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**From the beginning, Hot Rize wanted to stretch beyond the traditional bluegrass that its founding members loved.**

p. 32

## Features

### 18 Dark Star

Forty years after his death, Nick Drake continues to inspire

**By Derk Richardson**

### 24 Wayfaring

#### Stranger No More

Ed Sheeran has taken the acoustic guitar to places it hasn't seen since the rise of the Everlys

**By Mark Segal Kemp**

### 32 Free Spirits

Hot Rize reunion results in a tour and first studio album in 24 years

**By Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers**

## Special Focus

### Your Next Guitar

41 What you need to know to take the next step in your acoustic guitar journey

## Miscellany

### 10 From the Home Office

### 12 Opening Act

### 101 Ad Index

### 102 Events

### December 2014

Volume 24, No. 18, Issue 264

### On the Cover

Ed Sheeran

### Photographer

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## 84

**Great Acoustics**  
Hank Williams'  
other guitar**NEWS****14 The Beat**

The 'midnight ride' comes to an end for the Allman Brothers

**PLAY****54 Songcraft**

Doug Paisley's not-so-silly little love songs

**SONGS TO PLAY****56 If I Fell** by the Beatles**58 Wayfaring Stranger** by Johnny Cash**60 Bless the Telephone** by Kelis**62 Good King Wenceslas**, by Pete Seeger**66 Basics**

How to rock your riffing with '5' chords

**68 Weekly Workout**

Walk your jazz bass lines with chord accompaniment

**72 Here's How**

Safety tips for traveling with your guitar

**AG TRADE****75 Shop Talk**

Tempo AnyCase Device lets you track your guitar's whereabouts

**76 Kitbag**

Improve the sound of your home-recording space

**78 Makers & Shakers**

Paul Reed Smith's acoustic guitars are as powerful as the company's electrics

**82 Guitar Guru**

What happens when your flattop loses its flat top?

**84 Great Acoustics**

Hank Williams' other guitar

**86 Review: Collings 01 12-Fret**

The parlor guitar with the big sound

**88 Review: Eastman E20SS**

A handsome instrument at a workhorse price

**90 Review: Bedell's Revere Orchestra**

Built for the road, but you may want to keep it at home

**92 Pickin'**

Seagull's new Merlin gives guitar players an exciting new voice

**MIXED MEDIA****94 Playlist**

Damien Rice's charming third effort, *My Favorite Faded Fantasy*, plus new releases by Luke Winslow-King, Laurie Lewis and Kathy Kallick, Rome, the Alt, and David Childers

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In this video from *Elixir*, Strahle gives some tips on improving your acoustic grooves and plays through a few examples that will help your playing.

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Ed Sheeran

## Watch 'Acoustic Guitar Sessions' Online

If you love AG's print stories, don't miss our online performance series *Acoustic Guitar Sessions*. Go to [AcousticGuitar.com/Sessions](http://AcousticGuitar.com/Sessions) and watch rising star Ed Sheeran play a stirring version of "Thinking Out Loud" from his latest album, X. While you're at the AG Sessions page, check out appearances from other artists including Richard Thompson, Ani DiFranco, John Doe, Valerie June, and more.

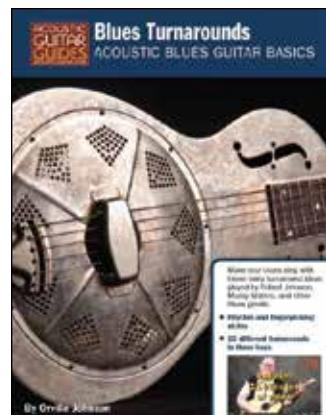
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# Pop Goes the Acoustic

**I**t was hard not to imagine a young Van Morrison when I sat down with Ed Sheeran during his appearance on our online video series *Acoustic Guitar Sessions* and watched him play and sing the soulful “Thinking Out Loud,” from his latest album, X. His eyes tightly shut and bright ginger hair all in a perfect mess, Sheeran plucked out a percussive riff on a little 00-size Martin and delivered a series of very Van-like lines, such as, “When my hair’s all but gone and my memory fades, and the crowds don’t remember my name. / When my hands don’t play the strings the same way, I know you will still love me the same. / ‘Cause honey, your soul could never grow old, it’s evergreen.”

He could have been singing, “I can hear her heart beat for a thousand miles, and the heavens open every time she smiles,” from Morrison’s “Crazy Love,” or “And I will never, ever, ever, ever grow so old again,” from “Sweet Thing.”

Not that Ed Sheeran is the second coming of Van Morrison. Far from it. Sheeran is very much himself—a full-on, 21<sup>st</sup>-century pop star who draws equally from contemporary R&B, ‘90s hip-hop, and ‘70s acoustic folk and soul. Rather than being a retro singer-songwriter selling oldies to his parents’ generation, what Sheeran’s massive success shows is the endurance of the acoustic guitar in popular music—not just in the singer-songwriter or country-bluegrass realms, but also

in the pure, unadulterated, teen-loving pop world. Watching Sheeran play an intimate performance for “AG Sessions” and then, just hours later, witnessing him mesmerize an arena full of young pop fans was an eye-opening experience. You can read what makes Sheeran such an important and compelling contemporary pop star in this issue’s cover story on page 24.

From the earliest days of recorded popular culture, young stars have used the power and simplicity of acoustic guitars to change the way people experience music. Elvis’ famed Gibson J-200 was nearly as iconic as his quivering lip. Dylan fans loved his 1930s Gibson Nick Lucas Special so much that some of them had temper tantrums when he strapped on an electric. One young singer-songwriter from Dylan’s era, the late Nick Drake, *should* have been a pop star, but the record industry at the time didn’t know how to market his brooding, acoustic-based songs. It took another quarter-century, when VW used one of Drake’s songs in a TV ad, for popular culture to catch up with his tortured genius. On page 18, AG contributor Derk Richardson brings Drake’s story to the present.

The beauty of the acoustic guitar is its flexibility. You can play music of any genre on an acoustic—blues, folk, country, bluegrass, jazz, rock, mainstream pop. But it’s important to know what kind of acoustic works best for what you want to achieve. Most players realize at some point that one guitar is not enough. If you’re thinking of expanding your acoustic-guitar arsenal, AG contributor Adam Perlmutter has put together a handy guide to buying your next model, whether you’re upgrading to higher-quality woods or looking for a new style of guitar, such as a 12-string, a resonator, an archtop, tiny parlor, or big jumbo. Learn about all those types and more in our special section on buying your next guitar beginning on page 41.

The acoustic guitar has survived lots of threats since the electric guitar drove its way into the jazz of the 1930s. And yet folks kept picking and strumming—through the swirling psychedelia of the late ‘60s, the bloated pop-metal and loud-fast punk of the ‘70s and ‘80s, the distorted grunge and hip-hop of the ‘90s, and the electronic dance music that’s all but killed off old-style rock in the early decades of the current century. Then along comes another Ed Sheeran with just an acoustic guitar and a few good ideas, and—voila!—the acoustic is back at the top of the charts yet again.

—Mark Segal Kemp

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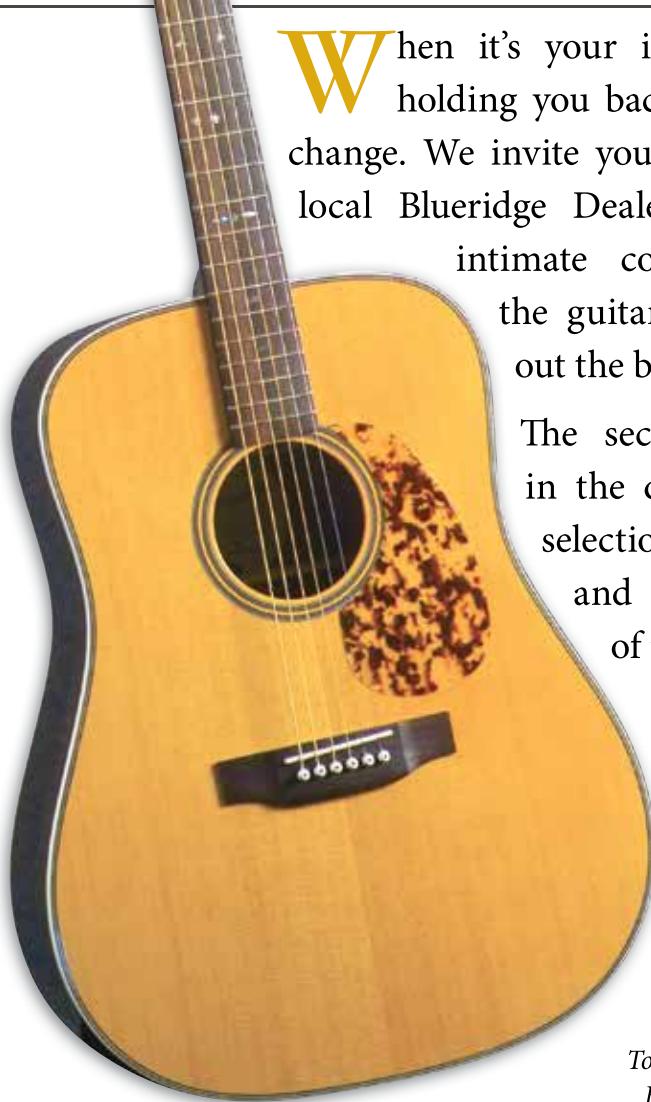
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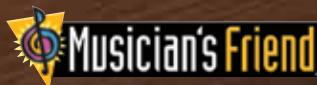
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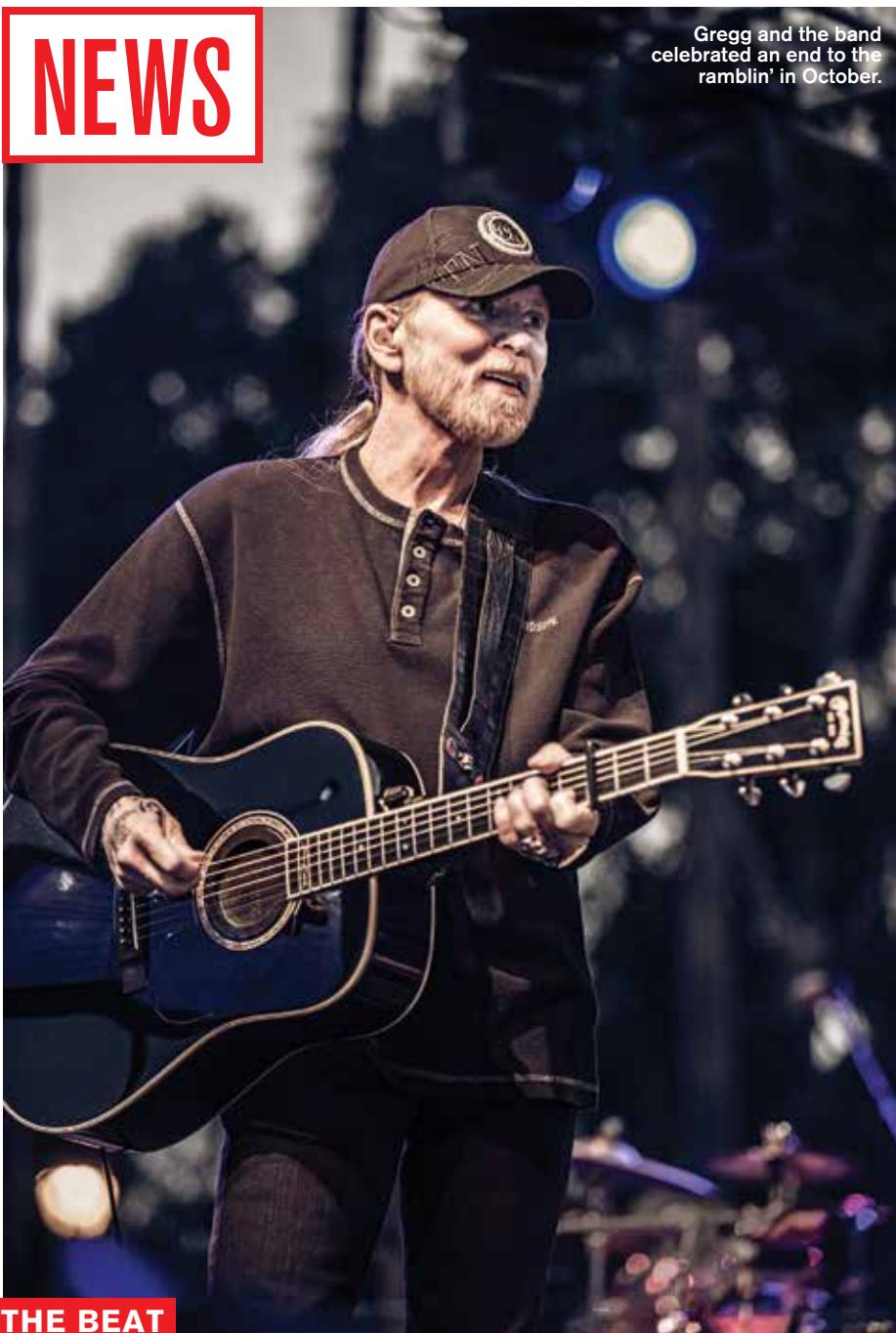
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# NEWS



THE BEAT

Gregg and the band celebrated an end to the ramblin' in October.

## The Road Stops Here

**Gregg Allman talks about what kept the Allman Brothers Band going—through the darkness as well as the light**

BY MARK SEGAL KEMP

**T**he name Allman Brothers Band conjures specific thoughts and images: Long hair; long, improvisational blues-based jams; the South; struggle and endurance; and most of all, more than four decades of great music.

Over the past 45 years, no rock band has made a bigger impact on how music fans and

players experience all the different strains of American song. Early on, the Allmans broke down musical barriers, merging the blues, jazz, folk, country, Latin styles, and more into a tasty Southern gumbo that appealed to multiple generations. The Allmans also broke through social barriers, being a mixed-race ensemble from the

South at a time when that was at best taboo; at worst, it was forbidden.

The Allmans broke endurance barriers, too, weathering heavy, heavy periods of darkness—the death of their pioneering lead guitarist, Duane Allman, shortly into the band's career; the death of their founding bass player, Berry Oakley, only a year later; band turmoil over drug use, drug busts, and disloyalty. And yet, through it all, the Brothers soldiered on, licked their wounds, made amends, offered forgiveness, fell out again, brought new ace musicians into the fold—and remained the Allman Brothers Band, with an unmistakable style of live improvisation that kept a steady following of rabid fans flocking to shows, year after year.

Along the way, the Allmans contributed such acoustic-guitar standards as "Melissa," "Midnight Rider," "Little Martha," and "Pony Boy."

Now, the Allman Brothers Band is at the end of a road that was to go on forever. The group played its final performances in October at the Beacon Theatre in New York City. AG's editor had a recent opportunity to ask singer, keyboardist, and founding member Gregg Allman about the band's legacy, endurance, and, of course, what his favorite acoustic ABB songs are.

**When all is said and done, you and your brother Duane formed a basic blues band that carried a great American tradition forward. What was it about the Allman Brothers Band's sound that proved to be so magical and so popular among so many fans—and among multiple generations?**

When we started out, there just wasn't another band like us. Think about it, man; we had two drummers, two guitar players who played these dual harmony lines, a bassist who played like a third guitarist, and a lead singer hidden behind a 450-pound Hammond B-3. Then you got the fact that we were a bunch of long-haired hippies—with a black guy, to boot—living in Macon, Georgia, and playing all across the Deep South.

Man, I look back at that now, and it's really amazing what we did. We overcame so much, and we did it by playing our music, our way. We'd play anywhere for anyone, man. We won over fans one gig at a time. You should look at our old routings—we'd jump all over the damn map to play. You got to understand that we were on the road for over 300 days in 1970; it was insane, but my brother had a vision and we all shared in it. We were trailblazers, we were musical explorers—when we stepped on a stage, we played as one.

**When Duane called you home from Los Angeles to join this new band he'd put together, what were your feelings about leaving L.A. and returning to the South to make music? Did you think it would work? Did you worry you might be putting a successful solo career in jeopardy?**

Well, I was always the “doubting Thomas” of the band. In the beginning, I just didn’t see how we could possibly make it work. I just wanted to go back to school and become a dental surgeon, but my brother made me believe through the sheer force of his will, and so I stuck it out. I don’t think I was actually convinced the band was going to make it until [the live] *At Fillmore East* came out, but that album would make a believer out of anyone, man! *Fillmore East* is the best thing we ever did.

**Since this is for a magazine devoted to the acoustic guitar, can you tell me what your favorite acoustic-based Allman Brothers song is—the one that will continue to be played by followers of the Allmans many years from now?**

You know what? I’ve got to give you two, man. I’m going with “Melissa,” because it was the first song I wrote that was actually worth keeping. I wrote it in 1967 on my brother’s acoustic guitar, which was tuned to open E. I didn’t know about open tuning. All I knew was when I strummed that Gibson, all these beautiful chords came tumbling out. My brother loved that song, and through him, I learned about open tuning.

“Midnight Rider” would be the other one. It’s the song I’m most proud of, I believe. I wrote that one in open G, and I love both versions of the song. The original one I wrote for the Allman Brothers, and the more haunting one I changed up for *Laid Back*, my first solo album.

**Who do you think is the most important acoustic-blues guitarist of all time—and why do you think this?**

Robert Johnson, man. It pretty much begins and ends right there. Without him, you don’t have anybody else.

**The ABB lasted a long, long time. What was the secret to your band’s longevity, even through some very, very tough times—situations other bands couldn’t imagine—and what can younger bands learn from your resolve to keep going and keep playing?**

Our secret isn’t really that secret: you have to persevere, no matter what happens.

The most important thing we did—and it’s something that I’m very proud of—is we kept the high standards my brother set all those years ago. If you look at the quality of players we’ve had in this band, I think Duane would have approved.

**What are your plans now? Will you continue writing, recording, and performing?**

Music is my life’s blood, man. I tell people that all the time. I plan on playing until I can’t play anymore. They’re gonna have to pull me off the stage.

AC



Talking New York City Blues

## A FRESH LOOK AT WOODY'S WORLD

Walk a mile, or more, in his shoes. Troubadour **Woody Guthrie** was known for rambling around the country, but a new audio book follows his footsteps around the Big Apple. *My Name Is New York: Ramblin' Around Woody Guthrie's Town*, by the singer-songwriter's daughter, Nora Guthrie, features two discs with

19 tracks highlighting significant locations where Guthrie lived and wrote, as told by **Pete Seeger**, **Arlo Guthrie**, **Ramblin' Jack Elliott**, **Bob Dylan**, folklorist **Bess Lomax Hawes**, and many others. A third disc features 16 of Woody's songs about New York, including previously unreleased material. —*Greg Cahill*

## THE GUITAR THAT STARTED A STONE ROLLING

At 70, Rolling Stones guitarist **Keith Richards** is on a new mission.

“I’ve realized, you know, it’s time to make grandpas hip,” Richards told the *Today* show during an interview about his latest project, the children’s book *Gus & Me: The Story of My Graddad and My First Guitar* (MT Books/Little Brown & Co.).

A follow-up of sorts to Richards’ acclaimed 2011 autobiography, *Life*, which chronicled decades of hard living with the Stones, *Gus & Me* presents a kinder and gentler side of the rocker, focusing on his close relationship with his grandfather, Theodore Augustus Dupree, who gave Richards his first acoustic guitar. The publisher of Richards’ bio found the stories of his grandfather compelling.

“While I was working on *Life*,” they said, ‘We think this chapter about your grandfather could make a really nice kids’ book,’ ” Richards told *Pop & Hiss*. “I said, ‘Are you kidding me?’ ”

Released in September, *Gus & Me* comes at a time when Richards is reveling in his own role as a grandfather.

“It happened to coincide with my first daughter, Angela, having my fifth grandchild,” the guitarist told the Associated Press.

“And I realized that I wanted to give my own grandfather his due for having turned me on to music.”

Keeping the project in the family, Richards’ daughter with Patti Hansen, Theodora Richards (who was named after her great-granddad), illustrated the book. —*David Knowles*

## LEGACY RELEASES EXPANDED 'BASEMENT TAPES'

*The Basement Tapes*, the iconic series of lo-fi demos recorded in 1967 in the cellar of the Band's pink ranch house in Woodstock, New York, are back—bigger and weirder than ever. Those relaxed, acoustic-oriented sessions, widely bootlegged and oft-covered, lay unreleased by Columbia Records until 1975. The sessions produced volumes of material written by Bob Dylan and recorded with members of the Band on an old Revox A-77 reel-to-reel tape machine in the cinder-block cellar with the musicians packed around a churning furnace, clanging pipes, and an oil-stained concrete floor. At the time, Dylan would retreat up the stairs to the kitchen table to tap out new songs on a typewriter.

The resulting tracks evoke what Dylan biographer Greil Marcus, in his 1997 book *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*, called “that weird old America.”

The fabled sessions—recordings of ancient blues and country songs, plus 60 originals—are



a window into one of the most productive collaborations in pop-music history. Now, for the first time, Columbia/Legacy has released the whole kit and caboodle on *The Basement Tapes Complete: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 11*—six discs, 138 tracks (a 38-song, two-CD—or hi-def three-LP—set of highlights also is planned).

The box set is a chance to eavesdrop at the top of the basement stairs at 2188 Stoll Road—immortalized in the Band's 1968 debut *Music from Big Pink*—listening to Bob and the boys spin their magic while conjuring the ghosts of America's musical past . . . and retro future.

At press time, the expanded edition was scheduled for a November 4 release.

Meanwhile, producer T-Bone Burnett, Elvis Costello, Rhiannon Giddens of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, Marcus Mumford of Mumford & Sons, Taylor Goldsmith of Dawes, and Jim James of My Morning Jacket have teamed up on *Lost on the River: The New Basement Tapes*, featuring 24 songs based on newly discovered lyrics from the Basement Tapes sessions. That project, set for a November 11 release, is the subject of a new Showtime cable documentary, *Lost Songs: The Basement Tapes Continued*. —G.C.

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# DARK STAR

**FORTY  
YEARS AFTER  
HIS DEATH,  
THE SONGS OF  
NICK DRAKE—  
FLUSH WITH  
MELANCHOLY &  
MYSTIQUE—  
CONTINUE  
TO INSPIRE  
GUITARISTS  
BY DERK  
RICHARDSON**

**N**ick Drake died in the dark. Not just in the literal shadow of nighttime—although he did apparently pass away before dawn on November 25, 1974, from an overdose of antidepressants—but also at a moment when the reclusive British singer-songwriter could have no way of gleaning the influence he would exert on generations of guitarists and songwriters.

Drake's death at 26 came while he languished in obscurity. The three albums released during his short career—*Five Leaves Left* (1969), *Bryter Layter* (1970), and *Pink Moon* (1972)—each sold in the low thousands. His seniors and peers in Britain's political and purist folk-revival scene shunned Drake for his privileged middle-class upbringing and Cambridge education, and his impact in the United States was negligible.

Then, almost 25 years later, on November 11, 1999, Volkswagen launched an advertising campaign for its Cabrio convertible that paired Drake's song "Pink Moon" with footage of four friends driving on a moonlit country road. Thanks to the mood-driven TV ad, Drake posthumously stepped into the spotlight—the album of the same title sold a staggering 74,000 copies the following year.

## STAR

Since then, anthologies, box sets, demo and rarity collections, tribute concerts and recordings, and cover versions of Drake's songs by such diverse artists as Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams, Beth Orton, Calexico, and Beck have all contributed to Drake's belated renown.

"It is sobering to think that more people now hear his songs in a month than ever heard them in his lifetime," Joe Boyd wrote in the liner notes to 2013's *Way to Blue: The Songs of Nick Drake*, an album culled from tribute concerts in the U.K., Australia, and Italy. The American-born Boyd, who became the producer for the Incredible String Band, Fairport Convention, Richard and Linda Thompson, and Kate and Anna McGarrigle, discovered Drake (on a tip from Fairport's Ashley Hutchings) and produced his first two albums.

"His music was unlike anything else I'd ever heard," Boyd says in a phone conversation from London. "He just bowled me over right away."

In the wake of the Volkswagen commercial, as well as the subsequent placement of Drake's songs in television shows and films, including *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *The Good Girl*, and *Garden State*, that same reaction eventually became widespread and helped spawn the rise of the most recent new folk movement.



Devendra Banhart, Iron and Wine, Will Oldham, Elliott Smith, and José González all owe stylistic debts to Drake's softly sung, introspective lyrics over acoustic guitar.

"My first thought was to compare him to Bert Jansch, Robin Williamson, John Martyn, and John Renbourn," Boyd says. "There was that whole genre of complex, fingerpicked guitar playing in Britain, Davey Graham being the grandfather of all of them. You could hear that Nick's playing was related to that, but it was so different. It didn't really have a folksiness about it. It was much more urbane and sophisticated. The main thing that impressed me about Nick, was his perfection."

That impeccability is especially evident on *Pink Moon*, the album that Drake recorded with only guitar and voice (and a bit of piano).

Musicians have been grappling for decades with the often-complex puzzles of guitar tunings, counter-intuitive fingerpicking patterns, and

asymmetric vocal lines that Drake created on the record.

"Some years after his death, Gabrielle, his sister, gave me a cassette made by their mother, Molly," Boyd says. (The album from that tape, *Molly Drake*, was released in 2013.) "She wrote and played songs on piano, and there's a unique way that she voices chords that made me think that Nick's complex tunings were his way of trying to replicate on the guitar the way his mother played the piano."

When Boyd was called upon to help put together a Nick Drake tribute at Birmingham Town Hall in 2009, he knew the guitar parts would require a special talent. He enrolled Neill MacColl, the son of British folk legend Ewan MacColl and American folksinger Peggy Seeger.

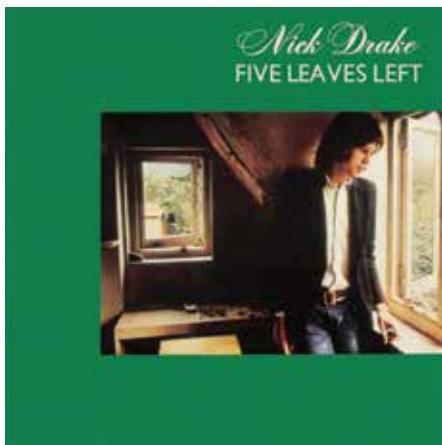
"I'd fallen in love with Nick Drake in my 20s," Neill MacColl says. "I was at the house of the drummer in my band, and I'd never heard *Five Leaves Left*. I had one of those experiences.

Seven hours later he was begging me to stop playing the record over and over again."

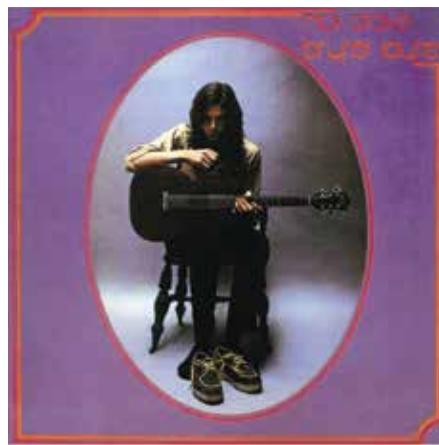
Now in his mid-50s, MacColl adds that unlocking Drake's guitar playing for the concert proved to be a challenge. "When I started trying to learn the songs, my God, some of them are hard, because they just don't do what you're expecting them to do, at all. His right-hand fingering, particularly, is like playing an upside-down guitar at times. And just the sheer number of tunings! For the gigs we did, I had eight different tunings to get through."

It was more than just the guitar that made Drake's music so vexing. "The Robert Kirby string arrangements on *Five Leaves Left* and *Bryter Layter* weaved a spell on me," MacColl says. "But it was the whole thing. It was fragile without feeling like it was going to fall apart. And his was the most unsquare singing there is. That phrasing was so particular to him—he never starts where you expect, he never ends where you expect."

**Musicians have been grappling for decades with the often-complex puzzles of guitar tunings, counter-intuitive fingerpicking patterns, and asymmetric vocal lines that Drake created.**



**Five Leaves Left**  
Island

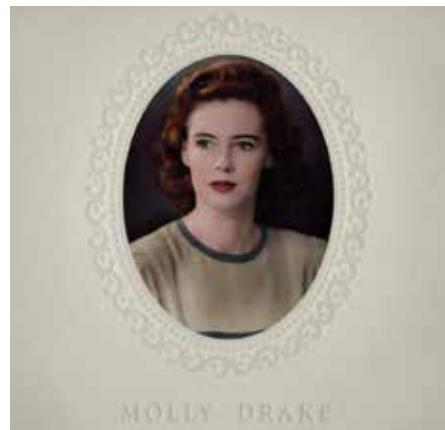


**Bryter Layer**  
Island



**Pink Moon**  
Island

**Molly Drake**  
Squirrel Thing



**T**hat tension between the complex beauty of Drake's music and the desolation of his lyrics is perhaps what brings most listeners, including musicians, under his sway. Singer-songwriter William Fitzsimmons, who came to prominence when his songs "Passion Play" and "Please Don't Go" were used in the popular TV series *Grey's Anatomy*, describes himself as "a little bit obsessed" with Drake, whom he first heard via the Volkswagen commercial.

"I don't want to over-romanticize it," Fitzsimmons says in a phone conversation from his home in Illinois, "but I heard 'Pink Moon' and I kind of froze in my tracks. I'd never heard anything like that before. I bought *Pink Moon* and it became the desert island disc after the first listen."

Fitzsimmons was working in a hospital psychiatry unit in New Jersey at the time, planning to pursue psychotherapy as a profession, partly because he had coped with his own depression. "In all honesty, the mental-health stuff was coming through to me very clearly in his music, especially on *Pink Moon*. But there was also this explosion of something in my head when I realized you didn't have to leave the guitar in standard tuning."

**P**erhaps no one has analyzed Drake's song structures more than Robin Frederick, a music-industry professional who coaches songwriters and has written several books on the craft. She met a young Nick in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France in 1967, when she was a teenage Los Angeles girl with a guitar, and he was an upper middle-class Brit indulging in the free-spirited atmosphere (and drugs) of the setting. Already a remarkable guitarist, Drake, born in Burma in 1949 and raised in the small village of Tanworth-in-Arden in Warwickshire, England, hadn't yet started singing his own compositions. Instead, he performed traditional tunes and songs by the major influences of the day. Late-'60s homemade recordings of Drake singing Bob Dylan's "Tomorrow Is a Long Time," Dave Van Ronk's "Cocaine Blues," Bert Jansch's "Strolling Down the Highway," and Jackson C. Frank's "Blues Run the Game" are on the 2007 collection *Family Tree*.

In an essay for *Mojo* magazine in 1999, Frederick confirmed that the famously shy Drake was in many ways a cipher, albeit a seductive one. "We knew each other for only a short time," she wrote. "I'm still not sure who I met; but then, that's what everyone says about him. Yet, for someone who was so elusive, he had an unmistakable presence that drew people to him. To put it bluntly, falling in love with Nick was a no-brainer and I promptly did; not that I ever let on, mind you."

After leaving France for Greece and eventually California, Frederick lost touch with Drake, who traveled to Morocco before returning to England. Like so many others, she discovered Drake's albums only after his death.

"When you play guitar, there's a tendency to strum and change chords on beat one," Frederick says from Los Angeles. "But there's also a tendency to start a melody phrase and a lyric phrase all at the same time, as you strum that beat one. Nick was not starting his vocal phrases on beat one. He was starting them on

unusual, unexpected beats, and it created that wonderful, floating, atmospheric feel.

"Today, we all start singing phrases on beat three or beat four—anywhere *but* beat one," she continues. "When I work with young songwriters, 14, 15, 16 years old, I notice they have absorbed this style thoroughly."

Drake's experience playing saxophone had a lot to do with his phrasing, Frederick argues. "When you listen to 'They're Leaving Me Behind,' he's playing this very steady, very fast guitar part of eighth notes—one, two, three / one, two, three / one, two—underneath this long, slow, running-out-of-breath vocal line. Then listen to Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and a track like 'All Blues.' The drums are playing these fast eighth-note things, and over the top of it Miles is playing these long, smooth lines—the same thing Nick was doing. Nick put that together with folk, and his music became this mélange of folk, Latin, pop, and jazz. It was just so far ahead of its time that he couldn't find an audience."

Drake labored over his complicated musical structures, Frederick says, in the service of prosody, the matching of words and music to evoke intense feeling. His widely covered "River Man" is a prime example. "You can listen to 'River Man' for years and never notice that it's written in 5/4," she says.

"Nick is holding the chords out for two long bars and starting the melody in no man's land in the middle. The overall feel is this sensation of floating down the river, even as he's singing about 'the ban on feeling free.' It's like he's saying, 'I want you, the listener, to feel like you're floating on this wonderful music, but I feel like I'm stuck in this backwater.' Everybody else is moving forward on this wonderful river—'Oh, how they come and go.' I think it's one of the saddest songs ever written. This dynamic is in song after song after song. The momentum is always in the music. It's only the lyrics that say, 'I can't go there with you.' "

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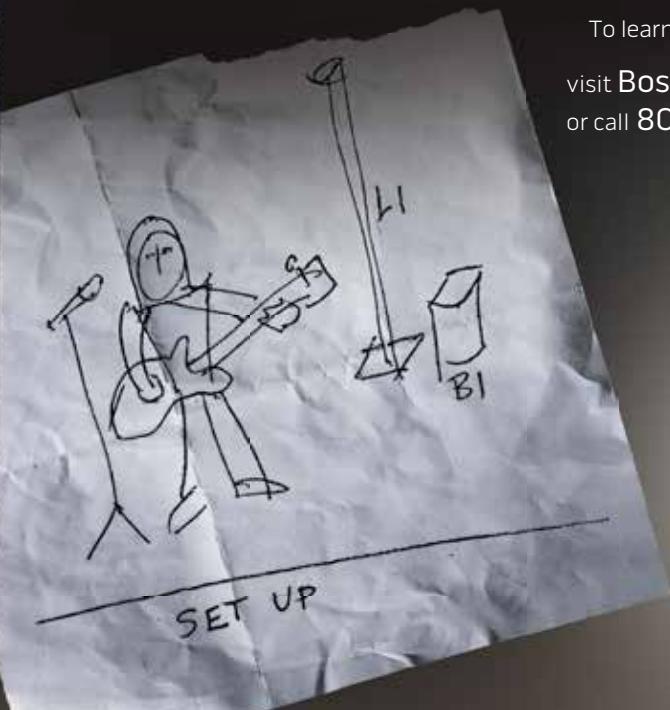
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# THE NICK DRAKE SHRINE



**'His right-hand fingering, particularly, is like playing an upside-down guitar at times. And just the sheer number of tunings!'**

**Neill MacColl**



TOM COPS

**'I love the mystery and not knowing how Nick Drake got his songs to sound like that.'**

**Mariee Sioux**



ERIN BROWN

**'I heard 'Pink Moon' and I kind of froze in my tracks.'**

**William Fitzsimmons**



**'The main thing that impressed me about Nick was his perfection.'**

**Joe Boyd**



ALLEN CRAWFORD

**'Nick's music opens your heart and protects it all at once.'**

**Meg Baird**

"Take a song like 'Fly'—you can't play it in standard tuning and get the same feeling," Fitzsimmons continues "The voicings that he's using hit a different part of your heart. With a lot of Nick's songs, like 'Northern Sky,' 'Which Will,' and 'Place to Be,' I truly believe that you could listen to the instrumental and map out a general idea of what the song is about, without the lyrics."

Conversely, California singer-songwriter Mariee Sioux—who is closely identified with the psych-folk movement for which Drake is nothing less than a godhead—makes little effort to parse Drake's music. When she was a teenager, Sioux, now 29, first heard *Time of No Reply*, the 1986 Drake collection of alternate and previously unreleased tracks.

"I listened to it nonstop, and for years after that," Sioux says. "Hearing his voice, I could feel exactly how he felt. I had always felt a lot of depression, and I could hear the sadness. It just spoke to me at that time in my life." But Sioux, who made her commercial recording debut in 2007 with *Faces in the Rocks*, has never tried to play a Drake song.

"I totally understand how someone would want to go there, but I don't want to break into the magic," she says. "I love the mystery and not knowing how Nick Drake got his songs to sound like that."

Meg Baird, who ascended into psych-folk semi-stardom with the Philadelphia band Espers, was first exposed to Drake in the mid-1990s, when a band she was in covered "Hanging on a Star." When Baird's sister and musical partner, Laura, gave her a mix tape of Drake's music, she got hooked. "It never much left my car deck for quite some time," Baird says. "This was such good, gentle music that ties together what feels like truly ancient sounds with modern sounds. It seems like the feeling comes from a great deal of work, re-work, and consideration."

Drake's influence can be heard on Baird's solo albums *Dear Companion* and *Seasons on Earth*. On the latter, she says, she "drifted into" one of Drake's favored tunings, D-G-D-G-A-D. "It wasn't conscious on my part, but I'm sure my ear gravitated to it because of Nick's writing."

Tunings, techniques, and genre experimentations may all be part of Nick Drake's legacy, but Fitzsimmons, Sioux, and Baird are onto something when they speak of the less tangible aspects of Drake's appeal. "Sometimes you aim for the heart in music," Baird says. "Sometimes you aim to strengthen, or agitate, or yearn. Nick's music opens your heart and protects it all at once. It offers an incredible depth of intention, encouraging you to do your best to incorporate that intention into anything you are making."

Nick Drake may have died in darkness, but through his singular sound he left behind a timeless template for self-expression, and, ironically, an artistic light that shines ever brighter. **AG**

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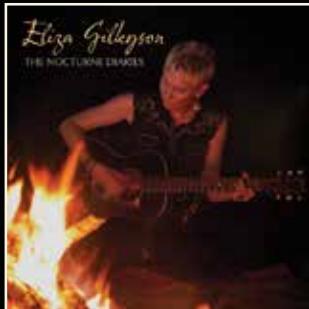


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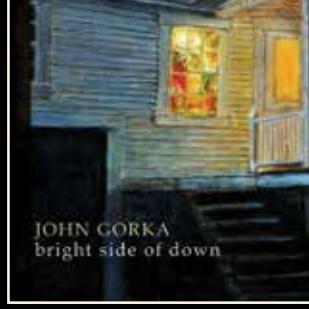
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BY MARK SEGAL KEMP



IN LESS THAN FIVE YEARS, POP SINGER-SONGWRITER

# ED SHEERAN

HAS BECOME A HOUSEHOLD NAME—  
AND TAKEN THE ACOUSTIC GUITAR TO PLACES  
IT HASN'T SEEN SINCE THE RISE OF THE EVERLYS

**W**hen the lights go down and a lone silhouette appears onstage under four towering LED screens inside the gargantuan SAP Center in San Jose, California, the place erupts into deafening screams. Ed Sheeran, who walked away from the MTV Video Music Awards in Los Angeles the week before with a Moon Man statue for Best Male Video, launches into the sweet sorrow of "I'm a Mess," from his new album *X*. Nearly every one of the 8,000 mostly young, mostly female fans mouths the words to the song, as if they, too, have suffered the relationship turmoil it describes.

For about two hours, 23-year-old Sheeran—with just one 00-size custom Martin guitar, a Little Martin, a couple of mics, and a loop station—positively commands the arena, performing a smart mix of gentle acoustic ballads and deeply percussive, high-energy, acoustic-based pop and soul. About five songs into his set—between the rap-based "Take it Back" and the sweet acoustic-pop of "One"—the red-headed singer and guitarist, looking like a young Van Morrison in jeans and a blue plaid shirt over a black T, smiles bashfully and confesses to the audience in a charming British purr, "I'm still quite surprised that so many people are interested."

Sheeran should be surprised. Just four years ago, he was still releasing EPs independently through the DIY website Tunecore, hoping people would like his songs enough to click "purchase." Each set sold better than the next, and by January 2011 he had gained critical mass when his fifth attempt, *No. 5 Collaborations Project*, shot to No. 2 on iTunes and sold more than 7,000 copies without a whisper of major-label promotion. It led to a feeding frenzy that resulted in Sheeran's signing to Asylum/Atlantic Records and the release of his debut, *+*, in September. The album topped charts from England, Ireland, and Scotland to Australia and New Zealand, reaching No. 5 in the United States, and spawning six singles, including "The A Team," which hit No. 16 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Sheeran was suddenly a hot commodity, writing songs for the British boy band One Direction, performing with Elton John, and touring as the opening act for Taylor Swift's 2013 Red Tour. When *X* came out last

June, it debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard* and spent a remarkable eight weeks at the top of the charts in Sheeran's native England.

What's surprising, though, isn't so much that an acoustic guitar-playing singer-songwriter has become such a huge success in an age of heavily digitized pop. After all, acoustic guitars have been on the rise across the pop spectrum since Damien Rice, Jason Mraz, Jack Johnson, and India Arie arrived on the music scene of the early 2000s, followed by the even bigger success of Swift, who brought her acoustic-based pop to an ever-widening country audience. The *really* surprising thing about Sheeran is that his acoustic music is skewing even younger, galvanizing a huge swathe of the same teen-pop audience that follows boy bands, and that he's doing it all by himself—no costumes, no choreography, no big props, and no slick electronic band behind him. In San Jose, Sheeran maintains a sizzling, electric vibe throughout his show by employing big, fat loops of luscious picking, strumming, and thumping on his tiny Martin—big enough to captivate thousands of young multi-taskers who are also checking their phones, snapping selfies, and posting to social media.

"It's amazing how much noise a ginger-haired boy with an acoustic guitar can make," says Rick Rubin, who helped produce *X* along with five others, including the ubiquitous hip-hop beatmaster Pharrell Williams.

"He is explosive!"

The collaboration with Rubin made sense for an acoustic guitarist whose songs run from spare fingerpicked ballads to beats-heavy pop and rap. After all, Rubin is the bearded, Zen guru-like L.A. producer behind numerous modern-music classics ranging from golden-age hip-hop essentials like Run-DMC's *Raising Hell* and the Beastie Boys' *License to Ill* to such landmark acoustic-based projects as the late Johnny Cash's solo-acoustic comeback album *American Music*, Tom Petty's *Wildflowers*, Donovan's *Sutras*, and the Avett Brothers' *I and Love and You*.

"Ed was willing to work day and night, singing and playing over and over again to get what we were both looking for," Rubin says. "We recorded a lot in a short period of time, and he always delivered. He was one of the most prepared artists I've come across."

**F**ive hours before Sheeran is scheduled to take the stage at the SAP Center, he saunters into the arena's backstage loading area, decked out in colorful soccer attire, all flushed face and sweaty strands of red hair stuck to his forehead. He and his road manager, Mark Friend, have just arrived from some much-needed exercise, and they're now headed to the arena's locker room for a shower and change of clothes.

But Sheeran notices a group of giddy young girls who've gathered at the gate leading into the loading dock, hoping to catch a glimpse of their idol. He turns, walks over to them, and lets them snap a few pics, presumably for immediate posting to Facebook and Twitter. Later, a fresh-faced Sheeran emerges from his shower and arrives in the arena's private Rink-side Room with his custom Martin 00-28VS, a beautiful little guitar with figured koa back and sides, and the telltale gecko pearl inlay that matches one of his many tattoos. He's here to do a performance and interview for *Acoustic Guitar*'s online video series, *AG Sessions*.

After nailing a stripped-down, note-perfect version of "Thinking Out Loud"—the next-to-last track on the new album—I note that the song has a Van Morrison-like vibe. Sheeran's smile turns to a grin. "That's exactly what I wanted to capture," he says. "I feel like everyone channels Jack Johnson, everyone channels Prince, everyone channels the Beatles, and there's not really anyone in popular culture now that has gone and channeled a bit of Van."

"Thinking Out Loud" began life as a simple riff, Sheeran says. "Sometimes when I write something like that, I'll write the melody with the guitar. That one started off with me just going"—he demonstrates by playing the song's recurring riff on his Martin—"which is very Van-like."

He smiles again, and his cheeks turn a slightly deeper shade of pink. "From there," he adds, "I thought I would just be a bit more obvious with it."

**S**heeran has long incorporated elements of songs he'd heard as a child, when he and his family took regular five-hour car rides from their home in northern England down to London. His mom and dad, John Sheeran and Imogen Lock, ran a London art gallery, and his dad, in particular, loves music of all kinds, from classic rock to the electronic dance music of Skrillex. "The driving music would be *Moondance* or the album Van did with the Chieftains, *Irish Heartbeat*," Sheeran says. "But also the Beatles' *Anthology*, and *Madman across the Water* by Elton John, and, like, Stevie Wonder."

The budding music fan was just beginning grade school when his family moved to the tiny village of Framlingham, in Suffolk—an area Sheeran describes as "middle-of-nowhere



With hit albums *+ and X* under his wing, Sheeran's star is rising exponentially.

farmerville, with lots of Land Rovers and sheep"—and within a few years his growing fascination with music would come in direct contrast to his waning interest in school. Late one night in 2002, Sheeran, then 11, switched on the TV and heard a voice and guitar that would change his life. It was the video for the wistful acoustic ballad "Cannonball," by Damien Rice.

"I remember writing down the name and being like, 'I have to get that!' and then going to Woolworth the next day and buying it," Sheeran says. "And I remember sitting by my window and playing the album all the way through, then skipping back, playing it again, skipping back, playing it again—the whole day."

Like lots of budding guitarists, he learned to play on a nylon-string he got for cheap at a pawn shop. But when he decided he wanted to be a songwriter like Rice, Sheeran graduated to a fiberglass-back Dean, playing just enough chords to begin putting his words to music. He got gigs at local venues, where he eventually hooked up with a guy whose parents ran an unorthodox high school that happened to have a recording studio in it. There, at 14, he cut some of his earliest songs, like the haunting "Misery," from his first EP *The Orange Room*, which he self-released in 2005.

Within a year, Sheeran had gotten a little Martin Backpacker and was ready to leave Thomas Mills High School, jump a train, and



**X**  
Asylum / Atlantic

busk his way across England. His mom was against letting her 15-year-old hit the road alone, but his dad encouraged him. "Actually, it was his idea," Sheeran says. "I think it was him just trying to kick my ass in gear, because I wasn't doing well at school. His way of doing that was to say, 'Oh, so you want to be a musician? Well, go and fucking do it.' So I just kind of called his bluff on it."

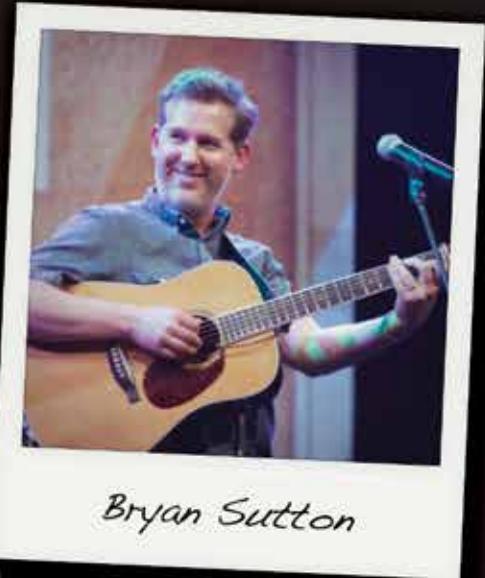
In 2008, Sheeran moved to London and began his steady climb, playing an astonishing 312 gigs the following year, signing with Elton



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In 2007, MTV named Rick Rubin as the most influential record producer of the last 20 years.



## HOW TO CREATE A DEFT ACOUSTIC JAM RICK RUBIN TALKS ABOUT PRODUCING ED SHEERAN

**MK** You are choosy about the artists you produce. In the roots realm, you've worked with Johnny Cash, Tom Petty, the Avett Brothers. What qualities did you see and hear in Ed Sheeran that turned your head?

**RR** He's a great singer and songwriter. He's an incredible one-man band. Using his loop peddle, he creates entire record-quality performances by live-overdubbing over himself. The song "Blood Stream" on the new album is virtually a live take with some added percussion. All of his guitars, drums, vocals and backing vox are live, on the fly, including the choir singing at the end. He has great internal rhythm, and when he plays solo, it really shows that off.

**MK** For the purposes of *Acoustic Guitar* magazine, it's Ed's guitar playing that turns heads—what he does with the guitar, using it as

a percussion instrument, strumming hard, looping it, fingerpicking it. That works on a grand scale during his performances. How do you harness all that in a recording session?

**RR** For many songs, we recorded as if it were a live-in-the-studio album.

**MK** A number of producers were involved with the new album—from Pharrell Williams, who puts his own songwriting stamp on everything he does, to you, who sort of distills the essence of what the artists you work with do best. How do you think your style impacted the overall musical arc on the album?

**RR** You are correct. Stylistically, I try to bring out the essence of the artist. It's less a collaboration. If I put my stamp on it, it would make it less theirs.

### From the top

**Johnny Cash, Tom Petty, Kanye West, and Ed Sheeran, all produced by Rubin.**

John's Rocket management, and releasing the first in his stream of digital-download EPs. But he was still getting shunned by the major record labels, and he was frustrated. In 2010, he booked a plane to Los Angeles, where he played a gig at Jamie Foxx's open-mic night and then appeared on his Sirius radio show the Foxxhole. The actor was so taken by Sheeran's music that he invited the young singer to his home.

"I had gone out to L.A. at a point where nothing seemed to be going right, and within a month I was at a Hollywood A-list actor's house because he liked my music! I was like, if I can do this in L.A., surely I can do it in England," Sheeran says, shaking his head and laughing.

Within a year, the singer-guitarist returned with a renewed vigor, and No. 5 Collaborations Project hit pay dirt. Asylum/Atlantic signed Sheeran and released his debut CD, which sold more than 100,000 copies in England its first week out. He was suddenly thrust into the lime-light, performing "The A Team" on *Later... with Jools Holland*, and getting attention for writing the song "Moments" for One Direction's debut album.

Sheeran hasn't rested since.

He now writes whenever and wherever he gets the chance—which often means finding the showers at big venues like the SAP Center. "They're huge in these arenas, and anything you sing in the showers sounds awesome," he says. "You can just find an idea and sing it and it will sound better in the shower than it would elsewhere."

He laughs, realizing he's just stated the obvious. "This is the first time I've actually had the opportunity to write," Sheeran continues. "I didn't write one song for six months, and I've written four in the last three days."

**R**ight now, Ed Sheeran's life may be a hurricane of arena shows, collaborations with rappers and country-pop stars, and thousands of screaming teens, but at the end of the day, he just likes to write songs, play guitar, and marvel at his beautiful instruments—like the LX1E Ed Sheeran signature model Martin released in 2013. (The guitar maker built an extensive yearlong marketing campaign around Sheeran, and proceeds from sales of the limited-edition model went to East Anglia Children's Hospices.) And then there's his pride and joy—the custom 00-28VS Martin with the cool gecko inlay.

"We had a great conversation over the phone about what kind of aesthetic Ed was trying to achieve," Fred Greene, Martin's chief product officer, says of the 00. "He wanted beautiful wood, but not too much bling. It was all about quality. He knew he wanted a gecko on the fingerboard and the multiply sign [X] on the front of the guitar. We drew up some graphics and traded emails until we got the look he was visualizing in his head."



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- Andy McKee



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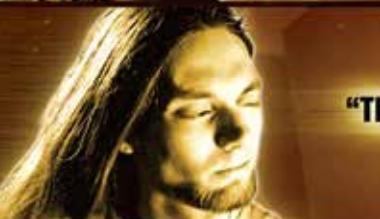
- Phillip Phillips



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- Antoine DuFour



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Sheeran embraces the instrument as if it's his child. He loves all kinds of guitars, he says—so much so that he still owns his old Dean with the fiberglass back, which he keeps back home in Framlingham. "I got hangers all around my kitchen with guitars on them," he says, with a grin and gleam befitting the most serious sufferer of Guitar Acquisition Syndrome.

"I own a lot of guitars—a *lot* of guitars," Sheeran confesses. "My favorite other guitar is a Christmas present from Gary Lightbody of Snow Patrol." It's a Lowden—the brand he'd coveted since he saw his idol Damien Rice playing one. "I remember going into shops and asking for Lowdens, and they'd be like, 'Oh, they stopped making them,'" he says. "And then I remember saying this to Gary when I was on tour with them. About four months ago, he got out this small case and was like, 'This is a Christmas present for you—a bit late.' He'd got in touch with George Lowden, who's his mate, and they made me a Wee Lowden, just a little one-off. That's my main writing guitar. It's a beautiful guitar and just . . . it's awesome."

Almost as important to Sheeran as his guitars is the quality of his electronics. A huge part of his

sound is the blend of loops and beats he creates (read about his loop setup at [acousticguitar.com](http://acousticguitar.com)). He learned to make them using a Boss RC-20XL, which worked fine for small venues, but couldn't carry his music when he began playing arenas. "It had a tendency to compress the loop as more overdubs were added," Sheeran's soundman, Trevor Dawkins, says. "And that resulted in a very squeezed and thin-sounding loop. It became quite obvious to us that the sound quality of the RC-20 wasn't up to it."

Dawkins called on everybody he could think of, looking for equipment Sheeran could play through in massive caverns like the SAP Center. He finally found a solution: the Chewie Monsta MK1. Now, when Sheeran stomps on his loop pedal and begins layering guitar lines and tapping and thumping his instrument to create a big kick-drum effect for songs like "You Need Me, I Don't Need You"—the mesmerizing track from his first album that he plays for a full 15 minutes during his encore in San Jose—you feel it in your chest.

Performances such as this one—together with the cover versions of songs Sheeran does, like his rendition of the folk-bluegrass standard "Wayfaring Stranger"—are what inspired Rick

Rubin to offer his services. "I went to see Ed live and saw that he was in a unique position," Rubin says. "His audience is very young and he played a Nina Simone cover. The fact that he was exposing 13-year-olds to such deep, spiritual music impressed me."

At one point in our interview, I ask Sheeran which kind of music he feels closest to—his purely acoustic songs or the ones that incorporate loops and beats? He looks up with a furrowed brow. "At gigs like this?" he asks, after a judicious pause. "The songs with the beats and the big thumping sounds—that's where my soul is here."

"But I played a gig in Dublin the other day where I just turned up in a pub and did some songs without amplification, and the ones with beats just wouldn't work in that kind of situation," he quickly adds. "So it depends what scenario you're in."

Sheeran pauses and smiles. It's a big 23-year-old smile. "To be honest, I do prefer this," he says, and waves a hand toward the arena area. "The excitement of it!"

Then he smiles again—a much mellower smile. "But I think in ten or 15 years time, I'll relish the purely acoustic ones."

AG



## STYLIN' MARTIN'S FRED GREENE DISCUSSES HIS CREATIVE PROCESS ON ED SHEERAN'S GUITARS

**MK** What was the process like when you worked with Ed on choosing the materials for his custom Martin 00-28VS?

**FG** Ed admitted he wasn't a wood expert, so I asked him what kind of sounds he wanted to hear from the guitar and then I gave him suggestions based on my experience. He was very open and trusting during the whole process. I can see why other musical artists love collaborating with Ed.

**MK** I know he wanted the gecko on the fingerboard and the X logo on the front of the guitar. Did you make



recommendations to him that he'd not thought about?

**FG** Sure. Things like a pyramid bridge, the use of Engelmann Spruce on the top, hide-glue construction. Technical guitar stuff.

**MK** Were there certain things you had to do to accommodate his heavily percussive style? I mean, he gives his guitars a real beating!

**FG** We were definitely conscious of his aggressive style, but we also wanted to make sure we didn't build the guitar like a tank. We wanted an

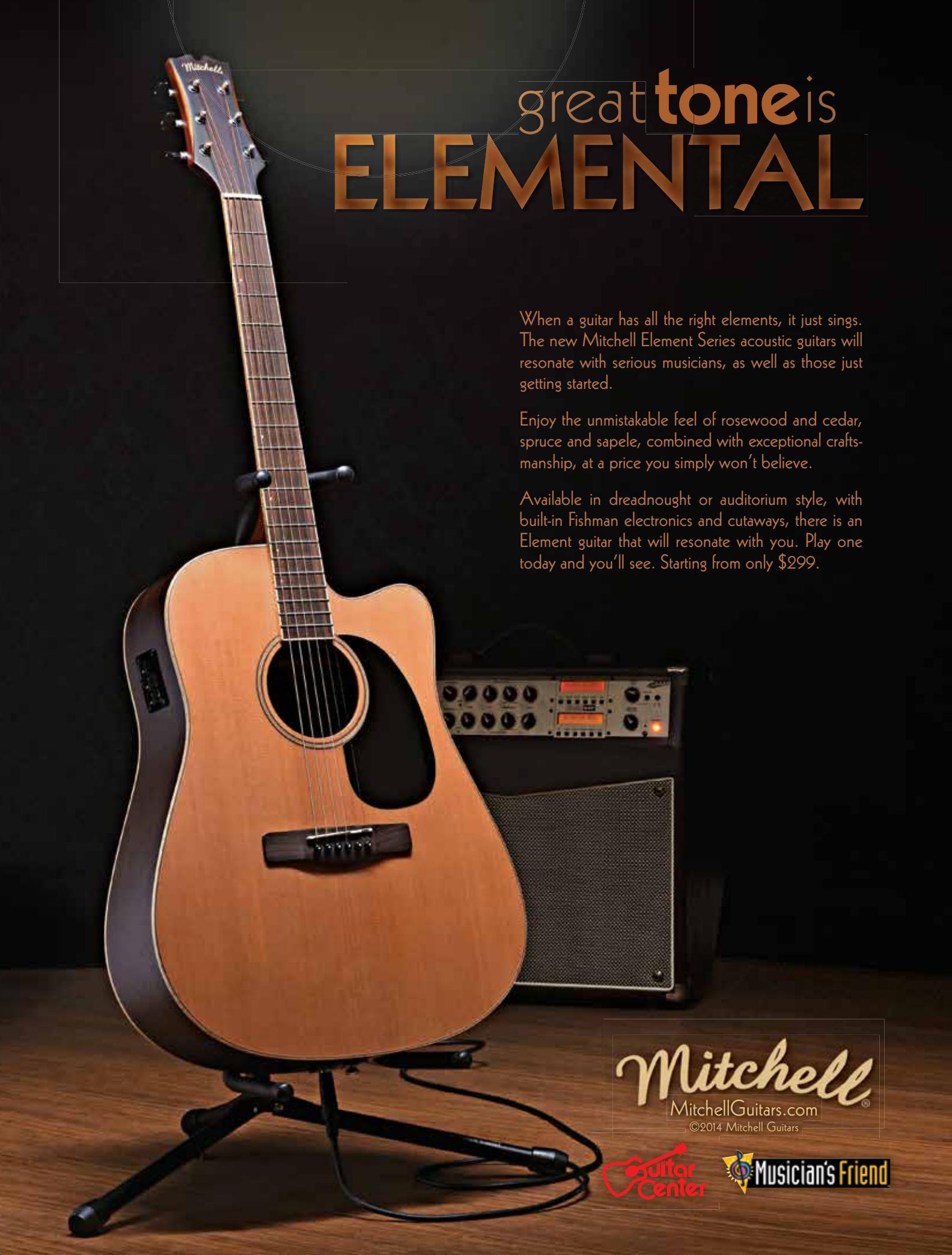
instrument that was both solid and yet capable of delicacy. I think we achieved that.

**MK** What about the Ed Sheeran signature LX1E Little Martin—how did that process differ from signature models you've done for other artists? Were there certain specifically Ed Sheeran-type factors you wanted to consider?

**FG** This is the first LX signature model we have ever done. So in that respect, it is unlike any other. Since Ed uses a basically stock LX, there were no specific Ed factors to consider.

Visit [AcousticGuitar.com/Howto](http://AcousticGuitar.com/Howto) for looping tips by Sheeran's soundman Trevor Dawkins.





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IN 24 YEARS**

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS



Rize of the bluegrass guardians: From left, Peter Wernick, Nick Forster, Tim O'Brien, and Bryan Sutton are cookin' again.

**B**ack in 1989, Hot Rize took the stage at a festival in North Carolina. The quartet, founded in Colorado ten years earlier, was one of the top bands on the bluegrass circuit, winning traditionalists and newgrass fans alike with a fresh mix of old tunes and originals, sweet circle-around-the-mic vocal harmonies, and tight instrumental interplay. The guys did comedy too: for a portion of their festival set, Hot Rize transformed into the tackily dressed, wisecracking country-western group Red Knuckles and the Trailblazers.

Hot Rize's multifaceted performance made a lasting impression on one young member of the audience: a 15-year-old aspiring picker named Bryan Sutton.

"I remember being struck by the quality that they brought to the stage—everybody, on every instrument, the singing, the writing, and then the addition of Red Knuckles and the Trailblazers," Sutton says. "It was high-quality,

high-fidelity entertainment, and I think that was fairly new for bluegrass in that era. There wasn't a weak link anywhere in the Hot Rize sound. That really spoke to me as a young player who was just starting to formulate an idea about trying to make a living playing this music."

Sutton, of course, went on to become a top-notch flatpicker and session player, and nowadays he's also a member of Hot Rize—carrying on for guitarist Charles Sawtelle, who died in 1999. Sutton began performing with Hot Rize in 2002 for occasional reunion gigs in between the many other musical projects of the two original members, mandolinist Tim O'Brien and banjo player Pete Wernick, and longtime bassist Nick Forster.

But this year the reconstituted band returned in a big way with its most extensive tour and first studio album since 1990, which celebrates the band's long history while adding a strong batch of new collaborative tunes.

### BLUEGRASS & BEYOND

From the beginning, Hot Rize—named for the secret ingredient in Martha White flour, longtime sponsor of Flatt and Scruggs—wanted to stretch beyond the traditional bluegrass that its founding members loved. In the early '70s, Wernick had already been exploring new directions in the acoustic-electric band Country Cooking.

In addition to bluegrass, the singer, mandolinist, and fiddler O'Brien was playing a lot of swing—an interest that ultimately fed into Red Knuckles and the Trailblazers, and also prompted Wernick to pick up the steel guitar along with the banjo. In 1978, after original bassist Mike Scap's departure, the Hot Rize lineup settled with Sawtelle on guitar and Forster on electric bass, and the band—along with such contemporaries as New Grass Revival and the David Grisman Quintet—set out to create new music based on bluegrass instrumentation.

A key step in developing Hot Rize was writing songs, O'Brien says. "If you listen to the traditional masters, we're just aping Lester Flatt, who said, 'If you have something nobody else does, then they need to hire you to do it.' So, original material was a big part of the push. Pete was known as a writer, and I was just starting."

Hot Rize's originals quickly made their mark, starting with the band's 1979 self-titled debut, which included O'Brien's neo-traditional "Nellie Kane" and O'Brien and Wernick's "Ninety Nine Years (and One Dark Day)." The latest Hot Rize album, too, is mostly originals written by all the members, from O'Brien's "Blue Is Fallin'" to Wernick's instrumental "Sky Rider" to the Forster/Sutton collaboration "I Am the Road."

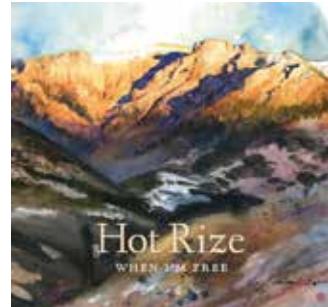
Another essential ingredient of the Hot Rize sound, according to O'Brien, is space. In contrast to bluegrass bands that barrel ahead on all instruments all the time, hardly leaving an eighth note unplayed, in Hot Rize the mix and



Hot Rize in the mid-'80s, with Charles Sawtelle (right) on guitar



LISTEN TO THIS



**Hot Rize**  
***When I'm Free***  
Thirty Tigers

dynamics keep changing as the players cut in and out and move closer to and away from microphones. This aspect of the music reflects Sawtelle's influence, O'Brien says. "He had a studio arts background. He was very much interested in contrast and space and its relation to the detail. When we sang on one microphone, some people would say, 'You can't hear all the other instruments.' Charles would say, 'Well, no one notices that. They're paying attention to the vocal, and the act of the four of us going forward toward the vocal mic draws attention to that and takes the attention away from the instrumental, which is what you want.' So he had a very good overview of what was effective."

#### THE SAWTELLE SOUND

Though Sawtelle has been gone now for 15 years, his less-is-more philosophy continues to shape Hot Rize. "His guitar style was very dramatic," O'Brien says. "He was so unusual, and yet what he really wanted to do was be the Stanley Brothers and Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs. His way of playing rhythm guitar was much more sparse, and much more Carter Stanley than Jimmy Martin."

When Sutton came on board, he was well aware of Sawtelle's role in Hot Rize. "The guitar comes and goes," O'Brien says, "and Bryan has taken that to heart, but it still sounds like him."

Sutton, O'Brien adds, is "more of a full rhythm player—he's certainly a Doc Watson

disciple, but I think he's learned to play a little more like Charles. It's funny to ask a guy like Bryan to do anything other than what occurs to him naturally, because he's brilliant. But it is Hot Rize, and we're a little protective of our identity and that sort of sound."

Playing in such a restrained way is not, Sutton confesses, his natural tendency. He describes his style as more "all on and nonstop," but says his tenure with Hot Rize has been a useful lesson in the value of laying back.

"I was a huge Hot Rize fan," Sutton says. "I wanted to hear Hot Rize, and so a goal of mine as a listener and a player was to provide me and anyone who might be listening with a real Hot Rize experience. So I tried not to just study and learn everything that Charles played note for note, but I did listen to his playing a little more in depth than I had, and learned a few signature things that he'd done and tried to adapt them."

Sawtelle's guitar legacy also lives on in Hot Rize in a material way, through his 1937 Martin D-28. Forster serves as the custodian of that guitar, loaning it out at times to players such as Chris Eldridge of Punch Brothers and Sutton. At a writing retreat in Boulder for the new Hot Rize album, Sutton played Sawtelle's D-28, capoed at the third fret, and was transported by its unique sound. "I really love digging in the tone of these old Martins," Sutton says. "I love the bloom of the D-28s."

A melody and some words quickly emerged, Forster helped flesh out the lyrics, and within about a half an hour, the song "I Am the Road" was complete. In the recording, Sutton plays the old dreadnought that inspired it.

#### BLENDING OLD & NEW

Hot Rize manages the tricky balancing act of putting its own stamp on traditional songs while making contemporary songs sound traditional.

On the trad side is "A Cowboy's Life," a mournful ballad O'Brien learned from folk-singer Jeff Davis—Hot Rize delivers a haunting performance of the song, its bluesy melody echoed on fiddle, banjo, and mandocello. On the contemporary side is "I Never Met a One Like You," written by Mark Knopfler, who recorded his own version of the song with O'Brien for the album but never released it.

"He said, 'I think that one needs a bluegrass treatment or a flatpicked guitar, and that might be a good one for you,'" O'Brien says. "I was flattered by that. I love the song. It's reminiscent of an old Grandpa Jones song that Hot Rize actually recorded back in the early days, called 'I've Been All Around This World,' which is really a traditional piece with his own lyrics."

"It's funny," O'Brien adds. "It comes from Knopfler, but it's not a rock song. It's a folk song, but it's modern, somewhat, in that he just puts his own thing in there."

Just as Hot Rize has always done.

AG

## WHAT BRYAN SUTTON PLAYS

#### GUITARS

1948 Martin D-28 with two pickguards and recently acquired a 1942 D-28. He also plays his Bourgeois signature model dreadnought.

#### AMPLIFICATION

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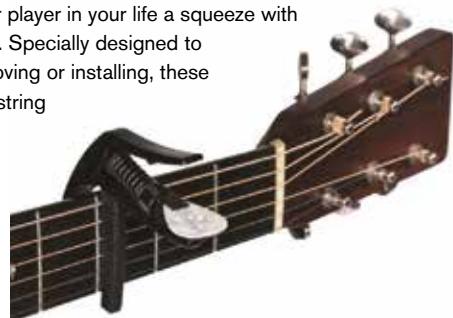


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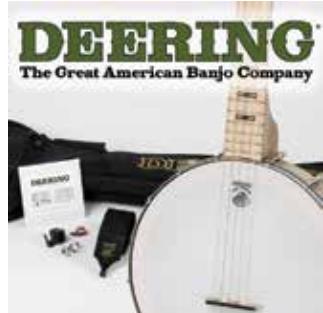
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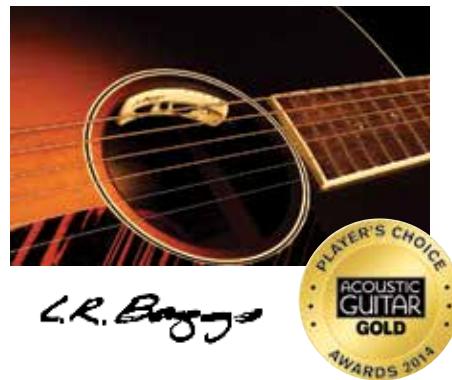
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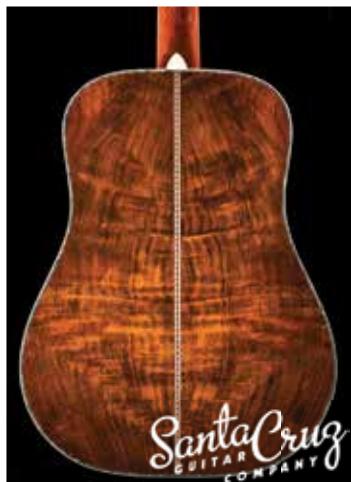
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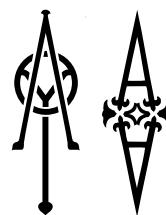
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## SPECIAL FOCUS YOUR NEXT GUITAR

# SWITCHING GEARS

**Whether you're upgrading, changing styles, experimenting with new body types, or just wanting a more comfortable instrument, picking the right model is essential.**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**F**ew things are more exciting to a guitarist than getting a new instrument. But selecting a guitar in what seems to be a golden age of guitar manufacturing can be daunting. Today, guitar makers are producing an unprecedented number of high-quality instruments for all budgets, in a mind-boggling array of designs—from period-correct replicas of 19th century flattops to the most luxurious modern archtops.

What's more, there are many different reasons for getting a new instrument. Maybe you're a beginner who's ready to trade up to a better guitar, or a more advanced player who's ready for the guitar that best suits a particular style. Maybe you've been playing a flattop forever and just want to experiment with a totally different type of axe. Or, maybe you've grown uncomfortable with the guitar you have and want something with smoother

lines. For these and other reasons, you are ready for a new guitar.

Selecting your next guitar involves a tricky balance of sonic preference, playing comfort, aesthetic taste, and personal finances, but whatever your specific needs are, you can be sure that there's a guitar out there for you.

Here are some guidelines to help you make the right choice.

**A**

**A** Made from mahogany, Martin's D-17M (\$1,549) is one of the venerable company's least-expensive all-solid guitars.

**B**

**B** High-end guitars, like the Collings D-41 (which pairs Peruvian rosewood with an Adirondack spruce top, \$7,535) are the embodiment of quality sound.

**C** Guild's GAD Series D-140 (\$699.99) boasts all-solid woods and a handsome sunburst finish.



## MOVING ON UP

If you've outgrown a typical beginner's guitar—perhaps a low-end import made from laminated woods—your playing will benefit from an upgrade. Your guitar may already have a solid soundboard, or top, but a sure step up will be one made from all solid woods, as it will sound livelier than its laminated counterpart. You may also consider the impact that woods can have on your sound. If you want a warmer, mellow sound, then consider a guitar with mahogany back and sides; for a brighter and more complex sound, rosewood is preferable. It's not uncommon for guitar makers to offer the same model with different tonewood choices, which you can hear for yourself at a music shop.

The feel of your guitar is another important consideration. Many beginners have struggled with guitars that have impossibly high action—that is, lots of space between the fretboard and

strings—only to see their technique improve rapidly after switching to more playable instruments. If this is you, be sure your next guitar has an action you find most agreeable. Also pay attention to how the neck profile feels. If you have small hands, you'll probably want to go for a thin modern neck, while those with larger mitts will appreciate the girth of a vintage-style profile. Whatever your physiology, be sure that you can comfortably play barre chords and single notes in all registers of the guitar.

Luckily, you can find a high-quality solid-wood guitar these days at a solid bargain. Two examples include the instruments in Guild's GAD series and the Seagull Maritime—all well under a grand. If you'd like to splurge, there's no shortage of options from American makers such as Gibson, Martin, Collings, and Taylor, with prices ranging from the low thousands to five figures.



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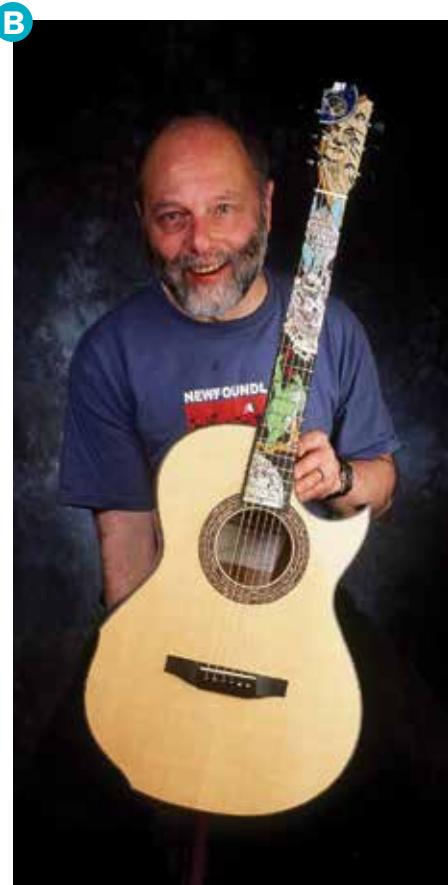
GENUINE TONE.





A

**A** A select number of Taylor guitars, like this PS12ce ES2 Presentation Grand Concert (\$7,000), feature an armrest and the most elaborate ornamentation.



**B** The arm bevel is standard on William Laskin's custom steel- and nylon-string guitars, with their trademark artistic inlay work. (Prices vary.)

**C** A guitar in Washburn's Comfort Series, such as this WCG25SCE (\$649), features a beveled armrest and other details more commonly found on boutique instruments.

## SMOOTH LINES

With their flatness and sharp edges, standard steel-string guitars aren't exactly ergonomic. If your guitar is causing you discomfort, it might be time to look for a better solution. It could be that the instrument just isn't well matched to your physiology. (See Teja Gerken's article "All About Guitar Ergonomics" in the January 2011 issue to find out more about that.)

Perhaps you'd benefit from a small-body 0-, 00-, or 000-size guitar (sales of those have been explosive in recent years, as have slope-shouldered dreadnoughts), or even a guitar designed specifically for player comfort. The armrest bevel—a curved edge on the soundboard where the picking hand's forearm rests—is one place to start. This feature was originally built onto expensive custom instruments by the luthier William "Grit" Laskin and others. But it's found its way into guitars

of all prices. At well under \$1,000, many of the guitars in Washburn's Comfort Series, for example, have the beveled-edge feature that keeps the instrument from digging into your forearm. Taylor has incorporated the feature into some of its higher-end offerings, such as the PS12ce that will set you back about \$7,000.

On the other hand, if you're otherwise in love with your guitar, before replacing it, you might try an accessory like the John Pearse Acoustic Armrest, a wooden device that fits on the soundboard to create a comfortable edge—at \$30, it's much less of an investment. Of course, if the Pearse armrest works for you, you'll no doubt still be strategizing your next guitar purchase. Because like potato chips, one guitar is just not enough for most of us.





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## BRANCHING OUT

Maybe you started out playing generic fare—basic chords and simple melodies—while getting a feel for your instrument, and now you find yourself gravitating to a particular style, such as finger-style blues. It might seem obvious, but this should guide your next acquisition, as certain guitars work better than others for specific approaches. Of course, a good guitar will be amenable to a range of styles, but there are some basic stylistic points to consider when buying your next guitar.

If fingerpicking has really piqued your interest, an OM (orchestra model), concert, 0, 00, or any variation on those smaller-sized bodies, including parlor-size guitars, will probably work best. While a 14th-fret neck-to-body junction has long been standard, many companies are now offering guitars with a 12th-fret junction,

which to some ears promotes a better tone. Taylor's 512 (\$2,149) is an excellent example of a modern guitar with the old-fashioned 12-fret feature. If you frequently travel to the guitar's uppermost register, though, you'd probably be better off with the 14-fret junction, found on Martin's basic OM-28 (\$2,849), among many other offerings in this category from a variety of guitar manufacturers.

On the other hand, if robust strumming or flat-pick soloing is your thing, you'll do best with a dreadnought or even a jumbo—body sizes that, in the best examples, promote an emphasis on volume and power. You could do no wrong with Martin's classic flagship D-28, which sells for about \$2,500, and has been recreated in a variety of other prices. If your solos tend to take you past the 12th fret, you should consider

a guitar with a cutaway, like Taylor's mahogany 320ce, a good value at \$1,699. While the cutaway may have a slight negative tonal impact on the guitar's sound, the access to the highest frets is a good tradeoff.

The original blues guitarists tended to play whatever they could scare up—usually cheap and small instruments. If you'd like to specialize in the blues and want an authentic sound, then you should go for the kinds of guitars those musicians played. For example, check out one of the Recording King Dirty Thirties models—doppelgangers of vintage instruments and, with their solid tops, a bargain at about \$200 (street price). For a splurge that one of the original bluesman surely couldn't have afforded, Gibson's 1928 L-1 Blues Tribute (\$3,300) is a finely built instrument.

**A** Gretsch's little blues machine, the G9500 Jim Dandy (\$149), sounds good and is one of the best bargains available for this size instrument.

**B** Gibson takes you back to 1932 with its exacting recreation of the L-00 (\$4,999), perfect for fingerstyle blues and other rootsy styles.

**C** At around \$1,200, Larrivee's OM-03 is a solid fingerpicker.

**D** The Blueridge BR-140A (\$700) boasts vintage styling and a solid Adirondack top for an unbeatable price.

**E** Martin's D-28 Authentic 1941 (\$6,699) was built to the original specs thanks to the use of CAT scanning of an original specimen by the Smithsonian Institute.

**F** Among Martin's costliest offerings is the D-45 Authentic 1942 (\$47,999) with its premium Brazilian rosewood back and sides and period details.

**G** Santa Cruz's OM Grand (from about \$4,500) is a luxurious take on the original orchestra model guitar.



Johnna Jeong, a guitar instructor at Maple Street Guitars in Atlanta, GA, plays a custom Santa Cruz OM Grand, that features a Redwood top, cutaway and Koa bindings.

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## SWITCHING PARTNERS

If you've bought a first six-string flattop—or even a second, third, or fourth—and want to add a different type of guitar to your collection, then some obvious choices would be a 12-string, a resonator, or an archtop guitar.

In case you're unfamiliar with a 12-string, the guitar has six courses of two strings each. The string pair in each of the bottom three courses is tuned an octave apart, while those in the higher courses are in unison. This arrangement gives the guitar a shimmering, choir-like sound, as heard on songs ranging from Lead Belly's "Black Girl (In the Pines)" to the Rolling Stones' "As Tears Go By," Bob Dylan's "Hurricane," and the Red Hot Chili Peppers' "Breaking the Girl."

Notoriously, 12-string guitars are often afflicted with inaccurate intonation and iffy playability, so remember to look out for those problems. Taylor's new 150e is free from these issues and sells for only \$700, with electronics. (See a full review in the October issue of AG.) For a bigger an investment, Guild's F-512

(\$3,500) offers the 12-string in a jumbo platform.

Another type of guitar offering altogether different timbres is the resonator. With its metal (or sometimes wooden) body, the resonator is mostly associated with the blues and bluegrass, and is often played with a bottleneck slide, although it can be played conventionally as well. If you'd like to explore the former approach, it's best to look for a resonator with a square neck; for the latter playing style, go for a round neck.

The resonator's spun metal cone serves the same function as the soundboard on a flattop guitar, and has three main designs: a tricone, or three metal cones; a biscuit bridge, or single cone; and a spider bridge, or single, inverted cone. Generally, the tricone has the smoothest and most complex sound, with the single-cone brighter and brasher, and the spider bridge drier and more nasally. Bottleneck players generally prefer the tricone, although many blues players also like the biscuit bridge. Bluegrass and country musicians have

gravitated to the spider bridge. Try all of the basic styles to see which sound best suits your style.

It shouldn't be difficult to find a resonator that agrees with your budget. Gretsch and Recording King both offer a range of affordable vintage-approved models, many for well under a grand, while National Reso-Phonic offers a comprehensive selection of single-cone and tricone models from about \$2,300.

And then there's the archtop. As its name suggests, the archtop has a carved, curved soundboard as opposed to a flat one; the back is ordinarily arched as well. Unlike a flattop, which has a fixed bridge, an archtop has a floating bridge and a trapeze tailpiece. Together, all of those attributes create a tone that's markedly different from that of a flattop. The archtop's tone is rich, woody, and punchy.

Acoustic archtops are most closely associated with jazz, but they can be used for any idiom; Maybelle Carter, for example, used an early Gibson L-5. A main consideration when buying one is the size. Archtops are generally

available with lower bouts ranging from 16 inches to 18 inches. Test different sizes to find one that's most comfortable for you to hold, and look for one with a comfortable neck profile and easy playability.

After the acoustic archtop was supplanted by the electric, the companies that first offered the acoustic versions in the 1920s and '30s phased them out. That's changed in recent years, as acoustic archtops have enjoyed a resurgence. These days, you can find good ones at affordable prices. The Loar, for example, offers a handful of hand-carved 16-inch archtops from \$600, and Eastman carries 16- and 17-inch acoustic archtops from starting at just more than \$2,000. At the other end of the spectrum, a rare Collings archtop such as the AT-16—if you can find you one—will set you back about \$10,000, and there are scores of luthiers, from established masters like John Monteleone to younger talents like Erich Solomon, who hand-make acoustic archtops on a custom basis.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 50 →

**A** L.R. Baggs electronics make the Breedlove Legacy 12-string (\$2,999) a good choice for the live performer.

**B** The G9212 Honey Dipper Special (\$549) by Gretsch has a square neck, a biscuit bridge, and a distinctive look.

**C** Seagull's Coast-line S12 12-string (\$499) boasts a solid cedar top, making it a smart value.

**D** Elaborate hand engraving is found on the National Style 4 (prices vary), a top-of-the line tricone model.

**E** Only \$519, Godin's 5th Avenue is a smart entry-level 16-inch acoustic archtop made from Canadian cherry.

**F** Eastman's AR910 (\$3,675) isn't cheap, but this 17-inch archtop is built from the top-grade woods and appointments customarily found on the finest luthier-built instruments.



## HOW TO PICK YOUR AXE

### IF YOU PLAY

Fingerstyle blues

### CONSIDER THESE GUITAR STYLES

Small flattop; biscuit-bridge resonator

Bottleneck blues

Tricone resonator

Country slide

Spider-bridge resonator

Flatpicked bluegrass

Dreadnought or slope-shouldered flattop

Fingerstyle folk

OM, OO, O, or concert-size flattop

Hard-strummed rock

Dreadnought or jumbo-size flattop, 6- or 12-string

Swing jazz

Archtop or Maccaferri-style

Classical/flamenco

Classical or flamenco nylon-string

## TO PLUG IN OR NOT TO PLUG IN

Electronics are commonplace on modern acoustic guitars, and with their increasingly faithful acoustic sounds, they can be seductive to a guitar buyer. But do you really need electronics in your acoustic? If you're a professional or even a coffee-house guitarist, it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a guitar with a built-in pickup-and-preamp system, as the option will afford you maximum flexibility for any gigging situation.

If you're a student or avocational guitarist and want to get into home recording, even

casually, you might spring for the electronics, which will make it easy for you to capture ideas on the fly. An acoustic pickup also can be used in conjunction with a condenser microphone for a high-quality sound when recording.

On the other hand, if you aren't going to use the electronics, it might not be worth the extra investment.

Instead, save some money by buying a non-electric version of the same guitar, or spend the same amount of money on a higher-level guitar.

AG



### MIXED NUTS

**Nut width is the source of lively debates among guitarists in online forums and at real-time jam sessions, but many players agree that wide nuts—1.75 inches or greater—are most comfortable for fingerpicking, and narrower ones—like the 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> on a standard Martin D-28—are more conducive to strumming and flat-picking.**

**But there are other variables that affect the way a**

**neck feels—obviously, the neck's profile; the size of a player's hands; and the types of chords he or she favors (for example, thumb-fretted shapes are harder to play on a wider neck), to name a few. So in considering the nut width on a new guitar, try to ignore what's argued on those online forums, and play a good cross-section of your repertoire on any guitar you're considering. Then go with what feels best for you.**

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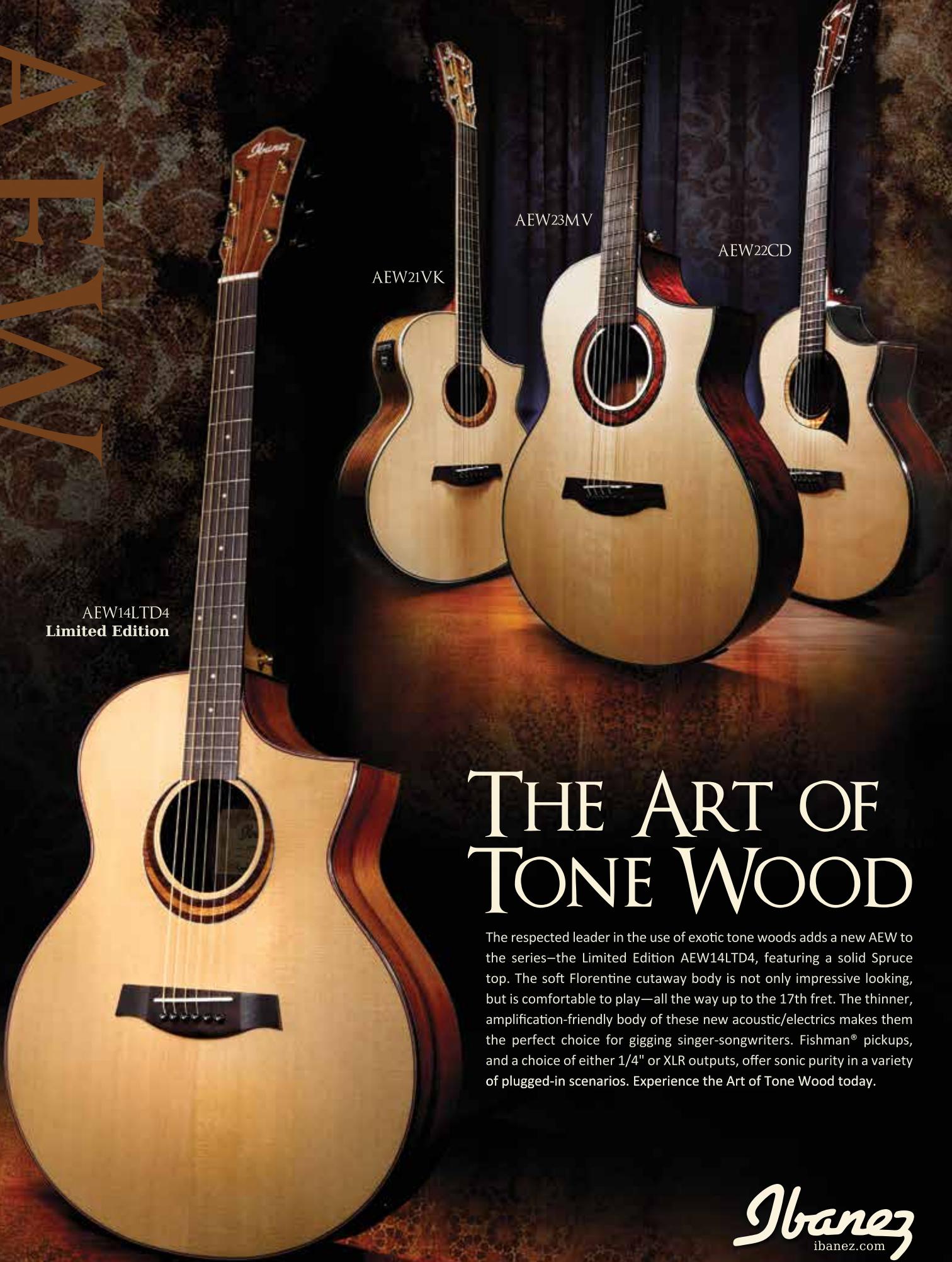
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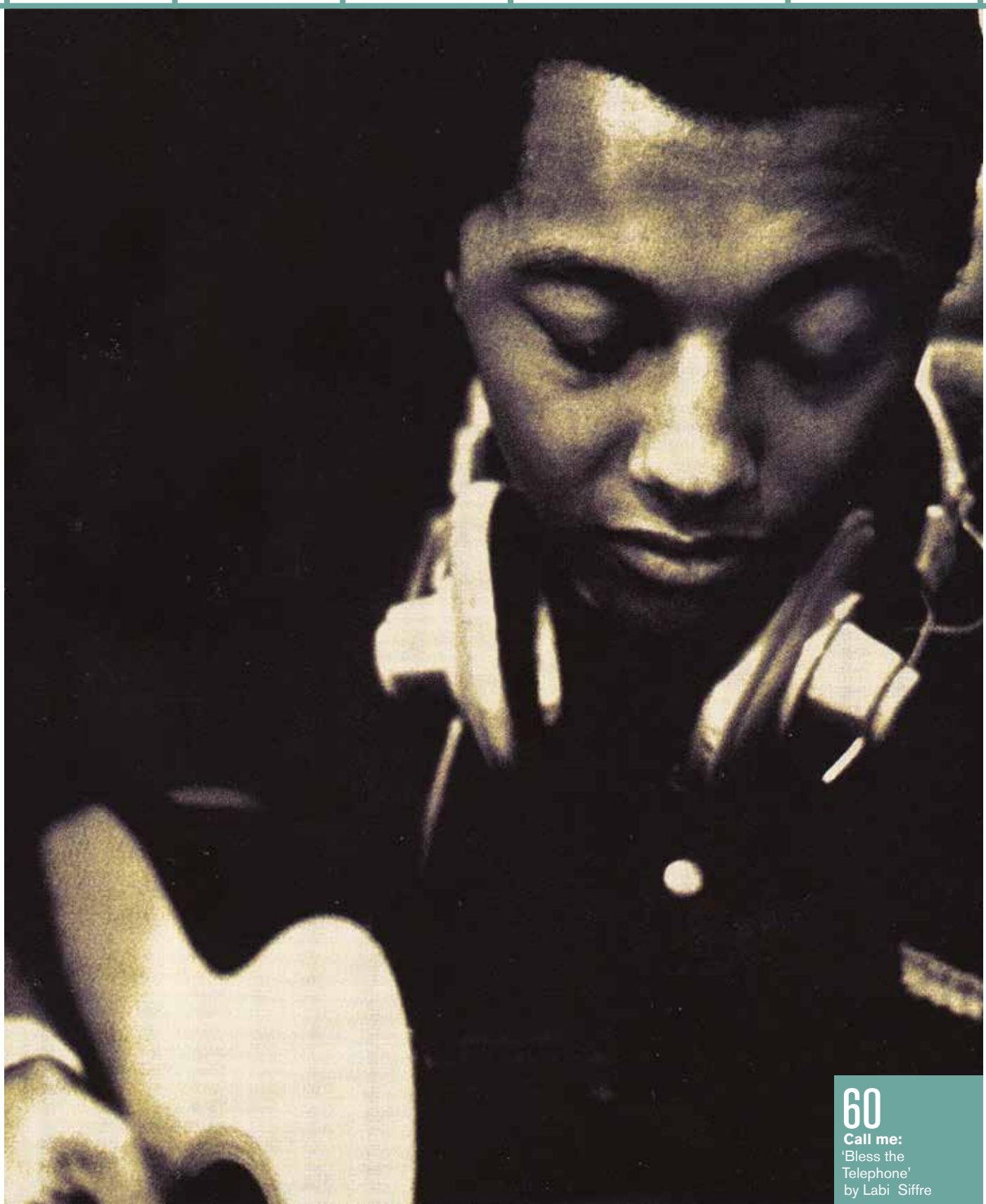
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True Confessions: Doug Paisley

# Song Chaser

The art of songwriting elicits ‘strong feelings’ from Doug Paisley

BY STEVE BOISSON

**O**n his latest album, *Strong Feelings*, the Canadian singer-songwriter Doug Paisley explores the dynamics of passion. Take, for instance, one of the album's best songs, “What's Up Is Down,” which scans like a declaration from a man blissfully unbalanced by love. A careful listening reveals a little more complexity: “Then there's me, I pretend to be someone else for you,” the narrator sings. “I bend my will. I hide the chill. The joy that I see through.”

“There's some deception in there,” Paisley says. “There's some confession. And then there's a picture of what's going on, on the surface. That's my experience, how relationships are multifaceted.”

Paisley's songwriting talents were widely heralded after the 2010 release of his previous LP, *Constant Companion*, a nine-song sleeper recorded in an attic. It was a “nearly perfect” collection of singer-songwriter music, according to *Rolling Stone*. *MOJO* dubbed Paisley an “anti-star” and ranked the album among the top 10 of the year.

Supported by estimable guests including Broken Social Scene singer Feist and former Band keyboardist Garth Hudson, the album came off as a simple folksy affair. On *Strong*

*Feelings*, Paisley's arrangements are bolder, his voice more fulsome, and the songs more diverse.

Like many songwriters, Paisley's first heroes were the Beatles, but he broke into music as part of a reggae band, playing rhythm guitar alongside Caribbean musicians. In college Paisley fell hard for bluegrass; he later performed with university chum Chuck Erlichman in a Stanley Brothers tribute show, an unconventional act that involved a Wurlitzer organ. “It's sort of liberating knowing that you're never going to be the real deal,” Paisley says of the group's nontraditional approach. “That kind of frees you up to do what you want with the music and what you like about it.”

Following a stint in a band called Live Country Music—“we obviously had trouble with the name,” Paisley quips. “It was our career downfall”—the singer and guitarist went solo. His self-titled debut album came out in 2008 on the Queens-based indie label, No Quarter Records, which is still Paisley's home.

It was during his days with Live Country Music that Paisley says he became a songwriter. He began recording song fragments and ideas on an old MiniDisc. “That's when I started taking writing seriously enough to hold on to things,” Paisley says. “That was a big step for

me: Just hold on to things that you're in love with and take them seriously enough to keep working on them, as opposed to dismissing them.” Eventually he finished a song, “The Light of the World,” which he played at a Live Country Music gig. The reception from the small crowd proved it was a keeper. “That was the first time I felt I could pass off one of my tunes on stage.”

Nowadays, songs often emerge from Paisley's regimen of guitar playing, although sometimes it takes a while. “I find you have to wait around the ice hole for a fish,” he says. “Once you've distracted yourself with a couple of hours of playing, stuff seems to come out of that.” Although MiniDiscs are now long obsolete, Paisley says he still records song fragments and random ideas. “Maybe I'll go back to it two years later, and still latch on to it,” he says.

Some songs grow out of guitar riffs. That was the case with “What's Up Is Down,” which centers on an acoustic-guitar lick that slides out of an open-A chord. (Paisley capsos the first fret, putting the song in B flat.) It's a simple melody line that rises up and rolls back down, then turns around on a hammer-on between the A and D strings. Paisley plays it over and over at the beginning, gently inducing his listeners into the music.

# WHAT DOUG PAISLEY PLAYS

## GUITAR

Martin D-28 (built in 1954, converted to left-handed instrument in 1960); Guild X-50 archtop

## AMPLIFICATION

Neumann KM140 condenser mic for the Martin; 1959 Fender Vibrolux for the Guild

## STRINGS

Martin Monel light gauge; D'Addario electric light with a wound G

## PICKS

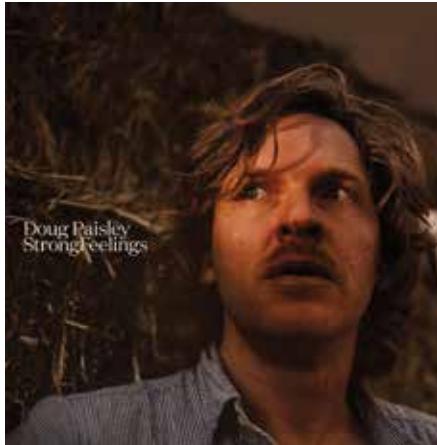
Dunlop

## CAPO

Paige

**Doug Paisley**  
***Strong Feelings***

No Quarter Records



**'I find you have to wait around the ice hole for a fish. Once you've distracted yourself with a couple of hours of [guitar] playing, stuff seems to come out of that.'**

"I was working with that riff, juggling it around for a year and a half, two years," Paisley says. Eventually, he constructed a melody that was closer to pop than folk or country. "I tend to stay within the 1-4-5 and maybe play the odd 2," he says. "When I do branch out, I discover that I know more than I thought I did about other chords."

The song's final arrangement is a study in contrasts: His steady guitar against Hudson's staccato piano; Paisley's resigned vocals against Mary Margaret O'Hara's more impassioned echoing of the lyrics. Masculine and feminine; yin and yang. A sultry saxophone finishes the track.

Paisley has written a lot of love songs, but this time, he says, he wanted other topics that engender strong feelings. He personifies his love of music in "Radio Girl," extols the Canadian prairies on "To and Fro," and weighs the cost of emotional unavailability in "A Song My Love Could Sing."

The latter song, Paisley says, is "looking way back at something. Some people say that you can't write about your current situation or even your most recent heartbreak because you're too close to it. Sometimes the perspective comes into focus years later. You might realize you

were wrong or you might realize what was important and what wasn't. I think there's some of that in the song."

Reducing a song's meaning to a simple statement is not easy, Paisley says. His songs often stem from several sources.

"I'm not a very structured person in terms of wanting to write about one specific topic or wanting to get points across," Paisley says. "I tend more to flesh it out and see where it ends up."

A good example is "It's Not Too Late (To Say Goodbye)," which begins as a simple break-up song before evolving into a meditation on survival. "I am a shadow of my former self, they've picked the bones, these drones, there's nothing else/ Still, I know I would not change a thing, in time to steal the standing, it's the only thing that means anything."

Much of the inspiration for those lines, Paisley says, is from watching a friend struggle with a near-fatal illness. "You're just pulling your body through. Sometimes that's all we can do," he says. "I've got a lot of romantic structure in the song, but I don't have one specific message."

Specific or not, the song is partly about perseverance—a perfect metaphor for Paisley and his endless pursuit of a song.

AC

An advertisement for The Music Emporium. The background is a warm-toned image of a guitar neck and body. On the right side, there is red text: "AAA to 000.", "Vintage to varnish.", "Coco' to Carpathian.", and "We speak guitar." Below this, there is a stylized graphic of a guitar body in shades of brown and tan. To the right of the guitar body, the text "the music emporium" is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by "finely crafted guitars". At the bottom, the address "165 Massachusetts Avenue Lexington, MA 02420" and phone number "781.860.0049" are listed, along with the website "www.themusicemporium.com".



Lennon told 'Playboy' magazine in 1980 that 'If I Fell' was his first 'ballad proper.'

## Tin Pan Lennon

Show your warm side by learning one of the Beatles' loveliest ballads

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**I**f I Fell" may have been John Lennon's attempt to prove he could write a Tin Pan Alley-like ballad just as well as that other most-famous Beatle.

"People forget that John wrote some nice ballads," Paul McCartney once told *Rolling Stone*. "People tend to think of him as an acerbic wit and aggressive and abrasive, but he did have a very warm side to him, really, which he didn't like to show too much in case he got rejected."

No one would reject this 1964 classic, released on the soundtrack album *A Hard Day's Night* in the United Kingdom and on *Something New* in the United States (and featured in the newly restored film). In the song, Lennon uses a sophisticated harmonic language that owes more to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century pop than it does to the blues-based progressions of other British Invasion artists.

Case in point is the dizzying way the song starts off, in the key of D<sup>b</sup>major, on the ii chord (E<sup>b</sup>minor).

The music travels chromatically down to the I chord (D<sup>b</sup>major), before ultimately settling into the distantly related key of D major in the verse, via a neat ii–V progression (Em7–A).

To learn the song, first familiarize yourself with the chord grips presented in the notation. Note that there are two types of D chord, one at the fifth fret and the other open; in this arrangement, the former is used only in the introduction.

You will also see an Fdim7 chord, implied by the bass on the original recording, but not played by the guitars. If this feels too clunky to play, simply omit it. But if you include it, be sure to adjust the fingering of the Em7 chord

that follows, using your third finger instead of your second to play the second-fret B.

Speaking of Em7, the Beatles tended to play E minor chords on the recording, but this arrangement uses an Em7 for the extra harmonic color it imparts.

Same goes for the D9 chord in the bridge, which is implied by the vocals but not directly stated by the guitars.

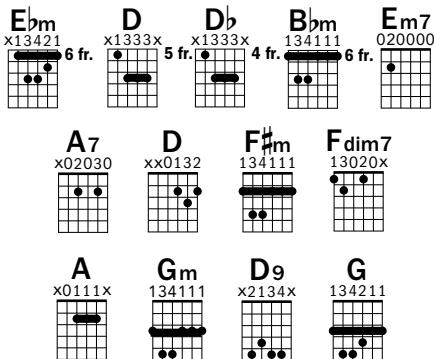
As for the right-hand approach, take things easy: Try strumming the intro in quarter notes, all down strokes, and using the basic strum notated here as the basis for the rest of the song.

And if you'd like to nicely cap off the song, play the wistful melody at the top right corner of the next page right after the last word of the outro.

AG

# IF I FELL

WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOHN LENNON & PAUL McCARTNEY



## Basic Strum

A diagram showing a basic strumming pattern for a 4/4 time signature. The top part shows a treble clef staff with vertical strokes indicating downstrums (square) and upstrums (inverted triangle). The bottom part shows a bass staff with horizontal strokes indicating downstrums (square) and upstrums (inverted triangle).

## Outro

A musical score for guitar showing the chords D, Gm, and D. The score includes a treble clef staff with vertical strokes for strumming and a bass staff with horizontal strokes.

\* □ = down; ∇ = up

### E♭m

If I fell in love with you

### D

Would you promise to be true

### D♭      B♭m

And help me understand

### E♭m

Cos I've been in love before

### D

And I found that love was more

### Em7      A7

Than just holding hands

1. If I give my heart to you

### A

I must be sure

### D    Em7    F♯m

From the ve - ry start

- Fdim7 Em7      A              D    Gm    A  
That you would love me more than her

2. If I trust in you oh please

Don't run and hide

If I love you too oh please

### A

### D9

Don't hurt my pride like her

## Bridge

### D9

Cos I couldn't stand the pain

### Gm

And I would be sad if our new love was in vain

3. So I hope you see that I  
Would love to love you  
And that she will cry

### A

### D9

When she learns we are two

## Repeat Bridge

4. So I hope you see that I  
Would love to love you  
And that she will cry

### A

### D

When she learns we are two

## Outro

- Gm      D      Gm    D  
If I fell in love with you

# The Long Journey Home

Let the 'Wayfaring Stranger' guide you safely through this world of woe

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**E**d Sheeran is only the latest in a long line of pop, rock, folk, and country artists to cover the 19th century spiritual "Wayfaring Stranger"—among them, Burl Ives, Bill Monroe, Doc Watson, Johnny Cash, Tim Buckley, Emmylou Harris, Neko Case, and Jack White. Also known as "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" and "I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," this melancholic song chronicles the life journey of a downtrodden soul.

For his interpretation, Sheeran, who graces the cover of this issue, sets aside his signature Martin LX1E to perform "Wayfaring Stranger" a cappella, using layers of harmonized melody along with mouth percussion. So, the arrangement notated here is based more on Cash's raw, stripped-down, guitar-driven version, recorded late in his own life journey and released on his album *American III: Solitary Man*.

As notated here, "Wayfaring Stranger" shouldn't present any fret-hand difficulties. It contains five cowboy-type chords—Am, Dm, E, F, and C—which you've likely already got under your fingers. Things are more involved for the other hand, which plays a type of Travis picking pattern, with the thumb etching out a bass line comprised of roots and fifths, while the other fingers add melodic patterns on the higher strings.

The Travis-picked part, as it pertains to the intro and the last eight bars of each verse, is shown in the notation. For the entire passage, follow the pick-hand fingerings in bar 1; feel free to modify these suggestions if another fingering pattern feels more natural. Learn this part slowly, if needed focusing on the notes on the bottom strings before adding those on the top strings.

You might also try playing "Wayfaring Stranger" with a slight swing feel, as Cash did. Rendering the eighth notes not evenly as written, but long-short, will breathe a little rhythmic excitement into the song.

AG



Johnny Cash: The Man in Black, natch.

# WAYFARING STRANGER

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY JOHNNY CASH

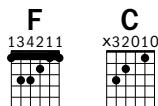
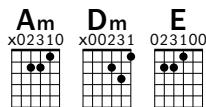
## Fingerpicking Pattern

### *Intro*

## Chords

**Am**

**Dm E Am**



1. I'm just a poor wayfarin' stranger

**Dm**                   **Am**  
Travelin' through this world below

**Am**  
There is no sickness no toil nor danger

**Dm E**                   **Am**  
In this bright land to which I go

### *Chorus*

**F**                   **C**  
I'm goin' there to see my father

**F**                   **E**  
And all my loved ones who've gone home

**Am**  
I'm just goin' over Jordan

**Dm E Am**  
I'm just goin' over home

*Instrumental solo (use verse chord progression)*

2. I know dark clouds will gather 'round me  
I know my way is hard and steep  
But beautous fields arise before me  
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep

### *Chorus*

**F**                   **C**  
I'm goin' there to see my mother

**F**                   **E**  
She said she'd meet me when I come

**Am**  
So I'm just goin' over Jordan

**Dm E Am**  
I'm just goin' over home

**Am**  
I'm just goin' over Jordan

**Dm E Am**  
I'm just goin' over home



New York native Kelis not only covers Brit folk like 'Bless the Telephone,' she's also got their charts well covered—with 10 top-ten singles in the UK since 1997.

## Dial-up Flashback

Learn to play the 1971 acoustic gem  
Kelis dusted off for her latest album

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**R**&B singer Kelis' musical leap from her powerful debut single of 1999, "Caught Out There"—with its screamed, hip-hop/punk refrain, "I hate you so much right now!"—to her dance-pop breakthrough "Milkshake" and more recent interpretation of the spare and simple acoustic ballad "Bless the Telephone," is remarkable. Of course, Kelis has always been a wildly eclectic singer and songwriter, and an artist willing to take creative risks, including the dusting off of this little-known gem from 1971.

"Bless the Telephone" was written by the British poet and singer-songwriter Labi Siffre, who couldn't have imagined the current smartphone culture when he wrote the song. The gentle, fleeting ballad—his version is only about 90 seconds long—perfectly captures the simple pleasure of hearing a loved one's voice on an old-fashioned rotary telephone, in the middle of the daily grind.

Kelis, who also is a certified chef, includes her version of "Bless the Telephone" on her latest album, *Food*, as a duet with singer Sal Masekela, the sports commentator and son of South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela. The duo's interpretation maintains the stripped-down feel of Siffre's original, incorporating just

voices and acoustic guitars. However, the music is reharmonized a bit, and certain wistful chords from the original—like the add2 that appears in every section—were changed to simpler chords. Kelis also extends the song, repeating the refrain. In the interest of harmonic color, the arrangement here restores the Siffre original.

Before you tackle the song, note that Siffre recorded it with his guitar capoed at the fifth fret, to accommodate his trademark high singing voice. If you choose to do the same, note that all the music in the notation will sound a perfect-fourth higher than written, in the key of G as opposed to D, and notes indicated in the music as played on the open strings will be played at the fifth fret.

It should be fairly easy for you to put this song together. The bulk of it—the verses and instrumental sections—are shown in the four bars of notation and tab. To play this part, hold down each chord grip for as long as possible, letting the notes ring together. Play it finger-style, using the pick-hand fingering suggested in the first bar. Remember, p=thumb, i=index finger, m=middle, and a=ring. Extend this pattern to the chords in the bridge, and you'll have polished off the whole song.

AG

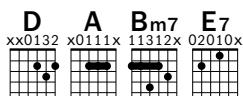


**Kelis**  
***Food***  
Ninja Tune

# BLESS THE TELEPHONE

WORDS AND MUSIC BY LABI SIFFRE

## Chords



## Intro and Verse Pattern

**let ring throughout**

Bass fingering: 2, 3, 2 | 3, 2, 3 | 0, 0, 0 | 0, 2, 0, 0

### Intro

**D    A    Bm7**  
**E7      Gadd9    G**

1. It's nice to hear your voice again

### E7

I've waited all day long

**Gadd9    G    D**  
Even wrote a song for you

**A                  Bm7**  
It's strange the way you make me feel

### E7

With just a word or two

**Gadd9    G    D**  
I'd like to do the same for you

*Repeat Intro*

2. It's nice to hear you say hello

And how are things with you

I love you

But very soon it's time to go

An office job to do

While I'm here writing songs for you

### Bridge

**F#7(#5)      Gadd9**  
Strange how a phone call can change your day

### D

Take you away

### F#7(#5)      Gadd9

Away from the feeling of being alone

### D

Bless the telephone

*Repeat Intro*

3. It's nice the way you say my name

Not very fast or slow just soft and low

The same as when you tell me how you feel

I feel the same way too

I'm very much in love with you

### Outro

**D    A    Bm7**

### E7

**Gadd9                  D**  
I'm very much in love with you

LISTEN  
TO THIS!



Labi Siffre

*The Singer and the Song*

EMI



# A Winter's Tale

Pete Seeger, King Wenceslas—  
they don't make 'em like that anymore!

**Editor's note:** In a 1995 issue of AG, Pete Seeger wrote of a simple arrangement he liked to use for one of his all-time holiday favorites, "Good King Wenceslas"—the inspiring tale of a kindly Bohemian monarch who, literally, walked the walk when it came to helping the servants and peasants of his kingdom. In light of the folk icon's death last January, we thought it fitting to mark his footsteps—yes, just as the page did with ol' Wenceslas—and revisit the arrangement in the spirit of Pete Seeger, who no doubt took to heart the song's final couplet: "Ye who now will bless the poor/Shall yourselves find blessing."

Happy holidays!



The first Christmas carols were earthy peasant dances with songs, which were not always approved of by church folks. In fact, a 17th-century Scottish law made singing "filthy carols" punishable by a jail sentence. In the middle of the 19th century—at about the same time that Dickens wrote his famous novella *A Christmas Carol*—a few young preachers in London, including J.M. Neale (1816–1869), sparked a revival of carol singing. Their intent was to revive a country custom among people who had left their villages to work in Britain's smoky cities. They collected carols from all over Britain and other parts of Europe. Neale translated a Welsh New Year's carol into English and retitled it "Deck the Halls." Then he discovered a

Swedish Easter carol and put completely new words to it about a medieval king of Bohemia named Wenceslas. I've sung about the good king for 70 years or more and have been plucking this tune for half a century. To play this simple arrangement, first lower the sixth string from E to D. Use your index finger (and sometimes your middle and ring fingers) to pluck up on the higher strings, and your thumb to play the lower strings. When only two strings sound, play them with our thumb and index finger. In the first half of the song, the melody is played with the thumb, and in the second half with the index finger. Keep the tempo steady throughout, even in the last three bars. Try swapping verses and improvising. It's easy! —Pete Seeger, 1995 AG

## GOOD KING WENCESLAS

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY PETE SEEGER

Tuning: D A D G B D

**D**

**G/B**

**D**

**N.C.**

B<sub>m</sub>      G      D

T 3 3 0 5 3 2 0 3 3 0 2 3 2 2  
B 2 2 0 4 4 2 0 5 0 0 2 2 0

D      G      A<sub>7</sub>      D

1. Good King Wen - ces - las looked out on the feast of Ste - phen  
2.3.4.5. See additional lyrics

T 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 2  
B 0 0 0 5 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0

D      N.C.      D

when the snow lay round - a - bout, deep and crisp and e - ven.

T 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 2  
B 0 0 0 5 4 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0

N.C.      D

Bright - ly shone the moon that night though the frost was cru - el

T 4 2 0 0 4 2 5 4 2 0 2 3 2 2  
B 0 0 0 5 4 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 0

B<sub>m</sub>

when a poor man came in sight gath - 'ring win - ter fu -

B 4 4 5 0 2 2 0 4 2 0 4 2 0

G

**1, 2, 3, 4**

D

**5**

**N.C.**

- el. - ing.

A 0 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0

B 5 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

2. Hither page and stand by me  
If thou know'st it telling  
Yonder peasant who is he  
Where and what his dwelling  
Sire he lives a good league hence  
Underneath the mountain  
Right against the forest fence  
By Saint Agnes' fountain
3. Bring me flesh and bring me wine  
Bring me pine logs hither  
Thou and I will see him dine  
When we bear him thither  
Page and monarch forth they went  
Forth they went together  
Through the rude wind's wild lament  
And the bitter weather

4. Sire the night is darker now  
And the wind blows stronger  
Fails my heart I know not how  
I can go no longer.  
Mark my footsteps my good page  
Tread thou in them boldly  
Thou shalt find the winter's rage  
Freeze thy blood less coldly
5. In his master's steps he trod  
Where the snow lay dinted  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed  
Therefore Christian men be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing  
Ye who now will bless the poor  
Shall yourselves find blessing

Collings MF5 Deluxe Varnish #1191



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# Pare Down & Power Up

How to rock your accompaniment with '5' chords

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

**P**ower chords, or “5” chords, are essential vocabulary for rock ‘n’ roll, from the Kinks and the Cars to the White Stripes and Black Keys. These stripped-down chords have a kind of primal sound that’s perfect for rhythmically driving music—not just rock, but blues, bluegrass, Celtic music, and many other styles. In this lesson, you will run through some common fingerings for 5 chords, and a few examples of how you can use them in your accompaniment.

## CUT THE THIRDS

While a chord normally consists of three or more notes, 5 chords have only two notes: the root and the fifth. There is no third, which is the note that would mark the chord as major or minor, so that leaves the tonality more open and undefined.

To get started, play through the open-position chord shapes in Ex. 1. You’ll notice that all of these voicings actually include three or more strings—that’s because the roots or fifths repeat at higher octaves, just to beef up the sound. The first E5, for instance, has the root (E, sixth string), fifth (B, fifth string), and root an octave up (E, fourth string).

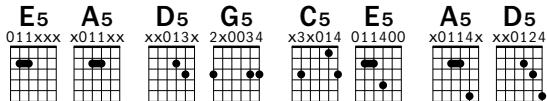
For E5 and A5 in measure 1, use a two-string barre with your index finger. The G5 is a typical bluegrass voicing; lean your middle finger against the fifth string to mute it. Similarly, in the C5 lean your ring finger against the fourth string to mute it. The last three chords are voicings of E5, A5, and D5 that include more upper strings. These require some pinkie strength (especially the A5) but are good to know when you want a bigger-sounding 5 chord.

Try the E5, A5, and D5 together in Ex. 2, which is reminiscent of the ’80s power-pop classic “What I Like About You,” by the Romantics. At the end of the measures of A5, lift up the barre and play the open strings for one beat. That makes it easier to transition to the next chord.

Ex. 3 is a bluegrass/country-style progression. Leave your pinkie in place when moving from the G5 to C5, and then slide it up two frets for the D5.

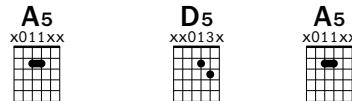
Ex. 4 is back in the rock zone, using the six-string version of E5 along with G5 and A5. If you’re having trouble with this A5 fingering, substitute the three-string voicing used in Ex. 2. Or, if you’re feeling more ambitious, try adding the first string to the A5, using a pinkie barre at the fifth fret on the top two strings.

## Ex. 1



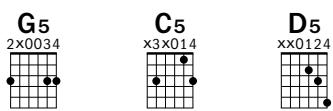
**Ex. 1**

## Ex. 2



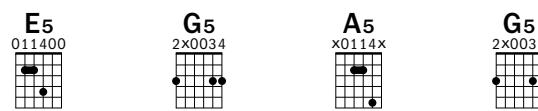
**Ex. 2**

## Ex. 3



**Ex. 3**

## Ex. 4



**Ex. 4**

## MOVEABLE POWER CHORDS

Rock rhythm (especially on electric guitar) often uses closed-position power-chord shapes that can be moved anywhere on the neck. The workhorse shapes are shown in the next two examples.

The chords in Ex. 5 have roots on the sixth string. Play F5 with your index finger at the first fret, then move up to the third fret for G5, to the fifth fret for A5, and to the seventh fret for B5. You can, of course, play this shape at any other fret too.

The 5 chords in Ex. 6 have a root on the fifth string—they use the same fingering as in Ex. 5, just moved over one string. Play B<sup>b</sup> 5 with your index finger at the first fret, C5 at the

third fret, D5 at the fifth fret, and E5 at the seventh fret. You also can include the open first, second, and sixth strings with the E5 if you want a big, ringing sound.

In Ex. 7, practice moving from G5 to C5 while maintaining a steady eighth-note rhythm, using all downstrokes with the pick. The open-string notes at the end of each measure give you a momentary break to change fingerings. Ex. 8 uses the same G5 and C5 shapes but mixes bass notes with chords.

Now try Ex. 9, which slides the same power chord shape around the neck—this is a less frenetic version of the changes in the Kinks' "All Day and All of the Night."

## MIX 'EM UP

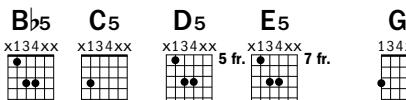
In practice, you don't often play 5 chords exclusively in a song—you mix them with regular majors and minors. That's the case with Ex. 10, a snippet of the kind of chord progression used in the Cars' hit "Just What I Needed." After playing E5 and B5, go to the fourth fret for C<sup>m</sup>—this is the same as the power-chord shape in Ex. 6, with an additional note (the minor third) added on top. The same is true for G<sup>#</sup>: you've added the major third on top of the power-chord shape from Ex. 5.

Try 5 chords in other songs. You can substitute them for either major or minor chords. You may find that the raw sound of a 5 chord is just what you needed.

AG

Ex. 5

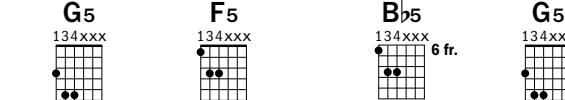
Ex. 6



Ex. 7

Ex. 8

Ex. 9



Ex. 10



# Pass It On

Learn to walk your jazz bass lines with chord accompaniment

BY RON JACKSON



**W**hile studying at Berklee College of Music in Boston in the mid-1980s, I had the honor of seeing the jazz guitarist Joe Pass give a clinic. It was just him, his trusty Gibson ES-175 hollow body, and a nylon-string acoustic. Pass made those guitars sound like a full band. He demonstrated chord melody, percussive tapping, virtuoso melodic solos, and—what really got me going—walking bass lines with chord accompaniment, or “comping.”

One of the best ways to learn how to play walking bass lines with chord accompaniment is to listen to jazz bassists. Another way is to understand how bass lines with chords developed. For that, you’ll need to start from where it all began—that is, with Django Reinhardt and

Freddie Green of the Count Basie Orchestra. Both of them played acoustic guitars and recorded that way—Reinhardt, in a small group setting, with the Manouche-style nylon-string guitar similar to a Saga Cigano (\$495); and Green, mic’d in a big-band setting, with an archtop similar to a Godin 5th Avenue (\$545) or D’Angelico EXL-1 (\$1,299).

Reinhardt and Green paved the way to playing walking bass lines on guitar with the chord shapes they used while comping in band settings. You can begin by listening to their music. After that, you’ll be ready for this month’s weekly workout.

In all of the examples, I have used the same chord shape and fingering, while progressively adding a walking bass line and comping pattern

for subsequent weeks. Pay strict attention to the fingerings.

Use a metronome and set the tempo at about 50 BPM. Practice so that the click is on beats two and four. This imitates the hi-hat in a jazz drum kit, and will give the music a swing feel. I suggest counting the one and three between the clicks so you will be able to catch the two and four. If that’s too difficult, just play on the quarter note starting at 100 BPM.

I recommend using a medium-tension standard pick.

## WEEK ONE

To perform walking bass lines with chords, first learn the three-note chord voicing commonly used on guitar in big bands and mainstream

### Week 1

swing: the root, third, and seventh of the chord. For a G7 chord, the notes will be G, B, and F, omitting the fifth, or D. One G7 voicing is the G root on the sixth string, third fret; the F (which is the flat seventh note of the chord, written  $\flat 7$ ) on the fourth string, third fret; and the B (the third note of the chord) on the third string, fourth fret.

That chord form and its accompaniment (or, comping) is known as the “Freddie Green” style. To begin understanding this style, first familiarize yourself with these three chord voicings:

## BEGINNERS' TIP 1

**Practice your bass lines with a swing feel by setting the click of your metronome as beats two and four. This imitates the hi-hat on the drum set so you can get into the groove. A walking bass line fills in the time so well that you don't even need a drummer!**

The dominant seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1, 3, 5,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in a G7 chord, the notes are G, B, D, and F.

The minor seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1,  $\flat 3$ , 5,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in an Am7 chord, the notes are A, C, E, and G.

The diminished seventh chord, which has the chord intervals 1,  $\flat 3$ ,  $\flat 5$ ,  $\flat 7$ . For example, in a C $\sharp$ dim7 chord, the notes are C $\sharp$ , E, G, B $\flat$ .

Use this week to learn the jazz-blues chord progression in the key of G. It's crucial that you commit to memory these chord shapes on the fingerboard, as well as the chord progression. These shapes will be used throughout the workout.

Below is the formula for a jazz-blues in roman numerals. Roman numerals are used so you can transpose this chord progression to any key, but memorize this chord progression in the key of G.

I7	Iv7	I7	II-7-V7of IV
Iv7	#IVdim7	I7	II-7-V7of II
II-7	V7	I7 V7of II	IIIm7-V7of I

Use all downstrokes on this exercise. Practice muting the unused strings and accent the two and four of each measure. Use the exact fingerings. Once you master and memorize the shapes, you will come up with your own fingerings. When strumming, make sure that you do

## BEGINNERS' TIP 2

**Play the bass note on every quarter note, or beat, to create a sense of “walking.”**

not strum too hard. Your strums should be smooth. Practice until you can smoothly change between chords.

### WEEK TWO

It's time to add the most basic bass line: the quarter note on every four beats on the root of each chord. The easiest bass line is to play the root on every beat. Walking bass lines are almost always played as quarter notes—something known as four to the floor—and this is how you begin to create them. You also almost always play the bass notes on the fifth and sixth strings. If you try to play the bass note on the fourth string, you will be out of the bass register. Finally, you also will usually play the third and seventh of the chord on the third or fourth strings.

### Week 2

In Week One, you played the bass note with the third and seventh as one chord. Now, separate the bass note root from the third and seventh and create two parts. Your right hand will become very important now, because you will be using the right hand to play the two parts. This is in the realm of fingerpicking, but on a very basic level.

For this exercise, I recommend you use hybrid picking, holding the pick with your first finger and thumb to play the bass notes, and using second and third fingers to pluck the two-note third-and-seventh chord voicing. Make sure that you accent the two and four. Practice the bass line so that it sounds smoothly connected (legato) and hold the chords for their full time value.

Your ultimate goal is to sound like you are playing two separate parts.

### WEEK THREE

Now, you will add a real walking bass line in quarter notes with the third and seventh chord voicing playing a half note on the first and second beats, again creating two different parts. You will begin to work on the independence of both your fretting and picking hands. Practice these two parts separately—first, the bass line, then the chords—and then put them together.

Learn this walking bass line using the fingerings on the music. These specific fingerings were written to work with the chords. Notice how the walking bass line connects each chord. Also notice how I throw in an occasional open

### BEGINNERS' TIP 3

**Bass players use open strings all the time when walking their bass lines. Do the same on your acoustic guitar.**

### BEGINNERS' TIP 4

**The goal of playing walking bass lines is to accompany yourself or others. Avoid playing a walking bass line when you're playing with a bassist, unless he or she takes a solo and you ask permission.**

A string. Jazz bass players play open strings all the time when they walk their bass lines. It gives them a break from pressing the frets or fingerboard. Remember: always accent the bass notes on the two and four to keep that swing feel happening.

Next, practice the two-note third-and-seventh voicing. Remember the fingerings of these notes and how they fit in the chord progression. If you were to play these two-note chords in a band jamming on the blues in G, they would fit perfectly.

Now, put it all together, paying strict attention to the fingerings.

### WEEK 4

This week with the same walking bass line, play the third and seventh on top, syncopated. This requires even more independence of the fretting and picking hands.

The syncopated rhythm for the third and seventh in this example is called the Charleston

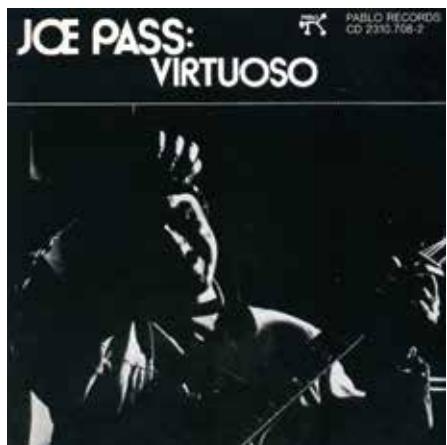
rhythm (listen to Django Reinhardt's version of the song "Charleston" from the *Quintette du Hot Club de France* album). The Charleston rhythm is a very common comping pattern in jazz.

Once you master this rhythm, put it together with the bass line. The tricky part is to mix the syncopated chords with the walking bass line.

Pay special attention to where the bass notes and chord rhythms fall into place. When you've practiced it to perfection, you'll sound like a full swing band on guitar. AG

**Ron Jackson** is a New York City-based master jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who's played with Taj Mahal, Jimmy McGriff, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, and many others. Find more of Jackson's lessons at [practicejazzguitar.com](http://practicejazzguitar.com).

## LISTEN TO THESE



Joe Pass

Virtuoso

Pablo



Django Reinhardt & Stephane Grappelli

Le Quintette du Hot Club de France:

25 Classics 1934-1940

ASV/Living Era



Count Basie (with Freddie Green)

Count Basie in London

Verve

### Week 3

G<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>7</sub>      G<sub>7</sub>      D<sub>m7</sub>      G<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>#dim7</sub>

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3 0 2 3  
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3 6 7 6  
5 4 5 4  
.

### Week 4

G<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>7</sub>      G<sub>7</sub>      D<sub>m7</sub>      G<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>7</sub>      C<sub>#dim7</sub>

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# The Only Way to Fly

5 tips to ensure your guitar arrives at its destination as safely as you do

BY OCTOBER CRIFASI



**W**hen the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 was signed into law in February 2012, there was much rejoicing among guitarists and other musicians, as it required airlines to allow many instruments as carry-on items and without additional cost.

The catch? There must be space in the overhead bin at the time of boarding.

With the holiday season upon us, many folks will take to the air with guitars and luggage galore, and that "space" will be at a premium. To ensure your instrument arrives safely at your final destination, take heed of the steps listed here and do your research by contacting the airline ahead of time to confirm their carry-on policies related to musical instruments.

### 1 YOUR GUITAR IS NOT LUGGAGE

Do not check your guitar as luggage—ever. You are rolling the dice if you do, and the odds of your instrument arriving safely are typically not in your favor. Those nightmare stories and images you may have seen online or heard about in a song are not just well-crafted cautionary tales of fiction. Guitars checked as luggage are hurled about and slammed on to conveyor belts just like your bags—it doesn't matter how many "fragile" stickers you slap on the case.

Instead, use the guitar as your carry-on item and check everything else as luggage—even the small pieces. If you absolutely must check your instrument due to space problems, do it at the gate. Gate-checked items go into cargo last and are the first to be removed and placed at the arrival gate for pick-up. That's a much safer and preferable alternative if you can't carry the guitar onboard.

### 2 BOARD FIRST

If possible, pre-board online as early as possible to ensure you are in the first boarding group—or when arriving at check-in, ask if you

can pre-board. If you cannot pre-board, ask if the guitar can be placed somewhere else in the cabin, such as the attendant coat closet. When booking your seats, select seats at the far back of the plane, as that is usually the section that boards first.

### 3 BUY A HARD-SHELL CASE

While the less-bulky soft-sided gig bag takes up less space in the overhead compartment, it does nothing to shield from that carelessly thrown roller bag or over-sized suitcase your seatmate is determined to shove into small quarters. Many major airlines now require "hard-sided" cases as a part of their carry-on policy, so be sure to check airline policies prior to travel (most policies can be found on the airline website).

### 4 KEEP CALM

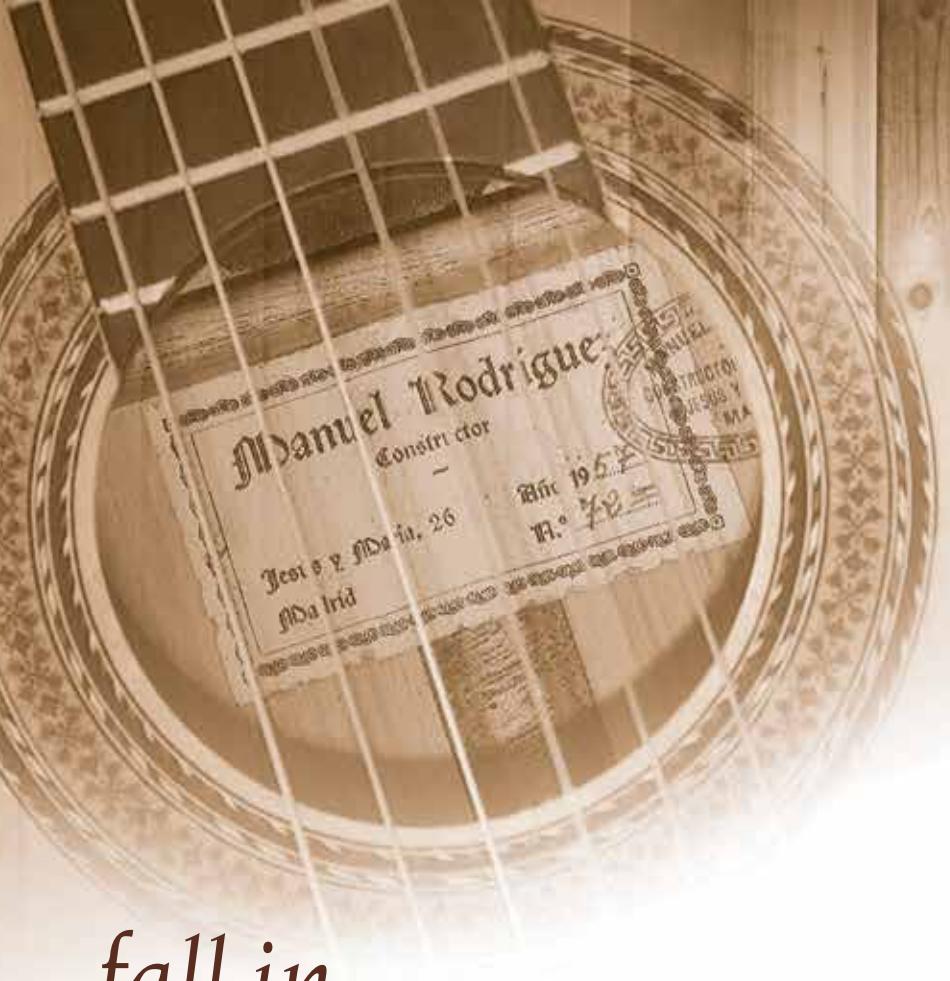
With so many flights filled to capacity during the holiday season, tensions and tempers can run high. Stay calm and treat airline staff with respect—that's more effective than getting into heated arguments about the law. Stand your ground when necessary, but be prepared to gate-check the instrument should it come down to that.

### 5 SPOT-CHECK YOUR GUITAR

Always check your instrument for damages prior to leaving the airport. If something has been damaged or taken apart by the TSA (in a random luggage search, for example), bring it to the airline's attention immediately.

There have been many instances when musicians waited until they got home or to the gig to find something has been damaged. If there is sign of a problem, either bring to the gate attendant's attention or find an airline representative onsite. TSA issues and complaints (such as damage to items due to inspection) can be filed at [tsa.gov/traveler-information/claim-forms](http://tsa.gov/traveler-information/claim-forms).

AG



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**PRS** PAUL REED SMITH  
GUITARS



The PRS Guitars' Acoustic Team.

78

**Makers & Shakers**  
Paul Reed Smith  
unplugs

82

**Guitar Guru**  
Battle of the  
flattop bulge

84

**Great Acoustics**  
Hank Williams'  
Martin D-18

86

**New Gear**  
Collings 01  
12-Fret

# AG TRADE



## SHOPTALK

# Guitar GPS

Tempo AnyCase Device lets you track your case's whereabouts

BY DAVID KNOWLES

**W**hen it comes to tracking down a stolen guitar, one Massachusetts company is on the case.

Tempo Cases, a Boston-based manufacturer that specializes in safeguarding musical instruments, has released the AnyCase GPS Tracking Device, which allows musicians to pinpoint the location of stolen gear.

Much the same way the “Find My iPhone” application relies on GPS technology to help Apple smartphone users see where their stolen products are traveling in real time, AnyCase relies on satellite monitoring and alerts customers via text message when an instrument is being moved. Using a computer, tablet, or phone, users can track a guitar case’s real-time trajectory on a map.

The company says it has purposefully used a stealth design on the tracking device, so that the suspicion of thieves is not aroused.

“The few buttons and LEDs on the device are completely invisible when it is mounted inside your case, and the button and LEDs are either unmarked or cryptically marked so only you know what they do,” the company notes in a press release.

To further ensure that a thief would not simply open a case and toss the tracking device, Tempo has also affixed a misleading sticker on the outside of the device that reads, “Humidity Monitoring System.”

All that stealth and deception comes at a price, however. The AnyCase retails for \$295, but, in addition to the possibility of recovering your prized guitar, there’s another benefit. “We have partnered with Clarion Insurance and Heritage Insurance, both of which are offering discounts on instrument insurance to customers who use our products,” the company’s founder, Gabriel Gunsberg, said in an email.

AG



## TANGLED UP IN NEW

Tanglewood spruces up its Premiere series

The United Kingdom’s best-selling acoustic-guitar brand, Tanglewood, is updating its popular Premiere line.

The revamped line—which includes three six-strings, a 12-string, and a four-string bass—all feature solid AA Sitka spruce tops, mahogany backs, sides, and necks, and NuBone nuts and saddles.

Four of the five new models include a B-Band Crescent pickup, and the Super Folk six-string will be available in a left-handed model. Best of all, the new Premiere line is affordable, with the Dreadnought cutaway and Super Folk cutaway retailing for \$739, the 12-String Super Folk and the Acoustic Bass coming in at \$779, and the fully acoustic Orchestra model carrying an MSRP of \$659.

In August, Tanglewood, founded in London in 1988, also introduced an all-mahogany line of its Premiere series in North America that included slope-shoulder dreadnought, orchestra, and parlor models. —DK



Experimenting with mic placement is a must when recording at home.

# Bouncing Off the Walls

5 ways to improve the sound of your home-recording space

BY DOUG YOUNG

We live in a golden age for home recording. Today, anyone can put together a studio with gear that matches or exceeds the quality of many professional studios of a few decades ago—all for less money than you probably paid for your guitar. But several factors prevent many home recordists from achieving pro-quality results. One of the most challenging and least understood involves the acoustics in your recording space. The science behind room acoustics is complex, but here are five ways you can improve your home recordings—even if you're not an acoustics expert.

## 1 FIND THE BEST-SOUNDING ROOM

Each room in your house will have its own sound, so first try to identify which room works best for recording. You can do this by strapping on a guitar and walking from room to room—or even outside—while playing. Keep in mind that microphones “hear” things a bit differently than you do. You may think your guitar sounds heavily in the bathroom, but on a recording it probably will be indistinct and distant.

Having a portable recording setup can be a big help here. Record to your laptop computer, a portable recording device, or even your smart phone or tablet, and see which room produces the best recorded sound.

Of course, there will be tradeoffs. If you discover the best sounding room in the house is the family room where your TV is, you may have to negotiate with a spouse or children about when you can use the space. If you plan to record often, you may want to leave mics set up and ready to go—not exactly ideal for high-traffic areas.

## 2 ADD ACOUSTIC TREATMENT

Among the bane of home recording are small rooms with hard reflective surfaces. Two techniques for eliminating these reflections are absorption and diffusion.

There are products available that address each of these, and it's also possible to build your own. But forget the egg cartons or carpet on the walls, as well as inexpensive foam products—it's important to absorb or deflect sound uniformly across all frequencies, and many

cheap materials will only absorb high frequencies, leaving a room sounding dead, but bassy and muddy.

Properly treating a room can get complex, but there are online calculators that can help. Some companies that make acoustic treatment will tailor-make a package for you based on your room size and wall materials.

Of course, hanging acoustic panels on the walls or ceilings can get expensive, and probably only works if you are fortunate to have a dedicated room for recording. If this isn't practical, there are other options.

## 3 LEVERAGE ROOM FURNISHINGS

In many cases, an average furnished room works surprisingly well for recording acoustic guitar and vocals. Couches, upholstered chairs, and drapes act as absorbers, while bookcases and other furniture in general may act as diffusers, scattering the sound and preventing resonances and slap echoes.

The worst case for recording is usually a completely empty room with hard surfaces; as you add furniture, the room becomes more recording-friendly. Without some analysis and special attention, your existing room probably will be less than ideal, but it may be good enough, especially when combined with the next suggestions.

## 4 CREATE LOCAL ACOUSTIC SPACES

You can get many of the benefits of full-scale acoustic treatment by setting up small acoustic panels around you when you record. You can purchase panels of absorbent material, typically 2-by-4 feet, for about \$50 each, or you can build them yourself for less. Setting up two or more panels around your recording space can create a local zone that helps eliminate reflections and will make your recordings sound more focused and present. When you're not using them, stash the panels in a closet or under a bed.

## 5 CLOSE MIC

In a great acoustical environment, placing mics three feet or more away from the guitar can sound glorious. The guitar has space to bloom and the room will enhance the sound. In most home environments, though, you have to resort to much closer mic placement to avoid picking up the sound of inferior room acoustics.

You might start by placing mics about 12 inches from the guitar, but be prepared to experiment. Depending on the room, the guitar, and the microphones, you might get as close as a few inches away, or you might be able to move farther out. One challenge is that many mics exhibit what's called proximity effect—a tendency to produce more bass the closer you get to the sound source. You'll have to balance the increased bass from close mic placement with the increased room sound from placing mics farther away.

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# Rocket Launcher

**Paul Reed Smith's acoustic guitars are as powerful as the company's famous electrics**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In a recent TED Talk about guitar making, Paul Reed Smith dropped three nuts on the floor, paused to make the obvious double entendre, then drew the audience's attention to something more subtle. Each guitar nut had a distinct sonic property. One was made from plastic, which Smith compared to the material linking a toilet to a septic tank. It landed with a dull thud. Another was made of bone, and had a greater resonance when it hit the floor. The third was constructed from a proprietary material, and sounded even livelier.

Smith looked up at the crowd. "It makes a difference what the materials are," he said. Moments later, he walked over to one of the acoustics that his company, PRS Guitars, makes. "So now I'm going to play with the theory," he said, strumming the instrument. "It's sustaining longer than most electric guitars. Can you hear that?"

Over his four-decade career as an instrument maker, Smith has approached the guitar, which he refers to as an "applied physics device," with scientific rigor. He has scrutinized the impact that even the smallest component, like the nut, has on sound. He has analyzed the best Fender and Gibson designs to arrive at his own style of high-performance electric guitar, and in so doing succeeded at crafting a lineage of instruments known for their imposing voice and easy play coupled with trademark cosmetics such as gemlike finishes and bird-in-flight inlays that have transformed the electric guitar into a luxury good. In more recent years, Smith has given the acoustic guitar a similar treatment in PRS's collection of custom and mass-produced instruments.

Like many guitar makers, the 58-year-old Smith had a modest start. The son of a big-band leader turned mathematician, Smith grew up in a musical home, taking up the ukulele when he was 4. At home his mother sang and played a nylon-string guitar, which he appropriated for learning Beatles songs. Smith got serious about the guitar as a means of coping with teenage life, but he couldn't afford the expensive instruments favored by his favorite groups. "I had no choice but to build my own," he says by phone from his headquarters in Stevensville, Maryland.

As a high school student, Smith began building guitars in his bedroom, and around the same time learned to repair guitars while working in a shop in Washington, D.C. He briefly studied at St. Mary's College of Maryland, but dropped out to focus on building guitars and playing in bands. Smith became a fixture on the local scene and soon developed a clever strategy: after completing a guitar, he would tote it to a venue and ingratiate himself with a roadie in order to gain backstage access. This is how he sold a guitar to Ted Nugent in 1975, when the rocker was known more for his lightning-speed leads than for his divisive political rhetoric. Not long after that, Smith sold another guitar to Al Di Meola and then another to Carlos Santana. "People were definitely much more excited by the instruments I was making than by my guitar playing," Smith says.

By 1985, on the strength of his high-profile clients, Smith was able to move from tiny shop where he'd been working and living to a proper factory with a staff of guitar makers. The mid-'80s was a rough period for the major electric-guitar manufacturers, both in terms of brand identity and quality control. But PRS, with its new designs and consistently fine craftsmanship, established itself as a top player on the electric market. Smith was so persnickety about quality that he was known to destroy guitars that weren't up to snuff. From the outside, it seemed that Smith had solidified his reputation as a lasting instrument maker, but he wasn't satisfied.

"They say it takes 10 years to get good at something," Smith says, "but it must've taken me twice as long."

Smith had always loved acoustic guitars. As a young repairman, he had become intimate with acoustics by rebuilding guitars that he says were "smashed in anger." At trade shows, he was well-known for checking out all the best new acoustics. "I enjoy the form immensely—this combination of guitar-making, beauty, and physics," Smith says. "Even more than electrics, acoustic guitars are physics devices, involving a transfer of force to sound. Take two identical sets of nylon strings, put one on a \$100 guitar and the other on Segovia's guitar, and the latter will fill an auditorium with music, while the other might have a puny sound. Segovia's instrument is doing a much better job of transferring force into sound energy."

In the early 1990s, PRS briefly flirted with acoustic guitar-making in a collaboration with the luthier Dana Bourgeois, resulting in a handful of instruments that never made it past the prototype stage. Smith couldn't put his finger on it, he says, but the guitars just didn't capture the sound that he was looking for. Then, in the mid-2000s, Smith saw a guitar in the collection of Larry Thomas, CEO of the Guitar Center who now heads Fender.

Smith was blown away by the instrument. "Larry played two notes on this tiny guitar,



1867 Torres  
acoustic, left,  
with a spruce  
top and maple  
back and sides.

Right, a Paul Reed  
Smith SE Angelus  
Standard Acoustic  
Electric.



three inches deep with maple back and sides, built in the 1800s by Antonio Torres," he says. "When I heard it for the first time, it was so beautiful that I instantly welled up. The guitar was just exploding with tone, so much louder and with more bass than any other acoustic guitar I'd ever heard. I was confounded."

To understand how the guitar worked, Smith had it X-rayed. Based on his findings, Smith says, "I came to the conclusion that, although he didn't know it as such, Torres was thinking of the guitar as a kind of speaker cabinet."

Smith knew then that his own steel-string acoustic guitar designs would borrow structural elements from Torres. He enlisted the luthier Steve Fischer to arrive at a model whose soundboard combines Torres-style fan bracing with the X-pattern traditionally used on steel-string guitars. Rather than having both the top and back vibrating, as on the traditional steel-string, PRS uses a back that doesn't move; it's locked in place with large but lightweight mahogany braces. To extend Smith's metaphor, the soundboard is the diaphragm and the back is the cabinet.

The same basic design principles are used on all PRS acoustics, which range from the Korean-made SE series to those built inside the 4,300-square-foot custom shop at the PRS factory. That shop is now headed by the senior luthier Michael Byle, who oversees a staff of eight builders. "There will always be people

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Smith, right, with Carlos Santana, an early customer of PRS Guitars.

who appreciate craftsmanship and attention to detail, and our small team strives to deliver that," Byles says. "When people visit the shop, they are always amazed to see how much hand-work goes into our acoustics."

Smith has never actually built an acoustic guitar himself, but he takes a hands-on role with the 16 to 20 acoustic instruments the company makes each month. "At this point, it wouldn't be a good use of time to sit in the back of a shop and work on an acoustic; it would take away from my role as a leader in working on new projects," he says. "But I have my hands on every guitar we make, and I even keep a master bracing pattern right here in my office. I might be the managing general partner of PRS, but not a single acoustic leaves the building without my playing it."

"Hold on a second, let me grab a guitar," Smith says. He pauses to retrieve a nearby Angelus and tunes its sixth string to D before launching into some aggressive playing. "This thing is probably distorting your phone. It just sounds like a rocket!"

Though Smith's description may sound like hyperbole, more than a few top-shelf players agree with his assessment of the power and tone of PRS's acoustic guitars. Two of those players are the finger-style wizard Tony McManus and singer-songwriter Ray LaMontagne.

"One day several years ago," LaMontagne says, "my friend brought over a PRS acoustic guitar and took it out of the case. I was like, 'Oh my God, that's so weird! The headstock is odd—what's going on here? But as soon as I started playing it, I just lost it. All that stuff I was missing was there. It was so present [with a] really beefy low end, and yet I wasn't losing anything on the high end. With every other guitar to this point, I felt like I was getting one or the other."

After distorting my phone, Smith picks up his Angelus and, in a nod to Torres, plays a brisk passage in the E Phrygian mode. "The guy had it right," Smith says, "and we've left a lot of his theories intact in making our rockets." **AG**

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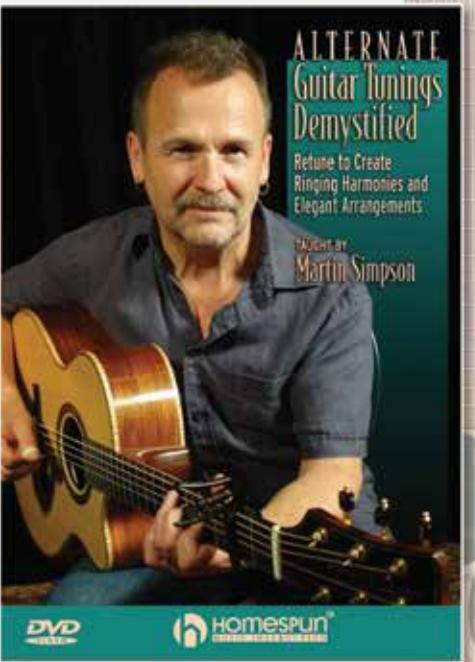
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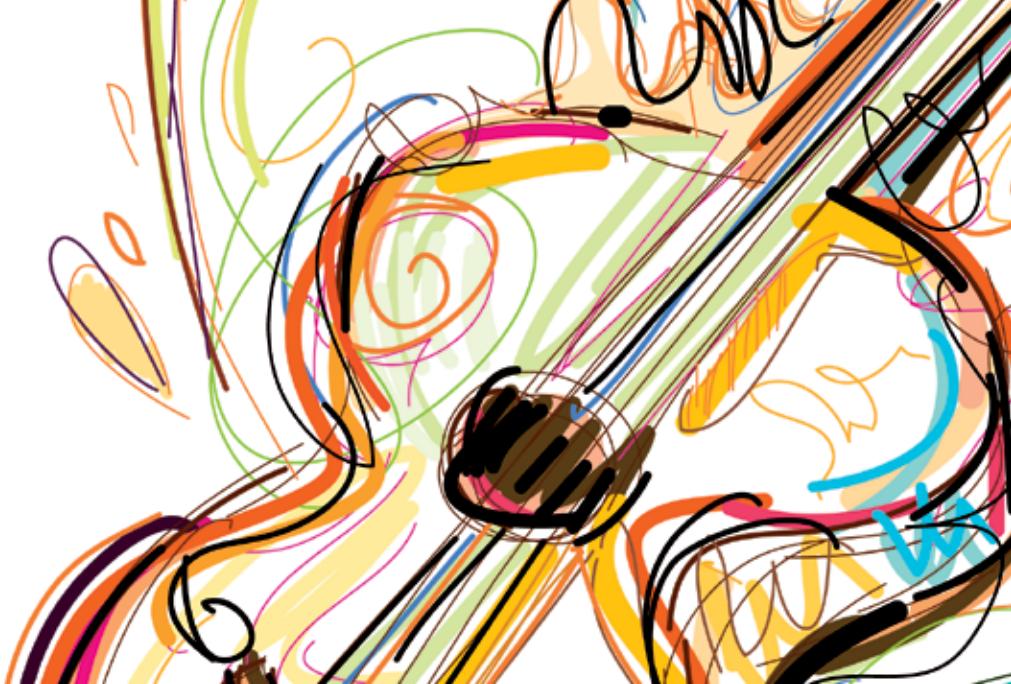
# No Belly, No Tone

**What happens when your flattop loses its flat top?**

BY DANA BOURGEOIS

**Q** Four years ago I purchased a new guitar by a reputable maker. I love the way it sounds, especially now that it's really breaking in. I briefly considered purchasing a vintage guitar, but quickly realized that great-sounding, problem-free vintage guitars are well out of my price range. Lately I've noticed that my top is no longer flat. In the right light I can see a faint bulge behind the bridge, as well as the outline of x-braces outside the soundhole. I've had a couple of minor action adjustments made and suspect these problems are related. Should I be concerned?

Otis Carlson  
Shreveport, LA



**A** Norman Blake, one of my guitar heroes and a connoisseur of fine vintage instruments, once remarked, "...no belly, no tone." Since overhearing that statement many years ago, I've noticed that the correlation between top distortion and truly great vintage tone is... well, let's just say it's roughly on par with the reliability of Newton's Law of Motion—an object in motion will remain in motion.

To work efficiently, a guitar top must be built lightly enough to vibrate in complex ways. Wood, the traditional material of choice for guitar tops, distorts when subjected to pressure and heat (this is how we bend sides) and, given enough time, will distort in response to pressure alone. Add 175 pounds or so of string tension and it will eventually distort any top built lightly enough for conventional tastes.

Yes, guitars can be built to stay flat forever. On the extreme end of the durability scale is the Telecaster, which helped create new categories of music, although it never succeeded in eliminating demand for dreadnoughts. Composites, tentatively accepted in the classical guitar world, offer the promise of distortion-free steel-string tops but have yet to catch on in a market that overwhelmingly favors traditional sound and appearance and retro, over progressive, trends.

I note that you love the sound of your relatively new guitar; that it is breaking in nicely; that its top shows signs of slight distortion; that your action needed minor adjustment. I am in agreement with your suspicion that these factors are related.

Newton's apple is clearly headed in the direction of the ground.

I recommend that you enjoy your guitar and stop worrying about changes in its life cycle that are the result of similarities to the great-sounding vintage guitars you wish you could afford.

At some point your top will stop stretching, and that point will roughly coincide with when you or your descendants stop wondering when your guitar will be fully "broken in." In the meanwhile, you will probably need several more action adjustments. Be thankful for your lifetime warranty, because continued top distortion may cause your guitar to eventually need a neck reset, as is the case with an overwhelming majority of vintage guitars.

And please take my advice: Insist on a neck reset, as opposed to a top replacement. **AG**

**Dana Bourgeois** is a master luthier and the founder of Bourgeois Guitars in Lewiston, Maine.

## GOT A QUESTION?

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If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *The Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.



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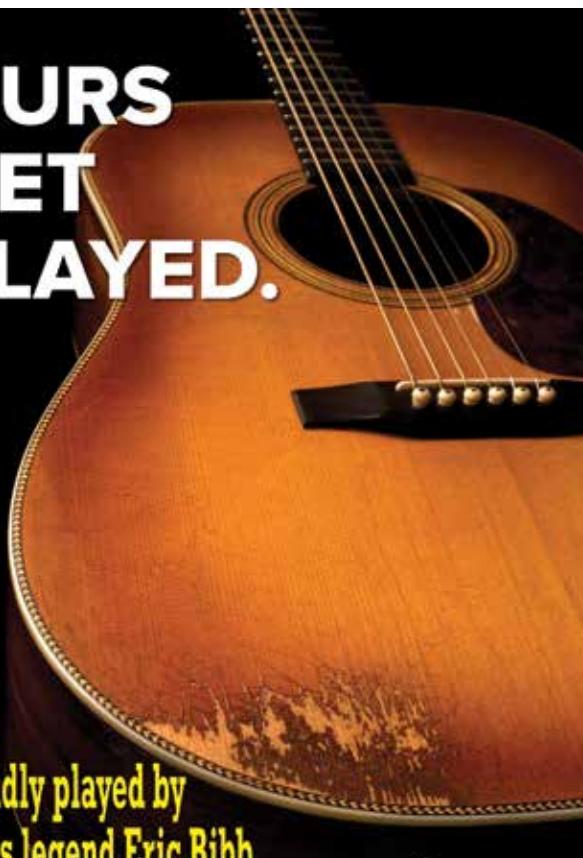


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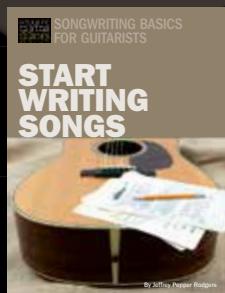
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## Hank Williams' Other Guitar

This Martin D-18 had a homecoming five years ago, but not before helping to launch a country legend

BY GREG CAHILL

**O**ne night, Hank Williams decided to swap guitars with a fellow performer on the Louisiana Hayride who shared his last name. Dock Williams, the guitarist for the Georgia Peach Pickers who was nicknamed "Curley" for his wavy hair, walked away from the deal with a distinctive Martin D-18. At the time, Curley had befriended the troubled country singer, whose reputation for drinking and hard living had left him ostracized by the Nashville establishment. Within a year, however, Hank's 1949 classic "Lovesick Blues" became a big hit, attracting a mainstream audience, luring the singer away from the Hayride and back to the Grand Ole Opry, and helping to seal his place as a country legend.

Curley remained in relative obscurity, although music historian Colin Escott has called the Georgia Peach Pickers "one of the best hillbilly swing bands." In the post-World War II era, the six-piece string band, which played jazz-inflected old-timey music while clad in bib overalls, plied its trade throughout the South at country fairs and in steamy West Coast dance halls. The farm-raised, curly-haired Dock Williams, who got his nickname from WSM radio host George D. Hay, who was known as the Solemn Old Judge, was the Peach Pickers' leader.

In the summer of 1948, after a two-year stint on the Grand Old Opry and a number of hits on the Columbia label, Curley moved his

band—and his family—to Bossier, Louisiana, just across the bridge from Shreveport to perform on the Hayride, the popular concert series and radio show that helped launch the careers of Elvis Presley, Kitty Wells, George Jones, Johnny Cash, and many others. For a spell, it served as a safe haven for Hank, already battling alcoholism and other inner demons.

"I don't remember the exact date that Hank Williams joined the Hayride. He arrived in Shreveport with his wife Audrey and step-daughter Lucretia sometime after we did," Curley's daughter, Morelle Williams Henry, says. As a pre-teen, she performed every Saturday night with the Peach Pickers as Little Georgia Ann. "Audrey was pregnant with Hank Jr. and my mother was pregnant with my youngest sister. Hank and my father became friends immediately."

"Hank was pretty down on his luck at that time . . . [he] loved my mother's biscuits."

Even after Hank's big commercial breakthrough, he and Curley stayed in touch, and collaborated on a couple of songs. "I remember how devastated my father and mother both were when they heard of Hank's death [in 1953]," Morelle says. "They attended his funeral."

When Curley died in 1970, the guitar he got from Hank was handed down to Morelle, who gave it to her son, Brent Weldon. Martin & Co., the current owner, acquired Hank's D-18 in 2009 at Christie's "Country Music Sale" auction for \$134,500.

"Many musicians have played this guitar between the years 1948 and 1970," Morelle wrote in an authentication document. "Some of the more notable ones were Boots Harris, whose primary instrument was steel guitar, but who played the Martin at times. Jack Pruett, whose primary instrument was the electric guitar, played the Martin, too—Jack left the Peach Pickers in 1956 and moved to Nashville to play for Marty Robbins. Jack loved to strum that Martin. . . ."

Williams' fabled 1941 Martin D-28, owned by Neil Young, is the better-known guitar: Williams bought that one from Dobro legend and Nashville guitar-store owner Tut Taylor (the legend goes that Hank Jr. once traded it for shotgun shells) and Young immortalized it in the song "This Old Guitar" (you can see it in director Jonathan Demme's *Neil Young: Heart of Gold* documentary and hear it throughout Young's *Prairie Wind* album).

But Curley's old D-18 may be even more deserving of its place in music history. "It is likely that Hank Williams personally purchased this Martin D-18 from Art's Music Shop in Montgomery, Alabama, in March of 1947," says Martin historian Dick Boak. "The grain of the top is distinctive, showing up in many promotional photos of Hank. Already having attained a degree of fame with the Drifting Cowboys, [he] performed with this guitar in his subsequent shows on the Louisiana Hayride and later during his famed years in Nashville."

AG



The prodigal son:  
Williams' D-18  
finally made it back  
to Martin & Co.  
after 62 years  
on the road.



## Love & Tonewood

**Collings' new 01 12-Fret parlor guitar plays so well, it's hard to put it down**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**D**espite its modest looks, this new Collings makes a strong first impression. A lovely little songbird, the 01 12-Fret is easy to play, responding to the lightest touch with a voice that's sweet and complex. And its aroma—freshly sanded wood and lacquer—is absolutely intoxicating. It's difficult to put this guitar down.

Collings has consistently hit the mark with its superlative interpretations of classic flattop acoustics—and more recently, archtops, electrics, mandolins, and ukuleles. The 01 12-Fret is among the smallest of the Austin, Texas, company's full-size guitars, a loving tribute to the 0-size parlor guitars Martin introduced in the 1850s, long before larger instruments such as the orchestra and dreadnought took over.

### NARROW BUT DEEP-SOUNDING

The 01 12-Fret is a narrow instrument, only

13.5 inches wide, but doesn't feel particularly small when played. It has a short-scale neck (24 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches) but a wide nut (1 $\frac{13}{16}$  inches), and a compound, 14- to 26-inch radius. The neck is ample but not overly cumbersome, and has a slight V profile that splits the difference between the vintage and the modern. Though I prefer narrower and smaller necks, the 01 12-Fret's neck feels comfortable and requires no adjustment in my technique.

A guitar like this begs to be fingerpicked and responds well to music of all types. Old-timey styles like country-blues and ragtime are a natural fit, as the guitar, although new, seems to have a mature sound. A pair of Duke Ellington pieces, "(In My) Solitude" and "Single Petal of a Rose," work out nicely on the 01 12-Fret, which has a nice, even tone. When I play some nylon-string arrangements of Claude Debussy



## AT A GLANCE

# COLLINGS 01 12-FRET

**BODY**  
**O size**  
**Select Sitka spruce top**  
**Mahogany back and sides**  
**Ebony bridge**  
**High-gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish**

**NECK**  
**Mahogany neck**  
**Ebony fretboard**  
**24 7/8-inch scale length**  
**1 13/16-inch nut width**  
**Nickel Waverly tuners**

**EXTRAS**  
**D'Addario EJ16 phosphor bronze strings (.012-.053)**  
**Collings Deluxe hardshell case by TKL**  
**Limited lifetime warranty**  
**PRICE**  
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and Maurice Ravel, they shine on this steel-string. Improvisations in tunings like DADGAD and open G also fare well, though the sound loses a touch of its robustness when tuned to open C. All of the tunings are easy to get into, thanks to the guitar's open-geared Waverly tuners.

When strummed with a pick, the 01 12-Fret doesn't have the brawniness of a larger guitar like a dreadnought, but it does have a good amount of bass response for its size. What's more, given the excellent balance between registers, this instrument would no doubt make a smart choice for the recording guitarist.

### GOOD WOODS

The basic 01 12-Fret comes standard with a Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides, all solid. But it can be custom ordered with

other tonewoods. Some 01 12-Frets advertised online come with enticing combinations of Adirondack spruce and birdseye maple, German spruce and koa, and all-koa, among other offerings.

The 01 designation indicates that this guitar has a minimum of cosmetic embellishments. Still, it's a looker. All of the woods are beautiful; the spruce is tightly grained and has a reddish hue, while the straight-grained mahogany has a warm, earthen coloration and a hint of figuring when viewed at certain angles. As on a vintage guitar, the body's tortoise binding adds a subtle shimmer to the edges.

Like all Collings guitars I've seen or played, the 01 12-Fret is impeccably built from stem to stern. Unlike a mid-19th-century guitar, designed for lower-tension strings, this one is made to withstand the additional force of steel

strings. Yet it's featherweight, at about 3.5 pounds. The nickel-silver frets are perfectly smooth, as is the high-gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish, which happens to be largely immune to fingerprints. Inside the guitar, things are also tip-top, with the scalloped bracing and the kerfing perfectly sanded and glued without a hint of sloppiness.

Collings has produced another winning guitar in the 01 12-Fret—an instrument that captures the essence of its early predecessors while being updated for the modern player with a fully adjustable truss rod and other constructional aspects. It's not cheap, and you can still find some 1800s-period Martin parlor guitars with Brazilian rosewood backs and sides for about the same price. But a player looking for a contemporary parlor guitar would be remiss in not checking out this fine instrument. **AG**

# Vintage Blues

Eastman's E20SS is a handsome, well-crafted instrument at a handsome, workhorse price

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**S**trum a few open chords on Eastman's slope-shouldered E20SS and you can hear the abundant power and slightly dark, rich voice. It's a good approximation of the golden-era Gibson J-series flattops from which this guitar draws inspiration.

The E20SS is Eastman's latest entry in a survey of great American guitar designs. The Chinese company established itself in the early 1990s as a maker of inexpensive, hand-built violin-family instruments before turning its attention to acoustic and electric archtop guitars and then flattops. Like all Eastman instruments, the E20SS is a relative bargain and workhorse—just like Gibson's J-45 was when introduced in 1942.

## COMFORTABLE, VERSATILE

The E20SS review model plays exceptionally well. With a  $1\frac{1}{16}$ -wide nut and  $24\frac{3}{4}$ -inch scale length, the medium-sized C-shape neck is a comfortable grip in all registers, whether I'm playing chords or single notes, and the action is smooth and low. The neck's satin finish feels sleek and fast, without any of the resistance that's sometimes associated with a gloss finish.

With its impressive headroom, the E20SS begs to be strummed with a pick, faring as well for Carter-style accompaniment as for rock-style riffing and even Freddie Green-approved comping. Chord qualities of all types work nicely on the instrument; given its excellent note separation, no muddiness is apparent in even the tightest cluster chords.

When I pick single-note lines in a range of styles, from bluegrass to swing, it's a lot of fun, although I sometimes have to dig in slightly harder on the treble notes, to give them good definition. The setup is excellent, encouraging speedy runs and even string-bending—plusses for players who double on the electric guitar.

The E20SS is also good for fingerpicking. Standard-tuned country-blues in the style of the Reverend Gary Davis and open-E patterns

## AT A GLANCE

### EASTMAN E20SS

#### BODY

Slope-shouldered dreadnought size

Solid Adirondack spruce top

Solid rosewood back and sides

Rosewood bridge

High-gloss sunburst finish

#### NECK

Mahogany neck

Rosewood fretboard

24.75-inch scale length

$1\frac{1}{16}$ -inch nut width

Chrome Gotoh open-geared tuners

#### EXTRAS

D'Addario EXP16 phosphor bronze strings (.012-.053)

Hardshell case

#### PRICE

\$1,625 list; \$1,299 street

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inspired by Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks* feel and sound terrific on this instrument, as does Led Zeppelin's "Black Mountain Side," in DADGAD, and improvised excursions in open G.

#### SOLID ALL ROUND

The E20SS likely draws much of its power from the Adirondack spruce soundboard and the hand-carved, scalloped X braces. Adirondack—which is harder to source and less commonly used today than varieties like Sitka—was the wood of choice for a majority of prewar guitars by Martin, Gibson, and others. Also known as red spruce, it's a stiff and dynamic species that maintains its sweetness and clarity when an instrument is played forcefully.

Unlike Gibson's J-45, whose back and sides were originally made from mahogany, the E20SS uses rosewood, which is likely responsible for the guitar's pleasing low end and its hint of brightness in the treble register. It's a wonderful set of solid woods—a combination usually reserved for more expensive guitars. Meanwhile, the neck is crafted of the customary mahogany; the fretboard and bridge, rosewood.

This E20SS is fairly light: 4 pounds, 7 ounces, and, as is the case with all Eastman instruments I've auditioned, very well built. The 20 Dunlop 6130 frets are perfectly crowned and polished, and the bone nut and saddle cleanly notched. The body's glossy sunburst finish appears thinly applied and free from irregularities, and the guitar's innards were crafted with similar meticulousness, without any excess traces of glue.

Vintage guitar fans will love its looks: multiply black-and-white body binding, upside-down bridge, no pickguard, dot fretboard markers—it's practically a doppelganger for an early-1940s J-45. The soundboard's burst pattern, fading from a rich, deep brown to a warm amber, looks impressively antique. But the headstock is slightly more refined, wearing a rosewood cap and sporting open-style Gotoh tuners that pair modern performance with old-school looks.

If you're looking for a finely built, golden-era-inspired guitar that looks as good as it plays and sounds, you can't beat the \$1,300 price. For those who are not opposed to foreign-made instruments, the E20SS is a smart choice. **AG**



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## Travel Light

**Bedell's Revere Orchestra was built for the road, but you may want to keep it at home**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**P**lay just one chord on Bedell's Revere Orchestra—it's like a little Steinway grand. An open Emaj7 hangs around for a very long time, as if a damper pedal is engaged, in a wash of almost reverberant sound, as the guitar vibrates excitedly against your ribcage.

That this guitar sounds so magnificent is hardly surprising. The instruments Bedell makes at its custom shop in Bend, Oregon, are among the finest of modern boutique guitars. And this particular example boasts an Adirondack spruce top and Brazilian rosewood back and sides—a tonewood combo that's common for many golden-era acoustic guitars but rare for new instruments, owing to restrictions on the woods.

### A REAL LUSH

The Revere Orchestra plays as well as it sounds. Its C-shaped neck has a decidedly modern profile, on the thin side, though hardly skimpy. The nut width is  $1\frac{11}{16}$  inches rather than the  $1\frac{3}{4}$  that's fashionable these days (a  $1\frac{3}{4}$ -inch nut will be an option in 2015). But the neck doesn't feel cramped when it comes to fretting chords, and the string spacing feels ample for fingerpicking.

Whether strumming basic open chords, doing some Travis picking, or riffing on rock chords, the guitar is resonant and responsive, with an excellent tonal balance in all of its registers, from thick and satisfying bass to tight, clear treble. Even styles not normally associated with a steel-string flattop—like bossa-nova comping and jazz chord-melody soloing—sound excellent on this instrument, given its great note separation and overall lush voice.

### LUXURY LINER

Bedell used an extraordinary set of woods for the review model of this instrument. The Adirondack spruce boasts a fine, even grain, and has a lively resonance when I tap the soundboard. The guitar company says it owns the world's largest collection of legal Brazilian rosewood for making instruments. Wood purveyors maintained this particular stash in the Segovia region of Spain for 50 years before Bedell acquired it, which means that this is the genuine "old wood" that guitar connoisseurs find so enticing.

The Revere's three-piece back shows the range of appearance that the prized tonewood is known for. Its center piece has a deep, dark-chocolate color, while the outer pieces are a lighter shade of brown, with a more dramatic grain pattern. The grains on the two sides form a chevron pattern that meets in the center of the guitar.

At just under 4 pounds, the Revere is exceptionally light. From the smooth fretwork to the uniformly lustrous finish to the guitar's tidy innards, the fit and finish are impeccable. The guitar has an organic appearance, thanks to the koa binding throughout; that same wood is used for the heel cap and end strip, as well as for definition lines between the back's three rosewood plates.

An abalone trim on the soundboard, fretboard and bridge pins make the instrument feel luxurious. My only aesthetic complaint is that the satin finish on the headstock seems an odd choice, given that the rest of the guitar has a gloss finish.

### AT A GLANCE

## BEDELL REVERE ORCHESTRA

#### BODY

**OM size**

---

**Solid Adirondack spruce top**

---

**Brazilian rosewood back (three-piece) and sides**

---

**Ebony bridge**

---

**High-gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish with aging toner on the soundboard**

#### NECK

**Mahogany neck**

---

**Ebony fretboard**

---

**25.5-inch scale length**

---

**$1\frac{11}{16}$ -inch nut width**

---

**Nickel Waverly tuners with ebony buttons**

#### ELECTRONICS

**K&K PowerMix Pure XT.**

---

**EXTRAS D'Addario EXP16 phosphor bronze strings (.012-.053). SKB iSeries travel case. Limited lifetime warranty**

#### PRICE

**\$9,990 street**

---

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## MADE TO BE PLAYED

Despite its high sticker price, this guitar is more for the traveling performer than the collector. It comes standard with K&K PowerMix Pure XT, an electronics system that incorporates an undersaddle piezo; a bridge-plate transducer; and an external, two-channel preamp. The external preamp is a smart choice. Although less convenient than an onboard module, it means you don't have that unfortunate hunk of plastic mounted to the guitar, as you see on many acoustic-electric instruments. The electronics sound surprisingly natural and hum-free when played through a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier—gig-worthy to say the least.

The Revere also includes an SKB iSeries travel case. This waterproof, military-grade case is built from injection-molded plastic and has TSA-approved latches that allow a transportation officer to open the case for inspection while keeping it impenetrable by other airport personnel. Given the problems associated with air transportation and guitars—not to mention the difficulty of touring internationally with a Brazilian rosewood instrument—the big question is: Will players be willing to travel—or even play a local gig—with such a nice and expensive guitar? Maybe. But even if not, the Revere is a worthy contender for any home player in the market for an exceptionally fine guitar made from the very best woods. **AC**

*Contributing editor Adam Perlmutter transcribes, arranges, and engraves music for numerous publications.*

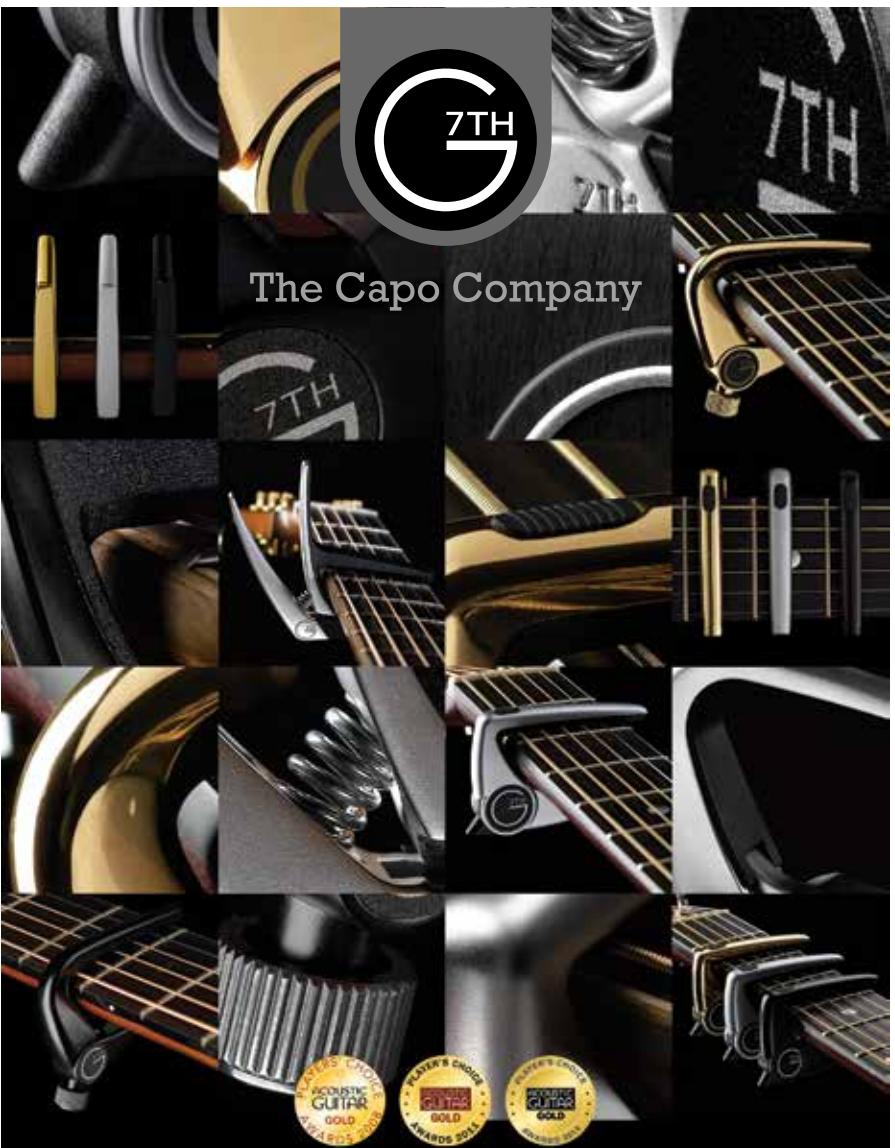


**Below, the three-piece Brazilian rosewood back is a brilliant combination of lights and darks; the luxurious trim on the fretboard, at right, is the icing on the cake.**





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# Bewitched

**By taking something old and making it fresh,  
Seagull's Merlin gives guitar players an exciting new voice**

BY GREG OLWELL

**B**efore the angry emails start pouring in, let's be clear about the Seagull Merlin—it is not a guitar. It's an instrument that didn't even exist before Seagull invented what it calls the "strummable dulcimer." But it's so charming and user-friendly that guitar players looking to expand their sound could easily fall in love with the Merlin's bright, twangy voice.

That's why AG is introducing the new "Pickin'" department—which will feature acoustic instruments that aren't guitars, but that guitar players may like—with a review of the little Merlin.

Seagull, the acclaimed stringed-instrument company based in La Patrie, Quebec, has made an instrument that's so easy to play that just about anyone who can press a finger on a string can begin to pluck melodies within seconds. In the several weeks that I had a pair of Merlins—one spruce-topped, the other mahogany-topped—I couldn't stop playing free-flowing melodies around the office.

For immediate music-making gratification, you can thank the Merlin's stripped-down design and nonchromatic tuning. The Merlin has fewer frets than usual, and weird spacing. That's because it takes its inspiration from the classic hillbilly stringed instrument, the Appalachian dulcimer.

The Merlin is designed to be simple to play and to make, and has the "unnecessary" frets

removed so it's almost impossible to press down on a wrong note—provided you're OK playing in one key.

Like a lap- or table-mounted dulcimer, the Merlin is a diatonic instrument, meaning that it's tuned to a specific key—D, in this case—and fretted so that you can only play notes in that scale. It's strung with four steel strings and tuned D-A-D, with the top string doubled, like strings on a mandolin or 12-string guitar.

There's something about being able to play an instrument without the fear of plucking a wrong note that's not only liberating, it makes you feel like a musical superhero. Both familiar and improvised melodies seem to fall from my fingers when playing the Merlin, and I find that music just flows a little easier. I mostly play the Merlin with a pick, either single-note lines or strumming all of the strings and playing drone notes while moving a melody line up and down the fingerboard.

There aren't many instruments built like this one, with strings about the same length as on a baritone ukulele. It has a thick and comfortable one-piece maple neck that's hollowed out where the fingerboard meets the body. Two small wings on either side of the center strip complete the body, which is capped with either a solid mahogany or spruce top. Both models have a zippy and raw, rootsy sound that leans toward a backwood-banjo plonk and zing, but

the different tops seem to give each a distinctive character that's like the difference between milk chocolate and lemon.

I prefer chocolate-y sounding instruments, so I'd reach for the mahogany Merlin if I were to play by myself. The richly grained top seems to balance the brightness of the maple body and neck with a mellower and warmer sound that feels right for more plaintive playing. But, it isn't a dark or muddled sound, it's more of a tight and warm midrange-y tone that compresses highs and lows into a bigger punchier tone the harder I strum or pick.

If the mahogany version balances the maple's brightness with softness, the spruce seems to accentuate it. It has tremendous dynamic snap, with a scooped midrange, fizzy highs, and a lively feel that screams "lead instrument." If I were to play a Merlin with a group and wanted to be heard, this would be the one I'd pack in the gig bag. It's loud, bright, and frisky, but not harsh.

I have to hand it to Seagull for twisting the lap-style Appalachian dulcimer and making a strummable instrument that feels familiar and useable for a guitar player.

Both Merlins are inspiring—and about as player friendly as a stringed instrument could be at a price that makes them an affordable way to add a fresh, unique flavor to your next strumming session.

## AT A GLANCE

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**94**

**Playlist**  
Damien Rice's  
'Faded Fantasy'

**95**

**Playlist**  
Laurie Lewis  
& Kathy Kallick

**102**

**Events**  
What's goin'  
on in December

# MIXED MEDIA



**95**

**Playlist**  
Luke Winslow-King  
resonates on his  
new album

# And So It Is

The Irish singer-songwriter's belated third album is a charm

BY MARK SEGAL KEMP

In the eight years since Damien Rice released his second album, *9*, a cottage industry of sensitive, Starbucks-approved indie singer-songwriters emerged and then exploded into the teen-pop mainstream with the arrival of Rice-acolyte Ed Sheeran, who graces this issue's cover. You can almost imagine Rice hovering in the wings with a furrowed brow, sullenly wringing his hands, thinking, "Please, please, relieve me of this writer's block."

Rice has been spared. And the depth and scope of music on his third full-length studio album proves that however seductive the songs of his legion of followers are, Rice's signature mix of acoustic guitars and strings, loops and layers, and achingly raw confessions is inimitable. If 2006's *9* was a slight letdown from Rice's sublime 2003 debut *O*, his more mature new album puts the singer and guitarist firmly back in the ring.

Bookended by a pair of hazy, atmospheric pieces—the title song and "Long Long Way"—and fleshed out with sparser songs featuring lots of crisp fingerpicking (on a Martin, rather than the Lowden he famously plays live) and swelling strings, the centerpiece of *My Favourite Faded Fantasy* is the one-two punch of "The Greatest Bastard" and "I Don't Want to Change You." The former, over gently picked guitar, is quintessential Rice, questioning a series of statements that are at once self-congratulatory and self-deprecating, and with a wisdom that only comes with age: "I made you laugh, I made you cry, I made you open up your eyes," he sings, and then after a thoughtful pause, "Didn't I?"

"I Don't Want to Change You" combines everything that makes Rice tick: dramatic strings and unadorned acoustic guitar; subtle touches of electronics, keyboards, beats, and a warm heartbeat of a bass line; aching, soulful vocals; and lyrics that burn with the passion of a confused lover. "Wherever you go, I can

always follow," he rasps, as if he's literally bleeding on the inside. The track is likely a love song to his former musical and romantic partner, Lisa Hannigan, whom he once claimed he still loves. "If you just want to be alone, I can wait without waiting," he continues. "And if you want me to let this go, I am more than willing. Cause I don't want to change you . . . I don't want to change your mind."

Yet somehow, you get the feeling Rice would like nothing *more* than to change her mind.

Other standouts among the album's eight extended songs—only one clocks in at less than five minutes, and two exceed the eight-minute mark—are "Colour Me In" (about wanting to be pulled in) and "The Box" (about feeling tied down). Both are signature Rice songs that begin gently with just his Martin before building to a crescendo of strings and wailed vocals. The exotic and sensual "It Takes a Lot to Know a

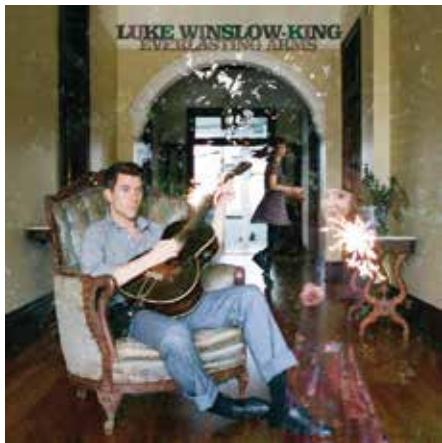
Man" incorporates Middle Eastern-like touches, and "Trusty and True," with its mix of simple British-folk balladry and a joyful African-like backing choir, adds a sense of spiritual release. As for the two bookends—Rice explores a rainbow of musical and cultural traditions on those tracks, including snaky melodies, classical flirtations, raging rock, and spacey, psychedelic textures.

Ed Sheeran may have taken Rice's place in the singer's absence, offering up a similar sense of drama and pathos for a larger and younger audience, but he was never a replacement. After all, it's hard to imagine Rice venturing into the arena (so to speak) of big looped beats and rap. Rice's work depends on nuance and dynamics, depth and scope. And after nearly a decade in the waiting, *My Favourite Faded Fantasy* delivers all of that in a set of scorching tracks of long-dormant anguish finally set free.



After eight years,  
Rice's career is back  
in the headlights.

Damien Rice  
*My Favourite  
Faded Fantasy*  
Warner Bros.



## Luke Winslow-King

*Everlasting Arms*

Bloodshot Records



## Laurie Lewis & Kathy Kallick

*Laurie & Kathy Sing  
the Songs of Vern & Ray*

Spruce and Maple Music

### Big Easy guitarist and songwriter makes every genre his own

Don't let Luke Winslow-King's clean-cut looks fool you. Hidden inside his preppy, Clark Kent exterior is the soul of a New Orleans bluesman.

On *Everlasting Arms*, Winslow-King's fourth full-length album, he pays homage to his hometown with Preservation Hall-inspired tunes like "I'm Your Levee Man," and with stellar, finger-picked slide guitar work on Delta blues tracks like "Swing That Thing" and "Crystal Water Springs."

Blending ragtime, folk, and straight-up jazz into the mix, Winslow-King—who was born and raised in Cadillac, Michigan, before moving to the Big Easy at 18—has a knack for making every genre he touches feel like it's his own. Years of holding down regular gigs on Frenchman Street helped him hone his act, and the songs on the new record have an in-the-room immediacy that doesn't sound the least bit forced. Backing vocals and washboard accompaniment by wife Esther Rose King punctuate the horn-section arrangements with down-home charm, and give you the feeling that you're marching along with Winslow-King's band in a parade through the Garden District.

Recorded in New Orleans and produced by Winslow-King himself, *Everlasting Arms* is a mostly acoustic album with a throwback vibe. His smooth and smoky vocals hold the proceedings together, but there are times—as on the shuffle "Cadillac Slim"—when you wish he'd channel Guitar Slim a bit more, and wail just a little bit harder. That restraint may be a result of his self-production. Still, when he takes out that slide, and starts percolating out a finger-snapping beat on songs like "Traveling Myself," that quibble seems, if anything, like gilding a mighty fine lily.

—DAVID KNOWLES

### West coast bluegrass duo pays tribute to their inspirations

On Laurie Lewis and Kathy Kallick's first set of duets since 1991's *Together*, the California newgrass masters pay tribute to a pioneering duo. It's no accident that both *Together* and this collection draw on the legacy of Arkansas-bred Vern Williams and Ray Park. The original Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Vern & Ray's full-blooded, crystal-sharp approach to standards and hill country originals exerted a seismic shift on a generation of 1970s West Coast players, Lewis and Kallick included.

Charging on Kallick's chunky rhythm and lead guitars, the Vern & Ray arrangement of Stephen Foster's "Oh! Susanna" barrels out of the gate with the snap and rattle of a Chuck Berry rocker. And from there, the adrenaline rush barely lets up. Lewis' cantina fiddle waltzes around Tom Rozum's pointillist mandolin, bringing an effortless swagger to the Carter Family's "Cowboy Jack." Another Carter Family interpretation, "My Clinch Mountain Home," ascends on Lewis and Kallick's haunted yearning yodeling, while the mountain hymn "Happy I'll Be" radiates joy. Lewis is joined by side-woman Annie Staninec for the twin-fiddle tapestry "Thinkin' of Home," which is perhaps Vern & Ray's most emotionally complex creation. Whereas Vern Williams' vocal part on the original version rode atop the tune, Lewis and Kallick's voices flow with the swaying, mournful melody, seamlessly merging into one sublime frequency, countering hope and heartbreak with isolation.

Lewis and Kallick do more on *Songs of Vern & Ray* than dip into the well that nurtured them. With sympathetic, vigorous playing, they revitalize their mentors' wildfire repertoire. If Lewis and Kallick always "got" Vern and Ray, now they've gotten under the skin of these durable, protean tunes.

—PAT MORAN

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**Rome**  
*A Passage to Rhodesia*  
Trisol

**Jérôme Reuter uses dark, industrial folk music to highlight oppression**

The dark-folk outfit Rome has built a reputation for blowing past genre boundaries and defying expectations. *A Passage to Rhodesia* is no exception, its mix of crisp acoustic guitars with electronics and industrial sounds marking a new evolution in the Luxembourg artist's crooning neofolk sound.

Set during the Rhodesian Bush War, Rome singer-songwriter Jérôme Reuter's narrative examines the struggles of Zimbabweans during a time of violent conflict and white supremacist rule. The music guides you through a landscape of destruction and oppression, calling on diverse influences, from Leonard Cohen to Popol Vuh.

The mournful drone in the opening ambient track "Electrocuting an Elephant" creates a sense of stillness before throwing the listener full-force into the hard-hitting "The Ballad of the Red Flame Lily." This lush, dynamic song is grounded in richly layered percussion and electronic elements, which contrast effectively with the song's delicate, pleading guitar, resulting in a lush and dynamic sound. Not letting up, "One Fire" delivers a stomping beat and driving acoustic rhythm. Reuter establishes the blend of European neofolk with southern African music traditions here and it persists throughout the record, evident in the gently fingerpicked "The Fever Tree," the defiant and percussive "Hate Us and See If We Mind," and the rainlike plucking on "Bread and Wine." It's a cultural intersection that feels organic in this globally minded narrative.

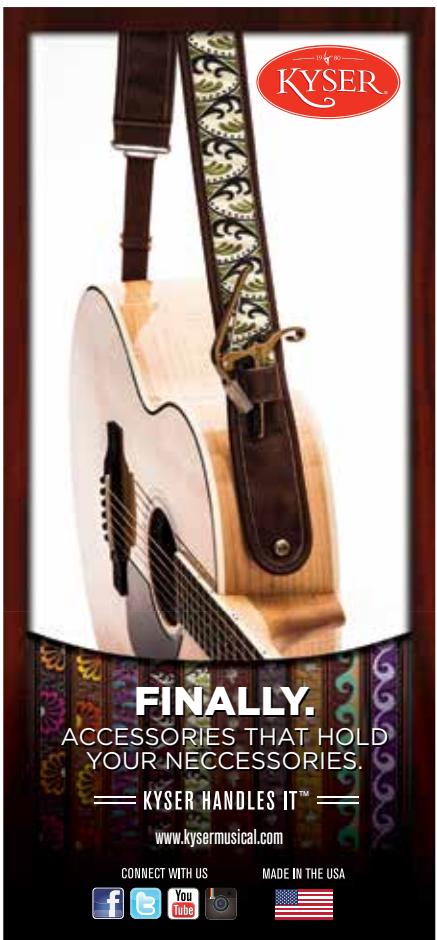
Reuter ties this narrative together with his rich, handsome vocals and elegant lyrics. The interplay of his brassy voice, silvery acoustic guitar, full-bodied percussion, and raspy audio samples bring out the human emotions at the center of the Rhodesian conflict: shame, grief, longing, and empathy. —AMBER VON NAGEL

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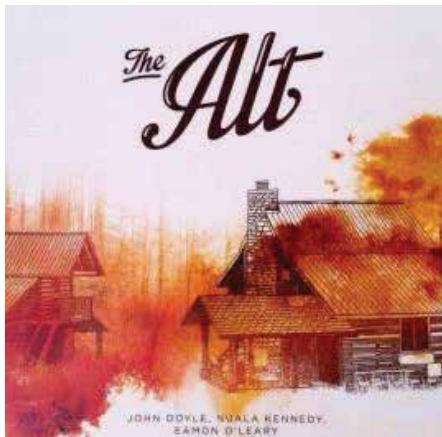
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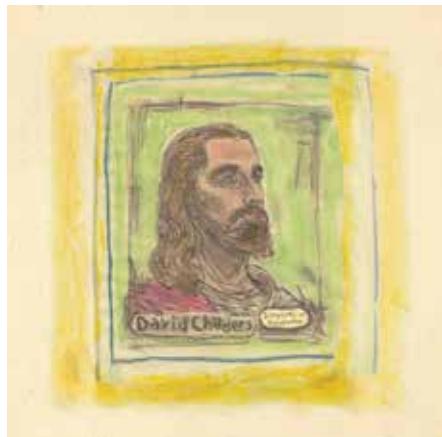
## PLAYLIST | MIXED MEDIA



### The Alt

*The Alt*

Under the Arch Records



### David Childers

*Serpents of Reformation*

Ramseur Records

#### Celtic folk supergroup revitalizes traditional music

On their brooding, bucolic, self-titled debut, Celtic folk collective the Alt's round-robin instrumental interplay is telepathic and miraculous.

That's hardly surprising.

In her solo work, singer and flautist Nuala Kennedy is a dab hand at crossing Celtic and contemporary traditions. Then there's Eamon O'Leary, who turns out crystalline tunes on guitar and bouzouki with the Murphy Beds. But the High King of Tara in this trinity of players is guitarist John Doyle. As founding member of Solas, he did much to reassert acoustic guitar in a genre long dominated by fiddle and accordion.

Doyle's melodic, percussive lines—there are no drums here—lay the pulsing bed for this set of traditional ballads, reels and winding tunes. Borne on his nimble, left-handed fingerpicking and metronomic strumming in dropped-D, the reel "Geese in the Bog" climbs with the insistence of beating wings, while Kennedy's cork-screwing flute wheels overhead. On "Finn Waterside," O'Leary's silvery bouzouki shimmers, while his harmonies echo an earthy yet ethereal duet by Doyle and Kennedy. And Doyle's reedy, rolling tenor winds through "Willie Angler," a cautionary tale of a pastoral Don Juan.

Nature's rhythms entwine in these tunes with human frailty and tragedy—there's a lot of blood and fornication in these pretty old strains and shanties. The exception is "The Letter Song," a hushed a cappella hymn in which Kennedy and Doyle spin the disconsolate tale of a missionary in the far-off Cumberland Mountains, bidding farewell to his Irish betrothed.

With this desolate air, the Alt traces Celtic music's progress across the sea to the new world, from the myth-haunted glen of Alt (which gives the group its name) to Appalachia, from High King to high lonesome.

#### Songwriter contrasts airy acoustics with dark electronics on this road to salvation

David Childers is no stranger to damnation and redemption. For 20 years, the gruff-voiced North Carolina singer-songwriter has weaved the sacred with the sardonic in musical tapestries that are as much tent revivals as honky-tonk rumbles—from acoustic-based LPs like *Good Way to Die* to plugged-in rock sets like *Jailhouse Religion*. On *Serpents of Reformation*, a mix of country-gospel standards and primal folk-rock originals, Childers strays from his typically thorny path, forsaking fire and brimstone for forgiveness.

Childers' rediscovery and embrace of humane Christianity is complemented by a fresh approach to his sound. Dark, synthetic rhythms bubble under many tracks—such as the decaying electronics that swarm through "Sodom and Gomorrah." Instead of chord changes, these pulsing signals are the spine of *Serpents*' snakiest tunes. "Don't Be Scared" celebrates the union of spirit and mortality as the airy sound of Childers' 1962 Gibson J-50 soars over a crackling processed rumble. A clanking steam-punk anvil anchors dueling Delta-blues vocal lines on "Jesus Set Me Free," a fierce condemnation of slavery. Beneath the jubilant gospel choir and baritone trumpet in the traditional "How 'Bout You" is the ghostly sound of a preacher's spiel. And on the liturgical standard "God is God," a cappella vocals ride rattling percussion from the chain gang to the pulpit.

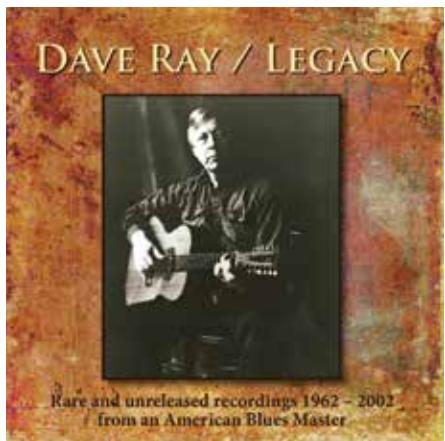
When the electronics fade, it feels like a break in the clouds. Ricocheting banjo, whirlwind mandolin and the jazzy strumming of guest guitarist Jim Avett (father of the Avett Brothers) turn the all-acoustic "Jericho" into a jaunty bluegrass shuffle. On "Tank Town," Childers strips back to just acoustic guitar for a beautiful end to his journey into the light.

—P.M.

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## Dave Ray

*Legacy*

Red House

### Three-CD set showcases solo work of an 'American blues master'

Guitarist and singer Dave Ray is remembered as one-third of the seminal folk-blues revival group Koerner, Ray & Glover. But this satisfying, three-CD set, produced by ex-bandmate and longtime friend Tony Glover, showcases Ray as a gifted solo performer with a solid command of everything from '20s, '30s, and '40s blues to the soul-inflected music of Rufus Thomas and Bobby Womack to originals.

The material on this compilation—subtitled “rare and unreleased recordings, 1962–2002, from an American blues master”—is culled from reel-to-reel tapes, old soundboard mix cassettes, video tapes, hard drives, and such. The songs are presented chronologically, so you can trace Ray's evolution as an artist.

Disc 1 covers the period from 1962–1987 and includes three lo-fi tracks recorded in Glover's basement. It features 12-string acoustic performances of songs by Leroy Carr, Lead Belly, the Carter Family, Skip James, and other folk and blues legends. Disc 2, ranging from 1988–1994, finds Ray dipping into the Delta and Chicago blues of Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, Jimmy Rogers, Yank Rachell, and the obscure artist Do-Boy Diamond.

Disc 3, from 1995 until Ray's death in 2002, is fairly eclectic, and increasingly electric, spanning artists as diverse as Big Bill Broonzy and Percy Sledge. It includes tracks from a short-lived Ray and Glover reunion tour. Geoff Muldaur accompanies Ray on six-string acoustic at a live performance of Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup's “So Glad I'm Living”—Ray, who suffered from lung cancer at the time, died 26 days later.

His legacy lives on here. Essential stuff for fans of the 1960s folk-blues revival.

—GREG CAHILL

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Signed, David A. Lusterman, Publisher

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<b>Acoustic Guitar Guides</b> , <a href="http://store.acousticguitar.com">store.acousticguitar.com</a> . . . . .	83, 96	<b>G7th, Ltd.</b> , <a href="http://g7th.com">g7th.com</a> . . . . .	91	<b>Ovation</b> , <a href="http://ovationguitars.com">ovationguitars.com</a> . . . . .	103
<b>Acoustic Guitar Magazine</b> , <a href="http://acousticguitar.com/subscribe">acousticguitar.com/subscribe</a> . . . . .	97	<b>Gibson</b> , <a href="http://gibson.com">gibson.com</a> . . . . .	77	<b>P.K. Thompson Guitars</b> , <a href="http://pkthompsonguitars.com">pkthompsonguitars.com</a> . . . . .	83
<b>Acoustic Image</b> , <a href="http://acousticimg.com">acousticimg.com</a> . . . . .	89	<b>Guitar Center</b> , <a href="http://guitarcenter.com">guitarcenter.com</a> . . . . .	13, 31, 73	<b>Paul Reed Smith</b> , <a href="http://prsguitars.com">prsguitars.com</a> . . . . .	74
<b>Alvarez</b> , <a href="http://alvarezguitars.com">alvarezguitars.com</a> . . . . .	40	<b>Guitar Salon International</b> , <a href="http://guitarsalon.com">guitarsalon.com</a> . . . . .	52	<b>Radial Engineering</b> , <a href="http://radialeng.com">radialeng.com</a> . . . . .	35
<b>American Music Furniture</b> , <a href="http://americanmusicfurniture.com">americanmusicfurniture.com</a> . . . . .	81	<b>Guitars in the Classroom</b> , <a href="http://guitarsintheclassroom.org">guitarsintheclassroom.org</a> . . . . .	95	<b>RainSong Graphite Guitars</b> , <a href="http://rainsong.com">rainsong.com</a> . . . . .	99
<b>L.R. Baggs</b> , <a href="http://lrbaggs.com">lrbaggs.com</a> . . . . .	50	<b>Hill Guitar Company</b> , <a href="http://hillguitar.com">hillguitar.com</a> . . . . .	80	<b>Original Guitar Chair</b> , <a href="http://originalguitarchair.com">originalguitarchair.com</a> . . . . .	50
<b>Bose Corporation</b> , <a href="http://bose.com/live1">bose.com/live1</a> . . . . .	21	<b>Hoffee Cases</b> , <a href="http://carbonfibercases.com">carbonfibercases.com</a> . . . . .	89	<b>Red House Records</b> , <a href="http://redhouseresords.com">redhouseresords.com</a> . . . . .	23
<b>Bourgeois Guitars</b> , <a href="http://pantheonguitars.com">pantheonguitars.com</a> . . . . .	27	<b>Homespun</b> , <a href="http://homespun.com">homespun.com</a> . . . . .	80	<b>Saga Musical Instruments</b> , <a href="http://sagamusic.com">sagamusic.com</a> . . . . .	11
<b>Bread &amp; Roses</b> , <a href="http://breadandroses.org">breadandroses.org</a> . . . . .	83	<b>Huss &amp; Dalton Guitar Company</b> , <a href="http://hussandalton.com">hussandalton.com</a> . . . . .	7	<b>Seymour Duncan Acoustic</b> , <a href="http://seymourduncan.com/acoustic">seymourduncan.com/acoustic</a> . . . . .	43
<b>Breezy Ridge Instruments, Ltd.</b> , <a href="http://jpstrings.com">jpstrings.com</a> . . . . .	47	<b>Ibanez Guitars</b> , <a href="http://www.ibanez.com">www.ibanez.com</a> . . . . .	51	<b>Sheppard Guitars</b> , <a href="http://sheppardguitars.com">sheppardguitars.com</a> . . . . .	16
<b>Collings Guitars</b> , <a href="http://collingsguitars.com">collingsguitars.com</a> . . . . .	65	<b>Journey Instruments</b> , <a href="http://journeyinstruments.com">journeyinstruments.com</a> . . . . .	95	<b>Shubb Capos</b> , <a href="http://shubb.com">shubb.com</a> . . . . .	16
<b>Creative Tunings</b> , <a href="http://spidercapo.com">spidercapo.com</a> . . . . .	96	<b>Steven Kaufman Enterprises, Inc.</b> , <a href="http://flatpik.com">flatpik.com</a> . . . . .	72	<b>Stewart-MacDonald's Guitar Supply</b> , <a href="http://stewmac.com">stewmac.com</a> . . . . .	50
<b>D'Addario &amp; Company</b> , <a href="http://daddario.com">daddario.com</a> . . . . .	72	<b>Kyser Musical Products</b> , <a href="http://kysermusical.com">kysermusical.com</a> . . . . .	98	<b>String Swing MFG.</b> , <a href="http://stringswing.com">stringswing.com</a> . . . . .	9
<b>DR Music</b> , <a href="http://drstrings.com">drstrings.com</a> . . . . .	81	<b>Luthier Music Corp.</b> , <a href="http://luthiermusic.com">luthiermusic.com</a> . . . . .	96	<b>Sweetwater Sound</b> , <a href="http://sweetwater.com">sweetwater.com</a> . . . . .	17
<b>Elixir Strings</b> , <a href="http://elixirstrings.com">elixirstrings.com</a> . . . . .	4, 8	<b>Mandolin Bros., Ltd.</b> , <a href="http://mandoweb.com">mandoweb.com</a> . . . . .	89	<b>Take a Stand, Inc.</b> , <a href="http://takeastandinc.com">takeastandinc.com</a> . . . . .	98
<b>Elliott Capos</b> , <a href="http://elliottcapos.com">elliottcapos.com</a> . . . . .	47	<b>C.F. Martin &amp; Co., Inc.</b> , <a href="http://martinguitar.com">martinguitar.com</a> . . . . .	104	<b>Tanglewood Guitar Company UK</b> , <a href="http://tanglewoodguitars.com">tanglewoodguitars.com</a> . . . . .	45
<b>Epiphone Guitars</b> , <a href="http://epiphone.com">epiphone.com</a> . . . . .	6	<b>Masecraft Supply Co.</b> , <a href="http://masecraftsupply.com">masecraftsupply.com</a> . . . . .	83	<b>Taylor</b> , <a href="http://taylorguitars.com">taylorguitars.com</a> . . . . .	2
<b>Ernie Ball Music Man</b> , <a href="http://ernieball.com">ernieball.com</a> . . . . .	29	<b>The Music Emporium</b> , <a href="http://themusicemporium.com">themusicemporium.com</a> . . . . .	55		



Bellowhead comes to the Great British Folk Festival to prove, once and for all, it's not the size of the tuba that matters, it's how you play it.

# December

## Great British Folk Festival

Skegness, Lincolnshire

**December 5–8**

[efestivals.co.uk](http://efestivals.co.uk)

The British are coming! And they're bringing their acoustic guitars... at least they are to the Great British Folk Festival, where the union of great music and Great Britain finally comes to a headstock.

From December 5 to 8, the Butlins resort in Skegness, Lincolnshire, will be something of a folk-music commonwealth when such acts as **Bellowhead**, **Full English**, **Jethro Tull's Martin Barre Band**, the **Hut People**, **Merrymouth**, and the **Steve Cradock Band** arrive from high and low under a unified flag of folkdom.

## Limerock Country Rock Festival

Ocala, Florida

**Early December**

[limerockmusicfestival.com](http://limerockmusicfestival.com)

This two-day country and alt-country 'palooza takes place at Bubba Raceway Park in Ocala, Florida, and bills itself simply as a "good ol' fashioned festival." Limerock is where acoustic

country artists like **Justin Grimes** and **Aaron Taylor** share the bill with **DeeJay Silver** and rapper **Coolio** (to name a few from the 2013 lineup) in an event to please country lovers who aren't afraid to widen their musical palette (at least for a weekend). The 2014 lineup hadn't been announced at press time; check for updates at [limerockmusicfestival.com](http://limerockmusicfestival.com).

## Christmas in the Smokies

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

**December 10–13**

[carolinaroadband.com](http://carolinaroadband.com)

Christmas is coming early this year for bluegrass lovers. Christmas in the Smokies, that venerable flat-picking paradise in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, heats up the fret boards December 10 to 13—mixing its blend of holiday cheer with some of the finest bluegrass ever heard in the Volunteer state.

This year's lineup includes **Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver**, **Goldwing Express**, the **James King Band**, the **Roys**, the **Gary Waldrep Band**, **Old Friends**, **Lorraine Jordan and Carolina Road**, and **Chris Jones and the Night Drivers**, among others. A banjo-toting old-timer from

the North Pole is expected to make the trek south for the event, as well.

Dress warm—but don't worry too much about the elements. The festival takes place at the Ramada Inn and Smoky Mountain Convention Center. Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!

## Boulder Creek Bluegrass & Old Timey Festival

Costanoa, California

**December 12–13**

[brookdalebluegrass.com](http://brookdalebluegrass.com)

The former Winter Brookdale Bluegrass & Old Timey Festival has changed name and location—but it's still offering up the same great music it has since launching in 1999.

What's now known as the Boulder Creek Bluegrass & Old Timey Festival raises its tent stakes December 12 and 13 at the Costanoa Lodge & Campground, located halfway between Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz in Northern California.

The main stage is at Scopazzi's Restaurant. This year's lineup hadn't been announced as of press time. Check the festival website at [brookdalebluegrass.com](http://brookdalebluegrass.com) for updates.

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