HENDRIX '67

Jimi's effects guru on the secrets of his early sound

TONE FOR HIRE

Should you be renting classic guitars, not buying them?

KIRK FLETCHER

A modern blues master on why the Strat's where it's at

Guitarist

Issue 474

AUGUST 2021

AMERICAN BEAUTY

HAS GIBSON CREATED THE ULTIMATE VINTAGE REISSUES?

Guthrie GOVAN
ON THE GUITARS THAT CHANGED HIS LIFE
PAGE 114

Featuring
'MURPHY LAB' ES-335
LES PAUL JR & STANDARD
REISSUE vs VINTAGE SHOOTOUT
CHRIS BUCK TESTS HOLY GRAIL GIBSONS

PLUS
STEVEN WILSON ON PROG & GUITARS
NEURAL QUAD CORTEX REVIEW
GWENIFER RAYMOND

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Old Flames

The question of how to get the vintage vibe from your guitar is getting more complex by the year. A high-end reissue should be an obvious choice for the vintage guitar fan who can't afford the real deal. But, as usual, things aren't quite that simple. Just to muddy the waters further, the price of the most prestigious reissues is climbing to be almost on a par with tatty examples of the real thing. This doesn't hold true of the most sought-after electrics, such as sunburst Les Pauls from the late 50s, but get into Gibson's less-prized 60s models and the picture changes. For example, a 1961 Les Paul/SG Custom with maybe a refin or some other non-original details can often be found for around the same price as an aged Custom Shop version.

We wanted to explore these issues in a bit more depth than usual so we produced a couple of unique videos you might want to check out – firstly, we visited the incredible collection of collector Andrew Raymond (see page 96) to try some original 1959 'Bursts to see how the 'Holy Grail' genuine article felt – with incredible Welsh guitarist Chris Buck as our test pilot for these awe-inspiring instruments. Are they really as good as the legend suggests? We also sent Nev Marten over to demo the Gibson reissues that grace this month's cover with tone maven Mick Taylor of *That Pedal Show* (see page 38). So once you've read the review be sure to check out those videos to get the full measure of how close the best of reissues get to the real thing. Enjoy the issue and see you next month.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Ida Mae
Guitarist Chris Turpin is one of the most rootsy, vibey British players out there – read about his new record with band Ida Mae on **p54**

Tone For Hire
Can't afford a classic vintage or custom guitar or pedal? We look into the expanding world of renting classic gear on **p66**

Gwenifer Raymond
Meet a young Welsh-born guitarist who's becoming one of the most viscerally exciting acoustic talents since Bert Jansch on **p48**

COVER: JIMI HENDRIX PHOTO BY GUNTER ZINT/K & K ULF KRUGER OHG/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; KIRK FLETCHER PHOTO BY RICK GOULD

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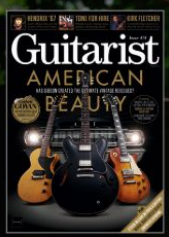

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Olly Curtis

COVER FEATURE

GIBSON MURPHY LAB REISSUES

76 Something old, something new… We explore the art and craft of Gibson's Murphy Lab – do these reissues really capture the mojo of the originals?

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Please note: to enjoy all of the video content in this issue, you will need a WiFi connection

BEST OF THE CLASSICS

Electro-Harmonix 7025EH

This new low noise, low microphonic 12AX7/ECC83 is rapidly becoming the most respected tube of this type in all markets, both guitar amps and high end hi-fi amps. Users will immediately notice the difference replacing 12AX7/ECC83 with the 7025EH, especially in the first stage.

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7591A • 7868 • EF86 • EL34 • EL84 • KT88 • KT90

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2A3 • 300B • 6H30Pi • 6SN7

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After extensive research and engineering, the famed Genalex Gold Lion KT88 is available once again. Recreated down to the finest detail, featuring gold plated grid wire, carbonized screen grids, and a tri-alloy clad plate structure for exceptional performance and sound quality.

ALSO AVAILABLE:

12AT7/ECC81/B739 • 12AU7/ECC82/B749
12AX7 • 12AX7/ECC83/B759
12AX7/ECC83/CV4004
6V6GT • 6922
KT66 • KT77 • N709/EL84
PX2A3 • PX300B
U77/GZ34

Tung-Sol KT170

The Tung-Sol KT170 is a beam powered tetrode; a pair can generate power output levels in excess of 300 watts. Its glass envelope is gorgeous. The KT170 is the ultimate evolution from the already widely used and respected KT120 and KT150 Tung-Sol tubes.

ALSO AVAILABLE:

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12AX7/ECC83
12AX7/ECC803S Gold Pins
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6EU7 • 6L6G • 6L6GC STR • 6SL7
6SL7 G Gold Pins • 6SN7GTB • 6V6GT
6550 • 7027A • 7189 • 7581 • 7591A
EF806s Gold Pins • EL34B • EL84/6BQ5
KT120 • KT150

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LOWDEN F-34
£3,750

WHAT IS IT? A Sitka spruce/koa combo F-style medium jumbo-sized acoustic that's new to Lowden's range for 2021

Tranquil Spirit

Lowden's koa and spruce combination offers a recipe for a light and airy tone and a response that will suit a gentle fingerstylist

Words David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

Having koa back and sides on your handmade Lowden would have previously meant a price upscale, but now this exotic timber has made it into the catalogue as a standard across the company's F, S and O body sizes. If you're at all unfamiliar with koa, we'll spend a few moments considering the role it plays in the game of providing an acoustic guitar with its singular tone.

George Lowden himself says of the wood: "Koa is a comparatively lighter tonewood, which means if you like to play gently, it's an excellent choice. It gives you the ability to express yourself and have lots of different nuances of tone. Just touch the guitar and it will respond."

Conventional wisdom adds that it's a tropical hardwood, found in Hawaii, and that it sits between the thrones of mahogany and maple in the kingdom of sound, as it boasts some of the midrange of the former with the top-end sweetness of the latter. We're also told that newer instruments made from koa have a tendency towards brightness

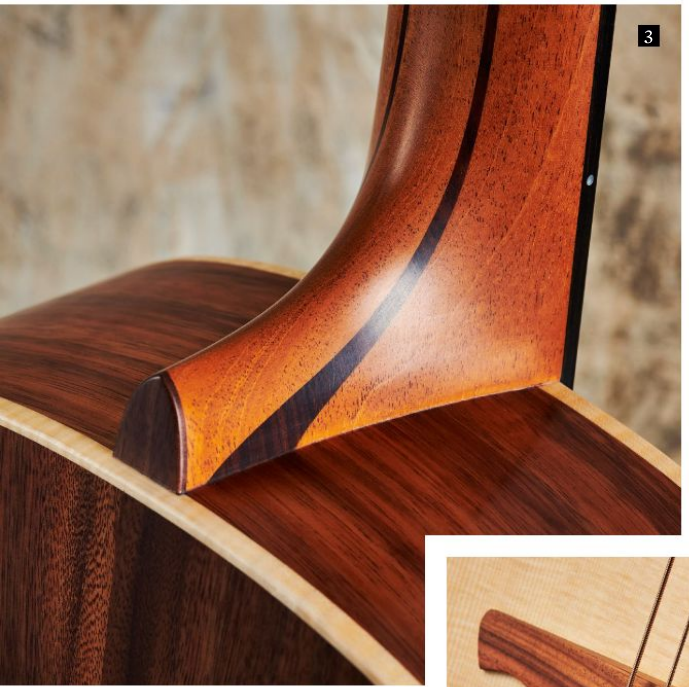
1. The Lowden's Sitka spruce top has some fine figuring within its grain and will continue to mature tonally for many years to come
2. If a koa/spruce combo floats your tonal boat but you're unsure of the F body size, rest assured that it's also available in Lowden's O and S ranges
3. A wealth of fine workmanship within a single picture – everything from the composite mahogany/rosewood neck to the flamed maple binding is exquisitely crafted
4. A set of Gotoh SG381 tuners with ebony buttons is another of the F-34's refinements
5. The guitar's distinctive rosewood top-loading bridge and split saddle have become a Lowden staple over the years

that will mellow down in time to produce a rich and even balance between treble and bass response. A quick check of our F-34's birth certificate included in the case reveals it left the factory in December last year and so we're looking at a youngster in its field. What's more, Sitka spruce also has a lifetime of tonal maturity ahead of it because it's a timber that needs a few years under its wheels before it reaches its prime. All things being considered, this guitar just might be a ticking tone bomb!

Feel & Sounds

As far as body size goes, this instrument belongs to Lowden's F-Series fraternity, although, to our eyes at least, it would be known colloquially as a medium jumbo. Don't let the pictures fool you; at 406mm (16 inches) across its belly, it's by no means the baby of the family.

As we've said, the F-34's top is Sitka spruce and the back and sides are koa, and as far as the other constituent parts are concerned you can add in a mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard, rosewood bridge and a bone nut and saddle. It would be true to say that many acoustic enthusiasts would have expected a cedar top to feature here, as has become something of a perceived standard for Lowden and is reputedly George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5

Lowden's favourite soundboard material. But spruce has usurped it here and we were curious as to why.

"With a koa and cedar pairing, out of the box you're going to get a faster response," George acknowledges. "The cedar will give a little more warmth, but maybe isn't quite so clear as Sitka. On the tonal spectrum, a koa/Sitka spruce pairing sits very close to an Indian rosewood/Sitka spruce pairing. Indian rosewood will give you that rich bass – which is one of the reasons why Indian rosewood is so popular – but for somebody that might want a tone where the upper midrange is more prominent, koa is preferable. The important thing is to give the spruce time to play in. Even six months of playing will make a big difference in tone."

In other words, this instrument has all the means to mature like a fine wine if it's treated right and given regular bouts of playing. And from what we've seen and heard already, you'll want to play it a lot.

As is usual with Lowden, the workmanship is exemplary. The flamey maple bindings on the front and back act as a perfect decorative foil for the spruce and koa, and the rosette – a composite of rosewood, sycamore, walnut and mahogany – is beautifully modest subtlety itself.

"Koa gives you the ability to express yourself and have lots of nuances of tone. Just touch the guitar and it will respond" ***George Lowden***

The neck is described as the 'GL Standard' and feels wide and moderately shallow to the touch, but it's worth noting here that if anything in the F-34's complement isn't quite to your liking then Lowden will refine it for you as part of its bespoke build service. As an example, if the 45mm nut width is a little too spacious for your fingerstyle fireworks, Lowden will happily reduce it to a very slender – and electric guitar-like – 43.5mm on request.

Exploratory first strums reveal that evenness in the tonal spectrum we heard about earlier is already there despite the guitar's youth. Both bass and treble are perfectly balanced without any rogue frequencies jumping out at you unexpectedly. Chords shimmer sweetly under the hands and the sustain is really impressive, too. Notes linger long after you've played them, melding together almost like you've engaged a fine studio reverb.

The koa and spruce here produce a tone that's both sweet and refined, especially when played with a gentler fingerstyle

We see what Lowden means about employing a gentler fingerstyle approach; revving back a bit means you're rewarded with super clarity and a surprising fullness at the same time. This doesn't mean, of course, that the F-34 wouldn't satisfy the bold strummers among you. On the contrary, we tried playing some chords vigorously with a pick and all the volume and projection you need is present and correct. But it's still a very refined voice – loud as you like, but demure and polite at the same time. This guitar simply refuses to deliver anything that nudges the brutish end of the soundscape.

Verdict

It's always good to explore a different wood combination on an acoustic guitar. In this world, the choice of timber is one of the principal controls you have over tonal expectations, and something a little away from your comfort zone challenges you to adjust your technique a little to meet it on even ground. With the F-34, we were surprised by its clarity and sweetness, and found ourselves taking advantage of its airy, refined nature. It made us play to its strengths, pulling out of us some hitherto little visited nuances, and that can only be a good thing.

> It's a very refined voice – loud as you like, but demure and polite at the same time

As with many instruments, the future is an unwritten page as far as its sonic development goes, while both the koa and spruce begin to open up and mature. As far as we're concerned, the guitar sounds great now, which bodes well for it to become a truly remarkable instrument in the fullness of time.

LOWDEN F-34

PRICE: £3,750 (inc case)
ORIGIN: Northern Ireland
TYPE: Lowden F Style (medium jumbo)
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Koa
MAX RIM DEPTH: 120mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 406mm
NECK: 5-piece mahogany/rosewood
SCALE LENGTH: 650mm (25.6")
TUNERS: Gotoh SG381 with ebony buttons
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/45mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Rosewood/55mm
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.93/4.25
OPTIONS: 12-string, cutaway (on all models except 12-string), fan fret, special neck width, shallow profile neck, LR Baggs Anthem or Highlander iP-1/iP-2 pickups. See website for details
RANGE OPTIONS: Koa/Sitka spruce combo also available on Lowden's S and O body shapes at same price
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no additional cost
FINISH: Hand-rubbed satin

Lowden Guitars
02844 619161
www.lowdenguitars.com

8/10

PROS Expertly built; gentle, sweet tonality with a very promising future

CONS Koa might be untested sonic waters for some

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The AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC JAZZMASTER shown in Tobacco Sunburst. Iconic acoustic voicings. Big electric tones. One powerful Blend Knob.

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VOX
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VFS3

VOX MINI GO 50 COMBO
£259

WHAT IS IT? The lead amp in a three-model range of highly portable combos, with VET amp models, digital effects, rhythm machine and looper

Tone To Go

Vox's latest amp is perfect for al fresco performance, with mains or battery power and a host of onboard extras for practically endless fun and inspiration

Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

We all know Vox's classic valve amplifiers go right back to the beginnings of pop and rock over 60 years ago, but it might come as a surprise for some that the company's digital modelling products have been with us for around 20 years now, writing a significant chapter in Vox's long and colourful history.

Unlike valves, digital guitar amplification methods are still being developed, and Vox's current modelling products use VET or Virtual Element Technology, an evolution of the original REMS engine used on early Valvetronix amps and effects, both of which were developed by Vox's parent company, synth giant Korg. In keeping with Vox's reputation for innovation, VET incorporates many cutting-edge refinements and captures traditional valve circuits in unprecedented digital detail, as we found out last year on Vox's Cambridge50. Vox's new portable Mini Go range of amps is the latest to benefit from this exciting technology and here we're looking at the largest of the trio, the feature-laden Mini Go 50.

1. The Mini Go 50 has a separate mic input section with a level Trim control and an effects Send control, routed to effects section two for a choice of delays and reverbs to enhance your vocal performance. Use a quality dynamic mic here for the best results

2. VET modelling provides highly authentic amp sounds by replicating circuits in the digital domain right down to component level. Voices include replications of the Vox AC30 Normal and Top Boost channels, plus classic British and American favourites, with a Line input channel for keyboards or acoustic guitars

The amp voices use the same VET engine as the Cambridge50 and they sound impressively authentic

This is a compact and portable combo with a single eight-inch custom loudspeaker, housed in a smartly finished cabinet with a rear port to enhance bass frequencies. A diamond-patterned speaker grille echoes the famous cloth used on classic AC amps, and a prominent silver Vox badge shines in the top left corner. There's no carry handle; instead, the amp comes with a shoulder strap that hooks on to a pair of side-mounted studs. There's also a small pair of tilt feet, which allow the Mini Go to be safely angled backwards for better monitoring.

Around the back there are two power sockets, one for the laptop-style mains adaptor and a USB-C for standard mobile five-volt power supplies, which means the Mini Go 50 can be used anywhere. There's a third socket for the optional VFS3 programmable footswitch, which remotely controls all the amp's essential functions.

The control panel has separate inputs for guitar and microphone, with a level Trim and aux Send control for the latter, feeding the Mini Go's delay and reverb effects. There are nine amp models in total, including seven well-known favourites from Vox's Cambridge50, together with a new Vocoder effect and a Line input for amplifying electro-acoustic guitars or keyboards. The amp controls include gain, bass, treble and master volume, which become bass, mid, treble and volume when the line input is selected.

A three-way power switch lets you select from either full power, 1/10th or 1/100th output, for stage, quiet practice or recording, and you can store and recall up to three patch settings.

Below the amp controls, the Mini Go 50 has two effects sections: three modulations and an octaver on section one, and delays and reverbs on section two. Next to the

3. The optional VFS3 footswitch is ideal if you're planning on using the Mini Go 50 live: out of the box button 1 scrolls through the three patch presets; button 2 stops and starts the drum machine; and button 3 operates the looper. But there are 14 assignable functions to cope with practically every possible need

effects we find the Mini Go 50's drum machine, featuring 33 patterns grouped into distinct genres, with tempo and level controls. And there's still more to come in the shape of a looper with a handy maximum recording time of around 45 seconds, together with a tuner function, an aux in and a headphone output, both on 3.5mm jacks. The headphones output disables the speaker and can be used for silent recording when needed.

Overall, the Mini Go 50 is well built to typically high Vox standards, looking smart and ready to rock with an impressive range of features.

Feel & Sounds

The Mini Go 50's amp voices use the same VET engine as the Cambridge50 and sound impressively authentic. The classic AC30 Normal and Top Boost channels both provide a wide range of excellent tones, from shimmering cleans and chiming rhythms to highly responsive classic rock and blues. Beside these two gems, there's a tempting choice of Brit- and American-influenced cleans and overdrives, including the D-style Boutique Cl and Boutique OD, which both sound remarkably authentic, while gain fiends will enjoy the Double Rec and SL-OD simulations, which make even the weediest single coils sing with practically endless sustain and fat, chugging bass.

The new Vocoder voice is a strong special effect and perhaps best used sparingly. Used with a microphone it adds vowel sounds to single notes or chords as you speak or sing, or you can use it without a microphone, in which case the vowels are triggered by picking, which is another useful sound.

The Line input has enough clean headroom to take most keyboards without distorting, and the EQ will suit most

4. The looper records up to a very usable 45 seconds and if the drum machine is running it will auto quantise to the beat so things start and stop in time. You can use the VFS3 footswitch to start and stop it remotely, making it a great live performance tool that'll help grab an audience

The drum machine offers 33 different rhythm patterns covering all popular genres, with a tempo range from 40 to 240bpm. Like the looper, it can be controlled from the optional VFS3 footswitch for live applications

electro-acoustics without too much fiddling around; it's a good, usable tone.

The other onboard effects don't disappoint, either, with lush chorus and phaser modulations, an authentically vintage-sounding tremolo and a fat octaver that turns into a mono synth bass at the end of the control knob's travel. Effects section two rounds things off with analogue and digital delays softened by spring or hall reverbs. While the guitar can access both effects sections, the microphone input is sensibly limited to delay and reverb.

The Mini Go 50's drum machine sounds aren't quite up to the same standard as its amp voices, but still more than adequate for live use, with a wide range of variations on each genre. The looper is easy to use and great fun, automatically quantising to a rhythm pattern, while the drum machine works vice versa, automatically adjusting tempo to recorded loops. As well as making the Mini Go 50 a powerful practice tool, these two features will spice up any solo live performance.

For street performers or non-buskers, this is an inspiring practice and recording tool

If you're planning on using the Mini Go 50 live then the optional VFS3 footswitch becomes more of a necessity as you can assign a variety of different functions to the three buttons: for example, operating the looper, switching effects on and off, or accessing the three saved patch settings.

Verdict

We barely scratched the surface of the Mini Go 50's potential in the short time we had it, but it's clear that if you're a serious solo performer on the street/busking circuit, this is an amp you really need to become acquainted with. Combined with the rhythm machine and looper, there's plenty of inspiration on tap for original music or pro-standard covers, while the authentic amp sounds are first class, with plenty of power to make yourself heard and impressive lows from the ported cabinet. For non-buskers, this is still an inspiring practice and recording tool – the great tones will sit happily in any pro-standard recording.

As an overall package, it's amazing value for money. If you don't need the preset storage or the high power output, the Mini Go 10 is equally impressive, while the Mini Go 3 does away with the looper but retains those great amp sounds and the drum machine. Whichever you choose, the Mini Go amps all come with great fun included, which is surely what it's all about.

VOX MINI GO 50 COMBO

PRICE: £259
ORIGIN: Vietnam
TYPE: Digital modelling preamp with solid-state power stage
OUTPUT: 50W RMS into 4 ohms, switchable to 5W or 0.5W
VALVES: None
DIMENSIONS: 390 (w) x 250 (d) x 358mm (h)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 7/16
CABINET: Particle board
SPEAKER: 1 special-design 8"
CHANNELS: 11 amp models, 8 effects, 33 rhythm patterns, separate mic input with Trim and FX Send
CONTROLS: Amp selector, gain, treble bass volume. Microphone Trim and Send level controls. Program store/recall button. Effects select/edit x2, effects tap tempo. Rhythm genre selector, variation select button, tempo button, start/stop button, level control. Looper level control, record/play dub button
FOOTSWITCH: 3-button VFS3 footswitch (optional) can be assigned to 14 different functions
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Aux in, headphones output, tuner function, auto power off, tilt-back feet, can be powered by mobile batteries via USB-C input on rear
OPTIONS: VFS3 3-button programmable footswitch is £59
RANGE OPTIONS: Mini Go 10 (£199) has a single 6.5" speaker; the smaller Mini Go 3 (£149) has a 5" speaker

Vox Amplification
01908 304600
www.voxamps.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Perfect busker's companion: built-in rhythm machine and looper; amp sounds and effects; foot-switchable; can run on batteries

CONS We'd be inclined to swap the Vocoder effect for another good amp voice; we wish the looper had 15 seconds' more recording time

A passion for playing means that inspiration can strike anytime, anywhere. With Elixir® Strings you know that when you pick up your guitar it's going to sound great—time and time again. That's because our featherweight coating protects your strings from the elements, keeping corrosion away and allowing your tone to sound great for longer, in any environment.

Elixir STRINGS

***Elixir* Strings. Performance-ready with long-lasting tone.**

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CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK24 HSH 2PT CM MAHOGANY
£1,059

WHAT IS IT? Recent addition to the DK 'Dinky'-shaped Charvel range, a surprisingly vintage-sounding, stripped-down hot-rod 'Strat'. What's not to like?

Raw Power

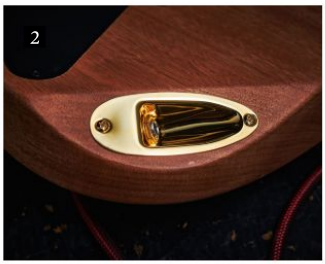
We all love our vintage-spec Stratocasters, but if you need to go up a gear or two, the Fender-owned Charvel brand is becoming the place to look

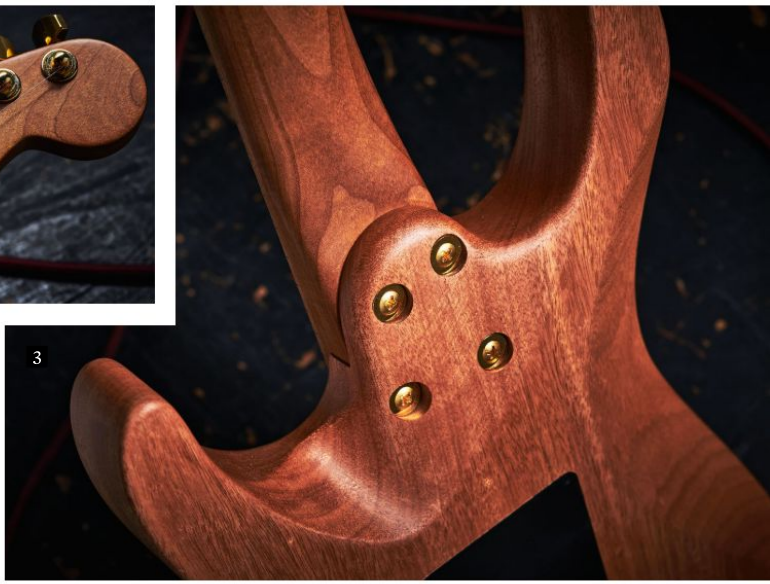
Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

Is it just us or are Charvel guitars becoming rather classy? This Pro-Mod was launched at the start of this year and certainly caught our eye. It continues the theme of an instrument with progressive but pared-back and simplified style – a real rock staple without the ubiquitous double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato. Even the gold-plated hardware looks right against the light red-brown colour of the natural finished mahogany body and that 'caramelised' maple neck. In the flesh, we're just as impressed. It's a classy piece.

The roots of Charvel – as a hot-rod 'Strat' maker – remain very evident here. The slightly smaller 'Dinky' body shape, with its deeper cutaways, looks classic enough viewed face-on, but flip the guitar over and additional shaping is everywhere. There's the curved and domed heel, with its four screws inset in thick washers rather than a neckplate, a deep palm contour on the treble side joining the more usual rib-cage contour. Then there's that shaved edge where the Strat-type output-jack dish sits. It's actually a two-piece body, just slightly off-centre-joined, but it's next to impossible to see any glue line. The *au naturel* finish means that the sanding and this very light satin finish have to be perfect. And it is. The downside is that without a harder protective coating it can mark easily, but for many that natural ageing from playing and use is surely part of the attraction here.

VOLUME
TONE





1. The classic headstock outline houses non-locking tuners and a slippery Graph Tech Tusq XL nut

2. This unusual placement of the output jack means it's easy to 'lock' your cable through your strap

3. There's plenty of contouring on the back of the guitar, not least the very rounded heel without the usual neckplate

Colour-wise, the caramelised or roasted maple neck is a near perfect match for the natural mahogany. And, in typical Charvel style, buried under the separate fingerboard are graphite reinforcing rods for stability and a dual-action truss rod with its easy-to-access wheel adjuster at the base of the neck.

The frets are big but not silly and sit on the compound 305mm to 406mm (12- to 16-inch) radius 'board. Of course, we also get those glow-in-the-dark Luminlay side dots with just small-diameter pearloid dots to the face. The finish here is specified as 'hand-rubbed urethane'; it's clearly a light coat that has been burnished to a dull sheen, smoother than the similar finish used on Fender's American Acoustasonics, for example. With lightly rolled fingerboard edges, this finish combines to create a guitar that feels nicely worn in. It's a great weight, too.

A 24-fret guitar – even with this full 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length – means the three pickups appear quite cramped. They all direct-mount to the body (only the middle single coil has limited height adjustment), the almost unfinished industrial style of the pickup routs adding to the vibe. Controls are rear-mounted, too, so apart from giving the face a very clean, unfussy appearance, it means that any wiring mods you might want to undertake, not to mention pickup swaps, are all dead easy.

Feel & Sounds

The all-steel Gotoh 510 vibrato should need no introduction – it's pretty much industry standard – and here it's recessed so the bridge plate is virtually flush with the top, as well as allowing an up-bend without tilting the vibrato or having it sit proud of the body. The only oddity is that a Floyd Rose-style solid backplate is used to cover the spring cavity. It should, of course, have an open slot so you can change your strings.

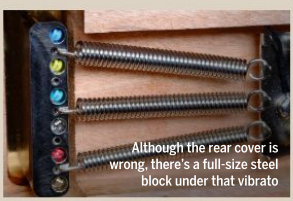
The system is completed with the more generic-style, perfectly functional rear-lock tuners, while the nut is Graph Tech Tusq

UNDER THE HOOD

A closer look at the heart of this Charvel

The rear control cavity looks well-crammed and, with a bit of poking about, you can see the 500k ohms EVH/Bourns low-friction volume pot and what looks like a CTS No-Load tone (with a .047 microfarads capacitor). As you'd expect, there's a four-pole five-way lever switch handing the different pickup connections.

The Seymour Duncan Full Shred is classed as 'medium output' with Alnico V magnet and a measured DCR of 14.69kohms. This is rather different from the Alnico II Pro APH-1N humbucker at the neck with its classic rock reference of Slash and a measured DCR of 7.2kohms. Wedged between these 'buckers is a Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single coil with flush Alnico V rod poles, overwound with a DCR of approximately 13k. However, that pickup is only voiced in positions 2 and 4 on the five-way, never on its own.



Although the rear cover is wrong, there's a full-size steel block under that vibrato

The control cavity is stuffed with cable, but remains very functional

The lack of scratchplate adds to the stripped-down vibe and shows off the two-piece mahogany body perfectly

XL impregnated with PTFE for friction reduction. As set, it offers just under a tone up-bend on the top E and major 3rd on the G; the down-bend is generous, although if you really want to dump the strings it's less of what this is about. But for smooth Beck-style manoeuvres or beautiful Bigsby-like shimmers, it feels great and stays in tune.

Even if you're unsure of what's happening on that pickup selector, the five selections are quite distinct. At either end we have each full humbucker, while positions 2 and 4 introduce the centre single coil to the neck-facing single coils of each humbucker. The middle position then links both inner single coils of those 'buckers and creates some useful Strat and Tele-esque sounds.

The neck humbucker certainly isn't overblown, almost the opposite when switching direct from the clout of the bridge, and there's good clarity for quite a vintage-y vibe. The Full Shred at the bridge doesn't leap too much in power, though it is the hottest sound here and has an almost cocked wah tonality that adds considerable character and isn't a million miles away from the throaty roar of a Les Paul Junior. It's a good choice for this mahogany platform and another example of a pickup that's deceptively named.

The volume control has a very good taper and we'd encourage you to use it, as well as, the No-Load tone, which does its job very well, despite a pronounced notch at the top of its travel where it's bypassed. As ever, with a guitar like this there's a lot more to it than its primary gained purpose.

Specification rarely tells the whole story… there's power on tap plus a rootsy heart

The elephant in the room is the neck. In depth, it's actually very slightly thinner than the Charvel Henrik Danhage we looked at back in issue 468, measuring 18.9mm at the 1st fret and 21.2mm at the 12th. Compare that with the 21.1mm to 23.6mm of Fender's American Pro II HSS Strat and you see our dilemma. However, the back is nicely curved, certainly not a flat-centred 'D', and it's very stable and hard to flex, thanks to those graphite rods. With a low, fast action, it actually feels a little delicate, encouraging a lighter touch.

Verdict

Specification rarely tells the whole story and although that neck shape won't be for everyone (and you can't help but think a slightly fuller shape would dramatically broaden the appeal), this recipe is worth a try. With a very tidy build, this is stripped down and bare bones with quality hardware and pickups that are well suited to the lightweight, purposely functional build. It just wants to be thrown into a gigbag – which isn't supplied, by the way – and gigged relentlessly. An effortless player with little to get in the way, there's power on tap if you need but a vintage-y, rootsy heart. Greasy raw power, indeed!

CHARVEL PRO-MOD DK24 HSH 2PT CM MAHOGANY

PRICE: £1,059
ORIGIN: Mexico
TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar
BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Slab-sawn caramelised maple, graphite reinforcement and Luminlay side dots, bolt-on
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq XL/ 43.3mm
FINGERBOARD: Caramelised maple with rolled edges and small dot inlays, 305-406mm (12-16") radius
FRETS: 24, jumbo
HARDWARE: Recessed Gotoh Custom 510 6-saddle floating bridge with screw-in arm, Charvel diecast locking tuners – gold-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 53mm
ELECTRICS: Seymour Duncan Full Shred SH-10B humbucker (bridge), Custom Flat Strat SSL-6 single coil (middle), Custom Alnico II Pro APH-1N humbucker (neck), master volume, No-Load master tone, 5-way pickup selector lever switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.31/7.3
RANGE OPTIONS: In Mystic Blue at the same price; made-in-Japan MJ DK24 HSH 2PT E Mahogany is £2,039
LEFT HANDERS: No
FINISH: Natural satin to body; hand-rubbed urethane to neck

Fender Musical Instruments EMEA
01342 331700
www.charvel.com

8/10

PROS Tidy build; neck stability; pickups and hardware; stripped-down vibe; fast setup and playability

CONS: Not everyone will enjoy the thin-depth neck; a gigbag would reflect its meant-to-be-gigged style

the Wishlist

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

Gibson Tom Petty Wildflower SJ-200 £8,799

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB **www.gibson.com** **Words** David Mead **Photography** Olly Curtis

When Gibson chose to honour the late Tom Petty with a signature guitar, they decided to do so with a very special edition of their gentle giant acoustic, the SJ-200. Named the 'Wildflower' after Petty's 1994 album, the guitar is a limited edition of which only 100 will be available worldwide. Crafted at Gibson's Acoustic Custom Shop in Bozeman, Montana, the guitar seeks to replicate the model that was made for Petty during the time of the *Wildflowers* album – and, included with the case candy, there's even a picture of him holding that very guitar.

As is the case with any special-edition collector-grade guitar, the appointments are top-class throughout. The guitar's top is made from AAA-grade Sitka spruce, while the back and sides are a luxurious quilted maple. The neck is flamed maple with a walnut stinger on the back of the headstock that bears the words: 'You belong among the wildflowers', an extract from the lyrics to the song after which the guitar is named.

On the front of the headstock, the theme continues with the *Wildflowers* motif that appeared on the original album cover and, we're told, was also present on the band's tour bus when they hit the road to promote the album in the mid-90s. The motif can also be seen on the guitar's case, while the other personalised custom feature is Tom Petty's signature on the pickguard.

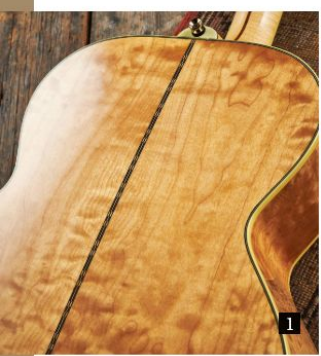
Pickup duties are performed by an LR Baggs VTC system with volume and tone controls tucked away at the edge of the guitar's soundhole. As far as the other furnishings on the SJ-200 are concerned, gold Grover Imperial tuners adorn the headstock, acting as a suitably deluxe foil to the guitar's Antique Natural nitrocellulose finish. The bound rosewood fingerboard bears mother-of-pearl graduated crown inlays with a 43.8mm (1.73-inch) bone nut at one end of the guitar's 647mm (25.5-inch) scale length and a bone saddle at the other.

Such a rarified acoustic doesn't often pass through our hands and so we simply had to release it from its case, tune it up, play a few well-chosen chords and take a listen. For such a big body, the guitar sounds sweet and refined with a very focused midrange that would delight any singer-songwriter. All in all, the Wildflower is a wonderful tribute to one of the truly great songsmiths of our time. G

1. The back of the Wildflower SJ-200 is a deeply patterned AAA-grade maple and the body has been finished in Gibson's Antique Natural nitrocellulose lacquer

2. A stinger on the rear of the guitar's headstock includes a line from Tom Petty's song *Wildflowers*: 'You belong among the wildflowers', reminding us of the inspiration for the guitar

3. The guitar's luxurious cream-coloured case isn't short on extras. It includes a key fob, a leather strap and this picture of Tom Petty holding his original Gibson SJ-200



4. The SJ-200's neck is maple with a rosewood fretboard, 20 standard small crown frets and Gibson's mother-of-pearl graduated crown inlays

5. Volume and tone controls for the onboard LR Baggs VTC pickup/preamp system are neatly tucked away inside the soundhole

6. The characteristic SJ-200 'Four Bar Moustache' rosewood bridge is another touch of luxury on this signature acoustic

7. Limited to just 100 instruments worldwide, the Wildflower includes Tom Petty's signature engraved into the guitar's distinctive black/white scratchplate

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

Fender Noventa Series From £759

CONTACT **Fender Musical Instruments Europe Ltd** PHONE **0333 200 8765** WEBSITE **www.fender.com**

JARGON CRUNCHING

Noventa

Take a look at the magnets, and you'll see that these aren't your standard Strat/Tele/JM pickups. Like the series itself, the pickups are called Noventas, too, which anyone who can count to 100 in Spanish will confirm translates to 'ninety' in English. So, replace the regular pickups with a chubbed-up single coil that has 'ninety' in its title and suddenly it all makes sense!

Another new Fender range? I can't keep up!

Yes, indeed! This is the Limited Edition Noventa line-up, a trio of guitars unveiled at 'Not The NAMM Show' earlier this year, and officially just released. As you can see, each model is a twist on the Big F's Stratocaster, Tele and Jazzmaster formats.

So, who are these aimed at?

Fender's blanket description for the Noventa Series is that it combines classic Fender style and dynamic single-coil pickups to deliver powerful tones, modern playability and dashing good looks. Make of that what you will, but we'd say these cover a pretty broad church in terms of visual appeal and tone, and, of course, the price point.

Are they all completely different?

There's a number of common features across the Noventa range. Obviously, this starts with the pickups, but the bodies are all alder and the necks are one-size-fits-all Modern C shapes with 21 frets and 241mm (9.5-inch) radius fingerboards. The 'board's wood changes depending on which finish you choose, but there are two options: maple or pau ferro.

Tell us more about each model...

The Tele is the biggest visual departure from the Tele we know and love. With its single pickup and 'half' pickguard it's a pinch of Esquire and a dash of La Cabronita, combined into something different. It comes in three classic finishes: 2-Color Sunburst, Fiesta Red and Vintage Blonde, with a pau ferro fingerboard on the 'burst, and maple 'boards on the other two. As well as that, it's got a modified 'cut' Telecaster bridge with three brass saddles.

What about the Strat?

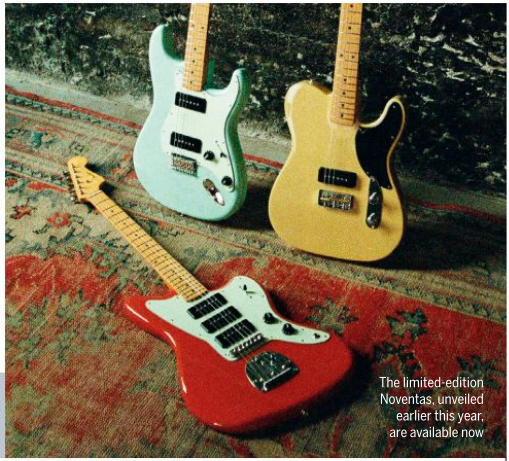
Again, you get the Noventa pickups and a choice of three colours, this time Crimson Red Transparent, Daphne Blue and Surf Green, with a set menu of pau ferro fingerboard on the red, maple on the others. Like the Tele, we think this one is primed for being a no-fuss rocker, with its single volume and tone controls, three-way switching and fixed six-saddle bridge.

RETRO FINISHES

Fiesta Red, Surf Green and Daphne Blue are among the finish options. Plus there are some less stylised colours for each model

DESIGN

Each guitar includes an alder body, Modern C-shaped neck, and either maple or pau ferro fingerboards that are governed by your overall finish choice



The limited-edition Noventas, unveiled earlier this year, are available now

That Jazzmaster has a lot going on!

A trio of chunky pickups means there's not a lot of floor space between the neck and the bridge. You get a five-way switch (positioned horizontally on the lower horn) on the Jazzmaster, too, giving you bridge, bridge/middle, middle, middle/neck and neck switching options. Maintaining the Jazzmaster's alt-rock credibility is the inclusion of an Adjusto-Matic bridge, but unlike the Strat you still get the classic JM vibrato. Finish options here are Fiesta Red/maple, Surf Green/maple and Walnut/pau ferro. We love that Fender has kept the 'spaghetti' logo here, too.

Down to business – how much and when?

Fender has played a bit of a blinder here. The Noventa range is a Limited Edition release, but we're pretty sure that limitation is time rather than a strict headcount, and we'd say it's set its sights on those looking for mid-level workhorse guitars. The Telecaster costs £759, the Stratocaster is £799 and the Jazzmaster is £889. These are already finding their way into stores, so you should be able to try them by the time you read this. **[SW]**

PICKUPS
Fender says the Noventa pickups provide hot single-coil tones with enhanced mid presence and touch sensitivity for bell-like cleans and throaty overdrive

CONFIGURATION
The single-pickup Tele's 'half' scratchplate and 'cut' bridge add to its stripped-back nature, and the Strat is offered as hardtail only. Meanwhile, the Jazzmaster features three pickups and a five-way switch

ALSO OUT NOW...

FRIEDMAN BE-MINI £299

If you've ever sat staring longingly at Friedman's website wishing it made something between a pedal and a large valve head, ready your credit card. Dave Friedman's latest creation is the BE-Mini, a single-channel, 30-watt solid-state amp, but don't let the lack of valves fool you. Thanks to the BE preamp circuit, this little brute promises to deliver the same "British-voiced harmonics, grind and punch" of the revered BE series.

As well as the gain/three-band EQ controls, you get a presence knob, plus Cut and Tight controls to help tailor your tone further. Around the back there's a series effects loop and speaker outputs. The BE-Mini is available now.
www.friedmanamplification.com

OLD BLOOD NOISE ENDEAVORS EXPRESSION RAMPER £59

You know that expression pedal socket you never plug anything into because you can't face losing any more space on your pedalboard? Well, Old Blood Noise Endeavors has a solution that saves space and also works while you're doing your best Kirk Hammett impression on the Cry Baby.

The Expression Ramper gives you two toggle switches: one for the shape of the expression movement and one for toggling between two rate speeds. Meanwhile, the central control knob is used to determine the rate for each, and when you stomp on the pedal it moves between the two. The shape toggle gives you triangle and square (similar to your tremolo pedal) or one-shot modes to manipulate the way the expression pedal sweeps through its movement. It's a handy solution that could unlock some creative results from the pedals you already own.
www.oldbloodnoise.com

The Players

The latest news, views and happenings from the world of your favourite guitarists

Building A Bridge

How Myles Kennedy was inspired by the digital and vintage worlds on his new album

From his time in Alter Bridge, with Slash, former band Mayfield Four and now a solo career, Myles Kennedy has decades of experience around great vintage gear. During lockdown, as he demoed his new solo album, *The Ides Of March*, he became so inspired by a Fender Tweed amp he'd never tried before that it became key to the record. But there was a twist; it wasn't the real thing.

"On the demos, the only guitar sound I kept gravitating towards was Universal Audio's [Fender] '55 [Tweed] Deluxe plug-in," Myles says. "And it's an amazing plug-in, it sounds just like an old Deluxe. What was interesting was I listened to the demos and I liked the way that kind of amp sounds with these songs, so I went on a hunt for that particular era of Deluxes. I think it's the 5E3 circuit; it's simple, but it's such an incredible sound. There's a reason Billy Gibbons uses those and so many guys gravitate towards those amps."

After tracking down a vintage Deluxe model, Myles continued the 50s theme of his new album with a '52 Telecaster (pictured above) in impeccable condition, and a '58 ES-335, of which he comments: "I don't even know how to articulate what a special guitar it is. Most of the solos were played with that guitar – the solo on *Worried Mind*, the solos on *The Ides Of March* and *A Thousand Words*. It's those PAFs, that period of PAFs from about 1958 to 1961..."

A 1954 Fender lap steel rounded out the vintage class, but Myles' experience with the amps and compressor plug-ins that shaped the album has made him more creative in the longer term.

"I have to say that discovering this stuff was a big part of this record because I was so inspired by it. It was a whole new world of all these toys – things that sounded so good and were so stimulating for me." **[RL]**

***The Ides Of March* is out now on Napalm Records. Get the album, merch and more at: https://myleskennedy.com**

Photo of Myles Kennedy by Josh Saldate

Above left: Myles' latest solo album was demoed in lockdown
Above right: Myles' Vintage Deluxe with '52 Telecaster

ALSO THIS MONTH

FUNDRAISER FOR JASON BECKER

Photo by Paul Haggard

Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Metallica, Neal Schon and KISS are among the musicians who have donated guitars to raise money for Jason Becker's medical expenses via Reverb.com. Virtuoso musician Becker has been living with ALS for 30 years and currently is recovering from a major health scare. DragonForce guitarist Herman Li has helped to organise fundraising that saw Satriani's Ibanez 'Flame' JS1000 sell for £59,058.

GEORGE HARRISON ALTER EGO

Beatles collaborator Klaus Voorman has cast some doubt on George Harrison's reputation as the 'quiet' Beatle – at least in the early days. In an interview with *Uncut*, Voorman recalls meeting Harrison as a teenager in Hamburg during the autumn of 1960. "The first time I saw George he was only 17," says Voorman. "He was different to how he was later. He was a cocky little boy! This band he was with was completely unknown."

MANSOOR'S WRITING CHORE

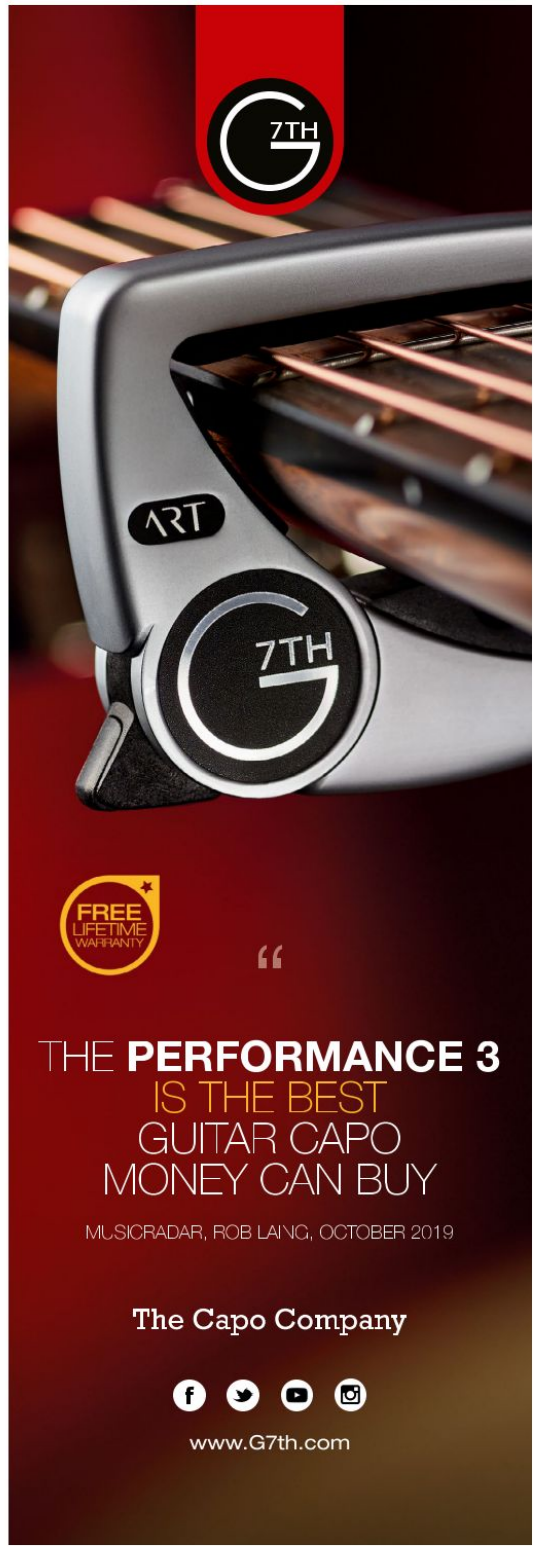
Periphery's Misha Mansoor has revealed he hates writing guitar solos. In an interview with the *No Guitar Is Safe* podcast, the musician was frank about that side of the creative process. "I don't particularly enjoy writing solos," he said. With two other guitarists in Periphery – Mark Holcomb and Jake Bowen – that shouldn't be a problem... but it is. "No-one wants the glory," Mansoor explained. "Everyone just wants someone else to have it, so the guys are gonna fight me. And they're going to be like, 'No, we've taken the solos on this one, so you need to do one on this one – we're not gonna do it!'"

NIGER'S MDOU MOCTAR GIVES BACK

Niger guitar star Mdou Moctar has explained why he's paying it forwards to support young musicians in his home country. "I think the key thing is just giving them gear to play with – just instruments, you know? Decent guitars," he told MusicRadar. "And the only way to get that in Niger is for someone who's travelling to bring it back. You can't even buy strings in the country. And we don't have music schools here. You need all these things."

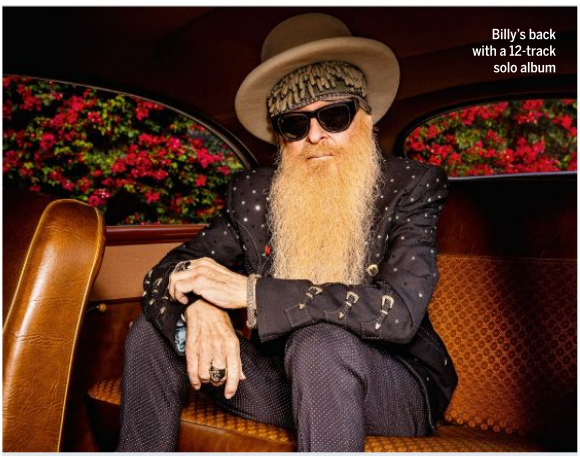
EVH'S SON KEEPS THE JOY ALIVE

As his debut album, *Mammoth WFH*, is released, Wolfgang Van Halen shared one overriding lesson he learned from his father Eddie: "Just to keep smiling and enjoy it," he told *Metal Hammer*. "The music is what matters. Being up there and playing is what it's all about."



Albums

The month's best guitar music – a hand-picked selection of the finest fretwork on wax



Billy's back with a 12-track solo album

PHOTO BY ROGER KISBY

Billy Gibbons
Hardware

Concord Records

8/10

ZZ musician releases AAA solo album

Blues-rock music just wouldn't be the same without ZZ Top and Billy Gibbons' guitar and vocals. Five decades is a long time, but this Texan legend is still going strong. *Hardware* is just what you expect from the bearded-dude-of-cool as his 12 songs feature thick guitar riffs, pounding drums and vocals that growl and soar. Opener, *My Lucky Card*, grabs from the get-go – drop D-tuned guitars set the scene, the drums swing hard and the vocals roar with fire. Great slide guitar solo, too. With Matt Sorum on drums and Austin Hanks sharing guitar duties, there is a modern spark to some of the songs: *More-More-More* sounds vibrant with its grunge production, but the steady groove and thick guitars are classic Gibbons.

As all guitar fans know, a great blues-rock album isn't complete without some swing, so tracks such as *Shuffle, Step & Slide* and the mysteriously smoky closer, *Desert High*, prove most appealing. *Vagabond Man* has quite a Hendrix vibe, from the chord progression to the clean-toned double-stop ornamentation. The twisting riff phrases of the catchy *West Coast Junkie* should perk up ears, as will the 50s rock 'n' roll drum beat that taps into our nostalgia. As for *I Was A Highway*, the guitars on this evoke the ZZ vibe with considerable aplomb. He may think he's bad, but he's still rock's principal sharp-dressed man to us! **[JS]**

Standout track: *I Was A Highway*
For fans of: ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers

Paul Gilbert
Werewolves Of Portland

The Players Club

9/10

Guitar virtuoso's 16th solo album simply howls

Gilbert played all the guitar/bass/drums/keyboard parts himself on these 10 new instrumentals. Its song-based approach to creating instrumentals works well and provides a lot of expression. While Paul is known as one of the most jaw-dropping 16th and sextuplet-based shredders around, his rich Marshall rock tone makes him a very appealing musician for all guitar fans. *Hello North Dakota!* is a great example: big ceremonial harmony guitar intro, vocal-like slide lead guitars, 70s funky wah riffing and a shredding blues rock solo. It's also worth appreciating his interest in good pop chord progressions, which he demonstrates on tracks such as *My Goodness* and *Meaningful*. Of course, if you want the shred it's there, but so are singing melodies, great rock grooves, vibrant chord progressions, versatile guitar chops and lots of musical variety. **[JS]**

Standout track: *My Goodness*
For fans of: Vai, Satch et al

Jackson Browne
Downhill From Everywhere

Inside Recordings

9/10

Songs of healing for a fractured world

One of best songwriters to emerge from the so-called Laurel Canyon scene of the 70s, Jackson Browne has lost none of his writing chops or insight into the human heart on this latest long-player. Painting intimate portraits of modern life upon the torn canvas of American society, Browne is on great form here. On *The Dreamer* he explores the struggles of migrants with compassion but admirable lack of sentimentality. Likewise, the title track explores how the world is spiralling faster towards an uncertain future of conflict and environmental collapse, while the band of commerce plays on. If it sounds preachy, it isn't: it's sincere, deftly observed and moving throughout – while guitarists Greg Leisz (Eric Clapton, Bill Frisell) and Val McCallum (Lucinda Williams, Sheryl Crow), handle six-string duties with superb flair and taste. Recommended. **[JD]**

Standout track: *Downhill From Everywhere*
For fans of: Joni Mitchell, David Crosby

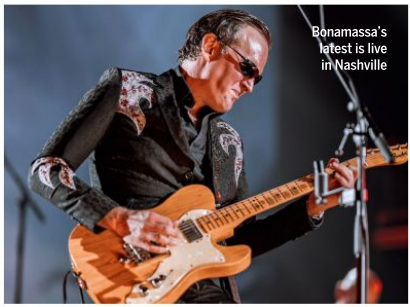

Bonamassa's latest is live in Nashville

PHOTO BY KIT WOOD

Joe Bonamassa
Now Serving: Royal Tea Live From The Ryman
Provogue/Mascot Group

8/10

Studio album live in lockdown

You might think it's a little strange to release what is essentially a live version of JoBo's *Royal Tea* album so soon after the studio album's debut. We did. But here's the thing; Joe was unable to tour the album because of the dreaded plague and so he went to the trouble of hiring the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville and playing a virtual gig so fans could hear the new material in a live format. And this is the result. All the tracks from the album are present with the exception of *Savannah*, and there are three extra songs thrown in for good measure. It's all available on DVD, too. Needless to say, Joe performs with his usual fire, making this package unmissable for the JoBo fanbase. We liked it a lot, too! **[DM]**

Standout track: *A New Day Yesterday*
For fans of: Clapton, Gary Moore

START ME UP

Dim Gray Flown
Grim Day Records

8/10

Haunting post-prog from Norway

Oslo-based trio Dim Gray's debut album grabs you from the first track. Originally a digital-only affair, the album is now receiving a well-deserved release on both vinyl and CD. The three-piece comprises Håkon Høiberg on guitars and vocals, Oskar Holldorff on keyboards and vocals and Tom Ian Klungland on drums and vocals – but there's no power-trio posturing here because the band's sound is augmented by strings and a variety of sundry instrumentation. In keeping with the group's prog credentials, *Flown* is a concept album and it's possible to hear references to Steven Wilson's Porcupine Tree with smatterings of Sigur Rós and even Fleet Foxes. It's an intriguing blend of well-written and superbly performed material that stays with you. **[DM]**

Standout track: *Again*
For fans of: Radiohead, Steven Wilson

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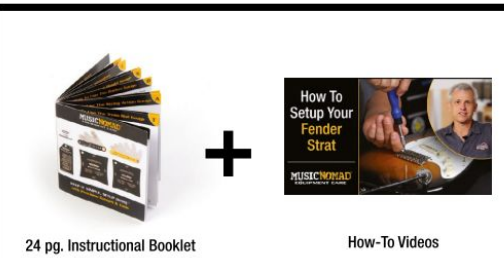

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THE LINEUP

Tones Behind The Tracks

Kirk Fletcher found inspiration for his latest long-player in a musical pilgrimage to the roots of the blues

Artist: Kirk Fletcher

Album: My Blues Pathway (Cleopatra Blues)

What was your route into the blues?

"My blues pathway sort of started in my father's church even before getting into playing blues, and really being a part of the church and soulful music. It was very bluesy in a way, and that's really the thing that has been consistent throughout my life: blues music in general and soulful music and things that are really moving. And then I got into playing blues. Along the way there were times when I doubted myself and maybe played other styles or got away from blues and everything like that. But all of those things were part of a pathway leading back to the things that I really love, which is blues and the things that excited me about blues in the first place. So that's really it.

"I had another focus originally because I felt like, 'Man, I want to record another record,' and at first I was sort of all over the place. I was like, 'Okay, well, I'll just record a bunch of songs that I've been writing and then put it together like that.' But I played at the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Helena, Arkansas, and there was something about that gig that really resonated with me... to just get to the things that I really love. So I kind of scrapped the idea of just recording a bunch of songs and I gained a new focus for the record. At the same time, I was listening to stuff like Robert Cray, The Fabulous Thunderbirds, as well as old records and soul records. So that really played a part in igniting that fire and in me wanting to do a straight blues record.

"My first two or three records were basically me playing guitar with other people singing. Now, after all these years, I came back around to thinking, 'Okay, well, I'm the singer now and I'm going to write songs and I'll do covers and I'll really be able to do a record with my vision more in place,' I guess."

Experimentation is key to Kirk's process: "Keep your mind open, keep your ears open, keep your heart open and try things," he says

Photo by Rick Gould

What gear did you rely on for the album?

"This record was basically all Stratocaster on everything. I used a couple of different Stratocasters, but the main one I used was sort of like a partscaster that I've had since right after high school. It's funny that I used it on my first record and I'm using it again all this time later [laughs]. Somehow it came back to that guitar and basically I used it on 'most every track.

"The Strat is sort of a home base for me... It's what I started on. When I came up I was listening to music by people like Jimmie Vaughan, Robert Cray, Buddy Guy, and all those guys played Strats. So for this record I just wanted a clean Fender sound. I wanted to try to be a little 'anti' where everybody else is going, you know? A lot of times, us modern guitar players will use a lot of pedals or we'll play humbuckers... but I just wanted to bring back that real clear Fender-y snappy kind of thing, just to be different.

"As far as amps go, I used a 'blackface' Deluxe Reverb for 'most everything except for some solos that I did in my friend Josh Smith's studio, where I used a tweed Bassman and a Morgan PR12, I believe. And throughout the record, I just used the one pedal – a Tube Screamer, basically – and that was pretty much it. I wanted to really try to be retro [laughs] and just play the Strat through the amp, turned up.

"I also used a Leslie cabinet, made by Benson amps out of Portland, on two tracks. I do feel that there is something to a real Leslie – it's like using a reverb tank. There are some really great reverb pedals... but, man,

Fletcher's blues pathway started with the soulful, music in his father's church. He says: "It was very bluesy in a way, and that's really the thing that has been consistent throughout my life"

Photo by Rick Gould

you get those tubes and everything in the reverb tank and it has a slightly different thing. It's the same thing with the Leslie: I felt it had a little bit more dimension to it, more depth to the sound. I really enjoyed that a lot."

What's your approach to getting great tones down on tape?

"That's a very interesting question because on this record I kinda relied more on my friend, the engineer Alan Hertz. But I would say my comfort zone is really, really some type of Tweed amp and a Shure SM57, and you just find a sweet spot. If it sounds a little weird, instead of adding another mic I'd rather just find a sweet spot with one mic.

"I don't know if it's psychological. I don't know if it's because I've done a lot of records like that, where I just stick an SM57 on it and move it around. If it sounds a little tinny I'll move it further away from the centre of the speaker... or if it's not cutting like I want, I'll just slightly move it. You can get so many different variations out of that. Once I find a spot where it sounds pleasing to my ears, I go with it. I'm in my element – maybe move it three inches back and I'm good. I'm happy having things really direct.

"I really like Tweed amps and Voxes and all of those kinds of amps, even a Pro Junior, you know? I like the way those amps record. And although I used a Strat on this record, actually, for a lot of stuff, a Telecaster is a better-recording guitar. Teles sit in the track and they have this presence on the track, but it isn't too much. And then you get that warm note on the Gibson-style guitars, especially on the high notes, which I really like; I like those kind of thicker tones on the high strings.

"But I don't know... if I can mic a Strat up with an SM57 and the Strat is turned up, and the engineer knows how to get that and doesn't get in the way... the Stratocaster is a crazy thing [laughs]."

What's your best studio recording tip?

"The thing is, there are no rules. Every time I go in the studio, I can maybe have a point from which I start something – but there are no rules. Whatever it takes to get to where you're trying to go, you should just do it. Just move that mic around to the place where you get a sound and don't get locked into one approach. I think that's so important. On a lot of iconic records that we all love, the producer and the musicians were experimenting: like Hendrix, Zeppelin and with all of these different records. I would say definitely experiment and try to keep your mind open, keep your ears open, keep your heart open and try things. And don't let somebody tell you that's wrong." **[JD]**

Kirk Fletcher's *My Blues Pathway* is available from www.kirkfletcherband.com

"Whatever it takes to get to where you're trying to go, just do it. Move that mic to the place where you get a sound – don't get locked into one approach"

SESSION DIARY

Ticket To Buy

Just like the rest of us, **Adam Goldsmith** is no stranger to the lure of GAS. But can new gear really improve your playing?

In order to minimise on porterage/cartage costs recently, I've been leaving different setups at a couple of different studios and venues. But, ironically, that's meant I've been on a bit of a gear-buying spree. However, there's a nagging voice in my head, which is kind of an echo of my long-suffering wife: do I really need *all* these guitars? I think I could have survived almost my entire career with essentially three guitars, a Fender Princeton, one or two decent drive pedals and a Line 6 HX Effects just in case. Over the years, I've spent tens of thousands of pounds on amp heads with switching systems, a million different drive pedals, and various multi-effects that offer you a choice of cup of tea or large gin and tonic during your Musicians' Union mandated 15-minute studio break.

"I shall apologise in advance for demonstrating galactic levels of hypocrisy in future columns by regaling you with tales of gear purchases"

Another studio, another setup – this time in the 'overflow' upstairs lounge of Abbey Road Studio One, with a Gibson ES-175 and Epiphone archtop for a session with Michael Bublé

This occurred to me during last week's album-recording sessions for Canadian superstar-singer Michael Bublé at Abbey Road Studio One. I came prepared with three amps, seven guitars and every pedal I own, especially knowing that Michael Landau was, at the same time, doing some sessions for Bublé in America – different tracks but presumably for the same album – so I'd need all the help I could get. I ended up using my Gibson ES-175, an Epiphone archtop and the 'house' amp, which was lying around at the time in the form of a totally stock Fender Deluxe '68 reissue.

For the most part, recording engineers and producers don't want your sound bathed in reverb, delay and assorted effects that they can't alter when it comes to the mix stage, so the Deluxe Reverb worked very well for this situation, adding just a touch of spring reverb and some tremolo from the amp for a 'Bond'-style guitar part. Oh, and a tuner.

In Excess

I can't help feeling we've been hustled a little into thinking we need more gear than we actually do – when what we really need is more practice, while learning how to properly manipulate sound using our hands and the controls at our immediate disposal on the guitar itself. For example, if the only guitar you have available to you during a recording session is a Stratocaster, it's possible to record all your clean rhythm parts in the normal fashion and then record your overdriven solo using the bridge pickup and judicious use of amp EQ. I often feel that the bridge pickup on a Strat needs a bit of toughening up for lead work, so, if I'm overdubbing a solo or fills, I might add plenty of mids and turn down the tone halfway on the guitar itself, in addition to any drive pedal.

Having just made the case for less gear... I'm now going to totally contradict myself and recommend an incredibly useful studio pedal for this purpose: the Boss GE-7 Graphic Equalizer pedal. If you wanted to perform this change of EQ for a solo on the fly, possibly for a live performance, this pedal is absolutely brilliant, and you can pick them up for peanuts secondhand. Add some mids, take the top-end off a smidge, add a bit more level, and you have the perfect 'solo boost' for a fraction of the price that certain boutique pedal builders will charge you.

So, after attempting to sell the concept of less gear to you, I shall apologise in advance for demonstrating galactic levels of hypocrisy in future columns by regaling you with tales of gear purchases, in the vain hope that they will improve my playing... while simultaneously trying to silence the voice of truth in the back of my mind that knows, in reality, only more practice will achieve this.

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Drive Time

This issue, *Guitarist*'s *Tone Lounge* meets *That Pedal Show* as **Neville Marten** hits the studio for some quality loud-time

Last week (as I write this) I spent a really interesting and enjoyable day over at the *That Pedal Show* headquarters in Somerset. As I had just reviewed the Murphy Lab Les Paul and ES-335 in this issue, Dave Mead suggested it would be a great idea to see how they sounded when played in anger. And why not try them alongside my own Tom Murphy Les Paul (which Mick Taylor of *That Pedal Show* has had for the past year), and Mick's blonde '58 Custom Shop 335?

"It had been ages since I'd sat in front of a trouser-flappingly loud setup, and I have to say it was an exhilarating experience"

I cleared it with Jamie and Mick rang me the day before the shoot to discuss what amp would be a good vehicle for all this noise. He suggested a dual rig, comprising a Marshall 1987x head and 4x12 cab, and a Victory V140 The Super Duchess sitting on a 2x12. He arranged a small 'board of pedals that would provide a sensible array of drives, reverbs and delays – the kind of 'classic' sounds at which these guitar models excel. It had been ages since I'd sat in front of a trouser-flappingly loud setup, and I have to say it was an exhilarating experience.

We had no intention of saying which of these instruments was 'better', because at that level it's daft to even think of it. Mick and I both expressed the opinion that *my* Les Paul sound is not necessarily *your* Les Paul sound. We all look for different things. He and I prefer the lighter-toned variants over the thick and middle-y ones that many other players prefer.

When it comes to ES-335s, it's a slightly different story. On my '63 Cherry Red Reissue I've kept the white nylon bridge saddles, as I prefer the softer tone they seem to impart; Mick likes the brighter metal ones. But his '58 and our review model feature nickel-plated brass ones, which sounded great, making me think I might try a swap.

Anyway, by the time you read this our little video (which Mick very kindly edited into a watchable programme) will be online. Head to the link above to find out more and let us know what you think. Remember, it wasn't a comparative review with a 'this one was better' conclusion, more an appreciation of the fine instruments we were privileged to be able to play.

Strat Chat

Mick told me it was exactly 25 years that we'd known each other, so suggested we film another video, where we discuss our long history and perhaps compare our respective Strats – his famous Sonic Blue one and my Custom Shop Faded Fiesta one. That was fun, too. Mick said mine sounded more "Stratty', but you'll have to wait until that's edited down from the hour and a half we spent nattering.

One slightly strange thing was that, despite having gigged with Mick on countless occasions in bands, duos and trios, and us knowing each other's styles inside out, I got a bit nervous. Not 'red light fever' as such, but a feeling that my confidence had suddenly evaporated – even while I was playing a lick I was thinking, 'Any second now I'm gonna screw this up,' which I inevitably did. He, on the other hand, is such a confident player that it was a pleasure to watch him make my Strat sound better than I ever did!

I will say, though, that I'm really pleased that, after years of trading in and trading up, and spending (wasting?) ridiculous amounts of money, I've arrived at the best Strat, Les Paul, ES-335 and Tele that I've ever owned. Including vintage. Probably. Possibly...

Anyway, do watch the videos, and please let us know what you think. I'll see you next month.

GAS OF THE MONTH

'Bird's The Word

What? Gibson Murphy Lab '63 Firebird V, Antique Frost Blue, Heavy Aged
Where seen? www.richtonemusic.co.uk **Price?** £7,499

If you read this column regularly you'll know I don't usually choose pricey gear. But checking out the Murphy Lab range I saw this fabulous-looking thing. In gorgeous 'heavy aged' Antique Frost Blue it's instant Johnny Winter (whether he ever played this colour or not). With all-mahogany, through-neck construction it features Alnico 5 Firebird mini-humbuckers, long Maestro Vibrola tailpiece, tune-o-matic bridge, and banjo tuners on a reverse headstock. Of course, you could buy a 2013 Mini Cooper Convertible for the same dosh (I checked), but I'll leave that up to you.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GIBSON

ERNIE BALL
STRAPS FOR EVERYONE

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Lending Support

Alex Bishop peeks behind the curtain to unveil the mysterious world of acoustic guitar bracing, and what makes it so important

When I'm discussing a potential guitar commission with a client, there are so many different aspects to cover, but a handful of topics are perennial. Naturally, a lot of players are keen to talk over which timbers we might be using. The shape and outward design of the guitar is key, too. But how often do players think about what's going on 'under the hood', so to speak? I have been working on a pair of guitar soundboards for clients, and (perhaps dauntingly) one of them has requested that I experiment a little bit, so this week I have been turning my attention to bracing patterns.

"The 'perfect' guitar keeps bracing lightweight and in all the right places, but provides enough strength for longterm reliability"

Soundboard bracing is the name given to the arrangement of struts on the underside of the top of the guitar. To understand the purpose of bracing, one must appreciate how delicate the top of a typical acoustic guitar is. Soundboards tend to be made of lightweight softwood measuring less than three millimetres thick, which is necessary for the top to vibrate freely. Given that the typical string tension on an acoustic guitar equates to a full-grown adult standing on top of it, without some supporting structure glued to it the soundboard would be crushed to bits before you could even finish tuning up. Too much bracing in the wrong place adds excessive mass, inhibiting the ability of the top to vibrate. Simply put, this could limit how good the guitar is going to sound.

At this point, the role of any pioneering guitar luthier is to consider exactly where these supporting struts should be placed, and how much of it there should be. The 'perfect' guitar is delicately balanced between the two extremes, keeping the bracing lightweight and in all the right places, without compromising tone but providing enough strength for longterm reliability. For my experimental soundboard I decided I should start by reconsidering some archetypal bracing patterns.

Luthiers of the past two centuries offered a plethora of solutions, including ladder bracing (struts arranged directly across the grain), fanned braces (radiating from the soundhole) and most famously X-bracing (primarily a pair of intersecting braces that span the whole top). Without doubt, each bracing pattern has a signature sound. I build steel-string guitars of both ladder- and X-braced flavours, and I daresay in a blindfold test I could confidently tell you which was which every time.

For this model – a nylon-strung guitar – I was asked to incorporate a lattice-braced design. Australian luthier Greg Smallman is credited with pioneering this design: an ultra-thin soundboard coupled with a grid-like structure of thin intersecting braces. Smallman guitars make use of modern materials, such as carbon-fibre reinforcement, but as a devoted disciple of all things dendrological, I'll be sticking with wood throughout. I decided to use this system on the area of the soundboard directly beneath the bridge only, in an effort to avoid unnecessarily stiffening parts of the top that might not need extra strength.

This week I've been putting these plans into reality by cutting up spruce from my timber store. I have an ideal selection of short, super-tight grained blocks that I decided to chop up into thin strips for the lattice-braced section. The tighter the grain, the thinner and lighter I can go with these braces without compromising strength. It's at this point that I've become aware that I leave the 'science' behind and instead begin to engage the artistic, intuitive side of my brain.

If people ask me about what I enjoy about guitar making, in part it's about the joy of operating at the boundary where art and science blend. There is an inherent unpredictability that comes from working with wood that means you just never know which guitars are going to be extra-special. While there isn't a magic formula for this, I'm feeling confident that the end result will be a highly responsive guitar, and – most importantly – one that holds up to the rigours of many generations' worth of music making.

Alex incorporates a lattice-braced design (left) and an X-braced design (right) into a pair of acoustic tops

PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

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The Birth of Jimi's Sound

Effects pioneer Roger Mayer tells **Jamie Dickson** that Hendrix's gear choices were shaped by budget as much as tone

There's a thriving market for gear that emulates the tones of famous guitarists – and few players' tones have been so widely emulated as that of Jimi Hendrix. Roger Mayer knows a bit more than the average pedal-maker about that subject, however. As a young electronics engineer with an interest in music, Roger struck up a friendship with Hendrix shortly after Jimi arrived in the UK in late 1966. This relationship saw Roger become Jimi's technical adviser on guitar tone and the nascent world of effects pedals.

"I met Jimi a few days after my 21st birthday in January 1967," Roger recalls. "I spoke to him straight after a gig and told him about a new effect I was working on, which was the Octavia, and he suggested I come down to a performance about two weeks later at the Chislehurst Caves in Kent near Bromley. That's where Jimi tried out the Octavia in the dressing room and he really liked it.

"He said, 'Come down to this club in Windsor, called the Ricky-Tick, and afterwards we're going to Olympic Sound Studios and we're going to do overdubs for a couple of new singles that I'm making, right?' One was *Purple Haze* and the other one was *Fire*. We became friends and the rest, as they say, is history."

"Jimi and I were both into science fiction, so we were interested in painting a sonic picture that would make your mind travel"

Fuzz Faces of the time were affordable – but it would take a batch of 20 to find the right sound for Jimi

The Octavia's otherworldly sound was unlike anything else available at that time and, unlike today, creating strikingly new sounds wasn't seen as a leftfield pursuit but the main goal of effects designers.

"We were both into science fiction," Roger recalls, "so we were interested in painting a sonic picture in your mind that would make your mind travel, you know? Much the same as, say, the music for Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and a few other classical pieces that really had a vast palette of tonal colour. So, yeah, we were into the esoteric side of breaking new ground and pioneering the new techniques that were available then," Roger says.

In contrast to the pure innovation that both he and Hendrix were interested in, Roger reveals that many of Jimi's now-canonical gear choices were driven by workaday considerations, not the least of which was saving money – at least in the early days of Jimi's all-too-brief career. Mods made to Jimi's guitars usually had to be applied on the fly.

"We didn't have that many guitars to play with in the beginning because Jimi was losing them or they were getting smashed up or stolen," Roger explains. "And we didn't have a lot of time because Jimi was playing gigs almost every night or he was recording, so we never really got that much time to delve into the guitars – there was a little bit in the beginning, but not much. One modification we did make was wiring the pickup directly to the output, bypassing the controls – because Jimi never used the tone controls, so there wasn't a lot of point in having them in the circuit, really."

Likewise, Jimi's now-famous association with the Fuzz Face was at least partly prompted by the pragmatic need to use a pedal that could be easily and cheaply replaced.

"Jimi needed a fuzz box that he didn't mind getting stolen or breaking," Roger tells us, "and that was the Fuzz Face, which at the time were pretty cheap to buy. But you had to buy a lot of them in order to find one or two that worked well because they were made down to a price, you know, and [the quality of the] parts varied a lot. So you could get 20 in and there would be one that became Jimi's favourite. The rest of them? As far as we were concerned, you might as well throw them in the bin."

Marshalls, too, were selected by Jimi for down-to-earth reasons rather than any special affinity he had with them – though he did return to them time and again, after trying different brands. "Marshall was the loudest, cheapest amplifier you could buy," Roger says.

"We used Sound City as well, in the studio, and Fender to get different tones – or combinations of the three. When we went to America for the first few concerts in early 1968, we had Fender amplifiers and Jimi didn't like them much, and then we had Sunn for a very

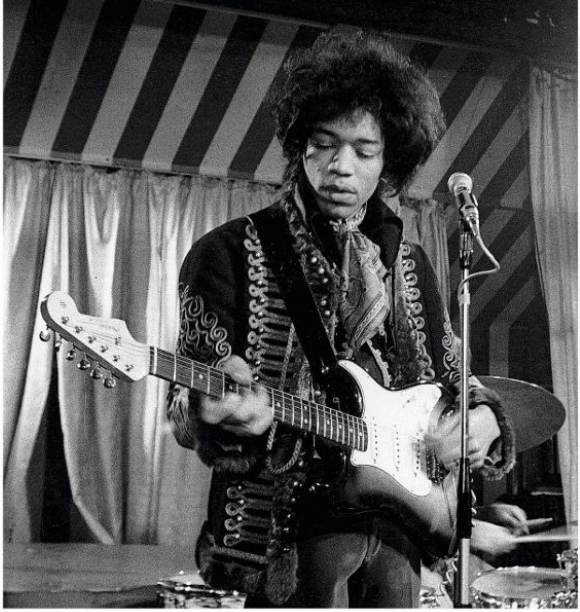


PHOTO BY BOB BAKER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

short period of time. Maybe it was about six months or something... I don't know, it wasn't a long time. And then we went back to Marshalls. But to keep them going was a nightmare, you know?"

Interestingly, Roger says he feels people tend to overestimate the importance of gear in shaping Jimi's sound. The aim, at least in the earliest phase of Jimi's solo career, was to choose equipment that performed well on a limited budget, leaving Jimi's mind free of niggling distractions so he could put in the best possible performance. Music was the goal, not GAS.

"We were going into the studio knowing that we'd got all the tools at our hands to get a great sound," Roger says. "But the most important thing was that both of us understood what we could do and then just executed it. It's like Lewis Hamilton rocking up to a grid and knowing that he's got great mechanics around him. After that, it really comes down to how Lewis feels as to whether he's going to do a fast lap."

Roger also cautions against regarding any piece of gear as being a magic bullet for achieving the incredible tones Hendrix got down on vinyl.

"The most misunderstood thing about Jimi's guitar sounds on albums is that what you're listening to is at least seven generations away from the Master, right?" he says. "And that means that you really have no idea what it took in the studio and in post-production and so forth to obtain that final tone that you listen to at home, on your loudspeakers, earphones, in the car, on the radio... whatever. Imagining that [reproducing it] would be as simple as just playing through one pedal and one amplifier... would be a complete misunderstanding."

Perhaps surprisingly for an engineer, Roger stresses that the most important element of achieving great tone is working on your playing and your personal connection with music itself – because everything else flows outward from that, bad or good.

"Music is a mission, not a competition," he reflects. "You're not supposed to compete with the people that you're supposed to be having fun with. People spend too much time obsessing over bits and pieces that make no difference. I mean, if you can really play, you're going to get the best out of even a mediocre guitar – people are still going to say, 'Wow, they can play.'"

Roger Mayer: "The most misunderstood thing about Jimi's guitar sounds on albums is that what you're listening to is at least seven generations away from the Master"

THREE TO GET READY

Jimi-themed effects for your 'board

Roger Mayer Purple Haze Octavia £1,440

It won't make you play like Hendrix, but recreations of the Octavia Jimi used on *Purple Haze* and other tracks don't (in fact, *can't*) get any more authentic than this – made by the man who built Jimi's and featuring a hand-wound ferrite transformer that Roger Mayer says is the crucial difference from the clones.

Dunlop Germanium Fuzz Face Mini £110

While it doesn't quite have the cachet of an original, the Germanium Fuzz Face Mini has a smaller footprint and more reliable componentry, making it a good choice for those who prefer the warmer sizzle of a germanium transistor fuzz plus that now-iconic enclosure.

Neo Instruments Mini Vent II Rotary Emulation Pedal £279

Lest we forget the sounds of late-career Jimi, we urge you to try this absolutely stonking little rotary speaker pedal, which emulates the celebrated Leslie 122 rotary effect and, to our ears, has the edge on almost anything out there for Dolly Dagger-esque vibes.

Lydian Moods

Chords that contain a #4th evoke a characteristic feel and are often heard in film soundtracks. **Richard Barrett** explains more

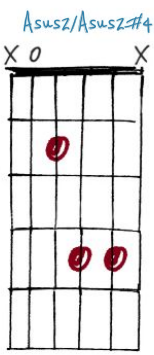
Certain chords can really evoke moods beyond the major equals happy, minor equals sad premise. If you've ever played or heard the Lydian mode, you'll know the fundamental difference that raising the fourth degree of the regular major scale by a semitone can make. By combining this into a chord, we can alter it in a similar way. This sort of harmony is often featured in film soundtracks and you will also hear it prominently in *The Simpsons* theme tune!

You may ask, how is this different from a ♭5? It's all about the context. Though a D# and E♭ are the same note enharmonically speaking, the ♭5 is more traditionally associated with the blues (where it often coexists with the unaltered 4th), plus heavy metal, half diminished or diminished chords. It's a completely different mood! The example chords all incorporate the tonality and mood of the Lydian mode in that they include a #4th and lean more towards major than minor, even though none have a 3rd. G

Right: Joe Satriani is certainly no stranger to Lydian harmony and has used it often in his music over the years

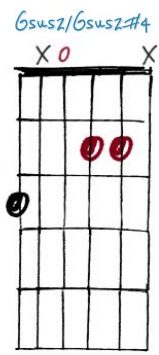
Example 1

This Asus2#4 bears a passing similarity to an Aaddd9 that can be played in the same position. However, this has the #4th on the B string where we'd normally have the major 3rd, so strictly speaking this is part of the 'sus' family.



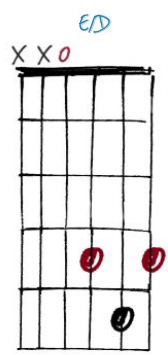
Example 2

This Gsus2#4 features the same 'stacking' of intervals as Example 1, but because it is played using a different shape on the fretboard it opens a completely different set of possibilities. Raising the C#/#11 to D gives us a Gsus2 – and if you barre the top three strings across at the 2nd fret behind that D, you have made a Gmaj7sus2.



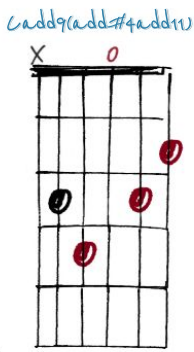
Example 3

Moving an open D major shape up two frets while keeping the open D root on the fourth string gives us this E/D chord. However, another way of viewing this could be D6 (sus2#4). Ultimately, you can hear that characteristic Lydian/#4, and that is more important than what we call it.



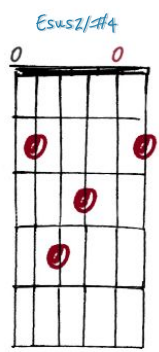
Example 4

This chord has that same Lydian feel, but is a tricky one to describe in theoretical terms. Taking this as an altered C major chord, we have (from low to high): root, #4th, 5th, 9th, #11th. The D and F# on the top could also be (correctly) described as a sus2 and #4, but due to the complexity and widespread intervals, Cadd9 (add#4 add#11) is most accurate.



Example 5

Once again, the name can appear daunting at first. This Esus2/#4 also contains the unaltered 5th (B), with a further F# on the first string. We're considering that as another sus2, rather than looking to add to this chord's already lengthy name. A bit of a twist for the fretting hand, but well worth the effort.



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Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor.
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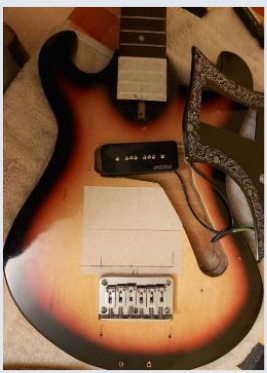
STAR LETTER

KAY TO SUCCESS



Late last year I was clearing my late mum's house when I came across my first guitar. It's a cheap Kay, which my parents bought for me secondhand for about £16 in 1976. I never really got on with it, although it inspired me to set up my first band in 1977. I didn't know what to do with my old guitar, so I took it home and decided to test it out.

The action was still poor and it was difficult to keep in tune. The pickup also had a fault, so I decided to pimp it up with a few adjustments and modifications. I searched online and bought some hardware from Northwest Guitars, including a new set of strings, Fender-style inline tuners, a Wilkinson soapbar pickup and a new Stratocaster-style hardtail bridge. I also had a go at shimming the neck and had to repair the scratchplate, as it had become brittle and broken at the jack socket. Believe it or not, I used a spare piece of rectangular roof guttering to replace the broken piece of the scratchplate!

It now plays a lot better and I recorded an instrumental track with it, which I'm quite proud of. It hangs on the wall of my office and I play it most days. Moral of the story: have a go at getting the best from your guitar!

Chris Marlow, via email

Congratulations for resurrecting a guitar rather than just taking it to the tip – and we bet you learned a few things along the way, too. Your finished creation is very on trend at the moment, with Teisco, Harmony and other quirky brands from the 60s and 70s gaining popularity for their retro looks and original sounds. Even better, you didn't just consign it to the cupboard as a curio, you went out and made some music with it. Bravo, sir – we wish you much happy music-making with it. To reward your initiative, you win this month's Star Letter prize of a brilliant Korg tuner.

KORG

Each issue's Star Letter wins a Korg Pitchblack Custom – a smart pedal tuner with ultra-high +/-0.1 precision for sharp visibility and pinpoint accuracy right at your feet.
www.korg.co.uk

STORAGE SOLUTIONS

During lockdown I organised a new music room and came across some rails originally sold for hanging equipment in kitchens. However, they can just as easily be used for cables, headphones, straps and lots of other paraphernalia we seem to acquire [see pic, right]. I also use tool bags for storing stands and leads, etc, because many instrument suppliers seemed to ignore the need for them. Just thought I'd share!

David Holt, via email

Ingenious idea, David. When we look at the websites of studio gear suppliers, it's tempting to think the only 'proper' gear for a music room must and shall be purpose-designed for music. But the fact is you can probably find effective solutions for less money by using a bit of lateral thinking, as you have. Have any other readers found any good music-making hacks at their local department store or DIY centre? If so, send them in and we'll share the best.

ART & SOUL

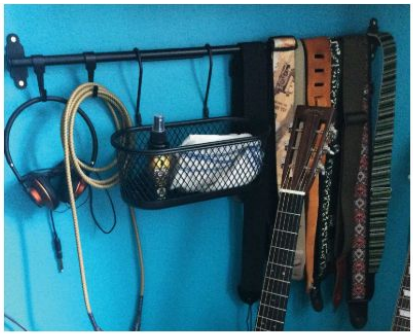
I was inspired by the Go West letter (Feedback, issue 465) where a Telecaster had been turned into a stunning work of art. The idea not only made me think I could have a unique guitar, but it also solved a problem. I had bought a 2019 Mexican Player model at a reduced price due to it being damaged in transit. It played perfectly but had a dent/gouge under the volume and tone control panel.

I was struggling for a solution until my eyes were opened to artwork possibly being the answer. My local guitar guru, Keith Dawson, whose Huddersfield shop has been the mainstay of my gear purchasing for years, has a couple of local artists who customise guitars. I chose the option of an abstract finish and I am delighted with the results [see pic, far right].

Perhaps I wouldn't have risked a mint-condition model, but, in the circumstances, it proved to be a very positive decision. And while it may be a Marmite scenario, I love the fact I have a one-off that no-one will ever match.

Pete Barrow, via email

Nice one, Pete – not only have you given a dinged guitar a new lease of life, you've employed some local artists from your hometown guitar shop to realise your dream. How's that for locally sourced? We think it looks very cool – and if it pushes your buttons, who cares if the look is the wrong side of the 'Marmite' equation for some people. The Les Paul Standard wasn't universally accepted when it was launched – and look at it now...



Left: David Holt gets creative with the storage solutions
Right: Pete Barrow updated his damaged 2019 Tele with a mighty fine spray job from a local artist

CREAM OF THE CROP?

Am I the only reader who would definitely not buy a guitar that looked as if some disrespectful toad had dragged it carelessly around a world tour in a beat-up VW campervan? Especially if it's an instrument that cost considerably more than a brand-new, pristine model? Of course, I understand how classic instruments made a couple of hundred years ago by Stradivari or Guarneri have acquired astronomical values, but these are the genuine articles, not a carefully battered example of a modern product.

In 2005, during a holiday to the US, my wife and I came across an outlet of Guitar Center in Nashville. An excited employee noticed our accents and insisted on showing us their single Cherry Red Gibson ES-335 copy of an instrument Eric Clapton had owned and played in Cream. Evidently, the company had won at auction the actual guitar Clapton had owned and played, paying $847,000 for the privilege. Guitar Center then commissioned 250 replicas, one of which was to go on sale at each of the company's 150 stores at a price of $12,000. A considerable part of the total profit was donated to Clapton's Crossroads charity.

The manager of the Nashville outlet insisted I have my photo taken with his copy of the Cream ES-335 guitar, showing the carefully reproduced damage to the back. It happens that I own a Gibson ES-335 Pro, bought at Sam Ash in New York. The headstock doesn't carry a facsimile of a Hare Krishna sticker given to Clapton by George Harrison, nor does the hard case carry a stencilled 'CREAM' on the top, but then mine only cost about £600 including the tax and duty I paid. It was played once on television by Richard Stilgoe, but otherwise has no 'fascinating' history...

The 18th century price of an original Guarneri violin is unrecorded. I noticed that number 212 of the 250 copies of the 'Cream' Gibson ES-335 was offered for sale recently for a little less than £12,000, so while the value of my investment still trails a Guarneri, I think I'm still slightly ahead of the 250 owners of the Clapton copies!
Philip Howells, via email

Thanks for your perspectives, Phil. The aged versus non-aged guitar debate continues to polarise players for sure. On some levels, it's a bit baffling that it has such legs as a bone of contention. After all, there are plenty of brand-new shiny guitars to choose from if you don't like the aged thing – as you yourself found with your ES-335 Pro, a great guitar that sounds like it has served you very well indeed for a modest outlay.

The main thrust of your point seems to be that aged replica guitars end up being priced as highly as some pretty decent vintage guitars – despite being essentially new guitars that only look old. For sure, the marketing departments of the various big makers who do this kind of thing know what they're doing. But then again, we don't feel the price is *completely* divorced from reality. A really good Custom Shop Les Paul or 335 is already going to be north of £4k – add more complex ageing and the price rises further, as it must, because more hours have gone into the making. Make the production run limited and add loads of fiddly aged decals, case candy and so on and it goes up more, again partly because of the fine work and partly because of the cachet of a famous name and limited production.

To be fair, we've been surprised by just how much aged Custom Shop replicas of, say, Jimmy Page's Number One Les Paul have gone up. Clearly, there's a strong and growing market for them. But if that leaves relative bargains to be had for the rest of us, among the non-aged guitars out there, then so be it...

REQUESTS...

Want to see something in the mag? Tell us at guitarist@futurenet.com

Reader Dave Leask would like to see the variety of takes on the Tele
For reasons beyond my control I've managed to slip behind in reading my favourite mag, so I've just read the 75th Anniversary Telecaster article in issue 471. The opening few sentences brought me to the realisation that the Telecaster really is the Land Rover of electric guitars. I recently joined a Facebook group for amateur guitar builders and found that the Tele is the most popular choice for builders. When you think of all the different models, configurations and special editions that Fender alone has released, I think this would make a great feature as part of the Tele's 75th year celebrations. It would be really interesting to see all the different takes, from its original form to more extreme or tailored models.
Dave Leask, via email

Cool idea, Dave – we did a big round-up of all the landmark models of Tele not so very long ago, but this year would be a perfect opportunity to look at some of the lesser-known variants on the Tele theme. As you say, the Tele has been adapted to supply everything from acoustic tone to heavy metal. In fact, this mag's editor has fond memories of visiting Morlings, his main local guitar shop in Lowestoft (the store is now sadly closed for good), and eyeing the Fender Heavy Metal Telecaster – complete with Floyd Rose, f-hole and scorching humbucker at the bridge no less – with envious wonder. The funny thing was, the chap who used to sit behind the till always picked this guitar to noodle on... and played jazz on it!

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com

Bradley Kincaid
Down Deep

Gwenifer Raymond

Welsh-born guitarist Gwenifer Raymond recently released her second album, *Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain*, recorded during lockdown. With that challenge firmly out of the way, she speaks to us about her love of American primitive guitar, the magic of the blues, and how she has evolved as a player in her own right

Words Glenn Kimpton

Gwenifer Raymond's rich, powerful solo acoustic instrumental music first took flight with her debut album, *You Never Were Much Of A Dancer*. A 13-song flurry of acoustic guitar and banjo compositions – very much in the vein of the big hitters of American primitive, John Fahey and Jack Rose – the set was a riveting demonstration of her often-blistering playing. For Gwenifer's second release, *Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain*, she has composed music that feels more personal and confident. Longer pieces unfold in complex forms and worry less about typical structure.

"The first album was the result of spending years playing in [American primitive] style and gathering songs," she says. "Some of the riffs went back to when I was learning. With the second album, I'd been playing this music for a long time and at lots of shows, so by that point my voice had begun to come out more naturally. Before, I felt like I was trying to do this American primitive music, but with this one I was like, 'I'm all right with whatever comes out.'"

Solo acoustic music is solitary by nature, but the pandemic put paid to Gwenifer's plans to record the second album in a studio, forcing her to take a homemade approach.

"I had the whole thing ready to record in the studio right as lockdown happened," she says. "So, instead, I dropped a couple of bucks on some mics – it was money I would've spent on studio time – and I recorded it in my bedroom. I intended to take my time over it, but I ended up doing a song or two an evening, in between waiting for the upstairs neighbour's washing machine [to finish]. I recorded it all over a week and mixed it the following week."

Gwenifer's playing is a sometimes foreboding mix, incorporating American primitive fingerstyle, 1930s US blues, plus her formative punk leanings: "I don't like 'pretty' guitar," she says

PHOTO BY JINNWOOD

SOPHISTICATED SIMPLICITY

Although Gwenifer doesn't read music ("I'm a very impatient person...") and tends to remember her tunes instead of writing them down, *Strange Lights...* remains complex and finely nuanced, with more sophistication over her debut.

"This one feels more compositional to me," she says. "It's a bit like classical music in that it's got these ideas of movements instead of a verse-chorus-verse-chorus structure. It has a section that has a certain vibe, which evolves into something else and then returns to it again. I've heard that more in classical and avant-garde stuff rather than folk music. It makes sense because I was listening to a lot of Erik Satie and Moondog, and all that kind of jam, when I was writing some of the songs. I also think a lot of the style-change came from a live-scoring gig that I did for silent movies, where I was assigned *The Red Spectre*, a French film from around 1907. So I wrote a track for it, which then turned into a single called *The Three Deaths Of Red Spectre*. And because it was for a movie it has a narrative to it where the mood changes, and I really liked that so I started doing that more. I still like a good riff, though.

"I started out in punk and grunge bands when I was a teenager," Gwenifer says of her rockier roots. "I then got into blues music by way of influences I'd discovered, the most famous one being Nirvana doing Lead Belly on *Unplugged*. But there was Dylan and The Velvet Underground, too, and I discovered that pre-war blues was an influence on those players, so I started getting these cheap blues CDs. They were about a fiver in HMV, so I bought loads of them and got into guys like Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James and Blind Boy Fuller. I loved how they could make the guitar sound as if there was more than one playing.

"So I started teaching myself that [style of playing] and ended up finding a blues teacher in Cardiff who was a really good alternating thumb player. He taught me open tunings as well and, because I'm the worst singer in the world, I started composing these more complex pieces without vocals."

•

"I started getting these cheap blues CDs and got into guys like Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James and Blind Boy Fuller"

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PAST INFLUENCES

Gwenifer's teacher went on to play her a record by John Fahey, which led to another turning point in her career, when she realised there were people making this music and that it was being heard. There is no denying Fahey's genius and his trail-blazing approach to solo acoustic guitar music, and the genre is now bursting with new, emerging players, as well as stalwarts such as Glenn Jones in the US and our own crop of talent here in the UK, which includes Gwenifer, Nick Jonah Davis, C Joynes and Toby Hay.

"I think it's cool that people are so interested in it now, because the more people you have doing stuff, the more likely it is that something interesting will come out of it," Gwenifer says. "I'm not really into that whole pastoral guitar thing, though. I don't like 'pretty' guitar, but that has also been a thing in American primitive music, that whole 'sounds like a lovely green meadow with some cows in it' thing.

"There are some players coming through now, though, that are getting into this weird angular, quite uncomfortable sound. People going goth, basically, which I'm always onboard with. What I don't like is self-indulgent guitar and I think that comes from my punk roots. It annoys me when it's all 'look what I can do' and the person that loves it the most is the person themselves.

TALES OF TUNINGS

Gwenifer explains how she gets her sound

When Gwenifer began lessons in alternating thumb fingerstyle with her specialist tutor, she also started to explore the riches of alternate tunings, with a few becoming integral to her sound. "My default tuning these days is probably C minor," she tells us. "C G C G C E♭. It's always the minor ones that I like, so I also go to G minor [D G D G B♭ D] and D minor [DADFAD]. Very occasionally I'll use a major tuning if I feel like it, but most of the time I'm in minor. They're spooky. They just have that sound, that sympathetic drone that comes with them and gives them a spooky vibe that I like. That with a bit of discord – can't beat it. I'm a big folk horror fan, too, I watch way too many horror films!"

PHOTO BY JINN WOO

PHOTO BY ANNWOO

"I do like a bit of noise, but to me it's also that 'loud-quiet-loud' thing, which is the easiest way to assert a mood change"

To me, most of the time, paring things down to their essentials is what turns it into a piece of art."

Gwenifer's picking style can be almost aggressively frenetic at times, her fingers blurring as she whips through her instrumental narratives. We talk about a Michael Chapman support slot at a venue in Bristol a few years back, where her finger-picks kept flying from her hand: "That was a rough gig – it was the hottest place on Earth!" she laughs.

"I do like a bit of noise," she continues, "but to me it's also that 'loud-quiet-loud' thing, which is the easiest way to assert a mood change. On record it's different, but playing live it's almost like theatrics – and it's exciting. I can't help it, I just get taken away with it and it can be hard to rein it in sometimes. There might also be some pent-up aggression there, though, which is probably why I played in punk bands when I was a kid."

GO-TO GUITARS

When it comes to favoured acoustic guitars, one instrument sits at the top of the pile for Gwenifer: "My go-to is my Waterloo WL-14L. I recorded the whole album on this and it's my live guitar as well. I got it because I was travelling around and touring and playing vintage guitars and just being terrified they were going to be smashed into a thousand pieces. Someone recommended Waterloo to me for that vintage sound that they have, without actually being vintage."

Waterloo was a concept of the late Bill Collings, who envisaged a guitar with all the charm of an old Kalamazoo but built at the Collings factory in Texas to the same high standard as Collings guitars, albeit with a simpler spec and a lower price.

"It has such a solid build," Gwenifer says. "My old Houn' Dog [a Bradley Kincaid parlour model, built by Silvertone in the 1930s], which I recorded the first album on, its neck is so fucked that it's unplayable above the 5th fret. I knew it was time for a modern guitar and I had a Gibson for a while, which was okay, but didn't quite fill the hole, so then I managed to find this Waterloo for a great price and it's spot on. I was really lucky because I bought it blind, having only heard it and not played it."

Another gem in Gwenifer's collection is a guitar gifted to her at 2018's The Thousand Incarnations Of The Rose Festival in Takoma Park, Maryland.

"[Guitarist and composer] Henry Kaiser got in contact with Tompkins Square [Gwenifer's record label] and said he had a guitar he wanted to give to me. I'd never spoken to him before, so I was quite surprised, but of course I said, 'All right, I will accept a guitar.' So when I got to the festival, it was there waiting for me. It's amazing sounding," says Gwenifer of the beautifully diminutive 1890 Joseph Bohmann parlour model. "I was gigging it for a while, but I've stopped now because I'm scared of it. It's got this crazy sick bass sound to it. I recorded *The Three Deaths Of Red Spectre* on that guitar. It's got this big wide arse and a slightly rounded back, too, which makes it sound amazing.

"So yeah," she laughs. "Henry Kaiser is a pretty stand-up guy!" G

Gwenifer Raymond's second album, *Strange Lights Over Garth Mountain*, is out now on Tompkins Square
www.gweniferraymond.com

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IDA MAE

We take a look at the tones of the husband-and-wife duo's new sophomore album, *Click Click Domino*, track by track, with guitar sensation Chris Turpin

Words Rod Brakes **Photography** Olly Curtis & Neil Godwin

Ida Mae are currently on home turf having relocated from the US back to Blighty. But slide guitar phenomenon Chris Turpin and multi-instrumentalist Stephanie Jean stand poised to hit the road again. The duo had chalked up thousands of miles on tour supporting the likes of Willie Nelson & Alison Krauss, Greta Van Fleet and Marcus King, but the pandemic suddenly forced them to isolate at their Nashville home-from-home where they immediately set about writing and recording Ida Mae's new album, *Click Click Domino*.

"Everything except the acoustic drums, bass and strings was recorded at our place in Nashville," Chris tells us. "Ethan Johns tracked the drums in his studio, and our bass player, Nick Pini, also tracked his parts separately. It's a proper lockdown record!"

Ida Mae's connection with famed producer/musician Ethan Johns (whose studio credits include Paul McCartney, Kings Of Leon and Laura Marling) began with their first record, 2019's critically acclaimed *Chasing Lights*. As news of the duo's spellbinding live shows and Chris's superlative British folk cum Delta blues-inspired guitar playing quickly spread, the pair were invited to Ethan's studio to discuss their new project. Finding plenty of common ground in their creative approach to making music, they hit it off immediately. Steph, a talented multi-instrumentalist, has also sporadically played keys in Ethan's band Black Eyed Dogs, and by way of Ethan's long-established studio relationship with Tom Jones was recently spotted duetting on piano with the Welsh singing legend for a string of prime-time TV shows on both sides of the Atlantic.

With one foot in America and the other in England, Ida Mae certainly have some miles under their belt, but that's nothing new for the pair who first met at university in the late Noughties while studying music. Armed with a demo recorded by PJ Harvey producer John Parish, they scored their first record deal together as alt-blues rockers Kill It Kid, and although the band defuncted in 2015, Chris and Steph haven't stopped playing live together since.

"With Ida Mae, we wanted to put the emphasis on our voices and our playing, without all the pomp and circumstance of a rock band," states Chris. "When Steph and I started this, we wanted to strip everything to the bare bones, keeping it as raw and honest as possible."

1. Road To Avalon

"*Road To Avalon* was nearly the title of the album. This song starts off with a banjolele and kalimba intro. The kalimba is going through the Zoom [MS-50G] pedal using a clip mic with a shit ton of reverb. There's also a cool Mellotron sound. The idea was to offset early American instruments with synthetic tones. We've also got some Native American drums on the album and other early instruments like the mandolinetto. We were so inspired by the American landscape after travelling across the US for a few years – we toured over 40 states and covered hundreds of thousands of miles. To me, this track sounds like the feeling of those long, weary and sometimes breathtakingly beautiful drives."

2. Click Click Domino

"*Click Click Domino* is the title track and was recorded using my Gretsch [G6128T-53] Vintage Select '53 Duo Jet with flat-wounds. I AB'd it with an original '55 and '56 and it sounded virtually identical. I also use an early 60s blonde Silvertone Speed Demon a lot on the record, which I string up with flat-wounds. A lot of the

Brit musicians Chris Turpin and Stephanie Jean recorded the majority of instruments for *Click Click Domino* themselves at their home in Nashville

"We were so inspired by the American landscape after travelling [on tour] for a few years. 'Road To Avalon' sounds like the feeling of those long, weary and breathtakingly beautiful drives"

CHRIS TURPIN

1. Ida Mae's Chris Turpin warming up the stage for Greta Van Fleet on their 2019 US tour
2. Gretsch G6128T-53 Vintage Select '53 Duo Jet and early 70s silver-panel Fender Vibro Champ
3. Fender American Professional Telecaster in Candy Apple Red and early 60s Magnatone model 410 amplifier
4. Gretsch G6120T-55 Vintage Select Edition '55 Chet Atkins and 1960 Tweed Fender Champ
5. This early 60s blonde Silvertone model 1445 was built by Kay and closely resembles the company's triple 'speed bump' pickup Speed Demon model. It was christened 'Maple' one evening when Ida Mae asked their audience members what Chris's new guitar should be named

quintessential early rock 'n' guitar sounds I love, like the Howlin' Wolf and Bo Diddley Chess recordings, feature [DeArmond] pickups and flat-wound strings. So I thought I should try using flat-wounds and see how they feel. I think Dynasonics are some of the best pickups ever made and the combination with flat-wound strings is magical. Marcus King and I duel solos on this track."

3. Line On The Page

"I used my single-cone National 12-string Style O resonator for this one. Years ago, I saw a picture of a [German] silver Style O from the 1930s and I asked National if they could make me a 12-string version. It has a raw brass body, and you'd think it would sound brash, but it's actually a very warm sound. They etched straight onto the brass, which is pretty cool. Through an amp it reminds me of a church organ. It sounds huge. It feels like the sound is coming up from the floor. I prefer single-cone resonators. Tri-cones sound fantastic and have a more vocal quality, but they're heavier. I think single-cones have just as much sustain and they generally have a more dynamic sound."

4. Raining For You

"*Raining For You* also features my National 12-string quite heavily, which I tune to open D (D A D F# A D), otherwise known as Vestapol tuning. There are some nice strings and double bass by Nick Pini on this track, and some cool Roland Juno synth parts. I grew up listening to British rock 'n' roll and then went back to country blues players like Reverend Gary Davis and Blind Willie McTell. At the same time, I was listening to Bert Jansch, John Renbourn and Davey Graham, and I realised they were kind of all doing the same thing – using a thumbed bass pattern up and down across strings. That's what I'm doing on this track. But I'm trying to take it all somewhere new while keeping it simple."

5. Little Liars

"This is one of our favourites. It was partly inspired by JJ Cale's early records and John Martyn's later

PHOTO BY JEFF HAHNE/GETTY IMAGES

> *"We learned quickly that the narrative of unedited vocals often creates greater emotional impact"*

records. It combines the sound of a 60s Ace Tone drum machine and an old Oscar Schmidt mandolinetto, which we tuned down one-and-a-half steps. We thought it would be cool to combine the sound of early American instruments with a drum machine and a synth. This was actually the demo, but we liked it so much we kept most of it and just added a few things. You can hear the Roland Juno synth come in just before Steph's vocals start. We tried to make the Juno arpeggiator and the mandolinetto riff go in opposite directions. The slide guitar you can hear is my Silvertone Speed Demon."

6. Deep River

"I used my old Waialae acoustic to track this one. It sounds really crusty mic'd up here, but live you get so much detail out of the LR Baggs M1 Active pickup. You can also hear the banjolele again on this track. This has another one of Marcus King's insane solos on it, which he did in one pass. He was using my Duo Jet on the bridge pickup, the Z.Vex Box Of Rock, and the 1960 Tweed Champ. I think it's one of the coolest tones ever. He was like, 'Now *this* is a fucking tone,' and I was like, 'Yeah. It *is* a fucking tone." [Laughs] But it was mainly coming out of his fingers. I think he's one of the best guitar players around."

7. Heartworn Traders

"I used a different National resonator on this track – one with a 14-fret neck and a steel body, which sounds brighter than brass. Again, we're taking an instrument out of context, this time by using a resonator with a string quartet. It's very simple – there aren't many other tones. That resonator records really well with lots of sparkling high-end without it being too splat-y or harsh. The piano is all live, as are the vocals. We kept the vocals that are slightly out of tune, so people know it's real. I think that's quite important. We learned quickly from Ethan Johns when he produced our first album that the narrative of an unedited vocal take often creates greater emotional impact."

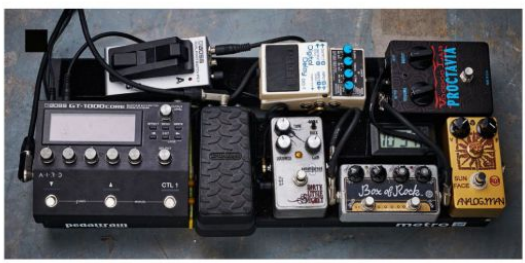
8. Calico Coming Down

"*Calico Coming Down* is another one of our favourites and was recorded on the little ratty Waialae acoustic. I like the sound, although to be honest, I would much rather have recorded it on a different acoustic. But it was all I had lying around at the time. The guitar and vocals were cut together on the second take and everything else was added afterwards. Which is nuts because it sounds like Ethan is in the room with us playing drums. It's strange – I think us not being in the same room gives it a certain tentative quality. It's in a really cool tuning... but it's a secret because I've only written this one song in it and I want to do more!"

6. Chris Turpin's guitar pedalboard (clockwise from bottom left): Boss GT-1000Core, Boss FS-7 Dual Footswitch, Boss DD-7 Digital Delay, Voodoo Lab Proctavia, Analog Man Sun Face, Z.Vex Box Of Rock, Catalinbread Dirty Little Secret, and Dunlop expression pedal

7. According to Chris, the Boss CH-1 Super Chorus "adds a third dimension to the 12-string resonator and sounds almost like a photocell vibrato"

8. Stephanie Jean's keys pedalboard (from left to right): Boss RV-6 Reverb, Behringer UV300 Ultra Vibrato (now replaced with Boss VB-2W Vibrato), Zoom MS-50G, Boss BD-2 Blues Driver (with Analog Man RE-J mod), and Boss LS-2 Line Selector



9. Learn To Love You Better

"This sounds like the poppiest tune on the record to me. I wrote this on the mandolinetto and put the sound through a Universal Audio Marshall amp-style plug-in, which you can hear near the end particularly. This is the first song that came out of that little thing. It also features a completely dry Telecaster going into the Magnatone amp for the electric stuff – my Candy Apple Red American Pro Tele. I was aiming for a kind of Stones/Keith Richards thing, and I was going for that kind of flat two-dimensional Faces guitar tone. For the rhythm we used a 1970s Korg SR-120 drum machine. In fact, there were no acoustic drums recorded for this song; the rhythms are all drum machines."

10. Long Gone & Heartworn

"This rhythm guitar sound is the Silvertone Speed Demon into the Magnatone and silverface Champ. I wanted it to sound like Wilco Johnson's proto-punk Dr Feelgood guitar tone – like mod meets Chess Records. You'll hear a sample at the beginning of a conversation I overheard when we were out on the road where these two girls are talking about buying a glow-in-the-dark Elvis. Anyway, it turned out the record playing in the background is in the same key as this song. Jake [Kiszka] from Greta Van Fleet wanted to orchestrate the solos with me on this track. He had his down on the second take and, like Marcus King, he picked the Duo Jet going into the Tweed Champ."

9. "It's a proper lockdown record!" says Chris. And yet the album calls upon the thousands of miles the band spent on the road in the US for inspiration, with a mash-up of vintage and electronic sounds

"We thought it would be cool to combine the sound of early American instruments with a drum machine and a synth"

11. Mountain Lion Blues

"We changed up the mics for this because we couldn't get it right to begin with. We have some old Stax-style Scully preamps, and we ran all the mics through those. I was using the Silvertone tuned down to open F and I got a really cool sound using the silverface Champ and Magnatone amps with an Analog Man Astro Tone Fuzz. I was trying to make it sound like a mountain lion. It's maybe the coolest electric guitar tone on the album. The Astro Tone is such a great pedal; it's fuzzy, but it's got snap and sizzle and cuts through a mix. The big boomy kick drum sound is a 40-inch Slingerland we took out on the Greta tour with us."

12. Sing A Hallelujah

"I used my Gretsch Vintage Select 6120 tuned to D standard straight into the 1960 Tweed Champ for this. I did it totally dry – it's a very pure Gretsch Dynasonic tone – and the reverb was added during mixing. Nick used a Fender VI for the bass, and there are some nice atmospheric Juno synth pads in the mix. Dynasonics retain a lot of top-end clarity and have that bell-like chime. They seem to sing more than most other larger-style single coils like P-90s. But they're also loud, and the way the bottom-end breaks up, especially with a Gretsch, is really cool. It makes for an incredibly dynamic pickup. You can go from completely clean to dirty Tweed-style overdrive with the right amp."

13. Has My Midnight Begun

"We used the Korg SR-120 again for rhythms on this track, and for the percussion in the chorus we used a tin of coffee beans as a shaker. I played the 12-string National and DI'd it via a Boss CH-1 Super Chorus, which enhances the guitar's natural chorusing in a really cool way. The banjolele features here again, this time going through an Electro-Harmonix Russian Big Muff. It's a weird clanky tone. We also used the Shimmer mode on a Boss RV-6 Reverb with a Casio synth to create a lush, spacey sound. Near the end there are some big reverb-y Gretsch 6120 chords, and the song ends with the resonator feeding back. I'm really proud of this one."

Ida Mae's latest album, *Click Click Domino*, is available now on Vow Road/Thirty Tigers

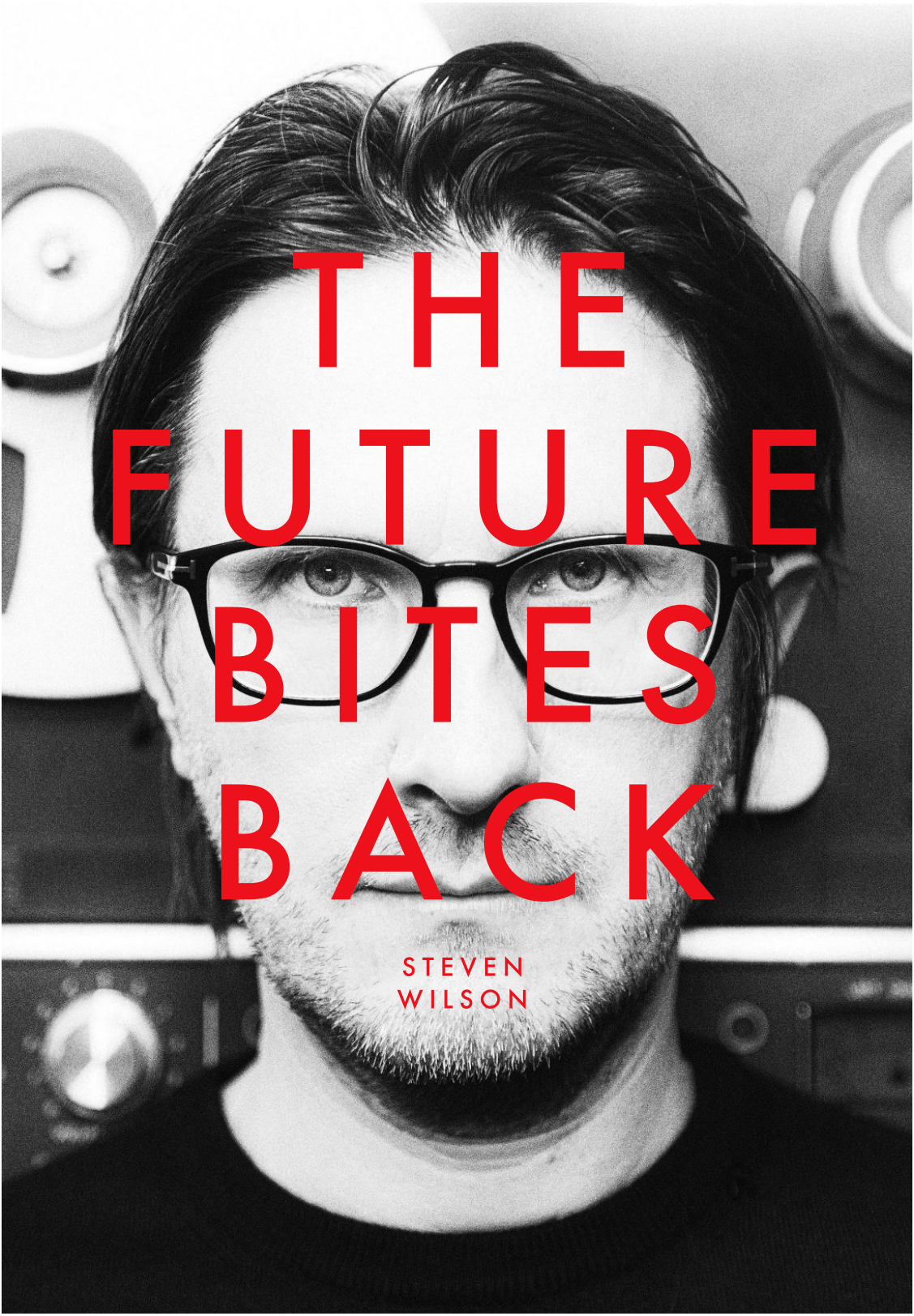
https://idamaemusic.com/

10. Fitted with a National Slimline pickup, this brass-bodied National Style O 12-string single-cone resonator is Chris Turpin's main gigging guitar

11. "This guitar is branded Waialae and it's a mystery," says Chris. "Nobody seems to know anything about them! It's fitted with an LR Baggs M1 Active soundhole pickup"

12. This antique Oscar Schmidt flat-top mandolinetto was made in New Jersey, USA

13. Something between a banjo and a ukulele, this banjolele features prominently on Ida Mae's latest album


THE
FUTURE
BITES
BACK
STEVEN
WILSON

GUITAR-BASED MUSIC CONSIGNED TO MUSEUM STATUS, ALBUMS NOTHING MORE THAN ARTIST-CURATED PLAYLISTS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ALTERING THE COURSE OF EVOLUTION... WHAT THE FRIGGIN' PROG IS GOING ON, MR WILSON?

Words David Mead

"It's obviously been extremely hard to release and promote an album essentially into a vacuum," Steven Wilson says at the start of our Zoom interview. "There's no touring. There's no record store appearances. There's no TV I can do. I can't travel to Europe and do the press and TV I would normally have done. So I basically sat at home talking to people on Zoom like I am now, which is pretty much all I can do..."

The irony is that Steven's latest album, *The Future Bites*, paints the picture of a society dominated and shaped by its online activity. This is a future that can't be too far off as more and more we live, shop, listen to music and generally amuse ourselves through the weird wide web, seeking 'little bubbles of happiness' often manifested in online shopping sprees – something addressed in Steven's track *Personal Shopper*, which also features a cameo appearance by none other than Elton John.

Whereas previously Steven's albums have been guitar dominated – something you can trace back to his Porcupine Tree days – *The Future Bites* focuses more on keyboard-generated electronica for its principal instrumental thrust. The guitar is still there, but this time around it's in a supporting role. We were curious as to why, naturally, but first of all there is the question of releasing the album while live music is still a wasteland and any promotion is similarly stymied.

It must have been disappointing to wait a year to release an album, hoping things would be returning to normal by now, only to find that very little had in fact changed.

"It's very disappointing because I grew up with the romance of releasing albums – the build-up and the momentum and the day of release was a big thing. But that's not really the world we live in any more. An album these days is really nothing more than an artist-curated playlist. You know, 'Here's nine songs and here's the order I think you should listen to them.' So that sense of the album as an event I think is largely eroded anyway. It's an album about living in dystopian times, but I didn't realise I would be releasing it into such a climate as the one we're going through now. And I guess it's hard to get people to engage with an album about dystopia when they're living in one."

When did the theme begin to come together during the writing process?

"I don't think it was a conscious decision. Like a lot of people I find myself reflecting what I see in the world. I began to write it late 2017, early 2018. So right in the middle of the Trump administration, which is something that basically made me question everything. I mean, it made you even question the very nature of reality and truth. And then, at the same time, the whole Brexit thing was going on, which is very depressing to me. And unfortunately,

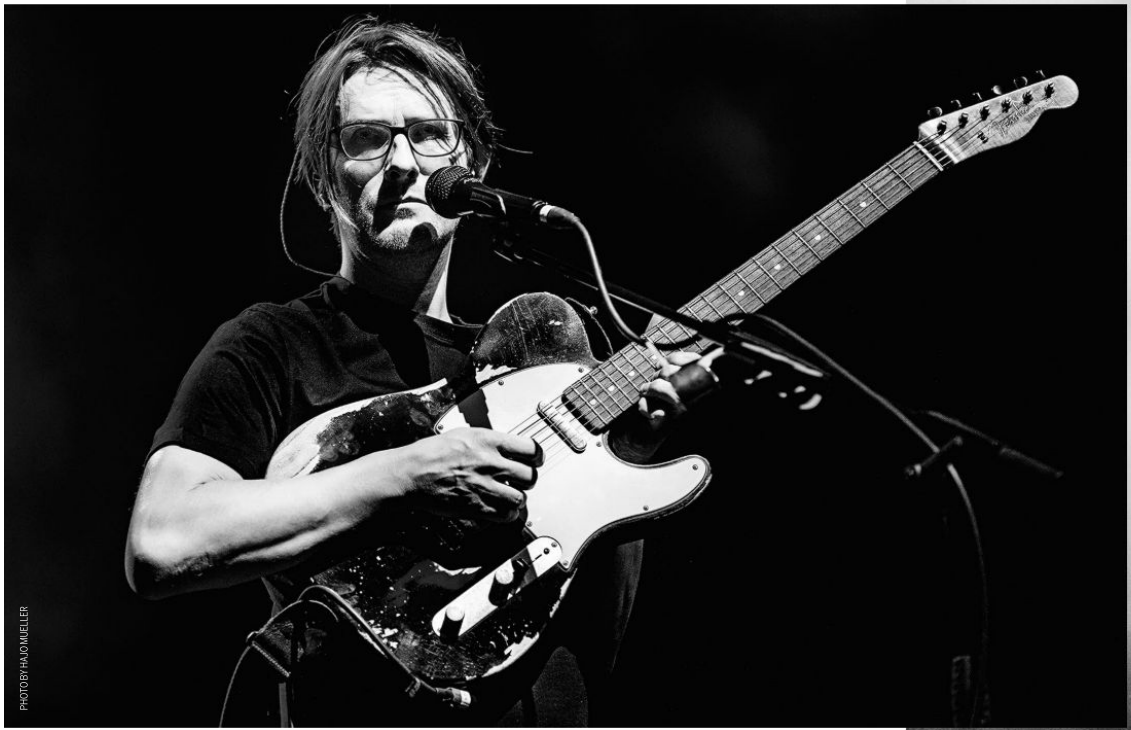


PHOTO BY HAJO MUELLER

Steven cites King Crimson's Robert Fripp as one of his leading influences. "Robert is definitely part of my musical DNA," he says

everything that I feared would come to pass has come to pass.

"So I was writing about what I saw as the increasing dominance of social media in everyone's lives, about how that was affecting, as I saw it, the evolution of the human species. I mean, it sounds like a very dramatic thing to say, but I don't think it is understating it to say that the internet and specifically social media has, without doubt in my mind, altered the trajectory of human evolution in an incredibly short period of time. The song *Self*, which opens the record, is about that idea of how identity has changed and been altered by the mirror of social media. We all see ourselves reflected back in that mirror. Now we all understand what it is like to have our opinions read, reflected on and responded to by people that we don't know."

•

"I'm not the kind of person who can go into a hotel room with an acoustic guitar and come out with an album written"

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Where songwriting is concerned, what's your process? Lyrics first, then melody, for instance?

"Well, the 'lyrics then melody' process is not really the way I've ever worked. My demos are quite elaborate from the very start. And I think part of the reason for that is because I've always tended to hear the whole thing in my head almost from the beginning. I'm not the kind of person who can go into a hotel room with an acoustic guitar and come out with an album written. I need to be surrounded by my gadgets: I need to be able to reach over and program a drum rhythm; I need to be able to pick up the bass or programme a sequencer pattern or place a bunch of backing vocals onto the melody. I can't just put that bare-bones demo down and feel like I've written something.

"For the second album in a row I worked with a co-producer. So I would be taking in my demo songs – which would have all the parts, orchestrations, drums and all that stuff – and we'd often deconstruct the songs and start to build them up from scratch again. Not always. Some of them stayed close to my original demos, but there was definitely an element of deconstructing and reconstructing."

PHOTO BY HAJO MUELLER

The writing process for *The Future Bites* began in the midst of the Trump administration in late 2017, a particularly unsettling time for Steven, and it explores how our relationship with the internet and social media has, as he puts it, "altered the trajectory of human evolution"

The Future Bites places keyboards centre stage rather than guitar. At what point did you make that decision?

"I think that was pretty early on. There was a number of factors. The first one is I don't think guitars really reflect the world that we live in any more. I know that's quite a depressing thing to say. Obviously the guitar is still very important to me. I grew up with them. And, you know, I come from the tradition of rock music where the guitar is fundamental. But I think it's also fair to say that the sound of guitars very much belongs to the second half of the 20th century in the same way that jazz and big band music was the dominant popular music form during the first half.

"Rock music has gradually been doing a disappearing act through most of the 21st century and I think it's going the same way that big band music and jazz music went. It never disappeared and never will disappear, but it has become a niche and almost like a cult form of music in its own right. Guitars don't really exist within mainstream pop culture any more. If they do, they'll be heavily processed almost to the point where they become part of the texture of the electronic backing track."

On the track _Eminent Sleaze_ there's a guitar solo that recalls Robert Fripp's solo on King Crimson's _Sailor's Tale_. Was that in your mind at the time?

"Robert is definitely part of my musical DNA. I'm sure it was somewhere in my subconscious. It's a very fragmented, angular, almost anti-guitar solo, isn't it? I mean, what is a classic rock guitar solo? I've had a lot of those on my recent records. I had some real superstar guitar players in my band playing traditional, classic rock guitar solos. And I got a bit bored with that. It's a familiar sort of trope, certainly in progressive rock music.

"I like the idea of approaching the solos on this album in a different way. Part of the reason I did them myself is because I'm not really a guitar player. I'm a songwriter-producer who's ended up playing a number of instruments in order to create what I hear in my head. So guitar is part of my tool kit, being the songwriter and almost approaching the guitar solo like, 'Okay, what's this song about? What are the lyrics about?' On _Eminent Sleaze_ this character is an embodiment of political sleaze and insidious persuasions. So what kind of guitar solo would that character play?

"I'm a songwriter-producer who's ended up playing a number of instruments in order to create what I hear in my head"

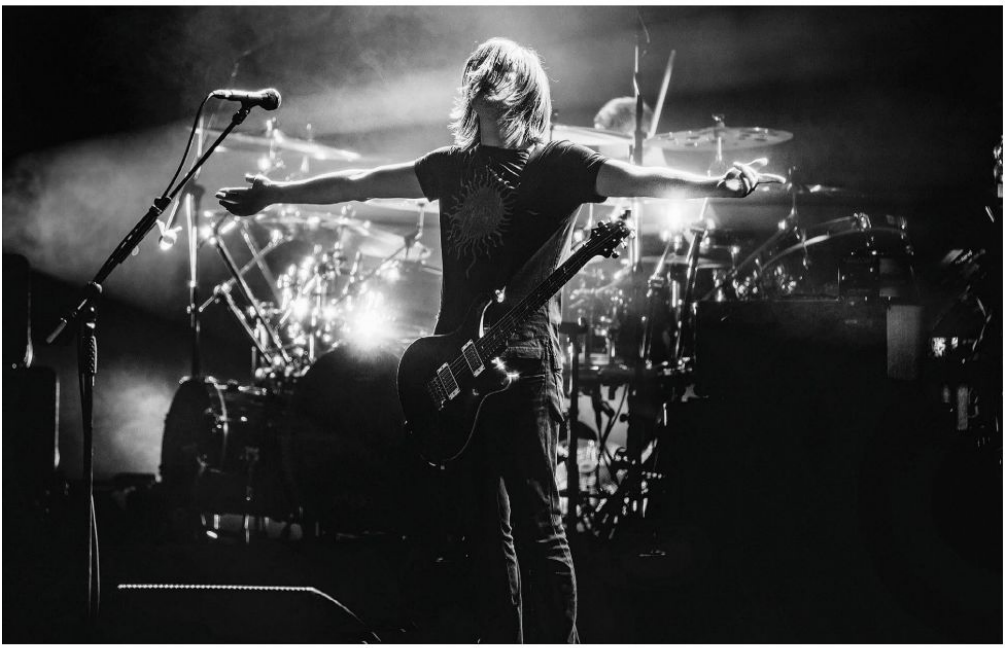

PHOTO BY HAJO MUELLER

He's not one for histrionic guitar playing and he even questions the instrument's relevance today, but the six-string remains an important part of Steven's songwriting tool kit

"I don't think guitars really reflect the world that we live in any more… The sound of guitars very much belongs to the second half of the 20th century"

You've toured with some virtuoso players in the past, Guthrie Govan and Alex Hutchings being two of them. What was it like to hear their interpretation of your music?

"It was amazing for a while. One of the problems I have with having superstar musicians play my music is the need they sometimes have to show what they can do all the time! Every few days, I would say, 'Look, can you play slower? Can you play with more feel and more consideration and perhaps less of the pyrotechnics?' Because sometimes that's their default setting. And that's not me. I never enjoyed that side.

"My favourite guitar players were always people like Peter Green, David Gilmour and Robert Fripp because they didn't play fast for the sake of it. So that whole shredder mentality, which I think a lot of guitar players seem to grow up with, I can't stand. It's like music is an Olympic sport and it goes without saying that music is not a sport. But you can go on YouTube and you can find clips of eight-year-old kids that can play John McLaughlin out of the park. But they've got absolutely zero to say musically. It's not music, it's become a sport. And unfortunately I find that a lot of that mentality has seeped into a lot of contemporary musicianship and a lot of contemporary guitar players."

How did you manage to get Elton John on the track *Personal Shopper*?

"The facetiously simple answer is I asked him. The slightly more convoluted answer is I had this song in demo form and I was looking for somebody to narrate the shopping list in the middle. I went to see the *Rocket Man* movie and at the end of the movie there's a 'where are they now?' sequence and they go through the main characters and it says something like, 'Meanwhile, Elton has kicked all of his addictions except for one…' And there's a picture of him with all the shopping. Everyone knows Elton John loves to shop. So it was like a light bulb moment for me. And I thought, 'This has to work. I cannot allow this to fail. This is too perfect.'

"Cutting a long story short I managed to get the track to him and I got a message one day to say, 'Elton John's going to ring you in 10 minutes.' And sure enough, 10 minutes later I got a phone call and I picked up the phone and this very familiar voice said, 'Hello Steven, this is Elton John. I fucking love your track. Let's do it!' Which I have to say is probably one of the most surreal and extraordinary moments in my career and one that I will never forget."

Steven Wilson's latest album, *The Future Bites*, is out now on Caroline International
www.stevenwilsonhq.com

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DIVINE INSPIRATION

Iain Henderson, owner of London-based guitar hire firm God's Own Guitars, explains how he has turned instrument collecting into a niche business by sharing his love for the guitars of the greats

Words Rod Brakes **Photography** Olly Curtis

Since the late 90s, Iain Henderson has been collecting guitars, selecting models known for their association with notable players, including some of the instruments owned by the artists themselves. Although the idea of lending out your prized possessions would horrify most collectors, in 2018 Iain decided to share the love and launched God's Own Guitars, passionately believing that his guitars were made to be played.

"I thought how nice it would be to keep hold of them while allowing other people to appreciate them, too," Iain tells us. "I mean, it's a shame when they just get left in cases not being played. That was the original idea behind God's Own Guitars. The sharing economy has become quite popular with companies such as Fat Llama bringing lenders and borrowers together. It's a great idea when it comes to expensive gear of any type that you might only use a handful of times. People also like the sharing economy because it can help them declutter their lives a bit. I mean, power tools are a good example; you might not want to fork out for something you only use occasionally. And the same is often true of guitars."

Although the guitar industry has experienced a major boom overall this past year, with London on lockdown the pandemic has hit Iain's business hard. Unable to gig and travel, and with more time at home to kill, people have simply been buying more guitars. Gibson and Martin have reported monumental boosts in sales during the pandemic, while Fender has stated 2020 as being its best year for guitar sales to date. This trend has also been reflected across the used instruments marketplace, as prices have spiked. Right now, it's a seller's market. But Iain hasn't let that put him off tweaking his inventory as business slowly begins to pick up again.

"There are two main things that impacted the business," explains Iain. "First, no-one was able to travel. About a third of the business comes from people travelling to London from outside the UK, including musicians on tour, plus I tend to deliver the guitars personally. But last week, I did my first hire in 15 months to someone visiting the UK who needed a guitar to play in their hotel room. They were visiting for 10 days, and they fancied the ex-Alex Trimble [Two Door Cinema Club] 2016 Martin LX1 Little Martin, made famous by Ed Sheeran. That's the sort of thing I expect we'll see more and more of in the near future, hopefully.

"I thought it would be nice to keep hold of the guitars while allowing others to appreciate them, too"

"It tends to be musicians and studios hiring guitars, but people hire them for photoshoots and film shoots quite a bit, too. We also get the occasional random request. One of the more memorable ones was when somebody hired out that Martin LX1 for a marriage proposal. This guy was coming from China with his girlfriend/fiancée-to-be and had booked into a B&B in Greenwich. I had to go there first and drop the guitar off so he could later 'stumble across it', serenade her and then propose. Very romantic!

"The second thing is that people have been buying a lot of guitars recently. If you look at the auction prices over the past 12 months, you'll see they've shot up. But it's actually turned out okay. For the first couple of months in lockdown, virtually nobody was hiring. It was like a ghost town across the whole of the UK. But by June 2020, there was a trickle of people – who were

This iconic-looking 2002 Epiphone Union Jack Supernova is flanked by the ex-Noel Gallagher 1963 Gibson B-45-12N and 1967 Gibson Firebird I

1. 1934 National Style O Resonator with open headstock and 12-fret neck. Mark Knopfler famously played a similar model with a closed headstock and 14-fret neck

2. From left to right: Hendrix-style 1962 Fender Duo-Sonic, Cobain-inspired 1996 Fender Jagstang, and 2016 Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar

3. 1963 Gibson J-160E: these unique Gibson dreadnoughts are well regarded for being choice instruments of John Lennon and George Harrison

"Producer Rob Cass asked if he could get hold of our 1983 Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer for Kirk Hammett to record Greeny with"

mainly doing recording projects and video shoots. And there were some people who wanted to hire three or four guitars for several months to give themselves time to decide what they wanted to buy. In the end, last year worked out okay; the turnover was around two thirds of 2019. Now, it seems like it's really coming back again. In fact, there are some days when it seems like it's almost too busy!"

With the used market especially active, Iain has been able to make some additions to the collection, while finding new homes for a handful of notable instruments.

"I've sold a few guitars recently, like the 2010 Gibson Custom Shop Don Felder Hotel California EDS-1275," says Iain. "I also sold a signed 2012 Gibson Custom Shop Kirk Hammett Flying V – number three of 50 – to one of his biggest fans in the States. My aim is to swap things in and out and keep it fresh.

"I've just got a 1969 Gibson Barney Kessel Regular. That's the one with the crown inlay on the headstock and nickel-plated hardware; the Barney Kessel Custom has fancier inlays and gold hardware. I've also just got a 60s Fender Mustang – famously played by Kurt Cobain– and a '62 [Epiphone] Coronet like Johnny Marr's. That's a lovely guitar. It's really light, but with the P-90 it has a huge sound. I also picked up an '89 Rickenbacker 330/12 in Fireglo, like Johnny Marr's, and went a bit leftfield with an early 80s Andy Summers-style Roland Guitar Synthesizer. The guitar is a great build and you can play it like a regular one, but it does far more, of course. It's an analogue synth and it's a lot of fun."

Also among the collection at God's Own Guitars are some Holy Grail effects pedals.

"We focus mainly on guitars," Iain emphasises, "but every now and then someone will call up in need of a pedal. We have some really classic stompboxes in the inventory from the likes of Lovetone and Analog Man. A little while ago, the producer Rob Cass rang up and asked if he could get hold of our 1983 Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer for Kirk Hammett to record Greeny with. He just called up and explained he needed it for the Peter Green tribute recording at Abbey Road. He was very kind and took a pic of the pedal. But that's the closest I've got to Greeny so far, I'm afraid!"

So, aside from the old-school method of simply picking up the phone, how do people go about selecting and hiring a guitar from Iain's collection?

"The inventory is on our website – www.godsownguitars.com," says Iain. "The starting price for hiring a guitar is

A 1966 Vox V251 Guitar Organ, like the one John Lennon owned, and a Billie Joe Armstrong-style 1964 Harmony Rocket H59 III

4. A 1993 Fender '52 Telecaster reissue like Graham Coxon's early Blur guitar, and a 1992 Fender Standard Telecaster in Lake Placid Blue

5. From left to right: 2004 Gibson Custom Shop Slash Les Paul, 2010 Gibson Custom Shop Don Felder Hotel California EDS-1275, and 2000 Gibson Les Paul Gary Moore Signature

"There's a great deal of responsibility in terms of maintenance and setup. The guitars need to be working at their best"

£10 per day, which is very reasonable. The daily rates go down after five days, and then again after a few weeks. The most popular hires tend to be the standard stuff, like the '92 Mexican Standard Telecaster. That's 10 quid a day to hire. They might not be the most expensive models, but they sound and play amazingly well. People read the reviews of others saying how nice the guitars are. There's a great deal of responsibility if you're hiring in terms of maintenance and setup. The guitars all need to be working at their best."

As well as providing standard working instruments, there is also a demand for those guitars that are just a little bit special.

"People often want a particular sound for a recording session," Iain tells us. "If someone wanted, say, a vintage Precision Bass to record with, we have a '72 P-Bass, which is available for £40 per day. All of the guitars are on the website in the Hire A Guitar section, and then there's the part called The Collection, which features some instruments that were owned by notable players. People really like to get their hands on ones that were owned and played by 'name' guitarists like Noel Gallagher.

"There's also a section called Hirer Videos [under the Gallery tab on the website] featuring bands and artists who are currently making their name, like Glass Animals, Anna B Savage and Lisey Tigra. One aspect to guitar hire is making music videos, and we often get approached by film companies looking for guitars to shoot with. There's a new Hendrix documentary in the pipeline and the makers got in touch about hiring a Strat and a Duo-Sonic for that. So people hire for a variety of reasons. I mean, as well as being great-playing guitars, they also look nice on film."

With some downtime to contend with, Iain has been doing some filming of his own.

"During lockdown, I started a YouTube channel to demo the guitars – and if you fancy feeling good about your own playing it won't take long if you flick through a few of those videos," he laughs. "Normally, the demos are related to a significant date. I just did one honouring the release of *Motorcycle Emptiness* by Manic Street Preachers. It features one of the newer guitars – a 1990 Gibson Les Paul Custom in Alpine White, which is the same as 'Faithful' [what James Dean Bradfield calls his favourite guitar]. I'm just doing a video on [Velvet Revolver's 2004 debut album] *Contraband*, which I think is one of Slash's finest performances during those years. I'll be demoing the 2004 Gibson Slash Les Paul signature model for that. That's what he played during the

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Acoustic Guitars

20599 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Parlour, D. Blue
18341 - Atkin Essential D Dreadnought Acoustic
18281 - Atkin Essential OOO Handmade in England
19361 - Bedell OH-12-G Parlour Guitar Secondhand
21716 - Blueridge 000 Acoustic Guitar (GR52202)
18269 - Breedlove Guitar Acoustic Strings
21922 - Brunswick BRL200 Left Handed Natural
13906 - Cort AD810-OP AD Series Acoustic Guitar
22106 - The Cort AF510M Mahogany
12332 - Faith FKM Mercury
19662 - Faith FKNCD - Naked Neptune
18898 - Faith FKR Naked Mars FKR, Natural
19266 - Fender CD-60 Dread V3 DS 0970110521 Nat
19267 - Fender CD-60 Dread V3 DS 0970110532
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
7090 - K Yairi New Yorker NY0021B, Natural
18950 - Yairi YBF2 Baritone Acoustic Guitar
22020 - LAG Tramontane 88 T89A Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
6009 - Martin 00018 standard Series Acoustic
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
16760 - Martin D28 Re-Imagined Version
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
21788 - Martin D45 Relmagined
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
19459 - Martin LX1RE Acoustic Guitar
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
19126 - Martin OM28 Reimagined
19804 - Martin SC-13E Guitar
22358 - Ozark High-Strung Guitar 3372G Nashville
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
20425 - Tanglewood Blackbird TWBB-O Smokestack
15480 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR O
17054 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE BW - Discovery Exotic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
18361 - Tanglewood TW2T Travel Size Guitar
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
19462 - Tanglewood TWJPS Parlour Acoustic Guitar
13271 - Vintage VTG100 Travel Guitar in Natural
13128 - Vintage VTR800PB Viator Travel Guitar

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19573 - Art & Lutherie Legacy HG Q-DISCR I.Burst
19446 - Art & Lutherie Roadhouse Indigo Burst HG
19299 - Ashbury Gazouki, Guitar Body, GR33024
21766 - Breedlove Artista Concert Nat Shadow CE
21765 - Breedlove Organic Series Concertina Copper
21850 - Breedlove Organic Series Wildwood Satin
21763 - Breedlove Pursuit Companion CE Travel
19795 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Natural
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
18886 - D'Angelico Premier Gramercy Acoustic
19448 - Eastman AC508CE Electro Acoustic, Used
22078 - Faith FKVL Naked Venus Cut/Electro Lefty
19542 - Faith FNBCEHG HiGloss Baritone Neptune
19136 - Faith FPNECG Nexus Neptune Cognac
21881 - Faith FVBLM Blue Moon Venus Cutaway
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
18798 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus LEFT-H
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
21838 - Faith PJE Legacy Earth Cut/Electro FG1HCE
19572 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat, Red
19573 - Fender Am. Acoustasonic Strat, Sunburst
19574 - Fender American Acoustasonic Strat Black
19576 - Fender Am Acoustasonic Strat, TS Blue
18565 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, Nat
18567 - Fender American Acoustasonic Tele, SGray
14742 - Fender CD140SCE Dreadnought Cutaway
18241 - Fender FA125CE Dreadnought Electro Nat
21626 - Fender Newporter Player, Sunburst
21512 - Fender Newporter Player
21121 - Fender Nylon Competition Stripe Strap Gold
21122 - Fender Nylon Competition Stripe Strap Silver
22082 - Fender PM3 Triple O Standard Guitar
21535 - Fender Redondo Player Electro, Bronze
19095 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Cognac Burst
18939 - Godin A6 Ultra A6 Natural SG
19601 - Yairi EM65CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19070 - Klos T_A Acoustic Travel
19069 - Klos F_DAE Deluxe Electro Acoustic

Electro Acoustic Guitars

19065 - Klos T_AE Electro Acoustic Travel
19064 - Klos F_AE Electro Acoustic
21966 - LAG Hyvibe 30 THV30DCE Cutaway
22026 - LAG T118ACE Tramontane Cutaway, Black
22027 - LAG T118 ASCE BROWN SHADOW
21965 - LAG T270ASCE
19691 - Larrivee D03 Dreadnought Electro Acoustic
21495 - Larrivée OM40 Electro Acoustic
19524 - Maestro Custom Series LE Rafles KOCSBAU
19528 - Maestro Double Top Series Rafles IRCSBD
19525 - Maestro Original Series Singa WE CSB C
18265 - Maestro Singa FM-CSB-A Custom Series
19531 - Maestro Special Build Trad. Series D-CO
18266 - Maestro Victoria KO-CSB-A Custom Series
21798 - Martin 00012E Koa Electro Acoustic Guitar
21585 - Martin 000-13E Guitar
19714 - Martin 000CJR10E, Cherry Stain B&S
19403 - Martin 00X1AE Guitar
21553 - Martin D-13E Electro Acoustic Guitar
21587 - Martin DC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
19489 - Martin DJr-10E Jnr Electro-Acoustic
12418 - Martin & Co DX1AEL Acoustic Guitar
20186 - Martin D-X2E 6 Sting Guitar
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
19717 - Martin GPC-X2E Rosewood Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1 E, Electro Travel Guitar
19458 - Martin LX1RE Electro Acoustic Guitar
18517 - Martin OMC1ME Electro-Acoustic Guitar
21974 - Northwood M70 14 Fret 000 Electro Acoustic
18167 - Northwood M80 OMV Cutaway
17418 - Northwood Auditorium Electro Acoustic Guitar
19339 - Ovation 1771 VI-1GC Glen Campbell Legend
19341 - Ovation 2771 STR-MB Main Street
19347 - Ovation C2078AXP-KOA Exotiowood Elite
19343 - Ovation C2078AXP2-PB Exotiowood Elite
19338 - Ovation 1771 STG-ES
22360 - Ozark Hawaiian Guitar
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
0000 - RainSong - 17 Models In Stock Now
19947 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith QIT Dread BB
19949 - Simon & Patrick Songsmith Parlour A/E
19676 - Simon & Patrick Trek SG Dreadnought Natural
19951 - Simon & Patrick Trek Parlour Electro Nat
19950 - S & P Woodland Cedar Dreadnought, Lefty
19547 - Tanglewood DBT PE HR Electro-Acoustic
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE FW
15869 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE OV
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
18366 - Tanglewood TW E Mini Koa
22161 - Tanglewood TW4 E Antique Violin Burst
22160 - Tanglewood TW4 E BS Black Shadow
22156 - Tanglewood TW4 E VC KOA Electro Acoustic
19114 - Tanglewood TW4 E WB LH, Lefthanded
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15832 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
18213 - Tanglewood TW4 E Koa Winterleaf
22159 - Tanglewood TW5 E AVB Antique Violin Burst
22157 - Tanglewood TW5 E BS Black Shadow Gloss.
8293 - Tanglewood TW5NS, Nat, Secondhand
22153 - Tanglewood TW6B SFCE Smokestack Black
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
22097 - Tanglewood TWCR OE Crossroads, USED
19548 - Tanglewood TWR2 SFCE Electro Acoustic
15979 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X47E
18789 - Vintage LVEC501N Dreadnought, Satin Nat.
18786 - Vintage VE300N Electro-Acoustic, Natural
14397 - Vintage VE800PB Paul Bret 6-String
18790 - Vintage VGEB20N Gemini P. Brett Baritone
21937 - Yairi Rag 65/VE Small Parlour Guitar
21936 - Yairi YFL55 CE BVS
19602 - Yamaha LLTA Trans Acoustic Vintage Tint
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Na

12 Strings

21764 - Breedlove Solo Concert 12-String CE
18730 - Cort Natural Glossy MR710F, 12-String
18916 - Faith FKV12 Naked Venus 12-String
19715 - Martin D-X2E 12 String Guitar
16029 - Patrick James Eggle Saluda 12 String
21559 - RainSong BI-WS3000 12-String
21560 - RainSong CO-WS3000 12-String
21563 - RainSong N-JM3000X 12-String Guitar
21564 - RainSong V-DR3000X 12-String, Natural

Classical Guitars

9153 - Daniel Slaman II Duomo in Blonde
19128 - Asturias by Kodaira 3340 Classical, Used
21770 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Satin Bourbon
21769 - Breedlove Solo Concert Nylon CE
21680 - Fender ESC80 Classical Guitar
20441 - Fishman AGX094 Passive Undersaddle
20440 - Fishman AGX125 Passive Undersaddle
19210 - Hanika 50 KF-N Studio Line, Secondhand
17847 - Hiscox LA-GCL-L-BS Artist Large Classical
17846 - Hiscox LA-GCL-M-B/S Medium Hard Case
18946 - Yairi CE1 Electro Classical Guitar
18949 - Yairi YCT8 Classical Guitar
22019 - LAG TN70A Tramontaine Nylon Guitar
19376 - Mendieta Artizan V Classical Guitar
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16035 - Mendieta Artizan X Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
8584 - Mendieta Conservatoire A Classical
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
6773 - Mendieta Flamenco LCE Electro Flamenco
8585 - Mendieta Professional Classica Guitar
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
12178 - Protection Racket Class Gtr Case Dlx
19942 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Cedar Top
22062 - Ramirez 135 Anniv. Del Tiempo Spruce Top
15239 - Ramirez 2 NCWE Classical Guitar
18906 - Ramirez 2 NE Classical Guitar
6914 - Ramirez Estudio 1 Classical Guitar
22060 - Ramirez Estudio 2 Classical Guitar
22061 - Ramirez Estudio 3 Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
22063 - Ramirez SPR Classical Guitar with Case
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15291 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar Blue
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
17106 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
17109 - Stagg C440M Classical Guitar
19470 - Stagg SCL50 3/4N Pack, Natural
19471 - Stagg SCL50 4/4N Pack, Natural
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon, Nat
19165 - Yamaha SLG200NW Silent Guitar, Nylon

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
18514 - AER Compact 60 Mk 4
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Signature Comp. 60
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
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
21540 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
21579 - Fender Acoustic Junior GO, Dark Brown
21588 - Fender Acoustic Junior, Dark Brown
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
19483 - Orange Crush Acoustic 30, Black
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
13029 - Roland Cube Street EX Stereo Amplifier
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
5618 - Roland Mobile Cube (2.5W+2.5W, 4x2)
13831 - Udo Roesner Da Capo 75
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

19899 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Engraved Sound
19893 - Aloha Concert Ukulele With Spruce Top
19911 - Aloha Shiny Model Concert Mahogany
19911 - Aloha Student Concert Mahogany Ukulele
20532 - Ashbury AU-15B Baritone Ukulele
20533 - Ashbury AUR-10 Concert Resonator Ukulele
19887 - Austin Naupaka All Mahogany Soprano
19872 - Austin Naupaka Soprano Ukulele With Bag
14699 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
19675 - B & M UBJ2 Banjo Uke Open Back
19698 - B&M Uke Bass Mahogany BMUKB1
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
18052 - Baton Rouge UR51S Soprano Ukulele
18975 - Breedlove Lu'au Concert Nat Shadow E Uke
18973 - Lu'au Concert Uke Ghost Burst Myrtlewood
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
19915 - Elvis Hanaurna Mahogany Soprano Uke
19913 - Elvis Hawaii Student Soprano Mahogany
19873 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19881 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele
19894 - Factory Prototype Concert Layered Head
19882 - Factory Prototype Concert Ukulele, Sapele
19917 - Factory Prototype Funky Top Concert
19916 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19918 - Factory Prototype Mahogany Concert
19897 - Factory Prototype Revesse Headstock Concert
21531 - Fender Fullerton Jazzmaster Uke Tidepool
21529 - Fender Fullerton Stratcaster Uke, Black
21530 - Fender Fullerton Strat Uke Sunburst
20278 - Fender Fullerton Tele® Uke Black
21875 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Daphne Blue
21876 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Shell Pink
21877 - Fender Venice Soprano Uke, Surf Green
20438 - Fishman AG0-UKE Passive Ukulele (Narrow)
19886 - Flight Nus310 Blackbird Soprano Ukulele
19888 - Flight NUS310 Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19883 - Flight Nus350:dc Dreamcatcher Soprano
19877 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele, Sapele Top
19876 - Flight Prototype Concert Ukulele Spruce Top
19869 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele, Spruce Top
19880 - Giannini Custom Concert Ukulele
20218 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo, Amethyst
18289 - Gold Tone Little Gem Ukulele Banjo Clear
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
19713 - KAI KTI-5000 Solid Acacia Tenor Ukulele
19071 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_A)
19073 - KLOS Deluxe Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_DAE)
19072 - KLOS Acoustic Ukulele (UKE_AE)
22310 - KLOS Full Carbon Uke
19306 - Kai KSI10 10 Series Soprano , Mahogany
18522 - Kai KTI700 Tenor Uke
19391 - Kai KTI50 Tenor Ukulele
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
21584 - Kanile'a Islander MST-4 Tenor Uke, Used
18833 - Kiwaya KSU1 Mahogany Student Soprano
16835 - AAMaestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert Eli Acoustic
13084 - Magic Fluke M80 Maple Uke Banjo, Hwood
14867 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass
18203 - Mahalo MH2CE ElectroAcoustic Concert Uke
18211 - Mahalo MJ3 TBR Java Tenor Ukulele
18195 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Blue
18197 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Sop Uke, Butterscotch
18198 - Mahalo MK1 Kahiko Soprano Ukulele, Red
18199 - Mahalo Union Jack Soprano Uke
19885 - Malbu 21s Soprano Ukulele With Bag
19867 - Malbu 23s Concert Ukulele With Bag
19875 - Malbu C26 Deluxe Concert Ukulele With Bag
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
10909 - Martin OXK Soprano Ukulele
19884 - Martin Romas MR01F Soprano Ukulele
19896 - Martin Romas MR02F Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15583 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
19892 - No Name Concert Ukulele In Mahogany I
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
8514 - Ohana BK10 Baritone Ukulele
19005 - Ohana BK-70M Solid Spruce Baritone Uke
19006 - Ohana BK70W Spruce/Walnut Baritone Uke
19003 - Ohana Bass with Fretless Marks OBU-22FLM
21599 - Ohana CK-150CEL Concert Ukulele
21575 - Ohana CK-28-5 Solid Premium Mahogany
21576 - Ohana CK-35GCE-LH Left-Handed Concert
21602 - Ohana CK-70-8 8 String Concert Ukulele
21566 - Ohana CK14 Concert Ukulele
19016 - Ohana CK14E Electro Mahogany Concert Uke
21569 - Ohana CK15WG Willow Gloss Concert Uke
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
13639 - Ohana CK22Z Concert Ukulele, Zebrawood
0000 - Many more from Ohana, Risa & Tanglewood

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

"I've heard some great recordings in recent months, but to see it live is the thing – gigs really are the lifeblood of music"

Velvet Revolver years. It's fantastic. But don't expect any Slash solos!"

Now that the gig circuit is starting to open up in London and beyond, things are beginning to look brighter for God's Own Guitars, as well as for Iain personally as a dedicated music lover.

"A lot of tickets are being sold at the moment," he notes. "I've just booked tickets to see Kasabian. Hopefully, we'll have a breakthrough and everyone will be able to go back to gigging as before. I saw John Bramwell recently at the Half Moon [in Putney, London] and he was kind of tearing up a bit. I mean, not being able to gig for so long is tragic for a lot of musicians and music fans. On the positive side, I've heard some great recordings from people in recent months, which is fantastic. But to see it live, is the thing. All this goes to show that gigs really are the lifeblood of music."

www.godsownguitars.com

6. Clockwise from top: Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, Lovetone Brown Source, Analog Man King of Tone, and Lovetone Meatball

THE PEDAL CLUB

Paul Bannister of Sound Affects in Ormskirk explains how the firm's new offshoot – The Pedal Club – is helping guitarists get hands on with more effects in the golden age of stompboxes

If you've ever spotted an effects pedal you really want but aren't sure you really need (or can afford!) then you're far from alone. Of course, there's always the option of selling or trading in something to soften the impact on your pedal budget while you scour the market. But wouldn't it be great if you were able to make such choices using your own gear in the comfort of your own space and in your own time, without any added pressures? Sound Affects' Paul Bannister says its new service, The Pedal Club, is a simple solution to the evermore complex world of guitar effects pedals.

"The idea is to be a one-stop shop for guitar effects," Paul tells us. "If you want to buy new or used pedals, or sell pedals, we can take care of that. But we mainly focus on a subscription service, which currently provides access to a collection of well over 500 pedals – and growing! There are different levels of subscription, but the most popular one at the moment is the Single Pedal option at £30 per month. That means you get access to one pedal at any point in time, so you can have multiple pedals per month if needed. The Dual Pedal and Triple Pedal options mean you can have either two or three pedals [respectively] at any one time. There's also a Single Pedal yearly membership deal for £299 per year."

In addition to its subscription service, The Pedal Club offers a convenient way to make the most of those pedals in your collection that have been gathering dust.

"Not only do we sell new and used pedals – used, with a three-month warranty – but we can also buy pedals you no longer use," explains Paul. "We'll get right back to you with a price if you fill out our quick online form and send a few photos over. We're always happy to look at part-exchanges, too. We can even arrange for pedal collections to be couriered if necessary."

Among The Pedal Club's impressive inventory are some of the more expensive, cutting-edge units from the likes of Chase Bliss Audio, Gamechanger Audio and GFI System. These also happen to be some of the most popular hire pedals.

"We try to adjust our inventory to meet the demand," says Paul. "We think it's important to keep the stock current, and as part of Sound Affects, we already have access to most brands. ThorpyFX just released the Pulse Doppler [a 'MKII version' of Dan Coggins' Lovetone Doppleganger circuit design, reviewed in full on page 104] and that's already in the inventory. We also try to look out for pedals that are difficult to find. We have some vintage Boss such as the SP-1 Spectrum and SG-1 Slow Gear, for example.

"It's good for people to be able to get hold of some of the quirkier pedals and have them for a while to mess around with, without feeling guilty about spending hundreds on something they might not use all the time," he says. "It's about having fun – playing guitar and discovering all these different sounds that are out there. It's an interesting journey and it never ends."

https://thepedalclub.co.uk

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Murphy's Lore

We've heard the buzz and seen the online ads, but with a trio of aged Murphy Lab Gibsons actually in our hands, we wonder, was all the hype worth the wait?

Words Neville Marten (Les Paul Standard & ES-335) & Dave Burrluck (Les Paul Junior)
Photography Olly Curtis & Neil Godwin

The history of Gibson's Custom Shop is cloaked in mystery and intrigue. In Walt Carter's book *Keeping The Flame Alive* he states: "In the early 90s, the Custom Shop didn't really exist. It was an undefined group within the regular production facility at Gibson's Nashville division. The R9 debuted at the January 1993 NAMM Show. Tom Murphy painted the finish on the first 25 sunbursts and the first 15 Goldtops."

Of course, as is always the case with Gibson, the story is more complicated than that. There had been Custom Shop designated instruments for many years prior, but the Custom Shop as we know it today started as a separate facility back in 1993, with its own craftspeople and its own front door.

At *Guitarist*, we've been reviewing such examples as they've come and gone, and it seems every time we'd say something like, "...with this one they've come even closer to the originals". Will the same be said of the three reissue guitars we have here: a Murphy Lab 1959 ES-335 in Ebony, a 1957 Les Paul Junior Single Cut in TV Yellow, and a 1959 Les Paul Standard in Lemon Burst? The ES-335 is ultra-light aged, the

Coronet 440

GIBSON MURPHY LAB '59 ES-335 REISSUE EBONY ULTRA-LIGHT AGED £5,099

MURPHY LAB '57 LES PAUL JUNIOR SINGLE CUT REISSUE TV YELLOW HEAVY AGED £5,499

MURPHY LAB '59 LES PAUL STANDARD REISSUE LEMON BURST ULTRA-HEAVY AGED £9,199

CONTACT **Gibson** WEB **www.gibson.com**

Junior is heavy aged, while the '59 Standard gets the top-level ultra-heavy ageing. As you'll see in our Murphy Options box later in the review, the heavier the ageing, the higher the price. Time is money.

The Murphy Lab, of course, refers to the aforementioned Tom Murphy. We've reviewed instruments hand-finished and aged by Murphy before (this reviewer owns a '57 Goldtop with Tom's initials deftly secreted among the lacquer cracks). And you'll learn all about how the Murphy Lab works in our interview with Gibson's brand president, Cesar Gueikian, elsewhere in this feature. As Cesar tells us, the Murphy Lab receives ready-built instruments from the Custom Shop, where they are then finished and aged by the small team under Tom Murphy's guidance.

Finish

There's little doubt, then, that the talking point and the initial engagement with these guitars is all to do with these aged finishes. Our dot-neck ES-335 is finished in Ebony, perhaps a strange choice when the model is so well known in its Sunburst, Cherry Red and Natural incarnations (there's so far no sunburst available). That said, this one has an impressive 'tuxedo' vibe about it,

> A guitar like the ES-335 gives its best when its voice is left to breathe… vibrato sounds very musical

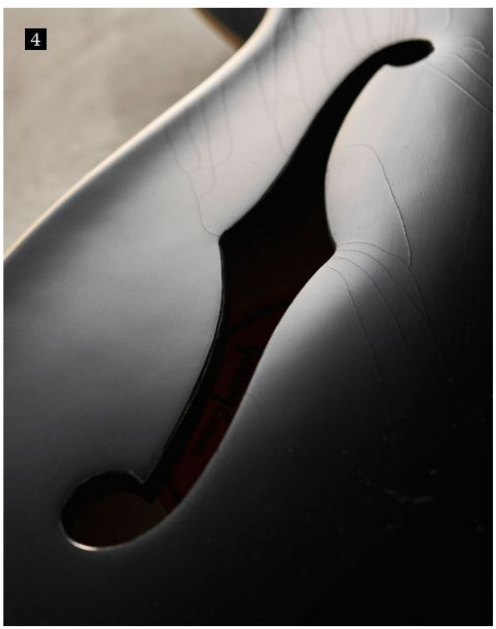
and its exceptionally dark-grained Indian rosewood fingerboard looks great against the black nitro lacquer. The '59 Les Paul on the other hand is Lemon Burst and has, in this writer's opinion, the perfect colour and flaming – not fine, ruler-drawn violin stripes or perfect, wide train lines but slightly haphazard and in no way over the top. In this faded finish with a hint of cherry toner remaining, it looks incredibly authentic. Our Junior is only available in TV Yellow and there's no doubt it looks well gigged and pretty authentic; we take a closer look at its finish in our direct comparison with the real thing in the pages following this review.

The ES-335 is more or less a new-looking guitar but with large lacquer cracks running across every surface. These are primary

cracks, with none of the secondary or ancillary lines running between them. There's no playing wear and only the mildest hint of tarnish to the nickel work. Like the '59 Les Paul, none of the plastic parts are aged, but here they don't sit too awkwardly against the mild ageing elsewhere on the guitar.

However, this situation is quite different with the '59 Standard, which comes with the Lab's most extreme ageing. So pristine humbucker rings, pickguard, knobs, jack socket surround, and so on, do seem somewhat at odds. It's the same with the '57 Junior where the classic shape of the single-piece plastic pickguard on this TV Yellow guitar really plays its part in the guitar's appearance – much more than it does on a sunburst variant. The P-90 sits under the dog-ear cover and, unlike the rest of the guitar, these plastic parts, including the rear backplate, are unaged in contrast to the finish and hardware. It's a glaring oddity in this Murphy Lab concept.

Continuing with the '59 Les Paul, its lacquering and ageing is mostly excellent. Gibson hasn't fallen into its old trap of dulling the finish, nor leaving the dreaded 'orange peel' of some VOS instruments.



1. The Custom Shop makes its own humbuckers such as this Alnico 3 Custombucker
2. Exactly what you'd expect in terms of control: here, Gibson uses CTS pots and paper-in-oil capacitors
3. Such a classic, this 'narrow' headstock places the 'crown' inlay (a design that dates back to 1938) adjacent to the A- and B-string tuners. Over the years, it moved and that headstock got wider
4. You can see some light lacquer cracks, but do they ruin the tuxedo vibe? That's the debate

5. There's very little ageing to be found on the tuners or headstock back at the ultra-light level of this Ebony ES-335 model

6. Thanks to the strap button's placement on the heel, ES-335s always hang differently when on a strap. It's all part of the ride!

In contrast to the ageing on the ES-335, the '57 Junior is heavy aged and certainly has a lot more wear

This is very well done. Other than that the bare wood sections on the mahogany back and neck look a little unnatural. The grain pores are open and clearly visible, and on the neck these would have been filled by 60 years of finger grease, salty sweat, or solidified grain filler – and had a belt buckle taken that much finish off the back, surely the wood itself would have been a lot more pitted and compressed. And are those lacquer dings on the back just a bit too uniform? It's the same with the Junior's heavy ageing. As evocative as it is, details like those bare wood patches are simply less believable.

Yes, we're being *extremely* picky, but don't forget this '59 costs over £9k. Our Junior, well, you could probably buy a 'player's grade' original for a similar £5.5k amount. But Tom Murphy does mention that the whole ageing process is in a constant state of flux and that they are learning new tricks all the time. So perhaps moans like this will be addressed further down the line.

Construction

As for the guitars' construction, they follow tradition as regards timbers. Hence the ES-335 features a three-ply maple/poplar/

7. The original Les Paul Junior was introduced in 1954 as the single-cut model we see here. The double-cut came later in 1958. Currently, you can only buy a Murphy Lab recreation of the former

8. It's this sort of heavy neck wear on our Junior that is bound to polarise opinion. Would you ever let your prized guitar get in a state like this? It does have a slightly uneven feel

maple laminated body with a centre block of solid maple, a Fijian mahogany neck and Indian rosewood fingerboard. The '59 Les Paul has a solid Fijian mahogany back and neck, with flamed maple top and Indian rosewood 'board. The Junior sticks closely to the original stripped-down recipe: a one-piece 45mm thick slab mahogany body, while the full-width of the mahogany neck slots into the body, resulting in that lip in the cutaway. Unlike the '59 Les Paul Standard, the fingerboard is unbound and, of course, just dot-inlaid.

As you'd expect, hide glue wood joins prevail, and shapes, contours, et cetera, have been slavishly scanned from actual vintage examples. All of Gibson's latest plastics, although unaged, conform as closely as possible to vintage specs, so there's a lot to admire here.

Electrics-wise, both the ES-335 and '59 Les Paul feature Gibson Alnico 3 Custombuckers, and these now come unpotted. This is said to offer a more transparent and open sound than when the coils are buried in wax. The Junior, of course, comes with its lone P-90 single coil in its 'dog-ear' cover, which first appeared on this model when it was introduced in 1954. As it's simply classed as a Custom Dogear P-90, we have little to go on, and obviously here we just have a volume and tone control. All our guitars use CTS 500k audio taper pots, while capacitors are traditional paper-in-oil. Toggle switches and jack sockets are by Switchcraft.

Feel & Sounds

Over the years Gibson has built on the accuracy of earlier reissues, constantly learning and improving, and arriving at a set of neck dimensions that now hits bullseye. Most players that we know, including all the *Guitarist* team, agree that the '59 medium C profile, with not too much 'shoulder' on the carve, is the most player friendly. So, how pleasing it was to pick up the ES-335 and '59 Les Paul and find ourselves completely at home. Juniors are known for their chunky neck shapes and if that's your preference you won't be disappointed here with this 'Chunky C' shape. That said, while the profile is a big clubby C with plenty of shoulder, the heavily aged neck back does give a slightly uneven feel.

> This is a very, very good example of the Junior style and one of the closest legal 'clones' we've seen

Our guitars come perfectly set up with Gibson' s standard 5/64th-inch (1.98mm) and 3/64th-inch (1.19mm) bass and treble action heights at the 12th fret. The necks are buzz free and the medium-jumbo frets do everything we always say they do – namely, provide enough fretboard clearance for string bending or squeezing out a tasty vibrato.

Naturally, the ES-335, with its double cutaways and 19th-fret neck join, allows for better top-fret access than the much more restricted Les Pauls, which provide no 'thumb over the top' facility past the 16th. But – again, as we say almost every time – this limitation hasn't prevented a host of amazing players bringing us dazzling dusty end solos. The Junior's higher-position access is further hampered by that body lip in the cutaway, but after quite a few decades of playing the real thing, it's really never bothered us.

So, while the softly rounded necks of the ES-335 and '59 Les Paul both clock in at 22mm at the 1st and 25mm at the 12th fret,

The beating heart of the Junior is its single P-90 pickup under that 'dog-ear' cover, matched by the even more simplistic wrapover bridge

give or take a hair's breadth, the ES-335's seems slimmer due to its perceived extra length and the guitar's much bigger body. But in reality there's all but nothing in it. Our Junior's neck is marginally deeper, but it's the fuller shoulders that really provide the added girth.

The guitars' fingerboard edges are beautifully rolled, but the corners of the top nuts are left a little sharp, and if anything the edge rolling on the Junior is slightly less uniform. You can't help thinking that a little more time fettling these would really make a difference. Other than that, they offer a delightful and fuss-free playing experience.

With our trusty Blues Junior fully warmed up and a classic drive pedal (Analog Man King Of Tone) in line, it's time to hear what these can do. First up is the ES-335. Played clean and with just a hint of reverb, it's a gloriously rewarding set of tones. Every switch position offers a distinct voice and all the old clichés slip smoothly off the tongue: crisp and nicely nasal for the bridge, quacky and chiming for both, and smooth and plummy for the neck. Turning down the volumes there's a dip in treble response but in a really pleasing way; the taper is remarkably smooth and, while the volume itself doesn't drop significantly until below 7 or so, we could find a place for every single sound – on every single switch setting. Particularly sweet was both pickups on, bridge up full and neck at about 7. Fruity! A guitar like this gives its best when its voice is left to breathe, so a hint of King Of Tone simply ramped up what we already had by a few notches. This left bends free to sing and vibrato sounding very musical.

Swapping instruments and running through the same sequence of settings, everything about the '59 Les Paul seems tighter, that big lump of mahogany and maple perhaps lending a bit more muscle. The tones are darker, too, but not by much – the Les Paul makes the ES-335 seem more 'scooped' overall, and it's that extra kick of middle that provides the punch. At extreme volumes, we'd guess that where the 335 might lose control and start banshee howling, the Les Paul would simply stay calm and carry on screaming.

> From the front we'd be hard-pressed to tell this Murphy Lab Les Paul apart from a genuine '59

On to the Junior and, even before we plug in, there's noticeable power to its acoustic response with a quickly rising sustain tail. It's very similar to our original '57, which simply sounds a little more mature and slightly smoother with less 'youthful' attack. With its controls full up, there really is nothing wrong with the new Junior's voice. It's nicely mid-focused and edgy, raw and really quite ballsy. Our real example does sound very similar, with a few exceptions: it has a sixth gear – the new '57 sounds like the real thing with the volume just slightly pulled back. Adding a touch more gain, not least from any simple boost/overdrive, and you really do get close.

However, the way the controls work is noticeably different. The new '57 model has slightly less range and lacks the ability to produce the surprising clear and clean tones of the original with the volume pulled back, not to mention the tone. It's this interaction that's less pronounced on the

9. The dynamic duo: Gibson's tune-o-matic bridge and stop (or stud) tailpiece ensure that the Les Paul's strings are both securely anchored and properly intonated – battle ready and fighting fit!

10. Despite the ultra-heavy wear to the finish and hardware, the plastic parts, such as this gold top hat, appear new

11. Custom Shop Custombuckers are used here to capture the legendary tones of the Gibson PAF

MURPHY OPTIONS

There are 50 different guitars in the current Murphy Lab line-up based on some 20 historic Gibson models in different ageing levels and colours.

Our 1959 ES-335 also comes in ultra-light aged Ebony with gold-hardware (£5,699) and, to the same spec as our reviewed model, light aged in Watermelon Red (£6,599) and ultra-heavy aged in Vintage Natural (£8,199). Meanwhile, our reviewed Junior comes in an ultra-light aged format at £3,799 (there's also a twin-pickup 1957 Les Paul Special Single Cut ultra-light at the same price).

The 1959 Les Paul Standard in Murphy Lab dress starts at ultra-light aged in Factory Burst, Southern Fade Burst and Sunrise Teaburst (£6,099). The light aged level comes in Dirty Lemon Burst, Cherry Tea Burst and Royal Tea Burst (£6,999). Next up is the heavy aged '59, in Slow Iced Tea Fade, Lemon Fade and Golden Poppy Burst finishes (£7,899).

12. Now, although the Custombuckers have heavily aged covers, Gibson doesn't explicitly state that these are based on a specific historic pickup

13. As with our Junior, that central decal was applied over the lacquer back in the day – an oddity that means it wears away very easily, hence the simulated wear here

14. Aside from the fact it's a solid body, the Les Paul hangs very differently from an ES-335 on a strap. The ageing in this area is hugely evocative of the real thing

It's important to remember that what you get here is a vintage-style guitar with no issues of provenance or originality

new guitar. But even if some of the finer details might be lacking, there's little doubt that this is a very, very good example of the Junior style. It's also one of the closest legal 'clones' of the original that this writer has ever experienced.

Verdict

To sum up a brand-new artisan-made guitar that sits north of the five grand mark is easy enough. Is it perfectly built? Are the materials, electrics and hardware of superlative quality? Does it play brilliantly and sound amazing? Simple! However, when it comes to guitars such as this that have been artificially aged to recreate various levels of use and abuse, at serious cost, it's rather more tricky.

So, is the ageing authentic looking? Is that really how a guitar goes after a number of gigs? And by the standards of whichever style of player – aggressive, careful, cleans the instrument after every show, or just chucks it in the trunk?

The ultra-light aged ES-335 is an odd one. We think we'd rather see either a totally new guitar or one that's an ageing grade or two above. This one, while a truly super ES-335 in every other respect, sits uncomfortably in no-man's-land, the big cracks spoiling an otherwise cared-for 'vintage' guitar. At the moment, only a '61 Cherry model in a heavy age is available, or a '59 ultra heavy aged Vintage Natural version. And they are roughly two-and-a-half to four grand more!

The Junior has the same dilemma. The light aged version of the same thing comes in £1,700 cheaper than our heavy aged review model, and while it really is a very good Junior, unlike our other two historic models here, you could buy a 'player's grade' real thing for that amount of cash. There's also those unaged plastic parts to consider (also present on the '59), which do give the impression that the Murphy Lab ran out of time in creating these fetching illusions. Nevertheless, despite those caveats, the Junior not only looks beautifully antique but it really captures the essence of this raw rock 'n' roll classic.

Finally, the '59 Les Paul. It's a particularly fine example of its breed and one that's been made to look as though it's lived a pretty tough life. Most of the distressing is exceptionally well done and perfectly plausible, but we're not convinced by some of the bare wood areas on this model. We

13

14

will admit that we've all seen reliced guitars and commented that "you'd never see ageing like that in real life..." only for a guitar with exactly that look to turn up the next day. What's more, Tom Murphy really does know his onions, and Gibson has many more originals at its disposal for reference than we're ever likely to see.

The Murphy Lab is in its infancy. We'd guess that Gibson will see which models fly and which ones tend to hang around, and then amend the line-up accordingly. With that in mind, we'd probably wait for the right ES-335 to come along. As for the '59 Les Paul, this one really is closer to an original than we've ever seen before. In fact, from the front we'd be hard-pressed to tell it apart from a genuine '59.

It's important to remember that what you get here is a vintage-style guitar with no issues of provenance or originality. Pots are crackle-free, there are no fret issues and, to be frank, a few more minutes on a setup bench – as with virtually any new guitar – would raise their game even further. Expensive and not quite finished they may be, but you could also argue that they're the closest most of us will ever get to the real thing. G

GIBSON MURPHY LAB '59 ES-335 REISSUE ULTRA-LIGHT AGED

PRICE: £5,099 (inc Lifton pink-lined case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Double-cutaway, semi-solid electric
BODY: Laminated maple/poplar/maple with f-holes and solid maple centre block
NECK: Mahogany, 59 'medium C' profile with hide glue join
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.57")
NUT/WIDTH: Nylon/42.85mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound dark Indian rosewood, pearloid dot markers, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo
HARDWARE: Nickel-plated ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, lightweight aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Kluson vintage, single line, single ring deluxe tuners
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson Custombucker Alnico 3 pickups, 2x volumes, 2x tones, 3-way pickup selector; CTS 500k pots with paper-in-oil capacitors
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 5.55/7.82
RANGE OPTIONS: See Murphy Options box
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Ebony (as reviewed). Vintage Natural and Watermelon Red are also available (see Murphy Options) – ultra-light aged nitrocellulose

8/10

PROS It's a fabulous example of a dot-neck ES-335 that plays and sounds amazing

CONS An almost-new looking guitar with big lacquer cracks looks spoilt not enhanced; unaged plastic parts; why Ebony, not Tobacco Sunburst?

GIBSON MURPHY LAB '57 LES PAUL JUNIOR SINGLE CUT REISSUE HEAVY AGED

PRICE: £5,499 (inc Lifton pink-lined case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, single pickup solidbody
BODY: 1 mahogany
NECK: 1 mahogany, 'Chunky C' profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.57")
NUT/WIDTH: Nylon/42.85mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: Wrapover bridge/tailpiece Kluson strip tuners with white buttons – Murphy Lab heavy aged nickel
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 50mm
ELECTRICS: Custom Dogear P-90, volume and tone controls. CTS 500k pots with paper-in-oil capacitors
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.42/7.5
RANGE OPTIONS: See Murphy Options box. The standard Custom Shop non-aged 1957 Les Paul Junior Single Cut Reissue VOS (in TV Yellow or Vintage Sunburst) costs £3,299
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: TV Yellow (as reviewed) – heavy aged nitro-cellulose

8/10

PROS Believable finish; great weight; big neck; playability; sound is close to the real thing

CONS Unaged plastic parts; 'board edges too sharp in places; P-90 could do with a shim; cost of ageing elevates the price; only one colour

GIBSON MURPHY LAB '59 LES PAUL STANDARD REISSUE ULTRA HEAVY AGED

PRICE: £9,199 (inc aged Lifton pink-lined case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Single-cutaway, solid body electric
BODY: Solid mahogany with flamed maple cap, hide glued
NECK: Mahogany, 59 'medium C' profile with long tenon and hide glue join
SCALE LENGTH: 624mm (24.57")
NUT/WIDTH: Nylon, 42.85mm
FINGERBOARD: Bound dark Indian rosewood, cellulose nitrate trapezoid, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium/jumbo
HARDWARE: Heavy aged nickel plated ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, lightweight aluminium stopbar tailpiece, Kluson vintage, single line, single ring deluxe tuners, authentic profile pickup covers
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 51.5mm
ELECTRICS: 2x Gibson Custombucker Alnico 3 pickups, 2x volumes, 2x tones, 3-way pickup selector; CTS 500k pots with paper-in-oil capacitors
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 5.55/7.82
RANGE OPTIONS: See Murphy Options box
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISH: Lemon Burst (as reviewed). Various colours available (see Murphy Options) – ultra-heavy aged nitro-cellulose

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Gibson at its best; largely one of the most convincing ageing jobs we've seen; stunning sounds and playability

CONS It comes at a price; it's difficult to make bare wood areas look convincing

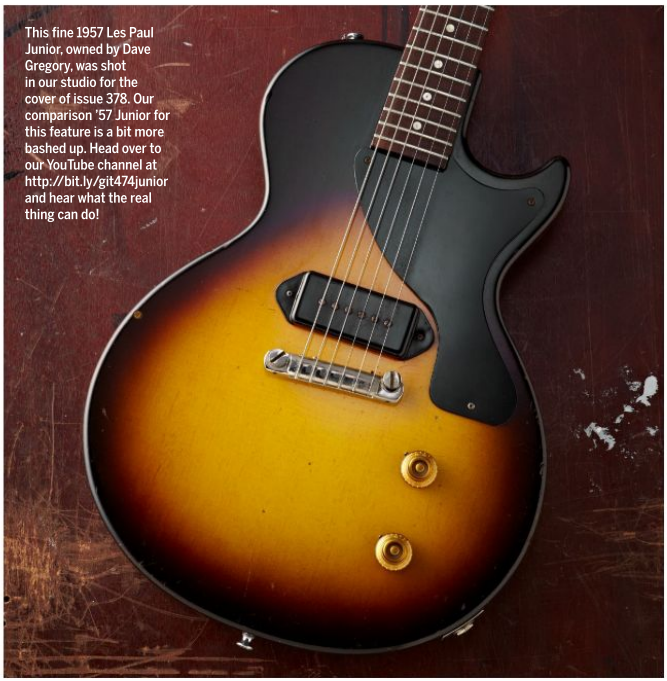
Junior vs Junior

Just how does this made-to-look-old new Murphy Lab Junior compare with a real 1957? We take a close look

Words & photography Dave Burrluck

Most of us have limited access to real vintage pieces, especially models that haven't been molested. It can be the same for many guitar makers who may base their '59-alike builds on far-from-vintage instruments, or even use books such as *The Beauty Of The 'Burst* (Yasuhiko Iwanade) as their guide. When it comes to ageing and relicing, it can be just as difficult: not every artisan working in this area has a real piece to study before they create their ageing. Evaluating authentic ageing, then, can be just as difficult.

The TV Yellow finish of our Murphy Aged '57 Junior illustrates another typical problem: there's not one definitive colour. Some are more sand-like, mustard or a brighter, deeper yellow – and even if there were a precise colour, is Gibson (or any ageing artisan) basing the colour on how it would have looked in 1957 or how it would look some 60-odd years on? A carefully cased guitar is going to look very different



This fine 1957 Les Paul Junior, owned by Dave Gregory, was shot in our studio for the cover of issue 378. Our comparison '57 Junior for this feature is a bit more bashed up. Head over to our YouTube channel at http://bit.ly/git474junior and hear what the real thing can do!

The finish of our Murphy Aged '57 Junior illustrates a problem: there's not one definitive colour

from one that's been used and abused, even if they had consecutive serial numbers. And then, of course, whether it's a finish, a pickup or a neck shape, there's the "Oh, they were all different back in the day" caveat that can be a great get-out-of-jail-free card for any relicer, or indeed faker.

There's plenty of truth in that caveat, of course, especially since Gibson, and other makers back in the 50s and 60s, didn't use the precise computer-assisted machining tools that most use today. Necks, in particular, were hand-finished from more rudimentary machining, and the sort of variances that are out of spec today were commonplace back then.

As Cesar Gueikian explains in our next feature, today Gibson has a large resource of scanned and photographed vintage guitars to draw on – not to mention access to quite a few vintage guitar collections and artist-owned instruments – and has even reverse-engineered the nitrocellulose recipe that the company used back in the day, which is a subject that could, and often does, fill many pages of debate and discussion. But surely Gibson's new '57 Murphy Lab Junior should be pretty darn similar to our original reference, shouldn't it? Let's see.

Wood

The fundamental aspect of any solidbody electric guitar is the wood it's made from, and here we start our comparison with an aspect that's impossible to evaluate. In 1957, we're told by numerous sources that the mahogany [2] was pattern-grade Honduran and the fingerboard Brazilian rosewood. Today the former is rare, expensive and endangered; the latter effectively out of trade. Gibson tells us nothing about the mahogany in its spec sheets, although we understand the timber used by the Custom Shop [1] is plantation-grown genuine mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) grown sustainably in Fiji. What we will say is that our new Junior weighs exactly the same as our old one: 3.42kg (7.5lbs). It's a very encouraging start to our evaluation.

Headstocks

The new Junior [3] is nothing if not well observed. The lacquer cracks across the headstock face of the new guitar are certainly similar to our real '57, although they appear enhanced. The original's cracks [4] are more subtle, while the black face paint has sunk into the mahogany (there's no holly veneer to face the headstock). Along with the marks and grime of 60 years of use, this creates a much more complex façade. The Gibson logo on the original looks slightly raised and is a brighter, more vibrant gold colour. And

is it just us or does the new guitar's logo look slightly off in terms of positioning? You'll notice, too, on both old and new how the headstock thickness tapers, going from approximately 15mm at the lower edges by the E string tuners to 14mm at the tip. The new Gibson is a very similar thickness at its base, but it is very slightly thinner, 13mm, at the tip. And despite the new Junior having more simulated wear to its body and neck back, there's less to the headstock than our original.

Neck Angle

A noticeable and potentially important difference between our two Juniors is the neck angle. Our original Junior [6] has next to zero rake-back and results in a height in front of the wrapover bridge at the G string of bang on 15mm – with pretty much the same setup. The new Junior's neck is very slightly raked back, resulting in the wrapover sitting higher [5], approximately 17.3mm at the G string. Both dog-ear covers have the same height of 11mm above the guitars' faces, and as there's no height adjustment, aside from the polepieces, the new Junior's pickup sits noticeably further away from the strings. Bearing in mind the measured DCRs (at output) are only very slightly different – our old Junior is 8.09kohms, the new one is 7.89k – the actual difference in power we hear plugged in is possibly due to the fact it's simply further away from the strings than the original. Adding a simple 2mm shim might well even the playing field.

The exact positioning of the wrapover bridge relative to the neck back in the day would have relied on some basic positioning jigs. So, at the 22nd fret, the top E sits some 7mm in from the fingerboard edge; the

1. The new Murphy Lab Junior's fingerboard is Indian rosewood
2. Meanwhile, the old Junior's fingerboard is Brazilian with a noticeable orange hue
3. There is much less crazing on the new headstock, although the model logo is typically worn because it's applied after the lacquer
4. 60 years of use means the old headstock's face has more complex ageing
5. You can see here that the new Junior's bridge sits higher from the body face
6. The old Junior's bridge sits lower and therefore the strings are closer to the pickup

As evocative as the new Murphy Lab Junior is, there's a lack of simulation of 60 years of grime

low E is closer, at 4mm. On our new Junior, the same dimensions are reversed with 4mm on the treble side and 6mm on the bass. This also affects the alignment of the dot inlays: our original's dots hug the G string; the new Junior's sit closer to the D.

Fingerboard edge rounding, or 'rolling', has become commonplace even on non-aged/unreliced guitars. It certainly feels better to many than a sharp edge, particularly if you wrap your thumb around the bass side of the fingerboard. In the real world, this rounding wouldn't be regular and could possibly be more noticeable on the treble side where a player's rings might have knocked that edge off over the years. You'd imagine there would be more rounding wear in the middle area of the neck than by the nut. That is replicated on the new Gibson: for example, the fingerboard edges by the nut are left sharp. Our original? Well, it's hard to tell whether Bill Puplett rolled the edges slightly when he refretted it. Either way, it feels broken in and worn but far from overdone, and a little classier than the more original-style simulated wear on the new guitar.

Neck Shape

If that alignment is a noticeable if subtle difference, the actual neck size and shape is much more profound. In terms of width, both necks are very similar: our original '57 measures 42.96mm just in front of the nut compared with the 42.85mm of the new guitar. At the 12th fret, the old-versus-new dimensions are 57.24mm versus 56.47mm. In terms of depth, our old Junior measures 22.4mm at the 1st fret and 25mm at the 12th; the new neck measures 23mm and 26mm at the same points.

It's the shaping that's *very* different. The old Junior has quite trim shoulders and almost feels slightly V'd in the lower positions – it really is quite like PRS's original Wide Fat profile. The shoulders are much fuller on the new Junior's 'Chunky C', more baseball bat, if you like. That's not to say one is better than the other, but they certainly differ. Less noticeable is that lip of the body in the treble cutaway. The old Gibson [8] has a chamfer to the tip; the new Junior is left square [7].

A point about scale length [9]. It would be nice after all these years if Gibson itself came clean with its *actual* scale length rather than the nominal 24.75 inches (628.65mm). Anyone who has measured the scale lengths on old Gibsons will agree it's actually a few millimetres shorter. PRS has concluded that it is 24.594 inches (624.6876mm), which is where its 594 model gets its name. Many makers use this or a similar slight reduction; in *The Early Years Of The Les Paul Legacy*, Robb Lawrence states that the scale is closer to 24 9/16ths of an inch (623.8875mm).

Now, we can only measure by eye, and from the front face of the nut to the centre of the 12th fret, times two, gives us 24 5/8ths of an inch (625.475mm) on our old Junior; the new guitar measured in the same fashion is 24 9/16ths of an inch (bang on 624mm). Obviously, the position of the nut may account for these subtle differences. How accurate was that part of the build back in the day? In theory, the nut could be further away or closer to the 1st fret, which would affect the measurement of a scale length in this manner. The position of the nut plus the height of the string grooves can also affect lower-position intonation. Our Bill Puplett-fettled original Junior is very in tune in its lower positions. With its slightly higher nut grooves, the new Junior is just a few cents sharp.

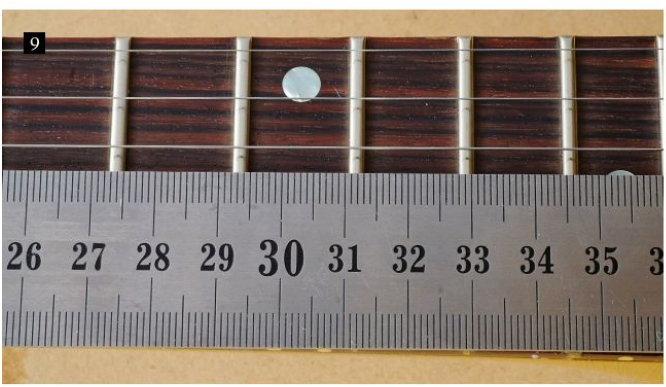
Hardware

You need to be careful to compare like with like – and many real vintage pieces will have had parts removed and replaced. Our original Junior's tuners [11], for example, are close repros fitted over two decades ago. Gibson's new aged versions [10] look older,

7. The tip of the lip in the cutaway is left squared-edged on the new Junior

8. On the old Junior, you can see that the tip is rounded

9. Measuring the scale length on the new Junior confirms it is virtually bang on 312mm, which, times two, gives us the actual length of 624mm



their 'white' buttons noticeably yellowed. Our top nut was replaced by Bill Puplett with the correct nylon material when the guitar was refretted about the same amount of time ago. In fact, the frets on the new Junior seem bigger (wider and taller) than the ones we remember being replaced. A sensible decision.

Nickel plating ages naturally remarkably quickly, but will only rust once that plating has worn away or been scraped, bashed or nicked. The bass-side bridge stud on our new Junior [12] is heavily rusted and looks rather overdone, not least that the treble-side stud is shiny and pristine. A sweaty player who keeps their palm over the bridge all the way through the set? Well, perhaps...

As we mentioned in our review, the plastic parts on our new Junior are all unaged and sharp-edged, including the truss rod cover. Note, too, how the original's screws [13] are blackened with rust and oxidisation in virtually every position. The new guitar's screws, including those polepieces of the P-90, all look too new.

Overall, as nice and evocative as the new Murphy Lab Junior is, there's just a total lack of simulation of the proposed 60 years worth of grime and dust.

Controls & Circuit

The black 'top hat' knobs on our new Junior [14] also look brand-new. The same goes for their pointed position markers, whereas there are noticeable rust flecks on our original [15] and its gold knobs – certainly the tone control knob – has some green (copper?) oxidation around the skirt. Rather oddly, there's a slight groove around the base of the new Junior's volume knob as if it's been worn by constant use. There's nothing like that on our real '57.

10. All the hardware is aged on the new Junior, including these strip tuners

11. The tuners on our old Junior look less aged despite the fact they were changed some 20 years ago

12. Aside from the heavily worn bass-side bridge post, the bridge looks quite new, as do the pickup and its cover

13. There's less age to our original '57's bridge and studs, and considerably more to the pickup cover and exposed polepieces

14. Note the wear on the new Junior behind the volume control, although the knobs themselves look brand-new

15. The knobs on our old guitar have plenty of marks from use, while the tone control has noticeable green oxidation

16. The new Junior's circuit appears very similar to the original, without the dust!

17. There's plenty of that in the old Junior's control cavity. Both are wired 50s or vintage style

18. This close-up, taken by the output jack, shows the more simplistic lacquer cracks on the new guitar

19. On the old guitar, you can see the crazing is a lot more complex

20. Again, note the quite mild lacquer crazing by the bridge of the new guitar

21. The primary crazing on the old finish seems caked in grime and there's more complexity here

In isolation, the new Junior certainly looks like a used piece and should continue to age over time

Irrespective of what's underneath, the new Junior pickup is completely unaged [12] and it looks brand-new. Compare that with the real '57 [13]: its screw polepieces are near-black and its cover is noticeably distorted by its mounting screws and dappled with age and use. Like the face of that scratchplate, the cover just looks too new on the contemporary pretender.

Glance inside the two cavities and it's easy to spot the real one. Now, we're not suggesting Gibson ages the inside of the guitar – that might be taking this lark too far. However, component values are different: the tone control on our real Junior [17] measures 276k, not the 534k of the new guitar [16]. Obviously, you can't measure the volume pot without desoldering the pickup, and we're not doing that on our original, although the new Junior volume pot is under spec at 413kohms. Our original volume control is a little noisy at the top of its travel, despite cleaning over the years. I can't bring myself to change it.

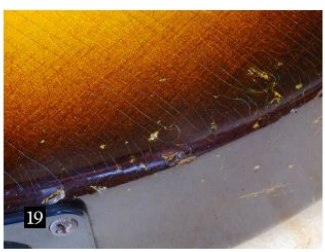
The large tone caps look pretty similar, but without knowing how they're made or indeed the precise (as opposed to nominal) value, that's about all we can say.

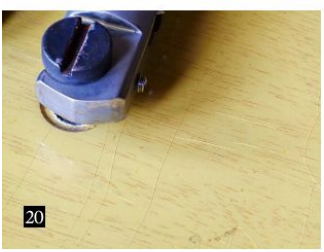
Finish

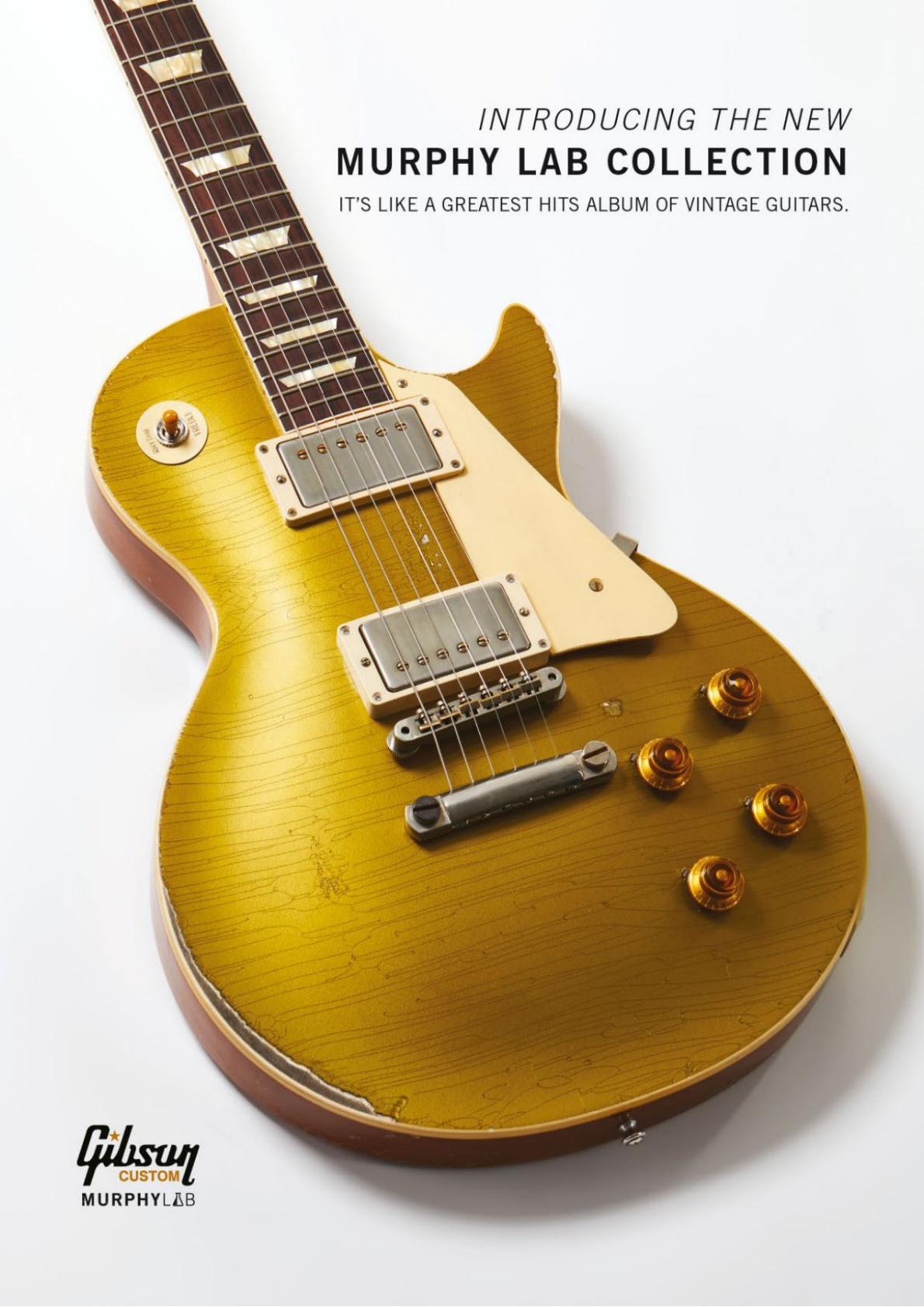
As we've often pointed out, too many relics have a dull matt finish, and our real Junior [19/21], which has never been polished on my watch, has a deep gloss sheen. The large lacquer cracks across the amber centre of the sunburst stand out and are surrounded by small, finer cracks. Looking under a magnifying loupe, you see how complex the real ageing is.

The similarly glossed Murphy Lab [18/20] is less multi-dimensional, almost cursory in comparison; there's no 3D depth to the cracks, nor the dirt and grime that has worked its way into those of the real thing. And the dings? They look a little casual and almost uniform in places, but this reasonably believable wear is contrasted by the areas where the finish is completely removed – on the edges, considerably in the belt buckle area, and the neck back. But this bare wood on the body looks too new as there's no grime in the wood grain, and there's a noticeable edge where the bare wood meets the finish, as though it's been scraped, not worn or burnished away. The considerable neck wear exposes rather rough feeling wood, although there's less edge to the remaining paint.

In isolation, and bearing in mind this is a brand-new production process, not the real ageing of 60-plus years of being on the planet, the new Junior certainly looks like a used piece. And if the lacquer on the new guitar is as accurate to the old stuff as Gibson believes then it's an ageing process that will continue over time and use.






INTRODUCING THE NEW
MURPHY LAB COLLECTION
IT'S LIKE A GREATEST HITS ALBUM OF VINTAGE GUITARS.
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Moving On

It's been quite a ride for Gibson since its new leadership team took the reins in 2018. We catch up with brand president, Cesar Gueikian, to get the backstory on the newly created Murphy Lab

Words Dave Burrluck

As far as its instruments go, Gibson is enjoying a renaissance. The new leadership team hit the ground running with the initial reorganisation and focus of its mainstream USA Production line into Original and Modern Collections devoid of the annual specification changes that confused and annoyed us in equal measure. The smaller output, higher dollar Custom Shop has seen similar focus, which, as of the start of this year, now has this new vintage-aimed strand, the Murphy Lab, named after Tom Murphy who instigated its creation back in 2019.

"Tom Murphy came to me with a guitar case – which he'd aged, by the way, so it looked like a 50s Lifton case," begins Cesar Gueikian, Gibson's brand president. "I opened the case and picked up the guitar. We have been working with a lot of originals from different collections – including my own – with Tom and looking at lots of guitars Tom had done in the past. I had no reason not to think it was one of those originals. I picked it up and said, 'This is amazing, it's great.' The binding had all been rolled from playing, the checking on the

"The nitro is a big plus in how the guitars are going to age over time, which I think will be very gracefully"

lacquer, the ageing, the bracelets, the buckle rash... amazing! So I asked him, 'Whose '59 is it? Is it for sale?' He then proceeded to tell me, 'No, I just made this guitar and I wanted you to see it.' I told him, 'This is the future of ageing: you've stepped it up now. We've gotta go here.' That was when we started to create the idea for the Murphy Lab."

Tom Murphy needs no introduction. His pioneering ageing techniques have created many old-looking new Gibson guitars over the years and he helped create what we now know as the Gibson Custom Shop back in the 90s. Today's Murphy Lab is a "restricted area", we're told by Cesar, that resides within the Custom Shop.

"We do create content and showcase Tom there," says Cesar, "but what happens in there is almost like a trade secret. In addition to being a place, a lab, it's a Collection. We make 50 guitars as part of the Murphy Lab Collection: different models and ageing treatments from ultra-light to ultra-heavy. I think we have 120 people in the Custom Shop now, and Tom, plus five more in the actual Murphy Lab."

Clearly, the output of the new facility is pretty low in comparison to that of the whole Custom Shop.

"It's about 10 per cent. It's very involved. It's obviously very labour intensive, it's all handwork and Tom's doing all of that with his team. That's why the lead times are so long. So if you pick up a '59 that we make out of the Custom Shop, that might take from when it actually goes on the schedule – and the lead time to go on the schedule is over a year – around two, let's say three weeks from when it starts being made to when it's actually finished, where it can take up to two months for an actual Murphy Lab model. Yes, they're very expensive to make as they require a lot of hours of labour. It's a very involved process to make that ageing in a very authentic way."

In terms of the woodworking, though, are the Custom Shop model and the Murphy Lab the same?

"Yes, the way the body starts and then its neck is fitted [is the same]. Once it reaches the point when it's ready to finish it goes into the Murphy Lab where the process starts – the finishing, the Murphy Lab lacquer, the lacquer breaks, the hand-ageing and then the aged hardware. All of that happens in the Murphy Lab."

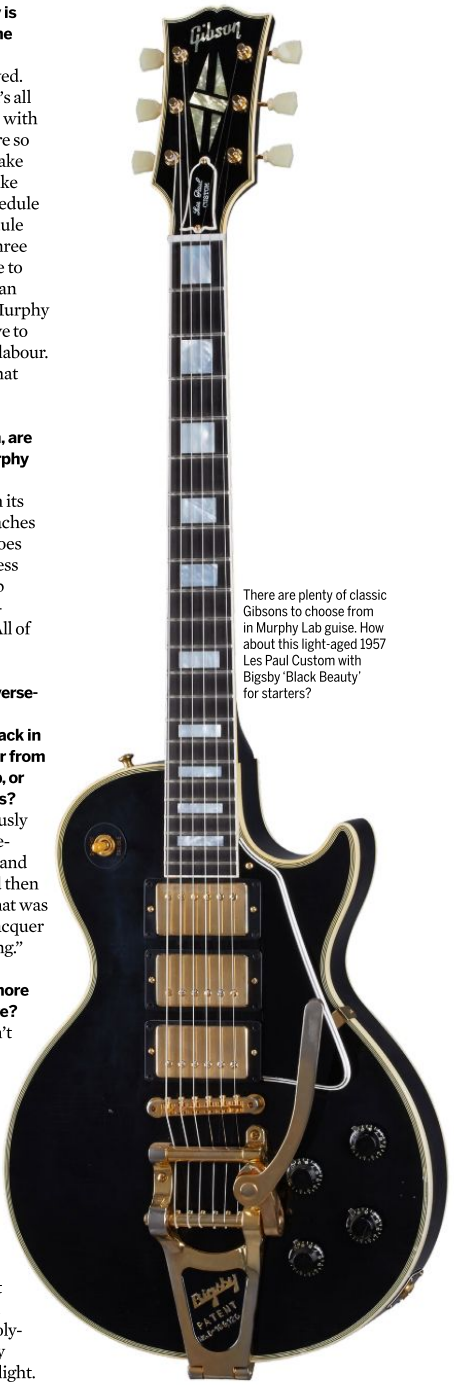
You state that you've managed to reverse-engineer the original formula of the nitrocellulose lacquer Gibson used back in the 50s and 60s. How does that differ from the nitro you use in the Custom Shop, or indeed on the USA production guitars?

"It's a great question, but that's obviously a trade secret! But, yes, we did reverse-engineer it by taking original lacquer and decomposing it then recreating it and then running tests. We ran a lot of tests! That was one of the breakthroughs: how that lacquer was reacting to the process of checking."

And presumably the new lacquer is more consistent than what was used before?

"In the past, yes, the technology wasn't there to do the quality checks and consistency checks that we do today. Definitely back in the 50s the lacquer would have been slightly different depending on the batches. Today we have great consistency, and the one we use in the Murphy Lab is slightly different, but we continue to use nitro across everything. It takes about eight layers of nitro to make a Gibson guitar – a process, just that alone, that can take three days, sometimes more.

"Other guitar manufacturers use poly-type lacquer that you can take and dry within 30 minutes under an infrared light.



There are plenty of classic Gibsons to choose from in Murphy Lab guise. How about this light-aged 1957 Les Paul Custom with Bigsby 'Black Beauty' for starters?

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIBSON

This 1963 Firebird V with Maestro vibrola comes heavy aged in Antique Frost Blue

As you can see, there's a considerable amount of hardware to age, too. Along with this bashed-up example, other standard colours are Pelham Blue and Ember Red, which are ultra-light aged, and Cardinal Red with the light-aged treatment

And that seals the instrument, so the instrument – in my opinion – starts to die. No, I'll take that back, it's not that the guitar starts dying, it's just that the guitar becomes a unit that will never change; it just will always be that way. With Gibsons, I believe the nitro makes the instrument age gracefully. It will continue to evolve and the nitro will continue to evaporate and it'll create that look that has made us so famous. It's different, it's more time consuming, more expensive and it's the Gibson way. Nitro is just one of the steps we continue to use and I think the Murphy Lab nitro is a *big* plus in how the guitars are going to age over time, which I think will be very gracefully."

Authentic ageing relies on access to the real thing, something that is part of the Murphy Lab process in the form of an ever-increasing database of 'golden era' guitars.

"There are two different things. One is scanning the guitars, basically creating an MRI of an actual guitar – that is, hundreds of images of one guitar that are giving us all the different measurements. In the 50s and 60s, every guitar was, as you know, a little different. Someone was too hungry at midday and did a little less on the neck roll and that neck, back in 1959, for example, is bigger. When they came back from lunch they might have gone a little too far and that next neck is thinner. Or one of the team winding pickups got distracted and they overwound.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIBSON

"It's different, it's more time consuming, more expensive and it's the Gibson way"

"Every guitar is a little different back then, but that is what makes them unique. That's awesome. The scanning gives us that information, by serial number, so we have a database of all these '59s and '58s, '57s and guitars from the 60s. We've scanned lots and lots of guitars from every year so we have a database of their dimensions. Then, in addition to that, we take hundreds of pictures of each instrument for the way that they've aged with a laser focus on the way the lacquer has checked, where it's aged, where the dings are, the buckle rashes, where's the pick wear. It's all captured in that library of images."

What about the pickups – do you age those as well?

"No, not the pickups themselves, just the hardware. We make our own PAFs at the Custom Shop and those are the ones that go into the Murphy Lab Collection." [Editor's note: as we mention in our review, the plastic parts don't go through any ageing process at the moment.]

Are there any IDs to tell someone that, maybe in 10 years' time, this is a Murphy Lab and frankly not the real thing?
"Well, one in the serial number – that's basically the guitar's ID. I actually don't know right now if we're doing it on all of them, but we do put an ML stamp in the electronics cavity. But the serial number alone is what tells the difference."

It's early days for the Murphy Lab, but the initial reception has been very promising...
"We already knew we were going to be in back-order mode with the Murphy Lab. What has surprised me is the extent of it. The order of magnitude is bigger than I thought and therefore now the lead times are longer. Not that I love that because I'd love to be able to fulfil on the order book faster, but that's the reality of where we stand today: it's a very long lead time.

"The strategy we set out immediately after taking over the company was being a guitar company again and [to] focus on making guitars – from the reorganisation of our guitars into Collections and all the changes you saw that we made originally, the Original, Modern, Custom Shop... and now the Murphy Lab. All of that is in service to that strategy, which was also, initially, about taking production down

> "We already knew we were going to be in back-order mode with the Murphy Lab"

to organise a quality team across all our 'craftories' [a word Cesar uses to describe the different guitar-making hubs within the Gibson facilities]. Now we have that, and we've had that in place for quite a while – a very big quality team inside each one of our craftories led by a team that works with everybody. That was the original governor of capacity: quality.

"Then we went into the journey of quality control, making the best guitars we've made in 127 years. Then we started to increase capacity and we did that pre-Covid. So we entered Covid in back-order mode because of the changes we had made. But we've kept on our path of increasing capacity governed by quality. We didn't say, 'Covid has increased demand so let's make more guitars without regard to the quality, governor.' We kept that and we kept our capacity plan, and have ramped up just like we did before Covid. So we're still on our path, our strategy, and that's not going to change."

There are five Goldtop Les Pauls currently listed in the Murphy Lab range. This 1954 heavy-aged model in Double Gold with P-90s and a wrapover bridge is the earliest style. There's then a '56 ultra-light aged with P-90s and a tune-o-matic bridge with stud tailpiece. Completing the line-up are three '57s with different ageing to choose from

The Great British 'Burst-Off

Ever wondered what a real '59 Les Paul Standard sounds like? How about three of them? We joined ace Welsh guitarist Chris Buck and guitar collector and trader Andrew Raymond to see how the legend measures up in the flesh – and filmed what happened next...

Words Jamie Dickson

Chris Buck puts some famous 'Bursts through their paces on our video

This issue's cover story grapples with some big questions about the validity, authenticity and value of high-end reissues – with Dave Burrluck performing a near-forensic A/B comparison of the Murphy Lab '57 Junior and the real thing on page 86, and Nev Marten guesting on *That Pedal Show* to put the Murphy Lab '59 Les Paul Standard and ES-335 through their paces. Not to be left out, editor Jamie journeyed over to Wales to visit the incredible collection of Andrew Raymond, proprietor of Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath, a fantastic spot to pick up classic gear to suit every pocket.

Andrew has the rare privilege of having not one but three original '59 'Bursts in his keeping, including two well-known examples, the so-called Minnesota 'Burst and the Grainger 'Burst. The Grainger in particular has the reputation of being a real musicians' favourite – having formerly belonged to Rod Stewart guitarist Gary Grainger. But since we covered 'Burst history in fine detail back in issue 469, we decided to do something a bit different this time to accompany our review of Gibson's Murphy Lab reissues, which aspire to be as good as the real thing.

> There's a rare clarity you don't find in most humbucker-equipped guitars but also a detail and depth

Before you can address the question of how close Gibson got with the Murphy Labs, it pays to familiarise yourself with the real thing. To that end, we asked stellar Welsh guitarist Chris Buck to put Andrew's genuine 'Bursts through their paces on video (see link, above right) playing through – what else? – an early Marshall JTM45 and basket-weave 4x12 cab.

While you'll have to watch the video to decide for yourself how the legend measures up to reality, we can share a few observations from the day that may be of use to anyone considering buying a reissue and hoping to capture the authentic 'Burst sound. First the good: playing the Grainger 'Burst revealed that its amplified sound is so rich in harmonic information that we even found ourselves playing fingerstyle acoustic pieces on it. There's a rare clarity you don't find in most humbucker-equipped guitars but also a detail and depth to its sound that rings evenly across all the strings. No, it won't make you a superhero or cure the common cold, but it is impressive.

By contrast, our second main observation is that owning the real deal is not without its challenges – pots rustled and controls cut in and out throughout our demo, and veteran guitar repair expert Huw Price even put in an appearance at one point to fettle the Grainger 'Burst so it behaved itself properly on camera. We're talking about 60-year-old guitars and circuitry here – which can't be swapped out for modern replacements without seriously threatening the originality and value of the guitars – so you should know that, in some respects, these guitars are made of flesh and blood like any other and actually have a slightly impractical side as well. They grumble and fuss like old cars, though they undeniably play and sound incredible when they're on song.

Viewed in this light, a really good reissue that gets you close to the tone and feel of the originals – which cost £250k and more – could make sense for serious guitarists and potentially perform more reliably in a studio or gig setting (not to mention being easier to insure). Of course, the genuine article has a certain sonic magic that is incredibly hard to capture with a brand-new guitar, aged or not. But we're exploring the upper reaches of the concept of 'diminishing returns' here. It's all very good – just some guitars are a little better.

Don't forget either that, like many guitars from Andrew's collection, original 'Bursts weren't always stratospherically highly priced. People who bought 'Bursts and the like back in the 80s saw the value of their guitars climb from the low thousands of pounds to the current prices well north of '*How much?*' that 'Bursts command. So it's as well to remember that price is just a function of what the market thinks something is worth. Underlying that is something that doesn't fluctuate as much, however: the intrinsic quality and musicality of the guitar. On that level, the genuine 'Bursts we played excel – with a few minor eccentricities to put up with. But good reissues aren't all that far behind.

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Large As Life

Plug-in specialist Neural DSP steps into the hardware world with this highly anticipated modelling unit that boasts 2GHz of power from its quad-core processors

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

NEURAL DSP QUAD CORTEX £1,449

CONTACT **Neural DSP** WEB **www.neuraldsp.com**

The display is armoured with chemically strengthened protective glass and a reinforced touch-sensor panel

What You Need To Know

1. **Neural? Never heard of them...** Neural is a Finnish company, known for its software plug-ins. The brand's mission is to design the next generation of both audio software and hardware products.

2. **So, it's a bit high-tech?** Well, any digital modeller could be defined as such, but this particular one leans towards a more modern approach with a sophisticated touchscreen, Wi-Fi connection and a massive amount of digital signal processing (DSP).

3. **Plenty of footswitches but only one knob. How does that work?** The huge volume knob is right where you need it, while the touchscreen takes care of a lot of what knobs, switches and buttons normally do. But there are actually knobs – they're just cleverly implemented as the cap on each of the footswitches!

Digital signal processing (DSP) in a hardware unit (providing a whole modelled signal chain of amp and cab simulation plus effects) is becoming increasingly popular, with many players opting for the likes of the Line 6 Helix or similar over a conventional amp-plus-pedals rig. New to the genre – and the subject of much buzz since its reveal at the 2020 NAMM Show – is the Quad Cortex, which manufacturer Neural is promoting as "the most powerful floor modeller on the planet".

Not only does the unit possess enormous processing capacity with 2GHz of dedicated DSP from its Quad-Core SHARC architecture, but it also has touchscreen capability implemented to a degree that we have never seen before in a guitar processor. But the jewel in the crown is Neural Capture, which digitally captures the sound of an analogue rig, in a similar fashion to Kemper's Profiling.

For all of its power, the Quad Cortex still manages to be a fairly small unit, which might not be out of place on a medium-sized pedalboard and is certainly easily transportable as a 'fly-rig'. It has a reassuringly solid build and its size has been kept down via two main features: the seven-inch touch display; and the metal caps on each of the footswitches, which are actually rotary encoders that can be used to change parameter values.

There are ample inputs and outputs that take care of many tasks besides plugging in a guitar. This includes a pair of combi inputs (with switchable phantom power for the XLRs) so you can plug in mics, as well as a headphone output, and a pair of send and return loops, which let you bring external pedals into the signal chain or employ the four-cable method of connection. There are standard MIDI DIN connections and MIDI over USB, although most players' use of the USB socket is likely to be employing the QC as an audio interface for recording and reamping.

There's no current computer-based editor/librarian to connect to via USB, but the unit is equipped with Wi-Fi to access firmware upgrades and more. It links to the Cortex Mobile app, and there's a Cortex Cloud for backing up your unit's presets, Neural Captures and IRs, and also sharing files with other QC users.

The sizeable Volume knob is in just the right place. Turn it up here!

Hold the tuner/tap switch to tune or tap in time for tempo change. A simultaneous press with the down footswitch changes modes

THE RIVALS

With similar functions for capturing sounds, the Kemper Profiler Stage (£1,401) combines the Kemper Profiler digital guitar amplifier with the Profiler Remote foot controller.

Line 6 modelling and effects floorboards are massively popular choices. There's the large Helix Floor (£1,230 street price) and the Helix LT (£799 street price), but the HX Stomp XL (£599 street price) offers great foot-switching ability in a smaller package.

Fractal Audio's Axe-Fx III is arguably the king of the hardware processors, but the company's FM3 floorboard (€1,299) is the unit most equivalent to the Quad Cortex, but only has three footswitches.

All the connections you need are clustered on the back panel

Creating and editing presets is easy with swiping, tapping and drag-and-drop moves on the touchscreen

In Use

The presets are built on a grid with four rows of eight blocks, each hosting a virtual device. This could be set up as four individual signal paths, but you have the ability to split and mix paths so you can use all four rows together to create a complex rig. There's no shortage of presets, either. 10 onboard setlists can each contain 256 presets (32 banks of eight). As for the virtual devices, you get more than 50 amps and more than 70 effects, and there are over 1,000 IRs, as well as the opportunity to load your own.

Creating and editing presets is quick and easy with swiping, tapping and drag-and-drop moves on the touchscreen. Just tap on any on-screen block and its parameters show up on the screen as virtual knobs. In addition, the footswitches – whose rotary caps correspond to those virtual knobs – light up, and you then have a choice of turning those or using the screen to make adjustments.

The amount of footswitches makes onstage use painless. There are three easily toggled main modes for the A to H footswitches: Preset, Scene and Stomp. In Preset mode, each of the eight footswitches calls up a preset in the bank. Scene mode uses the footswitches to access the eight 'scenes' you can have within a preset – variations on the theme, perhaps with adjusted parameter values or a different set of active blocks. While Stomp is for those who wish to use the unit as a standard effects pedalboard where any device block in a rig can be assigned to a footswitch for instant recall.

For all of these modes, the screen can be set to Gig View, which divides it into eight segments showing what each footswitch is assigned to. Expression pedals can be assigned to any device and control multiple parameters simultaneously.

Neural Capture, using modern AI technology, is dead easy to set up, too – just follow the on-screen instructions – and

Each footswitch has a rotary encoder that twists to adjust a parameter value

takes just a few minutes. The results are really good with just a little post-capture tweaking needed to get the taken global snapshot pretty indistinguishable from the real thing – whether that's the sound of rig, or a single amp or dirt pedal setting. You can then store it in the QC, integrate it as a block into presets and maybe gig with it, without having to take the original equipment out of the house.

Sounds

The Quad Cortex is naturally responsive to play through and has some great-sounding amps, with the usual familiar favourites covered. The actual modelled amps are variations on less than 20 guitar amps and a handful of bass amps, but these are supplemented with Neural Captures and, once you are part of the Neural community, there are loads of other users' Captures available to load into your machine. There are effects in all categories, but not the variety you'd see in some rival floorboards; there's no plate reverb, for instance. However, Neural says it is committed to expanding the amount of virtual devices and tells us there's a major update on the way with significant changes and features.

Verdict

By now, you'll all know the amount of different scenarios a unit such as this can be used in. Versatility is the name of the game and the Quad Cortex definitely has it. But does it outstrip the competition? Well, in certain ways... While its collection of models, particularly effects, is a work in progress (Neural is inevitably playing catch-up as other companies have been refining and adding to their hardware units for years), there is plenty of potential there. It has size and portability in its favour, its user-interface is outstanding, and the Neural Capture is an excellent facility. Overall, it's a powerful addition that pushes the boundaries of the genre. G

NEURAL DSP QUAD CORTEX

PRICE: £1,449
ORIGIN: Finland
TYPE: Amp and effects modelling floorboard
FEATURES: 2GHz Quad-Core SHARC architecture, Wi-Fi, 8-in/8-out USB audio interface, tuner, MIDI, 2,560 presets, tap tempo
CONTROLS: Touchscreen, capacitive power button, Volume knob, 11x footswitches, 11x rotary actuators
CONNECTIONS: XLR/standard jack combi inputs (1&2), standard stereo phones output, standard Capture out, XLR Main outputs (1/L&2/R), standard outputs (3/L&4/R), standard Send (1&2), standard Return (1&2), EXP 1, EXP 2 , MIDI In, MIDI Out/Thru, USB, S/PDIF digital out
POWER: Supplied adaptor 12V DC 3A
DIMENSIONS: 290 (w) x 190 (d) x 49mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Compact and portable; innovative touchscreen operation; ease of editing; Neural Capture facility; Neural Cloud for file storage and download; good USB interface capability; versatile connectivity

CONS No computer-based editor; no looper; lacking in some areas of effects

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Pulse Doppler

Turn up the rate knob of this all-analogue phaser to quicken your Pulse

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

Adrian Thorpe's latest venture is an analogue phase-shifting pedal, designed in conjunction with Dan Coggins, formerly of Lovetone and Dinosaural. Dan was behind Lovetone's much sought-after Doppelganger phaser/vibrato from the 1990s, which surely donated some of its DNA to this new project. The pair's idea was to create a dream phaser pedal to deliver some of the effects heard on classic records, but also take things further still. The Pulse Doppler is based around a four-stage, two-notch phaser design, but comes with a set of controls for an extended range of sounds with variations on phasing, vibrato and tremolo.

IN USE

Besides the standard bypass switch, you get another footswitch that instantly toggles between phasing and vibrato/pulsing effects by adding/removing dry signal. When incorporating dry signal, the Blend knob sets the dry/wet ratio with a 50:50 mix at noon, which produces the deepest notch. There's milder phasing to the left, moving towards vibrato on the right.

As standard on many modulation pedals, you get Rate and Depth controls, but the Depth knob here works closely in conjunction with a Manual knob that sets the notch filter frequencies. Basically, the Manual knob has an effect over a particular arc of its movement that varies with the Depth setting, having less control as the Depth control is advanced. With any set Depth, you can move the Manual knob in its effective arc to dial in the 'sweet spot' strongest effect or more subtle variations of it – not just phasing with an obvious sweep or wobble, but also that which offers a sense of altered tonality.

Resonance is added by the Enhance knob, which feeds back increasing amounts of phase-shifted output signal to the phase-shifting notch filter path input. This increases the depth of the two frequency notches, the result being an increased 'wow' effect.

More variation is provided by a pair of toggle switches. The Dual switch inverts the notches so they are either in sync or move in opposition to one another for a different flavour. All the action is easy to see as each notch has its own red LED that pulses at the set rate. A further three-way switch offers the alternate tonalities provided by having the straight and phase-shifted signal in phase for the fullest sound, or by inverting the phase

01. VIB/PHASE FOOTSWITCH
This removes the dry signal from the mix output, moving from phasing effects (combined wet and dry signal) to vibrato/pulse sounds that are wet only

02. RED LEDS
These represent the two notches. They pulse in sync with the rate you set and their brightness also increases with Depth

03. MANUAL & DEPTH KNOBS
These two work in conjunction: juxtaposition of the two will define the potency of your effect

04. DUAL SWITCH
Your choice of the notches being modulated in sync (Dual) or moving in opposition in a figure-of-eight style

05. 3-WAY TOGGLE SWITCH
Here's a gateway to some altered tonalities. You can have dry and phase-shifted sounds in phase or out of phase, or select Pulse for fewer low frequencies

06. WET & DRY OUTPUTS
Use the Wet output in a standard mono signal chain, but if you use both you can send Wet to one amp and Dry to another for a wide sound

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Phaser pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Enhance, Manual, Depth, Blend, Rate, Dual switch, Invert/Pulse/Normal switch, Vib/Phase footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard outputs (Dry & Wet)
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 100 (w) x 129 (d) x 54mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE
9/10

and adding an element of hollowness. Its middle setting, Pulse, removes low-frequency content from the phased signal, so it acts as a modulated high-pass filter for an altogether leaner sound.

SOUNDS

In A/B tests to see how the Pulse Doppler fared in recreating some classic vintage phaser sounds, we found the pedal had a brighter tonality than our 70s vintage pedals, but we were able to dial in the appropriate values to mimic the phasing action of our MXR Phase 90 and Electro-Harmonix Small Stone. Uni-Vibe sounds were likewise attainable as well as rotary speaker-style shadings.

While classic vintage sounds are one thing and important to many of us, the extended parameter range in the Pulse Doppler also makes it a fine asset in the creation of new variations: a wide range of phasing with a clarity of sound that slots in perfectly with modern signal chains, and, when you reduce or fully remove the dry sound, variations that encompass vibrato, tremolo and sequencer-style on/off rhythmic stutters. There's a plethora of these to embrace, from fatter pulsing vibe effects to choppy helicopter blade sounds, and the sort of Vox Repeat Percussion effects found in Thorpy's previous Chain Home pedal.

The fact is there's serious complexity going on under the hood here because each and every knob and switch interacts with the others to deliver a nuanced range of sounds. In just playing about, you will discover effects that you'd love to recall later on, many of them relying on precise placement of the knobs and switches. It's an all-analogue pedal, though, so no presets. You'll have to rely on the analogue method of remembering them – a pencil and a paper template.

VERDICT

The Pulse Doppler has a spacious sound in mono, but if you have a rig to handle it, you can send wet and dry signals to two separate destinations for a wider sound by using both rear-panel output sockets. Either way, it's a massively versatile pedal that demands exploration. G

PROS *Compact size; solid ThorpyFX build quality; versatile range of sounds; Vib/Phase footswitch*
CONS *Lack of presets means you'll have to draw templates to remember settings*

MANUFACTURER	PRICE
SCOTT MCKEON	£299
MODEL	**CONTACT**
SM FUZZ	SM FUZZ WWW.SMFUZZ.COM

SCOTT MCKEON

SM Fuzz

Scott McKeon's germanium-based fuzz pedal is back as a limited edition

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

In 1998, Scott McKeon was the winner of *Guitarist*'s Young Guitarist Of The Year competition. In 2021, he's back in our pages as the signatory for the SM Fuzz, although he could just as easily be here for his session work (studio and live) or his solo career. Not exactly a new pedal, the SM Fuzz first saw the light of day in 2011 and has been used by the likes of Doyle Bramhall II, Gary Clark Jr, Robbie McIntosh and James Bay, but it's been out of production for some time. However, it's now back and available in a new batch.

The pedal sets out to deliver the sort of vintage fuzz tone found in pedals from the 1960s, and key to that aim is the use of germanium transistors – selected and hand-biased AC128s. Now, germanium transistors are notoriously susceptible to changes in temperature, but you shouldn't get any audible surprises on a hot day because the designers have apparently come up with temperature-tolerant circuitry.

Looking at the design, the side-mounted knobs won't add extra width to the pedal once it's in use with jack plugs inserted into the adjacent sockets. Meanwhile, the Volume knob doubles as an on/off switch to save your battery power; we liked to run the pedal at max volume, and it's easy to turn it on and up in one movement.

The pedal is said to feature custom designed circuitry, not available in any other pedal, but to our ears it has a similar vibe to a well-sorted Fuzz Face. At the lowest setting of the Fuzz knob there's useful gritty drive tone, but towards the end of its travel there's rich fuzz, full-bodied yet with a clarity across the frequency range that delivers great string articulation. Particularly notable is the pedal's finely nuanced response to guitar volume, with smooth gradual clean-up – if you run the Fuzz knob flat out or somewhere near, you can roll back your volume from a full-on lead sound through shades of drive to clean as needed.

VERDICT

An excellent fuzz pedal. Considering that used examples come up for sale in excess of £600, this new iteration looks like a bargain. Grab one while you can... G

PROS *Rare pedal available again; authentic vintage fuzz sound; excellent reaction to guitar volume*

CONS *Those side-mounted knobs and on/off switching won't be to everyone's taste*

ALSO TRY...

ANALOG MAN

WWW.BUYANALOGMAN.COM

Sun Face from $195 (plus import taxes)

Analog Man has been producing its boutique take on the Fuzz Face for quite some time and offers a range of different options when ordering – particularly in specifying which germanium transistors the unit uses.

D*A*M

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID MAIN

1965 Tone Distorter £384

D*A*M is a go-to name in homegrown boutique vintage fuzz pedals and currently makes Macari's range of Tone Benders. This one, however, is one of the few pedals currently available direct from the company and is essentially a MK1 Tone Bender.

KING TONE

PHOTO BY ADAM BIGGIN / PEACH GUITARS

Guitar miniFUZZ-Ge £259

Built with carefully selected germanium transistors, this pedal offers control over bias, a three-way tone toggle switch, and switchable power filtering when using a nine-volt DC adapter to make the DC sound more like a battery.

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Germanium fuzz pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, on/off volume pot, temperature tolerant circuitry
CONTROLS: Volume (with integral power switch), Fuzz, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC adaptor
DIMENSIONS: 93 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MANUFACTURER	PRICE
FLATTLEY	£259 & £185
MODEL	**CONTACT**
REVOLUTION & CENTURION (SILVER RANGE)	FLATTLEY GUITAR PEDALS 07802 455 127 WWW.FLATTLEYGUITARPEDALS.COM

ROUND-UP

Flattley pedals

A duo of drives from UK-based boutique maker

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Olly Curtis

VIDEO DEMO ▶ http://bit.ly/guitaristextra

Gloucestershire-based boutique pedal company Flattley Guitar Pedals specialises in hand-wired pedals that aim to use only the highest quality components. Designer and builder Paul Flattley offers meticulously hand-finished pedals with artwork created by his daughter Phoebe, a graphic designer, who often bases the art around Mexican sugar skulls.

There are other custom options available, but the Revolution pedal we have here is typical of those sparkly finishes. The Centurion pedal is an example of the new 'Silver Range' (available directly from the company), which features plainer graphics and a lower price-point than the more ornate units.

One cool feature of the pedals is the Halo light ring that surrounds the footswitch and diffuses the light when playing live, avoiding the off-putting brightness you may get from standard LEDs. There are several colours available including the blue and purple seen on our review pedals. One variation is the custom-ordered Halo Light Plate with the light emanating from a transparent section inserted between the pedal base and chassis.

FLATTLEY

Revolution £259

Flattley describes the Revolution as being a "dynamic overdrive" and that's absolutely correct: playing through it feels really good as it responds to your touch and cleans up nicely with guitar volume, too. It's based around a Tube Screamer-style circuit, and an A/B test with our TS808 proved that it could nail all those TS sounds with ease and then some. The thing is, the Revolution goes beyond a standard TS by offering a range of clipping options courtesy of a three-way toggle switch for an op-amp integrated circuit, LED diodes or silicon diodes.

Each of the settings has its own attributes, completely warranting its inclusion. The upper setting of the switch has a lower output than the others and gives you the tightest sound with controlled bottom-end, whereas in the middle position things seem more opened up – louder, looser and more raunchy. The lower position of the switch may be the crunchiest of the lot with more compression and a spongier feel under the fingers as you dig in for sustain.

VERDICT *There's no shortage of drive pedals around, but this example excels with its easy playability and three-voice versatility*

FLATTLEY

Centurion (Silver Range) £185

If you hadn't guessed from its name and layout, the Centurion is a transparent overdrive in the same vein as the Klon Centaur. This Centurion is a Silver Range pedal, although you can buy one with a more traditional Flattley look for £259.

Set Gain at minimum and Treble to match your amp, and the Volume knob will give you boost from its eight o'clock position onwards so that there's plenty of knob travel to dial in just the right amount of clean boost from a slight lift to something that will really get your amp cooking – all while remaining true to your tone or perhaps adding a little enhancement from the Treble knob.

Advancing the Gain brings in a gradual increase in lower-gain drive, through 'clean with an edge' and 'just breaking up' tone to a mild raunch. These are practical degrees of drive that'll work in conjunction with the Volume to punch up an amp to the next level, or give extra options to another overdrive pedal when stacked together.

VERDICT *A great pedal for giving you more of what you've already got, complementing any decent amp or drive pedal*

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Dynamic overdrive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Volume, Drive, Tone, Clipping Switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 72 (w) x 120 (d) x 55mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

Tech Spec

ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Transparent overdrive pedal
FEATURES: Buffered bypass
CONTROLS: Gain, Treble, Volume, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 120 (w) x 96 (d) x 51mm (h)

8/10

Why Not Both?

Stefan Fast of YouTube channel ThePedalZone makes a convincing case for owning two of the same effect types

You might be inclined to choose from the duos of flangers (left) and delay/reverb pedals (right), but you'll find new and different shades of the effects in combination

If, like me, you tend to scroll through random gear groups and forums during your downtime, you've probably encountered a question such as: should I get delay pedal X or delay pedal Y? And as you sift through the replies you've probably also encountered one or several witty meme-lords answering, 'Why not both?' followed by a clever gif or a slew of pretending-to-roll-on-uncomfortable-imaginary-floor-while-chuckling-on-the-inside acronyms...

While these kinds of replies rarely contribute any real constructive feedback or useful insight, the idea of owning two pedals of the same type is actually one of creative value, as it lets you toggle between two different shades of the same effect, as well as achieve a third and completely new texture when you combine them.

> "A digital delay can carry the gooey warmth and sway of the analogue delay for a texture that's lush and wide"

Most of us have messed around with stacking overdrives and/or distortions in order to achieve a new and different dirt tone, but for some musicians the duplicate-device adventure stops there. If that happens to be you then let me be your sonic Sherpa and lead you up Mt Tone, in order to hopefully give you a new and fun perspective on things.

1. STACKING DELAY

Stacking delays is far from uncommon. If you've listened to The Edge, David Gilmour or Brian May then you've heard the spacious and rhythmic awesomeness stacked delays can produce. A lot of possibilities are available here, both with similar and contrasting delay tones.

The classic use is, of course, your rhythmic digital dual delays where you feed a short delay into a longer delay. You can never go wrong with the quarter and dotted-eighth note combo for that sweet galloping feel, but it's fun to experiment with other subdivision combos as well. The important thing here is to be aware of the levels and feedback of the delays. If you want a strong rhythmic delay, go for high levels and low feedback. If you want more of a washy texture then go for low levels and high feedback.

A cool way to make your tone more three dimensional and spacious is by stacking a short modulated analogue delay with low feedback and a longer pristine digital delay with high feedback. This enables the digital delay to capture and carry the gooey warmth and sway of the analogue delay for a beautiful texture that's lush and wide. It's important to run the delays at slightly off-set bpms in order to get that wide dimensional effect.

You can also walk the pedal path of Robin Guthrie, from legendary pop act Cocteau Twins, and stack several multi-tap delays – both short, long and modulated – for transcending, cascading reverberating textures.

2. STACKING REVERB

Stacking reverb is less typical than stacking delay, and personally I first encountered this by pure accident back in the day, as I turned on my

1

2

3

4

hall reverb pedal while having the spring reverb on my amp engaged. I just adored the extra liveliness the amp's springs brought to my initial note attack, while the ambient reverb washed away in the background.

A more well-known example of stacked reverbs is Jeff Buckley's iconic reverb tone on *Hallelujah*. This reverb tone manages to be both heart-breakingly intimate and close, and epically elusive and washy at the same time. This was achieved by running a short room-reverb into a long hall-reverb.

When it comes to stacking reverb, contrast is pivotal. Things will get mushy really quickly if you just pounce a washed-out 'verb on top of another washed out 'verb. So it's important to think about the individual tone, attack and decay of the reverbs before stacking.

A good use of contrast is, for instance, to stack a 100 per cent wet reverb with a long pre-delay and a long shimmer reverb. This way you can achieve a unique ambient volume swell effect, due to the full mix reverb removing your dry signal, which can then be carried away by the ethereal trails of the shimmer reverb.

3. STACKING PITCH SHIFTERS & OCTAVERS

Pitch shifters are definitely not something you find on every 'board out there and hence not what people typically stack, but you can achieve some really epic synth-like textures by doing so. A lot of pitch shifters let you use two or more intervals at the same time, but in those cases the intervals run in parallel and not in series. It's this huge cascading series effect we want to achieve by stacking two (or more) pitch shifters.

I like to stack a pitch shifter set to a 5th above into an octaver set to an octave up and octave down at the same time. Mix that with some fuzz and a touch of chorus and you can almost get into 'supersaw synth' land.

4. STACKING SIMILAR MODULATION

Now, this is a fun effects category to get stack crazy with – there are so many options available. Stacking two tremolo pedals set to different speeds and waveforms can create some really trippy asynchronous rhythmic patterns, while stacking a fast, shallow chorus with a slow and deep chorus will give you a really watery and psychedelic Leslie-like effect.

Stacking two envelope filters set to different thresholds and different envelope directions can create some super-spacey filter effects, while stacking two phasers set to slightly offset slow rates can create some really dramatic and bold sweeps.

Now go out there, my tonal troopers, and stack your hearts out!

HEAR IT HERE

You can check out my Tonal Teamwork video on stacking pitch shifters to get an idea of some of these concepts. Find it on the on ThePedalZone YouTube channel at **http://bit.ly/474TTstacking**

Longtermers

A few months' gigging, recording and everything that goes with it – welcome to *Guitarist*'s longterm test report

Fender American Acoustasonic Jazzmaster

with Dave Burrluck

Writer
DAVE BURRLUCK
Guitarist, Gear Reviews Editor

Following our review in issue 472, we continue our look at one of the most inspiring and divisive guitars of this year. Will our love affair continue?

A cheapo Encore turned into a homage to Elmore James. A world away from today's electrified acoustics!

Now, where were we? Ah, yes, recording. Thanks to our production deadlines, I was halfway through working on a demo track and our art editor – he who must be obeyed – recalled this Acoustasonic Jazzmaster back to our photo studio. Pronto. Then there were video demos to be done. While that's the same in every issue, it left me with a half-finished acoustic bed and some rather rattled band members.

As many of us have found over these past months, recording ain't what it used to be. Back in the day, the suggestion of "Let's try some acoustics..." would have had me and our band leader/guitarist blowing the dust off whatever acoustic-shaped things there were in the studio. "Anyone got a capo? What's that chord in the middle section?" Then, with some diligent work from our engineer/producer, we cobbled together a pair of acoustics that sounded way better in the track than they did while we were strumming away in person. Then we went down the pub, convinced we had a hit on our hands.

Working as an engineer back in the days of reel-to-reel tape machines, when a DAW was something you opened and shut, my job was to try to make a motley collection of musicians with their motley collection of instruments sound half decent. As ever, if you managed to produce a half-decent recording at the end of an arduous eight-hour session, the band thought they were great. If the results were less than spectacular, the studio was rubbish and the engineer was deaf.

"I'm hearing the sort of acoustic sounds our engineer would have heard after careful mic'ing and EQ"

With the Acoustasonic returned, it's just another example of how things have changed. Simply running the Acoustasonic, via Helix, straight into GarageBand on my laptop, I'm hearing the sort of acoustic sounds our engineer/producer would have heard after his careful mic'ing and EQ had made our crusty instruments sound presentable. I'm not saying that the Acoustasonic would replace a good-sounding, nicely played and nicely mic'd acoustic guitar, but for this simple plug-in-and-play route, it sounds way more realistic than any other piezo-equipped instruments I have access to. It's also so fast to work with.

With the acoustic bed finally finished, the Acoustasonic isn't. A quick thought that a slide part would help the chorus is realised by a simple flick to the bridge magnetic pickup and a change of patch on my Helix. I haven't got off my chair, let alone changed guitars, amps or pedals. Job done.

Except now the Acoustasonic Jazzmaster takes me on a journey back to one of my favourite bottleneck pioneers, Elmore James. Classic reference tracks such as *Dust My Broom* inspired many Brits in the early days of the blues explosion. Those simple licks combined with a raw yet urgent performance were, I believe, recorded on an acoustic guitar with a magnetic pickup stuck on. Somewhere, I have a cheapo acoustic that I modified like that, which – as I remember – was awful to play and next to impossible to control at any volume. It takes me a while to locate this forgotten piece of my playing history (pictured above), but when I do, it's pretty laughable. Did I really play it in front of a paying audience?

Now, the Acoustasonic doesn't look like a rootsy blues slide guitar that the likes of Seasick Steve would attack, and I don't recall any Fender videos referencing slide guitar players with their Acoustasonics, but they might have missed a trick: it's a seriously good acoustic-based slide guitar and so much easier to use than the real thing. Man, if only Elmore had used one of these!

It simply illustrates the scope of this guitar, open tuned, with or without that slide. And, frankly, with no outboard help I can go from pretty acoustics to dirty blues wails – and the ability to bring in a little more or less crunch just adds to the fun. Then I make the mistake of tuning from open E to open G and slip into my Keef comfort zone. *Street Fighting Man* never sounded so like the original's distorted acoustics! See, guys such as Elmore and Keef have been blurring the lines between the acoustic and the electric guitar for years. The Acoustasonic does it for you – effortlessly. G

Reviewed *472* ***Price*** *£1,879 (inc gigbag)* ***On Test Since*** *Early 2021* ***Studio Sessions*** *At home, yes* ***Gigged*** *No* ***Mods*** *No* *www.fender.com*

GUTHRIE GOVAN

The Aristocrats guitarist details the most original reason we've heard for buying a 335 and reveals an affection for ring modulators

What was the first serious guitar that you bought with your own money?

"I'm going to have to say an Ibanez JEM, I think. I had the precursor to that in the form of an Ibanez RG550, which was none more black, but I don't know if that quite qualifies as my first serious guitar because I bought it wishing it were a JEM. So when I actually got a JEM, that felt like a momentous occasion… for about a year and then I thought, 'I'm going to have to sell this because it looks like somebody else's guitar.' I sold that guitar not long after acquiring it in the hope of shedding any unnecessary Steve Vai connotation and ended up buying a more grown-up looking Paul Reed Smith."

What was the last guitar you bought and why?

"The last guitar I bought was a Nik Huber Orca 59. On the last Aristocrats studio album there's a song called *The Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde* and from the moment I heard the demo I knew instantly that the way I need to approach this song is to put on my 70s rock god hat. I need to be a guy with a Les Paul and I want it to sound like the Les Paul is around my knees and it's going into a Marshall that's far too loud. I had this character in my mind and so if I could somehow channel that character it seemed to me that I would be able to play the song in the spirit in which it was written.

"For the album [*You Know What…?*, 2019] I borrowed a Les Paul that was in the studio and which turned out to be the property of Kenny Loggins, of all people. Then we went on tour and everywhere we stopped I would go to a guitar shop, looking for Les Pauls, and finally we came to a place called The Guitar Sanctuary, which is an aptly named emporium indeed, in McKinney, a city near Dallas in Texas.

"Every time The Aristocrats go to McKinney at least one of us buys a guitar there. I asked them, 'What have you got that's kind of a Les Paul?' I tried everything in the shop and this Huber just jumped out at me. There were lots of things that sounded like a Les Paul, but this thing sounded specifically like the Les Paul in my head. It had that Gary Moore, Peter Green thing. It practically sold itself."

> "[When] your gear spends 22 hours a day in somebody else's custody on tour, you [learn to] treat guitars more like a tool"

PHOTO BY CIAN O'SULLIVAN

Guthrie's signature HSH Charvel is a mainstay in his live rig: one with an ash body, the other a maple-topped basswood model

What's the most incredible find or bargain you've had while buying gear?

"I once bought a guitar because it had the same birthday as me. How's that? I have a Gibson ES-335, very red, very secondhand, but whoever had it before me obviously took care of it as well. It's the right kind of worn – use, not abuse. I remember finding it in a shop and googling the serial number and discovering it was made in either very late 1971 or very early 1972. I thought, 'Cool, we could have gone to school together! This is meant to be…' It *is* a nice 335, but at least 50 per cent of my motivation for buying it was that it's the same age as me. I take that as some kind of significant portent."

What's the strongest case of buyer's remorse that you've ever had after buying gear?

"I guess the closest I could come to that would be the following. Taking a year off between school and going to university, I spent it working in Essex Police Headquarters and saving every penny. My goal was to treat myself to a little home recording setup so I'll collect what should be a year's beer money and see what I can do at the end of it. I remember ordering a Fostex R8 and a Studiomaster mixing desk, a Yamaha power amp and two Tannoy monitors. All this stuff came in the post and I remember setting it up and trying to get it to work, trying to understand how a mixer operated, what buses were, and discovering things were muted when they shouldn't have been. I really had no idea what I was doing. It took me quite a long time before I was able to record a signal onto a reel-to-reel machine.

GUTHRIE'S GO-TO RIG

"The last stage rig I used was two of my signature Charvel guitars: an ash-bodied one tuned down to D and a basswood one with a maple top not tuned down to D. That would run through a Fractal FX8, and then I do the four-cable method thing with that.

"The amp of choice would be a Victory V30 MkII. The core of my live rig with The Aristocrats is there's a volume pedal in there all the time just before the input of the amp – and it doubles as a bit of a noise gate and it also enables me to approximate messing about with the volume knob on the guitar but without my picking hand ever leaving the string. There's a wah always in the chain and the expression pedal is set so that as soon as you start moving it the wah engages.

"Other than that, a little bit of reverb and delay, a little bit of chorus sometimes, and the closest thing to an interesting effect I was using on the last tour would be the Fractal Ring Modulator. I was an early adopter of ring modulators; as soon as I discovered that the ring modulator was a thing I had to buy one and I treated myself to the Moogerfooger. But what's different about the Fractal one is it has pitch tracking and so if you turn that on and then mess around with the ratio control you can get something that's like a pitch shifter."

PHOTO BY DANIEL WORK

All the way through that process I was feeling these dark moments of thinking, 'Have I just wasted a year's worth of money on something that I'm not qualified to use?'"

Have you ever sold a guitar that you now intensely regret letting go?

"Not really. I used to be more soppy and sentimental about every single guitar I bought and possibly the thing that changed is going on tour a lot. I guess the realities of touring, particularly with bigger bands where your gear spends 22 hours a day in somebody else's custody, maybe that's partly what brainwashed me into this new mindset of letting go a little bit more and treating guitars more like a tool rather than something with real emotional weight."

What's your best tip for buying guitars?

"The best way to prepare for buying a guitar is to take the guitar you already have and make sure you have explored every sound you can get out of it. By messing with the knobs, by seeing how it behaves with different amp settings, how it reacts when you hold the pick differently; how many things can you do electronically or with your playing technique? Make sure you've explored the whole range of your guitar and not only will you have become a better player having gone through that process, but also you've become a more informed buyer. Hopefully the thing that inspired you to go to the music shop was this sound you hear in your head and you've tried every permutation of playing techniques and different control settings and the guitar you have doesn't do that sound. That's why you're going shopping."

When was the last time you stopped to stare in a guitar shop window (or browse online) and what were you looking at?

"The online gazing I've been doing recently has been more looking for something that has the topology of the fretboard but acts as a MIDI controller. I would like to find the perfect fretboard-shaped MIDI interface, rather than lusting after an old Strat or something like that. I'm in that fortunate place where I'm pretty happy with the guitars I have. If someone told me that for the next five years you can't buy any more guitars, I could be at peace with that."

If forced to make a choice would you rather buy a really good guitar and a cheap amp or a cheap guitar and a top-notch amp?

"I would go for the expensive guitar because I think the amount of bonding you do over time with a guitar is somehow deeper than the bonding you do with an amp. It's a more tactile thing, it affects your playing technique, it affects the kind of things you want to play… I can imagine having a nice guitar and a bad amp and thinking, 'Well, I can upgrade the amp one day,' but playing a dog through a Dumble would not be that satisfying because the Dumble would just magnify the dogness."

If you could only use humbuckers or single coils for the rest of your career, which would you choose and why?

"I'd go humbuckers, I think. As I came out of my dark metal phase of playing I realised you can actually get a decent clean tone with a humbucker as long as it's not monstrously overwound and isn't putting out 40 volts. A lower output, more sensitive humbucker can be decent clean – maybe more convincingly than the bridge pickup of a Strat will ever be able to do that thick overdriven thing that I need for my job. Oh, and I've just remembered that you can tap humbuckers and split the coils!" **[DM]**

The Aristocrats' new live album, *Freeze! Live In Europe 2020*, is available now via Boing Music ***www.the-aristocrats-band.com***

If you're in the market for a new guitar, Guthrie's advice is to make sure you've explored all that your current guitar has to offer in search of the missing sound in your head before hitting the shops. It'll make you a better player in the process, too!

CELESTION LOUDSPEAKERS

Tone pro John Paice gives us the lowdown on Celestion's expanded range of industry standard-setting 12-inch guitar loudspeakers

"When you're looking at choosing a speaker, the first spec you need to consider is impedance," says John. "Every amplifier has an output impedance, and the idea is to match that with the speaker(s). Power rating is the other important thing to be aware of. You need a power rating that is equal to or greater than the max output of the amplifier. In essence, changing a speaker is quite simple; in most cases it's a straightforward thing to do. Some amps are trickier than others, but it's normally a 10-minute job for an experienced tech.

"There is a big movement towards mixing speakers. If, for example, you have a 2x12 unit, you can pick and choose some interesting sounds. It is a nice thing to experiment with and can really broaden your range of tone.

"I tend to like blending speaker models that have noticeably different characteristics. Get it right and it can sound massive. A G12M Greenback and a Vintage 30 is a popular combination because they're dissimilar. Putting them together is nice to listen to.

"You could also take say a bass-y, girth-y-sounding G12H-150 Redback and pair it with something more treble-y like a Vintage 30 for some extra depth and contrast." **[RB]**

https://celestion.com

Celestion's John Paice is proud to promote the brand's leading reputation as it approaches its 100th anniversary

1 CELESTION BLUE

"The company has been around since 1924, so we're coming up to our 100th anniversary! We were one of the early developers of moving coil loudspeakers and in the early days we focused on radios and gramophones.

"In the late 1950s, we had a good relationship with Vox, and we set about developing one of our radiogram speakers – the G12 – to give it more power-handling capability for guitar amps. That speaker was put into [Vox's first dedicated electric guitar amplifier] the AC15 in the late 50s.

"Fast-forward to the early 60s and that became the 'Vox blue' [model T.530] – the original purpose-built guitar speaker. Alnico became affordable again in the 90s and the Celestion Blue is a recreation of the original 'Vox blue'. George Harrison and Brian May used it in their Vox amps and people love those sounds. It has a certain chime and a kind of gritty jangle."

2 G12M GREENBACK

"Marshall came along in 1962 and we started making an Alnico speaker similar to the 'Vox blue' for them called the T.652. Because of various geopolitical issues around the time, Alnico suddenly became very expensive, therefore we started using iron-based/ceramic magnets, and that's how the G12M and G12H came about. Alnico has a more laid-back, softer feel, whereas ceramic speakers tend to be a little punchier and more aggressive sounding – which was perfectly in tune with how rock music was progressing in the 60s.

"The G12M is iconic and very much of its era. Clapton, Page, Beck and Hendrix all used them. Later on, Van Halen and Angus Young used them, too. Up until the early 70s, the G12M and G12H were about all the choice you had! The key difference between them is the magnet – M being Medium/35 ounces and H being Heavy/50oz. The bigger magnet produces a tighter low-end."

3 VINTAGE 30

"There's a logic to the way Celestion speakers have evolved – it comes down to power handling. As amplifiers became more powerful, we had to build speakers that would take more power. After the 15-watt 'Vox blue', 25-watt G12M greenback, and 30-watt G12H greenback, the Vintage 30 was developed in the mid-80s to work with the hot-rodded amps of the time. The original idea behind it was to go back to the tonal benchmark of the 'Vox blue' and replicate that as closely as possible, but with a ceramic magnet speaker.

"Although the name implies 30 watts, it's actually a 60-watt speaker; we think the name comes from its 30cm diameter. The Vintage 30 is versatile and virtually bulletproof and has been adopted as an industry standard for rock and metal. It's famously used by Slash and Peter Frampton, although producers love it, too, because it tends to record well."

4 G12H-150 REDBACK

"Most of our speakers follow specific recipe, and with a 12-inch cone that means a 1 ¾-inch voice coil – that's the 'house sound'. But that does impose certain limitations in terms of power handling. Aside from needing to use more robust materials, more powerful speakers also need to deal with heat. Power and heat are inextricably linked, and when you up the power there comes a point when you need to reconfigure the system.

"Whereas the previous three speakers all have 1 ¾-inch voice coils, the G12H-150 Redback has a larger two-inch voice coil combined with a 50oz (H/Heavy) magnet. Along with its more robust materials, that enables us to up the power rating to 150 watts. Changing the voice coil – and, therefore, its relationship with the cone – changes the speaker's tonal signature. Consequently, these speakers have a darker, meatier sound, which is great for down-tuning or taming a super-bright amp."

1

2

CELESTION
G12
G12
Vintage 30
CELESTION INTERNATIONAL LTD

3

CELESTION

4

THE BUILD

HOT-ROD TELE
PART 2

In the second part of Jamie's 50s hot-rod-themed Tele modding build, we find out how it's all come together – from the new pickups and electronics to the retro-inspired pinstriping art

Words Jamie Dickson **Photography** Olly Curtis

As regular readers may know, a few months ago I bought a '52 Telecaster reissue that had seen better days. Despite being in a somewhat beaten-up condition it definitely had potential. And with the original case and documentation missing, it was ripe for modification – since much of its 'collector's' value as an all-original US reissue already had been lost.

I'd been inspired by the guitar collection of Billy Gibbons, which features quite a few modded Esquires and Teles with pinstriped finishes. For the uninitiated, pinstriping is a style of freehand painting that uses calligraphic lines to form flowing patterns. It was pioneered by 50s car-painting legend Von Dutch and today this motif has been adopted and evolved by car artists all over the world. One such artist is Somerset-based hot-rod artist Pace Frith, who lives just up the road from the *Guitarist* office. Who better, then, to give my Tele a Von Dutch-style makeover?

The guitar itself is well suited to be the 'chassis' for a 50s hot-rod. It's an American Vintage '52 reissue from around 2012, a period in time when Fender strove hard for maximum period-correctness in its AVRI line – to the point where some of the tooling developed for these production-line guitars was subsequently adopted by the Custom Shop. By going all-out for authenticity, the circa 2012 models

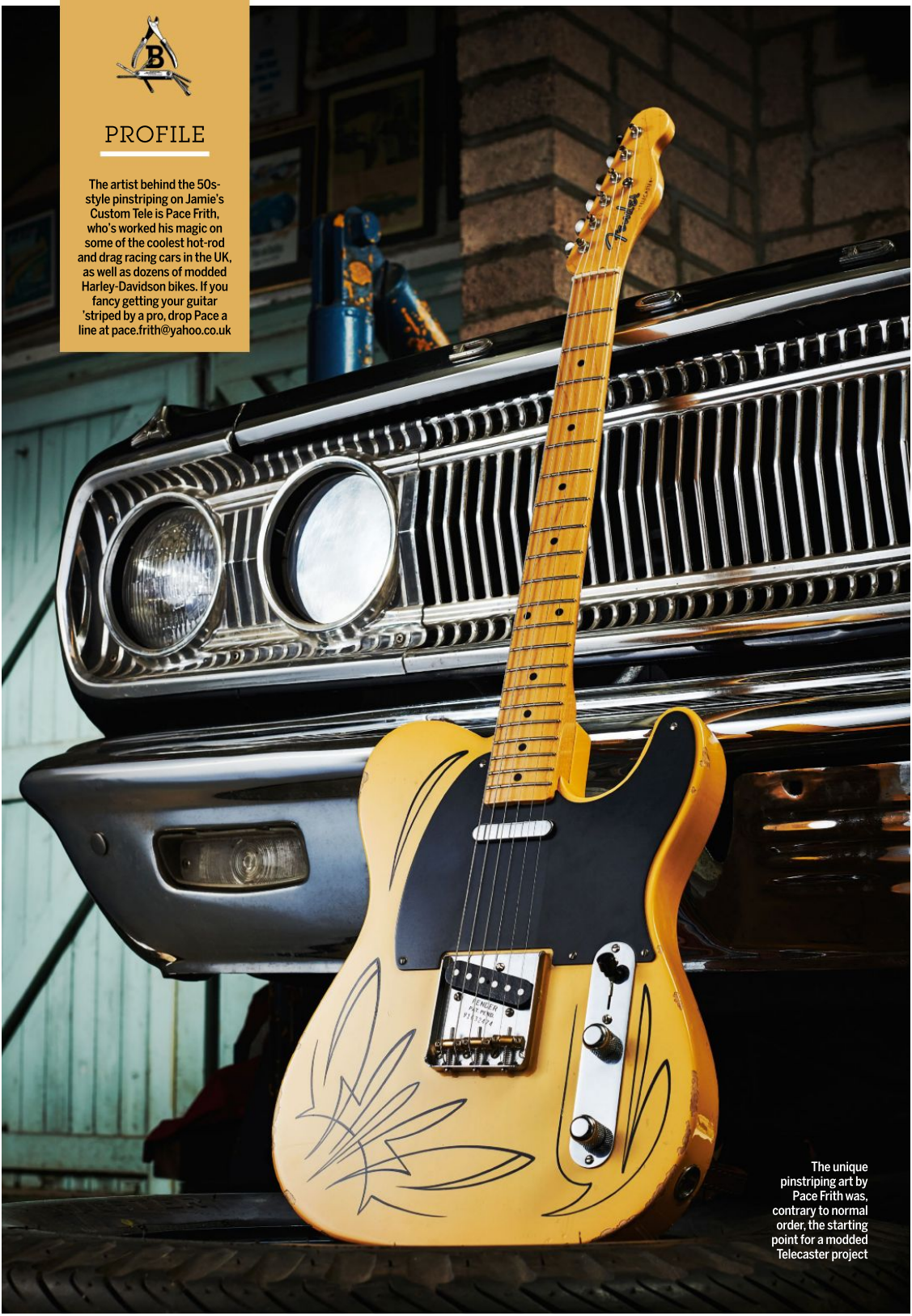
certainly pleased purists and enjoy a cachet of their own on the secondhand market. However, I still wanted to make my hot-rod Tele as versatile as possible in a modern playing environment. Pickup maven Jason Lollar recommended a set of his own Vintage T units, providing crisp but slightly hotter-than-average vintage Tele tone. Gear editor Dave Burrluck then kindly installed new switching that gave me an extra sound: neck and bridge together in series – a summed, hotter signal that gives an almost humbucker-like voice. This feature was engaged via a push-pull tone pot and the tone pot spec was also modded to provide a more gradual rolling off of high-end, since I dislike rapid drop-offs in treble that can leave you hunting for the right place to set the dial. We also upgraded the Tele's brass saddles to compensated modern versions, for improved intonation.

So how did the project work out? Well, I love the pinstriping and while, judging from people's reaction, it may be a bit of a Marmite thing, it really makes the guitar feel unique. Pace did a great job of nailing the early 50s style of 'striping, which means it's totally in character with the guitar. I also love the Lollars, which I'm coming to recognise as having a signature style: crisp and balanced, with a voice that feels timeless rather than dustily vintage or cleanly contemporary.

The in-series mod is quite a blunt, brash tone compared with the standard neck-and-bridge tone. But with a nice tight drive pedal, this extra voice comes alive – providing somewhat PAF-like thickness and grunt. I'm glad it's there and find myself using it more and more now. Any regrets? Well, only of my own initial choice in buying this guitar: I love its battered feel, but I shouldn't have overlooked the fretwear around the 2nd fret over the G, B and high E strings. Even a partial refret on a maple neck entails a blow-over with lacquer afterwards, increasing costs. Since the reissue's frets were tiny to begin with, this leaves me in the awkward position of either making good the frets as far as possible and tolerating the wear or biting the bullet and paying for a refret. But the former seems to be working okay for now – and what would any hot-rod be without a few handling quirks that only the owner knows how to steer round? G

PROFILE

The artist behind the 50s-style pinstriping on Jamie's Custom Tele is Pace Frith, who's worked his magic on some of the coolest hot-rod and drag racing cars in the UK, as well as dozens of modded Harley-Davidson bikes. If you fancy getting your guitar 'striped by a pro, drop Pace a line at pace.frith@yahoo.co.uk



The unique pinstriping art by Pace Frith was, contrary to normal order, the starting point for a modded Telecaster project

The MOD SQUAD

SIGNATURE TONE (PART 2)

In the second part of our look at signature pickups, Dave Burrluck gets up close and personal with a beastly tone

Bernie and The Beast in 2017 and the cloned Bernie Buckers, ready to fit

Fresh from the shock of the new in the form of Rabea Massaad's excellent Bare Knuckle Silo humbuckers that we checked out in last issue's Mod Squad, it's time to consider the opposite strand of the signature pickup world, and so we're looking backwards!

For every top-level player who's deserving of their own signature pickup (tweaked for their signature guitar perhaps), there seems to be an increasing number of signature pickups that aren't improved or enhanced, they're simply recreations of the artist's pickups in one of their significant guitars, presumably with the warts 'n' all of time and heavy use.

> "Visually, this signature set aims to be exact replicas of Bernie's pickups"

Few pickup makers, however, base their entire range on such historic signature designs. But one exception here in the UK is the revitalised Cream T brand that centres on this 'historic signature' pickup theme with models that have either been wound for the artist – be that Keith Richards or Jeff Beck – or are actually proper artist-endorsed signature pickups for, notably, Billy F Gibbons. His BFG WhiskerBuckers on a Patrick James Eggle Macon sounded magnificent and certainly outshone my own well-used 2001 PRS Singlecut.

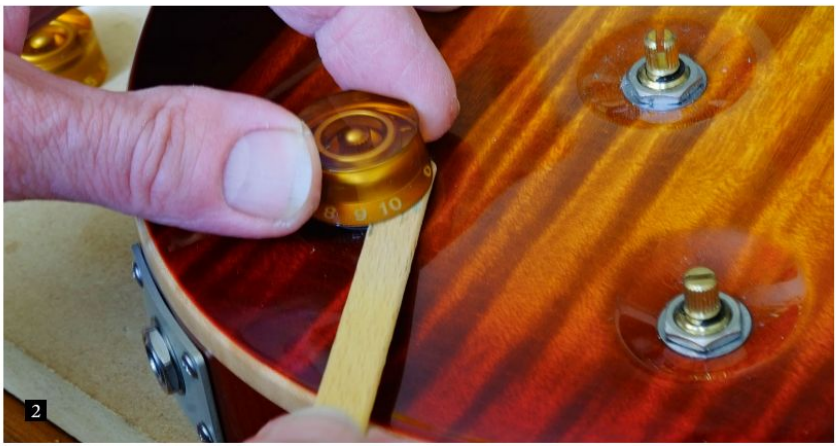
"Why don't you try our new Bernie Buckers?" suggested Cream T's Tim Lobley. In truth, I'd been thinking about upgrading that model as PRS's Singlecut has moved on in two decades, and while many would simply trade and move on up, I've always liked the guitar. Could I make it more like a 1959 Les Paul – or even Bernie Marsden's fabled Beast?

Before I could think any further, the Bernie Buckers arrived, resplendent in their natty display box. Sadly, they don't come with a '59 Burst. Exactly what's inside our BBs is kept secret and that reflects the methodology. Cream T founder Thomas Nilsen simply doesn't believe in the 100 per cent 'historically accurate' route when it comes to the component parts. His aim is simply to achieve a sound that – after extensive measuring and testing – satisfies the artist. Thomas also believes that DCRs matter, but only if measured correctly. The Bernie Buckers sit at the 'hot' end of the PAF world, 8.5k ohms at bridge and 8.3k at neck, but that's all the spec you're gonna get.

Visually, this signature set aims to be exact replicas of Bernie's pickups with shielded single-conductor hook-up wire, aged nickel covers and standard 'long' mounting legs. They're joined by the slightly less expensive 'Scan 2' versions that can be customised for your own needs, without a cover, for example, and with four-conductor wiring – not quite the same as those on the Beast.

Measuring pot values: make sure the pot is turned fully up

The precise inner workings of the Bernie Bucker is kept firmly under wraps by Cream T



2. Gently levering off the control knobs with a wooden spatula (aka a lolly stick!)

3. Making sure to use the right tool for the job

4. The outgoing PRS #7 neck pickup with 20 years of ageing

5. Finally wiring in the new pickups to the new circuit

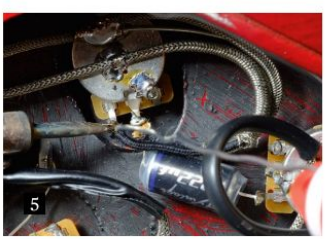
Playing Host

With any pickup, its success lies in the guitar it's on and that's where we come a little unstuck with the whole artist/historic model. Buying your BFG WhiskerBuckers will not turn your cheapo bolt-on 'Les Paul' into 'Pearly Gates'. But, if Thomas's readings are correct and he manages to reproduce the transducers, then the closer your host guitar is to the one you're aiming to replicate, the closer the sound will be to your goal.

"I'm happy with the new wiring, but as I go to load in the neck pickup I realise a big school-boy error: it doesn't fit"

Back in 2001, PRS's Singlecut was a close cousin to an old Les Paul – enough, of course, to famously kick off a serious legal spat with Gibson. But there are plenty of differences, not least that the PRS has a longer 635mm (25-inch) scale and a one-piece wrapover bridge. That said, it's a big, fat-sounding single-cut.

Still considering my modding adventure, the most obvious way to narrow the gap further is to rewire the guitar to the sort of spec Gibson would have used back in the day. Rather than mod the original circuit, I decide to remove that – keeping the toggle switch and output jack in place. And to that aim I call up Jeremy Tosh at Charles Guitars for some advice (read more on the page opposite), and set that part of the project in process.

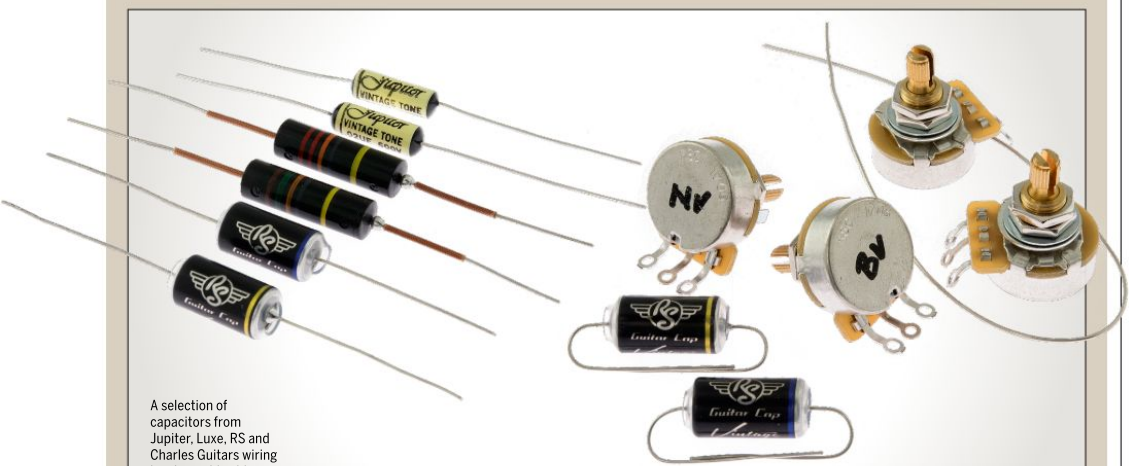


Getting To Work

The fact that I've decided to fit old-style humbuckers into a much more contemporary build reveals a rather fundamental error on my part. I'm happy with the new wiring, but when I go to load in the neck pickup I realise a big school-boy error: it doesn't fit. Depth-wise, the neck pickup cavity on the PRS is limited by the neck tenon, which extends all the way into the neck pickup cavity. Although the original PRS #7 and the Bernie Bucker have exactly the same 'long' legs, the adjustable polepiece screws, to original PAF size of the BBs, are longer than those on the #7. I need longer pickup mounting screws and shorter polepiece screws. So, if you're doing this, make sure you tell Cream T when you order; the company can supply what you need, effectively a Scan 2 version. Within 24 hours, I have loaded in the shorter polepiece screws supplied by Thomas, and thanks

CIRCUIT CHECK

What should you consider along with a vintage-aimed pickup swap?



A selection of capacitors from Jupiter, Luxe, RS and Charles Guitars wiring kit. Just add solder

Jeremy Tosh of Charles Guitars shares some wise words to help with our pickup swaps. "Between a standard CTS 500kohms pot and an 500k RS SuperPot, which are manufactured by CTS specifically for RS Guitarworks," begins Jeremy, "the main difference is that the SuperPots are never below 500k. As you know, the standard CTS pots will vary from around 470k to occasionally just above 500k. The SuperPots have a baseline of 500k, but they're usually in the 520k to 550/560k mark. If I wanted to get the most out of a Les Paul-style guitar – which is a question I get asked most of the time! – I'd put a 520k in for the bridge volume and something around the 540k to 550k at the neck.

"Also, I know there is a lot of snake oil about this, but the way the logarithmic curve is, the way it tapers off, is important. With the SuperPots they hold onto more as you turn the volume down, which means [the volume] doesn't drop off a cliff when you turn it down, so there's no need for treble bleeds or any of that malarkey. Of course, if you want to 'cool it down', take some brightness off as you turn down, then a standard CTS pot will be fine, but, even so, you want them 500k or slightly above – you don't want any 470ks in there.

"You see, the values of pots back then [in the 50s] were much better than today, so I'd be inclined to go the SuperPot route on the volumes. Obviously, back in 1959, Gibson wouldn't match the pots, they'd just pull out two from the parts bin and put them in. But I believe they were better to begin with: the tapers were better. In the SuperPot, the carbon resistor is thicker, they're screenprinted with a heavier carbon track. Better, basically."

The SuperPots aren't designed as tone pots, as Jeremy explains: "Standard CTS are fine as they're just acting as a rheostat. But, again, I'd look for a slightly higher value in the neck than the bridge."

Incidentally, when considering new pots for your guitar, always check if you need short- or long-shaft pots. To be honest, I'd always assumed I'd need long shafts on a guitar like the PRS with its thick maple top, as you do with many actual Les Pauls. But simply removing the backplate I see each pot sits in a recess, mirrored by the dishing on the front under each knob. Short shafts are good to go and that's simply what I order.

> "Back in 1959, Gibson wouldn't match the pots, they'd just pull out two from the parts bin and put them in"

So, with our pots sorted and the intention to rewire to 50s style, there's just the thorny subject of the tone capacitors to ponder.

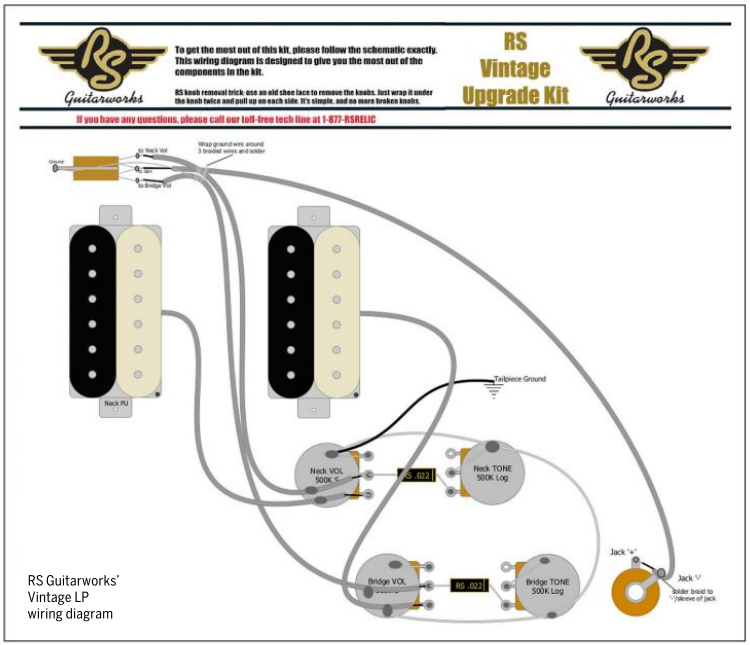
"You might want to consider two .022 microfarads – one for each tone control – or use an .015 on the neck tone to make it more balanced with the bridge tone control because the neck is slightly darker to begin with," says Jeremy. "But that is a matter of feel. If you're moving your tone just by the sound you hear, as opposed to moving it to a specific number, it doesn't really make that much difference."

When it comes to type, "the oil-filled Luxe Bumble Bees are very, very nice", Jeremy offers, "but they are expensive. They work very well and sound really great. The RS paper-in-oil (PIO) are a lot less expensive and very good. Then, for my money, it's the Jupiter caps – I only sell these with a kit, but they're very reasonably priced. They are used by Collings. I'd like to say I started using them before Collings, which I did.

"Do any sound better than another? I don't know. [Guitar maker] Don Grosh has said, 'I've tried them all; they all sound exactly the same.' But I will say that I've taken guitars and perhaps put in a Luxe and it's sounded terrible; I'll put a Jupiter in and it sounded awesome."

I decide on those mid-price RS PIO caps, with the .015/.022 microfarads values.

"I think that's a good choice," agrees Jeremy. "Bumble Bees are for those that want it to be and look period-correct. If you have a Custom Shop Les Paul or something and you're doing some work then the Bumble Bees are what you'd probably want to go for. To be honest, as you say, that's quite a muscular guitar you're working on so I think with the control upgrade it's going to sound epic. That's my pre-test verdict," laughs Jeremy. We'll see.



RS Guitarworks' Vintage LP wiring diagram

DIAGRAM COURTESY OF RS GUITARWORKS AND WWW.CHARLESGUITARS.CO.UK

to those longer mounting screws I found in The Mod Squad's ever-giving bits-box, we're back in business.

Unleashing The Beast

Okay, so while I wasn't expecting a huge difference, the changes here do result in a subtly brighter voicing that benefits clarity, particularly when the volumes are reduced. The RS SuperPots on both volumes have a slightly faster rise at the top of the pots' travel, meaning slight adjustments have more effect. The cap values mean we have a slower roll-off, too, and both have a more than usable 'woman' tone full-off, rather than the previous woolly woof. There's added dimension to the guitar.

Getting the balance you want is key to your enjoyment of any pickup set. There's no right way and, although the DCRs tell us to expect more oomph from the neck, it's easy to pull the bass side back and slightly reduce the polepiece heights on the bass side. To be honest, the voicings of old and new pickups really aren't miles apart, and the voice of the guitar – that big powerful muscular tone – is still the dominant part of this PRS Singlecut. A set of Cream T BFG Bangers I'd fitted to a 'wrong' maple-necked, alder-bodied Tokai LP-alike, again aren't a million miles away, but the voice of that guitar is noticeably brighter and lighter. It's a very vivid reminder that what we hear is certainly *not* just the sound of the pickups – they can only pick up what the strings provide them with.

But to answer my initial question – could I make it more like a 1959 Les Paul? – yes, the combination of these pickups and the control circuit certainly edge our Singlecut in the right direction. It was always a classic rock monster, now it has added subtlety if needed and, from what I'm hearing, just a little more vintage accuracy (or at least character) in its voice. Here are sounds that I and many others have been brought up on, and that's what we're chasing, isn't it? We're edging closer to the Holy Grail. Oh, and Bernie obviously likes them. Loaded into 'No 1' (his Gibson replica of the Beast) and compared to the real thing, he couldn't tell the difference. I've seen the video.

> "While I wasn't expecting a huge difference, the changes do result in a brighter voicing"

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Cream T Bernie Buckers set
COST: £349 (non-signature Scan 2 versions, £299)
SKILL LEVEL: If you can solder, it's easy
www.creamtpickupsdirect.com

PROS & CONS

PROS Impressive replicas of a famous 'Burst's 'microphones'

CONS Ageing of covers could be better: be nice to know a little more of what is under those covers, but not sure we care when this set sounds so good

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

MOD SPEC

PRODUCT: Charles Guitars Premium Vintage Electronics Upgrade Kit
COST: £67.50
SKILL LEVEL: The kit includes matched pots, caps, earth wire and wiring diagram, so again, if you can solder, it's easy
www.charlesguitars.co.uk

PROS & CONS

PROS Very considered vintage-style kit; 'woman' tone cap values and matched-for-purpose pots; fast, helpful service

CONS Nothing

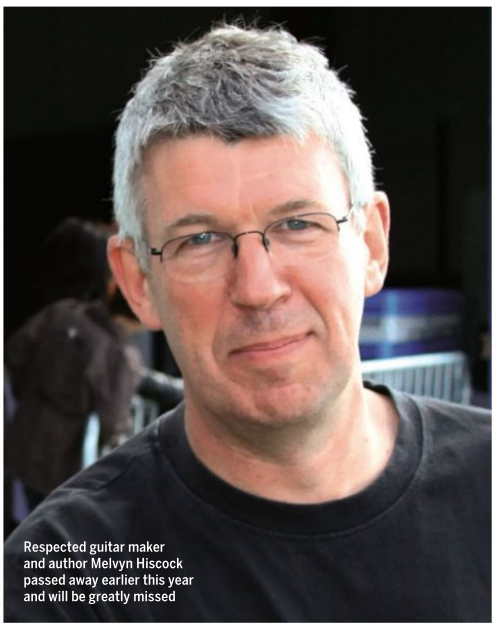
Guitarist GOLD

10/10

That should give you something to think about till our next issue.
In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

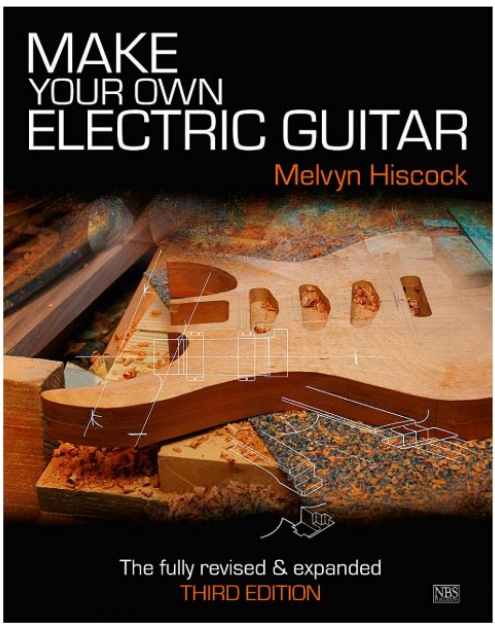
LIBRARY TALES

The recent passing of author Melvyn Hiscock coincides with a completely revised and expanded version of his groundbreaking book, *Make Your Own Electric Guitar*



Respected guitar maker and author Melvyn Hiscock passed away earlier this year and will be greatly missed

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HTTP://MELVYNHISCOCK.COM



If you were thinking about making an electric guitar back in the late 80s, you probably know of Melvyn Hiscock's authoritative tome. Originally published in 1986, *Make Your Own Electric Guitar* has been referenced as an influence by plenty of guitar makers, from Saul Koll to Ola Strandberg. Back then, in pre-internet times, there really wasn't very much else to browse and Melvyn's book seemed very contemporary. Donald Brosnac's books of the late 70s were the best resource we'd had, but they seemed rather, well, American and out of touch by the time Melvyn's book hit the shelves.

The original 160-page edition now seems more like a notebook in comparison to 2021's third volume, in larger format, with 304 pages. If it was essential back in the day, today's version is a document of the hand-builder, the craftsperson that Melvyn was.

Originally inspired by Brian May's Red Special, Melvyn was drawn to guitar making in his teens, applying to the then-essential London School Of Furniture's fretted instrument-making course. However, he only got as far as the interview. In the early 80s he moved to London and worked alongside, and then for, Roger Giffin who was already a legend on the UK guitar-making scene. With help from Roger he started writing his book in 1984, which was published in May 1986. To date, it has sold more than 120,000 copies.

> "The book is a document of the hand-builder, the craftsperson that Melvyn was"

But, by then, Melvyn realised the perilous life of the guitar maker was not for him. He returned to Hampshire and, via a stint in the 'real job market', got a day job at Macmillan, providing him with the skills to create his own venture, NBS Publications (as in 'No Bullshit!'), and the second version of his book appeared in 1998. Of course, he continued to play and build guitars.

In fact, 'The No Bullshit Guide to Making an Electric Guitar' might have been a better title: it completely encapsulates this latest book. It makes a home-build seem achievable if you have some access to basic woodworking tools and equipment. Even if you don't, new chapters on getting the best from a kit-build provide experienced knowledge of the pitfalls, while the sections on fretting and finishing are real foundations of the art. Likewise, the chapters on electrics and setup provide excellent reference for fledgling makers or indeed modders like us. This recent update also considers very current issues and topics in the guitar-making world – from the CITES restrictions of rosewoods through to 'baked' maple and stainless-steel frets – all put through Melvyn's sensible real-world filter. It's an easy read and hugely educational even if you have no interest in actually building a guitar. Though don't blame us if after digesting a few chapters you're inspired to have a go.

In these days of 'everyone's an expert' on the internet, we really need books such as this one that provide sense instead of snake oil: a pure note among all the noise.

***Make Your Own Electric Guitar* is available now for £39.95**
www.melvynhiscock.com

Archtop DeArmonds

Portishead's guitarist explains why the DeArmond classics affectionately known as 'monkey-on-a-stick' pickups are no toy…

"Everyone knows the sound of a DeArmond monkey-on-a-stick pickup," begins Adrian Utley. "Vic Flick famously used one – a Model 1000 Rhythm Chief – when he did the *James Bond* theme with his blonde Clifford Essex Paragon De Luxe archtop."

Taking a break from his busy recording schedule, Adrian has met with *Guitarist* post-lockdown to catch up and chat about his love of these rare vintage DeArmonds.

"I first became aware of them much later on from listening to jazz," he continues. "Kenny Burrell's sound is beautiful, and he used a D'Angelico with a DeArmond 1100 Rhythm Chief. His tone was incredible – *is* incredible. There's a great video on YouTube of Grant Green, Barney Kessel and Kenny Burrell; Grant is playing a blonde Epiphone Emperor with a McCarty pickguard, and Barney is using a Gibson ES-350 modified with a Charlie Christian pickup. I love those sounds. But when you hear Kenny Burrell's tone with the DeArmond/D'Angelico, it's just phenomenal.

"I really love DeArmonds. As much as Kenny Burrell's tone is beautiful, they can also sound ferocious. I think they work really well with fuzz boxes generally, and some of them with a high output will crank the shit out of your amp. One of the reasons I like the monkey-on-a-stick DeArmonds is there seems to be a certain graininess to them. They have the sound of a record before they're even on a record; it's like there's a kind of squish coming out of your amp within a certain frequency range. I find they sound particularly good with my 1963 Vox AC10, which I use to record with a lot. It's all there in the top-end and the mids are really present. I've never had Rhythm Chiefs up very loud, though, because they're usually on a massive old archtop acoustic and you can't turn it up or you'll be howling!"

This DeArmond RHC-B lives in Adrian's late-60s Gibson Southern Jumbo

The DeArmond goldfoil pickup in Adrian's Harmony H54 Rocket

> "I love DeArmonds. As much as Kenny Burrell's tone is beautiful, they can also sound ferocious"

Currently among Adrian's collection of fine vintage guitars are two Gibson archtops that – after some experimentation – have been paired with monkey-on-a-stick DeArmonds.

"There's the Rhythm Chief Model 1100, which is now on my 1947 L-12," he says. "Unlike the Model 1000 Rhythm Chief, you can adjust the polepieces on the 1100, which can be handy as it always seems like the B string is too loud. My 1937 L-5 has now got an old DeArmond monkey-on-a-stick from the 1940s fitted called an FH 'Guitar Mike'. The same pickup used to be on my L-12. I actually like the sound of that pickup more than the 1100. It's only slightly different but it sounds a little grainier. It has more of a honky, bluesy sound to it that I love and it's not as 'perfect'-sounding as the 1100. I got the FH really cheap as they're not as sought after as the 1100."

But what about attaching these intricate devices to a delicate archtop – surely that's a job that most people would rather hire a luthier to do?

"It can be a bit of a faff making sure they're fitted correctly and in the right place," says Adrian, "so I recommend hiring someone who knows what they're doing. There are different ways you can approach it. You can attach them to a pickguard, and you can attach the long monkey-on-a-stick bar behind the bridge. You can also discreetly fix some of them to the end of the neck. My L-12 isn't as valuable as the L-5, so that's what I did with the 1100; we attached it to the neck and cut a little bit out of the pickguard to get it lined up with the strings correctly. I also had the volume control built into the 'guard. But I don't mind messing with reproduction pickguards. I replaced the original [cellulose nitrate] 'guard because they gas off and damage other parts of the guitar. It's safely sealed in its own plastic bag now!

"My other main DeArmond is an old RHC-B model – a soundhole pickup like the one John Martyn used. It pretty much lives in my late-60s Gibson Southern Jumbo. I really like DeArmond goldfoils, too. I used my 60s Harmony [H54] Rocket on the last Portishead album, *Third*, a lot." **[RB]**

Adrian's 1947 Gibson L-12 when it was fitted with the 1940s DeArmond FH 'Guitar Mike', pictured in his Bristol studio

ClassicGear

The Strat continues its journey towards iconic status as a new decade unfolds

1960s Fender Stratocasters

By the beginning of the 1960s, the Stratocaster had already experienced its most significant changes. In 1959, rosewood fretboards with 'clay' dot markers superseded the guitar's initial fretted maple-neck design, and an 11-hole, three-layer 'mint green' nitrate pickguard replaced the original eight-hole, single-layer white plastic 'guard.

The first rosewood fretboards had a flat base and are thus referred to as 'slab' fretboards. Slab 'boards can be easily identified at either end of the neck, exhibiting a downwards curve at the headstock. In August 1962, Fender began using a curved-base veneer rosewood fretboard, which became thinner the following year. Contrary to slab 'boards, veneer 'boards display an upwards curve at the headstock end.

By 1960, Fender had addressed the issue of fading that occurred with the red aniline layer of its three-tone sunburst finish introduced earlier in 1958 (prior to this, Strats came with a two-tone dark brown/yellow sunburst as standard). By 1961, the dark brown outer layer became even darker giving the finish a somewhat bolder look overall. The sunburst changed appearance yet again in 1964 when Fender began spraying the bodies yellow in addition to using a yellow dip-dye. These vibrant 'target burst' finishes appear more opaque and are therefore better able to mask visual imperfections in the guitar's alder body.

In 1961, Fender introduced its first custom-colour chart, enabling customers to order a Stratocaster in their choice of 14 different shades in addition to Blond and the standard sunburst finish. These DuPont automotive paint colours included: Daphne Blue, Sonic Blue, Black, Sherwood Green Metallic, Foam Green, Surf Green, Fiesta Red, Dakota Red and Shell Pink nitrocellulose/Duco, along with Lake Placid Blue Metallic, Shoreline Gold Metallic, Olympic White, Burgundy Mist Metallic and Inca Silver Metallic acrylic/Lucite. Custom colours worked a treat to help popularise the Strat, and sales steadily increased throughout the decade.

Also, in '61, the Strat's neck profile became thicker (albeit not as chunky as the rounded- and V-profile neck guitars made between '54 and '58). From this point onwards, Strats retained an approximation of a modern C-profile, with relatively minor changes occurring throughout the 60s. The same year, two patent number decals appeared on the headstock, increasing to five by 1965. In 1964, a thicker gold/black outlined 'transition' logo replaced the original thin 'spaghetti' logo. Late the following year, the Strat's headstock was widened and a couple of years after that was adorned with a new black/gold outlined CBS-designed Fender logo, which appeared alongside an enlarged model name decal featuring solid black block lettering.

By 1968, Fender began using polyester finishes as a way of speeding up production and sustaining its instruments' clean appearance for longer. In the automotive industry, nitrocellulose lacquer had largely been replaced by more stable, harder-wearing materials by then, and Fender moved with the times. These thicker finishes changed the look and feel of the Strat – and many will argue the sound of it, too – although this didn't slow down the momentum of rock 'n' roll in the slightest, as the era of hard rock really got underway. Indeed, Hendrix almost single handedly elevated the Strat to unprecedented levels of popularity – poly finishes and funky flared headstocks or not. **[RB]**

The Evolution of the Fender Stratocaster 1960-1969

1960
5-digit serial numbers; black-bottom pickups; formvar coil wire; 'spaghetti' logo

1961
Headstock patent numbers; thicker C-profile neck

1962
Brazilian rosewood veneer fretboard; L-prefixed serial number (late '62)

1963
Thinner fretboard veneer; pickguard screw adjacent to middle pickup

1964
Grey-bottom pickups; enamel coil wire; 'transition' logo (gold/black outline); pearloid dots

1965
New pickguard plastic; 'F'-stamped neckplate, 6-digit serial number & flared headstock (late '65)

1966
'F' logo tuners (most still with 'double-line' Kluson Deluxe brand); Indian rosewood fretboard

1967
Optional maple fretboard advertised; CBS logo (black/gold outline); large model name decal

1968
Polyester finishes

1969
9 remaining custom colour options (including Blond)

1

7

1963 Fender Stratocaster in Fiesta Red

1. SERIAL NUMBER
89479; stamped on neckplate

2. HEADSTOCK
Stauffer/Bigsby-style profile; decals read 'Fender Stratocaster with Synchronized Tremolo' and 'Original Contour Body'; three patent numbers; nitrocellulose clearcoat

3. BODY
Alder; double-cutaway; rounded edges; forearm and belly contours; Fiesta Red nitrocellulose finish

4. PICKUPS
Three height-adjustable single-coil 'floating' pickups; master volume pot; neck pickup tone pot; middle pickup tone pot; one tone capacitor; three-way selector switch; front-loading jack socket

5. HARDWARE
Six nickel-plated 'single-line' Kluson Deluxe tuners; 'butterfly' metal string tree; Synchronized Tremolo vibrato system with six fully adjustable saddles; two metal strap buttons; chrome-plated: jack plate, neckplate, detachable vibrato arm and 'ash tray' bridge cover

6. PLASTICS
Three-layer (w/b/w) 'mint green' cellulose nitrate pickguard with 11 screw holes; three white pickup covers with rubber spacers; three white control knobs (one 'volume' and two 'tone'); white switch tip; white vibrato arm tip; white backplate

7. NECK
Single-piece fretted maple; bolt-on (four screws); 25½-inch scale length; Brazilian rosewood veneer fretboard; 21 frets; 'clay' dot markers; adjustable truss rod; bone nut; stamped '2MAR63B' on heel; nitrocellulose clearcoat

Guitarist would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath (www.vintageandrareguitars.com)

David Davidson's Vintage Icons

This original one-off Jag would give any Fender Alternate Reality a run for its money

1966 Fender Jaguar Prototype

David Davidson: "This guitar is one of the most unusual instruments I've seen..."

"My first Fender guitar was a Jaguar. When I was a child, I used to check the local buy-and-sell newspaper every day and one day, among a garage sale, I saw the words 'Gibson guitar'. That's all it said. I was nine years old, so I asked my dad to drive me over there with my $40, which I had made delivering newspapers. It was an ES-125TC. They wanted $100 for it and my father broke these people's chops relentlessly until I got it for $40. I was so excited. You know, a Gibson guitar!

"Anyway, after having that guitar for about a year, I decided I wanted to sell it because I wanted to save some money for a Stratocaster. So, with my parents' help, I put an ad in the same buy-and-sell newspaper and I asked $100 for it. This guy asked me, 'Would you be interested in a trade?' I had never even heard of Fender Jaguar, but then he came by with a [first year of production] 1962 Burgundy Mist Jaguar. I was just blown away by the fact I had a Fender guitar in my hands. My father went to the negotiating table for me, and the guy said, 'How about I give you my Jaguar and $40 for the Gibson?' So, I got my $40 back and a free Burgundy Mist Fender Jaguar, which I still have.

"I was obsessed with surf music and thought it was a really cool guitar. You'd see photographs in magazines of people playing Jaguars all the time. Even Roy Clark was playing one, it was crazy – Fender just put them in everyone's hands. This was around 1973/1974 and I was just a kid. They stopped making them in 1975, but production had ground almost to a halt by 1970. I think the purpose of the Jaguar was to try to tweak the Jazzmaster with a faster neck and an extra fret. The idea was to shorten the scale from 25.5 inches to 24 inches and to keep working with the separate Rhythm and Lead circuits.

"Later on, they tried to make those guitars fancier. In late 1964 and early 1965 they started using pearloid dot inlays, and then they went to the neck binding in late 1965. Finally, block markers were added in the first quarter of '66. I think the idea was to have a competitive look similar to the block inlays Gibson started putting in their ES guitars in 1962. I think it took a little while for Fender to catch up, but when CBS took over the company it was like a war. Everything was reactionary.

> "You'd see photos in magazines of people playing Jaguars all the time"

"Here in the States, the Environmental Protection Agency had changed the rules and Fender suddenly found themselves using heavy wood that they wouldn't have used before. They were obsessed with trying to get a lighter guitar. I have a lot of other prototype Fenders from that period: a Marauder, a thinline Stratocaster, a spruce-top hollowbody Telecaster, and a Telecaster Thinline prototype. These were all [Roger] Rossmeisl ideas they were trying out, while attempting to come up with something lightweight and usable. The 'smuggler's' Teles were in '67, and the Tele Thinline came in '68, so they were obviously experimenting with trying to make lightweight guitars. They worked out a lightweight Tele, but after 1966, Jaguar and Jazzmaster sales fizzled greatly. By '67, both of those guitars were an afterthought because Hendrix appears with a Stratocaster.

"This guitar is one of the most unusual instruments I've seen. Just the angling of the bridge pickup is saying, 'We need to get more Stratocaster out of the Jaguar.' You know, a hybrid. But obviously it never happened. The slotted polepieces of both pickups are adjustable. That's the first Fender guitar with adjustable polepieces. They work differently from any other pickups and it sounds completely different to a regular Jaguar; it's much thicker sounding. Regular Jaguar pickups sound kind of midrange-y and almost nasal. And yet these pickups give it that lower end. It's a combination of that and the fact it's chambered that changes the sound.

"In [the lower bass bout] there is a long, somewhat hockey stick shaped rout. In [the lower treble bout] there is a doughnut-shaped hole. And underneath the pickguard there is an extra-wide channel routed. It still has the belly contour, but no forearm contour. It has a flat alder top that was glued on after the alder body was routed, and the seam is disguised by single-ply white binding. The only thing that would have put the icing on the cake with the guitar is if it was a [custom] colour instead of sunburst. I mean, if you're going that far, why not just paint it some crazy colour?!" **[RB]**

Vintage guitar expert David Davidson owns Well Strung Guitars in Farmingdale, New York
www.wellstrungguitars.com

The flat alder top was glued on after the alder body was routed, and the seam is disguised by single-ply white binding

Photography By Paige Davidson

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Dangerous Waters

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Knaggs Choptank & Vox AC15 C1
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 10 mins per example

Jazz guitarist Oz Noy twists the traditional with some tricky rhythmic turns

PHOTO BY CARI PAIGE

PETER GREEN once compared improvising to crossing a river, with the 'right' notes being like stepping stones and the wrong ones... well, you'd need a change of clothes! Improvising over anything that departs from the 'standard' I-IV-V 12-bar progression requires us to keep an ear out for chords, which may mean venturing away from our safe 'stepping stones'. For this solo, I'm referring to the C minor pentatonic/blues scale. To do this, we need to look at the content of the chords we're playing over.

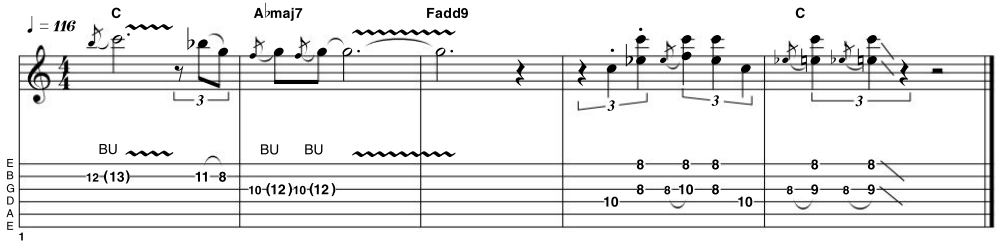
Take this in small sections at a time. The first section moves through Cmajor/A♭maj7/Fadd9. Though it may sound a drearily methodical task, check each chord for any common notes – these are the safest 'stepping stones' of all. In this case, G is the 5th in C, the major 7th in the A♭maj7 and the 9th in the Fadd9. Though G is already part of the C minor pentatonic scale, we can now also view it as a 'safe' note that fits really well with these chords.

When the chords repeat, the Fadd9 is replaced by Fmin9 and D♭maj7 – surely very dangerous? However, if we check out the triads for these two chords, we find F as a common note. Also, there is still a G in Fmin9 (still the 9th!), and for the D♭maj7, try the shape 1 D♭ major pentatonic at the 9th position, or the same C minor pentatonic I used to start the solo! The 'B' section of the backing track is based around A minor, so I shift my focus there during this section using the same principles just described.

Richard Barrett's new album, *Colours*, is available now from ***richardbarrettguitar.com***

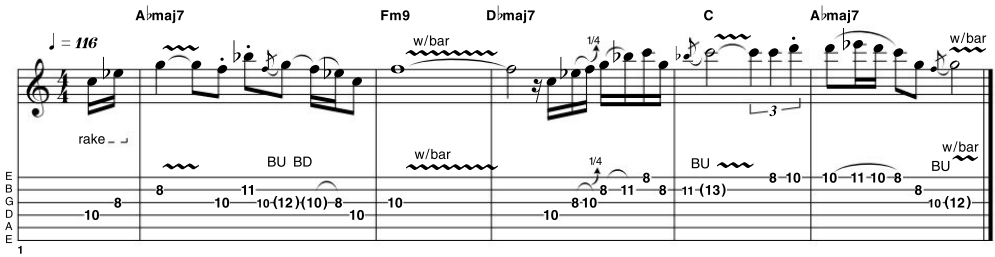
Example 1

USING THE C MINOR PENTATONIC, we start by bending up to the root then targeting G with another bend at the beginning of bar 2. I'm sure we've all seen phrases like this before, but this is done with the knowledge that the G is outlining the major 7th of the chord underneath. The piano-style doublestops in bar 4 also stay within the C minor pentatonic, but the beginning of the final bar acknowledges that C major by hammering on pointedly from E♭ to E natural.



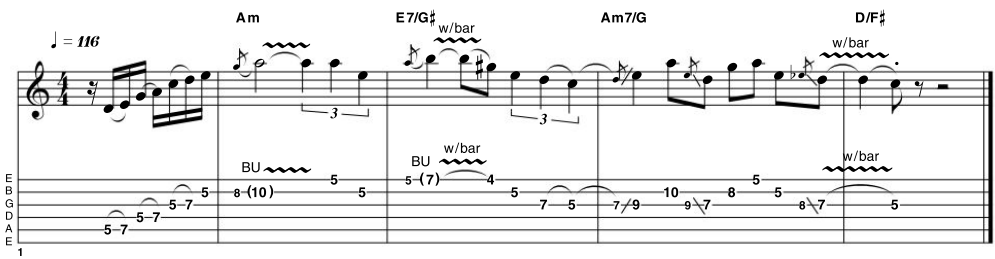
Example 2

STICKING WITH THE C MINOR PENTATONIC, this example shows how the chord progression changes on the first repeat. Through the Fmin9 and D♭maj7 I'm simply holding an F, in the knowledge (or more like hope at the time!) that its relationship to each chord will be pleasing in a different context: root then 3rd. Bar 3 flurries up the minor pentatonic to begin a variation on Example 1, though by momentarily including a D, this implies a fragment of the C natural minor scale in that same position. This came more from a 'playing licks' perspective than anything deliberate, but it's helpful to work out later.



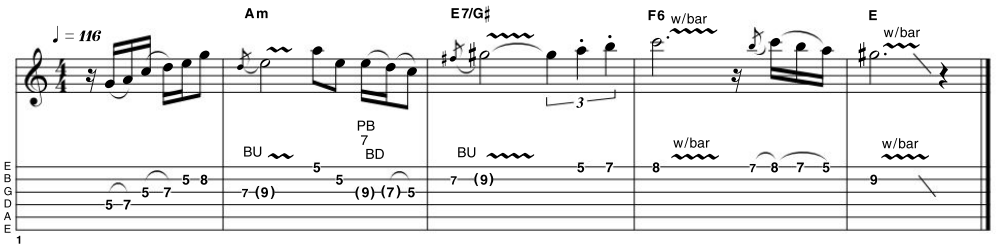
Example 3

ANOTHER FLURRY, this time using the A minor pentatonic into the 'B' section. This is less challenging than the first section, but in bar 2 I've deliberately targeted notes from the E7 chord to give another dimension and add some melodic interest. We return fairly swiftly to the A minor pentatonic/blues scale, though some slides between shapes 1 and 2 add a more melodic/less 'linear' feel.



Example 4

STAYING WITH THE A MINOR PENTATONIC, I'm combining some favourite blues licks with deliberately targeted notes – namely, the bend to G# at beginning of bar 2, the C at the beginning of bar 3, then finally it was too much to resist the final G# over the final E chord. It would be correct to say this contains elements of the A harmonic minor scale, but like the end of Example 2, I only fully realised this afterwards!



Hear It Here

SANTO & JOHNNY
VOLUME SECONDO

The first and most well-known track, *Sleepwalk*, was something of an influence on the demo solo (be sure to check out Jeff Beck's cover of this, too). Though the melodies are played on lap steel and are ostensibly simple, keep an ear open for how they negotiate potentially tricky changes, such as those between major and minor tonalities. This also features on *September Song* and *Venus*, which moves through quite a few changes.

THE SHADOWS
50 GOLDEN GREATS

The way Hank Marvin delivers a melody is always worth a careful listen no matter what he's playing – but most relevant for the way the melodies frame the chord changes underneath are the following tracks: *Man Of Mystery* with its descending chord sequence; *Midnight*, which has a couple of tricky twists; and *Nivram* (or Marvin backwards), which hints at the Gypsy jazz style Hank is also known to be very keen on – and rather good at!

OZ NOY
TWISTED BLUES VOLUME 1

This represents the cutting edge of modern blues in both the rhythmic and harmonic sense. The title track shows what can be achieved by building on traditional blues devices and stretching from there in every direction. *Oh Really?* alternates between a traditional melody and some tricky rhythmic and harmonic variations, while *Light Blue* is closer to the spirit of the demo piece, albeit on slide. There's no getting away from the fact this is advanced stuff to stretch your horizons!

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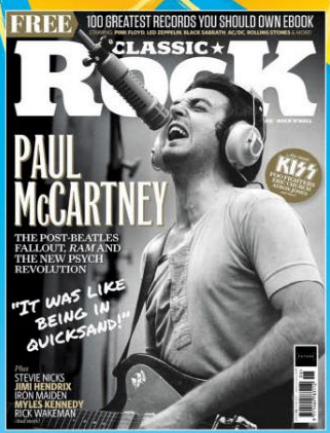

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Trading Licks

Robbie Calvo helps you enhance your lead playing with expert concepts to add to your own licks

Demystifying The Modes Part 7: The G# Locrian Mode

Tutor: Robbie Calvo | **Gear used:** Yamaha Revstar 502TFM & Line 6 Helix Floor
Difficulty ★★★★☆ | 15 mins per example

THE LOCRIAN MODE is the seventh mode of the major scale and creates a really dark, dissonant sound – perfect for movie soundtracks or haunting pop melodies. The A major scale contains these seven notes: A B C# D E F# G# A The G# Locrian mode contains the same seven tones as the A major scale but starts and resolves on the seventh degree, G#: G# A B C# D E F# G#

Note that paying the A major scale from the seventh degree produces the G# Locrian mode. Think of the Locrian mode as a natural minor scale with a minor 2nd and a diminished 5th.

Harmonising The Scale

When we harmonise the major scale (build chords from those tones) we produce seven chords. Chords are built by stacking consecutive 3rd intervals from each of the seven scale tones. The resulting chords built from the tones of the seventh mode are G# diminished or G#m7(♭5) (including any diatonic variation and chord extensions).

R	Min3	Dim5	Min7		Chord tones		Resulting chord
G#	A B	C# D	E	F#	G# + B + D + F#	=	G#m7(♭5)

The Tonal Centre

When we see a chord progression that starts with G# diminished or G#m7(♭5) and cycles through chords derived from the A major scale, then we know it's a G# Locrian progression. This progression cycles through the chords like any other chord progression, but it will never sound rested due to the dissonant sound and the diminished nature of the 'home' chord. The resolution point of a chord progression is called the tonal centre. However, you'll notice that the Locrian generally sounds anxious and unresolved.

Locrian Characteristic Note

Each mode of the major scale has a characteristic note that evokes the unique sound of that mode. The characteristic note of the Locrian mode is the diminished 5th. The G# Locrian characteristic note is D (♭5). Here is an example of a G# Locrian chord progression (note: 6/8 timing):
||: G#m7(♭5) | Bm | G#m7(♭5) | Bm | A | E | G#(♭5♭9) | G#(♭5♭9) :||

Solo Tips

The track this issue is in 6/8 time, which means that I've phrased a lot of my ideas as triplets (in groups of three). The rhythmic feel will support this phrasing and make the licks and lines a lot stronger.

I'd also advocate playing the chord tones whenever possible and trying to choke the end of each phrase so that it's not sustaining over the dissonant-sounding chord progression. Just remember the chord tones of the G#m7(♭5) chord are G# B D F#.

You'll notice I'm nailing those diminished 5ths (characteristic note and chord tone) and resolving to them often. This is how to evoke the dark flavour of the Locrian mode. Targeting the minor 2nd will also add spicy melodic flavours – just make sure you don't try to resolve there!

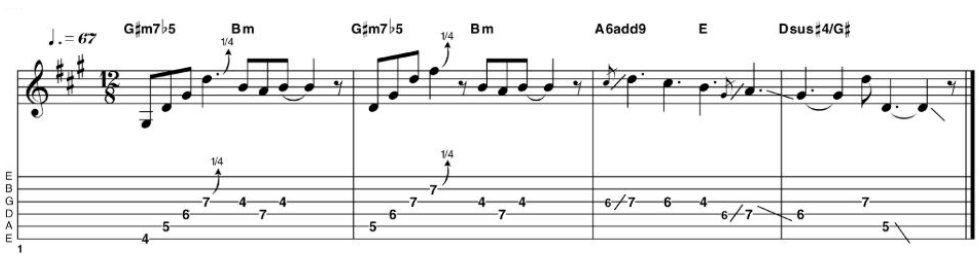
I'm using G#m7(♭5) arpeggios and the G# Locrian mode to create this issue's solo. You could also try using E9 arpeggios, as these contain all four of the G#m7(♭5) chord tones. So it's a great way to target the tonal-centre chord and create some bluesy dominant lines in the process. You can also think of the E9 arpeggios being the diatonic chord substitution for a G#m7(♭5) chord.

Take a moment to analyse the progression, tab and notation for a deeper understanding of why my lines work so well over the harmonic structure. Have fun learning my phrases and then dig into creating your own G# Locrian solos over the track.

www.robbiecalvo.com

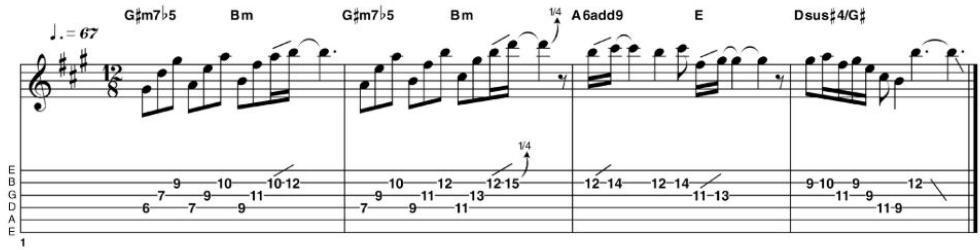
Lick 1 The opening line

I'M TARGETING the root note (G#) and diminished 5th (D) characteristic note specifically with this opening line. I'm also employing implied bluesy bends to add a bit of sauce over the Bm chord. I'm utilising the G# Locrian scale tones to create additional melodic lines, making sure I get back 'home' to the D and G# chord tones for the final resolution.



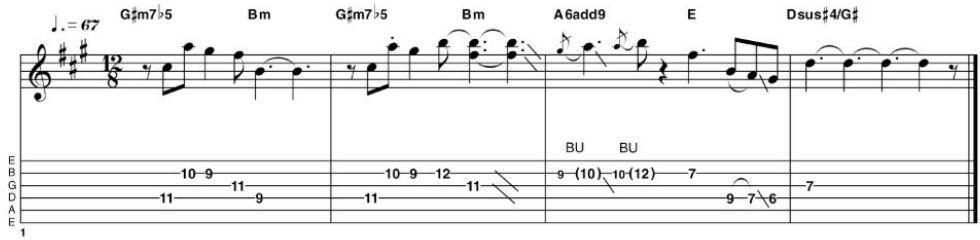
Lick 2 Stacking 5ths & 4ths

YOU'LL NOTICE that I'm stacking 5ths and 4ths in a triplet motion that follows the diatonic scale tones from G#. You could also see this as a root/5th/root (an octave above). This line sounds dissonant, but it actually follows the chord progression nicely. This phrase culminates with a simple intervallic line derived from an F#m7 arpeggio, and resolves to the note B, the minor 3rd of the G#m7(♭5) chord.



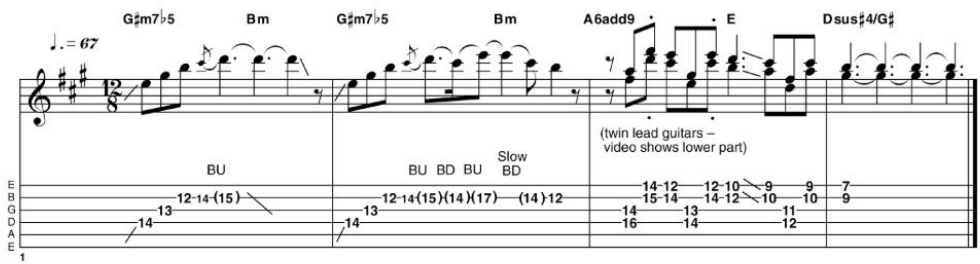
Lick 3 Using motifs

THIS LICK IS DERIVED from an F#m7 arpeggio. I'm playing a simple motif-based idea twice, which resolves to the minor 3rd (B) of G#m7(♭5). The first phrase resolves to B on the fourth string, and the second time the phrase resolves to a doublestop 4th F# and B an octave higher. The final lick is a smooth descending *glissandi* line from B down to G# (the root) and characteristic note, the diminished 5th (D).



Lick 4 E major arpeggio

YOU'LL NOTICE THE SHAPE of an E major arpeggio at the 12th fret for the first two licks. I'm also bending the note C# up a half-step to the note D, making this an E7 arpeggio. E7 is the diatonic chord substitution for G#m7(♭5), which is why it works so well. My crescendo line is a nice intervallic line of 6ths and 5ths descending towards the G# root note on the 9th fret, second string. I also harmonised this line a 3rd above for dramatic effect.



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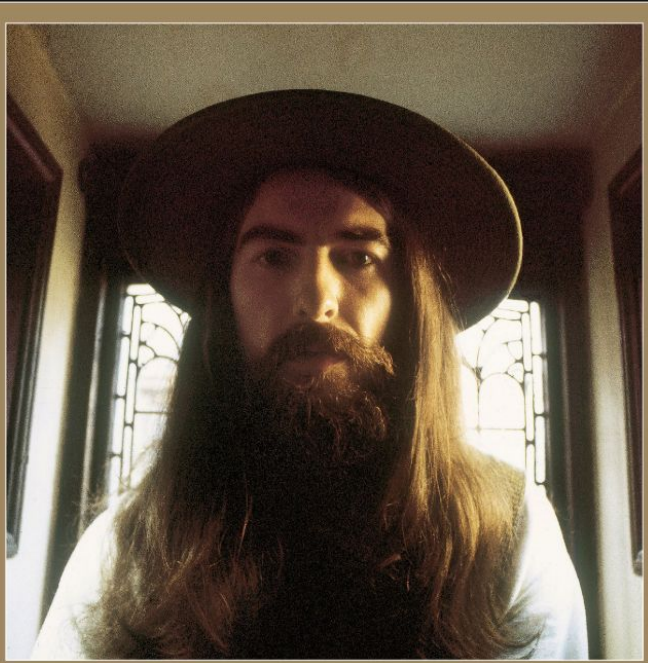

PHOTO BY BARRY FEINSTEIN

GEORGE HARRISON

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the milestone *All Things Must Pass*

JACKSON BROWNE

Legendary songwriter talks about his brand-new album, *Downhill From Everywhere*

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We take a look at two models from the new USA Epiphone collection

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