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Interview...

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from Tulsa boarded
a bus for Chicago with a
small handful of chords
and wound up in one of
the greatest blues bands
of all time...

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Hangin' with Elvin

"I been in the blues all my life. I'm still delivering 'cause I got a long memory."

— Muddy Waters

Half a century has passed since the blues bands of Chicago rocked the smoky clubs and bars crowding the Southside and street players set up to play curbside on Maxwell Street on Sunday afternoons. The blues that migrated north from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago defined a generation in the cultural life of black Americans, and eventually, those very same blues musicians and their songs inspired a new generation of younger, paler players to play the blues, culminating in one of the most potent cultural and artistic awakenings in modern history. In Clarksdale, Mississippi they still call it the boogie disease.



Much has been written about those days and the characters that created the blues in Chicago, and while we are all familiar with Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, James Cotton, Willie Dixon, Earl Hooker, Otis Rush, Magic Sam and John Lee Hooker, most of us have only experienced these legendary players through their recorded music, photographs and surviving film footage. By the time aspiring young white musicians discovered the true roots of the music they were chasing, many of the original Chicago bluesmen had passed away, or were approaching the end of their careers.

While the blues would be fervently embraced by young white Americans, it was clearly not born from the life experiences of white America in the segregated '60s. To understand how the blues transcended color to create a musical revolution in pop culture, we must look back to Chicago, a

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club called Big John's, and the Butterfield Blues Band.



A skinny kid from Tulsa, Oklahoma named Elvin Bishop played guitar in the band that would fully integrate Chicago blues into American life in the mid '60s. The spark was ignited at Big John's, where Paul Butterfield first formed the band as a quartet with Sam Lay and Jerome Arnold lured away from Howlin' Wolf, and Butterfield's friend Elvin on guitar. In 1964 Michael Bloomfield joined the

band, which achieved notoriety at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 for their own brilliant set, and for backing Bob Dylan in his first electric perversion of "Maggies' Farm," leaving diehard folkies scalded and writhing in horror in front of the stage. After several attempts at recording a live album, Mark Naftalin joined the band on keyboards and the Butterfield Blues Band LP debuted on Elektra in 1965. Hailed as a landmark blues record, the album's lasting influence on musicians and the public's awareness of blues far surpassed its chart position at 102 among the Top 200. Simply put, the Butterfield album is a classic record that inspired musicians and bands around the world for decades in their pursuit of rock & blues.



The Butterfield band released *East-West* in 1966, featuring blues standards and the 13-minute instrumental title track that explored Indian raga themes mixed with jazz-fusion and extended blues-rock solos by Bloomfield and Bishop. "East-

West" deftly captured the full, freaky psychedelia of the Fillmore that inspired 'acid rock' with bands like the Grateful Dead and Quicksilver Messenger Service jamming deep into the night while stoned and tripping Fillmore patrons dreamily nodded their approval.

Now, before we proceed, we urge you to log on to Youtube, type in Paul Butterfield Blues Band Driftin' Blues Monterey 1967, and watch and listen to Paul Butterfield, Elvin and the band cast a spell on the crowd. On this song Bloomfield sat out with Elvin doing the honors on guitar. It's a beautifully shot film and excellent sound recording featuring great shots of the band and audience, and a wonderful performance.



Alright, cue that video up now if you can, turn up the volume and watch it twice. We'll wait...

Uh, huh. Leaves you wanting more, doesn't it? We'll not see the likes of the Butterfield Blues Band again, ever. Times have changed, there is no concentrated blues scene left in America to rival the southside of Chicago, and if two young guys like Paul Butterfield and Elvin happened to cross paths on the street today, one or both of them would likely be jacking off with their cell phones instead of sitting on a stoop playing guitar and drinking a quart of beer.



You see, many of us no longer live in the moment in America. There is no time to simply hang out for the perpetually over-scheduled. Texts and e-mails have replaced conversation. Last week on Pawley's Island South Carolina we watched two upwardly mobile couples in their late 20s come to the beach, spread out their blankets and chairs, take a bored ten minute per-

functory walk and return to relax and surf the Net on their cell phones. No talking. No reflecting on the soothing sound of the ocean waves breaking on the beach in perfect rhythm as they have for millions of years. No quiet contemplation... Never mind the earnest pelican squadrons dive bombing offshore, the scurrying sand crabs, curious sandpipers, the blue horizon, or the placid expanse of sea reaching to Africa... Sadly, we have acquired the habit of not really being where we are, too often existing in a colder digital space void of the real world and all the sensory sensations it offers. Connected, yet entirely disconnected. We point out these facts of contemporary life to honor what earlier generations and musicians like Elvin Bishop have created in their lives, and to reinforce the idea that art and culture cannot be created on a smart phone, i-Pad or a PC. Art and culture require social human beings to interact, and when we do, miraculous, beautifully human things can happen that are entirely unique to us. Like the blues.

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The '60s are often poorly portrayed today by people who didn't live them. Yes, there were problems – Watts burned, there were riots in Chicago and marches on Washington to end

the war, and many young lives were needlessly lost – draftees who were too healthy or lacked the connections to obtain a deferment, two brothers who wished to make America and the world a better place, and another brother who simply wanted us to learn to love each other. But there was also a higher consciousness in play in our culture among the young, in part encouraged by the drug culture that inevitably turned on itself at Altamont, but also in terms of spiritual thought. The



1971 book on spirituality, yoga and meditation by Ram Dass titled "Be Here Now" has never seemed more poignant and instructive than it is today. Having studied with Timothy Leary at Harvard and experimented with psychedelic drugs, Ram Dass was left unfulfilled, embarking on a spiritual journey in which he was instructed to always remember to 'be here now.' Such was the spirit of San Francisco for

a moment, the site of 'love ins,' 'be ins' and 'happenings' no less. It was far fuckin' out, man, and Elvin Bishop was right there, all up in the middle of it.

Elvin eventually put his own band together in San Francisco and launched a solo career that is still going strong today, but this is a story best told by the man himself. And so it is with great joy and reverent appreciation that we are honored to introduce you to Elvin Bishop from his home in the country, far, far from the streets of Tulsa, somewhere in Northern California. Enjoy...

TQR: Did you grow up playing in bands as a teenager in Oklahoma, Elvin?

Naw, when I came out of Oklahoma I knew a handful of chords – a *small* handful. The thing was, there was nobody in my family that was musical and I didn't know anybody that played music in Tulsa. I didn't have any money, my dad was kind of chronically unemployed, and I worked a lot in high school. I always got my guitars in pawn shops and I didn't know the ropes, so I wound up with these Harmony and Kays with the strings two inches off the fret board. I was always



thinking, "Damn, I don't seem to be making much progress... This guitar playing sure is hard." Just mashing the strings down kept my fingers messed up and I'd give up for awhile. Then I'd go back to school and they would have a dance and I'd see the girls all gathered around the guitar players and I'd decide I needed to go back to work on the guitar. I finally stuck with it.

TQR: Were you a good student? You received a National Merit scholarship to the University of Chicago, and I

think you are probably the first guitar player we have ever interviewed that did that.

I was and I wasn't – it would kind of go in waves. I'd get all 'U's' one semester which was unsatisfactory, and the next semester I'd get all 'E's' for excellent. I was a good test-taker and the scholarship was based on standardized test scores.

TQR: What led you to go to the University of Chicago? Don't tell me that you chose that school because you wanted to become immersed in the Blues...



That's what I'm gettin' ready to tell you. People said it was unusual that I would be interested in physics, but I had always been good at math and you had to have a

major, so I just chose physics. Basically, college was my cover story for going where the blues was. It was frustrating in Tulsa because they made it real hard for you to associate with people of other races. This was the late '50s – there was white and colored everything, and no black people in my school. I remember when I left for Chicago at the Greyhound bus station there were separate waiting rooms, restrooms and drinking fountains.



TQR: And I would imagine they weren't playing Muddy Waters on the radio in Tulsa either.

You could hear it. If you knew which stations to listen to you could get it. White people just didn't know anything about blues. The only way you could hear it was if you went to a folk festival, because blues was considered a small

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aspect of folk music.

TQR: What was your first month in Chicago like?



Man, it was like being thrown in the middle of heaven. It was the luckiest thing that ever happened in my life. Blues was like rap is now. It was the living music of the black people. There were maybe over 200 blues clubs in Chicago because there were over a million black people

in the city at that time. I got there in 1960 and within the first week I made friends with the black guys that worked in the cafeteria at the University and they were taking me out to the blues clubs. The University of Chicago is located in a place called Hyde Park, which was an island in the middle of the southside ghetto. Hah, please don't throw me in the briar patch... It was unbelievable.

TQR: And there was a scene on Maxwell Street, too...



That was on the near northwest side, and it was a happening thing, too. It was the biggest flea market in the world and ever since the 1920s people had been

playing music on the street there on Sundays. They would run a long cord and somebody would let them run a cord into their house for \$2. If your bicycle got stolen during the week you could go to Maxwell Street and buy the parts to put it back together on Sunday.

TQR: When you were being taken down to the blues clubs, had they been integrated at that time? Growing up in Indianapolis, we knew the neighborhoods where the juke joints were, but the idea of walking into one of them was unimaginable.

Well, I was the only white guy in those clubs many times. There were a few white people that were interested in it – some of the academic people from the university were interested from a sociological angle I suppose, but also guys like Butterfield and Bloomfield and Barry Goldberg... Within a week of arriving in Chicago I saw my first blues band. The black guys that worked in the cafeteria were so nice to me –



Louis Johnson, A.D. Mosby, and a lot of guys I only knew by their first name – X.L., Andrew, Clarence... These guys took me down and we'd go in a group. I never went by myself and not with a \$100 bill hanging out of my pocket, as if I had one. The first blues band I ever saw was... dig this personnel – James Cotton, Willie Big Eyes Smith, Muddy

Waters, Otis Spann, Pat Hare and a bass player.

TQR: Were you able to fully appreciate the fact that you were seeing history being made at that time, living in the epicenter of American blues?

No. We were just trying to please ourselves. Our heroes were the blues guys, and just the idea of being able to play that music and get paid for it... You know, when you're a young guy gettin' high and chasing girls is number one on the agenda. It all fits in together and it was a beautiful thing. As far as the larger implications, I don't know how many guys have come up to me over the years and said that the Butterfield Blues Band got them started into music.

TQR: And also exposed an entire generation to music they would have otherwise never grasped at the time.



Yeah, the blues presented this huge body of beautiful music that a white audience of 200 million

people had never heard. We were just lucky enough to be standing there with enough talent to deliver the goods.

TQR: And incredibly, the music being played in Chicago was the same music that inspired many of the British musicians that launched the British Invasion as well as the explosion of a harder rockin' style from players like Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. It was all connected with roots in Chicago blues. Who did you meet first? Was it Butterfield?

Yeah, I met him the first day I was in Chicago. It was just a huge coincidence. I was walking around looking at the

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neighborhood straight from Tulsa, square as a pool table and twice as green, and I see this guy sittin' on some steps playing a guitar and drinking a quart of beer. That's how we met.

TQR: How did your initial exploration into the Chicago music scene unfold?



Little Walter

I just did what musicians do when they are starting out, and I soaked it up from all directions 24 hours a day. Anybody that looked like they knew anything I didn't know I'd learn from. My horizons kind of exploded when I actually found guys that I could look at their hands and see how things I'd heard on records were played. I'd hang out with

the black guys, and you know, you didn't have to go to class if you could pass the tests. I would go out into the ghetto and get lost for weeks at a time hanging out with guys. I learned what the words they were singing meant and how they fit with their lives and culture. I started playing in bands in Chicago as soon as I could. I had a hard time at first because I had never played in bands in Tulsa and I would try to play along with records by Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker, who I became friends with later, but I wasn't aware that there was a certain sequence you had to play the chords in. It just looked like they changed when they got ready, whenever the feelin' told 'em, so I had to learn how to change with them. That was a little difficult, but I just plugged away and got through it. I had to change from using a thumb pick to a flat pick, and now I've gone back again. Freddie King was the only guy I knew that used middle fingerpicks. You know that high sparkling sound he gets sometimes? That's from middle fingerpicks. I played with a bunch of little bands before I got with Butterfield. We used to play acoustically – me, Butter and Nick Gravenitas at parties. Butterfield was an amazing character. When I met him he didn't play harmonica – just guitar. He decided he'd learn how to play harmonica and within 6 months has was as good as he was gonna get. He was a natural genius on the instrument.

TQR: Who did you play with prior to the Butterfield Blues Band?



I played with a bunch of different bands that never made any records – the Southside Olympic Blues Team, Salt & Pepper Shakers, Larry and the Crowd Chasers... and I played

with some known blues guys like Hound Dog Taylor, Junior Wells hired me for a couple of weeks, and I played with this old honkin' sax guy from the '40s named J.T. Brown... It was a matter of gettin' gigs to play. Butterfield got a gig at this place called Big John's on the northside of Chicago, and that's where blues really crossed over to the white people. It was the right time and the right place, so he put the band together for that and it really took off.

TQR: How did you meet Bloomfield, and did he already have his chops together on the guitar?



It was in his uncle's pawn shop. He came from a very wealthy family. I don't know about now, but back then if you'd go to a restaurant or a diner and you looked at the sugar dispensers that you used to pour sugar

into your coffee or the salt and pepper shakers, there was a 'B' on the bottom. His father owned that business. Bloomfield was working behind the counter at his uncle's pawn shop, and oh, yeah, he was already fully formed. He had been playing since his pre-teen years and had taken lessons from jazz musicians and he knew how to play old-fashioned pop music. He was a real musician.

TQR: He was also a true music historian. I remember seeing him in the mid 70's when he was touring solo and it was kind of disappointing. We wanted to hear him play the Les Paul of course, and he was playing acoustic rags from the '20s for the most part, and a little blues, but all acoustic. He seemed to be a little hyperactive.

Oh, yeah, he loved all that music from the '20s, and that might be an accurate description – the most negative way of looking at his personality. It was rough on him because his mind worked so fast all the time that he had trouble sleeping. Clapton had a great description of him as "playing music on two legs." He introduced me to a lot of R&B with horns, and we actually fashioned a lot of our playing after horn parts. When we were playing at the Fillmore a lot he actually had a fire eating act that he did in the middle of "East-West." He used to get one of those mallets for a kettle drum, dip it in lighter fluid, lean back and slowly eat the fire. You talk about hippies with some blown minds... I asked him how he did it and he said as long as you didn't inhale you were OK.

TQR: I was just listening to "Got a Mind to Give Up Living" and it is very clear that the sound of that

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recording doesn't sound like anything being recorded today. There is a haunting mystery to that music that has largely been lost. How did you record back then? Were you hanging mikes in a room to get the sound of an ensemble?

I don't know about hanging mikes in a room, maybe a little bit, but there just weren't as many tracks. I was so ignorant of recording techniques back then that I couldn't even tell you how many tracks we had. Very few things happened in one take, but the only form of 'cheating' we had was splicing tape. I think East-West may have been recorded on both coasts and spliced together. The thing is, when you do it that way, playing everything all the way through from start to finish as a performance, you put the musical sound in the hands of the musicians and take it out of the hands of the engineers. This 'fix it in the mix' shit where you record everything separately and mix it together always struck me as like throwing a Ming vase on the floor and saying *"Don't worry, we'll put it back together better than it ever was."*

TQR: How has your gear evolved over the years?



I never got past the three knob stage. I fooled around with pedals and wah-wahs in the past and I've always found it wasn't something that worked for

me. I started out with a little black Princeton and that worked fine because we were playing small places, you know? Then I got this guy, Owsley, the guy who made the LSD during the Summer of Love in San Francisco, and he was an electronics genius. He modified my Princeton, and I remember doing this one gig with a band called Blue Cheer. They had a wall of Marshall amps and everybody said I kicked their ass that day with my Princeton. It got to where it wouldn't work anymore, and I took it to a repairman in San Francisco and he called me up and said, "I can't figure this shit out at all. I can't do anything with this."

TQR: What kinds of guitars were you playing in Chicago?

Basically anything they would give me for free from endorsements. I played some 335 knock offs... I had a Telecaster I was playing at Big John's and all the blues musicians would

come to sit in. Louis Myers came in and I was complaining to him that the threaded steel saddles on my Telecaster kept breaking strings, and he said, "Aw, you just don't know what you're doing. If I had that guitar I wouldn't never break a string." We were both drinkin' a little bit and he had this real nice stereo Gibson ES-345, so I said, "I'll bet if you had this guitar the same thing would happen. Why don't we trade and see?" He said, "Shit, I'll do that," so we traded. That guitar just suited me — a 1959 ES-345, the fingerboard felt great and I could get a great sustain out of that 3rd string. A week later he came back and told me we needed to trade back be-



cause every time he hit a string on that Telecaster it would break. I said, "I told you so!" I should have been nice about it and traded the ES-345 back, but I just loved it so much that I told him no.

TQR: And that was it for you. Search over. That was Red Dog, but didn't you also have an ES-345 you called Brown Dog?

Yeah... In those days my saying was, and it usually came true, that the life expectancy of a guitar was about 5 years. Either the airlines or the thieves would get it. I was playing somewhere every night and flying around a lot. The baggage is terrible now but it was worse then. Sometimes you would open up the case and there would be nothing but a jumble of wood and strings in there. I'd always just do the best I could and go scour the pawn shops and sometimes I'd be lucky enough to find another Red Dog and sometimes I wouldn't.



As far as the original guitar goes, we played a festival way up in the sticks in Canada, there was bad weather, the equipment guys got drunk and they didn't lock the back door of the van. I just figured it was lost, but somebody found it, and ten years later I was playing in Vancouver and a guy brought that guitar back to me, but it was in pretty bad shape. The one I have now is an original '59 ES-345 just like the first one.

TQR: Let's jump to San Francisco. You ran out the string in Chicago and moved west. Why?

Well, the reason I quit the Butterfield band is because of a

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overcomes all the objections, financial and otherwise. You forget about the security, hopefully you can make it on your own, so you say fuck it, I gotta do it.

Around 1968 I'd say half the main blues guys in Chicago moved to California because of Bill Graham. He created the opportunity. He was a great organizer and a hard-nosed businessman, but he also realized he was in a really loose social scene. He looks at it and he sees that all his customers were on acid. He realized they would dig any kind of music he could give 'em, and he was gonna give them some great stuff—crack this shit wide open and expose them to stuff they needed to hear. Along with Quicksilver Messenger Service and the



Grateful Dead he made them listen to Albert King and Charles Lloyd, Ravi Shankar and Paul Butterfield and B.B. King, so all of a sudden there was good paying employment for blues musicians. His

model was so successful that it spread all over the country and ballrooms were opening everywhere. So in '68... shit, I could name James Cotton, Steve Miller, Luther Tucker, Butterfield, me, Bloomfield, Magic Sam... All kinds of guys moved there because they got out here the first time and the weather was way better—you didn't have that Hawk, which is what they called the wind in the winter in Chicago that would cut you down. The weather was nice, the girls were friendly, and there was work. Nothing not to like. I started making records and things continued to get better and better, I got to travel all over the country and things were good.

TQR: How did your career come together in San Francisco?

Well, Bill Graham took me in and managed me, I got a band together and things steadily got better, and then the Allman Brothers were booked into the Fillmore. I'd been sitting in with them for a while, ever since we had met out on the road

natural phenomenon that you experience as a sideman. You get to do two or three songs that are close to your heart and you begin to think about what if I got to do *all* songs that were close to my heart, and that



next day I was signed to Capricorn and for the first time in my life there was a commercially approved slot that they could stuff my unusual ass in, and that was southern rock.

TQR: After you signed with Capricorn it seemed as if you really hit your stride. When I moved to Atlanta in the '70s I remember "Struttin' My Stuff" being played on the radio all the time. Being new to Atlanta, where the girls looked different in a fine way and everybody talked different, that song kind of defined what was going on in southern rock with that strong guitar hook, funky beat and chorus...

"I'm Struttin' My Stuff Ya'll!" Wet Willie was doing a lot of the same kind of music. But you had been a blues guy... Where did that come from?



It was always there. I grew up in Oklahoma, and southern rock is just country and blues mixed together. I had been concentrating on blues, but growing up in Oklahoma you get country just by breathing. It isn't anything you have to really think about or study.

TQR: Do you remember how "Fooled Around and Fell in Love" came to you?

Yep. It just popped out. I was hacking away on the guitar and I came up with some changes I liked, started singing some words, I got the hook line and wrote a couple of verses... You get the idea and it's just like hanging clothes on a line. The good ones take no time at all. You get plugged into the universal flow for a few seconds and that's all it takes.

TQR: I read a story about when you were cutting the record, you were trying to sing the song and listening back to the vocal you said, "That won't butter the biscuit."

Yeah, I knew I wasn't doing it justice and that song needed someone with a strong voice. That's when I got Mickey Thomas to sing it. He was in my band, but when I met him he

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was in a gospel group. There was this black guy named Gideon whose father had been a preacher in Philadelphia, and he had been on the road with all these great gospel groups like Sam Cooke and the Soulsters and the Mighty Clouds of Joy... He formed a gospel rock group and he would go through the South looking for singers. His dream was to have a multi-cultural group – he would get Japanese guys and guys from the Philipines... He found Mickey Thomas in Cairo, Georgia, and this guy Gideon was a friend of mine. So I wound up hanging out with Mickey and he joined my band. He is a wonderful singer and meeting him was one of the true pieces of good fortune in my career.

TQR: Swerving back to gear if we may, guitar players are reading this and by now they are probably wondering what kinds of amps you may have used. You said ‘Fenders’...



I used Super Reverbs, Princetons in the studio. One time I got disenchanted with tube amps because I couldn’t keep them going on the road, and I switched to the most tube-like sound I could find with a solid state amp, and the Fender Stage Lead was OK

for a while. These days I use a Super Reverb or a Vibrolux. Do you know who Tab Benoit is? He called and suggested Mickey and I cut a record in his studio so we went down to Houma, Louisiana and I think it turned out to be a damn fine record if I do say so myself. It isn’t out yet but I’ve played it for some people in the business who don’t blow smoke and they seem to agree. Anyway, back to amplifiers... This friend of mine is a fuckin’ genius. He just makes shit. If something doesn’t suit him, he makes something better. He got tired of getting his speakers reconed, so he cut the bottom out of a Coors beer can and glued it in the middle of his speaker and it worked like a champ. He got this little no-name 20 watt amp... somebody got drunk at a party and had thrown a hammer through the speaker, and he found the amp at the dump. He pulled it out, threw the guts away and saved the speaker. He brought the speaker to my studio, didn’t tape it up or anything, and we ran the Super through it and we got

the unholyest sound you have ever heard. I worked up this funk groove in E with an open string thing playing through that speaker, sent it to Mickey and he cut a vocal – it’s called “Swamp Water.” Check it out when it’s released.

TQR: What do you use in your home studio?



I’ve got an old Vibroverb that has a great sound. The speaker is partially broken, so I don’t take it out on the road because it sounds just right the way it is and I don’t want it to get

any *more* broken. I have a Super here, and a little Blues Junior amp that’s good for the studio when you don’t want to get to loud.

TQR: Do you miss the fidelity of the recordings of the past?

I do. Vinyl and tape sure sound better than MP3s. You know, ASCAP does this annual gig at the Library of Congress that I played this year where they get the songwriters to a do a show for the congressmen and senators to schmooze them up to pass more favorable laws regarding royalties. They asked me to say a couple of words, and I told them that when I first heard this guy from Napster say that he just wanted to “share the music,” I thought, “Man, why don’t you share something that belongs to you rather than something that belongs to me?” When I was teenager and you would play records on those big Wurlitzer juke boxes with their 15” woofers ... What a sound that was. But you can’t fight it. You don’t want to sound like an old fart complaining about everything.

TQR: Yeah, but sometimes it can’t be helped. Call me Mr. Guilty. Who were your biggest influences?



My ears are pretty wide open. Where my styles comes from is not being able to imitate any of them well. I was just kind of forced back on my own devices. I always loved John Lee

Hooker and B.B., all the great ones, you know. As for now I love Derek Trucks. I think he is what you might call a musician of a generation. Some people try to dismiss him because

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he uses open E tuning and plays slide as if he were some kind of 'Duane Junior,' but he's way more than that. I like hundreds of guitar players, really.

TQR: What are some of your favorite jams and collaborations from the past?



I had some great times with Albert Collins. Some pretty good ones with B.B., but sometimes he would turn it into a test. If you thought a little too much of yourself

he would call a fast shuffle in C sharp so you'd be struggling to keep your hand from flipping into C or D. He's a beautiful guy. My wife doesn't know all that much about music but she has asked me how he can only play one note and you immediately know who it is.

TQR: I've read that Clapton wound up jamming with you and B.B. during his first trip to New York. What was the scene like during the '60s in the Village?

Oh, yeah, that was really a jammin' time and the scene of many crimes... We used to have jam sessions with B.B., Buddy Miles, Clapton, Hendrix... We would jam at Cafe Au Go Go, The Genesis, Cafe Wah?... I remember Bloomfield running in inbetween shows at the Cafe Au Go Go and he had heard this guy named Jimmy James at Cafe Wah? and he said, *"You gotta hear this guy – it sounds like cars crashing into trains and shit!"* Hendrix came over to our place and jammed, and I saw him at Monterey when he burned his guitar. He impressed me as a great player, and you could tell he was a nice guy because he was considerate, he didn't try to dick in on your solo or try to hog things, and when he wasn't playing a solo he did a nice job of backing the next guy up. We had some good jams with a lot of people in New York. We always had a good rhythm section and it was real cool.

TQR: The Newport Folk Festival... the first time Dylan played with an electric band – your band...



You know, playing with Dylan is one of the few things I've been accused of that I didn't do. When they played with

Dylan I was at the other end of the fairgrounds splitting a half pint with Mississippi John Hurt and Manse Lipscomb. These were guys I was more interested in hanging with. I missed the Dylan thing and the big fight that Grossman had back stage. I have also had a lot of people tell me they saw me at Woodstock, but I wasn't there, either (laughing). I was at Monterey, and that was an amazing festival – not only with Hendrix carryin' on, but it was the first time Otis Redding was exposed to that kind of audience, and I remember him



comin' out in a continental suit and saying he was gonna do a song for "all you *flower people*," like it was a dirty word or something. It was also the first time I had the opportunity to fully appreciate Janis Joplin. I had seen her in San Francisco with Big Brother, and she had started out with some pretty raggedy hippie bands, but she wound up with a pretty good R&B band later. You don't get it from the records, but seeing her live could give you chills.

TQR: Did you get to play with Magic Sam in Chicago?

Yeah, man. I was pretty good friends with him. He was a good guy, and we did a benefit for him when he died. He had eight kids, and he died young in his early 30s. He is one of the greats, for sure. He was one of the first guys I saw in Chicago when I was 17, and at that age you aren't even supposed to be in those places. I got thrown out of one of his gigs three times, until I finally found the dressing room and they let me stay in there. I also loved Otis Rush... My favorite slide



player of all time was Earl Hooker, and I was pretty close to John Lee. I would bring him collard greens out of my garden, or bring him fish if I caught a bunch. One time we were out on the road doing this little review up and down the East Coast – me and John Hammond and some other people and I called John Lee in his room and said, "What are you doing John?" He said, "I got me some chicken." I said, "Is it good?"

And he said, "It's so good I ain't even goin' to eat it. I'm just goin' to lay here and kiss on it."

TQR: Based on some of your album photos showing you hanging out on the bed of a pickup truck with a hound dog, I'm guessing you live out in the country somewhere in Northern California.

That's exactly it, and I'm looking out at my garden right now. To be honest they have to use a crow bar to get me out of here

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sometimes. I'm lucky because I'm in the fortunate position to not have to do anything I don't want to do. If it looks like fun and it pays good, I'll head out on the weekends...**To**

www.elvinbishopmusic.com

Despite all references to a crow bar being needed to get Elvin off the farm, he has maintained a steady pace of excellent album releases on Delta Groove featuring guest appearances by B.B. King, John Nemeth, Buckwheat Zydeco, Ronnie Baker Brooks, James Cotton, Kim Wilson, Derek Trucks and many more great artists. For tour dates and a full discography visit www.elvinbishopmusic.com, and of course the entire catalog of Elvin's solo records and recordings with the Butterfield Blues Band are available on Amazon.

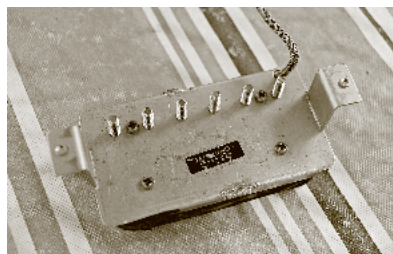
The Great Humbucking Cunundrum



If you subscribe to the theory that different models of guitars seem to fall in and out of fashion, it seems that guitars equipped with humbucking pickups are experiencing a strong resurgence in popularity. We have recently observed that variations on the Fender offset body design are also hot, usually but not exclusively mounted with fat P90s. Twenty years ago the Stratocaster ruled, while Telecast-

ers have always remained solid workhorses, but the tone of humbucking pickups has become very desirable again after a long stretch when their stereotyped sound just wasn't happening for many guitarists, and especially those caught up in what was happening in Austin, Texas...

Before we tease you with still more irresistible humbucker reviews, let's get a few things straight for the record... First of all, there *is* no single 'PAF tone.' If someone were to have, say, a dozen different authentic PAF pickups on hand, listened to them all, and then wound their own version to sound like their favorite among all the originals they had heard, that's fine, but it won't be representative of 'all' PAFs – only the one that the winder happened to prefer over all the others (assuming he has the experience, patience and skill to approximate the true sound and feel of the original in the first place). Gibson PAFs varied widely in tone, from bright, clear and incredibly chimey, to thick, penetrating and elegantly aggressive. In between these extremes you might find some that sound dull



and unexciting, bland and seemingly weak. Our vintage early '60s patent number Gibson humbuckers are single coil-bright, incredibly lush with

harmonic overtones and beautifully clear, but that may not be the sound you are looking for. Some players might even pass on them in a blind test when compared to a bigger, thicker humbucking tone. Ultimately, the only thing that really matters in the endless discussion of humbucking pickups is whether or not the sounds you are hearing are inspiring *you*. Acquiring truly 'magical' tone is another matter...

Ron Ellis is an engineer by profession with deep experience in materials analysis who still works on a fusion reactor while winding pickups in his 'spare' time. In our second conversation in these pages, we discussed the development of his 'LRP' humbucking pickups that were chosen by Lee Roy Parnell and the Gibson Custom Shop for Lee Roy's signature goldtop. Ron and Lee Roy spent months evaluating prototypes before settling on the final set, and their story is both fascinating and instructive. Enjoy...

Ellis



I had been working on my humbuckers for a number of years before I had actually met Lee Roy. Bill and Clay Hullett introduced us, and soon after that I made him some Tele pickups. This led to Lee Roy asking me if

I would be interested in working with him and the Gibson Custom Shop on his signature Goldtop Les Paul. I asked him what his reference was for the old PAF sound, and he said, well, something like Duane Allman's tone. Lee Roy being a slide player and a big Allman Brothers fan, that made sense. Being a Duane fan myself, I just used my ear and made adjustments on a number of prototypes to what I thought had that particular type of PAF sound. I tried variations of magnets, wind patterns, build, tension, and offsets on the coils. I had most of the parts made to my specs, with the same materials used in the originals. I would test them, and then send them off to Lee Roy to try out. We went through maybe 12 different prototype sets before we narrowed it down to two final sets. I then flew back to Nashville, where we met

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at the Custom Shop to test the prototypes. They had a number of the LRP prototype guitars there with the pickups I had made. Lee Roy had been in there testing

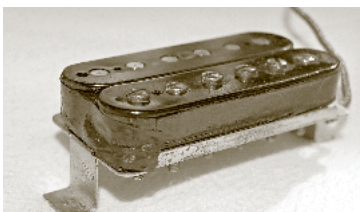
before I came back, along with session ace Bill Hullett and his son Clay lending their experienced ears, and comparing some guitars they brought in. We all finally settled on what became the LRP set. While I was there, Rick Gembar, head of the Custom Shop, asked me if I would be willing to put the LRPs up against a vintage '59 Les Paul that is known to be exceptional. I said sure, and he told me to open an old Lifton case sitting next to me in his office. Inside was a beautiful '59 'burst known as Goldie. We took it into the next room where Phillip



Whorton, Chad Underwood and Lee Roy were setting up his 50-watt Marshall and a 4x10 cabinet that he uses on stage. Lee Roy plugged in Goldie first and of course it sounded amazing. It's one of those reference LPs. He then played the Goldtop prototype with the LRP set, and it immediately presented a more harmonically rich 3D sound,

with more second and third-order harmonics. As Lee Roy went back and forth between the two guitars, everybody in the room agreed that the prototype with the LRPs sounded better. Eventually, Lee Roy looked over at Rick, smiled and said, "See what I mean?"

TQR: Yeah, and that's what Lee Roy had told us, too. Let's talk about the variables you tested to arrive at the end result.



What I have always tried to do is look at the absolute facts as far as what materials were used in the old days compared to now, but it ultimately comes down

to the pickup winder's ear. I'm just making pickups based on what I personally like.

TQR: That's exactly what Tom Holmes will tell you, and really, that's all you're gonna get. He is a bit of an engineer, too, and he doesn't believe in 'voodoo.' You mentioned different Alnico magnets and testing

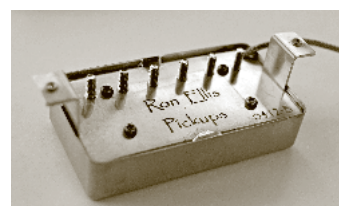
the number of turns and mismatched coils... How far did you get into testing different screw compositions, baseplates, wire, and true butyrate bobbins?



Well, I'm really fortunate that I have the background knowledge and lab facilities to be able to test all of these old materials in great detail. By using spectrometers

and other lab devices, I've been able to figure out what parts and materials really do or don't make a noticeable difference in the final sound of the pickup. I also had access to a number of old PAFs that I was able to take apart, test, and in some cases rewind. Each individual part and material selection for a humbucker contributes to the overall sound. For example, using different materials for the fillister head adjustment screws, slugs, magnets, covers or base plates can make a significant difference in the overall sound and feel. Screws today have a higher alloy content because of more stringent safety standards, which they didn't have to comply with back in the '50s and '60s. So you do all this testing, you get results back, you see these specific mass peaks, and you know what the ratios of the materials are. Then you have to be able to communicate with a manufacturer that is willing to correctly make the part for you, and this isn't such an easy thing to do. When Fender and Gibson started making pickups they were doing it at a perfect time, because those materials that they used were available as off-the-shelf parts, and they just happened to make some wonderful sounding pickups. I had to have my fillister head screws made to my specs, and buy 60,000 to get them to agree to do it. Because of the many individual parts involved in the parts cost, I didn't make much profit on the Lee Roy Parnell project. It was a great project to work on with a lot of great people at the Custom Shop, and of course becoming great friends with Lee Roy.

TQR: What about base plates?



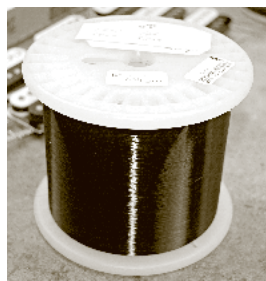
Depending on the material you choose, yes, it can definitely change the sound. I can take off-the-shelf base plates and other parts available today and make a great

sounding humbucking pickup. It won't sound quite as good as one of my signature pickups with my own remanufactured parts, but there is no reason why you can't get a good result with what's available, you just have to know how to make the proper adjustments. I had been working on the humbuck-

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ers on and off for about 4 years when I could fit in the time around my single coil pickup production. A pickup maker has to be willing to put in the time, and try a lot of different things. To find the sweet spot and finalize it, you have to be willing to test over and over, make a small change and try it in the guitar again. You have to go a little bit too far to the left and then go a little too far to the right and back again to understand where the sweet spot parameters are and why.

TQR: What did you learn about wire? We know the actual size of the wire on a single spool varied a lot.



Yeah, and that's still a problem today. I think the variables today are caused by the compression and stretching that occurs when the wire is put on the spools. They will run the wire off the mother spool down to a smaller spool and then down to a 6 lb. spool that is commonly used by pickup

makers. When the wire that comes off the mother spool that was originally compressed and stretched goes on to the next smaller spool, the outer wind becomes the inner wind, and by the time a pickup builder gets an even smaller 6 lb. spool, that wire has been worked over a few times.

TQR: And if you are putting 5,000 turns on a coil and the wire you are using isn't the size you think it is, there is no way to achieve a consistent result.

No, not at all. I'm constantly checking and measuring wire as I'm making pickups throughout the day. I will also use thicker wire or thinner wire with a specific tension for a specific result, which is again the result of years of testing.

TQR: And none of this was ever going on in Fullerton or Kalamazoo.



Without treading on any toes, these guys that make claims about having an original old winding machine means nothing. If you look at those old winders, the wire varied even more so

in the old days, so if you set up the machine with a tensioner for a specific thickness, that thickness is going to change, and the wire will go on loose, or it will go on tight depending on how you set that tensioner. I find that I can be more consistent with my fingers doing either a scatterwind, or what I call a

machine handwind, because I can *feel* the tension. On the old machines because of the variation in the diameter of the wire going through the tensioner, you would have the wire jumping all over the place. The machines today are very, very accurate, and the wire can go on layer after layer very tight. That creates a different sound, and with a humbucker and two coils, you can use a specific type of wind on one coil and something else on the other. It's like grandma's corn bread... we all know what the ingredients are, it's just how you put it all together.

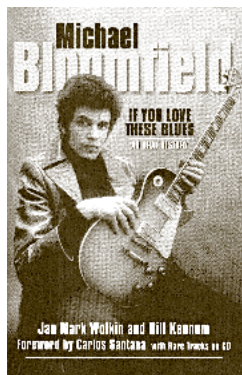
TQR: And ultimately, you have to make decisions based on the quality of your listening, or that of others like Lee Roy if you have access to them.

Fortunately, I have a number of great player friends I know



that help me with testing all my pickups. Peter Stroud has been a huge help, as well as my good friend Jeff Ruiz here in San Diego. You have to carefully listen to players with different styles, feel, touch and practical needs to make the proper adjustments.

Lee Roy and I talked for countless hours about the different humbucker sounds created by great players from the past. For instance, Michael Bloomfield playing a '59 Les Paul straight into a cranked Super Reverb on the Super Session LP. To me, "Albert's Shuffle," is *the* killer PAF reference sound. Lee



Roy is in that group of the all time greats, and he has experience playing those old guitars and he knows in great detail what they sound like. I was at Joe Walsh's house a few years ago and I had my old '64 Tele with my Broadcaster pickup in it. After he played for a while, he stopped and said, "You know, this goes to show that a great old Telecaster pickup is hard to distinguish from a great PAF bridge pickup."

TQR: That's true. Unfortunately a lot of people haven't had the opportunity to hear these things live in a room, or better yet, to play one themselves. The records are great, but to hear one in your hands is a completely different thing, and I will always lean on clarity as a common denominator. Even though your LRP is a tad more compressed than some PAFs, the clarity is all there, the note separation and the bloom as the notes expand. Yet, some people whose idea of a great humbucker is a hot humbucker might feel they are kinda weak.

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Yeah. The LRP set is what I did for Lee Roy's application and I wouldn't call it your typical PAF. It does compress, the notes bloom a little more, and it is what a lot of players prefer in a humbucker sound. Dan Boul, Peter Stroud's

partner at 65 amps likes the bridge a little hotter so it drives the front end of the amp a little more. He asked me if I could wind the bridge a little hotter, and I told him I could, but with that particular wind and magnet selection, if you go too far it will lose some of the clarity and feel.

TQR: The best sounding PAF neck pickups have always seemed to have the lowest resistance readings. I'm sure you could also look at inductance, but most of us don't have an inductance meter...

Resistance is really the last thing I pay attention to when I wind a pickup. I pay very close attention to the inductance and some other key measurements within the coil, and this is what makes all of my pickups very consistent. Using the resistance as a reference is OK for conversation, but it can be misleading in terms of what the pickup actually sounds like. For example, the ambient temperature can give you different readings. If I wind a Strat neck pickup to 5.8k in my shop at 60° then send it to Austin where it is 90° it can read well over 6k, depending on the temperature and humidity. Also, the tone and feel of the pickup changes at different temperatures. If you listened to a pickup in a room at 60 degrees it will sound tighter, thinner and more fundamental on the note. At a higher temperature it will open up,



feel looser, resonate and sound more 3D. I tell people when they get my pickups that as they play that guitar for a month or so the pickups are going to start to relax and everything will seem to flow.

TQR: It's almost like forming the dielectrics in the capacitors of a new amp. Things change. I have heard new pickups in a guitar open up as you described over time – it's like breaking in a speaker.

The pickups open up after they are played for a while, for sure. I think it's more of a feel thing – they just feel better with some time on them. Pickups are only as good as the

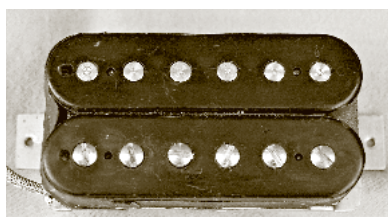
guitar you're putting them in. I wish I could say that my pickups will transform any guitar into a great one, but I can't. The pickups only amplify the tonal character and resonating properties within that guitar, but it is pretty amazing what a good set of pickups will do for a mediocre guitar. Customers want different PAF sounds inspired by their favorite players, so I try to work with them on getting that sound, but there are so many variables involved, like the players ability, their touch on the strings, the amps, pedals, cabs and speakers being used. Some customers will say, "I want to sound like Jimmy Page on the first record." I'm considerate, but I also try to be up front and honest with them about what they're after. Page sounds like Page no matter what guitar he plays. The major contributor to the sound is the player first, and



at what volume level they play. I make two humbucker sets – the LRP set, and what I'm calling the '59 Bette (pronounced Betty) set to honor my wonderful mom. The '59 Bette's are my take on the more typical brighter and fundamental PAF tone, with a little more of an edge to them. I prefer the LRP's myself. I think it's

a more pleasing and useful sound than most of the original PAF's I've heard and played. Whether it's a Tele, Strat, or a Les Paul, you want it to compress a little, then release, with bloom and swell. It's a pliability and bouncy feel we associate with the great old guitars and pickups... There are exceptions, like '60s Telecaster pickups that are more fundamental on the note – more like the Bakersfield kind of sound. I have guys bring different contemporary pickups to me and some of them sound beautiful, or they are kick-ass and really drive the amp, but too often there is nothing beyond the fundamental. And that seems to be the main difference between a great old pickup and a lot of the pickups being made by winders today.

TQR: We noticed that with all the PAFs we had with gold-plated screws. Dull. Nothing.

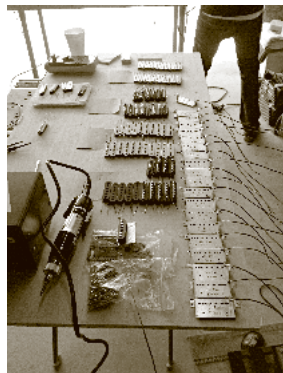


Yep, I offer raw nickel covers, polished nickel – which I recommend, or I can get them nickel plated and polished to a

mirror finish. For the polished mirror look, they have to flash copper on them, polish that down and then plate them with nickel. When you add the copper, it can change the sound somewhat, or with gold plating it's like throwing a blanket over the pickup. I just won't do it anymore.

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TQR: Do you pot your humbuckers?



No, not the coils, I do a slight potting technique on some of the parts though. I have potted the coils slightly – there have been a couple of high-gain guys that bought the LRPs and wanted them potted a little. One guy called me and he said, “Dude these sound absolutely fantastic, but when I’m gigging or recording they squeal some.” I told him they can be a little

microphonic because they are exactly like an old PAF in every detail, and an old PAF will squeal, too. I potted them a little and sent them back to him, and he said they worked out OK, but he still had some slight microphonic issues with his set up. I told him to just try a longer cable and move away from the amp a little, and he said “Wow dude, that worked. Thanks man!”

I worked on the Blackguard Book with Nacho Banos, where I did extensive lab tests on a number of old Blackguard Tele pickups. I learned a lot from that little project, and I have continued to do research on old Tele, Strat, Humbuckers, P90’s, and now P-bass/Jazz pickups. Because of my experience with my day job, I have a lot of knowledge about materials, how they’re made, and how to manufacture them.



I never want to come across as an authority on vintage pickups – they were all over the map in variations of materials and manufacturing. Everyone has their opinion and

interpretation of how the old ones were made. The test equipment I use doesn’t lie or come up with BS stories about what they heard from the good old days. I just go by the plain facts. Not all vintage pickups sound good, but when you do find the good ones, they can be pretty exceptional. Alan Hamel used to say... “31 flavors”, and I think that sums it up. I’ve always been curious about the great old pickups, but I think what really got me going on this whole journey was about 12 years ago, when I went into Guitar Center in Los Angeles and I picked up a 1960 Telecaster. I plugged in to an old brown Vibrolux and I thought, “What in the hell is this, why is this so freaking great?” That was the moment when my engineering head kicked in and I realized I had to try to figure this out. It was like dying and going to heaven and God hands you

his 1960 Telecaster. As I played it, it was as if the guitar just disappeared... I was more creative and I probably played better than I have on any other guitar. To this day, I remember the sound of that Telecaster... and mostly the feel of those old pickups... That’s what got me started on this crazy journey. **TO**

ToneQuest Lee Roy



What we were going for was a bell-like, almost single coil tone on the neck pickup that seems so hard to get right. So many of my younger friends have never heard a great PAF pickup, and back in the ‘50s when they were first made, nothing was shielded, and that was a big problem on stage for the entire band. That was the point of the PAF, not to get that woofy, overdriven sound

that humbuckers eventually became. The only guitar I owned from the time I was 15 to 30 was my ‘56 goldtop. That was the tone I knew, and the hum wasn’t quite as bad if you stood just right, so when I heard the modern pickups that were around when I started my own tone quest years ago, I just avoided them. They didn’t sound like my goldtop, and they sure didn’t sound like the guitars Duane and Dickie played.



Thanks to Bill Hullett, who is the ultimate Tele guy in my opinion, Ron sent me two sets of Tele pickups, I really liked them, and we began talking a lot. He asked

me what kind of sound I wanted from humbucking pickups, and I kept saying bell-like in the neck, and something *clear* for the bridge that wasn’t going to hit the front end of my amp so hard. We struggled to find the right words to describe the sound, and I don’t know exactly how many sets we went through before we finally landed on the right ones. We had the help of several other folks, Phillip Whorton at the Custom Shop, who was very instrumental in the LRP because he and I worked on the guitar itself, and Chad Underwood, a guitar builder in Lexington was there at different times... The big ah, hah! moment came when we were down to two sets – call ‘em A and B. What happened was that we took the neck from set A and the bridge from B and that combination was

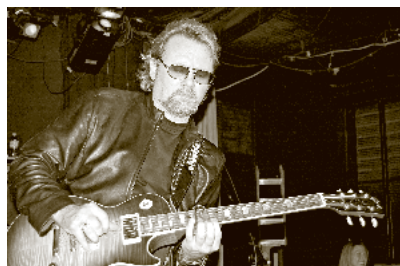
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it. What we heard was the clarity of the notes, very defined and very clear, this slight bit of compression, and the bloom. As I have continued to play some other old Les Pauls, I have learned that's what they have, and as we were growing up, that was the sound we heard before it was lost.



We used various LRP guitars for these tests, and Phillip Whorton was behind the development of the guitars at Gibson. I told him that we had to make sure that whenever someone picks up one of the LRPs they have to

be consistent to the extent that you can accomplish that, and I believe the piece of mahogany sitting on the back side of that pickup makes all the difference. I have put LRPs in my other guitars like a 336 and 335, and the LRPs still do it for me, but they also sound different in those guitars. Ron is so meticulous and he is so good about communicating the language of sound. Someone said that "talking about music is like dancing about architecture," and it's true. Those first two sets of Ron's Tele pickups had the same mojo as the LRPs. They had the same qualities – the clarity, the initial attack, and the bloom.



In that sense the language is the same. Another thing we kept coming back to is not just how they sound, but how do they *feel*? If it doesn't feel right you're not

gonna keep going back to it. I never even noticed this before but someone pointed out to me that when you get into a solo and it starts to build, you use a different part of your fingers when you dig in. I usually use one of three fingers and my thumb, and my first finger has the most callus on it, so I tend to use my second and ring finger for the tender stuff and dig in with the first. No disrespect to DiMarzio, but if you have a pickup that is kicking out 10K, it don't matter if you're using a finger or a hammer. There are cats that works for, and that's fine, but I guess I'm into the more subtle things.

REVIEW

LRP Humbuckers

Sometimes in life true stories are so compelling that further elaboration seems pointless. So when you read the background story on Ron Ellis' LRP pickups and his factual description of how the prototypes were tested and evaluated, culminating in



an A/B test against a celebrated '59 Les Paul, well, point made. Aside from the test Ellis described at the Gibson Custom Shop, you should know that other

comparisons were made in Texas... we just can't name all the participants for reasons related to endorsement agreements, but the results were essentially the same, and these guys were deeply familiar with the sound of vintage guitars because they *own* them. You can find more than a few contemporary pickup winders who may claim to have captured the sound of a true PAF... we will simply point to the facts as described here and leave it to you to decide how compelling those facts may be. Our job is to describe how the LRPs actually sound...

Tone



Let's start by addressing an important bit of reality that you won't see addressed in any other published review of pickups, that being, *your personal experience*

as it relates to the tone of classic vintage pickups. When the term 'PAF' is thrown around in a review, the reviewer can't possibly know what that might mean to the reader. Have you ever played a guitar with vintage PAF, '50s Strat or Telecaster pickups? How long ago? For how long – 5 minutes or years? Do you know what a great set of pickups in these classic guitars sounds like? Kinda sorta, absolutely, or not at all? "Sounds like a great PAF" is an inherently vague and potentially meaningless statement, since we have already stressed that there is no single 'PAF' tone, and if you haven't *heard* a "great PAF humbucker" you're still left clueless. Consequently, in our description of the Ron Ellis' LRP set, we aren't going to lean too hard on the term 'PAF' as a substitute for a more thoughtful and detailed description...

Bridge

For most of us, the bridge pickup seals the deal. It's the one we use the most, and if it's too sharp, dull or otherwise forgettable, that's it. In describing the sound of the bridge LRP, it is essential to reference Ron Ellis' comments about how so many modern pickups only seem to produce the fundamental, meaning a pickup void of 2nd and 3rd order harmonic complexity, that elusive dancing shimmer on the top, and a response to pick attack in which the notes seem to compress

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and expand – what we refer to as ‘bloom.’ Another quality not necessarily embodied in the fundamental pertains to a sense of space – space and separation between notes, and a spatial quality in which chords sound bigger, deeper, and ring and sustain longer. The 7.49K bridge LRP is adequately bright and trebly, but not as sharp and stinging on the top as some other absolutely stunning early Gibson humbuck-



ers we have played. The plain strings sound a bit rounder and more complex in the LRP – a beautiful sound, but one that is less penetrating with less bite than our early ‘60s patent number Gibson pickups, and other authentic PAFs we have heard. This isn’t a matter of which is ‘better,’ but more about what you prefer. We really like the LRP bridge, and suspect it might

wear very well with a lot of players over an extended period of time, where brighter, sharper pickups might leave them eventually craving more girth. On reflection, the sharper version of a PAF seems to be

Neck



a little more old-school to us – a more stripped down, bluesy tone. Examples? Freddie King, even when he played a goldtop with P90s, and the Bloomfield tracks on *Super Session*. The LRPs present a bigger soundstage in the style of... well, Duane Allman. Both are great sounds, just different.

It is generally easier to find more similarities than extreme differences among various neck humbuckers, and this relates to the physical location of the pickup and its distance from the saddles more than anything else. A neck or rhythm pickup naturally sounds warmer given its location, and analyzing subtle differences in these softer, warmer tones can be challenging. We pay a lot of attention to definition versus indistinct, muddier tones on the wound strings, and the degree to which the plain strings retain their treble character and attack. You have probably played guitars with humbucking neck pickups that were virtually useless for the styles of music you play, and the LRP neck humbucker measuring just 6.92K does a nice job of avoiding the stereotypical shortcomings described here. It impresses us as being a powerful and



animated choice for blues, clear enough for smooth rhythms, and like the LRP bridge, it possesses lots of character and depth. We have heard vintage PAFs and patent number Gibson humbuckers with slightly more treble presence on the plain strings than the LRP neck, but among contemporary humbuckers the clarity and character of the LRP really stand out as exceptional. We also noted that additional treble can be squeezed out of the LRP by simply moving your pick attack closer to the front edge of the bridge pickup. Where you choose to pick or strum notes relative to the bridge may seem obvious, but having watched Robert Cray use the location of his right hand and pick as an effective tone control all night left a lasting impression. Consider that a hint, and if you’re willing to wait 6-7 months, consider the Ellis LRP set to be a tantalizing choice to be savored among current PAF-style humbuckers. [to](#)

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Unleashing Red Dawg...

the Epiphone Dot ES-335



Like the Squier J Mascis Jazzmaster and Telecaster Custom we acquired last month, if you haven’t kept up with what’s been happening at Epiphone, we suggest you get busy. Inspired by our experience with the Squier guitars and Elvin’s lifelong love of cherry red thinlines, we perused the online Epiphone catalog on your behalf, and we discovered that they are building a diverse line of irresistible classic guitars. At one time not so long ago Epiphone even built an ES-345 Stereo, now discontinued. Of course we looked everywhere with none to be found, but we’re betting one will turn up around the time we send this issue to the printer... After investing considerable time trolling various web sources for new Epiphone models, we chose Sweetwater, mainly because they seemed to have the largest selection of Epiphone Dots in cherry, blonde and sunburst (also available in ebony), and their site allows you to actually compare high

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resolution pictures of identical models with *weights* included. We quickly narrowed our focus to a cherry Epiphone Dot ES-335 with the best looking rosewood fingerboard among four available guitars, combined with a moderate weight of 8.3 lbs. The lightest guitar listed was 7 lbs. 13 oz., but the pictures of the fingerboard on the guitar we chose looked exceptionally good, and our guitar still feels very balanced and light in hand. In fact, we consider this to be the perfect weight. We bought the Epiphone for \$399.00 shipped, case not included, and it arrived in 3 days via FedEx. A few days later we received a \$79.00 e-mail offer on the hardshell Epiphone case, and we bought that, too.

The first thought that will enter your mind when you open the Epiphone box or play one in a store is just how beautifully well-made these guitars are. When missus ToneQuest, who has seen hundreds of guitars come through here, stopped at the door of the music room to comment on how beautiful the cherry Epiphone is, well, that's high praise indeed, and as rare as a solar eclipse. The authentic gloss cherry finish is indeed perfectly rich and deep on the bound maple-ply body with vintage-correct Mickey Mouse ears, and inside, a full-length mahogany center block. The unbound, cherry-stained 'Slim-taper D Profile' mahogany neck really isn't *that* slim or tapered, measuring 7/8 inch thick along the entire length of the neck with a nicely rounded back, tapered shoulders, and a beautifully figured slab of streaky Indian rosewood. The neck shape reminds us very much of our first '67 sparkling burgundy Gibson 335. We love it, we love the medium jumbo frets, and the black composite nut seems to be cut well with no audible binding or 'pinging' when tuning.

The mahogany neck is also constructed with two crescent-shaped scarf joints located just above the heel and behind the first and second frets. We suspect that a 'scarfed' neck might cause some uninformed players to recoil with doubt, perceiving this as an indication of cheap or flawed construction... They would be wrong. Scarf joints on guitar necks have been used for centuries in the construction of classical guitars, and extensively in modern guitar-building by companies like



Taylor and Ibanez in addition to Epiphone. There are two reasons that builders use scarf joints... First, when carving a neck with an angled peghead and large heel such as a set neck found on a Gibson guitar, more wood is turned to sawdust on the factory floor than the amount remaining in the finished neck. Gibson's practice of cutting the wood for necks on a bias, leaving the grain orientation much longer (and stronger) at the headstock further adds to the waste incurred when

carving necks from single boards. On economical guitars like our Epiphone 335, a scarfed neck is far more cost-effective in reaching a specific price point. Secondly, scarf joints are extremely strong – stronger than the wood itself, and it is very rare to see a headstock or neck break at a scarf joint. So yes, scarf joints on a mahogany neck are more economical, but also stronger. *"Ooo, but what about the glue, man? The glue in those joints will block the vibrations from resonating throughout the neck..."* No, not really. Just keep reading.



As beautiful as our new Epiphone Dot is, it needed just a little work to attain the cult status of Red Dawg... Sweetwater boasts of a 55-point quality inspection, which doesn't mean a thorough

pro set up, and despite the sticker on the back of the headstock indicating that the guitar had been set up and inspected in the USA by #7, we found the string height on our guitar to be way too low with lots of fret buzzing.

The potted USA-designed Epiphone Alnico Classic and Classic Plus humbuckers measured 9K/neck and 8.66K bridge. As expected, they were perfectly acceptable for a budget-priced guitar, but of course we had higher aspirations. We pulled the wiring harness out and replaced the input jack with a Switchcraft, since that is the mechanical part that gets the most use



and abuse. The Epiphone 335 is already equipped with full-size 500K pots (not CTS, but they work just fine) and the wiring scheme is more complex than standard vintage wiring, so we chose to leave it intact, cutting the Epiphone pickup leads just below the baseplate of each pickup and splicing a set of Slider's PAF-style humbuckers into the existing wiring. That's the easiest

way to change pickups in this guitar without pulling the harness, which must otherwise be removed through the lower f-hole since a section of the center block has not been cut out below the bridge pickup rout as on vintage and most Gibson 335s. We also noted that the original mounting screws for the Epiphone pickups and rings are larger than the standard size, so when changing pickups you'll need to have a spare set of standard screws and springs on hand. At some point we may rewire the Epiphone with an RS Guitarworks kit, and when we do, we'll report here.

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The Epi 'LockTone' stop tailpiece consists of a nickel stop tail with two wire prongs on each end that 'lock' the tailpiece on the studs. We considered replacing the studs with steel, but the stud inserts are threaded differently than standard American studs, so we left them in and replaced the tailpiece with the heavier non-aluminum nickel

TonePros version. As we have noted in the past, lightweight nickel-plated aluminum tailpieces don't seem to produce the best tone and sustain on semi-hollow guitars. We will gladly keep the stock nickel Grover tuners.

Tone

With the Slider's mounted, a new set of Pyramid 10-48s installed, and the string height adjusted, we plugged into our blackface Super Reverb and began pushing chords through the Epiphone noting tone (chimey if not powerful) and how the neck and body resonated. The guitar sounded good, but we weren't detecting a lot of good vibrations resonating from the neck and body. Must be those scarf joints, eh? Uh, wait a minute... we had completely forgotten to check the truss rod. Sighting down the neck we spied a healthy bow on both sides – more than necessary even for those who like a little relief, which explained the spongy and loose string tension we felt as we first played the guitar. Under full string tension we broke out an Allen wrench, inserted it and turned clockwise to tighten the truss rod and reduce relief. Imagine our surprise when we realized the truss rod was loosening... Turning counter clockwise tightened the rod, and we noted that it was the smoothest, easiest turning truss rod we had ever adjusted, as if it were completely loose. We hit the Internet, queried 'reverse truss rod' and found a thread on the Gibson forum where a new owner of a royal tan Epiphone '61 Casino made in China

had experienced the same thing. After the usual back and forth, a response from a Gibson customer service rep confirmed that it was a *dual action* truss rod. Whatever, maybe so, but we and dude on the forum both felt that the truss rod only tightened in one direction – backwards. Well, who cares? Most important, the truss rod eased the neck to dead straight like we like it with a couple of turns, which required us to loosen the strings and significantly raise the bridge and string height again. With the



action set moderately high, we tuned up, strummed a full Em chord and just about fell out of our chair.

The acoustic volume and sustain of the Epiphone had easily doubled since straightening the truss rod and raising the bridge higher. Plugging back into the Super, we realized that we hadn't adjusted the height of the pickups after raising the bridge again and they remained way too low. We raised them, splashed a few big chords into the Fender, and 20 minutes of mesmerizing joy ensued. The Epiphone and the Sliders were utterly monolithic, the resonant character of the guitar massively stout, firing off incredibly complex harmonics, brilliant treble and midrange tones suspended by fat sustain that only a semi-hollow thinline can create. Damn it, man, this is good, and such a description isn't nearly good enough. In terms of tone, this may well be the epic cheap guitar buy and makeover ever presented in these pages. Yes indeed.



Is it easier to become delirious over an incredibly toneful and playable \$400 guitar versus a \$4,000 Les Paul? We recently acquired one of those, too that will be reviewed next month. Certainly there is a level of heightened expectation attached to an expensive guitar, but we also suspect that the price paid can introduce an illusory perception of goodness that sometimes colors reality. With a \$400 guitar your expectations

may be considerably lower, but confronted by the realization that you just paid about what a guitar cost in 1965 and it sounds and plays as if it had been *built* in 1965, it may be time to reconsider your priorities. Our Epiphone 335 is fully equal to any 335 we have owned in the past, and we don't feel as if any aspect of its construction and craftsmanship has compromised our usual high standards one bit. Slider's humbuckers are just a little tougher sounding than the LRPs in a Les Paul, slightly



thicker perhaps, which is why we chose to install them in the Epiphone. We expected it to be a brighter-sounding guitar, and the combination proved to be magical.

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Measuring 7.46K/neck and 7.81K/bridge, Slider's humbuckers deliver clarity, complex overtones and dynamic responsiveness with a little more attitude and bluster than the LRPs. The vocal character of Slider's pickups is a bit more aggressive, but their output seems similar to the Ellis set despite their slightly higher resistance readings. Overall, another excellent option in vintage-style humbucking pickups. For the price of a new set of pickups, there is absolutely no reason why your experience with an Epiphone Dot can't be every bit as rewarding and inspiring as ours. All you need to do is indulge in the momentary suspension of disbelief and *Quest forth...* **To**

*www.epiphone.com
sliderspickups@bigpond.com*

REVIEW

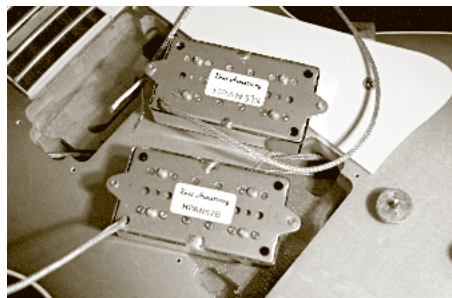
Kent Armstrong Humbuckers



Kent Armstrong's Vintage 57 humbuckers are just one of many of Kent's humbucker designs to be found on the WD Music web site, so we encourage you to log on and linger. The 57 pickups we received are described as being *'faithfully recreated from the famous 1957 Patent Applied For design humbucking pickup with the same plain enamel 42 AWG wire and Alnico 2 magnets for the warmth and singing tone*

the originals are known for, with proper 49.2mm pole piece spacing, braided wire with no tap and maple spacers.'

Made in Korea to his design and material specifications, Armstrong makes no overt attempt to visually mimic the appearance of an original PAF pickup, although we will readily give him credit for some very fine looking nickel covers. The Vintage 57 pickups are also potted as Kent described last month when he stated, *"It's essential if you don't want microphonic*



feedback or squeal. It's essential, but it has no bearing on the sound of the pickup. It simply solves a problem." While differ-

ent pickup builders are free to disagree on the practical pros and cons of potting, all we can tell you is that Armstrong's Vintage 57 pickups don't sound as if they are suffering from the typically muted, nasal, dull and honking tone of the humbuckers you would have found in your brand new 1972 Les Paul Custom. We speak from experience.

We chose to install the 57s in a '58 Historic Les Paul that Greg Talley kindly leaves with us to serve as a mule. We sold the '58 plain top to him after acquiring it for review, and it was just too cool to let out of the neighborhood. We suggest you use the supplied screws and springs that come with the Armstrong pickups since the feet extend out directly from the baseplate and the shorter springs will work best.

Tone



Measuring 7.19K/neck and 7.99K bridge, the Armstrong '57 set reminded us of Gibson's '57 Classics. The neck pickup sounds a little more defined and brighter overall than many production humbuckers intended for this position (including the 57 Classic), and the perceived output is moderate without sounding anemic or inappropriately weak. Expect full fidelity without the powerful low end roar of stronger neck

pickups. If you use overdrive pedals with the neck or both pickups combined, you'll find such full fidelity very useful for maintaining a more defined and solid low end.

The Armstrong bridge is extremely balanced across all six strings, lacking the dominant top end chime and sustain of pickups like the Ellis LRPs and Rolph '58s. Like the Gibson '57 Classics, the tone of the Armstrong bridge impressed us as more of a 'bread & butter' sound lacking a particular dominant emphasis in upper midrange or treble frequencies, equally agreeable played through a Fender or a Hiwatt. This must have been a specific goal in Kent Armstrong's design because the balance is really quite extraordinary. The 7.99K resistance reading is also deceiving, since the bridge seems more balanced with the moderate output of the neck pickup. All of these observations begin to make even more sense when you consider that this set is built with Alnico 2 magnets. The tone, attitude, character and output seem softer and less abrupt than Alnico 5, with excellent dynamic touch-sensitivity and feel. Like most Armstrong pickups, the Vintage '57 humbuckers are sold separately – \$98.95 with nickel covers, \$89.95 without. **To**

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We believe that every musician is unique, and deserves easy access to the equipment, tools and resources necessary to create his/her own tone. Amplified Parts is dedicated to helping you sound your very best.

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Analogman (Mike Piera) is one of the premier guitar effects dealers and manufacturers serving professional players worldwide. Analog Man is unique, since it manufactures, modifies, buys, sells, and repairs vintage and new guitar effects and accessories - they have everything you need between your guitar and amp. Specializing in vintage and high-end effects, you won't find cheap Taiwanese "happy meal" style, toy effects there. Analog Man is dedicated to helping you successfully pursue your quest for tone, and every customer is treated as a prospective friend. There are now Analog Friends all over the world with the common interest of vintage guitars and effects. Analog Man can meet all your effects needs, including: Buying and selling vintage, new, and custom built effects, and modifying pedals to sound and function better. A full repair service, including referrals to specialists. They specialize in creating the best new effects with vintage values. FREE help with effects problems by e-mail, plus professional consultation and technical services.

Analog Man was the pioneer in pedal modifications for Ibanez and Maxon Tube Screemers and several Boss pedals (TR-2, GE-7, SD-1, DS-1, BD-2, DD3, etc). They also modify DOD overdrives and Fuzz Faces to vintage specs and do true bypass mods on many effects. They also build custom switch boxes with effects loops, AB switches, buffers, channel switchers, tuner switches, etc. Analog Man hand-built pedals include chorus pedals, compressors, distortions, delays, and fuzz pedals. Three chorus pedals are available, with several options. Five versions of compressors are available, based on the Ross style and/or the Orange Squeezer style of compression. Several Surface versions are available for germanium or Silicon fuzzface sounds, plus the Astro Tone, Peppermint, and Sun Bender fuzz pedals. The Beano Boost is a crunchy treble booster and is also available along with a Sun Face in the Sun Lion pedal. The Bad Bob booster is now made

by Analog Man. The King of Tone dual overdrive has been incredibly popular and a Prince of Tone was developed in 2012 for better availability. The ARDX20 dual analog delay is also available with a tap tempo/modulation/preset controller for the most features in any analog delay. The BIG-T Telecaster pickup was developed with Jim Weider and is available at Analog Man.

Other hand-made pedals available from Analog Man include FOXROX, Teese RMC wahs, Z Vex, Black Cat, and Sweet Sound, plus production pedals from Boss, Dunlop, MXR, Wah Huge, EHX, Eventide, VOX, Xotic, etc. Power supplies for nearly any effect are available, plus cables, pedalboards, and other accessories. Mike maintains excellent relationships with these manufacturers to insure that quality and service standards are high. Please check the web site for more information.
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Callaham Vintage Guitars & Amps New from Callaham! Check out the new billet steel ABR-1 style 'tune-o-matic' bridge: Bill Callaham is a builder of exceptional electric guitars that exceed the original quality, tone, and beauty of the vintage models that inspire his work. "Better than vintage" is an apt description for the Callaham "S" and "T" model electric guitars that feature premium lightweight ash and alder bodies, custom hand-shaped rock maple necks, and cryogenically treated Lindy Fralin pickups specially wound to Callaham's specifications for true vintage tone. Bill also offers cryogenically treated, pre-wired vintage pick guards for Strat style guitars, and his exclusive formula for cold-rolled steel alloy tremolo blocks continue to delight players around the world with improved resonance and sustain. Callaham vintage saddles also improve sustain while minimizing string fatigue and breaks. Additional Strat parts include stainless steel trem arms, string ferrules, bridge plates and mounting screws, and string retainers. Attention Tele Players! Callaham now offers a complete line of custom Tele parts. Please visit their web site for information on pre-wired control plates with premium pots, capacitors, and cloth-covered wire, specially wound and cryogenically treated Fralin vintage Tele pickups, compensated brass bridge saddles, bridge plates, knobs, jacks, tuners and string trees!

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The only thing better than Callaham parts is a Callaham guitar. We said that, and you can take it to the bank.

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Carr Amplifiers Like you, all of us at Carr Amplifiers are guitarists. We share your love of the guitar, and we feel very fortunate to build amplifiers for a living at our shop in Pittsboro, North Carolina. And although we are understandably proud of our unique circuit designs, meticulous point-to-point construction, premium components and hand-crafted cabinets, our success has ultimately been the result of one simple fact; discerning guitarists continue to enthusiastically embrace the tone, reliability and versatile nature of our amplifiers. Perhaps it's because we view guitar amps as being as much an instrument as the guitar itself, and we truly believe that an amplifier should become a personal extension of every player. To that end, we strive to design and build amps with a distinct character and sonic personality, and the flexibility and practical features that will inspire you to create your very own signature sound at volume levels appropriate for home, studio and stage. Models include:

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Collings Guitars: Bill Collings' story provides a classic example of what can be achieved with an engineer's brain, a machinists' hand and an experienced repairman's eye. After dropping out of medical school in Ohio to work in a machine shop, ColliRDngs moved to Texas in the mid 1970's where the experience he gained repairing and restoring guitars guided his design of the first Collings guitars. His understanding of the flaws and shortcomings found in production instruments was instructive, and he set out to eliminate those shortcomings with the very first Collings guitars. Collings instruments have grown to include 32 different acoustic guitar models including the famed dreadnought and OM models, seven award-winning mandolin models in both lacquer and varnish finishes, three arch-top guitars, and a new line of seven electric instruments crafted to inspire rock, blues, jazz, country, and your music, too.

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For more information on the complete line of Collings instruments and dealer locations, please visit our web site.

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Resource Directory

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TONE & STYLE - All Eastwood Guitars are fitted with high-quality modern components that offer an optimal playing experience that far exceeds their 1960's original counterparts. It is hard to find a guitar these days that oozes more vintage style than an Eastwood! All Eastwood Guitars are setup professionally before shipping to our customers.

VALUE: All Eastwood Models are subjected to extensive research and development to continually raise the level of performance. At the same time, we are very careful to maintain an affordability level that our customers expect. These elements combine to deliver peak performance and higher quality than the originals at a much lower price.

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THE FUTURE: We continue to bring new models to the Eastwood line-up. Our goal is to introduce 3-5 new models each year, available in a wide variety of colors and of course, including left-hand versions. Please feel free to email us directly if you have some suggestions for models that we should consider developing in the future!

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The Echopark Guitar, Los Angeles

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Eminence Speaker LLC, Eminence, KY
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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

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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.

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

Jensen Loudspeakers Changing speakers in your amplifier is the easiest and often the most effective 'modification' you can do yourself in the quest for inspiring guitar tone.

The complete range of Jensen speakers reflects the heritage of the vintage C and P series ceramic and alnico speakers used in so many classic amplifiers from the '50s and '60s, as well as the modern Jet, MOD and Neo Series that offer a variety of tones and power ratings to suit virtually any type of music and application imaginable. You will also find Jensen speakers in all the sizes used today for electric and acoustic guitar amplification, including 5, 6, 8 10, 12 and 15 inch models.

With so many excellent choices available to guitarists today, we also understand that choosing the right speakers for your unique needs can be a complex, and even daunting decision. To assist you in making the right choice the first time, our web site offers a comprehensive library of sound files for each speaker, video demonstrations, user reviews, a detailed tone chart, and wiring diagrams for virtually every speaker configuration used in combo amplifiers and extension cabinets. Best of all, you may also utilize our exclusive Tone Generator program to determine the best speakers for your needs. Simply enter information such as the rated power of your amplifier, the number of speakers and size, playing style and musical taste, volume requirements and other relevant factors and the Tone Generator will develop recommendations for specific speakers based on the specifications and information you provide.

For detailed information on the entire line of Jensen Vintage, Jet, MOD and Neo speakers and a list of dealers, please visit our web site.

www.jensentone.com, 480-820-5411

Jescar Fretwire Securely pressed into the fingerboard, the fret wire is the gateway between the musician and the instrument. It is one of the most critical components in the playing quality of the guitar. The interaction between the strings and frets determines the feel of the neck as much as the neck contour, fingerboard material, or finish.

There are many different fret wire profiles available, from small to large, low to high, narrow to wide, oval to round to triangular, all affecting the playing characteristics and feel of the instrument. Brass frets from days past have given way to today's standard material, 18% nickel silver, also called "German Silver." Our highly refined nickel silver consists of 62% copper, 18% nickel and 20% zinc. But even with 18%

nickel silver, there are differences in hardness, tensile strength, surface quality, grain size, and other metallurgical properties that influence a fret's quality, performance and feel.

Beyond 18% nickel silver, new alloys have been employed in the production of modern fret wire that dramatically improves the performance and aesthetics of the guitar. Our stainless steel, with its greater hardness and tighter grain structure has much higher wear resistance for greater fret life. In addition, string bending is much smoother without the friction or grinding felt with traditional fret material. We have selected a stainless steel alloy that provides the best combination of fret life and installation ease.

Most fretwire is manufactured in coils for ease of installation. Our FW39040 and FW37053 are only offered in 24" straight lengths to prevent twisting if coiled. Pricing is based on orders of one pound minimum quantity per size, plus shipping via UPS, FedEx, or USPS. Gold colored EVO wire is available on selected sizes only. Individual frets cut to size, straight cut or cut and notched tangs, are available upon request. Minimum order quantity for pre-cut frets is 2000 pieces.

CAUTION: Jescar Fretwire will improve the tone and playability of your guitar.

www.jescar.com 877-453-7227

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:

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Resource Directory

fax at 603-889-7026 603-889-2664..
JustStrings.com, Nashua, NH
info@juststrings.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

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 Beastie 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

Mercury Magnetics: The basis of every tube amp's characteristic sound is the unique design of its transformers. Mercury transformers are legendary for their stunning tonal superiority, build quality, consistency, and reliability. We believe in old-world customer service and single-minded focus. Transformers are our only business, allowing us to concentrate on providing you with the best-sounding guitar amplifier trannies in the world.

If your amp is suffering from bland and unexciting tone, then it's time for a transformer upgrade or repair. Here are your options:

ToneClone™: Best-of-Breed Series

Transformers: Behind every great-sounding vintage guitar amp is a piece of transformer history. Within any amp line there are usually a large number of transformer variations, inconsistencies and just plain ol' building errors that affect their sound (good or bad). At Mercury, we seek out, study, blueprint and replicate only the best-of-breed transformer designs (including their all-important anomalies) and add these discoveries to our catalog. And we make these incredible tonal selections available to you through our ToneClone™ line.

Axiom® Series Next-Gen Transformers: Next-generation guitar amplifier transformers. The Axiom series are in a class by themselves. We've taken our advanced knowledge of modern transformer design and mated it with historically best-sounding designs of the past. Axiom trannies are hybrids that take vintage tone to the next level! More bloom, more overtone color, and awesome tonal depth. If you ever needed convincing as to how outstanding transformers affect your sound, Axiom trannies will astonish you.

Mercury Vintage™ Transformer Service:

Most vintage transformers have already outlived or are nearing the end of their life expectancies. That's the bad news – now for the good... Mercury will restore, rebuild or rewind your valuable original transformers. Or, we can clone your originals so that you can continue to play your old amp without fear of further "wear and tear."

Free Transformer Testing And Evaluation Service:

Do you think there might be something wrong with your transformer? Send it to us. We'll test it in our lab and report back to you. Our evaluation procedures are thorough, complete and reliable, and always free. The only transformers that come with a 10-year Manufacturer's Warranty and a Money-Back Tonal Guarantee. Made entirely in the U.S.A.

Mercury Magnetics
www.MercuryMagnetics.com
Sales@MercuryMagnetics.com
818-998-7791 404-325-0515

Mojo Musical Supply is your essential source for vintage amplifier and guitar parts, specializing in vintage pre-1980 reproduction cabinets and replacement components. Whether you are restoring

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Resource Directory

an older amp or building your own design or a vintage reproduction, we offer a full professional range of combo and speaker cabinets, speakers, grill cloth, baffleboards, chassis, transformers, components, tubes and hardware. The in-house cabinet shop at Mojo specializes in building authentic Fender and Marshall reproduction amplifier cabinets, custom cabinets from your own design, as well as expert 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. For restoration projects we also stock vintage-correct replacement faceplates, knobs, hardware, back panels and reverb parts. Mojo has also become one of the largest vacuum tube importers in the world, stocking over 20,000 tubes. Because we buy tubes in such large volumes, our prices are always very competitive. We also stock professional amplifier test equipment for the home or commercial bench. NEW! We now offer pedal repair parts and complete kits, plus René Martínez' "Texas Guitar Whiz" Signal Splitter.

For guitarists, builders and pro techs, Mojo has expanded our line of premium guitar components and parts to include bodies and necks, a full line of custom-wound single coil and humbucking pickups and parts, pickup covers, wiring harnesses, caps and potentiometers, hardware, tuners, bridges and tremolos, fret wire, knobs, nuts, switches and more...

Most importantly, you can depend on our knowledgeable and experienced staff here in Burgaw, North Carolina to help you make the right choice the first time! Be sure to access our online Knowledge Base, videos and blog at mojoshout.com.

ToneQuest readers receive an exclusive 10% discount on all Mojo products! Just reference the "MojoQuest" discount code when placing your order.

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

RS Guitarworks: You can depend on RS Guitarworks as your source for the finest custom guitars, expert guitar finishing, refinishing and aging, complete guitar assembly and repair, custom electronic upgrade kits, pickups, pickup covers, hard-to-find hardware, and more.

Located in Winchester, Kentucky, RS Guitarworks began as a small repair and shop in 1994. As the word spread among guitarists, business rapidly grew for RS, and today they receive guitars from around the world for restoration, finishing, aging and custom voicing with specialty components and exclusive pickups wound to RS specs by Lindy Fralin.

RS's Old Friend, SolarFlair, Stepside and custom guitars can be seen in the hands of many top players, and offer build quality and hardware second to none. Every guitar RS Guitarworks builds is meticulously crafted with wood personally selected by RS, finished in nitrocellulose lacquer, assembled with premium components, and individually voiced in final assembly as a true custom instrument.

RS Guitarworks also offers many hard-to-find aged, vintage replica parts and other specialty accessories for vintage Fender, Gibson and many other guitars that in many cases are exclusive to RS.

The RS Guitarworks Premium Wiring Kits offer a dramatic improvement over the factory electronics found in even the most expensive guitars. During extensive research and development in creating RS Premium kits, they tested over 20 different tone capacitors and nearly every type of potentiometer made before developing the RS SuperPot™. All the RS upgrade kits feature measured RS SuperPots™, that have a 5% tolerance for volumes, and CTST™ audio pots within 10% of their specified value for tone controls. Also in the RS kits are a wide variety of tone caps for single coil and humbucking pickups made by Jensen and vintage-correct replica caps by Luxe. RS Guitarworks™ also feature caps made here in the USA exclusively for RS called

GuitarCaps™. RS Guitarworks wiring upgrade kits impart a fuller, clearer tone than standard factory components, with a smoother, more even and responsive taper from each pot. Additionally, each potentiometer is tested on a digital meter, checked for the proper sweep pattern, sorted and labeled as a neck/volume, neck/tone, bridge/volume or bridge/tone control.

Wiring Upgrade Kits are available in Vintage, Modern and Reissue styles for various Les Paul type guitars, as well as 335/345/355, Telecaster, Stratocaster, PRS guitars, and Explorer and Flying V types in both kit and pre-wired versions.

Custom wiring and nearly any other configuration can also be built by calling RS Guitarworks™ directly at (859) 737-5300. Please call or visit the RS Guitarworks web site for complete information on finishing, refinishing, restoration and aging of new and used guitars custom wiring kits, vintage repro parts, pickups and repairs.

RS Guitarworks
859-737-5300, www.rsguitarworks.net

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

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Resource Directory

Swart Amplification: Long before the first Swart amp ever appeared, Michael Swart had been playing through vintage amps for decades at live gigs and recording sessions as both a guitarist and recording engineer in Wilmington, NC.

Despite his access to countless vintage Fender, Vox, and Ampeg amps, Swart always felt the quintessential small recording/home use amp had yet to be built, thus begin the quest for the best tone via a small, manageable package. After a slew of suitcase amp wannabees, emerged the original Space Tone 6V6se, a Class A, 5 watt, Single-Ended, tube rectified beast with an über simple circuit revolving around the soulful 6V6. The amp delivered big sound with unmatched musicality along with amazing distortion. The 18w Atomic Space Tone soon followed to wide acclaim, and Swart amplifiers were quickly embraced by working pros and guitarists who shared Swart's appreciation for truly exceptional guitar tone.

Today, six different Swart models are hand-built to serve the needs of guitarists for live performance and recording:

Space Tone 6V6se - The amp that started it all. 5w, Class A, Single-Ended, Tube Rectified, 8" Weber, finger-jointed, lacquered tweed pine cab. Amazing STR-Tweed - Another BIG Class A, Single-Ended 5w w/extra stage, Swart reverb, and 12" speaker. Atomic Space Tone - Perhaps the amp that REALLY put Swart on the map. Considered one of the finest made. 18w 6V6 or 6L6 with tube reverb & tremolo AST Pro: AST circuit w/ slightly larger cab, recessed knobs, 12" of choice AST Head MKII - AST in a head w/defeatable master volume and choice of cabinets Super Space Tone 30 Head (SST-30) 30w of soulful 6V6/6L6/EL-34 mother of tone beauty. Richer than chocolate. Matching, custom tweed 2 x 12 Space Tone Cabinet Head to Swart Online for the latest news, rants, photos, raves, artists, events, and dealer locations. Michael answers every call. Kelly responds to every mail. Personal service is #1 priority.

Swart Amplifier Co., Wilmington, NC
www.swartamps.com, 910-620-2512

Toneman: Veteran working guitarist Don Butler is an experienced tech who specializes in servicing, restoring JMI-era and modding Korg era Vox Amps to

vintage specs. These, of course would be valve (tube) amps. As well as servicing & upgrading any '62-'89 era valve Marshall amps. He also services most other Golden era British valves amps like HiWatt, Selmer, Orange, Laney's and Sound City's. Also included are Tweed, Blonde, Brown and Blackface era Fender Amps.

Don offers a number of standard mods for reissue Vox, Fender and Marshall amps to bring them into "Vintage Spec" and achieve that original tone/sound that reissues sadly lack. These have earned him a solid reputation throughout the country for dramatically improved, authentic Vintage Tone from reissue amplifiers. Don has used the hand-made Mercury Magnetics Axiom/Tone Clone transformers for over 20 years along with vintage spec Sozo Premium caps (both the Iskra/"mustard caps" replicas and Blue Molded Fender types) and Carbon Comp resistors in the signal path to bring reissue amps to Vintage specs. We also mod reissue Vox and Cry Baby Wah Wah's to original 1967 specs, Ibanez TS-9's and Upgrade Vox "Valve Tone" pedals.

Don is equally at home working on Gibson Historics and Standard Production guitars, Fender guitars, Rickenbacker, and of course, Gretsch Guitars. This applies to both Vintage models and current production guitars, electric and acoustic. Anything from re-frets & fret dressing, rewiring, etc. to simple set-ups and adjustments.

Don was also the first dealer for German made Pyramid Strings, starting in 1995. Don does attend the NAMM Show and the Frankfurt Musikmesse for Pyramid. Providing his input, Pyramid has re-introduced the Round Core, pure nickel flatwound "Pyramid Golds" and the exceptional Round core/round wound "Nickel Classics". All Pyramids use a silver plated core of German Steel and pure nickel wire wrap. All plain strings are pure silver plated German Steel.

Also available now are the Bronze Wound/Round Core Acoustic "Pyramid Western Folk". These strings are reminiscent of the strings from the '50's & '60's before most manufacturers went to Hex cores and smaller wrap wires. Strings can be ordered securely online through the website!

Toneman is open 10 am to 6 pm (Pacific Time), Tuesday thru Saturday!
661-259-4544, delb@earthlink.net,
www.tone-man.com

Visual Sound Founded in 1995, Visual Sound continues to grow and expand, while remaining true to their core commitment of "real tone for real people".

That commitment has become more than just a marketing slogan or mission statement: In 2012 Visual Sound was proud to announce its revolutionary Lifetime Warranty for all of its V2 and V3 series of pedals.

Bob Weil, founder and president, explains it this way: "We've worked hard for many years to make our products not only sound great, but also hold up to the demands of the working musician. The test procedures and quality control standards that R.G. Keen and I have developed are extremely thorough. On top of that, we designed our switching system to pretty much last forever, and we're very picky about our critical parts suppliers, too. When it comes down to it, we hate to have our gear go down in the middle of someone's gig, so we've gone over the top with reliability. To prove it, we're now offering a lifetime warranty on most of our pedals. And since we've been around since 1995, you can be confident we'll be around to support that warranty."

This "covered for life" promise extends to all V2 pedals, which includes the critically-acclaimed Jekyll & Hyde, Route 66, H2O, Double Trouble, Son of Hyde, Liquid Chorus, Route 808, Angry Fuzz, Open Road, TrueTone, and Van's Warped Distortion. In addition, the warranty applies to the still new (and growing) line of V3 pedals, which currently includes the Dual Tap Delay and Tap Delay pedals.

Expect to hear about new additions to the V3 Series in the very near future!

We're also happy to say that we continue to receive excellent reviews from Guitar Player, Guitar World, Premier Guitar, and Vintage Guitar magazines, as well as continuous compliments online, by phone, e-mail, and postal mail, for our unparalleled customer service and tech support.

To find out more about all of the pedals and ISPOT power supplies, and for more information about Visual Sound, sound samples, videos, artist endorsers and product information, please visit the Visual Sound web site, Facebook page, Twitter, or contact Bob Weil personally.

Visual Sound
www.visualsound.net
www.facebook.com/visualsoundpedals
www.youtube.com/visualsound.usa
931-487-9001

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Resource Directory

Wampler Pedals: There are a lot of pedal makers around that are just very ordinary. An overdrive, a distortion, maybe a fuzz thrown in, but nothing that really stands apart from the rest of the gear world. Maybe there's nothing terrible about being ordinary. Ordinary is safe and ordinary is comfortable, but the cost of being ordinary is living inside a box with all the other ordinary companies and builders who are doing the same old ordinary things and selling you the same old ordinary tones. But who wants to be ordinary? More importantly, who wants to sound ordinary?

Wampler Pedals makes effect pedals that are anything but ordinary. Guitarists like Wampler Pedals because they want to sound extraordinary. They want something that inspires them... to play better, create music better, and sound better.

While other builders play it safe selling products they've been making for decades, some of them reissuing designs that deserve the label "antique," Wampler has constantly pushed the envelope with new and exciting products designed to inspire guitarists to break out of the safety of the ordinary and into true excellence. Providing extremely high quality components and genuinely forward-thinking designs at prices that compete very well with anybody in the boutique industry, Wampler Pedals has a product to fit virtually every need.

Brian Wampler didn't invent the distortion pedal, but anyone who has used a few of his products can tell you he has done at least as much as anyone to make sure that the sound in your head can come out of your speakers. Best of all, it doesn't stop with what's available. With Brian Wampler continuing to wield the soldering iron like an artist's paint brush, the future has some serious tone in store. Wampler Pedals rocks today, and will rock tomorrow as new tonal options continue to be made available: definitely affordable, certainly competitive, and tonefully extraordinary.

Wampler Pedals
www.wamplerpedals.com
Brian Wampler
brian@wamplerpedals.com

Warehouse Guitar Speakers® LLC: is an Internet-based retail speaker supplier and manufacturer based in Paducah, KY – an area of the country with a long history in speaker manufacturing that includes the

original CTS company, Credence Speakers, Voice Communication Coil, and Hawley Products – the oldest cone manufacturer in the world. When an OEM speaker manufacturer needed to clear warehouse space in 2006, WGS was born and began manufacturing and selling American-assembled guitar speakers to the public.

Today we build a wide range of high-quality and reasonably priced 10 and 12-inch Alnico and Ceramic magnet guitars speakers that celebrate and reprise the golden era of speaker manufacturing in the USA and England during the '60s and '70s, including the 15 watt Alnico Black & Blue™, 50 watt Alnico BlackHawk™, 60 watt Veteran 30™, 25 watt Green Beref™, 80 watt British Lead™, 65 watt ET65™, 30 watt Reaper™, and 75 watt Retro 30™, among others. WGS also builds high-power bass and PA speakers, and we are constantly developing and adding new speaker models to meet the demands of today's guitarists.

Why should you consider buying WGS speakers? At a time when speaker manufacturers have moved production to Asia, compromising quality and reliability while prices continue to increase, our speakers are proudly assembled in the USA by a team with decades of speaker design and building experience, at a reasonable price. Our employees take pride in building the very best speakers available anywhere. Selling direct via the Web enables us to keep prices low without compromising quality. You buy direct from the manufacturer, and we proudly stand behind our products with fast shipping and exceptional customer service. For information on the entire range of WGS guitar and bass speakers, please visit our web site today.

Warehouse Guitar Speakers
www.WarehouseSpeakers.com
270-217-0740

WD Music Products: As a special offer WD® Music Products, Inc. is offering a 10% off coupon to Tonequest readers... Visit us at www.wdmusic.com and enter coupon code TQWD at checkout. Please note: Coupon good for wdmusic.com web orders only, offer not valid on wdbiz.com orders.

For the past thirty years WD® Music Products has been providing quality service and parts to satisfied working musicians, discriminating builders and OEMs. WD® pioneered the field of aftermarket

pickguards and continues to lead the way in the niche we created in 1978. We have manufactured thousands of pickguards and if you need a replacement or something you envision yourself we can make it happen. For many years WD® Music has also carried a full line of replacement parts for just about any stringed instrument.

WD® Music is proud to continue the legacy of Kluson® tuning machines, one of the most respected OEM and replacement tuners for decades. Replace or restore your vintage instrument with genuine Kluson® tuning machines from WD® Music. We stock Kent Armstrong® pickups, L.R. Baggs® acoustic gear, Q-Parts® custom knobs and accessories, Bigsby® tailpieces, Graph Tech® products, Wilkinson® bridges, Grover® tuners and accessories, Big Bends® maintenance supplies, Guitar Facelifts, effects and much more.

History is repeating itself with genuine Kluson® tuners, continuing with WD®'s customer service, and...Stromberg® Jazz Guitars. No one can attempt or claim to reproduce the prestige of the original archtop Stromberg® guitars. But with history in mind WD® is also proud to distribute Stromberg® Jazz Guitars. With six models to satisfy everyone from the serious working jazz musician to the rockabilly king Stromberg® offers an affordable, quality instrument for almost any taste or style. Stromberg® jazz Guitars is a small, limited production archtop guitar company whose main goals are quality, playability and affordability. Play one and see.

WD® Music Products. Thirty years of knowledge, service, quality parts and accessories waiting to serve you. Everything from pickguards, tuning machines, pickups, electronics, necks, bodies, bridges, prewired assemblies and hard to find hardware—if your guitar or bass needs it, chances are WD® Music has it. Old fashioned customer service, genuine Kluson® tuners, classic Stromberg® Jazz Guitars, and so much more.

877-WDMUSIC
www.WDmusic.com

ToneQuest



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the ToneQuest Report™

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