

Guitar

Interactive

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Joe Bonamassa

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+ masterclass video with
Danny Gill

Bruce Welch..

The man who drove
the Shadows!
Exclusive interview

Guthrie Govan..

mastering
fretless guitar



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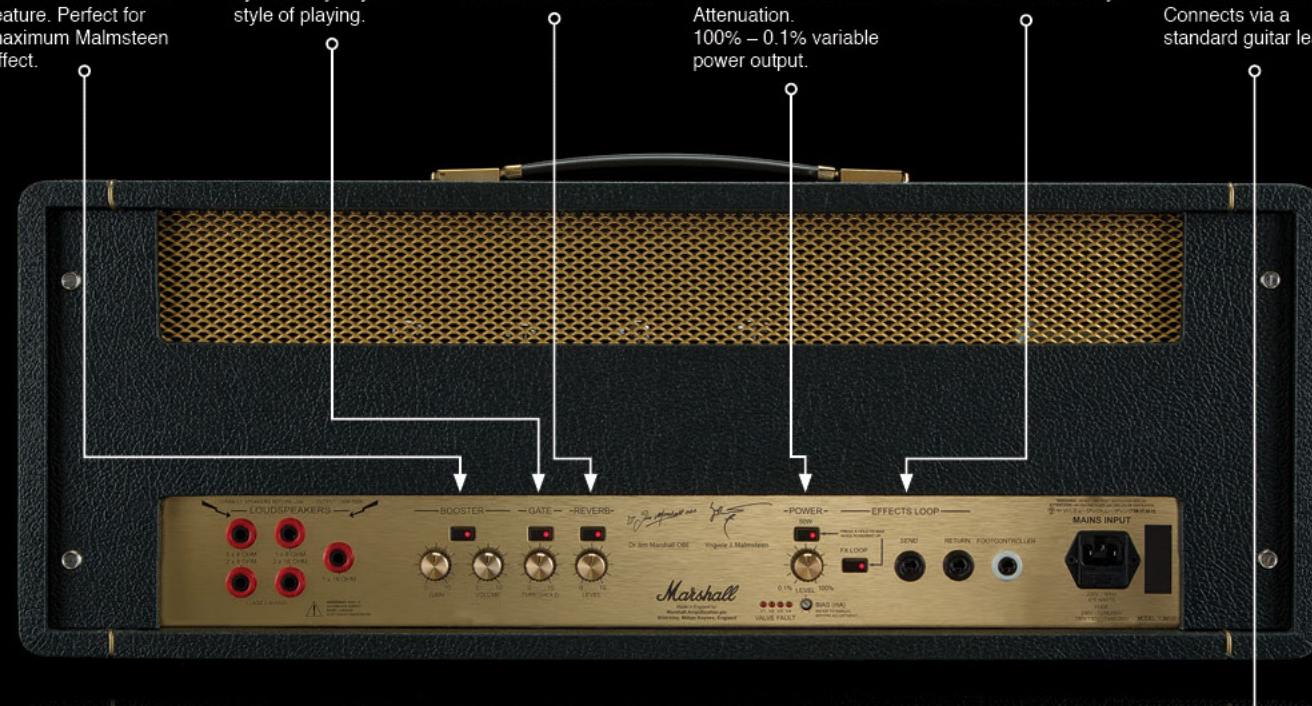


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Gary Cooper - Editor

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Get in touch

Editor -
Gary Cooper
gary@iguitarmag.com

Technique Editor -
Jamie Humphries

Contributors -
Stuart Bull, Michael Casswell,
Danny Gill, Lee Hodgson

Review team -
Michael Casswell, Rick Graham,
Jamie Humphries, Giorgio Serci,
Tom Quayle

Columns -
Michael Casswell, Rick Graham,
Jamie Humphries, Andy James,
Giorgio Serci

Advertising Manager -
Helen Bavester
helen@iguitarmag.com

USA Media and Sales -
Lisa Spiteri
LisaSpiteri@iguitarmag.com

Design and layout -
Simon Gibbs
simon@iguitarmag.com

**Head of website design
and production -**
Sam Marks
sam@iguitarmag.com

Animation -
Brad Verlander
brad@iguitarmag.com

Publishers -
Road Rock Music
International Ltd

Publishing Directors -
Kim Waller and Stuart Bull

Contact -
Sales and Information line:
+ 44 (0)1708 757 337
Fax Line: +44 (0)1708 757 528

Address:
2nd Floor Chesham House,
Chesham Close,
Romford,
Essex,
RM7 7PJ
UK

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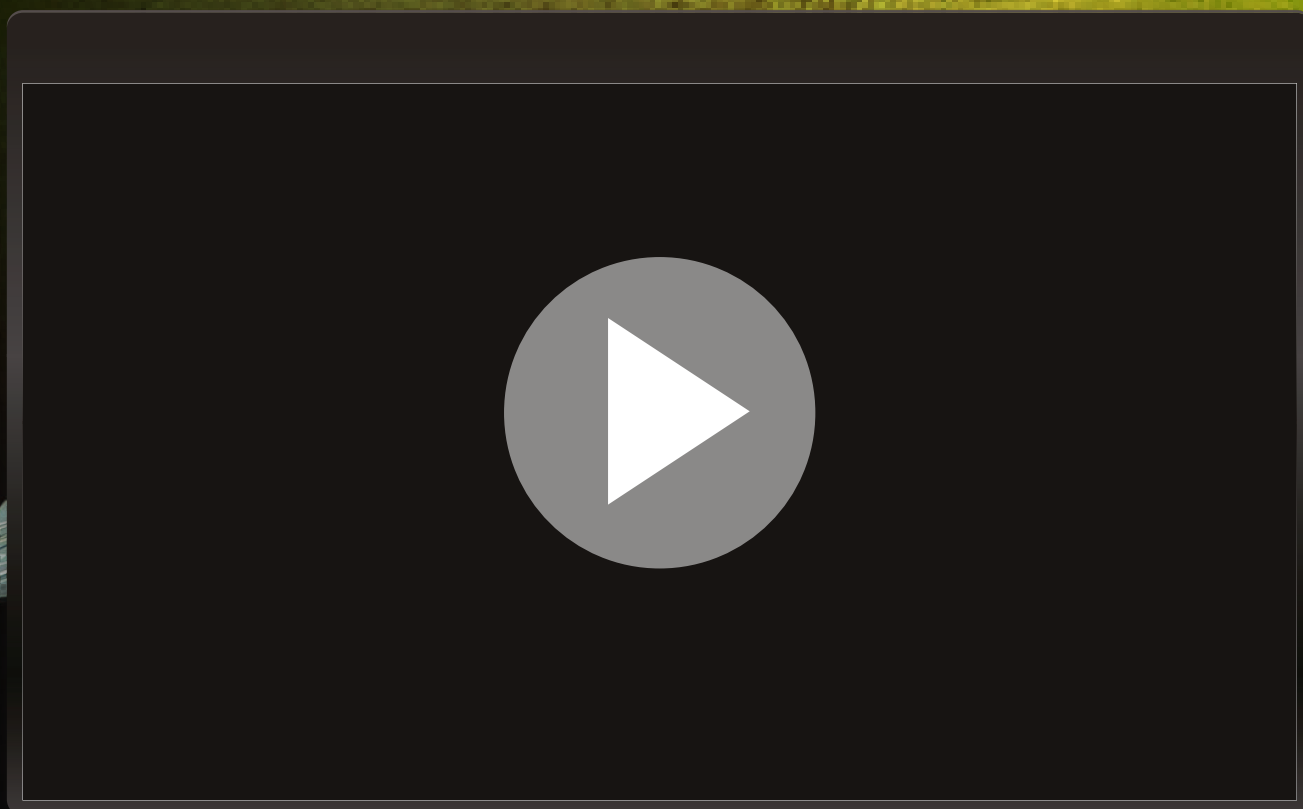
Joe Bonamassa

— The Blues and Beyond —

Joe Bonamassa is a living testament to the power of the Blues. Pundits claimed the age of the Blues/Rock giant had passed. Joe proved them wrong by slaying audiences around the world. Then he took on the Classic Rock audience with Black Country Communion - just to prove that Rock had many more miles left in it, too. **Gary Cooper** writes words, **Michael Casswell** interviews - and **Joe Bonamassa** plays us some guitar.

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© Photography by Kim Waller



There's a great picture going around the web. It depicts a suited Joe Bonamassa toting his Flying V, standing against a backdrop of gear. And not just any gear - it looks like the entire contents of a vintage guitar and amp shop - rows of Les Pauls, his two custom Music Man twin necks and the Steve Morse signature, Gibson 345s (or are they 355s?), acoustics and countless unidentified 'somethings'. Maybe to real hardcore gear nut the backline is even better - it's the backline from heaven, with

representatives of everything tweedy and tubey and plexi and... well, just about everything you'd expect to find waiting if you got to heaven. If you'd been good. Very good.

Maybe a saint.

Leaving aside the obvious fact that Joe Bonamassa has both a sense of humour and impeccable taste in gear (any why wouldn't he have - his parents ran a guitar shop) the picture says something that sets him apart from so many professional players from the past. You get the

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From a guitar magazine's point of view though, it makes him slightly awkward to write about.

distinct sense that Joe Bonamassa is actually 'one of us' as opposed to being A Rock Star.

The sense is reinforced the closer you look. His website is hands-on, enthusiastic and - dare we say it? - interactive and Joe's enthusiasm for the subject, slightly nerdy, just a tad obsessive, makes you think he still gets a thrill when he walks into a vintage guitar shop, just as we do - a thrill you can't help thinking so many uber-cool Rock stars stopped getting 20 or more years ago.

From a guitar magazine's point of view though, it makes him slightly awkward to write about. To start with, his gear is all over the Internet and there's simply no point our detailing what he has already told us about his guitars, amps and effects - so we haven't. In this feature you'll find Joe on video explaining for himself his European amp set-up, courtesy of our parent company, Licklibrary.

The problem with discussing his gear is compounded by the fact that Joe's a moving target. At the time of writing most of the web clips and interviews about his amps show his old Jubilee Marshall, Carol Ann signature (sometimes a Two Rock

takes that place), a Category 5 and Van Weelden heads, various other Marshalls (depending on whether it's a Joe gig or his Black Country Communion project with Jason Bonham and Glenn Hughes) his 2x12" EV loaded cabs... and on it goes.

Until this past Summer's London gig with Jack Bruce that is, when the target moved yet again and Joe took to the stage with Lazy J J80 amps - the impeccably hand wired, Fenderesque combos quietly taking the world by storm and reviewed in this issue. And that's what I mean by a moving target. Joe is a restless spirit, like all in search of the perfect tone, and he is constantly switching around, trying to find it.

It's much the same with Joe Bonamassa's guitars. In the famous YouTube clip from Musician's Friend, he reaches into his rack and pulls out an Explorer (his 'Rick Derringer moment'), a Flying V, his Music Man Steve Vai and the twin necks, a host of Les Pauls... it's like watching a happy kid who has been let loose in a toy shop - and which of us wouldn't be the same?

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Gibson and its sister company Epiphone clearly saw how influential Joe would be when it commissioned 1,000 Epiphone Bonamassa Les Paul Gold Tops (we've reviewed one in this issue) and then Custom Shopped a signature Standard Gibson for him.

You can still find the odd example around, but mostly they are sold out now - while Joe has, inevitably, moved on and bought himself a genuine '59 sunburst Les Paul Standard which, despite its enormous value, he insists on taking on the road and uses alongside his array of other Gibsons.

Michael Casswell, Guitar Interactive's interviewer for our feature, decided to hardly touch on

gear when he interviewed Joe for this issue. As he said "What's the point, when so much is out there on the web? We spoke about playing instead." And that, despite Joe's own fascination with equipment (and our own - let's be honest!) is perhaps the point. Joe Bonamassa isn't a phenomenon because of the amazing collection of guitars, amps and effects he uses, but because of his excellent technique (explored in this issue by Danny Gill) and the fact that he is absolutely steeped in 'that era' of guitar players - starting with Eric Clapton but rapidly moving to Paul Kossoff and Jimmy Page. If ever a guitarist has synthesised Classic Rock/Blues and fused it all into one style, it's Joe Bonamassa.

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Still only in his 30s and with a punishing touring schedule, 11 solo albums under his belt plus his successful Black Country Communion project preaching the message to audiences who might not quite get Blues purism but love their Classic Rock, it's impossible to guess where Joe will go next.

What we do know is that his success proves several things. The first is that it is possible to become a big name player and remain an approachable human being. The second is that, despite the best efforts of Simon Cowell and his clones, people still want to hear real music played by real musicians. The third (and there's an

echo of the past for those who recall it was the UK that re-exported the Blues to the USA in the 1960s and was the first to welcome Jimi Hendrix) is that Joes is probably a bigger name in the UK and Europe than he is in America. The fourth, and final (for now) is that Joe's success means there is hope for all the other guitar wielders who are determined to make a career without signing away their souls to corporate machine-music.

For all the above - thanks, Joe!
Oh, and yes - you can have your amp back, now.



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Guthrie Govan

King of the fretless guitar!

We received such a huge response to Issue One's Gi interview with Guthrie Govan - in particular questions about his playing on a fretless Vigier - that we invited him back to talk us through his approach to the instrument. Patrice Vigier explains how the guitar came about and Michael Casswell adds his thoughts about that famous YouTube jam with - the king of the fretless guitar!

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Though the first exposure a lot of guitarists will have had to fretless guitars (and we do mean guitars - not basses!) was by seeing the fabulous Guthrie Govan playing a Vigier Excalibur Surfretter on YouTube, the idea of fretless guitar isn't quite as new - or as crazy - as it seems. In fact there have been fretless guitars around for some time. In the past, fretless experimenters have include John Cale, Frank Zappa and Adrian Belew - but the instrument has always been not just difficult to play but highly problematical to build, not least because of the difficult choice of fingerboard materials. Wood doesn't work too well, which has led to some people trying even glass as an alternative.

French master guitar builder Patrice Vigier decided to take a typically unique

approach when he set out make a fretless model but even so, as he explains, it took him 17 years before his Excalibur Surfretter began to find fame!

"I started to work on the design around 1979 and the first Surfretter was introduced in 1980. My biggest problem was with a wood fingerboard. Using wood you have no sustain on the high strings. You have two factors - the damping of your fingertips, because they are skin, and the damping of the wood. Even if you use a wood like ebony it's relatively soft so it absorbs energy. I experimented with several materials before deciding that Delta metal worked best. Using that, we can produce a guitar that has sustain almost equivalent to fretted instruments."

What had led Vigier to introduce a fretless model - had players been

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Vigier

Vigier guitars are crafted in small quantities, not large industrial production runs. Instruments are available at select dealers. To find yours, please visit www.vigier.com or www.htd-uk.com

demanding one? "No, not at all and for 17 years it was a very frustrating experience because every year I was making new instruments for trade shows and nobody was interested - nobody! I was about to give up and accept that nobody wanted to expand their horizons."

Fortunately, Patrice gave the concept one last shot, this time as one of his Excalibur models, Shawn Lane adopted the guitar and Ron 'Bumblefoot' Thal followed. Suddenly, the Vigier fretless was starting to be heard and seen. "Ron Thal, in particular, has done some amazing stuff with the guitar," Patrice says.

Though sales aren't gigantic, interest in Vigier's fretless models is growing and they are available internationally as stock models - though you may need to hunt one down or get one on special order. Certainly, Gi has had tremendous interest from readers who have seen the famous YouTube jam with Guthrie Govan on fretless and our own Michael Casswell. And just in case you are one of the few who hasn't yet seen the video, we've included it in this feature.

Michael Casswell recalls the day the jam took place: "It seemed that Guthrie had only recently taken delivery of the Vigier and I did think to myself that maybe it might not be such a wise move for our filmed jam, considering how accurate you have to be with a fretless guitar to make it sound anywhere near musical! But sure enough, he played great with

no frets - the film of our little jam went global, and the Guthrie Govan mythology had even more fuel to feed upon!"

Did Guthrie explain how the idea came about? "Well, I did run into a 'reliable source' (as they say when it's completely made up in the tabloids) who informed me that in the dim distant past, Guthrie was sharing a flat with a couple of other musos, and one drunken night they all decided to rip out all the frets from a Squire Strat to create a more expressive instrument. The result being that there was a pseudo fretless guitar laying around, that young Guthers could experiment and practice on! I can't verify the story, but it would make sense. Also he did also tell me that for a good while, he got very into playing fretless bass, which would also help for pitching and vibrato.

"The one fact about this Vigier fretless is it will absolutely take no prisoners with your playing. Do you remember what is was like when you first picked up a bottleneck, started sliding it up and down your fretboard trying to sound like Joe Walsh? Did you sound like Joe Walsh? Of course not. I'm sure Joe Walsh didn't even sound like Joe Walsh when he first picked up a slide! Well this guitar or any fretless guitar, is a similar mindset, and will take some patience and perseverance before you start making anything close to something we might recognise as music. Notice the first thing Guthrie talks about is the first thing you should work on, which is actually getting notes to sound in tune.

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"He equated it to singing, in that as you play the note, you have to listen and adjust the pitch very quickly. The more accurate you are with the placement of your fingers, the less you would have to quickly adjust. Much the same as slide guitar. You may have a very large problem if your ear does not tell you how to adjust.

"He also talks about how some chord shapes on the fretless are simply a no-go area, due to the way we have to place our fingers to voice those chords. Which means you need

to be up on your inversions, chord fragments and actual, accurate clear sound production, to make chords work on a fretless guitar. This can be a big subject on a fretted guitar, let alone a fretless, and whenever I've seen Guthrie play chords on the fretless, he wisely keeps it all down to smaller chord fragments and stays mainly with single note passages."



||
Whenever I've seen Guthrie play chords on the fretless, he wisely keeps it all down to smaller chord fragments and stays mainly with single note passages.
||



BRUCE WELCH



Before the Beatles they were the biggest band in Britain - and in many other countries around the world. The Shadows didn't just do for electric guitar in the UK what the Ventures did in the USA, they made theme tunes for an entire generation that went on to include melodically inspired guitarists like Brian May, Jeff Beck, Wishbone Ash's Andy Powell, Mark Knopfler, Tommy Emmanuel, Neil Young, Frank Zappa and even Carlos Santana! Driving the band's sound was the wonderful rhythm playing of **Bruce Welch OBE**. Guitar teacher and GI contributor **Lee Hodgson** recently met the great man for our in-depth interview. He also got to gaze in awe at the first ever Fender Strat in Britain!

And when did it all begin? Cue spooky music - in 1959

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I don't know about you but I can't imagine a melody, or any kind of lead guitar playing come to that, sounding good for an extended period without some form of complimentary accompaniment, either in the form of interesting underlying harmony or a propulsive rhythm, or both. Even a lead guitarist as revered as Hank Marvin needs a helping hand or two!

Bruce Welch OBE, founding member of Britain's most successful and hugely influential instrumental group, The Shadows, calls himself a "driving" guitar player, and the importance of his role as their rhythm guitarist cannot be underestimated. While America had – and Japan still has – The Ventures, for countless aspiring British players, The Shadows are the epitome of guitar-driven greatness.

"I've never played a scale in my life!"

Born in Bognor, Sussex, but living his early life in County Durham in the north-east of England, Bruce formed a skiffle band, The Railroaders, aged just 14, but soon hooked up with a school friend who would become his future career partner – and a legend in his own right – Hank Marvin. Together these 'Geordie Boys' (as they were briefly known professionally) would move from

their Tyneside base down to London, virtually penniless, and... well, Bruce elaborates in the video interview.

Bruce unashamedly spoke about how playing in [jazzy] keys like Bb was never on the agenda.

"We made a career out of Am..."

At one point during the interview, while discussing chords used higher up the neck, such as 9ths and such like, I made the assumption that Bruce had maybe first heard a "6/9" chord from Elvis Presley's first guitarist, Scotty Moore, but Bruce quickly put me right on where he'd heard it first. He also surprised me with his choice of pick (check out the video interview for the reveals!).

Post-interview, Bruce was elaborating on and demonstrating how he simply enjoys moving his hand along the neck while literally keeping a grip on a familiar chord shape but allowing an open string or two to ring out all the while, just waiting for a beautiful sound to reveal itself. He was totally unaware of, and unconcerned about, the names of the resultant chords. As a teacher, I was of course keen to name things but what was I 'teaching' Bruce that he could gainfully use I wondered? I quickly realised, not that I was ever

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Interview 1



Interview 2



When it comes to gear, Bruce is no hoarder or collector, although what little he has is gear that has truly made pop history.

being disrespectful, that it was rather pointless me continuing to name all those sounds that Bruce was making before my very eyes and it was none clearer than when he played a vague yet musically satisfying chord structure.

When it comes to gear, Bruce is no hoarder or collector, although what little he has is gear that has truly made pop history. At one stage he produced a 1959 Martin acoustic guitar – now with knobs on (!) – that Paul McCartney had almost certainly first publicly performed ‘Yesterday’ on! Yet more than once he would wistfully bemoan the lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of one of his first guitars, an old Grimshaw. (I’m sure if anyone could shed light on the object then Bruce would be most grateful.)

During the interview Bruce would occasionally reference “the Buddy Holly [S-type electric guitar]”, which was the top quality electric guitar that his guitar tech had made him. Bruce also has a lovely acoustic (as used on the 2009 Cliff Richard & The Shadows Reunion Concerts) made by the same guy. Again, Bruce reveals all in the video.

Indeed, Bruce was almost tripping over guitars – including that fiesta

red Strat (the first one seen in Britain, as originally purchased for Hank Marvin by Cliff Richard) as he leant over his studio mixing desk in order to reach for yet another memorable picture from a golden era. Moments later, he’d dodge round the Burns electric guitar leaning up against a lizard skin ‘61 Vox AC30 in order to grab the little gold disc for ‘Apache’ (The Shadows’ first number 1 single from 1960 and, reputedly, the source of Carlos Santana’s first nickname). The multitude of larger gold discs adorning the stairway leading down to Bruce’s ‘den of iniquity’ as he likes to call it, are mostly awards relating to Bruce’s other career highlight: producing multi-million selling albums in the mid- to late-70s for the Shadows’ former frontman, Cliff Richard (now Sir Cliff of course).

GI would like to thank Bruce for the generous amount of time he gave us - not to mention the reassurance of seeing someone who has devoted his entire life to music and the guitar and yet who still retains the unbridled enthusiasm that you only really expect to see in a teenage wannabe guitar player who has just heard or seen the most wonderful thing

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Interview 3



Interview 4



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Interview 5



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And just a final, personal, note. Just before our interview Bruce told me that unfortunately he couldn't do any playing that day due to a seriously troubling hand problem, which he had been seeking medical attention for. Having said which, he enthusiastically led me and GI's indefatigable cameraman, Mike Thorpe, down to his basement

studio, where he just couldn't resist picking up the odd guitar or three and strumming away, with a massive grin on his face. I'm no doctor but I'd say that was music therapy at work! Thanks all the more then to Bruce for the unexpected bonus of some up-close driving rhythm guitar from a true master of the art.

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Bruce Welch

(b. 2/11/41)

- 'Living Doll' was recorded at Abbey Road Studios on April 28th 1959 by Cliff Richard & The Drifters – as they were still known at that time. It topped the UK charts in July 1959.

- 'Travellin' Light' – by Cliff Richard & The Shadows – reached No.1 on October 31st 1959.

- 'Fall In Love With You' reached #2 in the UK charts in March 1960.

(The Shadows started recording under their own name during 1959 and had a string of over 20 hits between 1960-1965)

- 'Apache' reached No. 1 in July 1960.
- 'Please Don't Tease', written by Bruce (who played electric rhythm guitar) was a UK chart-topper in July 1960.
- 'The Young Ones' was recorded over two sessions in 1961, on

August 11th and December 5th. When the single was released on January 11th, 1962, it shot straight to No.1.

- 'Dance On' topped the charts in 1962.

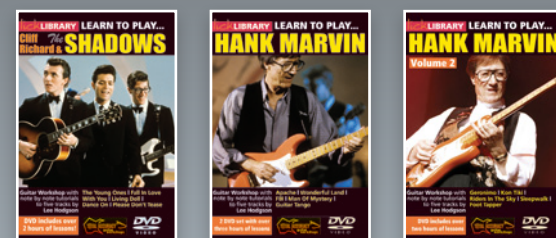
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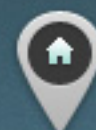
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Roy Buchanan

by Gary Cooper

the man who taught the Telecaster the Blues

F

or at least a generation, electric guitar players have come to think of 'tone' as something that flows out of a combination of guitar, technique, an amp and, importantly, effects. Sadly, strip away the last of those and a lot of apparently impressive sounds fall flat. But before the invention of the 'fuzz box' back in the 1960s, all a guitarist had to rely on to create his sound was what he could do with a guitar and amp alone. And of those guitarists, one of the greatest - and yet, paradoxically, one of the least known - was the American genius, Roy Buchanan who died, tragically young, in 1998.

[...>] 38



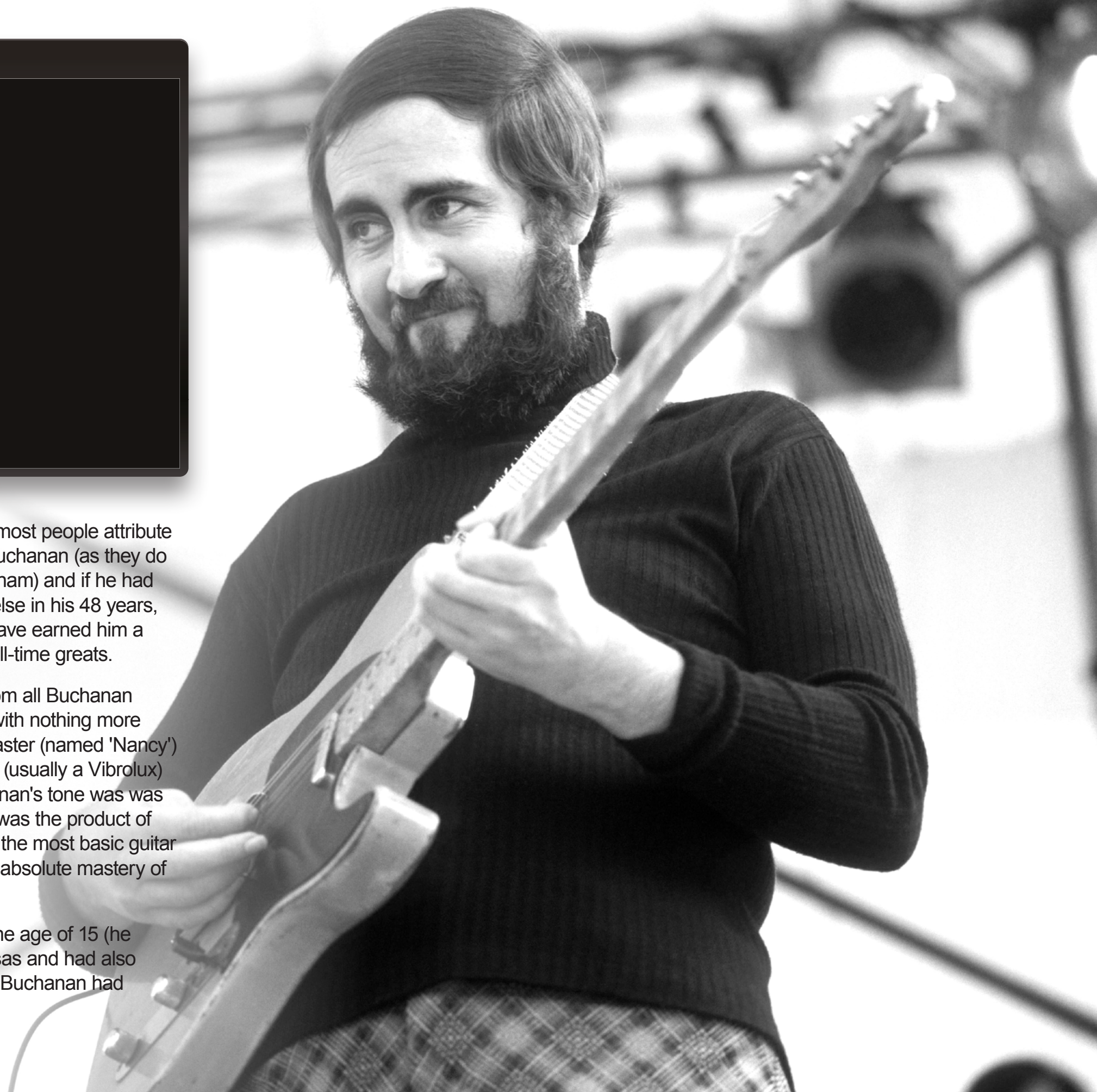
The first many outside the US will have heard of Buchanan was via a dedication on Jeff Beck's landmark 1975 album *Blow By Blow* - a dedication to Roy of Beck's superb version of Stevie Wonder's song, 'Cause We've Ended As Lovers'. When Beck offers a tip of the hat, it's wise to look in that direction and those who did take the trouble to find out who Roy Buchanan was were amazed to find they had stumbled on the source of a lot of playing techniques that had begun to appear in the '70s - using the volume control as a wah ('violining') and, most importantly, pinched harmonics. Did Buchanan actually invent pinched harmonics? Like the arguments that surround the great Davey Graham's introduction of DADGAD open tuning, you can never be quite sure who was

got there first, but most people attribute the technique to Buchanan (as they do DADAGAD to Graham) and if he had achieved nothing else in his 48 years, that alone would have earned him a place among the all-time greats.

But that was far from all Buchanan achieved. Armed with nothing more than a 1953 Telecaster (named 'Nancy') and a Fender amp (usually a Vibrolux) run flat-out, Buchanan's tone was was a revelation and it was the product of nothing more than the most basic guitar and amp - and his absolute mastery of both.

Leaving home at the age of 15 (he hailed from Arkansas and had also lived in California), Buchanan had

[.. >] 40



begun with steel guitar, which was a mournful influence that you could often catch in his playing. Like most when starting out, he gigged where and when he could, often in his case with Johnny Otis's Rhythm and Blues Revue, but he made his recording début in 1958, on the legendary Chess label, playing on 'My Babe' by Dale Hawkins. The legends that followed Hawkins and

didn't really take off until 1971 when, following a US Public Television hour-long special, he was signed by Polydor. It was around that time that the title that was to dog him was coined - 'The Best Unknown Guitarist In The World' and even if that wasn't what the PBS programme was actually called, it was sadly accurate. At one stage of his career he even enrolled to learn to be a

"Finding fame was always a struggle for Buchanan"

Buchanan as they toured the USA in true 'old school' style (by car, learning in the toughest musical school in the world) barely stand repeating, but it may have been the source of the drink problem that was to haunt him throughout his career.

Finding fame was always a struggle for Buchanan. He gigged relentlessly during the early Sixties, gaining a reputation as one of America's finest Rock/Blues players (there is a story that even Jimi Hendrix once turned down a contest with him!) and though he worked with many other musicians who were destined to become stars, (including the band's Robbie Robertson, whom he is credited with having more or less educated as a guitarist) Buchanan's own career

barber, he could see no future providing for his family by playing the guitar!

Success did follow Buchanan's Polydor signing, however, and he went on to make gold albums and win accolades from fans as diverse as Merle Haggard, Jeff Beck, John Lennon, Yngwie Malmsteen, Billy Gibbons, Gary Moore and even Jazz players like Charlie Byrd and Barney Kessel - not to mention a particular fan, Les Paul. But Buchanan was disenchanted with what major labels were doing with his music and quit recording during the early 1980s. He was eventually coaxed back into the studio, recording *When A Guitar Plays The Blues*, in 1985, which gained a Grammy nomination that year and he toured the world on the back of the

[...>] 42

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album, a year later making another - On The Edge. In 1988 he toured the USA, opening for The Band.

But despite the huge acclaim of fellow guitarists, Buchanan's new albums failed to set the world on fire and long-standing battles with alcohol came to a tragic end when, following a domestic dispute in August 1988, he was arrested for public intoxication, thrown in a cell in Fairfax County, Virginia where, it was claimed, he hanged himself with his own belt. It was a finding later disputed by those who asserted that he had been beaten.

Buchanan may have been gifted by the gods of music at his birth but he was also born under a very bad sign. Acknowledged as one of the finest guitarists in the world, the inventor of

techniques that have become every guitarist's stock in trade, creator of some of the finest sounds ever squeezed out of a Telecaster and a player with, perhaps above all, exquisite feel and sensitivity, though Buchanan may have gained the respect of his peers and shown a new direction to a generation of guitarists, he was doomed never to gain the public acclaim he so deserved.

All the same, for guitarists today who are encouraged to believe tone comes out of a box, watching a clip of Roy Buchanan making a Telecaster cry with the aid of nothing more than his ability is a revelation. Maybe it should be compulsory.



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THE LISTENING ROOM

John Stix listens as top players discuss their influences.

Performance:

Jeff Beck on Muddy Waters — I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man



"That song has the building blocks for about a million bands. It's so easy to play — but is it? Try to get that lurch. Nobody phrases like him. They can't. There have been others, but it's that full-bodied kippo voice that he's got. This song had an impact on me, but then that was the whole applecart being upset. My band was suited, tied and ready to go with pointy shoes, and then that comes along and you don't want the suit and the shoes any more. You want to be ragged. Back in '62, we didn't know what we should be doing. There was a whole rumble of this stuff coming over. It was so crude and lovable and accessible. There was no way you could not like it if you were a dirty boy. I opted for rebellious. The Rolling

Stones jumped on that bandwagon. In the early days that's all they did was play Muddy Waters songs, with the freedom to do what they wanted. You didn't have to play the solo exactly the same- you could do what the hell you wanted. But I bet you the Stones got more of their fair share of people coming up and saying, "Can you play something good, something pop?" 'Cause people couldn't dance to it. It kept stopping all the time. Most English kids haven't got the rhythm they were born with. They clap on the downbeat instead of the backbeat. That spells trouble to me. They haven't got any soul." Jeff Beck



John Stix was the Founding Editor-In-Chief of Guitar For the Practicing Musician Magazine and a principal architect for the creation of Guitar World and Guitar One Magazines. He started Guitar Recordings where he signed Blues Saraceno, Mike Keneally, Mark Bonilla, Randy Coven, and Brad Gillis. Currently he runs the print dept. at Cherry Lane Music.

VIDEO GEMS

John Stix searches the web for choice guitar gems that you may have overlooked in the vast universe of Internet videos.

Performance:

The Allman Brothers Band at the Fillmore East, USA, 23 Sept. 1970



Let's start by looking at and listening to an example of why some great players are considered to be so great. These links bring you to Wolfgang's Vault, a goldmine for classic rock. Promoter Bill Graham apparently recorded and videotaped as many shows as he was able to, meaning the sounds of

Winterland and the Fillmore East and West live on. Here we have the Allman Brothers Band at the Fillmore East, Sept. 23, 1970, about six months before they recorded their classic live album.

Players in a great Jazz band listen to each other while they play, improvise brilliantly on what they hear and support the tune, all at the same time. Players in a great Rock band have more in common with a symphony orchestra. The parts are written and rehearsed, the move is to make the moment special, to interpret the song in a familiar yet unique way night after night. To write classic Rock songs which infuse nightly performances filled with Jazz-like improvisation is the best of both worlds.

Here is the band showing us how to do just that. Even more importantly, these performances show how an opening act earned the headlining spot. Dreams is arguably the first ever Allman Brothers Band song. Gregg Allman explains: 'I have only written one song on the organ and that's Dreams. That was one of 22 songs I brought to the band when Duane sent for me (to audition for the band). I started playing songs for them and they go, "Okay, what else have you got?" I'm starting to sweat peach seeds. So I lay Dreams on them and their ears perked up. We counted it off and we had that damn thing down in less than an hour. And boy I was in there and I knew it. I was in like flint.

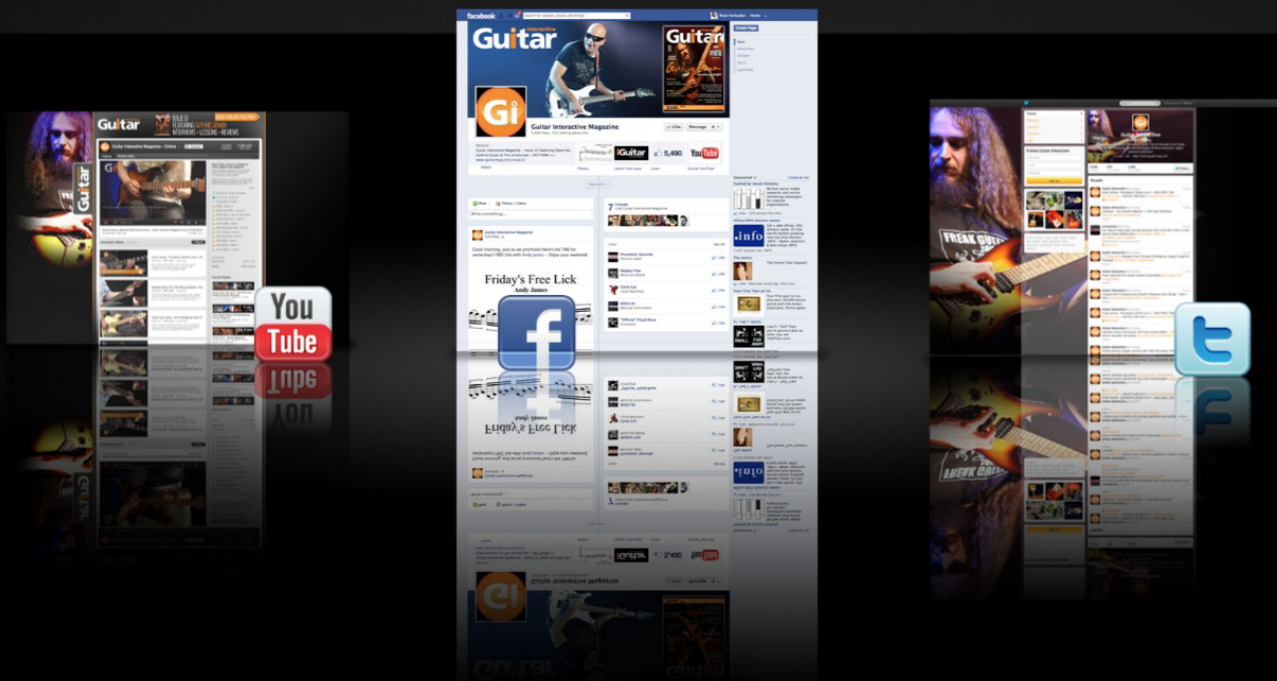
In this performance of Dreams the vocals are lost in the mix until toward the end of the song. But it's the band's performance and Duane's soloing that makes this one for the ages. Notice the band members are set up close to each other, so they feed off the physical performance and not just the monitors. There's no band look, no stage act, just the continuous moment of now, in which the music created commands our absolute attention.

Here we see why Duane was nicknamed 'Skydog'. His solo builds slowly and naturally. The lines soar like a bird in flight. His note bending is a model of style and grace. Duane speaks in phrases everyone can understand be they guitar geek or casual listener. Around the four minute mark he switches to slide playing and the solid lines become liquid and we're all with him, somewhere beyond the stars. At 4:50 bassist Berry Oakley takes the lead, before Duane comes soaring back in, Dickey Betts still deep into his two-chord vamp for this first ever all-audience interplanetary trip. Gregg's vocals, finally appearing in the mix remind us we're back on earth. Who knew the Allmans would take us so far for the price of a concert ticket? And that's why, decades later, their concerts still sell out.



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COMPETITION RESULTS..

Guitar Interactive's great D'Addario Joe Satriani Giveaway – and the winner is....!

To celebrate Issue Two's exclusive Joe Satriani interview and style analysis (it's still available here <http://licklibrary.ceros.com/iguitarmag/issue2/>) Guitar Interactive teamed-up with Joe's string manufacturer of choice, D'Addario, for a great competition to win 24 sets of D'Addario EXL strings, a Joe Satriani strap from sister accessory company Planet Waves, plus Joe's signature picks and even a set of Joe's chrome domes. To cap it all, D'Addario even gave us a signed copy of Joe's landmark CD *Surfing With the Alien* !

As you'd expect, we had an enormous response and our lucky winner - chosen at random from the correct entries - was Mr Mats Moland Træen from Dimmelsvik in Norway. Congratulations, Mats!

In the next GI we'll be announcing the winners of issue three's fabulous Orange competition. In the meantime, why not try your luck with this issue's super giveaway featured on the next page? You could be a winner!



Mats Moland Træen strikes a confident pose. Hang on - is that fretless Vigier!? They're getting everywhere!

WIN!

Win - Rotosound Guitar Strings For A Year!



There's a strong historical theme to this issue of Guitar Interactive - and no string maker has a greater claim to being a part of Rock history than Rotosound!

Made in the UK, Rotosound strings come in a wide variety of types and the ones we're offering are the 'industry standard' pro player's nickel on steel Rotos for electric guitar.

Each pack of Rotos is clearly colour coded so you don't make a mistake when you're grabbing a set in a hurry on your way to a gig. For example, the eternally popular Roto Pinks complete a 9-11-16 24w 32w 42w, while the Roto Blues are a light top/heavy bottom set featuring a chunkier 10 13 17 30w 42w 52w. There's a Roto set to suit most styles.

Meanwhile, if you've been tempted by our Rickenbacker 12-string review in this issue, Rotosound offers 12-string sets, not to mention

7-string sets and, for the really fussy guitarist, you can even buy Rotos as single strings and make up your own custom selection!

Additionally, Rotosound offers pure nickel, which is a favourite choice for electric guitarists, the market leader in pure nickel strings and produces strings for all the major players in the world. Rotosound also offers a range of coated versions for players who want to extend the life of their strings.

We're offering six GI readers the chance to each receive 12 packs of nickel on steel Rotos in their choice of gauge. What's more, our friends at Rotosound are even giving us some cool black Rotosound T-shirts to add to the package!

The competition is completely free to enter but you must be a registered Guitar Interactive reader (it's easy - if you haven't already, just sign-up today - it costs nothing). All you have to do is answer the following three questions by e-mail.

TO ENTER

Email your answers (e.g. **Q1 True/False**) along with your name, email address and daytime phone number to: competitions@guitarinteractivemagazine.com

COMPETITION CLOSED

questions

Q1 – Past Rotosound users included Jimi Hendrix and Noel Redding:
A: TRUE OF FALSE?

Q2 – Rotosound was founded in:
A: 1938 **B:** 1948 **C:** 1958

Q3 – Exclusive Rotosound user Guthrie Govan plays a fretless guitar made by:
A: Fender **B:** Vigier **C:** B.C. Rich

1/ All entries must be received by 16th October 2011. 2/ No cash alternative is offered instead of the stated prize. 3/ All entries must be submitted via e-mail. 4/ Employees of Guitar Interactive, Licklibrary, Rotosound and their immediate families are ineligible for this competition. 5/ The winner will be chosen, at random, from registered readers of Guitar Interactive who provide the correct answers. 6/ The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into regarding this competition. 7/ Entrants must provide a contact telephone number and valid email address 8/ Prizewinners must consent to having their name and city/country (e.g. 'Andres Segovia, Madrid, Spain') published in a future issue.

The Blues and Beyond

Joe Bonamassa is the hottest thing to happen to Blues guitar in a long time. **Danny Gill** analyses Joe's style and shows you how to get to grips with his masterful Blues lead style.

Joe Bonamassa is a great blues player who is also influenced by guitarists outside of the blues genre such as Eric Johnson and John McLaughlin. It's this mix of old school Blues feel and great technique that we're going to try and capture in this lesson.

What we're going to do is take an up-tempo 12 bar Blues in the key of G and solo over this 12 bar round one time. The licks will follow the basic structure of a 12 bar in G.

Lick 1: Played over bars 1-4. The bass is groovin' on G

Lick 2: Played over bars 5,6. The bass is now playing C

Lick 3: Played over bars 7,8. The bass is back on G.

Lick 4: Played over bars 9,10. In bar 9 the bass plays D; in bar 10 the bass plays C.

Lick 5: Played over bars 11,12. The last 2 bars are known as the turnaround. Everyone who plays the Blues should have a few turnaround licks up their sleeve!

The thing that is intriguing about Blues soloing is the fact that there is no single scale that fits over all three chords.* In the key of G we're soloing over G7,C7 and D7. Sounds simple but... things get complicated by the fact that we need to switch scales (licks, arpeggios,etc.) as the chords change.

This is what keeps Blues players coming back for more; the dichotomy between the simplicity of the chords and the challenge of sounding natural while navigating the terrain.

[...>] **54**

© Photography by Kim Waller

The Blues and Beyond

Lick 1

The first lick combines G major pentatonic along with G minor pentatonic. Either scale would work well on its own but Joe B. (and others) often combine these two scales to get that 'bluesy' sound. Generally speaking the major pentatonic gives a sweet sound a la BB King whereas the minor pentatonic is much more aggressive. Combining these two gives a good balance. This is sometimes referred to as the 'hybrid pentatonic' scale.

Lick 2

The second lick is a fast repetitive phrase outlining the notes of a C7 chord. The only note missing is the root note C.**

Lick 3

The third lick highlights a 'mirroring' technique where the same idea is repeated in different octaves. In this case we repeat in three octaves. The first two notes hammer on from the minor 3rd (Bb) to the major 3rd (B) This interplay between the 3rds is where the Blues lives and breathes.

Lick 4

The fourth lick is something Joe B may have gotten from a player like John McLaughlin. It is a descending sequence using the G dorian mode. Strictly speaking, G dorian works best over the C chord but it's the Blues so (almost) anything goes.

Lick 5

The fifth and final lick is a turnaround idea using hammer-ons and pull offs. You'll need to have fast fingers to pull this off but hey...it's Joe B style

*the exception is if all of the chords are major triads (OK to use the major scale) or if all of the chords are minor triads (OK to use the minor scale). In the real world of playing Blues this is kind of boring and doesn't happen very often.

**ironically it is often the root note that is the least important when arpeggiating. This is because the root is covered by the bass.

 **_CHECK OUT THE DVDs**





The Blues and Beyond

RHYTHM

Having got to grips with Joe Bonamassa's impressive lead style, **Danny Gill** dips into Joe's equally skilled rhythm playing.

THE GIG

Let's say you get invited to sit in with Joe B and his band for the night. Not only should you know how to play a few classic Rock songs (brush off those Zeppelin and ZZ Top riffs) you are also going to need to know an arsenal of Blues tunes. And what do you play 90% of the time when playing songs? Rhythm Guitar! The good news is that if you learn some rhythmic variations on a few Blues tunes, you can mix and match and voila...you know a lot of songs.

The most traditional Blues rhythm is the 'pinky rock' riff made famous by Chuck Berry in Johnny B Goode, circa 1958.

And while everyone should know how to play this rhythm, it's exhausting! Don't know how Chuck did it. Not too bad in a key with open strings such as A, but have you ever tried playing a five minute 12 bar blues in Bb using Chucks ol' pinky rock riff?

SO WHAT JOE DID...

Joe B's rhythm style is Blues based with a mixture of his many influences: a bit of classic rock, a bit of old school Blues, a bit of 'modern' chording and a bit of Country (finger picking, hybrid picking, etc).

WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO...

In this lesson we'll be looking at some ways in which we can spice up a traditional 12 bar Blues with some new rhythm ideas taking inspiration from Joe and his many influences. Follow along with the video as well as the transcription. Take it nice and slow and let the ideas absorb into your playing. One good idea can go a long way if you really let it sink in. Maybe the riff in bar one will lead somewhere great...if it does, let me know.

THE TRACK

We'll be in the key of G so the 3 basic chords are G, C and D. Because there is no rhythm guitar on the backing track we [...>] **58**

are free to interpret the chord sounds in a number of different ways. We can play major, minor or dominant chords. OR...we can combine these sounds to create a 'hybrid' which is what we will be doing today.

FINGER PICKING GOOD

Some things to watch out for: I'm doing a lot of hybrid picking which means pick and fingers. For ex: in measure one after playing the low E string with the pick I grab the G string with my middle finger and pull off. The piece continues in a similar pattern; the pick plays the lower strings while the middle finger grabs the upper strings. Joe B often uses a combination of pick and fingers to get a warm sound. This hybrid technique is very common to blues and country.

...AND IF YOU WANT TO HEAR WHERE JOE GOT IT FROM

listen to Eric Clapton (especially with the Bluesbreakers), Jeff Beck, Rory Gallagher, Stevie Ray, Eric Johnson, John McLaughlin, Danny Gatton, Buddy Guy, etc.



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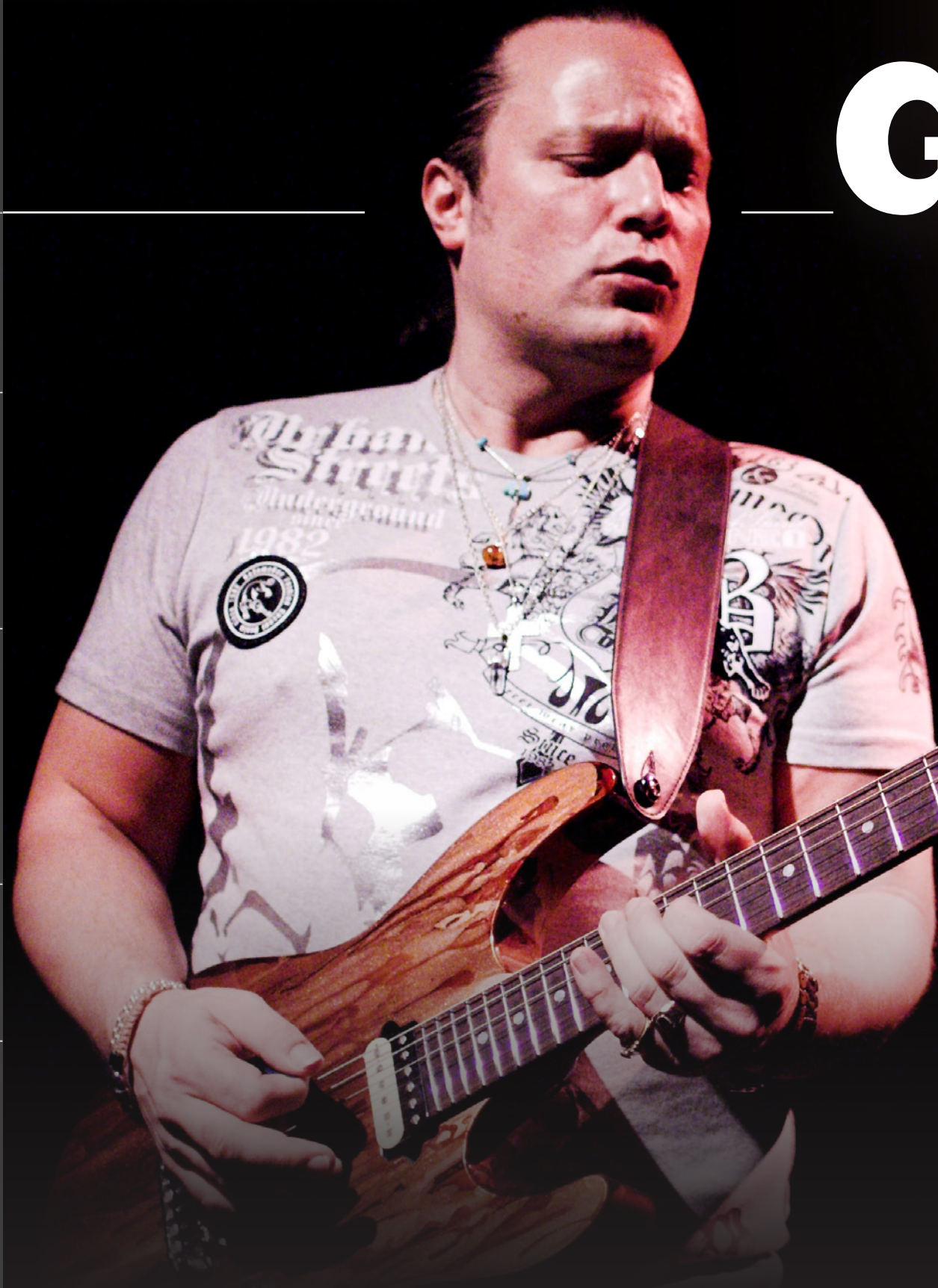
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Guitar Roadmaps

**R**

ick Graham began his musical journey in 1991, learning by ear, listening to artists such as Joe Satriani and Nuno Bettencourt. He later studied classical guitar at the prestigious Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has been featured performing on French Television and Radio on numerous occasions, both as a soloist and a session player. 2010 saw the release to rave reviews of Rick's debut solo album *Insideout*. In June 2011 he won *Guitarist Magazine's* Guitarist of the Year Award.

[\[...>\]](#) 62

Part four – creative pentatonics

In this month's lesson I'd like to give you some ideas with which you can spice up your playing by using something that you are more than likely already well familiar with, our old friend the minor pentatonic scale.

The minor pentatonic scale has built up a rather negative reputation particularly among Rock players as it is often viewed as a scale which can imprison you into a 'box' shape mentality. As far as I'm concerned though, I don't think that has anything to do with the scale itself, rather that the player who is complaining about the limitations of it. I personally find

that it is a remarkably versatile scale if you use it in a creative way.

One particularly useful way that we can apply the minor pentatonic is by taking the formula for building the scale which means taking the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th degrees of a major scale and building it upon the 2nd, 3rd and 6th degrees of the same major scale. In the key of G that gives us the minor pentatonics of A minor, B minor and E minor. By using a pre-prepared backing track using a static A minor 7 chord, I can use these three scales in conjunction with one another to great effect. If we analyze the notes contained within

The minor pentatonic scale has built up a rather negative reputation particularly among Rock players

them we can see how they relate to the A minor 7 static chord vamp.

A minor gives us the notes A, C, D, E and G, which in terms of scale degrees against A are: 1 b3 4 5 b7.

B Minor gives us the notes B, D, E, F sharp and A, which in terms of scale degrees against A are: 9, 11, 5, 13, 1

E minor gives us the notes E, G, A, B and D, which in terms of scale degrees against A are: 5, b7, 1, 9, 11

We can see from the above that by playing the scales in conjunction with one another, we are able to achieve all of the extended tones of the 9th 11th and 13th degrees.

Because of the intervallic nature of the pentatonic scale, we are able to achieve some very fresh, modern sounding phrases by using a shape which we already know without having to think too hard about doing so. This is part of the beauty of the simple pentatonic scale. Because we are limiting ourselves to just five notes we are afforded a sound that is much harder to achieve by using a full seven note scale. We can further heighten the intervallic nature of the

scale by applying techniques such as string skipping, which sounds great and isn't too difficult to achieve for the left hand. Incorporate this idea with some tapping techniques and you have a great formula to create some cool sounding lines!

I personally like to use the pentatonics built upon the 2nd and 6th degrees of any major scale together, particularly when using a minor 7 chord. To my ears they work remarkably well in conjunction with one another. To start with, try ascending on the A minor pentatonic and descend on the E minor pentatonic. Once you feel comfortable mixing the two scales together try doing it in different areas of the fingerboard. Sequences work really well with these scales too so be sure to experiment with them as much as you can. Hopefully this idea will change your view of the minor pentatonic scale from being a 'boring' scale to one which is full of wonderful possibilities. Have fun and see you next issue!



I'm a firm believer that if you play musically interesting stuff it keeps your interest for longer and practice ceases to feel like just that - practice.

METAL EDGE



Andy James is one of the U.K.'s rising stars of shred and metal guitar. A regular contributor to Licklibrary, he has also recorded solo albums *In the Wake of Chaos* and *Machine* and is a member of the band Sacred Mother Tongue touring their debut album *The Ruin of Man*. Andy's third solo album *Andy James* is just out - and Gi shows you how to get a copy - [here!](#)

[...>] 66

Hi and welcome to the fourth part of Metal Edge, where we're going to look at the alternate picking technique while training yourself to visualize the major scale.

All of these examples will use alternate picking starting with a down stroke. To practice alternate picking you might want to isolate one of the patterns that make up each full length example at a slow tempo to get used to the pattern then you will be able to extend through the whole of the examples more easily. These patterns are designed as a tool for improvising, practising alternate picking and visualisation of the major scale which also helps from an improvisational point of view. We are using the seven positions of the G major scale but in most rock and metal scenarios, this type of thing is more commonly used over minor diatonic chord progressions in this case A minor (or the dorian mode as the second note in G major is A).

Example 1

In the first example, we are ascending through the seven positions on the B and the top E string. Alternate picking is best grasped initially when you swap between two strings, so these examples will help with speed without being too much to deal with in the right hand. Pay attention to each position shift as accenting the down stroke on each position change will keep you in better time if you are not using a drum machine or a metronome and can add more dynamic to your playing even at speed. Practice slow and gradually speed up.

Example 2

In the second example you are applying the same thought process just reversing

the first example so you are now descending. Again, practice slow and then gradually speed up.

Example 3

In example three we are using all the positions again but changing string groups. Now we are using the D and the G string applying the same pattern and picking process as before. Again this is designed to visualize the neck using the major scale in a more linear fashion.

Example 4

In example four, again doing the same as before but just reversed using the same picking technique and accents and everything that you have done before.

The key to speed a lot of the time is to use a similar or same pattern over large sections so it gives your brain less to think about. When you train your muscles over time, playing, especially at speed, should become more in the subconscious and that is especially important when improvising. You should be thinking of the melodic content of your improvising rather than the technical aspect, so you will be able to express yourself more freely. Playing fast is not necessarily a physical difficulty, it's about training your brain to almost see what your going to play before you play it. That's why these exercises to visualize the neck are so important.

Okay that's it for this time, so until next time, keep rockin'!



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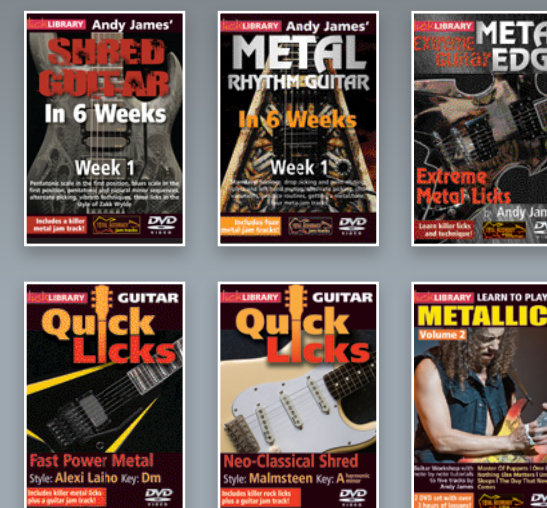


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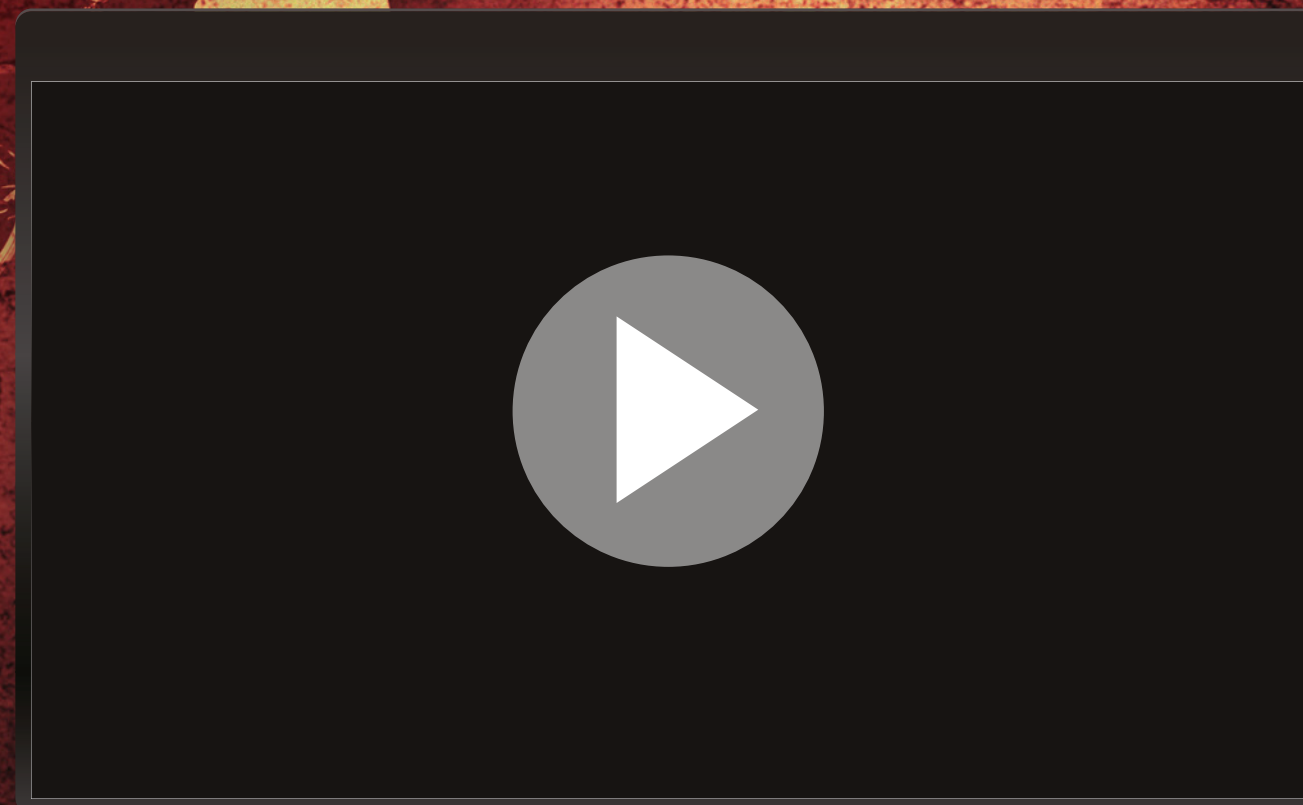
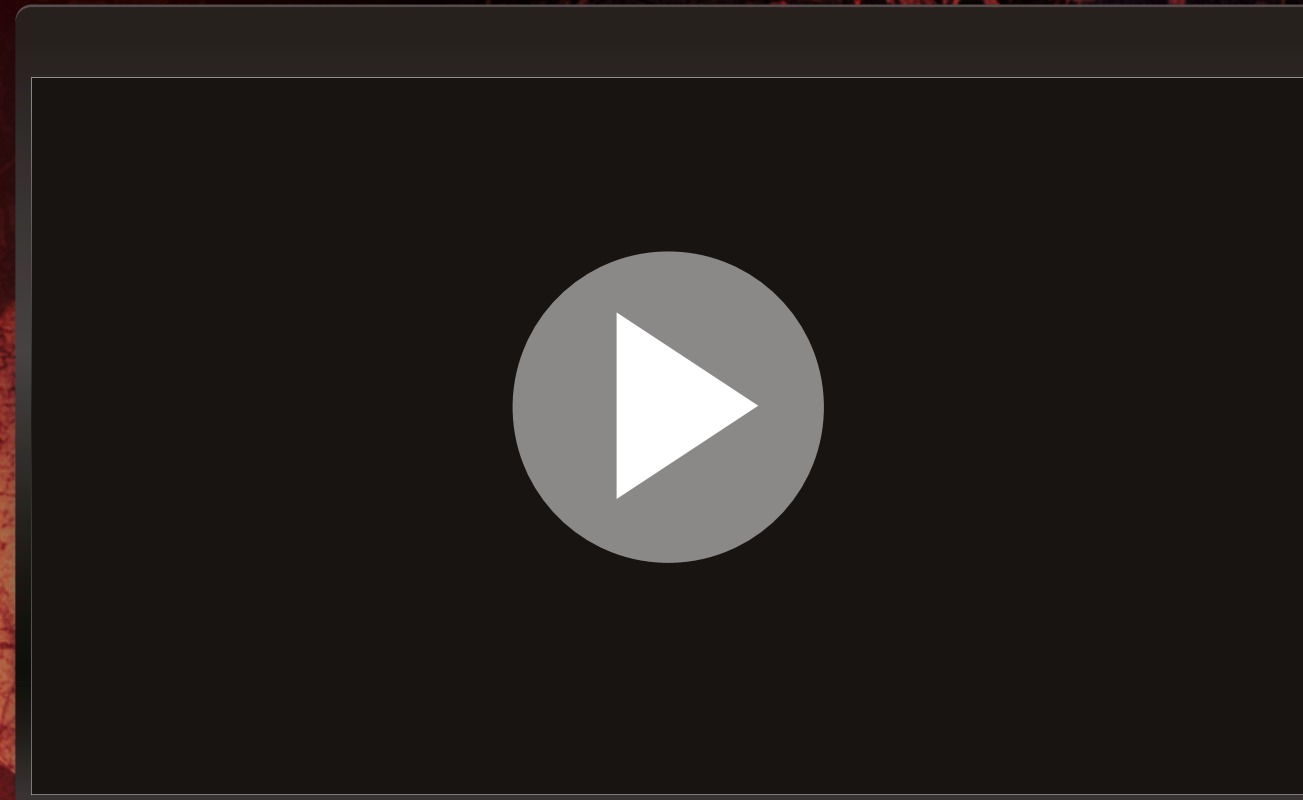
Andy James - **NEW ALBUM OUT NOW!**

It's been a while coming but the third Andy James album (cunningly self-titled) is out at last! One of Guitar Interactive's most popular columnists and a major draw with his tuition DVDs on our sister site, Licklibrary, the rising star of shred and metal guitar has been working on his new album for several months - and it's already receiving rave reviews.

An instrumental project, Andy's album is a far cry from shredding for shredding's sake - there is a real songwriting talent at work here and anyone expecting speed metal

soloing and nothing else is in for a real surprise - in fact the album's a revelation. One moment it's tearing your face off, the next it's lyrical. This is Metal with an extra dimension.

After a busy summer finishing his album, on a UK tour with Sacred Mother Tongue and a busy gig schedule. Andy has still found time to film and write his regular GI column and will be featuring as a guest interviewer in future issues.



BUY NOW!

To get your copy of the much anticipated 3rd album from **Andy James**, simply [click here](#) and purchase today!

THE RHYTHM METHOD

Want to know how to make your Blues progression sound more like the Pros'? This month Jamie Humphries look at some extended chord voicings and chord fragments that will really give your rhythm playing that added "X Factor".

O

ver the past two Rhythm Methods we have looked at building chords, understanding the basics of rhythm, and to wind things up last issue we looked at a killer blues progression. In this issue we are going to continue with our Blues progression, but take a look at how to give yours that pro sound.

Have you ever listened to your favourite guitarist and wondered why their rhythm parts just sound more "Pro" than yours? We seem to spend a lot of time learning chords all over the neck, which still is very important. But when we analyse the rhythm parts of guitarists such as Jimi Hendrix, Stevie

Ray Vaughan, Robben Ford, or Eric Johnson, we often see these guitarists playing chords that don't really resemble the chords that we have spent much of our time learning! This may seem a little disheartening, but before we continue, I want to point out that learning all of your basic chords is essential, and it's also vital for learning scales and arpeggios for your lead playing, so, please, don't stop practising them! We also need them as a basis for what I am going to present to you in this lesson.

To my mind, and obviously to many other guitarists, the sound of a basic barre variety chord can be too cluttered and thick sounding. For instance, if we look at the voicing of a traditional E movable barre chord it is

as follows; 1st, 5th, 1st, 3rd, 5th, 1st. As you can see from the list, there are quite a few doubled notes, which are pretty much redundant. In modern Rock and Blues we often use crunch/distorted tones. Often when using these tones, the placement of certain notes really effects how the chord sounds. Too many notes in a chord with a crunch sound will result in a thick messy sound that makes the sound of the chords hard to distinguish. Eric Johnson often employs a technique where by he shifts the position of certain tones within a chord to a give a much sweeter, less messy sound when using overdrive. His favourite technique is to move the 3rd of the chord from the bottom of the chord to the top, and this type of chord voicing is referred to as

[...>] 72

Another great tool for expanding our rhythm concepts is to include inversions.



the notes with in a triad. Our basic triad is 1st, 3rd 5th. If we invert this so that we have the following order, 3rd, 5th, 1st we result in a 1st inversion. If we change the order again, 5th, 1st, 3rd we have a 2nd inversion. The 1st inversion was used a lot by such legendary guitarists as Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan, and by adding this to your progressions will instantly give you that signature sound. You will be able to hear and see examples of the use of inversions in the accompanying video lesson. Now let's look at our examples;

Ex1 illustrates all of the chords found in this months featured lesson. As I explained in the video lesson, although I have laid them out in a specific order in the lesson, feel free to experiment with the order of the chords and which voicings you choose to use when performing our blues piece.

Ex2 illustrates our blues progression in the form of a basic chord chart. Use this chart to help you learn the order of the chords in the progression. You will also notice that the progression is made up of 2 sections,

[...>] **74**

an open voicing. One of his signature voicings is 1st, 5th, 3rd, producing s crisp open tone that works great with crunch.

Another approach is to eliminate many of the notes from the chord leaving us with the most important notes that imply the sound of the chord. Remember, there are other musicians playing in a band and we can rely on them to imply certain tonalities, leaving us to experiment with more sparse voicings that imply much more sophisticated harmony. The main chords featured in our track

this month include a dominant 9th and a 6th chord. Both of these chord types are based around just a three note chord voicing, enabling use to imply more advanced harmony with a smaller chord voicing. You will also notice an A7 chord that only makes use of 3 notes, 1st, b7th and the 3rd. You can see how much more sparse this voicing is compared to a regular dominant 7th voicing.

Another great tool for expanding our rhythm concepts is to include inversions. An inversion is where we simply change the order of



an A and a B section.

The form is the same as last month's progression, but includes our more sophisticated and advanced sounding chords.

I hope you have fun with this lesson; there are plenty of new rhythm and chord ideas for you to get stuck into. In the next issue we'll wind things up with our featured Blues piece and include some rhythmic fill ideas.



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ORANGE

Michael Casswell

PRO CONCEPTS



This issue I'm giving my Pro Concepts column the grand title 'Double Whammy'. The reason being, we are going to be looking at some double stop pedal steel type bends, combined with a touch of whammy bar trickery, combined with some advanced string bending that carries on from where we we left it, last issue. Double Whammy is the best I could come up with, but you are welcome to call it whatever you like!

[...>] 79



A

t the risk of repeating myself, string bending and vibrato are the two main components of guitar playing you have to get right, because they show, straight away, where you're at with your playing. You can, in theory, get by without knowing every scale or chord substitution, but if your vibrato is nasty, and your string bending is a bit random, it's game over. No second chances. Out!! So when you check out all the different lessons given in this fantastic magazine, by all the very fine guitar players, please work obsessively on your string bending and vibrato, (and your timing and rhythm), because what I and the other guys are showing you, should be built upon a solid foundation, and there is no point in copying my double stop bends with a whammy bar vibrato, if you cannot accurately play straight one and two fret interval bends with good finger vibrato. Remember to keep it snappy, and try not to fish for the notes, as we discussed last issue.

For those of you who feel you are totally on top of their string bending and vib, then you may enjoy what we explore in this column. There are some more challenging bends that you can steal from me to use in your own playing, which when used tastefully, can take your improvising away from the mundane. All I ask in return is that if your guitar playing buddies ask how and from who you got some of these more interesting bending ideas, then you might point them in the direction of Guitar Interactive, and if you are real cool guy, you may even give me a name check!

The good thing about what we go through this time is you don't have to be a rocket scientist to transfer the ideas to different chords and keys. The sequence that we are placing the bends over is Bm7/F#m, E/, back to Bm. Not strictly an 'in time' groove, but just a rough one bar per chord slow vamp that you can fit the ideas over. There are definite major and minor bends, which will work great over a lot of styles and grooves with a little creativity on your part.

I don't like to label what style it is I am showing you, because it can be used in Country, Blues, Rock and Jazz. In all my pro concept columns, all I am doing is showing you ways to stand out, and because you are never more than 20 feet away from another guitarist, standing out today can be a pretty big challenge!

Creativity, flare and feel count for a lot in today's technique saturated guitar market. I guess you need technique to have a certain amount of flare, but touch, tone, melody and creativity will always trump speed and licks. What's the point of being able to shred like Yngwie Malmsteen, if you can't come up with those cool guitar parts needed to weave in and out of that very well paid funk session? It's all about balance, creative thinking, and phrases and ideas that have definite musical weight.

We also start touching on some whammy bar techniques which some of you may like. Using that thing on your guitar called a tremolo bar may be a little daunting at first.

[...>] 80

Your average musical instrument store will have a collection of Fender Stratocaster trem bar arms under the counter, because many a Strat is purchased without even attaching the trem arm! Sad, but true! It is not essential to have a tremolo to play these ideas, but used correctly, the whammy bar can be so sweet and musical, it hurts! If you are interested in getting some whammy techniques together, about two years ago, I filmed a Licklibrary DVD showing beginner to advanced tremolo use, which may help you and also show you what can be achieved with a bit of focus and practice. What I did not talk about in the DVD was how double stop bending ideas can put the unbent strings out of tune when you have a floating trem. It is all a bit of a trade-off really. I find the advantages of my trem floating far outweigh the disadvantages, and I have learnt to compensate for the trem by either giving some musical trem vibrato, or literally bending the remaining out of tune string into pitch. Let me know if you like exploring the whammy bar stuff on my forum at Licklibrary, or

on my Facebook guitar page, then I will know whether to go further with it and show you more, or not.

What I demonstrate this issue is not easy to play straight away, and you may have to work at it. The trick is to take each idea slowly and make sure you understand how I'm doing what I'm doing, before moving to the next part of the run.

Again, if you get nothing else out of this, you will end up with a drop dead cool run to steal!

Finally, do not ignore the string bending exercise I showed you last issue. Well actually, you can, but don't say I didn't warn you, if you don't get the gig!

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Reviews



Welcome to Guitar Interactive's
reviews section.

The moment we realised we'd be interviewing Joe Bonamassa for this issue, we knew we had to do something different for our reviews - and we have.

Joe, famously, has joined the '59 Les Paul Standard Owner's Club (you don't get a special tie to wear) and when he kindly agreed to let us borrow his own, brand new, Lazy J combo for review, we decided we just had to borrow a '59 sunburst to do it justice!

Which set us thinking. What if you can't afford a genuine Gibson Les Paul - let alone a vintage model - and a custom amp? That gave rise to our '59 Challenge - two single cutaways going head to head through a surprisingly affordable Marshall Class 5 combo! Is it possible to get the best for less?

Add one of the much talked-about US made Splawn Nitro heads, the brand new Orange TH30C combo, a Hughes & Kettner 60 DFX and guitars including a G&L 30th Anniversary ASAT, the latest Yamaha shred-monster and that old favourite, a Rickenbacker 12-string, and we have a packed guitar and amp section.

Digitech's brand new Whammy DT pedal walked into our FX line-up, as did the unique Plutonium Chi wah-wah - and then there is the Stetsbar trem. Ever wanted an advanced trem on a guitar you didn't want to monkey with (like a '59 Les Paul?). No, we didn't believe it was possible, either!

Please keep your ideas for review gear coming - they really help.
Just email us at editor@iguitarmag.com

Gary Cooper - Editor



Stetsbar Pro II Tremolo system

Check the Spec.

GO

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A trem system that will retro-fit on just about any guitar - even your vintage Gibson? Without damaging it? And it's as good as any modern trem? No, we didn't believe it either. Neither did **Michael Casswell**. And then he tried one...

I'm lucky enough to own a few guitars, the majority of which are equipped with some kind of tremolo system. I think tasteful use of a whammy bar can add a lot to the colours and textures the guitar can create and knowing my way around the techniques that can be utilised on a good trem has certainly put some money my way over the years. And even though I own a few Gibsons and a couple of Fender Teles, I will usually grab one of my Strats or vintage Valley Arts guitars when I'm leaving the house for a gig or session, purely because they sound great and have a trem that can do everything I need it to. So imagine if I could create the same whammy bar trickery on my 335, Les Paul, or Telecaster. Well, the good news is, now I can!

In the dark ages prior to the Stetsbar, the best you could hope for on a Gibson, or even a Tele, was a pathetic, polite, out of tune wobble

Stetsbar Pro II Tremolo system



from something like a Bigsby, which has ruined many a beautiful Les Paul or 335. To fit a Bigsby, and most trem systems up until now, has usually involved major surgery to a guitar, usually devaluing it, creating more holes or chiselling away precious wood for a trem that usually ends up being rubbish anyway. And the thought of anything like that happening to my triple AAA grade flame top amber Les Paul is enough to make me lose control of all my bodily functions (not a good look)!

The whole idea behind the Stetsbar tremolo is that it can be fitted to any mainstream, non-trem guitar, with no modification or butchery whatsoever. You simply unscrew whatever bridge or tailpiece you have at the moment, and the Stetsbar bolts straight on to your existing factory holes, with no drama and minimal expertise needed.

What a fantastic concept.....but does it work? Is it any good?

Do you want the good news, or the bad news first? The good news is..... there is no bad news! Yes it works, and yes, it is really good! It's not even very expensive!

The demonstration guitar we were loaned was a UK-built Gordon Smith - a venerable UK handmade brand that has been around for decades and a pretty good test-bed for a Stetsbar Pro 2, which would be the one that would fit directly on your Gibson style guitar. To say I was sceptical is an understatement! Usually, with most tremos there will tuning problems straight away, or the feel of it is just hideous, or there will be knocking or clanking from

[...>] 91





The Stetsbar comes in chrome, black, gold and nickel

somewhere, but straight away I knew we had something special here.

The feel was silky smooth, with no effort involved to move the arm. Less effort means more control and more control means you sound better (in theory!).

The main part of the trem rolls on top of micro roller bearings, so there is hardly any friction to hold you back. It also delivers a wide pitch range. I pulled the G string up to nearly a C, which is the same as my Floyd Rose. It won't do the push down to slack thing that a Floyd does (but we have all grown out of that, haven't we!), but it does give you beyond a full octave down, which is more than enough. It also doesn't trill and chirp like a good Fender or Floyd trem, but the advantages with the Stetsbar outweigh any small compromises. For instance, with a Floyd or Fender trem, your strings are under attack from metal fatigue every time you use the bar, but with the Stetsbar, the strings move with the whole system, so no metal fatigue, which means far less string breakage.

Even if you were to break a string, the Stetsbar will keep your remaining strings in tune enough for you to get to the end of the song, unlike regular floating tremos, when string breakage means disaster and a guitar change

straight away. Also with the Stetsbar, you can use drop tunings without resetting or retuning the guitar. So it's all adding up to a great product. If you going to get problems, it will be your headstock end. A poorly cut nut will make your strings stick and worn or cheap tuning pegs will become a nightmare. The Gordon Smith demo guitar that you can see on our video has a brass nut that has been lubricated with some kind of silicon, which is what Stetsbar suggest you do, but if your guitar has no intrinsic high value, you could always fit a graphite nut, and even some locking Sperzel tuners.

The Stetsbar comes in chrome, black, gold and nickel and there is a version for stop tail, hard tail, Tele and Strat style guitars, so most popular mainstream instruments are catered for, but I get the impression from the stetsbar.com website that they do not like to be defeated, and if they have to make a tremolo for your strange hybrid, bitsa this, bitsa that, guitar, then they will try!

I may at some point fit one to my 335, safe in the knowledge that all my bodily functions will remain intact. This is a fantastic product that will be the answer to many a dream!



Splawn Nitro 100 Head

Splawn? Who? Pay attention at the back - Splawn is a US boutique amp maker on the way up. **Rick Graham** was so blown away when he tried one that he persuaded us to let him review it!

Splawn amplification is a company you may not have heard of but those who are familiar with them will be aware of the superb reputation they have built up due to their extremely high level of workmanship coupled with a truly phenomenal sound - I'll get more into that later.

Based in Dallas, a small town in the beautiful State of North Carolina, the company is the brainchild of the owner Scott Splawn. All of his products are handmade in-house, as are their speaker cabs and head boxes, although some parts are outsourced such as the chassis, circuit boards and transformers. Incidentally their transformers are custom wound by Hayboer, also in the USA.

The subject of this review is the Nitro Head. Although the majority of Scott Splawn's amps are geared toward the heavy rock market, they are by no means limited to that genre alone. Delivering 100 Watts, the

Nitro is loud. Very loud. Attenuation has been made available though, which enables you to reduce the power output by half at the flick of a switch, which will be a very welcome option to many. The head houses four EL34s in the power section and 4 12AX7s in the Preamp stage, although there is an option to have the amplifier fitted with KT88s in place of the EL34's, in which case it delivers a massive 120 Watts.

Essentially, the Nitro is a two channel amplifier - clean and overdrive - with a further additional Overdrive 2 boost and solo boost, controllable via the supplied three-way footswitch. Considering the fact that this amp is a high gain beast, the clean channel is remarkably versatile and although you are more likely to see this amp being used at a nu metal concert than a Blues gig, it is more than capable of fulfilling both roles with class to spare.

Sparkling, shimmering cleans to more chunky clean tones can be achieved with very little tweaking

SPLAWN NITRO 100 HEAD



involved. It is, however when the overdrive channel is engaged that the Nitro shows what it was truly made for. Test driving it initially with the gain control on a low setting showed that this amp is one of the most responsive amps I've encountered. An incredible dynamic range can be achieved just by varying the amount of attack on the strings and I couldn't help but be inspired to play, which is truly what a great amp should do. Kicking in the Overdrive 2 via

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the supplied footswitch gives you access all the gain you will ever need.

More often than not, an amplifier shows its true colours the more gain you throw into the mix and clarity- at which point clarity and balance can be compromised but this is most certainly not the case with the Nitro.

[...>] **94**





From belting out palm-muted heavy rock riffs, to rapid-fire alternate picked and legato line, there was absolutely no loss of tightness and clarity whatsoever.

Even though you will get killer tone straight from the word go, the addition of a Resonance control, which controls the low frequencies to the output section and Presence, which control the high frequencies, along with Bass, Mid and Treble

controls should give you countless hours to tweak to your heart's content should you wish to. Quite simply, this is one of the finest amps I've had the pleasure of reviewing and if you are looking for one of the best high gain amps money can buy, then you need look no further. It isn't cheap - hence the four stars rating - but it is an incredibly fine piece of gear!



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Orange TH30 Combo

Orange took everything they'd learned from their pioneering micro amps and poured it all into the new pint-sized TH30 Combo. Aimed at the Pubs and Clubs gigging player who demands a valve amp, it looks like a perfect package. But can such a small combo really cut it? We asked **Rick Graham** to find out.



ne of the amp makers looking to deliver the goods for the mobility-conscious gigging musician is Orange, whose new Class

A TH30 combo has followed on where its previous models, the Tiny/Dual Terror and the Rocker 30, left-off, whilst adding some brand new features along the way.

Personally, being all too aware of the need for portability, the first thing I was keen to find out was the weight of the TH30. A rather hefty 52lbs (24kg) is quite surprising for a combo with such a diminutive stature and while in no way was it back-breaking to lift, it was a touch heavier than I'd anticipated. For that reason alone

Orange TH30 Combo



you may want to take a close look at the combo rather than the Head and Cab versions as they would constitute quite a hefty pair. Against this, it's a typically sturdily-built Orange, so it's going to weigh more than a cheaply built amp.

The TH30 delivers a beefy 30 Watts, pushed out by the combo's single Celestion 1x12 G12H speaker, derived from four EL84 power tubes with the preamp section using four ECC83 tubes - in other words, the classic AC30-style arrangement. The effects loop is also powered by an additional ECC81 valve. While 30 Watts will handle most small club and pub gigs without a problem, Orange has chosen to add a mightily useful half power option which is controllable by the flick of a switch on the front panel. For the situation

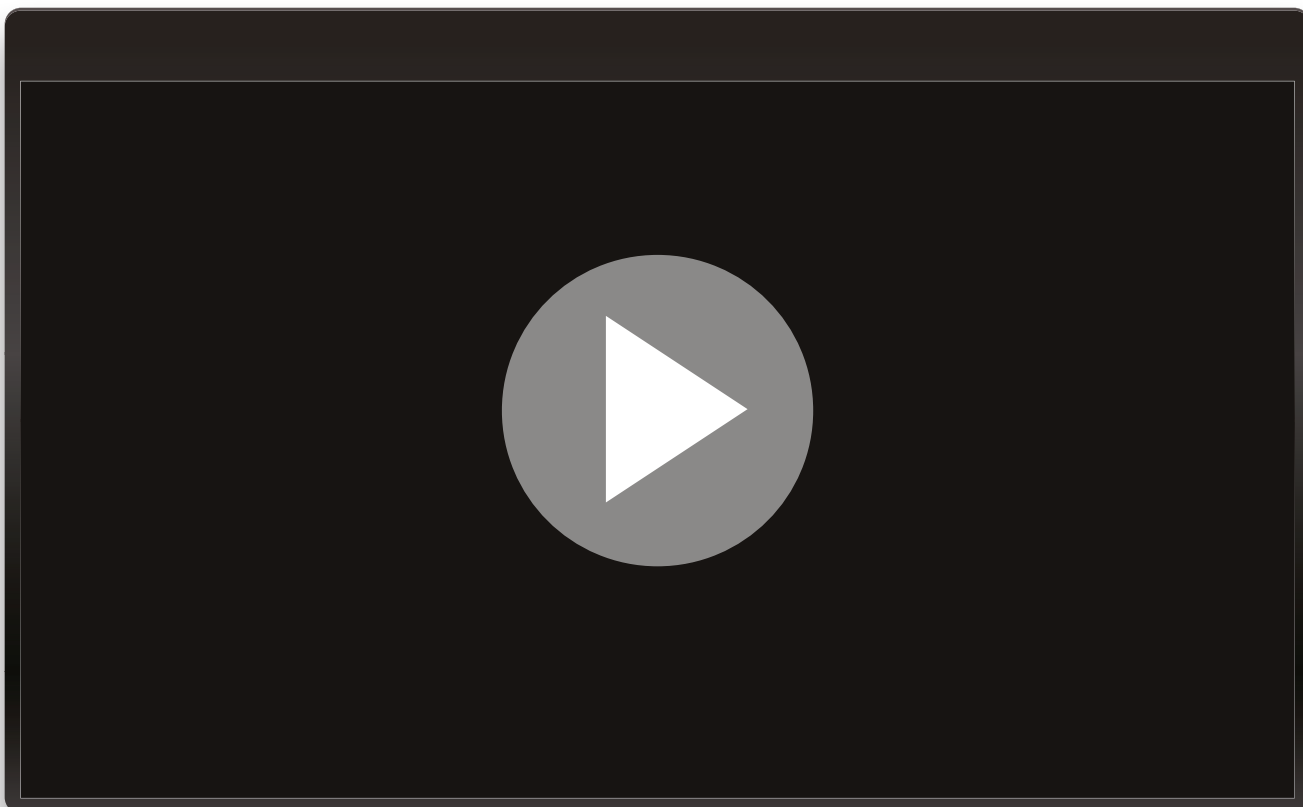
[...>] 96



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accompanying video to hear it for yourself.

If you are a player who spends a lot of time tweaking, you may feel little disappointed with the TH30's simplistic controls. Of course it doesn't mean that you can't spend time tweaking it, but those who need more controls to manipulate will probably be better looking elsewhere. On the other hand, for those who like to keep things as simple and user friendly as possible and just want

great tone straight out of the box, this amp may just be the amp you are looking for. Its price may seem a little on the high side too but don't be fooled, this is a great sounding, well made, Class A valve/tube amp with a lot of new new features coupled with that all important portability factor. It looks like Orange are onto a winner with this one.



where volume needs to be kept to the absolute minimum, a further switch on the rear of the amp enables you to engage just two of the four power tubes thus reducing the power output by half again.

Running the amp on its clean channel it's impressive, with lots of room for sparkling versatility when combining the onboard EQ in juxtaposition with the variable output modes and your guitar's volume control. Switch over to the Dirty channel and the TH30 delivers gain - and then some. But don't be fooled into thinking that this is just another high gain amp and neither

is it an AC30, as the TH30 retains a clarity and punchiness even with the gain controls on full. I took it through its paces, playing heavy chugging rhythms right up to soaring, modern rock lead lines and I never felt that the TH30 was out of its depth. It responded exceptionally well to everything I threw at it and did so with a character all of its own. Again you can get a variety of different tones with this channel and with the addition of the Dirty shape control you can achieve sounds that will take you from harmonic rich mids, right through to modern new metal scooped sounds. Check out our



I took it through its paces, playing heavy chugging rhythms right up to soaring, modern rock lead lines and **I never felt** that the TH30 was out of its depth.

Lazy J J80 Combo

Guitar Interactive always analyses the gear our cover star uses - partly to give you an insight into the artist's preferences - partly to explore how they get their sound. But with Joe Bonamassa we went on step further - we actually borrowed his brand new handmade Lazy J combo, before he took delivery of it himself! **Michael Casswell** promised to give it back. One day...

J

esse Hoff is the man behind Lazy J, a range of handmade amps that has taken the top end of the professional market by storm in

just a few years. Jesse learned his electronics in the USA and Germany but he and his workshop are based in Guildford, Surrey, in the UK from where, with almost no publicity and absolutely no hype, he has garnered a list of users that would make even the biggest brands stand in awe. No lesser beings than Jeff Beck, Joe Walsh, Pete Townsend, Paul Weller, Noel Gallagher and Joe Bonamassa have all taken delivery of Lazy J amps. Well, actually, I have taken

Lazy J J80 Combo



delivery of Joe Bonamassa's amp, because the amp we have on review here is his very own one and he has kindly allowed it to come to us first, before he has even seen or played through it. Joe, if you read this, a big big thank you from the team at GI!

What we have here is a 6L6 equipped, 80 Watt, 2x12, extremely loud and proud, point to point hand wired, hand built combo. Jesse usually puts a tremolo and a reverb in these, but Joe already has one like that, so he ordered this one as plain vanilla, because he is going to be using them both side by side, one with a touch of spring reverb, this one without.

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You can hear the heritage of this amp from the moment you fire it up. Jesse is very into vintage Fender amps. Vintage Fenders do sound great, but only if they are incredibly well maintained, and only if they are working, and it does tend to

be a little up to them when they want to be nice and work, or take a night off. Which means you might need a spare.

[...>] **102**



And if both amps have been talking, that one might fancy a night off too! It can all get very tiresome and boring very quickly, unless you are someone like Jesse, who knows these old beasts like the back of his soldering iron and can tweak and improve and replace and keep running a whole family of vintage Fenders. Which is what he did for himself, and then for friends, and then for a growing number of pro players, until he got to the point where it seemed it might be a good idea to build his own hand built range of amps, using the best components money can buy, put together in such a way that they will be utterly reliable. And, while he

One of those improvements was being able to switch the 80 watts down to 50.



was at it, there were just a few improvements that could be made to that vintage circuitry....

One of those improvements was being able to switch the 80 watts down to 50. This doesn't mean that the amp will sound particularly quieter, it just means that it will work harder quicker, with less headroom and start crunching up at more modest volumes. Another nice touch is the pot labelled 'ground' that makes the amp more touch sensitive. Real players like Joe Bonamassa, Jeff Beck and Joe Walsh are all about dynamics within their playing, and this knob is for these sort of players. If you have no idea what I am talking about, then you don't deserve to own a Lazy J, and should be made to pass an audition to buy one. I joke, but part of me is being serious, because it's not until you play through a point to point wired amp that you realise how mediocre most amps that companies sell to us are. Point to point, by the way, means Jesse has taken every wire and component, and hand soldered it, like they used to do when Hendrix was burning Strats and Clapton was reading the Beano. Nowadays it's all printed circuit boards and Chinese valves to save labour, cost, and to give consistency.

[...>] 104

This amp is as good as it gets.

While we're on the subject of cost, this amp is unashamedly expensive and in case anyone is thinking of quibbling, look at it this way. Most guitarists would pay extra for a hand finished custom guitar, but a lot of inexperienced players forget that your guitar is only half the story. You should take just as much care with your amp. Which is why we need true craftsmen like Jesse. Jesse takes pride in his work and cares about you as a player, no matter if you're Jeff Beck, Joe Bonamassa, or someone who just plays for fun at home. That's part of what you're paying for.

How does it sound? Well, the video gives the answer there and it does it

with as close as we could possibly get to Joe's own guitar. Yes, we borrowed a genuine 1959 Les Paul - then our Editor decided to base a large chunk of this issue to exploring the myths surrounding that fabled guitar. I did better as I got to use the beautiful Les Paul to get in the ball park for some of Joe's tones, and I also pushed the front of the amp (as Joe does) with my vintage ts808 tube screamer as well as a very cool Lazy J Cruiser overdrive pedal, which again was built and designed by Jesse because he was disappointed with the Klon Centaur.

Just for a balanced comparison, I also plugged in my white custom

shop Strat and the G&L anniversary ASAT, which is also reviewed in this issue, so you can hear how the amp responds to a few guitars.

The J80 is equipped with two 12 inch Tayden drivers, made in Great Yarmouth in the UK, which give a nice depth across the whole frequency range. The amp also has the traditional normal and bright inputs, both with a high and low bias. The bright channel volume knob is a pull pot, which when pulled, gives you more bark and push, which sounded really cool with the Les Paul. The bass knob also is pull pot, and when engaged, gives a tighter more 'blackface' bottom end. Think of it as a resonance switch.

This amp is as good as it gets. If I was to be picky, I personally like effects loops in my amps, but this amp was made for Joe Bonamassa and he just wants it old school and as it is. And if a plain 80 Watt combo isn't

quite what you're after? Well, Jesse also offers a Lazy J 20 which we're now itching to review and a bunch of customising options.

I hope the tone comes across in the footage, it certainly was a buzz playing a 59 Les Paul through a Lazy J. Sometimes life can be kind. Obviously man hugs and thank yous go to the very big hearted Joe Bonamassa, the very lucky Phil Harris for the loan of his cheap Les Paul, and to Jesse for making a beautiful product.

PS.....hey Jesse, we are going to have to come to some arrangement on an amp, and that Cruiser pedal!!

And the score? Despite the price, we think this is not only a fabulous amp but is also good value for money given the hours of painstaking work that goes into making one.



Revisited Special

THE '59

Gibson Les Paul Standard

It's probably the most expensive guitar you can buy and certainly one of the world's most sought-after - the 1959 Gibson Les Paul Standard.

But is it really worth so much? And are all '59ers as good as each other?

Gary Cooper gets to grips with the ultimate guitar icon and **Michael Casswell** gets to play one!

[...>] **108**

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ike the Holy Grail for medieval knights, Gibson Les Pauls made in what has become

regarded as the golden year - 1959 - have become objects of worship. It's hardly surprising when you consider the legends who have used them, quite literally, to create what we know today as Rock music. Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Paul Kossof, Mick Taylor, Mike Bloomfield, Jimmy Page, Mark Knopfler, Keith Richards, Billy Gibbons, Joe Walsh, Slash - it seems almost easier to count the great players who haven't strutted on stage at some time or another with that archetypal sunburst single cutaway around their neck, ready to rock the house.

But why all the fuss? Is a '59 really better than a '58 or a '60? What sets them apart from Gibson's countless reissues? The more you look into the legend, the more questions are raised.

So let's go back to the beginning - 1952, when Gibson, then based in Kalamazoo, launched the original Les Paul. A lovely guitar in its own right (and quite revolutionary

for the time) it had some way to travel before it became the guitar that created Rock. It started life with a trapeze tailpiece. That had to go and, indeed, it did - just a year later, though only in favour of a crude wrapover alternative. It took until 1955 before the great Ted McCarty, then Gibson's President, oversaw the introduction of the Tune-o-Matic bridge and stop tailpiece which have since become industry standards for fixed bridge guitars.

The woods had been right all along, of course. That great slab of mahogany, topped with a maple cap gave even the earliest Les Pauls phenomenal tone and sustain. The mahogany produced the sweetness, the warmth and the sustain, the maple gave cutting, pure highs. By the time the Tune-o-Matic had been added, those tonal characteristics could only have been enhanced - and they were.

1957 saw the next evolutionary leap, when Gibson's Seth Lover devised the PAF (it stood for Patent Applied For) humbucking pickup, which changed the sound of the Les Paul forever. It may, originally, only have been introduced



to defeat (hence 'buck') the hums and buzzes that plague single coil pickups but perhaps even more importantly, it produced a richer, more powerful tone that enabled a generation of guitarists less than ten years later to create the overdriven valve/tube amp sound which was to dominate the rest of the century - and, so far, most of this one, too.

The final act of alchemy was, in many ways, the master touch. In 1958 Gibson dropped the 'Gold Top' finish which, while an icon in its

[...>] **110**

That great slab of mahogany topped with a maple cap gave even the earliest Les Pauls phenomenal tone and sustain

So what is it about 1959 Les Pauls?

own right, gave way to the sunburst which allowed the sometimes awesome beauty of the Les Paul's naturally figured maple to shine through. Has there ever been a more handsome electric guitar?

What happened next is open to dispute. No, let me rephrase that. What happened next is guaranteed to start a bar room fight, as few pundits entirely agree about the chronology. My take on it is that sometime around the end of his stint with the Yardbirds, in 1965, Eric Clapton ditched his Telecaster and Vox AC30 in favour of a Les Paul and Marshall. And here's the first problem: that Les Paul was a 1960, not a 1959. Does it matter? Only if you want to start a bar room fight, I'd suggest - but more of that later.

Who actually got the bright idea of winding a valve amp into distortion and driving it to the edge of feedback will turn our mere brawl into a battlefield, but my guess is that, like so any great inventions in history, it happened in several places more or less simultaneously. In the USA, Mike Bloomfield was using a Les Paul and edging in that direction, Jeff Beck (who had replaced Clapton in the Yardbirds) was doing the same and the Kinks' Dave Davies had already stolen a march on all of them by slicing his

speaker cones, driving a little Elpico amp to bursting point and putting distorted guitar solos on international hit singles like You Really Got Me. Distortion was about to happen - it just needed a champion. And that champion was Eric Clapton.

Then again, if you listen to where Clapton's inspiration had come from - notably, the Chicago Blues masters - they hadn't exactly revelled in the squeakiest of Fender-clean sounds. Chuck Berry had used subtle distortion, Link Wray had, too, and listen to '50s Howling Wolf with Hubert Sumlin, or Country Rock and Roller, Johnny Burnette (whose Train Kept a Rollin' had, significantly, become the Yardbirds' signature tune). It may not be the screaming sustain Clapton achieved on John Mayall's 'Beano' Blues Breakers album in 1965 (and certainly not the banshee wail of Peter Green, who followed him in Mayall's band) but it's clear that the ground had been prepared for That Sound some years before.

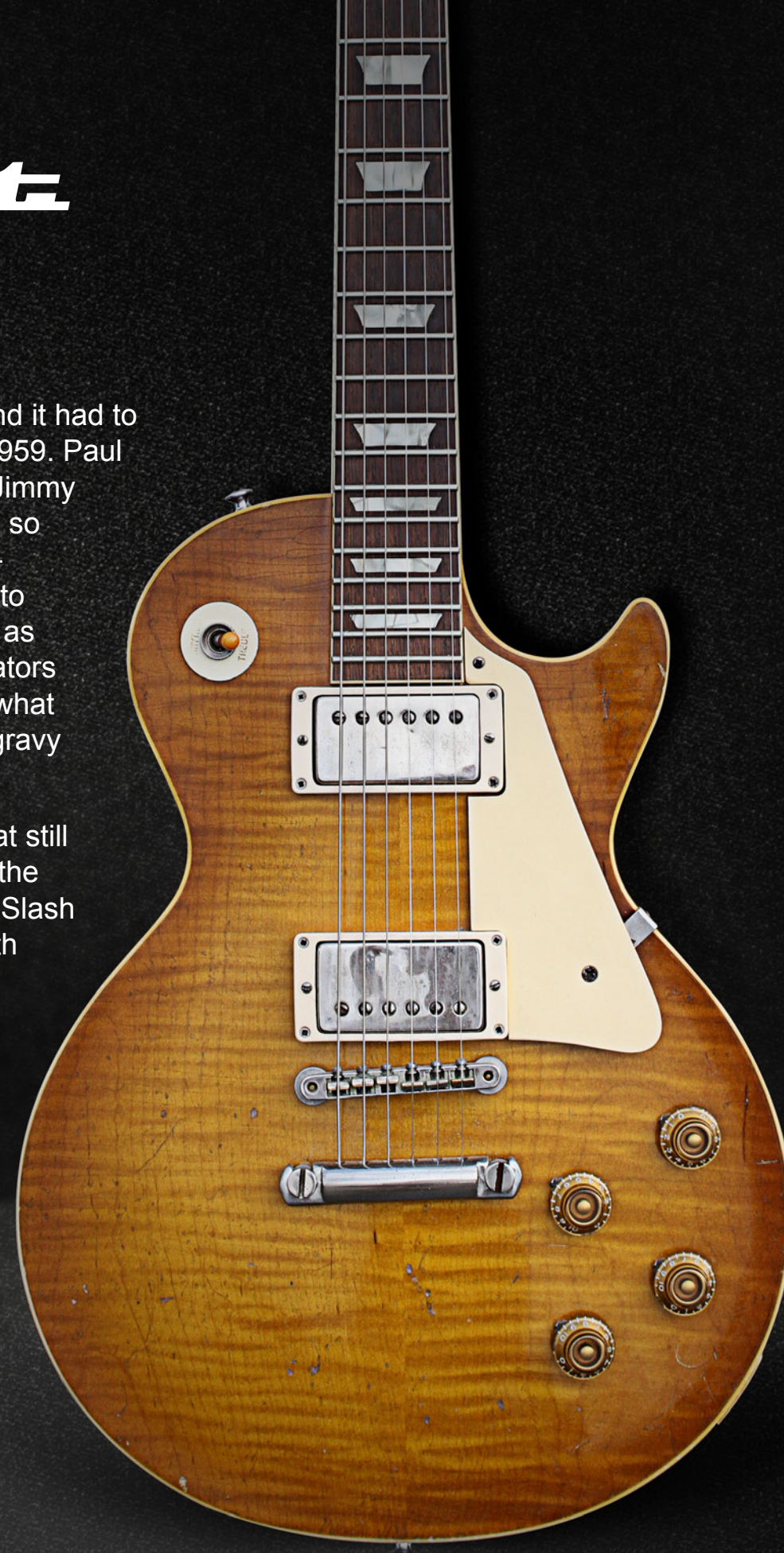
After Clapton - or perhaps more accurately, Peter Green, as his Les Paul genuinely was a 1959 (later owned by the late Gary Moore) - the legend swiftly grew, as a generation of the world's finest guitarists decided there was only

one guitar to own - and it had to have been made in 1959. Paul Kossof, Mick Taylor, Jimmy Page, Joe Walsh and so many more followed - and prices escalated to stratospheric regions as investors and speculators clambered on board what they believed was a gravy train to the stars.

It's a bug that still hasn't burned out. In the 1980s and early '90s Slash became The Man With The '59 and now the guitarist on the cover of this issue, and the latest to wear the '59 crown, Joe Bonamassa, has become the current guitar hero to fall prey to its charms.

So what is it about 1959 Les Pauls?

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Back in the day, the Les Paul was an OK seller for Gibson, but most guitarists were looking for something a little more modern, so in 1961 the single cutaway guitar that was, eventually, to sell for ridiculous sums of money, was dropped in favour of double cutaway versions which, in pretty short order, mutated into the far more modern-looking (to 1960s eyes) Gibson SG.

By rights, that should have been the end of the old Les Paul but something strange started to happen. Guitarists who had once craved everything modern began to seek out the old qualities - handmade guitars where no two were exactly the same. Tones that came from rare woods, properly aged and pickups wound erratically by hand, using now hard to find materials. In short, they wanted tone and exclusivity. And, to be honest, they wanted romance too. An old guitar has a story to tell.

Ironically, in keeping with Rock and Roll legend, the rehabilitation of the '59 Les Paul may have begun with the equally legendary Keith Richards even before Eric Clapton got his hands on one. It was Richards, in 1964, who started playing a pristine 1959 sunburst equipped with a Bigsby tremolo. To a generation of wannabes it was a revelation. Just what was that guitar that Keef was playing? No one had a clue as it wasn't even in the Gibson catalogue at the time and Gibson wasn't interested in talking about it. In fact, even when the Les Paul was on fire as a collectible item in the early-mid 1970s,

the company still dismissed it like a bad smell. It took a long time for Gibson to wake up to its own heritage.

Joe Bonamassa is the latest (but he won't be the last!) to fall for the '59s allure and in his case he is toting one despite Gibson having made not just Epiphone replicas but Custom Shop Gibson signature versions for him.

Joe likens his personal '59 to a Stradivarius violin, taking about an indefinable quality. In an interview on his website he says: 'But the real '59... when you play it and you hear it, it drives you to a different place. You feel as though the guitar responds to your every move, good or bad.'

So just how justified is this religious fervour? And can any guitar really be worth the sums of money Standards were fetching a few years ago, when talk of the \$1 million Les Paul was common and some were already scratching the ceiling of \$750,000?

Since then, prices have dropped back a bit and one can't help smiling as that means non-playing investors, who keep their Standards locked-up in glass cases or, even worse, in bank vaults, have received a valuable lesson. But all the same, they still aren't cheap. Can they possibly be worth that sort of money to a real player?

Moreover, who says Gibson has forgotten how to build a '59? Why can't a reissue be every bit as good?

This gets us to the heart of the problem - how guitars age. Over the years I've asked players and manufacturers this question so many times, and had so many different answers, that my head starts to hurt when I think about it. According to experts from Gibson I've asked this question, guitars age in all sorts of ways, for all sorts of reasons. In the old days they were made by hand - each one slightly different due to hand manufacturing techniques. The woods varied, too - but they were all properly aged and made from great tonewoods that were easier to obtain then. And then there was what happened to them after they left the factory. Guitarists sweat. Pickup windings get wet and short and corrode in strange ways. Wood expands, contracts, ages and mellows, natural glues settle down. In short, they told me, you can't say every '59 Les Paul will be the same. And maybe only the good ones (of the up to to 1,700 that were made) still survive, anyway? How many are still outside captivity? Some estimates claim as many as 900 could be up there in your grandpa's attic, or lurking in a local junk shop.

Sadly, as it has turned out, my sources at Gibson were right - not every old Les Paul is a good one.

Phil Harris, of Harris Hire in the UK, who generously lent Guitar Interactive his personal '59 Standard for our Lazy J review in this issue, is one of the world's authorities on these guitars. But he's also a realist.

'I've owned 37 original sunbursts since I was 19 - the guitar Gary Moore had when he died was one of mine and Mark Knopfler has two that I sold him - so I know them pretty well. But they aren't all icons - I've had them that range from terrible to average. The one Guitar Interactive reviewed was the best I've had so far - I've had better looking ones that didn't sound so good and worst looking ones that didn't so sound good so, thus far, the one on your video is the best combination I've had.'

So what does he think it is that makes one better than another? 'It's a recipe - and no one has ever used the same ingredients, including Gibson. They can't get the wood and, in my opinion, they don't even know how to make them any longer. The routers are obsolete, the type of animal glues aren't available any more, neither are the plastics, or the celluloid used back then.'

So what about the argument that pickups age differently? 'Absolute bollocks! I've had a Les Paul Standard that I loved, but that sounded like a pig, even though it looked amazing. I used six sets of PAFs in that and it didn't matter what you put in it - it always sounded horrible. The guitar makes the noise - not the pickups.'

So what does he think of '59 worship? 'It's rubbish. '58 or '59 - it's the same guitar, apart from a slightly different neck pitch and neck shape, but I've played '58s that felt like '59s and '59s that felt like '58s. The 1960 is a

[...>] 114

different guitar - it was structurally different - but a '59 or '58 is the same guitar.

'If you get the right Brazilian rosewood fretboard, the right celluloid inlays, the right Honduras mahogany back and Eastern European maple that happens to be grown in the same environment and you bought it today - as properly certified wood - and you made it using the old routers and the old glues, if you could clone it, you would have the same guitar.'

He does make another interesting point - that the '59s played by Beano-era Clapton, Kossof and Green were only six or seven years old when That Sound was born. It wasn't a 50 year old guitar that Peter Green used on The Supernatural - it was still relatively new. Maybe if Harris's recipe idea could be followed, in six or seven years time we could have a Les Paul that really could sing as sweetly Green's guitar?

Another expert on vintage instruments is David Crozier of Old School Guitars in the UK - a player, collector and dealer to the vintage cognoscenti, he has his own opinions.

'Those of us lucky enough to deal in beautiful vintage instruments have all, at some time, stripped-down a valuable vintage electric guitar and stood there looking at it in component form. That's the point at which we find ourselves wondering why that collection of bits of wood, metal and plastic is worth so much. In itself it is not, but saying that a pile of individually worthless parts must also be worthless as a finished item is daft. It is as silly as saying a fine Chippendale cabinet is just a heap of assembled twigs. So, why is it valuable? The answer is that, as creative humans using tools, we occasionally create something from nothing which inexplicably captures our imagination and satisfies all our senses.'

As David Crozier says, it's about mojo. Or maybe, as the Algonquin Native Americans might have had it, 'manitou' - the individual spirit that somehow animates what is, in theory, an inanimate object. That's why some guitars come alive in your hands. Whimsical? Ask a classical violinist, who would consider a '59 Les Paul dirt cheap compared with his Stradivarius or Amati!

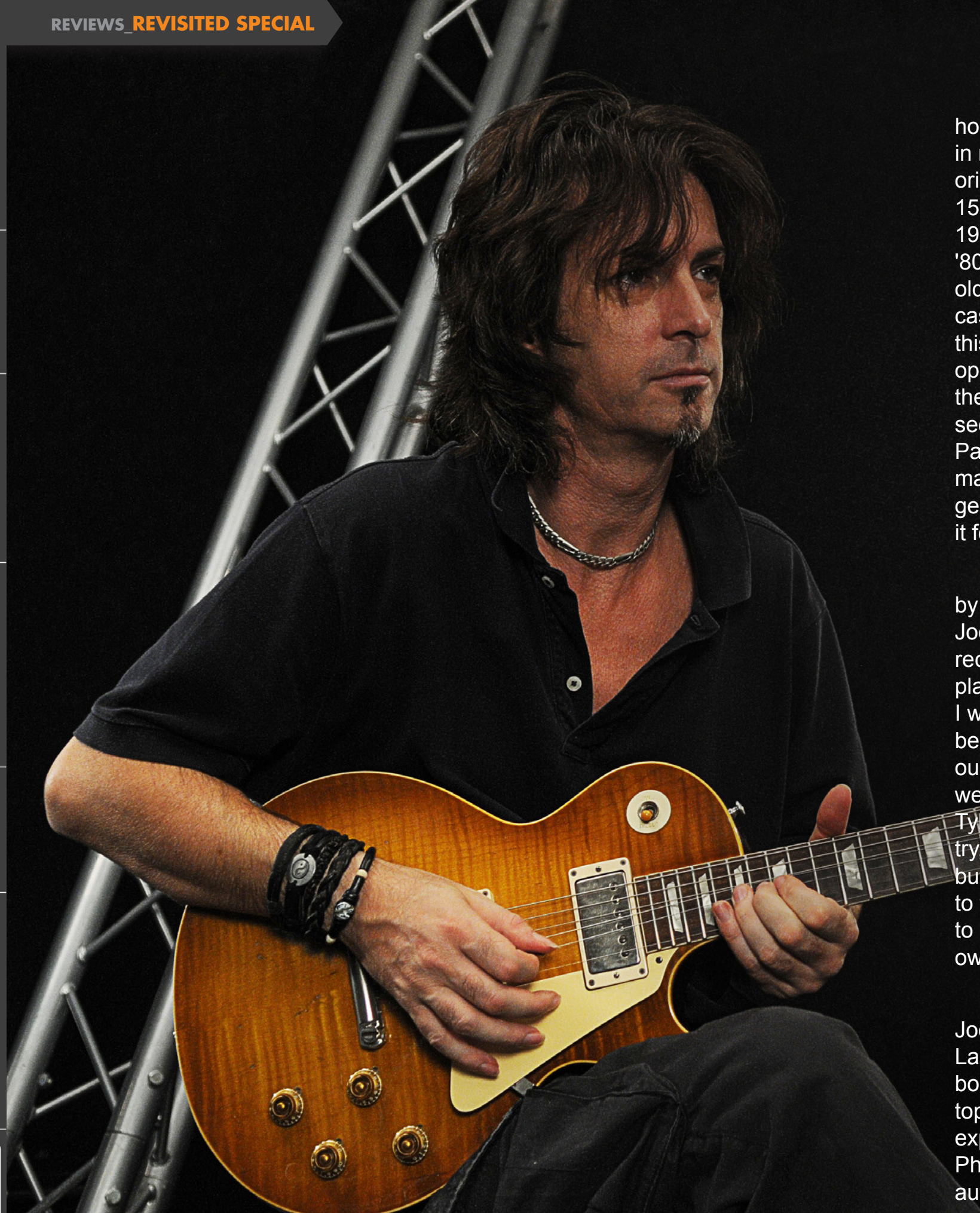
[...>] **116**



Revisited Special

GI had planned to review a Gibson Joe Bonamassa Les Paul for this issue - but Gibson said they didn't have any. Then again, Joe actually uses a genuine '59 sunburst anyway, so we got to thinking... who do we know who would lend us The Real Thing to drive our review Lazy J amp? And who could we trust not to drop it? Enter **Michael Casswell....**





I have been lucky enough to hold and try three vintage Les Pauls in my life. The first one belonged originally to Paul Kossof. I was about 15 and buying my first real guitar, a 1963 Strat, which in the very early '80s, was still affordable for a 15 year old. The dealer I was handing the cash over to said would you like to try this before you go? At which point he opened a tatty brown case to reveal the most beautiful guitar I had ever seen - a 1959 (or 1960) sunburst Les Paul with a very striking 3D flame maple top. He let me pick it up and generally widdle and strum about on it for about five minutes.

30 years later, I was asked by Guitar Interactive to interview Joe Bonamassa, who himself, had recently found and purchased a plain top 1959 sunburst Les Paul. I was sent an email saying Joe will be bringing the guitar with him to our meeting, which he did, and after we had jammed, he checked out my Tyler and handed me his '59 LP to try, which was not only an honour, but shows what a gentleman he is, to trust someone he had just met, to play the most valuable guitar he owns!

A few weeks after meeting Joe I get asked to review out his Lazy J amp and our insane editor borrowed a genuine '59 burst flame top Les Paul from vintage guitar expert and hire company owner, Phil Harris, 'just so we can make it authentic'. This, let me say, was Phil's

personal guitar and, again, it's a privilege and an honour to have been trusted with such a rare and valuable instrument.

Are these guitars worth the telephone number money they sell for? That depends on your standpoint. They come from an era when there were no endangered rain forests and no shortage of very high quality tonewood, an era of natural glues and when nitro finishes were the norm on a top quality Gibson. A period when it was about the quality of the guitar, not the profit margin. I have now played three in my career and they have all been very light, resonant, rock solid tuning wise, and even more beautiful with 50 years on the clock. Yes, if you hunt hard, very hard, you might find a more modern Les Paul that plays and sounds just as sweet, for a fraction of the cost, but it won't be able to tell the same story, it will not have the same patina that 50 years brings, nor have the natural UV light faded burst that can vary so much, nor the hand crafted hand built quality feel that the old ones give. You can buy the custom shop remakes, some of which are very nice, but you cannot beat the real thing.

Gi wishes to thank Phil Harris for the generous loan of his personal 1959 Les Paul Standard. You can find Harris Hire at www.harris-hire.co.uk



THE '59 CHALLENGE



1959 - the year of the Cuban revolution, when Alaska and Hawaii became part of the United States, the Russians became the first to hit the moon with a spacecraft and Buddy Holly, Richie Havens and the Big Bopper died tragically in a light aeroplane accident. More happily, it was also the year when the world's most iconic guitar was created - the **1959 Gibson Les Paul**.

ELSEWHERE WE'VE LOOKED AT THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS THAT HAVE MADE THE '59 PROBABLY THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE ELECTRIC GUITAR BUT WE KEPT COMING BACK TO A NAGGING QUESTION.

Joe has his genuine '59 LP (which he is still paying for, he says!) and his superb, handbuilt, Lazy J amp. But how do you get to sound like all those classic Blues guitarists - from Mike Bloomfield to Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Mick Taylor, Paul Kossoff and now Joe himself, without spending the price of a decent sized house?

When we set-out it seemed easy. We'd call Gibson, borrow a genuine Epiphone limited edition Bonamassa Les Paul and a clone or two, pair them with a Marshall Class 5 - the highly affordable amp range Joe helped launch last year- and hey presto! Instant Blues guitar legend at a bargain price!

Only it didn't work out that way. Having already told us they had no genuine Bonamassa Les Pauls available for our main Bonamassa gear test, Gibson next told us that their only Epiphone sample had been damaged and wasn't fit to be sent out for review. Meanwhile, the copy market has more or less died. Come back Tokai - all is forgiven!

But it takes more than that to put your Gi team off the scent.

Marshall kindly loaned us a Class 5, we managed to borrow an Epiphone from one of the few UK retailers who had one left in stock and we cast our eyes around for something to compare it with. Cue the Vintage V100 MRJBM. Now what could those initials possibly stand for?

So here's the Gi '59 challenge. You play in a pubs and clubs band - or maybe you're just a bedroom Blues guitarist. You badly want to sound like one of the masters and yet you don't have much money. Mission impossible? We set GI's Inspector Tom Quayle on the trail of the perfect Blues guitar sound for the man on a budget!

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THE '59 CHALLENGE

This Epiphone Bonamassa Les Paul Gold Top may be the closest you're going to get to the real Bonamassa sound without selling body parts. But how does it fare in our '59 challenge for a budget-priced rig?

Tom Quayle finds out.

The Epiphone Joe Bonamassa Les Paul Gold Top is something of a departure for Epiphone in that it is being produced in a very limited run of 1,000 pieces.

It represents what Epiphone believes to be the closest guitar you can get to the signature Bonamassa sound without breaking the bank. I have to say that I agree, but that level of quality comes at a price point not normally

Epiphone Limited Edition Joe Bonamassa Les Paul Gold Top

Gi RATING ★★★★★

associated with the Epiphone brand. For a 'budget' guitar this certainly isn't a cheap option. Then again, given that previously you could only achieve that sound and feel by spending a fortune on a custom shop artist model from Gibson, this is certainly an interesting alternative.

The guitar is very well constructed in the main, with a solid mahogany body featuring a carved rock maple top in the classic metallic gold finish, with black back and sides. The neck is a fat and wide

CHECK OUT THE SPEC



For a 'budget' guitar this certainly isn't a cheap option.

The closest guitar you can get to the signature Bonamassa sound without breaking the bank



'baseball bat' D shape, constructed from solid mahogany with a rosewood fretboard and felt huge in my smaller hands. Unfortunately, our review model (borrowed from a retailer as Gibson UK said they had no review samples available) had a large crack running across the neck joint and this set-off alarm bells. Epiphone says that this guitar has a specially lengthened tenon joint, extending the neck into the pickup cavity, which increases tone and endows the guitar with extra strength in the neck region - and yet our sample had suffered neck damage despite this. In fairness, for all we know it had been run-over by a forklift truck, but, Gibson UK had told us the reason they had no samples to spare was because their one example had a damaged neck. We have no reason to think this is a model-wide problem but would suggest it's worth checking

[...] 124



Finally the guitar comes with a certificate of authenticity signed by Joe

any sample you are offered quite carefully before parting with your money - though that's advice we'd offer with any guitar!

Hardware is in a nickel finish with solid feeling Grover tuners, a Locktone Tune-o-Matic bridge designed to stay in place between string changes, oversized strap buttons, Gibson BurstBucker pickups in the neck and bridge, finished off with two tone and volume controls and a three-way selector switch. The finish is flawless - beautiful, in fact - and the guitar is not excessively heavy nor unbalanced whilst over the neck or on the knee. Finally the guitar comes with a certificate of authenticity signed by Joe - and that may be enough to sway some buyers on its own!

Acoustically this model had sustain for days thanks to that solid mahogany construction and real rock maple top. It had great resonance but the neck was fatiguing on my hands after only a short period of time. I'm used to a smaller neck profile however and have smaller hands than the man himself. If you have larger hands, this neck may be right up your street. Plugged in, the sustain transferred well through the BurstBuckers and the tone was clearer than the Vintage model we put this Epiphone up against. BurstBuckers were designed by Gibson to mimic the sound of the original PAF pickups that gave the '59 Les Pauls their

signature sound. They can handle huge amounts of overdrive without becoming muddy or squealing but sound musical on all but the most insane settings.

On the neck pickup things became creamier and had that classic Bonamassa/Eric Johnson tone for fast picked pentatonic runs. Clean tones were warm and cozy sounding, perhaps lacking some top end clarity through our Marshall Class 5 combo. Tonally, it certainly hits the mark and with the combination of its classic looks it is a very desirable package.

For a classic blues/rock guitar in the Bonamassa vein, this is a model that would be hard to beat. I don't feel it represents the same value for money that the Vintage model we've reviewed does, however.

This Epiphone retails at street level for twice the price of the Vintage and that guitar is also very well constructed with quality hardware and a more comfortable neck profile - particularly for those with smaller hands.

On the other hand, if you're looking for that Bonamassa sound and look, or even just a quality rock or blues guitar in a Les Paul shape with the official seal of approval, this Epiphone seems like a good instrument for a fair price.

[...>] 125



The exclusivity of a 1,000 run model may appeal to some buyers too, so shop quickly to avoid disappointment. When we checked (in the UK) few retailers seemed to have any left.



The '59 Challenge

Vintage says its 'MRJBM' tag doesn't stand for Joe Bonamassa – or anything like it. Honest! All the same, there's something strangely familiar about this guitar, so we put it in our '59 Challenge anyway. Tom Quayle narrowed his eyes and played the Blues.

Vintage guitars are fast becoming a force to be reckoned at the less expensive end of the guitar market. In our very first issue one of the brand's acoustics (a V300) set the benchmark by which we now judge entry-level acoustics. This is no accident as the range has been designed by one of the UK's biggest distributors, JHS, to become just that - the starting point for guitarists looking for traditionally styled guitars (let's not call them 'copies') that offer near-professional levels of performance at extremely affordable prices.

Putting a range like this together, many would have done what so many do - go to China and buy whatever they were

Vintage V100 MRJBM

Gi RATING ★★★★★

offered, but JHS called in top designer Trevor Wilkinson and worked with him to achieve something very special right across the range. Wilkinson already had a name as a designer of top-class professional hardware (not to mention pickups and guitars) and has proved an inspired choice, judging by the glowing reviews and

expanding number of name artists who are endorsing the brand.

To be delicate about it, this artificially aged (aka 'distressed') guitar is definitely aimed at Joe Bonamassa fans and whatever the legal department might say, it certainly resembles Joe's '59 Gold Top more closely than the rest of the Vintage V100 series.

Vintage V100 models all feature solid mahogany bodies, maple caps with flamed maple veneers and necks with rosewood fretboards and perloid inlays. This particular model features an aged Gold Top finish that is successful up to about five feet away. Close up it looks and feels pretty fake, but

only your most ardent of fans is going to get that close! In true Les Paul tradition we have 22 frets and a proper set neck design that feels very solid, with no sign of movement or wear. Hardware is all Wilkinson designed with standard dual humbuckers in chrome, matched with a Tune-O-Matic bridge and Deluxe WJ44 tuners in three per side configuration. The neck is significantly slimmer in the hand than a true '59 Les Paul in my opinion (certainly so compared with our Epiphone Bonamassa LP!) but is very comfortable and was my preferred neck shape of the two guitars. The Vintage was set up very well out of the box and construction seemed solid with no obvious flaws in fret-work or finish. Well - other than the deliberate 'distressing'!

[...>] 128



Vintage V100 models all feature solid mahogany bodies, maple caps with flamed maple veneers and necks with rosewood fretboards and perloid inlays.

So does it nail that Bonamassa sound?

CHECK OUT
THE SPEC

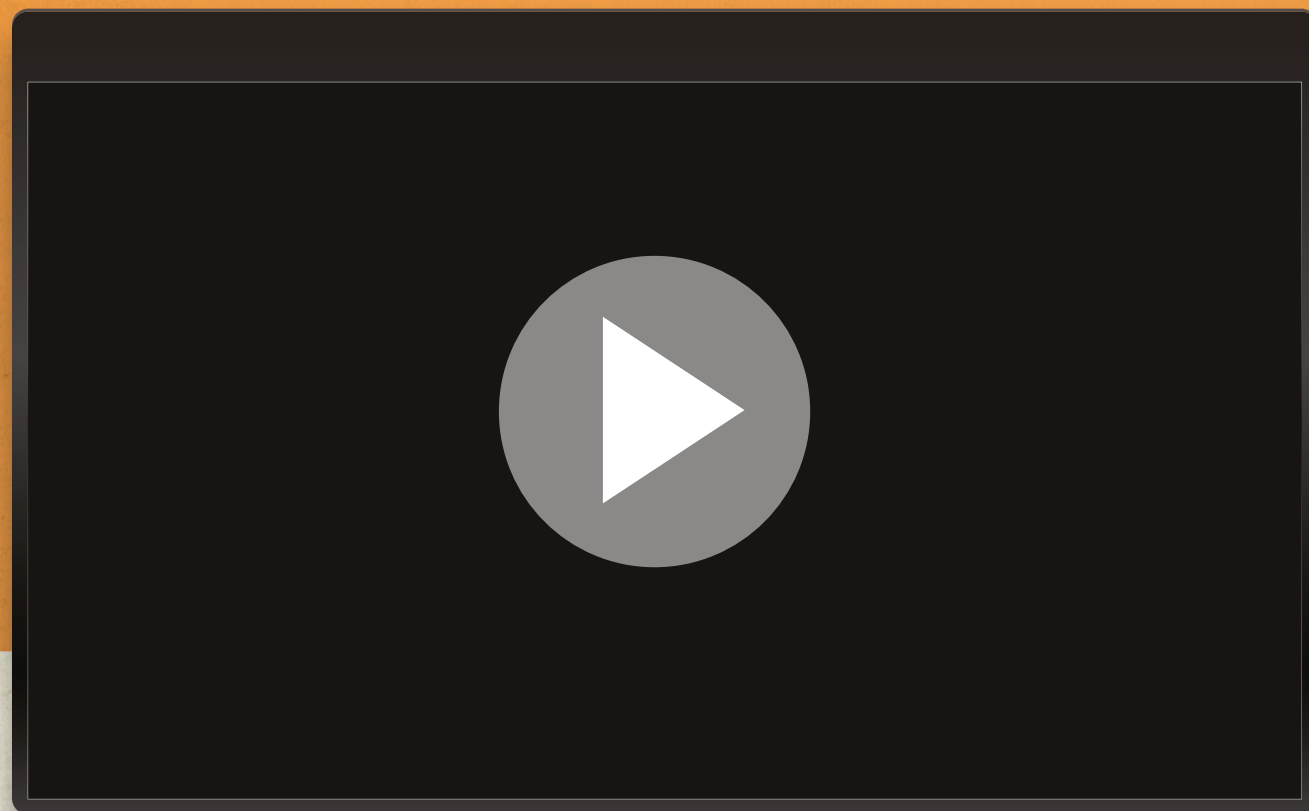
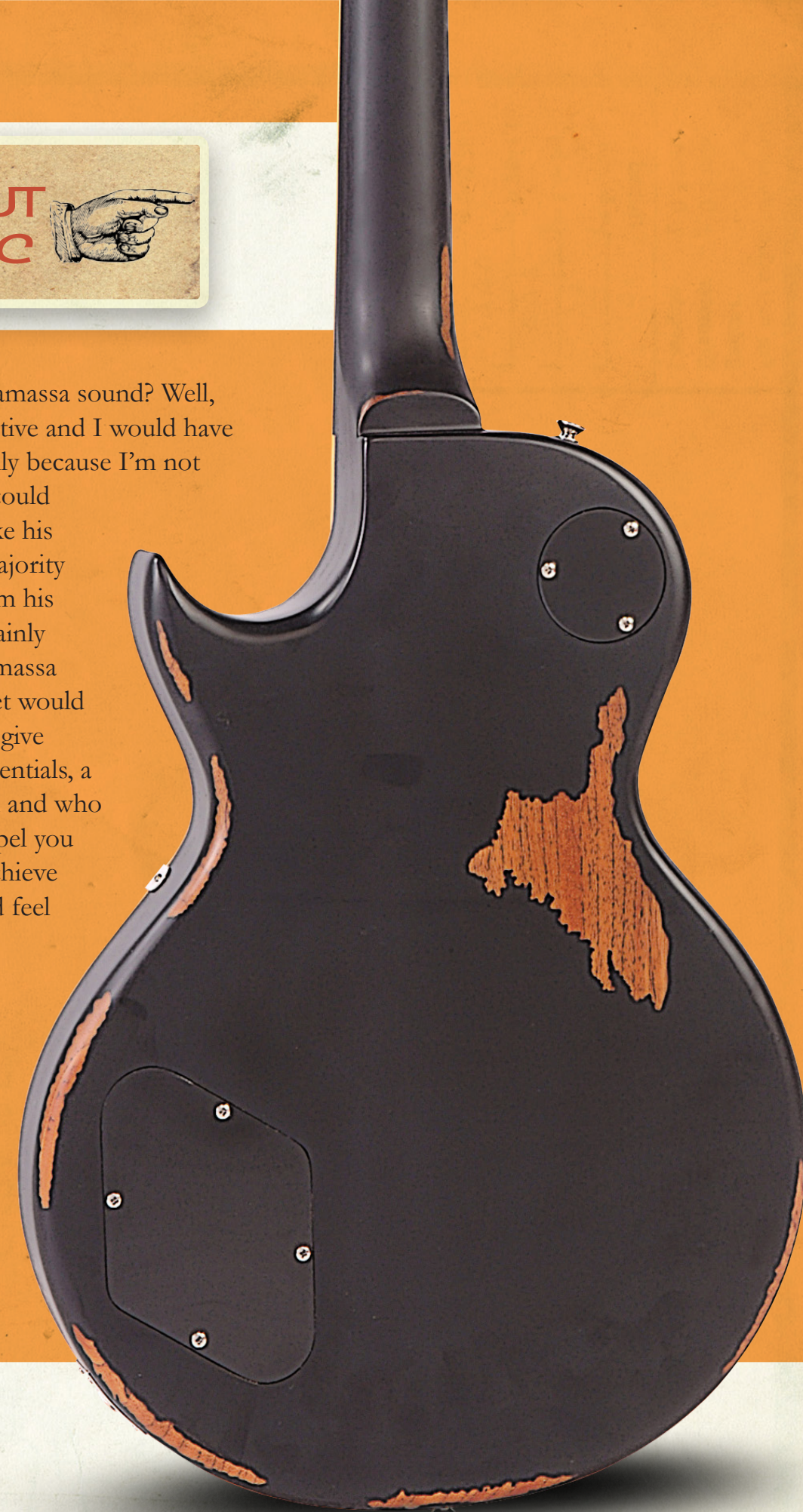


Acoustically the V100 MRJBM has body and warmth with a pleasing amount of sustain for a lower price model. Plugged into our Marshall Class 5 amp it had bags of sustain on both the neck and bridge pickups with no obvious dead sounding areas across the neck. Overdriven power chords sound full and lead lines have enough sustain to feel good under the fingers. Cleaned up, things are equally pleasing and the guitar is capable of really singing through the right amp. Obviously, you can't expect the clarity and bite of

a true Les Paul but as an approximation it hits the mark as well as you would hope for the money. For Joe Bonamassa fans without Joe Bonamassa levels of cash, this combination represents an almost irresistible combination of the look, sound and feel of the real deal for a seriously great price. If you have a bit more money to spend you may want to pass up on the 'aged' finish as it looks quite cheap up close, but this is a minor niggle for such a great value guitar.

So does it nail that Bonamassa sound? Well, tone is incredibly subjective and I would have to say not quite - but only because I'm not Joe Bonamassa and he could make anything sound like his signature tone, as the majority of his sound comes from his fingers. However, I certainly think that the Joe Bonamassa fan with a limited budget would love this guitar as it will give you the blues/rock credentials, a great deal of inspiration and who knows, maybe even propel you to practice enough to achieve the great man's tone and feel yourself. Here's hoping!

The V100 MRJBM is a great guitar that is worth a lot more than its lowly price and wouldn't be out of place in any Les Paul worshipper's collection.



THE '59 CHALLENGE

Marshall's Class 5 combo was the obvious choice for our '59 Challenge. Not only is it a traditionally made, all-valve, Class A amp, but it was actually launched by Joe Bonamassa himself. Despite being UK-built it's surprisingly affordable.

But can a mere five Watt amp nail that magical Blues guitar sound? **Tom Quayle** finds out.

When Marshall launched the Class 5 in 2009, Joe Bonamassa was the man tasked with showing the world what this diminutive

little Class A package could deliver. Once we'd heard the tone I think we were all impressed. But can the Class 5 deliver in real life with pub band, or in your bedroom/practice room?

The Marshall pumps out five Watts of Class A power, provided by 2 ECC83's in the preamp stage and a single

Marshall Class 5 Combo



EL84 in the output end. Controls are limited to volume, treble, middle and bass, so if you were hoping for channel switching and independent EQ controls, move on straight away - this is old school! The cab is well constructed, with no audible rattles or extraneous noises and features a 10" Celestion G10F-15 speaker. There is a headphone output that defeats the

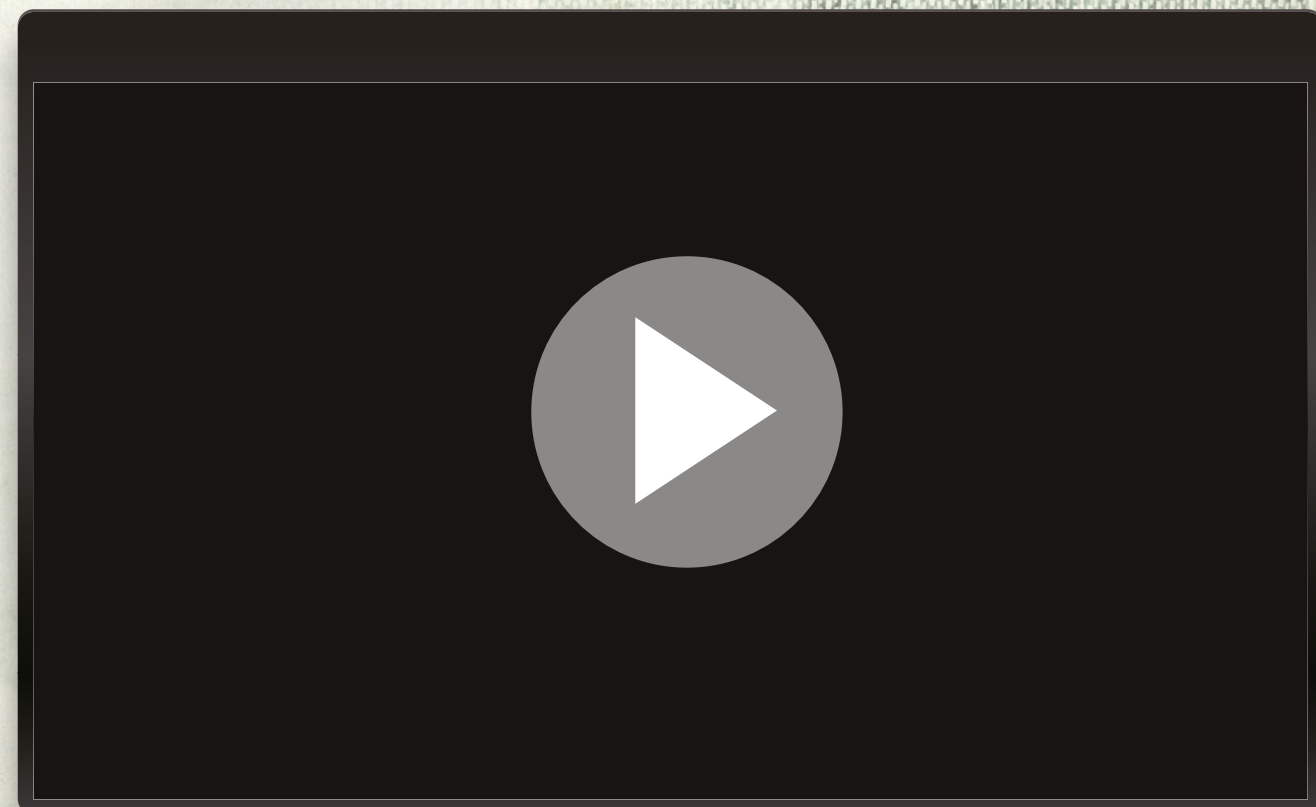
If you're looking for a small, low power combo for a pub rock/blues band or for a rehearsal space, then the Class 5 is a superb choice.

CHECK OUT
THE SPEC



speaker and a single extension output for driving a 4x12 or similar. The unit is small at just 19.5"x16.5"x9" but don't

[...>] 132



So does it nail the Bonamassa sound? Well Joe is running £2,000-4,000 amps on stage in various combinations so you have to set your sights accordingly.

let that fool you into thinking that it will have an equally small tone!

Many low wattage amps can have a thin, buzz-saw sound but the Class 5 immediately impresses with a warm, real tube amp tone. The clean tone has depth and responds well dynamically. Make no mistake, we're not in Fender territory here - but that's not why you came to the Marshall party: you want dirt I presume! Still, it's nice that the clean tone hasn't been neglected. That said, once the volume creeps up above 11 o'clock things start to break up very nicely so clean headroom may be a problem but that's what your volume control was invented for and the amp cleans up very well.

The overdrive is firmly in the Bluesbreaker and Plexi vein and a surprising amount of gain is available with the volume cranked. The Class 5 is certainly a loud amp - perhaps not loud enough for gigging in clubs or larger venues but for jam sessions and smaller stages it will keep up with a quiet drummer. Mic'd up it

would perform well on any stage and the depth of the tone is quite surprising for a 10" speaker. Many small amp manufacturers seem to have mastered the art of getting as much bass response out of a 10" speaker as possible and Marshall are right up there with the best of the pack with this combo.

We ran into some issues with the tone controls in that they weren't particularly responsive on our model (another old school characteristic, of course), the middle and treble controls being the worst culprits. With the tone controls set to 12 o'clock the bass was tight and highs were represented without being harsh or tinny. With a tube screamer in the front end, a saturated lead tone was easily achieved and things never got too noisy or harsh.

In a bedroom scenario you'll want to run a dirt box in front of the amp as there is no way you'll achieve the upper levels of drive without a call from the police. This five Watt combo is very loud, so it's something to consider

even though five Watts sounds like a small amount of power. Alternatively an attenuator would do the job and you could have the power amp saturation at sensible volumes - which is something this amp really needs to be heard at its best.

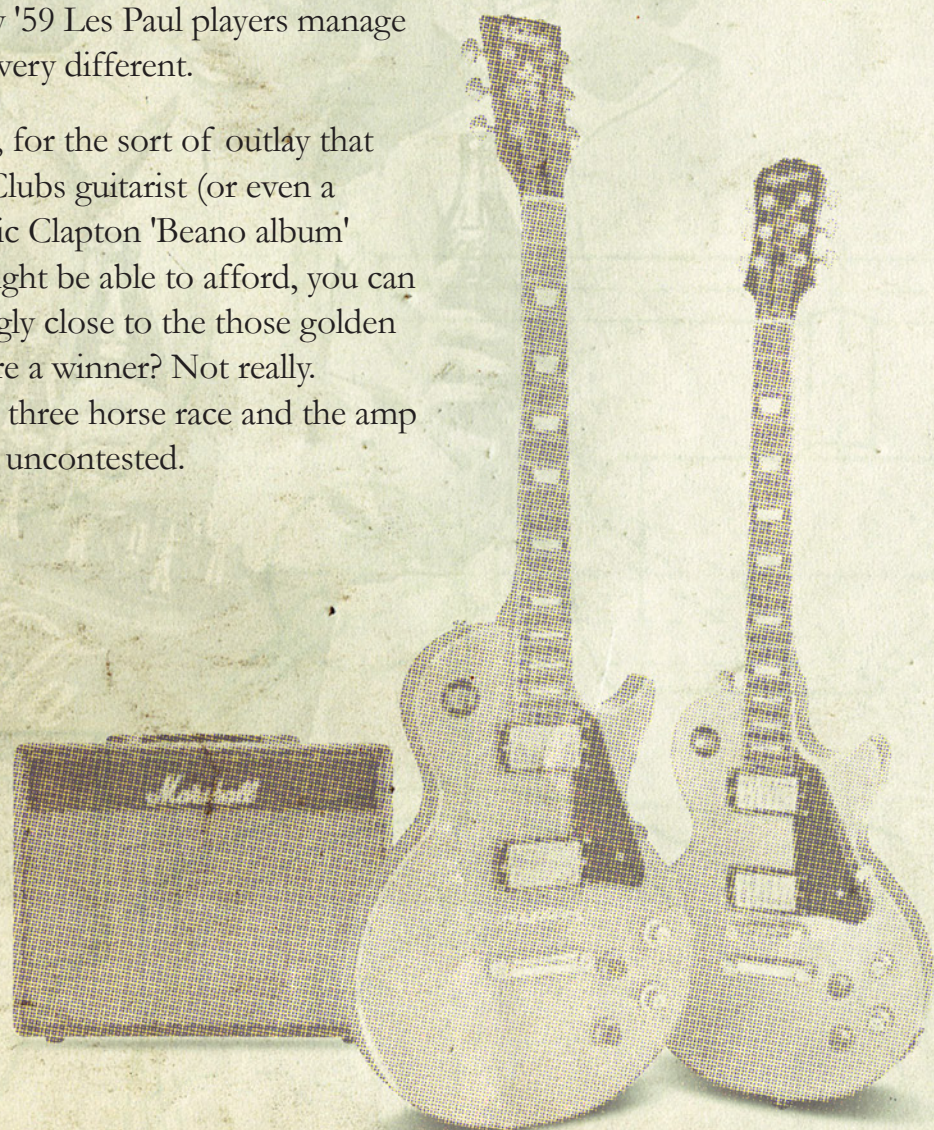
So does it nail the Bonamassa sound? Well Joe is running £2,000-4,000 amps on stage in various combinations so you have to set your sights accordingly. However, if you're looking for a small, low power combo for a pub rock/blues band or for a rehearsal space, then the Class 5 is a superb choice. There are more versatile and perhaps better sounding amps available for a more modern sound but to really capture that classic Marshall vibe for little outlay in a size that won't break the bank, you'd be hard pushed to find a better choice.



SO THERE YOU HAVE IT - YES!

It is possible to get pretty close to the Joe Bonamassa/classic Les Paul Blues sound for a lot less than the price of a small house - which is what it costs Joe and all those others who have bought 'the real thing' and teamed it up with a handmade valve amp. Of course, the sound isn't exactly the same - how could it be? - and, anyway, the real tone comes it of your fingers - which is why so many '59 Les Paul players manage to sound so very different.

All the same, for the sort of outlay that a Pubs and Clubs guitarist (or even a bedroom Eric Clapton 'Beano album' wannabe) might be able to afford, you can get surprisingly close to the those golden tones. Is there a winner? Not really. It was only a three horse race and the amp position was uncontested.



Of the two guitars, we actually preferred the cheaper Vintage and they are certainly easier to find, given the way the Epiphone Bonamassas have sold. But either will do the job well. All you have to do is master the style... and that's where Danny Gill comes to your aid, elsewhere in this issue!



"THE FIRST TIME I BLASTED THE LEMON DROP, I KNEW IT WAS FOOKIN' AWESOME! IT REALLY BLEW ME AWAY. THE SOUND AND FEEL WAS PERFECT, SO MUCH POWER AND TONE. THANK YOU FOR OPENING MY EYES TO MY NEW FAVOURITE AXE!"

Vintage

LEMON DROP

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The reverse-fitted neck humbucker and out-of-phase centre position wiring created one of the most recognisable guitar sounds of any genre - real "Black Magic".

Now you can feel the modern-day zing of the Wilkinson-designed humbucking pickups as you blaze up and down the Vintage Lemon Drop's inviting neck.

The mahogany body and maple cap with flamed maple veneer have the stage-owning looks to kill, with sustain to match.

Differential bell type control knobs, authentic battle scars and sealed gear replacement tuners all add to the mojo...

Still got the blues?

Haydn Conway
Oliver/Dawson Saxon

Rickenbacker 330/12 Guitar

12-string electric guitars are both rare and an acquired taste. But when you need a 12-string the first choice has to be a Rickenbacker - the magical sound behind so many hits. But what are today's Rickys like? We handed **Tom Quayle** a brand new 330/12 and watched his smile grow wider and wider...



It's that definitive sound - the Rickenbacker 12-string - that drove so many Beatles hits and, later, gave The Byrds their

unique jangle. Since the '60s the Rickenbacker mystique has been maintained as each generation of guitar players has discovered the Ricky 12-string's unique tonality. The model we were loaned for review, a brand new 330/12, was clearly a beautifully built instrument that was a pleasure to play from the moment I picked it up.

The Rickenbacker's body is built from maple with a chambered upper bout

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Rickenbacker 330/12 Guitar



giving it a stunning acoustic quality, accentuated by a lovely carved 'F-hole'. The design features some lovely contours and feels balanced and solid. The set in neck is all maple with a rosewood fret board, 24 vintage style frets and a very stable dual truss rod design. The 10" radius, 24 3/4" scale length and slim profile give the neck a seriously comfortable feel for long barre chord sessions or more complex chordal efforts. Electrics are represented by two Rickenbacker high output pickups, complemented by a tone and volume pot for each. There is a three-way selector switch giving neck, bridge and blend combinations of the two pickups. To finish the picture there is



Acoustically the Rickenbacker is everything you'd hope for. It rings with lots of sustain and has that archetypal jangle with a balanced tonal range.

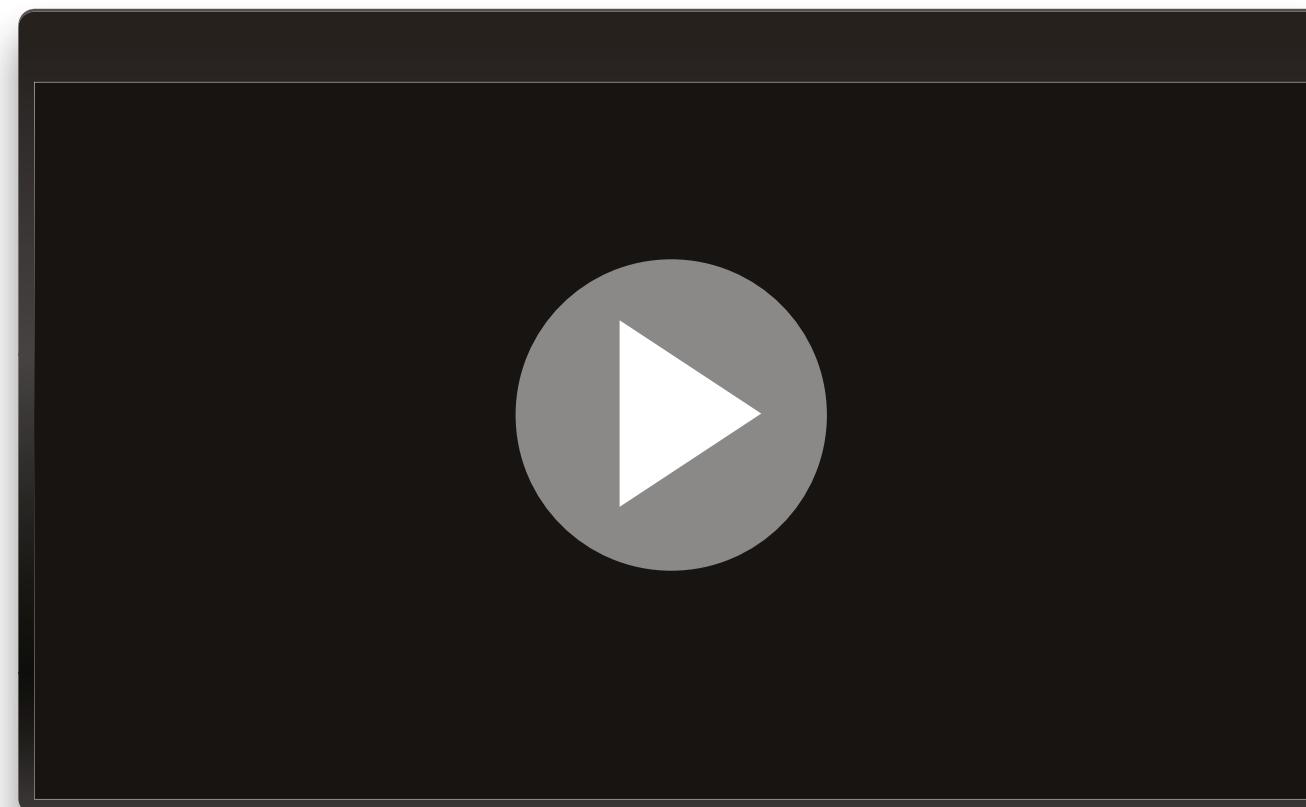
a fifth tone pot designed to adjust the volume of the neck pickup in relation to a pre-selected bridge pickup lead volume setting. It can also function as a bass/treble equalisation control. The actual use of this control can be a little confusing and I found myself using my

ears more than my brain to discover its best application. The manual explains some common uses if you get stuck, however.

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One of the main problems associated with all 12 string guitars is accommodating the tuning pegs. Rickenbacker has tilted every octave string's tuner by 90 degrees to allow easy access, whilst keeping the headstock a reasonable size. It's a great design and works very well. Out of the case, tuning took a while to get perfect on our sample, but once we were there the guitar stayed in tune well thanks to the choice of high quality Schaller tuners. A six-way adjustable bridge finishes off the design featuring saddles for each string and the famous 'R' tail-piece for easy re-stringing. Visually the design is superb - vintage but modern, classic but exciting!

Acoustically the Rickenbacker is everything you'd hope for. It rings with lots of sustain and has that archetypal jangle with a balanced tonal range. The set-up was perfect and I never struggled to play even complex chords with each note ringing out clearly across the neck. Plugged in, I was in chordal heaven as the octave strings gave a beautiful chorus-like effect with superb intonation and sparkle. We only demoed the Rickenbacker with the clean tone of our Blackstar Series One 100 and the bridge pickup had a bite and clarity that never became harsh. The neck pickup was warm and fat but still retained that top end jangle that you want from a guitar intended for chordal playing. A huge variety of tones can be achieved using



the volume and tone controls for each pickup and once the fifth control has been brought into the equation you can really start to dial in an individual tone. For a 12-string, this is a very versatile instrument and it rewards tonal experimentation.

I was really inspired by this guitar. It was asking me to take it away and write beautiful chordal sequences just to hear that lovely 12-string tone. It's certainly aimed at a niche market and 12-strings are not for everyone. However, I urge you to try one of these instruments, as I'm sure it will inspire and excite your compositional urges. I loved it and if you're after a 12-string and it has to be the real deal then this Rickenbacker is the only way to go!



Yamaha RGX

Yamaha's long-established RGX line has a new member of the family, the Yamaha RGX 420DZ II. Yamaha says it's hotter than ever. But does **Jamie Humphries** agree?



Yamaha has produced high quality guitars for many years and has had some of the most notable endorsers in the

industry. I remember seeing Carlos Santana in the late 70's when I was about eight or nine years old. I can still remember his Custom built SG with its fabulous inlay. My own first decent electric guitar was a Yamaha SG1300T, which I still have to this day, so I have what you might call a soft spot for the brand. Recently the company reissued the SG range - a review appeared in Guitar Interactive Issue 3 - and now we revisit Yamaha with a look at the new 'Hot Roded' Yamaha RGX 420DZ II.

The RGX and RGZ ranges have been around for a number of years. The RGZs were Yamaha's original answer to the 'Super Strat', in

Yamaha RGX 420DZ II



competition with Jackson, ESP and Ibanez back in the late 80's and early 90's. One of the main endorsers of this guitar was the youthful Blues Saraceno, a solo artist discovered in his late teens, who was hired by Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, and given the label 'The kid that replaced Clapton'. Blues also performed with Poison, and though out the late 80's and 90's could be seen sporting various 'plaid' finished RGZs. Then enter the RGX, still in keeping with the 'Super Strat' idea, but sporting a 3-a-side style headstock, with an interesting 3D design. Kings X guitarist vocalist Ty Tabor was a long time user of the RGX and even had his own signature models added to the line, including the 'Drop 6' model, which was designed for low tunings.

Which brings us to the RGX 420DZ II - a newer high octane version of its predecessor, the RGX 420DZ. This



guitar has the styling that you would expect, 'Super Strat' style body, with high access cut aways to the top of the neck, plus the instantly recognisable '3D style' headstock. The guitar for review came with a high gloss black and I have to say that the finish and paint quality were very high - almost like a mirror. The body material is alder and features a very fast maple neck with a flat rosewood board. The guitar features 24 frets, surprisingly not jumbo fretwire though which, personally I felt it would benefit from. Electronics include two EMG pickups, a master volume and master tone and a three- way pickup selector switch. The Yamaha also features a Licensed Floyd Rose double locking tremolo, so you can see it's aimed firmly at the hard Rock market!

The feel of the guitar was good; it sat well, and was well balanced. The body design was comfortable and reaching the higher frets on the guitar was made easy with all access cutaways. The neck was comfortable too - pretty slim and flat, although the set-up on our sample wasn't that great. In fact, out of the box it was nearly a semitone higher tuning, so it took a while to settle once I had retuned it. I also had an issue with the way the frets had been finished, which meant

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that every so often I found the top and bottom E strings would pop off of the fretboard, which was slightly frustrating.

This isn't the end of the world but it does reinforce the point GI is always making - that you should negotiate a set-up in the price of any guitar you buy. Even if the instrument is fine, it would still be better set up just for your style, so do bear that in mind when you go shopping!

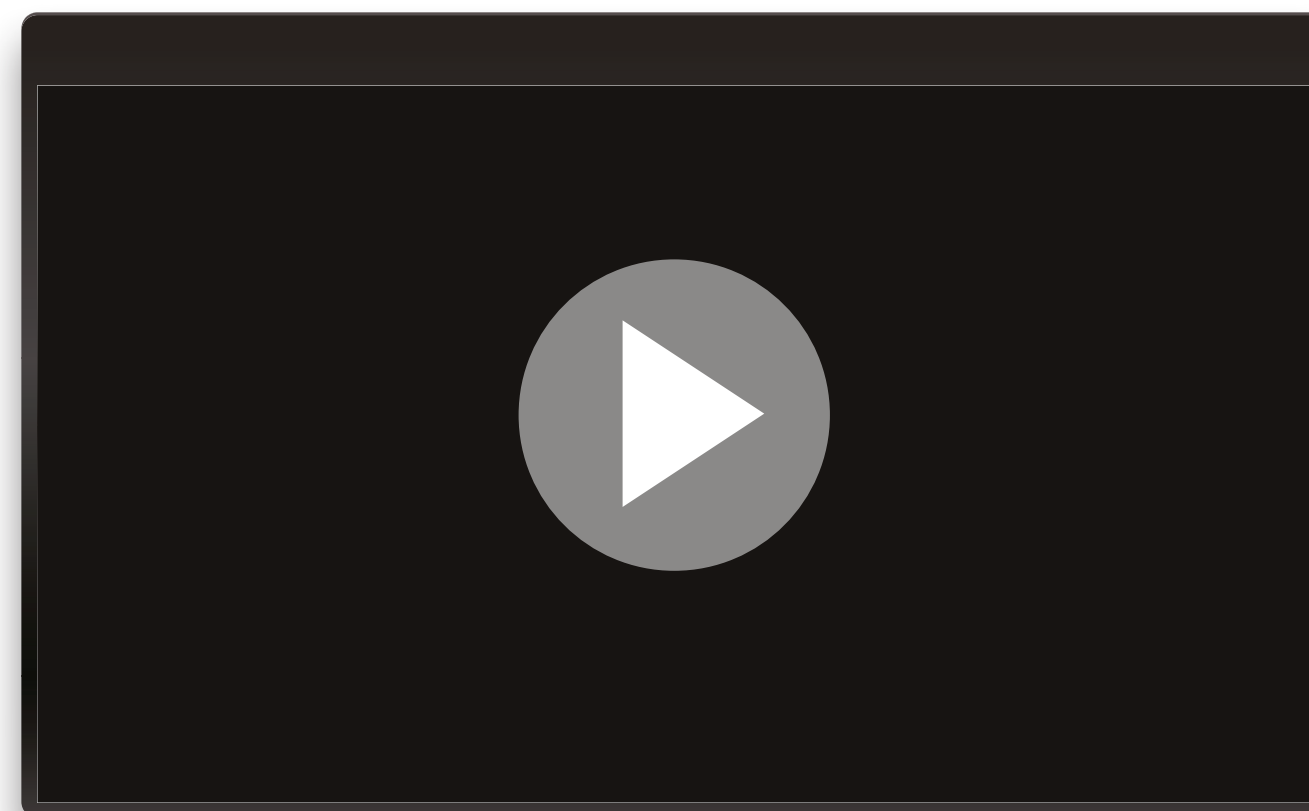
Soundwise, the pickups sounded thick and throaty, which is what you would expect from EMGs. They also cleaned up nicely when backing off the volume with a crunch sound. A wide variety of tones were available from the bridge and neck pickups, from classic crunch to modern high gain, and bright Country style cleans to warm Jazz cleans. That said, I was surprised to find only a three-way pickup selector switch and I'm at a loss to know why. The cost difference between a five way and a three way must be minute, so why only offer the former? This to my mind could be a deciding factor when choosing between similar instruments in this price bracket, one with and one without. It makes a big difference to a guitar's versatility and is something I believe Yamaha should rethink.

Now onto the bridge; this guitar features a licensed Floyd Rose system, and I have to say that in more than 30 years of playing guitar I have never come across a Floyd

where there is a thread on the bar its self; meaning you screw it into the bridge like an old style Fender. Most Floyds I've seen or own either push in and use a grub screw to get the bar at the correct tension for use, or when they push in, a simple nut around the arm where it inserts into the barrel is used to tighten it. I also have a licensed Floyd on a guitar that uses plastic bushes.

Why this mattered to me was because I found that when the bar of the RGX is tightened properly, its actually in the way of your playing position and inhibits the picking hand. Alternatively, if the bar is slackened-off a turn to enable easy picking hand movement, it's so floppy in the barrel that it rattles around and it interferes with the actual use of the system. Any Jeff Beck style 'gargles', or as Vai, Satch or Jason Becker do, where the bar is reversed so its pointing out of the back of the guitar, so you can bounce your hand on it, is totally impossible as the bar will not stay in place. To my mind this is not good design and at this price and going by past experiences of Yamaha guitars I would have liked to have seen a better bridge that would support modern techniques. I also found that when I attacked the strings hard, the guitar instantly gargled with me even touching the bar!

This is a well made, good sounding guitar, with great build quality, playability, finish and sound. But, for me, its not without its problems.



Soundwise, the pickups sounded thick and throaty, which is what you would expect from EMGs.

Better frets and a five-way switch would make it an even better guitar - and as for that Floyd Rose - well, I'll leave that up to you to decide, but do try it for yourself and bear in mind my comments when you do.



Hughes & Kettner Edition Blue 60 DFX

While glowing valves are many guitarists' ideal, not everyone can afford a tube amp - and not everyone even wants one. So when the top German amp manufacturer Hughes & Kettner offers an entry level feature packed range of solid state combos, it's worth paying attention. We asked **Jamie Humphries** to put H&K's Edition Blue 60 DFX to the test.

W

ith many amplification manufacturers adding entry level, 'all in one' combos to their ranges, the consumer is spoilt

for choice these days. Companies seem to be adding more and more features to make them more attractive and appealing and at a prices that are considerable easier on the pocket than the Pro class valve/tube products that tend to grab all the attention.

German manufacturer Hughes & Kettner is renowned for its quality valve amplifiers, ranging from classic to modern high gain. H&K also boasts an impressive list of high profile endorsers, including Rush's Alex Lifeson, Allan Holdsworth and Tony MacAlpine, so, clearly, ears at

Hughes & Kettner Edition Blue 60 DFX

Gi **RATING** ★★★★★

H&K are tuned to the right sounds, which should make their solid state offerings closer to the mark than some.

With all that in mind and all my preconceptions about the quality of German engineering, my expectations were pretty high when I unboxed our sample 60 DFX and it certainly looked good as we set it down in the studio. The H&K is a very compact, attractive, well constructed piece of equipment.

Its sturdy cabinet with black vinyl covering and heavy duty corner caps houses a 12" Celestion speaker (always a reassuring find) and with its



top-mounted control panel you get the impression of a much more expensive amplifier.

The controls are laid out on a mirrored panel covered with plexiglas. When the amplifier is switched on the plexiglas is illuminated with blue light. Sound impressive? I have to say I loved how it looked, but I'm not so sure that it isn't a

weakness, however good it may look. The problem is that the increments on the control pots are marked in black, and on a mirrored background this was pretty hard to read, I found. Add to that the reflections and the blue light and, well, let's just say that on a low-lit pub gig, or even worse on a gig with lighting, I think it could be quite difficult to read the settings. In fact I struggled quite a bit to see the markings in our studio environment.

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So, while it's a very attractive cosmetic feature, it's possibly not the most practical.

The H&K boasts two channels, clean and lead, both with independent volume controls. The overall volume of these can be controlled by the amp's master volume control. Your sounds are tailored with the three band EQ and channels are switched using either the button housed on the top of the amp, or by a footswitch which is sold separately. The amplifier also offers a digital effects section, which we'll discuss later.

Other features include an effects loop, which was surprisingly labelled 'line in' and 'line out'. According to the booklet supplied the line out can also be used as a DI, if used in conjunction with the H&K Red Box. The amplifier also includes a line in for CD player; not the usual mini stereo jack that is found on most amplifiers that include this feature, but instead stereo phono inputs.

Moving on to the sound, the amp's clean tones were both rich and valve-like, with plenty of clean headroom, meaning the tone didn't break up. Moving onto the lead channel, and again the amp produced very rich warm valve-like sounds ranging from classic Blues crunch to modern saturated heavier tones. A little extra EQ was required on the top end, but that's not uncommon with transistor amps. Check out the video to hear for yourself. Not at all bad, is it?

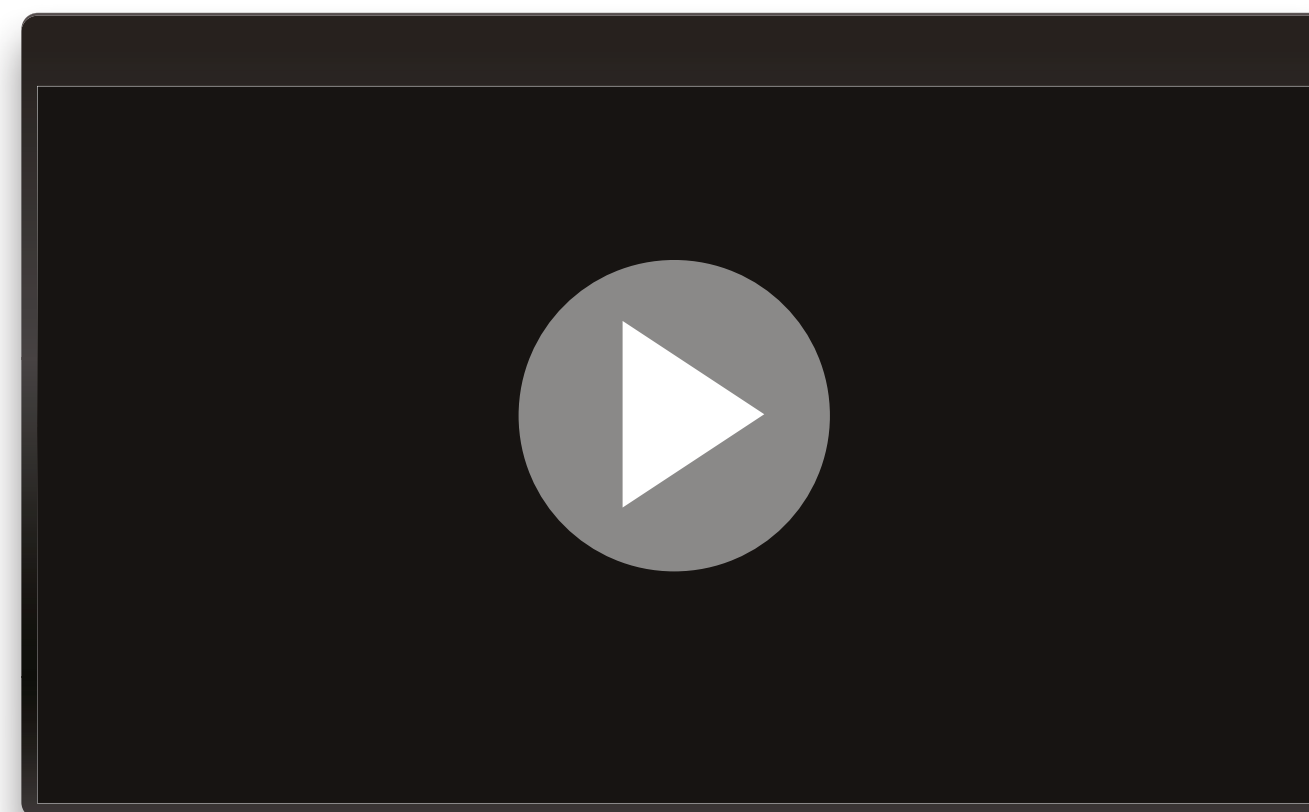
Like many amps in this market sector, the 60 DFX includes a selection of digital effects including chorus, flanger and digital delay, plus its own separate digital reverb. The effects parameters are controlled by a single pot, with blocked sections for each of the effects. Whilst within a block, the more you turn, the more the parameters change for each of the effects. This means that you are restricted to the sounds that have been set with in the parameters of each block. The delay includes a different range of delay times ranging from short to very long

Like many amps in this market sector, the 60 DFX includes a selection of digital effects including chorus, flanger and digital delay, plus its own separate digital reverb.

and with a bit of tweaking I got some very professional sounding lead delay tones. I should also mention that all of the effects are blended with a separate effects volume control. The separate reverb engine, although digital, is modelled on traditional spring reverb. This is also blended into your sound, dialled in via a pot.

Although I've picked up a couple of things - the difficult to see control markings and the slightly confusing 'line in' and 'out' instead of the industry standard send and return, the 60 DFX

is a very well made, good sounding combo. Although the amp also includes a headphone output for silent practice, maybe the addition of a speaker simulator output would have helped with the features, but overall, this is a good sounding amp, and well worth a closer look if you're in the market for something in this price range.



Plutonium Chi Wah

Boutique effects manufacturer Plutonium bills the Chi wah wah pedal as the world's smallest and most compact analogue type. But will its unorthodox design appeal to the discerning guitar player?

Jamie Humphries finds out.



There are certain pedals that are 'must haves' for guitar players - starting with crunch and delay units, and a good wah. There

are plenty to choose from, too, often looking and sounding much the same as all the others. Which certainly can't be said for the model we've got here!

The Chi Wah Wah is very small in its construction - about the same size as a regular compact pedal - and if you compare that to the size of a standard wah, that's a huge space saving on your pedal board. The Chi wah is completely hand built and boasts a 100 per cent pure analogue signal path - that's a buffered signal path as opposed to true bypass, and it will not colour your tone. The construction of the pedal is based around a thick armour plated casing, with a tough powder coated finish. The unit is powered by either a 9 volt battery or via a power supply.

Plutonium Chi Wah



The Chi wah offers three separate rotary pots: volume, contour and gain control. The volume does exactly what you would expect and can be set to control the output level of the effect, which is great for boosting solos, or for compensating those brighter tones that sometimes cut through too much when using a wah with a clean tone. The contour control is used to shape the frequency or "Q" of the wah, which is a great tool for helping to shape your desired wah sound and customise your overall tone. The gain control is an interesting feature as it affects the intensity of the wah tone. Turn the control anticlockwise for a more subtle effect, whilst all the way clockwise will produce a more aggressive wah tone. These controls make this one of the most versatile wah pedals I have ever come across. The pedal is also switchless, which



means as you depress the pedal the wah is activated.

OK, now let's look at how the wah operates, and this is where things become a little unorthodox. The wah pedal operates like that of a standard effects pedal, in other words you push it down towards the floor. This is a lot easier to explain in video than it is in written text, so make sure that you check out the video! Where normally a wah pedal's motion is pushed down towards the front of the



pedal, the Chi wah wah is the other way round. It states on the Plutonium website that this new rather unusual motion should be more natural than a standard wah, and should only take about 30 seconds to get use to. I have to disagree, as I played around with the wah for over an hour, and still found it operation rather hard to get accustomed to. Plus, I found myself operating the wah with the front of my foot, as the pedal is so small, and my foot kept slipping off, so many

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of my standard wah inspired licks were a little hard perform. That's not to say that after some time and perseverance that you wouldn't get use to it, but to my mind there is a reason why wah pedals share the same design - because it works!

That said, by no means do I want to be seen as being negative towards this pedal as it does have many plus points and as a space saving addition to your board, it really does solve a lot of problems. I would just be sure

to give it a try before you buy, and be sure that it works for you. If it does, then I am sure you will have hours of inspiring Chi wah wah fun! In summation? Great build, sounds fantastic but a little hard (for me at any rate) to get used to!



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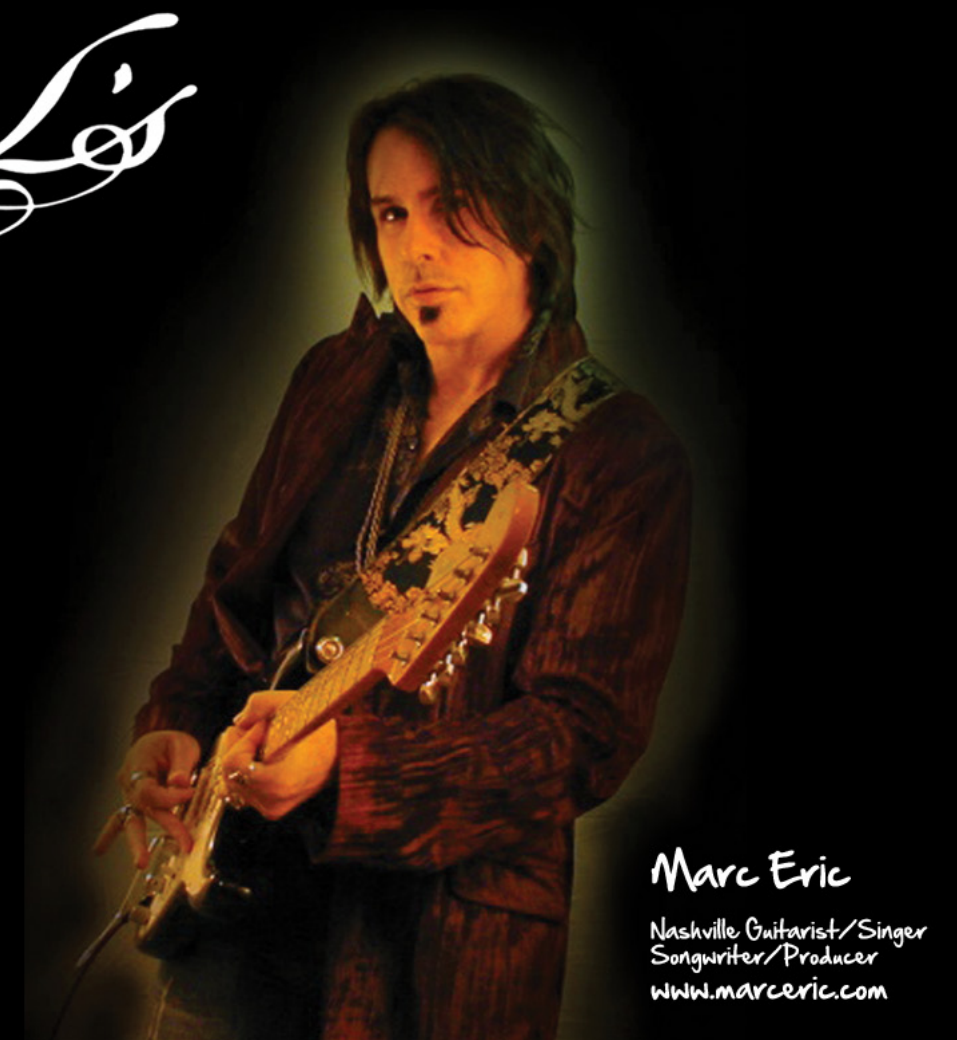
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Digitech Whammy DT

The original Digitech Whammy is now seen as a classic among pedal collectors. And now there's a brand new version capable of some astonishing tricks. **Jamie Humphries** gets ready to play with all things pitchy and bendy..

D

igitech first introduced the whammy pedal in the early 90's. It offered ridiculous pitch bending capabilities from a wah style pedal, also worked as a harmony pedal and even included a 'dive bomb' setting - ideal for use with fixed bridge guitars. As well as this, the pedal also included chorusing, or 'detune' as it's described on the casing. The pedal gained huge popularity with the release of the first Rage Against the Machine album, with Tom Morello using the Digitech to create his ground breaking soundscapes. Many artists followed, including Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, Jonny Greenwood and Matt Bellamy. I have an original Digitech Whammy myself, bought it in 1992 for £80 brand new! I've been offered some pretty silly money for it in the past, which shows you both how good and sought-after the original was.

Digitech Whammy DT



Digitech have released several versions of this pedal since, but with some of the new features on the Whammy DT, I think this one is by far the best yet.

If you already know the Whammy, the left side is going to look very familiar, with all of the regular Whammy settings enabling you to pitch up or down by certain intervals, and everything in between. This side of the pedal also includes the harmoniser sections and once again different intervals are set depending on the position of the pedal, plus all the micro tonal intervals in between, if that's what you're into. The pedal also includes detune, either deep or shallow, which is basically chorusing. The intensity of the chorus depends on how far down the pedal is pressed. Also included is the dive bomb setting,

so even fixed bridge guitarists can drop those strings till they wobble!

It's the right side of the pedal that includes the new features - and this is where the fun really starts! This side includes the drop tune section, which drops your guitar down in semi tones, or raises it as if you were using a capo. This section also features a momentary switch that when depressed cuts you straight back to your dry original sound, and then back to the processed sound when released. This newer version of

the unit also includes an addition input for a footswitch, plus MIDI.

At first I have to say I was slightly intimidated by the amount of settings on this pedal, but its layout is very intuitive and I was able to negotiate my way around pretty quickly. The quality of the whammy, harmony and chorus is top quality, with minimal tracking noise, even when playing chords. After overcoming the desire to bend your notes up and down stupid amounts, if you dig deeper there are some very inspiring and musical applications that go beyond what is usually associated with this pedal. But yes, I guess we all

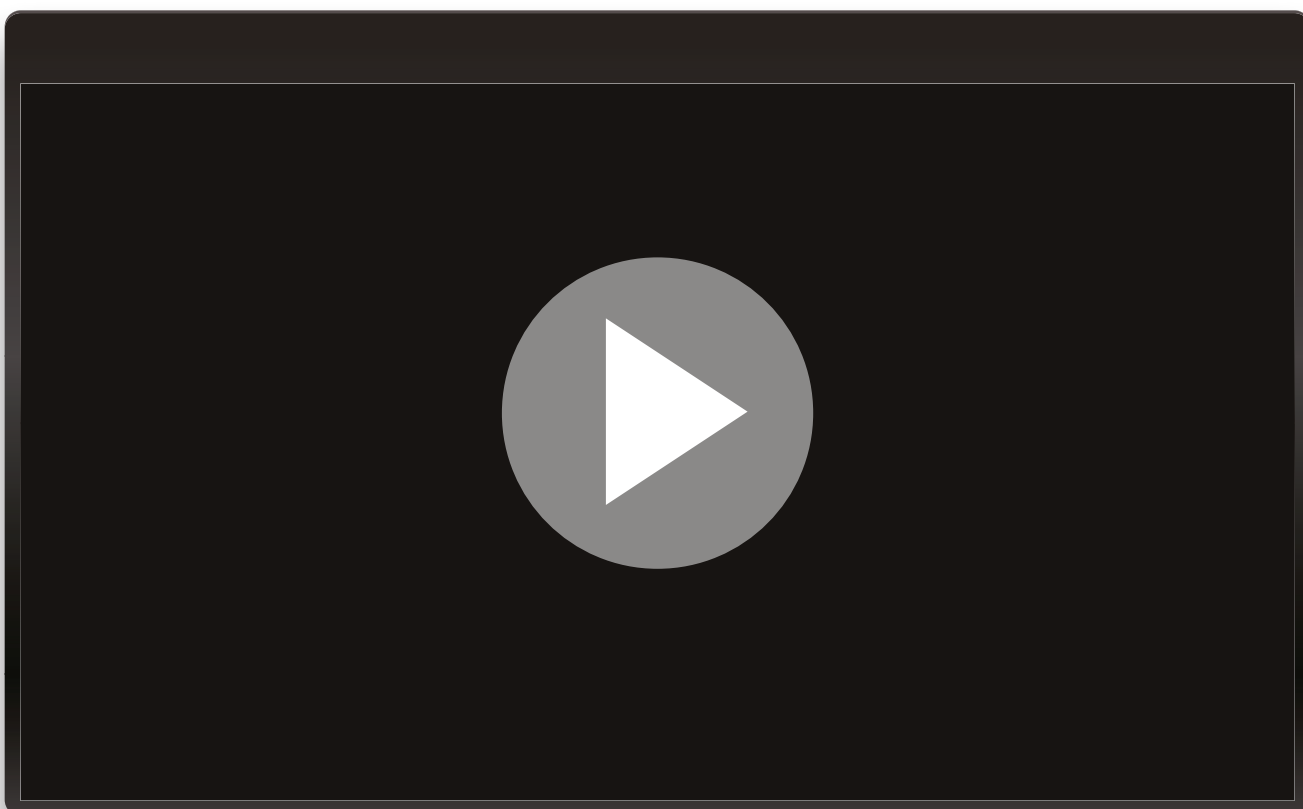
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have to play the 'Killing in the Name Of' solo to get it out of our systems!

But it's the drop tune section that really floored me. Take two guitars to a gig to cover songs in Eb? Not any more! Just select the dial to a semi tone lower and your standard tune guitar is ready to rock any tune a semitone down. It doesn't stop there; drop D or C, or even lower, are all possible and with such good tracking you'd be able to use this confidently and convincingly on a gig. Use the momentary switch to jump back to standard pitch during a song, and then back down! Need a capo? No more fiddling around trying to put it on and then re-tune, as the pitch can also be raised!

Other applications I enjoyed were using a harmony from the left side of the pedal, at the same time as using the capo setting on the right side in the detune mode. Hours of fun, and plenty of inspiration for unusual rhythm parts. Make a point of checking out our video as this new Digitech is something really special!

I have to say that I really enjoyed this pedal; yes it's bulky and it's not cheap, but look at what it does! I shall be adding this to my arsenal of effects as soon as I can. Go check it out, you won't be disappointed! Despite the price we've given it the highest rating our grumpy editor has so far let us award. It's really that good!



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The G&L 30th Anniversary ASAT Special

Did Leo Fender ever better his original Telecaster? He certainly thought so, with the G&L ASAT. 30 years after the formation of the great man's last venture, G&L is celebrating with a range of highly collectible special editions. We borrowed a 30th Anniversary ASAT and handed it to **Michael Casswell**. Sometimes Christmas comes a little early...



It has been 30 years since George Fullerton and the late, great, Leo Fender got together to form G&L guitars. To celebrate this

fact, the company has introduced a collection of 30th anniversary guitars across the range. Made at the G&L factory on Fender Avenue, Fullerton, California, the guitar we had for review was the Tele-style ASAT, which like all the 30th anniversary versions, comes resplendent in a white pearl frost. I guess that pearls have long been associated with a 30 year landmark, so what better colour? It's quite subtle and just

The G&L 30th Anniversary ASAT Special



looks white at distance, but on closer inspection, you see a nice metallic sheen to the white.

The headstock face also gets the white pearl paint and with the darkness of the ebony fretboard, the overall effect is quite dramatic without being over the top. It's nice to see they've used ebony for this guitar, which gives the snap and bark of maple, but with a nice smooth, faster feel.

The ASAT's neck has a classic C profile, which fills the hand without feeling too big or small, and should cater for all tastes. It's constructed

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Hard rock maple is the sensible choice for stability and cost

from plain hard rock maple, which should make it very stable when played hard on long tours, that can be the ruin of thin Japanese shred-type necks, or pretty birdseye or flame grained types. Highly figured maple necks need to be of very high quality seasoned wood to not be affected by temperature and climate changes that a guitar encounters when on tour, and that type of quality wood is getting harder and harder for guitar makers to source, so hard rock maple is the sensible choice for stability and cost.

The pickups are a pair of G&L high output single coils, which look and sound like P90s, giving the guitar a gutsy bark, or a warm twang, depending on how you play and how you set your amp. Hopefully, the footage of me playing the guitar should give you a better idea. I used a Keeley Blues Driver into the clean channel of a 100 Watt Blackstar head for the demo. The body is alder, and has a medium weight. I always look for lightness in my own guitars, and although the ASAT didn't strike me as being extra light, it certainly wasn't heavy, and had a good acoustic ring

to it before it was plugged in, which transferred to a nice alive feel through the amp.

The set-up on this guitar, in my opinion, could have done with a tweak. The action was a just a tiny bit too high for my liking and I know it could feel easier and slicker to play than it does now. The quality of the neck and frets are superb, however, and with a few small adjustments, I could have this guitar playing its best within 30 minutes. It's a fact that a higher action gives a better tone, so the best set up is one that's high enough to let the strings ring, but low enough to play your most impressive lines. The moral here, of course, is always buy a guitar with a set-up to suit your tastes included in the price!

Personally, I'm always wary of guitars that are painted solid colours, because you never know whether the body is made of one solid piece of wood, or three or four pieces glued together. There's nothing wrong with a body being made from separate pieces: it can still ring and be just as acoustically alive as a one piece body, but because quality wood is getting harder to source, guitar makers cannot afford to waste good tonewood and the answer is

[...>] 160



At the G&L factory, Leo Fender's office and workshop is as it was left when he died in March 1991. **I like that fact!**

usually a solid colour paint finish, that hides glued-together pieces. I'm not saying that is the case here and, in fact, I've never played a bad G&L. I've tried many and I would gladly buy one unseen and unplayed, knowing it would be great, solid colour or not. I wish I could say the same for the products of one or two other 'top brands'! But I do think it's worth thinking about as a general rule when you're offered a guitar with a solid colour finish.

At the G&L factory, Leo Fender's office and workshop is as it was left when he died in March 1991. I like that fact! It shows huge respect to his heritage and name. Leo Fender was a special guy, and we all owe him a huge thank you for giving us so many perfect guitars. It's great to know that G&L guitars are still producing true, made in the U.S. instruments he would be very proud of.

If you are in the market for a professional guitar that does a Tele's job, a G&L ASAT has to be right at the top of your list - not to at least compare it with the alternatives would be silly. This special edition is a step even further. It's going to be quite rare and it isn't even particularly expensive for a US-made guitar that comes with a good case. This is one to cherish!



BOOK

REVIEWS

Flying V Explorer Firebird -

An odd-shaped history of Gibson's weird electric guitars

Author: Tony Bacon

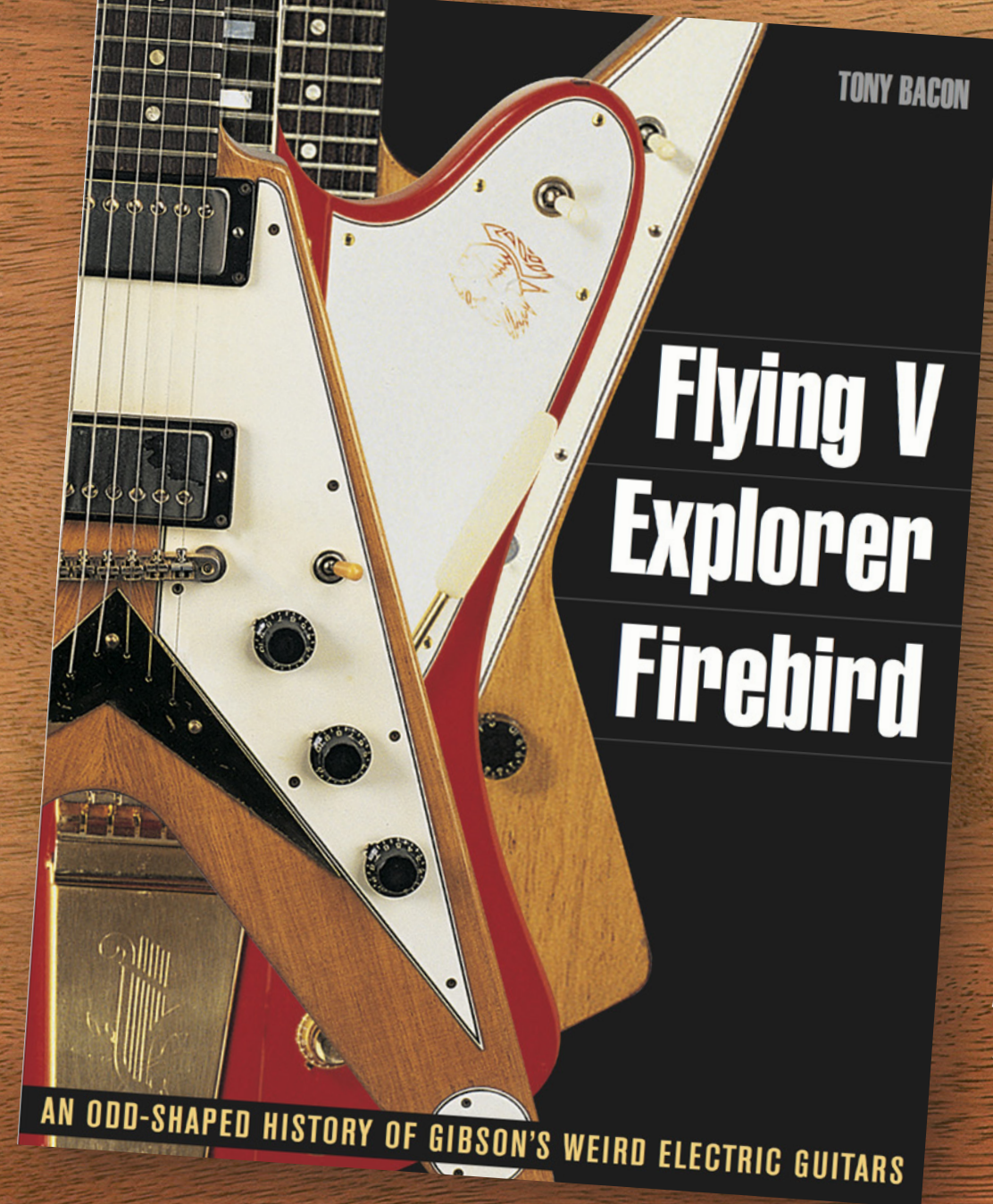
Publisher: Backbeat Books/Hal Leonard £16.95/\$24.99

S ometime in 1957, Gibson's President Ted McCarty decided it was time for the staid old Midwest guitar maker to finally start taking notice of the success of that newcomer down in California - Leo Fender. Fender's solid bodied guitars were light, easy to play, sounded great and looked like they came from the era they were made in - the 1950s, the age of fins and jet planes. McCarty's response was Gibson's 'Modernistic' new guitars. They become known as The Explorer, The Flying V and the Moderne and they marked the birth of the pointy headstock guitar. A little later, automotive designer Ray Dietrich was drafted in and his contribution was the Firebird. If you consider that this was also the era of the original PAF humbucker and the time when Gibson was making

what many regard as its finest ever solid guitars, it's hard not to conclude that this was Kalamazoo's finest hour.

Author Tony Bacon is no stranger to guitar writing, having produced countless reference works that always somehow seem to escape the dusty, nerdy, feeling that you're being reduced to reading lists of serial numbers. He's a fine writer with a dry wit, knows his subject inside out and produces books with authoritative, original research backed by great illustrations. This brand new title is no exception.

In addition to presenting the straight facts of Gibson's flirtation with modernity, Bacon has interviewed a host of people involved - both makers and artists - so you have the views of users like Andy Powell,



Rick Nielsen, K.K. Downing, Billy Gibbons, Michael Schenker and even Johnny Winter - all explaining their individuals walks on the wild side of guitar design.

It gets even more fun when, taking the story decade by decade, Bacon starts to look at the 70's - the early period of Japanese copies - and then the explosion of new US companies. Interviewees include Hamer's Jol Dantzig and Dean's Dean Zelinsky, among others - major contributors to the elaboration of McCarty's original ideas.

This is the real story - buy it!

The Stratocaster Guitar Book

Author: Tony Bacon

Publisher: Backbeat Books/Hal Leonard £16.95 \$24.99

V ery much a sister title (the elder sister as it was published in 2010) Tony Bacon's essay on Fender's iconic Stratocaster is very much in the Backbeat house style. It's well written, exhaustively researched,

and is guaranteed to settle Internet arguments in a flash!

There's not much about the outline of the Strat story that most guitarists won't have at least a glimmer of, but what Tony Bacon

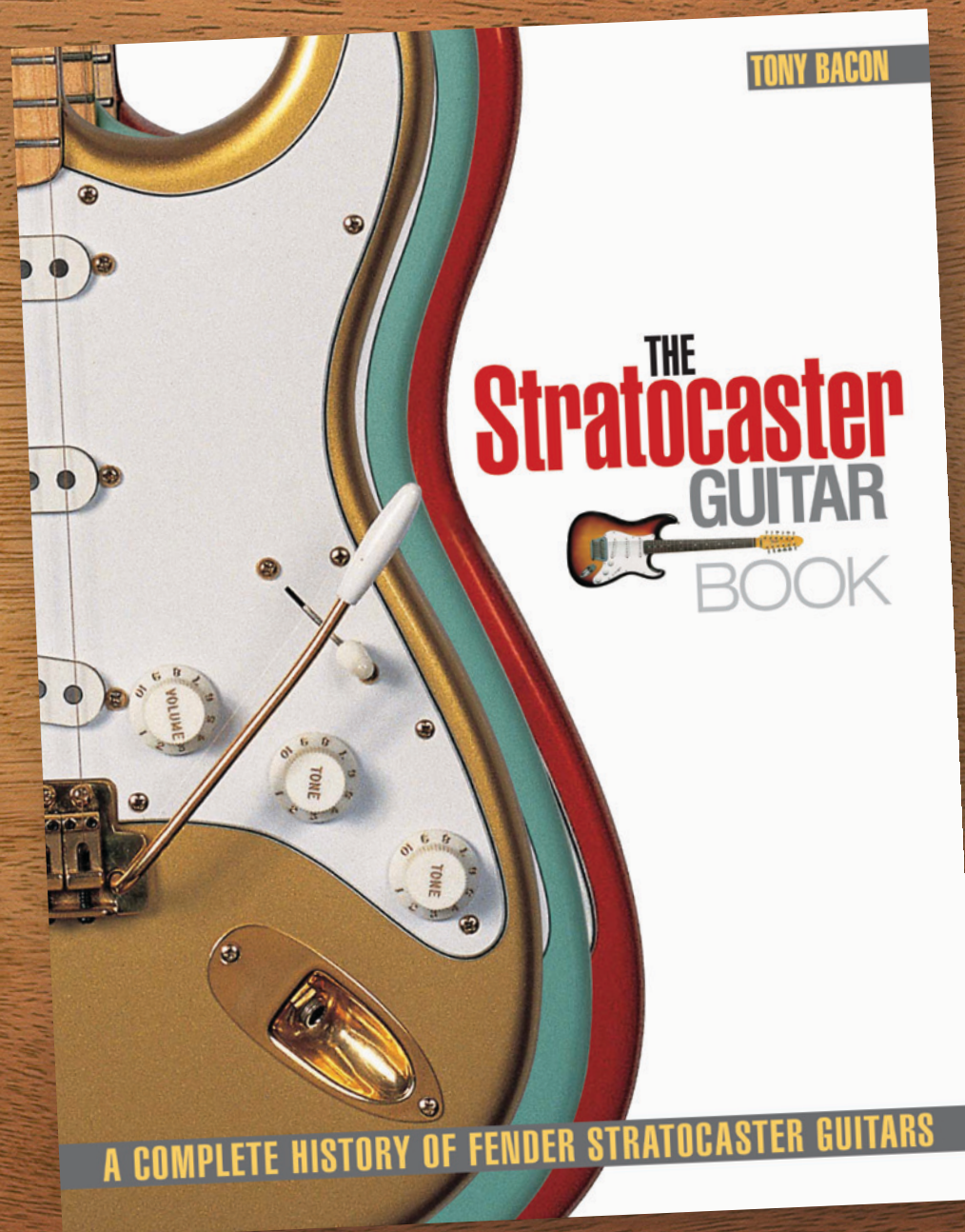
[...] 164

has done here is bring the story between two covers, add a lot of first hand interviews and produce what must be the definitive guide to one of the two definitive solid bodied guitars that helped create Rock and Roll and, later, its demented kid brother, Rock. In case you're wondering, the 'other' guitar was the Les Paul - and Bacon has a Backbeat title about that too.

One great shame is that Leo Fender died in 1991 without leaving many interviews behind him. It would have been good to have heard Leo telling us what really happened, but Bacon does a fine job piecing the story together with contributions from those who worked with and around Leo back in the early 1950's.

Personally, I'd have liked more on the Japanese copiers from the 1980s whose blindingly good Strat copies (thank you, Tokai) spurred Fender to launch the Squier series and generally pull itself out of the CBS-era torpor it had sunk into. Fortunately, rumour has it that Bacon is currently working on a follow-up book that should answer that need!

If you love Strats and want to know how Leo Fender's machines for making guitar music came to dominate the earth, look no further!



WIN - Flying V Explorer Firebird!

We've got five copies of Tony Bacon's fabulous new book about Gibson's Flying V, Explorer and Firebird guitars to give away, thanks to the publishers, Backbeat Books.

All you have to do to enter our competition is A/ be a registered subscriber to Guitar Interactive (it's completely free!) C/ Answer the following questions and C/ Send us an email with your answers. Five entrants with the correct answers will be chosen at random and will receive free copies of this excellent new title!

QUESTIONS:

Q1/ Gibson's President at the time the Flying V was designed was:

A] Ted McMurphy B] Ted McManus C] Ted McCarty

Q2 Influential '60s Flying V user Dave Davies played with which band?

A] The Animals B] The Kinks C] Creedance Clearwater Revival

Q3 Which Blues legend was famous for his use of the Gibson Flying V?

A] Albert King B] B.B. King C] Freddie King

To Enter - Email your answers (e.g. Q1- B) along with your name, email address and daytime phone number to competitions@iguitarmag.com

1/ All entries must be received by 16th October 2011. 2/ No cash alternative is offered instead of the stated prize. 3/ All entries must be submitted via e-mail. 4/ Employees of Guitar Interactive, Licklibrary, Backbeat Books., Hal Leonard and their immediate families are ineligible for this competition. 5/ The winner will be chosen, at random, from registered readers registered of Guitar Interactive who provide the correct answers. 6/ The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into regarding this competition. 7/ Entrants must provide a contact telephone number and valid email address. 8/ Prizewinners must consent to having their name and city/country (e.g. 'Andres Segovia, Madrid, Spain') published in a future issue.



THE QUIET ROOM

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e promised you something different in this issue of The Quiet Room - and here it is! To start with, instead of profiling an artist, we bundled GI's Stuart Bull and our US cameraman Jamie Borden onto a plane and sent them down to Austin, Texas, to visit Bill Collings and his team, who are currently making some of America's finest instruments at Collings Guitars.

We'll be doing more factory tours in the future, because every player likes to see how fabulous instruments are created, but we're not dropping artist interviews in favour of them. We already have two stunning acoustic guitarists lined-up for future Quiet Room specials.

And speaking of stunning players, we're truly honoured to be joined at GI this month by the Italian virtuoso guitarist and teacher Giorgio Serci. Giorgio brings an unparalleled level of professional expertise to The Quiet Room, as you'll see from the biography on his First Steps In Fingerstyle column, which starts this month.

We're genuinely interested in your feedback and welcome readers' opinions about what we should be reviewing and whom we should be interviewing in this oasis of acoustic sanity!

Gary Cooper - Editor

gary@iguitarmag.com



Collings

guitars tour

Collings produces some of the finest acoustic guitars in the world. That's not an opinion - it's a fact, widely acknowledged even by the company's rivals. But Bill Collings doesn't only make acoustic guitars. His company more or less rules the US Bluegrass mandolin market and if you ever wondered who makes the best pro-class ukuleles, look no further. Then there are Collings electrics - fast becoming as recognised for the same authentic vintage quality as the company's acoustics.

We sent GI's **Stuart Bull** to Austin, Texas to meet Bill Collings and his team of craftsman builders and bring us an exclusive factory report. **Gary Cooper** provides the background.

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You could argue forever about who makes the world's best guitars but get a group of top professional acoustic players together and one name increasingly seems to crop-up - Collings. It's a tremendous achievement for a relative newcomer to the ranks of volume producers. Not that Bill Collings himself is new to guitar making - in fact he's been working out how to make beautiful instruments for over 40 years, but it has been only relatively recently - since the early 1990s - that his factory, based in Austin, Texas, has been able to increase production sufficiently (albeit gently) to enter the ranks of brands you can find in a store - though only the very best guitar stores!

What sets Collings instruments apart, if you talk to professionals, is an almost mystical combination of a vintage-like sound and feel coupled with remarkable consistency. Guitar legend and lore suggests you don't get both together - that old guitars were better because they were all different. But Bill Collings approached the subject of guitar manufacture from an unusual standpoint. He was trained by mechanical engineers, who taught him the importance of precise and consistent measurement.

'After college, I worked in a machine shop with this old guy and that's where I learned machining

and a lot of other skills that added to my love of making things,' he told me when I met him a few years ago. 'After a while, I knew how to measure and I knew how to make things and the precision - I loved the precision. I got used to working to close tolerances for people who really needed work done to that level. So I learned craftsmanship from a 70 year old guy who did it all by hand and knew how to make good stuff. I hadn't known about any of that stuff. I could work with wood, but I didn't know any of that. I was a driven man back in that machine shop, sucking in all that knowledge.

'That's what I wanted. I loved everything to do with the metal but it didn't have a meaning, so I wanted to put the two together and it actually drove me to make good guitars right-off.'

Like many before him, Collings was frustrated by the guitars he owned. He had a Gibson Dove but couldn't get on with the sound, so swapped it for a cheaply made Guild D-25, which sounded better, despite its plywood back. And then there were the Martins he started dismantling to see what made them tick.

His first guitar, made with ideas gleaned from all these influences wasn't, he says, very good. But his next guitar, a dreadnought, was - and it led to orders. Bill's career as a maker had

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What sets Collings instruments apart, if you talk to professionals, is an almost mystical combination of a vintage-like sound and feel coupled with **remarkable consistency**.



begun - though his fanatical attention to what made old guitars tick hadn't stopped. He's been known to track down old pre-War guitars and measure the thickness of the lacquer and he can quote you those figures off the top of his head. It's knowledge he has translated to his own instruments and the way that every single one is finished.

But, as our factory tour video shows, kindly narrated by Collings expert Doug Chandler, there's a lot of handwork that goes into a Collings - even after it has been computer routed in some instances!

'Pennies make nickels, nickels make dimes..' is what he says when you ask Bill Collings about the secrets of guitar making. It perfectly encapsulates his approach - where each tiny step in the production of a guitar is considered carefully and afforded the time and importance it deserves. The instruments are near-perfect because every step is treated as a precision operation of real importance.

When we brought Stuart Bull back at GI HQ for his post-flight debriefing, he was a convert - to the extent that he'd actually ordered one!

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'Pennies make nickels, nickels make dimes..'



'The Collings factory is in a nice rustic setting. It's definitely a place of business and not any kind of egotistical reflection of the guitars or personnel,' Stuart says. 'To be honest I don't really do too much on these jobs, Jamie Borden, our US cameraman, is quite happy to set up the cameras on his own as he has a system and I just get in the way. This gives me an opportunity to walk around and make observations and take mental notes.'

'The first thing I noticed was the relaxed friendly atmosphere. I just walked from area to area looking at the guitars and speaking with the guys building them. They were all really

cool and enthusiastic, very happy to talk about the instruments and the musicians that play them. I've always believed that personnel is the key to a company's success and this company has nailed it, these guys are the top notch builders - artists would be a better name.

'I've known the reputation of Collings acoustic guitars for some time but my head was about to be turned in a very major way. I noticed a beautiful semi-acoustic electric model laying on a work bench. As I got closer I notice the inlays in the the neck. They read: "Conan O'Brien". I immediately inquired about the guitar and, yes, no surprise

'The first thing I noticed was the **relaxed friendly atmosphere.** I just walked from area to area looking at the guitars and speaking with the guys building them.

it's a model built especially for the US late night talk show host. By the end of the day I've ordered one of these for myself - minus the "Conan" inlays!

'The Collings factory tour filled me full of hope for a better tomorrow as I was inspired and delighted to see a facility with friendly hard working creative people who know the stuff and then some. I would like to personally thank Steve McCreary, Bill Collings and all the guys for making our trip an awesome experience of guitar excellence and human nature."



Collings C10 Acoustic Guitar

Some say Bill Collings and his team currently produce the world's finest production acoustic guitars. To go with our visit to the Collings plant in Austin, Texas, GI borrowed a Collings C10 - perhaps the perfect Collings acoustic for electric guitar players tempted to go back to nature. We handed it to **Giorgio Serci** for a professional's view.

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traight from the case this guitar has a beautiful wood scent, which is always a good sign for an acoustic instrument. It has

an elegant look, with contrasting wood colours, from the dark ebony of the headstock, fretboard, bridge and pins, to the light Sitka spruce top. It's smaller in size than an OM (Orchestra Model) and it has a smaller upper bout as well as a narrower waist. What makes this guitar look stylish and unique is, also, the asymmetrical headstock with the inlaid logo over the elegantly dark headstock, echoed by the curvilinear tortoise style pick-guard, which is beautifully shaped and gauged.

Check the Spec.

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GO

Collings C10 Acoustic Guitar



The model I played had a high gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish, which is standard on this model but different finishes are available, such as sunburst, satin neck and varnish finish. Various inlays are optional too, as well as a cut away, a left hand model and a wider neck (from 42.86 to 44.45mm at the nut). You can pretty much get whatever you want here.

When I strummed this guitar for the first time, I could not believe my ears, as the tone is so loud, with an incredible bass response, which is very well balanced with the treble and mid range. Sustain is also impressive! You will notice and appreciate this right away,

particularly when playing single-note melodies. The sustain and its lovely tone quality, makes it ideal to play singing-like melodies as well as rhythm guitar parts. and for this reason this guitar would be great for both studio and live work. Just listen to the sound on our video!

Constructionally, the C10 has its back, sides and neck made of mahogany and the 14th fret join, with a very elegant and thin heel offers easy access to all 20 frets. The bone

nut and drop-in saddle are finely cut, finished and positioned to perfection and I love the dark and shiny end of the fretboard into the soundhole. This is a tremendously good-looking instrument! But it's not all cosmetics, as inside the Collings you'll find pre-war style scalloped bracing, which allows the guitar's top to be lighter, more flexible and more resonant. Collings isn't the only manufacturer to do this, of course, but when it's done with such meticulous attention to detail and when using such

[...>] 178

fine tonewoods as have been used here, you get a result that is just outstanding.

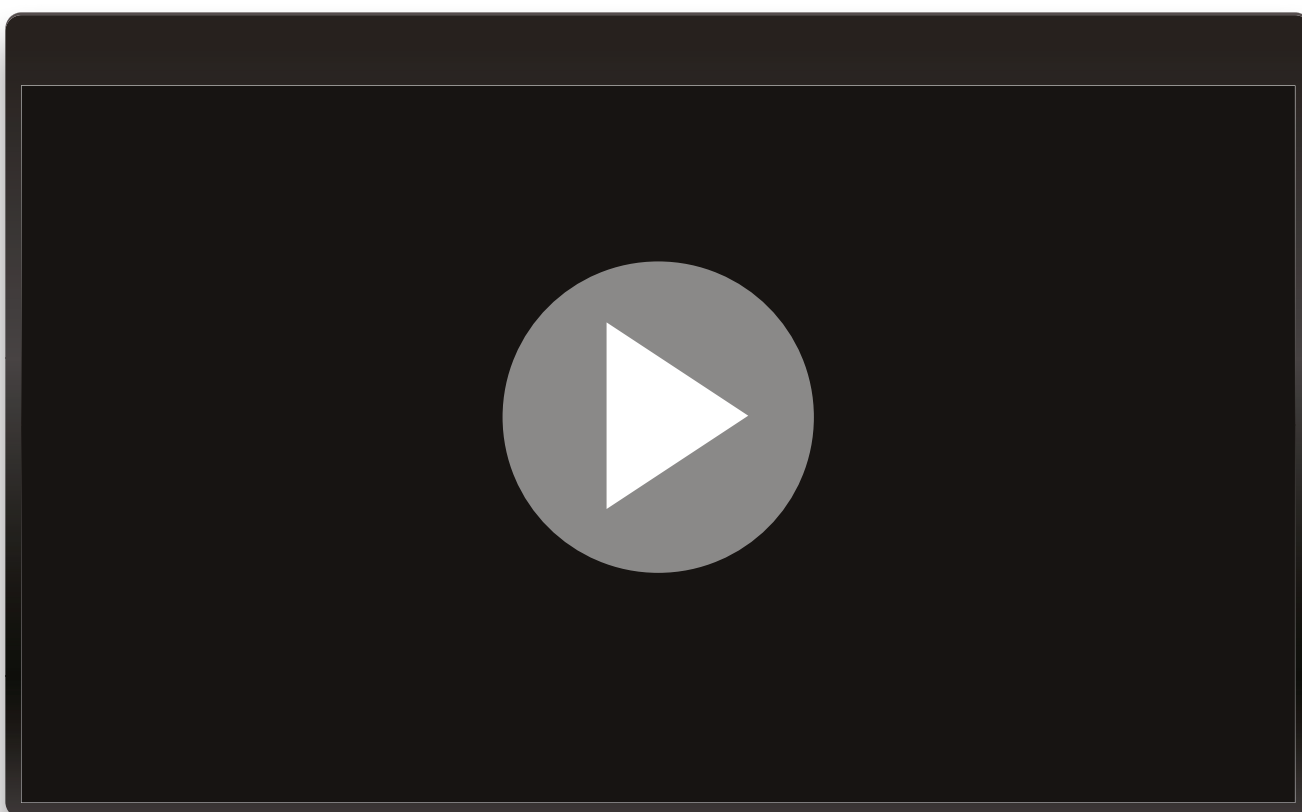
Collings says it believes this model is particularly suitable for electric guitarists and the use of a C shaped neck profile, coupled with an exemplary action on our review sample means they are right.

There can be no doubt that is a high quality instrument and a real joy to play. The choice of materials and the attention to detail in the manufacture is quite remarkable. And of course, being a professional instrument, it will improve with time and it will make its owner improve too, as fine instruments such as this Collings C10 can only make you play

better and definitely more, thanks to its remarkable playability and tone.

We had to think hard how to rate this guitar. It is one of the most expensive we have tried and yet it is a remarkable instrument. In my opinion it is worth every penny, which is why we have marked it so high.

If you are looking for a professional quality acoustic instrument - particularly if you are usually an electric guitar player and want a more approachable guitar - then I strongly recommend finding a Collings dealer near you and trying one of these amazing guitars. You won't believe your ears!



THE DVD COLLECTION

You've read the articles, watched the videos, even checked out some of the products but still feel you want a little more? Well this is the place to come for all related products and videos for all the features you've read about in this latest edition of Guitar Interactive magazine.



We've picked out and collected in one place all the great DVD titles that we know you'd be interested in so you can locate in one easy space and download as you need.

Enjoy!

Featured in this month's issue..



Freshman Apollo 3DC Dreadnought Electro-Acoustic Cutaway.

Freshman specialises in offering bang-for-buck acoustic guitars. Unencumbered with 'big brand' overheads, the small Scottish guitar company designs its own instruments then uses Asian makers to deliver the finished product. The results have been highly praised by reviewers and players alike. We handed an Apollo series Dreadnought cutaway to **Girogio Serci** and asked how it performed.

Freshman is a small Scottish company that has done a lot of design work for guitars that they have made in China. They don't just buy guitars from factories and have their name put on them, they actually do the design work themselves.

The dreadnought is a classic acoustic guitar design introduced by C. F. Martin & Co in 1916, taking its name from the legendary warships of the era, on account of their larger size, designed to make a big noise to compete with orchestras and bigger bands. Dreadnoughts are usually thought of strumming guitars - which isn't to say they can't be used for

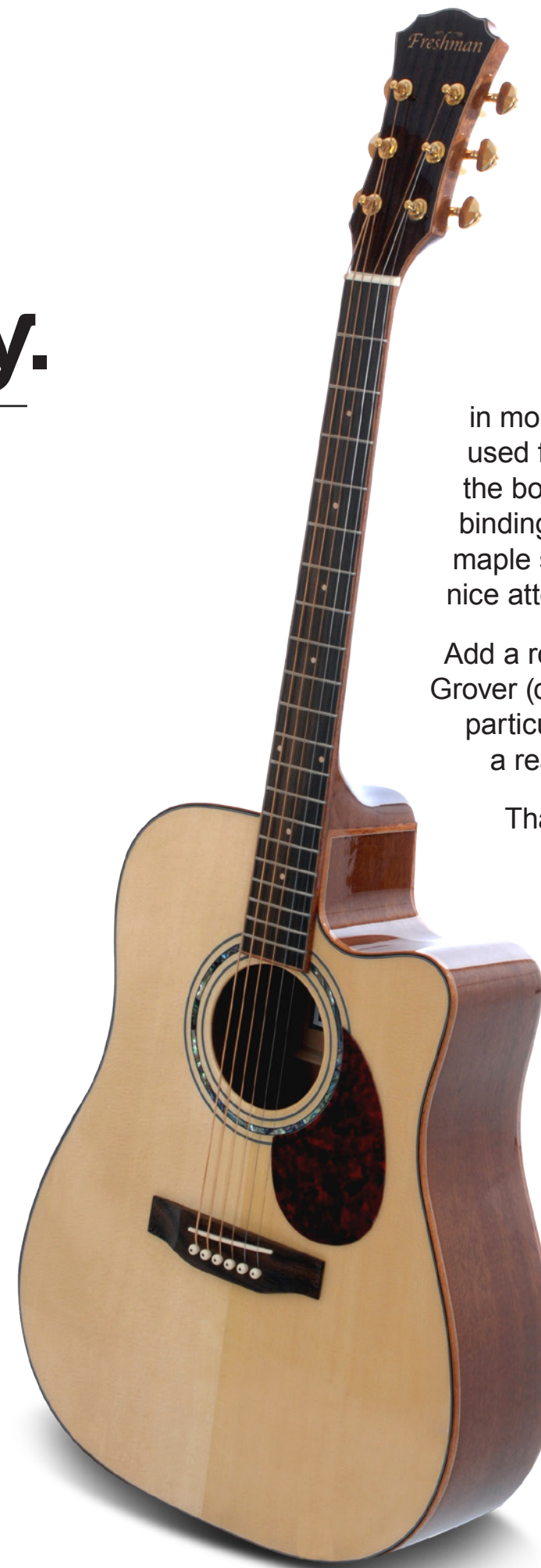
Freshman Apollo 3DC Dreadnought Electro-Acoustic Cutaway.



other styles, but they do, typically, give a 'big' sound.

Our Freshman Apollo came in a natural finish, with inlaid logo and dots, a tortoise style pickguard and with abalone purfling and rosette. It had a cutaway for easier access to higher frets and was equipped with a state of the art Fishman Presys duel blend pickup system.

The Apollo features a solid AA grade Sitka spruce top, which is normally the sort of wood you would find used



Check the Spec.

Get the product info you need.

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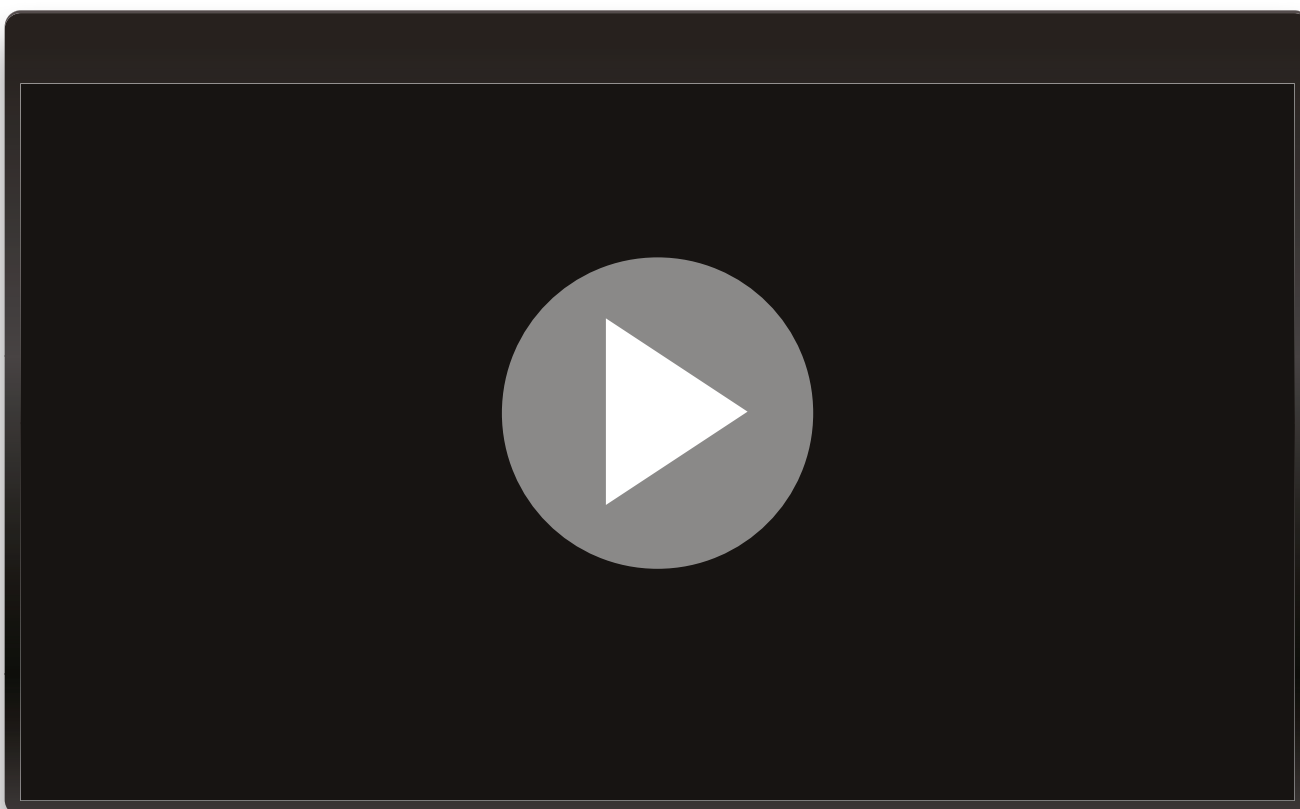
in more expensive guitars. Mahogany has been used for the back, sides, neck and for binding the body, headstock and fingerboard. The binding pattern has been embellished by a thin maple strip, which is a very nice touch and shows nice attention to detail.

Add a rosewood fretboard, bridge and gold Grover (die cast machine heads, which look great, particularly viewed from the back), and you have a really quite handsome guitar.

That impression was borne out when I started to play the Freshman. The action was nice and low, there was no basing noise throughout the fretboard and the cutaway, the C shaped neck profile, as well as the slim heel contribute to what is really excellent playability, making it easy to access all 20 frets.

Being a dreadnought style you can expect a very loud instrument and with a very resonant top made of AA grade Sitka spruce, which is a very light and resonant wood, that is exactly what you get. Sustain is quite good too and the overall tonal palette is wide and well balanced.

[...>] **182**



This guitar sits in the low-mid price range and it seems to me to represent excellent value for money, particularly in terms of the quality of the materials used and the excellent pickup

For when you need to amplify your guitar, this Freshman comes with a Fishman duel blend pickup system, which is a great preamp offering a three-band equaliser and a built-in tuner, which mutes the guitar when activated. This feature is very useful, particularly on a gig, as the audience won't have to hear the very popular guitar theme "EEE, AAA, DDD", etc, being played out of tune on every other song!

The preamp also features a notch filter, which is equally useful, particularly when playing louder gigs, for example with a full band, as it will act as an anti-feedback device. To combat feedback even further,

you will even find a phase button included.

Feedback is one of the most problematical issues for the performing guitarist and it is a phenomenon which is more likely when a guitar preamp features a built-in microphone. This however, should not discourage us from having a built-in mic in the guitar! On the contrary, I believe that it is really worth having a one built-in, as only with a mic can you hope to reproduce all those lovely harmonics and that percussiveness, which makes an acoustic guitar so different in timbre from an electric .

The Fishman system used on this guitar is excellent, because it lets you blend the piezo pickup placed under the saddle with the built-in mic, using the mic-blend knob. In effect it lets easily control your amplified guitar sound directly from the preamp, adjusting the quantity of piezo and mic according to the venue, style, general volume of the performance etc. For example, you will be able to have more mic in the blend when doing a quieter acoustic gig or you could set it to 25% mic and 75% piezo when playing with drums, bass etc.

This guitar sits in the low-mid price range and it seems to me to represent

excellent value for money, particularly in terms of the quality of the materials used and the excellent pickup. Whether you are a beginner or even if you are a professional guitarist, you should definitely try this Freshman out. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you decided to add one of these to your arsenal. It's really very good value for money.



Washburn WD25 SCE

Washburn is experiencing a new lease of life in the acoustic market with new models which have been universally well received. Ideally priced for the guitarist looking to treat himself to his first 'proper' acoustic - or the player looking for a hard working, gigging electro - the brand new Washburn WD25 SCE promises a lot. But can it deliver? **Giorgio Serci** finds out.



In recent years, Washburn has become associated with the Rock and metal genres, as a result of the production of

a number of successful electric models. However, not so many people know that Washburn was originally established in Chicago in 1880's. In those years this legendary city was the epicentre of the Blues, within which the role of the acoustic guitar was essential. From the 1920's Washburn guitars were involved in the actual development of Delta blues which, in turn, helped in popularising Washburn's acoustic guitars.

In recent years Washburn's acoustic models have consistently offered good value for money and the WD series in particular has come in for a lot of praise. This latest addition, the WD25 SCE, is a natural finished dreadnought with a cutaway that continues Washburn's value for

Washburn WD25 SCE



RATING ★★★★★

money approach and comes with a Fishman Isys preamp, mother of pearl Washburn logo, inlaid fingerboard dots and a stylised W on the heel. It has abalone purfling and rosette, die-cast chrome tuners and it features wood binding throughout, which gives it a very organic and natural feel.

The WD 25 comes with a solid Alaskan Sitka spruce top, which is a really light resonant wood. It features rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck and headstock and, interestingly, a two-way truss rod, which makes it possible to adjust the neck in both directions, backward and forward. The fretboard and bridge are made of rosewood and the saddle and nut are bone.



Check the Spec.

Get the product info you need.

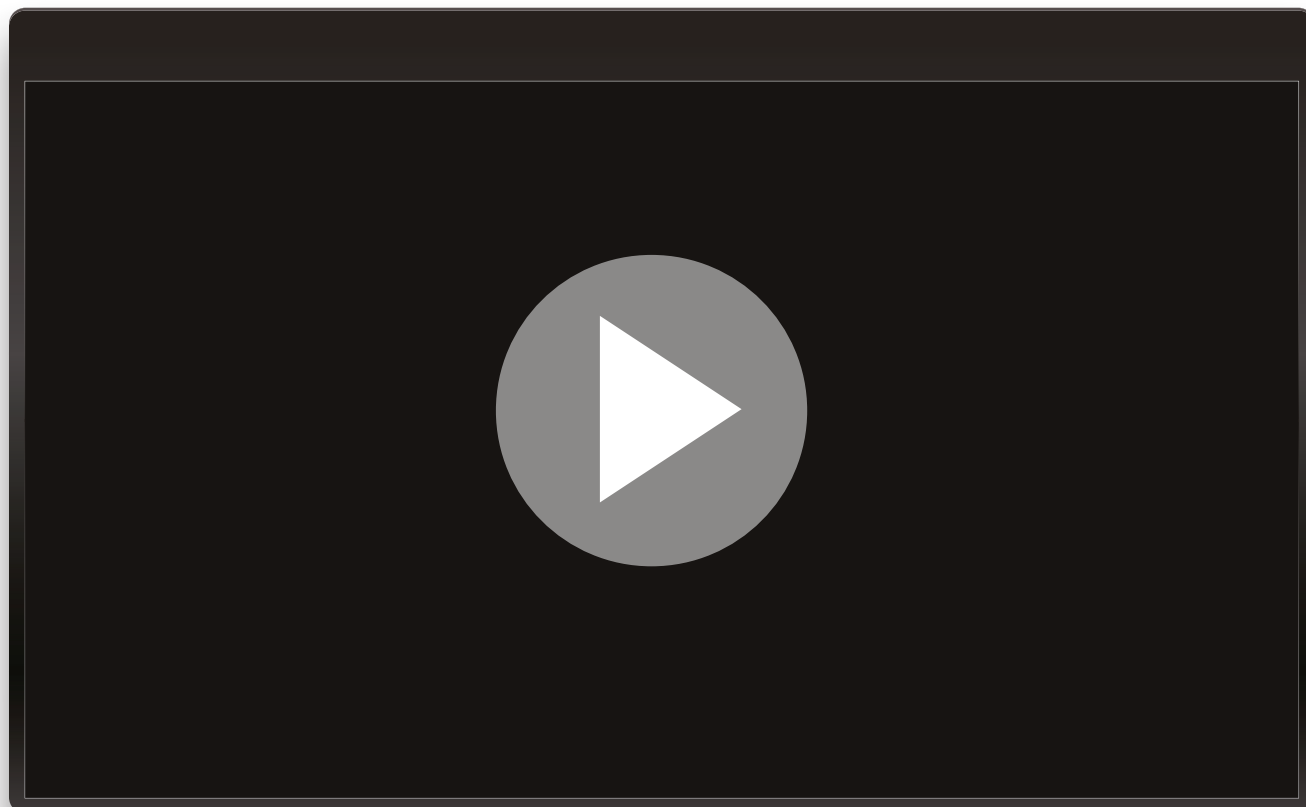
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As most guitarists know, the original dreadnought body shape was invented by C.F. Martin, when that company was looking to make loud acoustic guitars with increased bass response. So successful was Martin's innovation that just about every acoustic guitar maker in the world, from top to bottom, has copied the shape - increasingly in recent years with the addition of a cutaway to provide easier access to the top frets. But the dreadnought shape isn't the only thing Washburn has borrowed from Martin, as it has also used quarter-sawn scalloped bracing - an ingenious strategy which involves chiselling the top braces in order to enhance the bass response. It's a nice touch in a lower priced guitar.

Whether you are mainly an electric or a classical guitarist looking to expand your arsenal, this guitar is quite versatile thanks to its action, which is very nice and low, its C-shaped neck profile and that handy cutaway. All in all I'd say they make this guitar very good in terms of playability and undoubtedly competitive within its price range. As you would expect, the dreadnought size produces a loud sound, reasonably well balanced and resonant.

The Washburn's electric sound is generated and controlled by a Fishman Isys, a really fine piezo preamp that comes with a built-in tuner and a two-band equalizer (Bass and Treble). Acoustic guitars amplified with only a piezo pickup tend to generate

[...>] 186



a sound closer to an electric than to an acoustic guitar tone. The mic really is what makes the difference. However, since the price of this guitar is so low, you could easily upgrade the preamp at a later stage to include a mic blend and perhaps a three-band equaliser. Alternatively, you could keep the same preamp and simply add a gooseneck mic inside the guitar body, between the upper and lower bout.

Playing live, it is also really useful to be able to tweak the mid-range as well as the treble and bass from your guitar preamp, as they can be overwhelming heavy through a P.A. and that's a facility this Fishman

lacks. However, the absence of a mic and a mid range control in the equaliser are not a real issue - you have to consider this guitar's retail price, and what matters most is how it plays and sounds and in those departments it certainly doesn't disappoint. Check out our video for the full picture!

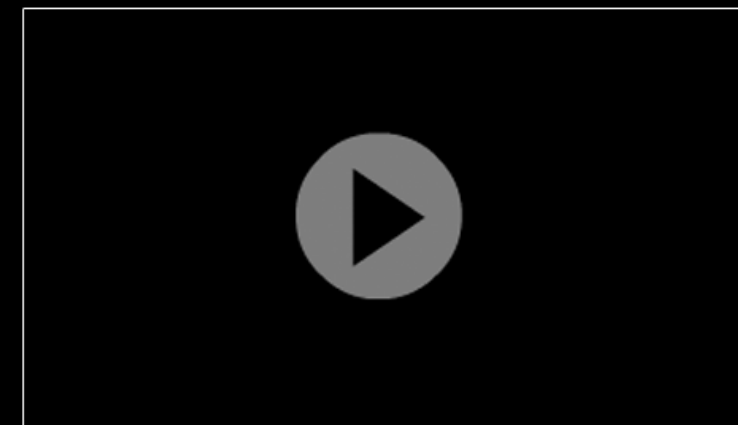
In conclusion this Washburn is a really good guitar with a loud and resonant tone, great playability and attractive looks. Frankly, it's excellent value for money and I'm sure you will be as impressed as I was. It looks like Washburn has another winner.



serious guitar

Collings Guitars have become the byword for craftsmanship and attention to detail in fretted instruments – acclaimed by professional and amateur musicians worldwide. If you're on the quest for the best and haven't experienced our guitars yet, here are just a few. Click on the image to see how we build meticulous quality and the sought-after Collings tone into every instrument we make.

For a Collings Dealer near you check out the "Dealers" section on our website or call +44 (0)1227 832558.



OM25



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collingsguitars@guitarxs.com
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First Steps In Fingerstyle

Guitar Interactive is proud to welcome the renowned acoustic guitarist and teacher Giorgio Serci to our team of columnists. Giorgio's 'Mission Impossible' will be introducing electric guitarists to the world of fingerpicking!

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Giorgio Serci is an award winning guitarist, composer, arranger and lecturer. From Sardinia and based in the UK, he has recorded, performed and supported the likes of **Jools Holland, Shirley Bassey, Basia, David Garrett, Julian Lloyd Webber, Dr John, Martin Taylor, Sylvain Luc, Eric Roche, Nigel Kennedy, Andy Sheppard, Bill Bruford, Harvie S, CBS Orchestra, BBC concert Orchestra** and the **Philharmonic Berlin** amongst others. He has been awarded an MMus in Composition at Surrey University, and his works blend jazz, classical and world music. He is also an active educator, working as a degree lecturer at the "**Academy of Contemporary Music**" in Guildford, as well as for Licklibrary and giving several master classes in many conservatoires around the world. He has recorded extensively as a bandleader as well as a sideman.

Hi, I'm Giorgio Serci. My aim in this column is to generate awareness and elucidate a few points about fingerstyle guitar.

First and foremost, posture! I can see you are stretching right now! While we all know how important it is to have a healthy posture, it is quite easy to overlook this important topic, which can have dramatic repercussions on our technical development and delivery. Playing guitar may not seem to be a strenuous activity, however it can be, as it involves a lot of micro movements, which can strain

muscles and tendons. At any level, from beginner to advanced we should regularly assess our body alignment, making sure tension is not being accumulated in our shoulders, neck, wrist, hands etc, as this could cause repetitive strain injuries, like tendonitis for example, or it could simply inhibit our coordination skills, making our playing sound and feel stiff. Have you ever noticed how the most technically advanced guitarists seem to play the most challenging pyrotechnics in an effortless and relaxed manner?

We may then wonder: 'Is there a perfect posture?' Nothing is perfect (apart from David Gilmour's solo on

'Comfortably Numb'!) simply because sitting down in any position for a long period of time will inevitably strain one muscle or another.

There are different schools of thought on this subject. The classical posture is very good when sitting down and it is, for this reason, the most common amongst classical guitarists. Steel strung acoustic players tend to prefer resting their instrument at the top of their right thigh (some cross-legged), or to use a strap. I found myself using the latter strategy for the following two reasons:

1. Helps keeping the back straight.
2. There are fewer discrepancies between the standing-up and the sitting-down position.

Physiotherapists and chiropractors, recommend alternating postures, so that different muscles are equally involved, rather than over-stressing the same ones. However, this is not always practical and finding a comfortable posture and sticking to it has its merits.

The moral of the story is that looking at the leading finger pickers in various music styles, it seems that posture depends on personal, stylistic and aesthetic choices, so long as the back is straight, the neck pointing upwards and the shoulder down and slightly backwards we should be fine! It is also healthy to take regular breaks, gently stretching the muscles used, as well as exercising those underused.

Nails play also an important role in sound generation, contributing in getting a consistent tone quality and volume. Not every finger picker use nails, depending on style, level of ability and guitar type. When used, nails should be the right length and size. Length is subjective, however it is easier to get a good tone if these are not too long or too short. The optimum length can be gauged by placing our fingertip perpendicular to a string and making sure that both the nail and the flesh touch the string, without having to tilt the finger.

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It is common for guitarist to mimic their favourite guitarists as to whether they should use nails, pick, thumb-pick etc, but it is definitely worth experimenting with various techniques, nails shapes and types (real, fake etc), as this will help develop a personal tone and touch.

The 10 exercises included in this lesson are designed to improve co-ordination skills between the picking-hand fingers, as well as consistency of tone and attack. Focusing on one hand at the time will enable us to refine our technique more effectively. We will be using open strings, in order not to strain the fretting hand. While executing these exercises, we should listen for consistency of tone, volume and attack. The 'a' finger is normally

weaker than the 'i' and 'm' fingers, so we should practice, making sure each finger produces a matching sound.

We often hear: "It's not what we do, but how we do it!" So, how do we get a good and consistent tone? An extensively tested strategy consists of planting our fingers on the strings prior to plucking them.

Each finger should make contact with the chosen string, pressing toward the soundboard and then releasing from the string, preparing the finger for the next note to be played. Notice the difference in tonal colour depending on the amount of pressure, quantity of flesh and nail used and the quality of the release.



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