

ISSUE 6

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# Guitar

## MICHAEL ANGELO BATIO

the godfather of shred - interview +  
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## STEVE HOWE

Yes's master guitarist interviewed  
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# THE HEAD OF SHRED

Michael Angelo Batio - who joins Gi this month as a guest columnist - is one of shred's founding fathers and leading exponents. Guitar Interactive celebrates a remarkable career, as **Stuart Bull** talks technique on video with MAB and **Gary Cooper** discovers there's a lot more to Michael than just fast guitar!

When a player has won awards ranging from "the fastest guitarist of all time" (Guitar World magazine) to "No. 1 shredder of all time" (Guitar One) you wonder what you might be up against when you set out to interview him. It's not that you automatically expect shredders to be Neanderthals, but there's the look, the obsession with speed and... well, you don't necessarily expect a thoughtful interview with an articulate, educated man who has piloted his career with considerable skill, over and above displaying virtuoso talents with his musical weapon of choice.

But Batio is a million miles from the stereotypical metalhead and he has had a pretty remarkable career. Not so very long

ago to make your life as a major league professional player you usually had to have been in a top band for a long time. Some broke free - Eric Clapton springs to mind, Jeff Beck, too - but many guitarists, even household names, have been associated with just one or two bands in their careers and more than a few have seen their careers dwindle when they have left those bands. Hence so many of reformed '70s giants, trying to revive their fortunes. But Batio - known just as MAB to many of his fans - is known in his own right and for what he does best - playing guitar.

Stuart Bull's video interview in this issue covers Batio's technique far better than I ever could in words, so instead of asking about his

[...>]





playing, I began by asking him about his early days. Batio started guitar at 10 and took to it quickly, he recalls.

“A musical epiphany to me was when I listened to the radio - AM and mono in those days - and I remember hearing a song and I knew the chords to it. I was only 10 or 11 and I could picture those chords in my head. That’s when I felt I had talent for it. Music seemed very easy for me to grasp. I’ll never forget my first guitar lesson. My teacher showed me four chords: G, G7, C and D7 and then I made a song from them. I played a measure of G, G7, then C then back to D7 cadencing back to G - I tried to make it musical. I didn’t know, he just showed me the four chords and I put it into a song. He also showed me exercises using my fourth finger,

so I’ve always used my four fingers, right from the very beginning.”

Batio had taken to music like a duck to water and he comes from a school of players for whom theory is more or less second nature. But this isn’t universally the case for Rock guitarists, even if it is more common now than it once was. In fact his musical knowledge goes deeper than most, as he has a BA in music theory and composition from Northeastern Illinois University. But does he believe such a background is actually necessary to be a great guitarist?

“To be honest, no. If you take someone like Yngwie Malmsteen, I probably know a hundred times more about the theory of music but that doesn’t mean he’s not an



[...>]

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incredible guitar player and I really think at the end of the day that all the knowledge in the world isn't going to help you if you don't have any talent. But it does help if you have. For example, just yesterday I had the radio on and the song Killer Queen came on. I remembered that song from when I heard it for the first time in the 1970s when it absolutely blew my mind. I couldn't comprehend it. I couldn't comprehend the chords and what I did was what I always do when I hear something that sounds foreign or different to me - I switch on my theoretical brain and analyse what I'm listening to. I find that I understand it much better as a result and that Queen song taught me that. It was so radically different from anything that I'd ever heard."

And so to shredding. 2012 will be the 25th anniversary of Batio's ground breaking 1987 DVD Speed Kills. Some credit him with almost having invented the shredding genre and it's here too that Batio says his training come into play.

"Yes, that and my piano playing," he says, perhaps surprisingly. "Ever since I was a kid, I was always fascinated by really good playing - especially in Rock. I loved bands like Zeppelin and Deep Purple but I soon became influenced by people like Steve Howe from Yes and King Crimson's Robert Fripp. In fact there's a song I wrote when I was 16 called A New Day - you can find it on the Internet - and I wrote it in the style of Steve Howe.

"Even as a kid I'd listen to Hendrix and would think 'some of those notes are out of

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tune' or I'd hear timing issues. People used to think I was nuts, like when I told a drummer who was listening to an Emerson Lake and Palmer album that I thought Carl Palmer had rushed a particular part. I was an over-critical little bastard! But I'd hear these mistakes and they'd make me cringe. I didn't want to play that way and that's how I ended up doing what I did.

"Back in the early 1990s, nobody called it 'shred' - nobody used the word - I just wanted to be as good technically in Rock music as Jazz guitar players were in Jazz, or classical players were.

music that I felt was freaky and weird but our label guaranteed us that if we did that kind of album they would ship 100,000 units, they would get us two MTV videos, major tour support and we'd be in the charts - and everything came true, I didn't like either of those situations - a great album that died, or putting out one that I wasn't happy with that did great. I knew I had to take control and if I sank or swam it was down to me."

What Batio doesn't say - but what we at Gi have seen for ourselves - is how hard he works at this. Everything MAB does is businesslike and professional.

## So how did the word 'shred' come into use..?

So how did the word 'shred' come into use? Batio isn't sure but says it's likely to have been the work of a critic on one of the US guitar magazines - and he doubts it was intended as a compliment! "There were critics who said all it was was just fast guitar - but what could I do? That's what I was playing."

Picked up by the fledgling Starlicks organisation when he was playing at the legendary Troubador Club in LA and working in analogue, which left no room for faking even if he had wanted to, Batio produced what became a landmark tuition video, which still stands up today for its speed and cleanness of style.

Batio says that, with hindsight, he feels that joining the newly formed band Nitro in the same year (1987) was a bit like being in a movie - the band was pretty much a fabrication and his heart wasn't in it musically.

"By the time I left and set up my own label, I'd seen both sides of being in a band. My first big signing was with Holland. We were with Atlantic Records, we made a phenomenal record, but we had terrible management and it flopped. But in Nitro we had


Photos arrive on time, copy appears, phones are answered, emails replied to. While a superstar can sometimes get away with erratic and unreliable behaviour (at least for a while), a solo performer who runs his own business cannot - and he understands that to a rare degree.

But does he ever feel pigeon-holed by his own success? "I did at first - especially when I was in Nitro. The president of our label said to me 'I want you to overplay all the time'. I got typecast by that but I realised something. I thought I could turn this into a business model and I did. McDonalds is known for hamburgers - not pizzas, so if I'm typecast, I'll go with it. If people call me a shredder and they mean it in a derogatory way, I don't care, It happened to Franz Liszt after all. They accused him of being a 'virtuoso' and they meant it as an insult!"

Another smart move was tying-up with Dean guitars, which has made a more creative commercial use of the MAB image than most guitar companies do with their endorsers. There

[...>]



A full-page photograph of Michael Angelo Batio, a guitarist with long dark hair, wearing a black jacket and playing a double-neck electric guitar with a fiery, flame-like finish. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark, industrial-looking setting with metal beams and chains.

I was playing over and under the neck and doing things that were different and they were getting me noticed.”

are now eight Dean MAB guitars, a pickup, a T-Rex pedal and, of course, the legendary double V-shaped twin neck guitar, enabling him to make full use of his rare ability to play ambidextrously, producing two separate parts with each hand. Then, astonishingly, there is also the Quad guitar which had originally debuted with Nitro and which was recreated for him by Dean in 2007.

“You asked me about getting typecast and that connects with the guitars too. If somebody can make a parody of you, then you’ve created an image - you’ve created a brand - and that’s what a lot of people miss. Having my own Dean guitars, having the double guitar - it’s a brand. I was using a guitar that was different. I was playing over and under the neck and doing things that were different and they were getting me noticed.”

Coming soon from the MAB is a ‘Tribute to Rock’ guitar show, recently premiered in Las Vegas - a historical timeline of Rock guitar starting with Clapton and even including a part where Batio, paying tribute to Jimi Hendrix, plays a left-handed guitar,

left handed. “I’ve got that and I’m working on a new solo album, too. It will be all original material, apart from an arty, fusionish, version of Still of the Night - it’s really cool. So I have that, I’m still very tight with Dean guitars and we’ve got confirmations for clinics up to October next year already. But the show will eventually supersede everything. We’ve already had offers to play in Russia, Italy, Slovenia - so we’ll be doing more of these concerts as it grows.”

Shred-fan or not, you have to admire Michael Angelo Batio’s clear-headed understanding of how a guitarist can make a living in a dog eat dog industry, without succumbing to the record company machine. And if you actually pause to listen to what the man plays, beyond the image, MAB just happens to be a very interesting musician, too.





# Flying High

STEVE HOWE

Steve Howe is a guitarist's guitarist, with a formidable technique. Both as part of the pioneering Yes and as a solo artist, he holds a unique position among his contemporaries. Jamie Humphries met-up with Steve shortly after the debut of Yes's new album *Fly From Here* for our video interview. Here Jamie presents a brief profile of the great man to go with an exclusive style analysis in our Tech Sessions.

If there has ever been someone who has embraced the guitar in all its depths it has to be Steve Howe. His technical prowess, understanding of a multitude of styles and genres, plus his unorthodox equipment choices, have helped him explore the guitar sounds in his head for nearly four decades. He has won countless awards from both the record industry and the guitar industry for his contributions to guitar and modern rock music. As Yes embarked on yet another tour, I was lucky enough to spend some time with Steve and chat with him, for this issue's video interview.

Born in North London in 1947, as a young boy Steve was drawn towards the music of Bill Haley and the Comets, Les Paul, Jimmy Byant, Chet Atkins, and Speedy West, all of whom fuelled the 12 year old's passion for guitar. His first instrument was an f-holed acoustic, which inspired his later choice of hallmark guitar, the Gibson ES175.

## 1970 was the turning point in this long career

Steve began playing pubs and dance halls and joined the Syndicats in the early '60s releasing three singles and working with legendary producer, Joe Meek. Later, Steve began working as a session guitarist, both in the studio and touring with a number of different artists.

1970 was the turning point in this long career, when Howe joined the newly formed band, Yes. He had been approached by two other major fledgling Prog Rock bands, the Nice and Jethro Tull, but it was in Yes that he found the perfect vehicle and partnerships to push his musical boundaries and experiment with odd time signatures,

[...&gt;]



extended arrangements that didn't conform to regular three minute popular music arrangements still being demanded by most record labels. The music composed by Howe and Yes took on the form of pieces more like classical compositions than Pop. Steve even had the chance to embrace his love of acoustic fingerstyle guitar, with his solo piece "Clap" being recorded live and included on The Yes Album.

Yes have gone through many line-up change and legal battles over the years, but the period with Steve Howe during the '70s is seen by most commenters as the band's classic period, producing unmatched progressive Rock albums like The Yes Album, Fragile, Close to the Edge and Going for the One. Howe has had an on-off relationship with the band as an entity down the years and has performed under the banner of

Yes, Anderson, Bruford, Wakeman and Howe and, later, as the ultimate Yes line up, including both Steve Howe and Trevor Rabin on guitar for the Union album.

But Yes was very far from Steve Howe's only internationally successful mega-band. Asia, formed in the early 80's by Howe, Carl Palmer, John Wetton and Geoff Downes, was also a huge influence, though after only a couple of albums Howe left the band. He has worked with Asia on few occasions since, including contributing guitar for the 2001 release Aura, which features a number of other high profile guitarists, and also for a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary tour, in 2006.

Other Steve Howe projects have included GTR with Steve Hackett from fellow UK Prog giants Genesis (featured in Guitar Interactive issue 5). The short-lived



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band split after just one album, although their debut went gold. Steve also performed a classical guitar solo on the title track of Queen's album *Innudendo*, released in 1991.

And then there has been a very successful solo career, starting with his first album *Beginnings*, released in 1975. Solo albums have continued to flow ever since, culminating in his latest solo offering *Time*.

Oh, and did I forget to mention his Steve Howe Trio, and also his work with UK acoustic jazz fingerstyle legend Martin Taylor? As I said, Steve is one of those guitarists you struggle to categorise and few of his contemporaries can match his breadth of stylistic reach, let alone equal his prodigious technique. Listen to the lovely acoustic track, *Solitaire*, from the latest Yes album, *Fly From Here*, to hear the work of a guitarist at the peak of his powers!

Gearwise, Steve Howe has his own signature models from Gibson, including a Steve Howe signature ES-175, as well as a Martin acoustic guitar. For the current Yes tour, however, Steve has broken the mould again, adopting high-tech in the form of a POD HD and Line 6 Tyler Variax guitars and the latest Line 6 amps - both of which we've reviewed in this issue.

Editor's Note: Just as we were closing for this issue, Yes announced the release of a two album live set - *In The Present - Live From Lyon*. It's a live CD recorded in Lyon, France on December 1st 2009. As a blend of old and new Yes material it's a great showcase for the band and, as you'd expect, Steve Howe simply shines.



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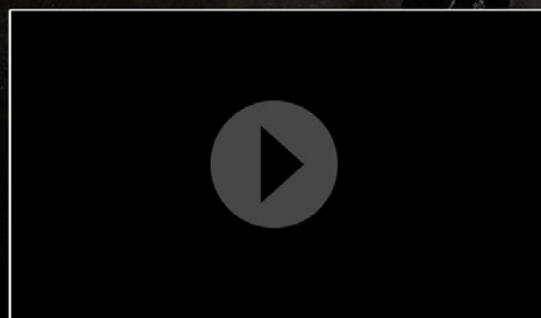
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# GOLDEN SHRED!

To celebrate our Shrapnel Records feature, and Jason Becker's account of his career, **Jamie Humphries** presents a Shrapnel Jam session, featuring, the riffs, the licks and the style of some of Shrapnel's masters of shred. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to shred till you drop!

For me, the artists at Shrapnel records recorded and produced some of the most inspiring guitar albums of the '80s. Guitarists such as Jason Becker, Marty Friedman, Yngwie Malmsteen, Paul Gilbert, Greg Howe and Richie Kotzen were at the forefront of the technical instrumental guitar movement, and produced ground breaking that defined the genre. This new era of guitarist made such techniques as alternate picking, sweep picking, economy picking, and tapping part of every day practice vocabulary for guitarists all over the world. They were also responsible for guitarists wanting to understand theory, and modes, and explore more exotic modes of the major scale, as well as Harmonic minor - and in the case of Jason and Marty, experiment with exotic Japanese scales. Then there were the guitars; colourful, pointy, and with fast flat necks for optimum shred capabilities! And of course there was Yngwie, although he played a Strat, the Stradivarius of the electric guitar as he called it, Yngwie scalloped his fret boards for ultimate speed, and a wide vibrato.

The track I have put together for this tech session, is pretty tricky, and although it only clocks in at 140bpm, it's to be played with a double time feel, so the equivalent to 240bpm!

The track is divided into three sections; the first section, **Section A**, features a harmony E harmonic minor line, concluded with the B/D# chord performed with accents, with the bass and drums.

**Section B**, is our verse and is based around a series of two note chords performed on the A and the D strings against the muted low E string, while the bass guitar underpins the harmony with a driving E note through out. The two note chords are all diatonic to the G major scale, and out line chords VI, V, and IV, before concluding with the chords of G5, and D5/A. The tone for this should be pretty distorted, but cut some of the lower frequencies, so the sound is slightly thinner than more modern metal, and add a healthy dose of stereo chorus. Checkout early Racer X, or Cacophony, for that mid '80s tone; think ADA MP1 preamp, and Alesis Midiverb chorus!



"This new era of guitarist made such techniques as alternate picking, sweep picking, economy picking, and tapping part of every day practice"



Section C is our chorus and is based around the A Aeolian mode, mode VI of the C major scale. For this section once again we pedal off of the root note, which for this section is the open A string. We imply the mode with the chords of A5, Am7, F/A and G5, which are accented against the tight driven root note.

Our first solo is over Section B, and kicks off with a Jason Becker inspired lick that is based around a Japanese Pentatonic scale based around E minor. This scale differs from a regular minor pentatonic, as it consists of the following intervallic structure; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, b3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and b6<sup>th</sup>. This symmetrical pattern crosses the neck and concludes with an E minor pentatonic phrase.

Our next phrase is also based around our Japanese pentatonic scale. This lick makes use of wide intervals and is inspired by both Jason and Marty, and has a very exotic flavour.



Our next lick is Jason and Yngwie inspired fast picking sequence that covers a large portion of the neck. Pay attention to the bends that conclude this lick. Our next figure is pure Paul Gilbert, and includes a figure that uses Paul's signature string skipping arpeggios. Our first solo concludes with some Yngwie inspired diminished 7<sup>th</sup> arpeggios that shift up the top three strings in minor thirds, and use sweep picking.

Our next solo is based around Section C, and sees us modulating to A minor. The solo kicks off with a simple stylistic phrase, that follows the chord changes, and its function is to add a little more melody, as opposed to being so lick based, and also to give you some breathing space! Our next lick is a cool Paul Gilbert Blues lick, which is a loop pattern, that is great for building speed, and is based around the A Blues scale. Our next phrase is a Richie Kotzen figure that demonstrates his fluid legato style and covers large sections of the neck. Our next lick includes some Yngwie inspired triad arpeggios based around Am and G major arpeggios. From this we conclude the chorus section with some larger Jason Becker inspired arpeggio's that feature Jason's slightly unorthodox fingerings, and wide stretches.

Our final solo is performed over the B section, and kicks off with a very large arpeggio based around Em9, and uses a mixture of sweep picking and legato, and

[...>]



also tapping. The lick is concluded with one of Richie's signature bluesy unison bends. The necks lick is inspired by Richie Kotzen, Greg Howe and Jason Becker, and is a lick that crosses the E minor pentatonic scale using a barring technique. Our next lick is another Richie lick, and utilizes wide stretches based around E minor pentatonic, embellished with some tapping. The licks also shift positions, performing the same phrase an octave lower on the D and G strings. Our next lick is inspired by Michael Lee Firkins, and makes use of 6<sup>th</sup> intervals played on the top two strings, and performed with whammy bar scoops, as they ascend up the neck. Our neck lick is based on both Greg Howe and Darren Householder, and

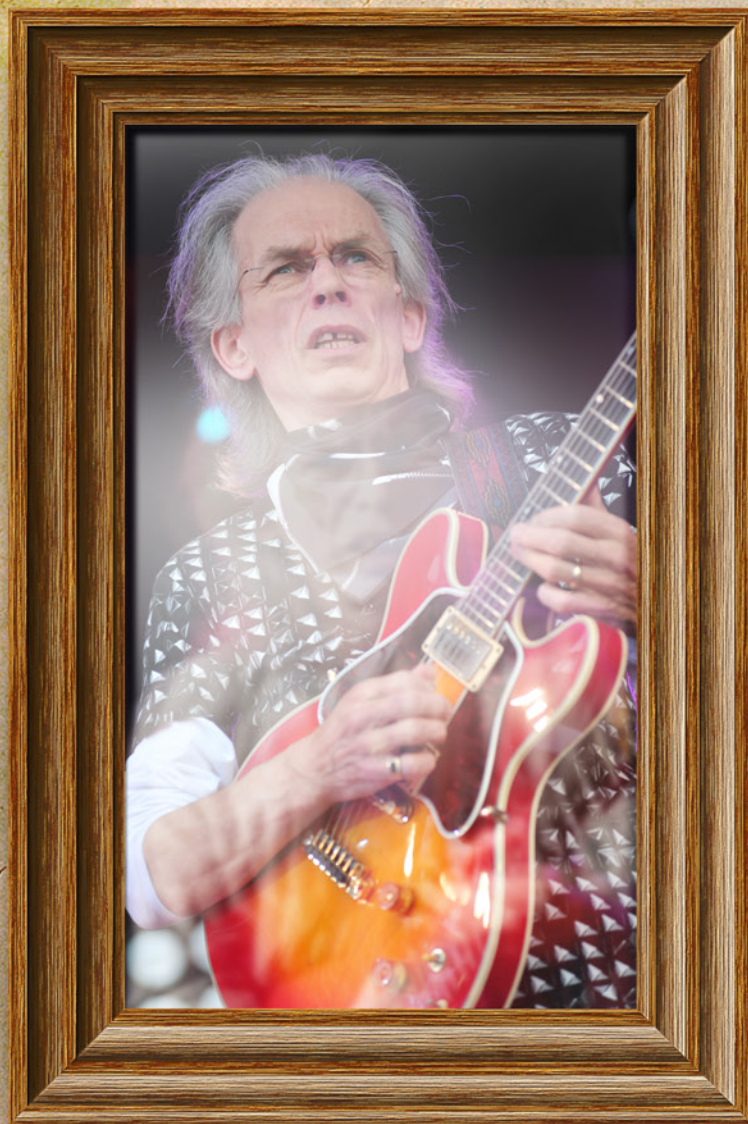
makes use of two G major arpeggios shapes based around the A and C shapes, performed with sweeps, then a series of taps and left hand hammer-ons. Our neck lick is another Paul Gilbert wide stretch pentatonic idea that uses string skipping and tapping, which concludes with a Greg Howe ascending and descending scale run that uses 3 note per-string ideas with tapping. The solo concludes with our intro figure performed and octave higher and concluded with some unison bends.

Good Luck!



[Click here](#) for Part 2 of the Shrapnel Feature, with an exclusive contribution from Jason Becker.





# HOW?

To coincide with this month's interview and player profile, **Jamie Humphries** offers a study piece in the style of Prog Rock legend Steve Howe..

Coming up with a track to demonstrate the playing style of someone like Steve Howe was never going to be easy, due to the huge breadth of musical styles and genres he includes in his playing. So for this month's piece I have chosen to highlight just a few of his common playing traits, such as odd time signatures, arpeggios, scale runs, open string ideas and chord arpeggios figures. We could have dedicated a couple of

tech session on Mr Howe, but hopefully you will enjoy my offering!

To start off with let's talk tone. Steve is very particular about his tone, using Gibsons, Fenders, Rickenbackers and Martin acoustics. He also uses Fender lap steel guitars. For years he has used Fender twins, split in stereo using stereo digital delays, reverbs, and vintage tape echoes, as well as various stomp boxes including Treble Boosters

(being a Rory Gallagher fan, like Brian May) and also fuzz units. These days, perhaps surprisingly for someone who strikes one as a bit of a purist, Steve has opted for the modelling route. He currently favours Line 6 combos and a POD HD floor unit. As he told me in our interview, to save carrying a multitude of expensive and rare guitars he has started to use Line 6 Tyler Variax guitars, enabling him to choose a

wide variety of vintage electric and acoustic guitars, and integrate their sounds with it with the POD and the amp.

Steve also told me he worked with a producer, really nailing each tone for the chosen song and programming the sounds prior to the tour. So for our session I use the Tyler Variax and the Line 6 DT25 head. I also used a rather splendid handwired Top Tone DG2 fuzz pedal and a Dunlop EVH wah pedal.

Our track is presented in several sections, and is as follows;

Section A kicks off with a funky wah figure with a pull-off lick that is based around the E minor pentatonic scale, and makes use of the open strings in the open position. Make sure you "pump" the wah

back and fourth as you strike the muted strings.

Section B enters with an up-tempo groove with the bass guitar playing a figure based around B Mixolydian. During this section we have used the triads of B, A and E major, V, IV and I of E major respectively, outlining the tonal centre of B Mixolydian. I have included some additional voicings of these triads higher up the neck for additional tonal variation.

Section C is our first solo, and makes use of triad arpeggios performed on the top three strings. This section makes use of several diatonic arpeggios and also includes a fast descending three note per string B Mixolydian run. Take care with this section as it's pretty fast tempo wise and includes



[...>]



quite a few position shifts, so practice this slowly to start with and build up the tempo gradually, making sure the lines and arpeggios are clean and accurate. This section concludes with a short arpeggio figure based around D major, F major, E minor and G major, before concluding with a D/F# triad.

Section D is our odd time section and is based around 7/4, meaning we

now have seven quarter note beats to a bar. For this section we have modulated to the key of E Phrygian, the third mode of C major. Once again we have used a series of chord arpeggios, that outline our mode. Pay attention to our new time signature, as this may take some getting used to!

Section E is our final section and features a free-form legato based solo performed entirely on the

G string, based around E Phrygian. This solo makes use of open strings, and I would urge you to experiment with some licks of your own. Also try kicking in some fuzz and dialling in some vintage echo for an authentic tone. The solo concludes with our arpeggio figure at the end of our C section. Good Luck!!



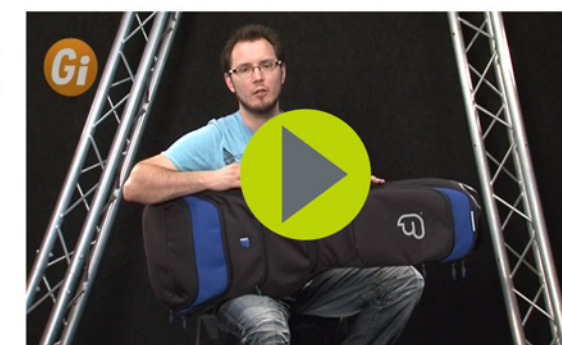
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# MAB to the Max!

## This issue - MAB on Alternate Picking.

I am known for my alternate picking technique, but I actually started out playing mostly legato passages in my early years of learning the guitar. I am left handed, so it seemed the path of least resistance to use my fret board hand to play extremely fast legato passages. It wasn't until I was playing the guitar for just over five years (15 years old) that I started really critically listening to guitarists like George Benson, Joe Pass, Al DiMeola, Robert Fripp, etc... and realized they were picking a lot more notes than I was. I absolutely loved the aggressive sound of their playing!

Now, I was on a quest to learn this technique. I asked myself the question - how does one pick fast? I listened, learned and watched everyone I could, in every style, to find the answer. I taught myself alternate picking. I came up with my own exercises and later on, was able to find books that showed me shapes of what to play, but not really how to play them. I am not saying in any way that I invented every exercise I practice. There just weren't the resources available for the electric guitar at that time, so I came up with my own ways of doing things.

What I am imparting to you in this lesson is the culmination of years of research and experience. The musical (and alternate picking) epiphany for

me was when I came to the realization that guitar players have many more differences in their technique than similarities. Many times I have been asked the question regarding someone's technique - "am I doing this right?" That is an extremely important question. I asked myself that question and at that time, I had to find out the answer for myself. I have an unusual way of holding my pick and striking the strings, so this was very important to know and feel confident that just because I was playing a different way, that wasn't necessarily a "bad thing." I discovered I did the "little things" with regards to my picking technique that other great players did. I sincerely hope this helps!

Guitar Interactive is thrilled to welcome one of the crowned kings of shredding and metal guitar to the team - Michael Angelo Batio! In this issue Michael begins a short series of tech columns giving you an exclusive insight into the style and technique of the man regularly voted by fellow guitarists the world's greatest shredder!





# THE RHYTHM METHOD

**Jamie Humphries takes a look at a shuffle in the style of Texan blues trio ZZ Top.**

For this installment of The Rhythm Method, we're going to take a look at a rock/blues shuffle. Although I've chosen ZZ Top as our source of inspiration this month, other such classic rock bands as Deep Purple and Whitesnake are also renowned for crossing over Blues into Rock in the form of a shuffle. I am not for one moment looking to make this column all about Blues, and that's why this month's track has a more Rock feel to it, but being able to play a shuffle well in any musical genre is a tricky thing and needs to be studied. Also the general playing technique, controlling the picking hand, keeping the timing tight, and being accurate with the picking hand. Playing a lazy feeling shuffle can sometimes make your technique sloppy and we need to keep things clean and controlled, especially with this month's example piece.

To start with, let's look at the technical approaches used this month. First of all, how we construct the riff. This month's riff is based around the concept of playing notes of a pentatonic scale in pairs on

adjacent strings. This concept should be familiar to most if not all guitarists, that is if you've ever played "Smoke on the Water" or "Burn". We can expand on this idea and perform the entire scale across the entire fingerboard in diatonic 3<sup>rd</sup>'s and 4<sup>th</sup>'s. If you start to experiment with the scale in this way you will hear pretty quickly the melodic possibilities that open up to you, and you can also hear how relatively easy it is to come up with cool sounding riffs pretty quickly. You should instantly start to hear famous riffs under your fingers and for a demonstration of this check out the video lesson.

Now let's look at the shuffle technique and how it differs from normal straight rhythm. The idea of a shuffle, or a swung rhythm as it is sometimes called, is that the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the beat is slightly longer than the 2<sup>nd</sup>, giving it an uneven swing feel. A beat can be made to have an uneven feel that doesn't swing, so it's important that when you practice playing a shuffle, you base it around a triplet feel, which means you count 1 2 3, on each beat. If we look at an eighth

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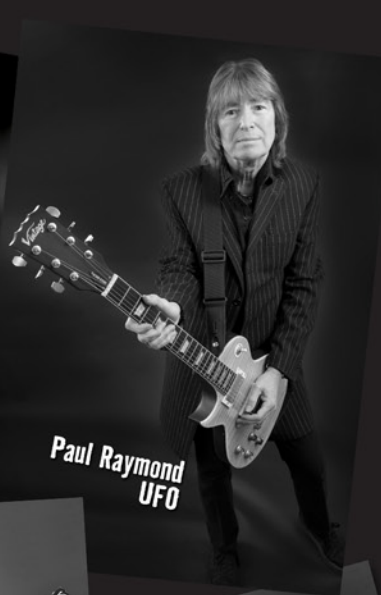
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*Dave 'Bucket' Colwell*

Dave 'Bucket' Colwell  
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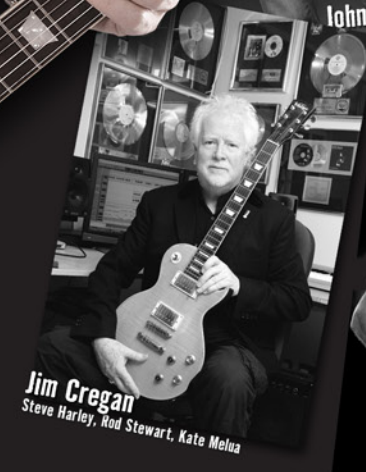
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## "The tricky thing about this riff is keeping the swing rhythm consistent"

note triplet, you can see that it is made up from three eighth notes. Two eighth notes are the same as one quarter note, so if we replace the first two eighth notes of the triplet with a quarter note, we have one eighth note left, resulting in a quarter note/eighth note rhythm, or a broken triplet. This will give use our swing feel. Once again be sure to check this out in the video.

Now let's take a look at our piece, and the form of the track. The rack is made up of three different sections; A, B and C sections. The A section is our main riff and is based around a figure based around the G minor pentatonic performed on pairs of strings. The tricky thing about this riff is keeping the swing rhythm consistent as you swap between the doubled notes of the scale and the G root note performed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret of the 6<sup>th</sup> string. This section also includes the blues based chords of C5-C6, Eb5-Eb6 and Bb5-Bb6. The A section is repeated several times, but the final time I have included a couple of inversions, just to add variation, and also include an idea that we have seen in a previous lesson, to see how these ideas will continue to appear in your playing and not just in a lesson here!

The B section kicks off with the Eb5-Eb6 chords, plus a higher register Gm7, performed with a tight triplet rhythm palm muted root note. The section concludes with

a heavily accented D7#9 that follows the bass and drums, before leading back into the A section.

The C section is something a little different and I wanted to demonstrate some movement with chords over a static root note. This idea is reminiscent of something the Ritchie Blackmore would have played. For this section I have chosen to treat our G tonal centre as a V chord, giving the track a bluesy dominant feel. As G is now a V chord for this section, it is being seen as the V chord of C major. With in any key there are three major chords, three minor chords and one diminished chord. The major chords are constructed on the I, IV and V of the scale, and in the key of C major these are C, F and G major respectively. It is possible to imply the sound of any mode by performing the I, VI and V triads over the top of the root of the chosen mode, in this instance we shall perform C, F and G major over the G root, resulting in C/G and F/G, and giving us a strong Mixolydian sound.

As you can see from the above, and also our video, this month's track has quite a bit going on, but the end result should prove very rewarding. Be sure to pay attention to the tone suggestions in the video! Good luck!



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## USEFUL LINKS

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





## PART 5 - Triad improvisation

# GUITAR ROADMAPS

Practicing scales is undoubtedly a fantastic method of unlocking the fingerboard for the advancing guitarist. However, it is not the only way to do it. One extremely effective way of helping us to gain much more fretboard knowledge is working with chord shapes and the best way to start is with the simplest type of chord: the triad.

At this point you may well be thinking 'well I already know my open chords and barre chords so how is this going to help me?' and you'd be forgiven for thinking so however, what we are going to do is approach these triads in a way which I'm sure is completely new to you.

What we are going to do is take the three major triads which belong in the key of A, which are A major(I), D major(IV) and E major(V). Our next step is really where this approach comes into its own and demonstrates the the power of limitation.

What we are going to do is play these triads in that same order i.e. I - IV - V but only using three strings at a time. Starting with the E, A and D strings we play the first available A major triad followed by the closest available D triad which is then followed by the closest available E triad. By following this limitation you will be ascending through various different root position and inversion shapes of those three triads, which will eventually lead to you to the first shape that we started with but one octave higher.

Following the same principle we then move our triad shapes to the next available string group, which is the A, D and G strings. Again, we play the root position and inversion triads until we reach the first shape but one octave higher. We continue this with the D, G and B strings and finally finish by applying these shapes to the G, B and E strings.

You see what I mean? Playing triads in this fashion is something that really is overlooked far too much by guitarists as doing this can not only help unlock the fretboard for you, but can also be an invaluable tool for improving your improvising, especially when you are looking to target those chord tones.

The next step is to allocate a time frame for each of the triads within our backing track and for this I have allocated an harmonic pace of two beats. The backing track is in common time (4/4) so it follows that we will have a cycle of A for two beats, D for two beats, E for the first two beats of the next bar and then A again for the last two beats of bar two. The cycle then repeats.

Once you have practiced those triads in ascending order and feel comfortable with all of those shapes everywhere on the fingerboard, it's time to start improvising

with them. Take your time and be sure that you really know where those shapes lie. If you find yourself struggling, be sure to stop and go back to working on memorising the shapes.

When you are comfortable with that, it's time to have a go at improvising single note lines. This is even more challenging! Remember to play the notes of each given triad during the allotted time frame. No other notes are allowed.

This study is essentially what we could call a limitation exercise as we are taking only the notes of the aforementioned triads and we are limiting ourselves to them. This is an extremely challenging method of practicing but persevere with it and the rewards are well worth it. Best of luck!





# PLAYING OVER MODAL CHANGES USING FORMULAS

One of the problems that many guitarists face when trying to get some changes playing under their belt is the sheer number of scales and patterns that must be learnt. If you take the major scale for example, it has seven different modes built from each of its notes. If you then imagine that those scales must be learnt in all 12 keys that's 84 different scales to learn! That's before we've even started with melodic minor and harmonic minor and their modes let alone the diminished scale and other synthetic scales. This is daunting to say the least – yet it needn't be if approached correctly.

Every scale that we play has what's called a formula and it describes how the notes in that scale differ intervallically from the major scale. The major scale has a seven-note formula because it contains seven unique notes. We simply number the notes from 1 to 7 giving us the formula: -

**Major Scale – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7**

Play through the major scale and number the notes for yourself through each octave getting used to where each interval within the scale is. Every other mode of the major scale has a formula that differs in some way from the major scale itself. If the interval is flattened we simply lower it by one fret, if the interval is sharpened we raise it by one fret. Here are all the formulas for the major scale modes. Once you've learned these we'll

figure out a way to make learning these much easier.

**Dorian Scale – 1 2 b3 4 5 6 b7**

**Phrygian Scale – 1 b2 b3 4 5 b6 b7**

**Lydian Scale – 1 2 3 #4 5 6 7**

**Mixolydian Scale – 1 2 3 4 5 6 b7**

**Aeolian Scale – 1 2 b3 4 5 b6 b7**

**Locrian Scale – 1 b2 b3 4 b5 b6 b7**

Try to figure out each scale through one octave using the major scale as your base.

This formula idea makes learning these scales much easier than looking at patterns and trying to learn them in all 12 keys all over the neck. First of all, start with the root note for each scale and learn what the first interval of the major scale looks like on the fret board. This would be 1 moving to 2 or C to D in C major. Try to find every combination of these two notes that is within a reasonable stretch of your root note in each octave. Now move to another root note and repeat the process mapping out what all the 1 to 2 combinations look like all over the neck.

Now, look back at our modes and you'll see that you've learnt the first two notes of Major, Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian and Aeolian. Because you were doing this from the root note if you change the root note the physical relationship between the root note

[...>]

THE  
**Tom Quayle**  
COLUMN



and the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree is still the same. In other words it looks the same anywhere on the neck. Now repeat the process for the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree, then 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> etc trying to visualise all of those intervals from the root note of the scale making a reference in your mind as to how they look in relation to one another.

Over a period of time you'll build up a catalogue of interval relationships and be able to find any interval from any root note on the fret board. You have twelve intervals in music so once you've learned all twelve you will be able to play any scale from any root note provided you know the formula for that scale. On the video I demonstrate this principle for each of the major scale modes

and then improvise over a chord progression that outlines each mode in turn.

In order for you to practice playing over each mode in turn and learn the intervals within the scales I have also provided you with a chord shape that outlines the sound of each mode. You can play these chords and create a backing track over which you can improvise using the relevant modes using your new-found intervallic knowledge to help you.

Good luck with this method and I'll see you next month!



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## Guitar Interactive's Issue 4 Rotosound Strings Giveaway!

# AND THE WINNER IS.....

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The lucky winners, chosen entirely at random from registered readers of Guitar Interactive were:

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Ondrax Kolarik  
*from Kromeriz in the Czech Republic*

Samuel Martins  
*from Feijo, Portugal*

Linda Mayson  
*from Poole, UK*

David Rolo  
*from Brussels, Belgium*

## CONGRATULATIONS!

The lucky winners will be receiving their prizes soon, courtesy of Rotosound - Christmas post delays depending, no doubt!





A black and white photograph of Mike Casswell, a man with long, wavy hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. He is holding a light-colored electric guitar with a dark pickguard and a maple neck. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Mike Casswell

## PRO CONCEPTS

Hi everyone. This issue I wanted to get you thinking about slide playing. As long as you get a few fundamental key areas correct, you can have yet another cool sound and colour that will give weight and kudos to your reputation as a player to be taken seriously.

Like a lot of other areas on the guitar, slide playing seems to be one of those techniques that comes easy to some and takes a while with others. Strictly speaking, there is no right or wrong way to use a slide. The only way you know it's right is when, and if, it sounds cool. If it sounds messy, pitchy or simply rubbish, then you know you are doing it wrong.

When I was a kid, there was no internet to visually check other players using a bottleneck, or to get tips and lessons on how to use one. Even the word "bottleneck" seemed shrouded in mystery. All I knew was that a few of my favourite players occasionally made this fantastic sliding sound

that I loved. Joe Walsh, Rory Gallagher and Jeff Beck spring to mind, but there was also Eric on a Dobro, as well as Ry Cooder and probably the best slide player there has ever been, Sonny Landreth, who is just untouchable and simply in a different league when it comes to specialist slide playing.

The thing I always found a pain was the idea of having a spare guitar that should be set up for slide, and maybe tuned to a chord. For most of my formative years, I had one guitar which was my old Strat (even back then it was old), which had a low action and a floating trem for the odd Hank like waggle. But ideally for slide, you should have a fixed bridge, and strings half a mile away from the fretboard. I didn't have the luxury or the inclination to be so thorough as to have a spare guitar dedicated to the perfect bottleneck style, so I went about making sure I could just pick up a slide and knock out the odd solo in a fairly musical fashion on my one guitar. Everything clicked when I

[...>]



# SO WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO GET RIGHT? WELL YOUR CHOICE OF SLIDE FOR A START.

saw Jeff Beck live, who played his Strat for most of the show, and would just have bottleneckes placed around the stage, which he would occasionally pick up mid song, use, then literally drop on the floor for a roadie to rush on and place back on the drum riser. That's the sort of slide style I was into. Years later, I was lucky enough to play in Brian May's band on his first solo tour shortly after the death of Freddie, and he would keep his slide in the buckle of his leather guitar strap, which would come out for the odd solo, then when finished, be put back safe in its notch. My point being, with the right technique, and the correct choice of Bottleneck, it literally can be another aspect and colour you can add to your playing, with your regular guitar, using regular tuning and set up.

So what do you have to get right? Well, your choice of slide for a start. If you are using a really nice medium to low action on your guitar, then things are all made very much easier if you choose a light glass slide, rather than a thick heavy brass or steel monstrosity. Anyone who talks about better tone with the "piece of steel pipe they sawed off their granny's plumbing", is probably all talk, and cruel to old people. A glass slide gives a great tone, and most of the tone comes from the player rather than material used anyway. A small light glass slide will enable you to get that delicate touch you need more quickly, when using a low action. Next would be pitching and vibrato of the note. This has to be right or it's game over. Make sure you can slide from low down the neck, right up to somewhere around the 12th fret, stop on the note directly above the fret, and make the note sing with

a sweet lyrical vibrato. It sounds easy, but to do it in such a way that sounds stylistically correct, and speaks musically, is much harder than you think. As with regular vibrato, if your bottleneck vibrato sucks, then again, game over. Think of it as a voice. If a singer has an irritating vocal vib, then they are never going to sound as good as the vocalist that has a beautiful musical vibrato that draws the listener in. It is exactly the same for us gee-tarr players, so I strongly suggest you bear that in mind both in your slide playing, and your regular playing!

I have been in many a recording session where whoever is paying me wants a guitar feature in the song, doesn't know how or what, but knows it is not a big technical solo.

Quite often, the trump card can be me saying "lets try this" and then breaking out the trusty little glass bottleneck, playing a few ideas, at which point everybody jumps out of their seat, gets really buzzed, and thinks you are some kind of guitar magician, and all you really are is someone that can make some cool sounds with a slide. Trust me, it works. The snag is you have to have some ideas, and technique to make them think you are a magician, but that goes with all areas of guitar and generally any instrument.

And if you are actually a magician, who plays guitar, well how cool would that be!!



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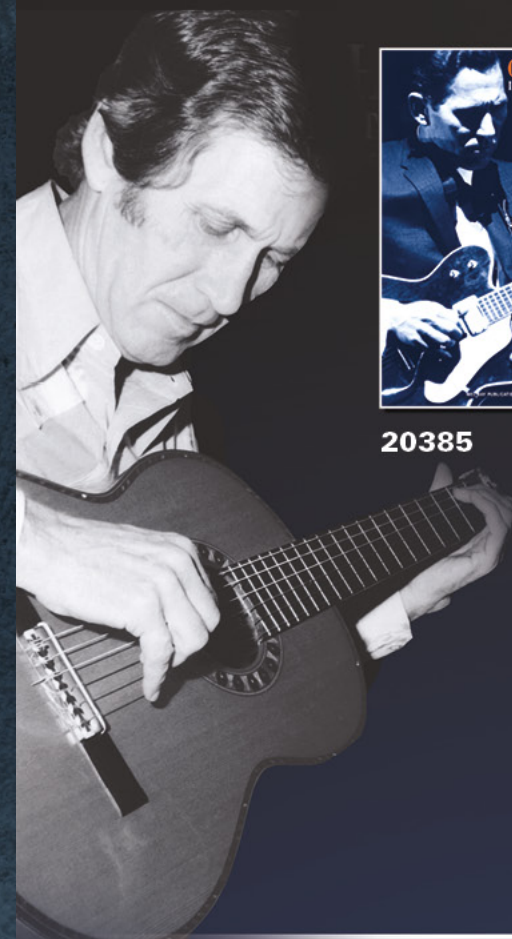
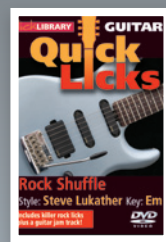
This is a big subject, and we could have filmed another hour, but I hope there is enough here to get you started, or to think about your current fundamental slide playing. I talk about being able to see and outline simple chord tones, as well as being able to play lines in the scale. Plus we have some fun with harmonics towards the end. It's the similar theme on all my Pro Concept column, where I try to show you how to think creatively, and how I might develop simple ideas into some musically strong guitar playing. Hope you like it and you can always let me know how you are doing by clicking Like on my Michael Casswell band/ musician Facebook page, or by getting in

touch on my Lick Library Q & A forum.

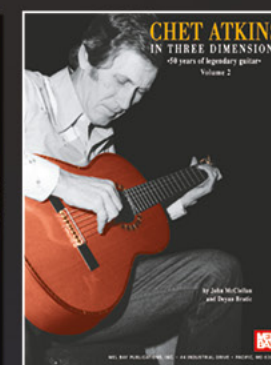
Hope you all have a great Christmas period and New Year (where does the time go?).



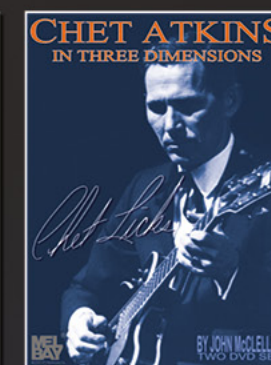
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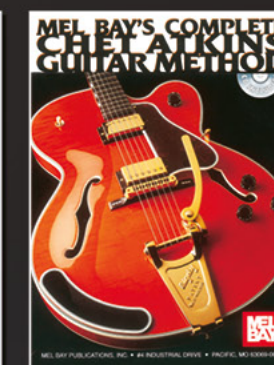
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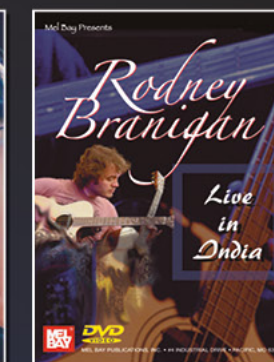
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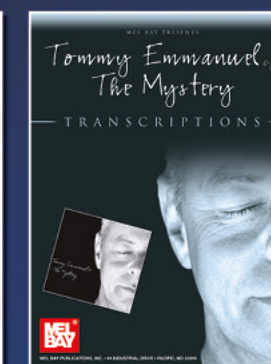


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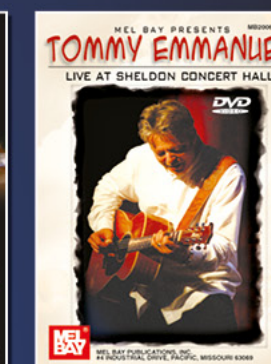
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# METAL EDGE

By Andy James

Who better for our special shred and speed issue, than **Andy James** to show us how? In the first of a specially commissioned three parter Andy teaches us -

## HOW TO PLAY FAST.

Hello and welcome to this issue of Guitar Interactive magazine. In this issue we are going to tackle part one of a three part tutorial on how to play fast.

Playing fast is quite often the thing that seems to grab most people's attention straight away, and done right can leave your audience baffled by your amazing agility on the guitar. Unfortunately this is not a skill any of us are born with - but it's one that everyone has the ability to possess if they are willing to put in a lot of hard dedication and a side order of practice, practice, practice!

Playing fast and playing fast musically are very different things, and it's the latter that often gets overlooked in the pursuit of breakneck speed. These examples are more like drills than musical exercises for one simple purpose and that is training. Training your brain to think faster, to the point where it becomes sub-conscious, is the key to playing long lines at a fast tempo without thinking about each individual note. It also trains your muscle stamina so you don't get fatigued easily. This, you may have heard

referred to as muscle memory. Like anything, it takes time to build muscle strength and you need to practice these examples over and over and over again. I cannot stress that enough! Familiarity is going to make your life a lot easier in the long run, and if you can spend as much time with the instrument as possible, you will greatly shorten the period in which you will see vast returns of speed and accuracy!

### LIICK 1:

This is a simple legato lick that just needs to be practised slow and then sped-up gradually until you're confident it's clean and smooth. Keeping the notes nice and even is especially important when it comes to speeding this up. Once you are comfortable with this, try to introduce alternate picking with the right hand, starting with a down stroke. Again practice it slowly and gradually speed up. When you feel you have mastered both techniques, try and alternate between the two techniques (see my video for an example of how to do this)

[...&gt;]



**LICK 2:**

This lick is the extended version of lick one, where you are stretching to involve the 17th fret (this is more of a pentatonic approach). Like lick one, practice the legato first, then the alternate picking. Then when you have these down, alternate between the two techniques. Also try moving between lick one and lick two while practising both legato and alternate picking techniques. This is really good training, although the example is not the most enthralling - but it's training so no pain, no gain!

**LICK 3:**

What this lick is expressing is the ability to just add a more usable sequenced pattern that, when used over a whole scale shape, can be very useful. Again, practice both legato and alternate picking and then alternate between the two (see the video for an example)

**LICK 4:**

Using the same extension as lick two, just apply the new pattern to that shape and go through both techniques until you are firing on all cylinders. This may take a while

but stick with it, you want to blow your audience away don't you?.....

**LICK 5:**

These next two licks are Yngwie Malmsteen inspired licks that are great for alternate picking and they all use just use the high E string. This is a descending version, which out of the two is the slightly easier. Remember to practice this slow and pay attention to your accuracy!

**LICK 6:**

This is the other half of lick five -the slightly more awkward ascending version. This is using the same notes but you will have to pay attention to your co-ordination.

Okay, it's time to get stuck into part one because part two is only round the corner so you better be ready! Until next time, keep rockin'

**\_CHECK OUT THE DVD's****USEFUL LINKS**

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





# Stuart Bull's

## GUITAR WORLD

### hybrid picking

Hi everyone and welcome to my latest column for iGuitar!

This month we are looking at some more hybrid picking ideas to add to what we have learned so far. Up to now we have pretty much used the hybrid picking technique to move between strings that are right beside each other, 1st and 2nd string, 2nd and third string etc. This time around we're going to introduce "string skipping" into the mix. String skipping has

been around for a good while and players such as Eric Johnson and Nuno Bettencourt have used it to great effect - the former using it with both hybrid and regular picking. In order to string skip at speed with alternate picking you have a fair amount of distance to travel with your picking hand. Imagine you pick the third string then wish to immediately pick the first string, you have the distance between the two to deal with plus making sure you don't bump into the 2nd string on your way across. By using the hybrid picking technique once you have picked the third string, the second finger of your right hand is conveniently resting upon the first string ready to pluck it. The distance has been eliminated along with any chance of hitting the string between the two you wish to play!

OK, the first lick moves from position one of the Em pentatonic scale ( E G A B D ) up to position two where the first string skip

is performed. Following this section we move back down to position one to finish off the lick. If you have any problems performing any parts of the lick, try and make up mini exercises to help with the bits you are having trouble with e.g. if you play the first seven notes of the lick over and over you have a great exercise working your pick and second finger. You also have a cool seven note odd grouping hybrid picking lick!

Moving on to lick number two, we see the hybrid picking technique used to great effect as we move through three positions by string skipping from the third string to the first string then sliding down to the next position. We start off at position one, move down to position five then move down to position four, at this point we move across the neck moving down one more time to finish in position three. This lick is a great advert for hybrid picking because playing it



[...>]





at full speed using just regular picking would not be impossible but certainly would be very challenging indeed!

Lick number three uses the same concept as lick number two in terms of using string skipping and sliding to move between positions. The lick starts off in position two of the Em pentatonic scale then shifts down to position one. We then see a pentatonic run utilising hybrid picking for both string skipping movement along with movement between strings that are next door to each other. This creates a dynamic and unusual line that takes us outside of the "regular" blues/rock style pentatonic run, offering something a little different to the ear.

Here we are with lick number four. This lick basically starts out life as regular

pentatonic idea using hammer-ons and pull-offs combined with slides to shift between positions. We start in position four of the Em pentatonic scale and make our way up to position five, moving up to position one - this is where the hybrid picking technique comes into play. In this section the run starts off pretty similar to previous ideas until we move from the A note to the E note. This idea gives us an interval of a fifth and when played twice in succession we add a contemporary flavour to a classic sounding line.

That's all from me for this issue. I hope you can enjoy the hybrid picking technique as its applications are literally endless. See you next time. Regards Stuart.



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## PAST MASTER

# BERT JANSCH

By Gary Cooper.

Bert Jansch, who died in October this year, may not have been a name too familiar to shredders and Metal fans, but to anyone who has listened to Jimmy Page, Neil Young, Donovan, Elton John, Bernard Butler or Johnny Marr (who played magically well with Jansch), even if they've never actually heard Bert Jansch, they'll have heard his influence - more, in a few cases, as his style and even his compositions have been ruthlessly plundered at times. But as a player of influence, Neil Young, no less, said of Jansch: "As much of a great guitar player as Jimi Hendrix" - which gives you some idea of the esteem he was held in. Young was such an admirer that he regularly toured with Jansch, as recently as this year, in the USA.

Born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1943, Jansch (he pronounced it with a hard 'J' everyone else didn't) was at the core of a revolution in guitar playing that was born in British Folk clubs in the early 1960s. If the late Davey Graham (three years older than Jansch - they met when the latter was 16) was the great pioneer of the era, with his discovery of DADGAD open tuning, exploration of Eastern and Middle Eastern music styles and forms, Jansch wasn't far behind him and what he had in addition was a stylistic rawness and aggression, coupled with a unique voice and serious ability as a songwriter.

The Folk Club scene in early 1960's Britain was a curious melting pot of radical politics, serious scholarship about traditional music and exploration of new musical styles. Centred around a handful of clubs in London, artists came from around the world to drink from the well - including Bob Dylan and Paul Simon from the USA, who certainly drank their fill (Simon in a less than creditable way, blatantly lifting Martin Carthy's version of Scarborough Fair for his first album). Among the contingent were Graham, Jansch, Al Stewart, Martin Carthy, Ralph McTell, John Martyn and the man who would so often work with Jansch - John Renbourn.

Jansch's first hint of stardom came, ironically, with the song, Anji, on his first album from 1965 and written by Davey

[...>]



Graham - though destined to become Jansch's trademark. Heard for the first time today - in an age where technique has advanced a great deal - it may not sound so very far out of the grasp of a decent player, but back in the 1960's Jansch's and Graham's development of fingerstyle acoustic playing was way ahead of anything most had heard and mastering at least a smattering of Anji became compulsory - not least for Paul Simon, who included it on his Simon and Garfunkle album, Sounds of Silence.

To say Jansch was a reluctant star would be a gross understatement. In the early days of his career he would hitch-hike from club to club, not even carrying a guitar - just relying on whatever he could borrow for the gig, and though he was eventually to achieve fame and recognition, it never seemed to make him comfortable and he was, most certainly, never 'a star'.

Steeped in the country Blues of Big Bill Broonzy and Brownie McGhee, he was also schooled in the fashionable Folk influences of the time, including Pete Seeger.

Rapidly established as a major figure on the Folk Club circuit and with his first album a success (albeit a modest one, restricted to Folk fans) he shook the tree again with his next album - the traditionally inspired Jack Orion, where he duetted with John Renbourn but, more importantly, expanded his formidable technique as an acoustic guitarist. And eager to learn from him was the young Jimmy Page, who took Jansch's Black Waterside, mixed it with some of Davey Graham's version of She Moved Through The Fair and created Black Mountainside - Page's solo spot on Zeppelin (and other) gigs, uncredited to either Jansch or Graham and... well, listen and make your own mind up.

Also influenced by Jansch were the young Elton John and Bernie Taupin and if his reputation was largely confined to seriously Folkie circles and musicians of a certain generation; it wasn't by any means confined to them, as Johnny Marr not only openly credits Jansch's influence but frequently recorded and performed with him.

Following Jack Orion, Jansch worked extensively in a guitar duet with Renbourn and then unleashed what was probably the world's first (maybe, with the exception of Planxty, the only) Folk Supergroup - Pentangle. The band achieved rapid success, effortlessly blending traditional music with Jazz influences, touring constantly, even starring at New York's Carnegie Hall as well as London's Royal Albert Hall. But the strain of success and a dispute

[...>]



To say Jansch was a reluctant star would be a gross understatement.





## Jansch's gift to guitar playing is very real yet hard to pin down.

with Pentangle's record label led to a break-up in 1973, following which Jansch, in disgust one suspects, quit the music industry and moved to Wales to take up a new life as a farmer.

It wasn't to last. After two years he was back on the road again, this time touring the USA and Japan and recording an album with Albert Lee.

Perhaps inevitably, for a deeply private, introverted man, Jansch struggled with fame and became a dangerously heavy drinker. His career suffered, as did his health, but by the 1990s his work had been rediscovered by a new generation of musicians and listeners, his drinking was behind him, which saw him achieve new success. He worked with Johnny Marr, Beth Orton and even Pete Doherty on a 2007 Babyshambles album. He performed again with the reformed Pentangle, opened on Neil Young's Twisted Road tour, was awarded an honorary doctorate of music in Edinburgh and was featured on a major BBC TV programme. Sadly, his health was suffering,

first with heart problems, later with lung cancer, which was to kill him as it had, a few years before, his inspiration and friend, Davey Graham.

Jansch's gift to guitar playing is very real yet hard to pin down. You could master his technique and still not sound like him, not least because of his wandering sense of timing, which never seemed to obey any rules, yet always worked and was often breathtaking. Beth Orton has spoken of having taken lessons from Jansch, with whom she recorded, and how difficult his playing could be to follow and predict. And as any player would know who has sat watching him perform, bars would shrink and increase at will, time signatures slip and slide and chords take on new fingering and shapes. And then there were the moments of aggression and percussion which set him quite apart from others. You could play it better, yet not as well.

Considering he was one of the most influential acoustic guitar players of his generation, Jansch was never greatly fêted by the guitar

[...>]





## VIDEO LINKS

— Black Waterside

— One For Jo

— Blues Runs The Game

— It Don't Bother Me  
(With Johnny Marr)

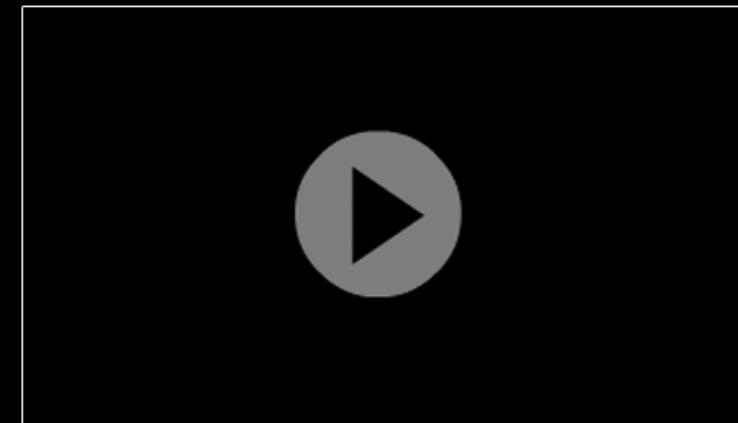
makers - even though he had a brief spell as a guitar shop owner, in London, during the late 1970s. He is pictured playing both Martin and Epiphone guitars in his early days, is reputed to have used a custom Rob Armstrong, but eventually settled down with two makers' instruments - one a custom made Fylde, the others, two instruments from Yamaha, who appreciated Jansch's worldwide influence when others seem to have missed it. Yamaha gave him an FG1500 which he used, along with an L Series Yamaha, to the end of his life.



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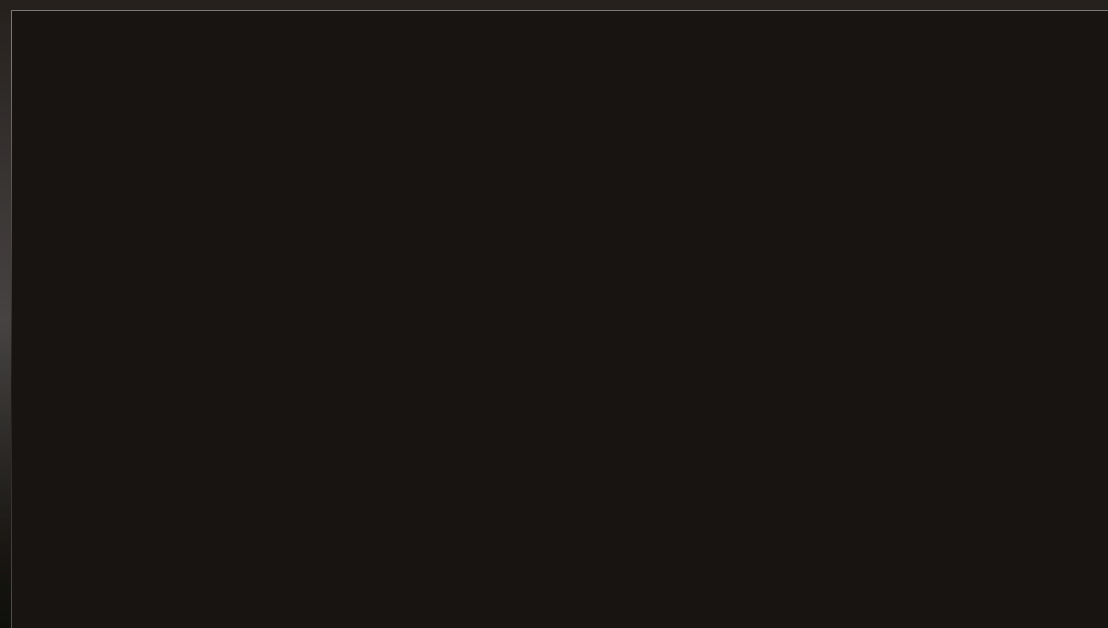
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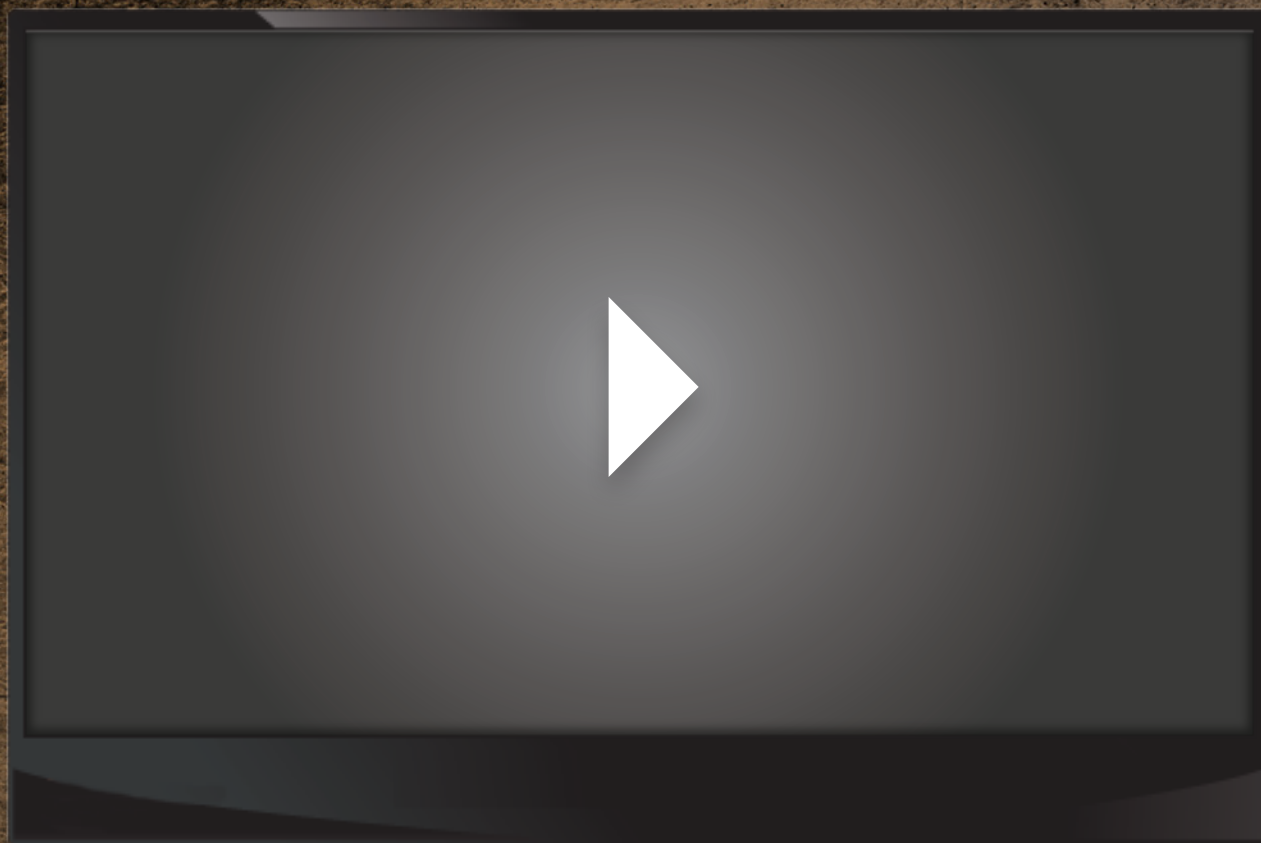


# THE LISTENING ROOM

John Stix listens as top players discuss their influences.

*Performance:*

*Elephant Talk - King Crimson*



"I love this. This is my kind of music. It's got a groove. Bill Bruford is great. It sounds to me like he is always trying to get away with the smallest part out of everybody in the band. I can't imagine what else he would have done other than fill up some of the space. But now he's created all of this room for the stick bass of Tony (Levin) and guitars of Adrian (Belew) and Robert (Fripp). I like Adrian Belew singing like this as well. The type of song it is and the sound of his voice seem to meet up. The guitar playing is perfect. I love the ringing chords with

two sounds happening, dirty and clean. I know there is a better way to describe this, but Adrian is a noise-oriented player.. To a certain extent, I am the same way. This is music concrete with noises. He takes in the whole world and puts it in his music. When he does it, I like it. When other people do it, I'm not convinced – it sounds kind of noisy. This is a song I wish I had written". - Joe Satriani



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**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.

## Nuggets 3

I was reading Pete Townshend's comments in an old Rolling Stone. He was commenting on the advent of keyboards and the state of the guitar in the 1980s. He said, "Jeff Beck is the most expressive guitarist we have and he has nothing to say." It sounds damning but it isn't. Who's to say that all great musicians are entitled to more than one gift. Before the Beatles, pop songs were constructed by crews of people, each with their own special gift. Ellie Greenwich co-wrote "Be My Baby" with Jeff Barry and Phil Spector. It was recorded using studio session players including Hal Blaine on drums and Sonny and Cher as part of the backup vocals, produced by Phil Spector, and sung by The Ronettes featuring Ronnie Spector. Brian Wilson declared "By My Baby" "The greatest pop record ever made." And every ingredient in this record was done by a specialist, just doing what they do best. The result was a whole greater than the sum of its parts. And this was the music business for

a good long time. That is until The Beatles declared that you could write, record and perform your own pop songs without benefit of outside talent.

Popular music has never had a shortage of classic singers who were specialists. They are known for their pipes, hitting the notes and inhabiting the lyric. For the vocal specialist it's about phrasing, tone, diction, and emotional commitment. Singers like Sinatra, Streisand, Cocker, Fitzgerald, Garfunkel, Rondstadt, Turner, Houston, Joplin, Warwick, Franklin and Bennett contributed little, and sometimes nothing to the compositions found on the Greatest Hits compilations. They too are among the most expressive of singers who have nothing to say. Composing is just not their gift. Instead we should view them like great actors picking out the scripts from which they will create their indelible performance.

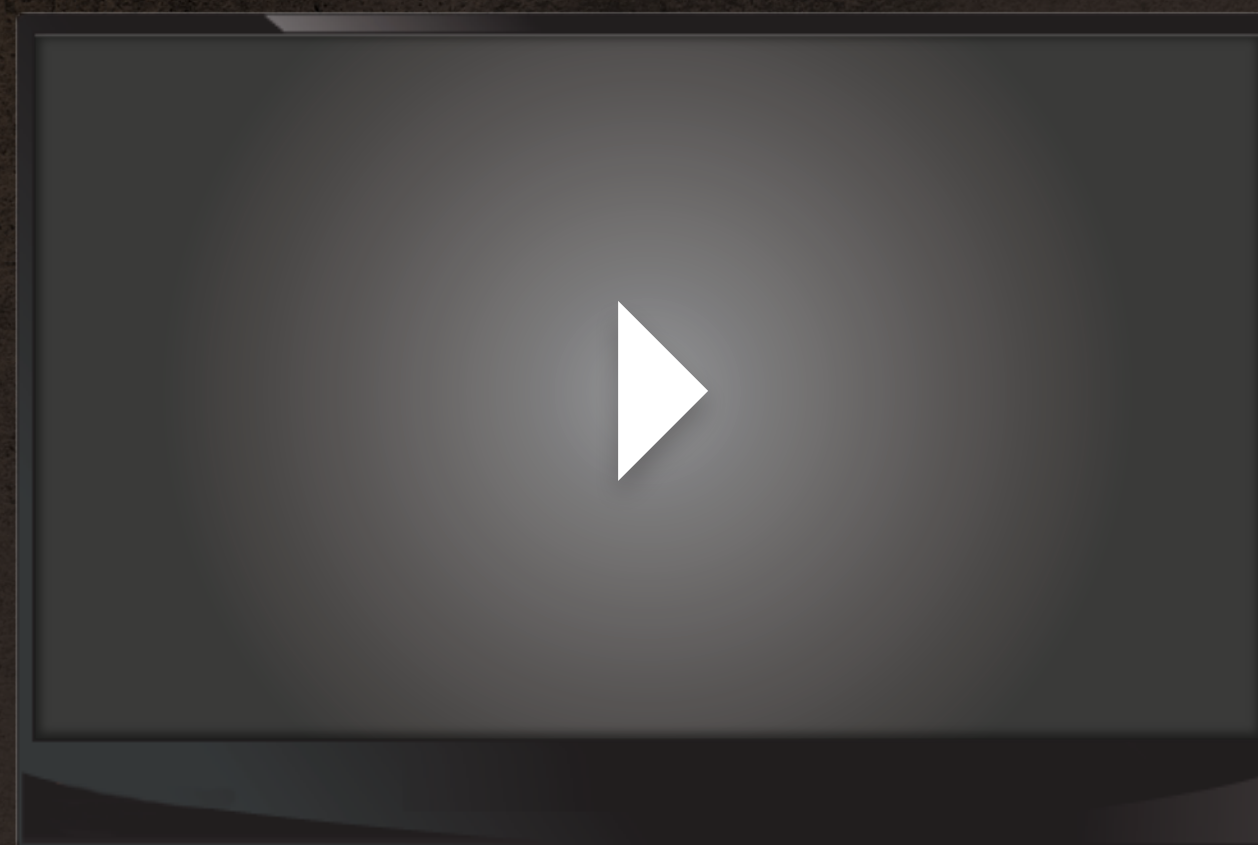
It is not at all odd to include Jeff Beck among these great singers. For that is what he does best, inhabit the spirit of a great composition. For over 37 years, since he started his instrumental years, the voice of Jeff Beck's guitar, interpreting a ballad, has

provided a link to the depths of our own emotions. He playing can quite literally make you cry. Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready" Charles Mingus's "Good-bye Pork Pie Hat" and The Beatles "Day in the Life" and Puccini's "Nessum Dorma" have all been highlights of Jeff Beck ballad performances, but the signature song we all want to hear his six-string sing is Stevie Wonder's "Cause We've Ended As Lovers."

None of us have heard Stevie Wonders version of the song, because it doesn't exist as a recording. He wrote it for his then divorced wife, Syreeta Wright. She sings it on her 2<sup>nd</sup> album, the 1974 release, Stevie Wonder presents Syreeta. The two had

collaborated on songwriting for years before their marriage, yielding "It's a Shame" for the Spinners, and Wonder's own "Signed Seals Delivered" and "If You Really Love Me."

Jeff's take on Syreeta's vocal is just as reverent and on melody as it is on "Day in the Life" the difference is we don't know this song, so he just owns it. It's not an impersonation but it is a direct read of the melody. Hearing the original is at first startling because you think he copped it. But because I came on the original so many years after hearing Beck's version, I prefer to think someone put lyrics to his instrumental. They are both equally exquisite.



[...>]



I've also chosen one of my favorite live versions of Jeff playing at the Secret Policeman's Other Ball. It's short and particularly sweet. I like it because Jeff is playing a Tele with a pick and no vibrato bar. It's quite different than the original with a

Les Paul and the current versions' with the Jeff Beck Strat. What better example can I give to illustrate that it's not the instrument, it's the player that makes it sing.



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# GUITAR INTERACTIVE'S PICK OF THE YEAR

It's the time of year for reflections and ... yes - presents! So we asked Guitar Interactive's review team which accessories have caught their eyes in the past twelve months. No amps, no guitars and no effects - just how generous do they think Santa is?

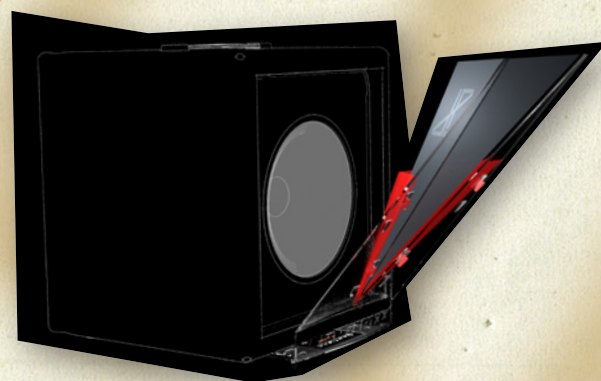
Meanwhile, just so they can show us how really cool they are, we also asked 'what's your favourite album of 2011?'

## Tom Quayle

Tom's first accessory choice was a completely new one on the rest of us - the US-made Souldier Straps - in particular, the Zen custom guitar strap. "I actually own quite a few of these and I love them. Beautiful design and quality. Makes you feel very classy indeed! (and no I'm not an endorser)" said Tiny Tom, as Scrooge raised a sceptical eyebrow.



Tom's second choice was no less esoteric - the Deeflex, described by its designer as "A high-end sound-deflection system for guitar amps...an absolutely new device for suppressing the BEAM-Effect and optimizing the sound of guitar amps and cabs," Tom adds: "It works very well indeed for live



playing and for recording. I use it to focus the sound of the cab into a condenser mic for recording - makes a huge difference to the captured tone as more of the signal is being fed to the mic instead of a very focused beam of sound." We're so intrigued we intend to review one next year.

**Tom's Album Of the Year :** Brad Paisley: "This is Country Music". "It's an amazing album and I have a secret (don't let anyone know) Country fetish! Haha!"

Don't let anyone know, he asks? As if we would!

## Dan Veall

Dan's the new boy on the Gi team, looking after all things deep down and dirty in The

Bassment. So what has caught his bass player's ear this year?



"D'Addario's new clip-on tuner, the NS Mini headstock tuner looks ace and would be very handy, clipping onto the back of your headstock!"



Greedy Dan also has his heart set on a set of new pickups. "I guess the big spend would go on the new EMG X series active pickups that I wanna get my bassy mits on!"

Dan's Album Of The year: "I think it's been a bit pants for albums but the one that I've been playing a lot is actually 'BILO' an EP by a Serbian guitarist called David Micic. Brutally 'Djent' metal crossed with Serbian female vocals! Interesting and more-ish!"

## Michael Casswell

An arbiter of good taste in all things (!) Michael fell big time for the Stetsbar add-on vibrato system which he reviewed for Gi in Issue 4. [Here's his review.](#)

Michael's second choice was a bit more Santa-friendly - a set of



Gibson's Luthier's Choice guitar cleaners: "What I like about them is they don't leave any sticky residues." He cleans his guitars?! What sort of Rock and Roller does that?



Michael's Album of the Year: 'All's Well That Ends Well' by Steve Lukather.

[...>]



## Rick Graham:

Ever the individualist, Rick's first choice was the ever-so esoteric Mogami Platinum cable line of guitar leads. He swears he can tell the difference, which figures - legend says he has the hearing of a bat.



"cos I'm such a lazy git," says Rick, nominating the fabulous Ernie Ball battery-powered string winder. Rick isn't the only one of our team who likes these power winders. Clearly, a popular choice.

Rick's Album of the year: 'Mr Malusardi' - Fabrizio 'Bicio' Leo - Shrapnel records (and perfectly timed for this issue's Shrapnel feature about which, at the time he made his choice, Rick knew nothing. Spooky coincidence, eh?)

## Jamie Humphries

Jamie's first choice was wished on him by the road crew of the Brian May May band (he's been playing with them most of this year - which is an unanswerable excuse for late copy!). They provided him with a Jim Dunlop pick holder that clips to a mic stand. "It's a ridiculously simple idea but it works

brilliantly!" he says. As it's cheap, we'll let him off.

A notch or six higher on the price scale is the Tascam Phrase trainer, which Jamie regularly makes use of in his private teaching as well as for his work with Guitar Interactive and our sister organisation, RickLibrary. Jamie reviewed the Tascam B-10 way back in Issue 2.



Jamie's Album of the Year: Ty Tabor: 'Something's Coming' (OK, it was released in 2010 but we'll let him off because he's been so busy).

## The Editor's choice:

Captain Grumpy (as he's known around the office for some strange reason) always complains he gets the left-overs but this year he got in first and bagged a bag - the Fusion F1 gigbag system, as reviewed by Tom Quayle in issue 5

"I first saw the Fusion system at an exhibition three or four years ago and its inventiveness really appealed to me. Since then, it has got even better - the quality is great and I



agree with Tom, they offer fantastic protection. I need to get one."

For some strange reason, our editor's second choice is an electric kazoo. Really. He's just like that. "I was going to pick the Planet Waves NS-Mini headstock tuner, but Veall beat me to it, so I'm sticking with the electric kazoo. It's next year's big instrument - mark my words!



Gary's Album of the Year: Dave Stewart - 'The Blackbird Diaries'. "Written and recorded in just five days, I picked it for the amazing slide guitar playing from Dan Dugmore and for the most remarkable tribute to Exile On Main St era, Stones, on the track 'So Long Ago'. I had no idea Dave Stewart was so good. This blend of Blues, Rock and superb Country has some of the best playing I've heard in years. No kazoos though, sadly."

## Giorgio Serci:

Another busy professional, our acoustic specialist, Giorgio reflected his busy recent tour of the USA in his choice: "Since travelling on a plane with a guitar is becoming harder and harder, I would go for a light but indestructible acoustic guitar case which is ideal for air travelling. Something like Gator's ATA P.E. Classical Guitar Case with TSA Locks."

Giorgio's second choice was also a piece of luxury gear: "For an expensive live acoustic guitar tone: Avalon's Acoustic guitar preamp is fabulous."



And Giorgio's album? Grumpy Ed wouldn't let him nominate Basia's, 'From Newport to London' because



Giorgio played on it (!) so instead he chose: Vince Mendoza - 'Nights on earth' How's that for a classy pick?

So there you are - 2011's idiosyncratic round-up of what caught the eyes of your Gi team during the previous 12 months. Gear manufacturers desperate for a free plug are invited to ship countless free samples us to us in the hope they will make 2012's version!



[...>]



Gi's SECOND GREAT FREE ENTRY D'ADDARIO GIVEAWAY!

WIN!

# WIN - D'ADDARIO GUITAR STRINGS FOR A YEAR + FABULOUS PLANET WAVES ACCESSORIES!

We've teamed-up again with our good friends at D'Addario/Planet Waves for a second great free entry D'Addario giveaway - and this time we've got even more prizes on offer for three lucky winners!

Our First Prize winner from this issue will receive a D'Addario/Planet Waves Guitarist Kit comprising a year's supply - 24 sets! - of D'Addario's fabulous nickel-plated steel XL 110 strings PLUS one of the new Planet Waves NS-Mini headstock tuners, a Dual Action capo, Planet Waves picks, an instrument cable and, just to ensure the complete envy of your friends, a D'Addario T-shirt and mug!

Our D'Addario/Planet Waves 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 - 3) along with your name, email address and daytime phone number, marked 'D'Addario Competition to: [competitions@guitarinteractivemagazine.com](mailto:competitions@guitarinteractivemagazine.com)

# COMPETITION CLOSED

Q1. In addition to the world famous D'Addario XL nickel roundwounds, D'Addario also offers XL sets in pure nickel. What sort of music are they intended for?

- 1/ 1950's style Rock, Rockabilly and Blues?
- 2/ 1940's style Jazz
- 3/ 1980's style Glam Rock

Q2. The Planet Waves NS-Mini headstock tuner works with acoustic as well as electric guitars. True or False?

A/ True B/ False

Q3. D'Addario offers 'half wound' string sets designed to bridge the gap between roundwound and flatwound strings. True or False?

A/ True B/ False

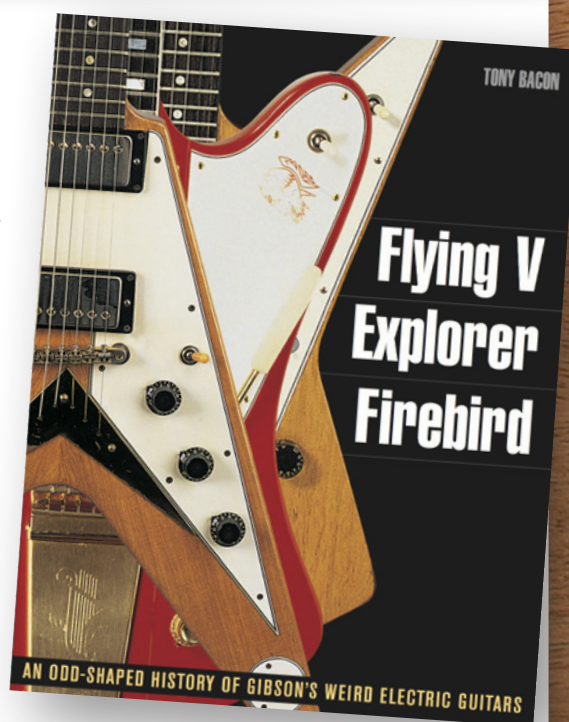
1/ All entries must be received by 30th January 2012. 2/ No cash alternative is offered instead of the stated prize. 3/ All entries must be submitted via e-mail. 4/ Employees of Guitar Interactive, Licklibrary, D'Addario/Planet Waves and their immediate families are ineligible for this competition. 5/ 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.



# Flying V, Explorer Firebird - THE WINNERS!

In Gi 4 we reviewed Tony Bacon's newly published definitive guide to Gibson's legendary Flying V, Firebird and Explorer guitars ('Flying V Explorer Firebird - An odd-shaped history of Gibson's weird electric guitars'; Backbeat Books/Hal Leonard)

As our review said: "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."



So if you want to know everything about Gibson's late 1950s 'Modernistic' guitar designs there really is no better place to go than this unmissable title - as five lucky Gi readers are shortly going to be finding out!

## AND THE LUCKY WINNERS ARE.....

Our randomly selected winners from registered Guitar Interactive readers are:

**Pedro Almeida**, from Coimbra, Portugal  
**Andrew Fitzgerald**, from London, UK  
**Patrick C. Bowes**, from Chateaugay, Canada  
**Richard Ottaway**, from Sandhurst, UK  
**Gary Gladwin**, Milton Keynes, UK

**Congratulations to the winners!**

Sadly, the rest of us are just going to have to buy copies of this great book!

# BILL KELLIHER

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# Reviews

Welcome to Guitar Interactive's  
reviews section.

**We've another bumper crop of reviews in store for you in Gi's final issue of 2011. And what a year we've had - with our circulation growing like wildfire as the word spread!**

One of the things we've learned this year is how much you value our editorial independence. One or two manufacturers have told us they don't feel quite the same way about our honesty. That's a shame because in our opinion a magazine that only runs rave reviews isn't much use to anyone. So Gi will continue to tell it the way we see it and thanks to all those readers who've thanked us for being honest. Ironically, this issue's review subjects really were universally excellent but that's just how it goes!

So here's this issue's mix, spearheaded by Michael Angelo Batio - we've looked at one of his signature Dean guitars - and the astonishing

Line 6 Variax and DT tube amps, as used by Steve Howe.

We sent Giorgio Serci on the road in the USA with a Taylor T3, sampled the Marshall Yngwie Malmsteen head and the revolutionary new Yamaha THR, plus we have products from Hagstrom, Washburn, PRS and a unique EMG pickup review from shredmeister Andy James!

Stick with us for a few changes in the coming year and please keep your comments and suggestions coming!

Above all - here's wishing you all a Happy New Year for 2012!

*Gary Cooper - Editor*





# Yamaha THR10 Amplifier

Yamaha is known for both its high end audio gear and innovative ideas for music technology. But can it marry the two and create the ultimate practice amp and recording tool? **Tom Quayle** checks out the revolutionary Yamaha THR10

Yamaha is trying to create a unique niche for its new THR10 and 5 amplifiers - marketing them as your third amp. The company is basically saying that its newest amplifiers are the simplest and quickest way to get a great, tube-like tone in your studio, bedroom or practice room, without worrying about volume levels, while having the flexibility of a studio monitoring system as part of the package. The idea of having a low powered amp that models high powered tube tones is nothing new, but combining this with a true Hi-Fi quality, stunning looks

and a full range speaker system designed by Yamaha's pro audio boffins, is a great idea and the pairing works exceptionally well.

The THR10 we reviewed is the bigger and more fully featured of the two and is packed with high quality models, effects and recording features. Five core amp models are available with increasing amounts of gain and bass, with acoustic and flat settings on tap for use with the appropriate instrument. Flat mode simply bypasses the modelling section so you can hear the clean DI sound



SRP See Spec

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC

[...>]





The models available are surprisingly authentic in that they really feel and respond like tube amps.

of your guitar plus effects. The acoustic setting is not an acoustic modeller but rather a mic emulation mode for use with an acoustic guitar with a pickup and works rather well. Effects are well catered for and are of the usual high quality Yamaha level. I'm a big fan of Yamaha's digital reverbs and choruses, having owned several pieces of high end Yamaha audio gear and the effects here match up to my expectations. Reverbs, delays and modulation effects abound and there is more control available than some other effect integrated modelling amps. A nice touch is the ability to use reverb and delay together and the addition of a tap tempo button makes getting that perfect delay sound even easier.

The models available are surprisingly authentic in that they really feel and respond like tube amps. Yamaha has been as thorough as possible with their VCM technology and the EQ and gain structure of each model work exactly as you'd expect in each amp model. For example, the Clean setting,

modelled on a Fender Twin style amp, has EQ controls that cut the sound completely when attenuated fully, whilst with the Brit Hi model the EQ is less responsive, just like the original amp. This is a small touch but it's great to know that the EQ will respond exactly as you expect from the amps you know and love. A full range of tones, from super clean to Stevie Ray Texan overdrive to death metal madness, are available and sound great through the supplied extended stereo speakers.

All of this flexibility might be overwhelming were it not for the ability to store five user presets via the small push switches at the top left of the unit. These are so simple to use and do their job with minimal fuss, the only downside being that at this price you can't expect motorised controls, so the settings on the amp are not updated visually when switching presets.

The overriding selling point of the THR10 has to be the ability to capture all

[...>]





these great tones through the supplied USB output and monitor everything from your DAW back through the built in speaker system - effectively using it as a quality soundcard and monitoring set-up in one. The unit ships with a copy of Cubase AI, a fully featured DAW, to get you going straight out of the box. You can even record the direct, clean signal of the guitar through one channel (for re-amping later) whilst recording the wet, effected signal on another channel at the same time.



Monitoring the computer output or another source via the Aux In sounds superb through the in-built speakers and it's obvious that Yamaha has spent a lot of time producing great quality hardware at a cost effective price for the consumer. I was very impressed with the sound quality from such tiny speakers and, front on, you get a good stereo image thanks to the extended stereo technology.

There is another angle to the THR series too. While dedicated guitarists might think a tatty AC30 looks just fine in the living room, Mrs dedicated guitarist might not agree. Yamaha hasn't just gone to extraordinary lengths to make the THR sound and perform well, it has also made the THR 5 and 10 look like pieces of high-end AV gear, which no one is going to object to having in their home, office, hotel room - or, really, just about anywhere. In

short - it looks as revolutionary as it sounds!

Build quality is top notch and given that you have the choice of two models, both of which feature the most important elements of the design, the THR series seems like a no-brainer for me, given that it is a complete modelling, recording and monitoring system in one with great sound quality. You can even run the units from AA batteries, allowing for the ultimate busking set-up with just enough volume to please the crowds! If you feel that this is a product that could solve some of your musical needs then you'd be crazy not to check it out. I for one will be sticking this amazing new product on my Christmas list!



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# Line 6 DT50 Combo

US modelling giant Line 6 is renowned for its million-selling mid-market Spider amps. But can the company take the next step up the ladder with a fully-fledged, tube-driven, pro range? **Jamie Humphries** finds out.

Line 6 wrote the book on modelling and gave the world's guitarists a revolution in sounds with its Pod range. The company's later move into applying that technology to amplification may not have been as hugely successful, but Line 6 is a very smart company and it's not too proud to call-in outside help when it thinks it needs it. Just as it has done with guitar guru James Tyler - and I've reviewed a Tyler Variax guitar elsewhere in this issue - it called in the renowned amp specialist Reinhold Bogner to help with its amps. Bogner applied his traditional valve amp genius to Line 6's modelling wizardry and the result, the Spider range became an industry phenomenon, with over 1 million sold - and still selling!

But there's a big difference between an amp that will satisfy a beginner, or a semi-pro, or a home recording user and one that will satisfy a professional, so Line 6 called Bogner back and this time, the teamwork resulted in what's intended to be a flagship product - the DT range.

We had both the head and 50 Watt combo versions in from Line 6 for this issue. Because Yes's Steve How is using a Variax guitar and Line 6 amps and we wanted to look in some detail at his current choices of

gear, we matched our review guitar with the DT head but as most of us will choose a combo these days, it's the DT50 2x12 combo version that we're reviewing here.

At first glance the DT50 amplifier looks like a traditional twin channel valve/tube amp with two identical, switchable, channels comprising drive, bass, middle, treble, presence, reverb and volume. The amp makes use of two EL34 power amp tubes and two 12AX7 preamp tubes and includes two different Celestion speakers - a Vintage 30 and a G12H90.

Facilities include an effects loop, with a level control on the back of the amp, plus the familiar Line 6 digital connection, for connecting other Line 6 products. At the far right end of the control panel we have the power amp stage controls, which affect the way in which the power tubes work, with a class A and class A/B switch, and a Pentode and Triode switch. We also have the master volume, which is a global control for both of the channels. If you pull this control out you will enter a lower volume mode. Set thus, the digital side of the amp takes over more than the analogue side to produce your tone, and as you turn the volume up, the analogue side



then takes over more than the digital side.

It's an interesting way to mix analogue and digital processing to produce its tones and the digital side of things comes into play even further when you get to the DT50's four voicings, which are described as USA clean, British crunch, British chime, and Modern high gain. This section makes use of analogue component switching as well as digital signal processing, or DSP. When each voicing is selected, the HD modelling adjusts to create the desired selected sound.

The analogue side of the amp, meanwhile, reconfigures to mirror a traditional amp set up for that sound; pretty impressive stuff!

On top of this we can select between class A and class A/B, reconfiguring the power amp section, Class A is more responsive and breaks up quicker, while class A/B offers more head room and is more powerful. You can also select between Pentode and Triode changing the operation of the power tubes, with Pentode being big, loud and bright, while Triode is lower in

[...>]



SRP See Spec

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC





I have to admit I was surprised at how good this amp is.



volume and more vintage sounding. You can mix and match any combination and as you can see and hear in our video demo, customise your amp into many different configurations. Both the class A and class A/B and Pentode and Triode controls adjust analogue components and are completely independent of the DSP.

[...>]

Frankly, trying to put all this down in written words is a bit of a nightmare. Fortunately, we have a video that might help...!

In use the amp responded just like a traditional boutique amp, producing glassy clean tones, and warm, thick, vintage British crunch, to full throttle high gain modern lead tones. I have to admit I was surprised at how good this amp is, as my previous experiences of modelling amps has been that they can tend to be a little flat and one dimensional. This, on the other hand, really is a great amplifier and Line 6 really seems to have got it right, with the correct blend of analogue and DSP.

On top of all this, the amp has a great look, with a vintage grille cloth, thick vinyl covering, and a leather handle. The amp feels expensive and well made. In my opinion it would stage up to any live or studio situation.

In summation? I can truthfully say the Line 6 DT 50 has really changed my view on modelling technology. You need to try one!



[...>]



# James Tyler Line 6 Variax Guitar

Steve Howe might seem like a serious traditionalist, given his love of Gibson's venerable semis - but as we reveal in this issue, he's become a convert to Line 6's revolutionary James Tyler Variax modelling guitars. So if an icon like Howe is convinced, just how good is the latest Variax? **Jamie Humphries** samples the JTV59.

Line 6 has long been the leader in the world of digital modelling, ever since the introduction of the original POD around 10 years ago. Since the birth of the company, it has pioneered direct recording units, floor units, effects, software and amplifiers, all of which model classic amplifiers and effects in affordable units. Several years ago Line 6 introduced the Variax guitar, an instrument that modelled a wide variety of instruments, from vintage solid bodies, semis and jazz guitars, to acoustics, Dobros, banjos, and even a sitar. The guitar worked well, with the signal not being picked up via MIDI, but via a piezo bridge, eliminating the tracking issues that had been associated with MIDI guitars in the past. They didn't quite set the world on fire at the time - the guitar's looks being issue, as it didn't have any pickups, and in some cases didn't sit or balance well.

Nothing daunted, Line 6 has since enlisted the guitar design skills of James Tyler, to fuse its digital modelling capabilities to a well-built premium quality guitar that also has traditional magnetic pickups, allowing the guitarist to use the guitar either traditionally or, as a modelling guitar. Suddenly, it has become a different animal altogether.

Line 6 and Tyler have released three models to date, a single cut Les Paul-like guitar - the JTV 59 which we are reviewing- a Strat-ish style, and a modern hard rock/metal guitar. Also available are USA custom shop models.

The JTV 59, is a classic Les Paul style guitar, made from mahogany with a set neck, a carved maple top, and rosewood fingerboard. The guitar features two vintage voiced Tyler alnico humbucking pickups, and a Tyler hard tail, with LR Baggs piezo system. Add to this medium jumbo frets and a Graph Tech self lubricating nut, and already you have a high quality instrument. Add to this 25 models of classic vintage electric and acoustic guitars, plus the ability to use 11 different tunings, and you begin to see that the Variax is a force to be reckoned with. Surely this is a session/gigging guitarists dream? You can see the list of models offered in our Tech Spec box.

I already own a Variax and have been a fan of them for a number of years. I use mine extensively in the studio and on sessions, if I want a specific guitar, or unusual acoustic instrument, so I was keen to see the improvements, namely the addition of the altered tunings onboard (previously these

I already own a Variax and have been a fan of them for a number of years.

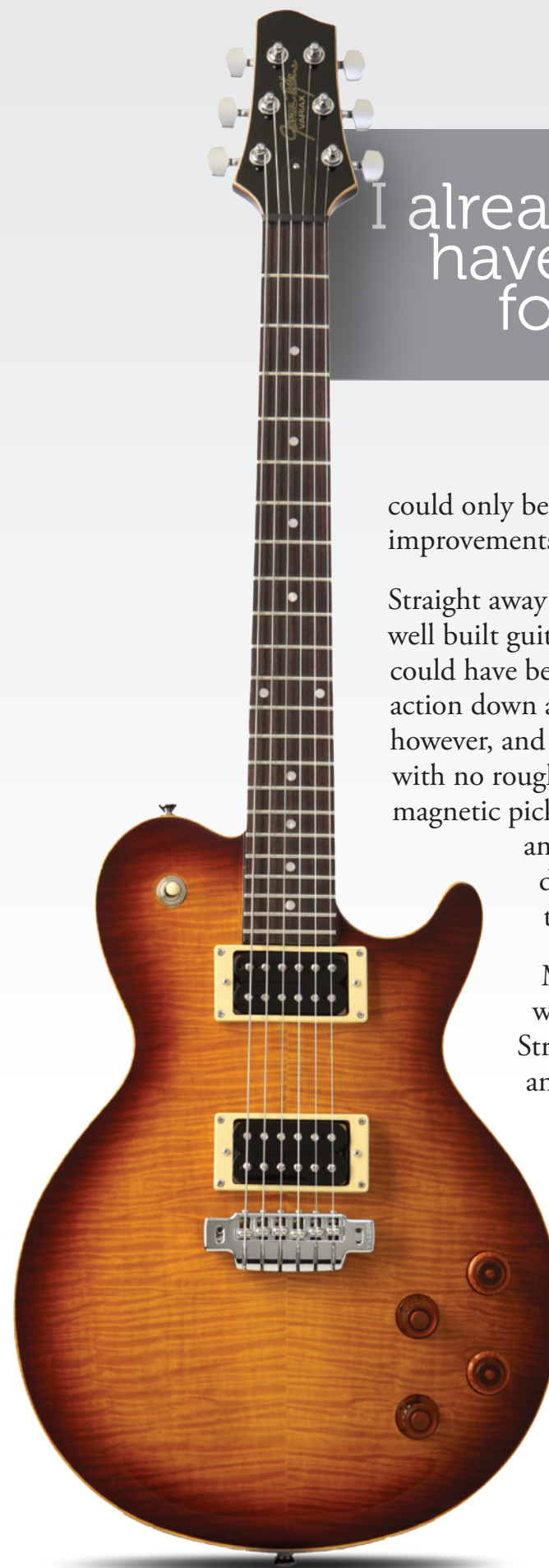
could only be accessed via the Workbench software) and also the improvements to the guitar itself.

Straight away I could feel that I was playing a well designed and well built guitar, although the set-up of the review model we had could have been better, with a little neck adjustment to bring the action down a touch. The finish of the guitar was immaculate, however, and the '59 style neck profile was very comfortable, with no rough fret edges. Plugging the guitar in and using the magnetic pickups, the sound was rich, producing warm cleans and thick overdriven tones, with plenty of bite and drive in the bridge position, and sweet and woody in the neck.

Moving on to the models, and again I was impressed with their accuracy. I was able to switch from vintage Strats, Teles, Les Pauls - the list goes on! - and enjoy an array of instruments that I could never afford! The sounds were authentic and closing your eyes it was hard to believe I was holding just one guitar.

Add to all these sounds, the acoustic instruments and you can really see and hear the potential of this instrument. And the fun doesn't stop there! By simply engaging the tuning knob we can use all of the common tunings, from dropped D to Eb, even open Blues tunings. I had a lot of fun with the Dobro model, using open G tuning and a slide! Be sure to check out the video, as I really feel the best way to experience this instrument is to see and hear it in action. I could go on for pages

[...>]



SRP £1099.99/\$1499.99

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC 



about the sounds on offer here - but just listen for yourself. On top of this, there are two custom banks that you can store five settings in each bank, so ten in total. These can be any combination of your favourite guitars and in any tuning. You can even simulate using a capo!

The guitar also comes with battery charger, the battery giving you 12 hours of playing time, plus Line 6 cables to connect the guitar digitally to any other Line 6 device. There is also an interface to connect it to the Workbench software, plus a very high quality gig bag.

All in all I feel that this is a great guitar, and a huge improvement on what was a great initial idea with the original run of guitars.

It's well constructed out of fine quality materials and has attractive conventional styling - so it's obvious that employing James Tyler has been a huge plus for the Californian company. The addition of the traditional magnetic pickups with the 25 models and 11 tunings makes this a very versatile tool, and well worth exploring further.

The Variax 59 isn't a cheap guitar but for a working Pro who otherwise could need a variety of instruments to get him through a gig or a recording session, it actually becomes really good value for money. And anyway, who wants to take a '58 Strat on the road? Even for the semi-pro pub and club player who might want several different sounds



[...>]





# You simply have to get out and try one of these!

during an evening, it's still quite an affordable guitar - comparable in price with a lot of other one-sound guitars but a whole lot more versatile, while being potentially just as nice to play.

Is it the Variax the revolution that Line 6 says it is? Actually, yes. Unlike some other flights of fancy, this one really works, is affordable and lives up to the promise. You simply have to get out and try one of these!





# Dean MAB1 Armorflame Guitar

We couldn't have a speed issue and interview the legendary Michael Angelo Batio without looking at his signature Dean MAB1, could we? It's a beast of a guitar, as you would expect but how does it compare with the competition and is it just a one trick pony? **Tom Quayle** flexed his fingers and got ready to shred!

Dean is well known for guitars designed for shred and metal players, so if any company was going to come up with a design suited for shred phenomenon Michael Angelo Batio, Dean would be at the top of the list. The MAB1 is Dean's collaborative design with Michael to come up with a signature model and features an all alder body and top, bolt-on maple neck, ebony fretboard, active EMG pickups and a real Floyd Rose tremolo with locking nut. The body is finished in a stunning custom armoured flame paint job and matching headstock. The neck shape is designed to Batio's demanding speed playing specifications for a fast, smooth feel.

The construction and finish of our sample model were beautiful, with a flawless paint-job that looks as good up close as it does from a distance. Everything is finished to a high level with lovely fret work and high grade hardware throughout. The body is lovingly contoured and has a pleasing curvature to the edges, softening the look of the guitar on the eye. As such, it is also very comfortable on the body, something my ever-expanding belly very much appreciated!

The headstock shape wears its influences on its sleeve but has a larger more unique look that complements the body well and the matching paint job is a great touch.

Whether stood up or sat down, the guitar is nicely balanced and reassuringly heavy, something not uncommon for alder construction. The neck is slightly thicker than the average shred type but still on the thinner end of the scale for speedy playing, imparting a more comfortable feel for chordal playing and long power chord sessions. I only experienced one playability problem with the guitar, linked to the Floyd Rose system Dean have installed. I love Floyd Rose trems but this one needed some attention in the way it had been set-up as the arm loosened in use and I didn't want to risk damaging the our review guitar by tightening the retaining screw with pliers. This was almost certainly a setting-up issue as Floyd Rose trems are usually fine.

The guitar was set-up very well straight out of the supplied hard case and was surprisingly resonant given that the trem was floating and the action was so low. The guitar had a naturally bright tone and

Reviewing a signature guitar like this is always tricky as it means different things to different people.

sounded solid across the entire range with no obvious dead spots. The EMG pickups are of the active variety and as such require power from a battery inserted in the back plate via an easily removed compartment. Plugged in the clean tones were pure and retained the brightness of the acoustic tone.

Things stayed solid during changes to the volume and tone controls, as you would from active circuitry and these EMGs certainly don't seem to suffer from any of the sterile tonal problems sometimes associated with active pickup combinations, retaining a dynamic response even with their high output levels. With overdrive and distortion applied, the tones are straight from the metal world and the guitar retains clarity no matter how much gain you apply. Rolling off the volume cleans things up nicely but you may miss the response and dynamic sound of lower output pickups if you're more used to a vintage style guitar. Obviously this instrument is designed for high gain lead tones and in this respect it excels.

Reviewing a signature guitar like this is always tricky as it means different things to different people. As an ardent Michael Angelo Batio fan you'll probably give this



SRP £1,299/\$1,788

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC

[...>]



guitar five stars every time as it represents what you love about the man's playing and allows you to be a part of that. To everyone else, they will judge this guitar on its merits and aesthetic values and whilst it is certainly a very high quality instrument, its appeal and versatility may be limited somewhat by its shred and metal heritage. If you're a Batio fan then you simply can't pass this up but even if you're not, this is about as good a shred guitar as you can get and I'd certainly recommend you check it out.



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# Marshall YJM 100 Head

Swedish shredder Yngwie Malmsteen joins the growing list of artists with signature Marshall Heads. **Jamie Humphries** sets out to tame this 100 Watt beast and discovers it has more than just a few tricks up its sleeve. He even recorded some special Malmsteen-style licks for his review. What could be better for our speed issue?!

Love him or hate him, Yngwie Malmsteen is without a doubt one of the most influential and important guitarists in the last 30 years of Rock. His genre-defining style, fluid, jaw dropping, technique and beautiful rich violin-like tone single-handedly pioneered the Neo Classical guitar movement during the '80s. His influences included Paganini, Bach, Ritchie Blackmore and Jimi Hendrix. For his entire career Yngwie has produced his beautiful rich tone with classic equipment - a scalloped neck Fender Strat and old, early '70s Marshall 100

watt heads. To celebrate Yngwie's dedication to the electric guitar and loyalty to Marshall Amps, Marshall has released a limited run of 100 watt YJM heads, and I was lucky enough to get the chance to spend some time with this beautiful amplifier.

Signature products can be a problem for guitarists. One thing that often puts me off is the use of garish logos and graphics, and another is a string of pointless modifications that may only be relevant to the artist whose name is on the equipment. In no way does

the YJM 100 fall into this category.

To start with, the appearance of the amplifier is very understated - in fact it looks like an old 1959 100 watt four input head, with just a small YJM logo, which is very discreet and subtle. The front of the amplifier has all of the controls you would expect to find: the on/off switch, stand by, presence, bass, middle and treble, plus the two volume controls for each channel. The channels can be "jumped" or connected together with a patch cable, allowing you to thicken up the sound, and blend the two channels with both volume controls to achieve your basic core tone.

And here's where the clever stuff comes into play. For those of you that have used a traditional Marshall, you will be well aware of that fact that to get a great tone out of these amps you have to crank them

up, which often isn't easy to do when you are playing pub gigs, or even bigger gigs for that matter, as it's a sound man's nightmare. The YJM head, however, includes a switch to change the head from a 100 Watt to a 50 Watt, turning off two of the four EL34 power amp valves. Additionally, the Marshall features one of the best power attenuators I have ever come across. I was able to get the head cooking at just bedroom level! Even more, you can kick in a booster, with the level and gain control situated on the back of the head. When you do that, the noise gate automatically engages and the threshold of the gate can also be set with a control on the back of the head. These functions can be controlled with the very compact and rugged footswitch, which is included in the price. The gate can also be used when the booster isn't engaged.



SRP £1515.00/\$3,000

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC



[...>]



Marshall have also included a beautiful reverb, with the level on the back of the head, and again it's activated via the footswitch. There is also an effects loop, which can also be engaged via the footswitch. The amp also includes auto biasing for when valves are replaced and four indicators that inform you which valve is faulty if you have any problems - a guitar tech's dream. As you can see, the amp retains its classic looks and values, but has been brought right up to date with features that really improve the head, and make it very usable and versatile.

Soundwise the YJM performed exactly how I would have hoped, delivering that hallowed vintage Marshall tone to perfection. But in addition to that classic sound, with the extra features I was able to achieve searing lead tones that were controllable and noiseless. The sound was rich, with a beautiful mid range that would punch through in a live situation. It was also wonderfully dynamic, not compressed or mushy at high gain when picking. It even cleaned-up beautifully, when backing down the guitar volume, something that is very important to me as a guitarist.

Even if Yngwie isn't your thing, you can get traditional Marshall tones to suit both classic and modern Rock from this really remarkable head. I was able to produce Van Halen, Hendrix and Page like tones with ease and found it a very inspiring piece of equipment to work with.

To summarise this amp, Marshall really has struck gold here, taking a classic design and adding features that really work and are relevant. The fact that the additional controls are housed on the back of the amp means that it retains its classic look that we all know and love. The addition of the booster, noise gate, reverb, power attenuator and effects loop make this a perfect combination of a vintage style amp but with the addition of the modern features that we have become accustomed to over the past few years.

Personally, I would love to own an original Marshall from this period, but when you consider the price, reliability and the lack of modern features of a vintage amp of this kind, it makes it pretty impractical, and something you would own more as a collector's piece than a professional working tool. But with the YJM you can have that desirable vintage Marshall, with modern features and reliability and at an affordable price. Go check these out before they are all snatched up!!

The Marshall features one of the best power attenuators I have ever come across.





# Washburn RX10

With the the season for gifts and impulse buys upon us, which low-cost solid bodied electric you can give to a beginner with confidence? Come to that, what's a safe buy for yourself, as a second guitar? Washburn has consistently impressed us with its budget offerings, so we issued a challenge. OK, Washburn - just how affordable can you make a playable electric? We handed their response - an RX 10 - to **Rick Graham** and told him to do his worst

Washburn seems to be on a roll at present. It has a fine reputation for crafting acoustic guitars that dates back to the late 19th century, it has some premium instruments endorsed by 'big name' players like the phenomenally talented Nuno Bettencourt and yet it also makes some of the most affordable electrics and acoustics around - all of which seem to score consistently highly in reviews.

The RX10 we were sent comes in at the affordable end of the market - very affordable, in fact. No, make that 'so affordable we wondered if it could possibly be any good'. Frankly, as our Editor opined, it's skating close to the sort of price you see supermarket no-name guitars selling for, which is worrying territory. Surely, Washburn wouldn't risk their fine reputation on something so cheap? The answer is 'what risk?' and we soon found out why.

The RX10 sits alongside the RX6 in this particular range, both instruments being the lowest costing electric guitars manufactured

by Washburn. In actual fact, they are pretty much the same guitar, with just a few minor differences. Visually, the RX10 has lots of appeal, especially with the vintage sunburst (vsb) colour option we were loaned, which wouldn't look out of place at any gig, whether it be Rock, Pop or Blues.

Specification wise, the RX10 has a basswood body, which happens to be one of my favourite woods, with a humbucker in the bridge position and two single coils in the middle and neck positions. Both of the single coil pickups have been reverse wound. The five-way pickup selector switch gives two extra pickup configurations for more tonal variety.

The RX10 sports a double octave neck offering a full 24 frets as opposed to the 22 offered by the RX6. The maple neck is bolted on to the body and features a glued on rosewood fretboard with dot inlays. The headstock, as you would expect, is emblazoned with the Washburn logo with the RX10 model name printed on the double

The RX10 we were sent comes in at the affordable end of the market - very affordable



SRP £126/\$266.90

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC

[...>]



adjustable truss rod cover. The tuning comes in the form of chrome die cast tuners.

Picking it up and playing the Washburn for the first time was rather surprising as not only did the guitar feel nice to hold and play, it also sounded quite resonant. As is so often the case with reviews guitars, the tuning seemed to be quite unstable at first, which made us wonder whether corners had been cut - but, no.

The Washburn's tuners were just fine - the fault was a set of new strings that just needed playing-in! It's hard to fault that!

Plugging in the RX10 in was just as surprising as it was unamplified. Clean sounds were sparkling and fresh and with a combination of change of pickup and a little experimentation with the tone knob, some nice thicker jazzier tones came through. Turning up the gain was equally as impressive and it really was surprising how well the RX10 responded to my playing dynamics. The action was set quite low, so I took full advantage of this by playing some long extended legato lines and it was a breeze. For an action set this low, I would normally expect to encounter the dreaded fret buzz but there was none evident.

I can't help but be impressed with this guitar. I find it staggering that a company can manufacture a guitar at this price at all, let alone make one that actually feels, plays and sounds good. Oh, and it looks great too! All I can say is, if you don't believe me, check out the video!

There is an awful lot of choice when it comes to the entry level market and not all of it is good. But this one is. If you are looking for the ideal first electric guitar for a beginner, or just fancy a cheap guitar as your own back-up instrument frankly, whatever your reason, the Washburn RX10 offers amazingly good value for money!





# On the Road with the Taylor T3

## SPECIAL REVIEW

Gi's acoustic guitar maestro, Giorgio Serici, is just back from a major US tour. Along the way Taylor Guitars cooked-up a surprise for him - they loaned Giorgio a Taylor T3 to take on the road. So how did Gi's acoustic wizard get on with Bob Taylor's electric magic?

Since becoming a musician I have always looked forward to touring around the world, playing for different audiences of different backgrounds, getting to know places far away, with their different cultural heritages and musical traditions. This has got to be one of the most exciting parts of being a musician.

Late this summer, I was lucky enough to go on tour in the USA with the wonderful singer-songwriter Basia, with whom I have been performing for the last few years. I love touring the US and visiting all of those towns, where hundreds of movies have been filmed, and where many iconic bands have recorded their live performances. The US has always been a reference point for modern guitarists, and, of course, it's the home of many of the finest guitars ever made.

With five weeks' touring from the East to the West coast ahead of me, Guitar Interactive's editor introduced me to Chalise Zolezzi, who manages PR for Taylor Guitars. It was Chalise who kindly made me 'an offer I couldn't refuse!' "Is there any of our guitars you would like to experiment with while touring the US?" she asked.

It must have taken me all of two seconds hard thinking, before I said YES!

Taylor guitars have long been synonymous with excellence in the acoustic guitar realm but as well as being excited by the prospect of borrowing one of their beautiful guitars I was feeling ambivalent as to which model to choose, simply because I like them all. However, after considering that on this tour I already had an acoustic guitar, I decided to try one of the recent electric additions to the Taylor's family and after perusing their website, my attention and imagination were immediately grabbed - for its looks, its specifications and its tonal potential - by the Taylor T3, which comes in two models: with a Bigsby tailpiece (T3/B) or a roller bridge stop-centred tailpiece. I went for the latter.

Taylor's factory is in San Diego, and luckily I was just about to go there a few days later, to play with Basia at the legendary Humphrey's By The Bay. Chalise invited me to visit the Taylor factory, but unfortunately due to time constraints, I was only able to meet her for lunch in the stunning bay, where Basia was due to perform that night.



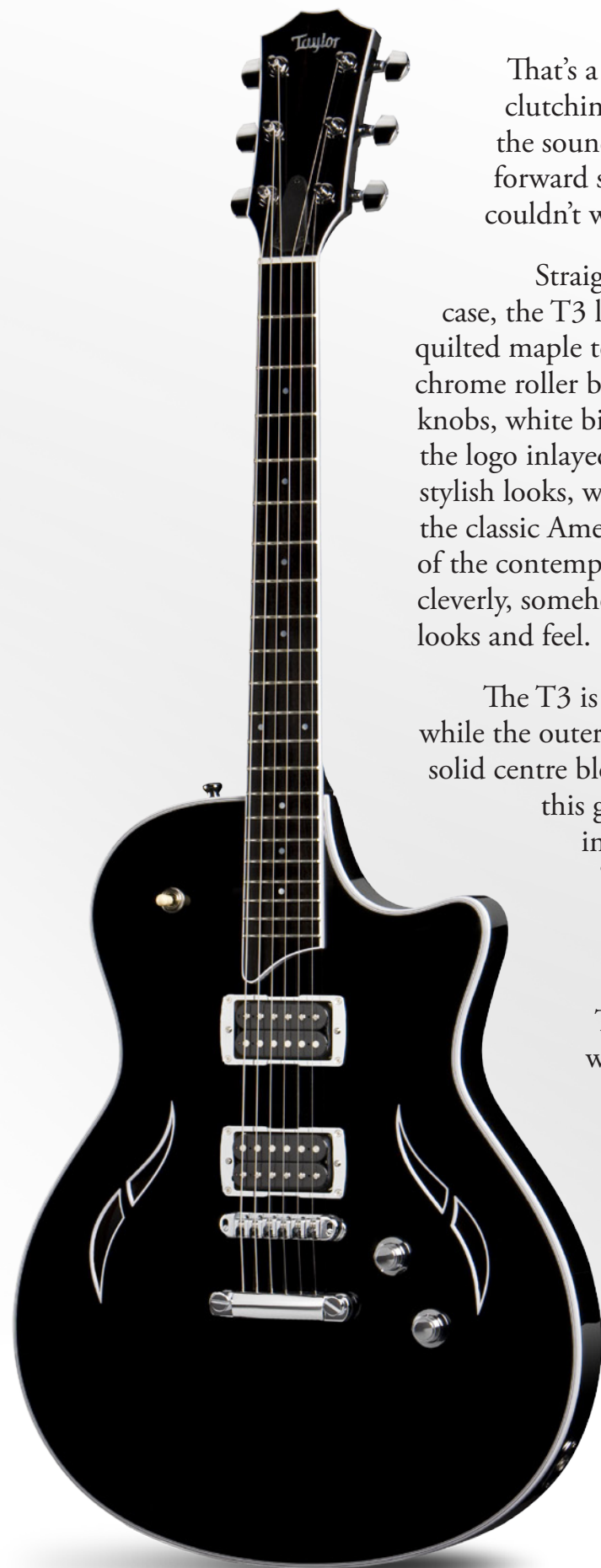
SRP See Spec

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC ⚙️

[...>]





That's a visit for the future to be sure! After lunch, clutching my loan guitar, I returned to the venue to the sound-check and... I must confess, I haven't looked forward so eagerly to sound checking in a long time. I couldn't wait to try the T3!

Straight from the elegant and robust deluxe hardshell case, the T3 looked stunning. How could it not with its quilted maple top, two stylish 'f' holes, sapele back and neck, chrome roller bridge, stoptail, machine heads and control knobs, white bindings, ebony fret board and headstock with the logo inlaid in mother-of-pearl? The Taylor's fresh and stylish looks, with an elegant silhouette, make it reminiscent of the classic American arch-top guitars that shaped the history of the contemporary guitar repertoire, from Jazz to Rock, but cleverly, somehow, it also manages to have a contemporary looks and feel.

The T3 is a semi-hollow bodied electric guitar, because while the outer parts of its bouts are hollowed, it features a solid centre block strip, in line with the fretboard, making this guitar very resonant. The guitar is well balanced in terms of weight as well as sound. Its sapele 'C' shaped profile neck (1 11/16" wide at nut), and its wide and precise frets, make this model a very easy one to play, as you would expect from any Taylor guitar - it's part of how Bob Taylor made his reputation, of course, designing wonderful-sounding acoustic guitars that were easier to play than those of many other makers. This general ease of playing is also supported by the T3's Venetian cutaway, which makes it easy to navigate all 21 frets.

This guitar features a single-bolt T-Lock neck joint, whereby the neck is screwed to the guitar body via an Allen key. While this is a bolt-on neck, it feels and looks like a set-neck. The design results in a very low action straight from its case, and it's an action that is not likely to drift. If it does, it will be an easy thing to rectify, thanks to its two-

way truss rod. The owner of this guitar will also benefit from the Taylor lifetime manufacturer's warranty. The fact that Taylor offers this warranty highlights their confidence in the quality of their products.

The T3 features its very own 2 HD (high definition) humbucking pickups, which can be selected by a three-way switch, similar in operation to a Les Paul's, as well as the push/pull control knobs, which can split the coils or boost the mid range, for an extended palette of tonal colours. From a warm Jazzy tone using the neck pick up and rolling-off the tone knob, to a funky rhythm guitar tone by using both pickups and splitting the coils by lifting the volume knob, to all the various in between tonal permutations, this is a hugely versatile instrument.

The T3, like all Taylor's electric models, also features a unique tone circuit, which can boost the mid-range when rolled off, generating a tone similar to a wah wah pedal set to the halfway mark. I noticed this straight away in my first sound check, as I went straight to the PA via an Avalon pre-amp that I was using for my acoustic, as recommended by our renowned sound engineer,



On tour, the T3 soon became my thoroughly reliable companion.

[...>]



Chris Morrison. This setting (without an amp) works on an arch-top guitar for a warm jazzy tone and, in fact, the sound was amazing! I was able to get a wide range of tonal possibilities, simply by tweaking the pickup switch and the control knobs. The sound engineer and the MD were so impressed that we decided to use the T3 to play 'From Newport To London', (title track of Basia's latest CD), which I had originally recorded on an arch-top guitar.

The looks of this guitar are as versatile as its sound, as it would look and sound just as great at a Rock concert as a Jazz gig, due to the clever combination of modern looks and technology, tinged with classy 'old school' nuances. That make the T3 ideal for guitarists who, like me, play both electric and acoustic guitar in a variety of styles, as with a flick of a switch this axe can sing with a screaming Rock tone, or produce a sweet, mellow and rich Jazz tone. Its natural acoustic sound is quite unique too.

I should mention that the intonation and tuning are brilliant too, thanks to the use of fine quality machine heads and a great bridge.

Travelling day in day out, as you do on tour, a musical instrument can easily be affected by the changes in temperature and

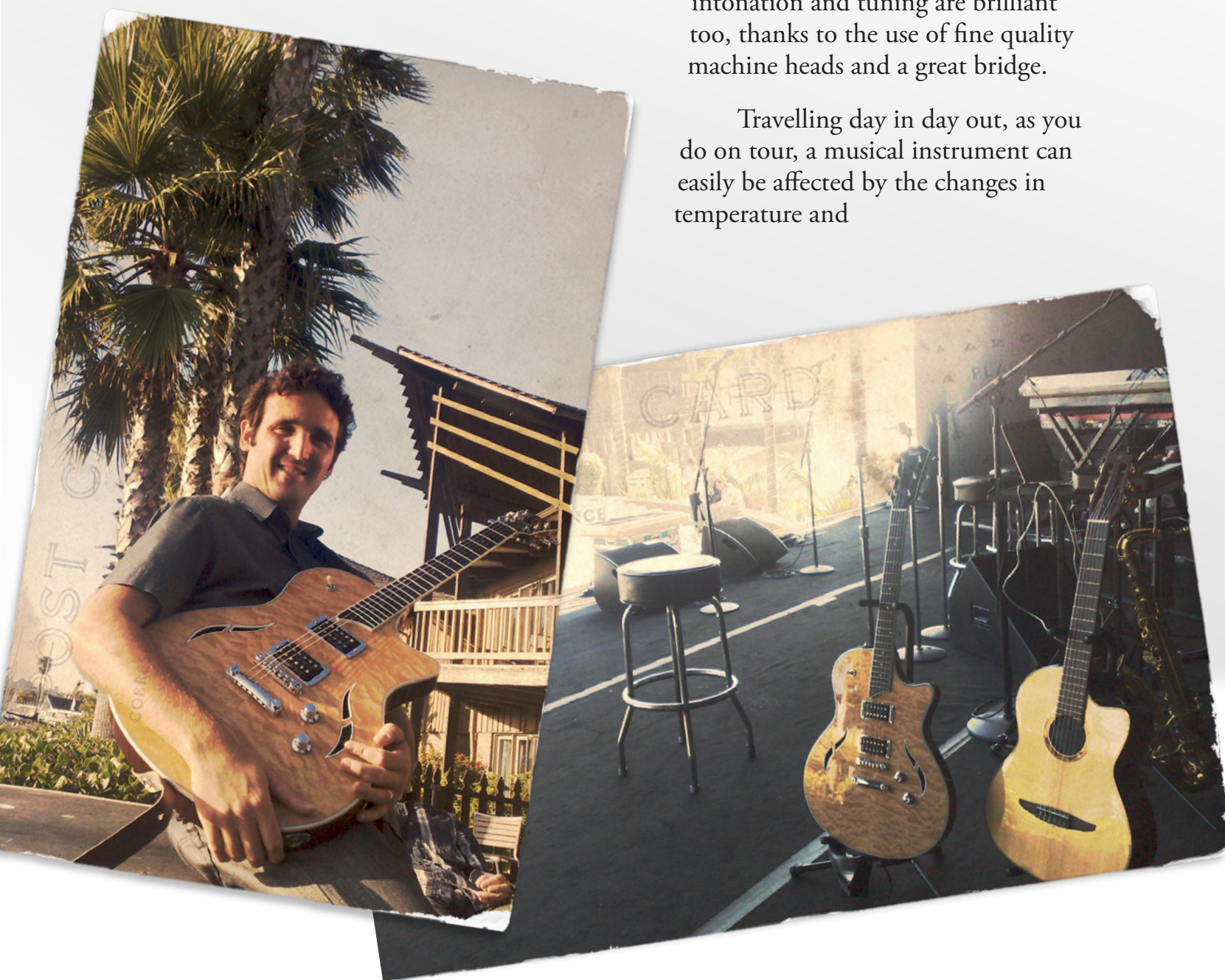
humidity. This can be a real issue at times, particularly when you are flying from one location to another in a country as big and as diverse as the USA, each place you visit having a different climate and humidity levels. Indeed, the ability to handle this sort of use is one of the qualities that separates an instrument suited to a professional from one that will be satisfactory for an amateur. Naturally, if you can afford a professional class instrument, even if you are an amateur or semi-pro, that extra reassurance you get from playing an instrument built to professional standards is very welcome!

On tour, the T3 soon became my thoroughly reliable companion. Everything works just as it should. Those high quality machine heads, the Tusq nut with Teflon coating, the Taylor bridge - all the features I've mentioned - reveal the enormous attention to detail that went in the design

and construction of this guitar. In my opinion it is destined to become a classic model.

In conclusion, I was really impressed by the Taylor T3 guitar, for its refined quality, its versatility, innovative design and sounds, its looks, playability and for its quintessential Taylor originality, which makes this model a very competitive one, strengthening even more Taylor's reputation worldwide for quality and for continuously pushing the envelope in the design and manufacture of guitars. The Taylor T3 isn't a cheap guitar but it is a unique and thoroughly professional one that I have no hesitation in awarding our joint highest ever rating!

All I have to do now is save-up and buy one!





# Hagstrom Swedie guitar

Hagstrom's new Swedie represents yet another interpretation of a classic electric guitar design - the single cutaway solid body. It's also an entry point to the Hagstrom range. It offers classy looks, good specifications and an attractive price. But can it pass the **Tom Quayle** test?

Hagstrom began making guitars in Sweden way back in 1958, starting out with the very modern looking (for the time) Standard, De Luxe and De Luxe A. Production continued until 1983 with a variety of models and, despite never quite cracking the international big time, the individualistic company pioneered some interesting design ideas and, along the way, secured a few Grade A artists using their guitars - including no lesser beings than Joe Walsh, Kurt Cobain - and Elvis Presley. Original Hagstrom guitars have become collectors items over the years, as you might imagine!

In 2004 Hagstrom returned as a brand - not exactly the original company, but following the original's ideas and with family involvement. The plan was to embrace the Hagstrom heritage while reflecting modern trends in technology and production techniques. As you would expect, production no longer takes place in expensive Sweden, but all the raw materials for the guitars are sourced from the USA and Korea, which should make Hagstroms a cut above some of the mass market brands.

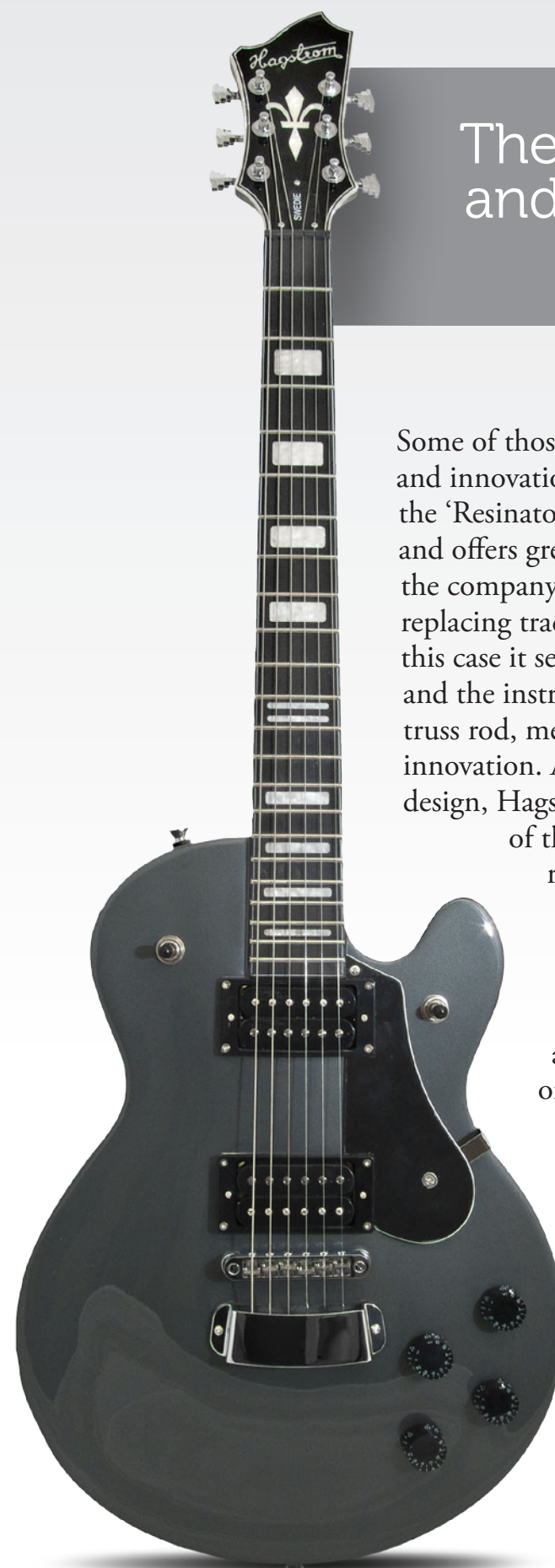
The Swedie model we were loaned for review is a relative newcomer to the range and leans in terms of both its name and inspiration on the highly respected Hagstrom Swede. Despite being an entry-level model (in Hagstrom terms), it impressed us in every way with its construction and build quality. It features a mahogany body with mahogany top, matched to a mahogany neck and Hagstrom's trademark 'Resinator' fretboard.

As we've said, this is one of the cheaper guitars in the Hagstrom range but its price tag certainly doesn't reflect the quality of the instrument. Everything feels expensive and solid, with a flawless build and finish. The corner cutting, normally associated with lower cost guitars, simply doesn't feature here and the frets, neck and body are all superbly put together with no cracks, flaws or warping to speak of. There are no flame or quilt veneers to add sparkle and flair, just a simple opaque finish to keep costs down, with five colours to choose from. Everything about this guitar says quality and value for money. The design is obviously vintage - in fact very 60's - but the unique headstock and body shape make it stand out from the crowd.

The Swedie is very resonant and has great sustain with a bright, bold tone.

Some of those ideas that characterised the original Hagstrom flair and innovation appear even in this lower cost guitar. For example, the 'Resinator' fretboard is made from a composite wood material and offers greater stability and fewer dead spots along the neck, the company says. It's not the first time a guitar maker has tried replacing traditional fingerboard materials with composites and in this case it seems to work well. On the Swedie it also looks great and the instrument performed well across its entire range. The truss rod, meanwhile, is another example of Hagstrom's design innovation. Always ahead of the pack with truss rod and neck design, Hagstrom's H-Expander design, running the full length of the neck and providing tension at both ends, offers a rigidity that allows for a very low action and a thin neck. In fact our Swedie was beautifully set-up and easy to play, with a low action and comfortable neck profile, helped by its 15" radius allowing for a flatter fretboard. Tuning was superb and, for once, a guitar arrived with the strings pre-stretched and in tune out of the box!

Strummed and picked acoustically the Swedie is very resonant and has great sustain with a bright, bold tone. Plugged into our valve head on the clean channel, the custom designed humbuckers are clear and confident sounding, without the muddiness associated with some budget models. All three position were useful and musical, without harshness on the bridge pickup. Overdriven and higher gain tones were punchy and had enough to cut through without being piercing. The neck pickup retained clarity and top end and had clout in [...>]



SRP £393.19/\$899.99

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC





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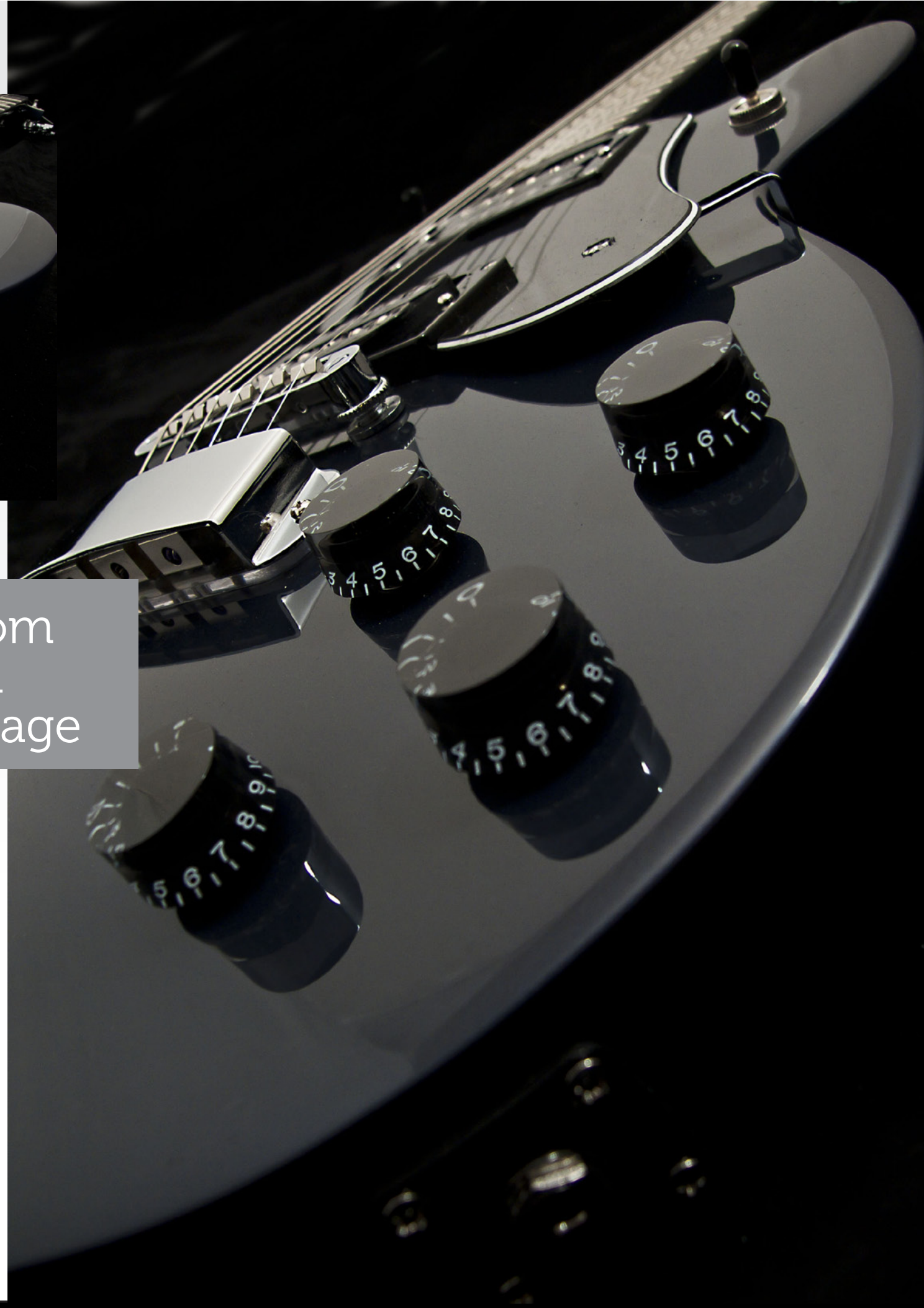




## All in all the Hagstrom Swedie represents a fabulous value package

the lower range frequencies with a tight attack, aided by the mahogany construction. The three-way filter switch located at the bottom horn of the body is used as cut for high and high/mid frequencies. It performed its job as expected, although it's not something I could see myself using as the sound became a little muddy with it engaged. Personally, I preferred it in the centre bypass setting although, I'm sure experimentation and combining it with the EQ controls on your amp would yield better results.

The guitar also features high quality hardware with a custom designed Graphtech nut, Tune-O-



Matic bridge and lovely 15:1 ratio die-cast tuners for accurate tuning.

All in all the Hagstrom Swedie represents a fabulous value package that feels like a much more expensive instrument than the price tag suggests. A long heritage of instrument building seems to have ensured good quality across the board and if you require a more flamboyant finish - well, the more costly Swede range can provide all sorts of bells and whistles!

If, on the other hand, you want a single cut guitar that is a little different to the rest of the crowd and has a few unique features coupled with great build quality and hardware, at a price that's sensible then check out the Swedie. All in all a great guitar at a superb price – you can't really go wrong with this. I look forward to checking out the rest of the Hagstrom range.





# PRs SE Custom 24

PRs is associated with the highest quality guitars - sadly at matching prices! But you don't need to be a millionaire to sample Paul Reed Smith's genius. The SE range is surprisingly affordable. We gave **Michael Casswell** one of the company's best sellers and asked him to give it a hard time. Could a semi-pro PRs satisfy a demanding pro player?

Some guitar companies excel at both quality and consistency. As I've said in Gi reviews before, names that spring to mind include Music Man, Suhr, G&L and, of course, PRs. I have tried many PRs guitars over the years and they are lovely every time, but I still don't own one. It's not because I don't like them, because I do, and I'm sure it's only a matter of time before I add a nice played in PRs to the embarrassingly large number of guitars I already own. My point being, some guitars you could buy unseen and untried and know it will be a great one. That sort of quality usually comes with a large price tag, but PRs's SE range of Korean made models, from which the SE Custom 24 comes, is a fraction of the cost of the U.S made guitars, but seems to suffer no loss in either quality or tone.

They say this model is based largely on Paul Reed Smith's first run of guitars that were shown at various trade shows in 1985 and you have to look hard to see how they are keeping the cost down compared with those originals. And I know they are consistently like this and that wasn't sent a hand-picked tri-colour sample. How do I know? Because

I've seen a few of these SE custom 24s owned by eager young players at the Guildford academy where I lecture, and those too have all been really good sounding, usable, pretty guitars.

To get down to the Custom 24, in a nutshell what you get is a nice flame maple top on a mahogany body and neck, with neck and bridge humbuckers, both of which produce a sweetly voiced midrange bark. And that adds up to good Les Paul tone for relatively little money!

So how does PRs do it? Well, beside making in Korea, labour and construction have been saved by the use of a flat maple top as opposed to the carved style on the high end PRs guitars. You get the familiar bird inlays, which are very neatly done, but on close inspection, the actual material used for the inlay is a plainer looking substance (PRs calls it 'pearloid'), rather than the mother of pearl/abalone type material found on the U.S versions. It's still nice though, but just another tiny way of keeping the cost affordable. Moving on, the tuners are non locking, but seem to work well and the

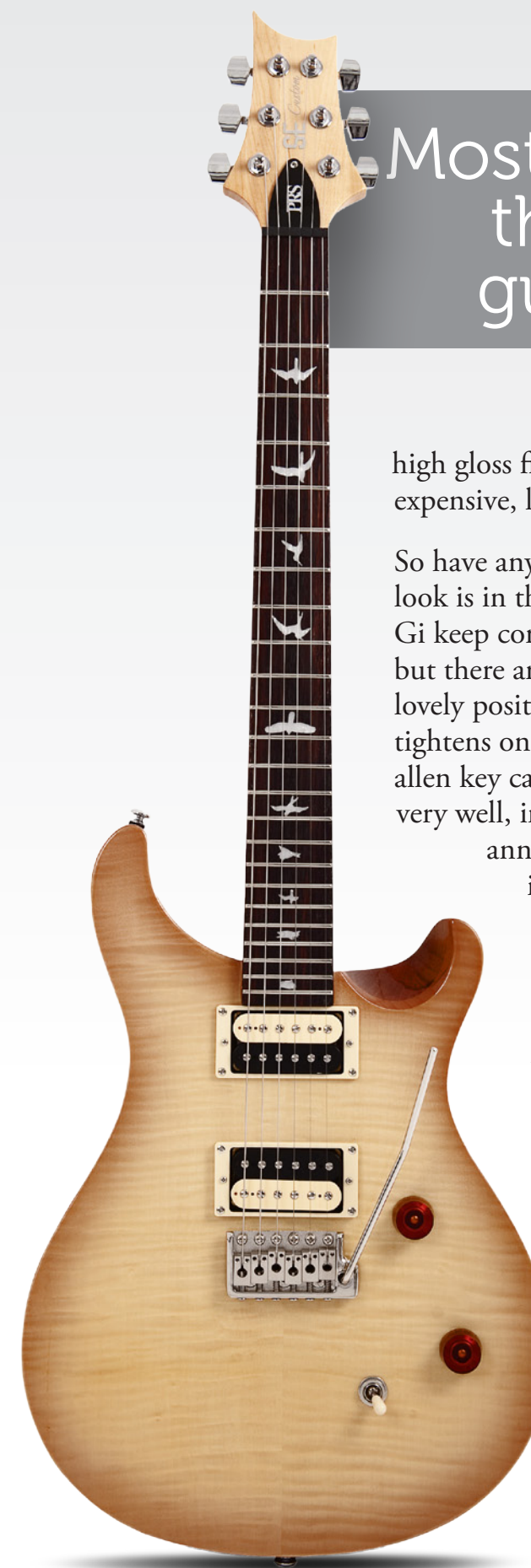
Most players would find the playability of this guitar to be excellent

high gloss finish will obviously be some kind poly, not the very expensive, labour intensive, nitro finish of the U.S guitars.

So have any important sacrifices been made? A good place to look is in the trem system which is a recurrent weakness we on Gi keep commenting on with guitars coming from the Far East, but there are no such issues here. The trem was fantastic, with a lovely positive feel, once I'd tightened the little grub screw which tightens onto the arm. That was no trouble, because the tiny allen key came supplied with guitar. The guitar kept its tuning very well, in fact, with and without trem use. It is always a major annoyance with any guitar that comes with a trem system if it doesn't even attempt to hold its tuning, but with this PRs, once I'd tuned it up after its journey, it stayed in tune for the whole review and my general noodlings whilst the camera guys were setting up, which is great sign, and a good indicator that the whole construction of the guitar is stable.

The mahogany neck and fret work is all very comfortable. Quite wide and flat but still substantial, with 24 frets easily accessible. Most players would find the playability of this guitar to be excellent, with no buzzing or choked bends, but still with a nice low-ish action. I would also like to mention the fact that the actual rosewood fretboard had a nice dark colour to it, which is good to see, because sourcing good rosewood is now becoming a quality issue for guitar makers. More and more rosewood fretboards on modern made guitars seem to be getting paler and a bit insipid

[...>]



SRP £699/\$1,046

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC



looking, even on some very expensive big name instruments. It's one of the things I'm starting to watch for. I am lucky enough to own a '62 and '63 Strats, and when you look at the Brazilian rosewood boards on those guitars, it is almost as dark as ebony. Sadly, the days of sourcing quality wood like that are over for most modern guitar builders.

There are no surprises in how the Custom 24 sounds. Mahogany with a maple cap, and two humbuckers is always going to be Les Paul territory but I would suggest that this guitar is more versatile than a Les Paul, because you have a great trem at your disposal.

I really can't fault this PRS. It plays and sounds great, seems to be very well made and finished and for a twin humbucker guitar there really is not much out there that can touch it - and certainly not at the price! It won't twang like a good Strat or Tele, but it will bark and roar like a good Les Paul. Nice guitar and when you look at the street price, it's stunningly good value for money!





# EMG James Hetfield Pickups

Fancy adding some real power to your guitar? EMG has been getting rave reactions to its collaboration with Metallica's James Hetfield - the new EMG JH set. So who do we have on the Gi team who'd like to give them a try? Step forward shredder extraordinaire, **Andy James**, for a special guest review!

James Hetfield has been laying down bone-crushing riffs with Metallica for over 20 years and has always used one brand of pickup to do the job - EMGs. In fact EMG has become a staple part of the metal genre and its pickups are known the world over for their rich response, tightness and clarity - in a studio environment, but no less on stage, through 100 Watts of pure drive.

Hetfield's traditional choice has been the time-honoured 81 bridge/60 neck combination in all of his ESP guitars but around 2009, so the story goes, he contacted EMG's Rob Turner and told him he wanted what EMG calls a 'stealth' looking set that: "...captures the power and transparency of a passive pickup and still retains the legendary active tone that molded a generation."

Apparently, Hetfield has always liked the punch and clarity of the EMG combination but after playing with a set of passives, was intrigued to see if EMG could come up with a combination of active/passive technology combining the tightness and clarity of active circuitry with the fat warmth and rich tone of passives.

Getting from there to the launch of these new pickups took some time and a lot of trial samples (19, Hetfield says!) and EMG says: "The JH-N has individual ceramic poles and bobbins that feature a larger core and are taller than the 60. This produces more attack, higher output, and fuller low end in the neck position. The JH-B uses the same type of core but has steel pole pieces, unlike the 81 that uses bar magnets. This produces the familiar tight attack with less inductance for a cleaner low end."

I was sent a sample set to try and fitted them to one of my own ESPs - an LTD EC 1000 - a really easy job. One of the great things about EMGs is that if you are already using this brand of pickups, replacing them is just a matter of plugging them in. If you haven't previously had EMGs, you need to do more, but you get a full kit and plenty of instructions, so as long as you're reasonably confident with a soldering iron and can find somewhere to store the battery you should be OK. If not, having a guitar tech fit them might be safer and not a very expensive job.

Once fitted in my ESP, the result was really impressive - so much so that I've decided



[...>]



SRP £265/\$299

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC





Swapping your existing pickups for a set of these doesn't come cheap, but if your aim is the perfect sound does money really matter?

to leave them there. As well as for the video on this page, I also used them in my new Licklibrary Quick Licks DVD: Progressive Shredding in the Style of John Petrucci and have had some great reactions to the sound I was getting. (*Is that a cheap plug, or what? Ed*).

For me, the James Hetfield signature series pickups deliver exactly what they set out to do. Playing through these pickups, you still get that punchy feel from an 81, but more overtones, giving a much richer texture that makes the guitar sound so much wider. The neck pickup is really creamy and is great for soaring leads, quite reminiscent of that holy grail Les Paul tone we all know and love. These neck pickups also delivers a

really transparent clean tone that's great for individual picking through chords

To go with the new and improved sound is the classic pickup shielding that gives the pickups a much more cool and vintage look, so these pickups not only sound great, they look great too.

Swapping your existing pickups for a set of these doesn't come cheap, but if your aim is the perfect sound does money really matter? I know not everyone will agree but for me it doesn't. Nothing gets in the way of the sound! I'm keeping these!





# THE BASSMENT

That went well, didn't it? Many thanks to all the Gi readers who've contacted us to say how much you've enjoyed our new venture into bass territory - **The Bassment!**

In this issue, our subterranean guide, **Dan Veall**, has another great interview for you - this time with the mighty Frank Bello from Anthrax - as well as a special treat: the first of a two-part look into the mysteries of bass strings. Stuck buying the same old same old strings every time, because you're not quite sure what all the different types have to offer? Dan has the answer!

Hello and welcome to **The Bassment!** When we started planning Guitar Interactive we knew we wanted to create a proper bass section, but as with our area for acoustic guitarists, we wanted to make it something special. Just a couple of bass reviews randomly dotted here and there in a magazine dominated by guitarists doesn't make it worth picking up if you're a serious bass player, so we were determined to wait until we found the right bass writer, had **The Quiet Room** happily under way and had the production resources to cope with the extra workload and make something seriously dedicated.

We also have another cracking bunch of reviews in store, with bass products from TC, Washburn, Musciman and a brand new bass effects pedal from the US pickup specialist Fishman.

Spread the word, bass readers! The more of you who join us, the more bass coverage we can bring you!

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# THE POWER OF ANTHRAX

Widely hailed as one of thrash's premiere bassists, Anthrax's Frank Bello talks to **Dan Veall** about 'the big four', playing, his gear - and that famous Bello attack.

Frank Bello is a powerhouse of 'driving low end' - standing out even among amongst all the other top bass players of his generation. His infectious personality and beaming enthusiasm, even after over 25 years in the business, is still a welcome breath of fresh air - the kind of breath of fresh air that follows a train speeding by! If you've seen Frank playing in Anthrax, you'll know what I mean - his energy certainly comes through his bass playing, as do the influences that he holds in high esteem.

Born and raised in the Bronx, northern New York, Bello learned to play bass parts on guitar because he didn't own and couldn't afford a bass in his formative years. He cites influences like Steve Harris, Geezer Butler and Geddy Lee as shaping his playing style and his three finger technique draws strongly on those players. It's a technique that sounds great when digging in, or piling out those triplets in a speed metal bass line. I'd urge you, if you are looking to follow a similar style, to check out videos of those three players as well as Frank; you'll learn a lot from all of them. If you ever want to build up stamina in your right hand to play rock and metal then there's a great place to start!

Interestingly, although Frank is best known for playing in one of the mighty 'big four' thrash bands Anthrax, (a term coined back in the '80s for Anthrax, Metallica, Slayer and Megadeth) before he joined as bass player he was actually the band's roadie and guitar tech. He replaced Dan Liker in 1985 and has been on board since. Speaking of Anthrax, a little known fact: when Frank first

[...>]



started playing bass he used to jam out songs shaping his playing style with his uncle, who in actual fact is Anthrax's drummer, Charlie Benante!

Bello joined the band in time for the *Spreading The Disease* album, along with singer Joey Belladonna. Anthrax's monstrous metal guitar sounds and crushing riffage were soon picked up by fans and the band went on to produce some ten albums over a twenty year period – although they 'took a break' in 2004 when Frank joined the band Helmet. This hiatus didn't last long and Anthrax reformed with Charlie, Frank, Joey and the two guitarists Scott Ian and Dan Spitz. Anthrax have had their fair share of line up changes but are very much enjoying a lease of new life touring once again with 'The Big Four' and of course, Frank is still giving the fans 100 per cent bass.

Gearwise, Frank says he likes to keep

his set-up simple - there's less to go wrong and he knows that what he uses, he can rely on to perform time after time, show after show. Recently he teamed up with Fender's Squier division to create a signature bass that he uses on tour. But the model also encompasses his vision for those wanting a great bass when starting out, as well as an instrument suitable for the professional, he says. In our interview Frank went on to say that when he started out he couldn't afford flash gear and wanted something that wouldn't fall to pieces and sounded great without breaking the bank. The Squier Frank Bello signature model is just that, he says.

Although Frank has used different basses in the past, he settled upon Fender Precision basses around the making of the *Persistence Of Time* album and has enjoyed a close relationship with the company since. The Squier signature bass includes the same pickup arrangement that he has

**THE PLAYER'S CHOICE**

**FREDERIC LECLERCQ**  
DRAGONFORCE

**ROBBIE MERRILL**  
GODSAVEN

**FRANK BELLO**  
ANTHRAX

**BRYAN BELLER**  
DEFTONES

**JOSH NEWTON**  
EVERY TIME I DIE  
THE DAMNED THINGS

**D'ADDARIO**  
EXL165  
NICKEL WOUND  
REG LIGHT TOP MED BOTTOM  
.045/.065/.085/.105  
Long Scale

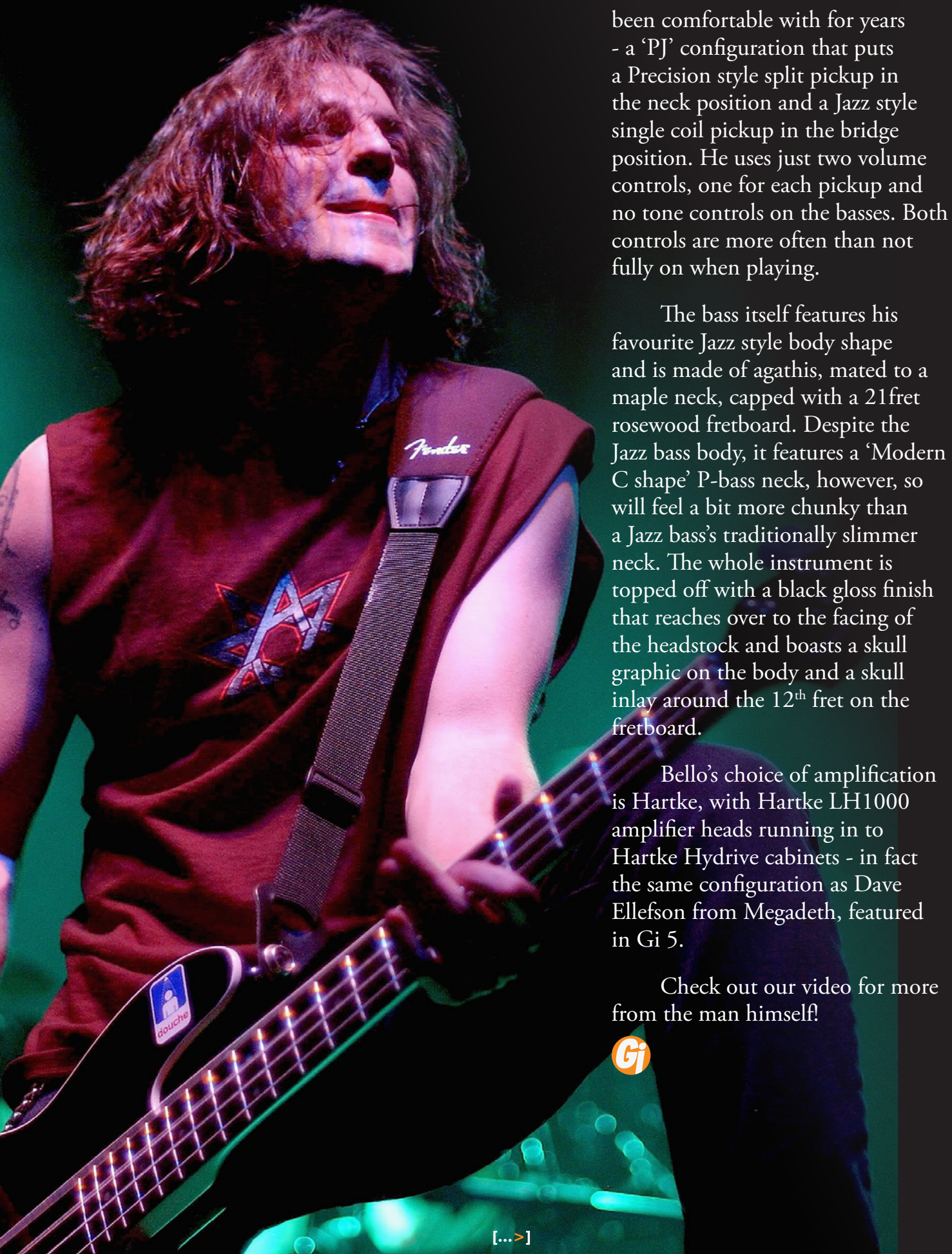
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[...>]





been comfortable with for years - a 'PJ' configuration that puts a Precision style split pickup in the neck position and a Jazz style single coil pickup in the bridge position. He uses just two volume controls, one for each pickup and no tone controls on the basses. Both controls are more often than not fully on when playing.

The bass itself features his favourite Jazz style body shape and is made of agathis, mated to a maple neck, capped with a 21fret rosewood fretboard. Despite the Jazz bass body, it features a 'Modern C shape' P-bass neck, however, so will feel a bit more chunky than a Jazz bass's traditionally slimmer neck. The whole instrument is topped off with a black gloss finish that reaches over to the facing of the headstock and boasts a skull graphic on the body and a skull inlay around the 12<sup>th</sup> fret on the fretboard.

Bello's choice of amplification is Hartke, with Hartke LH1000 amplifier heads running in to Hartke Hydrive cabinets - in fact the same configuration as Dave Ellefson from Megadeth, featured in Gi 5.

Check out our video for more from the man himself!



[...>]



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# Strung out.

Bass strings aren't cheap - so the temptation is to stick with what you already know. But there's a lot of choice out there in the market - if you know where to look and what to look for. In the first of a two part journey, **Dan Veall** finds a way through the mystery of bass strings.

In this two part series I'm going to attempt to unravel the very 'windings' of string construction and uncover the 'tones' at the very heart of bass guitar, I'll be taking 'action' to 'gauge' different manufacturing techniques and ask if this is unnecessary 'tension' and are we simply getting 'wound' up over nothing? How do you like all the string puns? Awful! (*You're fired!* Ed)

Bass guitar strings come in many different constructions each having a general name by which they are known, though as you'd expect, manufacturers come up with their own naming standards too, just to confuse matters - or to blind you with some 'new whiter than white' science in some cases! I'll be keeping it clear and simple to give you the bare facts to help you choose the right string for your instruments. You could well find, like many, you'll string each

of your basses (if you have more than one) with different types of string in preference for playing various styles. Flats for funk, Rounds for slap and tap for example!

So to understand what helps to create the sound of a typical bass string, we need to have a look at its construction. Let's look at the four main types of string on the market today and some of their variants.

The choice of string material has a huge bearing on the resultant sound as well as the construction of the string itself and you'll find that some string manufacturers are very guarded about the exact properties of their strings. It's a competitive business after all!

"Bass guitar strings come in many different constructions each having a general name by which they are known.."

## Roundwound –

The most well known type of Bass string, the 'Round wound' is pretty much that! String wire is tightly spiral wrapped around an inner core. This first winding is a thinner lower gauge wrap of wire to add clarity to the overall string tone. Over the top of this are the visible larger wraps. The core itself is usually of one of two different types - a round core, or a hexagonal core. There are reasons for choosing one or the other. The advantages of a hexagonal core are that the outer windings are less likely to become loosened through extended usage, that can lead to a dulling in sound and poor intonation. The hexagonal core string will also have a higher tension than that of the round core. The wire wraps 'lock' on to the edges of the hexagonal core wire and in comparison to a round core string; they will feel much less flexible and less compliant to bending.

You may find that round core strings have more sustain too due to the way that the core and windings interact physically.

## Tapewound –

This particular string is the 'odd one out' here, but I think is one of the most exciting types. Properly known as a 'Nylon Tapewound', the string still features the metal core of its other string cousins but uses a nylon outer wrap instead. Its tone is much softer than any of the metal wrapped strings; the subdued top end of the string makes it sound warmer and full in the lows in comparison. Being a softer material on the outside too means that these strings feel great under the fingers. They will also feel like they have a lower tension as they will be more malleable, because the nylon can 'give' to bending and vibrato easier. A number of well known manufacturers produce these strings and for the electric and acoustic bass player they are a fantastic option for creating a good facsimile of a double bass sound without having to lug a full sized upright around! If you are looking for this particular sound, you'll also be rewarded with a longer period of tonal life as well because they suffer less from the 'start bright and die off over time' effect of steel / nickel wound types.

[...>]





## Flatwound –

The Flatwound string is more difficult to manufacture than the roundwound. The outer wrap on a flatwound is a box cross section that is tightly wound around the centre core to make a completely flat and smooth outer string without the need for grinding. The problem with this method; as I am sure you have found when winding up guitar leads, is that the cable can rotate around and doesn't lay flat. That's less of a problem with a round cross section as it would be hard to notice, however the square shape of the Flatwound must lay flat and thus extra care is required to make the string. On the upside, the advantage of such a string is that grease and grime from playing is less likely to get caught between the windings, something that helps to kill off the brightness of a roundwound. Speaking of brightness, also less of a problem with the Flatwound as they are naturally less bright anyway! Some players really don't like them and feel that they sound dead and lifeless, whereas others like the punch and pillowy thud sound they produce through speakers when amplified.

## Groundwound, Halfwound and Pressurewound –

Here's an interesting string design! Take the process of winding a Roundwound string and it's resultant tone and add to that the comfort and 'finger noise free' sounds of the Flatwound string. When the Roundwound string is finished it is ran through a grinder or a press to flatten out the outer winding and then it is polished. This makes the string smooth and less susceptible to finger noise when amplified. Manufacturers will use a much higher gauge string for the outer wrap in construction of a groundwound as a large proportion of the string wrap is removed in the polishing process. It is important that the resultant string maintains the correct gauge after the excess has been removed.

In Guitar Interactive 7 Dan will be delving even deeper into the subject, including the controversial issue of coated strings! With any luck we'll have beaten the puns out of him by then - but no promises!



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# TC RH750 AMP

In his never-ending quest for zero weight and maximum bass power, The Bassment's **Dan Veall** comes head to head with TC Electronic's RH750.

When it comes to bass guitar, Denmark's TC Electronics is a relative newcomer. Then again, it has an illustrious history in signal processing, with TC products taking pride of place in many studios and live sound rigs. But TC is certainly no stranger on the world's stages, either. It actually started out making FX pedals and now numbers users like Steve Vai, John Petrucci, Brian May and Mark Tremonti - just a few of the stellar line-up of TC's live users. Not content to rest on its laurels, the company has now exploited its vast know-how in high-end electronics to develop a range of ultra-light, high power bass gear that has caused a considerable stir.

Heralding its product line as 'bass Version 2', TC Electronic has created a range of feature rich, user (and back!) friendly amplifiers and cabinets, so we borrowed one of the company's latest heads - the RH750 - and brought it down to The Bassment for trial by bass!

The RH750 is the latest in TC's RH line, following the original 450 Watt models: the RH450, the Classic 450, (a cut down version of the RH450) and the Staccato '51, a version of the RH450 remodelled tonally by Rocco Prestia. TC Electronic has also produced the BH range of heads and a 1600W power monster known as the 'Blacksmith' for those who want to level housing estates!

So what does the RH750 bring to the table? Well I referred to 'the lightweight revolution' in my review last month of the MarkBass TTE500 and the RH750 and its family are in the revolution too! I'm really pleased to see that more and more companies are adopting new technologies in their amplification, especially when said technology has the potential to be such a huge benefit to musicians. So before we start talking about the brilliance of the front panel programming, the weight of this unit must get a mention. At 4Kg, it's not the lightest lightweight head on the market, but that's not the point of the RH750. Yes, they have got the weight down, considering the output volume you can get from this little beast, but the whole thing still feels solid and ready for the road. We have a steel casing with an integral handle sculpted in the side. The handle even protects the grill behind it that aids cooling. You can't help reflecting that this is a really well thought-out design exercise, in every department.

And then, of course, there is also the clever front panel layout - enabling the user to access the deeper programme settings, such as the frequency centre of each of the tone controls, 'tweeter tone' and level preset, without having to lose yourself in pages of parameters. It's so refreshing that TC has managed to make this easy, because there is nothing more frustrating than having to wade through pages and pages of settings that are impossible to remember - particularly mid-set when things have gotten a bit out of hand!

On the rear of the RH750, as you'll see in our video, you will find a whole host of well thought-out and useful options, including the DI output, effects loop, digital output for connecting directly to studio hardware, a headphone socket, remote control input (for the footswitch) an MP3 input and power connector. Oh, but what's this? A closer look reveals that



the power supply integrated in to the RH750 is 'auto-adjusting'. In short, plug it in anywhere in the world within the 100-240vAC range and there's no need to do anything other than select the correct type of fused power lead. No visits to technicians or switches to set: I think this will certainly win-over touring musicians that travel light!

In our video I look at how the equaliser works, but felt it'd be a little laborious demonstrating [...] > ]



SRP £849/\$999

STAR RATING ★★★★★

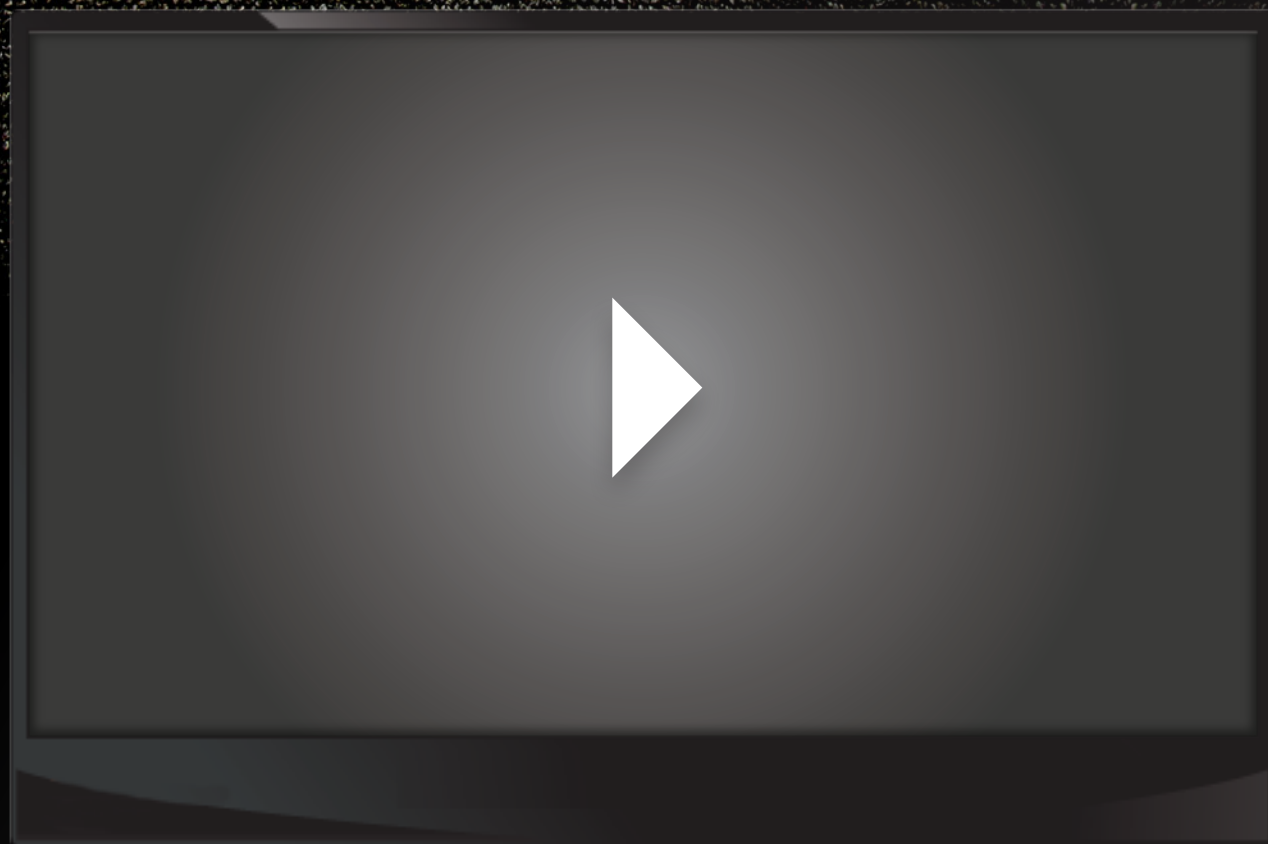
CHECK THE SPEC



the full sweep of frequency selection available from each of the separate knobs on the semi-parametric equaliser. The techies amongst us will probably like to know to what is on offer and what the actual frequency centres are. I have included those in our Tech Spec section but suffice to say, it's worth visiting a TC dealer for a full test drive yourself as our test bed isn't the be all and end all of reviewing a piece of gear. Though it's pretty great from where I get to sit, turned up loud!

The RH750 and the wide selection of heads in the TC Electronic Bass range offer flexibility, power and ease of use in a suitably light weight package. It's not for everyone and may on the face of it look rather

daunting to operate, but I'd have to say, if you can work a car stereo then you can work the RH750! If you'd prefer something a bit simpler in the same package configuration then take a look at the RH Classic (450W) that features a no nonsense 'plug in and go' approach. This is a great amplifier capable of ultra clean sounds as well as a reasonable facsimile of guttural grunge and everything in between. From a purely personal point of view I'd like a deeper centred bass control, as per the Staccato head, but that's a small point to mention. Out of all the current crop of lightweight heads, for me, this one is tight at the top of the list.



## MUSICMAN STINGRAY 4 BASS

It may have been around since the 1970s but the Musicman Stingray still commands a place in the world's top handful of professional bass choices. **Dan Veall** reassesses a genuine US-made masterpiece - and is pleasantly surprised when we tell him the price!

I'm pretty sure that the Musicman Stingray Bass needs no introduction - it's one of the most identifiable Bass designs on the market today and like 'the other most well known bass designs that you'll have no trouble in naming', it has a long history.

The first Stingray basses appeared in 1976, soon after the Musicman company was set up by two ex-Fender employees. In the early days, Sterling Ball, (son of Ernie Ball) according to web resources was employed as a beta tester for the Stingray bass. Leo Fender was involved with Musicman too, officially from 1975 where he took the position of Musicman Inc's president. Long story short - and boy is there a lot of story! - the Musicman company was sold to Ernie Ball in 1984 and Sterling Ball is at still very much involved and at the helm, as the company CEO.

The Musicman was certainly a departure from the Fender designs pre-1976 despite the body shape and headstock having a certain nod to the Precision. However, the inclusion of that big soap-bar pickup and active electronics certainly sent the Stingray bass trailblazing ahead in terms of sound

and options for the busy bass player. The recognisable three plus one tuning key layout on the headstock not only became eye catching but also helped to reduce neck dive. The tuning keys are physically smaller than Fender's equivalents, helping to cut down a bit on weight. Musicman didn't stop there and no doubt took time looking at how to make these new basses more robust. A six bolt design for fixing the neck to the body and the metal plate for mounting the jack socket and controls to no doubt cut down on the chances of a cracked pickguard.

Over the years we have seen numerous 'tech' upgrades but the Stingray has very much remained visually identifiable. The EQ system has included either a two band 'Bass and Treble boost/cut' circuit or a three band system, including a mid control - the bridge on some models has allowed for 'string through body' attachment or has included a set of 'mutes' for controlling tone and string sustain. Musicman has a wide range of wood and colour options for all of their instruments including some tasty 'special edition' finishes and premium fretboard materials.



SRP £1,355/\$2,200-300

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC

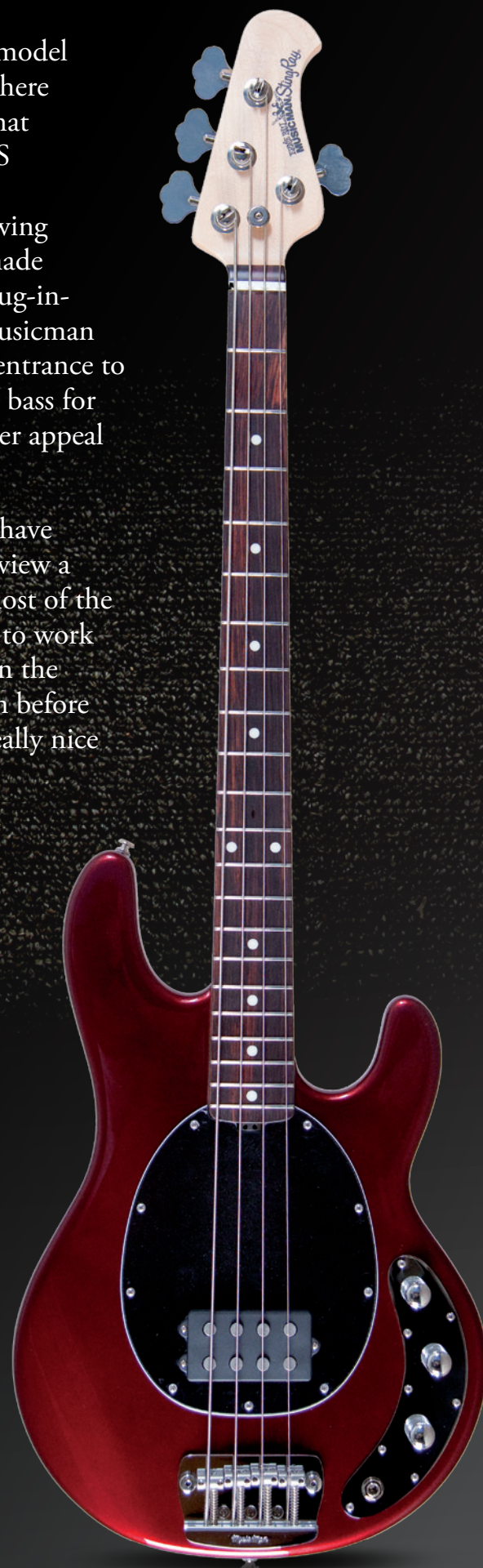
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I spoke to the UK distributor on receiving our test model to find out a bit more about it. I wanted to know where it fitted in the market. Apparently, Musicman felt that there was still a gap between the mid-priced non-US models and the premium ranges that needed to be filled and this is where this SR4 model we are reviewing here fits in. This model is actually a premium US-made instrument, however it favours a more simplistic 'plug-in-and-go' approach in order to make a cost saving. Musicman has suggested this instrument would be great as an entrance to owning a US-made Stingray, or indeed as a back up bass for a professional. I have to say that I think it has a wider appeal than that.

Let's dive straight in to discuss this fine bass then! I have to admit that I'm probably the ideal candidate to review a Musicman bass because I shy away from the herd most of the time, so an instrument with such heritage will have to work a little harder to win me over! I seem pretty happy in the video review right? Well, yes I am! Acoustically, even before I plugged this bass in, it sang out and rang with a really nice resonance and sustain. A really great start, as I will dismiss an electric instrument if it lacks in these areas. I'm a real fan of that 'piano string' tone with vibrant harmonics and clear sustain. Why? Well, you can roll all that off using EQ if you want to go and be all 'old-skool' with a more vintage sound, but you can't dial-in that resonance and sustain if it isn't there to start with and with the Stingray it certainly is.

Plugging in to our demo amp in the studio I was greeted with that unmistakeable topky rasp and bite. It may just be a two band system on this somewhat stripped-down Stingray, but I was really pleased with the active circuit as I was able to dial back the top a bit and boost the lows just where I like them. Well done Musicman! Something to note is that the active circuit does not feature centre detents to give you a flat or zero setting, so using your ears is the order of the day. I think the idea here is that you're meant to find the sound you like, not be directed by 'normal



## Let's dive straight in to discuss this fine bass then

settings'. Another notable absentee is any sort of pickup switching. I like that, too. The SR4 excels straight out of the included gig bag and like a P bass, it's a case of plug in and you're ready to go with a great tone, no messing!

If you saw our last issue's Bassment reviews, you'll know I like high mass bridges and this Stingray includes the large plate you expect to see on these instruments. This model does not feature string through anchoring or mutes, but some sacrifices have had to be made to get the price down to a more affordable level and these are not exactly major omissions.

Overall the workmanship on our sample was fantastic as was the attention to detail, resulting in a flawless finish.

There's no doubt this is a working professional instrument - a genuine US-made bass which plays beautifully and sounds great. It's simple, reliable and does exactly what Musicman set out to do - offer a more easily affordable entry point to this industry standard range.





# WASHBURN AB 5 ACOUSTIC BASS

What do you do when your band announces it's planning an unplugged set? Washburn has a suggestion - buy one of its new, very affordable, acoustic AB5s. Guitar Interactive asked **Dan Veall** to investigate.

Washburn started making instruments back in 1883 and is certainly no stranger to the acoustic guitar market, having established a very strong customer base for quality guitars at sensible prices. Washburn's latest line of acoustic six string guitars has been winning accolades all round (including a rave review in our Quiet Room for a WD25, back in Issue Four) but what about Washburn's acoustic basses? They've been around for a while now too, and I was interested to find out, not having had the chance to try one before.

Washburn was early into the acoustic bass guitar market and has done really well with the AB series. I remember watching the original 'MTV Unplugged' series of television music shows in my teens - you could pretty much guarantee you were going to see a Washburn acoustic bass being wielded by the featured artists.

Which brings us to this newcomer, the AB5 - a more affordable model, designed to appeal to the mid-level of the market, or the player who wants an acoustic bass now and then but can't justify a luxury model. At the moment there are just a few models listed on the Washburn website, including a five string and a Stuart Hamm model in the premium range. All come with a colour choice and depending on the model you choose, varying

degrees of 'tech' on board, such as mono-rail bridge pieces and pre-amplifier EQ options.

The AB5 keeps it clean, usable and simple. The body isn't a full dreadnought or a skinny 'thin-line' but more akin to the size of a standard acoustic in depth. It's very easy to lean over the instrument and nice to look down at the rich mahogany side walls. The back of the bass body and neck are also mahogany, giving it fantastic looks, contrasted against the light and glossy spruce top. Alternatively, if you are that way inclined, the AB5 is also available in a glossy black finish that I think looks classy too. It's a stripped-down, no frills, classic look that I think we can all agree is very tidy!

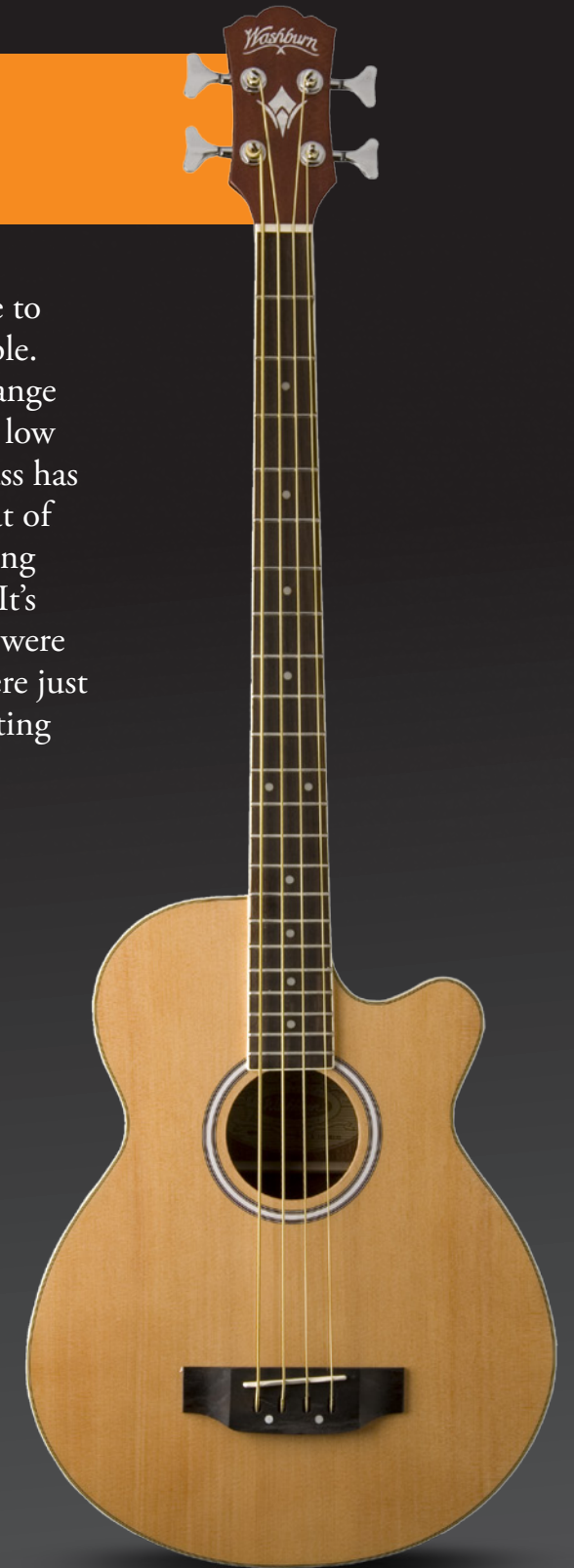
Before filming, I picked up the Washburn for a noodle and was quite surprised to find that it was incredibly light. That's not unusual in comparison to a solid body electric, obviously, but I am sure it's much lighter than the five string acoustic I have back at chez Dood. It's funny how you set yourself up with certain expectations and I have to admit that given my initial sensory input I was somewhat surprised to hear how loud the AB5 was acoustically, considering its weight.

Now sound-wise, when it comes to acoustic basses, they are on to a losing streak to start with. Bodies on acoustic basses are too small

## The AB5 keeps it clean, usable and simple.

to be able to produce the kind of low-end and volume to keep up with other acoustic instruments in an ensemble. Although the AB5 speaks with authority in the mid-range it, like many other acoustic basses doesn't have a great low bass end. Why? Well, there's a reason why a double bass has such a large body, even a cello's body is larger than that of an acoustic bass. My point being, we are already battling with physics and well, not gaining too much ground! It's an age old problem - after all, it was why instruments were 'electrified' back in the day in the first place; bands were just getting bigger and louder and us bass players were getting lost in the mix because we couldn't deliver the volume acoustically.

Thankfully, Washburn has taken this into account by including one of its premium Equis acoustic pre-amplifiers on board, powered by a 9V battery and fed with signal from a piezo pick-up in the rosewood bridge piece. In the video review I made a point of choosing to hear the bass acoustically as well as amplified. Despite my reservations about 'low end girth', the bass has a really nice tone and I found that through the preamp EQ, adding a bit of bass and pulling out the mids a little gave the instrument a big and rounded sound. I liked adding in a bit of treble for string 'ping' too, but be aware that doing this with a piezo pickup will pick up finger noise on the strings too.



[...>]



SRP £269/\$533.90

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC

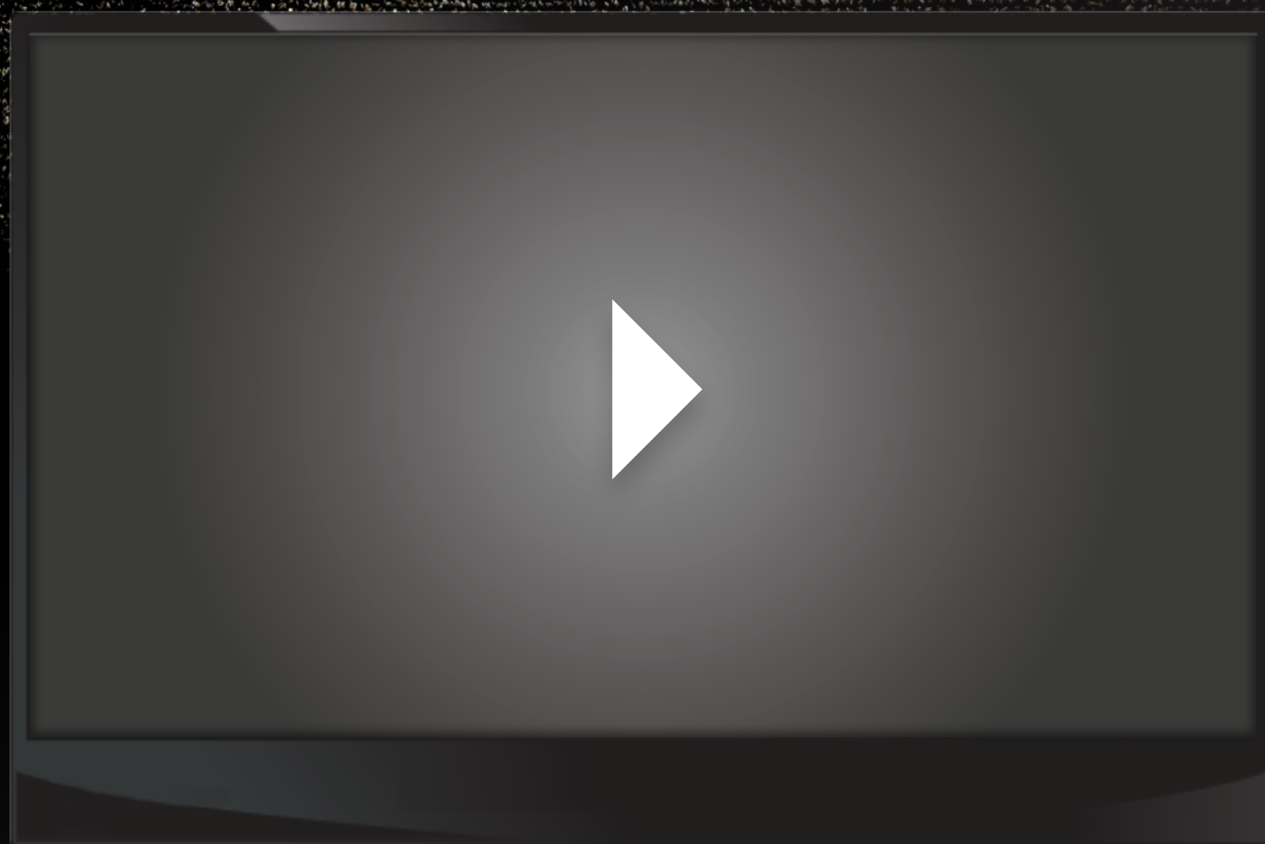


Speaking of the pre-amplifier, the amount of gain available from each of the controls is substantial and boosting could greet you with some feedback or howl from your amplifier or stage foldback if you do over-cook it a bit! My recommendation where possible is to cut, not boost - so, for example if you need more bass in your sound, try scooping out the mid range first before you push the bass slider up - it will have a similar effect when you readjust your volume control.

The balance of the AB5 was absolutely fine, no neck dive and it perched quite comfortably on my leg. The neck, as I've mentioned also in the video, has a really nice slim feel - smaller than a P bass neck but maybe not as tiny as the likes of a Jazz - a respectable 40mm nut width, jumbo sized frets and a reasonable string action made for

a fairly easy journey around the fret board. Now, I think, you can expect a higher action on an acoustic bass 'out of the box'. It's reasonable to assume that you'll want to dig in a little harder to be heard if you are going to use the instrument acoustically. However, I am sure that lowering the action in the normal way with an acoustic bridge would be possible on this instrument (seek a local guitar tech if this means nothing to you!)

So to sum up, I think that the AB5 is a really nicely made instrument and is worthy of its price tag. That said, there's an awful lot of competition in this market, so you might want to shop around. If you do, though, I'm pretty sure this one will be close to the top of the list!



# FISHMAN BASS POWERCHORD FX

**Dan Veall** gets to grips with a new departure from acoustic pickup guru Fishman - a dedicated bass effects pedal!

Well I have to say, here's an interesting addition to Fishman's product range! Better known for high quality piezo pickups and pre-amplifiers for acoustic instruments, Fishman has been busy designing effects pedals recently. The first for us bass players is something just a little bit different!

The 'Powerchord' is a pretty good description of what this pedal hopes to achieve. A 'Power Chord' (or part of) mixed in along with your original bass note with the added excitement of some raspy distortion in the mix. You have the option of selecting an octave up as your fundamental sound, mixed with the dry bass tone. You can then add a 5th above the octave on one button, then a 4th below the octave on the third button. By pressing both middle and right hand buttons an octave above is stacked on top as well giving you the 'powerchord' above your root bass note!

The pedal is able to do this through digital signal processing, much like a pitch shifter effect. Fishman uses top quality hardware, including 24bit Digital to Analogue converters and a state of the art 32bit signal processor. I have to say that I'm impressed with some of the sounds (and noises!!) on offer from the pedal.

I say noises, as I managed to get some pretty awful warbles from the pedal by forcing it to do things it shouldn't when I played discordant harmonics through the effect whilst engaged. "YUK!" you may say, but I do like to experiment and sometimes make basses not sound like basses! I digress; when I actually stopped messing about and used the pedal as prescribed I found the harmoniser rock solid and quite fat sounding when used down low on the neck, however as can be expected from 'Octave Up' generators, a kind of 'Mickey Mouse on helium' sound when playing above the 12th fret on my six string basses. Possibly usable for some genres of music? Well that's up to you! The overdrive effect that I'd prefer to describe as 'variations of all-out distortion' worked really well with each or all of the harmonies and added to an overall 'synth' sort of sound that I think would be great for padding out the band sound when your guitarist stops playing rhythm to reach for his soulful bit of neck shredding. I think the effect would also be fitting in electro bands; maybe a bit of Squarepusher?!

Fishman is not the first company to attempt a stacking a power chord sound in an effect for bass players, but these sort of



SRP £349/\$430.69

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC





**The 'Powerchord' is a pretty good description of what this pedal hopes to achieve.**

pedals are few and far between. You'd be more likely to see this functionality in multi-effect processors with intelligent harmonisers on board. Judging by the technology crammed in to this pedal, it would account for a price tag that is higher than your average 'name' stomp box. Fishman have designed the pedal logically having thought about a wider use than just crunching out root-5ths. I tried a pseudo eight string bass sound just using the octave up effect and with the right amount of level tweaking I think it could be passable - certainly cheaper

than buying a separate quality eight-stringer for the job.. oh yes, and easier to store!

In the video I demonstrate the modes available to you, but there were a couple of items that I didn't go over specifically and would like to touch on. The input gain control on the side of the pedal was really handy for taming the output of a higher output bass, such as my own Shuker with active electronics. Or indeed could be used to up the input to drive the distortion more, though it's worth bearing in mind that

you could drive the DSP circuit in to distortion and that would sound a bit ugly! The other thing to mention is if the effect and dry outputs are used separately, the effect output doesn't include the dry signal and thus the effect level control only affects this connection - a dry signal passes directly to the other output socket.

Here's another natty little inclusion in this all metal cased robust pedal: according to the manual, If you are playing away on battery and the clip LED comes on and stays on, you have approximately one hour battery life left. I suspect this will vary in time depending on the type of battery you use, however Fishman suggests you will

see around 27 hours use from an alkaline battery and 40 hours from a lithium type. I have to suggest it's worth investing in a power adaptor, especially if you are running a chain of pedals. The Fishman typically uses only about 24mA and Fishman has a 200mA adaptor available to take care of such juice duties.

Have a listen to the video review on a decent set of headphones or Hi-Fi speakers to really get an idea of what the pedal is capable of, better still head out and try one! It's great for doing Muse-like impressions - Chris Wolstenholme, step aside!





# THE QUIET ROOM

One of the greatest pleasures we've had in this first year of publishing Guitar Interactive has been the enthusiastic reception for our dedicated acoustic section - **The Quiet Room**.

**Gary Cooper** - Editor [gary@iguitarmag.com](mailto:gary@iguitarmag.com)

We started out on the premise that most guitarists, even the most hard-nosed shredders, appreciate the acoustic instrument and very often want to know more about it, how to find a good one and how to get the best sound.

That's why we were so delighted when the celebrated player and teacher **Giorgio Serci** agreed to join us - and as The Quiet Room continues to grow, you can be sure that Giorgio and our review team have some great plans for 2012!

In this issue we have the second part of our guide to buying acoustic guitars, by **Gary Cooper** - this time showing you how best to move up-market from a beginner's level instrument. We also have our usual player's eye reviews of great products from Simon & Patrick, Alvarez, LAG and a brand new acoustic amp from Tanglewood.

[...>]



# BUYING MID-RANGE ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Ready to move up a step or two from that starter acoustic guitar? Puzzled by tonewoods and body styles? **Gary Cooper** offers a guide to finding your ideal mid-price acoustic.

Back in [Guitar Interactive Issue Two](#) we looked at how to go about buying an inexpensive acoustic guitar. As our reviews since then have shown, finding great acoustic guitars for small amounts of money isn't hard today. Good quality steel-strung instruments are available at prices you couldn't have dreamed of even ten years ago - and some of them are very good indeed.

But what if you've been there and done that? What if your tastes have been sharpened by an OK guitar and you now want something better?

The quest you're on is for better tone. Even a cheap guitar can be made to play reasonably well but if your entry-level instrument isn't any longer thrilling you the way it once did, where do you look for a better one?

We're going to ignore electro-acoustics in this guide as they are a specialist subject that needs an article all of its very own - and we've one on the way. For now, we'll just stick to the basic acoustic instrument.

Let's start with an assumption and a definition. I'm going to assume that you're not going to jump from a £100/\$150 mass market guitar straight to a fully professional instrument. You might if you've won a lottery, or just signed a \$1,000 million record deal, but most people won't. We're more likely to move up the scale in stages as our skill levels develop and our ears get fussier. In other words, as the obsession takes hold! So that next move is likely to be to a mid-price instrument. And what are we calling 'mid price'? For the purposes of this article, we're calling a mid-price acoustic one selling from between just under \$1,000 (say £5-600) to \$1,800 (very roughly £1,100).

We talked a little about body shapes and styles in our earlier feature, but now considerations of size and shape matter more as we start looking for higher quality tone. Until relatively recently, the market was effectively dominated by dreadnoughts and other C.F. Martin derived shapes and sizes like OMs, 000s, 00s and so on.

[...>]



Taylor's 214 GA in spruce and rosewood - a classic

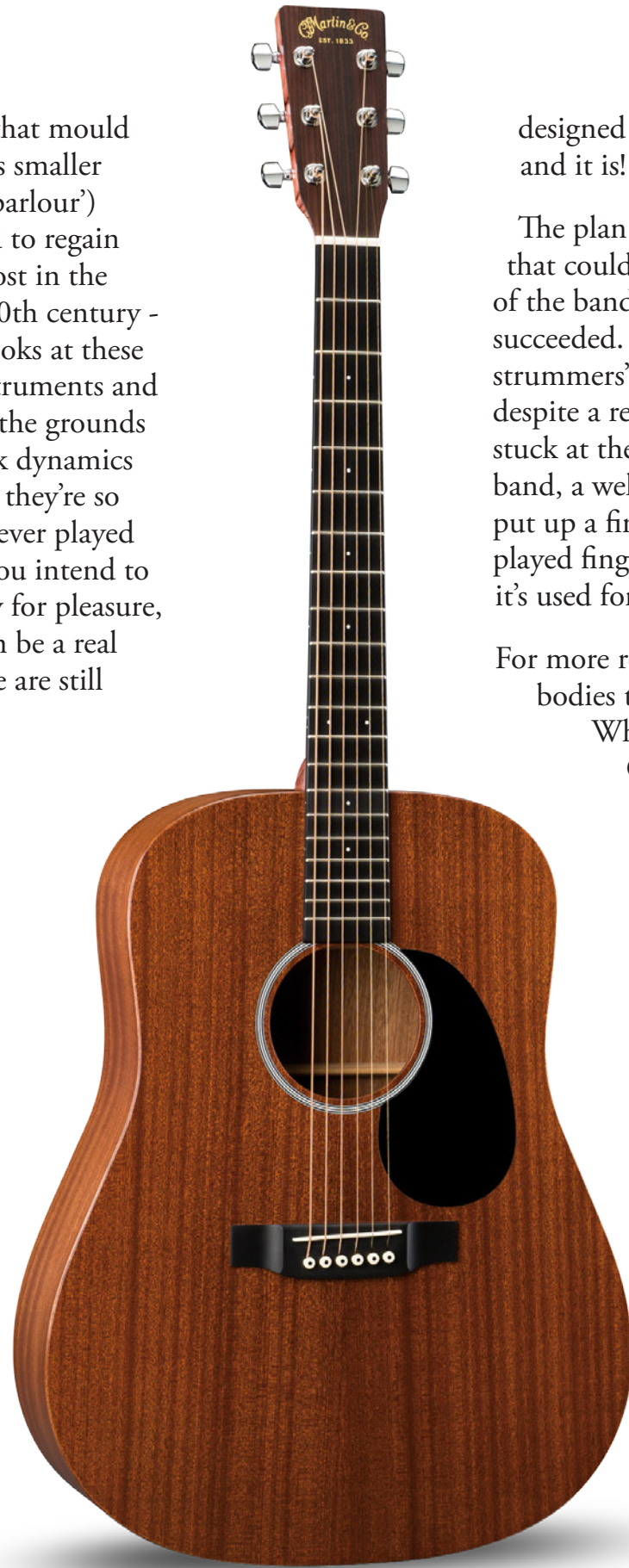


Breedlove's fine Passport C250 - Sitka with maple back and sides



Recently, though, that mould has been broken, as smaller bodied (so-called 'parlour') guitars have started to regain a popularity they lost in the early years of the 20th century - and anyone who looks at these rather delicate instruments and dismisses them on the grounds that they 'must lack dynamics and power because they're so small' has clearly never played a good one! If all you intend to do is record or play for pleasure, a parlour guitar can be a real source of joy! There are still comparatively few parlour guitars around but try one if you get the chance.

The starting point for most of us though, just as it was in our budget acoustic guide, remains the dreadnought sized guitar. Invented by CF Martin in the early 20th century, it was



Sapele - this time as the top on a distinctive Martin DRS1

[...>]

designed to be loud and bassy - and it is!

The plan was to make a guitar that could be heard above the rest of the band and in that Martin succeeded. It's still mostly the strummers' guitar of choice but despite a reputation for being best stuck at the back of a Bluegrass band, a well-made dreadnought can put up a fine performance when played fingerstyle, as well as when it's used for big, fat, juicy chords.

For more reflective playing, guitar bodies tend to get smaller. What is often called the Grand Auditorium (or a 000 - 'triple 0' - in Martin parlance) size is a good choice here. Its smaller waist makes it easier to handle (particularly for female players, who often complain about a dreadnought's bulk) and this body shape offers a fine balance between bass and treble, delicacy and power. Go down a size further and you are into

# T6 Acoustic Sound Big ... Think Small ...



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the 'Concert' range (Martin's 00s or Taylor's Grand Concerts, for example) which are even smaller bodied guitars, well suited to fingerstyle players - wonderful, when recorded well - and generally a delight to play and listen to.

There is a size outside these main categories - the 'Jumbo', invented by Gibson to take on Martin's dreadnoughts. You won't find too many guitars of this size on offer but they can be impressive when you do. Think Pete Townshend!

## Still a bit confused?

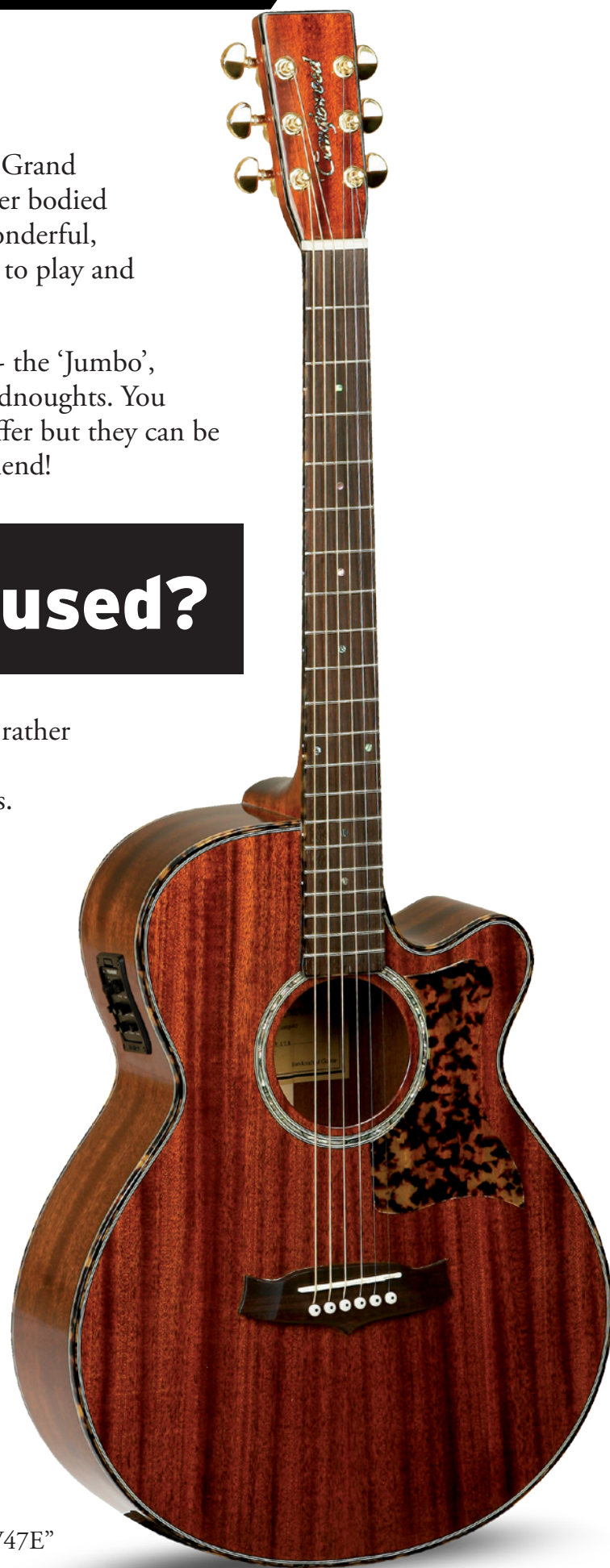
Your best bet is to find an acoustic specialist rather than a general guitar store and set aside an afternoon to try examples of the various sizes. The best way is to find different styles of the same brand.

Having got a general idea what sort of body shape appeals - you next have another option to consider - 12th or 14th fret? This refers to the point at which the neck joins the body on an acoustic guitar. For the most part, the obvious choice, having the neck join the body at the 14th fret, is all the choice you will get and that's fine as it makes it easier to play higher up the neck. But there is an argument for 12th fret models as some purists maintain they sound better.

What about cutaways? You have to assume that when the great makers offer cutaways on their acoustics,

Tanglewood's handsome all-mahogany TW47E"

[...>]



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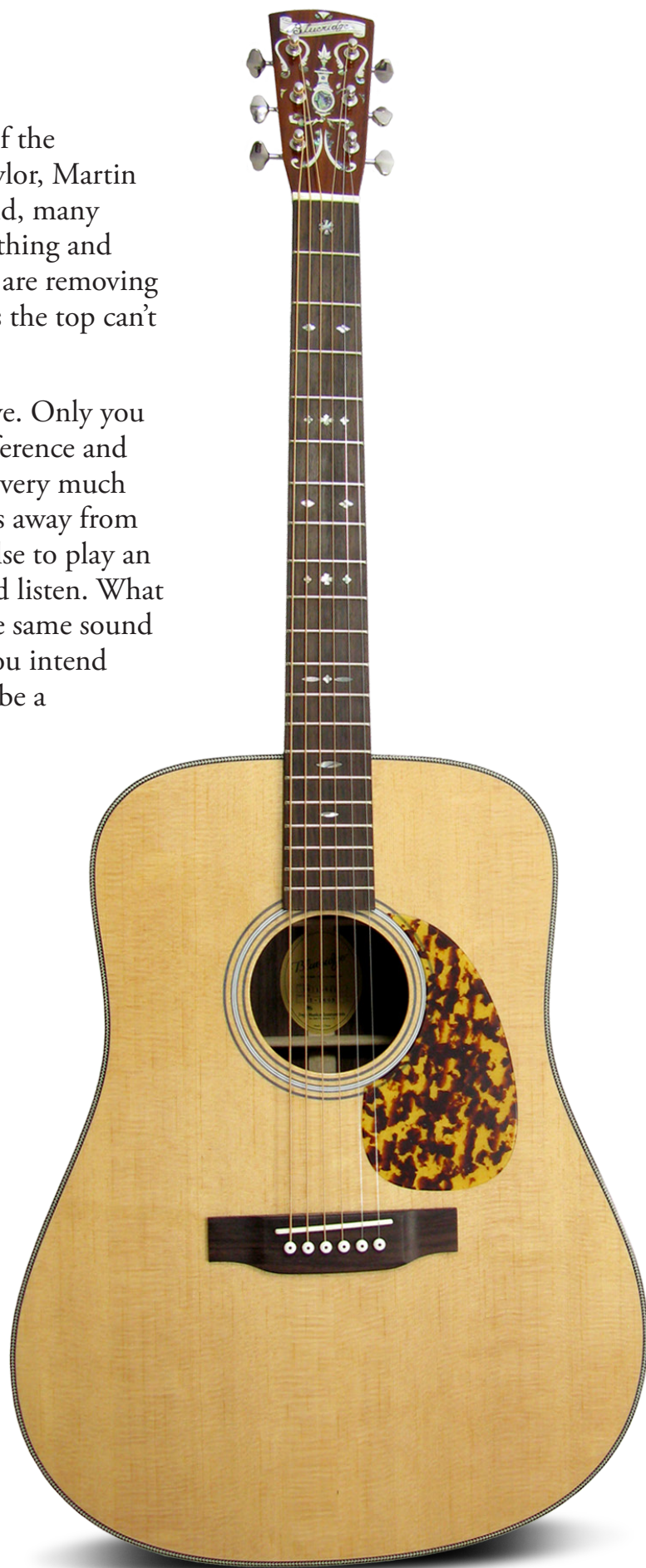
they cannot seriously degrade the tonal quality of the instrument. If they did, the likes of Collings, Taylor, Martin and the like simply wouldn't offer them. That said, many purists insist that you can't get something for nothing and that by increasing access to those higher frets you are removing wood and air from the instrument, which means the top can't move in the same way and tone must suffer.

And this is where we start getting really subjective. Only you can decide whether you can hear that sort of difference and you must always be guided by your ears - which very much includes at some stage situating them a few yards away from the guitar. In other words, always get someone else to play an auditioned instrument, while you stand back and listen. What your audience or a microphone will hear isn't the same sound you will hear as you play it and, particularly if you intend to perform acoustically, its ability to project can be a vital factor.

Now comes the hard part - woods!

We are now in the price range where you will often be offered solid wood as the material used for a guitar's back and sides, as well as its top. Does this matter? Yes. Not as much as a solid tonewood top, which is almost guaranteed at this price level, but if you can get a guitar with solid wood used throughout, if all goes according to theory, it will age and perform better. That's not exactly a golden rule (I have a rare plastic bowl-backed Gibson with a laminated top that sounds like a dream!) but it is a good rule of thumb. Don't rule out laminated bodies, though.

**As to which woods you choose, this is a subject that needs a book.**

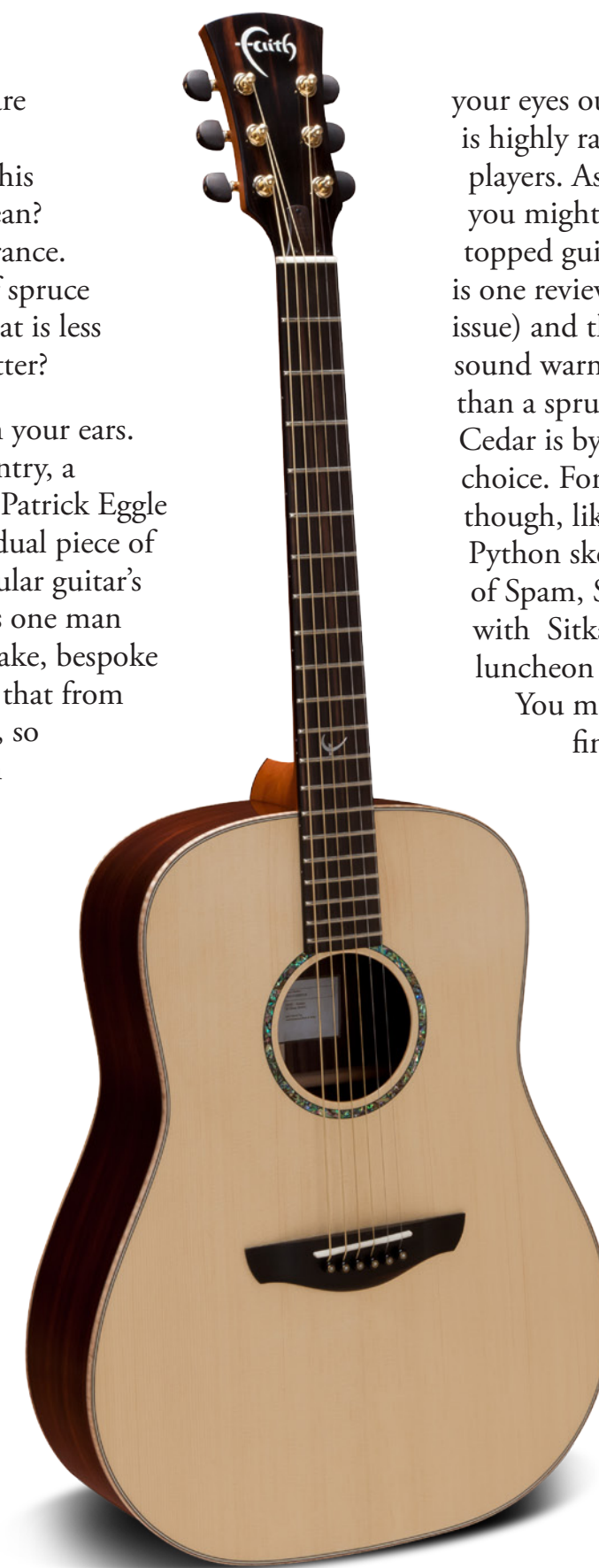


Blueridge's superb spruce/rosewood BR-160 dreadnought

We know Sitka spruce tops are by far the majority types on offer but, but what does all this 'A' grade and 'AAA' grade mean? Some of it is down to appearance. A particularly pretty piece of spruce will score higher than one that is less figured. But will it sound better?

Not necessarily. Choose with your ears. When you are in luxury country, a bespoke maker like Fylde or Patrick Eggle will actually voice the individual piece of wood chosen for your particular guitar's soundboard (and Collins has one man who voices every top they make, bespoke or not), but you can't expect that from a mass produced instrument, so you are better choosing from a selection in a store. This is another important reason why acoustic guitars are best bought in person, after a proper audition - not by mail order.

And what about woods other than Sitka spruce? Now and again you'll see a reference to Englemann spruce, which some players feel has a richer sound. Adirondack (aka 'Red') spruce is rarer still and possibly an unlikely find in this price range, but keep



Faith's 'dread' equivalent the FSHG, in spruce and rosewood

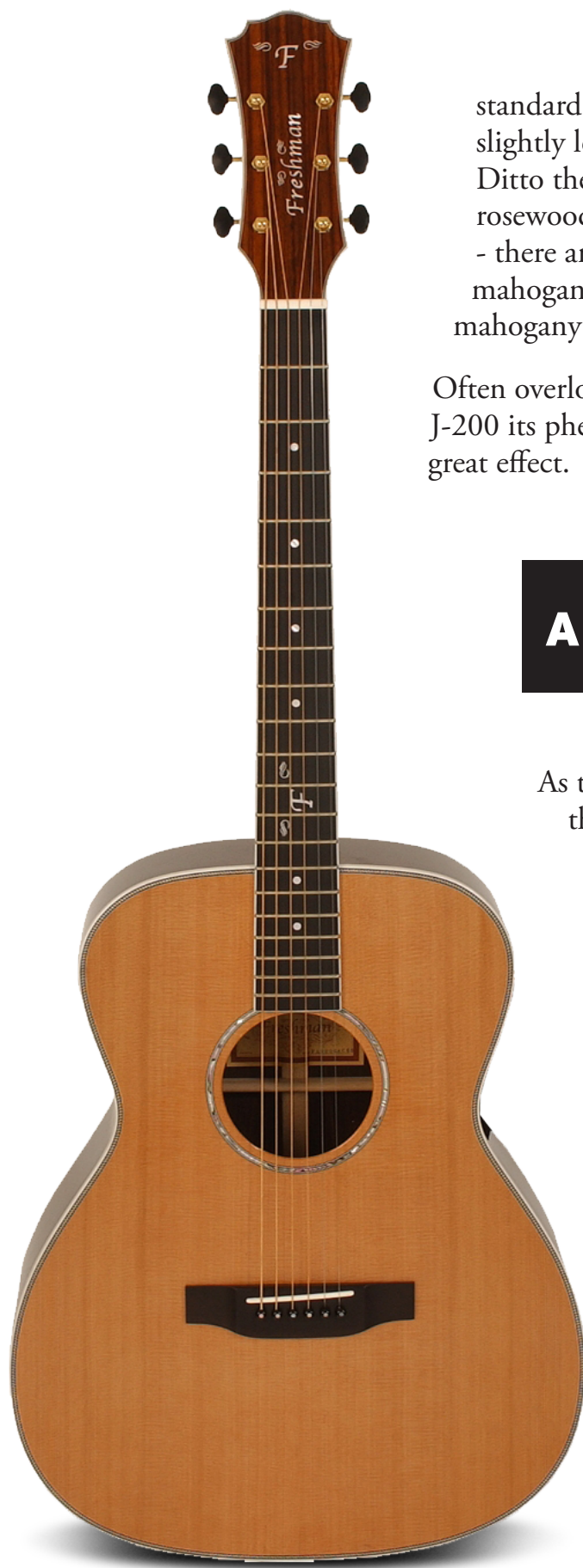
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your eyes out for it as it is highly rated by power players. Aside from spruce you might well find a cedar topped guitar on offer (there is one reviewed in this very issue) and that is likely to sound warmer and louder than a spruce equivalent. Cedar is by no means inferior choice. For the most part, though, like the Monty Python sketch it's a case of Spam, Spam or Spam - with Sitka spruce being the luncheon meat in question.

You might, however, find a wider range of woods used for the bodies and sides.

There's no doubt that the woods used here have less of an impact on your sound - though that doesn't mean they have no effect. Indian rosewood is more or less the





standard choice. It has a great bass and treble response with slightly less mid-range - it's hard to go wrong with this one. Ditto the other obvious choice - mahogany. Some regard rosewood as the better tonewood but it isn't necessarily - there are many factors to be taken into account and mahogany matched to a good spruce top - perhaps even a mahogany top - can produce a fantastic sound!

Often overlooked, it is maple that gives Gibson's marvellous J-200 its phenomenal sound and others have also used it to great effect.

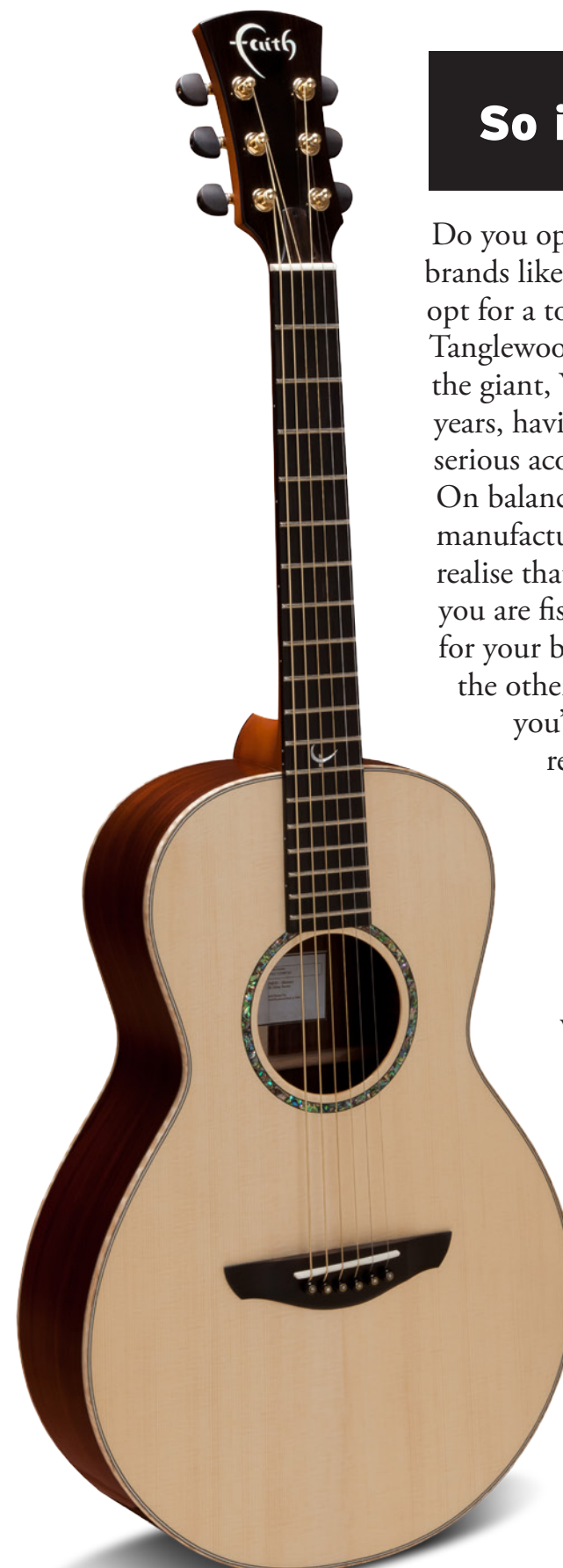
## And what of Maple?

As the world's resources of tonewood start to diminish, the use of alternatives is growing. Both Taylor and Martin offer models which mate sapele backs and sides (it's an African wood, not unlike mahogany) with Sitka spruce tops and if you look around you will find other more unconventional woods used, elsewhere.

And then there is bracing! As Giorgio Serci explained in Gi Four, the way strips of wood are applied to the underside of a guitar's top has a tremendous influence on how it resonates.

Discussions about the merits of various bracing styles can get very esoteric, but suffice it to say that there are differences and you can hear them. Bracing is needed because of the strain a thin piece of wood is under when it's the top of your guitar. Many makers use a variation of CF Martin's original X bracing design, some (increasingly) use a scalloped design which people say allows a good top to give of its best. Which is for you? Trust your ears!

Freshman's impressive cedar-topped GA sized FA500 GACED



A rare parlour model - Faith's pretty FMHG

## So in the end what do you buy?

Do you opt for a lower priced model from one of the major brands like Taylor, Martin, Takamine, or Breedlove, or do you opt for a top of the range model from the likes of Bluedridge, Tanglewood, Freshman, Seagull, or Faith? And what about the giant, Yamaha? Yamaha has come back strongly in recent years, having once dominated the affordable end of the serious acoustic guitar market and mustn't be overlooked.

On balance, we at Gi are very appreciative of the design and manufacturing integrity offered by the big names, but we also realise that, like Avis, the smaller guys have to try harder. If you are fishing in mid-price waters, you may get more bang for your buck from brands that can't rely on their name. On the other hand, of course, you have to consider that, when you're ready to move up a notch further, that may be

reflected in secondhand values, too, and your second tier brand possibly won't fetch as much as a top tier name. Swings and roundabouts. The one thing I would say is that in my experience, companies that specialise in acoustic guitars seem to offer better buys than general guitar brands - with the honourable exceptions of Gibson and Yamaha, who seem able to manage both with equal skill.

All the guitars we've used to illustrate this article are ones we particularly think you should try to make a point of auditioning, by the way!

In the Quiet Room, we'll continue to review guitars right across the entire price range - with more special features on the way to help guide you through this sometimes tricky market.

Happy picking!





# Simon and Patrick Showcase 6T CW Rosewood

Canadian guitar maker Simon and Patrick's Showcase acoustics are among the highest rated on the market, yet sell for around half the price of their rivals. Can you really expect top class performance at a mid-market price?

**Jamie Humphries** asks the hard questions.

Based in the LaPatrie, Quebec in Canada, Simon and Patrick has been producing some of the highest quality acoustic guitars, with the finest grade woods and highest spec materials, for a good few years now and has gained an enviable reputation for offering surprisingly affordable guitars. Surprising, that is, when you put them up against similarly specced models from other North American manufacturers.

All Simon and Patrick guitars feature pressure tested solid tops which, the company says, ensures maximum harmonic vibration. The guitars also make use of an integrated set neck system, said to add extra reinforcement where the neck meets the body. The guitars also include superior electronics and pickup systems, in this case using the B Band A6T system. As if all that wasn't enough from a guitar which scrapes the (admittedly somewhat arbitrary) upper limit of our 'mid price' band, as discussed in this issue's feature, you also get a very advanced TRIC hard case, for ultimate protection of your investment.

So far so very impressive, but what about

the guitar? Our review model, a Showcase CW Rosewood, features a solid spruce top and laminated rosewood back and sides. It's worth pointing out here, by the way, that this is laminated solid rosewood - not pressed composite material, so shouldn't be seen as a weakness. The guitar also features an Indian rosewood fingerboard and bridge and a Tusq nut and saddles by Graphtech.

First impressions were good. The Simon & Patrick felt very comfortable and had a "played in" feel straight out of the case. The satin mahogany neck felt smooth and comfortable in the hand, with no rough fret edges. The guitar was well set-up and felt easy to play, with a very comfortable neck shape. The tone of the guitar was rich, with a full woody bottom end, a bright sparkling top end and a mid that would definitely sit well in a mix. The cutaway also made it easier to reach the higher frets and with the wonderful set-up and comfortable neck, soloing in the higher register on this instrument would be very achievable. The guitar was also loud and vibrant, with a beautiful tone that would mic up very well for recording, which you can hear in our full video demo.

**The Simon & Patrick felt very comfortable and had a "played in" feel straight out of the case.**

Now let's look at the electronics. The B Band A6T system makes use of an undersaddle transducer, or UST, and acoustic soundboard transducer, or AST. This basically means that the guitar sound is picked up from these two sources and blended together with

a cross fader control. This means you can blend the full warm tone of the body, with the brighter tone of the strings at the bridge, making this a very versatile system for live and recording. The preamp also includes a 3-band EQ, volume, phase reverse switch,



[...>]



SRP £1,640/\$1,749

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC



feedback eliminator, and an on board tuner that mutes the output of the guitar when engaged for silent tuning on stage. Once again you can hear a full demo of the guitar's electronics on our video and compare between acoustic and pickup sounds. I found the pickup system to be one of the best I have tried - very authentic and natural sounding. I love the cross fade feature for blending the two sound sources, and the EQ was also very musical.

I really enjoyed playing this guitar, and was very surprised to learn its price. No, it isn't what you would call cheap. You can buy far cheaper acoustic guitars, some of which are very good. But this guitar is an investment and in a different class - a serious player's guitar. When you consider its construction quality, the materials used and its superior electronics, our feeling was that it will stand up against instruments twice the price, effectively putting it into the real high end bracket of acoustic guitars. If you are in the market for a top quality guitar then, based on this really lovely instrument, I would certainly say give Simon and Patrick guitars serious consideration.



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# Alvarez RD12CE | Alvarez RF12GB

It's the time of year when many of us are faced with buying a beginner's guitar - perhaps even for ourselves! But what's good value for money in a hugely crowded marketplace? We gave two prime contenders from the venerable Alvarez range to **Rick Graham** to see if they could pass the Gi value for money test.

With Christmas rapidly approaching - as it does every year, funnily enough! - it's the ideal time to head out and buy that acoustic guitar that your loved ones have been dropping hints about all year. The only problem being that with so many guitars to choose from within the wide range of entry level offerings, it can be hard to choose the guitar which offers the best bang for the buck.

And even if you're not feeling generous enough to buy someone else a guitar, some of our electric guitar playing readers may well be thinking about investing in a low priced electro/acoustic guitar to satisfy their fingerpicking fantasies, without having to re-mortgage their houses for the privilege. Well, read on, as the RD12CE electro/acoustic and the RF12GB acoustic by Alvarez may be just what you have been looking for!

Based in St Louis, Missouri, Alvarez has been manufacturing acoustic and electro/acoustic guitars since 1965. Although this is the primary output, it also produces classical guitars to a high standard. The majority of the guitars that Alvarez offer are

manufactured in China, with the exception of their top range Alvarez-Yairi instruments which are all hand made by Kazuo Yairi at the Yairi factory at Kani, Gifu in Japan.

Unfortunately, international distribution has caused some confusion here, so just to straighten it out, in Europe, K. Yairi guitars are branded just as K. Yairi, while elsewhere in the world they are known as Alvarez Yairi. At least, that's how we understand it! One thing to note is that rumour has it that some of Yairi's renowned expertise in bracing design and other constructional elements has found its way into the entire Alvarez range. Having tried these two, we're not surprised.

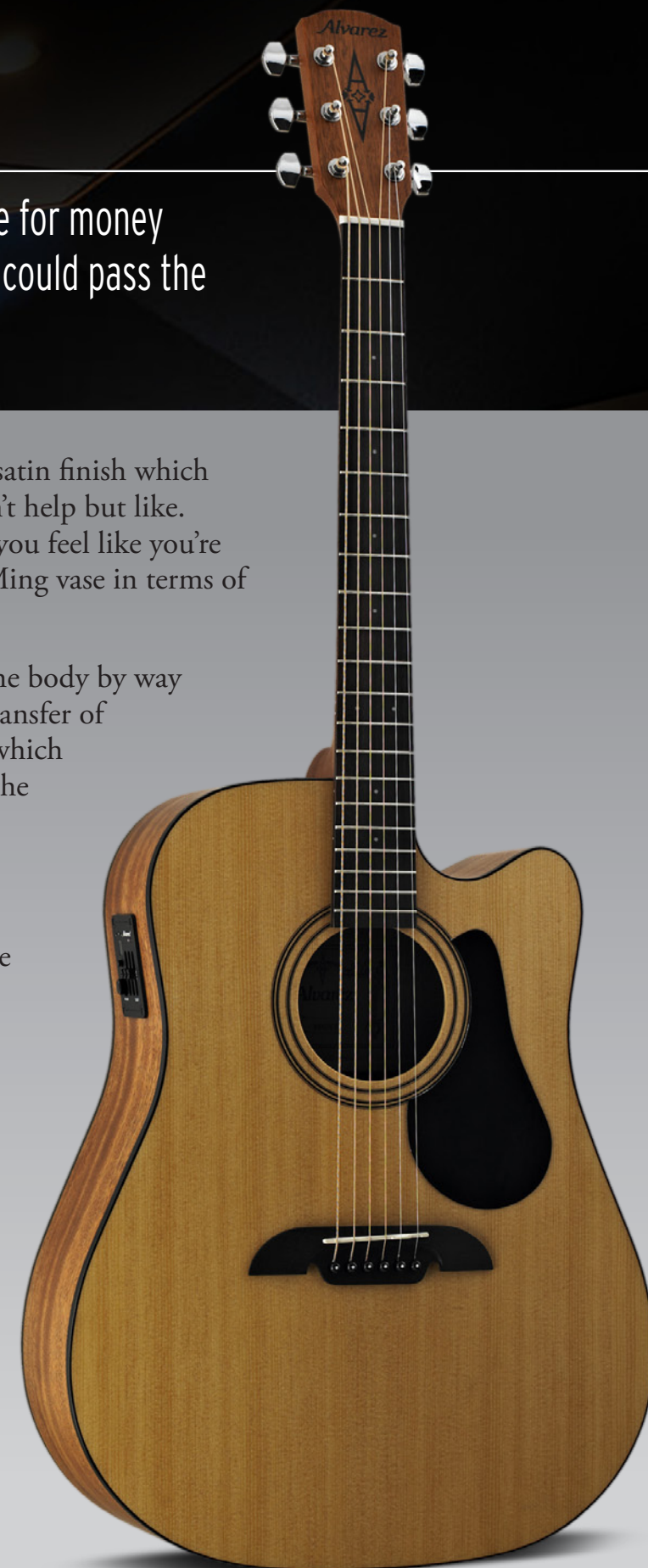
The subjects of this review are taken from the Alvarez Regent series range, which are entry level/mid-entry level range and both the RD12CE electro/acoustic and the RF12GB acoustic are very similar in terms of construction/specification. The wood of choice for the top of the guitar is spruce and that is coupled with laminated mahogany for both the back and sides. The bridge comes in the form of Alvarez's own bi-level bridge design, which is made from rosewood.

The guitars' bodies have an electrostatic satin finish which gives a very natural look and which I can't help but like. Sometimes a high gloss finish can make you feel like you're holding something along the lines of a Ming vase in terms of value which can be a bit unnerving!

The neck of both guitars is attached to the body by way of a dovetail joint which optimises the transfer of energy between the neck and body and which I think is a very welcome feature, while the fingerboards are made from rosewood.

With the RD12CE, the cutaway at the 12th fret gives easy access to the guitar's upper register should you wish to venture that far up the fretboard. You may not need to but it's nice to have the choice! Tuners on both, meanwhile, come in the form of sealed die-cast chrome pegs and the plain but attractive headstock designs, adorned with a simple yet elegant pattern, finishes off a pair of very nice looking guitars.

Regarding the electronics, the onboard S300T preamp, which is Alvarez's own, offers a very easy to use three band EQ with tuner on the RD12CE.



[...>]

**Gi** SRP See Spec STAR RATING ★★★★★★ | ★★★★★★ CHECK THE SPEC

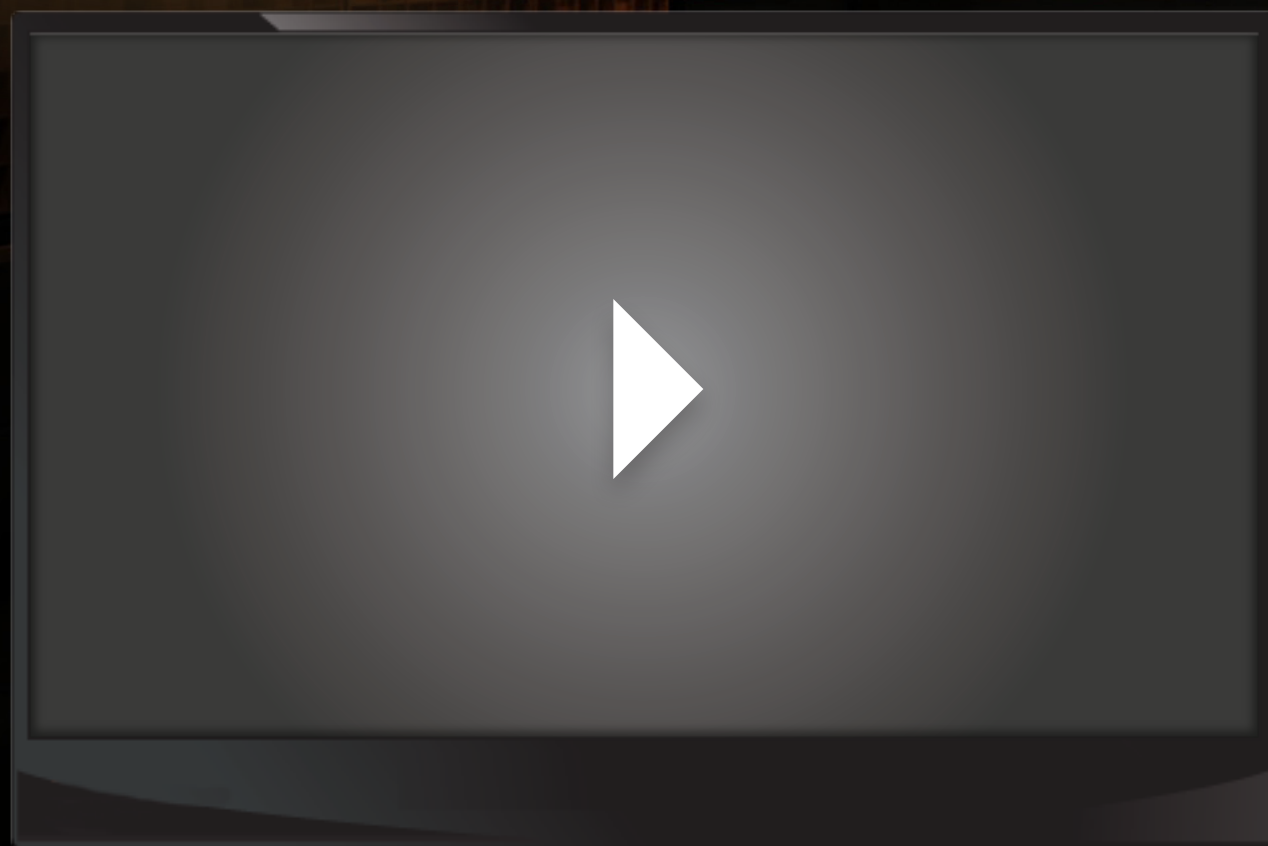


And so to business! In action, the RD12CE delivers a very nice tone which is remarkably well balanced, especially for a guitar in this price range and thanks to its dimensions, it also has the projection to match. The neck profile felt nice and slim but without being too much so and according to Alvarez the Regent series necks have been refined a little to add to their playability, which is good news, especially if you are a beginner/lower intermediate player.

Plugged in, the RD12CE sounded great and with a little tweaking of the onboard preamp's EQ section, some very nice tones were achieved. Tuning stability tends to be

a perennial problem with entry level guitars but it was never an issue during our test run with the RD12CE.

Next up is the RF12GB, which, as there is no 'E' in the model name, indicates that it is a non-electric model. The build specifications are the same as the RD12CE, with the exception of the absence of the onboard preamp and the cutaway at the 12th fret. Also, the 'F' in its model name stands for 'Folk', and as the 'D' in the previous model name stands for 'Dreadnought', it means that this guitar is considerably smaller than its electric counterpart.



### **The RF had a very impressive sound with an equally impressive ability to project that sound.**

The same high standard of build quality is also evident here which makes the considerably lower price tag all the more impressive. Playing the RF12GB was a thoroughly enjoyable experience and I have to be honest, I warmed to it a little more than I did to the CE, without wanting to take anything away from the latter.

Even taking into account its diminutive dimensions, comparatively speaking, The RF had a very impressive sound with an equally impressive ability to project that sound. Although it didn't reach the kind of acoustic volume that the RD12CE produced, it was still loud for a little 'un. I also felt that this guitar offered a little more in the way of sustain and seemed to have a slightly sweeter, 'singing' quality to the tone.

Very impressive, especially looking back at that price tag again!

I really enjoyed reviewing these guitars and it's great to know that manufacturers such as Alvarez are putting out products which are of such good quality at such remarkably low prices. Both models

offer exceptional value for money and if you are considering investing your hard earned cash in an acoustic or electro/acoustic, whether it be for yourself or as a gift for someone this festive season, these models by Alvarez should be high on your list.



[...>]





# LAG Tramontane T100 ACE

LAG's Tramontane acoustics have been picking up major endorsements in recent months - even Ozzy's Gus G has been playing one! We handed a Tramontane T100 electro-acoustic to **Michael Casswell** and asked him give it a Rock player's assessment.

The French company LAG has been building quality acoustic guitars for the past 25 years, so it certainly knows a thing or two about what us guitarists require when it comes to good quality without a huge price tag. And just in case you've been wondering, LAG isn't an abbreviation - it's actually the founder's surname. He's called Michel Chavarria Lag - so now you know! Opening up production in China and the signing of recent distribution deals has meant these guitars are now readily available in the UK and the US and, in fact, LAG is starting to become something of a name - despite being in a crowded market. We thought it was time to find out why, so borrowed a Tramontane T100 ACE (auditorium cutaway electric) to find out.

The T100 is the entry level for the Tramontane series and comes in three finishes, natural, what LAG calls shadow brown burst and the one we have here, which is black. Normally, I wouldn't be a fan of a black finish on an acoustic guitar, but this seems to work nicely because of the way it is counter-balanced by some very handsome touches, such as the binding on the body and around the sound hole, which looks to be mahogany, the dark Indonesian rosewood fret-

board, which seems carry on to the front of the headstock, and a LAG logo inlaid with maple. There is also the 'Occitania' cross inlaid with maple around the sound hole. All quite tasteful and civilized and setting the Lag a world apart from the endless number of lookalike acoustics we tend to find in music shops these days. There's a word for this - character!

A purist might object that a solid black finish conceals a rather nice solid cedar top, but there's an option if you'd rather have a natural finish. Our view was that this black version would look really cool under lights on stage. Incidentally, if you're unused to cedar tops and thought all acoustics should have spruce, worry not - cedar is a traditional choice and a very respectable tonewood, preferred by some makers and players alike for a sweeter tone.

On picking up the guitar, I straight away noticed how light it was: always a good sign for both acoustic and electric guitars. In my experience, lighter than usual guitars seem to resonate and sing just that little bit better under use. I know acoustic guitars are not usually heavy, but this particular guitar did seem to weigh nothing. It seemed delicate to the touch and almost



SRP £435/\$675

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC



demanding of a little respect from anyone who dared to strum some big open chords on it.

Once we were introduced to each other, the guitar allowed me to play it (!) and I was very pleasantly rewarded with a lovely rich, clear, almost 3D tone that filled the studio. I have played enough guitars to straight away know within a few seconds, if a guitar is a good one or not and this guitar is definitely a good one, with an acoustic tone to rival guitars five times the price of this one. It isn't always the case that electro-acoustics do both unamplified and amplified duties equally well and, worryingly often, it's the acoustic performance that suffers - but not in the case of the Tramontane, which sang out really well.

When we plugged the LAG in, again, it also sounded instantly usable, with its Nanoflex Piezo pickup, and Studiolog preamp, which offered five preset EQ curves, all shaping and biasing the sound in a sensible usable way. Personally, I would have liked a way of bypassing the preamp, to create my own EQ setting, which I think is a feature on the more expensive LAG models but saying that, the five presets onboard were excellent and in this respect, the guitar gave a good account for itself once again.

The Tramontane's playability was excellent, as was the intonation and general feel of the neck and fretwork. I also could not find any slip-ups or corners cut in the build of this guitar. The fret work was great, the binding and black finish were flawless and overall it looked like it

**The Tramontane's playability was excellent, as was the intonation and general feel of the neck and fretwork.**

had been put together by a company that cares.

As we've said there is no end of good acoustic and electro-acoustic guitars around at present - particularly in this price range, which is probably beyond most beginner's pockets, being more of a stepping-up instrument or as an option for an electric player who wants a striking looking looking electro-acoustic to use on stage. I think the LAG will do both those jobs very well - and more. It's good value for money, too for a particularly distinctive, great sounding guitar!





# Tanglewood T6 Acoustic instrument amplifier

A market leader in the high quality yet affordable acoustic guitar market, Tanglewood unveils its first ever dedicated acoustic combo. **Tim Slater** plugs in.

Perhaps oddly for a brand that is almost exclusively known for its extensive choice of acoustic guitars and folk instruments Tanglewood hasn't been tempted to produce its own brand of acoustic amplifier. Until now, that is.

Tanglewood reputation as a quality brand notwithstanding, a strong association with the more affordable end of the acoustic market might generate the mistaken assumption that this first foray into the amplifier market would spawn a cheap n' cheerful unit assembled from the parts bin of some mysterious factory in China, re-badged and shipped to our shores. Not so, it seems.

According to Tanglewood UK, the T6 acoustic amplifier is developed from the ground up with Tanglewood completely involved in the entire process from inception to the final signing-off of the finished version. Make no bones about it, Tanglewood is deadly serious about giving their customers maximum bang for buck, so does the T6 acoustic combo make the grade?

Given the highly mobile nature of your typical acoustic troubadour any acoustic combo needs to be fairly self-contained and the T6 duly presents itself not merely as a

guitar amplifier but it also functions as a highly portable active PA system. Indeed, a pole-mount socket is built into the bottom of the combo's chassis, not essential perhaps but the T6 will nevertheless benefit from the extra projection afforded by being mounted on a pole or stand. Build-quality wise the T6 feels reassuringly robust, the tough birch-ply enclosure is coated in a tough polymer coating and a posh AER-style black foam speaker cover protects the single 8-inch driver from unwelcome external probing!

There are no corner protectors – probably in the name of shaving off a few grams here and there - but the combo's solid construction and scratch resistant skin should be enough to keep damage at bay; plus £40.00 and the manufacturer offers a fully-fitted padded bag, if you want to give your new amp maximum protection!

The T6 is mains powered – would be buskers might need to consider packing some kind of external power supply – and its 60 watt output certainly develops a reassuringly clear and powerful tone with plenty of projection. With dedicated guitar and vocal channels the T6 presents a very clean and unfussy control surface that feels very intuitive to use.

Despite the lack of flashy built-in anti-feedback countermeasures the T6 still feels very forgiving and simple to set up. Channel One's High/Low pad attenuates the input signal by  $\pm 10\text{dB}$  to help compensate for differing signal levels whilst the gain level clip light and passive three-band EQ conspire to provide a fairly effective protection against feedback by helping the user to judge when the amp is starting to peak uncomfortably.

The amp delivers a very pure sound that lets the natural tone of the guitar really shine through, with little noticeable of the brittleness that can sometimes occur with piezo-equipped guitars. However, if a little more top end sparkle is required the Contour switch adds a dollop of extra brightness,

maybe at the cost of some warmth. We preferred the more natural sound when the Contour control was off but if you need to cut through a mix, the Contour function will definitely help make your presence felt.

Channel Two's combi-jack input will accept either an XLR microphone or a standard  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch instrument cable, with a switchable Mic/Line level input to set the correct input gain threshold and a clip LED that indicates when the input gain is too high. Again we find a perfectly serviceable three-band passive EQ that, when used with a correctly balanced input level, should be adequate protection against feedback. The global effects section contains four separate effects modes: digital reverb (Hall and Plate



[...>]



SRP £See spec

STAR RATING ★★★★★

CHECK THE SPEC





**Stereo RCA inputs and an MP3 mini-jack input on the rear panel offer plenty of scope for hooking up a CD player or iPod**



variants) plus chorus/room reverb and a delay. The effects are all presets and can't be modified or stored but the effects Level knob sets the effects mix whilst an Effects Pan knob designates whether the effects are sent to the Guitar or Vocal channels or both simultaneously. The effects themselves sound very good with virtually no DSP noise and while it might have been useful to have some degree of control over the delay tempo, the preset echo effect nevertheless graces the T6 with an expansive, spacious atmospheric shimmer that always helps to pad out an otherwise dry-sounding tone.

Stereo RCA inputs and an MP3 mini-jack input on the rear panel offer plenty of scope for hooking up a CD player or iPod for backing tracks or other suitable

musical accompaniment. The rear panel also includes a tuner out effects loop send and return jacks if connecting external effects are required, plus a choice of balanced DI and standard 1/4-inch Line outs and a footswitch to remotely activate the amp's built-in effects. The slightly puzzling inclusion of a headphone socket is the only feature on the T6 that inspired a mild spot of puzzled head scratching. A headphone socket on an amplifier that is principally amplifying acoustic instruments and a vocal seems a bit like giving a bald man a comb for Christmas but thinking about it, the headphone jack could be useful for monitoring a performance during recording.

While there are undoubtedly more powerful and better specified acoustic amps out

there, the T6 still sideswipes a lot of the competition thanks to its practical feel, great sound and an attractively understated design. And then there's that very agreeable price! It doesn't try to squeeze in as many whistles and bells as some guitarists might like but we feel that Tanglewood has exercised good judgment in its choice of the right specs at the right price point.

Bear in mind that The Tanglewood T6 is destined to sell for around half the price of amps that it will happily compete with in terms of sound quality, and you get some

idea of what's in store. Yes, you sacrifice some of the facilities that the more luxurious competition offers, but we feel Tanglewood has got the balance right and is going to do extremely well in the 'real world' market with this newcomer!





# FIRST STEPS IN FINGERSTYLE



**Guitar Interactive is proud to welcome back the renowned acoustic guitarist and teacher Giorgio Serci. In this issue Giorgio shows you how to master Part One of the famous solo guitar piece, 'Spanish Romance'**

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. His 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.

Hello again! In this column we will be looking at the legendary piece 'Spanish Romance', also known as Romanza or Forbidden Games, amongst many other names. I must confess this was one of the first solo guitar pieces I learnt and I vividly remember being so addicted to practising it and even though at that time I injured my hand while helping my neighbours chopping logs (as you do in Sardinia!) I couldn't leave the guitar alone to play this tune! This piece is full of idiosyncratic melodic, rhythmic and harmonic colours, often associated with the Spanish guitar repertoire.

It is a simple but perfectly crafted composition and arguably one of the best-known guitar pieces. However, its author for some reason decided to remain anonymous, never taking credits for it, which makes this piece even more intriguing. This reveals how different the music world was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century compared to today. Now, authors would give an arm and a leg to prove their authorship, going to court if needed and engaging themselves in endless legal disputes. Having said that, many guitarists have been attributed the authorship of this tune, amongst them the legendary guitarist Narciso Yepes, who is listed as the author of this tune in the movie Jeux

[...>]



Interdits (Forbidden Games). However, there is no real evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, we know that this tune was firstly recorded in 1900, before Yepes was born, in 1927.

Moving on to the meat-and-potatoes of this piece, its structure is typical of Spanish and South American Parlor music of the late 1900s, and it has two sections, organized in three parts. The first in E minor, the second in E major and the third is basically a repetition of the first minor part, to give this tune melancholic connotation.

In this lesson we will be looking at the first part in E minor, which is a very common tonality for the solo guitar repertoire, due to its high playability as we can often make the most of open strings. The rhythmic content can be described and notated (as you can see in the download) in  $\frac{3}{4}$ , or in its relative compound time signature, 9/8.

As I recommended in my previous two columns, where we mainly focused on the picking hand, we ought to focus most of all on accuracy and consistency of tone. To achieve best results, we should use the planting technique as described in the previous two columns, resting our fingers onto the chosen strings, and executing each stroke with a controlled and even pressure and with tonal and dynamic awareness. Each note we play should sound as full-bodied and as good as the previous one.

Considering that the melody of this tune is mainly played on the 1<sup>st</sup> string with the annular finger, we should slowly practise arpeggiating the following open strings with the picking hand, trying to play the 1<sup>st</sup> string slightly louder than the other strings.

**Here is a recommended hierarchy of dynamics and velocities:**



**Melody: Loud with the 'a' finger**

Bass: Quietly with the thumb or 'p' finger

Accompaniment: Moderately loud, with the 'i' and 'm' fingers

As you can see in the attached score, the 'p' finger will play the appropriate notes (mostly the root notes of each chord) every 3 beats or 9 subdivisions.

**The picking hand:**

Plant, press and release the 'p' and 'a' fingers together respectively on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> string.

Next 'm' and 'i' fingers on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> string.

Finally, twice more a, m, i, to complete one bar.

Practice this pattern for a while with open strings, paying attention to accuracy, consistency of tone, dynamics and emphasizing the 1<sup>st</sup> string, where the melody

will be played.

**Fretting hand:**

**Bar 1:** Place your little finger on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret of the 1<sup>st</sup> string and play 3 beats.

**Bar 2:** As above for the first beat. Next 2 beats middle finger on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret and for beat 3 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret.

**Bar 3:** Beat 1 middle finger on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret, beat 2 index on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret and beat three open E string.

**Bar 4:** Beat 1 open E string. Beat 2 index on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret. Beat 3 index on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret.

**Bar 5:** Little finger on the 12<sup>th</sup> fret on beat 1, 2 and 3.

**Bar 6:** Little finger plays respectively the 12<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> fret.

**Bar 7:** Barre on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret, little finger on the 8<sup>th</sup>, middle finger on 7<sup>th</sup> and index (bar chord) on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret. This is an Am chord.

[...>]



The 'p' finger plays an open A string. Please focus on minimum-movement approach, as this will help delivering the piece in a more accurate and consistent manner, while saving energy.

**Bar 8:** Using the same Barre, play A on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret, B on the 7<sup>th</sup> and C on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret with index, ring and little finger.

**Bar 9:** We'll play a B chord by using a Barre on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret with the middle finger on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret of the G string. Using the same arpeggio (but with the 'p' finger targeting the 6<sup>th</sup> string) play B on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret (with the prepared Barre), C on the 8<sup>th</sup> fret with the ring finger and B again on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret.

**Bar 10:** Play D# on the 11<sup>th</sup> fret with the little finger, C on the 8<sup>th</sup> and B on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Bar 11:** Back to an Em chord. Little finger on the 7<sup>th</sup> fret, middle finger on the 5<sup>th</sup> fret and then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret.

**Bar 12:** G on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret, F# on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret with the index finger and open E string.

**Bar 13:** We are going to fret a B7 chord as follows: index finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of A, middle finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of G and ring finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of E. The arpeggio will be exactly the same and will produce an F# on beat 1, 2 and 3.

**Bar 14:** Same chord shape. Beat 1 F# on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret, beat 2 little finger on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret and back to fret 2 with the ring finger.

Bar 15: Back in E minor, E shape with the index finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of A, and the middle finger on the 2<sup>nd</sup> fret of D. The arpeggio will be the same as before for the 'a', 'm' and 'i' fingers, however, the 'p' finger will target respectively the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> string to generate a descending E minor arpeggio. (E, B, G on the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret of the 6<sup>th</sup> string and a low E)

**Bar 16:** Low and high E played simultaneously.

This will complete the first section of Spanish Romance!

Whether you will play this composition on a steel strung or a nylon strung guitar, it will provide a great opportunity to improve coordination skills of the picking and fretting hand.

When executing the Barre remember to use the middle finger together with the index to strengthen the Barre as well as using the weight of the fretting hand and the arm to help pressing our index to the fretboard with a minimum effort.

In the next column we will be studying the second (Major) section of this composition. In the meantime, enjoy the practice and remember to say olé' at the end of each performance!

Till the next time, Good-bye!

**Giorgio Serci**



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[www.giorgioserci.com](http://www.giorgioserci.com) Licklibrary Online Lessons



# THE SHRAPNEL STORY

Mike Varney's Shrapnel Records was the cradle of shred. During the 1980s and '90s it launched the careers of many of today's most highly regarded players, defining an era and making instrumental fast guitar a genre in its own right.

**Jamie Humphries** tells the story..

I can still remember as a young teenager buying my first American guitar magazine and being mesmerised by the pictures of long haired Rock guitarists with brightly coloured guitars. Each month I'd thumb the Shrapnel records advert: "What was Shrapnel Records? Where could I find these albums?" The ads promised guitarists with amazing speed and technique - but where could I hear them? I found a local record shop that imported obscure albums and a huge collection of Shrapnel CDs began to grow.

For me and thousands of others, Shrapnel fuelled our passion, drive and desire for the guitar. It introduced me to players I had never heard of and would probably never have discovered and also helped build the basis for my own career as a guitarist, making me practice for hours on end, working on new technique, showing me I could have a career as a guitarist that wasn't mainstream, eventually inspiring me to record my own guitar music and release it. Shrapnel also opened the doors for many players to launch their careers and for their own guitar albums be discovered by established artists. So who

is Mike Varney, the man behind Shrapnel, and how did he end-up virtually creating an entire genre of guitar music?

Hailing from San Francisco, Varney was a successful guitarist in his own right, performing and writing with numerous bands and artists in the Bay area, including Jefferson Airplane. In 1980 he formed Shrapnel Records, dedicated to Heavy Metal guitar, and among the earliest releases was *Unsung Guitar Heroes II*, featuring Michael Angelo Batio and Marty Friedman. Following this came *One Nation Underground*, by the band Hawaii, featuring Marty Friedman, who later paired-up with the legendary Jason Becker. The nucleus of an entire genre had been formed.

Varney had been in the perfect position to find new guitar talent, writing the 'Spotlight' column for *Guitar Player* magazine. Receiving a tape from a young Swedish player called Yngwie Malmsteen, he flew Yngwie to California and set him up with the band Steeler, whose debut album became Shrapnel's biggest selling release to date.

[...>]





## Shrapnel lives on - still bringing us ground-breaking guitar

Another of Varney's discoveries was super-shredder Paul Gilbert. Varney had first encountered Gilbert when the latter was just 16, writing to Varney, asking if he could join Ozzy Osbourne's band. Although Mike couldn't understand what Ozzy would want with a 15 year old, he listened to the demo and featured him in his Spotlight column. They stayed in contact for the next three years and once Gilbert had attended the GIT in Hollywood, Varney recorded and released Gilbert's first release with his band Racer X.

And then there was Jason Becker. Becker was just 16 when he was paired-up with Marty Friedman by Varney to form the heavy metal band Cacophony. Jason recorded two albums with Cacophony, then released his solo album Perpetual Burn, featuring a blistering collection of neo-classical instrumentals.

Jason, immediately hailed as one of the greatest guitarists on the planet and a musical genius, was soon snapped-up by former Van Halen singer David Lee Roth, joining Roth's band to record the album A Little Ain't Enough. Everything looked set for a glittering career but tragedy struck in 1997, when Becker was diagnosed with ALS - Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis - a condition which has left him completely paralysed, and unable to speak. Miraculously, Jason now communicates with his eyes alone, using a system devised by his father. He continues

to compose music via a computer and in 1996 released the album Perspective, with fellow Shrapnel guitarist Michael Lee Firkins performing the parts composed by Jason. 2012 will see the release of a movie telling Jason's story.

Other notable guitarists to have graced the Shrapnel label include Greg Howe, Richie Kotzen, Michael Lee Firkins, Darren Householder, Joey Taffola and John 5. Others have used the label as a springboard for being discovered by other, larger, bands. Paul Gilbert formed Mr Big with Billy Sheehan, Marty Friedman joined Megadeth, Richie Kotzen joined Poison and Mr Big, Jason Becker joined David Lee Roth's band and Greg Howe became a session man, working with Michael Jackson, Nsync, Enrique Iglesias and Justin Timberlake.

Shrapnel hasn't been Varney's only venture. He has also launched the Blues Bureau label, featuring Pat Travers, Leslie West, Scott Henderson and Glenn Hughes, and Tone Centre records - dedicated to jazz and fusion - which has released material by Steve Morse, Eric Johnson, Victor Wotten, Mike Stern and Brett Garsed.

Shrapnel lives on - still bringing us ground-breaking guitar - but for that brief golden period, it was not only responsible for a host of careers but defined what became an entire style of playing.





# A LETTER FROM JASON

In a unique letter, written despite the complete paralysis from which he suffers, **Jason Becker** recalls his time with Shrapnel Records.

When I was sixteen years old, I sent a demo tape to Mike Varney. I wanted to be in his Spotlight column. My dad told me not to expect a response because Varney gets tons of tapes. About a week later, Varney called me and said I was really good, but my recording was sloppy. He asked me to make him a better tape, and to go meet Marty Friedman. I had never heard of Marty, but I was so stoked to be in communication with Varney and anyone he wanted me to meet.

My dad drove me to Marty's tiny apartment in San Francisco. Marty was so sweet. We instantly liked each other. We jammed and I showed him a couple techniques that he liked from my demo. As we played, I realized he was a lot better than I was. I wasn't used to that! It was intimidating, yet exciting at the same time. He never acted superior. I wanted to learn from him. I was taking his music into myself.

We started hanging out all the time. He came over to record his songs on my Tascam four-track. He would show me the harmonies and counterpoint lines to his stuff. I picked it up easily. He started adding some of my parts to his songs, and we started writing sections together. I guess he and Varney were so happy with me that they decided to have me join Marty on the album, which would become Speed Metal Symphony. We hadn't ever discussed it. I was just happy making music with Marty.

I remember rehearsing with Atma Anur at Prairie Sun for the album. We had about three days before we were to record. I hadn't met Varney yet. Apparently Varney snuck in while we were rehearsing and listened. That was good because I was nervous to meet him. When he saw me he got so happy and said, "Hey, you look like a rock star! From the photo you sent, I thought you were a chubby little teenager." Funny! That was really cool.

While recording the drums, at the end of one long song, I said, "great job," while the cymbals were still ringing, so we had to find a place to punch Atma in.

Everyone was nice about my silly mistake.

Peter Marrino, Atma, Steve Fontano and I were doing background vocals on Burn the Ground. We had to keep yelling "burn the ground." I kept ruining the takes because I would crack up in the middle.

I loved Speed Metal Symphony, but I wanted to get more of my own music out there. With Marty's influence, I was bursting with tons of musical ideas. We pushed each other to be so creative, it was insane. I spent every day writing and recording new music. As I sent tapes to Varney, he realized I needed to make a solo album. He asked Marty to do the same. We would help each other with our albums.

One night while Marty was recording me playing Air, we both fell asleep at the same time. We were workaholics. Billy Sheehan thought Air was like the next "Eruption." I met Greg Howe at this time. We had such a blast hanging and jamming together. He is the sweetest guy and the most badass player!

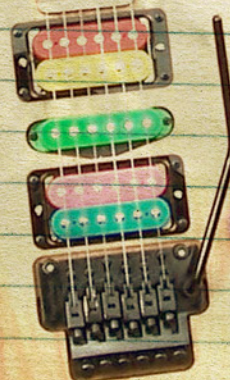
Cacophony played many shows around the San Francisco Bay Area. We played at some trade shows, too. We recorded "Go Off!" I had written words for my song Images. They were so lame we couldn't use them! I love how that song turned out. I'm also extremely proud of my part and my solo at the end of the song Go Off! It is very tasty and has a unique and beautiful melody.

Varney asked me to produce Richie Kotzen's first album. I was nineteen and he was six months younger. We had such a great time making his album, hanging out and being silly teenagers together. He is too damn talented.

Cacophony started touring around the United States and Japan. We played progressive metal, but on the road acted like Poison or Def Leppard. We had so much fun!

I left the band to do my own stuff. We are all still great friends. Marty and I often keep in touch. We all feel close to each other and cherish those times as some of the best in our lives. Shrapnel and Varney have continued to support me and put out any album that I want. Mike Varney is responsible for my career.

Guitar Interactive would like to thank Jason for writing for us. For more information, please see [www.jasonbecker.com](http://www.jasonbecker.com)





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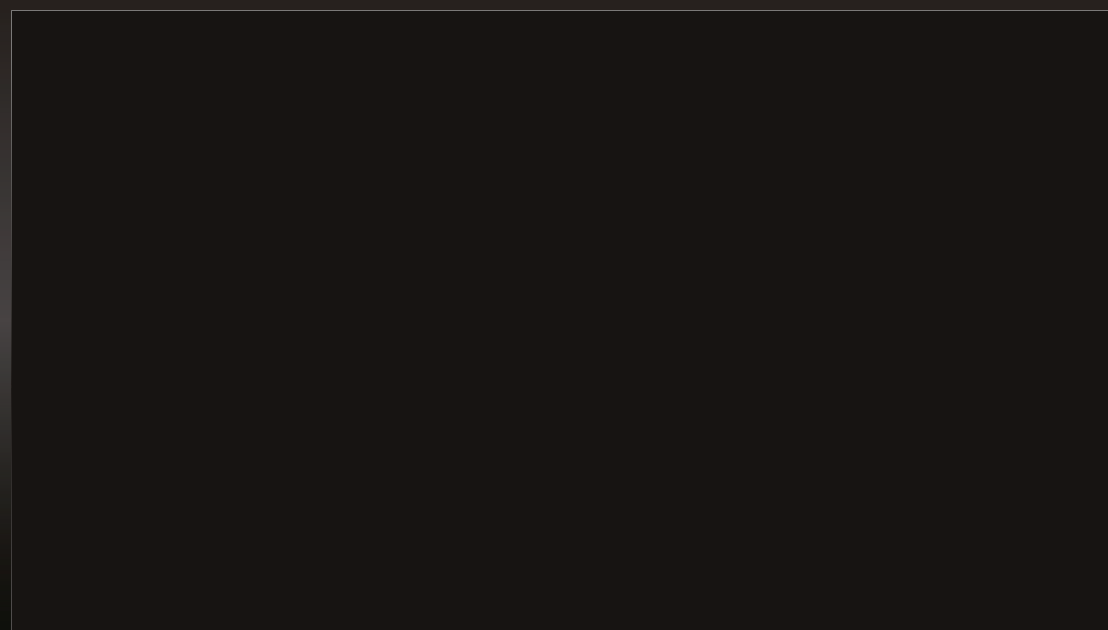
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