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the ToneQuest

The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone

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Report™

Johnny A

"When you strum a guitar you have everything – rhythm, bass, lead and melody."

– David Gilmore

Of all the guitars you have ever owned, has one seemed to suit you more than all the others? Did you keep it, or has your memory of perfection only deepened with every guitar that failed to measure up to the one that got away?



Most of us have been guilty of letting great guitars go due to a temporary cash crunch or the fever that clouds rational judgment when we impulsively sell an instrument to acquire the next one. How many players traded a vintage goldtop, '59 burst or '50s Strat or Telecaster for an acrylic Dan Armstrong, Kustom tuck n' roll PA gear for the band, a Sunn head, or simply for the sake of change?

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Consider the fickle, shifting fads that have alternately placed various Fender, Gretsch, Gibson and Martin guitars among the most desirable instruments solely based on who was playing what and when. You could barely give away an old Stratocaster or Tele in the late '60s and early '70s while players like Jimmy Page, Peter Frampton, Mick Taylor, Duane Allman, Joe Walsh and Jeff Beck were playing vintage Les Pauls, and guitar fashion would flip again in favor of vintage Fenders while Les Pauls, SG's and 335's suddenly lost their allure. Crosby, Stills, Nash and (sometimes) Young propelled Martin D45's and big Gretsch's to must-have status, while Alvin Lee, Freddie King, B. B. and Elvin Bishop put the spotlight on Gibson ES*** guitars. Fads have always affected the popularity of various guitars, amps and effects, but how many of us can claim to have stopped playing a certain guitar specifically because a successful, celebrated artist played the same instrument? Indeed, how many players have become so obsessed with the subtle nuances of guitar design and evolving personal preferences to have successfully developed the specifications for their own signature guitar and sold a major manufacturer on the concept despite having recorded no national, chart-topping hits?

Perhaps you are already familiar with Johnny A, but we're betting the things you don't know about him will give you reason to pause and reconsider just what it takes to be a truly unique and inventive guitarist today while surviving the radio and record industry's gross indifference to talent. Of course, it's the music that ultimately defines Johnny A's creative prowess, but the story behind the music reveals a rare determination and creative flair that is instructive and inspiring.



Afflicted by scoliosis as a teenager, Johnny was required to wear a 40 pound body cast for 14 months and a rigid neck brace for two years after that. During this time, it was impossible for him to turn his head to see what he was playing on the guitar, but given the circumstances, practicing was one of the few activities he could pursue at all. Ultimately, his disability became an asset as he learned to play without the advantage of actually seeing the fingerboard of his guitar.

Johnny's career progressed with the frustrations and all-or-

nothing, on-again-off-again stops and starts typical of the rock music scene in the '70s, '80s and '90s. While Stevie Ray Vaughan was tearing up the rock and blues world on his #1 Strat, Johnny vowed to stop playing his vintage Stratocasters rather than being perceived as a "Stevie Ray wannabe," picking up a Gibson to develop and refine what would ultimately become his signature tone.

In 1993, Johnny bought what he believed to be the state-of-the-art in amplifier design for the time – the Marshall 30th Anniversary 6101 combo. He returned it, bought it again, and finally resorted to contacting the product manager at Marshall to help him decipher how the amp was supposed to be used. It has since become the only amp he has used for the past ten years, played through the direct XLR out straight into the house sound system, and his tone is stunning.



Suddenly jobless with no prospects after six years with J Geils' Peter Wolf, Johnny realized two truths that would have to be dealt with if he was to continue making a living in the music business. First, he would have to become a complete guitarist no longer dependent upon working with a front man, and secondly, no one was going to do anything for

him or his career unless helping him was profitable, and it was going to be up to Johnny alone to make that happen.

Today, Johnny A is living proof of just how times have changed. Thinking outside the traditional box has become an essential skill for all guitarists seriously pursuing a career in the business of music, and Johnny has proved that you can reinvent yourself. You can create and market your own music within the community you build around it through live performances and grass roots, guerrilla marketing. He has proved that you can evolve as an artist and develop your own signature sound, and that sound can continue to evolve... And yes, you can even play gloriously clean, sparkling Twin tones and magnificently distorted, high-gain brain-smack with depth and fidelity through an obscure, blue Marshall amplifier and a fully hollow Gibson guitar loaded with stock '57 classic humbuckers. Listen, and enjoy...

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TQR: How and when were you first exposed to music?



None of my family are musicians, but I did grow up in a Greek family where there was a deep appreciation and passion for music. Every weekend we would have these huge, crazy parties where all kinds of Middle Eastern

music would be blaring – Armenian, Turkish and Greek music. Also, my dad was a lover of jazz and big band music – Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Count Basie – and my mom was a big blues fan, so I really heard all kinds of music growing up.

TQR: Was the guitar the first instrument you picked up?

No, it was my grandfather's bouzouki. He wasn't really a player, but he had one and I would play with it around the house. My dad was also a bartender at night at a Middle Eastern club, and this great Turkish dumbek player named Ronnie Kirby gave me a solid silver dumbek, and I would bang on that. The first instrument that I really took up seriously was the drums when I was about seven years old. I took lessons and played the drums for quite awhile. I love the



drums and I'm still very passionate about great drummers and rhythm and I still own a drum kit, but as a player, I was frustrated by the instrument because I

always had melody running through my head. I finally picked up the guitar when I was about 11 or 12 years old, and I was a huge fan of the British Invasion – bands like Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Beatles, The Dave Clark 5, The Searchers, The Stones, The Kinks, and also the Everly Brothers. I was

still playing drums in a band at the time and I didn't even know how to tune the guitar at first. The first guitar I owned was a \$49 Lafayette guitar and amp. My mother and aunt were hairdressers and I would sweep up the hair off the floor in their beauty salon on Saturdays to earn money. I eventually saved enough to buy a Vox Clubman guitar that I saw in the window of a music store in 1965 for \$88. I still have it.

TQR: When did you finally switch from drums to guitar?

I was playing drums in a band and still learning how to play guitar when all the guys in my band left to play in another one. I had been taking drum lessons all along, but I was really working hard to teach myself guitar and learn all the songs of the day from the Invasion stuff to psychedelic music. Well, the guys that had left to play with another band had a gig at a pizza joint in Saugus, MA and I went to see them. The guitar player didn't show up that night – he had a fight with his girlfriend, so knowing that I could play a little, they asked me if I would fill in that night for him. I went home and got my amp and guitar and we played the ten songs I knew, then they taught me more during each break. That was the first time I ever played guitar with a band and they asked me to join them that night. During high school I also developed scoliosis, which is a curvature of the spine. I had to wear a 40-pound full body cast for 14 months and after that, a back brace for two years. That body cast forced me to practice without being able to look at the guitar or see what I was doing with my hands. It's funny to realize how obstacles and limitations like that can make you stronger.

TQR: So you continued to play in various bands throughout high school and...

I graduated and went to a business college. I have also always been fascinated by marketing and the concept of developing something from nothing and making it viable. I did that for about a year and eventually dropped out and went to Berklee School of Music for almost a year, but I didn't dig that at all. At the time, the curriculum was all jazz-oriented and I was into more progressive music like John McLaughlin, King



Crimson and Gentle Giant. I'm not suggesting that I'm against getting a musical education, and I did like the theory classes at Berklee, but the other things they

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wanted me to do, like transcribing and learning standards, I wasn't into. In hindsight, I do regret not having acquired a formal understanding of music and developing the ability to read music earlier, but that wasn't what I wanted to do at the time. And again, sometimes your limitations can help define what becomes your unique style. Take Keith Richards, for example... a phenomenal rock player who is emulated by how many people? Here he is playing 5-string open tunings and his limitations created that style. When so many people wind up emulating that style, who is to say what is "right?" I'd rather have it great than be perfect. For me, it's the guys that really have a personality and a voice, whether it be Chet or Wes, Jeff Beck, Clapton, Billy Gibbons, Hendrix, Jimmy Vaughan... It's not necessarily the guys with the greatest chops, but those with the strongest personalities that I gravitate to. I have always been intrigued by the things that make someone's voice print, and I have always tried to grab the nuances of those styles, throw it in a blender and hit "puree" and try to come up with my own style.

TQR: How did your career develop?



Bill Bruford & Johnny

True artists, and I'd like to think that I can be counted as one, don't choose music – it chooses you. So I did all the usual stuff with bands and music in junior high and high school and I also

worked in a big music store in Boston, so I got to know everybody – Joe Perry and the Aerosmith guys, The Cars, the Geils Band... All the big guys that came through town would go there – George Benson, Joe Pass, Steve Howe... So I worked there for a while, continued to play, went out to the Midwest for a while to start a progressive rock band, and then I went to England and auditioned for Bill Bruford from Yes/King Crimson (I didn't get that gig). Then I came back and played in local bands around New England, and I wanted to put a rock band together with a lot of melody – kind of like "Aerosmith meets the Beatles." That was a band called The Streets, and we were pretty successful in the Boston area. We were getting tons of radio airplay without being signed to a major label and we toured with Aerosmith in 1978-79. Then I went to California where I hooked up with Bobby Whitlock and played with Bobby and Doug Clifford



from Credence Clearwater. It was really good, but scattered and lacking focus – kind of *un-together* – so I came back home to play with my band The Streets again, but we eventually broke up after the drummer got busted. Then I put another band together called Hidden Secret, which was more of a pop rock thing with keyboards, two guitars, a percussionist and sax player. That lasted for

a couple of years before I began to stop feeling what we were doing. It began to sound a little too contrived and fabricated. At that point, around 1982, I began to wonder about the whole music thing. There wasn't a lot of guitar-oriented music being recorded or played. I mean, there was some wonderful stuff that came out of that period from The Cars, Talking Heads, Roxy Music... but as far as the guitar was concerned, there wasn't much happening with the kind of guitar I wanted to hear. I really wasn't even playing that much at home. I had gotten married in 1983 and I was working for Tom Scholz (guitarist with Boston) at the time with the Rockman Company. But then I started to get the itch again and I began writing a lot of songs. I've also always had a certain slant toward country music that dates back to my



early interest in The Everly Brothers, so I had this idea to put together a country rock band with Everly-style harmonies but with a more aggressive edge, and

that band was called Hearts on Fire. That was a really good band, and it was the first band of mine that seemed to have a very tight focus since The Streets. The band members were really good, we had some great songs, and I was playing a Tele somewhat in the style of James Burton and Albert Lee. We recorded a demo and we had a manager shopping it, but as good as we were, I couldn't get arrested playing this stuff even though the style we were playing was what Americana turned out to be – kind of like Lone Justice before their time.

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So we changed the band to more of a hard rock thing, but that really didn't feel honest to me and I eventually broke the whole thing up.

Later on around 1993, a friend of mine was working on a concert project with Peter Wolf (J Geils) and I got called to audition for Peter. I ended up getting the gig and we rehearsed for a couple of months before that gig was canceled because of permit problems. Well, we hadn't been paid for any of the rehearsal time, so Wolf decided to line up some gigs for the band to enable us to make a little money for the time we had put in. The band was called Peter Wolf & The House Party Five, they booked a half a dozen gigs, and the whole thing just exploded. The six shows turned into seven years, I wound up co-producing one album for him and we got a 4-star review in *Rolling Stone* for the album and we toured all over the US and Japan. But by early '99 Wolf didn't really want to tour anymore and that left me with no day job and no band. It was at that point that I had an epiphany... I was sittin' on my bedroom floor with my guitar when I realized that I was at the mercy of lead singers. I had sung lead before and I wasn't that bad, but it wasn't my strength, either. I realized that I had been playing guitar for 30-something years and I couldn't play a song by myself. I couldn't deliver the melody and the chords at the same time because I had always backed a singer as a lead/rhythm guitarist playing rhythm behind the vocals and occasionally taking a solo. Out of survival, I decided that my goal was going to be to become a more complete guitarist and put a new project together to feed my family. The question was, how am I gonna do this?



I had this music book that a friend had given me, *The Complete Beatles*, and I decided I would flip the pages, randomly stop somewhere and learn how to read that song – chords and melody at the same time. The song was "Til There Was You" from the play *The Music Man*. I was determined to read the notes on the staff rather than the chord symbols, so I'm playing the notes in these strange chord structures that I had never played before, and at first I didn't even know what they were. It took about three days, and my fingers, my left hand and the muscles in my forearm were sore and on fire by the time I was done, but I accomplished what I had intended to do. Now, when I play, I try to emulate the vocal melody, a back-

ground vocal part and the rhythm section as I hear a song and play it on the guitar.

TQR: And this all came about as a means of survival...

It was *all* about survival. I put a trio together in Salem, MA where I live, and we played this little place called the Dodge Street Bar & Grill. They had some of the best local talent around on the off-nights because the kid who booked the acts was a passionate music lover who had grown up during the whole punk scene in Boston and he knew all the bands and players. He didn't pay you shit – \$60 a night – but he had some great guitarists, great keyboard players... tremendous players all around. They had a shitty sound system, you set up on the floor, and the place held about 80 people. So I played there every other Monday night and that's where I crafted this new thing.



One night a guy came in who used to work for Polygram Records. He was blown away by what we were doing and he asked me if I wanted to make a record. He brought in a guy who had a local label with national distribu-

tion, he liked what I was doing, and we talked. I told him I wanted 100% complete creative control with no compromises, because I wasn't interested in just making a record to hear myself play. I only wanted to do it if I could make a recording to the best of my capabilities, with no stylistic or technical compromises. So we went into the studio, we went over budget before the project was finished, and he ran out of money. Eventually, I had to borrow money from all kinds of people and buy the tapes back from this guy and finish the recording with my own funds. I put out the record, *Sometime Tuesday Morning* and I sold it at gigs, it got played on a local radio station during this free-form lunch-time show, and it got crazy phone requests. Eventually I sold about 10,000 copies as it was picked up by radio stations in the six-state New England area. It got to the point where I would drop off CD's at stores and they would pay me for them on the spot, knowing they would sell them.

TQR: All through your own grassroots marketing efforts... How much did it cost you to make this recording?

About \$37,000. I had a lot of friends over the years that I had

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done a ton of favors for, so when it came time to finish that record I asked everybody for everything and called in all the favors. I also was given a listening post spot in Newbury Comics, a 21-store CD chain across New England for three months, which helped immensely. At the time of that recording, the band hadn't played a lot of gigs together live, so we didn't take a lot of liberties with the songs in the studio, consequently there is a lot of space in that album. It turned out just the way I had hoped and even when I listen to it today I'm still happy with it.

TQR: Do you think you could duplicate that grassroots formula today?

Yes. I think someone who is not in the mainstream has a much better shot getting somewhere doing it that way than through regular channels. When I was in The Streets and some of those other bands I played in during the '80s, if you didn't have a record deal you weren't even in the business. But now with the Internet, I'm not even sure you *want* a record deal today (laughing).

TQR: But bottom line, you recorded music that people wanted to hear, and hear again.



Well, yeah. I eventually licensed *Sometime Tuesday Morning* to Steve Vai's Favored Nations record label as a result of him hearing that album and the instrumental

version of "Wichita Lineman." It was released internationally and the song "Oh Yeah" became the highest charting instrumental on AAA radio since Eric Johnson's singles from *Ah Via Musicom*. We went on to sell 80,000+ copies and that made it possible to cut the latest CD, *Get Inside*.

TQR: That story is such a great example for any musicians who may be struggling to get exposure.

Well, the other epiphany that occurred in addition to my realizing that I couldn't play a song by myself and deliver a complete melody was that no one was going to do anything for me. I called an attorney to get a record deal and she told me that attorneys don't really make record deals anymore. Well, what do I do? She said, "You need a press story, you need to have a sales story, you need to have a live show story and you

need a radio story." So I took those four bullet points and I worked on them. I developed the live show and we started playing shows in the suburbs, I got a couple of shows opening for people at The House of Blues in Boston, and then a residency there, I got a little bit of press and the radio airplay followed, but I was never passive about any of this. If I had just been a guitar player that didn't take any responsibility for making this a viable commercial product, nothing would have happened.

TQR: Let's review the chronology of the gear you've played as well as the development of your signature Gibson guitar...



I had been playing all different types of guitars when I was a kid. One of my

first great guitars was a goldtop Les Paul in 1969, and I had a '68 Paisley Telecaster back then, too. I had a BC Rich when they were handbuilt, a PRS when they first came out, a Jackson when they were cool, Rickenbackers... But to me, the two great guitar companies are Gibson and Fender, and I had been playing Les Pauls, Strats and Teles for a long, long time. I had old guitars – a 1964 factory black and a '65 Lake Placid Blue Strat – and then Stevie Ray Vaughan hit really big. He got a great tone... great player... great for the blues... great for music....great for guitar... an incredibly explosive, passionate player, and he had *the tone*. And *the tone* on a Strat is Jimi Hendrix. So when Stevie Ray began to hit big, people would come up to me and say, "Oh, man, you're really into Stevie Ray, huh?" Well, honestly I hadn't been influenced by Stevie Ray. He was a little younger than

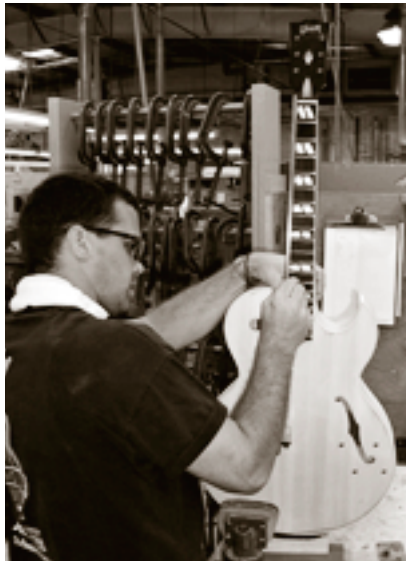


me and I think some of his influences may have paralleled mine. I mean, I saw Jimi Hendrix, and he had a profound influence on me in

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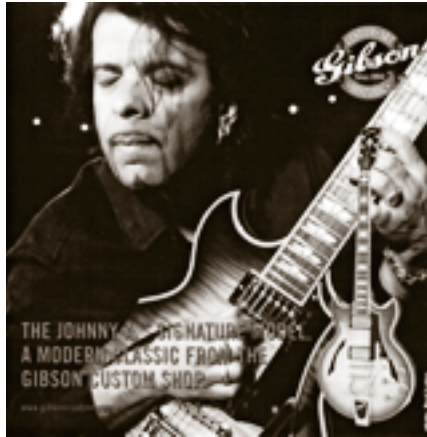
terms of my approach to tone, my approach to effects, my approach to phrasing. So as soon as I heard that comment about Stevie being one of my influences, I decided I had to get another guitar. I couldn't play Fenders anymore. This guy was taking it to the pinnacle, and that was the tone that, if I was playing a Strat, I got. But I didn't want to be compared to a contemporary. With all due respect to Stevie, it wouldn't have been good for my career. Stevie was strong enough with what he was doing to make me say, "I'm getting out of this game."

Two things happened at that time. Someone made that comment to me about Stevie being an influence and I knew I had to make a change, plus, I was playing with Wolf, and I realized that a lot of the R&B guys he listened to were using Gibson guitars, but they were playing *clean*. The Jackson Five... Smokey Robinson's guy played a Black Beauty... If you listen to Gibson Les Pauls pre-Led Zeppelin in popular music, none of these tones were really dirty, but they were pure and they were pretty and really great. So I decided to get a Gibson, and it was just when they launched the Custom Shop in 1993 and I got a goldtop because I couldn't afford a flame top ('59). I saved some money and then I found one of those '59s at a shop in Bangor, Maine, and that's when I got in touch with Mike McGuire at the Custom Shop. I told him who I was and that I was playing with Peter Wolf, I was lov-



ing the Custom Shop stuff and would they be interested in endorsing me? He said yes and the first guitar I got from Gibson was a '95 'burst that is absolutely unbelievable. I still have it. That didn't mean I got guitars for free, but every time I needed something they would build them to my specs and I

paid artist prices. They learned about what I liked as far as color and neck shapes and all of that, and we developed a great relationship that continues today. When my first solo album was about to be recorded, I was looking for a new tone. I knew I wanted that romantic Bigsby sound and my Gretsch wasn't working for me. It didn't quite sound like I wanted, and I didn't want to get into that Brian Setzer thing. So I started looking around for guitars and I fell into this reissue ES295. I put a set of flat wound strings on it and that was the tone. Seventy percent of the *Sometime Tuesday Morning* record was cut with that guitar.



How the signature thing came about was that the guys at Gibson really liked the record, it was picking up steam and getting airplay in 2000 and 2001, and I was using the 295, a 335 and a Les Paul live to sup-

port that record. But I didn't like changing guitars. The neck placement between an ES 335 and a ES 295 and a Les Paul are all different. I loved the tone of the 295, but I couldn't turn the thing up loud enough and scream on it because of the feedback. So I called Mike and I asked him if he could make me a '59 flame top with a Bigsby. They made me one and I loved it, and they made me another, and another, and I think I have four of them. They were all great, but I still didn't have that hollow tone I was looking for.

The thing I was missing with the Les Paul was the hollow tone of the 295, and since I sit on a stool, I was hunching over that 13" body for 90 minutes every night and my back was killing me. So we had a talk during summer NAMM in 2002 and I was telling Mike and Rick Gembar that I love the Les Pauls, thank you, but I'm not really getting 100% of what I want, live. They asked what I was thinking, and I told them what I wanted was a guitar that was a little bit bigger, that was hollow to emulate the sound of the 295, and one that could resist feedback but still rock. So we did some prototypes and it was a year in R&D and we were all very excited about this guitar. That's what happened, and I guess because of the music I was playing and the critical respect the CD had received, they were as into it as much as I was. And you're right - I'm not a household name - I wasn't then and I'm still not now. I may never be. So when you think about contemporary players that have signature guitars like Joe Perry and



Peter Frampton - guys that have sold millions and millions of records - and then looking at the lineage and the history of Gibson and the absolute

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giants such as Les Paul, Tal Farlow, Chet and Wes, I certainly never even imagined having my own signature guitar with Gibson. It was the farthest thing from my mind. Other companies had approached me, but I never wanted to do it unless it was something that I really would prefer to play over everything else. To Gibson's credit, they really turned me loose with it, too. I was down there all the time. They even let me name the color, called "Sunset Glow" after my dad's old 1959 Pontiac Bonneville. Aesthetically, I wanted it to feel and look like a guitar that could have come out in 1961, because I am a vintage guitar guy and I love that look and feel. The neck has to feel like that, it has to be respectful of Gibson's Golden Age, and tonally... well, I really wanted it to sound like that 295, but I couldn't keep the P90's because they presented another set of problems live. We used a 25.5" scale neck with an ebony fingerboard for a bright attack, a totally hollow body and we used humbuckers to eliminate the hum of the P90's. That guitar can come very close to the sound of the 295 and yet, it can also really scream.

TQR: What type of pickups did you choose?

The '57 Classics – those are my favorite Gibson humbuckers. I'm a vintage guitar nut, so another thing I looked at was the dish (top carve) of a '50s Les Paul. Although the body of my guitar is larger, Matthew Klein calculated how to come close to that old style dish. If you look at the thickness of the peg-head, it's tapered very much like a '40s or '50s Gibson and that was really very important to me. It's thinner at the top



than it is near the nut and is much more pronounced than it has been in modern times. And I wanted the Florentine cutaways to be reminiscent of an old guitar but also to give me access to the entire fingerboard.

A lot of people think that my guitar is just a modified 356, but it's not. The body length is different, the neck scale length, the neck joint where it meets the body – all different. There are a lot of little subtle differences. The toggle switch functions at a 45 degree angle so that I can flick it with my pinky finger without moving my hand. It always seemed crazy to me that those toggle switches functioned vertically up and down on a 335 when the natural sweep of your hand is more like 45 degrees.

TQR: Let's talk about amps...

There are a lot of great amps out there, but I've been using

the Marshall 30th Anniversary amps almost since they first came out in 1992. I actually bought that amp twice, because the first time I brought it home I hated it and took it back. I bought a couple of combos and I just fucking hated them. They just didn't sound good. Then I started playing with Wolf, and I had to be able to get several sounds out of one amp, and I bought the amp again and I *still* didn't like it, so I called Nick Bowcott at Marshall. I told him who I was and that I had bought the amp twice because it was supposed to be the flagship amp in the Marshall line at the time, and it sounded horrible. He asked me what kind of tone I was looking for and he told me to start with the second channel, where to set the controls, etc., and as soon as he told me that, it was like having a key that unlocked the amp. It did everything I wanted it to do. It has three channels and MIDI channel switching. Live, I was mic'ing the amp just like you would normally do, but it also has a built-in speaker emulator in it – an XLR right out of the back. One day I went to the sound check early at a Wolf gig and I asked the house sound guy if we could try the direct out and compare it to a Shure 57 on the speaker. I tried it, going back and forth and it sounded pretty good, but I'm old school, and I couldn't believe that running the amp direct into the house system could sound better than mic'ing the cabinet. I mean, that's what you do... you put a mic on a speaker cabinet on stage to get your sound. That's the way it's done. We did a blind test and eight out of ten times I liked the direct sound best, so from that point on that's what I've done. I haven't used a speaker on stage since 1993 and I've recorded both my albums with just that one amp, all direct.



The funny thing is, I do love vintage tones, and when I went to do the first album, I abandoned the Marshall and brought in

a Vox AC30, a Super, a Deluxe, a Marshall Plexi, a VibroKing, and I brought in all these things and got a great sound – they were good tones – but they didn't sound like me. They sounded good, but they didn't feel unique to me, so I scrapped all the tracks and did them over. We had first tried the Marshall direct and it wasn't working – it sounded thin in the studio, and that's why I had brought all the other stuff in. The engineer thought I was crazy, but I had been using the Marshall direct for six years with Wolf and I wanted the same

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tone on the record that I had been getting live, because that had become my sound. We kept working on it and tweaking it to get the tones I wanted, and that was the only amp I used on both records.

TQR: What has been your history with effects?



When I was with Wolf, I used a lot of rack stuff like the Rocktron Intellifex and

Replifex, good sounding dense reverbs, a couple of Lexicon Jam-Mans, and for distortion I always use the channel switching in the Marshall. When I record, I record totally dry. I don't even record through the console. The signal comes right out of the back of the amp into my old Neve preamp and I plug that directly into the input of the tape deck and record direct to tape. No compression, no EQ, no reverb, because I don't want to be committed to anything but the pure guitar tone when I record. I want total control for how I might wish to manipulate the tone of the guitar later.

As far as my pedalboard goes currently, it's very basic – a Dunlop 535Q Wah, a Boss tuner, a Boss OC2 octave pedal, I do run in stereo live, and I occasionally use an Aphex Punch Factory optical compressor when I want a more even or sustaining clean sound. I like this compressor a lot because I don't like to feel compression or hear it grab or pump. It's the best pedal-type compressor I've found because it seems to work without me *hearing* it work. I came across a couple of the new Line 6 Tone Core pedals... a stereo pan/trem pedal which is where the signal splits, and an Echo Park pedal. I also use a Radial Engineering A/B/Y Switchbone and an Xotic Effects RoboTalk, which is an envelope filter.

TQR: When people consider that you are running direct into a different house system every night, that would seem to open up a host of unwanted variables...

No, actually, it's just the opposite. It's more consistent than mic'ing, because one of the things that always drove me crazy when I was mic'ing a cabinet was that my tone was never the same – it was never dead nuts on. You gotta rely on guys using different mics every night, off-axis rejection, and how close is it to the cone? Is it in the right spot compared to the night before? Is it two inches? An inch and a half? Is it a 45 degree or a 30 degree angle? I used to sell microphones, and



just moving a mic as little as half an inch off axis totally changes the tone

of the guitar (or any instrument). I would probably never go back to using speakers in a traditional way unless I was in a different band playing different music. If I was in a Black Crowes type of band, I might... Don't get me wrong – I don't think I have the greatest tone on earth and there are things about my tone on stage that I don't particularly like, but the consistency from night to night outweighs the things I don't like. Sure, I would love to use a blackface Fender for this sound and something else for that sound, get the perfect Fender Twin sound on one song and a Marshall Plexi for another, but I'm riding in a van with three or four guys. I have to be practical. And honestly, every night there will be at least three or four guys that will tell me they can't believe I'm not using speakers on stage – like Paul Barrere from Little Feat. All he could see on stage was one of the 30th Anniversary heads and he still couldn't believe I was getting what he was hearing without speaker cabinets.

TQR: What would you like to accomplish in the future?

Making money might be nice (laughing), along with continuing to play live and making more records. I'd like to write for film. I'd also enjoy playing and touring as a sideman for other artists. That would be like a vacation for me compared to what I'm doing now, because the solo thing is very demanding and emotionally draining. Sometimes after a gig I feel like, "Wow, this is really a lot of work," because the concentration level for me has to be so high. But it's fun. We'll see what happens. **TQ**

www.johnnya.com



Once we heard Johnny's tale of woe and ultimate salvation regarding the Marshall 30th Anniversary amplifier, it seemed only fitting that we query the man who guided Johnny in his quest to embrace the amp that has become so important to his signature tone. Thanks to TQR advisory board member Mitch Colby at Korg USA, the product manager for Marshall, Nick Bowcott, graciously brought us up to date on the development and inner secrets of the 30th Anniversary amp...

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At the risk of stating the obvious, as the “30th Anniversary” part of their name suggests, these amps were specifically designed to celebrate Marshall’s 30th year in

business – a landmark which occurred in 1992! This tradition began in 1987 with the Silver Jubilee series of amps that marked the company’s 25th Anniversary and was further continued in 2002 with an extremely limited run of only 40 1962 JAGs – a gold plated 1962 “Bluesbreaker” combo covered in white leather by the legendary Jaguar automobile company. The majority of these highly coveted amps were sold via an internet lottery for £5000.00 (approx. \$8750.00, depending on exchange rate) with the bulk of the profits going to worthy causes (Jim Marshall has been a generous contributor and active member in various charities for many years). A precious few, however, did find their way into the hands of artists whom Jim felt had played a notable role in his company’s history – such as Eric Clapton, Gary Moore and Zakk Wylde.

Not surprisingly, when given the task of coming up with a 30th Anniversary amplifier, Jim’s R&D team decided to build what they considered to be the ultimate Marshall – the most comprehensive valve amp to ever bear the company’s famous script logo, not only in terms of tone but also in terms of flexibility and features. In order to attain this lofty goal, it was decided that the amplifier should have three totally independent channels – our best sounding and most versatile Clean Channel ever; a Crunch Channel capable of sounds spanning the previous 30 years – from the original JTM45, through the Plexi and early MVs, and right the way up to the high gain of the then-current JCM900s; and a Lead Channel with more gain than ever before. They also determined the amp should be loaded to the gills with modern features including comprehensive tone shaping options, MIDI channel switching, switchable speaker damping, a sophisticated Series/Parallel FX loop and no fewer than four output power options via Pentode/Triode and High/Low Power switches on the power stage – 100-watts pentode, 50-watts pentode, 50-watts triode and 25-watts triode.

The resulting 3-channel beast boasted no fewer than 17 control knobs, 22 switches and 3 trim pots. The number of valves its chassis housed? A Nigel Tufnel-approved 11 (7 x 12AX7s

and 4 x EL34s)! Was the amp worthy of its “ultimate Marshall” tag? Judging by the critical acclaim it attained and impressive sales in spite of its lofty price tag, the answer would have to be, “at the time, in the minds of many, yes.” In truth though, and with the universal gift of 20/20 hindsight, while Channel 1 and Channel 2 were truly breathtaking, Channel 3 didn’t quite hit the mark – even with the addition of a modification in 1994 that gave the channel even more gain, an upgrade designated by an LM (Lead Mod) prefix on the model numbers.



A High/Low Power switch that halved the amp’s output power by switching the output from Pentode to

Triode operation was nothing new for Marshall at the time as both the Silver Jubilee amps (1987) and also the then-current JCM900 Series boasted that feature. (Note: in addition to lowering the power amp’s output, this changes the amp’s sound and feel – pentode mode is brighter and more aggressive, triode is smoother and boasts a silkier high end). The other power-halving switch on the 30th Anniversary head and combo – the one marked High/Low Power worked by switching off two of the amp’s four power valves. This one is unique to that pair of amps and while it a very cool feature, especially when combined with the Pentode/Triode option, it does have one major negative – extended use of the “Low” option causes uneven wear of the output valves due to the fact that only two of the four are used.

In the JCM2000 series of all-valve amps that followed in the late ‘90s, the power stages are voiced in such a way that the amps start to “fatten up” at much lower volumes, making this sort of switching redundant, especially when the deep switch on the EL34 powered models is employed. This said, the all-singing, all-dancing TSL100 and TSL122 (as already mentioned, the triple channel successors of the 6100 and 6101) do boast a unique output stage switching feature named VPR. VPR is an acronym for Virtual Power Reduction and when this switch is engaged it kicks in a clever little piece of circuitry that lurks between the Phase Inverter and output valves which modifies the power stage, causing it to emulate the sound and feel of a much lower powered amp (approx. 25-Watts). VPR achieves this by doing two things: 1) It attenuates (reduces) the post Phase Inverter signal by approximately 6dB; thus effectively reducing the amp’s output power from 100W to 25W; 2) It alters the negative feedback circuit of the power amp and, as a result, lowers the damping factor of the

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output stage so that the speaker is less damped (i.e.: is allowed to “flap” more). This adds to the realism of the 25W output emulation as an all-tube 25W output amp has a lower damping factor than a 100W all-tube power stage.

In-between the brass-plated, Limited Edition 30th Anniversary amps covered in blue vinyl of 1992, and the brass-less, black vinyl models of 1993, there were also a bunch of brass-less, *blue-vinyl* models made in 1992. The difference between these three? Aside from aesthetics, absolutely nothing, except that for tonal preference reasons, the USA-sold combos were loaded with an Electro-Voice EVM 12L speaker while the rest of the world got a specially designed Celestion G12 “Gold” speaker. In 1994 however, as already mentioned earlier, that changed when the Lead channel was hot-rodded for even more gain – and upgrade designated by an LM (Lead Mod) prefix on both models. So, from 1994 until the discontinuation of the amps in 1999, the head and combo were known as the 6100LM and 6101LM respectively.

Regarding the changing of the output valves from EL34’s to 5881’s for a period in the mid ‘90s, that was not done out of choice, but out of necessity... Back in the good ol’ days of the ‘60s and ‘70s, good quality valves of all flavors were in plentiful supply. By the mid ‘70s however, due to continuing success of the much smaller, cheaper, cool-running and vastly more reliable transistor, the valve was no longer used in many of the everyday, electronic applications it once was (e.g. TVs, radios, hi-fi systems, telephone exchanges). As a result, companies stopped making the things and before long most of the Western manufacturers had disappeared, availability diminished dramatically and prices sky-rocketed. Jim and his troops saw the writing on the wall, stock-piled like crazy and worked closely with the few remaining suppliers to ensure quality and quantity. By the early ‘90s however, the only manufacturer making an EL34 worthy of the Marshall logo in sufficient quantity was the Tesla factory in the country once known as Czechoslovakia. Then disaster struck when the fall of communism caused that plant to close. Thus, when Marshall’s once huge mountain of EL34’s was reduced to virtually nothing in the autumn of 1994, we had no choice but to start using Russian-made 5881’s. Sure, there was a Chinese factory churning out EL34s at the time, but they were far from satisfactory (technically speaking, they sucked!) so the Sovtek 5881 was the only option.

Because of this, from late 1994 on, pretty much every Marshall valve amp that once boasted EL34’s was loaded with 5881’s instead and bore a “Marshall 5881 Power Valve Equipped” sticker on the front panel. In some ways, this was an ironic twist of fate because, as Marshall history buffs are always quick to point out, the very first Marshall, the JTM45 of 1962, used American-made 5881 power valves, but price

and availability forced the company to find another power valve (the KT66, then the EL34 by the mid ‘60s). So, some thirty years later history effectively repeated itself, but this time, in reverse! Thankfully, by the time the JCM2000 series was ready to roll a few years later, Marshall had been working closely with the Russian valve manufacturer Svetlana and a good sounding, reliable EL34 was once more available in plentiful supply. So, by the launch of the DSL100 and DSL50 heads in 1997, the EL34 valve crisis was over. Long may the supply of great EL34’s continue!

While the 6100LE and 6101LE numbers were obviously extremely limited, and the blue covered, non-brass plated ones limited to only being produced during the anniversary year of 1992, both the 6100 and 6101 did in fact remain in production all the way up until 1999 – by which time public demand for them was no longer present due to the unparalleled success of the three channel TSL100 head and TSL122 combo. So, in truth, the numbers were far from limited!

As a company, we always strive to learn from our successes and our occasional failures too. As the saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” Jim Marshall has always been a huge proponent of his company paying careful attention to the likes, dislikes, demands and wishes of his users and reacting accordingly. As is now rock folklore, the JTM45 was born in 1962 as the direct result of Mr. Marshall listening to the desires of the young rock guitarists in his shop...43 years later the song remains the same! **To**

www.marshallamps.com

REVIEW

Johnny A

SIGNATURE GUITAR

We’ve had mixed feelings about many “signature” guitars that are marketed as having been inspired and meticulously designed around the preferences of major players, and perhaps you share our misgivings based on personal, hands-on experience. Of course, we do believe that artists for whom signature models have been developed are consulted during R&D and various phases of pre-production concerning pick-up specs and tone, wiring layout, neck and fingerboard profiles, scale length, fret size, and finish color options. The problem is, in the public’s mind the term “signature guitar” implies that either the artist’s most treasured instrument has been painstakingly reproduced to exacting specifications with no compromises, or the artist’s “dream” guitar has been created with extraordinary passion and obsession for detail. Unfortunately, the marketing story often fails to accurately reflect reality for discerning players capable of resisting the rip tide of hype surrounding a new product launch. Given the

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number of such instruments that are produced (in a factory staffed by hourly employees with quotas to fill), if the artists whose names appear on many signature guitars were required to sign-off on each and every one, rest assured there would be bounces and rejects. It's one thing to sketch out a prototype based on individual specifications, but quite another to achieve and maintain a reproducible level of craftsmanship throughout the entire run of a signature guitar model, which may last for decades. In all cases, with *any* guitar new or old, it remains up to you to find "the good ones,"

because as long as guitars are made by human hands and wood, they aren't all gonna be good out of the box, and some of the good ones aren't going to age particularly well, either.

We continue to experience inconsistencies to varying degrees among all types of guitars – signature models and otherwise. Just this week as we were returning a couple of new Gretsch amps to Midtown Music, we spied a Gibson Custom Shop case on the counter (a sure sign that a fresh trade has just gone down). "What's in there?" we asked. "Oh, something that just came in." Pop go the clasps, and we lift the top of the case with the same anticipation that has plagued us for years, followed by a barely controllable gasp. An extraordinary 2002 '58 Custom Authentic Les Paul lay nestled in its plush womb, beckoning us within. Once we recovered from our initial shock (it's a shockingly attractive and unique guitar crafted in the image of a moderately figured and faded to amber-butterscotch vintage Les Paul with aged hardware) we took it home to be re-strung with fresh Pyramid wire, set up, inspected, played and prodded, and it has now earned a permanent home in our music room after some quick horse-trading. Right time, right place, luck of the draw, and we have owned a dozen Les Pauls that couldn't come within a mile of this one on all counts, although we can't say precisely why. We could tip you off to other finds, but we've kept you in suspense long enough about the Johnny A Signature guitar, so let's get to it.

The Gibson Custom Shop doesn't keep a wide variety of completed guitars sitting around, and there were no Johnny A's in production at the time this article was being developed,



so we prevailed upon the ever-present goodwill at Willcutt Guitars and they promptly sent us a Johnny A for review. If there is one word that can describe the 'A', it's stylish, in a very *old school* style, yet still unique when viewed against the backdrop of the entire Gibson heritage. We like it a lot, as the look seems to have been inspired to some extent by a vintage Barney Kessel, a Trini Lopez and a Les Paul, with none of the funky quirkiness of a Barney/ Lopez.

Even more significant are the practical design features that evolved from Johnny's wish to maintain the hollow character and comfort of his ES295, and the solidbody prowess of his Les Pauls when a song calls for ballsy sustain. The 'A' can indeed range between the classic, clean, hollow humbucker tones required by jazz and swing tunes, and it can also be pushed into subtle, bluesy tones with just the right hint of girth and dirt, or all-out screaming sustain. The 'A' was specifically designed to avoid being a one-trick pony, and nearly every stylistic variation on the electric guitar can be authentically explored with it by degrees. The key contributing factors to this uncommon versatility are the solid mahogany back and sides carved from a single block of wood and joined to a solid maple top, which creates a much more stable and controllable hollow body electric guitar tone than



the typical 'ES' design that has historically utilized plywood construction with or without a center block.

The 'A' is also laid out by design to provide easy and constant access to the Bigsby and the entire length of the 25.5" scale length neck. As described, the toggle switch can be moved with a flick of the pinky,

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literally between notes. This is also a very light and comfortable guitar at 6.8 pounds, very well balanced, with none of the dive-bomb tendencies of a Les Paul teetering on your lap. Even in the absence of a traditional center block, the thinline-style hollow body produces a great hollow tone without robbing the guitar of sustain or causing squealing feedback at higher volume levels. The neck profile can best be described



as similar to a '60s ES335 – not nearly as clubby as a typical '50s neck shape, but slightly more rounded than an early '60s thin-taper or the flatter Les Paul Classic neck shape. The fret wire feels similar to medium jumbo Dunlop 6105 with plenty of crown, and the fret ends extend over the fingerboard binding rather than beneath it – a good move. We were also pleased to find that the 'A' did not exhibit any string binding and telltale creaks

at the saddles or the nut. We sometimes find new Gibson guitars to be plagued with nut slots that bind the strings during tuning until they have been tweaked with a fine needle file, and if you choose to use anything larger than a .010-.048 set, you'll need to re-work the nut slots on the 'A.'

And now we've come to a part of this review that needs to be digested very carefully... The '57 Classics have remained one of our favorite humbucking pickups, and the more variations on humbuckers we hear, the more we like them. At \$198 a pair, they are priced far lower than typical "designer" pickups, and we have found them to be well-suited for all types of applications. As much as we admire and enjoy the work of builders like Jason Lollar and Jim Wagner at CR Coils, the '57 Classics originally designed by J.T. Ribiloff and Tom Holmes continue to earn "classic" status. They are warm and rich, exceptionally well-balanced with a very musical top end



character, and driven to extremes through a great amp they produce thoroughly pleasing inside/out harmonics, all of which serve to remind us that you don't always have to lay out a thick stash of cash to get the tone you crave.

Although we aren't big fans of gold-plated hardware, the workmanship and detail on our review guitar was really quite phenomenal from top to bottom. The sole negative we can report is that the 'A' may simply be *too* pretty and flashy for some players who would otherwise really dig this guitar. Perhaps Gibson and Johnny A will consider an optional model offered with nickel hardware and a slightly less flashy, toned-down look that would match up better with a t-shirt, jeans and a wallet chain, ya'll. We do believe they would sell well. But in all respects, the 'A' earns an A, and we urge those of you who can appreciate an extraordinarily versatile and exceptionally well-built guitar to check them out. This is one "signature" model that truly earns its name. **To**

www.gibson.com
www.willcuttguitars.com, 859-276-0675

J.T. RIBILOFF on the...

'57 Classic Humbucker

During the course of our many conversations with various Gibson employees past and present, J.T. Ribiloff is frequently-mentioned as one of the most passionate, knowledgeable and skilled innovators to have worked at Gibson in the days leading up to the development of the Custom Art & Historic Division, and he is credited for having developed the '57 Classic humbucker along with Tom Holmes, who continues to build his own signature humbucking pickups in Joelton, TN.

Thanks to TQR advisory board member Ernie King at the Gibson Custom Shop, we contacted J.T., now working at Floyd Rose in Redmond, WA, and we asked him to describe how the '57 Classics were created...

Well, by the time I was 21 I had owned over 400 guitars... I've been a guitar freak since I was 14 years old, I'm 44 now, and I'm sure I've had over a 1,000 guitars. I grew up in southern California, so we had access to a lot of guitars and I've owned lots of vintage Les Pauls, SG's, Specials and ES175's. When we started to develop the '57 Classic I had quite a few vintage pickups at my fingertips, and George Gruhn was very generous in that he would let us go in and pull guitars and hold on to them overnight so that we could find those that really had the ultimate tone. There were significant inconsistencies among all of those old instruments, because you have to remember that these factories existed primarily to make money, and the way to make money was to keep material and labor costs low and build as efficiently as possible. They were trying to use whatever was commercially available, but in the music industry the quantities of usage are very, very low compared to the automobile industry, for

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example, and that's where the inconsistencies in materials came in. The rod stock for the pole pieces in the PAF's was basically low-carbon steel, and I had different pole pieces analyzed to find out

what types of carbon compound and grade of steel they used, because that's a big part of getting that authentic sound. They used plain enamel 42 gauge wire, and the very first PAF's basically used the same magnets that were being used for the P90's at the time. The magnets didn't really change dimensionally until around 1961, but the magnet material in the early PAF's did vary between Alnico 2 and Alnico 4.

The '57 Classic was specifically aimed at making a "middle of the road" version of the PAF pickup that would sound equally great played through a Fender reverb amp or a Marshall 100W Super Lead. The final testing came down to just playing the pickup through a variety of guitar bodies and amps. And it's not just about how the pickup sounds, but also how it feels... At the same time the Classics were being developed, we were also trying to develop the historic Les Paul, so we were listening to a lot of different vintage guitars. There were some vintage pickups that didn't sound good at all, and it wasn't so much due to the way they were originally made, but the way they had aged. Enamel wire becomes brittle with time, and as it gets brittle, you can get little breaks in it, and the pickup actually stops working on inductance and starts working on capacitance. Some pickups with these breaks can become warmer sounding, and others become really bright.



The final testing of the Classic took place in multiples of different guitars because what I wanted was a good, rudimentary pickup that worked equally well in a broad range of instruments, and I'm sure that was the goal they had in mind when the original PAF's were designed. Any time I tried to duplicate the extremes that we heard in vintage pickups, one

style of playing always seemed to suffer. A pickup that sounded particularly great through a Marshall amp for really aggressive kinds of rock music would sound way too dark through a Fender. Then, if you made the pickup sound super sweet, it would sound like a buzz saw ripping through your skull played through a really bright Marshall.

Gibson had just started potting pickups prior to the time we were working on the Classic, and they had never wax-potted pickups prior to 1988-89. Fortunately, at the time we were working on the Classics we were also going through a complete re-tooling, so all of the usual restraints and resistance to change had been removed.

One of the main factors in how a pickup sounds is also due to the value of the potentiometer you use. You can change the sound of a pickup just by using different values of pots. Some of the 500K pots in the old '50s guitars can measure as high as 800K because of the loose tolerance in the part specs, and those guitars can sound cooler (laughing). The thing is, there is so little to these things that what little there is does a lot. That's my rule of thumb with pickups. If you change the type of steel you use for pole screws, you change the sound. Change the spacing of the pole pieces and you change the sound... What we tried to really do with the '57 Classic was to make them as close to the originals in terms of the material specifications as was physically possible. The actual grade of steel was specified from the original pickups, the #22 shielded wire was the same... The Classics *are* potted, even though the originals never were, but I haven't noticed anything detrimental from potting, unless of course you were trying to create a counterfeit PAF.

It was Tom Holmes and an engineer at Gibson named Ray Atwood who really helped me with the development and documentation for the '57 Classic. I'm proud of the fact that when I left Gibson, I also left them with complete documentation on every aspect of the pickup. In fact, one of the stipulations made when we developed the Classic was that there were to be absolutely no deviations in the production of that pickup. I hope that is still true today. **TO**

REVIEW **Eric Johnson**
SIGNATURE STRATOCASTER

Over the years, Fender has developed an impressive range of signature Strats, including the Clapton model favored by Joe Bonamassa, the Jeff Beck (a favorite of Phil Brown), Stevie Ray Vaughan, Mark Knopfler, Rory Gallagher, Jimmy Vaughan, Buddy Guy, and most recently, signature models for John Mayer and Eric Johnson.

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Given EJ's penchant for bravely touring with his favorite vintage guitars and amps, we were particularly anxious to check out his new signature Stratocaster,

which seems to embody a few non-traditional preferences that we assume have evolved over the decades that Eric has played his own vintage Strats. Most notable are the flat 12" fingerboard radius, a classic "soft V" neck shape, quarter-sawn maple neck, the omission of a string tree on the peg-head, bone nut, and the specially designed pickups and wiring scheme that leaves the middle pickup unaffected by a tone pot. Fender's description also includes features such as a "very thin nitro finish, staggered vintage style machine heads eliminating the need for a string tree, and silver painted block and '57 style string recess with no paint between base plate and the block."

We had access to two new EJ Strats at Midtown Music finished in Candy Apple Red and vintage 2-tone burst. Both guitars were on the lighter side of the 7-pound range as advertised, built from very nice 2-piece alder, and the finishes appear to be typical of the vintage reissue guitars built in Corona. The "soft V" neck shape absolutely nails that of our original '56 Strat in every way and we loved it, but our enthusiasm for the neck profile was tempered by the gummy feel of the tinted finish on the necks. Granted, Georgia



humidity in August doesn't help (we do have air conditioning down here), but we found it difficult to ignore the rubbery, sticky feel of the nitro lacquer on the back of the neck and the maple fingerboard.

The fret wire on the EJ is larger than the usual "vintage" wire used by Fender – a good thing – but with the extremely flat radius of the fingerboard, a slightly higher crown could



improve playability even more, especially when bending strings. We noticed that the high E string on one of the guitars also produced a sitar-like harmonic which seemed to be caused by insufficient string tension at the nut, which left us pondering that missing string tree...

The specially wound pickups are exceptional, and this is where the EJ really shines. An entire book could be written about all the variations on Stratocaster pickups that exist, new and old, but there isn't an excessively sharp, brittle or muddy tone to be found in any of the EJ's pickups. The neck pickup is extraordinarily rich with just the right amount of sparkle on the top, the middle cuts with solid, full midrange tones that seem much better defined than any other Strat set we can recall, and the bridge pickup is actually trebly-sweet and musical. The out of phase #2 and #4 positions are also perfectly voiced. We could *live* in #4 (middle and bridge) for days... This set will also match up very well with a wide range of fuzz, gain and overdrive effects. We aren't surprised that the pickups in Eric Johnson's signature guitar have been voiced and designed so brilliantly; given Eric's reputation for



obsessively mining tone and Fender's expertise with pickup design, we would expect nothing less, and we hope this custom set will be available soon

through Fender dealers.

At \$1600, the Eric Johnson Signature Stratocaster has been designed to be affordable while offering custom features that reflect the taste and preferences of one of the most talented and original guitarists of our time. The vision behind this guitar seems sound, but if our review instruments were typical of this new model, a lacquer formula or finishing process that produces a slicker, more forgiving feel on the neck would significantly enhance the unique character and tone this guitar clearly offers. **To**

www.fenderusa.com
www.ericjohnson.com
www.midtownmusic.com

the Saga of the ...

Brown Twin Amp Part III

The previous articles in this series have shed some light by showing a little history of the Fender brown amps, and by squashing the idea that the mythical low-power brown Twin was ever a production item. With the history and the hype aside, this article crowns the 3-part series by introducing some solutions for players who want to hear what this amp *would* have sounded like.

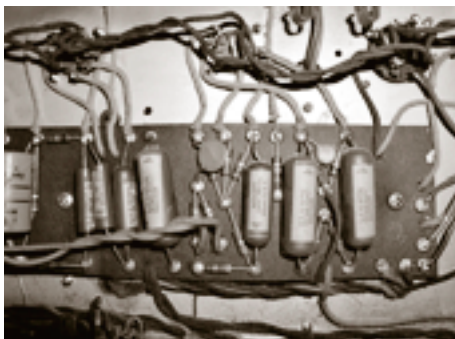


To bring this ghost to life, the following pages provide the key points and the general outline of an amp project perfect for all kinds of amp nuts: those who have the time

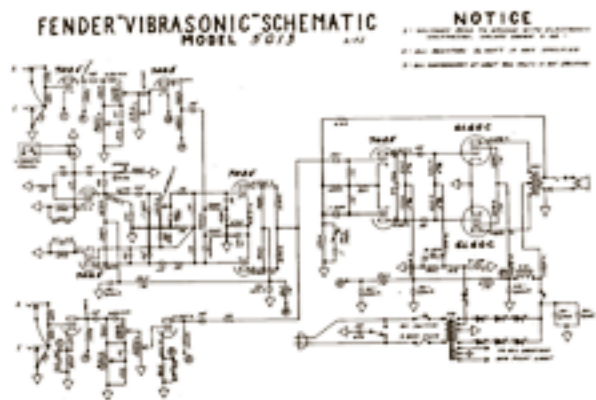
and skill to build the 5G8 from the ground up, those who already have a stash of old parts lying around, or those who fall somewhere in between. Before we get started, it's important to remember that this project is responding to a myth that is based largely on the error-ridden 1960 Fender catalog. So, while it is unlikely that Fender would have actually reverted to the "small-box" or dual 6L6 design after having already beefed up the Twin to its infamous four 6L6 power section, this project is about creating the fabled *low-power* brown Twin.

APPROACHING THE CIRCUIT

As with any amplifier design, there are three fundamental questions that ultimately result in a final product: the circuit, the cabinet, and the speakers. With respect to the first question, we are immediately confronted with a dilemma: without a Fender schematic for a low power brown Twin-Amp, where to start? Well, there is the more complicated idea of using the schematic from the 5F8-A and that from the 6G8 as "before and after" reference points that should point to a middle



ground where the 5G8 would have been found. Then again, there is the very simple approach that comes from realizing that the beauty of



Fender's Professional Series Amplifiers (which debuted in 1960) is the consistency of their circuit design. In other words, all five of the known circuits are basically identical outside of the following variables: the power transformer, the negative feedback resistor, and the output transformer. So, the absence of a 5G8 schematic (given that the hi-powered, 6G8 circuit is sometimes erroneously referred to as the 5G8) is no longer such a drag. We can use any of the existing 5G* schematics, within limits, for the basics of the circuit design.

In this situation of lesser variation (trannys and negative feedback or "NFB" resistor) within a larger, fixed structure (the 5G* circuit), we can use the first, "before and after" approach to define a spectrum of possible values. For instance, the NFB resistor values in the tweed 5F8-A versus that in the blonde 6G8 Twin are good reference points for getting close to the value we want to give to the same component in the mythical 5G8. By combining the above methods (while *always* deferring to what actually sounds best), this approach is designed to allow a little creativity so that the amp will work for us instead of the other way around.

VARIABLES WITHIN THE CIRCUIT

As for the first variable (power transformer), we can see that, outside of the 5G4 Super with its 8087 power transformer with 5VAC tap for a tube rectifier, the rest of the 5G* Professional Series amps typically used the Triad 67233 power transformer. This tranny's high B+ (averaging in the 500VDC range) was sufficient for the later, blonde 6G8-A Twin-Amp circuit in which it is commonly found. As for the second variable (negative feedback resistor), we can use the "before and after" tweed and blonde Twin-Amp circuits as reference points. Looking at the use of the "NFB" resistor in the Fender Twin from the mid '50s through the early '60s, we see the following general trend: the values are generally consistent outside of a dramatic drop around the year 1960.

Looking more closely at the Tweed (5F8-A) and early Blonde Twins (6G8), we can see the "dip" or first half of this trend: NFB resistor values decline from 56K to 22K. In the later Blonde Twin (the 6G8-A), the value of the NFB resistor springs

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back up to 56K. How does the NFB resistor affect sound? The greater the value, the more distorted the sound. So, for the project at hand, choosing a resistor that is between these values is both authentic, while also allowing you to “tweak” the circuit’s performance to suit your individual taste.

Now for the final variable in the circuit – the output transformer. Here we find ourselves with less certainty in terms of precedent, so this also becomes a question to be resolved primarily by individual taste. The reason that the 5G8 output transformer poses a real dilemma is because we are deciding to (re)create the “mythical” low-power brown Twin. We can’t really use the “before and after” approach, because the 5F8-A and 6G8 circuit designs are both hi-power circuits, employing four 6L6 power tubes. Looking back to the great year 1955, we find that Leo chose the Triad 2818 as the output transformer for the low-power 5E8 Twin-Amp (the one re-issued by Victoria and more recently by Fender). Other authentic and perhaps more “period-correct” OT choices include the Triad 45268 (the massive chunk of iron found in both the 5F8(-A) and the 6G8) as well as the 45550 found in the 5G13 Vibrasonic amp). For those builders who have other old output transformers lying around, the following rules of thumb are useful.

First, the larger the output transformer, the more hi-fi the signal will be. In other words, larger transformers like the 45550 and 45249 (used in the Vibrasonic and Concert amps respectively) are “interleaved” – a more advanced design intended to produce later distortion. The result is better highs and lows. Unlike their big brothers, the “small-iron” transformer choices (like the 45216 and 45217 found in the 5G4 Super, 5G5 Pro and 5G7 Bandmaster) are not interleaved; so they tend to be less hi-fi due to early “saturation” or distortion. Secondly, if you have an output transformer that is designed to match 4 power tubes to a 4-ohm load (like most other Fender Twin output transformers), then reducing the number of power tubes in half results in multiplying the impedance by a factor of 2. So, using the 45268, the 125A29A or the 022889 (all of which were used in Fender’s hi-powered amps to match 4 6L6 tubes to a 4-Ohm load) in a circuit powered by two 6L6 tubes, the total speaker impedance should be 8 Ohms.

THE CABINET

As for the cabinet, the accepted wisdom on the 5G8 has been that it was essentially “a converted 2x10 Super cabinet.” However, this idea is dead wrong. To fit two 12-inch speakers

into a brown Super-Amp cabinet, the speaker frames would just about be hanging outside of the cabinet! Referring to the 5E8 low powered Twin-Amp (1955-57) for cabinet info is also problematic since that design won’t fit with the “new-fangled,” horizontal chassis design found in the tolex era. While the baffle of the 5E8 is tall enough for a pair of diagonally mounted speakers, adding the approximately 1 3/4" extra height to accommodate the horizontal chassis results in a cabinet that is too tall and therefore awkward in appearance. After a couple of initial glances then, the cabinet and the output transformer are the only things really standing in the way of building this mythical amp.

THE VIBRASONIC SOLUTION

We previously showed that it’s no mistake that the debut of the 5G13 Vibrasonic amp in late 1959 coincides with Fender’s effort to fill the absence of the Twin. The similarity between these two models is also indicated by the fact that, at the



moment of its debut, the Vibrasonic was marketed as the flagship of Fender’s fleet of amplifiers. Such revered status had been reserved for the Twin-Amp since

its appearance in 1953. Another hi-powered Fender amp of the era, the Showman that debuted in late 1960, also shares a common chassis with the Vibrasonic and Blonde Twins. For our project, the kinship between these amps is very helpful in terms of solving our cabinet and output transformer problems.

Looking at the Professional Series as a whole, it seems bizarre that Fender would have two models featuring a single 15" speaker – the Pro and the Vibrasonic amps. Upon closer inspection, however, we find that despite the identical speaker arrangements of these two amps, the Vibrasonic-Amp uses a cabinet that is 2 inches wider than the Pro’s 24-inch wide cabinet. The Vibrasonic is clearly the oddball here since all of the other Fender Professional Series amps are 24 inches wide.

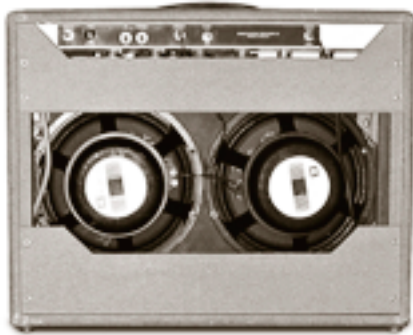
Why the extra width for the Vibrasonic? It is true that the cabinet dimension does change the amp’s over-all frequency response. The JBL speaker upgrade and the longer cabinet dimension also seem to go hand-in-hand with the big-iron output transformer, working to separate the Vibrasonic from its lower-priced brother, the Pro. Regardless of these suggestions, one thing is certain: the extra width of the Vibrasonic-Amp is just barely enough to accommodate the two 12" speakers required by the 5G8. So, the “Vibrasonic solution” for our 5G8 project is such that any owner of an early ‘60s

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Vibrasonic amp is only a loaded 2x12 baffle board away from completing a 5G8 cabinet in the easiest way.

SPEAKERS AND BAFFLE

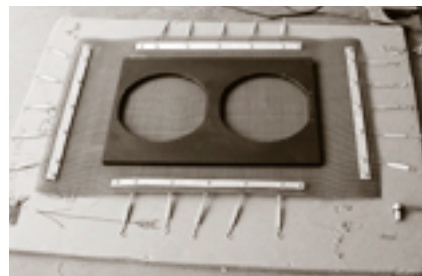
One big reason why the hi-powered Twin-Amp was scrapped from production for the first half of 1960 is that the Jensen P12N was unable to handle the full throttle of the 90-watt 5F8-A circuit. Two of these speakers however, are designed to handle the 40-50 watts generated by the typical 1960



Professional Series circuit, and therefore, a 5G8. Our issue is not so much what speakers are used, as long as they are designed to handle at least 20-25 watts each (P12Qs/C12Qs

may be a little weak). Its more important to nail down the proper impedance and the fabrication of a baffle board. If we use the Vibrasonic-Amp as our guide, we find that the question of speaker impedance is determined in part by its 45550 output transformer (the 8-Ohm 45548 output transformer is also listed on schematics but almost never actually found). Despite the fact that the JBL D130 speakers often measure 8 Ohms, the 45550 transformer is nonetheless designed for the 16 Ohm load that these speakers are supposed to have. In this case, wiring two 12", 8 Ohm speakers (P12P's for example) in series gives us the proper impedance match. The 16 Ohm load has performed great in terms of fidelity and power – not too clean or dirty and with very good headroom. The recommended negative feedback resistor value with this setup is 47K Ohms.

With respect to the baffle, we recommend 5 to 7-ply fir that is 3/8" in thickness for optimum performance. This plywood is void-free and strong enough to successfully handle speakers as heavy as the JBL D131/D120 or the Jensen P12N. Although it is an upgrade from the 3-ply pine used by Fender in 1960, modern 3-ply has a lot of voids (empty spaces), thin-



ness and other cost-cutting bums. The remaining dimensions of the baffle are as follows: 24 1/4" W; 16 & 5/8"H. The screws that

Fender used to hold the baffle in place are #8 nickel-plated, oval top, 1 3/4" wood screws. And at least one on-line vintage parts seller offers replicas of the speaker mounting studs

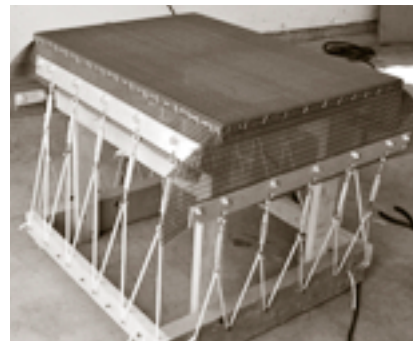
used by Fender. Before finishing, you'll need the furring strip that is mounted on the front side of the baffle to hold the grille cloth away from the board itself. This fir plywood strip is 3/8" thick and should be cut in 1" wide strips to the length of the board before being mounted along its forward-facing edges.

ASSEMBLY GUIDELINES

For those builders opting to start from scratch, the main issue is getting a chassis. Although Vibrasonic or even brown Showman chassis infrequently turn up at auction, there is no current, after-market chassis that's good for this particular project. With a little demand however, it is likely that this situation can be rectified. As for the cabinet, many amplifier cabinet builders are currently reproducing vintage Fender designs, including the early '60s brown Vibrasonic. For the do-it-yourself builder, use 3/4" yellow pine with the following dimensions: 26" W, 20" H and, 10 & 1/2" D (along the bottom). This depth dimension tapers gradually to either 8 & 3/8" or 8 & 3/4" at the top of the amp (depending on where the measurement is made). This taper gives the baffle board its slight upward angle. All outer edges of the cabinet (with the exception of the top-front) should be trimmed with a 1/4" routing bit. The cabinet is assembled using 1/4" box jointing (a.k.a. "finger jointing").

It is important to note that the full-length, 1" x 1" vertical cleats used to secure the baffle board to the cabinet will have to be partially cut or trimmed in order fit the two 12" speakers in the cabinet. The furring strip is typically trimmed to coincide with the speaker cut-outs in the baffle board itself. In the top left-hand corner of that furrow-strip frame, Fender also included an irregular piece of wood where the flat, badge logo is mounted.

Due to its water-solubility, the type of hide glue originally used by Fender is no longer preferred. The furring strip can be secured to the baffle with heavy duty staples along with



either Franklin Tite-Bond III or Elmer's wood glue for a connection that will stand up to the force of a tightly stretched grille cloth. Glue is also a good reinforcement to the cabi-

net's other joints. Finish the board with a couple of coats of flat black spray paint and attach the grill cloth to "coin-bouncing" tension.

In terms of covering and grill cloth, the 5G* Professional

-continued-

Series amps were all covered with Fender's first shade of tolex that was rough and tan or pinkish-brown in color. Some attempts have been made to reissue it but with limited success. "Rough brown tolex" is the next best bet. The grill cloth of the period was the tweed style, "maroon with yellow stripe" which has been reissued as well. Only the sickest ampoholics will miss the prototype metal knobs found on perhaps 25 of the earliest brown Fenders.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the five 5G8s we built have varied surprisingly. In terms of commonalities though, the 5G8 is like the other members of the 5G* amps in terms of its silicon rectified "punchiness," the "underwater" pitch-shifting impersonation of the tremolo and, monster bass frequency response.



Paul Linden with his low-power brown Twins

Compared to its tweed and black-face cousins, this circuit sounds a little dark, especially since there is no "middle" control or on-board reverb. Another oddball characteristic is the bleed-over between channels, since they use common pre-amp tubes for tone (V1) and volume (V2).

Plug into channel 1 and turn up channel 2 to hear this freaky, but low volume signal!

The examples we have built have focused on "big-iron" rather than "small-iron" output transformers and with good results. The Triad 45268 and 45550 transformers have both performed very well, along with the 2818 (which is essentially the same size as the 45550 but wound for 4 Ohms). Due to its massive size, the 45268 distorts very late if at all. In terms of speakers, we have experimented with Jensen P12N's, P12P's, and JBL D120's/D131's. We found that all were able to handle the power while naturally contributing their own flavor to the final product (JBL's being typically more bright, crisp and clean). In particular tests, the amps we built performed well for guitarists that like a cleaner setup. More distorted signals can be generated at moderate levels through manipulation of the NFB resistor value as well as through standard bias adjustment. For harmonica, this amp (like most of Fender's brown tolex tube amps) requires minor tweaks such as re-voicing the pre-amp section with 12AY7 or similar tubes in V2 and/or V4 according to taste. Once dialed

in though, the low mids will slap you upside your head like a 32-ounce T-Bone.

For traditional bass payers who like the sound of 12's in a partially open-back cabinet, the 5G8 with JBL's is a magnificent bass amplifier for studio or other low to medium volume applications. Overdriving with bass is not recommended for wimpy speakers or old components!

Outside of the romance of its mythical existence, the actual beauty of the 5G8 has a lot to do with the combination of the tweedish-brown sound of the 5G* circuit, a low-power setup and two 12-inch speakers. The singing, almost "choral" quality found in most any well-made amp that uses multiple speakers is complimented by Fender's early brown sound. Trying to estimate the sound of the 5G8 by way of the black-face Pro-Reverb or the '55-'57 low power tweed Twin only gets you so far. Although the power and speaker arrangements are nearly the same, the 5G* circuit has a rather unique sound and was very short-lived by normal production standards. Although Fender certainly doctored up an image of a 5G8, the actual amp is a unique combination of these elements that can now break through the silence and leave its mystery behind. **To**

We would like to thank Greg Gagliano, Dan Del Florentino from the NAMM library, Harvey Gerst, Paul Bechtoldt, Jeff Bakos, Jim Litloff, Peter Brown and Steve Soest for their help in our research. We would also like to dedicate this project to the memory of Robert Perrine. For questions regarding this project, please e-mail Paul Linden at:

centervolume@yahoo.com or visit our website at:

http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/serrede/Twin_Amp_Pix.html

http://www.hep.uiuc.edu/home/serrede/5G8_Twin_Amp_Pix.html

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A Brown Soun The all-new Hemp E Cones, Bass 10's, and 10's for guitar are here! In addition to A Brown's original hemp cones, John Harrison has created a new "E" cone that is a bit brighter than the original hemp cone. Killer tone for Fender amps, or in combination with the original Hemp Tone Tubby speaker. The bass 10's have received rave reviews from none other than Tommy Shannon, and the 10's for guitar will knock you out in your Princeton, Vibrolux, or Super. A Brown Soun was founded in San Rafael, California in 1974 by John Harrison – a working musician who refused to settle for the few reconing choices that existed when he first needed speakers repaired in the Bay Area. Since then, John has been recognized by artists such as Carlos Santana, Neil Young, Pearl Jam, Van Halen, and many others as California's top speaker reconer. In addition to its famed reconing services, A Brown Soun also custom builds speakers and cabinets for virtually every application. The renowned Tone Tubby speaker developed by A Brown Soun has received rave reviews from top professionals around the world. Brown's recently released series of speakers for guitar and bass featuring hemp cones is setting a new benchmark for guitar and bass speaker performance, with dramatically improved clarity, note definition, frequency response, durability, and power handling. Whether you need new speakers, custom built cabinets, or vintage speakers rebuilt and sounding right, A Brown Soun is your professional resource. As the Tone Tubby logo says, "We're committed to tone," and that means yours.

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Our amplifiers use traditional along with unique circuit designs that make CORNELL amplification one of the most interesting to use and toneful to hear. A typical example of this is our Plexi range. Yes, the word 'Plexi' tells you just what type of amplifier this is, but try one and you will wish the original sounded as good. It is with this knowledge that together we design the Plexi range.

Plexi 45/50 and 18/20 are available now! The Plexi 10 combo will be launched in September.

www.dc-developments.com

Dr. Z Check out The Doctor's new amps, including the "Mini Z" 8W Combo featuring a single EL84 power tube and 8" speaker, and the high-powered custom rig built for Michael Burks!

Tone - Is there a substitute? Absolutely not, and that's why Dr. Z was at the top of our list of essential ToneQuest reviews and interviews when TQR was launched 5 years ago. Today, Dr. Z celebrates 15 years of providing professional musicians with affordable, road-worthy amplifiers and Z Best cabinets that are the choice of renowned players like Joe Walsh, Vince Gill, David Grissom, Anson Funderburgh, Brad Paisley, Audley Freed, Walter Becker, Buddy Whittington, and Michael Burks, among many others.

As the prices of "boutique" amplifiers have continued to climb, the value of every hand built Dr. Z has never been more apparent, proving that you don't have to spend \$3,000 to acquire inspiring tone, great looks and solid dependability in a custom amplifier. Whether

you're a bedroom player looking for a solid low-power amp, a weekend player working small to medium-sized rooms, or a touring pro who needs big stage punch, Dr. Z amps are universally regarded for their unique, characteristic touch-sensitive dynamic response, brilliant overdriven tone, and their ability to "clean up" with subtle adjustments to your guitar's volume control. Dr. Z's wide range of birch-ply combo cabinets and extension cabs are loaded with your choice of Celestion speakers. Z knows speakers, and he'll gladly recommend the best combinations to go with every amp he builds...

Current models include the Carmen Ghia, KT45, MAZ18 Junior, MAZ38 Senior, the new Mazerati, Prescription, Route 66, SRZ-65, Z-28, and the 6545. For more information on all of the Doctor's fine amplifiers and cabs, please visit the Dr. Z web site or call Dr. Z. Everything he builds is ToneQuest approved!

*Dr. Z Amps, Maple Heights, OH
(216) 475-1444 www.drzamps.com*

Eminence Eminence is proud to present the Patriot and Redcoat series of guitar speakers. Incorporating both British and American cone technology into speakers that we manufacture in the USA gives us the ability to provide you with virtually any tone you desire. Be it British or American, clean or dirty, big bass or screaming highs, we have a speaker that will allow you to "Pick Your Sound." Choose from one of seventeen new models! Eminence has been building speakers to custom specifications for nearly every major manufacturer of guitar amplifier and sound reinforcement products since 1967. Their new Legend Series of guitar speakers captures the essence of the vintage American and British speaker designs that are held in such high regard today by so many discerning players. The Legend Series includes classic British and American designs for 6," 8," 10," 12," and 15" speakers utilizing ceramic and AlNiCo magnets, British or American cones, and Kapton polyamide voice coils for superior heat dissipation and durability. Best of all, because Eminence has been successfully competing for years with other speaker manufacturers as an OEM supplier, the Legend Series speakers are priced far below those of many other popular manufacturers of "reissue" and custom speakers. The Eminence Legend Series delivers all of the tone and durability you need, at a lower price, with no compromises in quality. To locate genuine Eminence dealers in your area, please visit their web site or call Eminence Speakers.

*Eminence Speaker LLC, Eminence, KY
www.eminence.com 502-845-5622
Contact: Chris Rose*

Evidence Audio was founded in 1997 by Tony Farinella to supply the MI and Studio community with performance-based cables at reasonable prices. The most well-known cable is the Lyric HG (High Gain) guitar cable. Readers of Guitar Player Magazine voted the Lyric HG as "Best Accessory of 2004" supporting the opinion drawn by editors of magazines from around the world.

In simple terms, cables from Evidence Audio are built different; as a result, they sound different. The Lyric HG features two solid core high grade IGL copper conductors and a braided shield that is grounded at the amp end only. This is the correct way to "drain" spurious noise. By using solid core conductors strand interference is eliminated as well. Designed to be neutral and honest, the cables don't actually "improve" your tone, they simply replace a cable in your signal path which was likely destroying it. What you hear is a tighter more muscular bottom end, a clearer more complex mid-range and a sweeter more detailed high end. Dynamics and harmonics are improved and sustain is no longer masked. Overall the guitar becomes more three-dimensional sounding, cuts through clearer and at the same time takes up less space in the mix.

The Siren Speaker Cable and The Source AC Power Cable compliment the Lyric HG. They offer a solution to distortions cause by cables in other areas of the signal path and power supply. The effects of the speaker and power cable are consistent with that of the Lyric HG: you hear the guitar and amplifier, not the cables.

While not inexpensive, cables from Evidence Audio are still one of the most cost effective ways of improving your tone. It's like changing pickups or a bridge - a small detail with big results. Please visit the Evidence Audio website to locate a dealer near you and demand a demo!

*Audionova Inc., <http://www.audionova.ca/>
514-631-5787 ext. 22*

Fishman Widely recognized as the premier designer and manufacturer of acoustic amplification products, Fishman is committed to making acoustic musicians heard while faithfully maintaining their own natural tone, for the best possible sound.

The Fishman product line began with the BP-100(tm) acoustic bass pickup, originally developed to meet founder and president Larry Fishman's own jazz performance needs. With a track record of quality engineering, reliability, functional simplicity and - most importantly - the natural tone it enables, Fishman firmly established a reputation of excellence that consumers have come to expect from the brand.

For acoustic guitar, Fishman offers the flagship Acoustic Matrix(tm) Series active pickup system, the Rare Earth(tm) Series active magnetic soundhole pickups, and the Neo-D(tm) magnetic soundhole pickup, as well as passive undersaddle, classical, archtop, and resophonic guitar pickups. Fishman's new Ellipse(tm) series combines the Acoustic Matrix(tm) pickup with our industry leading preamp design. Designed to fit in the guitar's soundhole, the Ellipse(tm) system provides volume and tone control at your fingertips and easily installs without any modification to your instrument.

Fishman pickups are also available for banjo, mandolin, harp/piano, violin, viola, cello and acoustic bass. In addition, the Concertmaster(tm) amplification system for violin and the Full Circle(tm) upright bass pickup offer two elegant and cutting-edge string amplification solutions.

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Utilizing cutting-edge Acoustic Sound Imaging(tm) technology, Aura(tm) features the most innovative acoustic amplification technology available today. This stompbox-sized unit captures your instrument's true acoustic sound with stunning, studio microphone quality. Anytime, anywhere. Aura(tm) eliminates the boundaries of conventional acoustic amplification and gives the most natural, realistic amplified acoustic instrument sound available - both on stage and in the studio.

Joining the award-winning Loudbox(tm) and Loudbox Pro(tm) acoustic instrument amplifiers, the new Loudbox Performer(tm) completes Fishman's popular, highly-acclaimed family of acoustic amplifiers and represents the size, power and features that musicians demand. Setting a new standard in acoustic amplifiers, the Loudbox(tm) series feature a powerful tri-amped system that delivers sweet highs and undistorted lows-even at tremendous volumes.

As Fishman celebrates its 25th year as the leader in acoustic amplification, the company continues to redefine the benchmark of acoustic sound. For more information, please visit www.fishman.com.

*Fishman Transducers Inc.
Wilmington, MA
www.fishman.com 978-988-9199*

GHS – The String Specialists Who plays GHS strings? Artists as diverse as Eric Johnson, Martin Barre, Charlie Sexton, Will Ray, Warren Haynes, Tom Morello, Ritchie Sambora, Steve Howe, Brent Mason, Junior Brown, Zak Wylde, Tommy Castro, Rene' Martinez and TQR advisory board member and AC30/Telecaster stud Mr. James Pennebaker, to name just a few! GHS has been manufacturing guitar strings since 1964, and whatever your musical tastes, GHS has the right string for you. You're invited to try a set of GHS classic Boomers, brilliant Nickel Rockers, Burnished Nickel strings for a warm, vintage tone, Compound Nickel strings for electric arch tops, and the recently introduced Infinity Bronze coated acoustic strings for extended tone and brilliance. All GHS strings are available in a wide range of gauges to appeal to every player. Refer to the GHS "Brightness Bar" found on select packages of strings and at our web site. It's your guide to determining which strings will produce the specific range of tone you're seeking.

Please check out the all new GHS web site at www.ghsstrings.com for expert information about GHS strings, including technical documentation on the entire GHS line of strings for fretted instruments, tech tips, string tension calculations, the "Brightness Bar," and a comprehensive list of the top artists who play GHS strings. All GHS strings are manufactured to continually exceed your expectations.

*GHS String Corporation
Battle Creek, MI
www.ghsstrings.com
1-800-388-4447*

Gibson Gibson Repair & Restoration World Class Repair of Stringed Instruments

Over the years, Gibson has received countless requests from players needing work on their guitars, mandolins, etc. These players all say the same thing: "I don't trust anyone but Gibson to work on my instrument!" Until recently, these folks had to rely on whoever was available in their local area and hope they had the skills and experience to do the required work.

All that has changed now. Gibson has opened the doors of its in-house repair facility and is accepting stringed instruments of all types and all brands for repair or restoration. Offering a state of the art, temperature and humidity controlled environment, as well as a full staff of highly skilled and experienced luthiers, Gibson is fully equipped to perform any and all operations required in all phases of repair and restoration.

Among the services offered are:

Pro Set Up – Acoustic or Electric
Fretwork – Fret Dress to Plane & Refret
Custom Wiring/Pickup Installation
Structural Repairs – Body Cracks, Bracing,
Broken Headstocks
Neck Resets

Custom Paint/Finish Repair/Relics
Total Restorations

So whether it's an acoustic or electric guitar, mandolin, banjo, ukulele or oud, if it has strings and it needs attention, we can help. It doesn't even have to be a Gibson – we're an equal opportunity Repair Shop! Call, write or email. We'll guide you through the process and we'll help with shipping and insurance information so your instrument gets here and back quickly and safely. We'll tell you upfront what your costs will be and no work is begun before what is to be done has been explained and approved by you.

*Gibson Repair & Restoration
Nashville, TN
615-244-0252
e-mail: repair@gibson.com*

Hands On Guitars Informed and inspired by a 20 year friendship with James L. D'Aquisto, Eric Miller has been building, repairing, and customizing instruments for over 18 years, and has taught guitar repair and construction courses at Boston's Berklee College of Music and the Evergreen State College. Eric is best known for impeccable craftsmanship, extreme attention to detail and client's needs, and an almost clairvoyant ability to bring out the best in an instrument. Meticulous fretwork is done using tension jigs and asymmetrical planing techniques for ultimate accuracy, and Eric has pioneered fingerboard preparation and finishing methods that enhance tone and playability as well as duplicating the look and feel of the finest vintage patinas. He is a dealer for Tom Anderson, Robin, Gretsch, D'Aquisto, Breedlove, Stromberg, Everett, Larrivee, Rainsong and Garrison instruments, as well as crafting his own Eric Miller Custom Guitars. Eric stocks and is extremely knowledgeable about most brands of aftermarket and original equipment pickups, both electric and acoustic. Hands on

Guitars also carries designer pedals by Roger Mayer, Zachary Vex and Frantone, and maintains a large inventory of guitar "pro" products such as fossil ivory and woolly mammoth nuts, saddles, and bridgepins; Tone Pros locking bridges, tailpieces and studs; and Virtuoso Guitar Cleaner and Polish.

*Hands on Guitars, Chehalis, WA
handsonguitars@juno.com 360-740-9158
Contact: Eric Miller*

Just Strings.com Now more than ever, guitarists are reaping the benefits of technical innovations in string making that have led to the widest selection of guitar strings ever available. JustStrings.com is dedicated to providing guitarists with the largest selection of acoustic, roundwound, and flatwound strings, complimented by exceptional personalized service and outstanding value. Trying different types of strings often results in amazing new discoveries that not only improve the sound of your instrument, but dramatically enhance your playing enjoyment. From traditional hand-crafted strings to high-tech exotics, JustStrings.com exists to help you get the most out of your instrument. Try a new set today, or order your favorite acoustic or electric sets and SAVE!

Juststrings.com offers the best prices on all of the major and specialty brands, promptly delivered to your door. Shop online at JustStrings.com, or place your order by fax at 603-889-7026 or telephone at 603-889-2664..

*JustStrings.com, Nashua, NH
www.juststrings.com info@juststrings.com*

KCA NOS TUBES Mike Kropotkin's KCA NOS Tubes offers a wide selection of hard-to-find and rare new old stock (NOS) American and European tubes for guitar amplifiers and tube hi-fi, including American 6L6 and 6V6, 12AX7, 12AT7 tubes, tube rectifiers, European 6V6, EL84 and EL34 power tubes, and other hard-to-find NOS tubes for guitar amplifiers and audio equipment. KCA has expanded it's offerings to new production tubes including SED (Svetlana), Electro Harmonix and Sovtek tubes. Due to the growing demand for NOS tubes, KCA's stock is constantly changing, and inventory is regularly updated on the web, or you may call for more information. Ordering is simple through a secure online shopping cart. If you're not sure which tubes will sound best in your equipment, contact Mike for unbiased advice via e-mail. KCA's web site also provides reliable information on tube substitutions and general advice on tube selection, and Mike services and restores new and vintage point-to-point amplifiers.

*KCA NOS Tubes, Sterling, VA 703-430-3645
www.kcanostubes.com*

Klon Since its inception in 1994, Klon has been a one-product company, and given the overwhelming success of that product, the Centaur Professional Overdrive, it's not hard to see why. Designer Bill Finnegan, assisted by

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two circuit-design specialists, set out in 1990 to create an interactive and ultra-transparent overdrive, one that doesn't put its own stamp on your sound, but rather brings out in a very organic way more of what your rig was already giving you. Bill's premise was that there were many players who, like himself, had great guitars and amps, and who, as he likes to put it, "were not looking to reinvent the wheel," and the fact that he has sold some four thousand Centaur units (as of November 2002) attests to his intuition, as well as to the perfectionism that led him to spend over four years developing a single product. That perfectionism, of course, is also evident in the production unit: Bill builds every Centaur himself, by hand, using only the finest components and assembling them with meticulous care. Each unit undergoes a series of rigorous tests before shipment, and each is backed by a comprehensive ten-year warranty. Given the ongoing demand for the Centaur and Bill's disinclination to let anyone but himself build them, expect a wait of several months for delivery, but also expect your Centaur, when you receive it, to manifest a sonic superiority, a construction quality, a physical beauty, and a conceptual rightness beyond your expectations.

*Klon, Boston, MA 617 666-1551
www.klon-siberia.com info@klon-siberia.com*

Keeley Electronics – Check out the new Keeley Katana Preamp! ToneQuest subscribers receive 10% off on all pedal mods and the Keeley Comp, Java Boost and Time Machine boost! Keeley Electronics recently won a Guitar Player Reader's Choice Award and Keeley is now the exclusive distributor for Framptone! Robert Keeley's Time Machine Boost, Keeley Compressor, and his custom, state-of-the-art modifications for vintage pedals continue to receive rave reviews from guitarists around the world. Keeley pedals are used by Aerosmith, Abbey Road Studios, Steve Vai, legendary producer Bob Rock, George Lynch, Peter Frampton, James Burton, and many, many more guitarists and music pros around the world. The Time Machine Boost is a versatile 2 channel, 3 mode pre-amplifier designed to drive your amplifiers into overdrive or saturation. The two channels are labeled "Vintage," and "Modern," with the "Vintage" side inspired by rare germanium boosts like the Dallas Rangemaster. The "Modern" channel is a new +23dB gain, dual JFET transparent signal amplifier. The Keeley Compressor is a superb audiophile and studio grade compressor with true bypass switching and premium metal film resistors and capacitors for the cleanest Ross clone compressor ever available. Available with a standard Ibanez/Boss style adapter jack and/or battery power, you can say goodbye to that old red Dyna Comp!

Robert Keeley pedal mods include 2 versions for TS9's – the TS808 mod, and the "Baked TS9" for searing hot Tube Screamer tone. Keeley uses the original TI RC4558P chip that appeared in the early TS808's, while increasing the bass response and overdrive range. The result is a perfectly voiced 808 that's cleaner when turned down and produces twice the drive/gain when turned up, with all of the stock

808 character in the middle. The Keeley modded BD-2 is not a fuzz pedal but has the best characteristics of a fuzz pedal, and it's much smoother and more realistic sounding. Other exclusive Keeley modifications include the Boss Blues Driver BD-2 Tube Mod, the PHAT Switch BD-2 Mod, Rat Mods, Boss DS-1 Seeing Eye Mod, Boss SD-1, and Boss Chorus CE-2. For detailed specs, user comments, dealer information, sound clips, and ordering information, please visit the Keeley Electronics website.

*Keeley Electronics, Edmond, OK
405-260-1385, www.robertkeeley.com*

K&M Analog Designs — Two Rock

K&M Analog Designs, LLC, was formed in northern California in 1998 by Bill Krinard and Joe Mloganoski. The company brings a combined 65+ years of experience in tube amplification and guitar tone to the boutique amp market. As talented designer/engineer and seasoned guitarist (respectively), Bill and Joe have developed a uniquely toneful, dynamic and affordable line of hand built vacuum tube amplifiers that are instruments designed to completely complement your individual playing style. Each amp is equipped with proprietary custom transformers and coupling caps, the best available new and NOS tubes, and each model has unique build architecture and layout not found in other modern hand built designs. Early K&M customers such as Carlos Santana helped launch the company to the forefront in its earliest days. Current K&M and Two-Rock devotees include John Mayer, Steve Kimock, Mitch Stein, Barney Doyle, Mark Karan, Michael Kang, and Volker Strifler, among others. The company launched its line of Two-Rock amps in the summer of 1999. Past models include the Amethyst Special Indoor Storm Model, Emerald 50, Sapphire 100, Emerald Pro and Topaz. Current models include the Custom and Custom Reverb, Onyx, Opal, and Ruby and LTD recording amplifier. Recently Two-Rock introduced their Signature series of amplifiers, by far the most popular of any Two-Rock series to date. Future models will include a single channel clean amp in various power levels. A number of customized versions of the aforementioned have also been built for players seeking the ultimate personalized tone machine.

*K&M Analog Designs, LLC.
www.Two-Rock.com
707-584-TONE(8663)
In Japan: www.Two-Rock-jp.com*

Koch Guitar Amplification was founded in 1988 by Dolf Koch in the Netherlands and are known worldwide as a manufacturer of high end boutique guitar amplifiers. They have many models for all styles of music from the new 20W Class "A" Studiotone combo to the 120W Powertone II head.

All amps are channel switching with two or three extremely versatile channels. They are recognized for having both sparkling clean channels and wide ranging drive/gain channels. They were the first to utilize trim pots on their heavy duty circuit boards enabling anyone to adjust bias with only a screwdriver and volt-

meter. Speaker damping switches which when toggled from high to low alter the tone to a more scooped sound. Rhythm volume switch on the footswitch (included) which when engaged drops the level to a pre-determined "Rhythm" level. It's the opposite of a boost and does not alter the lead tone as a result. It so useful guitar players tell us that they're surprised that no has done this before. All amps have Accutronics reverbs and Koch designed speakers that have a sweeter more extended high end. These speakers also handle more power and have a better bass response than almost any guitar speakers available. They are an integral component to the KOCH sound.

Other products include the Loadbox which attenuates a tube amplifiers output without destroying its tone, i.e. no huge loss of high frequencies. The Pedaltone is a semi-four channel, foot operated preamp which has four 12AX7 preamps tubes. One of these tubes acts as a .5W power tube! It has many patch points and output options for almost any application.

Some famous people that use Koch are: Paul Reed Smith, Al Di Meola, Randy Bachman, Buzz Feiten, and Jimmy Bruno to name a few. KOCH also manufactures the 300W EDEN VT300 all bass head and the 200W Sadowsky SA200 bass head on an OEM basis.

*Audionova Inc.
www.audionova.ca/
514-631-5787 ext. 22*

Lava Cable Founded by guitarist Mark Stoddard, Lava is rapidly becoming the cable of choice amongst professional musicians across the United States such as Johnny A, Chris Maresh, Carmine D'Amico, Marc Seal, Josh Smith, Tomas Cataldo, and Harry Jacobson. With more than 70 products tailored to the working musician, Lava Cable is an affordable alternative to high-end cable that can typically cost as much as \$100-\$300 for a 20 foot cable. Lava Cable's philosophy is simple: make superior products using the best cable and connectors available at the lowest possible price, with no compromises. Lava guitar, microphone and speaker cables are handcrafted with studio quality Canare cable and Neutrik and G&H gold contact plugs. Each cable is built to demanding military specification standards and individually tested. Only the best silver solder and industrial heat shrink tubing is used to provide superior durability and sonic performance.

Lava guitar cable comes in a wide variety of lengths. Connector combinations include Standard ¼", Right Angle, Quiet, and Oak Wood, along with optional black nylon braided sleeving. Custom length cable and connector combinations are available on request. Each cable comes with a lifetime warranty. Lava Cable believes that your source of AC power is just as important as your cables and any other link in your sound chain. Lava Cable AC Power Systems are built with the best components from Hubbell, Corcom, Little Fuse, Bussman, Belden, and others. Lava Cable's Surge Suppression circuit is unsurpassed in protecting your equipment from lightning, ground faults and transient voltage spikes and is designed with low clamping voltages to protect sensitive

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sound gear. For more information on Lava Cable and their product line please visit their website or contact Mark Stoddard personally.

Lava Cable
910-797-7214
www.lavacable.com

Lollar Custom Guitars & Pickups

According to Jason, he never really set out to become a custom pickup designer and builder. Jason Lollar is a guitar builder on Vashon Island, Washington (near Seattle) who originally began building pickups for his own guitars and a few friends when he couldn't find the tone he was after. The word spread, and now Jason custom builds over 30 different pickups, including Strat, Tele, humbuckers, P90's, custom steels and Charlie Christian-style pickups, all personally designed and wound by Jason. He is especially well known for his P90, Imperial Humbucker and Tele replacement pickups, but he has also designed pickups for many unusual applications...

Recently, Jason was acknowledged by gonzo pedal steel player Robert Randolph for having wound the pickups in his two custom Fessenden pedal steels. And the list doesn't end there - Jason has wound pickups for guitar greats such as Billy F Gibbons, Peter Stroud, Kevin Russel, Rick Vito, Elliot Easton, Duke Robillard, and the Beastly Boys, among others. Jason is always happy to personally consult with his clients via phone and e-mail to determine the pickups that are right for each player, and TQR recommends Lollar pickups without exception. His Lollar Special Strat pickups are standard equipment in our custom built ToneQuest guitars.

Call Jason or check out all the options available on his web site.

www.lollarguitars.com, 206-463-9838

Midtown Music, Atlanta, GA is one of our very favorite sources for guitars, amplifiers, effects, and accessories. Midtown offers great deals on new amplifiers by Dr. Z, Victoria, Savage, Two Rock, and Roccaforte, all in stock! They also carry the complete line of Blackbox effects, Wha Whas by Geoffrey Teese, and new Jensen and Celestion speakers. Midtown Music is now a Fender Custom Shop and Master Built and Gretsch dealer! The staff at Midtown is experienced and helpful (they're all great players), and Midtown has been the choice of working guitarists in the southeastern U.S. for decades. Highly recommended, and definitely ToneQuest approved! See their web site for the full inventory or call (404) 325-0515 for prices and availability.

www.midtownmusic.com
404-325-0515

Nash Guitars Have you ever thought, "If they would just make a Tele with..." , "I love my Strat but it just doesn't..." "Why don't they

make a Jaguar that could..." Well, you've come to the right place. From exotic woods, custom paint, unlimited neck types, custom designed logos, pickup selections, Timewarp aging, or any other feature imaginable - Esquires with hidden neck pickups, Strats with interchangeable pickup assemblies, Custom Shapes - whatever... If you can dream it, we can build it.

Each guitar is a unique work of art, handcrafted by me. The use of 100% nitrocellulose lacquer, high quality vintage hardware, superior woods and a wide variety of pickups and options produce magical instruments that have thus far not been available "off the rack". The level of aging on our Timewarp guitars can be adjusted from "played it once a month at church" to "used to break open a window during a fire in a Louisiana roadhouse."

Offered only at Nashguitars!! A dedicated client webpage that lets you watch and approve all work as it goes. This is truly a unique and enjoyable way to become involved in the exciting process of building a custom guitar. Please visit our web site for inspiring examples of client pages past and present.

To get a quote or discuss options and time frames, please email or call Bill Nash.

Nashguitars
Olympia, WA
www.nashguitars.com
1-877-484-8276

Mojo Musical Supply is the all-inclusive amplifier parts supply house. ToneQuest readers receive an exclusive 10% discount on all Mojo products! Just reference the "MojoQuest304" discount code when placing your order. Mojo specializes in pre-1980 amplifier parts, including a wide range of custom and vintage reproduction cabinets, a line of exact reproduction transformers, and hard-to-find electrical components. Mojo continues to supply a full range of speakers for the guitar market, including Jensen, Celestion, and of course, their own custom Mojotone speakers. The in-house cabinet shop at Mojo specializes in making authentic Fender and Marshall reproduction amplifier cabinets, custom cabinets from your own design, as well as cabinet repair and re-covering. Mojo stocks over fifty different amp coverings and grill cloths to insure that vintage enthusiasts and custom amp creators have a large palette to choose from. Within the last two years, Mojo has become one of the largest vacuum tube importers in the world, stocking over 20,000 tubes. Because they buy tubes in large volumes, their prices remain very competitive. For completed electronics, Mojo is the east coast distributor for Belov amplification and also the home of Mojotone Custom electronics. Mojo manufactures and markets the Tone Machine amplifier, a powerful and eclectic tube guitar combo. They are also able to offer turnkey and partial component electronics and cabinets for OEM's and builders of all sizes. The future of Mojo lies in their ability to work directly with manufacturers, or bring the manufacturing in house. Our plans for the coming months and years are focused on making

quality vintage parts available at even better prices, while assuring that all of their products are of the highest quality.

Mojo Musical Supply
Winston-Salem, NC
www.mojotone.com
1-800-927-MOJO

PLEK The brand name PLEK stands for a technology which allows the best fret dress and setup work, based on a computer controlled scan.

The Plek is a computerized tool that scans an instrument strung to pitch, generating graphic views of the fret plane, fret heights, fret shape and placement, fingerboard relief radius, humps and bumps - basically everything that luthiers and repair pros have wanted to see well but couldn't, until now. Besides having measurement and dressing capabilities many times more accurate than the human eye allows, the PLEK has two particularly great advantages over manual fretwork.

First, it scans and dresses a guitar while it is tuned to pitch. This is a major breakthrough, since necks are subjected to approximately 100 pounds of string tension. This string tension invariably affects the shape of the fret plane, creating curves and humps that change when the strings are removed for a fret dress. The PLEK identifies precisely what needs to be done for perfect results when the instrument is re-strung, whereas even the most skilled luthier or repair professional must guess about how to compensate for the effect of string tension when dressing the neck with the tension released.

Secondly, the PLEK applies very sophisticated formulas for optimum neck curve or relief, adjusting the calculations for the actual string height and individual string gauge from the treble side of the fingerboard to the bass. Achieving these same results by hand would be lucky and extremely rare at best!

The Plek is now in use by some of the top repair and restoration experts worldwide. We invite you to contact the Plek repair shop nearest you, or learn more about Plek technology at www.plek.com

Plek, Berlin/Germany
+49 30 5369-6339, custom@plek.com

Joe Glaser, Nashville/TN
+1 (615) 298-1139, glaserjoetoo@aol.com

Gary Brawer, San Francisco/CA
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FretTek, Los Angeles/CA
+1 (310) 474-2238, plek@frettek.com

Philtone, Baltimore/MD
+1 (410) 783-0260, philtone@erols.com

Suhr Guitars, Lake Elsinore/CA
+1 (951) 471-2334, johnsuhr@suhrguitars.com

Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience, London, UK

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Resource Directory

+44 20 8973-1441,
sales@guitarexperience.co.uk

GuitarLabs Scandinavia, Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +46 8 644-9480, info@guitarlabs.se

Sound Sculpture Forget everything you know about guitar switching systems! The **Switchblade** series by Sound Sculpture re-defines the way effects are integrated in a typical guitar rack. The pristine, all analog audio paths combined with the most advanced audio matrix in the industry make the Switchblade line the only true choice for guitar tone purists and musicians that need to integrate their system to the highest level of tone and flexibility.

Honest-to-goodness unsolicited comments by users of Sound Sculpture products state "The Switchblade is a life changing device" and "Once you use a Switchblade you will never go back." If these comments seem surprising, once you use a Sound Sculpture Switchblade, you will understand. Users of the Switchblade system include John Paul Jones (Led Zepplin), Robert Fripp (King Crimson), Trey Gunn (King Crimson), Chris Squire (Yes), Buck Dharma (Blue Oyster Cult), Roger Hodgson (Supertramp), Jerry McPherson (famous Nashville session artist), Paul Crook (Meat Loaf) and many others.

The current Switchblade line is based on our award winning Switchblade-16 (Electronic Musician Editor's Choice Award, 1995) and is offered in three models. The Switchblade gives you the power to inter-connect all of your rack and floor effect processors in any conceivable way, from effects-in-series in any order, to effects in parallel, to parallel/series networks all under MIDI preset control. Gain levels between every connected device are fully programmable or controllable in real time by MIDI. The newest "Smart Insert" feature also gives you instant "loop control" in a traditional fashion for those that desire it.

Sound Sculpture also offers several other products including the HeadTrip MIDI controlled amp head/speaker swapper, the ABCadabra MIDI controlled A/B/Y box, the FootSim MIDI controlled footswitch simulator and more.

Sound Sculpture Musical Instrument Products was founded in 1986 by Ken Czepelka and is located in Bend, Oregon. All Sound Sculpture products are built in the USA.

Sound Sculpture
www.soundsculpture.com
541-318-1877

Stewart MacDonald Stewart-MacDonald offers a complete line of hard-to-find tools, parts, accessories, instructional videos and books for building, repairing, setting up, and optimizing the playability and tone of stringed instruments. Whether you are just getting started or you're a seasoned luthier, you'll find everything you need in the Stew-Mac catalog,

including: fret wire, finishing supplies, glues and adhesives, wood, bodies, necks, binding, tuners, nuts and saddles, inlay, bridges, tailpieces, electronics, pickups, and free information sheets and professional advice! Their friendly customer service and technical support staff are trained to help you make the best product choices, and they also offer an Unconditional Return Guarantee. If you're not satisfied with an item for any reason, simply return it.

Stew-Mac is the leading supplier of innovative products for guitarists and repair pros, and every thing they make is guaranteed to work well, because every product is tested by the professional luthiers at Stewart MacDonald first! The master builders and repairmen on staff include Dan Erlewine – well-known author of guitar repair books and magazine articles, member of the ToneQuest Report advisory board, and a regular contributor to TQR. Dan and all of the experienced luthiers at Stew-Mac personally develop and test every product the company offers, and they are also dedicated to education. The Stewart MacDonald catalog is packed with helpful tips, and the company produces an extensive series of training videos at their facility in Athens, Ohio.

For more information on the entire range of products available, please visit the Stewart MacDonald web site. In addition to their free online help service, your telephone call is also always welcome.

Stewart MacDonald
www.stewmac.com,
1-800-848-2273

Talos Amplifiers makes custom, hand-crafted amplifiers based on our fundamental conviction that an amplifier is as much an instrument as the guitar connected to it.

The Talos Basic was conceived in response to the proliferation of overly complex amps with a bewildering array of controls, switches and modeling options. The Basic, with only two controls and four switches, covers a wide range of subtle tonal variations, with most of the sound control transferred to the guitar itself, where it belongs.

Construction: The short signal path is highly sophisticated, using audiophile grade components (1% metal film resistors, high quality polypropylene capacitors, silver plated/Teflon hookup wire), full power supply regulation and careful attention to the mechanical layout to minimize noise and crosstalk. The three position mode tri-mode switch enables the output stage to run in triode mode (low, 20 Watts), partial triode mode (medium, 30 Watts), or pentode mode (high, 40 Watts). Each mode has a unique sonic signature – almost like having three different amps in one box

Chassis are made from heliar welded aluminum instead of cheaper steel to provide a quieter, more predictable performance. Our output transformer is special. Instead of using an off-the-shelf unit, we designed a custom transformer to utilize high induction laminations

instead of the more usual steel. This results in tight base response and smooth extended highs.

The Basic is available in either Head or Combo configuration. For the touring musician, the Basic Combo was sized to ATA baggage spec to allow the unit to travel by air. Cabinets come in three distinctive tonewoods: birch ply, pine and redwood. Each provides a beautiful, distinctive voicing ranging from crystal clear highs, to piano-like fullness, to more aggressive tones. With uncompromised quality and unparalleled tone, Talos amplifiers are like no others in the world.

Talos Instruments
www.talosinstruments.com 703-764-7005

Toneman Veteran working guitarist Don Butler is an experienced tech who specializes in servicing and restoring JMI-era Vox tube/valve amps as well as many other vintage British amps including Marshall, Selmer, Hiwatt, Sound City and Orange amps. Don also services and restores vintage tweed, blonde, brown and blackface era Fender amplifiers. Don's modifications and upgrades to vintage reissue Vox, Marshall, and Fender amps have earned him a solid reputation among players throughout the country for achieving dramatically improved, authentic vintage tone from reissue amplifiers. Don uses hand-made Mercury Magnetics Axiom Tone Clone transformers, along with the correct, premium signal path components to bring reissues to vintage specs. He also modifies reissue Vox wahs to vintage specs, and he offers upgrades to Vox Valve Tone pedals and reissue Ibanez TS9's. For the past 6 years, Don has been building the famous Rangemaster Treble Booster, which is an exact replica of the original Dallas Rangemaster unit from the early 60's. In addition to the original treble model, Don builds a full range model and a switchable model combining the features of both Rangemaster units. Don was also the very first dealer for Pyramid strings, and you can count on him to maintain a full inventory of Pyramids at all times.

Don Butler, Newhall, CA
www.tone-man.com
661-259-4544
10-6 PST, Tuesday-Saturday only

TonePros Sound Labs All TQR subscribers will receive an exclusive 10% discount when ordering TonePros components — just mention the "TQWD" discount code when ordering by phone or online.

TonePros Sound Labs International System II Guitar Components distributed by WD Music Products " Making the world a better place for guitar guitarists!" Ever since our first published review article, The ToneQuest Report has enthusiastically recommended the patented TonePros system of guitar components. You deserve to discover why TonePros works!

TonePros tailpieces feature a patented locking design. For years, guitars with stop tailpieces and wrap-around bridges have been cursed by "lean" or tilt on their stud mounts. Since string tension was all that held tailpieces on, the only contact area was just a bit of the edge of the

-continued-

Resource Directory

bottom flange, just a bit of the lip of the stud top, and often just as little contact with the intonation screws. TonePros® Locking Studs provide 100% of the contact area of the bottom flange, 100% of the contact area of the stud top, no lean, and dramatically improved sustain, resonance and tone.

TonePros bridge and saddle components feature the “patented pinch” — the lateral pressure that is applied from the strategically placed “tone screws” that greatly reduce the play or wiggle of the bridge posts in their inserts. The posts are frozen in place, resulting in a solid connection between the strings, bridge, and guitar top, transferring more string vibration and resonance to the guitar body, resulting in an audibly stronger, sweeter, woodier type of resonance and sustain. And once your guitar is set up, it's locked. Bridge height and intonation settings remain intact and exact, even after re-stringing. TonePros® System II Components are found on the world's best guitars, played by the world's best artists.

*TonePros Sound Labs International,
www.tonepros.com
www.wdmusicproducts.com
239-337-7575*

Victoria Amplifier From our first Victoria to the one we build for you, every Victoria amplifier is meticulously crafted for real musicians and built to be played for a lifetime. We utilize components and manufacturing techniques that are chosen for their proven ability to meet both the sonic and real world gigging demands that musicians depend on. From the real Allen Bradley resistors (new manufacture, not surplus) to the finger jointed pine cabinets, every aspect of a Victoria Amplifier is designed to provide years and years of faithful service and superior tone. With the addition of our new Victorilux and Sovereign amplifiers, Victoria now offers amplifiers with features like reverb, tremolo and high gain circuits that will surpass anything currently available and define the word “tone” for years to come. But manufacturing new amplifiers is not all we offer! Our restoration and repair department is equipped to turn the most heinous, hacked up old amp into an inspiring gem. Our obsession with period correct components and our real world expertise are your assurance that an investment piece or an old road hawg will leave the shop with all of its tonal potential maximized. The job gets done right at Victoria Amplifier. You can be sure that we at Victoria Amplifier Co. will continue to provide the finest guitar amplifiers available anywhere, at any price. New from Victoria — the Victorilux and Victoriette — the ultimate club amps, plus, the Sovereign — our answer for players seeking true vintage British tone with master volume and reverb at a stage-friendly 35 watts!

*Victoria Amplifier, Naperville, IL
www.victoriaamp.com 630-820-6400*

Visual Sound Founded over ten years ago by guitarist Bob Weil, Visual Sound has rapidly grown from its “out-of-the-garage” roots by creating innovative effects pedals with impeccable

tone at a reasonable price... what they call “Real Tone for Real People.”

Visual Sound is excited to announce that it is expanding its ‘stable’ of products with the Workhorse™ line of amplifiers: the 60W 112 Mustang, the 60W 212 Stallion and the 30W 112 Pony. The 60W models have microprocessor controlled auto-biasing, while the 30W model has easy user biasing. All three models have 100% clean tube amplification, celestion speakers, accutronics reverb, hand-wired controls and jacks, carbon comp resistors (where they count), a toroidal power transformer, and a 9VDC output and cable for powering the free Jekyll & Hyde pedal which comes with the amp. Protection circuitry throughout each amp prevents failure of all critical components. Each amp features a Hubcap sound dispersion speaker grill, making it sound great from anywhere on stage. Housed in an all-wood cabinet, these amps are truly built like a Workhorse.

Each of Visual Sound's pedals — Jekyll & Hyde Ultimate Overdrive, Route 66 American Overdrive and the H2O Liquid Chorus and Echo — is actually two pedals in one, having two completely separate channels that can be used individually or in combination with each other, just like two pedals. In addition to the Workhorse™ amps — and back by popular demand — Visual Sound will also be re-introducing a redesign of the flagship Visual Volume pedal! Both the Workhorse™ amps and the Visual Volume pedal received a lot of positive buzz at the Summer NAMM Show in Indianapolis and will be available very soon.

As if all that weren't enough, the 1 SPOT space-saving adapter continues to fly off the shelves as word keeps spreading about the first 9VDC adapter to require only one spot on a wall outlet or power strip. Why? Because the 1 SPOT works with almost every pedal in existence and can easily power an entire pedal board by itself with the addition of optional daisy chain cables. It's also a fraction of the cost of brick-sized pedal board power supplies and it takes up no space on the board. It even converts voltage automatically, anywhere in the world!

For more information about Visual Sound and product information, please visit the Visual Sound web site, or contact Bob Weil personally.

*Visual Sound
www.visualsound.net
931-487-9001*

VOX has been a major force in guitar amplification since our first combo amp was introduced in 1958. Almost five decades later, VOX continues to create innovative products for guitarists.

Today, VOX is pleased to introduce the COOLTRON series of effect pedals, a line of very special stompboxes that use a 12AU7 pre-amp-type tube at low voltage to deliver the kind of tone that, until now, would have been impossible to achieve in a battery-powered pedal. Historically, attempts have been made to use

tubes at low voltages in what has been dubbed “starvation” mode, but these circuits don't allow the tube to function in an acceptable manner. The COOLTRON circuit basically operates by using two very special signal paths. The first is the “servo circuit,” which provides the right conditions between the plate of the tube and the grid. This achieves controllable, stable parameters for the tube and provides the correct operating conditions for the tube to function as it would if run at a higher voltage. The second circuit is a patented power supply that provides a low voltage, low current supply to the heater elements in the tube. Since the tube is now running at such a reduced supply level, the anode current is much smaller than normal. This means that the amount of heat required at the cathode to achieve sufficient cathode current emission is much smaller — hence the ability to run the heaters at a lower level and for COOLTRON pedals to run for 20 hours on 4 x AA batteries!

The first three pedals in the series are now available. With dual channels — each with its own Gain and Volume controls and a number of tone shaping controls — the BULLDOG DISTORTION adds aggression with its high gain circuit. The BRIT BOOST is designed to drive your amp into Overdrive. Its Treble Boost setting accentuates the treble and upper middle frequencies, while the Full Range Boost position enhances all frequencies. The BIG BEN OVERDRIVE responds to your playing dynamics and cranks out extra oomph when you really want to dig in and cut through.

www.voxamps.co.uk

Willcutt Guitar Shoppe Located in Lexington, KY, Willcutt Guitar Shoppe is one of the world's premier boutique guitar and amp dealers. Customers may select from guitar lines such as PRS, Hamer USA, Fender, Gibson, McInturff, Gretsch, McNaught, Nik Huber and Taylor. With a vast inventory of over 1500 guitars always on hand, Willcutt's staff of experienced guitarists can reliably assist you with the purchase of your next dream guitar or amplifier.

Recognizing that a superb electric guitar requires an amp of equal quality, Willcutt offers a tremendous selection of handbuilt amplifiers, including Dr. Z, Victoria, Carr, Bad Cat, Bogner, Mesa, Fuchs, Rivera, and Koch.

Willcutt's staff of veteran, working guitarists has the hands-on product knowledge necessary to assist players at every level in finding just the right guitar or amp the first time. The store's website features high quality digital photos of nearly every item in stock, and 99% of all high end instruments are kept in their cases — not on display — insuring that every instrument remains in the best possible condition prior to sale. Pictures and detailed, in-hand descriptions are always available on request.

*Willcutt Guitar Shoppe, Lexington, KY
www.willcuttguitars.com
859-276-0675*

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