fun, deep thinker, wealth of knowledge, multi-talented. In Roger Wallace's band, we played anything we thought was fun – R&B, blues, rockabilly, 'funky-tonk,' garage, swing. You pretty much were not going to stump Jim on a style."

"He was an exquisite jazz guitarist," Rosie Flores adds. "I was fortunate to have so many amazing hours with him in our Blue Moon Jazz Quartet with [pianist] T Jarrod Bonta. All of the musicians we worked with know how special it was to have had him as a dear friend, bandleader, and arranger."

Bonta met Jim in 1998, when he was 18. "There is no doubt in my mind we've played thousands of gigs together, in all kinds of incarnations," he says. "One of my favorite memories was when we were touring through St. Louis, and after the gig he and I grabbed guitars and played music in the parking lot. His love of music and his generosity had no limits. Jim was a mentor, teacher, producer, bandmate, one of my closest friends, and someone I could count on no matter what. I'm so grateful I had the honor to know him."

Beyond producing and playing on T Jarrod Quartet's *Jazz Offerings to the Schnauzer King*, the albums Stringer and his AM (Austin Music) Band released on his Music Room label include *Triskaidekaphilia*, *In My Hand*, *Pick It Up*, *Swang*, *(Play Other People's) Gold Records*, and *On The Radio*. He also produced albums by Ted Roddy, Karen Poston, Susanna Van Tassel, and others, and hosted Jim's Country Jam for nearly 30 years.

Jim Hilmar penned *Travis County*'s liner notes. "About nine months later, I received a package in the mail," he recalls. "I was stunned to find a bunch of Speedy West & Jimmy Bryant 78s and Jim's note, reading, 'I thought you'd like these.' Whether he was backing a country singer or playing a jazz-inspired solo in one of his own songs, Jim's playing always grabbed my attention and made me want to pick up my guitar and play."

In 2017, Stringer was diagnosed with kidney cancer, and friends credit Dana's tireless research into clinical trials with buying him many more years. After Jim died of a heart attack, Flores wrote, "Just last Tuesday he was looking and sounding better than ever, and, boy, it was a joy to see him smiling at the end of every tune."

There will be a memorial for Jim at Sagebrush in Austin on April 4. A memorial will take place in Lawrence at a later date

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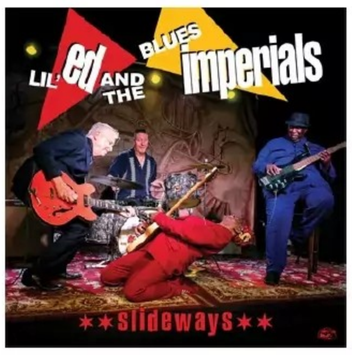
Jim Stringer photo courtesy of Dana Lynne Stringer.

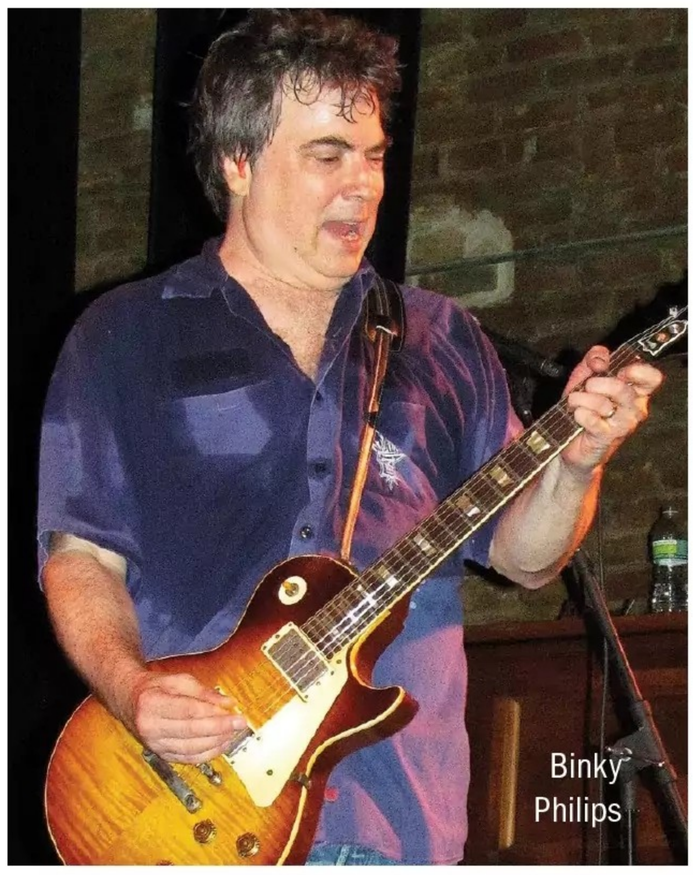


Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials
Slideways

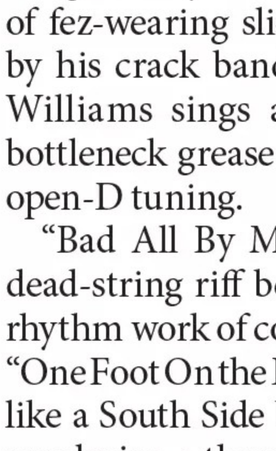
If you want to know the difference between blues and blues-rock, look no further. This Alligator platter is pure Chicago boogie led by slide bruiser Lil' Ed, the nephew of fez-wearing slide icon J.B. Hutto. Backed by his crack band, The Blues Imperials, Ed Williams sings and delivers spoonfuls of bottleneck grease on *Slideways*, most of it in open-D tuning.

"Bad All By Myself" starts with a fuzzy, dead-string riff before Ed lays licks over the rhythm work of co-guitarist Michael Garrett. "One Foot On the Brake, One On the Gas" feels like a South Side blues club in 1963, offering wry lyrics, a thumpin' beat, and nasty guitar all over town. "The Flirt in the Car Wash Skirt" is genuine house-rockin' music, with the frontman effortlessly intermingling slide and single-note licks. Garrett steps out with jump-blues breaks on "Homeless Blues," "More Time," and "Crazy Love Affair."

For sheer tone, cue up "Wayward Women" to hear Ed's guitar bends and slides bathed in gloriously heavy reverb. Again, if you're not sure about the difference between blues and blues-rock, this track is a textbook example. The minor-key ballad wails, sighs, and cries with no unnecessary rock polish – it's guaranteed real-deal blues. **– *Pete Prown***


Binky Philips

gofer at another store, which is how he ended up buying Rick Derringer's '59 Les Paul Standard for $600 (*VG* "Classics," August '25). Derringer kept upping futile offers to buy it back. At a photo shoot with Jeff Beck, the surly genius said the guitar looked like one that had been stolen from him and offered to buy it. No dice, but Binky had him sign it. That Les Paul and a '57 Strat that Philips bought for $50 together are now conservatively worth more than half a mil. **– *Bret Adams***

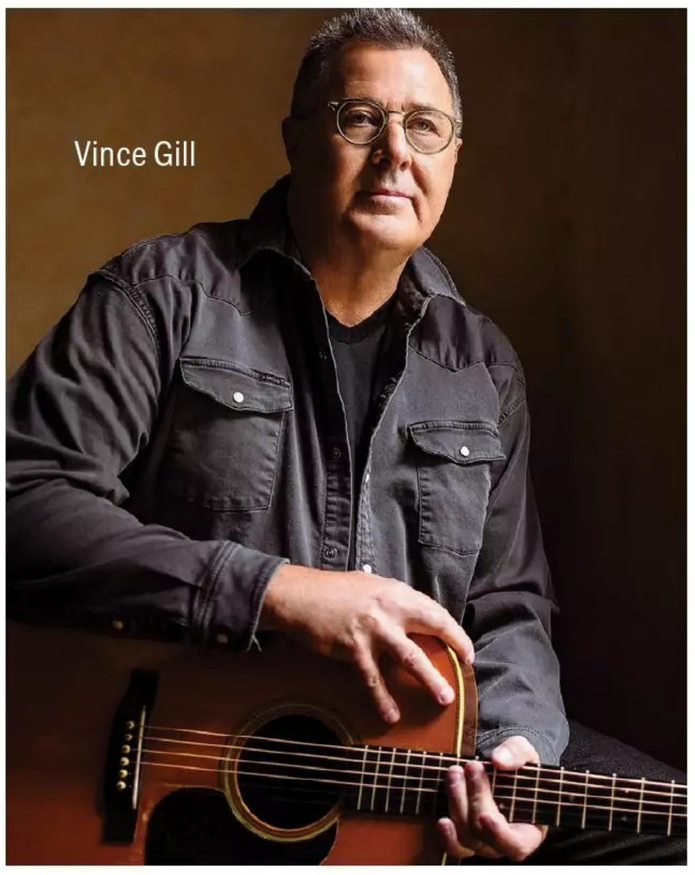


Binky Philips
You're a Liar, Binky Philips!

For a guy who never made it as a famous musician himself, Philips has wildly entertaining music-biz tales, including a *ton* centered on guitars. This book includes most of the Brooklyn native's updated and edited *Huffington Post* essays about his (mis)adventures; guitarist/songwriter for The Planets in the early-punk/CBGB scene, he eventually ran a record store, became a successful indie-record promoter, and more.

Philips is a Who fanatic and recounts stories of attending their early NYC performances, which led to becoming casual friends with the band and started a longtime correspondence with Pete Townshend.

He saw Townshend, John Entwistle, and countless others while hanging out at the legendary Manny's Music and working as a

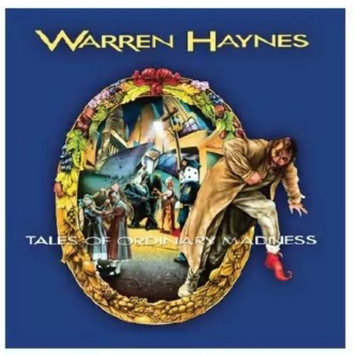

Vince Gill

Vince Gill
I Gave You Everything I Had
Secondhand Smoke

After decades of enduring hit singles and albums, in 2025, Vince Gill signed a rare lifetime contract with his longtime label, MCA Records. *50 Years from Home*, a set of seven-track EPs being released monthly throughout the year, commemorates that milestone. Each includes six newly recorded songs and a well-known Gill favorite; instruments from his vast collection make up the cover art.

Guitar-wise, Gill associates Jedd Hughes and Tom Bukovac, bassist Jimmie Lee Sloas, and longtime pedal-steel collaborator Paul Franklin are present. Both sets emphasize philosophical and occasionally elegiac themes graced by cohesive, always-complementary backing. On the first EP, *I Gave You Everything I Had*, graceful amplified solos appear in "Her Heart" with Franklin adding sympathetic chord work. Gentle acoustic guitars and banjo frame "I Hope Everyone Lives to Be a Hundred."

Secondhand Smoke begins with the powerful, gospel-flavored Civil Rights anthem "March On, March On" with a screaming electric break from Vince in the middle. The autobiographical title song about his guitar-playing dad features flowing acoustic and banjo, while his passionate vocal on the ballad "The Whole World" floats above spare, shimmering acoustic work and Franklin's steel. Growling amplified backing emerges on "Hill People," Gill's take on the timeless country murder ballads of the past. **– *RK***



Warren Haynes
Tales of Ordinary Madness

Released at the height of '90s grunge, Warren Haynes' debut was a rallying call, reminding fans that fierce blues-rock wasn't dead. The LP has now been remixed and slightly expanded. Opening track "Fire in the Kitchen" remains a bare-knuckle punch to the jaw, laden with fat, funky grooves, thick overdrive, and Haynes' deadly bottleneck. "Kiss Me Goodbye" showcases Haynes' powerhouse voice and reveals his importance to the revitalized Allman Brothers Band – he could slide like Duane and sing like Gregg. The man was fast becoming the ABB's not-so-secret weapon.

For unreleased material, check out "Tear Me Down," which brings sax and organ to the equation, a perfect setting for the guitar man to get down and burn. His blistering solo leads into a straight-up funk groove, setting the proverbial house on fire. Conversely, "I'll

Binky Philips: Gary Soffer. Vince Gill: David McClister.

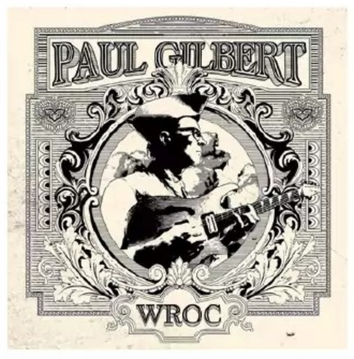
Paul Gilbert

Be the One" is a sweet R&B ballad led by Warren's soul-soaked vocals and building to a face-melting Stratocaster solo. "Blue Radio" contrasts reggae with a ripping Les Paul break.

While this remixed/remastered set isn't quite essential, it's hard not to be thrilled by the house-on-fire material. In 1993, Haynes was a musical hand grenade and, with *Tales of Ordinary Madness*, he pulled the pin. **– *PP***

The Fell
Killswitch

Paul Gilbert
WROC



New music from two founders of Mr. Big: The Fell unleashes a hot cup of caffeinated modern rock with guitarist Mike Krompass and bass icon Billy Sheehan demonstrating killer riffs, licks, and edge-of-your-seat beats per minute. Epic vocals and manicured sound design yield a modern flair that remains grounded in traditional heavy rock songwriting. Sonic designer Krompass delivers fresh fretboard antics and ultra-salty licks, cramming a patchwork of hyperkinetic guitar lines on "Trippin" and the title track. Tricky licks and catchy hooks abound; other highlights include "Footprints," "Dancing on a Glass Floor," and "Face Out."

On *WROC*, Paul Gilbert uses etiquette from the 1500s as inspiration for a concept packed with power-pop, hard rock, psychedelia, and Texas boogie. Recorded live in Portland, Gilbert is joined by guitarist Doug Rappoport to explore three-cornered hats, old-world philosophy, and bodacious guitar harmonies. Incorporating 400-year-old texts, Univibe, slide, and shred, Gilbert plays with fire and zeal. Ditties like "Keep Your Feet Firm and Even," "Show Not Yourself Glad (At the Misfortune of Another)," and "Maintain a Sweet and Cheerful Countenance" set the tone for driving rhythms, idiosyncratic breakdowns, and inspiring single-note lines. **– *Oscar Jordan* VG**

Paul Gilbert: Sam Gehrke.

extra EXTRA

MEGADETH
Megadeth

Their swan song reveals founder/vocalist/co-lead guitarist Dave Mustaine full of fire, albeit with some fatigue. He and Teemu Mäntysaari play in a lightning-fast frenzy, but some songs have slower, precise passages. "Tipping Point" rips while locking into a groove. "Made to Kill" and "Obey the Call" churn with thrash ferocity; the dramatic "The Last Note" is Mustaine's career farewell. A solid goodbye. **– *BA***

IAN ROSS COHEN
Instrumentals 3

Cohen earns brownie points simply by playing bottleneck on a Weissenborn – there aren't many hollowneckers around in 2026. Not every composition is of equal strength, but he delivers sweet fingerpicking on "A Straight Line," "Ne'er Do Well," and "The Dead Show." Despite the edgy title, "What The F*** Am I Doing Here?" is full of charm and musical wit. **– *PP***

THE DAMNED
Not Like Everybody Else

Fifty years since their first single, the Damned remain fun and ferocious. Here, the Gothic punks deliver covers like "Summer in the City" and "See Emily Play." A high point is The Creation's 1967 "Making Time," featuring Captain Sensible's whip-smart chords and Entwistle-style bass from Paul Gray. "Heart Full of Soul" gets the garage-band treatment, with Dave Vanian aping Keith Relf's vocals to perfection. **– *PP***

KILLERSTAR
The Afterglow

Led by vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Rob Fleming and drummer James Sedge, KillerStar deploys members of David Bowie's past bands including lead guitarist Earl Slick, pianist Mike Garson, and bassist Mark Plati. "Proud" flies high on an instantly appealing melody and superb rhythm and lead guitar parts; the ethereal "Rubicon" is like art-rock Fleetwood Mac. A strong sophomore album. **– *BA***

TAILGUNNER
Midnight Blitz

Mining influences from the New Wave of British Heavy Metal, Tailgunner serves up an exciting buffet of tightly executed, fist-pounding thud. Produced by K.K. Downing of Judas Priest, guitarists Rhea Thompson and Zach Salvini offer daredevil arrangements and blistering solos. Dial in soaring vocals, bass, and jackhammer drumming, and fans of '80s metal will invariably bang their heads. **– *OJ***

MOUNTAIN
Don't Look Around: The Recordings 1969-1974

Across seven CDs, this box contains the entirety of Mountain's output, from Leslie West's 1969 solo album and the band's fiery Woodstock set through '74's Avalanche, plus bonus tracks. You can dig multiple versions of "Mississippi Queen," "Theme For an Imaginary Western," "Blood of the Sun," with Leslie's ever-soulful guitar and Felix Pappalardi's monster bass. Mountain fans, don't miss this sleigh ride. **– *PP***

GARAGE SPECIAL

The Danelectro Pro

Once upon a time hailing from Nepture, New Jersey, Danelectro was the definitive "student" instrument – an American electric guitar of the 1950s and '60s that launched many a garage band. They were cheap, fun, and funky back in the day. Today, the brand delivers the same lo-fi vibe as the originals – albeit with better tuning!

Vintage Danelectro guitars are, shall we say, humble axes, built with Masonite tops and back, a lightweight poplar frame, and vinyl tape for sides.

Price: $529
www.danelectro.com

Today's Danelectro Pro, built in Korea, has a semi-hollow design using a spruce frame with hardboard back and top and two poly finish choices – Black Red or Maroon Silver Glitter. Other details include a bolt-on maple neck, rosewood fretboard, mid-century-modern pickguard shape, and metal bridge with rosewood saddle. Using the old Dano "bowtie" Pro shape from circa 1959, the new plank sports a 21" scale with 19 frets clear of the body, 14" radius, 1.65" aluminum nut, and dot inlays.

For electronics, simplicity rules the day. The sole Danelectro '50s single-coil pickup uses Alnico IV magnets wrapped in copper and tape, with one Volume and one Tone knob. The lipstick cover is made from an 80/20 brass zinc, like those Danelectro purchased from a cosmetics factory 65 years ago. In terms of functionality, the improved tuners and dual-action truss rod will help you stay in tune. The company calls this neck a C shape, but it's also something of a large D – a big, wide neck that resembles some Gibson SGs.

Plugged into a recording interface, the Pro was just as funky as hoped. With the pickup located toward the neck, the Pro's tone isn't overly trebly, but instead right in the garage-band zone, perfect for "Walk Don't Run" or "Pipeline." The fretboard setup is also old-school, more like a '60s import than a modern shredder, but that's what you expect from a classic Dano. In all, the Pro is a lively, budget semi-hollow loaded with vibe and 'tude. ***– Pete Prown***

Price: $220
www.hardenengineering.com

WAVE RIDER

The Harden Seahorse

Harden Engineering is a small shop in Illinois that makes all kinds of cool guitars and pedals, some of which have been reviewed in these pages. Their latest is the Seahorse, an all-analog vibrato/echo that seeks to evoke a vintage vibe. Let's ride the waves.

The Seahorse is a straightforward, old-school design. For those who appreciate electrical artistry, the circuitry here is discrete, all-transistor, and wired point-to-point like it was crafted 50-plus years ago. The concept is a funky '60s-style vibrato not based on the archetypal Fender design, but still conjuring all sorts of warbling goodness. The nuance is that beyond vibrato, the Seahorse has a booster circuit – a welcome surprise. Other amenities include true-bypass, 9-volt power, Switchcraft jacks, Alpha pots, and a lifetime warranty.

To get going, there are just three knobs – Depth, Speed, and Volume. Once you pick a speed, use the Depth to define the flavor you're going for, from surfy shimmer to psychedelic space jam; the echo dimension is a subtle part of the vibrato character, not a stand-alone circuit. It's wicked vibrato with nearly zero effort.

The surprise kicks in when the Depth knob hits 4 o'clock, where vibrato is disabled and suddenly you have a boost that interfaces with the Volume knob. In a pinch, having a booster circuit cleverly tucked into the Seahorse might just save your next gig. ***– Pete Prown***

LOW TWELVE

Taylor's 260ce-K DLX Doce Doble

Taylor has introduced a series of acoustics based on folk instruments from Mexico and the Americas. The 260ce-K DLX Doce Doble may look like a regular acoustic, but its distinction is doubled strings that are not the octave pairs of a conventional 12.

The concept is a deeper, more rustic tone compared to the shimmer of octave strings. To accommodate the heavier strings, the 260ce's neck is reinforced and its top has Taylor's C Class bracing to handle the tension.

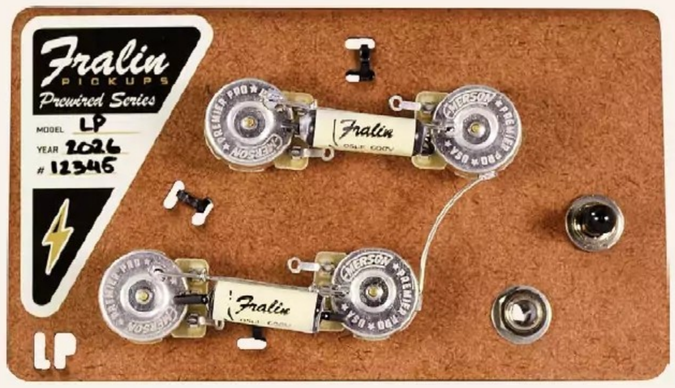
Price: $2,099
www.taylorguitars.com

The Doce Doble's solid top and laminated back and sides are made from Hawaiian koa, which makes sense, as it's a treble-focused hardwood that can counter the lower sonic range of this string setup. The neck is mahogany with an ebony fretboard, 20 frets, and faux-pearl Sentinel inlays. Its carve is Taylor's Standard shape, which is wide, shallow, and quick for a 12. Other perks include an Expression System 2 pickup with controls for Volume, Treble, and Bass, Venetian cutaway, and ebony bridge.

Acoustically, the 260ce-K DLX is certainly a warmer 12, but also adds a deeper dimension – neither too bassy nor too trebly, overall tone is balanced and natural with moderate projection. If you need a lot of unamplified volume, there are other Taylors for the job (like the new Legacy 855e jumbo). Plugged into the acoustic channel of a Boss Katana, however, the 260ce-K DLX soared at every volume level and handled EQ tweaks with aplomb. The ES 2 preamp is easy to use and delivers sweet fidelity for gigging or jamming.

Aside from traditionalist purveyors of Mexican folk music, the 260ce-K DLX would be ripe for Tex-Mex, roots explorers, folk-rockers, and anyone who wants to hear a little more earthiness from their 12-string. The Doce Doble qualifies as a specialty acoustic, but that might be exactly what your music needs. ***– Pete Prown***

GEARIN' UP



FRALIN LES PAUL HARNESS

Fralin Pickups' Les Paul Wiring Harness is a pre-wired drop-in that uses Emerson Premier Pro Pots, a Switchcraft output jack, and Fralin's proprietary tone caps. Each is made for a specific type of guitar, the player's choice of wiring including push/pull options, control configurations, and other variables.

LEVY'S REBEL AMPED ACOUSTIC STRAPS

Levy's Amped Leather Series includes two acoustic-format versions in black and dark brown. They have a narrow, elongated end designed to fit smaller strap buttons.

SEYMOUR DUNCAN 50TH ANN JB/JAZZ HUMBUCKERS

Seymour Duncan's 50th Anniversary JB/Jazz Humbucker Set is a faithful re-ecreation with butyrate bobbins, rough-cast Alnico V magnet, long-leg bottom plate, and braided cable. They measure 7.5k (Jazz) and 16.6k (JB) and are offered in Black and Zebra.

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

VG APPROVED GEAR

GREEN MONSTER

TWA's Source Code SC-01

The name Susumu Tamura might not ring a bell, but nearly 50 years ago he designed the venerable Maxon TS808 overdrive pedal, which begat the Ibanez TS9 TubeScreamer and later generations of green monsters. TWA has been working with Mr. Tamura for a while now and their latest is the Source Code, which they bill as the "next gen soft-clip overdrive." In short, the Source Code contains your favorite 808 tones, but also new features aplenty.

The Source Code is bedecked in snazzy Christmas-green sparkle, built in the U.S., and has real aluminum knobs. Its jacks are top-mounted and an old-fashioned footswitch completes the deal. Inside, TWA has given the Source Code several tweaks. The 9-volt jack feeds into an 18-volt boost circuit for extra headroom (i.e., more audio clarity), 6dB of boost, and an input buffer to preserve your guitar's natural tone.

Price: $299
www.godlyke.com

Like the TS808/TS9, this box has the ubiquitous Level, Drive, and Tone knobs, but also a fourth control, labeled Bite. Use them to find your sweet-spot overdrive tone, but then dial in Bite to add what TWA calls "even-order harmonics and amp-style saturation." That translates to a bit more top-end shimmer, but also beefier mids, again, conjuring more tube-like sounds – even from the modeling amp we tested with it. Like everything else on the Source Code SC-01, it sounds fierce and works extremely well, much like everything else in Mr. Tamura's little green monster. **– *Pete Prown* VG**

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HOSTED BY JAMES PATRICK REGAN

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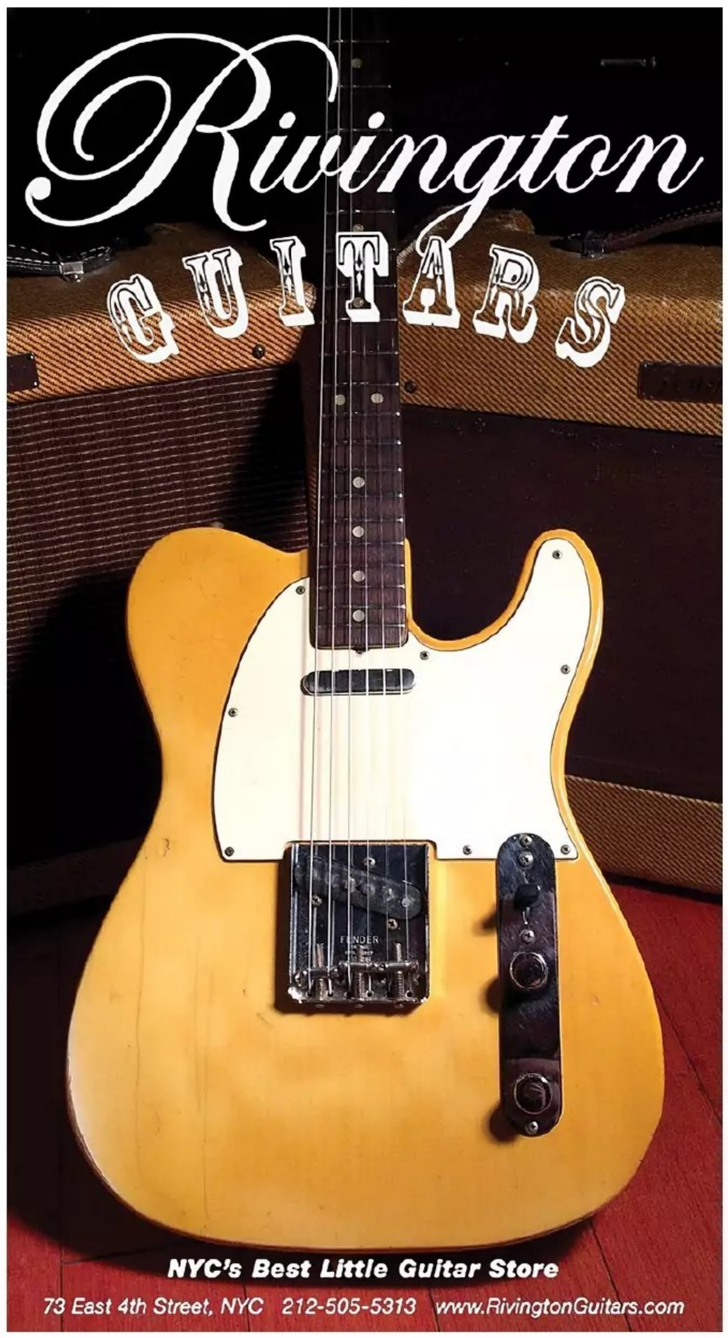

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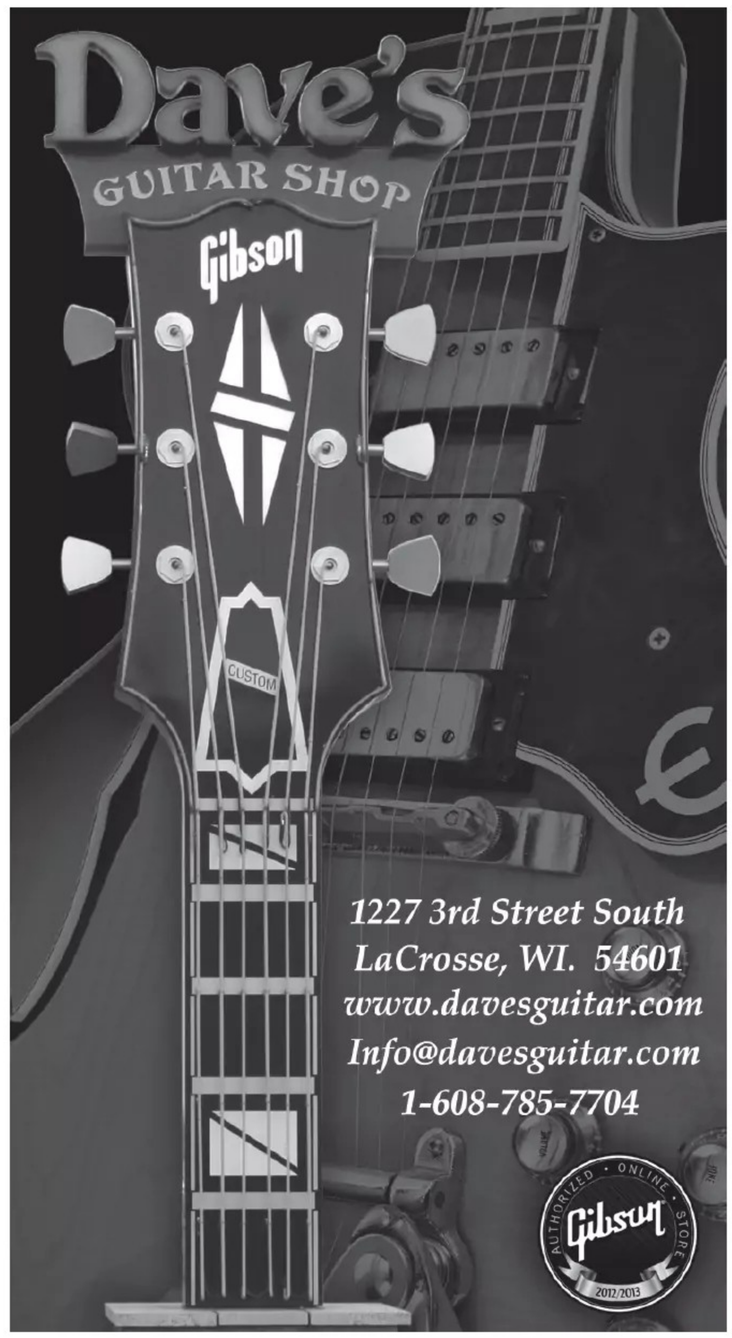

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READERS Gallery

Send your photos to:
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01 Jim Meyer is a longtime subscriber who spends time bonding with his ’91 Washburn 12-string, modern Gibson J-45, ’52 L-48, Taylor 324 CE V Class GA, modern National Reso-Rocket, ’81 Ovation Custom Balladeer, ’45 L-50, Clapton Signature 000-28, and a modern Tele Thinline.

02 The pinnacle of Paul Johnson’s collection is these three black beauties – a ’57-reissue Les Paul Custom from ’94, an ES Les Paul Memphis, and a ’65/’66 Vox Berkeley.

03 Paul Thomason’s Danelectros include a ’59DC, Hodad, DC-12, Doubleneck, Convertible, and a DC-3.

04 Gordon Dorish has a nice selection in his music room, including an Ibanez SR300, ’79 Larrivee L11, Taylor Grande Orchestra 618e, ’75 Mann acoustic, Les Paul Classic, Squire Deluxe Jazzmaster, Classic ’50s Tele, ’11 Strat, ’64-reissue Vibroverb, Deluxe Reverb, Bassman 150, and a Roland Jazz Chorus 22.

05 Anton Brink’s bass collection includes this ’73 Rick 4001 in Fireglo and an ’81 4001 in Burgundyglo.

SEE MORE PHOTOS ON WWW.VINTAGEGUITAR.COM

1

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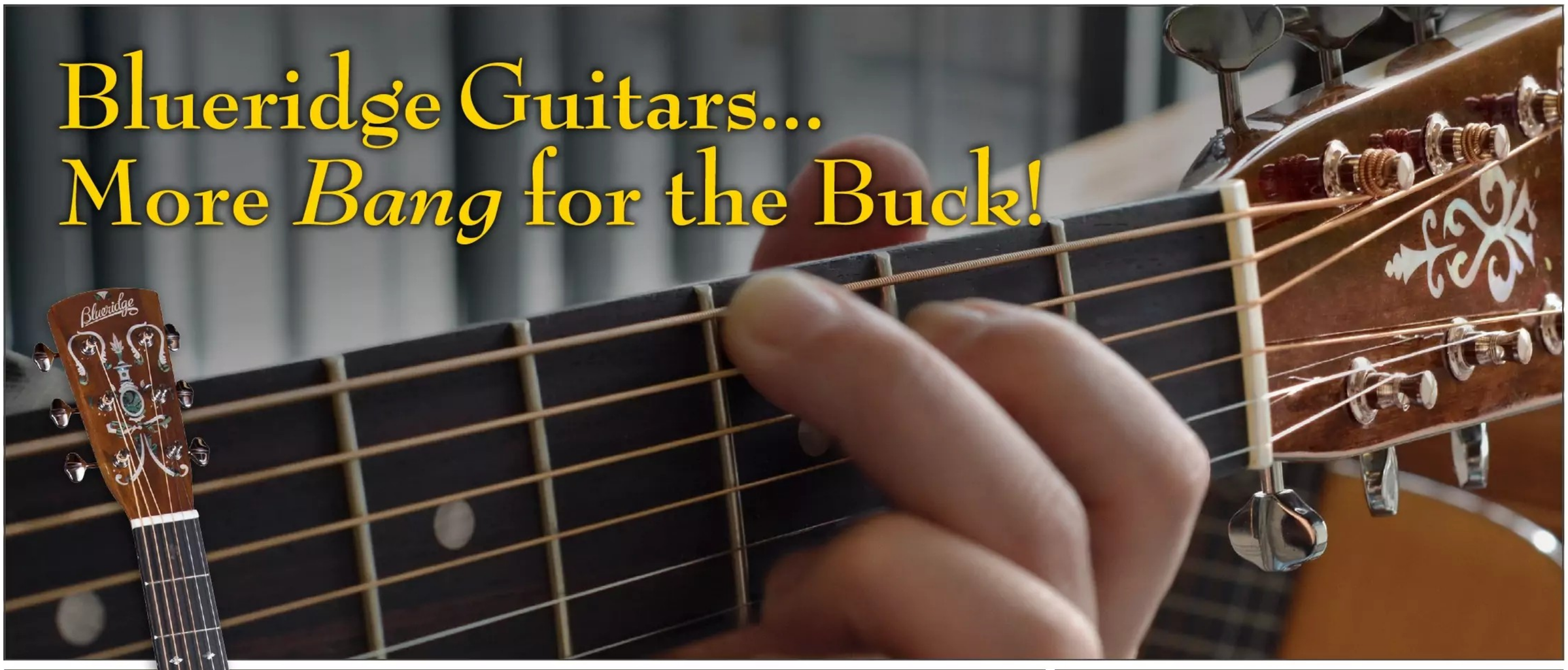

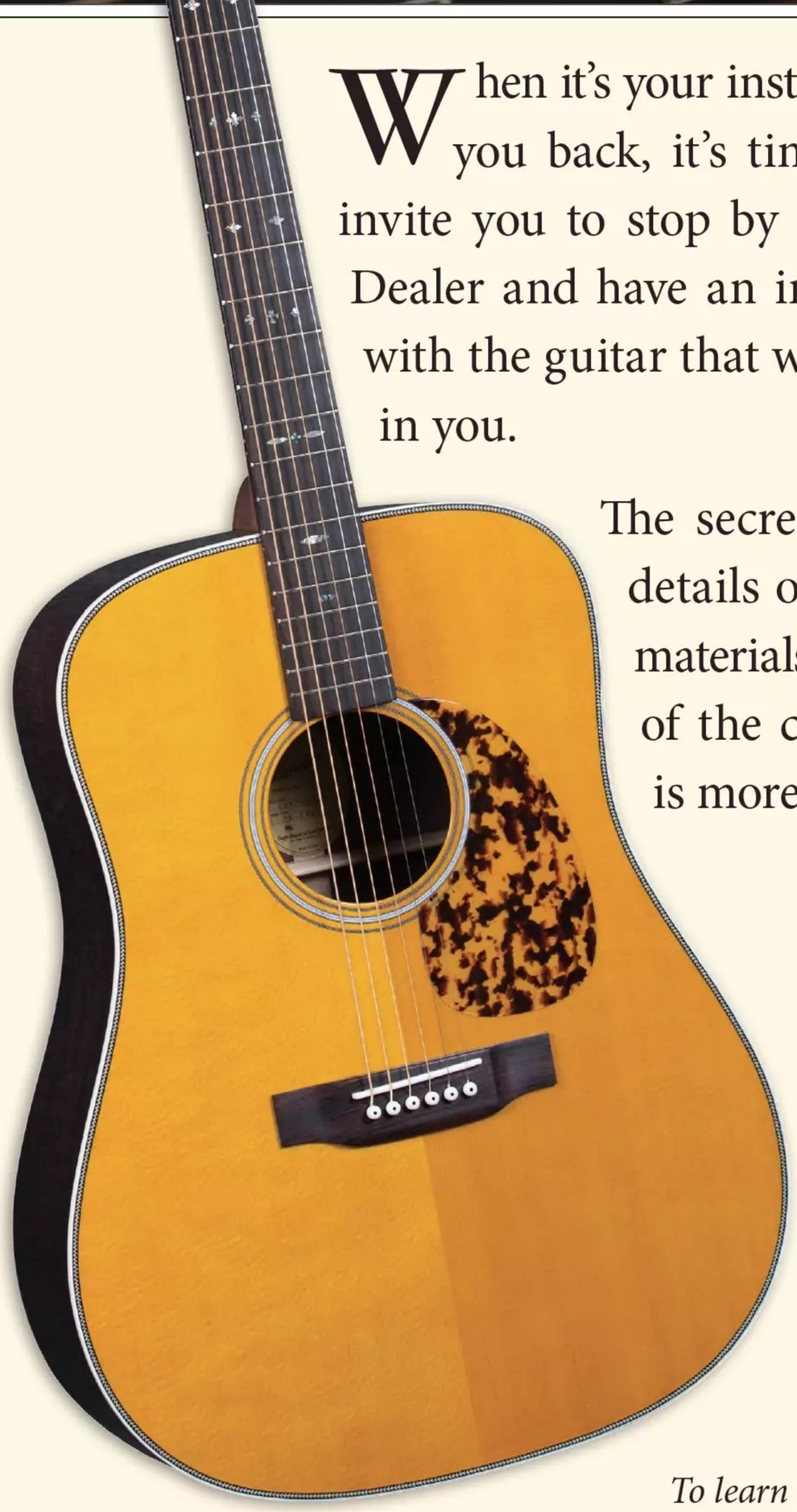

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