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Mountainview Publishing, LLC

# the ToneQuest

The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone

# Report™

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## Gabriel Tenorio - theGTSCO



"It's good to feel like a bird, it's better to be the bird."—Gabriel Tenorio

*Cue the backyard charcoal grill, the river camper and tent, a cooler of iced down ales, the fireside twilight smores with bourbon drizzled on them for good measure and leave it all behind for this summertime double down ToneQuest magical mystery tour. Don't you worry, the lawn will be just fine, it can wait. And when back home from our camping adventure, simply throw on your wireless headphones with some old school Little Richard recordings and trim that grass up while dancing away in your flip flops. Don't ask us how we know this works—Tutti frutti, oh rootie. Remember those cheesy country bar mechanical bulls that were all the rage in the honky tonks for a while, when even disco fever legend John Travolta thought he was a cowboy? This issue reminds us of that since it is as wild a ride as it gets. But our bull is real, baby—TEN THOUSAND POUNDS OF SUPREME WOOLY TONE. Grab that rope with your leather gloved hand, flip the standby switch, ring that cowbell, and let's get to it. See you by the river, and make sure you bring the flattops and mandolins. No banjos!*

What do we have without strings? Not a single note of music. It is equal parts amusing and disconcerting to think of how many thousands of dollars can be spent on a guitar or amp, an endless array of pedals, and eventually, everything comes down to being able to pluck a wire. Or a gut string, as it was for some orchestral instruments. Gabriel Tenorio is hand-winding every single string, using the purest materials he can find, with innovative designs for both traditional and non-traditional instruments, as both an ode to the seriously cool Latino musical heritage out on the West Coast, and as an inspiration to the modern grooves that all of us worldwide are laying down. In this day and age, where research now estimates that the typical human will spend seven years of their life staring into a phone screen, here is a human taking the time to hand-wind strings. Like we said above, every single string. Unbelievable.

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



Red Copper GCS - photo by Bajo Quinto

But what's far better is that they are just plain magical strings, filled with heaps of mojo and vivid tone. Plus, they keep cranking for months, and in some cases, years. Gabriel spends the rest of his time visiting prisons helping others make music, supporting a program for young girls to rock and roll, teaching music, making music, working with serious touring artists to create custom sets, and help them chase the muse, while being there for his cherished family and his community. There is no big buck fancy BMW SUV driving existence happening over there, nor would Gabriel want that, ever. It is a true labor of love. But you can bet your ass he's a very rich man at heart, and that's priceless. For all the right reasons. This is a tale of an unfathomably soulful endeavor, and at the very least, we hope you will watch the little film documenting him roaming around his neighborhood, riffing out loud about life, and creating strings. If ever there was a daring pure nickel high wire artist, it's him. Welcome, brutha Gabriel. Hereby forevermore known as EL TORO TENORIO!

**TQR:** Tell us about your path in life and music to get here making these beautiful strings. We've heard stories of Los Lobos connections, a bicycle accident, and mentors...



Guadalupe Crew - Boyle Heights

My life has taken tons of twists and turns, but it has always centered around art making, music, culture, and community. I've always been a musician first, however. Coming to make these strings is complicated and unexpected. I was in between touring, writing and recording records as well as film and television work. I was also helping to rescue a prominent arts organization in East L.A., working as a professional art preparator, and developing curricula. Amid all that I fell into hanging out, working and helping at Guadalupe Custom Strings. My percussionist in our band was an apprentice string maker and then took over the business with his family from Francisco González, the founder of Los Lobos. I had been referred to Francisco from Candela's Guitars in Boyle Heights back in the 90s. Candelas are an institution, having made guitars for legends, synonymous with East Los Angeles and being an integral part of the journeys of so many Chicano musicians like myself. Candelario Delgado, master luthier, said Frank was doing crazy things, "pulling the strings too tight," so I knew I had to check out what he was doing.



Francisco González (R) at Guadalupe Boyle Heights

Francisco González was the first maestro to take our kind of music seriously and make strings specifically for our instruments which were various Mexican and Latin American stringed instruments. He was a practitioner, historian, teacher, innovator, and fan of music. All that went into everything he did and everything he did informed his string making. He sat me down as a kid (in the 20th century) and had me play for him. He listened to how I played, knowing full well the tradition I was pulling from, and he was able to fashion strings so perfect for what I was doing right before my eyes. He then took the time to teach me, inform me, guide me toward a greater understanding of how our instruments work, and how important it is to pay attention to how players approach their instruments and their style of music. It was eye opening because it was common for folks from my background to purchase up to three different packs of strings to create one working set.

I learned mostly that we are very much guided by superstition and disinformation under the cover of "common knowledge." He focused on the human element, as much as the technical and scientific facets of what he did. Most importantly, he taught us to not approach our traditions, our instruments, or our understanding of our work through

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an American capitalist lens. To not define ourselves or our work, measure our worth or acuity, through the white gaze. That was liberating.

**TQR:** Heck yea, power to all the people on our Mother Earth!

It came to guide how I approached my own string making decades later. When I was busy doing a million things in my early thirties, I landed at Guadalupe Custom Strings as things were becoming tenuous for the company. I depended on Guadalupe for the strings for all my acoustic instruments. It was important to me. I recorded a demo for a documentary in the workshop and then went off to score the whole film. Guadalupe was going through a rough patch so Jacob Hernandez, now Master String Maker, took on the shop and its debts and issues, and basically whipped the business into shape. I wasn't making strings back then. I was convinced I would chop my fingers off.

I worked on designing, testing, selling, and distributing, etc., but I was afraid to make strings. Until I wasn't. I think the string makers were tired of me bugging them, and I was growing restless with ideas. Like curiosity about metal and how it worked and what was going on that made this all work.



Artist Series

I didn't learn directly from Francisco on the machine. I kinda stumbled around and asked the GCS guys for pointers. But I was never directly taught by Frank. He visited from time to time to work with the guys, but not me so much. I wasn't considered a string maker.

By my late thirties I was making all kinds of traditional stuff from the GCS line, and I was getting my bearings around understanding the processes, the tools, and the materials. That was when I started focusing on designing electric guitar strings. And here we are now.

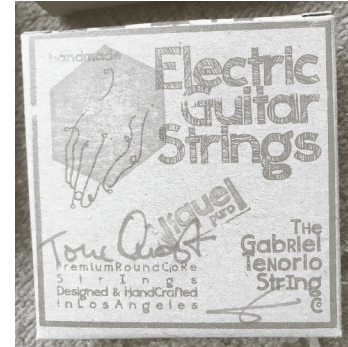
**TQR:** What tips and wisdom can you tell the guitarists about strings in general, and specifically that could be meaningful and relevant to them?

Leave behind a lot of what you're convinced of. Understand that most of what is available in the market is available in mass quantities at low prices for a reason. There is a space for mass consumed strings, just as there is a space for my strings. The measure of a good string isn't how much you can beat it up. It lies with how much of a return you get for your effort. If I don't have to play harder to make a good sound, if a string is responding to me and my needs in the moment, I am no longer preoccupied with my tools, I am busy making music. If I don't have to play harder, I am saving my hands,

my energy, improving my technique, I am making music. Imagine if a violin player beat the shit out of their strings, or a pianist went ape shit scraping the strings on a Steinway. They wouldn't do that. I'm not saying I'm making violin strings, but I take my strings seriously, and they don't need to be beaten to play well. That's the point.

**TQR:** Pure nickel is...? Please explain the difference between yours and the big brands, factory production...

I don't know who is making pure nickel outside of Pyramid or Thomastik that are any good. My pure nickel is extremely clean, high quality, NASA level, first drawn, extra virgin, made in America wire. I spend a lot on my material for a reason. I've felt other "pure nickel" products made



in the USA, and I don't think we are using the same grade material at all. And that is reflected in the price. I also use thicker wire wraps than all the factory produced strings. The amount of pure nickel on my strings makes a notable difference. Also, I use round cores, so the wrap wire integrity is always intact. There are no crimps or folds that happen with hexagonal core wire. Pure nickel has a nice round tone once it has settled in. The round core construction keeps my pure nickel strings in tune and performing consistently for a longer time. That is the advantage of using round cores, pure nickel, and enough pure nickel to make a difference.

**TQR:** What is your understanding of how strings were made back in the old days?

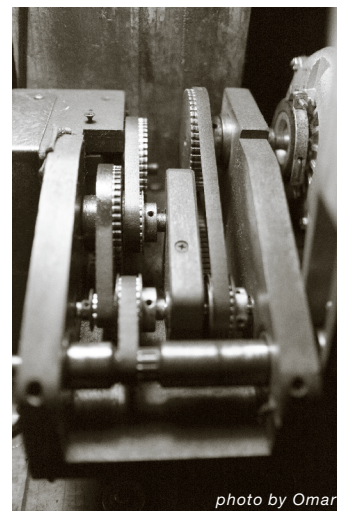


photo by Omar

I've seen string making in the cut in Mexico. There is no real secret to the process. You have a core made from whatever you got, you stretch it as best you can, you turn it and wind wire around that core. Et voilà, a string. So, this process was complicated for strings for baroque instruments made with cat gut. The true "old days." The process I know was learned to us from harp makers, specifically, Robinson's Harp. They guided Francisco in his early string making endeavors, as he was primarily a harp player. Understand that nobody made strings for Mexican harps,

-continued-

## cover story

or Mexican harpists that were any good. This is where the journey began. A lathe outfitted with basically a treadle style motor drive. Before that, in the late 19th century, they were powered by foot-like sewing machines were. Sewing machines are actually inspirations for modern string making machines like ours—Guadalupe and GTSco. Victor Squier was the first to make guitar strings en masse in the United States. Until then, all strings were imported from Europe. His strings were great because he was a violin string maker, with a lot of cool ideas and big time “American ingenuity.” His first large order forced him to expand the guitar string making business, which eventually became the entire business, before selling to Fender. This was just as Fender was about to be sold to CBS. Squier was the first to employ electric motors to wind strings, when they caught wind of the electric sewing machine.

They used round cores and pure nickel. I’ve seen some unused Fender pure nickel No.10 Electric Spanish Guitar strings, and it is amazing to have insight into what they were using and how much our process is similar to the Squier process of the early 20th century.

**TQR:** What is different structurally and compositionally about your round core versus these modern hex cores?

Have you ever seen a hexagonal bell? Next question.

**TQR:** Ahaha! Sassy! We understand. No, we have not, nor would we want a hexagon bell.



Pre GTS at Guadalupe

Hexcore wire has 6 points, 6 facets so the wire is actually crimping around the core a thousand times to make one wound string. The hexagonal shape makes it easy to program a machine to wrap the string. There is no human process needed to apply the wire to the stretched core, unlike a handmade round core string that requires multiple steps and processes to prepare and execute the string. The process I use is proprietary. Ones I refined after messing around with a lot of techniques at Guadalupe. While there, I was the one that pushed and guided us toward using only round cores for our entire line. What

Ok, seriously. Something that is round and even and consistent will resonate better than something that is faceted. So, to begin with, the hex core just doesn't vibrate as well as we want it to. Hexagonal steel cores were the death knell for handmade round core, and eventually pure nickel.

Hexcore wire has

I do now is just not done by anyone else in the U.S. because it's just so time consuming.

**TQR:** Tell us about the rad Mexican traditional instruments and world instruments you make strings for...

I worked on a lot of strings for instruments including the requinto jarocho, jarana, requinto romantico, bajo quinto, bajo sexto, tololoche, guitarrón, huapanguera, vihuela, and so many more from other traditions. I expanded the ukulele line, refined and expanded the ManoucheTone Gypsy Jazz line, designed strings for domra, balalaika, and contrabass. I got to design Tres strings for Septeto Nacional de Cuba, that was an amazing honor. Tons of weird one-offs. I left all the stuff GCS had already been working on at GCS including my contributions. When I split off, amicably, we each focused on our own expertise and mine is guitar and bass, steel string instruments, etc.

**TQR:** You guys help kids and schools with music charities?



Mason Stoops & Guitaco at GCS

I've always worked in education and with various community orgs and entities whether I'm developing curricula, training for artists, teaching in schools, and even prisons. Before the Pandingo, we had an ongoing taco party at NAMM. Like five years straight. Imagine all the boutique guys leaving NAMM in Anaheim to drive in Friday night traffic into L.A. to Boyle Heights for tacos, beer and music. We did raffles and raised funds to donate to different groups, like Chicas Rockeras, one of my favorite programs in the metro area that promotes girls in rock. The point is to always be of service to your community. Right now, kids all over the city don't get any music education in school. I realized that if I don't do it, who will? And I'm pretty good at it.



Mason Stoops (L) and Jared Scharff (R) - Guitaco

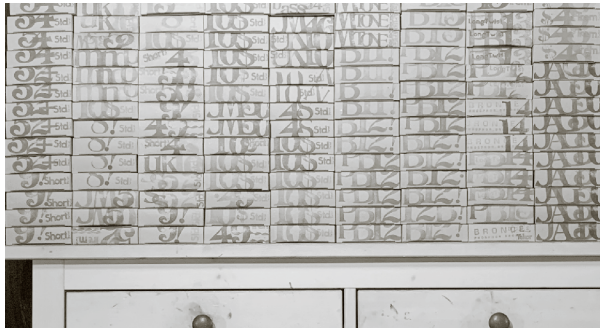
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## cover story

**TQR:** Girl power rules. Especially in music. How cool is that? What is a typical day in the shop for you? How many employees?

The shop is just... me. I have an assistant who helps with the packaging, which is all handmade. The Pandini made my plans for expanding the biz kinda freeze up for a bit. However, it is always on my mind. I can only put out so many strings a week and run the business at a certain level. Anything more will require thoughtful plans for expansion. I have a string maker trained at GCS coming in to help me with some acoustic stuff that is similar in technique to the bajo quinto strings he makes. I am going to teach him my machine mods and techniques, as well as the standards. I have a very specific set of processes that must be followed to be called GTScO strings. After I get my production orders sorted for the day, I tape up my AIs, get my wrists wrapped up, and get right to work cutting wire. I like making strings first thing, for the first half of the day. I like to take on batches, stuff that I can warm up with and get my mind focused around. Like cutting, then making plains, and then making wounds is grounding to me. It reminds me of riding bikes. The first twenty miles are chaos, then you get in the zone for another forty. Sometimes the second half of the days are dedicated to emails and shipping, some days to packing and printing, some days are for promo, some days are for maintenance. But I cut out to teach, then pick up my son, make dinner, then get back to work. Bob Taylor once told a group of us that he always kept up at home. He was relentless, until it was dinner time and family time in the afternoons and evenings, then back to work. It works for me.

**TQR:** What are your favorite electric guitar sets to make?



Wall of string sets

I love my JM50s because they are the coolest looking, fastest to make and I know they make everyone happy. I created the first and only string dedicated to offset guitars. The construction of my strings is already unique compared to all other mass-produced strings. I formulated them differently from core size, wrap material and diameters, quality, and fabrication techniques. Even the finish is different. All my strings feature high quality round core wire with the option of three different twist sizes for use with different types of guitars. The TremTwist is something I applied from my time doing Bajo Quinto and Guitarrón strings. The twists on those strings are longer than American made strings and I saw the value in employing the longest twists possible. My

STD twist is for string through body instruments and TOM style bridges—the most common setups. However, my offset strings feature the TremTwist for several reasons. I created the long twists to help deal with the issues a lot of offset and Bigsby players experienced, inconsistent tuning, instability, and wear and tear from those screw on Fender tremolo plates. I had heard of players soldering the twists. No need for that with my extra-long twists. I started doing the chenille (silk wrap) on the twists for more stability and for looks, of course. They have become my calling card.

The way I balance out the cores and wraps are a complete departure from ninety-nine percent of guitar string making that is all based on what is called the Taylor's Formula. Francisco told me a long time ago to not even learn to understand how to use the formula because it had no relationship to or bearing on what we were focused on. Again, the limitations of this industrial, American, massed produced method wasn't working for our music and our instruments. That said, trial and error, experimentation, testing in the field, this is the formula for making strings.



Mason Stoops (L) and Daniel Tyack (R) - Salvage

Mason Stoops was one of the first to find me and we've had an ongoing relationship since then. He is one of the best guitarists around and his insights are intangibly valuable. I hear that Austen Hooks, who does all his amps, is your best amigo and neighbor in Texas. What a small world. Also, Mason is one legit human being to whom I owe a ton of gratitude. Once everyone caught wind of what he was doing with my strings, the entire project took off and I was even more free to explore my ideas. Pedal companies and amp builders began buying my stuff. That's how I met Robert Keeley, Chris Benson, Joel Korte, Tim Marcus of Milkman Amps, Creston Lea, Jamie Stillman, and Josh Scott of JHS, who helped me get my branding together, paid for my graphic design, and placed the first big order I ever had. He's a legit good dude.

The first set I was selling was for Teles and it wasn't even 10-46. It was and still is 10-44.5. I call them



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Nashville 10s because they are light and twangy. Nobody could tell that they were thinner on the bass string since the volume and playability were unmatched. I began expanding the line and that's how I got into offset strings. The need for something solid and high quality was intense—a lot of people started playing offsets!

I've spent years working with lots of pros getting feedback and testing them in real life situations. I'm proud to have folks like Josh Smith (guitarzan), Celisse Henderson, Gaby Moreno, Raul Pacheco, and so many more playing my strings on the regular. And of course, luthiers like Wide Sky, Creston, and Diesel using them on their builds.



I've been making a secret string for several years that takes forever to make and costs \$99. The 99s are special stainless-steel round wound that I grind by hand down to a flat finish, then polish to a mirror finish. These have gone on tour with several folk including Blake Mills, Mason Stoops, Marcus Mumford, (Jackson Browne), and Jimmie Vaughan's guitarist on their tour opening for Clapton. These are in high demand, especially for fretless instruments. I hardly have time to make them, though. I'm all over the place with lots of things swimming in my head. This moment today, right now, I'm thinking about short scale basses. Go figure.

**TQR:** How the heck do these GTS strings last so long? Tim at Milkman Sound swears he has a set that are still rocking out after 4 years!

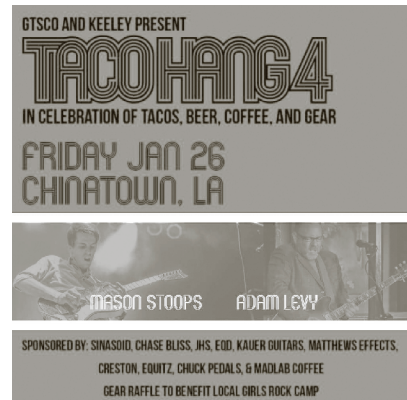
Roundcores keep the integrity of the wrap more intact. More wrap wire, less strain on your hands, thus a more responsive string. All of which combine to make the experience enjoyable, and then unconscious. You don't notice how old the strings are because you're just making music.



GTS J-200

**TQR:** What is on the path ahead for GTS? Have some new products and more hopes, dreams?

Expansion. I am working on ideas about machines and training, and sadly, margins and labor costs. Not like in an evil way, I want to make sure I can build a business that is a good faith member of the community and society.



What I have in mind product wise, I can't share. I know my impact on the industry. It's not a big, wide industry, it's just a few huge actors. They don't worry about me, and I don't worry about them. We talk, we share. Eric Coco and Peter D'Addario have been so kind and cool with me. I know my impact on the "boutique" world because I watched brands chase my ideas, packaging, terminology, gauges, artists, dealers, and most telling—price points. I'm the most expensive string on the market, and that allows other strings that aren't any better than the majors to charge more. And I know folks are curious about my formulations and proprietary processes. That's why I stopped doing demos and posting vids of me working.



I want to get into designing more new stuff, making prototypes, and sharing them with the pros that I'm in constant contact with. I truly love making strings. Some days I just don't have to think because I'm too busy making JM50s. And that is always rewarding. **TQ**—Riverhorse

*The absolute, coolest, most soulful meditative film around. Highly recommended:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41kBG\\_gd4nM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41kBG_gd4nM)

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## GTS Strings Review

We ordered up quite a few sets from Gabriel in Los Angeles and they arrived on the front porch of the bungalow within a couple weeks. We are guessing this usually takes a bit longer, but perhaps that's what happens when you get to write stories for TQR. Oh, the perks. Another perk is that we are sitting here at almost three in the morning writing this story, with a ceramic mug of lavender tea by our laptop, and as brain fried as we are, we have the biggest smile on our face knowing we get to celebrate this story for you to read when it lands on your porch in a few days. That, too, is priceless.



GTS J-45

When the strings got here, in hand painted boxes with our names on them as well—same as they could be for you—we sorted them out for the different types of guitars, and then rolled to Rockin' Robin's Guitar and Music Shop in the truck with the J-45 and the J-200 acoustics, so Clancey Compton and Bart Wittrock could listen to these strings with us before and after. Bart, after some fifty plus years in the business, was more than happy to scowl and let it be known he was going to shame us out of the shop if the strings sucked. Well, they were as amazing as we hoped. All three of us were floored. The first thing we noticed is that in our hands before putting them on the guitars, each string has a wonderful organic feel and they floated in the air when we twirled them and shook them to observe how they responded. There is no strange coating at all. The all-brass set that went on the Gibson J-45 rang so WOODY, vibrant, loud, true, and gloriously huge, it was beyond illuminating. The big ol' blonde Gibson J-200 got the PB set on them since it already has so much bass, and it, too, rang out in a heady and beautiful richness, with the notes blooming away. What is fascinating is that as much as we always keep our guitars in tune, as we all should, these guitars sounded more absolutely in tune than they ever have. Bizarre. Un milagro. The underground rumors were legit.

When we loaded the electric sets of NiquelPuro on Telecasters, Strats, Les Pauls, and the Jazzmaster, with each set having been designed for that specific guitar, the results were just as sublime. The notes rang true and lively harmonics poured from the strings and amps, with a wide glide and



GTS Goldtop

clear resonance. The signal to the amps from the pickups was even a bit stouter than we've heard it before, since the pickups were being driven by a more solid compositional form of nickel than we had used. We also noticed the outer edges of the chords and notes with the GTS strings had none of the harsh overtones we often hear from mass produced strings. Round core, round tone.



New shop and new machine

When you think about it, mass produced hex strings have so many edges missing from them, so much of the string, and are compromised already straight out of the box. Can you still rock with mass produced strings? Heck yes. But part of our gig here is to find you the crème de la crème of tones. Do you want the fast-food plastic fantastic cookie cutter hamburger, or the marinated carne asada tacos? You could eat both, but we'll take the latter. Because we like to roll our own, in both flour and corn, baby. And if they last longer, game over. If you are feeling it, theGTS.co website has a drop-down menu where you put in the simple details of the instrument and gauges, formats you want to order, and things go forward from there. Better yet, if you have any questions, you can just email Gabriel and tell him what guitars they are going on, and what you want to do. He'll take care of the rest. Do we have any stake in this? Nope. But we are believers in these strings and the life spent creating them. Viva los badass round wounds. Artisanal craftsmanship—this is as good as it gets. Quest forth...TQ—Riverhorse

[www.thegts.co](http://www.thegts.co)

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FEATURE INTERVIEW

# Carl Verheyen



A Carl Verheyen guitar solo is a breathtaking performance of an artist in command of the guitar. Carl has a catalog of albums and a vast career of work as a preferred sideman and studio session ace. Best known for being the guitarist for Supertramp, Carl has recorded with The Bee Gees, Little Richard, Dolly Parton, Glenn Frey, John Fogerty, B.B. King, and others, and played on film and TV soundtracks. Complex, simplistic, acoustic, or electric, it's all right at home here. If you haven't had the good fortune to experience a live performance, Carl is touring with Stewart Copeland, performing orchestrated versions of tunes by the Police. Welcome, Carl Verheyen.

**TQR:** What are your earliest recollections of moments that set you on the path to first picking up and playing guitar, then on to becoming a professional musician? Did you have a clear dream or vision?

Before the Beatles and Rolling Stones there were surfing shows every afternoon on our local TV stations. I wasn't really into surfing, but that guitar music really captured my attention. Then when I heard the Byrds' version of "Mr. Tambourine Man" and the *Meet the Beatles!* album, I was hooked. I borrowed my dad's Gretsch ukulele until my grandmother bought me a thirty-dollar nylon string guitar and my first lesson on my eleventh birthday, and that was it. When playing basketball in the driveway I'd play the radio from my bedroom window,



Photo by Bruce McBroom © Apple Corps Ltd

and I'd completely stop the game when a song I wanted to learn came on. I'd rush in and try to learn it before it ended. My parents would never have to tell me to practice, in fact they'd beg me to stop practicing!

**TQR:** How old were you when you had your first professional gig and what was it?



A little band I was in played five songs at the St. Bede's Fiesta Days festival when I was about twelve. We played the theme to the surf movie "Endless Summer," and by coincidence, many years later I played on the "Endless Summer II" soundtrack. By the age of fifteen, I was playing dances at the Youth House near Pasadena and our trio split the whopping twenty-dollar paycheck three ways. By the time I was sixteen, I started a band called Colossus and played high school dances. Then I joined a band called Madshadow that played opposite Van Halen a few times. At eighteen, I got a gig playing and singing with my Martin D-18 in a bar in Pasadena called the Sawmill. So, I was fortunate to be a working musician from a very young age with opportunities that don't happen as much these days. And with the exception of a summer job as a box boy in the supermarket to pay off my Les Paul, I've never had another job that wasn't music.

**TQR:** How did you break into the studio session scene? What was your first legit pro recording session, and what do you remember about it?

I played on a few demos and did a record with a pair of singers called the Haggins Sisters in my teenage years. After taking the accelerated summer semester at Berklee College of Music in Boston, I moved back to L.A. but lived with some jazz musicians down in Orange County. There was session work at a studio that did a lot of Disney recording, so I joined the union and started doing one or two dates a week. I also did a lot of live jazz gigs, a great learning experience, and worked at Knott's Berry Farm backing up Frankie Avalon. I worked at Disneyland for a few summers and eventually I was the big fish in the small pond, so I moved back up to North Hollywood to become the very small fish. "Happy Days" and "Laverne & Shirley" were my first TV sessions soon after arriving on the scene. I remember working with Tommy

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## feature interview

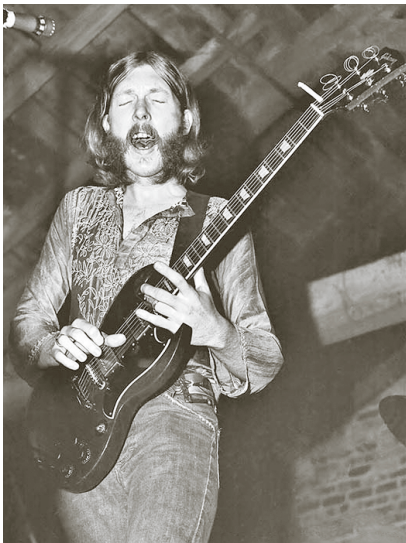


photo by Rick Cuilty

Tedesco, Dennis Budimir and Tim May, all great guys and mentors in my very green, early years in the studio.

**TQR:** Who have been the most influential artists in your development as a musician?

While on tour I do master classes all over the world, and a great place to start is what I call *Artistic Signatures*. I compiled a list of fifty-four guitar players that have influenced me in rock, jazz, country, blues, fusion, R&B, and even bluegrass. Here are a few of the most influential, Roger McGuinn, George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Albert



Duane Allman - Photo © Sidney Smith

King, Mike Bloomfield, Jimi Hendrix, Steve Cropper, Duane Allman, Ry Cooder, Jeff Beck, Wes Montgomery, Pat Martino, Joe Diorio, Pat Metheny, Chet Atkins, Joe Walsh, David Gilmour, Steve Morse, Andy Summers, Allan Holdsworth, Tony Rice, and most recently Derek Trucks.

**TQR:** What styles of music and other art forms inspire you the most?

In my world, all styles of music inform each other. I hear the blues in Charlie Parker's bebop playing, and jazz sensibilities in the bluegrass licks of Tony Rice. Cross-pollination of styles is what advances each genre forward and the music where artists are not doing that are simply preserving a period when that style was popular. But the visual arts inspire me, too. Like how Picasso could convey a bull or a human figure with just two pencil lines or two strokes from his paint brush, I aspire to that level of simplicity and freedom of expression.

**TQR:** Not only do you have extensive performing and playing mastery, but you are an educator. Is there something that draws you to teaching?

Sharing knowledge with someone and experiencing their excitement is a nice feeling. I also feel it's important to pass it on to the next generation. Making music with your hands on an instrument is so much more satisfying than typing it into a computer.

**TQR:** You have worked with many famous artists over the course of your career. Do you still find yourself being an unabashed fan?

Not while actually playing with my heroes, but sometimes just meeting them. I turned into Spotty Herbert, which is a Supertramp term for geeky fanboys, when I met Donald Fagen backstage at a Steely Dan concert. So embarrassed!



Walter Becker (L) Donald Fagen (R)

**TQR:** Do you find promoters or other industry types wanting to pigeon-hole who you are as an artist? How do you navigate that?

There's really nothing you can do about it. I just read something that called me a "funk-rock-fusion" artist. I remember when I met Prince Charles and Lady Diana backstage at the Royal Albert Hall. She asked me, "What was it like growing up in Pasadena, California and learning to play the lead guitar?" I replied, "I learned rhythm, too!"

**TQR:** What is your favorite go-to fly rig for electric, for acoustic?

My CVB tours in the U.S. and Canada are almost always driving tours with my four-amp rig. The European tours are all done with a duplicate rig I keep over there that runs on 220-volts. But sometimes during a tour overseas, we'll have to jump down to Italy for a festival or fly up to Lithuania for

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three shows. For those occasions and when I need to do the same in the U.S., I have a 10x10 inch pedal board that fits in a computer bag and sounds good with any Fender amp. For acoustics, I ask for a backline AER amp. I just played the Ullapool Guitar Festival in Scotland and saw some amazing acoustic players with delay, reverb, and looper pedals that sounded great, so maybe I'll put together something like that in the future.

**TQR:** What has been the most heartwarming award or compliment you have received?

I've received letters from fans telling me that my music pulled them through some really difficult times. A few nights ago, on tour, the venue owner in Velden, Austria told me that business has not been back to the pre-Covid years, and she was very depressed, but when she heard the familiar sound of my guitar it all went away. One guy on this tour asked me to play "Place for Me" from the album *SIX* because it was his deceased daughter's favorite song, and I could see him crying through the whole song. Music really touches people.

**TQR:** Looking back over the span of your career, what are you the proudest of up to this point?



Starting my own band and keeping it working for twenty-five years. Putting out sixteen albums and surviving the transition from full time studio musician to full time solo artist. And doing that without sacrificing the lifestyle and comfort of my family. **TQ**—Rick Cuilty

*This interview took place while Carl was on his European tour, and recording his latest album called Riverboat Sky scheduled for release on July 7th. Carl is busy as ever. The early cuts of his latest album reveal his continuation of exploring new ideas, and will no doubt be another gem.*

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

## The LSL CV Special Strat



I first saw Carl playing the CV special at Alva's Music in San Pedro California, probably around 2011. Alva's is a very cool mom and pop music store that is definitely not a big box store, but rather a very hip boutique shop with lots of great gear. A gold mine in the Pacific Ocean port town. Next door to the music store is Alva's Dance Studio, that doubles as a small, very intimate concert room. Some great artists have played there, from Allan Holdsworth, Allen Hinds, Laurence Juber, Will Ray, Carl, and many others. I had been following Carl from his Guitar Player column days. One day I bought one of his records, *Trading 8's*, in which he went toe-to-toe with Joe Bonamassa, Robben Ford, Steve Morse, Albert Lee, and others. Carl certainly more than held his ground. When I found out that he was playing a gig at Alva's, we went over to check it out.

Carl was playing through a vintage Marshall 50-watt, a Fender reverb unit, some other pedals, and an LSL CV special. I was immediately struck by the tone of his guitar. There was certainly a lot of great stuff in that signal path and the sound was magical. The cleans were airy, glassy and three-dimensional and with soaring leads. For most of the night, I thought the guitar was a Fender, but after looking a little closer I noticed the headstock was different.



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## feature interview

At the end of the night, my wife urged me to go up and speak with Carl, and I did. He was immediately friendly, gracious, and engaging. When I asked about the guitar he said, "No, it's not a Fender, it's an LSL," and handed it to me. I was reluctant to play it after hearing his chops but in any case, this led to a relationship with Carl that included lessons, friendship, production of an EP of my original music, and the purchase of my own sunburst CV Special from LSL. Let's talk with Carl about the guitar, speak with the LSL builder, Lance Lerman, and then give the guitar its due with a review of the CV Special.

**TQR:** Carl, can you tell me about the genesis of your Carl Verheyen Signature Strat?

Way back in 1989, I had a Fender endorsement. But it was sort of a low-level endorsement where they would give you stuff at cost. And every time you talked about guitars or amps in an interview you had to say "Fender." Then a long interview in *Guitar Player Magazine* came out while I was right in the middle of a pretty fabulous studio career where I was working every day, eight to ten sessions a week. As you can imagine, a studio musician needs to use different kinds of guitars. You need a good example of everything, because producers are hip enough to say, "That sounds great man, can you try that on a Les Paul, or could you try that on that 335 you brought?" So, the Fender guys dropped me at that point saying, "Sorry, you didn't mention Fender all the time."

I was just being honest and telling what I really used in that article, but I got a little hand slapping! Fast forward to 2009, Fender called me out of the blue and said, "We'd like to make a signature Strat, based on the 1961 seafoam green, rosewood neck guitar we always see you playing in videos." I agreed and they flew me to Scottsdale, Arizona for the day, for a big lunch and a tour of the Fender offices. At the end of the lunch, I was shown into this an office, and they said, "Okay, here's what we want to do. We want to make an exact copy of your 1961 Strat, complete with all the blemishes and burns and things in the exact spots. Every little imperfection. And we want to make forty of them and charge \$5,000 to \$6,000 each." And I said, "Well that's exactly what I don't want. I want a Fender Stratocaster guitar, exactly what you make, but with my little tweaks, mods and improvements. It can't be over 7.35 pounds with the block, and you can't use a titanium block. Next, it must include my vibrato bar set up. And finally, it needs to have the volume and tone controls the way I have them set up." They answered, "Well, you need to talk to somebody at the Corona factory about that." I flew home and the next day I called the factory about my signature Strat. They said, "Oh that's not our business. We're strictly a hard hat and steel toed boot facility. You need to talk to the people in Arizona." I really appreciated the very kind offer and I'm still a huge fan of all things Fender. I own quite a few Fender amps, guitars and even two vintage Fender tube Reverbs. But it wasn't part of my master plan at the time.



Then a week or two later, Lance Lerman called me from LSL and said, "You seem to know a lot about Stratocasters and have an opinion about how they should be, how about let's talk?" And I said, "Well I'm only interested in doing it if you do it all the way and you put my name on it." We talked and talked and put together a prototype. It was the best Strat I'd ever played. Now they make the CV Signature Strat-style guitar, and they sell quite a few of them. The very first one I got was exactly what I was looking for. Everything about it, even the weight. And it's really alive, this first one. Then I got a second one because we were attempting to do a studio model with noiseless pickups. I had just been on a session at Capital Studio A, with a forty-piece string section. They wanted me to sound like Jeff Beck live at the Royal Festival Hall with orchestra.



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## feature interview

Both my '58 and '65 Strats were too noisy, even my LSL Strat which cancels the hum in the split positions. I ended up playing this \$350 Fender Tex Mex Strat from 1996 with Seymour Duncan noiseless pickups in it. That was the only one where the buzz and hum wasn't louder than the orchestra. LSL then made me a studio model. The third Strat I had them make me is a maple neck version with a slightly skinnier neck, because I have a few Strats that have slightly skinnier necks than my original that are fun guitars to play. That's the only way I can describe it, they are just fun—that's how my association with LSL came about.

**TQR:** There is so little value added to put every burn and scratch and ding and worn-down spot on your guitar. You would pay a lot of money for something that doesn't make the guitar any better.

I agree. And those aren't the guitars that the real players buy. Those are for guys that have a guitar collection and the instrument in their office is played when they're on a long Zoom call with the screen muted.

**TQR:** They just have it hanging on the wall, it's a collector's thing, not a player's guitar.

True, so that's definitely not what I wanted.

**TQR:** Tell me then the difference between the rosewood board and the maple. Also, you said the maple one has a slightly skinnier neck. But tell me about the difference in sound and why you would use one versus the other at a recording or a gig.

That's a really good question. Over the years I've come to realize that when you're using a lot of distortion, the maple neck seems a bit more focused, especially at the low end. On the last CVB tour I used the maple Strat because there was a lot of distorted soloing. But even with the amount of distortion I use, I can still tell what pickup I'm on. I've got a five-way selector on all the Strats, and I want to hear the difference between each pickup. I'm obviously not producing a total square wave with a massive amount of gain, it's just enough to be saturated, silky, fat, and warm with none of that high-end sizzle. From C#, the fourth fret of the A string, on down is where a distorted tone starts to get mushy. My goal is to keep the tone focused on all five pickup selections. And that takes a little doing, it takes a little time to work that out. Here's my method. I first get a semi-distorted amp to sound good on all five pickup selections. Then I kick in a pedal and do the same, working with the pedal until I have it sounding great with all five positions. I've come to realize over the years that the rosewood neck is fantastic for my clean stuff, and the maple neck sounds better for my distorted playing. Therefore, I go back and forth, whatever I'm in the mood for. When recording it's easier because you can tailor the tone to the part. I'll use the rosewood for a rhythm track or a pretty stereo clean sound. And then if I'm taking a crunchy solo, I'll pick up the maple one.

**TQR:** With respect to the CV Special Strat, the original prototype of the CV special was a 1961 stock Fender Strat?



Aged LSL Saticoy

Yeah, exactly. 1961 stock Strat. I had changed the way the tone knobs work. The middle knob handles tone for both the neck and the middle position. And the lowest knob, closest to where you plug it in handles tone for the bridge pickup.

**TQR:** When LSL was developing the Strat for the CV Special, you gave him your 1961? The seafoam green?

Yes, and when you take the pick guard off, you can really see the original seafoam green. It's over sixty years old now so a lot of the color has changed. It looks darker than a seafoam green but the paint under the pick guard always stays fresh.

**TQR:** He was measuring neck profiles and the five-position switch and everything else?

I've had other companies attempt to make me a Strat over the years. I don't want to say who, but they didn't get it right. They made a beautiful guitar, but it's a subtle thing. When you walk into a room and there's a heavy guitar and a light

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## feature interview

guitar, you always go for the lighter one. And that's not just because you might be old and have a bad back. It's just because the lighter ones always sound and resonate better.

**TQR:** With respect to the LSL CV Special Lance developed and the actual original, how do they compare? It was a good match, you said that he nailed it.

Yeah. You can hold a guitar by the headstock, cradle it between your thumb and forefinger so that you're not clamping down on the neck, and let it hang. Play the B string and feel the lower bout down where it's plugged in. Just playing the B string should make the body vibrate. If you feel vibration there, you've got a live one. And I have to say the LSL is even more alive than the '61 Strat. The next thing we did was work on pickup output. I'm not a fan of really high output pickups, I believe pickups with a little lower output have better tone. So, we measured them individually and then he wound the pickups and put them in the guitar. But it was all wrong. We soon realized you must measure them at the end of the jack because after the pickups, the signal goes through a volume pot and the pair of tone pots. Measurements of the output should be taken at the jack. We remeasured them and finally got the pickups right.

**TQR:** How about other parts of the electronics? Some people are adamant about the resistor that goes across the tone knob. Did he just try to match what you had on the original Strat?



I'm not sure about the resistors, but I was given a choice of how loose the pots would be. For live performance I've weaned myself off the volume pedal, and instead I use my pinky to swell the volume up and down. I settled on a slightly stiffer volume pot, so I don't accidentally turn myself down in the middle of the solo if I bump it.

**TQR:** For the neck shape of the first one, he just measured the profile of the '61 Strat?

Lance at LSL calls it an asymmetrical D shape, thicker on the bass side. I've been playing my '65 Strat a lot and that's got more of a C shaped neck, so neck shape never matters

to me. When I started off as a professional guitar player my thinking was, "I can only play this particular kind of neck, it has to be a certain radius. I can't play anything else." And then one day I realized, "I can play anything with strings on it. I'm not gonna worry about all that stuff." It takes about forty-five seconds to adapt to a new scale, new neck shape, new fingerboard radius, even a new string gauge. And it's different from Gibson to Gibson, too. My ES-335 has a different neck size than the Les Paul, which is different than the SG. So, you just have to have an open mind and just adapt to it, get the sound you want out of it and go from there.

**TQR:** We talked about fingerboard woods. With respect to the neck and body wood, not the fretboard wood, did he try to match the woods? Or just give you something that gives you the weight you were looking for? I think you said he uses alder for the body.

We used alder for the body wood and maple for the neck. Then the rosewood fingerboard was put on top of that. Maple is such a great hard wood for necks. It won't warp or bend and it has a good memory. You can take the strings all the way off and it comes right back, but I never do. I'm a superstitious, one-string-at-a-time guy. But I'm really happy with both the rosewood and maple necks, they're both really fun to play. I don't know why alder wood is such a constantly used tone wood in the Fender catalog, maybe because it was cheap to get back in the day. But it's become a standard of the industry for Fender style solid body guitars. I know there's a lot of ash Telecasters and Strats. But alder seems to be the most common wood for Strats.

**TQR:** It seems so, but who knows what was going on in Leo Fender's mind? Sometimes you wonder, was it just an accident? But he was such a tinkerer. The alder body, the neck, electronics, all that stuff he did with Strats and Telecasters the standard.

He really got it right. He got the vibrato bridge right, he really nailed that! I believe it's the most musical bridge ever made, including the Bigsby vibrato and all the modern stuff like Floyd Rose and Kahler.

**TQR:** Tell us a little bit about the vibrato. I know you said you like it set up a certain way, and can you tell us about that on the LSL?

Years ago, I figured out that if you look at a blueprint of Leo Fender's vibrato bridge, he designed it to float, travel up and down. And at some point, I realized it would be great if I knew the interval I would achieve by pulling up all the way on the bar. I needed to know where it was going. I didn't want a random tone or a tone that was not in the scale. So, I got to thinking about it and thought maybe I could work out a way to where at least some of the strings went where I wanted them to go. I took the back plate off and started messing around with the claw until I got the G-string to go up to a B flat, which is a minor third. And I thought, well that'll be useful. I continued to turn the screws back there until I got

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## feature interview



LSL Guitar & Lance

the B string to go up a whole step to C sharp and the high E string to go up to F, a half step. So now I got a half step, a whole step and a minor third. And then I started playing around with single licks like Jeff Beck. Soon I was working with double stops to see if I could get two strings to go up to from one chord shape to another chord shape. Eventually it became a big part of my playing. So that's something that the CV Special definitely has. In fact, all my Strats with floating bridges are set up that way. And you're really not seeing a big angle on the bridge, it's not cocked way up. It's only a little more than a quarter inch off the deck. To my ears, it's the most musical way you can set up a Strat and closer to what Leo Fender had in mind with his original patent. The other thing I'm looking for is the ability to play a chord and shake it a little bit. It's nice to have a little shimmering shake on a chord using the bar. The Bigsby on my Gretsch guitar is pretty musical. But all the other vibrato systems I've come across are not nearly as musical as the simple one Leo Fender designed back in the early fifties. It's amazing how good it is!

**TQR:** I agree with you, that sort of shimmer vibrato on a chord adds a lot of depth, a huge amount of feel. On the CV special, it's extraordinary.

I've got a hot rod Strat with a Floyd Rose on it that I call a "stunt guitar" for doing heavy metal and those dive bombs heard a lot in eighties hard rock music. You can't really do massive dive bombs on a Strat. But I believe another reason the Fender style bridge sounds so musical is because, unlike the Floyd Rose, the strings pass through the body. More bottom-end lows are transferred to the amp.

**TQR:** You're right. How about the bridge? Is it just a typical bridge?

On my original prototype, they actually put a Fender bridge on there and all the saddles said Fender on them. It's a \$50 bridge, not that big of a deal. But eventually they sourced some parts, a better-quality bridge. I've tried titanium blocks on various guitars, but I don't like the sound as much. Yeah, something's going on. My guitar tech, Norik Renson said, "Everything matters. Everything you do to a guitar changes the tone." And he says, "Even changing a screw in the pick guard, you won't hear it but it's doing something." That's his theory and I agree.

**TQR:** Norik is certainly some kind of magician. With respect to frets, you probably insist on nickel. Do you have any preferences there? Are they just sort of like what the '61 Strat had?

Yes, they're definitely nickel. I'm not into stainless steel frets at all, I don't like the sound of them. Gotta be nickel, tall and skinny.

**TQR:** I know that Lance puts a really nice finish on there. Some kind of relic, thin nitro so the body doesn't get damped out by a thick poly finish.

He definitely wants the wood to breathe. Yeah, he got that right for sure. The slight relic is less for the look and more for the sound, the concept being a slightly "cracked" nitro cellulose oxide finish will breathe more.

**TQR:** Describe the tone of the CV Special. I'd say the cleans are that magical sort of pristine glassy sound without being thin. And when you overdrive it, it sings.

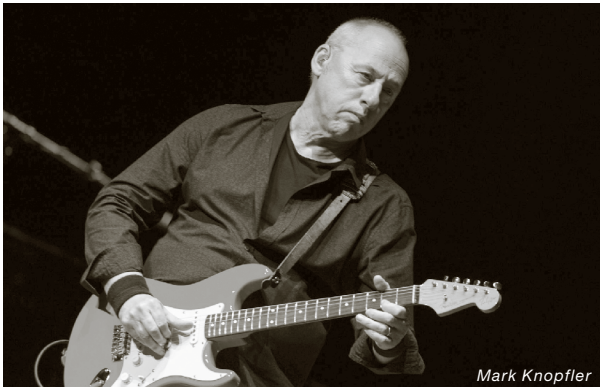


I am looking for specific sounds from each pickup. If I go to the neck pickup, I want it to be woody and fat and warm, like Stevie Ray Vaughan. And it doesn't matter what your string gauge is, it's your action height that's important. With the right action height and a good sounding pickup, I can get that beautiful Stevie Ray

Vaughan sound without a problem. The next position, which would be a combination of neck and middle, I want that to be warm and jazzy sounding. I sometimes darken it with the tone knob to sound like a hollow body guitar. I'm looking for that "hollow warmth." It may be my least used pickup selection, but when I need it, it's there. Next is the middle pickup by itself. I call it my glassy sound.

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## feature interview



Mark Knopfler

A lot of Jimi Hendrix's rhythm guitar was played with that middle pickup. You can hear it on songs like "One Rainy Wish" and "Electric Lady Land." That's a really important sound that I don't want too bright, but it should cut through. The next sound is the middle and bridge combination. I'm looking for that clucky tone and I find myself using it a lot with distortion. It's probably the most recognizable Strat sound that is immediately identified with Fender. So that combination is really useful for country music, country rock and that great Mark Knopfler rhythm tone. And then the back pickup should be bright but not an ice pick through the ears. I don't want it to hurt. Adjusting pickup height on the bridge pickup is an important part of dialing in your Strat's overall balance. I like the pickup to be a little higher for the bass strings, so they really smack out at you. I have the bottom tone knob dedicated to that pickup. I can get some really nice tones by just dialing it back a bit with distortion. So that's kind of what I'm going for with it. If each one of my three pickups is working the way I want it to, the overall sound is going to be fine.

**TQR:** You have a portfolio of a lot of other vintage guitars, but is the LSL one of the guitars you take on tour and into the studio?

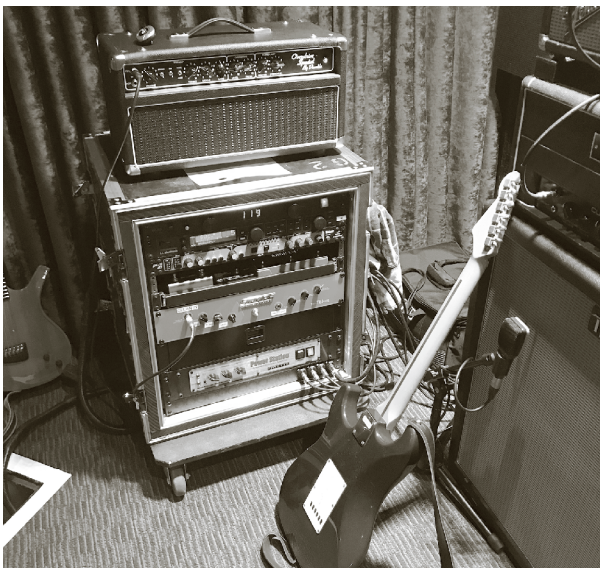


photo by Rick Cully

I use them for all types of live and studio recording situations. I just got off the road using the maple LSL for seven weeks of touring in the fall. Last year I took the rosewood one to Europe on a five-week tour. It was not the regular CVB, I took Alphonso Johnson and Chad Wackerman for bass and drums, and that guitar seemed to work really well with Alphonso's bass sound. As I listened back to the fans' videos on YouTube, I realized it worked fine with clean tones and distortion.

**TQR:** You just touched on something that can really help us understand the creative process and to be able to hear what's happening when we listen to a recording.



photo by Rick Cully

I use everything! When I'm making my own records, I'm looking for different and interesting textures. Here's an example, I've got a song called "Take One Step" from the 2006 album of the same name. I start off with the '65 Strat playing a little theme. Then when the band comes in, I add a pair of strumming acoustics right and left. I like to use this 1951 Gibson J-50 acoustic of mine because when you dig in strumming harder on it, it seems to self-compress like that *Rubber Soul* sound—that was a tip from John Fogerty.



photo by Baron Wolman

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Then I added a little bit of distorted Telecaster using the back pickup for some crunchy downbeats on the pre-chorus. A Taylor acoustic 12-string sneaks a little figure into the verses, too. When the chorus kicks in, I used my Les Paul panned left and my SG panned right for the bass line figure. For that tone I drove a couple little amps really hard. I kept the acoustics in there and the Tele so it's big, like a chorus should be. On the second verse I brought in this real nasally, out of phase tone using a Gretsch 6120 that added some "ear candy" behind the vocal. And when I came to the solo, I told the engineer "I want the guitar solo to sound like Frank Sinatra." My analogy is that when you listen to those old Capitol Records Frank Sinatra records, you know he recorded them in the big room at Capitol Studio A. You hear the big band come in and they're just slamming, and it sounds fantastic, but when Frank comes in, he's completely over the top and sounds even more awesome. The sound of his vocals is really special. I'm looking for that when I do a guitar solo, I want *that* to take over from the lead vocal and be just as special. I've played on lots of other people's records and been disappointed when the guitar solo comes in and it's not nearly at the level that the vocal was. And that always bugs me, because when you think about the mix, ask yourself, what are we selling here? What's the focal point of this section of these bars going by? And if the vocalist has stopped and the guitar player or any soloist is playing, *that* needs to be the leading sound instrument.

**TQR:** One last question. With respect to LSL and your relationship with Lance, can you tell us a little bit about that?



Lance Lerman

He's a great guy. He's a lot of fun and he listens carefully. The company's successful and they're selling more guitars than they can make. I love him—He's got a lot of respect for musicians. When I first met him, a friend of mine named Loni Specter, the guy that puts on the Amp Show every year, called me out of the blue and he goes, "I've got a friend making Telecasters, want to come, check them out?" And I said, "No thank you, I've got two Telecasters and one of them is really fabulous and really valuable, a 1960 Tele Custom. I really don't need another Tele." And he goes, "Well just check it out, because he's made a great guitar."

I went over there and played a Telecaster that Lance had made when he was just getting his company started and I really liked it. I had to have it because it sounded more like a Tele than my Tele. It does the Tele thing, that spank and trebly country kind of thing, even better than the ones I own.

I got the LSL and I never looked back, it's my main Telecaster. I keep the real valuable ones on hand for recording or songwriting. The 1960 Telecaster Custom is swampy with a rosewood neck for that warm, fat tone. And I own a 1969 Telecaster Thinline with a maple neck for funky rhythm work. They definitely have their place in my arsenal, along with an LSL Soledad Tele with a P90 and a humbucker. Can't have too many Telecasters. **TQ**—George Gomez

## INTERVIEW LANCE LERMAN

# Proprietor LSL Instruments

**TQR:** Lance, you have literally gone to the other side of the world, and back when founding LSL Instruments, and the Carl Verheyen Signature Strat—the CV Special. Before we talk about the guitar, can you tell us about your odyssey of California to China and back?

Sure. I started a wood shop when I moved to L.A. from Berkeley, a one-person wood shop that ended up employing two hundred people. And that took a big dive when my largest customer declared bankruptcy and took me out with them. At the same time, the Coast Guard made new rules for riverboats that put me out of the machine making business, which were two of my main businesses. That shop was originally California Wood Products and became Sequoia Wood Products. My wife and I had designed a great toy for small children called Marble. But it was so difficult to make that we never really got off the ground with it. I still have some of them here. Anyway, I went to China to make that toy. I figured you can't make this stuff in the U.S. anymore. If anybody knew that, I did. I went to China and started sourcing these products and I found that you don't ever turn your back on the production, especially back then. China wasn't as sophisticated and didn't have the same quality standards that they do now. So, I had to oversee it and watch every move. We also developed a children's computer desk that was adjustable up and down as a child grew. And so, we made that. That was called Kidstation. I had it made in China, did a sourcing and I had one factory make it. I had to source everything, and it just became a longer and longer process and I ended up staying there on and off for about eight years. My Chinese is pretty good.

I lived in Shanghai, and then moved back to Dongguan to the original factory that was making Kidstation. I became the general manager of that factory, which overall had about five hundred people working there. I was running that for quite a while and I was playing music in a band at night in various bars in Dongguan, which is in southern China, just about an hour north of Hong Kong. I was playing music and working my butt off in that factory, and after several years, I

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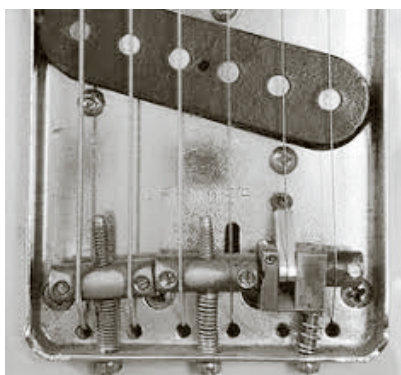
## interview

figured, I'm not getting paid nearly enough to do this, to stay in China, work six days a week, burning the candle at both ends, and playing music at night.



I decided to come back to the U.S. and find myself a job, which I figured was going to be better, working for an American furniture manufacturer that wanted to source in China and have somebody there who would oversee that. When I was playing in these bands, especially in one bar, it was called Thirsty Dog, that was sort of a furniture dude hangout, American guys who had jobs that were sourcing furniture and overseeing quality. I found out their jobs were about a tenth of what my job was, and they were getting paid about three times the amount I was getting paid to run a whole factory. The heck with this. I'm going to go back to the U.S., find myself a cushy American job in China and have a better income and do half the work. So, I came back to the U.S., and I started interviewing with various furniture companies and none of them were satisfactory. A lot were back East, where generally furniture in the U.S. is made.

Meanwhile, I was playing in China. I was playing a Fender B-Bender, which is fun, but super heavy. I didn't feel it was right for me. I had made guitars in the past. My first guitar company was with my partner Joe Deetz in Berkeley, and it



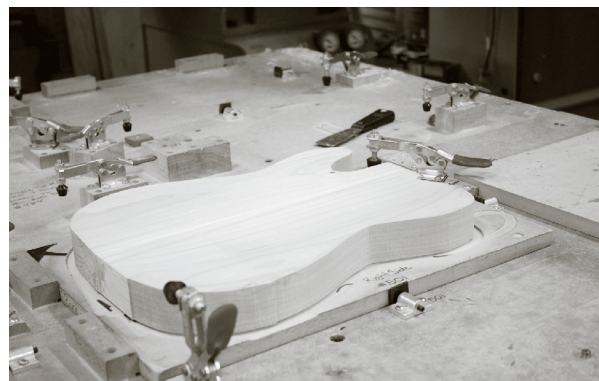
was called D & L Instruments. We made guitars, that were an Alembic sort of look that was popular back then. I knew how to make guitars. I was a repairman at a place called the 5th String, a music shop. I started this guitar company with Joe. We were too young, stupid, and stoned to run a business and so that eventually just died, but I knew how to make guitars. When I came back from China looking for another job, I decided I'd just make myself the guitar that I wanted, which was a basic Blackguard Tele. I made all these jigs and fixtures in my own garage because my wife and I are both pretty accomplished woodworkers. We had a fairly

good shop in the garage. I spent months flying around the country doing interviews, but I was spending a lot of time at home. I made this guitar, and I was hanging out at Cal Vintage Guitars a lot, the music store in Sherman Oaks. They were friends. And when I finished the guitar, I'd gone through all this work making the jigs and all the fixtures. I was determined not to just buy a body, and not to buy a neck. I'm going to make as much of the guitar as I can by myself. I went on for months because I had to make jigs and fixtures and stuff to make this guitar. Then I strung it up, played it—Oh my god, that sounds great. You make it yourself, you go through all that trouble, and you really want it to sound good. You think it does, but I didn't actually believe in myself.



I figured, oh yeah, you made it, you went through all this and of course you think it's the greatest guitar in the world. I brought it down to the most critical guy I knew, a guy named Tommy Kay, who worked at Cal Vintage Guitars. He's now a proprietor of Imperial Guitars in Sherman Oaks. If that guitar sucked, he would tell

me. He was the perfect person. Tommy is a fabulous guitar player, incredible, mostly jazz stuff. I put it in his hand, he plays this guitar, and he says, "You made this?" And I go, "Yeah." "You made the body?" "Yeah, I made the body, made the neck. I made the whole thing." He said, "I'm blown away. Can you make another one?" "I guess, I'm not doing anything else. Sure." So, I made him another one and I think he sold it in about two hours. One thing led to another.



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Andy Brawer, a pretty noted repair guy at the time said, "Listen, I got a friend coming from Sweden. They need to rent five feet of their booth at NAMM." I said, "NAMM, I have no business going to NAMM. I'm a guy in a garage." He says, "Come on man, it's only five feet. You'll have a good time." He talked me into it. At that point, I had a guy working with me, Ari Shabat, who now has his own guitar company, helping me. We made four guitars to bring to NAMM. My wife Lisa a graphic artist by trade, created the LSL logo and I put the our logo on the first guitar, even though I didn't really have a company. Lisa also made a display for our five feet of the Elmwood Amps booth, and I figured I'll just have a great time, but I wasn't really serious about becoming a guitar company. After four days, I had European and Japanese distribution, and ten dealers in the U.S. We're walking away from NAMM going, what the hell just happened? I sold more guitars than I could make, I have dealers...I guess I'm in the guitar business now.

I rented a building in Van Nuys and that became LSL Instruments. I had Ari and I hired Robbie Camlas to help us move from my home in Granada Hills. We were using a closet for a spray booth, and we had to move. Robbie was our painter, and he actually became a really fabulous one. He works for Wilkins in Van Nuys. That's how it started, we kept making great guitars, and they kept selling, and it continues to this day. We have twelve people working here, besides Lisa and I, and my daughter works here, too.

**TQR:** All right... The beginning of LSL guitars. And I can certainly attest to the quality of your guitars since I have a couple including a CV Special. I'm sure that there's a backstory on the CV Special. Can you share that with us?



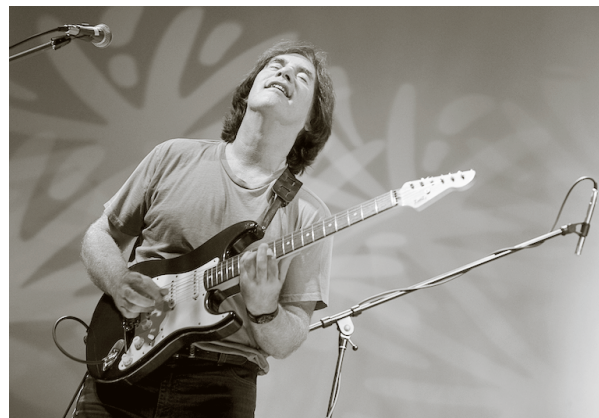
In those early days in Van Nuys, I really didn't know anybody in the business. I don't know how he found us, but Carl and Steve Trovato came to the shop. I guess Steve had come by before, and he was one of my guitar heroes. I had one of his books in China and had stars in my eyes when Steve came in. One day he brought Carl to the shop, I handed Carl a guitar and Carl was sold. I had never heard of Carl Verheyen. I'd been in China for eight years. Carl played one of our Sa-

ticoys, an LSL Strat, and I guess he was blown away. I agreed to make him a Carl Verheyen Special. Carl has specific needs he wants in his guitar neck shape. He wanted it copied off a '61 Strat that he had, so we did that. And all our necks are hand shaped here, so we don't care really. We're not tied

to any specific neck shape. We can make anything anybody wants. In fact, we tell people, you can come here, and we'll shape the neck while you wait.

Carl was a fan from the moment he touched one. LSL Instruments have never placed a single advertisement. I always figured that if you make a great guitar, people will come. It sells itself. We founded our company on that dedication to quality. It worked with Carl, worked with Steve, and everyone who has purchased an LSL. There were a lot of details that Carl wanted, and we were more than happy to do it. A guy like Carl can get a guitar from anyone and here he is with us. It wasn't all that far from our standard stuff. Carl's requests were easy to accomplish, except perhaps tuning the tremolo. We made the guitar and handed it over and Carl has been playing it ever since.

I swear Carl can hear paint dry. You watch him play and you walk away shaking your head. He's really an amazing guitar player—the best guitar player I know. It's not just speed or anything, he's so musical. And he always seems to be getting better. He just has made a fantastic career out of guitar playing because he's earned it. So, if you can get that guy to play your guitars, you can get anybody. He's got such a great ear and he's probably one of the most underrated guitar players on the planet. I don't follow too much media, I had never even heard of him, but thirty years with Supertramp ought to do it for you. Carl's been a loyal customer. He's gotten several guitars from us. And to tell you the truth, I haven't seen him playing anything else.



**TQR:** When I first saw Carl, he was playing an LSL CV Special, and I was blown away by the sound. I ended up buying a CV Special and it's my number one guitar. I can attest to the quality and the sound. I know you wind your own pickups for the guitar. So how did that come about for a guy with sawdust in his veins?

From the beginning, I was determined to make as much of the guitar as we could because I believe in order to make a great guitar you don't do just a few different things. You do every single thing better because you're stacking pennies. People are always searching for the magic bullet. You can go

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on the internet for weeks on end and you'll see all these little things... you do this to your guitar, and it'll be a great guitar. You do that to a guitar, new bridge, new tuners, new this, new that, and I've always been of the mind that there is *no* magic bullet in guitars. You can't turn an okay guitar into a great guitar. It starts with the wood. The magic bullet is to do it all great—all better. That means every single step—you have to find a better way to do it. Nobody was more surprised by this than me. Part of that was making the pickups. I wanted to control all of the process.

For a while when it was still possible, I was making our own bridges. That became just too costly and difficult in the U.S., especially plating them in California. My feeling is that you can make a decent guitar and make it a little better with great pickups, but that's just a piece of the puzzle, just like everything else. It's a part. You're not going to turn a Squier into a great guitar with pickups, but you can certainly screw a great guitar up with bad pickups. Pickups were an inherent part of the guitar that I needed to control. We even make our own truss rods.

**TQR:** Personally, I feel those pickups are awesome. Carl, in my interview with him, talks about the five positions of the switch and which he uses for what. He loves the pickups, and I'm a fan of them as well. Are there any last words you'd like to say?



We have a three hundred guitar backlog right now. We still only make about ten guitars a week. We're pretty set, sales are not a problem. We don't want to ruin the guitars by becoming too large a company run by accountants.

**TQR:** I agree because where you are now... makes an honest, beautiful sounding guitar.

I play them every day and check every guitar myself. It's our aim and has always been my philosophy to make guitars that sell themselves. **TQ**—George Gomez

## My Custom LSL CV



This LSL CV Special guitar is certainly a killer in playability, sound, and looks. It is a 3-tone sunburst, light nitro-cellulose lacquer, with a lightly reliced alder body. The neck is maple with a rosewood fretboard. The guitar in most aspects, is like a Fender in body contour, scale length, bridge, and tremolo system. Fret wire is .055 x .090 nickel-silver, a 1.62 nut width, 9.5-inch neck radius, vintage in-line tuners, and hand wound single coil pickups. They measure bridge, 6.7K; middle, 5.9K; neck, 6.0K. The guitar weighs in at 6 lbs., 15 ozs.



George Gomez

The guitar is based on Carl's '61 seafoam green Fender Strat. The neck profile, and other build features are to a large extent, taken from that original guitar. The tone controls are somewhat different from a stock setup. The first tone knob controls the tone of the neck and middle pickups, and the second tone knob controls the bridge only. The

tremolo block is classic metal, not titanium, and the system floats comfortably to raise and lower the pitch.

The overall feel of the guitar is welcoming and comfortable. The profile is a perfect fit. Lance let me customize it at the LSL factory. He took off just a little bit on the bass side. I preferred it just a bit smaller so that I could more effectively work the guitar, wrapping my thumb around that side. The guitar has a pleasing resonance unamplified, a good indication of what the sound will be like when plugged into one of your favorite amps. The neck and body vibrate nicely.

It is no secret that low-wind, lower impedance single coils are the holy grail of Strat tone inspiration. Using two amps in stereo, similar to Carl, both amps are set clean, and the signal goes through a TC Electronics Chorus in stereo, with a Magnatone Varsity on the right, and a Dr. Z, Z-Plus on the left. The two-amp tonal characteristics are complementary without the chorus on, the guitar cleans are sublime, think SRV at the beginning of "Lenny." Chords float like clouds, single note leads and melodies inspire you to play beyond your perceived boundaries. This is what makes it all worthwhile. A sound that you love—a tone that makes you want to keep playing. Through a cranked Magnatone Super Fifteen, the notes sing and sustain well. Step on a Strymon Riverside, or a Fulltone PlimSoul on your favorite settings, and you can instantly go from beautiful cleans to far across the border. Using the Nobels ODR-1 pedal set to light drive and gain, with the LSL on the neck pickup, you are transported to Texas, ready to hang with Stevie. All 5-positions conjure up great usable sounds, from blues, cutting leads, jazz melody comping, funky chords, Strat quack and perform for just about any gig. When I'm asked about a desert island companion, I don't hesitate—that it's my custom LSL CV Special. Quest forth...TQ—George Gomez



*Islinstruments.com*

## CHANDLER LIMITED'S Wade Goeke



*photo by Adam Fiori*

Wade Goeke is the man behind Chandler Limited, a boutique gear firm intent on taking the legendary designs of EMI's Abbey Road and updating them for present day studio use, along with other fine gear. His TG1 Limiter is beyond stellar, it is a recreation of the compressor and limiter found on the historic EMI TG12345 recording consoles used at the famed Abbey Road Studios. EMI's recording equipment were never commercially available, and only EMI owned studios had access to them. They were used on many classic recordings by the Beatles, Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon, and by the Rolling Stones. The Limiter/Compressor from Wade and Chandler Limited is known for producing a smooth, pleasing distortion with a warm, open sound and the utmost clarity. Wade talks about how his quest for the ultimate in gear design took him from being a kid who loved guitar, to Los Angeles, London's Abbey Road Studios, and back to his home state of Iowa, where the company is currently located. Chandler Limited also produce a pair of unique guitar pedals that we're taking for a ride here at TQR.

**TQR:** Iowa to this gig? How does a kid from Iowa end up in the music business and eventually at Abbey Road Studios?



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## interview

I started in music when I was in junior high. When I was twelve, I talked my parents into buying me a 4-track Tascam. Back then that was a really big deal, I think they were around \$500 to \$600 bucks, which was a lot of money in 1982. So, I started recording early on and it progressed from there. I played guitar starting in junior high and also sang and took voice lessons.

**TQR:** We love the heartland. Iowa is beautiful! Did anyone in your family play?

No one in my family played instruments, but my folks were music fans and played music around the house. My cousin Ron played guitar, he had a 1960s Fender Mustang. My brother and I visited him and were fascinated with it. He didn't play that much and sold us his guitar, it was a hundred bucks or something.

**TQR:** Hendrix started out on that same guitar.

Yea, right! It's funny, those guitars now are worth far more. We felt like it was a piece of junk back then, but it was a start. So, I kept playing and writing songs and was recording away. I had a lot of effects I was exploring, and I used to like those Boss micro-racks even, which seemed like studio equipment to me then. I saved up money from playing in bars in a cover band and went into a real studio at eighteen and recorded a 4 song EP because my plan was to head to L.A. and go for it. I graduated early and made it out there. I transitioned fairly quickly from music into studio endeavors. They always have gone hand in hand for me.

**TQR:** Those were interesting days, as gear seemed to evolve light years and into digital, for better and worse. We can remember having our band record 6 songs to tape, then buying a DAT machine for a grand to master it to DAT tape, then taking that to another city where we had to pay to get ten CDs made. What we would even do with the CDs, we didn't know yet.

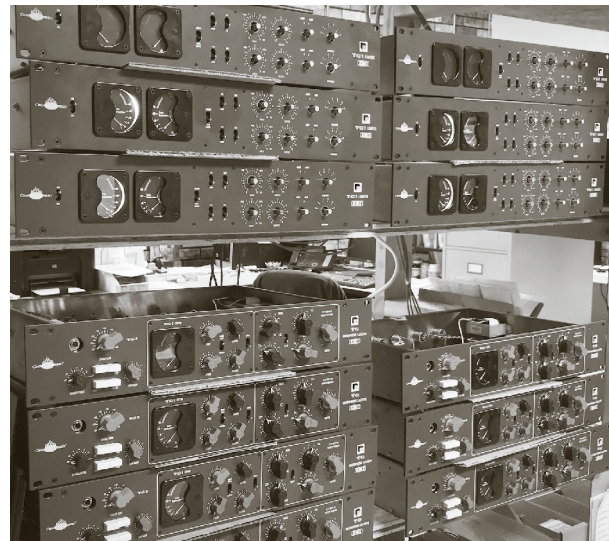


Chandler Limited REDD Microphone Package

It was a wild time. As things progressed out there, I started building an 8-track then a 16-track on to a two-inch 24-track

by the time I was in my mid-twenties. I started taking gear apart and seeing what was inside, which progressed into a deeper focus, for me. I also got into songwriting more than trying to be a guitar hero, which was a big change for me then. That was a crazy period where guys like Yngwie Malmsteen, and Joe Satriani were taking over the magazines and airwaves. I realized songwriting was far more important to me than the solos. Which in some sense is thankfully to the music I listened to that my parents had playing in the house, like the Beatles, which inspired me immensely. I still remember the sounds of those vinyl Beatles albums. How the reverb was for "Please Please Me," and hearing Karen Carpenter's voice through that pre-delay plate. We'd listen to music together as a family at night, even the Eagles, because as we all know they were so good. Things peaked there for me, and I still like mono. The impact of a mono mix with how the drums sit is stellar.

As I was taking things apart and doing studio work and music, I ended up working at a place called Vari-Lite, which had automated lighting systems for concerts. If you remember the Pink Floyd tours where they had the large circle of lights with all sorts of changing colors, that was them. I did repairs in their shop and got really into troubleshooting, intricate soldering, and more. Then I worked at Yale Electronics, which sold parts for studio wire and cable. I met a lot of people through that and was getting more studio jobs, since I could do things like wire a patch bay, calibrate a 24-track, etc. By that time, I had already started working on our first TG Limiter. My folks helped me buy a pair of them for



TG1 Limiter - photo by Adam Fiori

\$1900 bucks, which is insane to think of now because they are eight to ten grand apiece currently. Which is worth every penny, by the way! I realized how amazing these sounded, and it reminded me of the compression they used on Beatles recordings. I took those apart and looked inside them to study everything. I ended up etching some boards by hand.

**TQR:** Amazing. Etching a board by hand means...

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## interview

I completely drew the design out by hand. A proto board is just copper on both sides, so I literally drew out the circuitry. It's a really intricate circuit and there is a lot to it, so luckily, I had taken plenty of art classes along the way. You dip it in acid after you draw it out, then drill all the holes by hand and start building it up. Some people use layout programs where a schematic is imported, and auto-routing does it for you. I don't do that, I think it's fun and creative to do them by hand. Later, after contracting with Abbey Road, I was able to find many of the actual circuit board layouts after searching through their archives at Hayes. So, all the units we make are actual 1:1 versions of the old PCBs.

**TQR:** How did that connection happen?

I made the TG1, which was our first unit, and I put EMI on the faceplate, and only made a few of them. One of those ended up in England with Spike Spent who had a long-term lockout in one of the Olympic Studios room, which was owned by Abbey Road at the time. They found out I was making an EMI unit, by chance. Initially they weren't too happy because I was infringing on their property, but once things settled down, they shared that they had listened to it and really liked what I had done. They mentioned they had been wanting to get back into gear development and we started having discussions about working together. Life just happened and lined up.

**TQR:** There is something going on with people like you, the rare ones who their inner wiring has them tearing apart gear and making their own versions. We see it time and time again with people like Bill Collings, Ken Parker, amp builders, pedal gurus, and more. Most are happy to just plug into things. Not you guys. That's a different breed of human, and that's you.

I can't do anything else in life. So thankfully I'm good at something, HAHHAHA!

**TQR:** So when you got into Abbey Road, what can you tell us about that?

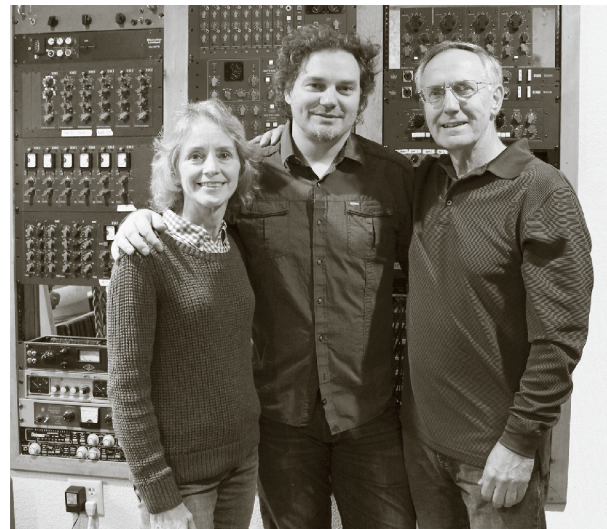
Once we did a couple projects together, I talked them into letting me go into the archives and look through everything. Archives meaning all of the EMI document storage, spare equipment, disk cutting equipment etc. There was documentation from the design of the units, boxes of old transformers, and pretty much anything that ended up there. Since we started doing things they went through the archives and organized and logged everything. Now everything there is completely cataloged and can be referenced when needed.

**TQR:** And the gear Chandler is making now ends up being used by McCartney, Green Day, on big movie soundtracks like Frozen, with Dolly Parton, Paul Simon, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, The Avett Brothers, Beyonce and so many more. What a range. That must feel good.

Yes, it's weird to really think about, wrap my mind around. I was never someone who wanted to make a business. I was inspired knowing that artists would love to use this gear, so that's my entire reason for going forward with all of this.

**TQR:** So you move back to Iowa and start it, go for it, and it becomes a family operated company.

We've grown quite a bit into an actual company. In the early days, I was working out of a garage and in this big walk-in closet in a house I rented with friends in L.A.. Literally. We're not huge, but we have thirty-five employees now and we still make everything in house. We don't use any offshore foreign parts or send anything anywhere else to get made. We don't use surface mount, or ribbon cable. We make things like they did in 1969, which costs more, but it will last.



Goeke Family - photo by Adam Fiori

**TQR:** Do you have any personally preferred tone wisdom for our readers?

Sure. I still play guitar every day. I'm always testing with guitars and drums. We are in Shell Rock, Iowa, which is a small town of thirteen-hundred or so and have three old buildings on the main street of this town. Upstairs in two of the buildings are our studios, with giant twenty-foot ceilings and plaster walls, etc. They sound great. I am always listening to the gear designs, and it's my favorite part of the job. Transformers, pickups, old wood, and microphone capsules to me are the four things that are very hard to make like the old ones, and that's my job. Transformers are voodoo. I approach guitars the same way I approach gear. I am lucky enough to have thirty to forty vintage pickups and with each guitar we match them up and even go as far as tuning the capacitors. For me, a stock Les Paul with a .22 capacitor is not my first choice. I love dialing them in, like you do at TQ. To me, Tom Holmes pickups, for example, are worth every penny. I love them so much. As a manufacturer obviously we want to be able to sell things, but I would rather have people buy one great product from us that stands the test of a lifetime for them, even though it may cost them more to take the initial

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## interview

plunge with the highest quality. And speaking of humbuckers, my personal favorite are the old vintage patent number pickups what some call T-Tops, since Les Pauls can often be muddy, I love the clarity those pickups give me. My favorite guitar is a 1982 Gold Top Reissue that has an actual PAF in the bridge and a Tim Shaw in the neck. That guitar is insane.

**TQR:** Getting a great Les Paul neck pickup is tough. That woody, huge, airy, organic harmonic clarity. We know you made a guitar amp for a while and were obsessed with that. How was it? Do you still make the Little Devil Boost and the Germanium Drive pedals?

As far as the amps, we only made a hundred of them, it was a limited thing. It was such a cool road to go down but required a tremendous commitment. At about that same time, we had signed a new contract with Abbey Road and had to focus there. You can read about the amps on our website. We had to concentrate on our core business. We do still make the pedals and we are open to building some other types down the road, too. We'll send you a couple to review and enjoy.

**TQR:** We look forward to that. Let us know if you ever build a great Univibe, there are so many awful ones out there that sure as heck don't sound like an original.



Wade Goeke (L), Lester Smith (R) - Abbey Road Studios

I'm right there with you, nothing compares! I've never heard a modern one that does. That's a tough circuit. It could definitely be another distraction I would chase for a lifetime.

These two Chandler guitar pedals are all handmade and hand-wired with true bypass and no chips or components. They are Class A with true bypass overdrive. I wanted discrete and pure tonalities I wasn't getting from other products out there. A lot of pedals use chips, and I'm not saying that's not okay, but I wanted something different. Like the Little Devil pedal we do, it has a lot of gain if you want to overdrive your amp, there's no external clipping with diodes because I feel that is unnatural, where things are forced to clip even though the amp isn't, which I never liked. So, the Devil is pure overdrive, with a selectable bias control. There are a few flavors in it. The frequency selection in it gives players a full range. I use those pedals all the time. We do have one other guitar pedal we are going to put out at some point, and we'll let you know.



photo by Adam Fiori

**TQR:** Walk us through the germanium pedal you make.

That's really a similar scenario, where I was looking for the highest quality gain, and overdriving an amplifier internally as opposed to clipping it. This is germanium based which has a bipolar supply, which runs on plus or minus 9, so there is a plus or minus 18-volts range. The bias control with it also gives guitarists a tailored range to work with. They have somewhat similar functions, but they sound different from each other, so we put them both out there. So many things are made offshore with cheaper parts from the same Chinese or foreign companies, and we don't do that here. Things may cost a bit more, but everything matters, and we strive to get things as perfect as possible.

**TQR:** We will keep an eye out for what you guys do in the future. And if you cross paths with Beyonce, let her know we will be more than happy to put a big, greasy, nasty, rocking tweed Deluxe Echoplex Texas slide solo on some dance song she's got. Ahahaha. Hey, it could happen, even Bowie tapped SRV!

AHAHAHA! Tony Maserati, who does her mixes, is a friend of ours, I'll check on that for you!

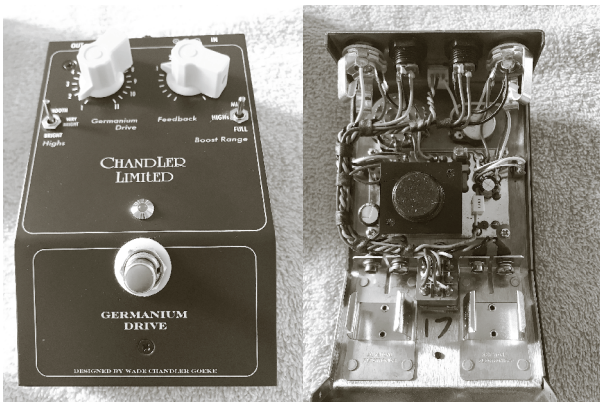
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**TQR:** You are our kind of people, we're proud of you. What is ahead for you guys?

I do have a couple guitar related projects pedal related that are done, and we are figuring out how to release them. We have a number of things with Abbey Road in the works, and some more of our microphones, which are a big deal for us. Our REDD Microphone has a patented design. We have another tube mic design that uses the patent, as well as a ribbon, and condenser microphone coming. We hope to explore all of the Abbey Road opportunities before our lives are over. My kids are both into computers and engineering, so I imagine they are likely to take over the company from me. My oldest son is getting a master's in digital signal processing and he's interested in the software aspects of all this. There's a lot of good still ahead.

### Chandler Limited Germanium Fuzz and Little Devil Boost Reviews

It is obvious Wade Goeke is playing for keeps. All of the tools he is creating are engineered right down to the no-holds-barred highest quality. The simple fact he walks the walk so seriously enough to be working with the legendary EMI Studio in England, says plenty. When Chandler sent this pair of hand-wired pedals to the Texas bungalow, we were beyond curious. We have a few fuzzes in our stash, including a vintage Octavia, so it would be simple enough to run them alongside each other to evaluate the vibes. The Germanium Drive is genuine Class A, true bypass, and runs off either an independent dual power supply or a pair of nine-volt batteries inside it. Call us old school, but we took the four side screws out and immediately threw in a pair of Black Cat batteries. These batteries were also the favorite of David Wilson, our Editor of Tone Emeritus and TQR founder, the guru in the truest sense of the word. We prefer to run all pedals through vintage Fender black panel amps, which offer a perfect clean soundstage to hear and discern everything they can do. But yes, we also fired these through the 1959 GA-40 for some tremolo vibey slide goodness, and a tweed Deluxe.



The Germanium isn't over the top and has a very sweet and usable spectrum and range of drive. It has a pair of

toggle switches for magical tailoring. One is the HIGHS for frequency, (Smooth, Bright, Very Bright) and the other is the BOOST RANGE for selecting the response (Mids, Highs, Full). The two chicken knobs control the GERMANIUM DRIVE for the amount of gain, and the FEEDBACK to adjust negative feedback, which is a lovely way to vary the feel in your hands, compression, and for detailed unique shaping. We like this, because we actually have a negative feedback toggle on our vintage 1964 Vibrolux Reverb amp, on the back chassis ground switch, so we can have three options of negative feedback or without feedback, as well. Thanks Mr. Valco. This pedal shined when cranked at mid-level or so, with a sweet, CHUNKY, wide glide just across the border goodness, and then when launched all in, still was beyond musical. It was happy with single coils and buckers alike. It also dug the tweed, yes indeed. With the 1964 Deluxe Reverb and a sunburst Strat, within thirty seconds of tweaking, we had ZZ's "Jesus Just Left Chicago" nailed like no tomorrow.



We ran the Little Devil pedal along with it, to understand what Chandler is going for thematically, with these being the only two pedals offered by them. The Devil has heaps more drive, and wicked gain. It also has the frequency shaping toggles, as well as a dial for COLOR BOOST and another dial that was sublime, for FEEDBACK/BIAS. That dial has six programmed settings you can click to that lets you go from mild fuzz to roaring plexi-style vibes in a flash. Each preset has its own style of harmonic distortion and clipping, which in turn affect the sine wave differently. It is very capable of absolutely melting down the house. We did that with a Strat, oh, yes, but our happy place was dialing in perfect bluesy and sugar sweet gain characteristics with each guitar we played with it, or amp. That lovely just across the border beauty you find difficult to stop cranking, it is that good.

What Wade at Chandler is doing with these pedals is asking each player to go the distance, to truly tailor their tone with each specific guitar, pickup, and amp, as they go through the ranges of power tube volume levels. Many players simply find a setting they like, and then crank the amp, which doesn't get you to the top of the tone mountain. You lose wonderful characteristics as things change when wound up or down. Great players will pay attention to how, with a black panel Fender amp for example, as the volume levels go up, more bass needs

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to be pulled out of the signal to allow frequency clarity so the bandwidth is even and gorgeously presented. Wade is offering you the chance to not only find the gain and feel levels that inspire you, but to also dial them in absolutely perfectly to your discriminating tastes, so you are hearing the best version of yourself. That's how it's done. Quest forth...TQ—*Riverhorse*

*chandlerlimited.com*

JCA CIRCUITS

## The Vibe Amp

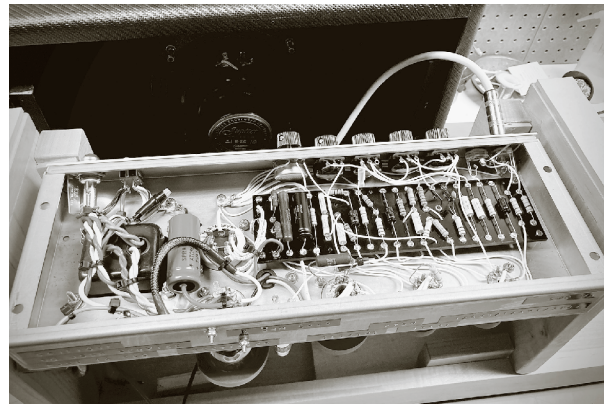
It's a strange endeavor, sitting there with capacitors, transformers, tubes, schematics of what has been, and the dreams of what could be. Jason Arthur has been in that moment at his Pottstown, Pennsylvania work bench wistfully contemplating the characteristics of sound many times. When he offered to send us his latest amp, we didn't hesitate.



He began offering this design in late 2021, and it is based on a beloved 1970s silver face Fender Vibro Champ AA74 that a friend had given him decades ago. He has a passion for single-ended amps and exploring their incredible potential. While he was digging in deep, he came up with several design concepts relative to modified grounding schemes, power supply/filtering, voicing and frequency response, and touch

sensitivity, which differ significantly from the original Vibro Champ. He let us know it was designed to pay homage to and improve upon the format of his favorite low power Class A amplifiers. The Vibe excels on its own or as part of a wet/dry dual amp rig thanks to the splitter box he designed based on the classic Jensen Transformer JT 11 P1. We were able to plug into the splitter box and go directly out to any two amps. He even supplied us with a biased cable for the on/off tremolo switch box. That's class.

When it arrived here at the Texas bungalow, we were on the road living along Lake Erie and hiking into tributary rivers for fish. But you know as soon as we were home—long before we unpacked bags or did laundry or checked the mail, we took a wood handled knife from France and uncorked the double box holding it. We pulled the chassis and tubes to get a good feel for everything, put it back together, and then went to work over the course of the next couple weeks.



The Vibe build quality, right down the tube dampers, is serious. There are a variety of tubes that can be substituted, both for preamp and power, that can give the amp different levels of feel and gain. We worked our way through them and found a preferred sweet spot. For life, is all about the sweet spot, isn't it? You know it when you find it. The amp has a beautiful and absolutely WIDE GLIDE, pure Fender tone, all while cranking out far more clean headroom than we thought possible from a small amp, and the use of the Jupiter ceramic 8-inch speaker was superb. It was definitely surprising how much sweet and stout low end each note has, and the clarity of the top and mids are also pristine.

Once we cranked it past about 8 it really sang, but still, maintained a gorgeous fidelity of signal with zero graininess or harsh



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frequencies. It loved Strats, Les Pauls, and the Junior, and we even put a Gibson J-200 through it to hear it acoustically. This amp is all about the pristine and stunning clean tones, and what you do from there is up to each player.



So many possibilities. The Vibe was quiet as a mouse and was happy as could be with any pedal we put through it, Echoplex, Univibes, and yes, the Milkman Reverb/Harmonic Tremolo unit tank absolutely rocked the house inspiring with the Vibe, low watt, of course. The onboard Vibe tremolo is lovely, too, as expected.

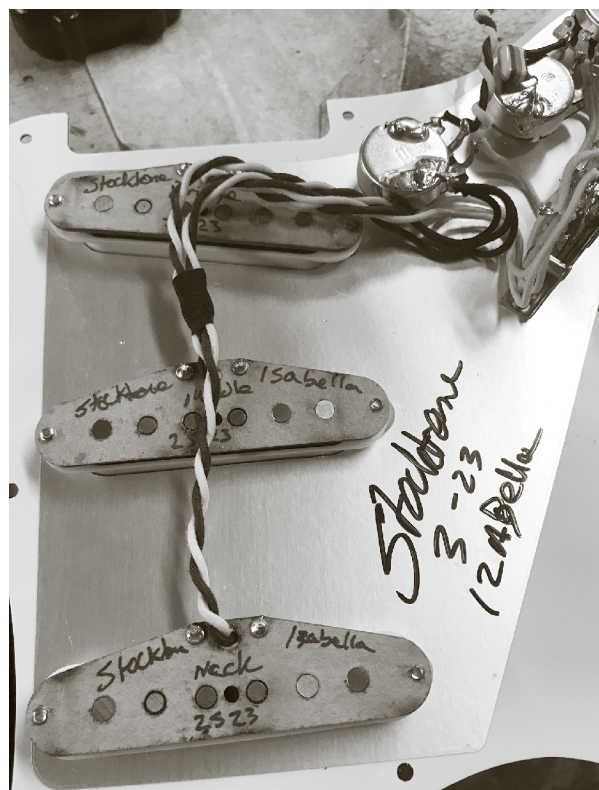


This strikes us as an unreal studio amp, or something that would be amazing for around home sitting right in front of it and pouring your heart out to after midnight. What a perfect little amp that can do it all. Hot damn. Quest forth...**TQ**—*Riverhorse*

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STOCKTONE'S

## Hendrix Izabella Single Coils



Jimi Hendrix was my first guitar hero, so I've always been trying to figure out how to nail down that "Voodoo Sound." He had some things going on when he flipped that right-handed over to be left-handed that a regular right-handed player just can't capture with stock guitars on the market. When I decided to go down this rabbit hole, I just dug out my notes on all the pickups that I've gotten to examine from that era, along with information I researched on the net and some input from some trusted tone freak friends.

**TQR:** Why the name Izabella?

As the story goes, Jimi named that white Strat Izabella, so that was the natural choice for the loaded pickguard.

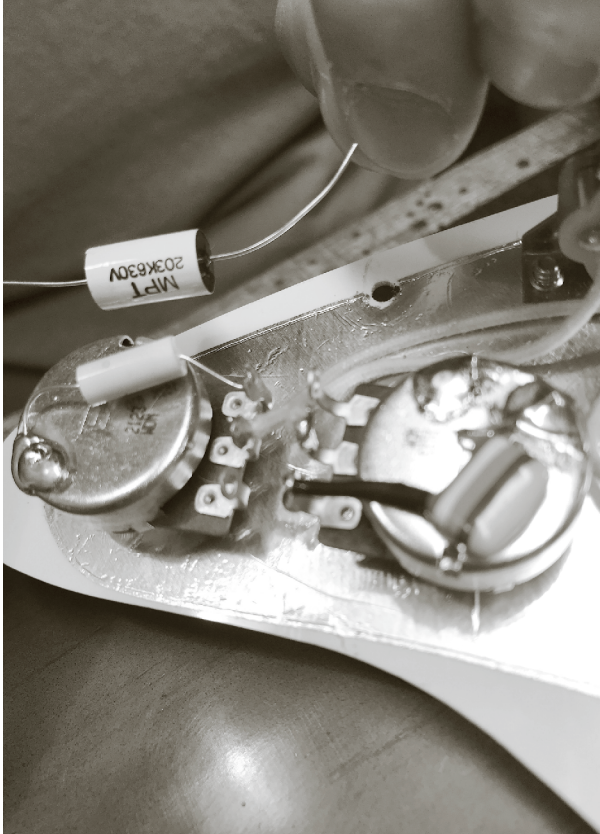
**TQR:** These are Alnico 5s? How do they measure in general, and do you age the magnets?

Yes, Alnico 5s. In my research, for 1968, the lowest reading pickup that I have examined, or have found on the net was around 5.2, and the highest was about 6.3. I decided, with that range to choose from, the goal was to develop a calibrated set that met all of those parameters. By calibrated, I mean from neck to bridge the pickups increase resistance incrementally. Yes, they are definitely Stocktone custom aged magnets.

-continued-

## pickups

**TQR:** The way you have aged the many sets we've had here is beyond stellar. What pots and capacitors, values, and switches and why? Why did you make the bridge tone knob so subtle?



I took some liberties with the wiring diagram on this one and did some of my favorite mods. We are doing these loaded guards with Bourns pots, because they glide so easily, and they are well made. We decided to put a 5-way oak Grigsby instead of the traditional 3-way. The neck and middle have their own tone knob with a .047 cap. The bridge has its own tone knob, and I'm going to offer it in either a .0015 cap, which you can tweak in for a subtle humbucker type tone, or a .022 cap, which will operate in a little more familiar territory.

**TQR:** How did you make those super cool aged gray bottoms?

Staying true to the '68 motif, I had a friend of mine cut the flatwork out of some gray vintage era period correct forbon.

**TQR:** What guitars do these fit in, upside down Strats or with a wide bridge route? Explain...

To achieve that true "Voodoo Sound," your bridge pickup needs to slant the opposite direction, like when Jimi flipped that right-handed guitar upside down. So, these guards will fit in any Strat with either the boat route or a humbucker route in the bridge position.

**TQR:** Anything else we need to know?

Another aspect of the "Voodoo Sound" that needed to be captured was when Jimi flipped the guitar upside down, it flipped the pickup pole staggering upside down. This put the short B-String pole under the A-String. That, along with the slanting of the bridge pickup, essentially mellowed out the bass response of the guitar slightly and boosted the lead. Being a working musician myself, I wanted to make an affordable option to take a Mexican made Stratocaster to the next level, or to just finish out your favorite standard. With the tonal options that this setup will get a guy, you should be able to navigate between rock, blues, country, all the way to the South Saturn Delta recordings.

### Stocktone Izabella Review

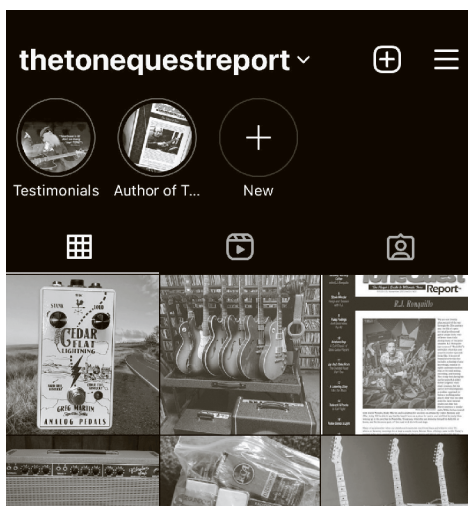


We threw these in a cherished sunburst hardtail Strat with a giant maple neck done by Cody at Gleason Finish & Aging, that has been here by the couch for a year or so. These pickups are all there. Straight out of the blocks we were pleased with how woody, round, and truly Strat city they are. The Izabellas are very responsive when you lean into them and absolutely love fuzz pedals, because of the perfectly tailored and aged winds. Aesthetically, the gorgeous vintage style gray bottoms were a bonus, and the set has beautiful capacitors. That said, we did change out the .0015 for a .022 in the bridge tone pot, and that seemed far more traditional to us, which we opted to keep. The Izabellas have an overall beautiful fullness of body, rounded clarity, and are just plain very absurdly sweet. What a fine, fine, superfine custom Sherman Stockton creation and concept. Yes, so good. Quest forth...TQ—Riverhorse

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Join us for the ride on Instagram @thetonequestreport! Slowly but surely, we are getting that aspect of sharing all things supreme tone with you rolling. Hop on and follow and don't be surprised if you see some early heads up to features, live and on the fly reels of vintage guitars and amps, and much more. These days it's a beautiful and amusing way for all of us to keep in touch more often and celebrate the guitar life. See you there! —Riverhorse



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