



**DOYLE BRAMHALL II**

Clapton's sideman on tone, gear, SRV & his new album



**PRS S2 STUDIO**

A seriously impressive American PRS, for less



**DUANE EDDY**

On new Gretsch & legendary sessions

# Guitarist

Issue 439

NOVEMBER 2018

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FUTURE







## All The World's A Stage



This month, the *Guitarist* team packed its bags and headed down to the all-new UK Guitar Show, along with our pals from *Guitar Techniques* and *Total Guitar*. We had a brilliant weekend – big thanks to all the readers who came up to say hello while we were on the show floor. It was a pleasure to meet you all and I hope you had a great time. My personal highlight of the show was seeing so many of the guitars that Rory Gallagher made his spellbinding music with, from that oh-so-weathered '61 Strat to his 1932

National Triolian resonator. Having listened with renewed admiration to *Deuce* in the car on the way up, seeing his guitars – each bearing numerous scars of a long and illustrious life on the road – was a poignant reminder of the man's huge talent.

Thanks also to everyone who came to see me, Nev Marten and Mick Taylor have a bash at some classic Hendrix and Cream tracks in the evening in the guise of the Cream Experience (see what we did there?). We've performed the set, in various forms, at a few festival gigs over the past year or so, and we love playing such stellar material to an audience of guitar fans. Of course, quality gear helps when it comes to showtime, so we hope you enjoy our review of the stage-ready Custom Shop Fenders that grace this month's cover and which spring from the inventive minds of the Master Builders. To read the review and hear their insights on what makes the ideal six-stringed companion for gigs small and large, turn to p84.

Elsewhere in this month's packed issue, we're lucky enough to have Kirk Fletcher, a great player and a real gent, pass on some of his best blues licks in a six-page tutorial (see p66) that'll help make your own playing more expressive and musical next time you step up to the mic. If that whets your appetite for learning, check out Richard Barrett's tribute to the playing style of Robin Trower on p146's Blues Headlines tuition column. In the meantime, gig done, I'm going back to the woodshed to see if I can't get a few Rory tunes learnt, too. Who knows, maybe we'll perform some at next year's show? Enjoy the issue.

Jamie Dickson **Editor**

## Editor's Highlights



### Duane Eddy

Not only is he the king of twang guitar but he's played with everyone from Chet Atkins to Howards Roberts. Join Duane Eddy to hear all about it on **p78**



### Manson Guitars

We journey way out west to visit the workshop of one of Britain's most respected guitar makers, Manson, and learn more about its unique instruments **p124**



### Doyle Bramhall II

He's one of the coolest men in guitar and a very soulful player as his new album proves – plus he's Clappo's long-serving sideman. Meet him on **p52**

# Guitarist

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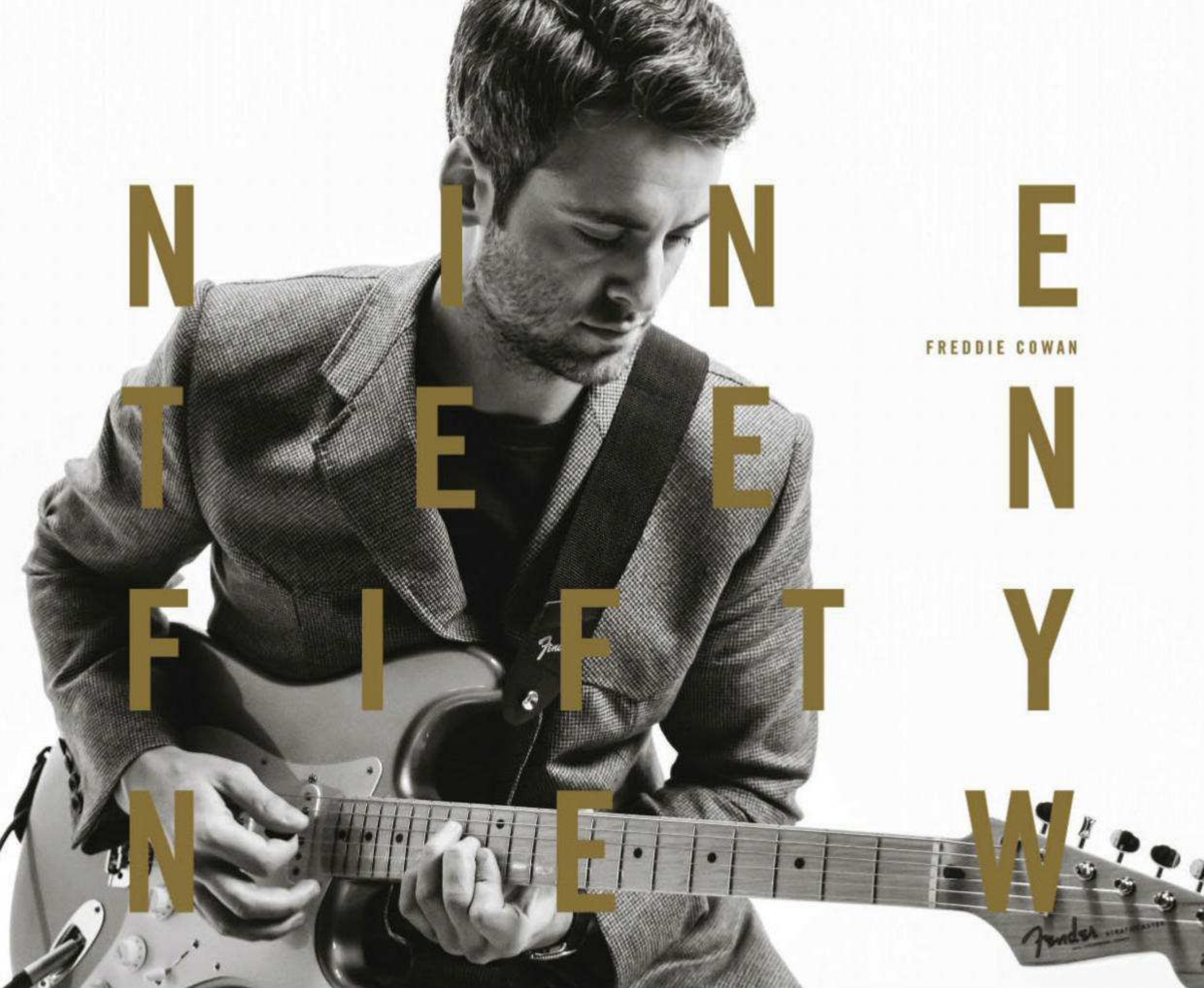
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FREDDIE COWAN



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*Neil Godwin*

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**<http://bit.ly/guitaristextra>**



# MUSIC TRUMP(ET)'S WAR

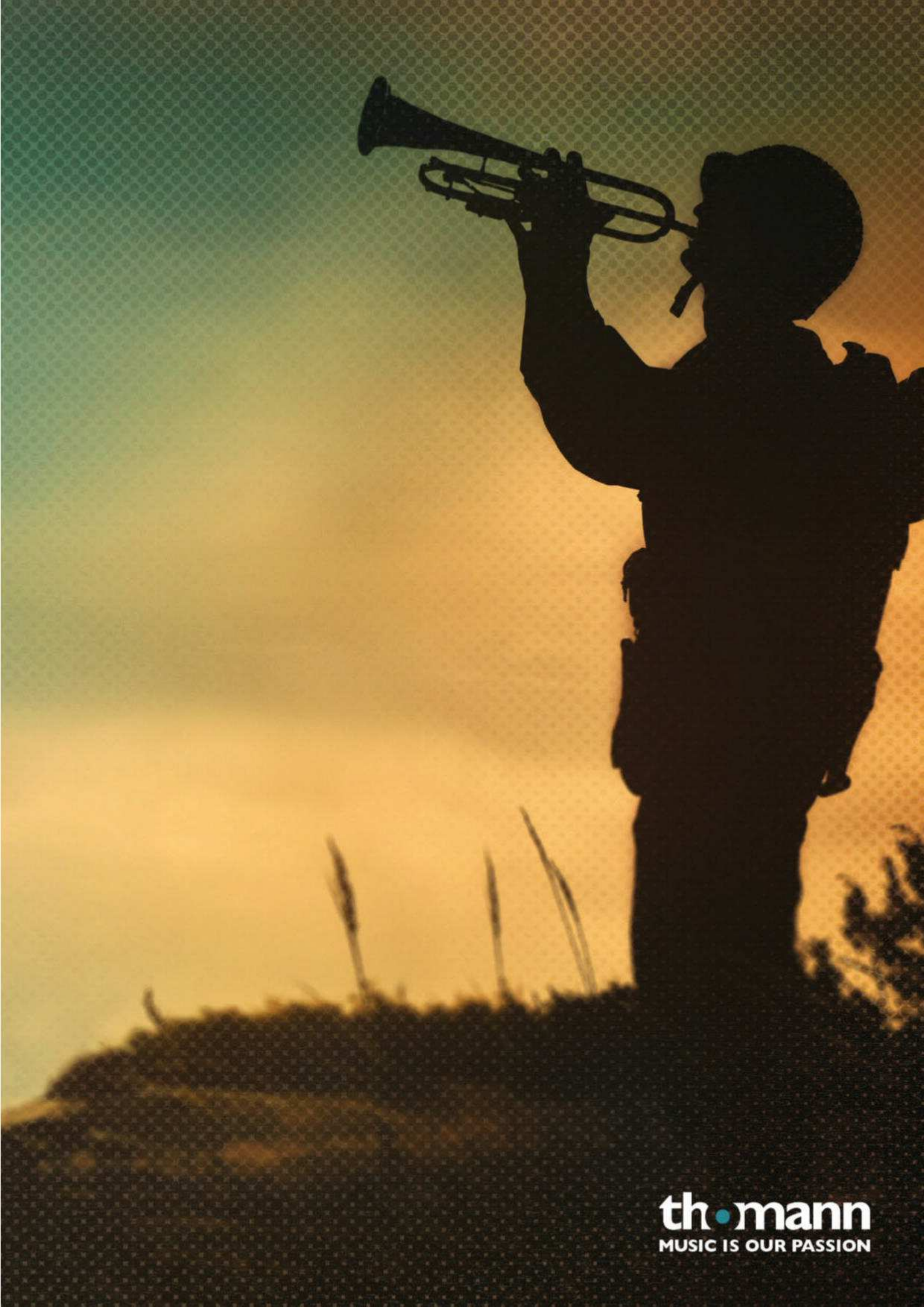
Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our

man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just

couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.







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## FIRST PLAY



**GRETSCH LIMITED EDITION  
STREAMLINER G2420T-P90  
HOLLOW BODY**  
£470

**WHAT IS IT?** Limited-edition full-size hollowbody with P-90 single coil at the neck and a satin finish



**GRETSCH LIMITED EDITION  
STREAMLINER G2655TG-P90  
CENTER BLOCK JR**  
£519

**WHAT IS IT?** Limited-edition down-sized double-cut centre-blocked semi with P-90 single coil at bridge, one-off satin finish and glitzy gold hardware

# Twang Tough

Gretsch's entry-level Streamliners provide plenty of 'Gretsch-ness' at an affordable price. Here are two new limited 'modded' models to tempt us

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

**I**t's not always easy to drag a heritage brand into the modern age, but Gretsch – certainly in recent years – has been doing it rather well. Its Players Edition adds numerous player-centric tweaks and the range is a good foil to the 'don't-touch-me-I'm-vintage' Vintage Select models. The Electromatics have recently been upgraded and, until the launch of the Streamliners back in 2016, were the entry-point to those wanting that look without those prices.

A couple of years on and the Streamliners are not quite as affordable as they were, but even at their quoted RRP (and no









1. This 'dog ear' P-90 single coil, with a DCR of 11.48kohms, is made by G&B in Korea, like the Broad'Tron humbuckers. There's no height adjustment, although slightly raising the pole pieces helps with its clarity

doubt lower street prices) they offer, on paper at least, substantial bang for yer ol' buck. Not only are they perfectly good guitars, but they also make for prime modding material, not least because the original models all featured the Broad'Tron humbuckers. These not only provide a more contemporary 'beefed up' Gretsch-y voice, but with a standard full humbucking size, there are trillions of retrofit pickups to choose if you want to change their flavour. However, with a pair of recently released Limited Edition models (limited to 300 pieces each in Europe), it seems Gretsch has been modding them for us. Both new models add a P-90 and come in smart satin colours – only one per model, though – which make a welcome change from the plethora of over-glossed Asian guitars.

Our 16-inch (406mm) wide hollowbody G2420T-P90 is a close cousin of the standard Streamliner Hollow Body, which is offered with a Bigsby or a trapeze tailpiece. Our limited model is Bigsby-only, a licensed B60, and comes in quite a moody-looking Midnight Wine Satin. Finish aside, however, its *raison d'être* is the neck-placed 'dog ear' P-90 single coil, which nods towards the G6120 Eddie Cochran that pairs a similar-style neck pickup with a Dynasonic single coil at bridge. Here, however, we get one of those aforementioned Broad'Tron 'buckers.

Aside from its finish, the G2420T-P90's *raison d'être* is the neck-placed 'dog ear' P-90 single coil

The G2655TG-P90 Streamliner Center Block Junior is again based on an existing model, the 13.375-inch (340mm) wide G2655T Center Block Junior. Gretsch's product specialist Adam Bowden-Smith reminds us that "the 'junior' bit refers to its small body – it doesn't mean it's for beginners or anything like that". Again, while the standard model sports either the V-Stoptail or a licensed Bigsby B50, the limited-edition model is Bigsby-only, in one satin colour, and here the 'soapbar' P-90 sits in bridge position flanked by a Broad'Tron at neck. Incidentally, it's not the first time Gretsch has added a P-90 in bridge position (that was another limited model but in the Professional Series, the G6115T-LTD15 Center Block Junior 'Red Betty').

Entry-level they may be but Gretsch's classic laminated construction, with proper kerfed linings, is replicated here with nice touches, not least the 'secured' tune-o-matic bridge, which sits on a wooden foot on the Hollow Body and goes directly into the







2



3

2. These Broad'Trons (with a DCR of 9.3kohms) were conceived for the Streamliners: "Basically Filter'Tron-style full-size humbuckers – punchy with a higher hotter-than-vintage output"

3. Any Bigsby-equipped guitar needs a little love. Here, some of the nut grooves are a little tight, but with minimal fettling, a little lube and, of course, string stretching, we're good to go

spruce centre block of the Junior. There's a vintage style to the simple black knobs and, although both rosewood fingerboards are bound and feature big pearloid block inlays, neither looks over-blinged like some classic Gretsch models. That said, our Junior goes for gold-plated hardware – a first for the otherwise nickel-only Streamliner range – which accounts for the upcharge in price.

### Feel & Sounds

With an obvious 'little and large' vibe thanks to the different body sizes and depths (the Hollow Body is 73mm deep at the rim, and the Junior is just over 46mm), there's still plenty of shared style. The necks, for example, are pretty similar, despite being quoted as 'Slim U' on the Hollow Body and 'Thin U' on the Junior. Nut widths average 43mm with depths of a shade over 22mm at the first frets, and while the Junior measures 24.4mm at the 12th, the Hollow Body is that deep by the 9th fret before the neck curves into the relatively shallow heel. Those profile descriptions are a little off, though; neither feels slim nor thin and both have a more substantial, full-shouldered D shape that measures and feels slightly bigger than an original-release Streamliner Hollow Body that we have for

comparison. As noted in our original review, 'medium jumbo' is also a misnomer for the fret size. Here it is vintage Fender-like 'narrow' (2mm wide) and not particularly high either, averaging out at 1mm. Both guitars have nicely dialled in setups, though, approximately 1.6mm on both treble and bass sides, and with this style of small fret you certainly get to feel the 'board.

The weight is also light, the larger guitar only a little weightier, although they obviously feel different seated or strapped on. The Hollow Body's depth means it sticks out some way – the smaller thinline Junior is more conventional, although it's slightly neck-heavy but easy to play simply because of its light weight. And obviously there's considerable acoustic volume from the Hollow Body – plenty enough for practice even with another acoustic guitar player – while the Junior attenuates all the low-end and depth, and sounds rather bright and a little harsh in comparison.

Both use Gretsch's Tone-Pot control circuit and from what we hear we'd guess that the master volume has a treble bleed cap – the sounds remain pretty clear as you pull that down, while the individual volumes remove a little high-end when pulled back, as well as some thickness.



4. This 'soapbar'-style P-90 is height adjustable, which can be helpful to balance the different outputs here. This one has a lower DCR of 8.74kohms, while the neck-placed Broad'Tron measures 7.84kohms



It would be easy to plug in this Hollow Body and ask, 'Where's the Gretsch?' Initially, it appears quite a dark, moody voice that hints at those late 50s/early 60s jazz/blues sounds on the neck P-90, but needs a little more presence, and with only the pole pieces to adjust in terms of height (unless you add another shim) you'll lose some of the P-90's girth. That said, it's worth spending some time here. Not only did the nut grooves need attention but slight tweaks can reap rewards, although the rather-too-dark bridge pickup holds us back from the snap and sizzle we were expecting. But as we listen and compare with other semis, we begin to find much more.

The pickup volumes, especially on the bridge, thin the sound enough to get us into the right ballpark, especially if we pull back the master volume, too (and kick in a level boost from our pedalboard). Reverb and a hint of slapback and/or tremolo just about gets us there. The softer voice of the neck P-90 is helped by raising those poles a little. The tone control could certainly help a little more, though; with the pickup volume up it has quite a slow, subtle roll off that then suddenly dives to a muted woof. Pull the volume back, though, and it's a lot less effective. Still, true to Gretsch, there's always an idiosyncrasy or two, isn't there?

The Junior certainly has more of the high-end than you'd expect. It's a tighter,

These Streamliner models offer any of us on a budget a taste of Gretsch with a bit more oomph

more solidbody voice, but – and this is important – when you're swapping guitars during a set, as many of us do, things need to sound right without making too many adjustments. And this gets us much more into *that* camp on bridge and in mix position (especially with a little neck pickup volume roll-off). The neck humbucker alone, however, certainly has a jazzier thickness, but again it lacks a little clarity full up. We find ourselves pulling the pickup volume back and we're already imagining a pickup swap – perhaps to a humbucking-sized P-90? But this Junior wants to take us on a different journey with on-the-edge-of-gritty amp tones giving hugely 60s-informed Americana or with some fuzzier gain we drop right into Jack White Street via a garage or two. There's certainly some trashier, edgier voices here and a lot more feedback resistance, although it's still easy to coax some musical feedback (which you can manipulate easily with the Bigsby). It's certainly the guitar that got more play time,







5. Along with the three-way toggle pickup selector and the master volume on the two horns, this trio of controls provides individual pickup volume control and master tone – the key to unlocking more Gretsch-like tones

yet rather like the Hollow Body, if you're just going to run it with the volumes full up, then you're missing a lot.

### Verdict

Aside from needing a little more attention to the Hollow Body's nut and the general bedding in of both the Bigsby (like the original 2016 Streamliners), these are perfectly well-built guitars for the money. They also offer any of us on a budget a taste of Gretsch with a bit more oomph. These Broad'Tron pickups don't immediately capture *that* sound, but work at it a little and you can get close. That said, the P-90s give each guitar arguably more validity turning the Junior into a punkier proposition, and the Hollow Body into a slightly more characterful and jazzier or Texas swing kinda piece. Yes, the Hollow Body remains a big-bodied ship, and although the Junior actually feels so much more comfortable, there's still that oddity of the shrunken size that might not appeal to everybody. **G**

6. This Junior is the only Streamliner that comes with gold-plated hardware. Both Bigsby's are licensed versions, but sadly don't have the excellent 'string-through' string attachment of the Gretsch Players Edition Bigsby-equipped guitars



### GRETSCH LIMITED EDITION STREAMLINER G2420T-P90 HOLLOW BODY

**PRICE:** £470  
**ORIGIN:** Indonesia  
**TYPE:** Single-cutaway Hollow Body electric  
**BODY:** Laminated maple back, top and sides  
**NECK:** Nato, Slim "U" profile, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/42.95mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, pearloid big block inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, small  
**HARDWARE:** Nickel-plated secured Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B60 vibrato, die-cast tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** Broad'Tron humbuckers (bridge), P-90 Dog Ear (neck), 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone, 2x individual pickup volume controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.2/7.04  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The standard G2420 Hollow Body costs £420; the Bigsby-equipped G2420T is £470  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Only the double-cut centre-blocked G2622LH Stoptail (£470)  
**FINISHES:** Midnight Wine Satin (as reviewed) gloss body, satin neck

8/10

**PROS** Tidy build, satin finish, additional P-90 at neck and standard sized Broad'Tron 'bucker

**CONS** It's built to a budget and needed a little nut work to ensure the Bigsby stayed in tune; not for vintage snobs; just the one colour



### GRETSCH LIMITED EDITION STREAMLINER G2655TG-P90 CENTER BLOCK JR

**PRICE:** £519  
**ORIGIN:** Indonesia  
**TYPE:** Down-sized double-cutaway centre-blocked semi electric  
**BODY:** Laminated maple back, top and sides w/spruce centre block  
**NECK:** Nato, Thin "U" profile, glued-in  
**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")  
**NUT/WIDTH:** Synthetic bone/43.32mm  
**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, pearloid big block inlays, 305mm (12") radius  
**FRETS:** 22, small  
**HARDWARE:** Gold-plated secured Adjusto-Matic bridge, Bigsby B50 vibrato, die-cast tuners  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** P90 Soap Bar (bridge), Broad'Tron (neck), 3-position pickup selector toggle switch, master volume, master tone, 2x individual pickup volume controls  
**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.96/6.5  
**OPTIONS:** None  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** The standard G2655 Centre-Block Jr costs £420; the Bigsby-equipped G2655T is £470  
**LEFT-HANDERS:** Not this model  
**FINISHES:** Riviera Blue Satin (as reviewed)



Fender GBI  
01342 331700  
[www.gretschguitars.com](http://www.gretschguitars.com)

9/10

**PROS** Tidy build, compact size, feedback resistance, slightly more Gretsch-like voicing, a punkier edge

**CONS** Just the one colour; the Bigsby needed a little TLC; the shrunken size, as compact as it is, might not appeal to everyone



## FIRST PLAY



**PRS S2 STUDIO**  
£1,589

**WHAT IS IT?** The debut three-pickup S2 model looks back to the original Studio with a little Starla-meets-Vela vibe

# Working Class Hero

Eight months after PRS launched its S2 Studio to considerable interest, we finally get our hands on one and discover whether it was worth the wait...

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Olly Curtis

**P**laced between PRS's Asian-made SEs and its core-level US models, the S2 Series (also made at PRS's US factory but using PRS-design 'import' hardware and electronics) isn't simply about offering affordable versions of PRS's classic electrics. By design, the S2 range has a different player in mind, one who's less bothered about PRS's posh aesthetic and wants a working guitar to use and abuse on stage, night after night.

This year's only addition to what is now a 16-strong, five-year-old range, the S2 Studio takes its name from the original hum'-single-single PRS Studio, made between 1988 and '91, and which returned for a similarly brief period between 2011 and 2013. The HSS format was also offered as an option on other models such as the Studio Package, but three-pickup guitars – HSS or dual-humbucking guitars with a middle-placed single – have always been a relative rarity for PRS compared with its dual-'bucker format.

John Mayer's ultra high-end Super Eagle put the style back on the map, leading to this year's core-level Special Semi-Hollow Limited Edition, which places a single coil-sized Narrowfield humbucker between its two standard-sized humbuckers at the bridge and neck. Then there's the 2017 revamp of the 513, the 509, and let's not forget the three-single coil Silver Sky.







The S2 Studio is not your typical PRS, with a three-pickup HSS combination and a style distinct from the company's core-line guitars





1. Typically, this import version of PRS's vibrato – which uses a cast, not machined, steel top plate and steel block – has a longer arm. Here, the arm is smaller in length with a black tip, just like the core-level models, although it's a smaller diameter and nickel-plated, not stainless steel

2. The four-pole five-way lever switch gives us the usual Strat-like selections, except for the middle position, which here voices the neck and bridge mix, not the solo middle pickup

But the new HSS S2 Studio lies at a much lower price-point and has been hotly anticipated, although – probably thanks to the demand for that Silver Sky – PRS has been pretty slow to actually ship more than a handful. Technically, too, the S2 Studio is also a 'limited' model: not limited by numbers but by dealer orders placed between 16 January to 31 March 2018.

Based on the S2 Standard 22, which PRS refers to as a “bare-bones workhorse”, it's all mahogany with a good weight of 3.32kg/7.73lb. It also has that familiar outline, the S2 style, SG-inspired body chamfers (rather than a carved top), and the hallmark treble cutaway scoop with a slight rib-cage contour on the back. Incidentally, under the mint-green scratchplate, the 44.6mm thick body is routed for three full-size humbuckers.

To make the S2s more affordable, the neck is three-piece (not one piece) with a bird-free, unbound rosewood 'board peppered with over-sized white dots. The Frost Green Metallic might not be to everyone's taste, but it certainly adds a very retro-like style, not least with the abundance of shiny nickel plating, which really is the antithesis of the highly figured 10-tops or fancy bird inlays PRS is known for. If this colour doesn't float your boat, then there are four others to choose from.



Along with the perfectly serviceable hardware – steel-block vibrato and top-locking tuners – the main draw here is the pickups taken from the Starla (coil split-able bridge humbucker) and the Vela with two Type-D single coils. In appearance, these single coils suggest the old DeArmond-made Gretsch 'Dynasonic' pickups with six magnetic slug polepieces and a second row of six smaller diameter slot-head screws. On the original, these smaller screws adjusted the height of the rod magnets; here, they don't adjust anything. The Starla pickup is a full-size humbucker with six slug poles and six slot-head poles, both rows visible through the cover. On the Starla, those slot-





These top-locking 'low mass' tuners are now only found on the S2 Series. Along with a friction-reducing graphite nut, with properly stretched strings, they combine to form a very in-tune and effective vibrato system

head poles sit closest to the bridge, while here, as with the Vela, it's reversed and it's that slug coil that dominates when split.

We get a master volume with treble bleed cap, master tone with the usual 0.033microfarad tone cap, plus a pull-switch that primarily voices the bridge-facing single coil of that Starla humbucker via a partial split achieved with an additional 2.2kohm resistor.

If the pickup complement is unusual, so, subtly, are the sounds voiced by the five-way lever switch. It's Strat protocol, except the middle position, which doesn't voice the solo middle pickup but the bridge and neck pickups, giving a more classic dual-pickup mix – and made especially versatile as that bridge pickup can be split creating eight basic sounds in total.

Nice, too, that the lampshade knobs and the shaped switch tip are proprietary PRS designs and not the off-the-shelf parts that so many use. Even the vibrato arm is now

It's not a Strat and it's different enough from the Vela or Starla to have substantial validity

black-tipped and follows more closely the shape of the arm used on the core-level models. Even before you plug in, this is classy guitar making: functional, gig-ready and with a definite eye on style.

### Feel & Sounds

There is a unity to the S2 stable in that all models use the same pattern regular neck found on guitars made in the late 80s at PRS's former Virginia Avenue location", states PRS. It's the narrowest nut width offered by PRS, but is only 1/32nd of an inch (0.794mm) smaller than the Pattern or Pattern Thin (previously the Wide Fat and Wide Thin). It's little to get het up about, not least that our sample measures 42.82mm at the nut with quite a usual taper, depth-wise, from 21.9mm to 24.1mm between the 1st and 12th frets. Put simply, this Pattern Regular feels like home, very subtly V'd in the lower positions, rounding out as you move higher up, and bigger in the hand than the Pattern Thin you'll find on the current CE 24 bolt-on, for example. Set up with a virtually straight neck and PRS's standard 1.6mm on both treble and bass sides at the 12th fret, it's an effortless player.

With its all-mahogany construction, you might believe you're going to hear all classic Gibson-like grunt. But there's a good

ring and resonance, no doubt helped by the steel-block vibrato, that seems to nod much more in the direction of Fender. It's slightly lighter and crisper, acoustically, than a new bolt-on CE 24. But, plugged in, we move further away from more typical PRS voicings and, like the Vela and Starla, if lower output, cleaner tones are your bag, pay attention.

The neck-placed Type-D has a Strat-y percussive attack, but slightly rounded, smoother in the high-end, it's slightly less raw. It's little surprise, then, that both position 2 (bridge/middle) and 4 (middle/neck) on the five-way do pretty good 'hollowed' Strat-like voices. However, neither is over-sharp, while the middle position's Tele-like width really suits this platform, giving a third mix flavour that can be thinner, like the bridge/middle mix, with that partial coil-split engaged. And certainly where so many coil-split bridge pickups on their own sound a little over-thin, here it's a good match for those mixes, although there's no lack of highs and quite a stringy, open voice.

In full 'bucker mode the bridge pickup adds a slight kick and smoother power but with plenty of clarity. Gretsch-y? Yes, but with more body, though considerably less 'rock' than the 85/15s of the CE 24. If you want to chase those slightly grittier and



3. The same bridge pickup is used on the Starla and Vela. Although here, like the Vela, it's reversed so the slug coil faces the bridge. Again, it's made by G&B and has a DCR of 7.06k and 4.89kohms when split

4. These Type-D single coils follow the style of the original DeArmond Dynasonic pickups, which had adjustable height polepieces. These, made by G&B in Korea, don't. DCR is 6.96kohms



textured overdrive sounds that inform styles from Americana through to alt-rock and modern country heat, it does it rather well.

We spent far too long playing this Studio alongside a couple of other S2s, old and new CE 24s and a couple of Strats. There is little doubt that not only does it hold its own, but along with the stable vibrato performance and general in-tune-ness it – importantly – offers a different and distinct voice. It's not a Strat (although it certainly has a Strat-y flavour), it's not a typical PRS, and it's different enough from the Vela or Starla to have substantial validity.

### Verdict

The different style – not to mention exclusive designs such as the Starla, Vela and now this Studio – gives the S2 Series a rather different identity to either of PRS's core-level guitars or the lower-tier SEs. Yes, there is plenty of 'PRS', yet the polarising bling (for some) of the high-end core

guitars is absent here. The colour choices have a definite retro aesthetic and, overall, the Studio displays a vintage-y style with sounds to match. Yes, the Starla and Vela go for a similar sonic space, but here we're not bothered by the Starla's lumpy Bigsby or the altered outline of the hardtail-only Vela, plus we have that middle pickup contributing to the more Strat-like mixes. It's a tasty dish with a pro-level, hugely detailed build.

Price-wise, it's bang on the money (and has a street price of £1,429). This means it slots into what is a pretty exciting real-world area, which has the benchmark Fender Professional range on the one hand, contrasted by more progressive guitars such as Ibanez's AZ models. The S2 Studio certainly holds its own, not least for the player. It's a classic-sounding and classic-feeling, versatile guitar that any player needing to cover a huge range of styles will lap up. We certainly did. **G**



### PRS S2 STUDIO

**PRICE:** £1,589 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Double-cut solidbody electric

**BODY:** Mahogany

**NECK:** Mahogany, Pattern Regular profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 635mm (25")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Friction reducing/42.43mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood, dot inlays, 254mm (10") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** PRS patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed low mass locking tuners – nickel-plated  
**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 52.5mm  
**ELECTRICS:** PRS Starla Treble humbucker (bridge), Type-D single coil (middle & neck), 5-way lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone (with pull switch partial coil-split)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.32/7.73

**OPTIONS:** Colour only

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The S2 Standard Satin 22 and 24 start at £1,199; the gloss versions are £1,409. The Bigsby-equipped Starla costs £1,479; the Vela is £1,539

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Frost Green Metallic (as reviewed), Frost Blue Metallic, McCarty Tobacco Sunburst, Antique White, Black

**Guitarist would like to thank Wildwire Guitars (01757 701996) for the loan of this guitar**

**PRS Europe**  
**01223 874301**  
**[www.prsguitars.com](http://www.prsguitars.com)**



**10/10**

**PROS** Price, build quality, broad range of single coil/clean humbucking sounds, feel, playability and style

**CONS** Err, we're still looking...



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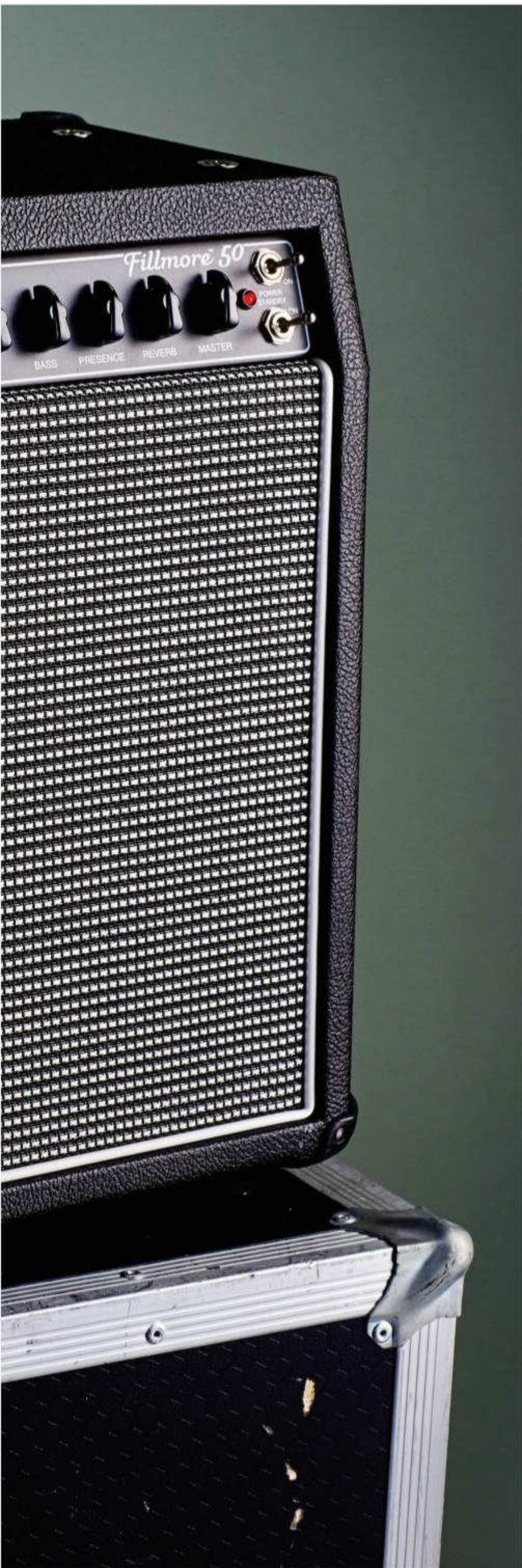
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## FIRST PLAY



**MESA ENGINEERING**  
**FILLMORE 50 1X12 COMBO**  
£2,175

**WHAT IS IT?** Superb dual-channel combo designed to exploit the low-to-medium (by Mesa standards) gain range, focusing on classic Boogie tones from the Mk I and early Mk II designs

# Top Of The Bill

History repeats as Mesa returns to the original bone tone in a package that recalls yesteryear but remains thoroughly up to date

**Words** Nick Guppy **Photography** Olly Curtis

**M**esa Engineering introduced the world to the treadplate-covered Dual and Triple Rectifier heads, which have dominated metal and rock since the early 1990s. However, it's worth remembering that these giants were actually Mesa's second game-changers. Two decades earlier, Randall Smith created the original high-gain stack killer, the amp simply known as the Boogie.

The original Boogie amp was the first to use cascaded gain controls, and arguably the first amp built from the ground up as a true musical instrument in its own right, with a unique tone and ability to sustain almost indefinitely. Compared with later Mark amps and Rectifiers, early Boogies had a sweeter, rounder tone, but were just as gained-out and expressive. On a few previous occasions, Mesa revisited the original format; now there's a new amp





1. The Fillmore 50's channels each have three voice options controlled by this mini toggle switch

2. Like all Mesa amps, the Fillmore 50 uses a custom-designed Celestion C-90 'Black Shadow' loudspeaker. It's one of just a few OEM loudspeakers still made by Celestion in the UK



2

that promises to properly redefine that original Boogie sound as never before. Named for the legendary East and West Coast concert venues, let's welcome the all-new Mesa Fillmore 50.

Like all Mesa products, the Fillmore 50 is beautifully designed and put together with a real eye for detail. The standard trim looks suitably vintage, with perfectly fitted black vinyl and a black control panel with simple chickenhead knobs. In the top left of the black-and-white jute speaker grille is the original Boogie badge, a pointer to the Fillmore 50's inspiration.

Inside the tough aluminium chassis, the electronics are arranged on high-quality printed circuit boards – one for the power valves, one for the rear panel sockets and one large board for everything else, including the five preamp valve sockets. While earlier Mesa amps featured pad and trace circuit layouts hand-drawn by Randall Smith himself, the Fillmore's boards are CAD-drawn, although there are still a few typically Mesa quirks in the layout that point to old-school Boogie design. It's good to see that Mesa still hand-wires all the front-panel controls for superior reliability. Meanwhile, the circuit boards still have that distinctive Boogie look, thanks to

## The Fillmore's Hi lead tone is packed with layers of smouldering harmonic bite

custom resistors, 'orange drop' capacitors and ultra-neat wiring.

The Fillmore 50 combo features two independent footswitchable preamp channels, with identical sounds and controls – something Mesa calls Channel Cloning. It means you can replicate one great sound and use it for rhythm and lead, adding a touch of extra gain and volume if needed. Compared with most Boogie amps, the control panel is simple. There's a single input jack socket followed by an output power switch offering 50-watt or 25-watt options. Next come the channel controls, with two sets of gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, reverb and master volume. There's also a pair of mini-toggle switches that pre-set the channel to one of three voices: Clean, Drive and Hi. Sat in between the middle of the panel is another mini-toggle for changing channels when the footswitch isn't in use.

The Fillmore's rear layout continues in the same 'less is more' format, offering a simple series effects loop and a trio of loudspeaker jacks – clean, functional and almost spartan by Mesa standards. There are two footswitch jacks: one under the input jack changes channels, with an optional reverb footswitch jack on the rear panel. Overall, the build quality is typical of what we've come to expect from Mesa. As well as being pleasing to the eye, the Fillmore is as hard as nails and should handle anything thrown at it.

## Sounds

The first thing that impresses us at switch-on is the Fillmore 50's lack of electrical noise. Hiss and hum levels are exceptionally low, even with the reverb level maxed out, making the Fillmore equally rewarding for quiet home use, studio or stage. This wasn't always the case on some earlier Boogie iterations. However, all the recent models we've tried are exceptionally quiet.

We tested the Fillmore with a variety of different guitars covering all the popular tonal bases, including a PAF-loaded Les Paul, an MHS-powered Custom Shop '63 ES-335 replica and a pair of Strats (one with





3. The Fillmore 50's classic valve-powered spring reverb is exceptionally smooth and quiet, with plenty of range. It can be foot-switched from the rear panel if needed

4. Like some classic Boogie amps, the Fillmore 50 has a single input jack and a footswitch jack underneath it for changing channels. Great tone comes as standard; the Fillmore 50 features the legendary Boogie badge on the speaker grille



Duncan Alnico Pro IIs, the other a stock USA '63 reissue). The Fillmore 50's lower gain clean voice has the sparkling treble and buttery midrange scoop of classic Blackface tone, flattering to single coils but creating real magic with PAF-style humbuckers. At around one o'clock on the gain control, there's a subtle drive and smoky midrange lift, with more of a tweed character that's outstanding for jazz, blues and roots genres and really sings at high volume. The Drive voice adds a forceful edge to this sound, creating a more aggressive tone that sits well for Texas blues lead and rhythm parts.

The Fillmore's Hi lead tone is a magnificent modern take on the smoother lead sounds of the late Mark I and early Mark II Boogie, packed with layer upon layer of smouldering harmonic bite, changing emphasis and colour depending on how hard you hit the strings (and sustaining what seems like forever at higher gain settings). It's Santana, early Larry Carlton, Knopfler, Keith Richards and much more. Every guitar we plugged in sang through this channel.

The Fillmore's reverb also deserves a special mention. It's remarkably free of the noise and splatter that often affects many spring reverb effects. A warm natural

ambience at lower settings, it turns into a deep cavern at full power, but without overpowering the guitar.

### Verdict

The Fillmore 50's classic Boogie-inspired tones are full of spine-tingling nostalgia yet manage to sound fresh and contemporary, with exceptional range from a simple control panel layout that makes dialling in any guitar intuitive, rewarding and, above all, great fun.

Our only small reservation is that for some lower gain stuff, the Fillmore could do with a little more volume, perhaps making an extension cabinet necessary for some players. Stick the gains up around 12 o'clock, though, and it's definitely loud enough. Still, if we're being really picky, it would have been nice to see a footswitch for that effects loop.

The Fillmore 50's price tag may cause a sharp intake of breath for some, but we think it's justified. You're getting a top-drawer amp that's aimed at professional and dedicated amateur players, with build quality, tone and creative potential to last a lifetime (at around half the cost of a decent custom shop guitar). Has Mesa just made your perfect amp? **G**



## MESA ENGINEERING FILLMORE 50 1X12 COMBO

**PRICE:** £2,175

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** All-valve preamp and power amp

**OUTPUT:** 50/25W RMS

**VALVES:** 5x 12AX7, 2x 6L6

**DIMENSIONS:** 475 (h) x 520 (w) x 220mm

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 18/40

**CABINET:** Birch ply

**LOUDSPEAKER:** 1 x 12" Mesa/Celestion Black Shadow C-90

**CHANNELS:** 2

**CONTROLS:** Gain, bass, mid, treble, presence, reverb, master volume, voice switch x2, output power select, channel select

**FOOTSWITCH:** Single-button footswitch changes channels, optional second footswitch toggles reverb effect

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Extension speaker outlets, series effects loop

**OPTIONS:** A matching 1x12 extension cabinet costs £575

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The Fillmore 50 head sells for £1,899, with a 2x12 extension cabinet at £845

**Westside Distribution**

**0141 248 4812**

**[www.mesaboogie.com](http://www.mesaboogie.com)**



9/10

**PROS** Superlative, vintage Boogie-inspired low-to-medium gain tone; exceptionally smooth reverb

**CONS** It's not quite as loud as we were expecting for a 50-watter; it's relatively expensive, especially if you need the extra punch of an extension cabinet



# *the*Wishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

## SUPRO DAVID BOWIE LIMITED EDITION DUAL TONE £1,099

CONTACT JHS PHONE 01132 865381 WEB WWW.SUPROUSA.COM

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Olly Curtis



1. On Bowie's original guitar, these rainbow-coloured lines replaced the top five frets: "They brought me the second guitar, which needed to be done very fast, within one day," recalls Flip Scipio. "That is why I didn't reinstall the top frets. The fret filler is made of dyed Japanese maple. David loved the way this guitar looked and sounded, so I chose the colours based on what I thought would look cheerful"

2. Like the current Island series, this one features a satin-finished set neck, but not the longer 648mm scale. Instead, we get a Gibson-like 629mm scale (like the original Dual Tone) with a similar 305mm radius to the pau ferro fingerboard

3. Although there are numerous vibrato-equipped models in Supro's current Americana series, this is the only one to feature a licensed Bigsby. This roller saddle tune-o-matic bridge helps tuning stability





**I**T'S NOT the most obvious legacy of the late, great David Bowie, but this long-awaited Supro Dual Tone (which comes with Supro/Bowie hard case, plus signed and numbered certificate of authenticity) is perhaps the finest moment so far for the relaunched brand.

Supro tells us that during the recording of the *Reality* album in New York City, early 2003, Bowie purchased two early 60s Supro Dual Tones on eBay. One was a 1961 hard-tail model and the other was modified by master luthier Flip Scipio (who studied at the London College of Furniture, and worked at Guild and the prestigious Mandolin Brothers on Staten Island). Scipio inlaid the top five fret slots with rainbow colours after installing a Bigsby vibrato at Bowie's request. And it was this Dual Tone that became Bowie's favourite and main live instrument, also appearing on the cover of the *A Reality Tour* live album.

This contemporary version is a close replica, although the original does feature a wooden-foot 'jazz' bridge, swapped here for the roller-saddle direct-mount tune-o-matic. It's based on the third version of the Dual Tone Supro produced with a wider (13-inch) single-cutaway slab body that appeared from around 1957 up to 1961 before the body was replaced with ResoGlas. However, here it's alder and we get a rib-cage cut.

And yet history doesn't tell the whole story. At 4kg, it's as weighty as a Les Paul and the strapped-on balance is perfect. Meanwhile, the black-satin maple neck is very smooth with a more 'Fender' feel than the scale and radius suggests. The bigger 'refret'-feeling frets means it's a very positive player and, if you enjoy that whole single coil-meets-vintage humbucker sonic area, you're in for a treat.

The Supro Vistatone single coils are really, really good – in the hum-cancelling mix, there's a timeless soul rhythm voice that's hollowed but with bags of depth. The neck adds some cream but doesn't get too soggy, while that bridge pickup just does Keef to a T – clear but not sharp and gnarly, and when you kick in a drive or fuzz it sits perfectly in a Chicago blues or Detroit garage raunch. Put simply, it's the best new Supro we've played and, irrespective of the Bowie connection, it would be a crime if we didn't see an unlimited model.





# What's Goin' On

*All the best guitar events you need to put in the diary...*

## Tremonti

29 November to 6 December

Nottingham, Manchester, Bristol, London & Edinburgh

Even by Mark Tremonti's prolific standards, this year has been a busy one: the guitarist launched a highly acclaimed signature amp with the PRS MT-15; achieved a landmark with his band Alter Bridge by playing the Royal Albert Hall with a 52-piece orchestra; and created a concept album with companion sci-fi novel from his solo band. "I got to sing from a lot of different perspectives on the record," he says, explaining how *A Dying Machine* marks an evolution. "I'm almost getting in character when I'm doing different songs. I get away with things I might not usually get away with." It's made for his strongest release to date with the Tremonti band, and alongside guitarist Eric Friedman, this tour to round out the year should make for their strongest set yet.

[www.marktremonti.com](http://www.marktremonti.com)



Tremonti rounds off the year with fellow friends and musicians on tour

## The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society

Until 18 November

Proud Central, London

An exhibition celebrates the 50th anniversary of The Kinks' sixth studio album with rare collector's items on show, including commissioned artworks by band members and memorabilia. This will be combined with a collection of photographs documenting this era of the band.

[www.proudonline.co.uk](http://www.proudonline.co.uk)

## John Smith

Until 17 November

Various UK and Ireland venues

Mr Smith will already be on the road with his Fylde guitar in hand as you read this, as he's hitting as many venues as possible in support of new album, the 10/10 *Guitarist*-rated *Hummingbird*. Expect sublime fingerstyle as he plays his traditional favourites alongside his own songs.

[www.johnsmithjohnsmith.com](http://www.johnsmithjohnsmith.com)

## Sarah McQuaid

1 November to

2 December

Various UK venues

As the folk musician tours in support of fifth album *If We Dig Any Deeper It Could Get Dangerous*, she's expanding her palette with new instruments to add to her acoustic. In addition to an electric loaned by the album's producer Michael Chapman, she'll be using drum and piano, too.

[www.sarahmcquaid.com](http://www.sarahmcquaid.com)

## The Australian Pink Floyd

9 November to

15 December

Various UK venues

A tour for the world's best-known Floyd tribute band (they even played Gilmour's 50th birthday party). The band have been regularly on the road since 1988, so this 30th anniversary tour is a celebration of them as much as the band they honour.

[www.aussiefloyd.com](http://www.aussiefloyd.com)

## Bude Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival

9 to 11 November

Penstowe Manor Resort, Bude, Cornwall

Previously hosted in Ilfracombe, the three-day festival now moves to a Cornish manor in private grounds to offer an impressive line-up of talent including Focus, Erja Lyytinen, Aynsley Lister, Gráinne Duffy, Wishbone Ash, Chantel McGregor and Federal Charm.

[www.solidentertainments.com](http://www.solidentertainments.com)

## Paul Draper

14 to 24 November

Various UK venues

The former Mansun leader returns with his first acoustic tour. He'll be accompanied by guitarist Ben Sink to play songs from his back and future catalogue, spanning Mansun, as well as his debut solo album, *Spooky Action*. He'll also be road-testing songs from his forthcoming album.

[www.pauldraperofficial.com](http://www.pauldraperofficial.com)

## Dan Patlanksy

21 to 30 November

Various UK venues

After solo acoustic tours in his home country of South Africa over the summer, we're betting he can't wait to plug his beloved '62 Strat back in for this nine-date tour. His last run of dates in March sold out, so best move fast if you want to catch him live.

[www.danpatlansky.com](http://www.danpatlansky.com)

## Ruston Kelly

21 November to

5 December

Various UK venues

This singer-songwriter's marriage to fellow musician Kacey Musgraves has seen them compared to Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash. And although he certainly has the country outlaw spirit about him, comparisons with Ryan Adams and Bingham seem more appropriate. Catch him and his bright pink J-45 on tour around the UK supporting *The Wandering Hearts*.

[www.rustonkelly.com](http://www.rustonkelly.com)



# The Players

*News and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists*

Photo by Charles Paul Harris/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images



## Chicago Blues Legend Otis Rush 1935 – 2018

To say that Otis Rush was a tragically underrated bluesman isn't really going far enough. His reach into the genre was immense, his recorded material an inspiration for many players in the mid-60s British blues boom. At the time, few enthusiasts realised that the opening track on John Mayall's seminal *Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton* album, *All Your Love*, was an Otis Rush original. Or that Led Zeppelin's *I Can't Quit You* from their 1969 debut album was a faithful cover of Rush's version from 1956. Furthermore, Stevie Ray Vaughan named his band after another of Otis's tunes, *Double Trouble*, from 1958, the track going on to feature heavily in Clapton's live sets in the 1970s. And yet, Rush's own career was one of struggle and trial.

Born in Philadelphia, Mississippi, Otis moved to Chicago in 1949 and soon came to the attention of blues legend Willie Dixon. His recording career was launched on the short-lived Cobra label and, for a while, at least, it seemed that his flame was set to burn brightly. But his career was blighted by poor luck and bad deals, and he never experienced the same public acclaim as his peers Buddy Guy or BB King.

A left-hander, Otis played 'Albert King-style' with his bass strings on the lower edge of the fretboard, often on flipped-over right-handed Stratocasters or Gibson semi-acoustics. His style was fiery, his phrasing away from the crowd with slow-burn solos that went on to influence players such as Clapton and Peter Green. Otis was elected to the Blues Hall Of Fame in 1984, but his career was cut short in 2003 when he suffered a stroke that robbed him of his ability to play or sing. Alas, it was complications from this medical condition that led to his death last month in September. He will be missed, of course, but his ongoing influence will be eternal for generations of blues players in years to come.

Many artists, including **Eric Clapton**, **JD McPherson**, **The Monkees** and **William Shatner** will have Christmas albums out this year. Clapton's 14-song *Happy Xmas* even features his illustration of Santa on the cover. We think he's missing a trick not calling it *Snowhand*, though...

To coincide with the release of biographical Queen film *Bohemian Rhapsody* on 23 October, **Brian May** is releasing previously unseen photos that he took on the film's set as part of an updated version of his stereoscopic Queen autobiography, *Queen In 3D*. "They show the four brilliant boys who played the four of us [Queen] in the film in action," says May, "plus Lucy Boynton [who plays Mercury's muse Mary Austin], and some interactions with the old boys themselves!" The book includes Brian May's high-quality Lite Owl stereo viewer embedded in the backboard to allow readers to view the images in all their glory.

**Led Zeppelin** are reportedly planning to launch the Led Zeppelin Experience, a streaming service to release an archive with

hundreds of live recordings. A US trademark filing submitted by the three surviving members of the band names live recordings for the purpose of "providing non-downloadable pre-recorded music online via a global computer network". The trademark has already been made in Europe.

**Wolf Alice** may have won the Mercury Music Award last month, but they're still sensitive to the challenges facing aspiring young guitar bands in their wake. "I think it's hard to be in a standard guitar band now," singer/guitarist Ellie Rowsell told *i* newspaper, "because, in London at least, it's so expensive to find a place where four people are allowed to make loads of noise, where they've got all the equipment that's needed to make heavy music. Whereas you can sit at home and make really amazing synth sounds and incredible drum beats, and make it sound professional in your room."

The Maton Mastersound MS500 guitar **George Harrison** borrowed for performances (including the band's last Cavern Club performance – see issue 437) sold for £347,000 at auction last month. The guitar was won by telephone bid by an unnamed overseas private collector during the auction at Gardiner Houlgate in Corsham. It's still less than the £373,000 the same guitar sold for in New York three years ago. Other highlights from the Wiltshire auction include **Bee Gee Barry Gibb**'s custom-made 1968 Gibson EBS-1250 double-neck, which sold for £8,680, and a rare 1933 Selmer Maccaferri Orchestra, which sold for £12,000.

They played a farewell tour back at the turn of the century, but it looks like **KISS** really mean it this time as they announce their final End Of The Road world tour after a 45-year career. It's expected to last multiple years...



Wolf Alice's  
Ellie Rowsell





# BACK TO THE MOTHERLAND

Does it matter where a guitar or a guitar part is made? As more and more manufacturers bend the rules, Dave Burrluck wonders if country of origin is actually such a big deal...

**I**t doesn't matter where the feckin' thing is made, it's about how good it is and how much it costs," ranted a representative of a guitar brand. The company he worked for came to market in the late 80s boasting a European source, although its instruments were made in Japan (and pretty soon after, Korea). Trying to calm the waters, I agreed with the surly rep – it's not where something is made, but *how* it's made. However, I added, as consumers surely we have a right to know where something is made? If we don't want to buy a guitar from wherever – for whatever reason – isn't that our choice? The rep and I eventually came to a slightly uncomfortable agreement.

It's not rare to see comments such as, "I have five Korean-made guitars. I won't buy the Indonesian ones." Or "I used to see many [insert brand name of Asian factory] guitars in the pawn shops in the 80s – they were all garbage." You'll find videos galore comparing the US with China, Japan with Indonesia and so on. Rarely, however, does that person investigate the instrument's parts – be that neck or body or the output jack.

Earlier in our Mod Squad series I'd pondered a 'No Logo' concept by putting together a partscaster. When asked what it was, I simply refused to say. Instead, I handed the guitar over and told them to just play it. It was only when the player recognised the headstock, that he suddenly changed from really liking the guitar to, "Oh, that's one of those Trev Wilkinson Chinese things." Same with the vibrato that still had its Wilkinson logo. "I'd have thought you would have put on a USA Callaham," he said. I've never let on what pickups I put in that partscaster, but I gig the guitar regularly. In reality, with its mixture of bits sourced from China, Korea, the UK and US, its country of origin is dubious. And 'Made on a kitchen table in south-east London' doesn't quite have the ring I'm after.

What's this got to do with our modding community, I hear you ask? Quite a lot, actually. Country of origin and price suggest a level of quality, but it's



Our mental template for guitars is often based around the classic USA builds. But could our perceptions be changing?

increasingly hard to know where our parts and pickups come from. Recently, I put together a cheap-as-chips Tele-style guitar kit from China. It cost around £100. But because I'd brought the kit (a box full of parts, *not* a finished guitar) and turned it into an okay instrument, I found out I could legally call it 'Handmade in the UK'. I could start my own boutique pickup business, too. You guessed it: buy all the parts, wire and magnets from Asia, turn 'em into pickups, then brand it all as made in the UK, while charging less than the going rate to make them appear, in a very crowded marketplace, like a good deal.


## Not Born In The USA

Smaller but important parts, such as pots and switches might bear the name of a classic US brand. Look into its business, however, and you'll find it has factories all over the world. Do they actually say 'Made in the USA' or is that your assumption? It's the same with hardware. Just because something was made in the US a few decades ago, doesn't mean it still is today. I can think of a prestigious US guitar company that no longer makes *any* of its bridges in the US. Yet I still see endless forum posts about fitting that 'USA' bridge because

it's 'better' than the lower-level import bridges used on the brand's mid- and lower-tier guitars. Perhaps both are made in the same factory. The difference is how they are made and their materials.

Surely, our choice should be based on experience, not country of origin. Personally, I'll always use Gotoh tuners as my default – I've used them for years. I presume they're made in Japan, but I really have no idea. The company's tuners – in my experience – are certainly not Made In A Hurry... There are plenty of other brands that do the job, but getting to test a lot of guitars, at different prices with different quality levels of tuners, there are some I'd avoid for a project or repair. Why? Because they don't feel as positive, smooth (and the rest) in use. Again, that's my experience.

The assumption that something made in China is rubbish is just as rubbish as saying something made in the US is "the best". I've played many guitars from all around the world – the US, Japan, Korean, Indonesia, China, UK – and I've played stellar guitars from all of those locations, too. It's the same with parts.

As the famous song by Melvin Oliver and James Young states: "T'ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it. That's what gets results." 

*That should keep you busy till next issue.*

*In the meantime, if you have any modding questions or suggestions, drop us a line at: [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)*



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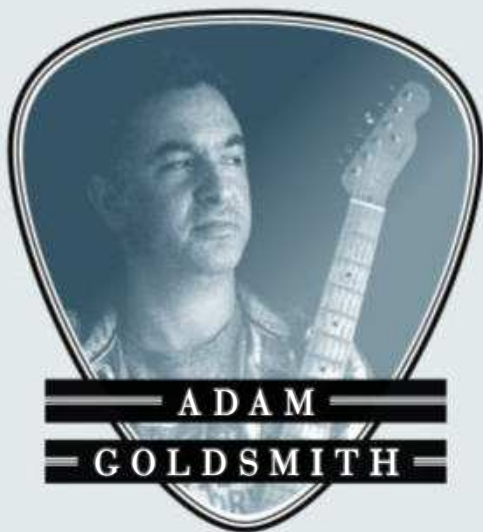
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# SESSION DIARY

## *Orchestral Manoeuvres*

Adam Goldsmith reflects on the realities of playing with an orchestra, bow tie and all

The last few days working with one of Yngwie's producers has left me thinking about the fundamental differences between being a rock star and being a working session musician. Apart from the frilly shirts, Ferraris and bank balance, the most 'meta' difference seems to be that, as session players, we are in the service industry. And while our service may be playing guitar (occasionally in an environment familiar to rock stars), we actually have more in common with the nice chap who just served me coffee in Starbucks where I'm writing this column.

In other words, for the most part, you're just there to make sure there are the correct guitar noises at the correct times and that the general public will find this acceptable. You're there to provide what people require of you musically (and, possibly, socially) at any given time. You're not necessarily there to be 'you', to service your ego or to show off your latest licks or sweep-picking chops.

Over the past few days I've got to focus on rock guitar, amp settings, the minutiae of gear and playing solos with Phil Lanzon from Uriah Heep – doing all the things that we, as guitar players and enthusiasts,

love and feeds our souls. This contrasted sharply with my concert last week at the Royal Albert Hall, playing with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on a selection of music from the James Bond films.

They are obviously a fabulous orchestra and I was very happy to be doing this gig, but my point is, many of the considerations we have as guitarists on a day-to-day basis go to the back of the queue when it comes to working in orchestras with a classical conductor. Sessions with orchestras are generally booked as three-hour slots, so it's very common to turn up at a concert like this for a 3pm to 6pm rehearsal, having never seen the music before, and then be on stage for a 7.30pm concert in your dinner jacket and bow tie (with no parking space for your Ferrari or, indeed, anyone to iron your frilly shirt). You need to make sure you're plugged in and ready to play on the dot, and you need to have had your coffee beforehand as classical orchestras can sight-read anything.


It never ceases to amaze me that session musicians are expected to interpret their guitar parts in the same amount of time. In these rehearsal/concert situations you

are lucky if any of the music is played twice before the concert.

Classical conductors usually (and why shouldn't they) have less knowledge of the different skillset it takes to make a rhythm-section part sound good than it does for a violinist to sight-read their parts (which are usually much more prescriptive and leave less room for interpretation). You are, however, expected to do it within the same time frame. Suddenly, whether your distortion pedal is true bypass or not seems very secondary to just making any sort of correct noise at all at the right time.

### Code Of Conduct

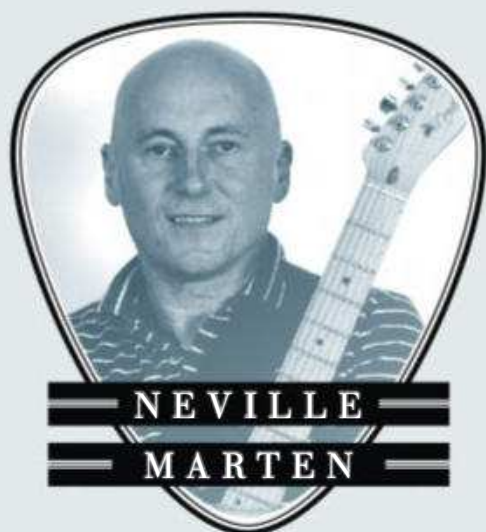
For this particular concert we had a fabulous conductor in the shape of Gareth Hudson. But, the first few times I played with orchestras were utterly terrifying. Like most of us, I grew up playing along to Metallica and Iron Maiden records in my bedroom. I don't recall James Hetfield ever wielding a conductor's baton, and the first time I was confronted by this phenomenon, I realised very quickly I had absolutely no idea what all the waving of arms meant. I still don't really, but here's a tip: whenever you think the conductor is giving you a downbeat, it's actually about half a second later. Classical musicians tend to have a much more fluid approach to time-keeping than those of us from a rock and pop background, and your job, in this instance, is to surf the fine line between where you think the beat should be as a rhythm-section player and where the orchestral players might hear it.

I'm not suggesting there's a right or wrong, simply that your job is to be flexible and aware of what is required of you (and not to superimpose your ego and opinions onto the situation). Also, make sure you don't kill the back desk of the violas with your Marshall stack (Fender Princeton is my orchestral amp of choice) and don't forget your bow tie. Finally, remember to have yourself a cleansing listen to a nice bit of Napalm Death on the way home. 



Adam's recent session with Uriah Heep's Phil Lanzon looks a little different to his Albert Hall concerts





# NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

This month **Nev Marten** opines how tone is as much to do with ears and fingers as it is to do with gear...

**R**ecently, while rehearsing for the Cream-meets-Hendrix gig at the UK Guitar Show last month with Mick (from That Pedal Show) and Jamie (your esteemed editor), an interesting conversation started about tone. I had commented on Mick's amazing pedalboard plugged into his awesome Two-Rock amp. Pedals and tone are Mick's livelihood so one wouldn't expect anything less, of course. His reply was, "I'm happy to pay for top-quality amps and pedals, because even the best guitar won't sound great through a rubbish setup, whereas a quality backend can make even an average one sound great." Mick went on to demonstrate this with his inexpensive Mexican Hendrix-style Strat.

But as viewers of That Pedal Show know, Mick has tone in his fingers and knows exactly how to extract the best from any setup. He will tweak and trim and, in just a few seconds, have the gear doing exactly what he wants. So given this (not particularly common) ability to make almost anything sound great, I only partly agree with his wider view. For instance, the best PA in the world won't make a rubbish singer sound like Pavarotti. In fact, isn't it more likely to highlight flaws? You can tame thin and raspy pickups to some degree, but you don't shell out for wonderful pedals and gorgeous amp, just to polish the proverbial doggy do-do. So I always think a great-sounding instrument is the best starting point – and a quality backend simply emphasises that quality.

Over the years, I've come to believe that tone is first and foremost in the ears, secondly in the fingers and thirdly in the gear. I make everything I play through sound like me. I know what sound I want and have the experience and the ears to create it through any setup. Obviously, each amp and guitar will add its own nuances, but essentially Mick always makes his gear sound like Mick, Jamie does likewise, me the same and I'm sure you do too.

The other side of that is if Jeff Beck were in the next room playing the cheapest guitar through the most rubbish pedals and amp, you'd still know it was Jeff Beck. This underlines my thought that it's in the ears and the fingers. Jeff knows exactly how to get 'his' tone out of any setup, and of course he plays in a certain way and goes for certain kinds of things. I think we all do, because we can't hide the essence of 'us'. But with better gear Jeff would have just sounded like a better version of Jeff.

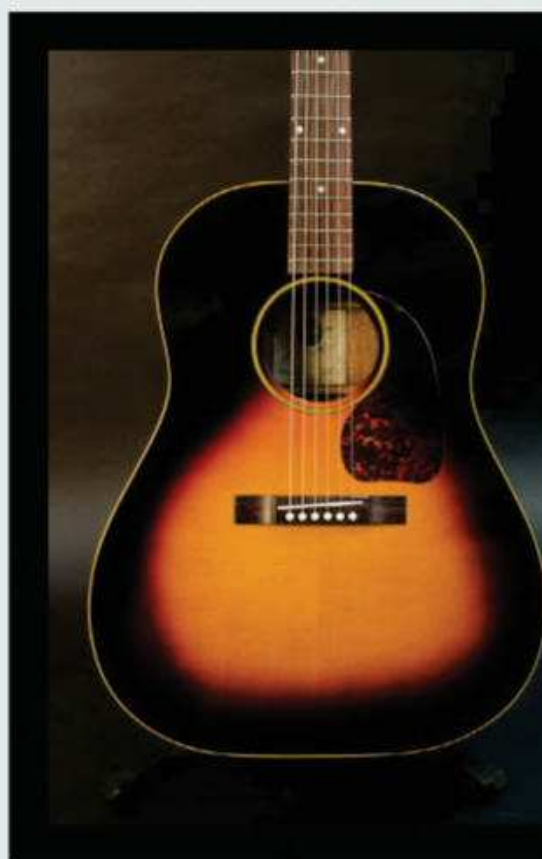
## Difference Pays

When it comes to choosing quality equipment it's the top 10 per cent of difference that we pay for. And it's that difference that makes us feel better on stage, just knowing you've got the best you can afford. It lessens the chances of a rubbish sound and a nightmare gig (so many other factors creep in when playing live that any safety net is good). Plus, who doesn't feel better with something amazing strapped round their neck, some tasty stuff on the floor and on stage behind you?

At this rehearsal I used my '52 Reissue Tele through a Fulltone OCD into a Blues Junior for both the Cream and the Hendrix songs, and got tones that were close enough for the devil in me to want to use the Tele for the actual gig. But for authenticity and that feel-good factor, it was my Strat and ES-335. I was going to go against the grain and deploy my Line 6 Helix, but a malfunction between me and my car keys meant it stayed locked in the boot so I used a Matchless King Cobra, an OCD pedal plus reverb and delay. I used the same tone for both the Jimi and Eric parts, and it was simply the different guitars and playing approach that gave each set its own voice.

The gig went great despite nerves making us mess up things up a little, but mistakes are fleeting things and the overall vibe was so good it didn't matter.

But back to tone and gear. In the end nothing is gospel. It's all really speculation based on experience and developing a feel for what suits us. And if you came to our gig, thanks so much – I just hope our tones lived up to any expectations. **G**



## NEV'S GAS OF THE MONTH

A stunning recreation of an acoustic classic

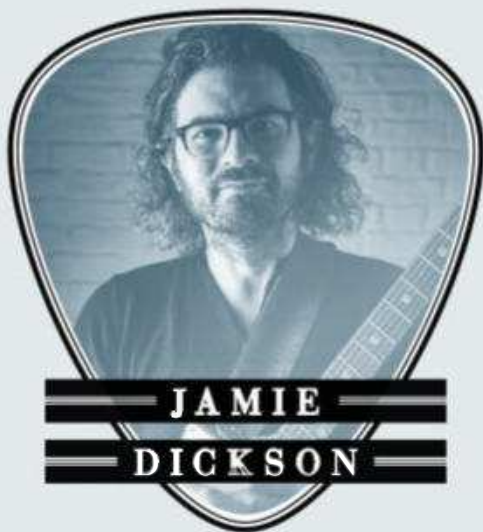
**What?** Atkin The 43, aged

**Where seen?** UK Guitar Show

**Price?** £2,749

**Description?** This was as close as it gets to Guitar Of The Show for me. Alister Atkin has perfected the art of recreating vintage Gibsons and Martins, to the point where you believe you're holding a 75-year-old classic. The one at the show was spectacularly good, from its initial looks to its playability, tone and overall build and vibe. He's got the ageing right, too, so the lacquer checking seems like it occurred over decades. Alister also designed a great headstock shape. Using all the correct timbers (regulations permitting), it's like a real vintage guitar but built to 2018 standards.





# RAISING THE TONE

## *Dreader Than Dread*

Inspired by our trip to Martin, **Jamie Dickson** explores what separates a stunning dread' from a dull duffer

One of the most striking things about guitar tone that dawns on a player as the years go by is how different guitars that share the same basic design, shape and construction materials can sound from one another. Talk to any player who's been lucky enough to play a few vintage Les Pauls, for example, and they'll tell you about the ones that sounded wonderful – and the ones that were fit only to hang on a wall. As far as outward appearances go, the good guitars and the bad might only be separated by a few digits in the serial number. And yet the tonal difference can be night and day, thanks to variations in the woods used, pickups and so on.

The elements that add up to make great tone in acoustic guitars are, in some ways, even simpler. There's less hardware to factor into the tone equation, for example. And yet there's a world of subtle refinement in how tonewoods and luthiery are combined that, again, can add up to the difference between lacklustre, pedestrian dreadnought and a honey-toned keeper. And just to make the equation even more tricky, each individual's playing style will

bring out different things in an acoustic guitar. Some acoustics only come fully to life in the hands of heavy strummers, while others will only yield up their best in the hands of gentle fingerpickers. So, what things should you look for when you're seeking a dreadnought that will suit your musical personality?

"We'll start by asking people, 'What type of music do you enjoy?'" explains Scott Sasser, director of Martin's Custom Shop. "What do you hope this instrument would sound like?" That allows us to assess if this guitar is going to be an anvil to the hammer-like strumming that they're using every night – or if the guitar is going to be used in a more intimate setting. Maybe it's going to be used for recording in a close-mic situation and so they need a voice that is expressive and articulate."

The process of tailoring an acoustic to a particular player's needs starts with the soundboard itself – usually made of one of the varieties of spruce known to offer good tonal qualities. As the 'speaker' of the guitar, the top has a fundamental role to play in defining the character of the finished guitar.

"The back and sides are going to bring their sauce to the gravy, for sure – but the top will move the needle the most, the fastest," Scott says.

To explore what that might mean for individual players, I give Scott my own example – I'm primarily a fingerstyle acoustic player who, perhaps unusually, favours dreadnoughts over the smaller-bodied acoustics typically associated with fingerstyle playing. What top material would he recommend in my case?

"For a lighter player, we may opt for one of the European spruces, such as Italian spruce, with Engelmann being the loosest of the varieties," Scott explains. "But those

*The process of tailoring an acoustic to a particular player's needs starts with the soundboard itself*



Martin doesn't really do radical overhauls of classic models; the 'new' D-28 continues to embody the classic dread' in look and sound

types of looser spruce varieties are really at their most articulate on smaller body sizes. So, in the case of a dreadnought we might steer someone away from a spruce type that's known to be the softest, unless they say, 'I will only play it soft and fingerstyle.'"

Scott adds that like any other pursuit, guitar making is subject to fashion which can further complicate design choices. While Sitka is the most familiar type of spruce used for dreadnought tops, Scott says that another famous spruce variety used for guitar tops has overtaken it in terms of bragging rights in recent times.

"Folks are always asking about Adirondak spruce. It's the buzzword at the moment, and whether folks know exactly why they want it or not, it's considered to be the 'Harley Davidson' of tonewoods. Another player might come to us and say, 'I've just got to have an Adirondak spruce top.'"





At Martin's Nazareth, PA factory, many of the hand building techniques of the early 20th century remain in action

## Brace Yourself

If the player has already made up their minds what kind of spruce they want for the top, Scott and the luthiers of the Custom Shop must adjust other elements of the guitar's design, such as bracing, to ensure the guitar's overall voicing and performance fits with the customer's playing style. Bracing is the X-shaped pattern of wooden struts that reinforces the guitar's top, so it can withstand the tension exerted upon it by the strings – but at the same time permitting it to resonate freely. How this bracing is arranged influences the tone and performance of the guitar in a fundamental way.

"In the case of a dreadnought, we might look at where that X-brace is positioned within the body to give the guitar the greatest tonal potential in the hands of a particular player," Scott says.

"If someone's playing style is heavy strumming, and they need that focus and presence, and they have to cut through other instruments in a combo environment, they may wish to move the bracing a little rearward in the mix, tighten up that recipe, to be able to get the focus out of it, to really be able to lay into that thing and not overplay it," he says.

"On the other hand, if we have someone who's looking to help drive a band with a little more bass – or they may just prefer more bass – we can build them a big, booming sound on the guitar. Moving those braces forward helps that top loosen to a degree, if you will, and then the potential for bass just explodes in that thing. So, the D-28 is a great structure, because it's got a couple

of voices that are just waiting to get out of there, depending on how you jockey the placement of that X-bracing."

In fact, the 'forward-shifted' bracing style – which appeared on Martin's classic pre-war dreadnoughts – has proved so popular with present-day players that it has become a standard feature of the company's new Reimagined Standard Series dreadnoughts. But, as ever with matters of personal taste, some things about guitarists' perceptions of what a really good dreadnought ought to be go beyond the simple evidence of our ears.

"The one thing that we continually rub up against with the dreadnought is the colour of the wood," Scott says. "We had a tremendous instrument that was built from Italian olive wood, and it was one of the best-sounding customs we've ever experienced. It was a monster of a guitar, but the wood colour put people off. If you gave someone the behind-the-curtain challenge and they purely had to make a choice based on tone, then they would've chosen it – but when you showed them the back of the guitar, they'd say, 'No, that one's not for me.'"

"So, we went to one of our specialists in finishing and told him that our challenge was to, 'Trick us into thinking that it's Madagascar rosewood. Colour it however you need to give it this quasi-rosewood appearance.' When it was done, it was still gorgeous. Humongous, great-sounding guitar, and it sold in a heartbeat. But it was just that momentary aversion where someone said, 'Martin Dreadnoughts are supposed to be brown....'" **G**

## THREE TOGETHER READY

Three dread'-style acoustics to inspire stellar strumming



**Martin Reimagined Standard Series D-28 £2,399**

The D-28 defined the dreadnought style as we know it. Martin recently launched a sympathetically revamped version of this classic, which deftly blends vintage features such as herringbone binding and forward-shifted bracing, with comfort-focused modern touches such as the Performing Artist Taper Neck. A tone-rich triumph that is classic in feel yet revitalises the Martin dread' platform.



**Sigma DM-SG5+ £495**

Formerly a Martin-owned company, Sigma has long impressed us with its affordable and competent take on 20th century dreads. No prizes for guessing the DM-SG5+ takes its inspiration from that other classic dread' design, Gibson's Hummingbird, but for under 500 notes it's an accessible way to evoke the vibe of one of the prettier vintage dreads that plays well and sounds up to muster, too.



**Taylor V-Class 714CE Grand Auditorium £3,359**

Ever the innovator, Taylor's Master Luthier Andy Powers has thrown down the gauntlet with the boldest change to the dreadnought formula in a century. By changing the bracing pattern from an X-shape to a Taylor-designed V, Powers claims improved sonority, sustain and even intonation. Our review of the flagship cutaway from the last issue said: "Typically fine-detailed build, with all-round performance acoustically and plugged-in that's enhanced by V-Class bracing."



# Substitute

## *This Issue: Pentatonic Superimpositions*

**If there was a way** to use your existing pentatonic scales and licks to play over a variety of new chords – and sound more exotic while you're at it – it would sound too good to be true, wouldn't it? Well, actually it is true...

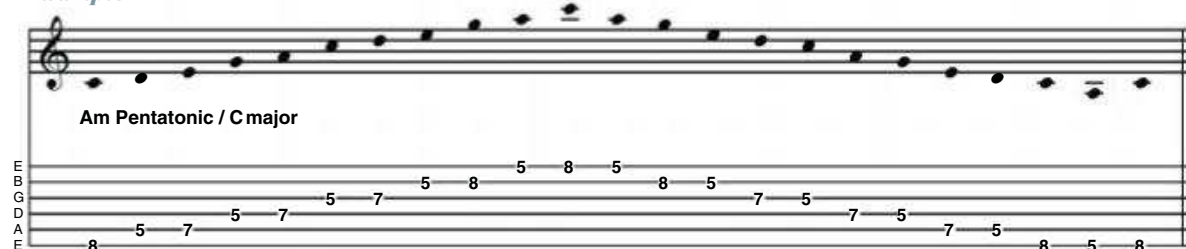
In short, it is possible to play most of your favourite ideas over alternative chords. The only 'catch', if there is one, is that you'll need to understand how the notes in the scale relate to the underlying chord. As you'll see, this isn't all that complex – we're

using chords associated with the C major scale (C/A minor/D minor) to illustrate these ideas, but they can be transposed to any key. We've thrown in a few different shapes of the pentatonic for variety, but the concept remains unchanged.

### *Example 1*

This A minor pentatonic is superimposed over a C major chord. You will find the same licks and lines that fit over A minor will fit over C major the 'relative major'. We start with A, to reflect the root note of the chord, but you'll see the root of the scale itself (A) is referred to at the end, before heading back to C.

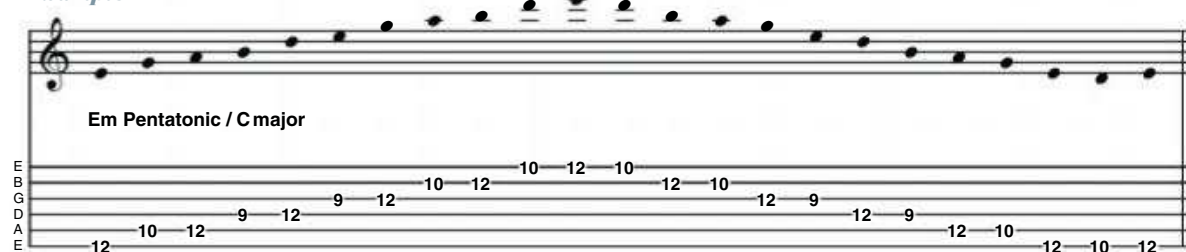
#### *Example 1*



### *Example 2*

The C major chord contains C, E and G (root, 3rd, 5th), so playing the minor pentatonic scale beginning with the 3rd (E) means we still have a useable scale for extra options. Start with standard E minor blues licks, then notice how certain notes imply a more complex harmony than a basic C chords.

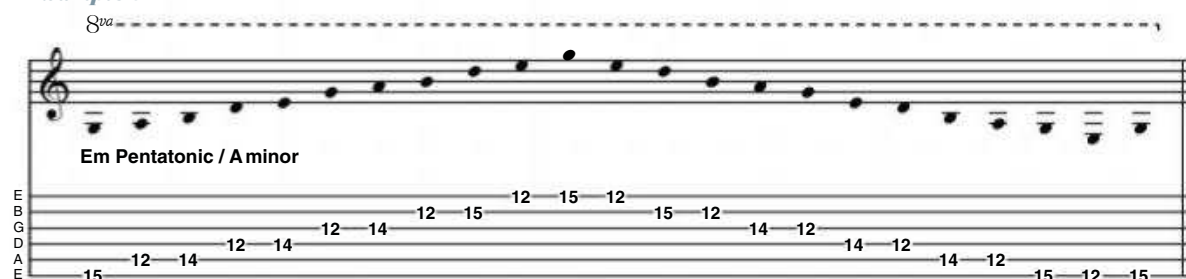
#### *Example 2*



### *Example 3*

The underlying chord is A minor, with a root/3rd/5th of A, C and E. By using E minor pentatonic, we're 'playing off the 5th', resulting in a pentatonic sound that refers to the 9th and 11th – even though these aren't present in the backing chord – adding depth and interest. We start and finish with G.

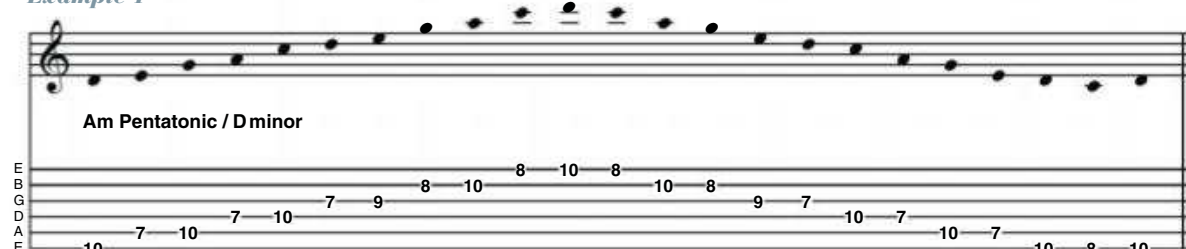
#### *Example 3*



### *Example 4*

Starting and finishing with D, this A minor pentatonic scale shape implies both the 7th and the minor 9th, giving extra melodic interest, while retaining the familiar scale shape. Simplify this by reverting to shape 1, though some of the lower notes can sound a little dissonant if emphasised or left to ring.

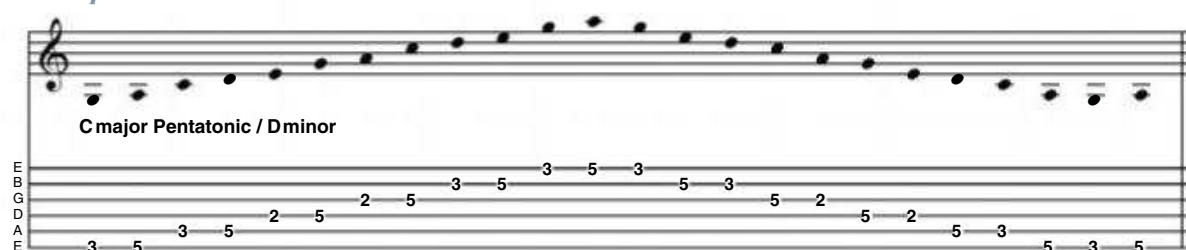
#### *Example 4*



### *Example 5*

This low-register C major pentatonic shape fits nicely over the D minor chord, but demonstrates the need for caution when experimenting with the lower notes. Try all the C major pentatonic shapes and see how it can open up different harmonic ideas when combined with your existing repertoire.

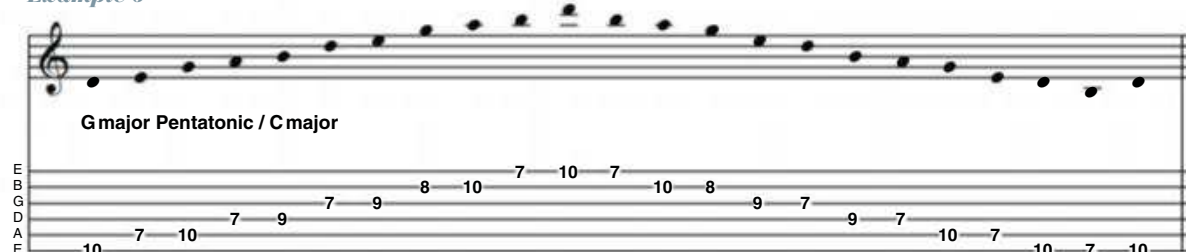
#### *Example 5*



### *Example 6*

Playing a G major pentatonic over a C major chord gives an alternative to the G major scale – or the E minor pentatonic for that matter. We start and finish in D, as it's nice to use all six strings, though many will target the root of the chord (C) if playing round the lower reaches of the fretboard.

#### *Example 6*







# SOUND OF HONOR

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# John Smith

He's a rising star in the firmament of folk, but how will he fare with the 10 questions we ask everyone?

## 1 What was your first guitar and when did you get it?

"It was a Squier Stratocaster, given to me by my dad when I was 11 years old. It was red and I think it was a Mexican build and just a really basic practice guitar. It was perfect for me at the time. I think when you're that age and someone hands you a Stratocaster, you feel like you've been handed the key to a big shiny door and everything is on the other side. I was obsessed with Led Zeppelin, Clapton and Delta blues and Chicago blues – I was listening to a lot of Muddy Waters."

## 2 Suppose the building was burning down, what one guitar would you save?

"Whichever one was hanging on the wall nearest the door! If I knew the sprinklers were going to kick in and I had a minute to spare, I think I'd grab my spruce top Fylde Falstaff. That's the guitar I play the most. It features most heavily on the new record [*Hummingbird*] and in all my shows. It's the only guitar I've ever picked up, played and bought on the spot within five minutes."

## 3 What's the oldest guitar that you have in your collection?

"I've got a 1936 [Gibson] Mastertone Special that I bought in Runcorn for a couple of hundred quid in Frailers guitar shop. It's set up for slide, so at some point it has been un-fretted and it has a massively high action. I use it for lap slide and it sounds great – really mellow and resonant."

## 4 When did you last practise and what did you play?

"I've just been away for the weekend without my guitar and so it must have been Friday. I think I picked up my SG and just played bottleneck slide for an hour. I'm really into slide guitar lately and I've been working on an arrangement of *The Late Show* by Jackson Browne, but just for slide guitar. And it's quite difficult. I've just bought this Strymon Flint pedal with tremolo and reverb and I think I went into spacey-tremolo world."



•  
*"When you're 11 and someone hands you a Stratocaster, you feel like you've been handed the key to a big shiny door"*  
•

## 5 When was the last time you changed your strings?

"I change them as little as possible, to be honest. I like the sound of old, dead strings and I use Elixirs, which never break no matter how much I beat them up. I think I changed a set recently just before a flight – you always have to detune and retune them – and it's an ideal time to put some new strings on. But I would say, on my main guitars I change the strings three times a year."

## 6 If you could change one thing about a recording you've been on, what would it be and why?

"You take songs you've recorded in the studio, then you play them live and they find their voice. You go back and listen to the album and realise you recorded it too slow or too fast, or whatever. There have been times when I've wanted to go back and revisit the *Great Lakes* session and speed something up or change the sound because it turned out so different live."

## 7 What's the worst thing that's happened to you on stage?

"I had a gig with Lisa Hannigan and it was in a very hot room in Boston. Somehow the banjo that she was playing and the guitar I was playing ended up a semitone apart. She did the first verse and it sounded great and at the chorus I came in with a lovely guitar lick, but it was a semitone flat. The whole room went, 'Uhhh...' and she looked round at me and went, 'What?' and I was looking at the guitar going, 'I don't know!' And the guitar tech looked up and went, 'Sorry...' It was terrible. It all happened in slow motion and I just wanted the ground to pull me in."

## 8 What song would you play around a campfire?

"Normally *Beeswing* by Richard Thompson. It never goes wrong; it's always a song that people respond to and I really enjoy playing it. I never cover it in gigs because it doesn't need to be covered, but if ever I'm around a campfire, I have a really good time singing that one."

## 9 What aspect of playing guitar would you like to be better at?

"I'd like the time to study theory like I used to. The trouble with touring and then being at home and being with your family, is making time for practice. At some point I'm hoping just to hide myself away for a month and get back up to speed on theory, because as soon as I started learning music theory and you learn that there are thousands of ways to play a major 7 chord, then suddenly the fretboard opens up and it becomes a road map, rather than just a single track."

## 10 Is there a myth about you or your guitar playing that you'd like to set the record straight on?

"I don't know... is there?" 



John Smith's album, *Hummingbird*, is out now on Commoner Records

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# Feedback

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)

## Star Letter



### OUR GAIN?

Last month, Neville Marten asked for new guitarist debating points – well, here's one: will the overdrive channel become obsolete now that amps are promoted as 'great platforms for pedals' and all the drive sounds we need lie in transistorised thingies at our feet rather than the valves cooking behind us? There was a time when reviewers would say an amp's drive channel was so good there was no need for pedals. Now it's the other way round!

Leo and Jim's original combos/stacks soon developed into twin-channel amps to give us greater control over sound and volume. Along the way, we discovered sonic magic in the power amp as well as the preamp, and a plethora of smaller amps followed. But now, stompbox technology has reached a point where, today, the range of excellent analogue effects is staggering.

Ironically, the years we spent venerating

the sound of hot valves have given way to a love of chip or transistor-derived pedalboard equivalents. Increasingly, reviewers (not forgetting the vloggers) get most excited about pedals, while ever more new amps have just one channel. And yes, when I gig my own Fender amp, it sounds best set clean with a bit of Lovepedal squeezed through the front-end. The past few decades of R&D have helped us to obtain and manage better sounds, so this solid-state/digital-assisted move from valves isn't wrong. It's progress, I suppose. Very interesting!

Steve Painter, via email

Thanks for providing an interesting talking point, Steve. Here's what Mr Marten says: "When the pedal market began in earnest in the early 80s, it was not long after Mesa/Boogie had invented cascading gain stages to create tones previously only available with amps set to 11. But now a cranked 20-watter could produce a similar effect using the now mandatory 'gain' channel. And as pedals become more refined, maybe we are entering a new era where the channels slowly become a thing of the past – many manufacturers now make 'pedal amps', don't they? But some players still love a blistering valve amp and don't want the hassle and potential tone-suck of long cable runs and clusters of pedals, so I don't see multi-channel amps going away just yet."



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## WINCE I'VE BEEN LOVING YOU

Had to chip in on the 'gurning' issue raised by Steve Barker [Feedback, issue 438]. I remember seeing Paul Kossoff many times when I was a young 'un, and he used to do a superb open-mouthed 'silent scream' as he vibrato'd soaring notes and it certainly impressed me! Rory Gallagher had more of a subtle wince, but still oozed sincerity as his solos took off. Meanwhile, Jimmy Page's face was generally in the shade of his locks, so the gurning jury is out on that one...

Fast forward to today, Joe B has obviously gone with the painful wince, Joey Landreth (whom I saw recently, and he was great) just smiled. Overall, I think it's 'showbiz' so we're stuck with it, but I for one enjoy it. Sadly, my problem is that I now wince, even when I'm at home practising. It must be contagious, so be careful out there...

Nigel Seed, via email

**There are many variations on the 'guitar gurn' – from 'mild heartburn' to an expression of unbearable agony straight out of the Spanish Inquisition. We reckon if it's a side effect of really feeling what you're playing, then it can't be all bad – but, if you fancy a bit of a laugh, look up the spoof Tumblr page Slug Solos, where the guitars in live pics of famous players have been Photoshopped and replaced**

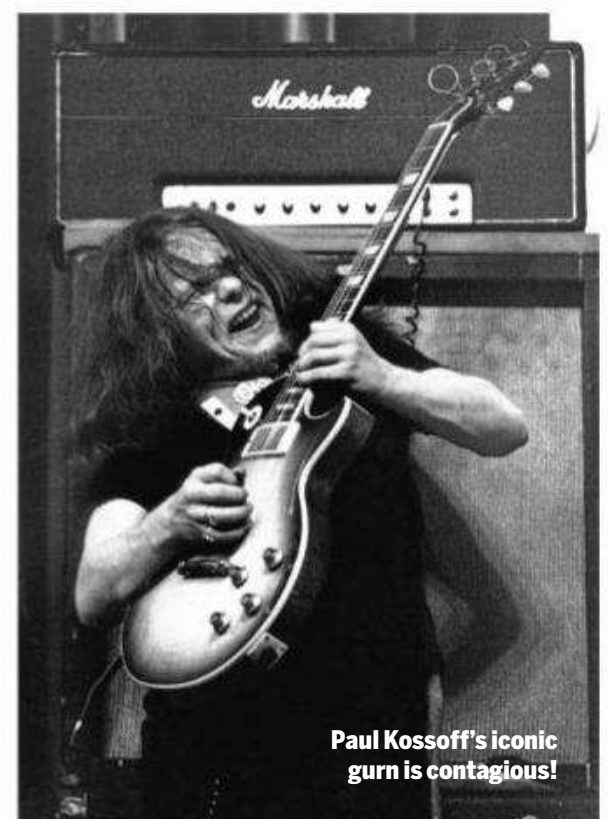


PHOTO BY GRAHAM LOWE / REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



The late John Renbourn continues to inspire: stay tuned for an acoustic retrospective in these pages soon...



by... you've guessed it, slugs. Check it out at <http://bit.ly/slugsolo>. The anguished gurns of the players make perfect sense when they're holding a giant, slime-covered mollusc!

## BADLY SERVED

I recently moved away from Surrey, where I had Denmark Street as well as at least four huge guitar superstores all within an hour's drive. It was gear nirvana for sure. I'm now in rural North Shropshire where my options are more limited. The larger stores are further away (and not as large), and my local guitar shop, though brilliant in many ways, adopts an 'if we order something in for you, you must buy it' policy. So, if I want anything more exotic than a standard Strat/Tele or low-end shred guitar I'm faced with a very long drive or taking my chances online.

So, I find myself buying online from the same stores I used to visit in person in London, and my experiences haven't been great. A recent purchase, a £2,000 USA-made guitar, arrived with the worse possible setup. I ended up doing a four-hour round trip to the retailer just to have it looked at; they admitted the neck was "way out" and made adjustments, which having brought it home again clearly weren't enough. I'm now faced with the hassle of having to arrange collection by courier.

Another guitar, from another (huge) retailer's website, arrived in its hard case, in perfect outer packaging, but with a huge, deep scratch across the guitar's front. Does nobody check this stuff before it leaves the warehouse? Anyway, the replacement, supposedly personally checked by a senior staff member, arrived with multiple scratches, and a two-inch long hardened glue deposit on the bottom on the fretboard – utterly noticeable when playing. Another return!

These are businesses I have spent tens of thousands of pounds with over the years, and yet when I point out these issues I get the distinct impression I'm being viewed with indifference, as if I'm over-reacting. Am I expecting too much?

**Matt Baker**

**Bad service has never been a benefit to any retailer – bricks-and-mortar or online – so it's always worth sharing stories so**

**that any retailers reading are reminded how much a quality product with good setup and effective aftercare matters. That said, most successful retailers know that repeat custom follows from a good experience and do their very best to provide it. By contrast, poor service can be, and is, punished by customers voting with their feet and buying elsewhere. What are other readers' best and worst stories of customer service?**

## SMOKING PERFORMANCE

I loved the feature on the late great Bert Jansch in your acoustic supplement [issue 436]. It was also good to read about his collaborations with John Renbourn, and I think a big acoustic feature is overdue about this great player. I had the privilege of seeing him play live several times. On each occasion his playing was mesmerising and simply beautiful. At the Winning Post in York I saw him light a cigarette just before he played *Cherry* from his album *The Three Kingdoms*. He puffed away right through the piece (at least five minutes) and not one single mote of ash left the end of that cigarette until he had finished and pulled on it for the last time. And if that's not genius, then what is?

**Lee Hanson, via email**

**We heartily agree, Lee. Only the other day we had *The Black Balloon* playing in the office and marvelled at Renbourn's artistry. His masterly mid-gig control**

**over cigarette ash only increases our admiration! Seriously, though, a big retrospective feature is due and your letter is just the prompt we needed to start putting wheels in motion for an issue in the not-too-distant future.**

## FINGER TIP

I just thought I'd share this tip with you and your readers. I wanted to ensure my wall hangers did not damage the finish on my guitars, and after looking into it, the consensus seemed to be the safest material to be in contact with the finish is cotton. My solution, therefore, was to cut the fingers off some cotton gloves and use them to cover the hooks that contact the guitar neck.

**Colin Bentham**

**Ingenious, Colin – thanks for the excellent tip – we like your thinking. But is your house now also full of fingerless gloves? Never mind, the guitars must come first, of course...**

## PEDALBOARD BLUES

I've subscribed to *Guitarist* magazine since 2016 and really enjoy your publication. I have dipped in and out of playing over the years, but have been restricted by my job, family and watching my beloved Hartlepool United – so this has certainly messed with my desire and the time required to become the next Paul Kossoff.



## Feedback

I first picked a guitar up many years ago and received a few lessons from a very patient teacher. It would be fair to describe myself as a guitaring 'hacker'! Now, as older age creeps up, I have once more taken the plunge and my few guitars are back on the ground floor of my house (retrieved from the loft), and now stand proudly next to my Blues Junior, reawakening to the sounds of fretbuzz and chord choking.

But occasionally, just occasionally, a tune appears and like Gary Player said in golfing terms: 'The hundred bad shots you hit are more than made up for by the one good one you hit.' Therein lies the joy for me.

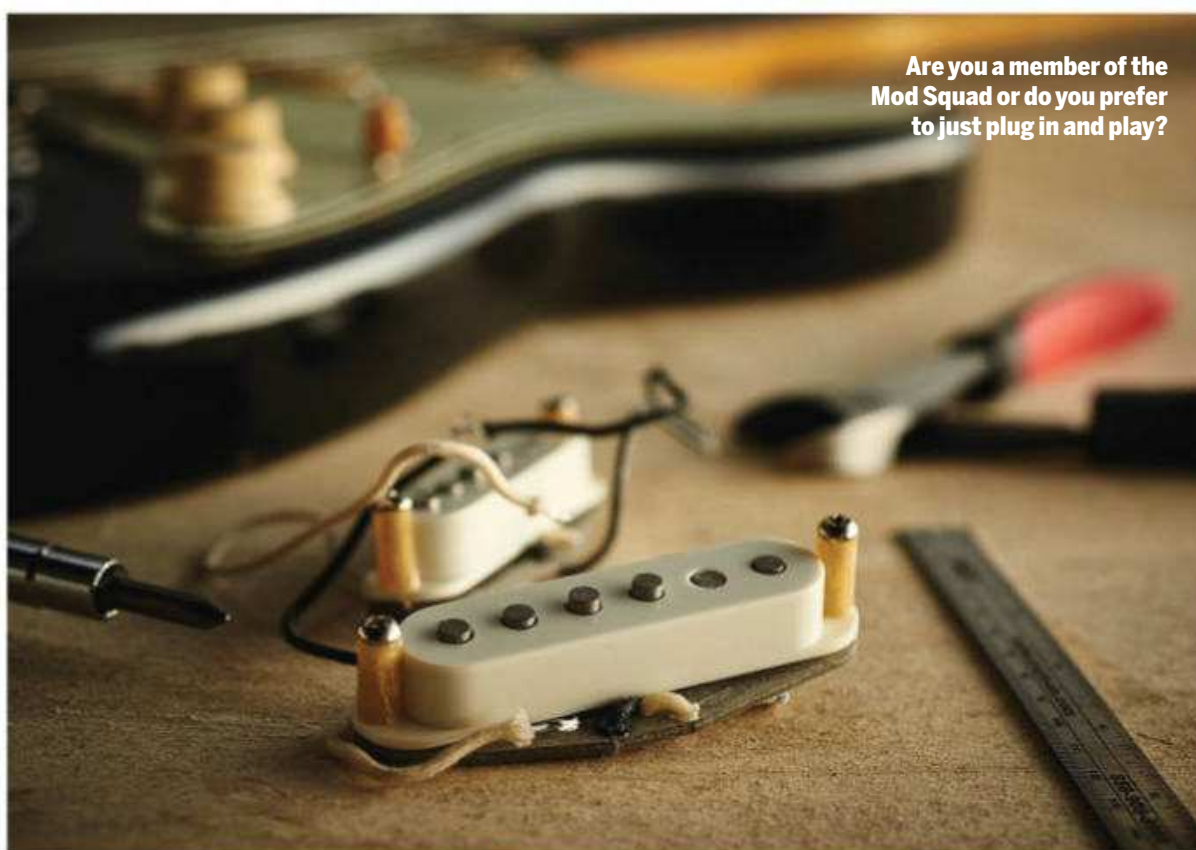
So keep inspiring people to do what I do and the joy it can bring and keep it real. With that in mind, I sometimes wonder with all this modding and pedals, etc (I am an artisan blues player, I just 'plug it in!'), has the player doing all the modding and pedalboarding not just bought the wrong guitar?

**Robin Meredith**

**Thanks for the kind words, Robin. Very glad the mag is providing inspiration for your playing that keeps you hunting for that perfect note or phrase. As for your**



Huw's pair of Patrick Eggle Berlin Pros had a serendipitous meeting



Are you a member of the Mod Squad or do you prefer to just plug in and play?

**point on modding, it really depends. We've certainly had our share of queries from players who want to know what hardware to mod their Strat with to make it sound exactly like a Les Paul, for example. The answer in that case is usually polite advice to simply seek out a Les Paul if that is the thing you really want, rather than try to cajole the basic character of a guitar into something totally different.**

**By contrast, a tweak to a much-loved guitar that enhances a particular aspect of its performance can be a smart move, from adding a Bigsby to fitting a hotter set of pickups, for example. The key is to do your research, avoid getting swept away by hype for this or that 'miracle mod', and use your common sense. New hardware that unlocks extra tones, reliability or functionality from a much-loved guitar can be a win. But no mod will ever turn a Tele into a 335 – they're not magic spells, after all.**

### SILVER LINING

Hi *Guitarist*, great mag, the definitive one for guitarists. I go back to the very early days of this mag, long before you added CDs, etc, had a hiatus and then returned to the fold as a subscriber. So, I've been searching for a 22-year-old guitar and finally found one.

Back in 1996 at the London Music Show, I was chatting to the guys on the Patrick Eggle stand about a 24-fret metallic silver Berlin Pro hardtail. I think they felt a bit sorry for me and agreed to sell it to me for the sum I had available. Excitedly, I trotted off home with a professional-standard, top-quality guitar at last. Since then I've been gigging that guitar a lot – for the past 22 years, in fact – as my main guitar and it's been a star.

My covers band now plays over 80 gigs a year, and although I love my Gibson Gary Moore Signature model Les Paul and my PRS Custom 24, changing over if I bust a string means a very different sonic response and feel across the music of a wide range of artists. So I'd been scouring eBay for a long time for another Berlin Pro. Of course, there are many variations now, but I wanted something as close to my original one as I could get. I wanted the same neck shape and size and a 24-fretter. It was looking like a dead loss without buying brand new, spec'd the same... but late last year I found something promising. Met the owner at M5 Services, opened his case and, although a trem model, it was in great condition for a 22-year-old guitar and the feel was perfectly the same so I bought it. To my astonishment it was a 1996 model and its serial number was just 102 down the line from mine! Serendipity smiled that day, I'm dead chuffed and think they look fab together [pictured left].

I replaced the pickups with Bare Knuckle units and now happily gig two 1996 Berlin Pros, one Silver top and one Gold top.

As an aside, apparently they only made two of these Silver tops and Peter Goalby had the other one! I don't suppose anyone's got a 1996 Bronze one...?

**Huw, via email**

### CORRECTION

A couple of eagle-eyed readers spotted that in our review of the Martin OM-28 Reimagined Standard Series last issue we quoted a rather salty price of £3,899. This is, of course, £1,000 higher than the retail price of £2,899 that you'll find in major stores. We blush and offer sincere apologies to Martin and any fans of the new OM-28, which is a smashing guitar.

**Send your letters to:** [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)



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# Music

The month's best guitar music, plus top players in the studio



## Robben Ford

*Purple House*

earMUSIC

9/10



### Plushly produced, song-led return from a master guitarist

Robben Ford's always been hugely respected for his tasteful, eloquent playing,

which abides in the guitarist's happy hunting ground between the genres of blues and jazz that has permitted him to be by turns gutsy and virtuosic in his playing over the years. For this new long-player, however, Ford has taken a small step to the left, setting out to use production more creatively. What we get is an album that's more akin to the recent work of Mike Landau or Doyle Bramhall II.

The production is rich and sophisticated but also a little more edgy, ambitious and contemporary than you might casually expect of Ford. Robben's writing is certainly on top form. Take *Bound For Glory*, for example, which blends a sophisticated R&B vibe with some funkily jagged guitar lines that recall Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter's work on Steely Dan's *Countdown To Ecstasy*. It's a really strong arrangement and Ford keeps his playing superbly tasteful and concise,

letting the song be about the song – not a disposable vehicle for his best chops.

Elsewhere, in the acoustic-led *Break In The Chain*, we see Ford venture even further into the role of American songsmith, with a rough-hewn, bluesy duet that feels like a pickup truck ride through the travails of blue-collar American life. There's even subtle flavours of country-blues, blended with something more enigmatic and contemporary, in the start-and-stop beauty of *Wild Honey*.

We're hearing a newly contemporary, creative and confident spirit in Ford's music here that's a pleasure to listen to. This is his first outing for the earMUSIC label that he's now signed with and the change seems to have done him good. There's still plenty of top-drawer Ford solo chops on tracks such as *Cotton Candy*, but he seems to be placing fresh emphasis on songs – and it works. [JD]

**Standout track:** *Bound For Glory*

**For fans of:** Mike Landau, Doyle Bramhall II

## Richard Thompson

13 Rivers

Proper Records

9/10



### Renowned folk-rocker wrestles with his darker side

Equally at home with either his signature Lowden acoustic or a Fender Strat in his hands, it's the latter incarnation that we meet on Richard Thompson's *13 Rivers*. Explaining the title, he tells us, "There are 13 songs on the record and each one is like a river; some flow faster than others... They all culminate on this one body of work." It's a raw, to-the-bone album with songs coming to the folk-rock legend as a "surprise in a dark time." Those more familiar with his acoustic work might be taken aback with the angry, snarling guitar on tracks like *The Rattle Within* and *The Dog In You*, but repeated listenings reveal a landmark album. [DM]

**Standout track:** *Trying*

**For fans of:** Fairport Convention, John Martyn

## Max Davies

*In The Realms Of The Mercury Halo*

Fast Speaking Music

8/10



### Song-driven soundscapes marry electronic rhythms with vivid guitar textures...

With a diverse back catalogue featuring collaborations alongside musicians and writers such as Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, as well as Lydia Lunch and Toni Oswald, Max Davies' latest solo album appears via influential American poet Anne Waldman's label of prolific interdisciplinary artists, Fast Speaking Music. Dedicated to the memory of David Bowie, *In The Realms Of The Mercury Halo* yearns with a sorrowful gravitas and minimalistic intensity reminiscent of the great man's *Black Star* and *Low* albums. Taking insight from Bowie's selective lead guitar lines in songs such as *Be My Wife*, Max's choice-note Fender Jaguar melodies and elegant washes of chordal embellishment are complemented throughout by the tastefully succinct electronic rhythms of composer Jonas Leuenberger. [RB]

**Standout track:** *Beyond*

**For Fans of:** David Bowie, Thom Yorke



**John McLaughlin**  
Live In San Francisco  
Absolute Logix

10/10



**Mahavishnu Orchestra revisited in the 21st century**

On his farewell tour of America last year, fusion visionary John McLaughlin stopped off at The Warfield Theatre in San Francisco to play a set of compositions from his days with The Mahavishnu Orchestra. To enhance the occasion, he invited his friend and fellow guitarist Jimmy Herring along, combining the talents of Herring's The Invisible Whip band with McLaughlin's 4th Dimension, the result being a nine-piece 'orchestra' paying tribute to some of the most revolutionary jazz-fusion music from the early 70s. The connection between the musicians is approaching the supernatural, as is the respect and admiration for the music involved, Jimmy Herring noting that, "Playing these timeless compositions with John and the 4th Dimension was a life-changing experience!" It's a guitarfest of epic proportions – two masters supported by some of the best instrumentalists around. The offbeat blues trip *The Dance Of Maya* alone is worth the price of admission. [DM]

**Standout track:** *The Dance Of Maya*

**For fans of:** The Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return To Forever



John McLaughlin revisits his Mahavishnu days

PHOTO BY JIM BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

**Bob Daisly & Friends**  
Moore Blues For Gary  
Absolute

7/10



**Star-studded line-up pays tribute**

Friends, colleagues, family and band members get together to pay their respects by playing some of the songs that form part of Gary Moore's legacy. The project was put together by Bob Daisly, who gathered together guitarists including Steve Lukather (*The Blues Just Got Sadder*), Steve Morse (*Parisienne Walkways*), Doug Aldrich (*The Loner*) and John Sykes (*Still Got The Blues*) as well as luminaries on vocals, drums and keys. With such a varied line-up, it's understandable that some tracks work better than others, but overall, it's a very fitting tribute. [DM]

**Standout track:** *Still Got The Blues*

**For fans of:** Gary Moore, Thin Lizzy

# Start me up

*On-the-rise guitar acts to look out for*

**The Marcus King Band**  
Carolina Confessions  
Snakefarm Records

9/10



**Remarkable maturity from young rising star**

Not so well known on this side of the Atlantic – but we suspect this will soon change – this is blues-rocker Marcus King's third release, and it's a stonker. Remarkably, Marcus is still only 22 years old and yet the level of maturity here would lead you to suspect he was at least twice that age. Soulful vocals, powerful songwriting, great guitar playing and immersive arrangements add up to a joyful, upbeat

album. Tracks like *8am* mix the very best elements from Motown and Southern rock with a dash of soul thrown in for good measure. If you're quick, you'll catch him live in the UK this autumn. [DM]

**Standout track:** *Remember*

**For fans of:** Allman Brothers, Doyle Bramhall II

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## Martin Barre

The Jethro Tull legend recalls how running keeps him sane and fears a life without cheese...

Words

David Mead

### *What was your first gig?*

"The first Jethro Tull gig was in January 1969. It was in Penzance at a very horrible club, which I hope doesn't exist any more. This was in the days when it probably took seven or eight hours to drive from London to Penzance, so we got there ridiculously late, got into this club and there were people all over the floor, comatose. The air was thick with pot and, at the far end, you could just about make out the stage, so we had to bring in the gear climbing over all these people – they didn't even move an inch.

"We'd bought new stage gear the day before at Portobello Market and mine was a pirate jacket and it became quite apparent after the first song that the arms were too tight so I had a severe loss of blood in my left arm, leading to the inability to play. We only had one guy in the crew and I called out to him and he brought over his trusty Swiss Army knife and cut away the underside of the jacket around my armpit. This produced a lush flow of blood back into my left hand and service was restored. I think the audience thought it was some sort of Druid blood ceremony – and the only bit of the set they actually enjoyed! We never got asked back..."

### *Describe your current stage rig...*

"It's quite straightforward, I've had this rig for many, many years – it's a Soldano Decatone

with a Marshall 2x12 at the back and an extension 1x12 Marshall at the front. The only effect is a tiny little PicoVerb with a bit of room reverb to wet up the sound a bit. Then a radio, which at the moment is Sony, and my trusty PRS P22 – and that's it.

"If it's a gig in the UK, I load up the car with as many guitars as I can fit in – I've started going back to old guitars again. I went through the phase of having amazing vintage guitars a long time ago and I'm starting to collect them again – 'collect' as in a musical term and not in a 'hang on the wall and don't touch them' way. I've got a nice 345 from '69 I take on the road in England, I've got a Cherry Dot Neck '61 335 that I love and I've got a '63 Fender Strat, Fiesta Red, that I love probably as much as the 335, but more than the 345..."

"I've got all these lovely guitars that are fun to play maybe just for one song. I can get by with the PRS forever and a day, it does everything I want it to, but I just like guitars!"

### *What's on your rider?*

"There's very disappointingly little on there. Unfortunately – and this is more for other people than myself – I'm actually a gluten-free vegetarian. As I say, it's more unfortunate for the people I'm with because, when we go out to eat, it's just so depressing when they hear me order food. The waiter or waitress always looks at me with these great depths of pity, thinking, 'Y'know what? You're going to eat a lettuce leaf tonight, so get over it...'

"So hence my rider is usually just water and a nice dry white wine. The only thing I'm allowed in life. I'm not even allowed cheese, but there's nothing else I can eat. Hence cheese is on my rider and I eat it guiltily. Life would be pointless without cheese."

### *What's your best tip for getting a good live sound?*

"Maybe just knowing your gear? I play through my live gear at home and I just know

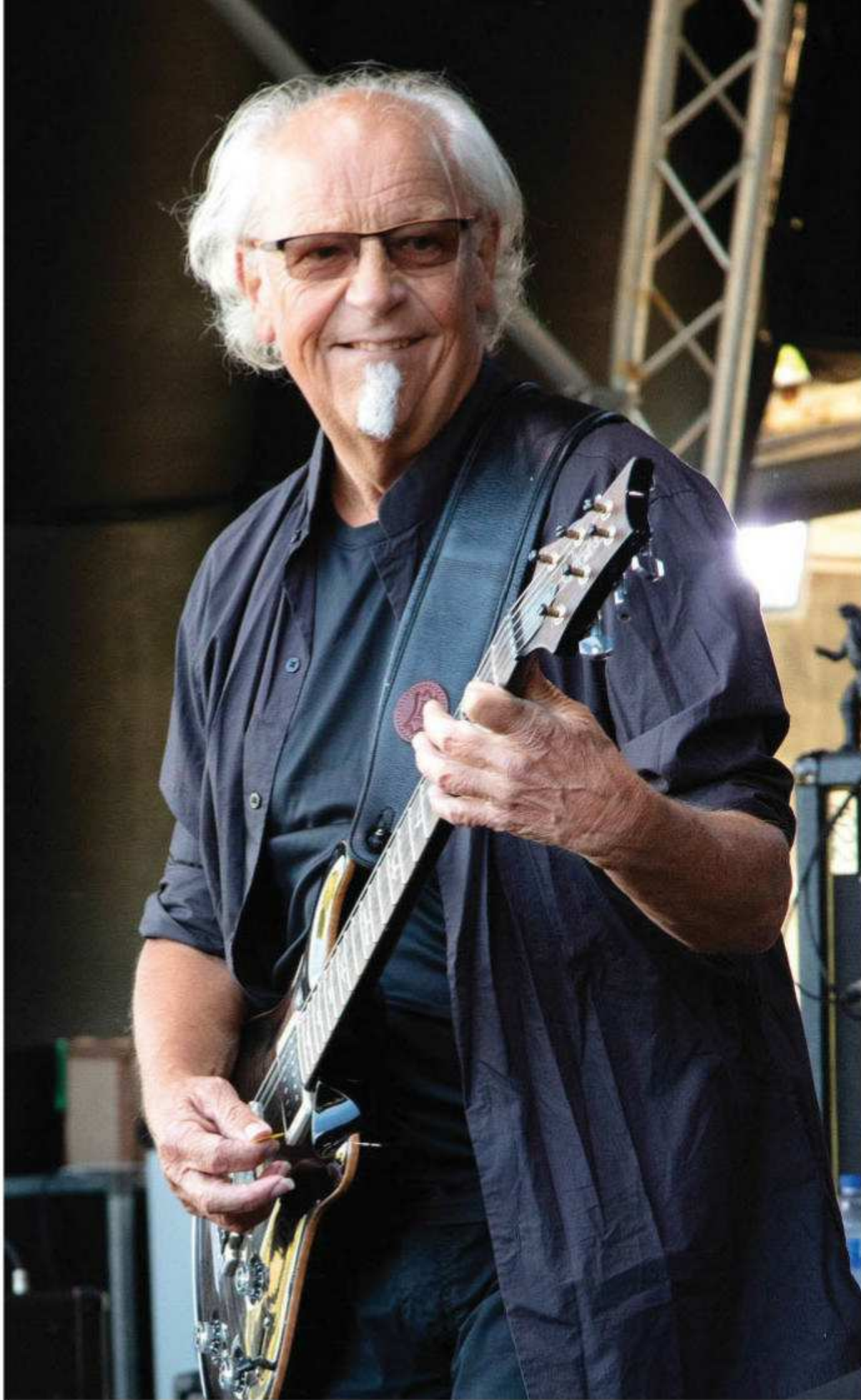


PHOTO BY ELAYNE BARRE



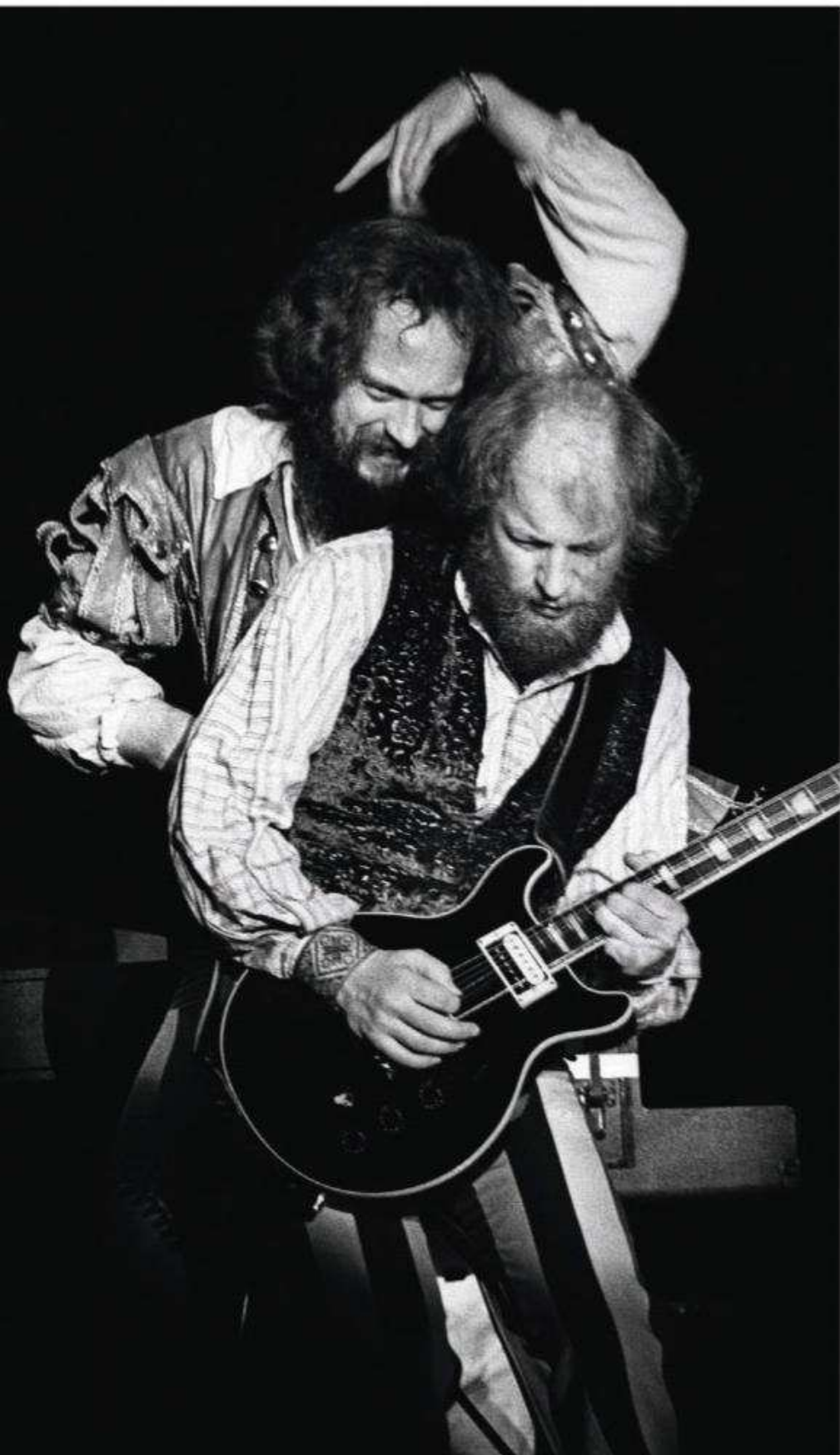


PHOTO BY ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

it so incredibly well – and I think that I play to the guitar and amp as much as the guitar and amp play to me. It's a sort of two-way energy link, if you like. It's familiarity and there are so many variables in the way you play and how hard you bite with the plectrum, backing off the volume, left-hand technique...

"There are infinitesimal variations [in your technique], and we're talking about millimetres here, but I can hear the difference and every time I play through the same rig, the same setup, I get to know it that little bit more. And it's the same gear, and it's the same settings, but it sounds better with age. I can't explain it. I just alter the way I play to the gear and the gear responds."

***What non-musical item couldn't you do without on tour?***

"My running shoes, because running keeps me sane. Everybody thinks it keeps me fit, but I question that. In the worst place you've

**Barre remains unperturbed by Ian Anderson's pantomime villainry**



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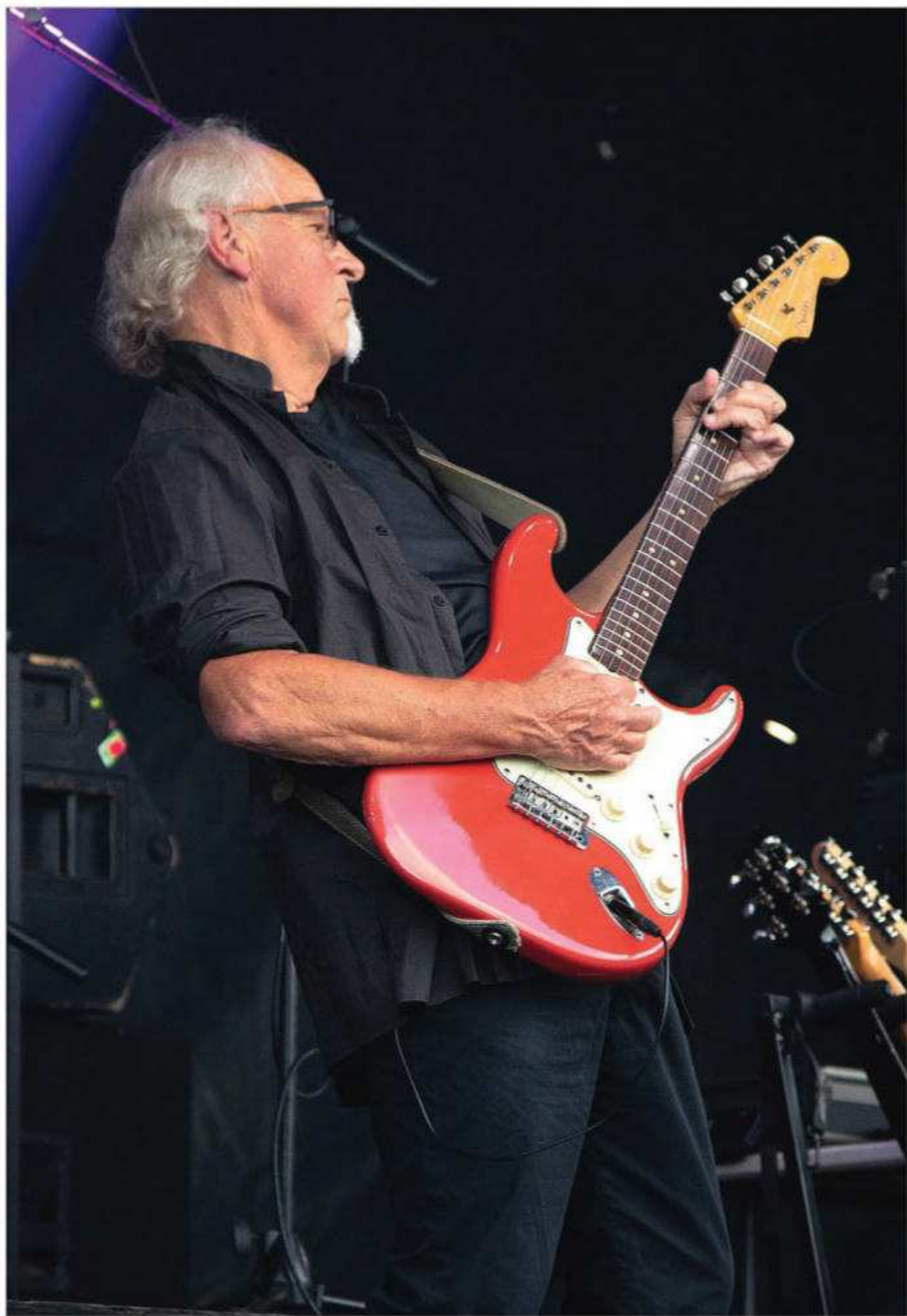


PHOTO BY ELAYNE BARRE

ever been in your life, there is somewhere to run and it will cheer you up. I've been in horrible Eastern European industrial towns and everyone blocks themselves into the hotel room, but I will find a park or a river and along that river or around that park there will be similarly weird people like me running – and they're smiling.

"It's like being an express tourist because every town we visit, I see a lot more of it than anyone else."

## ***What's the best tip for getting the audience on your side?***

"I think it's honesty. If you try and have a 'show' people see through it. It's a veneer. People can tell when you're being genuine and communication with the audience isn't scripted – and the fact it isn't scripted means you're treating each audience as a unique gig.

"I have fun and I try to communicate that fun and enjoyment in every respect, other

than just playing – talking about the music, chatting to the audience, interplay with the other guys on stage. People can see and read in the musicians' faces exactly how they feel about what they're doing."

## ***Where in the world is the best venue you've played and why?***

"I would say that, in general terms, the worst country you visit, the poorer the town, the more horrible the place is, the nicer the people are. I guess you could say they might be grateful that you're there, but that would just be really condescending. I tend to think that people who have a very basic existence enjoy things in a very honest way and I would never favour one venue over another. In some ways I would rather not remember where that certain gig was, but I can remember how good it was. To me, every gig is the first gig I've done and the most important gig I've done and I want the attitude that everything is equal."

•  
*"I think the best Spinal Tap moment in Tull was when we used to dress up in animal suits and have four-hour shows"*  
•

## ***What's the worst journey you've ever had either to or from a gig?***

"There are so many nightmare journeys and most of them involve flying. The worst one was when I had to get to Switzerland the next day. I got the last flight out of Heathrow, which went via Brussels. I got to Brussels and had to stay in a horrible, horrible motel because fog cancelled flights. The only flight I could get to Switzerland was via Athens on a Greek airliner when everybody smoked. I had the last seat in the very back row, surrounded by smokers. The flight was diverted mid-air and I ended up in the wrong town in Switzerland. I got on a train and I was so filthy and dishevelled they wouldn't serve me in the dining car. I got to my hotel and it became apparent in the next half an hour that I had inherited some 'visitors' from that horrible motel... let's just leave it there, shall we?"

## ***What's the nearest you've come to a Spinal Tap moment on tour?***

"I think the best Spinal Tap moment in Tull was when we used to dress up in animal suits and have four-hour shows. It wasn't me, thank goodness, but there was a person who wore a hare suit. He kept the head of it backstage and it was such a long show he used to pee into an empty lager can. Anyway, he was fumbling backstage to get his head, and knocked the can of pee into it unknowingly. He then put the head on and had to play the rest of the show. That's Spinal Tap, isn't it?"

## ***What's your favourite live album?***

"I guess it would have to be *Live Cream* mainly because it had such an impact. It was an amazing album anyway and I think it was in an era when – if I can be cynical here – 'live' albums were actually live and not repaired. It was totally genuine but it just held all that vitality – it just came out of the speakers, such a powerful sound, just incredible." **G**



Martin Barre's latest album, *Roads Less Travelled*, is available now via Cleopatra Records  
[www.martinbarre.com](http://www.martinbarre.com)





## the moment of truth

Hollywood, California · December 8th 9:58 PM

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# « BACKTRACKING »

Our pick of recently reissued classic albums, essential compilations and vintage guitar recordings you must hear



**Nazareth**  
Loud & Proud! **BMG**

8/10

## 50th anniversary of Scotland's pop rockers

It's definitely the year of the huge, lavish boxed set and the latest band to receive the treatment are hard-rock popsters, Nazareth. Formed in Dunfermline in 1968, original members Dan McCafferty, Manny Charlton, Pete Agnew and Darrell Sweet released their first eponymously titled album in 1971 going on to have a string of hits. *Loud & Proud!* charts the band's glory years across a multitude of different formats, including a monster 32-CD package, chock-full of goodies that will satisfy even the most hardcore fan. Damned by a few for being at the pop end of rock, this compilation goes a long way to dispel that myth and showcases the band's harder edge magnificently. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *This Flight Tonight*

**For fans of:** AC/DC, The Sweet



## DEEP CUTS

*Nigel Pulsford on lost-classic guitar albums you must hear*

**Bobby Bland**  
*Dream*  
**ABC Records 1974**



The great Bobby 'Blue' Bland had something of a revival in the 70s through his association with BB King

and the enthralling live album *Together Again For The First Time*, released in 1974. He'd been a big star in the late 50s, often working with Wayne Bennett as his guitar player. Bland's version of *Stormy Monday Blues* is a wondrous creation recorded in a free five minutes at the end of an hour-long recording session. An early compilation of his work is well worth seeking out. His voice, expressive, passionate and tinged with a feeling of world-weary sadness, was a huge influence on vocalists from Richard Manuel to Greg Allman.

*Dreamer* was the second of his Californian albums and was released in 1975. It was recorded in ABC Studios, LA with the cream of the usual mid-70s suspects who put on their Sunday best for the occasion. Larry Carlton, Dean Parks and Ben Benay feature on guitar. The ensemble exhibits a distinct Stax feel with Ed Greene and The Crusaders' Wilton Felder handling drums and bass respectively. The album is chock-full of great songs, but check out *Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City* in particular.

### Further listening:

*Two Steps From The Blues*  
*The Anthology*

**Loudon Wainwright III**  
*Years In The Making*  
**Storysound Records**

9/10



### Rare and unissued tracks from an amazing career

Described as being "45 years of offbeat, rare and unissued tracks... an audio-biography", this double-CD sees 42 songs made up from live recordings, demos and radio shows that span a long career of esoteric songsmithery. "*Years In The Making* covers a lot of ground," says Loudon. "Sonically, it's all over the place and, at times, noticeably low-fi..." And it's true to say that some tracks clock in at under a minute, too – *Rosin The Bow* and *Station Break* being a case in point. But long-standing fans won't bat an eye, as it's all part of the man's leftfield appeal and, as such, this collection is an absolute treasure trove. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *Floods Of Tears*

**For fans of:** Anna McGarrigle, Suzzy Roche

**Eddie And The Hot Rods**  
*The Island Years*  
**Caroline**

8/10



### Canvey Island's finest show what they've got in a six-CD retrospective

Eddie And The Hot Rods rode the new wave of the mid-70s along with other Essex-based bands such as Dr Feelgood and The Kursaal Flyers. Initially a pub rock band, they moved on to produce the hit single *Do Anything You Wanna Do* in the heartland of the punk era, surviving many break-ups and reformations since. As the title suggests, this collection of six CDs comes from the time the band was signed to the Island label – roughly speaking '76 to '79 – and comes complete with bonus tracks and John Peel sessions aplenty. It also includes the reissue of a highly sought-after 12-track fanclub release from 1977. **[DM]**

**Standout track:** *Do Anything You Wanna Do*

**For fans of:** Dr Feelgood, The Kursaal Flyers



## 6 String Acoustics



13022 - Alkin Acoustic Guitars To Special Order  
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar  
18240 - Faith FN Natural Neptune  
16482 - Fender C60S3 Tone Sunburst  
16484 - Fender C60S3 Tone Natural  
16878 - Fender CD60S Acoustic Guitar  
18045 - Fender CD60S Acoustic Guitar, Used  
16483 - Fender CP60S Parlor Acoustic, Sunburst  
16855 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Black  
18250 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar, Black  
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar  
18251 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar, Sunburst  
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand  
13366 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used  
18169 - Lantivee G3 Parlor Sized Mahogany, Used  
18258 - Maestro OO-IR Traditional Series Guitar  
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural  
6009 - Martin 00018 Grand Auditorium Acoustic  
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand  
16780 - Martin D28 (2017) Re-imagined Version  
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural  
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural  
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchestra, Natural  
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway Acoustic  
18188 - Segovia SJC31, Secondhand  
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Cutaway  
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic  
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O  
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS  
16866 - Tanglewood TW11 D Olive Wood D-Nought  
9570 - Tanglewood TW40 DAN Dreadnought  
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlor  
12668 - Tanglewood TW70 EG  
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ Travel Guitar  
17052 - Tanglewood TWR O Roadster II  
17053 - Tanglewood TWR2 D TWR D II Roadster  
17056 - Tanglewood TWU D Union Dreadnought  
17055 - Tanglewood Union TWU F  
15980 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X15NS  
18206 - Taylor 814CE LTD Limited Ed. Model, 2006  
13910 - The Cort AF510OP Acoustic Folk Guitar  
8007 - Vintage V2000MGG Giltap Mahog Acoustic  
18104 - Vintage V2000MGG Giltap Mahog Acoustic  
5632 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought, Natural  
15577 - Yamaha LL26 Handcrafted Jumbo Acoustic  
15576 - Yamaha LS26 A.R.E. II Handcrafted Guitar

## 6 String Electro Acoustics



16828 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid  
18266 - Maestro Victoria KO-CSB-A Custom Series  
18267 - Maestro Raffles PH-CSB-AX Private Guitar  
15747 - Maestro Victoria WE 000 with LR Baggs  
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic  
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro  
16760 - Martin D28 (2017) Re-imagined Version  
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3Q Signature Edition  
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar  
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded  
8039 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Natural  
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar  
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar  
16545 - Martin OM28 Standard Series  
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Dreadnought  
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar  
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic  
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic  
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlor Electro Acoustic  
14927 - PJ Eggle Saulda Elec/Acoustic  
10095 - RainSong BJM1000N2 Graphite Guitar  
10038 - RainSong BW1000N2 Black Ice Graphite  
9820 - RainSong CO-DR1000N2  
9821 - RainSong CO-JM1000N2  
9819 - RainSong CO-OM1000N2  
9818 - RainSong CO-WS1000N2  
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss, Secondhand  
7974 - RainSong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar  
15258 - RainSong NP12 Nylon Parlor Guitar, Used  
15257 - RainSong SMH Smokey Hybrid  
16427 - Takamine EP261S-AN, Gloss Antique Stain  
15376 - Takamine EP360GF Glen Frey Model  
14264 - Takamine GX11MENS  
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E  
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV  
14952 - Tanglewood TSFCE Black  
18219 - Tanglewood TSP45 Electro Acoustic  
15866 - Tanglewood TSR2 Masterdesign Electro  
14070 - Tanglewood TW145 SS CE  
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK  
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR  
18214 - Tanglewood TW4ER, Electro Acoustic, Red  
18215 - Tanglewood TW4ESB, Electro, Sunburst  
18216 - Tanglewood TW4E, Whiskey Barrel Gloss  
15498 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black  
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgundy  
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss  
16524 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads  
13288 - Tanglewood TWJPE Parlor Electro  
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE  
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar  
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltap  
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltap Signature  
0000 - Yamaha - 7 Models in Stock Now

## Classical Guitars



18080 - Admira Clasico 7/8 Classical, Used  
8690 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar  
15547 - David Peller Handmade Classical Guitar  
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical, Used  
12622 - Jose Ferrer 4/4 Full-Size Classical  
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar  
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar  
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical  
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical  
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical  
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical  
16057 - Mendieta Estudiante Classic 3/4 Pequeno  
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar  
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size  
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar  
16038 - Mendieta Professional Classica  
17786 - Mendieta Professional Classica  
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Anniversary Classical  
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar  
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar  
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical  
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar  
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar  
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar  
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar  
16326 - Stagg C405 Linden 1/4 Classical Guitar  
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar  
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar  
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar  
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar  
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar  
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red  
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural  
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar  
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand  
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar  
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical Guitar  
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar  
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar  
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar  
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar  
17276 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Nylon Engleman  
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electro Acoustic  
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic  
15719 - Ortega Honey Suite CE Nylon String Guitar  
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar  
15258 - RainSong NP12 Nylon Parlor Guitar, Used  
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar  
8358 - Westcoast SS Solid Slim Electro Nylon Bk

## Ukuleles



16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele  
18054 - Baton Rouge UR3S Soprano Ukulele  
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele  
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele  
13616 - Fender Phalea Soprano Ukulele  
18129 - Fender Venice Soprano Ukulele, Natural  
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia  
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano  
15833 - Kozala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele  
9539 - Lag U44S Soprano Ukulele, Used  
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case  
0000 - Mahalo - 8 Models in Stock Now  
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag  
0000 - Nukulele - 6 Models in Stock Now  
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple  
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele  
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany  
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele  
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele  
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag  
0000 - Tanglewood - 20 Models in Stock Now  
18064 - Kala Waterman Soprano Uke, Transparent  
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke  
16714 - Baton Rouge UR11C Concert Ukulele  
15931 - Baton Rouge UR21C Concert Ukulele  
15555 - Baton Rouge V20CE Electro Concert Uke  
18263 - Brunswick Skulladelic Concert Ukulele  
10386 - Fender Mino' Aka Koa CE Concert Uke  
18130 - Fender Zuma Concert Ukulele, Natural  
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert E-Acoustic  
16836 - Maestro UC-MR-SB-G Electro-Acoustic  
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural  
18221 - Mahalo Java Concert Ukulele, 2515C  
18201 - Mahalo MH2 Hano Concert Uke, Wide Neck  
18203 - Mahalo MH2CE Electro Acoustic Concert Uke  
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele  
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag  
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke  
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke  
18261 - Barnes & Mullins Tenor Ukulele BMUK2T  
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor LEFTY  
15553 - Baton Rouge V2T Sun Tenor Ukulele  
14650 - Baton Rouge V4TCE Electro Tenor Uke  
18259 - Brunswick Tenor Mahogany Finish BU4T  
18165 - Kai KTM100 Tenor Ukulele  
16837 - Maestro UT-IR-SB-C Ukulele  
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Elec. Bass, Fretless  
18200 - Mahalo Electro Acoustic Bass Ukulele  
18211 - Mahalo MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele  
18202 - Mahalo Solid Body Ukulele Bass  
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag  
15476 - Risa Tenor Ukulele Electric Tenor-Uke  
16865 - Stagg UB30 Mahogany Baritone Ukulele

## 6 String Electro Acoustics



18073 - Alkin D37 Handmade in the UK  
10915 - Breedlove Solo C350CRE Electro Lefty  
17276 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Nylon. 2018  
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic  
16244 - Breedlove Pursuit Dreadnought Ebony  
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural  
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry  
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar  
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black  
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Outaway/Electro  
18186 - Faith FMESB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury  
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Outaway  
14717 - Faith FVHG Venus Out/Electro Acoustic  
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway  
16486 - Fender CD60SCE Black  
16858 - Fender CD60SCE Mahogany  
16485 - Fender CD60SCE Natural  
16861 - Fender CP140SE, Natural  
16862 - Fender CP140SE Electro-Acoustic Sunburst  
18255 - Fender FA125CE Dreadnought Electro Black  
18241 - Fender FA125CE Dreadnought Electro Nat  
18256 - Fender FA125CE Electro Sunburst  
18111 - Fender Malibu Classic, Cosmic Turquoise  
18112 - Fender Newporter Player, Rustic Copper  
16727 - Fender PMTE Electro Travel & Hard Case  
16889 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought  
16872 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought  
16873 - Fender PM2E Deluxe Parlor Guitar, Nat  
6932 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought, Natural  
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red  
16852 - Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat Checker  
16131 - Ibanez FX72NT 120 Electro, Secondhand  
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature  
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro  
16830 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid  
18260 - Maestro Raffles KO-CSB-K Custom Series  
18262 - Maestro Raffles TM-CSB-AX Private Guitar  
12791 - Maestro Rosetta SF Dreadnought, Used  
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series  
14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-CAI Solid Med Jumbo

## Mandolin Family



18225 - Breedlove Crossover FFNT Mandolin, Nat  
18226 - Breedlove Crossover KO Mandolin, Natural  
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural  
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural  
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin  
16868 - Tanglewood TWM F VS E  
16869 - Tanglewood TWM OS VSG Mandolin  
17050 - Tanglewood TWM TBKPE Mandolin Black  
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst  
8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola  
17917 - Ashbury Celtic Cittern with Case GR34016  
17923 - Ashbury Gazouki with Case (GR33024)  
17925 - Ashbury Iona Guitar Bouzouki GR33104  
17924 - Ashbury Iona Irish Bouzouki (GR33102)  
17920 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki with Case GR33016  
17921 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki with Case GR33017  
17918 - Ashbury Irish Bouzouki, Flat Back 33015  
17922 - Ashbury Lindsfame Archtop Bouzouki

## Travel & Tenor Guitars



8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar GR36113  
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak  
17363 - Adam Black O2 Travel Guitar  
16855 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Black  
16727 - Fender PMTE Electro Travel & Hard Case  
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3Q Signature Edition  
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar  
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar  
14264 - Takamine GX11ME NS  
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Bk  
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat  
17588 - Ashbury Weissenborn Squareneck GR53026  
14615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage  
10019 - Gretsch G5700 Lap Steel, Tobacco  
5736 - Gretsch G5715 Lap Steel  
12730 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Nickel  
12738 - ResoVille Lincolnwood WS12 Reso, Maple  
12735 - ResoVille Parkville MS12 Single Cone Nic  
13239 - ResoVille Stamford MS12 Single Cone Nic  
7121 - Cigano GJ0 Gypsy Jazz Guitar GR52027  
16911 - Cigano GJ10 Gypsy Jazz GR52029  
16073 - Gitane Cigano Gypsy Jazz Guitar, D Hole  
7120 - Cigano GJ5 Gypsy Jazz Guitar GR52026  
7122 - Gitane D500 Gypsy Jazz Guitar GR52066  
17143 - Gitane DG250 Bouche Gypsy Jazz GR52068  
17144 - Gitane Bouche Gypsy Jazz Guitar GR52068M  
7216 - Gitane DG255 Gypsy Jazz Guitar GR52067  
9805 - Gitane DG300 Jorgenson Gypsy Jazz 52069  
14912 - Gitane Gitane Reinhardt Guitar

## 12 Strings



18257 - 12 String Electro Acoustic Soundport  
16750 - Ibanez AEL108TD NT 8-String, Natural  
16724 - Yamaha APX700 II 12-String Thinline, Nat

## Acoustic Amplification



5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"  
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"  
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk III  
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8  
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE  
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"  
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8  
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"  
9028 - AER Domino 3 200W Watt Acoustic Amp  
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Sig. Compact 60  
0000 - Boss - 2 Models in Stock Now  
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp  
18243 - Fender Acoustasonic 40  
17983 - Fender Acoustasonic 90 Acoustic Combo  
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo  
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220W, 6x4"  
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220W, 6x4", Ex-Demo  
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"  
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"  
4976 - Roland AC330W - 1x5"  
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood  
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier  
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30W, 2x6.5  
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW  
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"  
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5  
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier  
14371 - MOBILEAC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp  
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)  
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp  
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp









DOYLE

BRAMHALL II

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Words Mick Taylor  
Photography Will Ireland

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The producer and sideman to rock royalty returns with  
a new solo studio record. And not a minute too soon...



The world received its first flash of this guy's brilliance more than 20 years ago. A pair of solo albums released just before the millennium (*Doyle Bramhall II* and *Jellycream*) confirmed he was steeped in something deeper than most. That his father had played and co-written with Texas legends including the Vaughan brothers was part of it, as was Doyle Jr's friendship with Jimmie and Stevie.

As it happened, it wasn't just music fans who noticed his talents. Throughout the 2000s he toured with, wrote with and produced for a glittering list of musicians, (including Roger Waters and Eric Clapton) who kept him busy enough to divert the solo records until 2016. But then, to everybody's surprise, he released *Rich Man*, a highly skilled display of sonic and compositional vision that won him a whole new fanbase. Less than two years later, it seems he has a taste for the solo career, which now includes his latest album, *Shades*. Full of Bramhall's customary fuzzy, reverb-drenched blues-based guitar, this new instalment

*"I like all roles, but I guess it gives me a more empathic sensibility when I think about my own situation and band"*

has turned out to be an exciting career progression. So why this, and why now?

"I've really been trying to cultivate my career in a different way to how it was before," smiles a relaxed Bramhall during a recent trip to London. "I was spending a lot of time producing and working for other people, which served that time. I really loved collaborating with other people, but maybe about five or six years ago I started to come into this new relationship with performing and playing live and connecting with an audience in a different way.

"All my favourite artists growing up would put out a record – or two! – per year. Stevie Wonder, Hendrix, Sly Stone, The Beatles... So I like the idea of creating a body of work. I just feel like I'm in a good place when I'm flowing and I just want to keep creating."



"Strats were the Texas guitar, y'know. That's what it was, right from Buddy Holly"

**Producer, sideman, solo artist – does it require a different headspace to be in those different modes?**

"Producer can be pretty time-consuming because I'm having to think about so many things all at once. It can be overwhelming, always problem-solving. Being a solo artist is actually pretty easy because once you're on the road, you get your schedule and you just go from thing to thing – you're in the moment.

"Being a sideman is even easier than all of that because it's all set up – you just show up and do your thing. In that situation, everything doesn't reflect on my personality. If I'm not, y'know, creating the most genius thing, it's not all on me. I'll always give as much as I would my own thing, but it definitely takes the pressure off when you're just the support for someone else. I like all roles, I like all

those situations, and I guess it gives me a more empathic sensibility when I think about my own situation and band."

**It feels like there's little compromise between your vision and what ends up on record – it doesn't feel like you're trying to fit a niche or radio-friendly market. What gives you the courage to do that?**

"I think maybe part of it is age. The more experience you have and the older you get, the more comfortable you are with certain things. It's taken me a long time to be comfortable in my own skin because when I was younger I would always second-guess everything I did. I still have moments... I've even heard Eric [Clapton] say it, where he'll have moments of self doubt, but he also has such a strong sense of self. I feel like that I've spent my life studying music and I know what I



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*“When I got the call to have Eric and BB doing covers of songs I’d written, and join them on record... it was just a dream come true”*

•

love. I just follow what comes out of me and it’s undeniable – whatever songs I write, I don’t know what genre they fit in, but it doesn’t really matter because if it’s coming out of me then that is the running thread, that’s the continuity.”

**You mention Eric Clapton – can you remember what you felt like when you got the first call from him? [It was to work on the *Riding With The King* album, 2000.]**

“Yeah, it was just a constant state of excitement. It was almost like a dream state. I guess there were two guitar players that I wanted to emulate. The first two solos that I ever learned, one of them was Eric and *Outside Woman Blues*; that, and a BB King track. I emulated Eric and BB when I was a kid, so when I got the call to have Eric and also BB doing covers of songs that I’d written, and then being asked to join them on a record with the songs... it was just a dream come true. When I showed up that day in the studio and they were learning the song, I remember Eric saying, ‘Hey Doyle, come out – it’s me and BB and the band, just come out and show us how to play the song.’ ‘Er, okay.’”

**What does a young man do with that – do you play what you think they want to hear, or just do your own thing?**

“I was so comfortable in that position, it was almost like it was meant to be. I’d spent my childhood and formative years with their music, and I knew it; I knew all of it because I had lived in that world. Everything they spoke was my language, musically speaking. I don’t think there are lot of people – especially now in the music culture we have – who still speak that language. It was uncanny because with Eric there were so many connections. When he first called me and we got together for the day, when we were talking it turned out we had all these connections. For instance, he didn’t know that I grew up with Stevie and Jimmie Vaughan and also Marc Benno who was a songwriter who worked with Leon Russell. He knew all those guys. And then we bonded over

This Fender Custom Shop 1958 Heavy Relic Stratocaster was loaned to Doyle by Fender for his UK trip. It features a two-piece ash body under the aged White Blonde Heavy Relic finish. The neck is quarter-swain flamed maple with a ‘59 Esquire ‘C’ profile. 6105 frets and Fender Fat ‘50s pickups finish it off. Like us, Mr Bramhall was very taken with it!





Doyle Bramhall and Eric Clapton perform on stage during the 2013 Crossroads Guitar Festival at Madison Square Garden in New York City



Photo by Larry Busacca/Getty Images

both being sober, both going through similar things. Also our love for really obscure blues – I was surprised because he knew about all these things that you would only really know about if you were into deep Texas and Louisiana blues, really unknown. We bonded over that – different takes on the same vocabulary.”

**Eric is on the new record: *Everything You Need*. Who plays the first solo? It sounds either like you channelling him, or him channeling you – it could be either...**

“Ha! It’s him [laughs]. I’d written that song and recorded it – tracked it with the band in Brooklyn. I put a vocal melody down and I felt like Eric would like that particular track. He happened to be in the States, so I went to him to record it.

“When I originally brought it to him, I don’t think I’d played a lead on it yet. So I said, ‘You take those first two rounds and play at the end.’ He did four or five passes and I said, ‘Great, I think I have what I need.’ I told him I was going to go back and put a guitar solo on it, too. And he said, ‘Oh, hang on – I didn’t realise you were going to play on it as well. Okay, let me do it again. I’m going to step it up a bit.’ So then he played with even more fire [laughs].”

•

*“I was the only kid in my school who liked blues music and played guitar. Everybody else liked Duran Duran and Oingo Boingo!”*

•

**The tone is great, too – is that a Strat he was playing?**

“Yep, Eric is playing a Strat. I come in with a 335 for the second solo.”

**Does the Strat and 335 thing come straight from Eric and BB for you?**

“Strats were the Texas guitar, y’know. That’s what it was, right from Buddy Holly. I’d gotten used to playing Strats because they’re so easy and functional. With the Gibsons, you have the four knobs, and if one gets turned off you’re trying to figure out which one it is! So the Strat became the live guitar, but less so for recording. I might use it for solos, but for most tones, SGs, 335s...”

**Were there staple guitars on *Shades*?**

“Yes, my ’64 Strat, the Heritage 535. I used a Collings I-35 and also a Guild Aristocrat – that’s a great recording guitar – and a late-60s Epiphone Casino.”

**The track *Consciousness* and that Leslie sound is very Beatles, notably the ending!**

“The vocals are through a Leslie, too, and the guitar was through a proper Leslie at [Electro-] Vox Studios in LA. The working title for that song was ‘Ram Song’ because one of my favourite records is *Ram* by Paul McCartney – still one of my favourite productions of all time. I played everything on that. And the end part... I thought I’d save that for the end so I didn’t lose everybody at the beginning! [laughs]”

**Have you always played drums, because of your dad, I guess?**

“Yeah, and my stepbrother played drums, too. I think I was forced into playing another instrument because we didn’t have anybody doing it. So I started out on bass guitar because I figured it was easier, then I switched to guitar from there. I think I was the only kid in my entire school who liked blues music and played guitar. Everybody else liked Duran Duran and Oingo Boingo, ha!”





# LEGACY

by Patrick James Eggle

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**And the lefty-strung-righty thing – was that simply down to what was available to you at the time?**

“Yeah, there were right-handed guitars around the house. So I just picked it up, and it didn’t even occur to me to swap the strings over – I didn’t even know what that was. And the thing was, I could play pretty much from the beginning. I picked it up and I could play. I was 14 when I picked up the guitar, and the bass was a couple years before that?”

**What does it bring, playing that way up? Does it give you something unique?**

“I think it does, but I don’t know if I can explain it or verbalise it. I know that pulling down to bend instead of pushing up makes a difference – it’s much easier. Maybe that’s why when you think about Albert King or Otis Rush – big bends, all the time.”

*“Fuzz tones are so pleasing to me – not at all harsh, just thick and warm. My pedalboard basically has five different fuzz boxes”*

**There’s a fantastic guitar sound at the top of *Live Forever* (featuring Greyhounds) from the new record – what is that?**

“That’s my [British Pedal Company] Zonk Machine through – believe it or not – a 1980s 1x12 Peavey! I hadn’t used a Peavey since I was 15... So I plugged in, getting all this feedback and killer tones. Who would have thought? It was a trip!”

**You’re obviously a fan of classic fuzz... How did that begin?**

“The biggest influence for me, especially for records, was Jimi and Eric, so Fuzz Face all the way. Fuzz tones are so pleasing to me – not at all harsh, just thick and warm and, well, pleasing. Now, my pedalboard basically has five different fuzz boxes. The [British Pedal Company] Zonk Machine is my go-to fuzz. And then I just got these exact replicas of the original Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face – a ’67, ’68 and a ’69. I’m working my way back up to big pedals again.

“I also have the [Acid Fuzz] Zoink, and the Experience by Prescription Electronics. I’ve used the Prescription Electronics COB for many years, and if you hear me playing octave sounds, then it was probably that.



Photo by Clayton Call/Redferns/Getty Images

## TS/SRV

### A LEG-BUCKLING MOMENT

“Y’know, I’ve never really liked Tube Screammers,” laughs Doyle as we talk about pedals. “But maybe if you were playing through Stevie Vaughan’s rig, the original [Dumble] Steel String Singer – that sound was so big and so thick, you couldn’t really thin it out! But with any normal amp, it just sounds thin and irritating to me.

**Do you remember Stevie’s sound?**

“His amps, man. The Dumble, the Supers, the Leslie... It was crazy. I remember doing this show – it was Roomful Of Blues, Jimmie [Vaughan], some of the Thunderbirds and Stevie. I was supposed to play next to him and he had it all there. I remember being called on stage and as I walked across Stevie’s rig to get to my amp, he played this run, really fast at full volume – it literally buckled my knees it was so loud! And I plugged into my little Super [Reverb]. It was immense.”

“My Vibe-Bro is probably the best knock-off of the Uni-Vibe with all the right parts. Although on *Parvanah* on the new record, that was an original 60s Uni-Vibe.

“I’m also using an overdrive that I really love – the Duellist by Jesse Davey, the right side, which is the String Singer.”

**What do you look for in a guitar amp?**

“I’ve really just been playing the Two-Rock amps for the last year or so. I was opening some shows for Eric [Clapton], and Scott McKeon the UK guitar player loaned me his, and I really loved it. I hooked up with Two-Rock after that.

“For recording, I try different things in the studio for different characters and personalities. I used the Two-Rock [Classic Reverb Signature], a [Fender] Super Reverb,

a Fender Vibratone, an old 100-watt Selmer – which is on *Everything You Need* – and I also played a Supro. It wasn’t a Thunderbolt, but maybe the one down from there. That was a killer amp, too! And a 1969 Fender Pro, which I’ve used on a lot of things.”

**So, will you be out touring the new record around the UK?**

“Never. Hahahaha! Yes, of course – I don’t have anything set up just now, but there will be. I’d be content to just play Europe. It’s a great place for me!”



Doyle Bramhall II’s latest album, *Shades*, is available now on Provogue

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# KIRK FLETCHER

This autumn sees the arrival of bluesman Kirk Fletcher's new album, *Hold On*, and while he was over in the UK for some dates recently, he stopped by the *Guitarist* studios to talk and also delivered a soul-shaking blues lesson

Words David Mead Photography Adam Gasson

**B**efore the cameras started rolling for this issue's video tutorial, we settled back to talk about Kirk Fletcher's forthcoming release, *Hold On*. We started by asking him to explain the basics: "*Hold On* means something to everybody," he says. "It can mean holding on waiting on the train to get there, waiting on your child to be born, whatever, you know?"

Recorded in Bristol back in January of this year, the album features Matt Brown on drums and Jonny Henderson on organ and piano. "You've probably heard Jonny Henderson with Matt Scofield," Kirk continues. "He's a bass player and an organ player, but he just plays the organ – he actually plays bass on the Hammond B3 and it's fantastic, y'know? The funny thing is that most people that have heard the record are like, 'There's no bass?' It is bass, it's just Hammond bass!"

The album offers a great mix of soul, gospel and 60s-style R&B, with Kirk's smooth baritone a perfect foil for his singing guitar lines. We wondered where his style originated: "The first inspiration was my older brother in my father's church," he tells us. "That's where it really started, just gospel music – and now I feel that the older I get, that's coming out

again. I went through all these different musical things and now it seems to be coming out more."

**Besides the gospel sounds, who were your other early influences?**

"Oh, man... Some of the main players were Howard Carroll from The Dixie Hummingbirds, a fantastic guitar player. Another guitar player they call 'Spanky', his name was Eddie Alford, he played with The Mighty Clouds Of Joy – those were some of the fundamental guys. Then you had BB King, obviously, Albert King, Stevie Ray Vaughan – early influences – and also Prince, Eddie Van Halen and all those guys, too, because I'm 42, a child of the 80s."

**How old were you when you started playing?**

"I started when I was about eight years old in my dad's church. I just picked it up from my brother; he played guitar and it was the classic story. I didn't even really think about it: one minute I couldn't play and I just loved it, and the next minute I could kinda play a little something – bend a note or play a little Jimmy Reed thing or some simple church song, something like that, y'know. I was like, 'Hey, wait a minute, I'm starting to learn how to play...' I just kept going on from there – five or six

hours would go by after school and I'm still playing. I'd wake up in the morning, look at my guitar first thing, it would be propped up against the chair... and my whole life has been pretty much that."

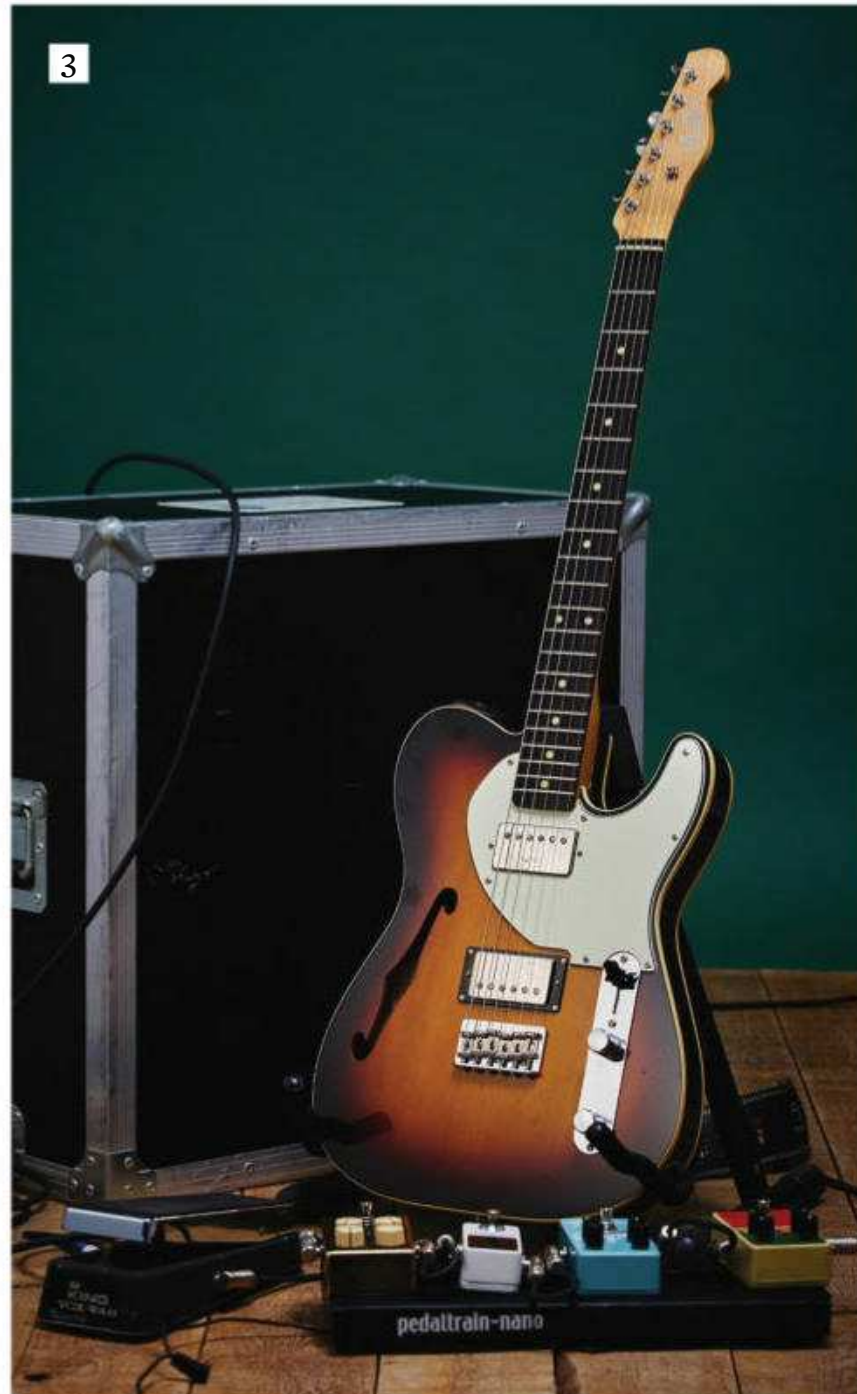
**When did you start getting into bands?**

"Well, the thing about church is that you're playing in front of people immediately. The kind of church that my dad was a pastor of was Pentecostal, so it's like whatever you've got – snare drum, tambourine, a guitar, a bass with a couple of strings – whatever you've got to make music, just do it, just play it. Nobody judges you and you just go for it. But the band thing happened when I was about 15 or 16. I started playing in R&B bands and little Top 40 bands with my brother and different musicians I went to school with and members of the church that had other family members that played and had R&B bands and stuff. I guess my first real legit band was probably Brent Jones & The TP Mobb, like a hip-hop gospel choir. We played real funky, contemporary gospel stuff."

**What instruments did you start out with?**

"Squier Stratocasters. Just the old Japanese Squiers and a lot of solid-state amps, like the Randall RG80 – I had that for a long





**1.** Kirk's current touring and studio amp is from Cliff Brown at 633 Engineering: "Basically a Tweed Bassman style thing with two 12-inch Vox Gold speakers..."

**2.** After using transistor amps at the beginning of his career, in pursuit of a big, clean tone, Kirk is now a convert to the warmth and power of valve amplification

**3.** A dual-humbucker semi-hollow Moollon T-Style guitar took care of all the Les Paul and 335 tones on the new album, *Hold On*

time – a Roland Jazz Chorus, Peavey amplifiers – a lot of that stuff. So from the beginning it was trying to get the biggest, cleanest tone."

**When did you decide to go into music professionally? Was there a watershed moment for you?**

"Deciding to go professional happened at a music store that I went to when I was about 17 or 18. My brother took me to this music store called Music Works and there I met Robben Ford's tech and he started bringing me along, y'know, to help with gear, stuff like that. Seeing those guys – Robben Ford & The Blue Line at that time, at about '94 or '95 – was what did it. That was the thing to make me go, 'Okay, I wanna play for real...' I'd be riding with my buddy Jeff, who was his tech at that time, and he'd take him to the airport or something, or pick up gear for studio sessions and stuff and I'm like, 'Oh, man! You can actually do this for a living?'"

**Was it a bit like having a guitar lesson from Robben every night?**

"To this day I still really remember his sound. And it was a very special time for him because he had all this back history of Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis – he was about the same age as I am now. So he's writing

songs and playing with his band and they were just incredible, y'know? So the timing couldn't have been better. I would ask Robben, 'So, what Miles Davis record should I buy?' Because, of course, he has listened to Miles Davis ever since he was a kid, so who better to ask?"

**Which of Miles's albums did he recommend?**

"*Kind Of Blue* and then you go to *Miles Smiles*, *Four And More*, *My Funny Valentine*... However, I went backwards. I got all the *Steamin'*, *Relaxing With*... or whatever. I can't play jazz. I have friends that can *really* play jazz, so it's kinda like, 'No!' But just having that phrasing of saxophone or organ players... it's a different approach to my blues playing and that's what I got from that. More so than harmonically playing through all these changes, or whatever."

**Many people will have discovered your playing via the YouTube videos of you jamming with Josh Smith and Joe Bonamassa...**

"My buddies! Those guys are crazy guitar players. I did play a lot as a kid and everything, but these guys... y'know, hard work really does pay off. When you listen to those guys, I'm inspired because those guys are guitar players' guitar players and I'm sort of like the record collector guy; the guy you'd see in the record store and I don't maybe take it as serious as those guys, in a way. With all the love in the world – those guys are like my family – but I come from a different place. So it's fascinating to see those guys. And Eric Gales; he's a nice guy, too."

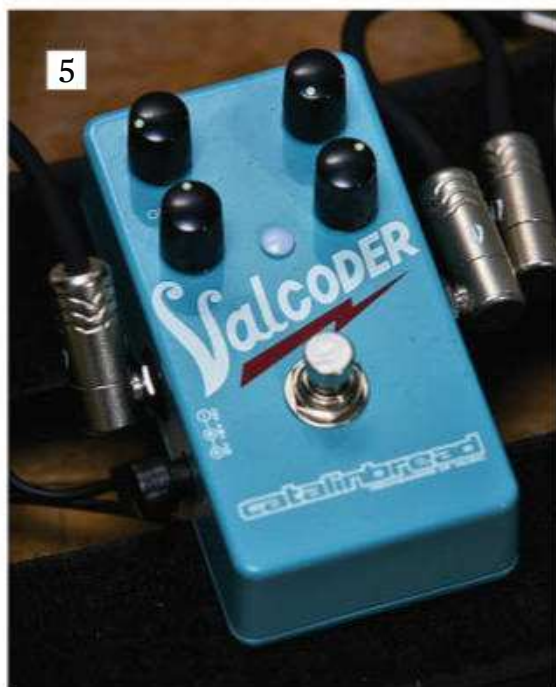
*"I'd be with my buddy Jeff, who was Robben's tech, and he'd pick up gear for studio sessions and I was like, 'You can do this for a living?'"*



Kirk's new album, *Hold On*,  
is a meeting place between  
the blues, gospel and soul







4. Kirk's Topanga reverb pedal is on all the time with the volume knob turned nearly all the way up to hit the front-end of his amp hard

5. A Catalinbread Valcoder 'dirty trem' pedal plays a dual role on Kirk's 'board: tremolo, obviously, but also as a further boost to drive his amp a little more

6. An essential part of his tone, Kirk leaves his Vemuram overdrive pedal on all of the time, using his guitar's volume control to turn the heat up or down

7. Fellow blues player Josh Smith recommended the Vox King wah-wah pedal to Kirk

8. Nicknamed 'Sofia', Kirk acquired this Tele from pickup maker Ron Ellis

#### How did you meet Joe?

"I actually met Joe years and years ago in Belgium for a couple of minutes. He was just backstage at this festival and I just walked over, because I'd seen him in magazines. So I was like, 'Hey, how you doing?' Then I think we exchanged numbers and just stayed in touch. Then I was playing at Harvelle's, this little club in Santa Monica, California, and he came out and sat in. It was amazing, off the cuff. I gave him my guitar to play and he gave me my guitar back and we exchanged guitars back and forth and it was so amazing and so moving. I think that's what really solidified the deal for us being buddies."

#### And you recently toured with Joe...

"Yeah, and it's funny because does Joe really need a rhythm guitar player? He says it was fun to have me, but I know that Joe really did that to help me, too. To bring me on a bigger stage so I could play and be a part of that. Joe's like that; he's just a good dude."

#### Another case of having a guitar lesson every night?

"Well, yeah. It was not only a guitar lesson, but it was also a life lesson. A lot of people see Joe and they go, 'Oh, he's successful and everything...' but that guy works his ass off. His work ethic and what he puts into

it – I've found only a few people who would be willing to do all that. So he deserves everything."

#### What gear will you be taking out with you when you tour the new album?

"I'm playing a 633 amplifier made by Cliff Brown and it's fantastic. It's like basically a Tweed Bassman style thing with two 12-inch Vox Gold speakers, but Cliff made it really efficient. It's got a solid-state rectifier and it's loud; it's so loud and fat and warm and it just sounds amazing. So I'm using that for my main amp. My guitar is always evolving. I play a Gibson Les Paul, Collector's Choice, I have a '64 Strat that I love, and I also have this Telecaster named Sofia – I love that guitar. I just got my '66 335 back that I sold to a friend and I'm really excited about bringing that out at my UK shows next year. I've got two Tyler Strats that I love – I mean, just for grabbing a guitar that's fat, plays in tune, my Tyler guitars are fantastic. I've got a Taylor and a Moollon Tele that I used on the record."

#### Will you be touring in the UK?

"I'll do some touring in the UK and everywhere, just promoting the new record. So I'm really excited about that and playing with the same band all the time. That's just about it, just promoting the new record." **G**

*"Joe works his ass off. His work ethic and what he puts into it – I've found only a few people who would be willing to do all that"*



Kirk Fletcher's new album, *Hold On*, is available now on Elaysia Records. Find out more over at Kirk's website <http://kirkfletcherband.com>





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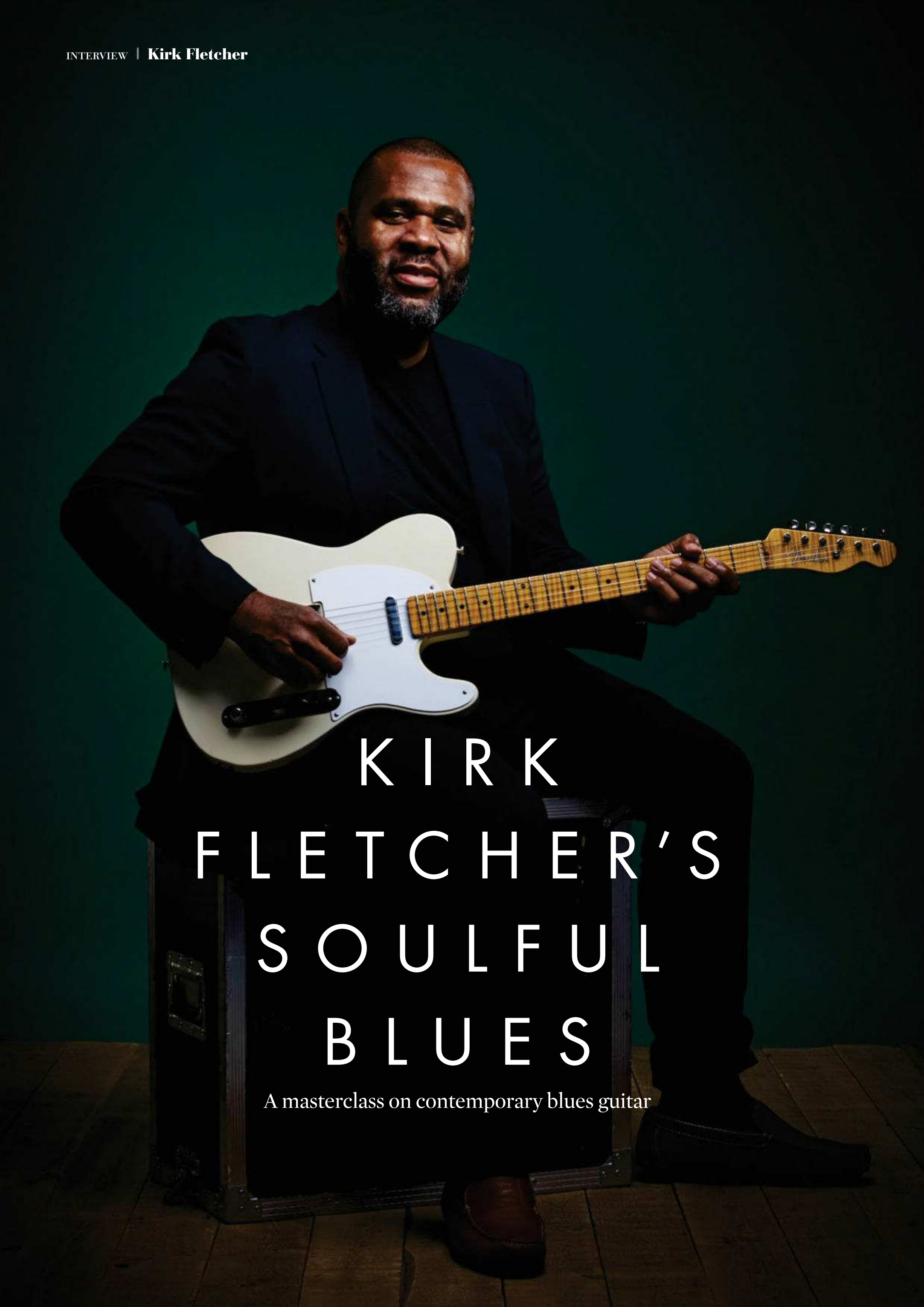
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INTERVIEW | **Kirk Fletcher**

A full-page portrait of Kirk Fletcher, a Black man with a beard, wearing a dark suit and a black t-shirt. He is sitting on a wooden crate, holding a white Fender Telecaster electric guitar. The background is a dark, textured teal wall. The floor is made of wooden planks. The text 'KIRK FLETCHER'S SOULFUL BLUES' is overlaid in large, white, serif capital letters. Below it, in smaller white text, is 'A masterclass on contemporary blues guitar'.

# KIRK FLETCHER'S SOULFUL BLUES

A masterclass on contemporary blues guitar



An absolute master of blues, soul, gospel and funk guitar, Kirk Fletcher has gone from fronting his own band to playing rhythm guitar for Joe Bonamassa (and then just about everything else in between). In this masterclass, he shows us some of the techniques – and a few of the licks – that

make up his guitar style. Drawing from a range of influences, Kirk's playing relies on a big, semi-clean guitar sound. As you can determine from the interview and video, he goes to great lengths to keep his sound full, fat and creamy. Check out his use of pedals at the start of the video and then move on to the examples... **G**

## Example 1

**IN THIS FIRST EXAMPLE** Kirk demonstrates how he learned to produce an even response while moving between a pick or his fingers to strike the strings. Being confident that you can produce a similar range of dynamics from either method, so that any transfer mid-solo is tonally seamless, is a difficult trick to pull off and requires a lot of dedicated practice.

The musical notation for Example 1 consists of four systems, each with a standard notation staff and a corresponding guitar tablature staff. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4.

**System 1:** The standard notation staff shows a melodic line starting on a quarter rest, followed by eighth and quarter notes. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers: 8, 9, 5, 5, 7, 7, 5, 6, 6 (marked with an 'X'), 7, 5, 3, 4, 7, 5, 4, 5.

**System 2:** The standard notation staff shows a melodic line with some chords. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers: 10, 11, 11, 10, 13, 12, 11, 11, 10, 11, 10, 13, 10, 12, 15, 12, 15, 12, 15, 13, 14, 14, 14, 12, 10, 11, 14.

**System 3:** The standard notation staff shows a melodic line with some chords. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers: 7, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 9, 7, 10, 7, 9, 7, 8, 7, 10, 7, 12, 14, 10, 12, 10, 12, 10.

**System 4:** The standard notation staff shows a melodic line with some chords. The tablature staff shows the fret numbers: 8, 7, 7, 7, 5, 6, 5, 8, 5, 7, 5.







## Example 4 Continued

Example 4 Continued shows a guitar lick in treble and bass staves. The treble staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The bass staff is in E major (no sharps or flats) and 4/4 time. The lick consists of two measures. The first measure has a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), a dotted quarter note (C5), and a quarter note (B4). The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (G2, A2, B2), a dotted quarter note (C3), and a quarter note (B2). The second measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). Fret numbers are indicated below the bass staff: 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 5, 8, 5, 8, 9, 5, 5, 7, 7, 5, 6, 7, 7, 7, 5, 3, 4.

## Example 5

**ON THE SUBJECT OF MAPPING THE FRETBOARD,** Kirk demonstrates how playing the same lick in different positions can be a good way to find your way across the 'board, thus turning that frightening brown stick into an organised musical workspace!

Example 5 shows a guitar lick in treble and bass staves. The treble staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The bass staff is in E major (no sharps or flats) and 4/4 time. The lick consists of four measures. The first measure has a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), a dotted quarter note (C5), and a quarter note (B4). The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (G2, A2, B2), a dotted quarter note (C3), and a quarter note (B2). The second measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). The third measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). The fourth measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). Fret numbers are indicated below the bass staff: 12, 10, 12, 11, 10, 8, 5, 7, 9, 8, 7, 5, 7, 5, 7, 6, 5, 3, 0.

## Example 6

**TAKING EXAMPLE 5 AS A STARTING POINT,** this example demonstrates the outcome of being fluent across the full range of the fretboard, instead of being locked into individual pentatonic shapes. In addition to that, there are some great bluesy licks to add to your repertoire here...

Example 6 shows a guitar lick in treble and bass staves. The treble staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The bass staff is in E major (no sharps or flats) and 4/4 time. The lick consists of three measures. The first measure has a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), a dotted quarter note (C5), and a quarter note (B4). The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (G2, A2, B2), a dotted quarter note (C3), and a quarter note (B2). The second measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). The third measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). Fret numbers are indicated below the bass staff: 10, 12, 12, 10, 11, 10, 8, 10, 9, 8, 9, 7, 9, 9, 7, 9, 7, 5, 7, 5, 5, 7, 5.

Example 6 continues with a guitar lick in treble and bass staves. The treble staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The bass staff is in E major (no sharps or flats) and 4/4 time. The lick consists of four measures. The first measure has a treble staff with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), a dotted quarter note (C5), and a quarter note (B4). The bass staff has a triplet of eighth notes (G2, A2, B2), a dotted quarter note (C3), and a quarter note (B2). The second measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). The third measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). The fourth measure has a treble staff with a quarter note (A4), a dotted quarter note (G4), and a quarter note (F#4). The bass staff has a quarter note (A2), a dotted quarter note (G2), and a quarter note (F#2). Fret numbers are indicated below the bass staff: 7, 9, 7, 7, 8, 7, 5, 7, 7, 5, 7, 5, 6, 5, 3, 5, 3, 4, 2, 4, 2, 2, 0, 4, 5, 6, 4, 6.



# Example 6 Continued

Musical notation for Example 6 Continued, measures 8-11. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure 8 starts with a quarter rest, followed by an eighth note G#4, a quarter note A4, an eighth note B4, and a quarter rest. Measure 9 contains a quarter note B4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G#4, an eighth note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter rest. Measure 10 features a quarter note D4, an eighth note C#4, a quarter note B3, an eighth note A3, a quarter note G#3, and a quarter rest. Measure 11 begins with a quarter note F#3, an eighth note E3, a quarter note D3, an eighth note C#3, a quarter note B2, and a quarter rest. Fingering numbers (5, 7, 8, 9, 10) are indicated below the notes. A triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G#4) is marked with a '3' in measure 10. A 1/4 note accent is shown over the D4 in measure 11.

# Example 7

**INSPIRED BY THE PLAYING OF BB KING** and Chris Cain, this is a great example of the old 'less is more' principle. Kirk takes a simple lick and produces a series of variations on it to the point where it sounds like a complete solo. Economic and effortlessly tasteful at the same time, it's sometimes worth making a simple idea go just that little bit further.

Musical notation for Example 7, measures 1-6. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked as 128. Measure 1 starts with a quarter note G#4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note G#4, and a quarter rest. Measure 2 contains a quarter note F#4, an eighth note E4, a quarter note D4, an eighth note C#4, a quarter note B3, and a quarter rest. Measure 3 features a quarter note A3, an eighth note G#3, a quarter note F#3, an eighth note E3, a quarter note D3, and a quarter rest. Measure 4 begins with a quarter note C#3, an eighth note B2, a quarter note A2, an eighth note G#2, a quarter note F#2, and a quarter rest. Measure 5 starts with a quarter note E2, an eighth note D2, a quarter note C2, an eighth note B1, a quarter note A1, and a quarter rest. Measure 6 contains a quarter note G1, an eighth note F#1, a quarter note E1, an eighth note D1, a quarter note C1, and a quarter rest. Fingering numbers (10, 12, 13, 11, 12, 15) are indicated below the notes. The notation includes various bends (BU, BD, PB) and a 1/4 note accent in measure 6.



## Example 8

**ANOTHER LICK THAT KIRK USES** a lot in his playing, this idea goes back to the basics and occupies one of the most popular locations on the fretboard – the A minor pentatonic at the 5th fret. It's not difficult or complex, but the type of smooth fluency needed to pull it off takes work.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Wind' consists of a treble clef staff and a four-string guitar staff. The treble staff is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It contains two measures of music. The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4), followed by a quarter note (C5), and then another triplet of eighth notes (B4, A4, G4). The second measure has a quarter note (F#4), followed by a quarter note (E4), and then a quarter note (D4) with a 1/4 rest. The guitar staff has four strings labeled E, B, G, D from top to bottom. The first measure contains a sequence of notes: 7 (9) on the D string, 5 on the G string, 8 on the B string, 5 on the G string, 7 (9) on the D string, 7 on the G string, 7 on the B string, and 5 on the G string. The second measure contains: 7 on the G string, 5 on the B string, 7 on the D string, 7 on the G string, 5 on the B string, 7 on the D string, and 5 on the G string. The system is numbered 1 at the bottom left.

## Example 9

**AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT...** We've travelled away from soloing techniques in order to explore accompaniment – something that the average guitarist finds him- or herself doing for most of the time on stage. Here, it's old-style 'jump blues' with its very characteristic staccato chordal stabs and athletic single- and dual-note runs. It's tricky to master, but just listen to the result!

[illegible]





# 1969 GIBSON FLYING V

*We uncover the unique charms of an original 1969 Flying V, a rocket ship that appeared to be on a downwards trajectory until a small handful of high-flying guitarists helped propel it to astronomical success – and value*

Words Rod Brakes Photography Olly Curtis

When the Flying V's original patent appeared in 1957 alongside the Futura/Explorer and Moderne, it might have been argued that Ted McCarty's heady 50s sci-fi-style brainstorming sessions in the Gibson boardroom were pitching a little too far out into the modernist field. As it transpired, these guitars were way ahead of their time and took many years to catch on; indeed, the Flying V stuttered, stalled and got off to a few false starts before it really began to fly. As Fender's Stratocaster and Telecaster models consistently captured the guitar-buying public's imagination by embodying the modernist design principle 'form follows function', the Flying V's function appeared to follow its form, as it eventually took off and found its wings as an archetypal hard rock statement guitar.

"It's very much a 'rock' guitar," begins Mike Long, proprietor of ATB Guitars in Cheltenham and temporary custodian of this 1969 Gibson Flying V. "And that's probably dictated by the shape as much as anything else. I mean, you can't exactly sit down and play folk music on it. It evokes a certain kind of playing style and when you pick one up, you're likely to rock out with it. The pickups are very raunchy-sounding mid-60s humbuckers with lots of bite and sustain to them. You won't see many of

these being played through clean Fender amps, but they really come into their own through something like a Marshall stack."

Although synonymous with Gibson, the Flying V feels immediately very different when compared with its other classic rock guitars. "They feel nothing like a Les Paul," says Mike. "When people pick up a double-humbucker solidbody, they often expect it to be a bit on the hefty side, but one of the first things you notice when you pick up a Flying V is how light they are. This one-piece Honduran mahogany body is incredibly light, but it's a really powerful instrument. They're very easy to use and play for a long time with. This one has brilliant action up and down the fingerboard, and you can access the upper frets very easily. It's a real joy to play."

## The Underdog

The joys of the Flying V were not always immediately obvious, however, as Mike explains: "It was a very unpopular guitar for Gibson. They made about 100 of the original gold-plated hardware korina [African limba wood] Flying Vs between 1958 and 1959, and they're extremely rare – and desirable – these days. After only a handful of Flying Vs with nickel-plated hardware came out around 1962 to '63, they were reintroduced again in the late 1960s with chrome-plated hardware, but they didn't sell very well,

either. It was a bit of a disaster, really. It wasn't until a few key players cottoned on to them in the 70s that they started to gain in popularity. They were reintroduced a couple of more times, before Gibson brought out various reissues, and they steadily grew in popularity."

As the Flying V's popularity grew, so, too, did the demand for rare, original examples from the earlier periods of production. Subsequently, the prices of original 1950s Flying Vs now reach well into the six-figure range, while this 1969 Flying V recently sold for £30,000.

"1969 Flying Vs are very rare," says Mike. "Gibson made only 175 Flying Vs throughout the late 60s, in five batches of 35 instruments, and this is possibly the very first guitar of the batch-five walnut Flying Vs. All batch-five Flying Vs had a walnut finish, like this one, but this is the only one known to have a black painted factory-[original] headstock; all known others have a natural walnut-finish headstock. It has a 1968 serial number and was completed in 1969; all batch-five Flying Vs are considered to have been manufactured in 1969 and were released to the public in 1970."

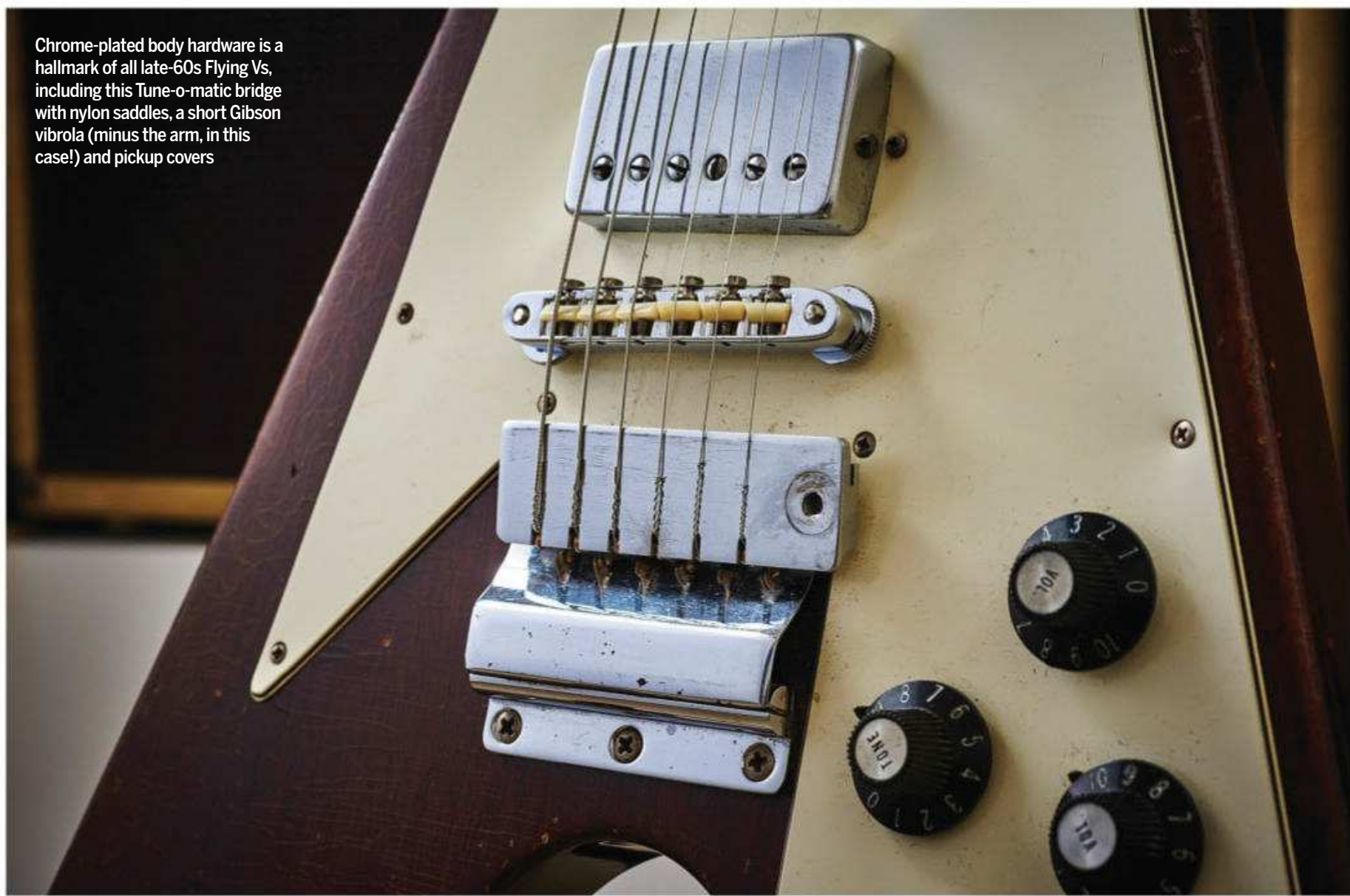
Although this Flying V reached final assembly in 1969, it appears to have begun life at the Gibson factory years earlier. The vast majority of late-60s Flying Vs share identical pickguards and electronic







Chrome-plated body hardware is a hallmark of all late-60s Flying Vs, including this Tune-o-matic bridge with nylon saddles, a short Gibson vibrola (minus the arm, in this case!) and pickup covers



components, with pots dating to 1966, regardless of shipping year, indicating that they were all allocated parts at the same time for later assembly.

“It appears Gibson did all of the electronics assembly in one go, back in 1966, for the entire five batches,” explains Mike. “It’s likely the pickguards were all put together at the same time – certainly, the parts were sourced at the same time, because they’ve all got ’66 pots, identical pickguards, and pre-‘T-Top’ pickups [‘T-Top’ humbuckers appeared in the mid-60s].

“Although the pickguards were assembled in 1966,” Mike continues, “they were most likely wired together at a later date when they finished the guitar off, because the only difference in the electronics between batches appears to be the wiring – it’s often coloured differently throughout the years. Previous batches have multi-coloured wiring [there are combinations of green, yellow, black, white, grey and plain wires], but the wiring in batch-five Flying Vs from 1969 tends to be the same colour: yellow. However, this one does have multi-coloured wiring, so it was probably wired up soon after batch four in 1968, or very early on in ’69.

“The pickguard itself is a three-ply [white/black/white] plastic type. It isn’t shielded with a separate plate or foil – they put shielding paint on the back instead.

•  
*“Marc Bolan, Leslie West and Mick Ralphs used instruments from the fifth batch of Flying Vs”*  
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MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS

If you look inside a Firebird cavity, you’ll see they used the same technique. It’s a silver-coloured conductive paint; they just sprayed it on, and that – they claimed – was the shielding covered. There’s usually a red inspection stamp on the underside of the pickguard, which is the same for every batch. This also supports the theory that they were all assembled together in 1966, when everything was in place, apart from the final wiring. It’s possible they had stacks of Flying V pickguards in the factory from 1966 until 1969, while they were slowly building them and shipping them out.”

The pre-‘T-Top’ humbuckers retained in this 1969 Flying V are a particularly desirable feature and, according to Mike, “these are original patent number sticker [“PATENT NO 2,737,842”] humbuckers from the mid-60s. They’re similar to

PAF pickups, but they’re wound with an auto-stop machine and they have slightly different wiring. They’re some of the last of the really, really nice-sounding pickups of the 60s era.

“Because of the unique assembly of the Flying V’s pickguard, the neck pickup’s braided wire is soldered to the underside of the pickup casing. They had to solder the wire there to keep it neatly within the body cavities, so that when they put the pickguard on it didn’t snag. It’s a unique feature you only see on Flying V pickups – you don’t see that on any other guitars. Les Pauls and 335s, for example, had a channel for the neck pickup wires, but Flying V routings are very different.”

### In Control

Unlike a majority of Gibson’s double-humbucker guitars, the early Flying Vs featured three pots/knobs, as opposed to four. “There are two independent volume controls and one master tone control,” explains Mike. “All three pots are 500k[ohms] CTS brand, dated to ’66 [prefixed 13766]. In fact, all the late-60s Flying Vs I’ve seen have 1966 pot codes – and the tone capacitor is a 0.022uF ceramic disc type. The pickup selector switch and the output jack are both Switchcraft brand, but I think they often had problems fitting the socket, because Flying Vs have a very





One-off factory-original black-painted headstock face with three-ply (w/b/w) Gibson logo-embossed plastic truss rod cover, and nickel-plated Kluson Deluxe tuners, featuring plastic 'keystone' buttons

*“The walnut Flying Vs from '69 are the most desirable because the neck profile is fairly chunky”*

**MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS**

thin body. As is the case with this guitar, you often see the shielding paint has been filed away around the socket, and when they finally assembled them, they sometimes found it was a bit difficult to get the tip of the jack all the way in, so on some of them you can see they've increased the space of the routing by hand to accommodate it.

“The knobs are often called ‘witch hat’ knobs because of their appearance,” Mike explains. “Although they’re not the most popular style of knobs these days, I think they go really well with the angular styling of the Flying V. Before they brought in the witch hat knobs in 1967, they were using ‘reflector’ knobs [with metal ‘tone’ and ‘volume’ caps]; the first few batches of late-60s Flying Vs mainly had reflector knobs, but they moved over to the witch hat knobs for the last couple of batches.



Note the independent pickup volume controls and a master tone control featuring ‘witch hat’ knobs, adjacent to a Switchcraft three-way selector switch and an output jack mounted onto the three-ply (w/b/w) scratchplate





The late-60s Flying V's original short neck shelf style reappeared for the fifth and final batch of guitars completed in 1969. The semi-circular 'buckle rash' on this guitar was likely created by the buckle of a guitar strap



The vast majority of late-60s Flying V pickups are pre-'T-Top' patent number sticker humbuckers, although the occasional PAF has been known to put in a rare appearance!

"The last batch of walnut Flying Vs from '69 are the most desirable of the five batches because the neck profile is fairly chunky. It's like a '68 Gibson profile – it has a bit of meat on it, whereas the others, in batches one to four, tend to be a bit on the skinny side. A lot of the famous V players tended to use instruments from the fifth batch – people like Marc Bolan, Leslie West and Mick Ralphs. Jimi Hendrix also used late-60s Flying Vs from the earlier batches.

"The batch number is buried in the serial number, but more than anything they're identifiable by their features. Distinctly, all batch fives have a walnut finish and a three-piece neck. The three-piece neck is something that appeared in 1969 after Norlin took over Gibson production; they started to look for ways to economise and one of the things they did was to introduce the three-piece neck because it required thinner pieces of mahogany to make. It's made with Honduran mahogany and is constructed using a thick centrepiece, with two pieces glued on either side, and that extends from the tip of the headstock to the end of the neck tenon.

"All of the late-60s Flying Vs have the same long neck tenons," Mike tells us, "but the neck joins changed throughout from batch one to batch five. They went through various neck shelves from short, to a long, rounded shape, to a skinny tapered

*"The cardinal sin of all Flying V mods is adding a stop tailpiece... This one's a survivor"*

MIKE LONG, ATB GUITARS

"V"-shape, before going back to the short, rounded shelf again."

### Shine On

Another distinctive feature of the late-60s Vs is their chrome-plated body hardware. "The late-60s Flying Vs had the shorter version of the Gibson vibrola," says Mike. "Although it didn't have a plush 'leaf and lyre' Gibson logo engraved cover like the longer one, it did the same job. Those units can really hold their own. Obviously, you can't dive-bomb with them, but they're pretty stable. The Tune-o-matic bridge is also chrome-plated and has nylon saddles. Any 60s Flying V you come across should have nylon saddles – they were all manufactured in that period [1961 to 1971].

"Unlike the vibrola and Tune-o-matic bridge, however, the tuners are not chrome-

plated. They were made by Kluson and were always nickel-plated. The tuners on this Flying V are Kluson Deluxe branded, but they changed later in '69 to Gibson Deluxe. They're almost identical. It's very difficult to spot any difference at all, but if you look really closely, you'll see 'Gibson' rather than 'Kluson' branded on the back.

"It's a completely unique guitar and is all original, which is unusual for a Flying V, as many Flying Vs have had mods done to them over the years. Most commonly, it's Grover tuner replacements and added pickup surrounds, but the cardinal sin of all Flying V mods is adding a stop tailpiece. That is one of the worst things you can do to them. A lot of these poor things have had all sorts of mods done to them and it's rare to come across one that has survived intact. Thankfully, this one's a survivor.

"This Flying V model was here at ATB Guitars for about a year and we got very familiar with it in that time. Everybody who came into the showroom loved it – including the local vicar, whose photo with it caused a bit of a stir on Instagram! It had become part of the family and we were quite sad to see it go, but it's gone to a good home now and I'm sure the new owner is looking after it very well."

Guitarist would like to thank Mike Long of ATB Guitars in Cheltenham [www.atbguitars.com](http://www.atbguitars.com)



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**GRETSCH**







# DUANE EDDY

He's the original king of twang guitar and his canyon-deep sound made him America's first guitar hero of the rock 'n' roll era. Poised to tour Britain once again, we caught up with Duane to talk about playing to mysteriously silent English crowds on his first tour back in 1960, his friendship with jazz guitar greats – and how a 2,000-gallon water tank became an essential part of his tone...



**Words** Jamie Dickson

**Portrait** Eric Fairchild/Joe Carducci

## London Calling

"Touring England for the first time in 1960 was a fantastic trip. It was more of an adventure than a tour. It was my first time in England and when we got off the aeroplane and started for our hotel, we marvelled at how much England looked just like it did in the movies, with the English cabs and the double-decker buses. We were just thrilled.

"We were used to kids screaming and yelling and carrying on during the songs and all through the show in America. But then we got there that first night in London, there was just polite applause after every song. Finally, the sax player, Jim Horn, kind of sidled over to me during a song and he said, 'I don't think they like us.' And I said, 'Yes, it looks like it's going to be a long night.'

"I said, 'Well, maybe they don't like this music. We'll play something they're bound to know. Maybe they want something familiar that's older?' so we played

*Greensleeves*, which we'd never played. Jim got out his flute instead of his sax and I had such a great band that they'd follow me off a cliff, musically speaking. You couldn't tell we hadn't rehearsed it or played it before.

"But that didn't work, either. Still polite applause, until the very end of the show and then when I played the last song and they dropped the curtain, the place went wild. They stamped their feet, they clapped their hands, they yelled and then they started this chant, 'We want Duane.'

"What it was, I found out later, they had never heard a band that sounded so exactly like the records. I had the same musicians I used on some of the records with me. So the audience got the full impact. The reason they were polite, I learned since, was that they just wanted me to get on with it. They didn't want to take up time with applause, they just wanted me to get on so they could hear more. So England and I fell in love with each other on that tour, in 1960. It's never stopped."

## Modded Magnatone

"There was a bass player in Phoenix named Buddy Wheeler, who was also a pedal steel guitar player. He and a friend of his, Dick Wilson, who's a guitar player in Phoenix, modified Magnatone amps. They originally had two Jensen speakers in them. Well, they did away with those and put a 15-inch JBL and a tweeter in the amp, a 100-watt power pack and a spring echo, and then hooked it all together. Then they covered the case with black Naugahyde with a white grille front and charged \$100 for it, which was a lot of money in 1957. They did that for several guitar players around town.

"That was my amp. That was the one I played *Rebel-Rouser* through and it was the most powerful amp and one of the best amps in the world at the time. I compared it with a Standel, which was supposed to be the best amp in America at the time. That's what Chet Atkins played. But when I played through the Standel it would break up at a certain point. But you couldn't get mine to



•

*“We’d seen people who had one successful record and then come out with a second that was similar and it wouldn’t go anywhere”*

•



## Deep Thinking

Duane on the creation of his recent Gretsch signature series G6120TB-DE six-string bass

**“I had always used a Danelectro six-string bass. I found it in 1959 and used it on *Because They’re Young* in 1960 and on the third album that I did late in ’59; *Twang Is The Thang*, I think it was called. *My Blue Heaven*, *Blueberry Hill*, *Kommotion*, I used it on all those songs. But it was not an easy guitar to play.**

**“Anyway, one day I asked a guy in the Custom Shop at Gretsch, Stephen Stern, if he could make [something like the Dano but better]. I said, ‘I’ve picked out a bass body, a double-cutaway hollowbody,’ because they make basses besides the guitar they make. I sent him the measurements anyway for the neck and he put the same electronics as in my 6120, my regular Gretsch. And the Dynasonic pickups, he put those in and the same wiring and everything, and the same pickups.**

**“Anyway, he built one and sent it to me. I said I wanted it really deep, shiny black, whatever they call that – a finish that you can almost see into the depths of it – with a white binding and a dark grey G Brand. I’d never had a Gretsch with a G Brand like Eddie Cochran so I thought a dark grey one would be subtle and very cool. And when I opened the case there it was, just like I dreamed.”**

break up no matter how hard you hit the notes. They just rang clear as a bell.”

## Rebel Rousing

“I love Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, Hank Garland... Les Paul, of course. Loved what he did. But as for my own sound, I came up with that because I had done a few sessions when I was 16, 17 in Phoenix. I was working in a country band and playing guitar as sideman. Friends would do sessions and they’d ask me to come play – and I discovered that the high notes weren’t as powerful as the low notes when I got to do a little solo or a turnaround or something. So I realised the bass strings were stronger, recording-wise, especially in those days.

“We had to use three or four rhythm guitars to get a good rhythm guitar sound, like on *Cannonball*, to where it would record properly. So, I realised that I had to come up with a melody as opposed to a riff, or some kind of a hook or something. So, with *Movin’ N’ Groovin*, I thought, ‘Well, I’ll try high and low.’ And I did the high part and the low part, and they were both hooks that I just put together.

“After that got up to 70 or so in the Billboard charts they said, ‘Go back and do something else.’ So, in March of ’58, we went in and I wrote *Rebel-Rouser* at the session in the studio – just had the drummer play a backbeat and I fooled around with this melody that was in my head and came out with the song. I pictured a gang of thugs coming down the alley towards me with their chains and their switchblades and everything. That was the mental picture I had.

“Also, I wanted to leave a long space in front so I had time to get on stage. I pictured myself just playing that and then walking

out on stage while I’m playing it and then the spotlight hit me as the band came in. So those were the mental images I had when I wrote it.”

## Never Repeat Yourself

“The first fight I ever had with my producer Lee Hazlewood – well, it was not a fight but a disagreement – was after we’d done this record called *Mason Dixon Lion*. It was about the same tempo as *Rebel-Rouser* and he said, ‘Well, that’s going to be the next thing going.’

“But I said, ‘No, it’s not.’ He looked at me in surprise and shock, because I’d never said, ‘Boo,’ before that. He said, ‘What do you mean, it’s not?’ And I said, ‘No, we don’t want to do that, Lee.’ I said, ‘It’s *Rebel-Rouser* sideways. I mean, it’s got too many of the same elements and people will think we’re trying to recreate *Rebel-Rouser*.’

“To give him credit, he saw the wisdom of that, because we’d seen people who had have one successful record and then they’d come out with a second one that was similar to that trying to recreate their first hit, and it wouldn’t go anywhere and that would be the end of their career. So, I said, ‘No. Please, no.’ So, it ended up on the B-side and that was the end of that.

“Those are traps you can fall into when you are writing. It wasn’t exactly similar or anything – and, in fact, the melody was entirely different. But it had some of the same elements and I thought it was too close. When people do that, they plagiarise themselves, you know?”

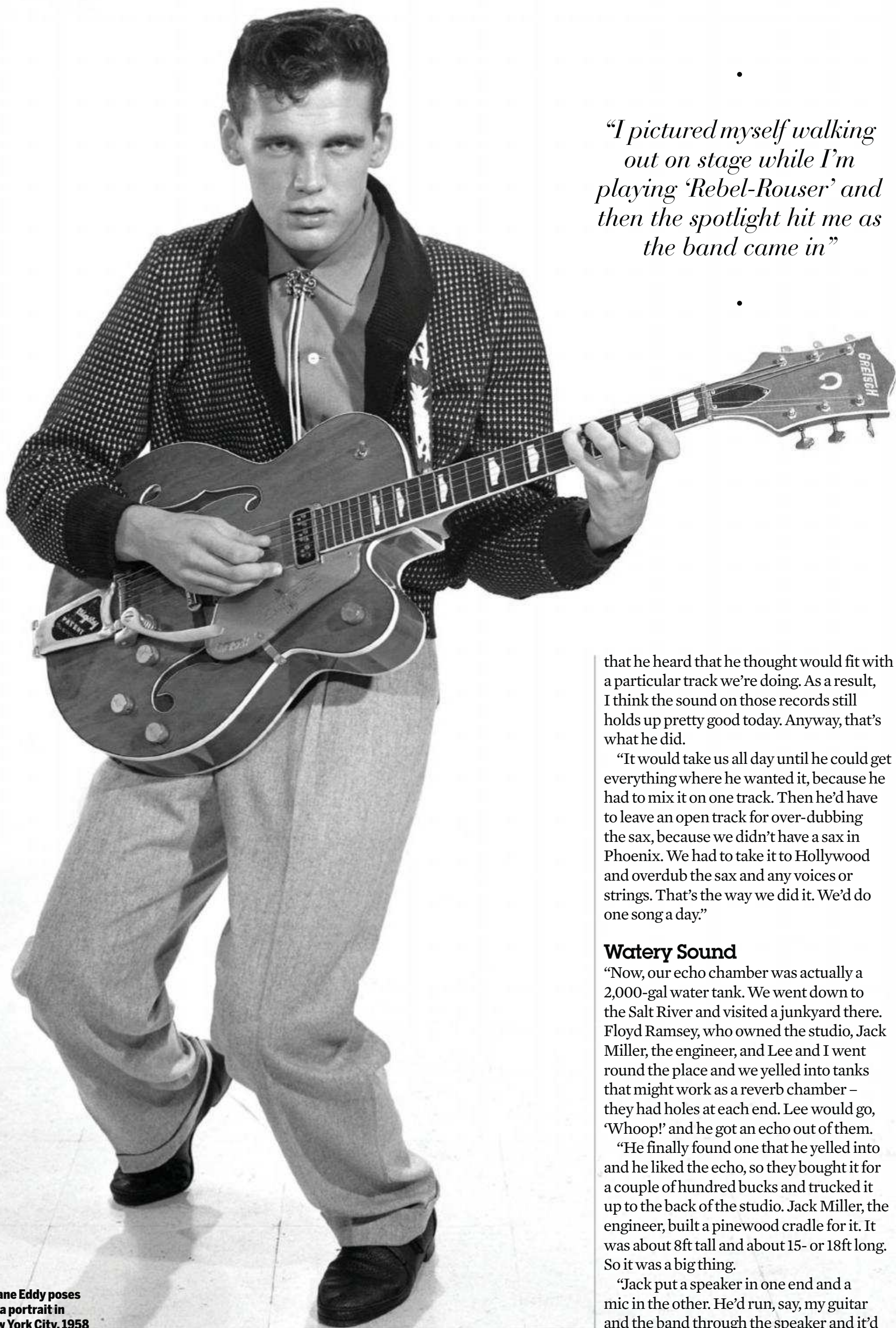
## Mix Mastery

“Lee Hazlewood had been a disc jockey before he became a record producer. He sat in there for three or four years, I think, doing that. He’d listened to these records and he intended to be a producer, so he listened on good equipment in a radio station in those days, the best you would have anywhere. Better than anybody’s home hi-fi. You had these big speakers so you could hear the records and everything, and great turntables that were balanced because they wanted to be perfect to go out over the air.

“So he’d sit there and listen. He’d listen to the bass sound on this record and that record and how Pat Boone’s records were louder than some of the others, they were mastered hotter, and how the piano sounded on this one and that one. He knew all these sounds in his head. So, we started working on a song. We seldom got more than one song a day because we had another handicap I’ll tell you about in a minute.

“He would work with Jack Miller, the engineer, on our primitive three-track, four-track equipment and get those sounds





Duane Eddy poses  
for a portrait in  
New York City, 1958

•

*“I pictured myself walking out on stage while I’m playing ‘Rebel-Rouser’ and then the spotlight hit me as the band came in”*

•

that he heard that he thought would fit with a particular track we’re doing. As a result, I think the sound on those records still holds up pretty good today. Anyway, that’s what he did.

“It would take us all day until he could get everything where he wanted it, because he had to mix it on one track. Then he’d have to leave an open track for over-dubbing the sax, because we didn’t have a sax in Phoenix. We had to take it to Hollywood and overdub the sax and any voices or strings. That’s the way we did it. We’d do one song a day.”

### Watery Sound

“Now, our echo chamber was actually a 2,000-gal water tank. We went down to the Salt River and visited a junkyard there. Floyd Ramsey, who owned the studio, Jack Miller, the engineer, and Lee and I went round the place and we yelled into tanks that might work as a reverb chamber – they had holes at each end. Lee would go, ‘Whoop!’ and he got an echo out of them.

“He finally found one that he yelled into and he liked the echo, so they bought it for a couple of hundred bucks and trucked it up to the back of the studio. Jack Miller, the engineer, built a pinewood cradle for it. It was about 8ft tall and about 15- or 18ft long. So it was a big thing.

“Jack put a speaker in one end and a mic in the other. He’d run, say, my guitar and the band through the speaker and it’d





Playing on *American Bandstand*, 5 August 1958

Photo by ABC Photo Archives/ABC via Getty Images

swirl around in the tank and into the mic at the other end, and we'd have our echo. It worked. Then, of course, Lee would take – when he took it to Gold Star Studios in Hollywood, they had the best echo in the world at that time and he'd have their record, mix it with ours. That's why it had such a wild echoey sound on many of those records. That's how we recorded it."

### Among Giants

"When we later on went to LA, I did two songs in three hours with *Because They're Young* because that was my first proper session. There were some wonderful jazz players present: Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Shelly Manne and Red Callender were the rhythm section and I had the LA Philharmonic Orchestra, about 30 of them anyway, came in there and we did it all live in the studio.

"We finished up early because Bob Thompson had charts written and I knew what I was going to play. So I knew the arrangement and, in fact, we finished 15 minutes early. When we were done, Howard Roberts started showing Barney Kessel some new guitar he'd bought, some new old guitar, I should say. It was, you know, an antique, but beautiful. One of those gorgeous hollow-bodied [archtop] acoustic guitars.

"Anyway, Barney started playing it, so Howard picked up another acoustic and

•

*"Barney had these chequered pants on and a cap that was very strange. I thought he was dressed for playing golf, you know?"*

•

started playing rhythm with him. They started jamming a little bit there and Shelly Manne picked up a couple of brushes and sat back down at his drums – he was just starting to pack them up – and started playing with them. Red Callender picked up his upright bass and played.

"I had albums by these guys on, along with a [vibes player] named Red Norvo. That same section, that same four guys, had played with Red Norvo. I've still got the albums today and I would listen to them to crank myself with jazz and things. Eddie came out from the booth and Lee, and we stood there and they played *Witchcraft* for about 15 minutes. We got our own little personal concert by these giants of jazz, which was a wonderful experience."

### All That Jazz

"Barney Kessel and I became good friends. Howard Roberts took me over [earlier that day] and said, 'I want you to meet a friend of mine.' I said, 'Okay.' So I see this guy sitting there tuning up and I didn't know what Barney looked like, so I didn't know who it was. He had these chequered pants on and a cap that was very strange. I thought he was dressed for playing golf, you know? But as I got to know Barney later, it was no surprise to see him like that.

"Anyway, I started to reach out my hand to shake hands just as Howard said, 'Duane, this is Barney Kessel.' I pulled my hand back and I said, 'What? What are you doing here?' He said, 'Trying to earn a living.' I said, 'Oh my God.' Then I said, 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude,' and I shook hands with him and said, 'It just startled me, surprised me.'

"They got a kick out of it. I was so startled and such big fans of theirs. They couldn't get mad at me for being rude. I turned my back to them when I played. I didn't want them to see how badly I fingered, if I did it wrong. It was just a thrill for me and an amazing event." **G**



Duane Eddy is set to play dates through the UK from 23 to 30 October. For more information and to order tickets, visit [www.duaneeddycircle.com](http://www.duaneeddycircle.com)





SOME MUSICAL  
BREAKTHROUGHS  
HAPPEN IN STUDIOS.  
SOME IN GARAGES.  
*And some in forests.*

ON A DUSTY ROAD OUTSIDE YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON, YOU CAN PEER INTO THE AFRICAN FOREST AND SEE SOMETHING TOTALLY OUT OF PLACE: VILLAGERS PLANTING EBONY SAPLINGS. ALL SUPPORTED BY A GUITAR MANUFACTURER FROM EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA. DESPITE THE FACT THAT EBONY HAS BEEN USED IN GUITAR AND VIOLIN FINGERBOARDS FOR CENTURIES, THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HAD DONE VERY LITTLE TO REPLANT IT. SINCE WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO EVER MAKE GUITARS WITHOUT EBONY, WE TEAMED UP WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST RESEARCHERS AND FORESTERS TO STUDY HOW TO REPLANT IT ON A LARGE SCALE. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, WE'RE PLANTING, GROWING, AND HARVESTING EBONY SUSTAINABLY. ONE LOOK INTO THAT FOREST IN CAMEROON REVEALS SOMETHING ELSE SPROUTING: HOPE. NOT JUST FOR EBONY, BUT FOR THE FUTURE OF TONEWOODS WORLDWIDE. WATCH THE WHOLE STORY [at taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject](http://taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject).



*Step forward. MUSIC IS WAITING.™*







# MASTER STROKES

The top of Fender's tree is its Custom Shop, the guitar company within a company that's now into its fourth decade and showing no signs of slowing down. You want the best? You might want to start here...

## FENDER CUSTOM SHOP EU MASTER DESIGN

'53 TELECASTER, '56 STRATOCASTER & '69 STRATOCASTER

**ALL £3,999**

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments EMEA** PHONE **01342 331700** WEB **www.fender.com**

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Neil Godwin

**I**f you're serious about your guitars, you'll have played a Custom Shop Fender over the years and it'll probably have been one that strongly references the past. "It continues to be the heritage of Strats and Teles that drives the business," says Simon Jacobs, Fender EMEA's Custom Shop sales manager. "And, of those, the majority are probably 60s Strats – it's what everyone wants." He's got a point. There are plenty of new features and designs, but there's something about an old Fender that continues to inspire us, especially when you can personalise the build to the extent currently offered by the Custom Shop.

To that end, Simon and his team commissioned seven of the Custom Shop's

Master Builders to conceive their own specific designs as the centre-piece of a European dealer roadshow that kicked off in early October 2018: "Rather than just having a lot of different-spec guitars on show, we kept it more focused and asked each of the Master Builders: 'If you were going to grab a guitar to go to a gig on a Friday night, what would it be?'"

"The thinking behind this was to make something that was interesting with a few curves, but wasn't so far out there it wouldn't be a genuine player's guitar," he continues. "It was meant to be something you'd happily grab and go off to your gig with: your preferred workhorse. It was a very loose brief, and the responses from the Master Builders has been quite varied."





1



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The resulting guitars fall into the Master Design category: “The Master Builder comes up with the build and aesthetic of the instrument,” continues Simon, “and that’s put out to what we now refer to as Custom-Built [previously Team-Built], essentially to hit a price point: a more affordable piece but with all the details and appointments a Master Builder would choose.”

The seven models (each a limited edition of just 20 pieces) certainly illustrate the potential for your own build. “The idea of the Master Design – and the Custom Collection in general, actually – is that although our customers, which include dealers as well as end-users, can spec up their own guitars, they are not always totally aware of what can be done. Colours, electronic combinations... I mean, sticking a mid-boost on a Telecaster isn’t something that everyone would consider,” says Simon, referring to the Paul Waller-designed ’53 Tele we have on review here alongside Todd Krause’s ’56 Strat and Greg Fessler’s Pink Paisley ’69 Strat. “So it also partly acts as a shop window for what people can come up with. A taster, if you like, like dipping your toe in the pond.”

the block more than a few times thanks to the typically semi-translucent White Blonde Journeyman Relic finish that’s lightly cracked and features a few dings but is far from overdone. The neck still has its gloss finish over a deep ’53 soft V shape, the big frets feel like a recent refret, and there’s a lively resonance and snap to our initial play test.

It might look old, but it plays really well with a slinky, bend-friendly low action. The chromed parts (neck pickup cover, bridge plate, control plate and domed-top knurled knobs) appear un-aged in contrast to the aged nickel plating of the vintage-style split-post tuners – very vintage correct. And this level of detail is everywhere: even the bone nut looks worn and dirty, and the slight fretboard wear is realistic, just like the aged and well-used-looking (uncompensated) brass saddles.

Under the single-ply black pickguard, however, lies the twist: a Clapton mid-boost circuit board routed into its own smuggler’s cavity, which also holds the nine-volt block battery. Unlike the Clapton Strat setup of volume, TBX and mid-boost controls, here the Tele’s volume is a centre-notched double-ganged pot. Above the centre notch, the boost is applied (the Clapton is spec’d at +25dB); below that notch, we have a volume roll-off, while the tone control appears pretty normal. The pickups are spec’d as

1. This classic Tele bridge uses aged brass saddles, uncompensated like the original, and holds a flush-pole Hand-Wound Broadcaster single coil

2. The rift-sawn one-piece maple neck/fingerboard has a ’53 soft V profile and gloss nitro finish



**PAUL WALLER**  
Designer,  
'53 Telecaster

### '53 Telecaster

Paul Waller’s vision is deceptive. Outwardly, we have a lovely lightweight, ash-bodied Telecaster that looks like it’s been around



Paul Waller's attention to vintage detail here is exacting. And yet there's a little surprise under the hood in the form of an Eric Clapton mid-boost circuit board







Hand-Wound Broadcaster (bridge) and '51 Nocaster (neck) and, as a consequence of the added boost, are underwound with measured DCRs of 4.76k (neck) and 5.15kohms (bridge) – quite a bit lower than you would expect.

### '56 Stratocaster

The term Master Design seems to have been used for various models, and even pickups over the years, but it was back in 2014 – the 60th Anniversary of the Stratocaster – that the term was applied to guitars designed by John Cruz ('63 Relic Stratocaster) and Todd Krause ('50s Relic Stratocaster in Moss Green). Todd's latest Master Design again illustrates his preferences and, like the prior model, also has some electronic tweaks.

The white/black theme of Paul Waller's design is continued, although the '55 Desert Tan Relic is more worn-looking and opaque, hiding any view of the two-piece alder body underneath. But it's the neck here that is this guitar's boldest statement. If you like big, big necks, this quoted '55 soft V will be love at first feel. In fairness, it's only very slightly bigger dimensionally than the '53 soft V profile of the Tele, but our left-hand is telling us different. Unlike the '53 Tele, there's no finish on the back of the neck, either; the maple already looks dirty, and won't get cleaner, contrasted by the finish around the base and the back of

the headstock. If we're honest, it looks like someone has taken a piece of sandpaper and rubbed off the finish rather than it being worn away from years of use. Whatever, it feels great, especially if you live with your thumb around. There's a little more wear to the fingerboard face than Paul's Tele, but again it's not overdone. We also have the similar contrast of the newer-looking chrome jack-plate and vibrato top-plate compared with the aged nickel tuners and unplated steel saddles.

As with Todd's previous Master Design, the Hand-Wound single coils have additional copper foil shielding along with foil and a thin metal control plate on the back of the scratchplate. The cavities are screened with conductive paint, too, but the circuit is deliciously old-school with a three-way pickup selector, single (non-boutique) 0.1microfarad cap and CTS 250k pots, and, as wired, there's no tone control for the bridge pickup.

The fretwire gauge is slighter smaller here, but the setup is just as sharp with quite a lot of tilt to the vibrato, which, using three springs, gives an up-bend of approximately four semitones on the G string and just a shade under a full tone on the high E. The small length screw-in arm feels perfect under your right hand, and although this is an original-style vibrato, the stability fresh out of the case is pretty good.

3. The Hand-Wound Fat Strat single coils are shielded with additional copper foil. The control cavities have conductive paint, too. It suggests that this one wants to be played loud

4. As you'd expect, Fender's classic six-screw vibrato is included here. It has a steel block that isn't deep-drilled and is set with quite a pronounced up-tilt and three springs

5. As a Relic, there's a little more wear compared with the Journeyman Relic of the '53 Tele. It's the biggest neck here, too (classed as a '55 soft V profile), and the back has no finish



**TODD KRAUSE**  
Designer,  
'56 Stratocaster



The big neck profile here is a credit to its Master Builder, Todd Krause, for which 'thumb around' players in particular will thank him. Elsewhere, there's a trio of Hand-Wound Fat Strat single coils and a pro road-worn look from its Relic finish





Wallflowers need not apply! Greg Fessler's divisive choice of flamboyant Pink Paisley and silver sparkle scratchplate shouldn't detract from its first-class credentials, though. This guitar's sounds are superb







**6.** This Pink Paisley Closet Classic finish looks new and glossy until you take a closer look – there are a few cracks and minor dings. Along with the silver sparkle scratchplate, you might need sunglasses

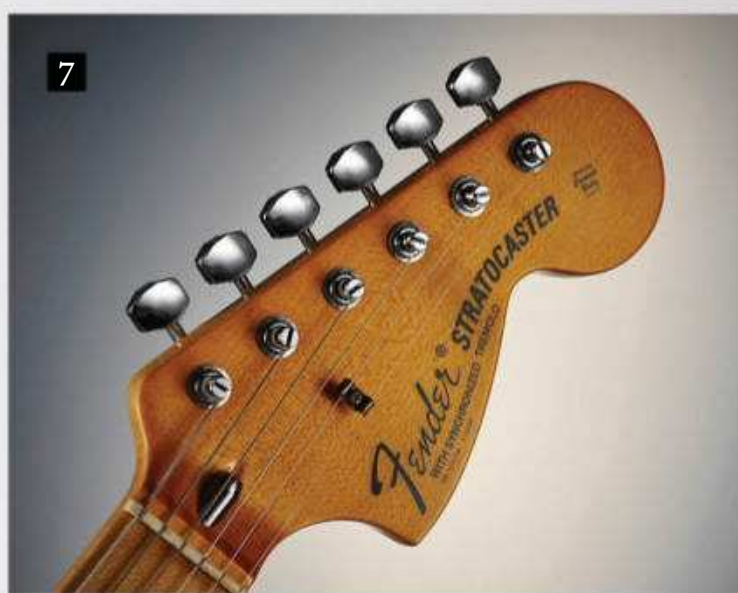
**7.** Once upon a time this large headstock was derided by Fender fans. Now, its vintage tinted face just looks cool. The bullet-style truss rod adjuster was equally unpopular, but it allows for very fast tweaks. “The ‘69 Strat is, and was, a great instrument,” says Greg Fessler, “it just wasn’t well executed in those days. We build much higher quality guitars now and I always enjoyed the look of the big peghead. Plus, the music of that era was fantastic”

### '69 Stratocaster

Greg Fessler clearly likes his guitars to be noticed! The polar opposite to the ubiquitous Sunburst, this Pink Paisley Closet Classic will certainly achieve that, not least with its silver sparkle scratchplate. “Paisley is very popular right now,” offers Greg, “and I thought it would appeal to a lot of people. Plus, I enjoy the retro look.”

As per the base spec, of course, we have the period’s larger headstock and Schaller F logo tuners along with a gloss polyurethane finished neck (not nitro) that goes over the sides of the frets. As some of you might remember, as the 70s progressed, Fender sprayed an over-thick finish on its maple fingerboards, but this isn’t like that at all. There’s no ageing, either, although the headstock face is given a warmer tint. Grain-wise, it’s virtually bang on quarter-sawn, despite its rift-sawn spec – the other two guitars have that spec and the diagonal grain is clearly visible at the headstock tip.

The quoted ‘69 U neck profile here actually feels the most contemporary of the trio, the slimmer depth and additional shoulders suiting thumb behind. It’s very different to the others, especially with its finish, and illustrative of the personalisation possible with the Custom Shop concept. Fretwire, for example, is again slightly different; likewise, the narrow spacing of the 12th fret black Micarta dots (which are



7mm diameter as opposed to 6.35mm of the others). And to match that big headstock, we have a bullet-style truss rod adjuster behind the nut, unlike the original body-end adjustment of the other two here.

The wiring gives us separate tone controls for the neck and bridge pickup, but not the middle, and we get a disparate trio: Texas Special (bridge), Fat 50s (middle, RWRP), ‘69 Strat (neck) – all hand-wound with the middle pickup reverse-wound with reverse polarity (RWRP), so we have humbucking mix positions on the five-way lever. Magnet staggers are vintage on both our Strats.

The setup here mirrors the ‘56, including the vibrato, despite the similar-length arm being taller with less up-bend at the tip. You want details? You got ‘em.

### Feel & Sounds

Somewhere, someone has probably developed an algorithm that you could put in all the details of your Strat and Tele and it’d tell you what it’s going to sound like. In the meantime, ‘different’ is a good starting point. We are continuously amazed how no two Strats seem to sound the same, even if their specification is similar. Quite often it’s as much about the character.

For example, the ‘56 Strat’s neck pickup proves just about as muscular as its big-boned neck: it’s thick and woody and when people ask why you’d spend £4k on

**8.** Unlike the original-spec ‘56, this one has the usual master volume and separate tones controls for neck and bridge only. It’s simple to change if you can solder



**GREG FESSLER**  
Designer,  
‘69 Stratocaster



FENDER EU  
MASTER  
DESIGN  
DIMENSIONS

(in mm unless stated)



	'53 TELE	'56 STRAT	'69 STRAT
Neck width (nut)	42.19	42.02	42.23
Neck width (12th)	51.21	51.08	51.28
Neck depth (1st fret)	23.35	24.4	22
Neck depth (12th fret)	25.2	25.5	23.9
Weight (kg/lb)	3.3/7.26	3.4/7.48	3.6/7.92
Bridge string spacing	54	55.5	55
Bridge PU DC resistance (kohms)	5.15	6.08	6.23
Middle PU DC resistance (kohms)	N/A	6.06	6.19
Neck PU DC resistance (kohms)	4.76	6.09	5.23

a Strat, well, have a listen here. There's no overwound power; it's more like you've upped the size of your speaker cabinet. The three-way switch does mean you have to lodge it to get those classic in-between sounds, which can be a little touch and go, especially live, and the '56 then almost focuses on the Strat's trio of primary voices. On one hand, the bridge does sound a little thin, though with a slightly rounded brightness yet quite visceral in its attack. As ever, the middle pickup sits on the fence: lighter than the neck, beefier and less sharp than the bridge. Whatever each of the subtleties of the design brings, the combination is quite something. The neck won't be for everyone, but that's the beauty of the Custom Shop proposal: you choose.

Once you get over the dress, the '69 Strat comes across with the sort of sounds you'd put into space to tell another civilisation what Earth's most popular electric guitar sounds like. There's that metallic splash to the front of the note that adds a halo of sparkle to everything we hear, and in a clean environment – well, it more than does it for this writer. While the '56 does earthy roots blues effortlessly, this '69 has funk-tastic snap, bounce and life. The tone setup allows you to tame that sparkle a little on more gained classic rock settings, but never pulls back its Stratiness. The neck isn't remotely sticky, like the '53 Tele tends to be,

especially as you work up a sweat, and its shape tends towards the everyman. It might look bonkers, but it sounds sublime.

Sound-wise, the '53 Tele is the hardest to pigeonhole. With the volume in the centre notch position and the tone full up, there's a stingingly bright voice on the bridge – a little hotter with an active edge compared

The subtle  
enhancements and  
component blends  
combine to give each  
instrument a unique  
character and voice

with our reference original '69 Tele. Yet the volume isn't really a volume as you're used to. Turn down from that centre notch and the sound thins then drops off abruptly. Turn up from that notch and the midrange boost thickens the sound and adds beef (though it doesn't sound like 25dB). At times, it can almost get too big and fruity, but using this volume/mid-boost and the tone control, there's huge scope and flexibility that runs from Tele-like steeliness to boosted cocked-wah fatness. To our ears,

it's all about this interaction between these two controls, particularly if you add in a volume pedal. In all this playing and sound experimentation, the guitar disappears, but the neck profile was probably our favourite here. This Tele is all about its sounds.

Verdict

By design, this trio illustrates the diversity of Fender's Custom Shop. With the exception of the Tele's mid-boost, it's less about bold strokes, more about subtle enhancements and component blends that combine to give each instrument a unique character and voice. Far from looking over-aged, they have a real sense of prior use: they feel broken in, vintage, and don't remotely tick the 'don't touch me' collector's box. And that's why so many players choose these over the real things with their escalating values and, quite often, issues from fretwear to originality.

At these prices, they are no impulse buys and £4k is going to bag you an exceptional guitar from many, many makers. Could you do that Friday night gig with a lesser Fender? Of course, but that's not the point. If you can afford it, we'd wager there are few players who wouldn't choose a guitar at this level and with the right name on the headstock. The only problem is the colossal choice. Download the 2018 Custom Guitar Design Guide and get started! 🎸





### FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '53 TELECASTER

**PRICE:** £3,999 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Single-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** 2-piece ash

**NECK:** Rift-sawn maple, '53 soft V profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT:** Bone

**FINGERBOARD:** Rift-sawn maple, black Micarta dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius

**FRETS:** 21, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Nocaster bridge w/ '51 brass saddles, Fender logo vintage-style tuners (relic finish)

**ELECTRICS:** Fender Custom Shop Hand-Wound Broadcaster (bridge) and '51 Nocaster (neck) single coils (underwound), 3-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume and tone controls, Clapton preamp

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Base-spec '52 Tele in NOS finish from around £2,969

**LEFT-HANDERS:** To order

**FINISHES:** White Blonde Journeyman Relic (nitrocellulose)

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA

01342 331700

[www.fender.com](http://www.fender.com)



9/10

**PROS** Build, light weight, neck profile and expansive sounds

**CONS** The onboard mid-boost won't be for everyone; likewise, the gloss neck



### FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '56 STRATOCASTER

**PRICE:** £3,999 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** 2-piece alder

**NECK:** Rift-sawn maple, '55 soft V profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT:** Bone

**FINGERBOARD:** Rift-sawn maple, black Micarta dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius

**FRETS:** 21, medium (Jescar FW50085)

**HARDWARE:** American Vintage vibrato, Fender logo vintage-style tuners (relic finish)

**ELECTRICS:** Fender Custom Shop Hand-Wound Fat Strat x3 single coils (shielded), 3-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck), tone 2 (middle)

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Base-spec '56 Strat in NOS finish from around £2,969

**LEFT-HANDERS:** To order

**FINISHES:** '55 Desert Tan Relic (nitrocellulose)



9/10

**PROS** Build, good weight, big neck profile and sounds, not least the muscular neck pickup

**CONS** We might go for a five-way pickup selector and a tone control for the bridge...



### FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '69 STRATOCASTER

**PRICE:** £3,999 (inc case)

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** 2-piece alder

**NECK:** Quarter-sawn maple, '69 U profile, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT:** Bone

**FINGERBOARD:** Rift-sawn maple, black Micarta dot markers, 241mm (9.5") radius

**FRETS:** 21, medium (Sanko 6105)

**HARDWARE:** American Vintage vibrato, Schaller 'F' logo tuners (relic finish)

**ELECTRICS:** Fender Custom Shop Hand-Wound Texas Special (bridge), Fat 50s (middle, RWRP), '69 Strat (neck) single coils, 5-position lever pickup selector switch, master volume, tone 1 (neck), tone 2 (bridge)

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** Base-spec '69 Strat in NOS finish from around £2,969

**LEFT-HANDERS:** To order

**FINISHES:** Pink Paisley Closet Classic (nitrocellulose)



9/10

**PROS** Build, good weight, contemporary neck profile and hugely classic sounds

**CONS** The finish might put many off what is a stellar Stratocaster



# FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '52 TELECASTER

DESIGNED BY JASON SMITH

**T**his Jason Smith-designed '52 Tele features a two-piece offset seam roasted ash body, a relatively new trend in both acoustic and electric guitar making. "Roasted wood is one option that more and more people are beginning to take up," explains Fender's Simon Jacobs, "but it's by no means central."

The cool '52 Chevrolet Bittersweet Journeyman Relic finish is typical of this EU Master Design run – "it's just that slightly off-centre beam thing," says Simon. The rift-sawn neck here, with a light Relic finish, goes for a Nocaster U profile with medium jumbo frets on the 241mm (9.5-inch) radius fingerboard. Powering comes from a Hand-Wound Twisted Tele single coil at the neck and Broadcaster at the bridge.







The round string tree helps evoke the early 50s vibe here



A Broadcaster-spec pickup at the bridge gives the Jason Smith Tele plenty of bite

## FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '65 STRAT

DESIGNED BY DALE WILSON

Fender's Master Builders love their alder-bodied Strats and this is another, in Pale Sonic Blue, from Dale Wilson who, says Simon Jacobs, "specialises in Relics and is constantly developing new techniques. I believe there's something like a four-year wait for him to build you a [Master-Built] guitar." This time the neck is AAA-grade flame maple with a round-lam rosewood fingerboard. It has Sanko 6105 frets and a '65 Strat C profile with spec'd depth of 20.8mm at the first fret and 24.74mm at the 12th.

The pickups here are Hand-Wound Fat '60s single coil (the middle is RWRP). The control setup features a master volume and tone, and a blender in place of the second tone control, which allows neck and bridge to be combined (in positions 1 and 5 on the five-way lever), plus all three pickups on together (in position 2 and 4).

## FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN MODERN ROCK STRAT

DESIGNED BY JOHN CRUZ

John Cruz's grab-and-go is quite the axe, using a chambered roasted alder body – certainly a looker with its Bright Silver/Blue Metallic NOS finish – with an oil-finished roasted AAA flame maple neck and flat-lam fingerboard. The neck profile suits it perfectly: a large C with spec'd depth of 22.2mm at the first fret and 24.1mm at the 12th. Little surprise, then, that it goes for the biggest Dunlop 6100 frets, here with a flatter 305mm (12-inch) radius as well as the 'improved' vintage style RSD vibrato.

More surprising is the Hand-Wound Broadcaster pickup at the bridge, augmented by John's own design Strat pickups in the middle and neck positions, which again use the blender circuit (see Dale Wilson's '65 Strat), although it uses a three-way pickup selector, not a five-way.



# FENDER EU MASTER DESIGN '67 TELECASTER

DESIGNED BY DENNIS GALUSZKA

**T**he third Tele in the seven-strong mini-range is designed by Dennis Galuszka and shoots for a white bound '67 style, with a two-piece ash body. The AA flame maple neck has a AA flame maple round-lam fingerboard, again with 241mm (9.5-inch) radius and medium jumbo frets. Its neck profile is classed as a '63 Strat-style C with spec'd depth of 21mm at the first fret and 25.4mm at the 12th.

Pickups are again Hand-Wound, a '67 spec pair with what Fender calls its Fat '50s control setup.







Hardware and logo style reflects the '67 spec



Pickups are also '67 spec but the guitar features 'Fat '50s' control circuitry

## INTERVIEW TODD KRAUSE



**M**aster builder Todd Krause is one of the best-known luthiers working in Fender's Custom Shop. He's the guy who builds Clapton's guitars, for example, and his designs combine pragmatic, player-focused features with a deep appreciation for Fender's heritage. We caught up with Todd to quiz him about the gig-ready ethos behind the '56 Strat he contributed to the range...

**If the concept of these EU Master Design guitars was a Friday night gig grab-and-go, what sort of music do you envision playing on your design?**

"Any type of classic rock music can be played on this guitar – from Hendrix to SRV. It was designed for someone who plays a lot of blues-based classic rock or power blues – anything you can use a Strat on. That was my inspiration; that's the type of music I personally play."

**On an earlier 2014 Master Design guitar you also shielded the pickups and the cavities. Is the main reason to reduce hum pick-up or does it change the sound of the pickup a little?**

"It's done to reduce hum, but it does also alter the sound. With less of the 60 cycle hum in the background, you hear more tone of the guitar, but the shielding adds more inductive to the pickup, making them slightly hotter. That was a popular hot-rod mod in the late 60s/70s. If you open up Clapton's or SRV's guitar, they all have that treatment done to them."

**What's the tonal difference when you pair a maple neck/'board with an alder body as opposed to ash?**

"Alder body and a maple neck is the classic combination. To me, a maple neck is not as much tone as it is feel, and pairing with the alder body is being true to form. I've always found the alder body a little more articulate, especially in the low range. Ash bodies sound great, too – neither one is bad, just not the same."



# INTERVIEW

# PAUL WALLER

The Master Builder behind the unique '53 Telecaster explains how his latest creation is built around its 'secret weapon' sounds. Here's how he did it...

It's not always easy co-ordinating instruments for review along with interviewing the makers. In this case, we only got to speak to Paul Waller after we'd tested his and the other EU Master Design guitars. Luckily, we agreed: Paul Waller's Telecaster is all about the sounds it's capable of producing. "It's very versatile because of all the tones that are coming out of it," says Paul. "What you have is an underwound set of pickups designed to work with the boost circuit and it's at the centre-detent [of the volume control] that the boost circuit comes on. So, if you like, from zero to five, it's in essence a passive volume control, then from six onwards it's the booster – it's like a pedal inside your guitar."

"I voiced the pickups so that they sound a lot more clear and have a tremendous amount of midrange in the lower passive settings," continues Paul. "What you have is a very clear and midrange-y voiced passive circuit *before* the boost comes on, because what the boost is doing is adding a lot of sparkle and high-end. I knew that would come on later if you choose to use it. So you have your range from fingerstyle low volume with very beautiful and musical notes, to in-your-face and over-the-top boosted gain that's coming on at 10."

#### It was a bit of a shock when we plugged in and turned everything full up!

"I did that on purpose because I wanted people to pick it up and think it was just going to be a run of the mill Tele. But you'll notice a difference right away! The volume/boost control is a stacked pot that has two different values, so the passive part of the circuit is working up to the centre detent. The tone circuit plays really well with the boost, too, so you can dial in the sound of a more stock Telecaster, but you can get all these other voices that surround it."

#### We can't remember playing a Tele that had a boost circuit before...

"It's not uncommon that we put a boost circuit in a guitar, but it usually comes



It takes just one pick to realise that Paul Waller's Master Design is no 'run of the mill' Tele

with the rigmarole of bells and whistles – switches and extra knobs. I like simplicity, so I wanted to take this to a very simple, user-friendly level – encased in one knob so there's no searching for the right knob to pull in when you don't have time to look for it, so to speak. I wanted it to be a simple version of that [Clapton boost] circuit. So, no, it's not the first time it's been done, but it's the first time it's been done this cleanly."

#### It also didn't sound as fierce as the same circuit on a Clapton guitar...


"It is the same amount of boost, 25dB, but I designed the pickups to be voiced for that circuit. In a typical Clapton guitar, you'll have a stacked single coil that ends up having quite a bit of volume itself: it's a pretty high-output pickup. Then you add the boost on top of that and, sometimes, for a lot of players, it's over-the-top: a little too much sparkle. I wanted to stay in the more midrange part of the spectrum, so I wound the pickups a little differently. These are just stock single-coil pickups, but they've been severely underwound so they'll be voiced properly with this circuit. The reason it doesn't sound like it's that full 25dB boost

is because I've tailored the pickups to work better with the circuit."

#### And did using this boost circuit present any other issues you had to deal with?

"Warming up the guitar with that circuit was my number one goal. I figured I could get more of the range of notes that I wanted by using the light ash body because it's warmer than alder. That circuit has so much sparkle, I didn't need any more. Lightweight ash can be a little bit 'not-as-musical' for some of the high-end stuff guys are looking for. But the combination of the ash and that circuit works really well. It's a lightweight guitar with lots of lower midrange, but you also have the sparkle that you can bring to the table later on if you choose – it's all right there conveniently located at the stock volume control position."

#### Will you be grabbing this Tele for your Friday night gig?

"Let the jokes begin... I'm actually a bass player! Truth is, I don't get too much time to play out. I might jump in on a jam-band jam at work or sit in with a friend, but life has me pretty busy with Fender and home." 



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SERIES

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# TAKING IT TO THE NEXT STAGE

Can't afford a Custom Shop creation that's been fettled for the stage? Fear not, there's plenty you can do to prepare a workaday electric to rock harder at your next gig. We join a bevy of seasoned techs to hear their advice on prepping guitars for peak performance

## THIN PICKINGS CAN BE GOOD

**Roger Mayer**, the audio electronics wizard who was Jimi Hendrix's tone tech, offers this surprisingly simple piece of pick-related advice for taking to the stage with confidence. "When you're playing live, use the thinnest possible pick so that the pick will break first before the string – if you hit the strings hard. You should be able to hit the strings as hard as you want with the pick and not break them! It gives you a sense of freedom when you're playing, knowing

that when the red mist comes down you can really attack the string and not break it. Being able to use more attack when you need to is really important."

## MAKE FIRM CONTACT

**Roger Mayer is no stranger** to fettling Strats and also suggests that close scrutiny of the output jack can yield tone benefits on stage. "One of the most important and overlooked things on a guitar is the output jack. The original output jack on a Stratocaster was a Switchcraft one that had a very strong grip to it. In fact, it was quite

hard to pull the guitar lead out! Some of the newer ones aren't strong enough to retain a really good connection. The current from the pickups is so low that it's really, really sensitive to dirt and oxidation. The tighter socket will also cut through oxidation a lot better. You need a great contact to get a detailed sound, so my top tip is make sure you get a good quality Switchcraft output jack socket fitted."

## KEEP IT CLEAN

"**Keeping your sockets** and the ends of your leads clean is very important," says Roger Mayer, once again emphasising the importance of keeping connections optimal throughout the signal chain. "If you're on the road, you'll often need to clean them every time you play a gig. I used to do this for Jimi when I was out on tour with him. I mean, how long does it take to wipe the guitar leads down? I use several cleaning solutions. One of them is almost the same as lighter fluid – like Ronson fluid. It's actually a very good substitute. If you can't find some proper cleaning fluid, try and get hold of a can of fluid that you'd use for a Zippo lighter. Methylated spirits and isopropyl alcohol will also work very well as a cleaning agent. In fact, they're very good for cleaning guitar strings, too."

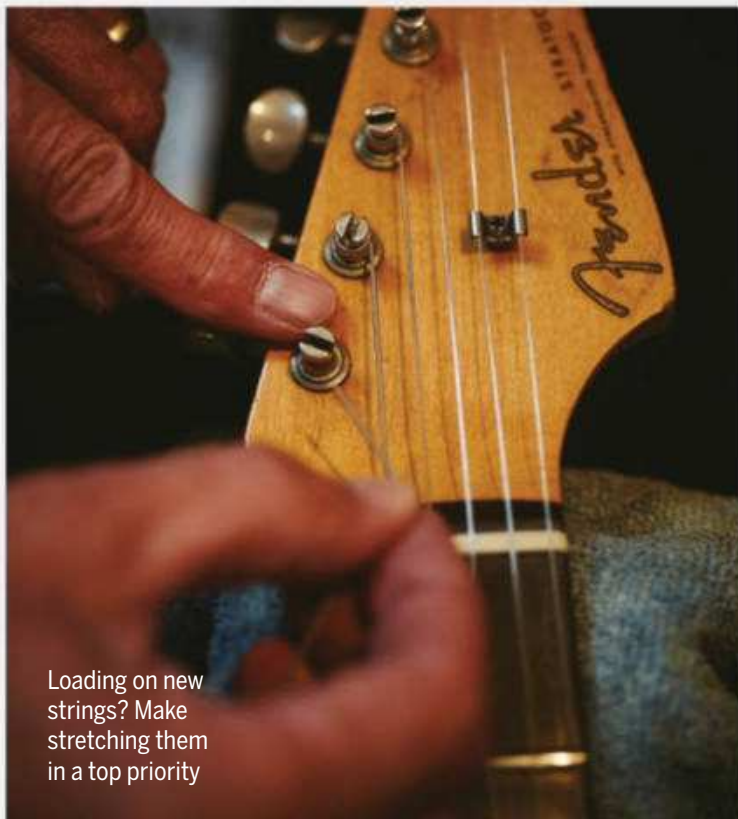
## STRETCH IT OUT

**James Sharpe**, tech to top acts such as Opeth and Gary Numan, has this advice to offer on getting top performance from your guitar night after night on stage.

Selecting the right plectrum can bring more to your playing than you may realise







Loading on new strings? Make stretching them in a top priority



Don't be too quick to blame your Strat's trem for your tuning issues - there is a solution!

“One thing that I always feel is overlooked from a performance point of view is the importance of stretching in strings properly when you change them. A well strung-up guitar with a nice fresh set of strings on is good only once the strings are stretched in properly. Not stretching in the strings can have an impact on all manner of aspects: the most obvious being how well the guitar will stay in tune. It also affects the pressure on the truss rod, therefore having an impact on the string action height. If your guitar has a trem system, then, again, having unstretched strings can end up giving you a nasty surprise.

“Another particular touring point is making sure you keep a well-gigged instrument clean. You wouldn't believe the damage sweat can do to a guitar if left in a case after a show for a few months, not to mention the acrid stench! Corrosion on the frets, pickups and hardware can discolour the wood, and in bad cases corrode the electrics. Keeping an instrument clean and dry is a must after playing a show.”

## ONE AT A TIME

**Ryan Taylor of Deadmill Guitars**, who also techs for top bands such as Foals, gives this advice for making sure your Strat vibrato doesn't throw your tuning out when performing live. “Here's my advice on modifying and adjusting tremolo systems. I get frustrated with that common criticism ‘tremolos always put my guitar out of tune so I'll only play hard-tails’. Here's the how-to: tune a string, then use the trem. Continue until the string stays in tune after vigorous ‘trem-ing’. Then move on to the next string; repeat; then check back

in on string one and so on. Once the guitar is in tune and remains unaffected by the tremolo action, using the trem will actually return your guitar to pitch when it wanders instead of being problematic.”

## CONSIDER UPGRADED HARDWARE

**Simon Law, who techs** for guitar luminaries such as Robben Ford, recommends considering a hardware upgrade for your off-the-shelf Fender if you want incremental improvements in tone and functionality next time you hit the stage. “Most ‘off-the-shelf’ guitars are fitted with fairly low budget hardware; even the most expensive custom shop guitars can be improved in this department. Fender-type guitars are usually fitted with bridges that are made from all sorts of alloys and metals. These can always be upgraded to far superior items made by such people as Callaham. These are a fairly straightforward swap, and so long as you match the saddle alignment and height,

and so on – you shouldn't have to adjust too much – the tonal improvement can be from moderate to huge depending on what was fitted before. Both sustain tone and volume increases are made.”

## UPGRADE YOUR ELECTRONICS

“**All electric guitars** are fitted with various pots – short for potentiometers – switches and sockets,” continues Simon Law. “Some of these can be okay, but many affordable electrics are fitted with relatively modest-quality volume pots, sockets and switches. A better-quality pot can give a better ‘sweep’ from one end of its range to the other and a better tone. Most single-coil pickups guitars are fitted with 250k pots; this value is chosen for its tonal response to the pickups themselves. If these measure less than 250k, then the guitar can become dark and dull sounding. If they measure more, then they can be bright and shrill. So ideally their actual value needs to be as close to the 250k as possible.

“The same goes for the 500k pots fitted to humbucker-equipped guitars. Makers like CTS, Alpha and Emerson make some amazing replacements for not a huge amount of money, and they really are worth every penny. For me, the best sockets are made by Switchcraft. Switchcraft also makes the best Gibson-styled switches – while, for Fender type guitars, I'd recommend getting a US-made CRL switch. All these can be fitted relatively easily by anyone with a soldering iron and a little patience – just take some pictures and copy the wiring like for like.” **G**

•  
*“One of the most overlooked things is the output jack”*  
 •

**ROGER MAYER**







# Pedal Powered

As backline style continues to change we look at two new – and very different – ways to amplify your digital modeller. The revolution is here...

Words Nick Guppy Photography Adam Gasson





# LINE 6 POWERCAB 112 PLUS & HEADRUSH FRFR-112 **£799 & £299**

CONTACT **Yamaha Music Europe / HeadRush Europe** PHONE **+49 (0)4101 3030 / 01252 896040** WEB **line6.com / headrushfx.com**

## What You Need To Know

- 1 What is FRFR?**  
It's generally taken to mean 'Full Range, Flat Response'. These days, it's usually applied to powered monitors used to reproduce the sound of amp and effects modelling devices. Conventional guitar amps and speakers deliberately colour the input signal, which is the last thing you want if you've spent ages creating your favourite sound in the digital domain.
- 2 We know Line 6, but HeadRush?**  
A relatively new player to the market, HeadRush is part of the inMusic group of brands, which also includes Alesis, Akai and Alto. The HeadRush Pedalboard has proved a runaway success, with arguably the best user interface of any modelling floorboard, and sounds powered by the Eleven HD DSP software.
- 3 So, who would buy one of these?**  
Any guitarist who owns a modelling preamp and wants to reproduce its sounds cleanly on stage, without the need for in-ear monitoring. The Powercab 112 Plus is a more specialist product aimed at owners of Line 6's Helix, while the HeadRush FRFR can work with just about any preamp, in any size of venue.



**D**uring the last decade or so, digital amplification and effects modelling has properly come of age, with software and hardware capable of producing convincing amp-like sounds that are hard to separate from the real thing. There's also been a significant advance at the guitar end of the signal chain, with products such as Line 6's Variax capable of sounding like a multitude of instruments in any tuning you like, all at the touch of

a button. At the other end of the chain, we've seen the development of IR (impulse response) technology, to mimic the dynamics of different speaker cabinets and microphone arrangements.

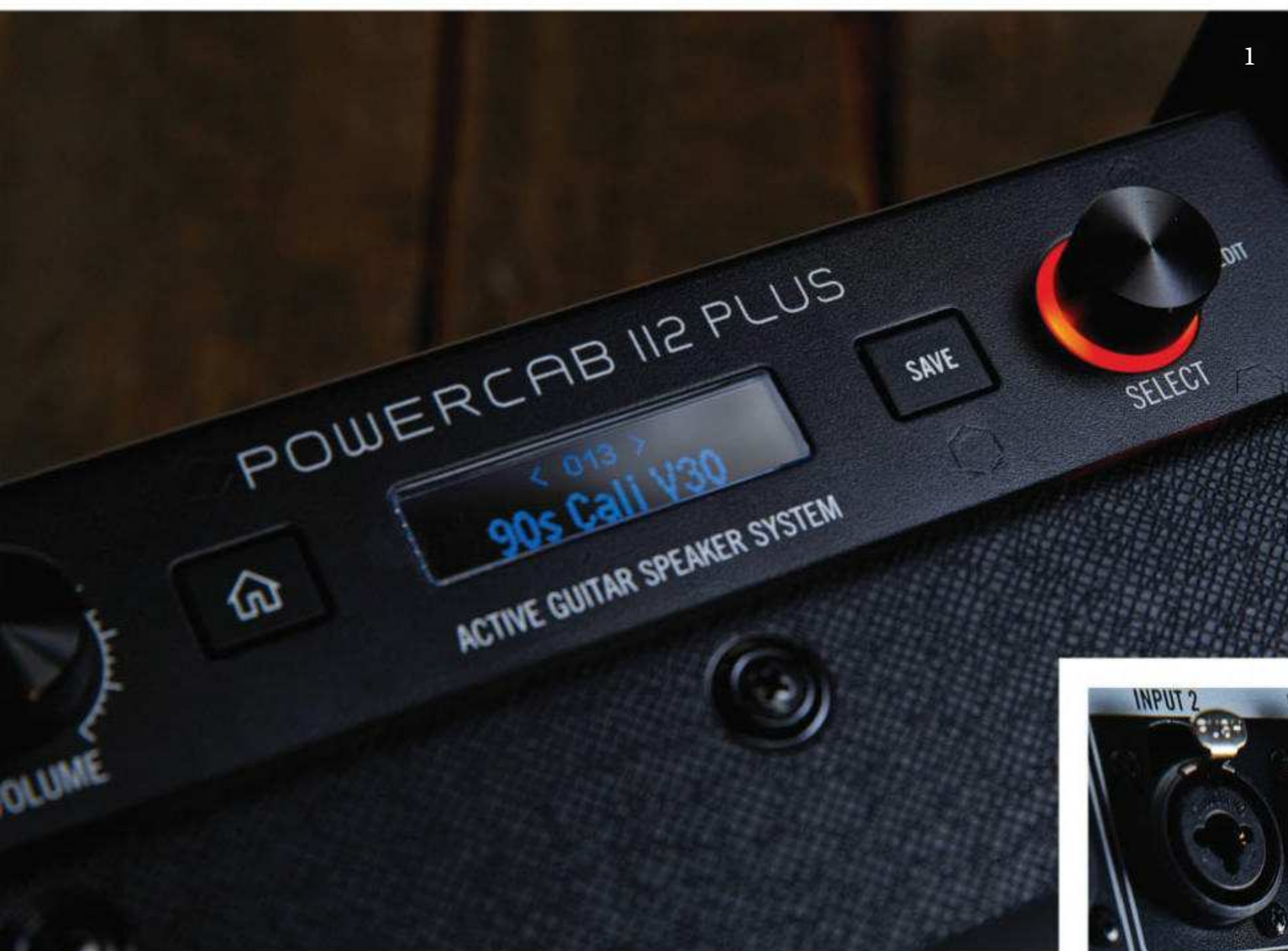
While many companies package their digital products in conventional-looking plywood boxes with speakers, the professional end of the market is tending towards all-in-one rack or floorboard controllers, such as Line 6's Helix or the HeadRush Pedalboard, which are portable and output directly to a PA without the need for microphones. This is an ideal setup for the modern 'quiet stage' approach, where performers use in-ear monitoring, but for more conventional live use some kind of local monitoring is needed, ideally something that won't colour your carefully constructed amp sounds.

One abbreviation doing the rounds at the moment is 'FRFR', which stands for 'Full Range, Flat Response'. In simpler terms, this means a powered PA-style monitor, so you can plug your amp modeller into a PA but still have a volume knob you can turn up when you need to – after all, we are guitarists! There's always more than one pathway to tone where amp modelling is concerned, and this month we're looking at two very different approaches: the new Powercab 112 Plus from market leaders



The Powercab Plus's clean, modern design is also very functional, with rounded rear corners and a front port to reduce internal reflections and improve bass response and projection





1

1. The ring around the Edit knob can be programmed to light up in different colours, so you can see at a glance which preset is in use
2. USB connects the Powercab to a PC for editing with the software app. You can also record and play back sound through it
3. The Powercab Plus has AES/EBU/Line 6 Link digital inputs and outputs, which mean the sound can stay in the digital domain right up until it hits the loudspeaker, for maximum clarity and zero latency



3

Line 6 and the FRFR-112 from relative newcomers HeadRush.

Now teamed with industry-giant Yamaha, at first glance Line 6's Powercab Plus looks like a conventional boutique guitar combo, with a smart grille cloth and distinctive cabinetry featuring a one-piece plywood back and sides. There are also generously curved rear corners and recessed kick-back feet. A small top-facing control panel features two knobs, two buttons and a slim LCD display. The rear panel gives the game away that the Powercab Plus is anything but conventional, with a comprehensive range of connectors including main and aux inputs on combi jack/XLR sockets, digital AES/L6 Link in/outs, a balanced XLR main output with a ground lift and low cut, MIDI in and out/thru and a USB connector.

Behind the grille cloth, there's a unique dual-concentric 12-inch loudspeaker and HF driver in a front-ported enclosure, driven by a power amp producing up to



2

250 watts peak. According to Line 6, this will deliver 125dB SPL at 1m, which is more than loud enough for the average gig. The Powercab Plus's digital features include speaker modelling, using newly developed Line 6 technology to reproduce the characteristics of six popular loudspeakers, including Celestion's Vintage 30, Alnico Blue, Greenback and Creamback alongside Jensen's P12Q and Eminence's 'Swamp Thang'. There's also a HF defeat, which turns off the compression driver for a more traditional guitar speaker response, and a Flat setting that takes out the modelling and IR responses, turning the Powercab Plus into a full range PA-style monitor.

HeadRush's FRFR looks more like a conventional modern PA speaker,

with separate 12-inch and horn-loaded compression drivers in a practically indestructible polypropylene wedge casing that can sit on the floor or be pole-mounted. On the rear panel there's a pair of inputs on combi XLR/jack sockets with separate volume controls, and a single XLR output for connection to a PA or another FRFR, with ground lift and EQ contour switches. Basic fare maybe, but everything you need to amplify your cabinet and speaker models is here. Most importantly, inside the enclosure there's a chunky power amp capable of producing a whopping 2,000 watts at peak or around 1,000 watts continuous. Whichever rating you choose, that's ample power for any venue, with headroom to carry over every nuance of

Line 6's Powercab Plus scores well on the tone front, with an authentic 'real amp' sound





4. As well as sitting the FRFR on the floor, you can pole-mount the HeadRush, just like a conventional PA speaker

5. The FRFR chassis has a built-in grab handle for easy carrying



your sound. Both speakers weigh about the same and are quite portable; the FRFR is taller and narrower with an integral grip on the top rear, while the Powercab Plus's more conventional shape makes it a little easier to carry single-handed.

## Sounds

Both monitors power up cleanly and smoothly; we tried them out with an entry-level amp modelling pedal and a higher-grade rack unit, also borrowing a Helix Floor to check out the Powercab Plus's digital and MIDI integration.

Sonically, the HeadRush and Line 6 are both quality performers. There's a big difference in power and this was immediately noticeable, with the massive headroom of the HeadRush FRFR making itself felt as well as heard. While the 2,000-watt figure is qualified as a peak measurement, this still works out at around 1,000 watts continuous, which is respectably loud by any standard, with no less than 128 dB SPL. With immense power comes great clarity and the HeadRush is perfect for music that demands precise definition, like metal, or anything that uses detuned instruments. The only downside to this level of power is that any mistake you make is reproduced with the same stunning clarity. So if you're prone to sloppiness, then

be prepared to polish your chops if you want to get the most from the HeadRush's huge headroom.

While not as powerful, the Powercab Plus scores well on the tone front, with a more authentic 'real amp' sound compared with the HeadRush FRFR, which comes over more like a high-quality recorded track. The Powercab Plus still puts out 125dB peak SPL, which is loud enough for small to medium gigs and, of course, there's a balanced output to hook it up to whatever PA is in use. Another cool feature of the Powercab is that the dual concentric driver arrangement means you can mic it like a regular guitar speaker and hear the HF and LF content from one source. The speaker models are very impressive, particularly the Vintage 30 and Alnico Blue programs, both of which sound spine-chillingly authentic compared to the real thing. The Creamback and Greenback models are ideal for putting the final polish of authenticity on vintage

The massive headroom of the HeadRush FRFR makes itself felt as well as heard

Marshall-type tones, while the Eminence Swamp Thang patch mixed with a rude tweed champ model is instant *Tres Hombres* ZZ Top.

The Powercab Plus functions on a number of different levels when combined with a Line 6 Helix. You can choose to set it to 'Flat' and use the Helix's amp/cab modelling, or turn off that part of the Helix and use the Powercab to generate speaker, cabinet and mic placement effects, together with your choice of impulse response. The Line 6 Link ins and outs let the whole operation take place in the digital domain with zero latency.

While the presets and other digital features of the Powercab Plus worked perfectly with other MIDI-compatible sources, it's clear Helix users will enjoy Powercab's full potential. There is a lower spec'd version of the Powercab that retains the speaker models but does away with almost everything else. This will work just fine with any other modelling source, although we wish Line 6 had left MIDI in.

Onboard programming is quite straightforward, with one knob for selecting and editing parameters and 'home' and 'save' push-button switches. The other knob is a non-programmable volume control. The edit knob has a useful LED-illuminated ring that can be





programmed to shine in different colours, to let you know which speaker model is in use. The Powercab Plus can also be edited from a computer using Line 6's Powercab Edit software, which allows loading of up to 128 user IR files (although you may find all you need with the default Line 6 Allure pack that comes pre-loaded). This is a cool feature for Helix users, because it lets you offload some of the Helix's processing power, making space for other things.

### Verdict

So, two different solutions for the same problem. The HeadRush is a great choice for bigger stages and all kinds of modellers, including HeadRush's own. It's particularly good for metal, thrash and modern rock and also relatively inexpensive, so you get a lot for your cash. No speaker simulation means you're relying on the built-in cab and mic sims of your modeller, but that's what most of us do anyway.

Helix users owe it to themselves to see what a Powercab Plus can do – it's the accessory many have been asking for and much more besides. While it costs a lot more, it's worth it – if you're a Helix owner. Non-Helix players would do well to check out the standard Powercab. Either way, powered cabs like these give you back your volume knob, so turn it up! **G**

**6.** The HeadRush has two separate inputs, each with individual volume controls

**7.** Always a good thing to have on this kind of monitor, the ground lift is sometimes needed to stop excessive hum caused by ground loops between pedal and amp. The contour switch adds a 3dB lift to highs and lows, improving the tone at lower volume



### LINE 6 POWERCAB 112 PLUS

**PRICE:** £799

**ORIGIN:** Designed in USA, made in China

**TYPE:** Powered monitor with built-in speaker emulation

**SPEAKERS:** 1x custom-design co-axial 12"

**MAX OUTPUT:** 250W peak

**INPUTS:** 2x XLR/Jack combi, 1x Line 6 link/AES digital

**OUTPUTS:** 1x XLR, 1x Line 6 Link/AES digital

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 70Hz-20kHz

**DIMENSIONS:** 567 (w) x 462 (h) x 305mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 16/35

**CABINET:** Plywood

**CONTROLS:** Volume, edit/select, save, home

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:**

Loudspeaker modelling (6 models), 128 presets, impulse response support, USB audio in/out, MIDI in/out/thru, editing via Line 6 Powercab software, retractable kickback stands, ground lift and bass cut switches

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The standard Powercab 112 does away with presets, MIDI, USB digital in/out and IR, but retains basic speaker modelling, for £622

8/10

**PROS** Top-quality sound from the custom coaxial driver, brilliant onboard speaker modelling; a perfect partner for the Helix

**CONS** It's expensive, though there is a stripped-down version that retains the speaker modelling



### HEADRUSH FRFR-112 POWERED MONITOR

**PRICE:** £299

**ORIGIN:** Designed in USA, made in China

**TYPE:** Powered monitor

**SPEAKERS:** 1x 12" LF, 1x 1.4" HF

**MAX OUTPUT:** 2,000W peak

**INPUTS:** 2x XLR/Jack combi

**OUTPUTS:** 1x XLR

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE:**

50Hz-20kHz

**DIMENSIONS:** 605 (w) x 354 (h) x 350mm (d)

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 16/35

**CABINET:** Polypropylene

**CONTROLS:** 2x volume, contour switch (3dB low/hi boost), ground lift

**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Can be pole mounted

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** None

7/10

**PROS** Massive power, headroom and clarity at a very affordable price point

**CONS** The cabinet isn't so portable because of its shape, but there's not much else to fault at the price



# Are We There Yet?

Digital modelling is hardly new, but is it still a work in progress or fully formed?  
Nick Guppy takes up the debate

**W**hen reading amp reviews or forum comments, you might be forgiven for thinking there are two kinds of guitarists: those who will never forsake their valve amps, and those who have burned their bridges and embraced the brave new world of digital modelling. And while some of us might feel loyal to one camp, the reality is most of us are in both.

Amazingly, it's been 20 years since the arrival of the original Line 6 POD, and, ever since, there's been a relentless march toward improved tone as software engineers work out how to capture the elusive dynamics and drive characteristics of the humble electron valve, as used in many guitar amp designs, not to mention effects pedals, guitars, microphones and loudspeakers. It's really only in the last five to 10 years, with massive leaps in processing power and the downward tumble of RAM pricing, that digital modelling has properly matured, in the shape of products such as the

## Those of us who grew up in the pre-digital era shouldn't feel guilty about jumping ship

Kemper profiling amplifier, Line 6's Helix, and Universal Audio's OX Amp Top Box.

There are two main driving forces for digital development – convenience and control. In the early days of PA, sound reinforcement was primarily for voices. Guitar amps had to be loud enough to fill a hall and this led to the 100-watt stacks that commanded most stages during the late 60s and early 70s. Meanwhile, bands such as the Grateful Dead pushed for higher sound quality with less distortion, which led to the development of their legendary 'wall of sound', the forerunner of the standard PA layout, with FOH speakers to relay sound to the audience and monitor speakers on stage. Often not ideal from the sound engineer's perspective, there's a tendency for backline sound to spill off the stage and interfere with a carefully balanced FOH mix, while putting microphones in close proximity to speakers often results in feedback squeals.



Products such as HeadRush's FRFR bridge the gap between the player and their loudspeaker

As everyone becomes more careful of long-term exposure to high-volume music, there's been a continued drive to reduce onstage levels, particularly in environments where sound has to be tightly controlled, such as broadcasting, theatres and church worship, which has resulted in the modern 'quiet stage', where performers wear in-ear monitors and use instruments without traditional backline.


### Quietly Controlled

Modelling products are perfect for this environment, feeding into the PA system where the sound engineer has complete control over what the performers and audience hear, and no more volume-knob battles. With no need to worry about mic placement, temperature and humidity, or valves wearing out, and all the associated buzzes and rattles that many guitar amps generate, you can program all the sounds your set needs and reproduce them perfectly night after night, at the touch of a button.

In the studio it's more about convenience. It takes time to properly mic up a guitar amp and achieve an ideal sound that suits artist, engineer and producer. Studios often won't have much more than a dozen guitar amps to experiment with, so software and hardware digital solutions that provide unlimited ready-to-track amp sounds and

effects are great time savers. It's no wonder digital modelling has become so popular.

Those of us who grew up in the pre-digital era shouldn't feel guilty about jumping ship. If new technology excites and inspires creativity, surely that's all that matters. Products such as the Kemper and Helix clearly have their place in modern music production, but there's no danger of 'real' old-school valve guitar amps being left behind just yet. Korg, one of the world's top digital innovators, cleverly provided an alternative path with its Nutube 6P1. Rather than try to emulate a valve in the digital domain – which it already does very convincingly – Korg just made a better valve that's smaller, more robust and uses much less power.

As long as there's a demand for power valves such as the 6L6 and EL34, someone will make them, even though as time moves on the science and know-how needed to manufacture valves could get diluted. Meanwhile, for players who aren't quite ready for the disconnect of plugging directly into the PA, as well as those occasions when a PA isn't there, products like Line 6's Powercab Plus and HeadRush's FRFR serve an important purpose of connecting the guitarist to their own loudspeaker – for many players it's still the other half of the instrument. 



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WALRUS AUDIO

# Defcon4

It won't unleash World War III, but this pedal, designed for Ryan Adams, will considerably ramp up your tonal options

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Olly Curtis

While it's always possible to use just one guitar for the entirety of your gig, many of us prefer the tonal flexibility of having a choice of instruments to draw upon. That might be a luxury enjoyed by touring bands with their own guitar tech, but two is a practical consideration: one equipped with humbuckers, and the other single coils, for example. As anyone who has swapped between a Les Paul and a Stratocaster on stage will know, a compensatory amp tweak might also be needed: more volume for the Strat's single coils, or a bit of bass roll-off for those Les Paul 'buckers.

Of course, a pedal that incorporates a boost/cut and/or EQ change could do the job instantly. And that's one primary role of the Defcon4: a preamp and EQ pedal

developed by the Walrus Audio team with American singer/guitarist Ryan Adams in order to make his regular onstage switches between Les Paul and Strat completely painless. Besides that, though, what you're also getting is a pedal that can give you tonal sweetening and a kick-up when a song calls for it.

The design of the Defcon4 has its roots in Adams' love for all things 80s and in particular the 1983 movie that inspired its artwork, *WarGames*, most notably in the inclusion of a blue backlit world map, complete with missile trajectories, rather than a standard bypass LED.

## SOUNDS

There are four elements to the Defcon4 pedal's sound-shaping capabilities, each

with an individual switch on the pedal coupled to an LED showing its on/off status. Whichever combination of the four is active is what you get when operating the bypass footswitch. First up is the Launch switch (Defcon 1, white LED), a 10dB MOSFET boost. This is very useful for giving extra bite to lower-output pickups should it be needed, but it can also be a workable quick boost for solos, adding a little more volume and grit in front of your amp.

The other three elements are EQ bands. Each has a rotary switch with five options: Flat EQ, two strengths of frequency boost, and two of frequency cut. From left to right you get Low (IV), Mid (III) and High (II) EQ. These are all very nicely voiced, concentrating squarely on frequencies that



## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Preamp, EQ and boost pedal

**FEATURES:** True bypass

**CONTROLS:** EQ rotary switches x3, EQ toggle switches x3, Launch switch, internal trim pots x3, bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V adapter, 100mA minimum (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 93 (w) x 119 (d) x 39mm (h)

### 01. ROTARY SWITCHES

Each of these EQ switches has five positions, making it easier to recall settings than using a continuously variable knob

### 02. DEFCON LEDS

If any of the four sections is engaged for use, then these numbered and coloured LEDs will indicate that

### 03. LAUNCH SWITCH

This brings in a preset amount (10dB) of boost. It has an internal red LED when engaged as well as the white 'Defcon' 1 LED



### 04. MAIN DISPLAY

Inspired by the 1983 film, *WarGames*, the world map lights up courtesy of six LEDs behind it when the pedal is active

### 05. INTERNAL DIP SWITCHES

Remove four screws to get into the pedal and you'll find three trim pots that come factory-set to Ryan Adams' specifications. These fine-tune the midrange

8/10

are most relevant for guitar with sensible amounts of cut and boost – proper tone-enhancing EQ.

Referred to in the manual as a “Strat Fixer”, the Defcon4’s EQ certainly multiplies the tonal options available for our Strat, sweetening the tone in all five positions and especially for the tone-knob-free bridge pickup. The bass knob alternately thickens things up or rolls off some low-end for more clarity, while the High knob can tone down spikier sounds or bring out some extra glassiness.

The mid-band EQ can be set to taste – tweaked to suit your needs via a set of internal trim pots adjusting the centre frequency of the mid-band from 3kHz to 300Hz with a median position of 1kHz, while the Q (bandwidth) can be set in

the range from 0.3 to 2.5. As shipped, the pedal comes with Ryan’s settings, clearly marked in the manual if you need to come back to them. Those settings with the centre frequency just north of 1kHz let you tweak the presence of the sound, maybe mellowing out some harshness or pushing the sound forward for soloing, but there are other options if you don’t mind getting handy with a crosshead screwdriver.

If you do use different guitars on stage, putting this pedal between guitar and amp will let you quickly call up a tweak for consistency. For no-brainer functionality, set your amp for your Les Paul and set the Defcon4 for the compensatory boost and EQ tweaks needed when switching to your Strat – swap the guitar over, hit the footswitch and you’re good to go.

## VERDICT

Walrus Audio offers up an extremely practical pedal that’s equally good for tonal compensation when swapping between guitars, giving you a footswitchable consistent EQ change and/or boost when needed, or simply adding enhancement to your guitar’s inherent tone. While there are other EQ and boost pedals that can do a similar job, this one scores by having a well-thought out feature set with the preset amounts of EQ and boost, and the individual switches for them. **G**

**PROS** Easy recall of settings; clear vision of exactly which elements are engaged; well-chosen EQ for pickup enhancement; practical amount of nice-sounding boost

**CONS** It’s rather expensive for the genre





**ELECTRO-HARMONIX**

# Op Amp Big Muff

EHX discovers that a tweak its boffins did to the Big Muff in 1978 is actually quite popular... so they've reissued it

**Words** Trevor Curwen **Photography** Joby Sessions

**A**nother Big Muff Pi from Electro-Harmonix? Well, why not? It's the company's pedal after all, and they can't let those boutique companies who offer their clones have *all* the fun. And that's what this pedal is about. This is one variant that EHX has so far passed by for reissue, but it is one that has spawned many clones due to its difference from normal transistor-based Big Muffs and its association with one particular band.

In 1978, EHX briefly switched the design of its Big Muff Pi from its traditional four-transistor circuitry over to a design based around the more cost-effective op amps (integrated circuits) and with one less gain stage. This particular model, known as the IC (or 'Version 4' to Muff aficionados) didn't last long with only a few thousand made and production soon passing back to transistor circuitry. Now, that version may have remained in obscurity were it not for the fact it was used by Billy Corgan on the Smashing Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream* album. This created a demand for the vintage pedal that, in recent years, has been met by various boutique versions, something that doubtlessly influenced the original manufacturer to get busy...

The nano-sized pedal sports the usual Big Muff triumvirate of Volume, Tone and Sustain knobs but

also includes a switch that bypasses the Tone knob. It delivers that typical Big Muff Pi combination of fuzz and distortion, but the devil is in the detail here. Compared with what you might get from a typical transistor-based Big Muff, there's a little more coarseness to the sound, an underlying grainy crunch that lends itself to grungy riffing and thick 'n' heavy chordal work. This is, of course, is tempered by the tone knob, which at the clockwise extreme gets a little too thin and nasty while being a little woolly at the other. In between, though, are the sweet spots where you can dial in the right amount of edgy presence or instead go straight to a no-nonsense sound that cuts through the mix by flicking that Tone Bypass.

## VERDICT

Those after that particular Smashing Pumpkins experience will find it here, in a reasonably priced compact pedal from the original manufacturer. Anyone else who gives this pedal a roll will find a solid source of edgy fuzzy distortion that lends itself to all manner of heaviness. **G**

**PROS** Recreation of a rare Big Muff Variant; small pedalboard footprint; true bypass switching; Tone Bypass switch

**CONS** Nothing

## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Fuzz/distortion pedal

**FEATURES:** True bypass

**CONTROLS:** Volume, Sustain, Tone, Tone Off/On switch, bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 70 (w) x 115 (d) x 54mm (h)



**9/10**





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MXR

# EVH 5150 Chorus

The latest in the MXR Eddie Van Halen pedal range joins the phaser, flanger and overdrive models

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Adam Gasson

**E**ddie Van Halen has used a variety of chorus pedals in his time (as well as rackmount Eventide Harmonizers for detuning), but this new pedal is based on a chorus unit that he used in the early 80s – although, for now at least, MXR is not saying which one.

Based on the controls, our guess is that it's the Roland DC-30, a table top/rackmount unit as seen in Eddie's onstage rig during that era. The DC-30 (and its Boss DM-300 twin) offered BBD analogue delay plus chorus with the Intensity, Tone and Volume knobs, as well as the input and output pad toggle switches seen here.

Those pad switches on the 5150 let you set it up for a variety of input and output sources – direct guitar, effects loop, and so on. The Volume knob sets overall output, running from zero with unity gain at about 1 o'clock with (passive guitar-friendly) 35dB input and -20dB output level pad settings, so there's plenty extra if you want a gain boost. To the left, the Tone knob offers a fat warm sound that gets leaner as you turn it, the top-end remaining intact at all times.

The overall effect of this new pedal is to add an extra dimension to your sound. This is a classy chorus – spacious with a sense of more than one instrument playing, but without the obvious warble you'd get from higher rate settings. That

single Intensity knob (rather than separate Rate and Depth) is also typical of early Roland chorus as seen in the CE-1 and RE-301, and seems to be adjusting a range of parameters.

Our favourite sounds are found in the first half of the Intensity knob's travel – head further still and the subtlety dissipates as the pitch shift gets more wayward. As might be expected, this pedal really shines with driven tones, either in front of a distorted amp or after a dirt pedal, and while mono operation sounds great, it's with stereo width that the results are quite spectacular.

## VERDICT

If you're an EVH fan, this pedal is another one to add to the collection and will help you recreate *Diver Down* tones such as those on the *(Oh) Pretty Woman* track. For other players, the 5150 Chorus offers an otherworldly dislocation of sound, adding interest and making everything huge. **G**

**PROS** Excellent old-school chorus sound; pad switches accommodate different usages; stereo or mono operation; extra gain on tap

**CONS** Stripy graphics obscure some labelling; prominent battery compartment lid might cause problems for pedalboard mounting with Velcro

## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Chorus pedal

**FEATURES:** Selectable true or buffered bypass

**CONTROLS:** Intensity, Tone, Volume, Input Level (-20dB, -35dB, -50dB), Output Level (-20dB, -35dB), bypass footswitch

**CONNECTIONS:** Standard input, standard outputs L (mono) and R

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied), 95mA current draw

**DIMENSIONS:** 122 (w) x 92 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist  
CHOICE

9/10



Portable  
Professional  
Simple



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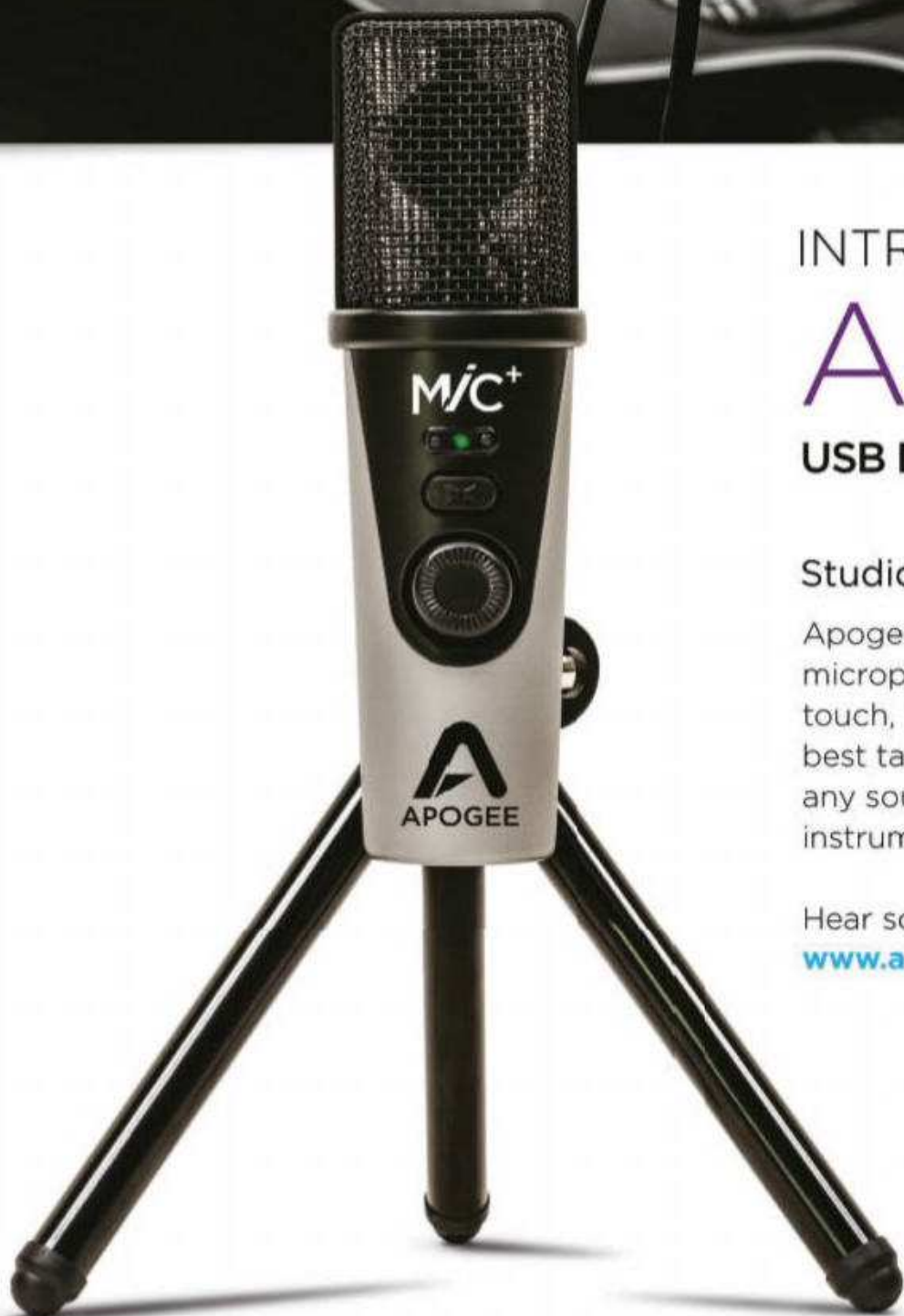
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# David Main

Sola Sound's Yorkshire connection reveals how he carried the legendary Tone Bender baton up north with D\*A\*M...

## 1 What was the first pedal you built and how did the design come about?

"The first pedal I built – that worked! – was from Craig Anderton's book [*Electronic Projects For Musicians*]. It was called the Tube Sound Fuzz and it used a CMOS chip. The first D\*A\*M [Differential Audio Manifestationz] pedal was the Rooster, which was basically a [Dallas] Rangemaster in a small box. I really liked Tony Iommi's sound, and the Rangemaster was an important part of that. They were expensive back then, but they're even more expensive now!"

## 2 What do you think it is about D\*A\*M that makes it unique?

"I'm honest about things and it's quite simple stuff – we don't make anything too complicated, and if I've based one of our pedals on something, that's the first thing I'll say. Like the Meathead is based on a Fuzz Face – there's no hiding that. There's a lot of marketing hype surrounding pedals these days."

## 3 What's your best-selling pedal and why do you think that is?

"Anything Tone Bender related. It's gone really crazy with the old 60s Sola Sound stuff. The original ones are selling for thousands these days. Sola Sound is one of the oldest companies – it was founded in 1962, and they've never stopped doing Sola Sound and Colorsound pedals. Back in 2009, we were making our version of a Professional MKII, and underneath was written 'Sola Sound Tone Bender Replica'. Being a bit naive, I didn't think that putting another company's name on my pedals was a bad thing, but they got in touch and said, 'Would you please not do that?' So I apologised. I was trying to give them kudos, or respect, y'know? A couple of weeks later they rang again and said, 'How do you fancy building them for us?'"

## 4 Which notable players/bands have used D\*A\*M pedals?

"I like it when there's a musical connection in my head. I like Monster Magnet and Phil [Caivano] uses our stuff. Terry Glaze from Pantera uses our pedals for some of his solo stuff, and we got one of the [Sola Sound] Professional MKII Tone Benders to Jimmy Page."



D\*A\*M's Main man, David, can't shake his Tone Bender obsession – the Professional MKII is his go-to vintage effect

## 5 Is there anything new on the horizon with D\*A\*M?

"This year we've mainly been focusing on the Sola Sound stuff. I'm cracking on with the MK1.5 and the MKII Tone Benders, and Danny [Tunstall] is cracking on with the Sola Sound BUM Fuzz, which is like the Edwyn Collins [*A Girl Like You*] B&M Fuzz Unit."

## 6 Tell us a secret about effects that you've discovered...

"Well, if I told you a secret, it wouldn't be a secret any more, would it? [laughs]. But okay... When it comes down to germanium transistor circuits, such as old Fuzz Faces and Rangemaster units, anyone can just slap the parts together, but that doesn't mean it'll end up sounding like it should do – it's all about the biasing. That's the main thing."

## 7 Name some common mistakes guitarists make with effects...

"Don't buy a fuzz pedal and expect to immediately sound like Jimi Hendrix or Jimmy Page from whatever song off whatever record. Germanium transistors are little gremlins and they're really sensitive to temperature, the type of amp, amp volume, and so on... and who knows what the picture was when they recorded those parts?"

## 8 What new pedal triggers your GAS most now?

"I don't really pay attention to anything past 1978! That's what I'm into. It's like music – I'd rather just go back to the roots of it. If I'm working on something, I don't really want to know what anyone else is doing; I'd rather interpret it for myself."

## 9 What's your favourite vintage pedal and why?

"It'd be a Sola Sound MKII Professional Tone Bender. It varies, but that's the one I always come back to. I like the MKII's gain structure and midrange. I've got a real soft spot for it – it's just a great-sounding pedal."

## 10 What pedals are on your own effects 'board?

"I don't have an effects 'board! I've never owned a pedalboard. I'm still stuck in the past. I play bass in a couple of bands and I just use one fuzz pedal. I'll choose whatever fuzz pedal to use and it goes in the backpack – that's pretty much it. I can't even remember the last time I plugged two pedals together in a row. I don't even like putting a tuner in line. I'll tune before the gig, unplug it and hope for the best! But I totally understand the pedalboard thing and, obviously, D\*A\*M makes very pedalboard-friendly effects."



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MORLEY

# Custom Shop Mini Steve Vai Bad Horsie 2 Wah

This runaway beast has shrunk to pony size, but it won't be reined in!

Words Trevor Curwen Photography Adam Gasson

The Steve Vai Bad Horsie wah has always been a huge pedal – from the 22-year-old original to the newer Bad Horsie 2 – so a smaller version is a most welcome addition to Morley's roster. Limited to just 500 pieces, this new pedal features Vai's own artwork. And it's a psychedelic looker that would brighten up the most mundane of pedalboards, both in bright daylight or on a darkened stage where the luminous logos on the front and on the treadle come into their own.

As is the tradition with Morley wahs, it features electro-optical operation, so there's no pot to get scratchy and eventually replaced. Operation is different from traditional wahs, too – this one is spring-loaded and starts operating as soon as you press down, rather than having to press down on the treadle toe to activate a footswitch. Take your foot off and it will spring back to its bypass mode. We like the way this works, but players steeped in traditional pedals may need to adjust their technique. If you like a boost in volume when you engage the pedal, there's also a volume knob with loads of extra gain.

The pedal's default mode is set to Steve Vai's preferred tone and sweep (the same as the original

Bad Horsie), and it's a nicely expressive classic wah with plenty of chewy midrange – particularly vocal with distortion sounds. However, there's also a footswitchable Contour Wah mode where you can shape the effected frequencies with a Contour knob, greatly increasing the wah options from subtle and subdued to gnarly with a strident peaky top end with the toe down.

## VERDICT

It's a lot of money for a wah, but then it's a lot of wah for the money... It also has a very practical design with a small footprint and that ultra-cool spring-loaded operation (if that appeals, but you're on a tight budget, try the Mini Maverick Switchless Wah at £169). You also get a wah experience that's been painstakingly perfected by Steve Vai, complemented by the flexibility of the Contour mode for a range of alternative wahs. **G**

**PROS** No traditional toe-down footswitching; two distinct wah modes; no pot to wear out; rugged steel construction

**CONS** No parking for cocked wah sounds unless you wedge something under the treadle's tail

## Tech Spec

**ORIGIN:** USA

**TYPE:** Wah pedal

**FEATURES:** Switchless operation, buffered bypass, quick-clip battery door

**CONTROLS:**

Contour, Level, Contour footswitch, treadle

**CONNECTIONS:**

Standard input, standard output

**POWER:** 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)

**DIMENSIONS:** 114 (w) x 174 (d) x 63mm (h)



9/10



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# Pedal Power

This issue, *Guitarist's* guru of tone Adrian Thorpe tackles the disorderly subject of pedal placement

## THE BACKGROUND

### CHRIS WOODSIDE, GUITARIST READER

I bought a Behringer PB1000 Pedal Board so I could have all my pedals in one place. I play rock/blues and have a few humbucker-loaded guitars including a Gibson SG, Alex Lifeson ES-Les Paul and Alex Lifeson Axxess Les Paul, Fender Strat and Ovation CE44P-8TQ. I have a Marshall DSL40C and Code50, and my pedals are Boss BD-2 Blues Driver, DS-1 Distortion, BF-2 Flanger, PH-3 Phase Shifter, CH-1 Super Chorus, DD-3 Digital Delay, FV-300H Volume Pedal, DigiTech Obscura Delay, Polara Reverb and Nautila Chorus/Flanger. What's the best order to place these pedals and why? Also, why aren't volume pedals more widely used?

## THE QUESTIONS

- 1 IN WHAT ORDER SHOULD I PLACE MY PEDALS TO ACHIEVE THE BEST SOUND?
- 2 COULD YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU CHOSE THE ORDER?
- 3 IS THERE A REASON WHY WE DON'T SEE MORE VOLUME PEDALS ON 'BOARDS?

## SUGGESTED PEDAL ORDER



## THE ANSWERS

**01** I recommend the order above for your 'board. I like to stack pedals low gain into higher gain. Modulation pedals I like to place as above, as it sounds best that way to me. Finally, because you have several delays and a dual chorus/flanger, I've experimented and placed the Nautila both after and before another delay. You might yield different sounds that could be inspiring! Another option would be to create a small 'board from the BD-2, Nautila and Obscura for travelling light.

**02** Considering the question of pedal order, there are no real rules. If it sounds good then go for it... but if you prefer, here's a general order that works for most:

**1. Wahs and filters:** Upfront ensures they respond fully to your picking dynamics without any attenuation/amplification affecting how they work.

**2. Compressors:** These should be close to the start of the chain, usually because some compressors amplify the noise floor of all pedals that are placed before them. Keeping the compressor close to your guitar keeps noise to a minimum.

**3. Overdrives and distortions:** These generally sound best with a dry signal (ie, an unmodulated signal) before them.

**4. Modulation/time-based effects:** I'm talking phasers, chorus, flangers. These are best after distortion, which is why many put them in the loop of amps to ensure they come after preamp distortion.

**5. Delay and reverb:** These are useful applied after your signal has been manipulated by all that comes before. If you consider natural reverb in that your entire signal would echo around a building, rather than the echo occurring and then being made to distort...

**6. Volume pedals:** These can be placed in several places, depending on how you want to use it. Place before overdrive if you want to clean up your signal. Place after overdrive if you want to lower the volume of a distorted signal. Place at the end of your 'board if you want to manipulate the volume of your whole 'board. This leads me neatly on to...

**03** I've always thought volume pedals are strange, especially considering most guitars have a volume knob right near your picking hand. However, many do use them, but they aren't as ubiquitous as a wah pedal. This is also down to them taking up space, I believe. That being said, for those who like to have more control over volume swells, etc, there is no substitute to the control you can achieve with a dedicated volume pedal.

EMAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS: [GUITARIST@FUTURENET.COM](mailto:GUITARIST@FUTURENET.COM)



A man with dark, curly hair and a beard is playing a red electric guitar. He is wearing a black t-shirt and a brown guitar strap. The background is a bright blue sky. The guitar has two black pickups with a carbon fiber pattern. The text "Bare Knuckle" is written in a white script font in the top right corner. The text "MISHA MANSOOR SIGNATURE 'RAGNAROK'" is written in a small white font on the top pickup. The text "The end of all things... or just the beginning" is written in a white sans-serif font in the middle. The text "The next step in progressive rock and metal tone" is written in a white sans-serif font below the first line. The text "Ragnarok is here" is written in a white sans-serif font below the second line. The text "Ragnarok is NOW" is written in a white sans-serif font at the bottom. The website "bareknucklepickups.co.uk" is written in a small white font at the very bottom.

*Bare  
Knuckle*

MISHA MANSOOR SIGNATURE 'RAGNAROK'

The end of all things...  
or just the beginning

The next step in  
progressive rock and  
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# MANSON GUITAR WORKS

This issue, we're headed to Ashburton in the folds of the Devon countryside, to find a maker with a client list that boasts heavyweight stars such as Matt Bellamy, John Paul Jones and Dave Grohl

Words David Mead Photography Olly Curtis

**L**uthier Hugh Manson has been realising the dream designs of musicians for many years. The triple-neck acoustic and signature bass for Led Zeppelin legend John Paul Jones, the MIDI guitars for Muse's Matt Bellamy, and the 'Swiss Cheese' metal guitar you might have seen in the hands of Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl have all emanated from Hugh's Devon-based facility. If further evidence was needed regarding the quality of Manson's instruments, we'd refer you to our in-depth review of Mikey Demus's signature MD-1 and MD-2 in the previous issue, which saw the MD-2 win a coveted *Guitarist Choice* badge.

Many Devonians will be familiar with Manson's retail outlet in Exeter, but today our journey takes us a little further southwest to the workshop at Ashburton, a positive hive of industry, where customers' drawing-board dreams are turned into wood-and-wire reality. Our guide is Manson Guitar Works CEO, Adrian Ashton. "Originally, I was a customer of Hugh's and ordered some custom basses from him, which I absolutely fell in love with," he tells us. "That led to the opening of the shop in 1992 where I was heading up mostly the retail side of things and Hugh obviously was being the luthier that he was. Over time,

as the shop grew, expanded and became more successful and more known around the world, the luthier side obviously started taking a bit of a backseat."

Around eight years ago, the company took a long hard look at the artists they had been building for and supercharged the operation in order to make a return to the manufacturing side of the business. Originally sited at the old Manson premises in Exeter's Rackclose Lane, the rapidly expanding company soon made the move to its current location where the Manson range is now managed, including the custom builds. "Customers can come to the premises here by appointment and we can sit down with them and talk about design details, woods used, pickups and electronics," Adrian explains. "That's the higher end of the guitars, prices from £2,500 and upwards."

Manson's MA and E series have the woodwork done in Europe, demand for these models being such that the company's original premises wouldn't have been able to keep up with the numbers involved. But a change is in the offing here, as the intention is to do much more of the building in the new expanded premises. "Then customers can order those guitars but can spec all kinds of different changes from colours



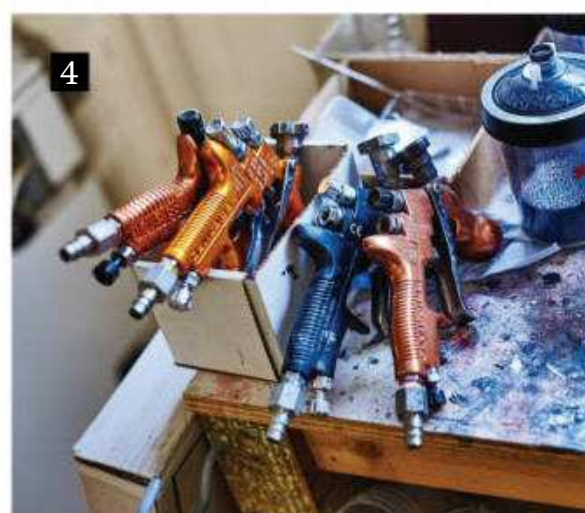
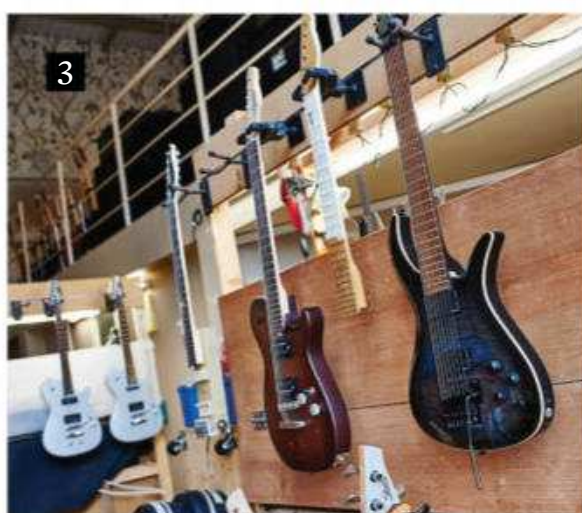


The Manson Guitar Works team  
(left to right): Tim Stark, Jolyon  
Holroyd, Adrian Ashton, Rom  
Dobbs and Simon Thorn





1. Templates for the various Manson guitar body shapes sit on the shelves, awaiting customer orders
2. Tim Stark attends to the final setup on a new guitar at his workstation in Manson's Devon-based facility
3. Manson offers a range of different body styles and finishes and will try to satisfy even the most bizarre requests!
4. A whole array of spray guns are necessary to cater for the full range of finishes available on Manson instruments



to electronics, to custom circuits to MIDI controllers," Adrian affirms. "Those prices are from £1,000 to £3,000, so it fits a really nice price point for the customer."

Then there is the arrangement Manson has with Cort: "They manufacture Hugh Manson's designs under licence, which has produced the Matthew Bellamy MBC-1, the new M-Jet and the classic TC."

There are modifications on offer here, too. "We also find, because of our reputation for customising and modifying, that many of those come back to us for modifications and upgrades to try and give more of a boutique and unique feel, but we're looking now at the £400 to £600 price point."

## ORIGIN OF SIGNATURES

As we've seen, Muse's Matt Bellamy is just one of Manson's celebrity customers and one that has a whole battalion of Hugh's instruments at his disposal. We wondered how many guitars the company has built for him. "Lots," laughs Adrian. "Hugh and Tim [Stark] have worked extensively with Matt, and Tim was involved in the crazy doubleneck guitar, which was one fretless neck and one fretted. That was incredible. Obviously, the MIDI screen controller guitars, there are lots of variations of that, the Bomber guitar with the LEDs coming

from it, the Drone guitar with the military theme... I mean, it's a real honour to be making signature guitars for John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin and Matt and all the other artists we have. These are the only signature guitars these guys have used and they're basically some of the biggest names in the industry. We're not a very small company and we're not a very big company, so it's an amazing experience to be involved in the design process and working with these people. What a great job; you come to work and you have to remind yourself sometimes of the things we do here!"

What sort of demands are made for custom finishes and things like that? "Lots of crazy finishes: mirrors, cracked mirrors, metal paint guitars, aluminium guitars, the original DeLorean. In terms of numbers

"We find 80 per cent of our custom work is people designing their preferred spec on a layout such as the E-Series or MA"

of different designs, there are a lot. Then actual numbers of guitars that Matt uses for touring or has taken out with him... Gosh, it must be close to the fifties, hundreds."

Bringing it back to a more standard customer level, where does the design process start for them? "What we find most customers want to order is one of our already established shapes. We have a good range," says Adrian. "There is the E-Series through-neck that appeals more to the rock guys with the extended horns, six- and seven-string versions. We're already set up to do any kind of custom version of that particular shape and body style. Then there is the MA shape, which, of course, we've seen recently on the Mikey Demus. Basically, the body outline is the MA shape, even though it's a very different-looking guitar to what we call our MA EVO.

"We find probably 80 per cent of our custom work is people designing their preferred spec on a layout such as that," says Adrian. "But we also do full custom. Tim has done some doubleneck basses recently for customers. We did one for Nick Beggs, who is often on tour with Steve Hackett and so obviously a doubleneck was a requirement in the Genesis Revisited tour. There is such an extensive catalogue of Manson guitars and different designs – we

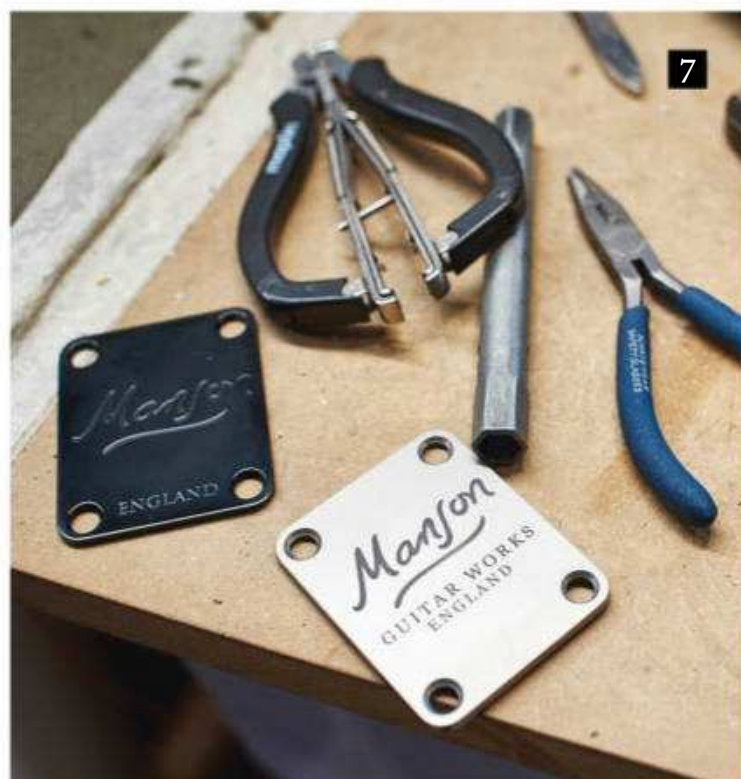
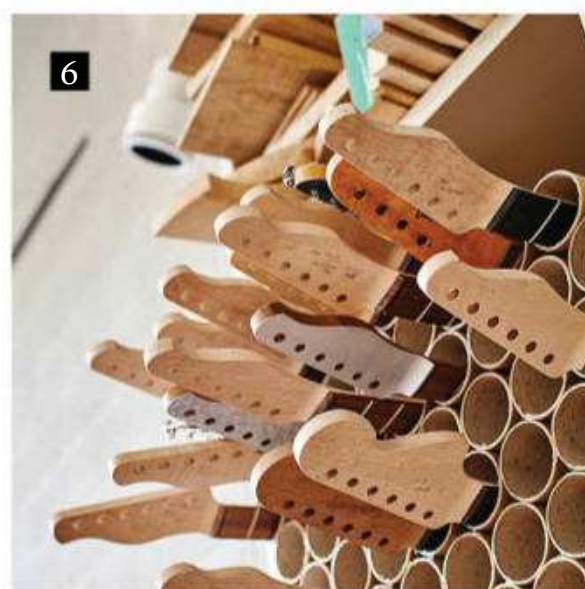




With MIDI controllers and other electrical refinements, the wiring on a Manson guitar can sometimes veer towards the extremely complex!



5. Simon Thorn is the Manson pickup guru; all winding and soldering is done in-house
6. A range of necks await their turn in the building process
7. Customers can visit the Manson workshop by appointment to be guided through the process of ordering their dream guitar
8. A 'holey' guitar is surrounded by various Matt Bellamy signature models



can show people work that's been done in the past by Hugh and Tim. They might get an idea from that."

What about if someone approaches you with a completely new idea? "If it's going to be a completely new design to the customer specification, we'll do a set of drawings. Then we're usually going to template up to make sure there is accuracy, even though it's a one-off guitar. That will be the starting point to show them the visuals so they can go, 'Yes, that looks great.' Then we've been spec'ing guitars for decades, so we can usually help the customer if they tell us the sounds and playability they're looking for, how important weight is. We can guide them with things like woods, technology, pickups, hardware towards the end result."

## FUTURE PROOFING

During our tour of the Manson workshop, our discussion turns to the current trends in bodywoods, especially in view of CITES regulations making certain tonewoods difficult to import. What are people going for at present? "Swamp ash is very popular because of the lightweight element," says Adrian. "You get great tones from swamp ash. Of course, it would only form part of it, but it does seem to be very popular, whereas seven or eight years ago it seemed to me that

mahogany was the popular wood. I think so long as there is choice and so long as the customer has an idea of what they want sound-wise and what they want weight-wise, we can usually direct them to a couple of tonewoods that will satisfy them."

And have the CITES regulations had much of an effect on the business? "I think we're going to see quite a bit of change on that in the next five to 10 years to come. But we're at a nice size where we can make quite rapid changes so we can accommodate that. We also have some good stocks of wood to keep going for the next few years. It's probably not the time and place to go into CITES and international law, but I mean, just personally, I find it interesting that what sparked the CITES implementation was furniture being made from solid rosewood and being illegally harvested and imported. It seems to me

"We're doing a lot of things with guitars that no-one else has ventured or done before"

that that's probably the thing that needed to be stopped rather than stopping guitar makers, mainly who have very good green credentials and usually are thinking about the best way to maintain longevity of wood stocks. But you can't argue with the result. We have reduced our rosewood consumption to almost nil because of the licensing required to export it. But rather than view it as a problem, [we] view it as a challenge to see what alternative woods there are. It's been good for that."

Despite the fact that Manson guitars are shipped all over the world, the team in Ashburton is relatively small and intent on keeping the quality of its instruments as high as possible with innovation at the heart of the business. "We're doing a lot of things with guitars that no-one else has ventured or done before," Adrian agrees. "Things like the MIDI controllers – and this technology is sometimes seen as the main thing on the guitar. I mean, you see that great big MIDI screen we put on the front of a guitar; it's going to grab everyone's attention. But I always say to people, 'Yes, we have that technology, but if you took that off it is still a great, great rock, blues, folk, jazz, metal guitar underneath.' We make a great guitar first, then think about the crazy finishes." 

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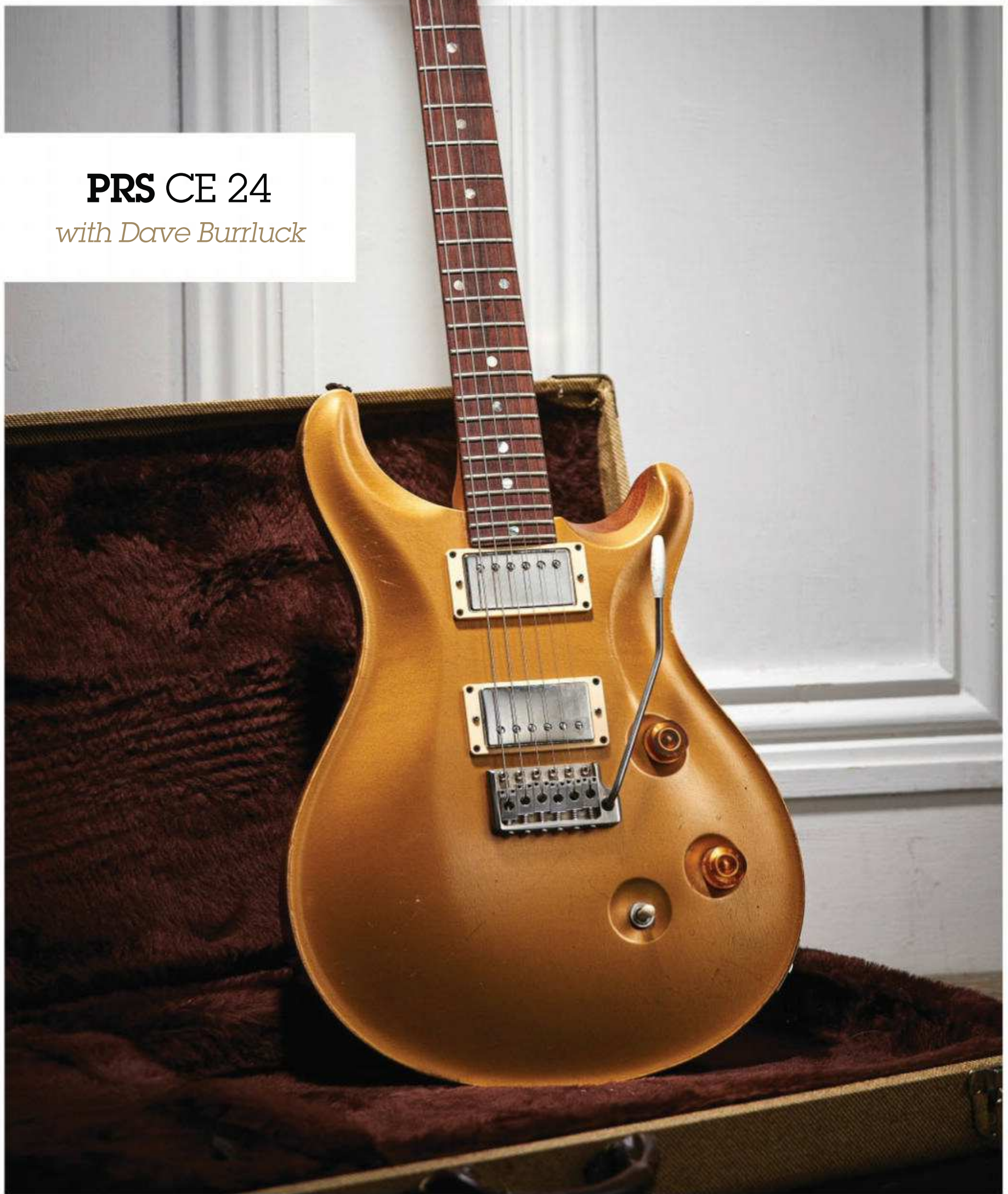


# Longtermers

**A few months'** gigging, recording — and everything that goes with it — welcome to Guitarist's longterm report

**PRS CE 24**

*with Dave Burrluck*





## Writer

DAVE BURRLUCK  
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor



The cost of this 'bitsa' is mounting, but finally our Reviews Editor gets his old PRS CE 24 working just in time to take it out on some gigs...

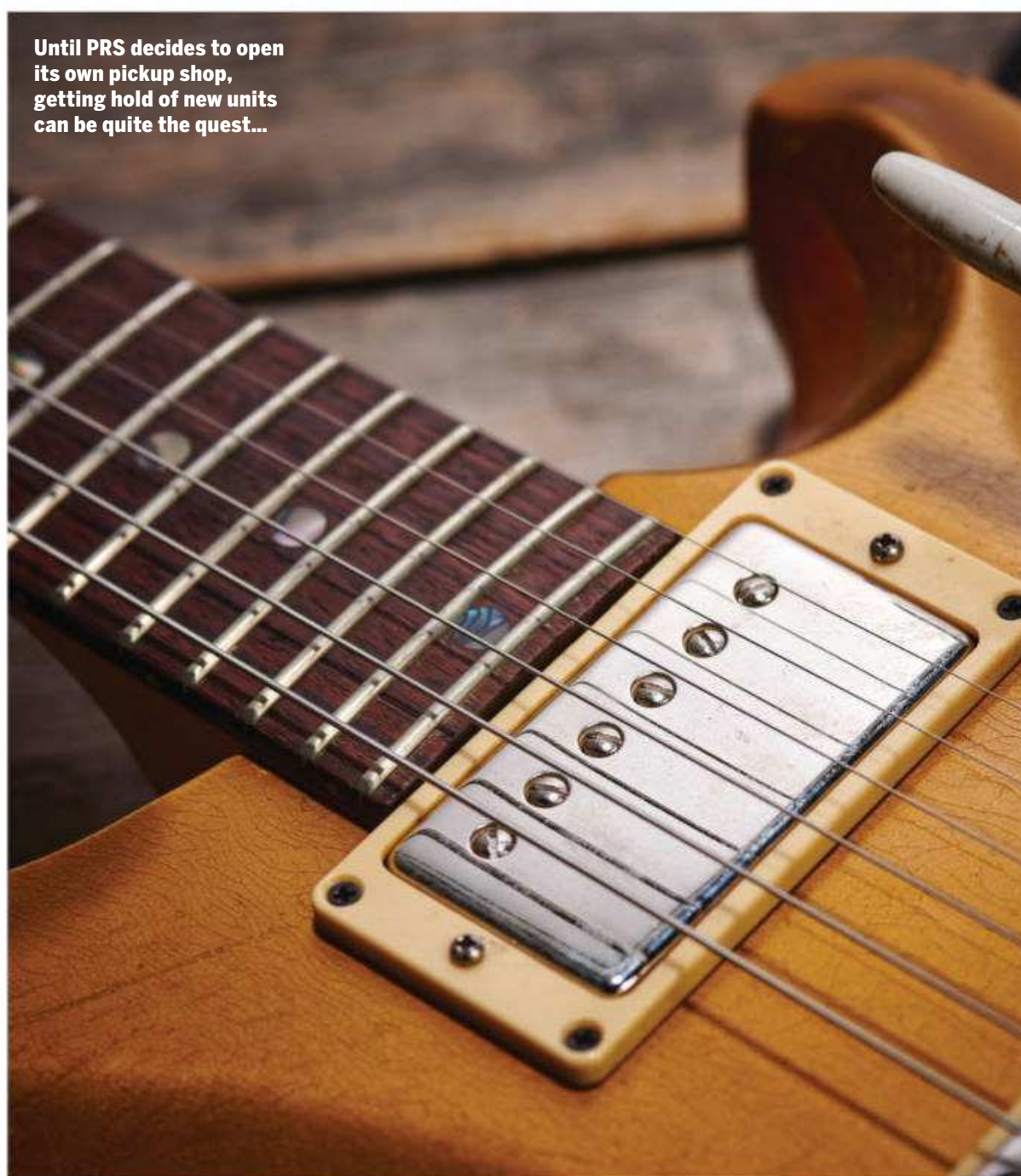
The smartphone pinged and the text read: "Got some 53/10s!" It was from an ol' buddy of mine, who had been scouring the interweb on my behalf for quite some time. These pickups are a personal favourite, but they're no longer made by PRS and have since been superseded by the 58/15s. The last set I got went into said ol' buddy's Ibanez semi, as part of an upgrade that surprised us both, the idea being we'd, er, share the guitar. Then I found out he'd sold the thing... with my pickups on! However, when the pair of 53/10s arrived, I soon forgot all about that. "I got some money off because they looked a bit knackered and they have gold-plated screws," he continued. Did I care?

The boy did good. He got them for the price of one 57/08, if I'd have bought it new from PRS. "The 53/10 and 57/08 have the same

*"I've given the bitsa a new lease of life, but I've also rediscovered the charms of those original CE 24s"*

output; the 53/10 has a slightly sweeter high end," stated Paul Reed Smith in 2010, in a largely off-the-record conversation about those pickups and the 59/09s. "They're the sweetest version of the 57/08 yet and nobody's gonna think they're dark, but they're different and I like them."

Things have moved on since then and the 58/15 has taken over the 'vintage humbucker' slot. I'd be happy to use those, of course, but, as we've said, you can't buy them and the last set I saw were for sale at \$400. That's out of my budget. But if the whole point of this Longtermers test is to upgrade my old bitsa PRS CE 24 to 2018 specs, well, I've



Until PRS decides to open its own pickup shop, getting hold of new units can be quite the quest...

failed. Yes, in terms of parts I've done as much as I can, but these 53/10s are yesterday's news. Dropping them into the CE 24 is straightforward enough and I added a pull/push switched tone pot, so I could split them (with just the one white split cable you can only voice the screw coils, by the way).

However, when a new-spec CE 24 arrives for comparison, I realise there's still quite a chasm between PRS 2018 and my bitsa. No, it doesn't capture the old-style vintage vibe of my Goldtop, but it's got more zing and life to the acoustic voice. The 85/15s are clear and clean, the splits sound 'Strat-ier', while the full-coil sounds span everything I need. It's a woodier, jazzier voice from the neck and a more-than-useable kick from the bridge that does 60s/70s crunch and – even though I don't need it – it slips effortlessly into the 80s realm and beyond.

With another gig just a day away, I treat my bitsa to a little spit and polish. I've added new strings, and I've dialled in the setup to very closely match the new CE 24. And, well, I feel as if I've inched as close as I can. We actually get a soundcheck and the Goldtop is sounding like a perfectly good guitar. As it bloomin' well should, of course! It gets more play-time than before and sits right in that middle ground between Strat and

Les Paul that, personally, is the reason I've always loved these guitars. There's a fair bit of knob twiddling – pulling back the tone on the slightly too-sharp bridge coil split, for example – but there's character. It comes across as a slightly less refined, rougher and tougher version of the current CE 24 with a definite Texas-blues bite.

To a certain extent, this is still a work in progress, but I not only feel as if I've given the bitsa a new lease of life, but I've also rediscovered the charms of those original CE 24s. While it's possible to upgrade older PRS models, you can only go so far – simply because they don't make their latest spec pickups available. Then, of course, you're going to have to do the upgrade work yourself or pay a professional to do it for you. While the US has the PRS Tech Centre (PTC) to do exactly this kind of job, we don't have that luxury here in Europe. And while that might push most of us into simply buying a new guitar instead, it means that there are a considerable number of perfectly good 'old-spec' models in collections (and on the used market), which could be even better, with a little bit of TLC.

Here's looking forward, then, to a European PTC... and isn't it about time PRS opened a pickup 'shop'? C'mon!

**Reviewed** 403 (2016 spec) **Price** £2,329 (current) **On Test Since** The past decade... and a bit **Studio Sessions** Yes **Gigged** Yes **Mods** Yes

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# Q&A

This issue: Tenon trials, heavyweight contentions and serious frets...

## Expert Panel



### Jamie Dickson

*Guitarist* editor Jamie is as happy with steel wool in his hand as he is with Steely Dan in his headphones, and loves vintage-gear restoration and ambitious signal chains.



### Dave Burrluck

*Guitarist's* assiduous reviews editor is also the author of numerous guitar books. Very handy with a fret file and indeed any aspect of a finely fettled six-string.



### Ed Mitchell

After 18 years in guitar retail Ed turned to journalism as reviews editor of *Total Guitar*, then as a contributor to *Guitarist*. He's also edited the mags *The Blues* and *Country Music*.



### Neville Marten

Edited *Guitarist* for 13 years, after working for both Fender and Gibson as a repairer. From desirable Les Pauls to dream Strats, he's owned and worked on the lot.



### Nick Guppy

*Guitarist's* amplifier specialist has built up a wealth of experience gained from collecting, repairing and restoring all kinds of guitar-related audio.

Email us your questions: [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com) or write in to *Guitarist*, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

## YOU'RE GONNA CARRY THAT WEIGHT...

Having played a Fender Telecaster for the past 30 or so years I've decided I fancy something different. My plan is to switch to a mahogany-bodied guitar with a fixed neck. I guess I'm most likely to end up with a Gibson, although I am prepared to consider other similarly spec'd stuff, such as PRS and the like. I have a couple of grand to spend.

My quest should be an easy one, right? Well... the thing that worries me is that I'll miss my Tele's agreeably lightweight body. How, when I go looking for a mahogany guitar, do I get something that won't make my shoulder regret my decision? Are all mahogany guitars heavy, or have I been misinformed? I remember playing a mate's old Les Paul back in the 70s and it was like dragging an anchor around. That's why I ended up with the Telecaster. I'd like your advice here. I want the sustain boost and easier string tension inherent in Gibson-style guitars but I don't want to be punished by the extra poundage.

**J Dawson, via email**

The idea that mahogany guitars are heavy is a myth. Mahogany is not a particularly heavy timber. Gibson SGs are hewn from blocks of the stuff and Angus Young has no problem throwing his around...

Your mate's Les Paul (and others of the same ilk) was heavy because of the maple used in its construction. It's not the mahogany backs and necks that make those models such spine benders, it's the maple tops. Gibson has addressed that issue in various ways over the years, most effectively by weight-relieving the bodies of



A mahogany Gibson SG and not a bad shoulder in sight

its Standard and Custom Les Pauls. This has taken the form of thinner bodies (the 80s/90s 'Lite' models), ES-335 style semi-hollow construction, or by chambering. Since the early to mid-80s, Gibson has mainly weight-relieved Standards and Customs by routing out circular plugs from the body timber before the back and top are bonded together with glue. Not everyone is happy with this arrangement and those who consider weight-relief spec-sheet sacrilege, there's the Custom Shop Historic stuff, the popular 1958 and 1959 R8 and R9 models.

Getting back to your requirements, even a weight-relieved Les Paul will tip the scales at around nine pounds, so you might want to look at the lighter SG models. The Gibson SG Standard is the biggest-selling guitar the brand has ever produced. They won't outstay their welcome around your shoulders and they are world-class tone-machines. Just ask Angus, Sabbath's Tony Iommi and Paul Weller. Alternatively, take a look at the thinner-body Paul Reed Smith Custom 22 and 24 models. They'll give you all the Gibson-

like spec you want without stretching your budget, and guitar strap, too far.

## THE NECK'S BIG THING

I'd love it if you could settle an argument for me. As I've developed as a guitar player and owner, I've become obsessed with detail. The latest thing is the Gibson neck tenon. I've spent ages on forums soaking up the opinions on whether a traditional 50s long neck tenon is indeed better than a short tenon used on later Gibson models.

What is the deal here? I get it that tonewoods, scale length, pickups, hardware, strings and everything else makes a difference to how a guitar sounds. Does it really matter how long the tenon is? I mean, Fender just screws its necks on and their stuff sounds great! If I want a long tenon I'm pretty much looking at high-end Custom Shop 50s reissues so I want to know if it's worth robbing a bank to get one. What do you say?

**Rick Hemmings, via email**

We should explain that the tenon is the part of a Gibson's (generally) mahogany neck that slips into the mortice

Email us your questions: [guitarist@futurenet.com](mailto:guitarist@futurenet.com)



# What Should I Buy?

80s metal survivor seeks beauty without the beast...

**Q** I want to get my hands on something that will offer me some classic glassy Strat tones, but has a modern feel. I'm coming from a 'super-Strat' background but don't want the heavy-duty pickups and lairy looks anymore. What I don't want is an old-school radius. I'd miss that flat fingerboard feel. Any suggestions for a max outlay of two grand?

**D Walker, via email**

**A** The world is your oyster. You can get a Fender reissue with a more modern 9.5-inch fingerboard radius. If that's still not flat enough for you, sniff around and you'll find Strat-shaped killers with 10-inch, 12-inch and flatter 'boards. Look for compound radius jobs, too, which offer a progressively flatter 'board as you wander past the 12th fret.



## 1. Fender American Elite Stratocaster £1,799

This guy looks as classic as an old glass Coke bottle but features a modern 241mm to 356mm (9.5- to 14-inch) compound radius fingerboard. That means it's perfect for chord work up to 12th fret. Beyond that, you're in 80s-rock-guitar heaven with a super-low action and effortless string bending. That's, like, awesome, dude.



## 2. G&L S-500 Deluxe £1,395

Leo Fender's other iconic brand offers this pimped-up S-type with a lightweight yet vibrant body, bolt-on maple neck and choice of 305mm/12-inch radius maple or Caribbean rosewood fingerboards. One of the coolest features here is a mini toggle switch that engages a Tele-style bridge and neck pickup combo, or all three single coils on simultaneously.

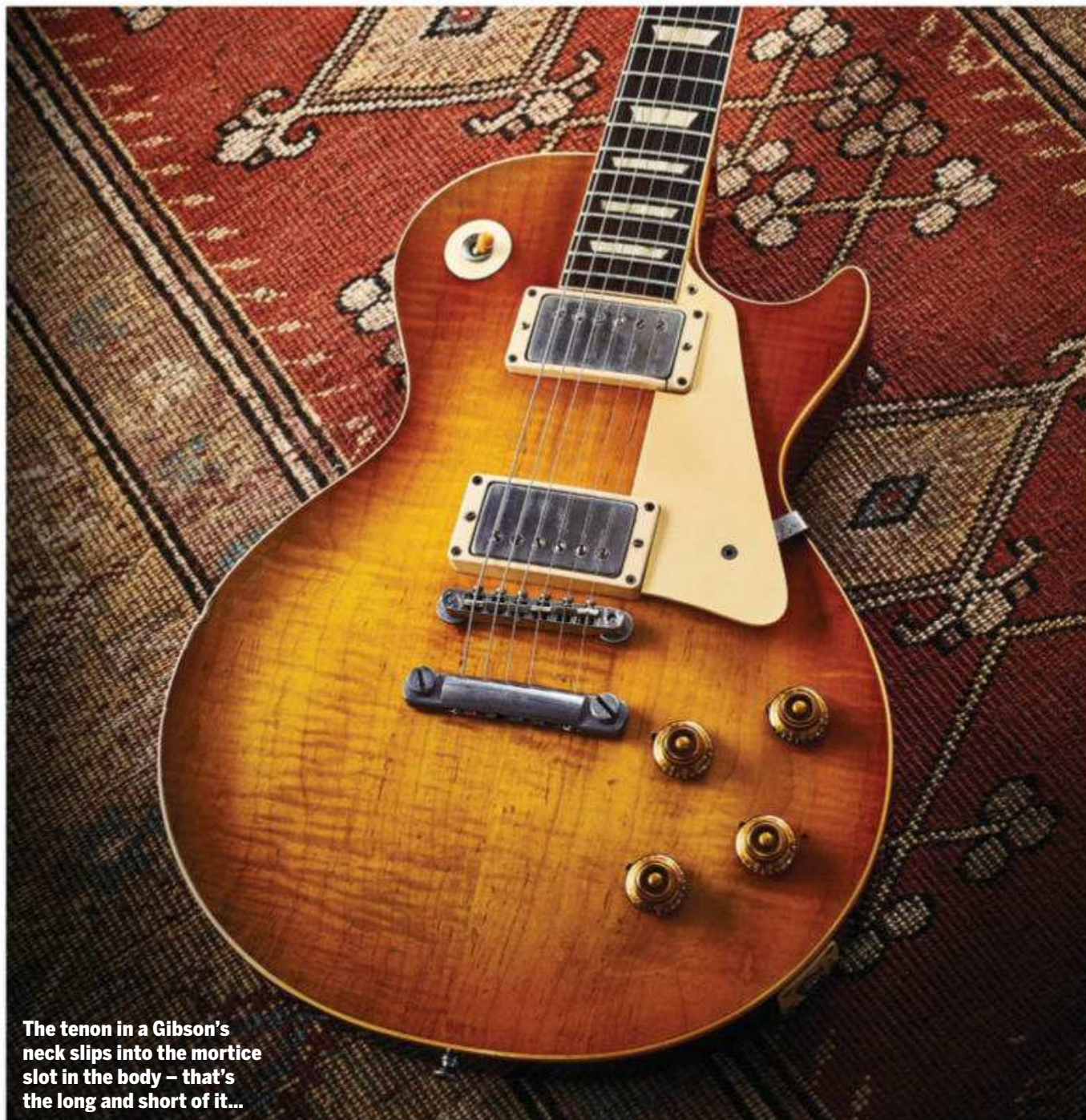


## 3. Suhr Classic Pro £2,099

This alder-bodied, maple-necked beauty cloaks its modern features with classic 50s looks. It's a tonal jack-of-all-trades with a humbucker in the bridge position. It also has a pair of middle and neck-position single coils that are so glassy you can almost smell the Windolene... The 241mm to 305mm (9.5- to 12-inch) radius 'board gives you excellent playability in every position.

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slot in the guitar's body. In original 50s Les Paul models, the tenon was long. In fact, it extended quite a fair bit into the neck-pickup cavity. Later models feature a shorter tenon that is cheaper to produce. Logic dictates that, because it extends further into the body, the longer version should provide a more stable union and therefore better tuning stability, tone and sustain.

Now, we've all tried cheap and cheerful guitars that turn out to have great tone regardless of how the neck is held. That's why this long tenon vs short tenon thing causes squabbling on forums. Some say it's an essential part of what makes a Gibson the real deal. The naysayers invariably say, well, nay, you can pick up a short tenon Les Paul and, if it sounds the business, then what does it matter how much wood the tenon is packing.

There's your answer. If vintage details are important to you then you'll never be happy with a short stubby tenon.

It'll be another thing that will prevent you bonding with the instrument, a growing niggle that will lead to its inevitable listing on eBay. If, however, you buy your guitars with your ears then you won't care what the construction quirks are, it'll only matter what the thing sounds and plays like.


#### YOU'RE NICKED

I recently bought a guitar from an auction site and have noticed a little problem. There's a small nick in the top of the 7th fret on the treble side. It's not a huge disaster, but I can feel it if I bend my top E string. Couple of things. What could have caused this? Second, is there an easy fix I can do myself or should I have it looked at by someone that knows about this stuff? Thanks in advance for your advice.

**Mark Falls, via email**

We've actually seen this before, Mark. Small nicks in frets can actually be caused by the strings. We're not talking about

longterm wear and tear. These nicks generally occur when the guitar is being shipped. The shipping box suffers an impact and that energy is transferred to the guitar. The fingerboard slaps against the lid of the case and the string bites into the fret. Strange but true. That's why many manufacturers like Gretsch and ESP ship their wares with a long fingerboard protector. You can make one yourself out of a long piece of card that slips under the strings to isolate them from the frets. As for repairing the damage, some light nicks can be polished out without too much trouble, but, to be sure, have it looked at by a professional. Any material you remove from a fret can affect the guitar's playability so it's always worth having it done right.

If the damage is very bad, consider asking the guitar's vendor for a contribution towards the repairs if the damage wasn't stated in the ad. There are rules on auction sites about this kind of thing. 

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# PICKUP LINES

## Telecaster Pickups

Matt Bascetta of House Of Tone Pickups explains how one of Fender's lap steel single coils morphed into a timeless powerhouse of twang...

**I**n the late 1940s, as electric Spanish guitars gained further popularity following World War II, Leo Fender continued to evolve his lap steel solidbody electric guitar designs, culminating in the release of the Esquire and Broadcaster in 1950. The following year, the Broadcaster was renamed the Telecaster, and although the basic designs of these instruments' remain relatively unchanged, the early 50s 'Blackguard' pickups tell a story of their own...

"Not everybody is aware that the bridge pickup started as a lap steel pickup," begins vintage pickup expert Matt Bascetta of Chester's House Of Tone Pickups. "When Leo developed the new electric Spanish guitar, he just changed the size of the pickup base to fit under the bridge plate. There was a lot of variation on the early lap steels from one pickup to the next. There wasn't a lot of consistency with regards to windings and magnets – none of it was set in stone."

These irregularities are typical of Fender's earliest electric Spanish guitars, although they are commonly regarded as especially powerful-sounding instruments. "The bridge pickup had flat polepieces and they were overwound for the most part," says Matt. "I've seen original examples over 10kohms, and others in the high 7kohms region. DC readings were all over the shop. Consistency was not the word, but the original Esquires and Broadcasters often were really hot."

"Not only were a majority of [bridge pickups] wound with a high number of turns," he continues, "but they were originally using 43-gauge wire [which is thinner than the regular 42-gauge wire], and that also allowed for a higher resistance. Back in the early 50s, there was a transition to using 42-gauge wire for the bridge pickup, but the neck pickup remained as 43-gauge wire, right up until this day."

The diameter of the Formvar coil wire can radically affect the sound of the




Legions of boutique pickups, such as this, point to vintage Tele units as their inspiration

pickup, as Matt explains: "42-gauge is the most common coil wire for Fender pickups, but using 43-gauge ups the resistance and capacitance, therefore not only could they fit more wire onto the smaller neck pickup bobbin, but a lesser number of turns can give a higher resistance. If you're not careful, however, higher resistance and capacitance can equal a muddy tone, and to this day there are a large number of players who aren't too keen on Tele neck pickups for that very reason! Not only that, but right from the beginning, Fender used chrome-plated brass for the neck pickup covers, which affects the magnetic field and further woollies up the sound."

Being uncovered and, therefore, having exposed polepieces, the bridge pickup was uninhibited in this way, although the presence of a large copper/tin-plated steel baseplate exerted a significant effect of its own upon the magnetic field, as Matt explains: "Underneath, the baseplate is steel – that creates a hell of a lot more inductance and gives you a hotter sound, but without getting that muddier compression in the gain that you would normally get from overwinding. Being ferrous, the steel makes the magnetic field stronger and changes its

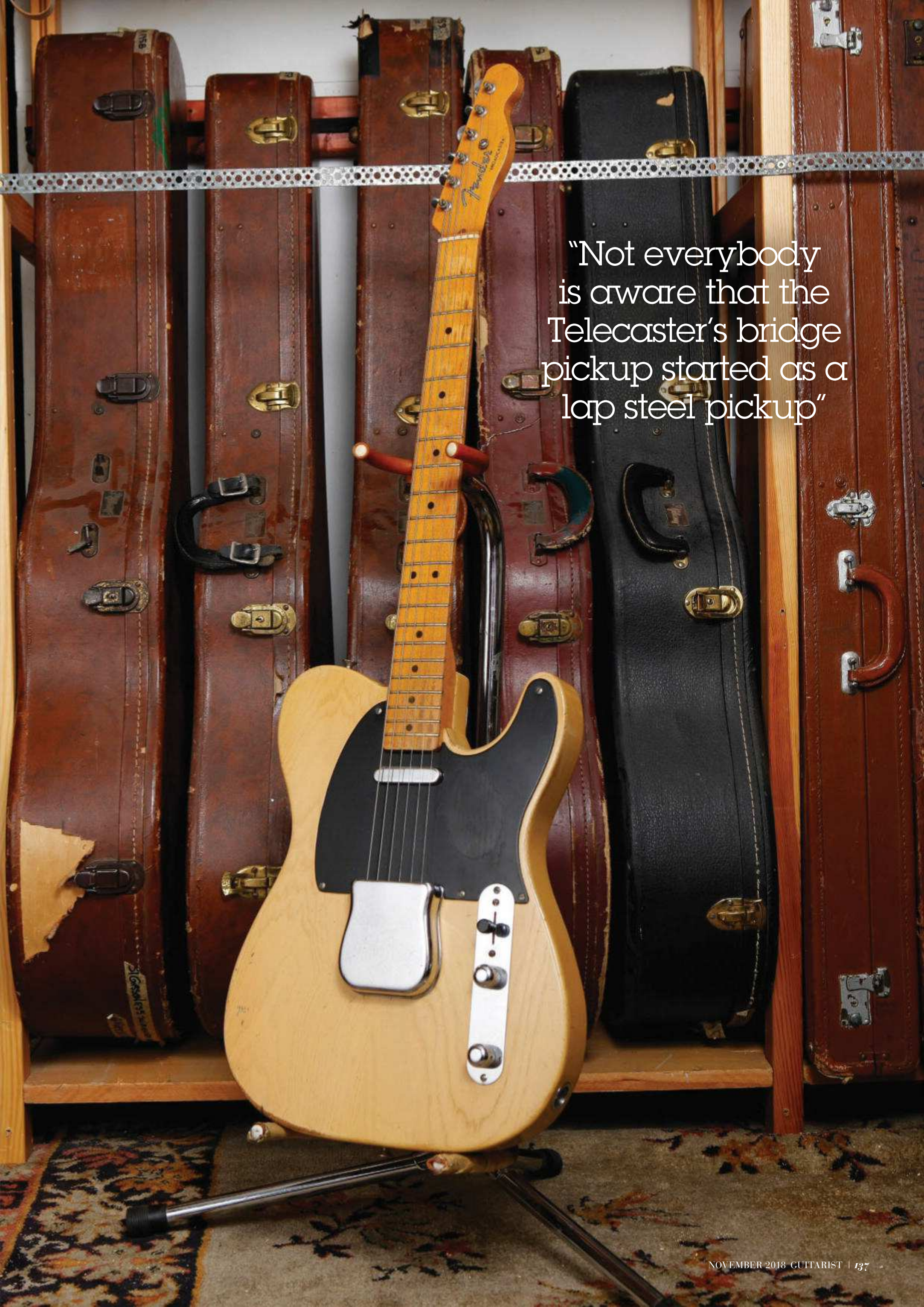
shape by widening the focal point, and that gives you a fuller, fatter, thicker sound."

Central to this, the type of Alnico magnet used for each of the pickup's six individual polepieces is crucial to the overall sonic picture. "From '54 onwards, Fender used Alnico 5 exclusively," says Matt, "but, prior to this – right from the first Esquires, through the Broadcasters and 'Nocasters' to the early Telecasters – they also used Alnico 2 and 3. You often get more midrange with 43-gauge wire and the extra wind, but Alnico 3 also has a much more midrange-y pickup tone, naturally. Alnico 3 doesn't compress so much in the lower, muddier midrange: you can hear it more in the upper mids – it's clear and pokey. Alnico 2 does a good job, but it isn't as twangy."

"Those early 50s Blackguards don't always sound like people expect them to, because they've got something a lot more 'country' and Alnico 5-sounding in their head. What I like is very different from a standard Telecaster; my favourite electric is a Broadcaster copy that I built. It's off the beaten path, for sure, but years of experimenting meant I could try out lots of different pickup styles." 

[www.houseoftonepickups.com](http://www.houseoftonepickups.com)





“Not everybody  
is aware that the  
Telecaster’s bridge  
pickup started as a  
lap steel pickup”



# classicGear

Gibson's multi-voiced tonal smorgasbord came in many guises...

## Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

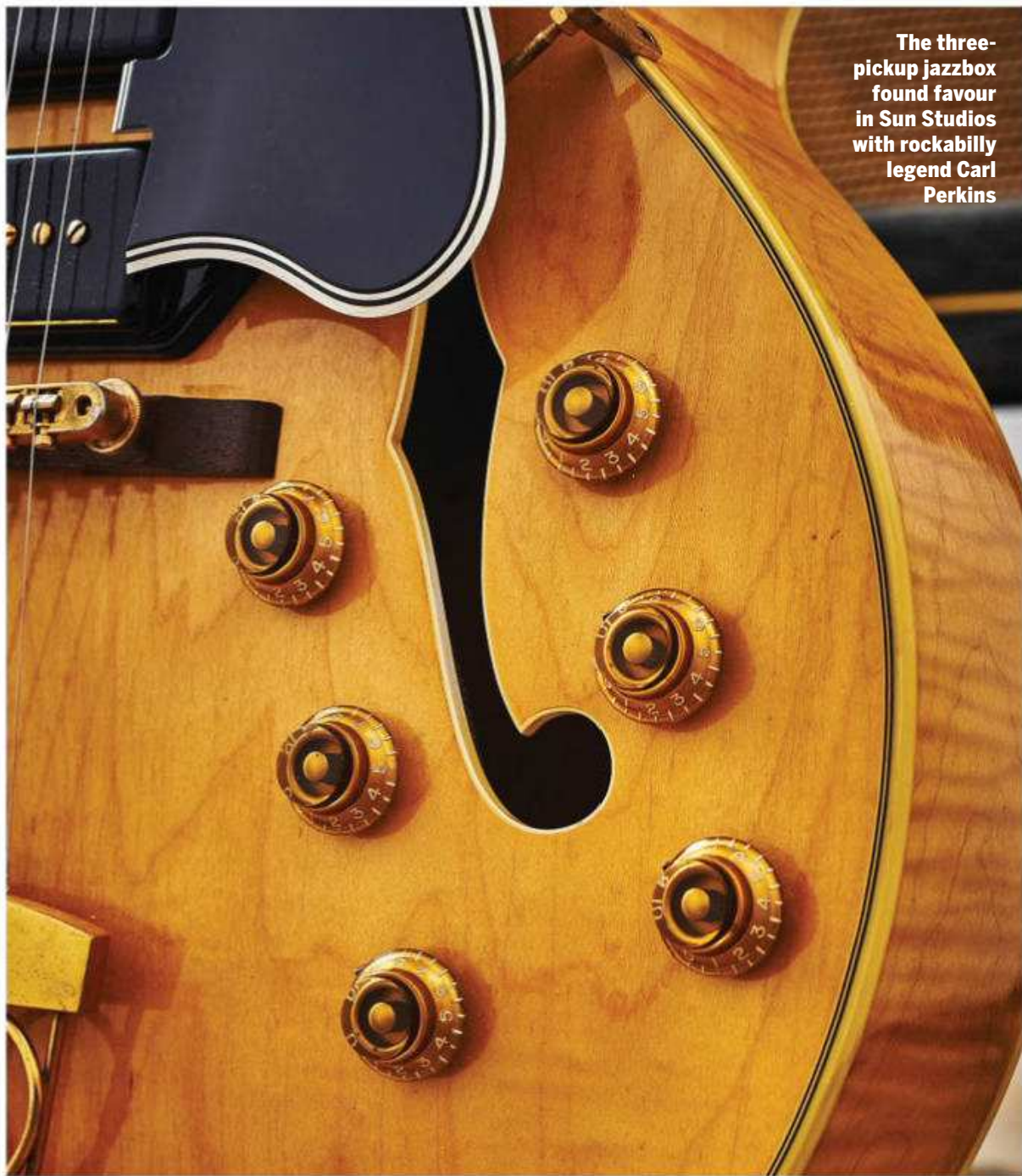
**G**ibson released its 17-inch wide, single-cutaway, maple-bodied, maple-necked, double f-hole, triple P-90-loaded ES-5 electric archtop in both Sunburst and Natural finishes in 1949. Complete with all the ornate trimmings that Gibson could muster – including gold-plated hardware, mother-of-pearl inlays and multiple-ply binding throughout – it was an apex of guitar craftsmanship and the result of an evolutionary course that can be clearly traced back to the company's beginnings at the start of the 20th century.

Gibson was founded partly on the basis of Orville Gibson's 1898 patent relating to carved arched instruments. Starting in 1902, its very first archtop acoustic guitars (the L, L-1, L-2 and L-3) appeared with round soundholes. In the pursuit of even greater projection and tonal enhancement, Gibson recruited sound engineer and master luthier Lloyd Loar, resulting in its first f-hole guitar, the L-5, in 1922. By 1935, while continuing on the quest for increased guitar volume and clarity, the

The addition of a pickup selector switch in 1955 rebranded the guitar and made for a dynamic electric

L-5's body size had advanced from 16 to 17 inches, and the following year, Gibson's first Electric Spanish model, the ES-150, arrived, marking the dawn of a new era.

Soon after the groundbreaking ES-150 arrived in 1936 (complete with Charlie Christian pickup), Gibson increased its Electric Spanish range with the ES-100, ES-250 and ES-300 in 1938, 1939 and 1940 respectively. However, things had only just got underway when World War II forced a temporary pause upon proceedings. In the late 40s, Gibson recommenced ES production in earnest with its larger-bodied, P-90-equipped guitars, including the revamped ES-150, the ES-125, and the 17-inch ES-300, accompanied by its Premier/cutaway version, the ES-350. It was this guitar, along with the 17-inch L-5 Premier/cutaway, that inspired the ES-5's



The three-pickup jazzbox found favour in Sun Studios with rockabilly legend Carl Perkins

complex design, and to which the guitar owes its unique look and sound.

When the ES-5 was originally released in 1949 (pre-dating the flagship Super 400CES and L-5CES electric archtops by two years), it was equipped with three individual volume knobs corresponding to each of its three P-90 pickups and a master tone knob. All pickups were active simultaneously, therefore varying the guitar's sound was akin to operating a mixing desk, namely balancing multiple volume sources. This rather unwieldy arrangement was revised in 1955 – a pickup selector switch was added in place of the master tone control on the upper treble bout, and the guitar was fittingly rebranded the 'ES-5 Switchmaster'. This new addition suddenly made it possible for each pickup to be selected individually, as well as in

unison, which – along with individual volume and tone controls for each P-90 – made for a uniquely versatile electric guitar, both on stage and in the studio. Indeed, it soon became an instrument of choice for influential Sun Studio recording artist and king of rockabilly, Carl Perkins.

When the ES-5 Switchmaster was loaded with three PAF humbuckers in place of its P-90s in 1957, it changed the fundamental character of the instrument entirely, turning it into more of a distinctive rock 'n' roll machine than a progressive jazzbox (although it remained a little of both!), and as such, it became a go-to guitar choice for Frank Zappa and Steve Howe. Perhaps due to its odd blend of tradition and innovation, however, it didn't turn out to be as popular as Gibson intended and was subsequently axed from production in 1962. **[RB]**



## 1956 GIBSON ES-5N SWITCHMASTER

### 1. SERIAL NUMBER

'A'-prefixed five-digit number inked onto orange oval label on back (visible through bass f-hole)

### 2. HEADSTOCK

Single binding; mother-of-pearl Gibson logo and crown inlay; black painted taper on rear; black face

### 3. BODY

Laminated maple with pressed, arched top; single Venetian/rounded cutaway; five-ply top and back binding; single bound double f-holes; natural finish (hence the model name, ES-5N)

### 4. PICKUPS

Three P-90 high-output single coils with individual volume and tone pots; 'bumblebee' tone capacitors; four-way pickup selector switch ('1/2/3/ALL')

### 5. HARDWARE

Gold-plated 'waffle/radiator back' Kluson tuners, Tune-o-matic bridge, tubular 'double loop' tailpiece, pickguard bracket and screws

### 6. PLASTICS

Two-layer (white/black) bell truss rod cover; three black 'dog-ear' P-90 pickup covers; black hexagonal pickup selector surround; black Telecaster-style pickup selector switch tip; six clear, gold-backed bonnet knobs; bevelled five-ply pickguard; white plastic keystone tuner buttons

### 7. NECK

Glued-in two-piece bookmatched maple neck with centre stripe; pointed (L-5-style) rosewood fingerboard with five-ply binding and mother-of-pearl block inlays; natural finish

Thanks to Mike Long of  
ATB Guitars in Cheltenham  
([www.atbguitars.com](http://www.atbguitars.com))



## The Evolution of the Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

**1949**

ES-5 released; 3x P-90s with individual volume knobs and master tone knob

**1950**

Bound f-holes now standard

**1955**

5-ply top/back binding replaces 3-ply type; Tune-o-matic bridge added

Late **1955**

Rebranded ES-5 Switchmaster; 4-way pickup selector switch

**1956**

Tubular 'double loop' tailpiece replaces parallelogram trapeze type

**1957**

3x new Seth Lover-designed PAF humbucking pickups replace P-90s

**1960**

Florentine/pointed single cutaway replaces Venetian/rounded type

**1961**

Serial number changes to digits

**1962**

Discontinued

**1996**

Release of ES-5P Reissue P-90, ES-5A Reissue Alnico & Switchmaster Reissue



|||||  
**Old Gold**  
|||||

# 1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe

*Photography by Olly Curtis*

**T**he Les Paul Deluxe entered Gibson's catalogue in 1969, a year after the Standard model's rebirth owing to a surge in popularity. This was thanks, in the main, to a certain Mr Clapton using a 1960 Standard with The Bluesbreakers and early Cream. Suddenly, guitarists everywhere wanted in on this mahogany-powered tone monster, its reputation strengthened by biting but sweet pickups whose snarl, grunt and whack were exactly what was called for as rhythm and blues morphed into heavy rock. The problem was, there weren't enough of the original 50s models to meet demand and a reboot became necessary to satisfy guitar players hooked on the riffs of Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page and Fleetwood Mac's Peter Green...

Despite the Les Paul Deluxe being widely acknowledged as an offspring of its more illustrious cousin, many collectors see it as a degeneration and tend to write it off accordingly. It's also true to say that the model came along when history records that the manufacturing quality of Gibson's solidbodies had slipped since its 1950s heyday – and hence the plot thickens. Stories of inferior tonewoods and poorer quality materials being used during this era prevail, and yet well-worn and battle-scarred models like this one have survived and are beginning to attract the very market that denounced them in the first place. We think that Darwinian theory prevails here and that the strongest and fittest models of the era have survived, despite the weight of popular opinion, and that it's indeed possible to find gold in them 1970s Les Paul hills after all.

As for our specimen here, we were charmed off our feet by its easy playability, genuinely relic'd good looks and soulful tone. After all, if a 1973 Les Paul Deluxe is good enough for Lizzy-era Scott Gorham, it's certainly good enough for us...

**Guitarist would like to thank ATB Guitars, Cheltenham for allowing us access to this fascinating instrument**  
[www.atbguitars.com](http://www.atbguitars.com)




## TONEWOODS

The Les Paul Deluxe of this era still had a mahogany back. Well, sort of... it was made from a 'sandwich' of two layers of mahogany with a thinner maple piece in the middle and the usual bookmatched maple cap. This is known by collectors as the 'pancake' body

**HEADSTOCK**  
The Gibson logo has gone through various transformations during the company's history. Here, the 1970s 'pantograph' logo is easily spotted due to the closed 'b' and 'o'





### PICKUPS

Possibly one of the more controversial aspects of the Deluxe, its mini-humbuckers are not, tonally speaking, quite as girthy as standard 'buckers. Gibson, somewhat cynically, made the change to use up excess stock of Epiphone pickups

### NECK

Another questionable aspect of Les Pauls of this era was the three-piece neck. Damned for being made from inferior wood, laminating three pieces offered strength – on paper, at least. There was also the volute at the base of the headstock; many luthiers and repairers doubt the claim that this added reinforcement at the neck's weakest point

### FINISH

When the Deluxe was introduced in 1969, it was available with a Goldtop finish, as shown here. Later models were to be had in Cherry Sunburst, Cherry, Walnut and Tobacco Sunburst options

### BRIDGE

From the trapeze tailpiece to the uncompensated wrapover bridge and later the compensated wrapover, the Les Paul went through various bridge/tailpiece designs before arriving at the king of them all, the tune-o-matic in 1955 – which was still in place in 1973



## Things You Can Learn From...

# Tony Iommi

*Back to the roots of heavy rock with the dark master of riffs*



**Difficulty** ★★★★★

10 mins per example

**Tutor:** Phil Hilborne | **Gear used:** PRS Signature Custom 24 Guitar into a Fender Blues Deluxe amp mic'd using a Royer R-121 and a Shure SM57. The distortion was from a Friedman BE-OD Overdrive pedal and any additional reverb/delay was added via Logic plug-ins in the mix. The chorus during the intro was via a Boss CE-5 Chorus Ensemble pedal



### BLACK SABBATH GUITARIST

Tony Iommi is, without doubt, one of the most influential guitarists in heavy metal. Throughout his career, memorable and classic riffs have poured out of him – where would the world of rock be without classics such as *Paranoid*, *Black Sabbath*, *War Pigs*, *Heaven And Hell*,

*Sweet Leaf*, *Children Of The Sea*, *Symptom Of The Universe*, *Iron Man* and the many others he has written?

To many, his song- and riff-writing falls into the 'anyone could have written that' category, but the reality is there is a real skill and art involved in coming up with catchy and memorable musical ideas. In other words,

there is a lot to be learned from Iommi. Let's take a look at the examples that feature in this month's audio and video demos.

Meanwhile, whereas it might be tempting to think of this material as being quite straightforward, it's the feel of these ideas that you need to take time to master!

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## Example 1 Clean Arpeggio Picking

**THIS SECTION** is a very typical 'pseudo classical' picking phrase, in which clean chordal arpeggios are interspersed with simple high E string melody notes and short bass note 'lead-ins'. Technically, it's pretty easy to play and will suit pick, fingerstyle or even hybrid picking. Just play it in time, taking care to observe the syncopated/

accented melody notes (>), and all should be okay with the appropriate amount of practice. Adding a touch of reverb and chorus would also be appropriate during this section. Similar intros to this can be heard in Black Sabbath songs such as *Children Of The Sea* and *Sign Of The Southern Cross*.



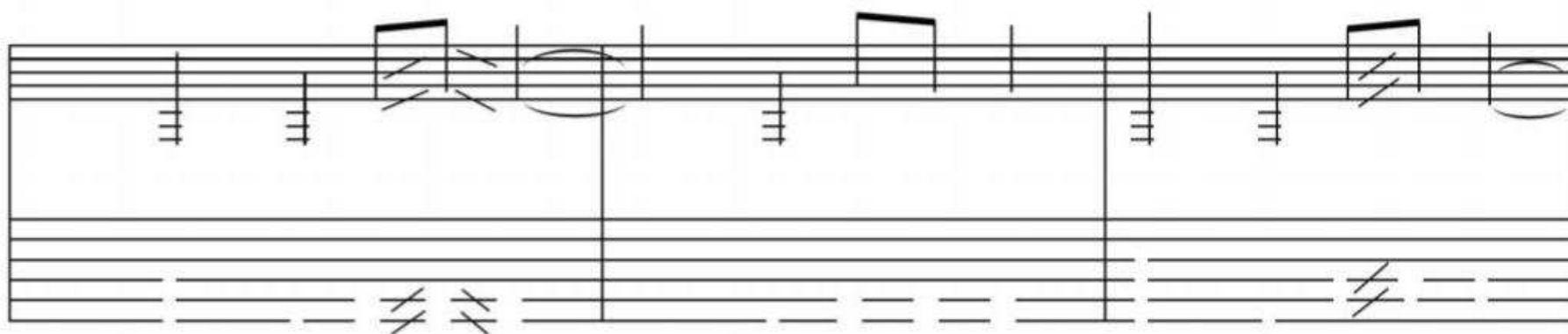
## Example 2 Heavy Slow-Tempo Riffing

**THIS SECTION CONTAINS** some typical heavy riff ideas. Here I show the chords played in more than one location. Realistically, if you were to play something like this in a song, you would probably stay in one area. For instance, you could use E rooted powerchords for a little longer and then, on later repeats, perhaps change to another type, such as the open chords or the low E and A string diads. I've shown a few different options in the space available. It's up to you to find out what you prefer and come up with a part that works for you.

Tony consistently does a few things with his riffs, including using E rooted powerchords such as G at the 15th fret, as opposed to the same chord played as an A shape at the 10th fret. Chromatic movement also abounds in his writing. The G-F#-F seen in the

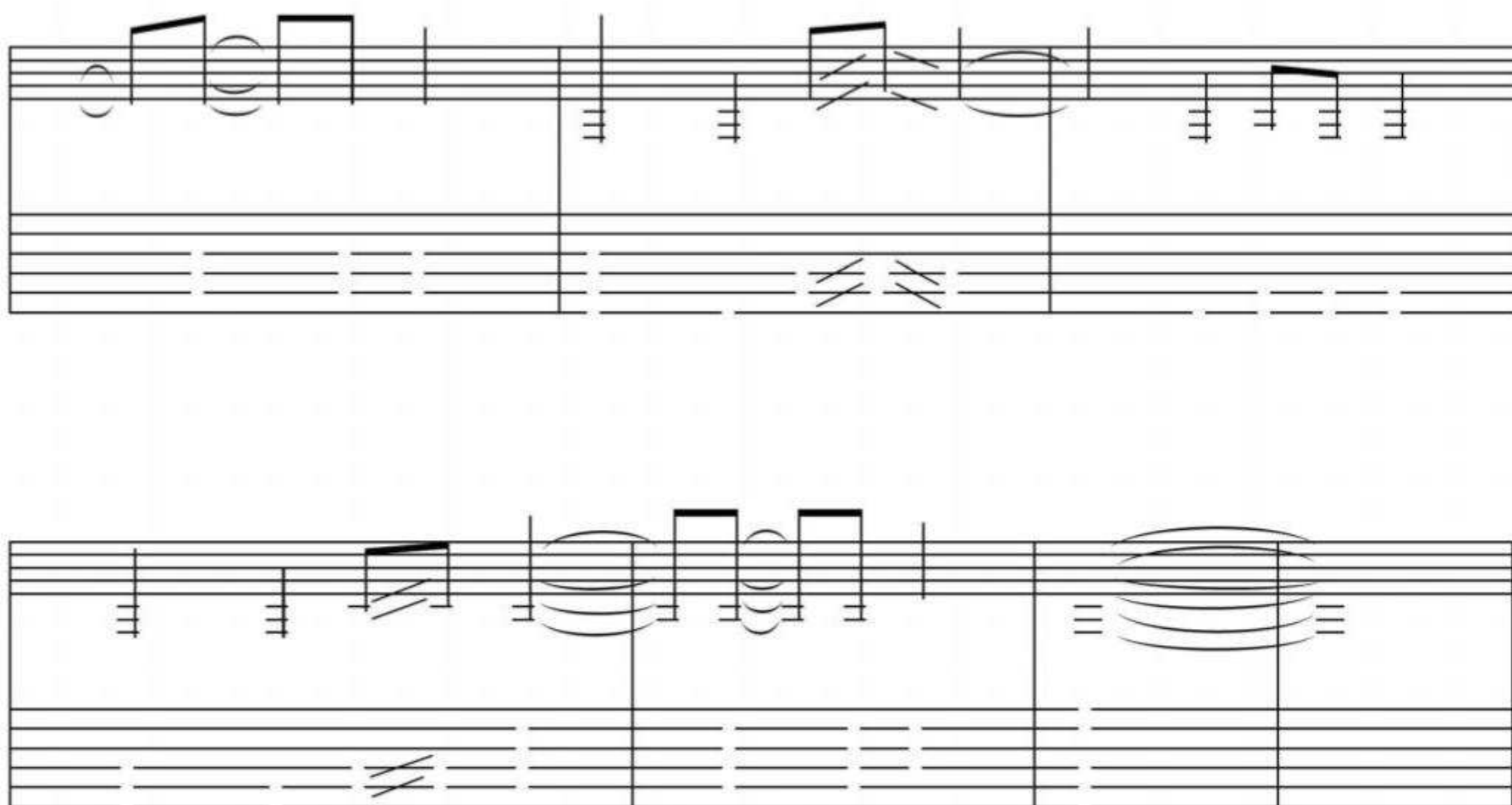
second bar of the riff section here is typical. The main riff in Sabbath's *War Pigs* offers a good reference for this idea. Tony is a real master at leaving space for his ideas to breathe – he often cuts chords short in order for this to occur.

Finally, he is brilliant at playing in time at really slow tempos – the extremely slow three-note main riff of the song *Black Sabbath* is a prime example of this. The secret to playing effectively at these slow speeds is to subdivide the underlying pulse with much smaller rhythmic units silently in your head. For instance, it's a lot more accurate (and less risky) to count in 16th notes (or possibly even 32nd notes) than quarter notes at slow speeds – try it and see for yourself!





## Example 2 Cont...



## Example 3 Single-Note Bass Riffs

**IOMMI OFTEN INCLUDES RIFF SECTIONS** that go from chordal ideas to single-note riffs or vice versa. It is also routine in this style to incorporate a musical break that then goes into a contrasting new riff played at a different and often faster tempo. It's a great device for generating excitement by kicking everything up a gear.

In my example, the last chord of the heavy riff section is held and the speedier tempo of 128bpm (up from 118bpm) is introduced by the new single-note riff. This riff then continues until the end of the

track, acting as a solo backing played by the bass guitar. Note how, in my riff, the 'devil's interval' (ie, the  $\flat 5$  note of  $B_b$ ) has typically been featured as an accented note. Also, the  $D5 - D5/C\# - D5/B - D5/A$  progression can be played as written, or you could just sustain or hold a root/5th diad  $D5$  chord and let the bass do the work. On the demo I play it both ways, letting the bass take over the line and not always doubling it on guitar. Listen to the song *Neon Knights* to hear exactly what I mean.





## Example 4 Unison Bends

The eight-bar solo section kicks off in bars 27 to 34 with a few ascending unison bend ideas. These are a pretty common feature of Iommi's lead style and work well in a three-piece band setting (like Black Sabbath) because they fill everything out nicely. As you

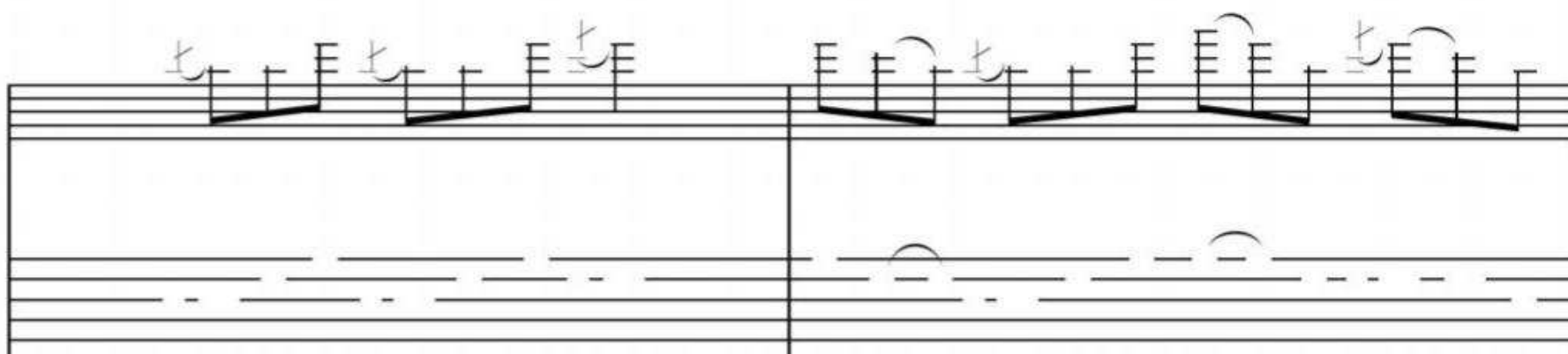
play these, try to aim for a fairly fast vibrato that doesn't go sharp in pitch, and you will be in the right ballpark. You might notice I use my fretting-hand first and second fingers for these bends. Bear in mind, a lot of players tend to use their first and third fingers instead.



## Example 5 Cliché Pentatonic Licks

I think it's fair to say a lot of licks found in Iommi's lead style have become rock clichés. But they weren't clichés when he started using them! To my mind, he was an originator, as well as an adopter of early blues/rock 'n' roll licks and, like many other players, took them to a

whole new place. Typically, Iommi has a pretty fast left-hand vibrato, uses a lot of legato 'trills' and fluid pentatonic legato phrasing in his soloing. Check out other licks in Iommi's back catalogue – there are some real gems awaiting...





# Blues Headlines

*Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks*

Robin Trower performs live at The Oakland Coliseum, California in 1975

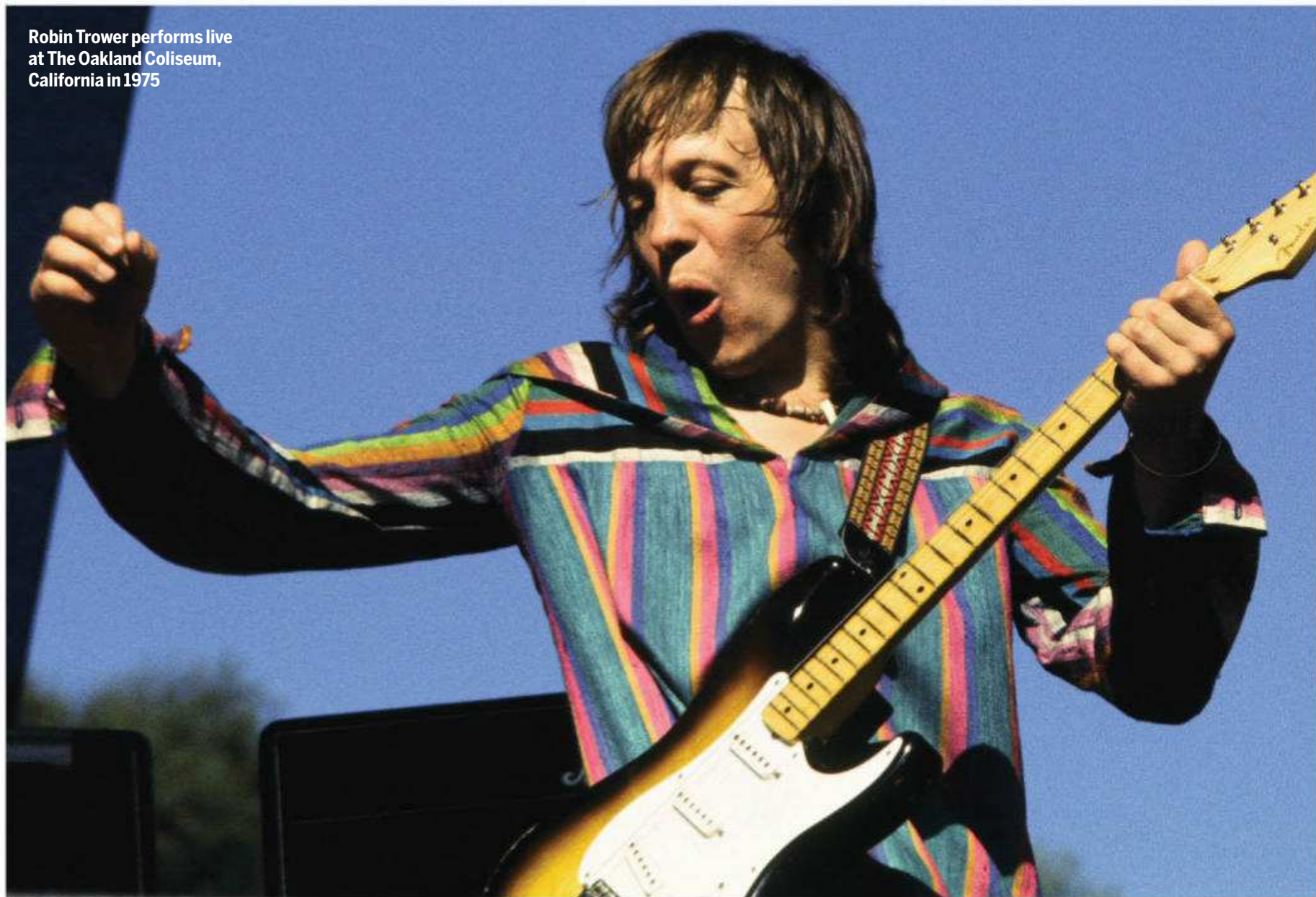


PHOTO BY RICHARD MCCAFFREY / MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Difficulty ★★★★★

5 mins

Tutor: Richard Barrett | Gear used: Knaggs Choptank, Line 6 M9, Vox AC15 C1

## Trower Of Power



### FIRST, A LITTLE DISCLAIMER.

While heavily inspired by Robin Trower (especially his playing on *Day Of The Eagle*), I make no claim to have absolutely 'nailed' his style. Only he can do that. However, what I have done is dial up a Uni-Vibe simulation, plugged into the studio AC15, cranked the volume and given it my best shot! You'll find it's essential to hit the distorted amp/pedal after adding the Uni-Vibe rather than before, as adding the effect afterwards gives a much more 'hi-fi', less authentic effect. Using the middle pickup and some amp gain, these ideas are designed to get

you in the ballpark if you've ever fancied having a go at emulating Robin's style.

First coming to prominence as a member of Procol Harum, Robin went solo in 1973, quickly becoming a major concert draw with his power trio, featuring drummer Bill Lordan and the epic talents of vocalist/bassist James Dewar. This format – and Robin's funky, flamboyant soloing – prompted many to compare him with Jimi Hendrix. High praise indeed, but entirely justified, certainly in the mind of prog legend Robert Fripp, who said watching Robin play had "saved his life", later taking lessons from him in the early 1980s.

The five examples are basically my whole solo cut into chunks. Key technical points to watch are maintaining a positive attack on the strings, pitching of string bends, and keeping the phrasing as fluid as possible. Robin favours legato over picked phrases most of the time, which combines well with the 'chewy' Uni-Vibe effect. Much of the sustain comes from playing loud, rather than using lots of drive, though a little compression can certainly help if you're forced to play at more sensible volumes for any reason.

Hope you enjoy these ideas and see you again next time!



## Example 1

**SLIDING DOWN THE SIXTH STRING** makes a confident, attention-grabbing start to any solo and this is no exception. There is certainly something of Hendrix in the phrasing of the second bar – but before that, be sure not to miss the quarter-tone bend that carries over from bar 2. Nothing shockingly technical here, just make sure you’re delivering with commitment and confidence – and as much volume as you can reasonably get away with.

♩ = 103

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

17 5 7 9 7 9 9 9 7 9 7 9 7 9 11 7 9

## Example 2

**CONTINUING FROM EXAMPLE 1**, this phrase gets a little more fiddly by virtue of the semiquaver triplets, though this shouldn’t present too much of an issue. In any case, it doesn’t hurt to ‘push and pull’ the tempo a little. Many of Robin’s most iconic solos were recorded in the days before click track or Pro Tools, so timing is as it was on the day – just like this solo! Watch for the slide into the tone-and-a-half bend in bar 2.

♩ = 103

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

9 7 9 11 7 7 10 12 7 10 7 9 7 9 9 7 9 7 11 14 11 10 9 7 10 9 11 9 9

## Example 3

**THIS BLUES-INFLUENCED B MINOR** pentatonic phrase jumps from shape 1 to 2 in the second bar, milking those repeated string bends. Don’t worry if there is a little extraneous noise from the B string here; it adds a little gravitas and thickness to what might otherwise become rather shrill at volume.

♩ = 103

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

7 9 7 9 11 7 7 10 12 7 10 7 9 7 9 9 7 9 7 10 12 14 12 14 12 14 12 10 10



## Example 4

**THIS FLURRY OF SEMIQUAVERS** – including a sneaky little triplet – forces you to choose your fretting hand fingers carefully. Run through slowly and carefully, and check out the video for hints, too. Remember, it may feel odd changing old habits, even when it's for the better, so be prepared to spend a little more time on this one than you may have expected to at first listen.

$\text{♩} = 103$

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

## Example 5

**THIS FINAL PHRASE** is less about perfection and more about creating an exciting crescendo. Mixing tremolo picking and slides, mute the unwanted strings around (and between) the G and top E and dig in! If you find yourself being concerned about playing this tidily, you've probably missed the point...

$\text{♩} = 103$  *8va*

E  
B  
G  
D  
A  
E

## Hear It Here

### ROBIN TROWER

*Bridge Of Sighs*



Probably Robin's best known album from back in 1974, the title track conjures up imagery of Jimi Hendrix playing *Dark Side Of The Moon*, with an archetypal 'loud-Strat-through-a-Marshall' tone that starts to feed back at the very mention of a held note... Also, check out the previously mentioned *Day Of The Eagle*, which inspired my own solo, and *Too Rolling Stoned*, which features more classic Trower.

### ROBIN TROWER

*Robin Trower Live*



Recorded in 1975, this album features a great contemporary version of *Too Rolling Stoned*, plus the great ballad *Daydream*. It's always interesting to compare studio and live versions of recordings, as it gives a valuable insight into thought processes – especially on the solos. This is an album that will probably make you nostalgic for the 1970s, whether you lived through them or not.

### ROBIN TROWER

*Twice Removed From Yesterday*



This album features drummer Reg Isidore (before he was replaced by Bill Lordan the following year), and is where Robin's solo career started in 1973. Listeners will recognise that the sound is already here, fully developed. Check out the original version of *Daydream*, plus a hint of what was to come on *Bridge Of Sighs* with the final track, *Ballerina*.



# BOOTCAMP

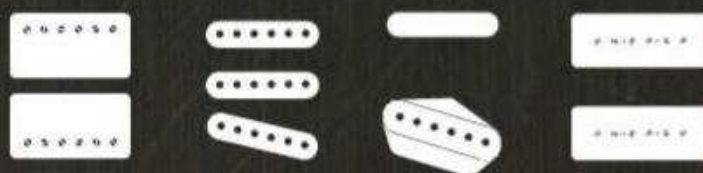


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**Fender** Stratocaster SRV Artist Series, 2003. All original, tweed case, great Texas twang: £975. Pickup only, Essex 01277 626595

**Gibson** 2010 Les Paul Standard Plus. AAA flame top, Heritage Cherry Sunburst. All original with Gibson case and documents. £1,495. Worcester 01386 861873

**Gibson** Nighthawk, Cherry Red, three pups, no Bigsby. Jazz/blues delight, hard case, £750. Pickup only, Essex 01277 626595

**Gibson** SG Melody Maker, circa 1969. Twin pickups, natural mahogany finish, customised with Grovers and Badass bridge. Original Gibson case: £2,500 rthompson525@btinternet.com

**Ibanez** JS 1000. 2004 model in black pearl, full setup and fret dress, new cosmo black Ibanez pickup rings and control knobs. Light buckle rash and finish has worn off on the upper section of the bridge. Overall in very good condition, sounds and plays fantastic. Comes with hard Gator case and spare trem arm bushes. Contact Darren 07763 330179 or email darren.dean76@hotmail

**Parker** P38. Finished in black, light surface scratches, normal play wear. Piezo Fishman Powerbridge was faulty and has been removed, fitted with the superior Gotoh/Wilkinson trem system, a new non-piezo pickguard, pickups have been replaced with Dimarzio PAF Pro and two Dimarzio single coils. Fret level/dress, full setup and plays great. Comes with original gig bag. Contact Darren on 07763 330179 or email darren.dean76@hotmail

**PRS** 2010 McCarty double-cut flame maple vintage burst. 10 top, ebony 'board with moons. Superb condition, PRS case: £1,595. Worcester 01386 861873

**Yamaha** SG1000 Cherry Sunburst 1978 with case. A few marks/scratches but plays and sounds great. £650 ono. Call John on 07777 630259 Hertfordshire

## Acoustics

**Epiphone** USA archtop, circa 1930s, sunburst, no cracks, no problems, light studio use. Pro setup, handmade USA replacement machine heads. £700. Steve 07740 948925

**Lowden** WL35. East Indian Rosewood back & sides, redwood top with Lowden case. Built April 2015. Virtually unplayed so immaculate condition. £2,500. Call John on 07777 630259 Hertfordshire

**LR Baggs** M1 active acoustic soundhole pickup, perfect working condition, £95 inc p&p. Phone Henry 07958 554930 henryield@me.com

## Bass

**Ampeg** B2-RE bass head, max 450w, £250. Matching cab, Ampeg B series SVT15E, £300. Together, £500. Condition as new, still with manufacturer's labels. Never left the house. David dprestidge@yahoo.com

**Vintage** electro-acoustic bass guitar, light studio use, pro setup, immaculate. Quality gig bag. £150. Steve 07740 948925

## Amps

**Fender** Rampart Ltd edition nine-watt boutique style amplifier. Mint condition, very little home use, £250. Tel Steve on 01246 280299

## Misc

**Pedal Train** Classic Junior pedalboard complete with Strymon Zuma PSU, five outputs. Boss TU-3 & Strymon Flint tremolo/reverb pedal. £300. Contact Mick 07759 471891 hunkydory@tiscali.co.uk

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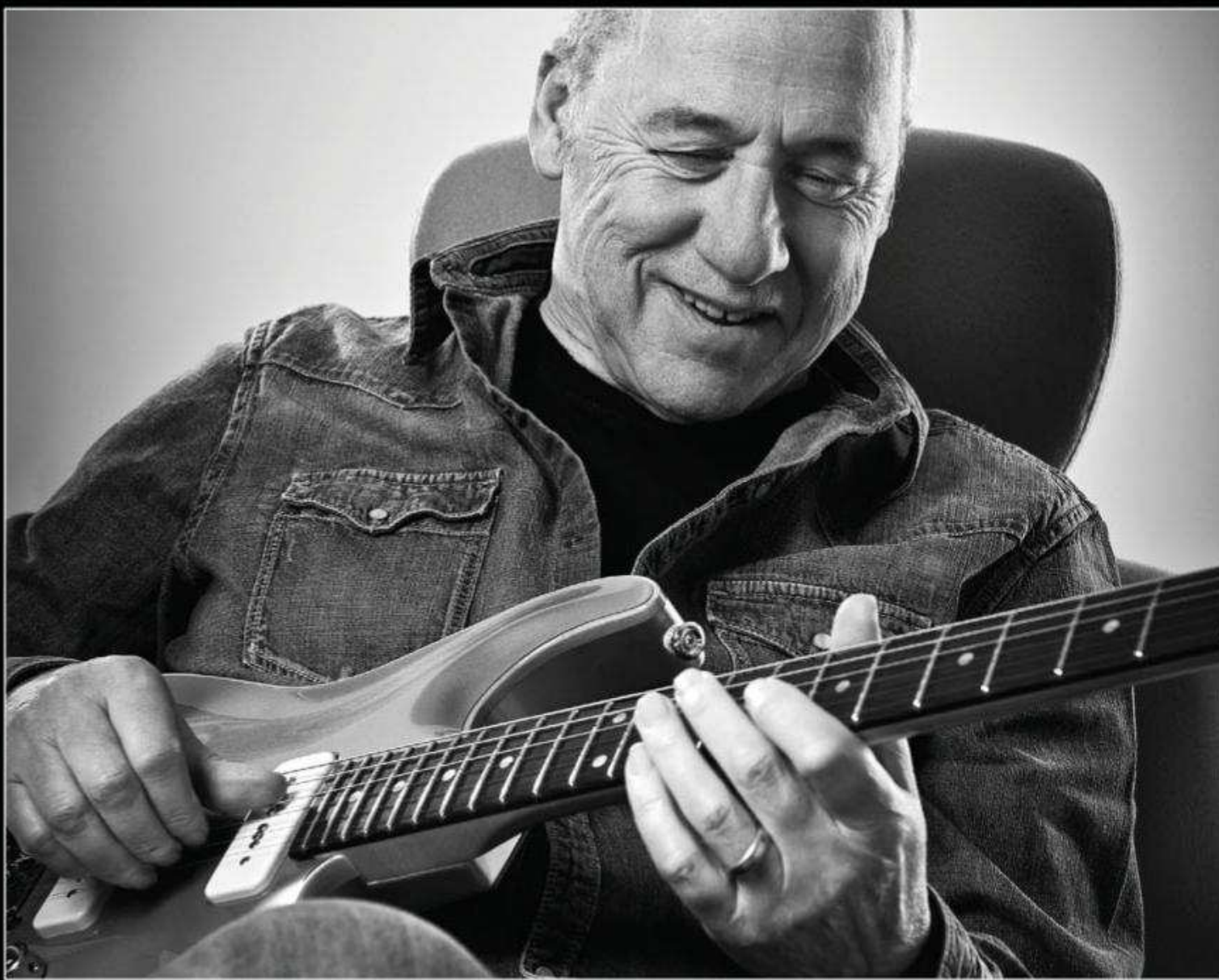
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