



# *The Guitar Note*

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Editorial & Production

CEO & Co-publisher: Matthew S. Richter

Co-Publisher & Editorial Director: PT Hylton

Director of Design and Production: Andy Piper

Managing Editor: Emily Marino

Head Staff Writer: Russell Southard

Correspondence

Mail: The Guitar Note, 2 Princess Lane, Loudonville, NY 12211

Email: [info@theguitarnote.com](mailto:info@theguitarnote.com)

Subscriptions & website: <http://www.theguitarnote.com>

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## The Note

Starting a magazine in this age of blogging, Twitter, Facebook, and streaming video requires massive amounts of audacity. I would not call us audacious. Starting a magazine during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression implies obliviousness and naivety. Yes. We are both those things. Starting a digital magazine with no real funding or technical expertise could be construed as simply dumb. Well, I will leave your assessment of our intelligence to you after you read the first issue—but, maybe we are. Given the above context, you should have no doubts, though, about our abject love for guitar and all things guitar.

The Guitar Note is a balance of what we hope will be excellent content and a multi-media approach to experiencing that content. The meat is in the sauce. The ice-cream is in the cone. With contributors like Tim Brookes, author of *Guitar, An American Life*, and Eric Skye, acoustic jazz guitarist, we are very excited about what's in the zine. Our video and audio production will improve—we are learning. We have chosen to keep the interface as user friendly and simple as possible so as not to distract from the great material. To us, a lot of cool popups and twitch-speed video are fun at first, but get tedious over time. This is a magazine, where art, text, and now video and audio come together as a tapestry telling great stories.

The Guitar Note is a work of love. Formed as a partnership between the Six String Bliss podcast hosts, PT Hylton and Andy Piper, and Gear for Guitar podcast host, Matt Richter, TGN was born in Nashville. While attending the Nashville Amp Show, PT and Matt met and expressed their mutual dream to put together The New Yorker of guitar magazines. Keep in mind, the comparison to The New Yorker was aspirational. We hope someday, perhaps with a bit of audacity, to hit that goal. Andy soon joined the conversation, and by October, The Guitar Note was born. We all wanted the magazine to be paperless. We all read our favorite magazines digitally at this point (The Fretboard Journal, the main exception). With the Kindle Fire and the iPad, as well as a host of other digital reading devices, it was easier than ever to manage at a fraction of the cost.

Content was the next challenge. Matt approached Tim Brookes, who immediately said yes to a contribution. Eric Skye was onboard. Steve Benford was onboard. Eleanor McEvoy and Roger Sadowsky agreed to interviews, and we were off.

Future issues will feature Santa Cruz Guitars, Walter Trout, Orange Amps, Doug Kauer, and more. We have great columns and exposes. And, your feedback and comments will help us make The Guitar Note better. Please send us your thoughts, ideas, concerns, etc. to [info@theguitarnote.com](mailto:info@theguitarnote.com).

Lots of people deserve our thanks. First, all of you who pre-purchased the magazine on faith we would actually deliver. Second, Tim, Eric, Eleanor, Roger, Steve, Pappy, Carmen, and everyone associated with this virtual stack of paper. Jason Verlinde of The Fretboard Journal was our guru, providing great advice. Richard Hoover, founder of Santa Cruz Guitars has supported us from the start. Our families for letting us pursue this endeavor. And, an industry more exciting than ever.

We said in the very beginning we wouldn't be narcissistic enough to think any of you would care about our introductory thoughts. Yet, here we are. Total narcissists. Enjoy Issue 1. Issue 2 will be on time, delivered mid-June. 🍷

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## One for the Road

By Tim Brookes



*Tim and his Running Dog Guitar*

When you're young, every guitar you have is a travel guitar.

My first guitar, which (like all first guitars) was almost unplayable, may have barely left my bedroom, but that's because as a player, I barely left the bedroom—and just as well, probably. But by the time I got to college and someone had handed me down a battered flamenco guitar, I was ready to get out and play, and that guitar went everywhere. I played on staircases and around the bonfire at backyard parties. I took it out on the river in boats. I used it for hand-to-hand combat. As soon as I heard Arlo Guthrie's "The Motorcycle Song" ("I was ridin' my motorcycle/going down this mountain road at 150 miles per hour/playin' my guitar") I taught myself to play that guitar while I was riding my bicycle. "Crossroads," the Eric Clapton version. Ridin' my three-speed bike. Playin' my guitar.

Which leads me to my first two points.

The first is that our first guitars are travel guitars because they are so unpretentious. You really couldn't do much to that guitar to make it more beat-up than it already was. Any finish had long been worn off. Tuning—it had genuine flamenco friction pegs—took a good ten or fifteen minutes. The neck was so bowed the guitar was pretty much unfingerable above the fifth fret. It had such a broad crack, running with the grain, across the lower bout that I could play a chord, put rapid pressure on that lower hip of the guitar, squeezing the crack shut and letting it open, and create a wah-wah effect. It was the Jeep of guitars, not the modern Jeep but the original World War II article, no windshield and no synchromesh, muddy and shell- shaken. It could go anywhere.

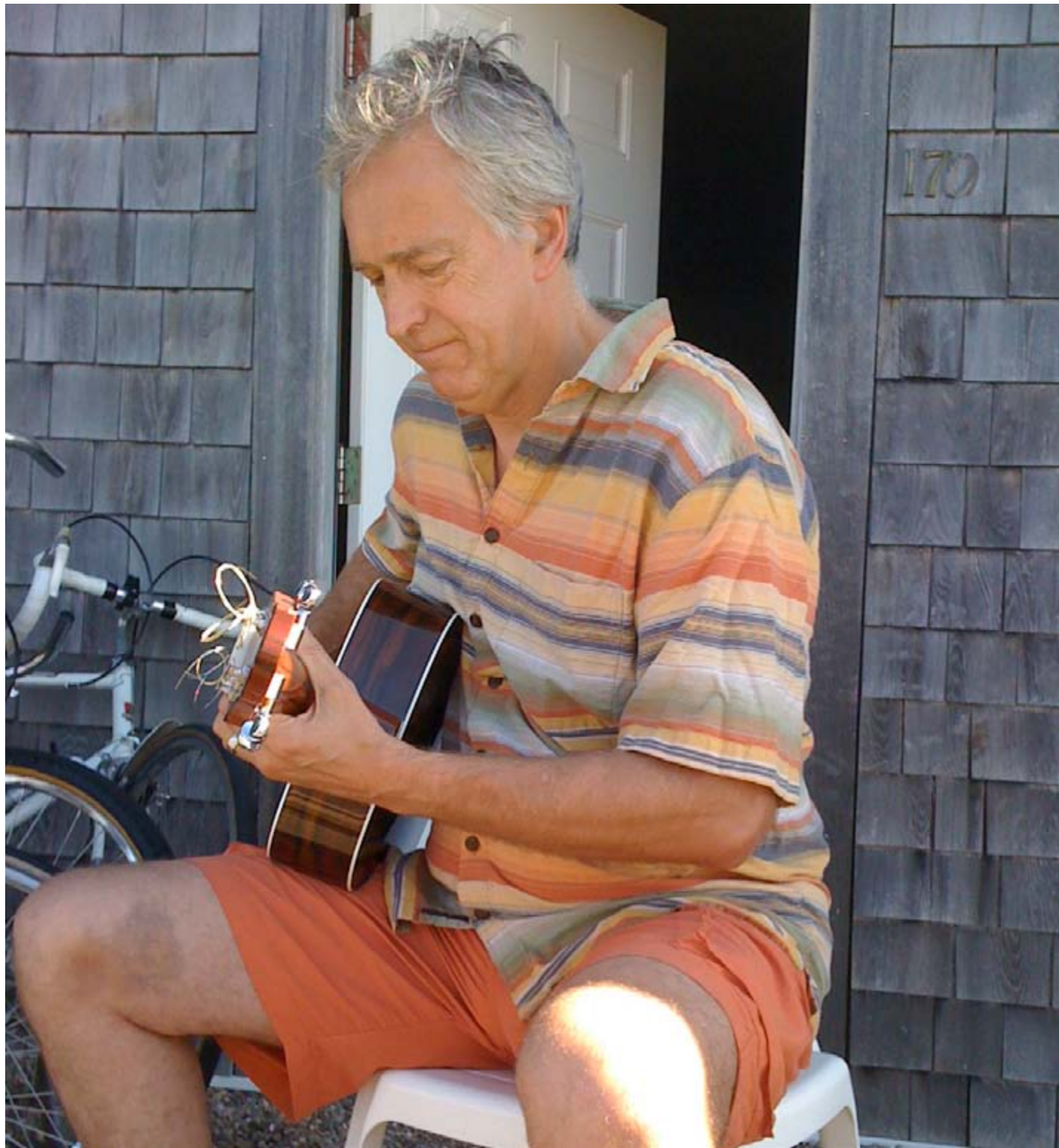
The second point is that our first guitars are travel guitars because we ourselves are so unpretentious. In those days (sorry, you young dudes, but we're talking 1970-1975 now, the heyday of acoustic music and the singer-songwriter, the heyday of hitchhiking and the terminally unreliable Volkswagen) I lived in jeans, a faded yellow nylon shirt whose sole virtue was that you could wash it, put it back on wet and it'd dry on you in fifteen minutes, and an army greatcoat cut off at the hip. It seemed an insult to those clothes *not* to prove, day after day, how rugged and proletarian they were. If I were waiting for a bus, or a ride, I sat on the ground, asphalt or grass or earth, loving that sense of self-sufficiency, loving my lack of money and possessions, feeling more grounded than I ever had before or have since.



*Tim gassing up his guitar.*

And part of that identity was my guitar, which went with me like the kind of buddy who could be my best mate without ever infringing on my solitude. Better than a girlfriend, really, as I was still uncertain around girls, my thoughts too complex and ambiguous. I have written elsewhere that the acoustic guitar, with its relatively small voice, is the instrument of introverts and would-be seducers, and that guitar was with me whichever mode I was in. (Usually the second, and then, later in the evening, the first.) If that thing was the travel guitar of its day, it was because I was a travel guitarist, and vice versa.





*Tim playing the Voyage-Air.*

It's astonishing to me now that this transformation, this radical change of identity that now would be called a makeover, took place in only 18 months. Before I went to college I could play maybe five chords, and only in private. By the beginning of the summer vacation at the end of my second year I was a confirmed traveler and guitarist and travel guitarist. My flamenco guitar had finally gone to the great Alhambra in the sky when its entire top finally sprang off, but I'd bought a classical guitar for ten pounds (in today's terms, maybe \$45) and I was heading off to the USA on a student charter flight singing *Let us be lovers/we'll marry our fortunes together and It took me four days to hitchhike from Saginaw and Counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike*, embodying the spirit of the age so well I was singing and playing songs about singing and playing songs about singing and playing songs all across America.

Oh, but it went farther than that: I was in love with a girl from Des Moines called Kathy, and as I caught the Greyhound to start my epic overland bus-and-thumb journey to see her I sang *Kathy, I said, as I boarded the Greyhound in Pittsburgh*, and even though I was actually boarding the Greyhound in Port Authority, I was clearly doing the right thing, clearly hearing the soundtrack of the times. And everywhere I went I played those songs and everyone else who was listening to the soundtrack of the times nodded and smiled and took me in and gave me a couch or a bed or a floor or, in Berkeley, the coolest place in the universe of 1973, the floor of a broom closet.

Which is worth an aside of its own: I had been given an address where the brother of a girl I knew had once lived. That was pretty much all it took in those days. The guy who opened the door listened to my explanation in some confusion, but then caught sight of my guitar and said, "Hey, man, you got an axe? Let's jam!" And it didn't matter that the next 90 minutes were the most musically tiresome of my entire life and he ploughed on playing whatever came into his head with a total lack of interest in or attention to whatever I was playing—the guitar was the lingua franca of the day, and when he finally got tired he said, "Cool, man. You can crash here," and pointed to the broom closet.

At this point we skip over 25 years—a quarter-century in which the guitar changed, I changed, travel changed, music changed, America changed. And here's the sign of how much all of them changed. In 1998, on the 25th anniversary of my first hitchhiking trip around North America, I decided to do it again. Having caught the bus once again from Port Authority, I started from exactly the same spot on the same on-ramp of Interstate 80 in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, I went to many of the same places, I even arranged to meet some of the same people I'd met on that first trip in 1973. The one thing I didn't do the same was—I didn't take a guitar.

I didn't do it because I thought I'd look foolish and out of date. I thought I'd lost touch with America and with music, the soundtrack of America. I thought people would want me to play Death Cab or Modest Mouse or Nickelback or Garth Brooks, and my guitar would serve only to prove how out of the loop I, now 45 years old, really was.

I was dead wrong. For one thing, I missed my guitar, even simply as a companion. For another, the one time I met up with someone who had a guitar it was Ramblin' Jack Elliott, the legendary folksinger who knew just about every song ever written, and we played together for hours. Yes, it's nice if you can play a Metallica fan a Metallica song, but it's just not possible to please everyone—and besides, most people just want some music, or even just a show. The trick is to just get out there and play.

This turned out to be a crucial lesson, even a pivotal one. Once I got back I decided I was never going anywhere ever again without a guitar.

But which guitar?

Those 25 years we skipped over, you have to realize, included the Eighties, when Americans became convinced that everything they bought needed to be gourmet and custom and specialized and designed by experts and preferably bought from catalogues that had their own faux travel narratives that made it seem as if everyone except you was going on safari every weekend wearing a \$125 custom mosquito-repelling sun hat and a \$66 hand-printed bandana soaking up the sweat that trickled down their necks, scented with a travel cologne specially designed by Christie Brinkley and a team of expert Kalahari Bushmen.

By the end of the Eighties, therefore, we had reached the point in our history, the history of America and music and guitars, when it seemed necessary to make a guitar, an actual, new guitar, costing real money, that people could take with them when they traveled.

The first, as far as I know, was the Martin Backpacker—a curious name, if you think about it: what genuine



backpacker, in his faded yellow shirt and sawn-off greatcoat, would buy a faddish new guitar for four times the cost of a used Yamaha or Takamine, a genuine Jeep guitar if ever there was one?

The other problem was that the Backpacker was—and I say this as one who thinks Chris Martin is a sweet guy who deserves all the success in the world—a crappy product. It had no timbre, no volume, and a radical new shape that looked cool but actually made the thing slide off your lap as soon as you tried to play it. Despite (or perhaps because of) these handicaps, it was followed into the Age of Specialization by more than a dozen other specialized Travel Guitars. Some were basically ordinary guitars with small bodies. Some were more-or-less ordinary guitars that came apart. Some were just guitar outlines that held a fingerboard. Some looked like ghastly genetic accidents. Some could only be played through an amp, which seems to miss the point: if you're really backpacking through the woods or hitching the roads, who wants to lug an extra ten pounds and forty miles of extension cord?

How could this weird specialist market develop? Because in those intervening years, not only did the guitar become precious, but the traveler became precious. (I'm using "precious" in its sense of "brittle and pretentious.") Hitchhiking became the brunt of absurd urban legends of rape and murder, and almost entirely died out. The Volkswagen changed, in people's minds, from being a fun piece of junk to being just a piece of junk. The Greyhound bus, Kathy, slid right down to the bottom of the social ladder. To be solitary and penniless was no longer a sign you were a romantic seeker for truth; it became a sign you were a loser (another Eighties word). The Eurail pass, once the *de rigeur* gift for college juniors, started to seem like a ticket to inconvenience and compartments full of sketchy guys and chickens. The classic *Europe on Five Dollars a Day* wasn't just financially unfeasible—it was borderline grubby. Meanwhile, the falling cost of airfares made unthinkable destinations thinkable: Thailand. Bhutan. Bali. The whole definition of "traveler" changed: travelers were now simultaneously more ambitious and more easily scared, and hence more reliant on gadgets and good-luck charms: the GPS, the sunscreen shirt, the \$150 sneaker.

And yet, in spite of all this, I decided at the age of 50-and-change that I'd had it up to here with being that kind of traveler. Mind you, I had also decided I was damned if I was going to run through one more airport lugging my precious guitar (because by now, like most middle-aged Americans, I had splurged and bought the guitar I could never have afforded at the age of 21) in its twenty-pound case, hyperextending my shoulders and banging the crap out of my knees. I was going to leave the good guitar at home, and leave some of my precious dignity with it. I was going to become a travel guitarist again.



The Voyage Air Folded Up



Unfolded.

After several months of trying almost every model on the market, I opted for the world's best (so far) acoustic travel guitar: a Voyage-Air.

Designed by Harvey Leach, the Voyage-Air is a \$2,000 guitar that just happens to hinge where the neck joins the body. A single bolt holds or releases the neck, and it can be put together or taken apart in thirty seconds. The truly amazing thing—even Harvey was surprised when this turned out to be the case—is that when you put it together *it's already in tune*. And it sounds great. I mean, I now know what I'm talking about when it comes to guitars, and it sounds like a \$2,000 guitar. And it travels, appropriately, not in a case but a backpack, light as a feather, that slings over both shoulders, leaving your hands free. Bingo.

I loved it at once. Hugging my back, it had a buddyish quality already. But was I ready for *it*? It's one thing to make a travel guitar; it's quite another to remake a travel guitarist.

The first trial run—for both the guitar and the guitarist—took place two and a half years ago, when I carried it with me (the great thing about the Voyage-Air is that it fits in the overhead bin, and even under the seat in most planes) to Mexico over spring break.

The coolness factor kicked in at once. As Harvey had warned me, the Voyage-Air caused a stir everywhere, even at security. The X-ray belt stopped. Went back. Stopped. TSA colleagues were beckoned over. Perhaps not coincidentally, I was called aside for a search. They couldn't even figure out how to open the backpack.

One TSA official peered at his screen and said straight-faced, "I'm sorry, sir, your guitar's broken."

When I assembled or broke down the V-A, women gasped, men got excited over the engineering.

Yeah, yeah. Don't be impressed yet. So far I'm just describing a cool gadget. The real test happened at Cancun Airport, and it was more a test of me than of the instrument. Could I play the thing the way I'd played in 1973—as an extension of myself? How would people react? Was the age of the travel guitarist dead?

I thought I'd start out by looking for another guitarist in a quiet corner, strike up conversation, see if we could play together.

The first challenge was finding a quiet corner. Piped Mexican music, people talking on cell phones, a guy yelling into his Bluetooth—the very notion of a quiet corner has become an anachronism. Finally, out by Gate 2776 1/2 where Jungle Air's weekly Cessna leaves for Punta Anaconda, I saw what I was after: the classic black pressed-cardboard case of the beater guitar and, sitting guard over it, a woman in her mid-twenties, clutching an American passport and reading *Allure*.

The glossy magazine was, I admit, a surprise. I had expected *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Nevertheless: to work. I zipped open the cool case, did the lock-and-load on the Voyage-Air, and began to play, carefully not looking in her direction so as not to spook her. Don't know any Mexican songs, so I played "One Note Samba" and other Latin-flavored bits and pieces.

Nada. A middle-aged couple in the next row turned slightly so as to hear better, but otherwise I might just have been picking my teeth.

What was I doing wrong? Was I just too old for this game? I started formulating increasingly desperate



plans for my next airport gigs. Plan E: dye hair. Plan F: wear baseball cap. Plan G: wear baseball cap backwards. Plan H: wear my pants so low my ass hangs out.

Paranoia set in. A gorgeous blonde sat down three seats away and glanced in my direction. I knew what she was thinking: *If only my mom had come on this trip with me. I could have totally hooked her up with this old guy.*

Finally, the mystery was solved. A tall guy in beach gear and a six-day stubble, clearly the boyfriend sent off for Starbucks, strolled over and sat down next to Allure. It was his guitar—and at once I knew how this scene would play out. Sure enough, he cocked an ear in my direction, casually glanced at the Voyage-Air and fell straight into the abyss of Superior Guitar Envy. Nothing in the world was going to make him say hi, dig out his old beater Fender and play along, especially in front of his *Allure-reading* girlfriend. As soon as the next boarding announcement was made, the two of them leaped up and made a big show of getting on a flight to Denver.

Blast. Still, I hadn't been arrested.

In fact, as I packed up for my own plane, a young Mexican airport official who had been making unnecessary rounds in my area stopped to watch the miracle of the Voyage-Air's dismemberment. "Hola," he said with a shy grin. It was my standing O.

Since then, I've taken my Voyage-Air everywhere. I've played in airports from Denver to Dubai, the best remedy for long layovers. I've gotten that "Hola" in multiple languages, even from a Kuwaiti in full Islamic garb and beard when I was playing the Beatles' "I'll Follow the Sun." I've played at the Cairo Jazz Club in Egypt. I've played in the grounds of the Library of Alexandria, in the waiting-room of a car dealership, in the line for Hertz car rentals, at a dude ranch, and, sitting on the filthy ground, on a tube station in London.

I've still got a ways to go. I still worry more than I probably should about getting some of my trickier instrumentals just right. I don't sing as often as I used to, though the other night I finally found that sense of abandon and sang Beatles tunes with my daughter's guy friends. I don't always wear shirts and pants that I can happily get filthy, then wash and hang to dry overnight. On the other hand, I don't need to be the center of attention as badly as I did at 20, and I've spent half an hour playing a colicky baby to sleep out at some godforsaken Terminal F when there was nothing in it for me but the look of relief on a tired mother's eyes.

I have three fantasies about how I'm going to die. They're all good fantasies; I seem to have left the terror fantasies behind with that young bearded guy in the half-a-greatcoat. In one, having been diagnosed with some terminal illness, I wade out into the warm ocean and open a vein. In another, I succumb peacefully to pneumonia at home, my guitar propped in a corner of the room. In the third, I just hitchhike off across the continent one last time, my guitar on my back, with just a thick coat, a pair of jeans and a faded yellow shirt.

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*Tim Brookes is the author of *Guitar: An American Life*, selected by *Library Journal* as one of the Best Books of 2005. You can find more of his work at [www.timbrookesinc.com](http://www.timbrookesinc.com) and [www.endangeredalphabets.com](http://www.endangeredalphabets.com). 🎸*



## The Artist Interview: Eleanor McEvoy

By Matthew Richter



*Photo by Shane McCarthy.*

**TGN:** So tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you come from; what were your musical beginnings.

**Eleanor:** I'm from the north side of Dublin. I started playing piano when I was about three, just because there was one in the corner. There were a lot of instruments around my house. There were guitars, tin whistles and recorders, which is fairly typical in an Irish household. I grew up listening to a lot of radio, but also to my older brother and sister playing guitar. They were both singers as well, and they both played a bit of piano.

Then, my sister kind of started formally teaching me when I was about three or four and sent me for a little exam in a local place where there was a proper teacher. That proper teacher asked to see my parents and said, "Look, this child is gifted musically, and, really, you should try and get her proper lessons and maybe teach her an instrument like the violin that might make more use of her ear."

It took a few years for that to happen, but eventually I got a violin and I started learning it. But, all the time, I kept picking up the guitars around the house and learning. Now, ironically enough, the two things I do for





*Eleanor with her older brother and sister. Eleanor with her sister's guitar.*

a living, which are play guitar and sing, I've never had lessons, whereas I'm a trained classical pianist and violinist, and I worked to make my living on the violin for many years in an orchestra.

**TGN:** So you went to conservatory. Was your primary focus piano and violin?

**Eleanor:** Well, no. When I went to Trinity College that was actually another turn. That was academic music, so there was no playing at all involved in that degree. It was purely theoretical. It was writing music, arranging music, looking at manuscripts, dating it, musicology, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, etc.

**TGN:** So music theory.

**Eleanor:** Music theory, yeah. I loved that, believe it or not, because I was playing anyway. I was in about seven orchestras at this point, and playing with bands and all those sorts of things. I played a lot of guitar at this point too, writing songs. It was completely different than what I was doing in college, but I loved it. And, I absolutely loved what I was doing in college.

**TGN:** Did you always plan to be in band, play in an orchestra, or were your longer-term goals more academic?

**Eleanor:** I always wanted to be in music-- always. But, I never knew what area of music I wanted to be in. Also, growing up, I knew tons of musicians, but none that were doing it professionally. I didn't know, for example, that you could be a professional songwriter. That hadn't occurred to me. Even by the point I was in college I suppose, I had over 100 songs written. It never occurred to me that actually you can make your living doing this.

**TGN:** How did you make that transition?

**Eleanor:** Well, while I was in college, I was playing a lot with bands, you know, jamming, playing fiddle, or playing a bit of guitar, backing vocals, things like that...bit of keyboards. I was also playing in orchestras, and I was getting good work because I was a good sight-reader on the violin, in pit orchestras and session work. At that time Dublin would've been quite an important place to record for bands, and a lot of international bands used to travel to Dublin to record something.

During that period I was playing with U2, Sinéad O'Connor, and a lot of major acts who'd record in Dublin. I'd just be down in the back of the orchestra. That made me think, "God, I can actually make my living playing music, so why don't I give it a shot?" I auditioned for the symphony orchestra here in Ireland after I left college, got in there, and started working. But, I realized after a few years that, really, my heart and soul were more in the song-thing and the band-thing that I was doing late at night after the orchestra curtain had come down.



*The Band in Action – Photo by Kevin McGing*

**TGN:** The mechanics of playing and performing classical music versus pop rock are very different. Was going back and forth a challenge?

**Eleanor:** Not at all, but I think that was because initially, as a child, I was more into pop. I came to classical music later on, in my teens. At this point I already was a huge fan of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Thin Lizzy, Rory Gallagher, and all of these kind of people. So, I had huge passion and I had huge inspiration in rock and pop long before I got into the classical thing. I think for me, the classical thing was another color to the palette. It wasn't that I was trained as a classical musician and then branched into pop. That wasn't what had happened with me. I've always been a bit of a rock-and-roller underneath it all. I think they all will tell you I was a little out of place in the orchestra. I was the one that was always considered a bit left of center.

**TGN:** Your first single, at least that was popularized, was "Only A Woman's Heart." But, it sounds like you had 100 other songs in your back pocket at that time, or more.





*Photo by Shane McCarthy.*

**Eleanor:** I did, and it sounds ridiculous now, but I had over 100 songs written before I ever played one to anybody. I know people find that utterly bizarre, and I don't know why it is, but quite honestly, I never felt particularly the need to play them for anybody. I was writing for writing's sake, which is very odd, I know, but I was. I've always written. It's always a huge part of who I am and what I do. I get frustrated when I go for periods without doing it.

**TGN:** So tell me the story how your songs got out.

**Eleanor:** Well, I eventually played one song for my brother, and he said, "God, you really should record this. You should do a demo."

So, I did a demo, and I did three or four songs and played them for a few friends. They said, "Oh, Eleanor, you've gotta do more of this." So I started gigging around Dublin, and I got a three-piece band: myself, a bass player, and a drummer. We used to gig around the clubs of Dublin, and I started to get a bit of a name for myself.

Then, after a few years of this, two extraordinary things happened in the same week. The first one was happened on a Monday night. I was playing a club in Dublin called the Baggot Inn, and a man called Tom Zutaut, an A&R man from Geffen Records in Los Angeles, walked into the bar. Now, he tarried around town. He'd ask people who was kind of good around Dublin to go see, and they said, "Oh, there's this girl down in the Baggot Inn. You should see her."

I was doing a residency there every Monday night, and he came down and he saw me, and he literally came up after the gig. At this stage I had a few more demos out. He bought all the demos I had that night, and he came to me after the gig and he said, "I want to sign you to an international record deal with Geffen Records." And he said, "I'm Tom Zutaut. I signed Guns 'N Roses, Mötley Crüe, and Edie Brickell," and named off all of these names. And, I thought he was a little crazy, to be honest, so I put him sitting in the corner and I said, "You sit down there." Luckily, I was nice to him. I said, "I have to talk to these other men here from Sony." I had a bit of record company interest just in Ireland at that point. It would've been very small in monetary terms.

I went to talk to the guy from Sony, and he actually fair played it and said, "Eleanor, you really should go talk to him. He's a very important guy." And I said, "Really?" I said, "He looks scruffy." And he said, "Yeah, but, he is a very important guy." And, I said, "Who's the guy with him in the suit?" And the guy from Sony said, "That's his driver." I said, "His driver?" He said, "Yeah." So I said, "Okay." So I talked to him.

**TGN:** It's almost like a movie.

**Eleanor:** It was like a movie, yeah. Then on the Wednesday, something else happened that was like a movie. A song of mine that I'd written, called "Only a Woman's Heart," was released. I was playing in the band



*Eleanor also plays a Fender Precision Bass*

of an Irish singer called Mary Black. I was like a session musician. I played keyboards and a bit of violin and backing vocals. She'd been to one of my gigs and heard the song "Only A Woman's Heart," Her husband had this idea of putting together a women's album. Just women, six women. When he heard my song, he said, "Why don't we call it *A Woman's Heart*?" And he said, "Maybe you could duet with Mary on the song and we'll release it."

It was a fairly small project. We thought it would do okay. Very little investment. There was no release or anything. It was just sort of a very low-key thing. But, over a period of months, it just got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until it became eventually the biggest-selling album of all time in Ireland. Remains, actually, to this day the biggest- selling Irish album of all time.



**TGN:** That led right into your self-titled record?

**Eleanor:** Well, yeah. It was actually the Geffen thing that led right into the single album. But can you imagine Tom having signed me, and then looking at what was happening with Mary? While we were making the album, he'd wanted the first single to be the song "Apologise." And all of a sudden he's seeing this happen with "A Woman's Heart," and he's going, "Oh, okay, maybe we need to make 'A Woman's Heart' a bigger priority here," because he could see that it was getting legs and going. So, yeah, that was my first album. An extraordinary experience.

That album, at least when I listened to it, had a very romantic sensibility about it, a lot of love, loss, and so forth. What was going through your mind as you were putting that together? Some of those songs were probably written before. What was the process for constructing that album?

Well, at the stage of my first album, I was still at quite the traditional process of writing— I've often called it my bedsit album. You don't have bedsits in the States. You call them studio apartments over there, you know, your first little apartment. It's always just one room, where everything's that one room. And, it was really me sitting there writing a lot of songs. Of course, at that age, you've got heartbreak. When you're that age, you split up with somebody, you think it's the end of the world. It takes you two years to stop crying. Nowadays, not so much. [Laughter] But, you take that stuff very seriously when you're that age, and I think you look into yourself a lot.

In terms of the actual writing, in those days, I wrote on a guitar or a piano. So, I'd sit at the piano. I'd doot around things until something came up, and then I'd write. Similarly, with the guitar. That is not the way I do it at all now, and over time I found that when I was writing on the piano, my hands would just go over the same chords again and again. If you're on an A flat on a piano, your fingers tend to go to a B flat and an E flat and a C minor, without you thinking about it, because you've been doing it since you were a kid and the shapes are just in your fingers. But, if you think about that, it's terrible. It's your fingers telling your brain what to do.

To get away from this, I started writing on guitar, because at that point I would've been less proficient on guitar. Then I found I was falling into the same old grooves. So, a number of years after that, I stopped writing on any instrument, and I now write with a blank sheet of manuscript paper in front of me. I just scribble out the lines that I'm writing. That's what I do.

**TGN:** That process would be very distinctive from what a lot of singer- songwriters do. How do you think that's changed the uniqueness of your sound, and can you give us an example of a song that came out differently as a result of that process?

**Eleanor:** A song that came out differently? Yeah, I mean, I have a song I wrote quite recently called "Harbour," where the idea was that it would be a piano part that anybody could play. There was a friend of mine, an adult, who was learning piano, and I thought, "God, there's so few songs that adults can play if they're just starting to learn." I had this idea about this song, so I left her house and I got on a train and I started writing just on the manuscript. I guess because in my head, I was playing the piano part, it was almost as if I was playing a piano, but you really have to think more. You think, "Do I really need to go to an F-sharp minor here?" No, you don't. You look at the lyric.

So "Harbour" is one. I think it's slightly different because of the way I'm writing. I think any of the newer ones are different because of that way of writing. Now, of course, you then have to learn to play the damn things. You have to pick up the guitar and think, "God, how am I gonna play this?" I always have arrangement ideas. I always, in my head, have an idea for the way I want it to play. You also have to learn to sing it too. It's very bizarre.

**TGN:** Your bands have changed from album to album. Is that musically intentional for you to get a different sound as you're putting things together, or is that more logistic?

**Eleanor:** No, it's always been musical, to be honest. The first album — well, the band with the first album is nearly the same as the second album, with one exception — oh, no, two exceptions, actually: the drummer and the guitar player. And that was more the way things happened. That was just the way it worked out.

After my second album, I didn't want a band at all. I decided I wanted to go a very different route. I had been touring with the Fugees after *What's Following Me?*, my second album. Just looking at them every night with the kind of electronic stuff, loops, sequences, all that kinda stuff, I got really interested in that. I decided, okay, I don't want to do what they're doing, but there was an element of what they're doing that I wanted to incorporate in kind of an Irish way, if you know what I mean. Me, with my songs, not changing me and making me American, but me doing what I do, incorporating a little bit of the electronic thing and the loops, and so forth.

I was very into drum loops. So, I hooked up with a producer that I thought could do that for me really well, Rupert Hine. Fabulous guy. We worked together on *Snapshots*, which is the third album. So, we then brought in a drummer and a bass player. The bass was fabulous, Pino Paladino. Also, we had Ian Thomas on the drums. Then we had a sax player on one number, Snake Davis. Phil Palmer joined on guitar. Great, great, top session musicians. But, again, it was very much directing them. That wasn't a live kind of album. I tend to want to play live with everybody in the room at the same time playing, and we did the complete opposite for this album.

**TGN:** *Snapshots* received, at that point, some of your highest accolades. After that was *Yola*, which went almost toward jazz. You had a fairly heavy influx of jazz tones in the music.

**Eleanor:** Yeah, that was really Brian Connor. What happened was, at the end of *Snapshots*, I broke my hand very badly, and couldn't play. I was unable to play for a long time at the end of the recording session for *Snapshots*. For physiotherapy I was told to play piano and acoustic guitar just to get back to making my fingers move again. The sound of an acoustic guitar made me say, "Oh my god, I've forgotten how great an acoustic guitar sounds — why have I been doing this electronic stuff? Why have I been playing electric all these years? Oh my god, acoustic guitar is just so beautiful."

Columbia Records had contracted me to do the *Snapshots* tour in the States, and I had no hand. I couldn't play. So I went from playing violin, guitar, and piano on the shows to not being able to play at all, only being able to sing. I had to have a big band for that tour. And, one of the people I brought in to play piano was a guy called Brian Connor. He was such an extraordinary pianist. He had a huge effect on me in terms of his playing. So I based the next album, *Yola*, primarily as an acoustic album-- just kind of me and him. Then, I added in a bass player and drums later on, but it was written around me thinking about Brian's playing and my singing and songwriting.

**TGN:** Tell me a little bit about "Sophie" and how that came to be— why you wrote about eating disorders.



*“Sophie”*



**Eleanor:** Okay. I find a lot of the songs I write, and that I'm drawn to write, are very dark. I was driven to write it because I knew a girl. Actually, I knew two different people, but for the purposes of the song I morphed them into one person who had anorexia. One, I knew quite well. And, it just ate into me that a beautiful, intelligent, bright, caring young woman was starving herself to death. You're sympathetic, but you're also angry with them, and you feel for their family.

I had all these mixed emotions. Try as I might to not write a song about it – because when I'd sit down to write, I'd go, "Oh, for God's sake, Eleanor, nobody's gonna wanna hear a song about anorexia. Just forget it. Write something else, write something else." I couldn't. In the end, "I'll just write a song about anorexia, get it out of my system, get rid of it, and then move on to the next song." I thought, "Well, I'll never play it for everybody. I'll just write it." And, again, that seems odd to some people, but I often write songs and don't play them for anybody. It's kind of a therapy for me, so I don't know. But, anyway, I often do that. That was the end of it.

Then, when I was doing *Snapshots* – that's that album with Rupert Hine – he heard it. He was going through stuff, and he said, "What's this one?" He was pointing to pages I had, and I said, "Well, that was one I never intended doing." He said, "Well, play it for me," so I sat down at the piano and I played it for him. And he said, "Oh, I think we have to put this on this record." And, I said, "The record company'll hate it.

Columbia Records won't go for this at all." He said, "That's okay. We'll put a track 10, and they won't even notice."

He kept it very simple, and my hat's off to Rupert, because I think a lot of producers would've put orchestra or would've put in bronze and all sorts of things, even choirs. He didn't. He just left it piano and voice. A very wise move on his part.



*"Wrong So Wrong" from Out There*

**TGN:** Were you surprised about the impact it had on people?

**Eleanor:** Initially it didn't have any impact at all, because that album came out and Columbia didn't back it. It got great reviews, but that was it and that was the end of it. Then I split off and I did *Yola*. So, for years, there was no impact. It was only about four or five years ago when I started getting floods of emails, letters, and messages. That's how it started. People were saying that there was a whole thing happening on the Internet

about this song. I looked in, and I'd go onto YouTube, and I'd find, you know, 400 videos that people had made to my song "Sophie." They were acting out the song, or doing it through dance, or doing cartoon versions of it. There's even a Lego version.

Then they started using it in treatment centers throughout the world for patients with anorexia. I'd get these lovely letters from people saying, "Eleanor, your song saved my life," and beautiful letters from the family members of people that the song had helped. I think of all of the things that have ever happened to me in music, that reaction has meant more to me, because music has always played a very healing role in my life. Anytime I've been down, it's music that's gotten me out. So, to think that one of my songs could've played that same role for somebody else really means an awful lot to me.

**TGN:** *I'd Rather Go Blonde* really epitomized the continued sophistication of the meaning behind your songs. Every song on that album was almost "Sophie"-esque in its weight and meaning. Talk to me about the transition from the self-titled album through to this.

**Eleanor:** Well, I think the way I write has had a big influence-- in that when you are strumming a guitar, you'll sometimes tend to go around and isolate the chord pattern because it's a nice little thing to do. Whereas, if you're not strumming on a guitar, if you're just writing, you take out everything unnecessary and you're just left with very pure songs. Now, I love songs that are written the other way, don't get me wrong. But for me, it was about taking out everything unnecessary, so the songs are short; they're concise; they're to the point. There's not a note in them that shouldn't be, as far as I'm concerned. There's nothing superfluous.

I felt, at the time I wrote it – I had written another album. I had planned to record a different album.

My mother died that January, and about four days after the funeral I went into my room and I sat and I wrote about 14 new songs over the next 20 days or so. They are the songs that ended up on *I'd Rather Go Blonde*.

It was an extraordinary time in Ireland. Our banks had just collapsed. I don't know if you know, the country went bankrupt and the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, moved in to take over Ireland because we were making such a mess of it ourselves. We had awful flooding in one part of the country and water shortages in another part, which will tell you how inefficient our government has been, because they allowed the pipes to leak. They weren't looking after the infrastructure. So, despite the fact that we had massive rainfall with huge water shortages, we also had terrible flooding. That turned out to be their fault as well because they weren't dredging the rivers. They were giving permission for houses to be built on flood plains. Dreadful corruption. And then, of course, there was the church, which has huge influence in Ireland. We had a telling report coming out at that time just saying how they'd facilitated the rape of children for so long, and they were unrepentant and arrogant in the way they dealt with it.

So, I felt that every establishment authority in Ireland was a sham, and it was all of that that influenced my writing. "Deliver Me" is a direct song to the church. It's a direct song to the hierarchic Catholic Church, saying, "Deliver me away from what you do. There's nothing Christ-like in what you're doing. And, in fact, you're doing the opposite." "Shibboleth" was a song about what the government has done to the country, and how they let things happen. There was nothing superfluous on the album.

**TGN:** Yeah, it's a magnificent album. My favorite album, however, is your latest one. I love *Alone*. It basically took many of my favorite songs and it actually brought me back to how I first experienced you, which was standing alone onstage...

**Eleanor:** Oh, wow.

**TGN:** ... in the U.S., accompanying yourself, which I loved. And your arrangement of "Did You Tell Him?" – it



rocks. It's awesome.

**Eleanor:** Thank you very much. Well, the reaction to Alone has been an awful shock because the album wasn't even supposed to happen. I just had a break in a tour, and I ended up in a studio just for a place to stay. During the break, I had nowhere to stay for five days. I know the people that own this studio in Norfolk, and I said, "Look, can I crash out in your place and give you a few quid to cover heating and lighting and stuff?" and they said, "Yeah, sure." But, they had nobody in the studio, and they said, "Look, you can use the studio to rehearse in if you want," so I said, "Oh, that's great," and I did.

But, of course, the engineer was sitting there bored and said, "Do you mind if I put up some mics and record you?" and I said, "Yeah, yeah, sure." So I didn't even know when he was recording and when he wasn't. I just played and sang for a couple days, and I did old songs, new songs. It was a great chance to just go through old stuff and hone things.

And then I got in my van and I drove off thinking, "I'm just going home now," not even aware that there was something in the can to take with me. And after a couple of weeks he called me up and said, "Look, I've been listening to this. I think it's extraordinary." At that point I said, "Okay. What should we do?" And he played it for management and for record companies and distributors, and they all said, "No, you've got to put this out."

**TGN:** How did you come up with the arrangements? Are those arrangements you've had always in the can that you'd use when you played alone?

**Eleanor:** Well, yeah. When I started the process of playing alone, I went into a warehouse that is near me here in Wexford, and I set up a PA system and deconstructed all of the songs, in order to try and make them interesting. When you're performing for an hour and a half on your own, there's a big challenge to keep the audience interested. Now, it helps that I bring a lot of instruments with me, because it means you have a lot of textures and a lot of colors and different grooves, etc. But I really work quite hard on starting it off – so building in the right places, making them quirky, making them interesting.

Over years, I guess, of doing that – and to be honest, even before I go on the road, every six months or so, I'll go back into that warehouse and I'll deconstruct it and change things a bit, more to keep myself fresh, really even more than for the audience's sake. I want to keep me fresh doing it, because there's nothing worse than a tired performer onstage playing the same old things. I don't do that. So, I think because of that, actually, a lot of work had gone into arranging those songs, without me nearly knowing or noticing over the last few years. When I hit that studio on those days...

**TGN:** You were ready.

**Eleanor:** Yeah. And, of course, I've played them hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times.

**TGN:** For the songs that you played in that studio that day, what do you think caused you to pick those specific 10 or 12 songs?

**Eleanor:** Well, I think I was in a pretty bleak state of mind. I'd had a couple of dates cancelled. I was doing some dates with somebody else, and their dates were cancelled because the singer he was working with lost her voice. And, that was frustrating to us all. I was in a bit of a bleak place anyway, and I'd heard that song, "Eve of Destruction," on the radio, and it just really got inside me, and I was kind of "Yeah, we're on the eve of destruction," and there was some other tragedy that happened somewhere else in the world that got a bit more in on me than it should've. The world was a bit of an unwelcoming place for a couple of days, as tends to happen. And, of course, I get very down about stuff like this, but then two or three days of playing music and

I'm right as rain again, and I go off happy as Larry. But, yeah, I think for those few days I was in a bit of a bad place, which made me choose some of the bleaker songs.

**TGN:** We're a guitar magazine, so I have to ask you: What guitars do you play?

**Eleanor:** Okay. Well, I play my acoustic, my electric, and my bass, but what I play most often is the Fender Telecaster. It's an American Telecaster. It's late '80s or very early '90s, I think. It's beautifully set up, kept by a guy here in Dublin called Derek Nelson, who looks after it for me.

I play through a Fender Blues Junior amp, which I love. I love the sound of it, although, to be honest, one of the reasons I use it is purely practical. It's very easy for me to lift, and I have specially modified valves in it, so I can get a lot of drive with low volume. I play in small places and you don't want to be cranking it up and blasting people out. But, to get the sound you want, you have got to crank it up, so the modified valves worked out beautifully for me. I love my amp, so that's what I tend to play all the time.

If I'm flying to a festival where I can't bring my own amp, I'll tend to specify a Fender Twin, just because they tend to be consistent from venue to venue. I love a Vox AC30 if you get a good one, but if you put it on a spec sheet, you don't know what you're getting with every venue. One will be great; one will be terrible. And I've had too many mishaps for me to go down that road again, so I'm sticking with the Fender Blues Junior.

My acoustic guitar is a Taylor, the 814CE, the Auditorium model. Lovely instrument. I'd never intended buying a Taylor. I'd always wanted to buy a Martin. I had a two- week period in Boston, and because I was gonna be in one place for two weeks, I went into a guitar shop every single day to try them out. I'd made the mistake before of trying them out acoustically, but really – and this is where practical stuff interferes with your heart, maybe – I always play plugged in. I play for an audience, and I'm plugged in. So I said, "Eleanor, just practice it. Don't listen to the damn guitar acoustically. Just plug it in and listen to it plugged in."

So I did that every single day with the Martins, and at the end of every single day I would try this Taylor, and I started off saying, "I'm not gonna buy that. It's way too expensive." And by the end of the two weeks I put out my credit card and I said, "I'll take the Taylor," which was so expensive, but there you go.

**TGN:** I'm sure Taylor is very happy, though.

I'm sure they are, yeah. *[Laughter]* Well, a couple of times it's gone down, but they fixed it for me pretty quickly, so they're good guitars. They really are. And, then even with the punishment now that they got on airlines, which is a huge problem for me. I've gone through – in 2009, I think it was, I went through four acoustic cases in one year, like molded fiberglass cases. Smashed.

**TGN:** Really? That's horrible.

**Eleanor:** Yeah, it's horrible, but that's the life of a touring musician.

**TGN:** Are we going to see you in the States anytime soon?

**Eleanor:** Oh, I hope so. I'm aching to get back there. I really, really am. It's just, on a small independent label, it's tough to do the States. If I have enough dates put together to make it viable, I will go, and I'm hoping to get back there later in 2012. 🍷



## Tone Builders:

### How Tore Mogensen and the Guitar Team at TC Electronic Are Designing the Future of Guitar Effects

By P.T. Hylton

Photography by Tobias Welter



*Tore dialing in a TonePrint with John 5.*

When it comes to guitar effects, TC Electronic has no shortage of ideas.

“We have this giant idea bank. At any given time, we probably have around sixty ideas for products we could do,” says TC Electronic’s Tore Mogensen. “By no means do we have time to do them all, though.”

With its seemingly endless output of new products, you’d think that Tore and company have it all figured out, that they have a system of cultivating and harvesting guitar innovations like some sort of ultra-modern tone factory. But, the truth is simpler.

“It very rarely starts with an official ‘let’s sit down and come up with crazy ideas’ meeting,” says Tore. “I think it’s very hard to force inspiration like that. Typically, it comes when you least expect it. A great example is the PolyTune. Our guy who does most of our UI designs— his head is turned on a little differently, because he really thinks outside the box— he came up with the idea. I was at the coffee machine, and he mentioned that he thought this would be a cool thing to do. One of the engineers and I freaked out. The engineer is a very

clever guy, and he said ‘I can do that.’ I think he did the first prototype in three days.

“That was a great experience because it was so out of the blue. It took a year to actually make the product, but that first prototype was done in three days.”



*Tore discusses a TonePrint with Duff McKagan*

In recent years, Tore Mogensen has become the public face of TC Electronic’s guitar division. He is a regular contributor to a number of guitar internet forums and the star of TC’s product demonstration videos. He is also the mad scientist behind their innovative and often maddeningly teaser-like marketing videos. But, what does Tore actually do at TC?

His official title is Business Manager for Guitar, but he doesn’t use it much. “Business Manager sounds like somebody who is just counting dollars, and that’s not me,” says Tore. “My job is tough to define. It’s one of those things where your grandma might ask you, ‘So what exactly do you do?’ and you don’t know what to say.

“Even though I’m a manager, I’m not the boss of anybody. I am the boss of the products. So that means that anything that comes out of TC that has to do with guitar goes through me first. I’m kind of the judge of whether products are good enough, whether they sound good enough, or look good enough. I also determine whether the marketing is okay, and the sales material is ready.

“My role is really to nurse the products from idea until we discontinue them. I’m part of the process of coming up with what products we will do next, and, even longer term, what products and direction we want to take as a guitar company. And, I am involved all the way down to, ‘Okay, this is how the tape echo should sound on the Flashback delay’. I’ll be the guy tuning it in.”



## The Birth of the Guitar Team

Tore came to TC Electronic about ten years ago. He had a Masters degree in Philosophy, a background working with computers, and, most importantly, a love for guitar. Being a musician located in the same city as TC Electronic, it was only natural for him to send them an application. Luckily for Tore, TC was looking for some help retooling their website. After five years working with TC's website, he moved into a project management role, which allowed him to work directly with the object of his passion: gear.

"I have the most incredibly stupid giant pedal collection in the world," Mogensen says. "I have way more assembled pedal boards than I would ever need. I just think it's a fun thing to fool around with. I'm not afraid to admit that there are a lot of really cool companies out there doing amazing pedals and amazing amps. I think we do some pretty amazing stuff, but there are definitely a lot of companies that do amazing work. The competition is great. We try to find our own little niche, but there are a bunch of really cool companies out there that I respect a lot."

Around the time Tore began his new position, the leadership of TC Electronic decided to focus more attention on the guitar department, and Tore was just the man to oversee it.

As guitar players, we might not think much about the organizational structures of our favorite gear companies. Sure, the end products are cool, but how often do we think about things like the physical proximity of the pedal designer to the engineer?

According to Mogensen, it was a change in organizational structure that led directly to the creation of two of TC Electronic's most successful lines of products: the TonePrint series and the PolyTune.

"We kind of changed things around at TC about three or four years ago. Before that, we had all the hardware guys sitting in one room and all the software guys sitting in another room. One software engineer might be working on a guitar pedal, and then his next project would be crazy high-end loudness controllers for TV stations, then the next one would be control software for studio monitors. They would jump around a lot from project to project. We decided to make sure the engineers had way more knowledge about the customers for whom they build product. "



*Dave Stewart and Tore jamming.*

The company was divided into three dedicated teams: one for bass amps, one for pro audio and one for guitar. The shift in the design process happened quickly, and the result was a much faster timeline and a clearer focus on the needs of the average guitarist.

"The guitar team now sits together," says Tore. "We go out to concerts together and check out what guitarists are doing. Even though there aren't that many of them that actually play guitar, the engineers know a hell of a lot about guitar players at this point. They make sure our products have the features that players want without me having to spec out every little thing."

The open structure and creative atmosphere has led to greater communication and more input from all members of the team. Tore jokes, "Typically the engineers will bring me two choices. One is like the obvious reasonable one, and one is like this totally stupid thing. I can choose either one, which obviously means I will choose the one they want me to choose."

The TC guitar team is comprised of ten members: Tore, a designer/mechanical engineer, two hardware engineers, four software developers, a test engineer, and a project lead. For a team of only ten, they have put together a pretty amazing track record in a short period of time.

"Right now the guitar team at TC is really on a roll," Mogensen continues. "We've done a lot of really successful products lately, and we kind of feel that we have so many cool products sitting around waiting to be made... We wish we were more people so we could build more stuff, more quickly. "

Tore points to two of those recent successes, the TonePrint series and the PolyTune, as valuable learning experiences and excellent examples of the mind-bending output his team is capable of producing.

## Designing the TonePrint

"I knew for a long time that I wanted to do some simple, classic guitar pedals in the Boss/MXR vein," says Tore. That may not sound like a revolutionary idea, but, at a company known for the numbers of buttons and presets on their gear, it was not exactly a business-as-usual concept. The challenge was to find a fresh take on the old standard guitar pedal.

"We rarely do something unless we have some competitive advantage. We'd never do something like everybody else. As soon as we came up with the TonePrint concept, it was obvious. It was also a matter of really looking at what guitar players want, what's on the market now and how we can make it differently.



*Tore with Guthrie Govan*



The basic building block of the TonePrint series was actually from another group: the bass amp team. “They built the editor that we use. They built it for the amp in a totally different way. I saw that and freaked out and said, ‘We can use that for the pedals!’”

And with that, the TonePrint concept - a pedal that allows the user to switch between multiple tunings to change a wide range of parameters - was born. The initial concept was very different from the end result. The guitar team had first envisioned more of a ‘blank slate’ approach.

“The original idea was to give it to everybody and just say ‘Here’s this totally blank pedal and you can do whatever you want with it.’ After talking about it and looking at what guitar players like, we figured we would go for the artist angle. Most guitar players don’t like to tweak a lot. They just like to get some really cool sounds setup by somebody who really knows what they are doing and that they admire.”

While the idea of TonePrints designed by artists solved the ‘blank-slate’ problem, it did raise a whole new set of challenges, including getting artists to participate. The success of the line would be somewhat dependent on the artists willing to get involved.

“We knew that when we launched the pedals, we would need to have a fairly significant amount of artists to begin with. The whole idea from the get-go was to keep adding new ones to keep the interest going. Now, it’s been a year since we launched the pedals, and we can still create new buzz by putting out new TonePrints. But, when we started out, we just made a list of the dream guys we’d love to have.”

Before a design concept moves to the production phase, the guitar team presents a business proposal to TC Electronic’s leadership team. At the time of the presentation, the guitar team didn’t have any artists signed on, but they did have that dream list.

“We present it like it’s a final product. We usually have some prototypes, and we really try to wow them. I vividly remember doing the business presentation, and I was explaining the TonePrint concept. I was sharing the list of artists I thought would be cool, because at the time we didn’t have any artists at all. As I was saying this, I was thinking, ‘How the hell am I going to get those guys to do this in like eight months? This is crazy. Man, this is going to be a lot of work.’ And it was, but we pulled it off.”

A combination of hard work and an informal approach turned much of the dream list into a reality. “It’s not like being in L.A. where all these guitarists just hang out at the local diner. Denmark is a very small country. Driving from one side to the other is three hours at most. So if we see somebody cool playing anywhere in Denmark, we will try to get in touch with them to see if we can do TonePrints.” Mogensen also spent a month touring the US, meeting with artists and developing their TonePrints.

“The interesting thing is that we haven’t paid a single guy, yet. They just want to do it because they like the pedals, I guess. They think it’s fun. We also took advantage of the fact that lots of guitarists, and some fairly famous ones, have been using our gear for a long time. Those were the obvious guys to get. I think a big part of why these artists say yes is specifically that we say there are no strings attached. If they don’t like what we come up with, we’ll never use it. And if somebody comes to us and says ‘I just signed this really big agreement with this other pedal company’ and they want us to take off their TonePrint, we will do that no questions asked. We try to keep it on a friends basis instead of a big contract or anything.

“Now we’re at a point where we don’t have to struggle to get new artists. They write us and ask if they can participate.”



*Steve Morse and Tore talking through a TonePrint*

## Designing the PolyTune

When asked which product he is most proud of, Mogensen barely pauses before saying, “PolyTune was a big learning process. For us, as a team, it was a whole new way of making products. First of all, it was such a radically different idea, and we knew that we were onto something pretty darn cool. But also, we had a lot of ideas for things we could do with the pedal which would make it more of a typical old-school TC product with tons of options and lots of features, and really expensive as well. But we tried to really keep focus on doing what’s important in a guitar tuner instead of just continuing to add stuff.

“Some of the companies I admire are really good at keeping things simple. Even though there are people who say ‘I wish it could do this’ or ‘why doesn’t it do that’.... As soon as you start adding too many of those requests, the product gets bloated. You push away the majority of the customers because you are catering to these one or two or three guys. The lesson of keeping things simple, and making sure you add the right features instead of adding everything... that was really important. I think the product took the guitar team to the next level.”

The team’s new selective approach to features wasn’t always a matter of choice or taste. There was one feature the team would have liked to include if only they could have made it work. Tore explains, “On PolyTune, there are two button. One of them toggles between two view modes, but it also doubles as the selector between whether the polyphonic tuner is looking at the bass spectrum or the guitar spectrum. So it does two things at once, and it wasn’t supposed to do that. It was supposed to be just the display mode. We did have an automatic guitar/bass detector in the product, and it was in there for a long, long time. But, it wasn’t stable enough. It’s really odd. You listen to a guitar being strummed and a bass being strummed, and, as a human



being, you can immediately tell the difference. The algorithm couldn't. So, we could do something really complicated like picking six individual strings out, we could do the monopoly thing where we toggle between two modes depending on whether it's a single note being plucked or all the strings being strummed, but we couldn't distinguish between guitar and bass. At least not consistently enough that we wanted to have it in the product."

Despite a hiccup or two along the design road, PolyTune has been an overwhelming success, spawning an iPhone app and a Mini version.

"That was great experience," says Tore. "It started out with just us saying 'I wonder if you could do that?' and, we could."

## The Future

One of the most difficult aspects of being a guitar company, especially an innovative one like TC Electronic, is anticipating what guitarists will want not only today, but also two years from now. The polarized, yet parallel trends of boutique gear and digital software complicate matters even further.

One of TC's latest innovations, the TonePrint app, bridges that gap nicely. It adds a great set of features for those who want to take advantage of the technology, but it still allows you to have a solid hunk of metal on your pedal board where you can reach down and tweak the knobs. "We knew we wanted to do an iPhone app that allowed you to send TonePrints from your phone to your pedal. And, we knew what we didn't want. That all came from the entire guitar team hanging out drinking beer one night and talking about different technologies."



*Tore tweaks a TonePrint with John Petrucci*

As to the future, Tore says, "Part of me wants to say that computers will take over and we'll all be playing through iPads. But, on the other hand, the whole vintage, back to basics thing that has been going on for at least ten years now doesn't seem like it is stopping. It actually seems like it's getting even more bare bones. I've been looking at the trend toward having smaller pedal boards. Three, four, five years ago, if you went to the guitar forums and checked out the 'show us your pedal boards' threads, you would see immense, football field sized pedal boards with every pedal under the sun. Now it seems like there is a trend toward just handpicking five or six pedals that you really need.

"It's hard to generalize guitar players. If you go to some of these big guitar forums, you'd get the impression that every guitar player won't play a delay pedal unless it costs \$400 and is hand-built by virgins in a basement somewhere. But, the fact of the matter is that there are way more guitar players buying multi-effect processors with amp simulators and plugging into a PA or playing through headphones at home. "

"In the long run, the kids growing up today with Guitar Rig and their iPads and all that stuff, that's what they're used to. They're not used to changing tubes on their Marshall. In the long run, I think that's where it might move. I'm not sure whether it's going to be as simple as just plugging into a computer and that's it. There's a certain cool and sexy thing about having an amp and having some pedals you can stomp on. I don't think that'll ever go away." 🎸





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## Road Stories

By Carmen Caramanica



*Carmen Caramanica was a touring guitarist throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s, playing for Lou Rawls, Tony Orlando, The Mandrell Sisters, and more. He now owns and runs a music studio and school in Utica, NY, where students can learn guitar, drums, bass, and keyboards. His jazz trio, The Carmen Caramanica Trio, just released their first live CD and has their first DVD coming out later in the year. Carmen will be a regular contributor to The Guitar Note, telling stories about his experiences as a touring musician.*

From 1972-1976, I was Lou Rawls' guitar player and musical director. It was in that capacity that I first went on The Tonight Show as the guest conductor. Between Lou, my time with Tony Orlando, and others, I have been fortunate to have been on the show six times. Back then, when you were the musical director, you played all those TV shows, if you worked for somebody in that circuit. The circuit included The Tonight Show, Dinah Shore, Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin, and others. But, this was my first and the pressure was on.

One of the duties I had as musical director was to write arrangements for Lou. My first one that was more than just a rhythm section arrangement was going to be for The Tonight Show band. We had two songs to do, and we didn't have arrangements for them.

I will admit. I was nervous. The Tonight Show band—basically a jazz big band—was reputed to be the best in the country. I can't emphasize enough how wonderful those musicians were. Notably Doc Severinsen, Tommy Newsom, and others. These were household names back in the '70s, both for jazz folks and the average person watching T.V.

I wrote these arrangements out on a little Wurlitzer piano that I brought with me on the road. I sweat blood over every little note nuance. Is this right? Should I be doing it this way? How does that sound? And, this was all pre-playback. You couldn't just perform and listen back to it on your computer. You had to imagine. If the trumpets are doing this, if the saxes are doing that, what's this guy suppose to do?

Even though I had done other arrangements before on a local level, these were the big boys. I was afraid of getting up there and having them say I did everything wrong.

It's no secret that I do not have a college education in music. I learned by the seat of my pants, as well as through the good graces of a lot of people that helped me. Back then, we also had correspondence courses by mail—certainly nowhere near as convenient as what's available on the web today. So, you can see why I might have been nervous.



But, as it turned out, we had the rehearsal. I counted one, two, three, four, and the music started playing. It was wonderful. Everything sounded beautiful. These guys just played the crap out of it. I was much more relaxed after that. The second song went the same way during rehearsal. So, it all went off without a hitch, and all was fine. That experience really taught me a lot about what I was capable of doing, and more importantly, taught me to really trust the caliber of musicians I was lucky enough to play with in those days.



There is a funny side to this story. I went back to my room after the taping. The show was taped in the afternoon. Around 7:00, or something like that, I'm back at the motel we were in. I was rooming with this other guy. I said, "You know, I haven't eaten. How about a pizza?" So, I went out to get it. When I came back, he said I had just missed myself. I was just on The Tonight Show! It was that moment when the magnitude of what I was a part of hit me. I hadn't realized that on the west coast they aired the show that early. I'd missed the whole thing. No video recorders, no YouTube, no way to catch my first time on The Tonight Show. I did ask my friend how I sounded. He said, "You sounded good."

One other quick anecdote before I leave you... In 1978 I was with Tony Orlando. It turned out I had my own dressing room, and the other guys in the band shared their own dressing room. Tony, of course, had his own dressing room. This venue had three in total, so that was it. The opening act was considered, well, you know, the opening act. He didn't have a dressing room.

So, I get a knock on my door, and it's David Letterman—whom I didn't know at that point. He said, "Hi, I'm Dave, and I need a place to change my pants. Can I use your room?" Thankfully, I said yes. Later, when Letterman got very big, I enjoyed telling people, "You know, he's changed his pants in my room. " 🎸



## Atom Bomb

### Behind the Scenes at Satellite Amplifiers

By: Pipes



Adam Grimm picks me up from my sleepy So Cal hotel on a Thursday evening. After a short ride peppered with small talk, we pull up to a nondescript building. It's 10:30 pm, and at Satellite Amplifiers the workday is about to begin.

Six years ago Adam launched Satellite Amplifiers with two models, the Atom and the Neutron. Since that time, the Satellite family has expanded to twelve models. Most recently they added a new name: White Higher Fidelity, a meticulous recreation of one of Fender's most sought after amplifiers.

In the company's short history, they have made an impressive impact, building a loyal following among punk, hard rock, and country guitarists. Their amps are deceptively simple, sporting few knobs – just a volume and tone on most models – and are often covered in eye-catching colors.

What makes Satellite stand out among the crowd of boutique amplifiers? Why have iconic punk guitarists like Social Distortion's Jonny "2 Bags" Wickersham and Flogging Molly's Dennis Casey been so quick to embrace the young brand? The amps are

undoubtedly cool, but there is clearly a lot more to them than what you see at a first glance.

I have owned a Neutron for two years now. I have met and interviewed Adam Grimm a number of times. Yet I struggle to give a definitive answers to those questions.

So tonight I plan to find the answers. That's why I'm standing here on a warm San Diego night. I'm about to step into the headquarters of Satellite Amplifiers and watch Adam and company go to work.

I open the door and walk into a guitar player's paradise; amplifiers and guitars are everywhere I look. As I stroll through this amazing collection of vintage gear, I catch the faint sound of a guitar playing. In the basement, Adam's business partner Eric Bernstorff is dialing in some seriously sweet sounds on a prototype amp.

We walk down the stairs and away from the crowded workbenches. This is where Adam and Eric bring their designs to life.



The basement has the feel of a war-time bunker; it makes the array of gear upstairs feel like a meager appetizer. Adam takes me through the carpentry shop where the cabinets are made and through the speaker room. We enter an area that is set-up like a live room in a studio. Vintage Marshalls line the walls, and there is a row of production and prototype Satellite’s in front of them. It’s here that Adam and I sit down to chat.

Adam: My basic philosophy is that no amplifier is really useless. Provided you have the financial means, everyone should have at least four amplifiers. There are at least four distinctive sounds that only certain amps can do by themselves. Only a Marshall has a classic Marshall sound. You should certainly have at least one Marshall. Everybody should have some kind of tweed Fender - a Champ, a Deluxe, a low-power tweed Twin - any of the amps in that family. I think everybody should have a Vox or something like it. The AC-30 is a great amplifier, but it could be a Rickenbacker, a Gretsch, or a Supro. Finally, I believe everybody should have, oddly enough, a really good solid state amplifier.

If you play a solid state amplifier and a tube amp together it makes for a richer environment. A solid state amplifier by itself sounds like ass. But, when played with a tube amp, it adds more body to your low-end. That being said, I think I own three solid state amplifiers and somewhere around 60 tube amps.

As Adam walks me through his vast gear collection, I start to realize that everything in this room has a story. Sure, there are more amplifiers here than I could play in a week, but there is more going on than a serious case of gear addition. Among the ocean of more impressive gear sits a Squier Sidekick 15 Reverb, the first amp Adam ever owned. From the road case plastered with Battalion of Saints stickers to the purple 1976 Marshall Super Lead, each item is more evidence to the passion and history behind this company.



*A fuzzy Satellite made for Doug Kauer of Kauer Gutiers. “Satellites are the only amps I have ever owned that, no matter my mood, always put a smile on my face. I always look forward to playing them.”*

We begin talking about the Satellite models, and it becomes clear that every aspect of these amps is filled with the same thought and passion. During our conversation, Adam talks a lot about the design details of his amplifiers. While in the concept stage, he tweaks relentlessly.

Adam: I am very stubborn and strong-willed. If I want something, I am going to keep going until I get it. I am a nice guy (chuckles). But, if there is something we have to have, that is what we get. That is part of what our reputation is built on. We build these products to get them to the point of completion where I can actually say, ‘That’s done!’ It gets that stamp of approval where I am not going to change anything on it. When that happens, it gets named and it goes out to the public.

Knowing the love and detail that goes into each amplifier, I ask Adam where he draws his inspiration in designing new models.

Adam: When we originally built the Atom, we were not specifically going for a Marshall sound. But, I grew up with a Marshall. I grew up listening to guys like Social Distortion, and the sound we were going for was more like this: ‘Here are the things I like. I want to roll all of those into one package that creates that sound.’

Our design philosophy confuses a lot of people. People look at our amps and say, ‘it only has two knobs.’ Well, yes it does. We’d make it with no knobs if you want. ‘Why?’ Because I can get the same quality of sound out of two knobs and fewer parts as I can with six knobs and a lot more parts. And, that is where a lot of the philosophy came in. Four of our models use the same power transformer. It is the standard Satellite transformer. We use it in multiple models simply because it works really well. It is just like our design philosophy. If it isn’t broke, don’t fix it.

I ask how they went from building those first amps to building all of the different models in their line-up today?

Adam: Well, product development comes to us in a couple of different ways. One way is a customer comes in and says, ‘I really like this, but I want an amp like that. Can you build that?’ We will develop a product with them. We had one amp, the Proton, recently discontinued. It is an extremely high-gain kind of Uber-Metal sounding amp. Not really my kind of thing, but we had a customer that came in looking for it. It took us about 6 months of product development from the time he came in with his hand drawn chart. We built it for him. Then, at the end of the process, we felt this was a good-enough amp to add to our line-up.

The other half of product development is when either me or my business partner Eric gets some wild hair idea and says, ‘You know what? I am gonna build something.’

It is very free-form the way we do it. We never walk into it saying, ‘I want to build another Deluxe.’ The Mudshark is a great example. We added that to our product line last year. Eric was sitting around, looking at the transformers and said, ‘I think I am gonna build a rock/blues amp.’ He sat down and designed the whole thing.



*Another one-of-a-kind Satellite.*

Really, I only had input on one thing. He had a light on it that was a bit dim, and I had him change that out. He did everything else, and it is phenomenal. He worked his way through it. He had a basic idea in his head, and he ended up with this final product.



The Moonshine, which came out after the Mudshark, actually happened because I had a repair order. We ordered new tubes for the client, and they sent the wrong ones. Well, I am not going to send them back, so here we have a matched set of tubes. I said, 'I am gonna build an amp with these.' So I busted out a chassis, started drilling holes, and made an amp out of it. It sounded really good, so then I got Eric involved. We talk about it. We have couches upstairs and some record players. We listen to a lot of music, a lot of really odd-ball stuff. We sit down, and talk through it.

By the way, I still haven't gotten the right tubes for that repair.

You know, we have some amps that have no names and that no one will ever hear. They will never see the light of day. You work on it over and over until you step back and realize that it isn't working. The concept was great. The execution was good. It isn't that they don't work. They function, and they make sound. Actually, they sound really good. The problem is they don't sound amazing!

The key piece of all our stuff is that when someone sees it and plays it, they turn around and say, 'That is a great amplifier. It may not be what I am looking for, but that is a great amplifier.'

And I firmly believe that all of our amps do just that.

We want all of our products to have our sound. If somebody hears them, I want them to recognize that it was a product made by us. I want it to be our sound - our family of sound. One hundred years from now when I am dead and gone, I want someone to listen to an album recorded with one of our amps and be able to pick out and hear our sound.

From the beginning, Satellite Amplifiers has been doing things their own way. This past year however, in a thoughtful tribute to those that came before them, they added the name 'White Higher Fidelity' to their list of products.



*Just a few of the combo amps in Adam Grimm's impressive collection.*

To some, the original White is just an obscure twist on the Fender tweed Princeton. To others, Adam included, it is the best sounding amp Fender ever produced. While most do not know much about White amps, Adam is clearly an expert on the subject.



*White Higher Fidelity Amps + Adam's foot*

For starters, Adam and Eric collected twelve original White amplifiers representing every slight variation that was made in the original production line. Adam even has two that pre-date the "first" one built and given to Forrest White.

Adam: That is the only amplifier that we truly set out to copy. The other Satellites all have stylings and sounds of other amps, but nothing else in our line is a direct copy. It all started with Eric. He had one of the original White amps, and I was blown away by it. You know it is a Fender Tweed Princeton in a different box, but it is also so much more than that. He had his, and all of a sudden I said, 'I have to have one.'

We have a shared passion for this amplifier. There is so little known about it. I have never seen a banner or an old sales catalog. Nothing. We know Fender made them and we know that they named them after Forrest White. They made them from 1952 through 1962 at least.

Eric and I thought about this for a long time. We have seen people do this thing where you can buy old product names and put out products under the old names. I said, 'If we are going to do it, I am all in. But the only way I will do it is if we do it exactly the same as the originals.'

Eric looked at me and said, 'That is exactly how I feel.'

So we started tracking stuff down to see if we can make this. We found the original people that were making the badges for Fender. We have them making our badges on the Whites.

It has been this huge labor of love for us. We found the specific type of Sugar Pine they were making the cabinets with. We found the correct stain that they used inside the cabinets. We found Whites with all the different transformers and all the different revisions and started testing them to find the right one, the one that sounded the best of all of them. We had custom chassis built to match the original specs.

For as simple of an amplifier as it is, it has been the hardest thing to source because we needed to have it exactly as the White was.





*More Whites.*

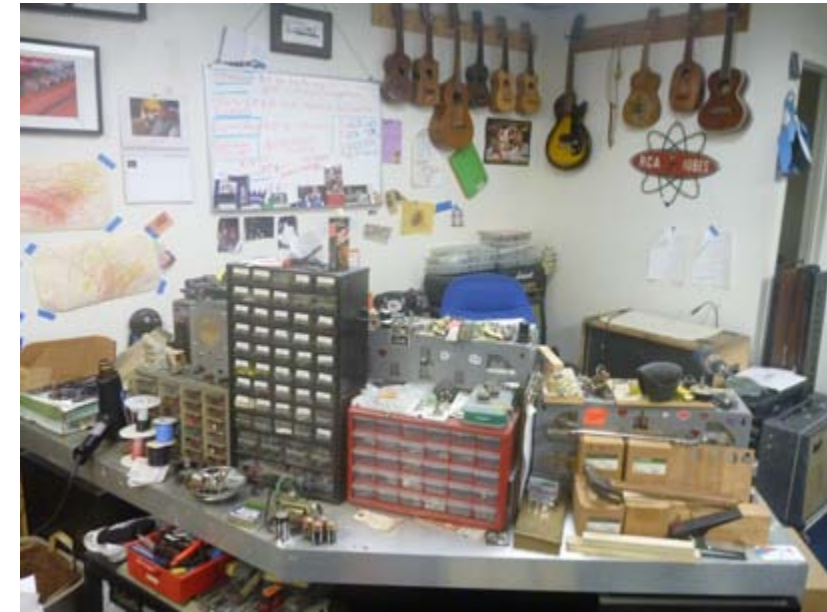
One of the sonic differences between the Princeton and the White is that Princeton's are covered in tweed. Tweed is a thick fabric that is glued on to the wood, which deadens the sound of the wood. The original Whites are covered in this wallpaper-like material. We had to find the correct source for that covering.

All the original Fender and White amplifiers used this wax-covered/cloth-covered push-back wire. Now everyone uses Teflon coated wires. For the Whites, we had to have the original wire. We couldn't find anyone that had it. We found a lot of cloth-covered wire, but it sucked. So Eric made some phone calls and found the name of the company that supplied Fender. I looked them up, and they still make wire. They have been making wire for 85 years. I called them up. I told them exactly what wanted, showed them the original I had and they said, 'Sure.' All of a sudden I have spools of wire that is date stamped 2011 but is exactly the same wire that Fender used in the Whites.

There is one thing that we are still trying to get. When we were at the NY amp show, I stopped in a cobbler's shop after seeing the sewing machines in the window and asked if I could get the handles made in the original blue color. He said, 'Sure,' but it would take longer than we were in town. I figured I could get any cobbler to do this. I have been to every cobbler in Southern California, and no one can do it.

So this year in NY, I will retrace my steps to find that cobbler and have the blue handles made. Everyone who has purchased a White will get a new blue handle in the mail.

In the back of my mind, I know the brown handles are fine. It doesn't have to be blue. But I want it to have the blue handles. I want it to be exactly like the originals, and that is what it will take to get that final stamp of approval.



*Parts drawers and ukuleles at Satellite Amplifiers.*

Several hours after I started my evening at the headquarters of Satellite Amplifiers, it is time to leave. I am no smarter in the ways of electronics. However, I walk out understanding the passion and attention that goes in to everything that is a part of the Satellite family.

Six years ago Adam created two amplifiers, the Atom and the Neutron. The original names for these amps were FM36 and LB18, Adam's obscure way of paying homage to the band Social Distortion and their song 1945. Today, Social Distortion guitarist Jonny Wickersham travels the world playing 1945 through a Satellite Atom.

One of the things that make Satellite Amps special is the passion and the stories that inspired them. Adam Grimm loves to know the tale behind every piece of gear. Now, the gear he created is building a whole new set of stories. To Adam, that is simply another indication of a job well done. 🎸





## A Lesson with Eric Skye

By Eric Skye



In each issue, renowned jazz guitarist provides a video lesson. For his inaugural column, Eric provides an introduction to using scales. Eric occupies a unique niche by squarely residing in the classic jazz guitar camp, but with the intimate sound of the acoustic steelstring guitar, and an eclectic array of influences from bluegrass, to latin music, to vintage soul jazz and funk... all threaded together with the blues, and a healthy respect for the groove. Eric can be found at [ericskye.com](http://ericskye.com).



## Sadowsky Guitars

By Matthew Richter and Emily Marino

If you go to the website for Sadowsky Guitars, you'll find advice on which woods to use for fingerboards, from brightest to warmest. The disclaimer at the top of the page states that the information is simply the opinion of the owner, Roger Sadowsky, as if that somehow makes the information less valuable. But to the contrary, Sadowsky is a veritable expert in crafting guitars, having built over 6000 basses and guitars during the past 30 years. Thankfully, he points this out...

However, odds are that anyone who makes it to his website already knows what an amazing artist he is.

Sadowsky Guitars doesn't advertise much. They don't have to. They only sell directly to customers. And, if the Who's Who style list of musicians playing his guitars doesn't make it abundantly clear, the guitars speak for themselves. With a new shop in Long Island City, NY, you can visit and try out any of their instruments in a custom soundroom.

So, how did Roger Sadowsky become the maker of guitars played by Keith Richards, Adam Clayton, and John Fogerty? Well, it all started with an unhappy psychobiology graduate student. Sadowsky had gone to his first folk festival in upstate New York a few years earlier while getting his undergraduate degree at SUNY Geneseo. After being inspired by the music, he purchased his first guitar, a \$40 Aria classical guitar. He started teaching himself to play, but really pursued it further when he was struggling in his PhD program in psychobiology. "The more miserable I was in graduate school," Roger explains, "the more time I spent playing guitar, and taking lessons, and hanging out with a serious crowd of, at the time, professional folkies. They all had beautiful vintage Martins. I just got obsessed with the idea of making beautiful guitars, and I thought that if I could learn to do it, I could get out of the rat race."

The idea was a solid one. At the time, President Nixon had cut funding in science drastically. So, after attempting to get an apprenticeship building guitars while still working on his degree, Sadowsky made the leap. He quit school to work full time selling instruments at Rondo Music in New Jersey. This job introduced him to Augustino LoPrinzi's handmade guitars. Sadowsky was impressed. "So one day the sales rep came in and I said to him, you know, I really don't want to be selling guitars. I want to be making them," he recalls. "Can you arrange for me to meet with LoPrinzi? He said sure." Two job offers followed: one at \$80 a week from LoPrinzi, and a second one for \$35 a week working with Gurian Guitars. It was an easy choice.

What followed was as Sadowsky describes, "two of the most wonderful years of my life." At LoPrinzi's shop, Sadowsky learned the basics of guitar building. There were only 5 people working in the shop, so he was exposed to all parts of the process.

From there he moved on to Medley Music in Pennsylvania as head of the repair department. This was a turning point for Sadowsky. He was able to build upon the skills gained with LoPrinzi by mastering his techniques for repairing, restoring and modifying instruments. "I had a huge number of broken stock instruments in a warehouse to practice to my heart's desire refining my techniques," he reminisces fondly. His incredible skill became apparent to a client, Craig Snyder, a Philly session guitarist. Snyder would frequently make the trip from New York City to Philly so that Sadowsky could work on his guitars. When asked why he was making the trek, Snyder simply explained that Sadowsky was better than anyone in New York. This was a surprise to the guitar builder. And, a good one at that.

Sadowsky was a native New Yorker, and had always wanted to return home. Plus, he knew he needed a



strong base of musician clients in order to support setting up his own shop. This interaction, among others, gave him the confidence to return to NYC and give it a try.

In 1979, in a 1,000 sq ft loft in New York, Sadowsky Guitars was born. The original shop was obviously small, especially considering Roger was living in half of the space. But, it was what he needed to get started. Initially the shop was focused primarily on repairs and restoration work. However, he also started to make solid bodies on the side. By 1982 Sadowsky launched his first line of guitars and basses. Over the next couple of years his build time increased, until it was taking up about 50% of his days. This balance between repairs and restoration versus building continued until the shop moved to Brooklyn in 2002. At that point, Sadowsky switched to building most of the time, and only doing repair work on his own instruments.

So, what makes a Sadowsky guitar so special? Roger explains, “You know, I’d done thousands of fret jobs in my life, and so I think fret work and setup work was really the thing I gained a really strong reputation for doing. Electronic shielding work and hum reduction work was another area.” Even more than that, Sadowsky had a lot of experience with both building guitars and modifying them. As he’d modify two instruments in the same fashion, he’d notice differences in the end result. So, he’d examine them, to figure out what caused those differences. These observations helped him develop his philosophy about the best ways to build guitars. In his own words, “I developed the point of view that solid body guitars and basses are still first and foremost acoustic instruments. The better they sound acoustically, the better they will sound through any amp.”

Sadowsky focused on making lightweight solid body guitars. The trend at the time was quite the opposite though. Guitar makers were using heavier exotic woods, such as African hardwoods. But, for him these woods didn’t resonate well. The resulting sound was flat. “These woods make beautiful coffee tables, but they don’t make very good guitars,” Sadowsky explains. He chose to use lighter woods instead. His top priority was finding woods that were lighter and more resonant. This proved to be a very smart approach.

Included in those lighter woods are African Khaya mahogany, domestic alder, and swamp ash. However, with changing times came new challenges. Sadowsky noticed the weights of his guitars creeping upwards. So, he tried to get wood mills to cull lighter pieces. But the mills couldn’t accommodate. Undeterred, Roger came up with another approach. He chambered his instruments, cutting the chambers right into them. This ensured that the overall weight of the guitars stayed at 7 ½-8 lbs. making them a very comfortable weight. Plus, it allowed him to keep the wood of the guitars consistent.

This type of innovation has proven to work for Sadowsky with other guitars as well. He found he was frequently hearing customers complain of intonation issues with the low E string on The Chet Atkins electric nylon guitars. So, in 1990 he decided to make a better one. His friend Alex Aguilar, who had helped with other previous circuits, came up with a buffer preamp for the electric nylon. Soon after it was completed, the shop was doing a bunch of work to help the Rolling Stones get ready for their Steel Wheels tour. Sadowsky was asked by the guitar tech (soon to be production manager), Pierre De Beauport, if he had a nylon string that would work in a big arena. Roger offered to let him take his newly completed one. As a result, Keith Richards ordered a second one and owns the first two electric nylon guitars produced by Sadowsky.

The guitar has also been extremely popular among Brazilian players and jazz musicians.

Archtops were another example. Sadowsky saw the issues that arose as new innovations to the archtop build process were designed and applied. They cost too much. They had too much feedback. It was hard to change floating pickups. In general, they weren’t user friendly. Sadowsky changed that as well. But for more details on Sadowsky archtops, see the accompanying interview.

Sadowsky also received some peculiar requests for instruments over the years. The most memorable was probably the guitar mockup made for Prince, which Sadowsky affectionately referred to as, The Ejacucaster.

Prince needed a couple of guitars for his Purple Rain tour that mimicked his Hohner Tele, which was out of production. After successfully creating the guitars, they made another request... to create a prop guitar that would ejaculate into the crowd. After ensuring that he could not be sued for the Ivory liquid sprayed onto an unsuspecting audience, Sadowsky came up with the design. “I ran brass tubing alongside the truss rod that ended at the tip of the headstock and then ran into the body. I had a separate compartment where they would install a valve, a solenoid valve, which would connect to a hose offstage that was connected to a pressurized barrel of Ivory liquid.” While fun, Sadowsky does prefer to be a purist when it comes to designing guitars. He declined to create a Starship Enterprise shaped guitar for Billy Idol and a guitar modeled after a medieval executioner’s axe for Meatloaf.

One thing that is undeniable though, is that for all his insights into guitar design, Sadowsky’s guitars are very much Fender based. This is for a couple of reasons. When Sadowsky first started building guitars in the early 80’s, Fenders were dominant. Session musicians were frequently booked to play on jingle dates, which meant only a 45-minute job. Engineers weren’t willing to spend more than a couple of minutes hooking up and calibrating the sound on the boards with the musician’s guitar. Anything unusual would take much longer and guaranteed that the musician did not get a call back. So, there was a lot of pressure to stay within the basic framework of a Fender design. Furthermore, it was very easy to modify a Fender style instrument. After years of doing repairs, restorations and modifications, Sadowsky knew that ease of modification was very important.

Lastly, there was a change in the Vintage market that propelled Sadowsky to make instruments on his own. For years he advised clients to pick up an old Fender for a reasonable price, and bring it to him for restoration. He’d do some fret work, some electronic shielding and upgrading, and the client would end up with an amazing guitar. However, as people started to realize the value of the older instruments, the Vintage market grew. The guitars were more valuable without modifications and cost more to buy initially. At that point, Sadowsky realized that he would be better off starting from scratch and building a new, reasonably priced, high-quality guitar instead.

High quality has really been the hallmark of Sadowsky Guitars. At the heart of his company is his workshop and a group of very dedicated individuals. He has Dan, his shipping manager; Kevin, who handles his website, sales, and graphic design; and eight people who work in the shop building the guitars. Four of those people are dedicated to final assembly, in which one person does the entire final build for each individual instrument. Every guitar is made carefully, with special attention paid to choosing a neck and body for each. Once these pieces are completed, they can then be assembled together. Another three people do preproduction work, including body sanding, finishing sanding, etc. Sadowsky himself does all the truing of every fingerboard they make and inspects and sets up every instrument that is made in the workshop. To hear him say it, “I feel that all I really brought to the table is very old fashioned values. Good workmanship. Good materials. And, most important is how we treat our customers. One of the reasons that I sell direct is because no one can take care of a Sadowsky customer better than we can... From the sales end to the service after the sale.”

As a result, you have to contact Sadowsky Guitars directly if you are interested in one of their products. Their website is [www.sadowsky.com](http://www.sadowsky.com).



# Interview with Roger Sadowsky:

## The Sadowsky Archtops

**The Guitar Note:** Tell us about your Archtops. What’s your process?

**Roger:** I’ve been dealing – selling in Japan since ’87. We have a wonderful devoted customer base, and a wonderful group of dealers, and I’ve been working with this one exclusive distributor in Japan since 1987. And so in 2003 we began two manufacturing projects in Japan. One was our Metro line of basses, which are comparable to my instruments prior to chambering and putting graphite in the neck. So they’re a non-chambered body, and no graphite in the neck. But the quality of the workmanship is every bit as good as what we do here. And so they sell for about two-thirds of a comparable New York City instrument.

Then at the same time, I began the Archtop project in Japan. I’d been thinking about making a laminated Archtop since the late ’80s, and as the Archtop market exploded, what I saw was all these wonderful craftsmen making \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 Archtops. My issues were first, I don’t know any working musicians who can afford to buy one. Number two, even if I could to afford to buy one, would I want to take it on a gig and risk my drummer’s cymbal falling into it. And third, the tendency among these Archtop makers is to make them more and more acoustic and resonant, and the more acoustic and resonant they became, the worse they perform amplified. They feed back way too much.

Also, there was the issue of floating pickups. If you owned an Archtop with a floating pickup and you wanted to try a different pickup, it became a \$500, \$600 project just to find another one you could mount on that guitar— and half the time you had to make a new pickguard to mount it.

Gibson’s offerings at that time, the 175s, the L5s, they were starting to weigh as much as Les Pauls, and I felt there had to be a better way. I had been taking care of Jim Hall’s D’Aquisto for many years, which was a laminated D’Aquisto. I asked Jim if he would be willing to personally play an affordable guitar if I could make it. Would he support me in the project? He said, “Absolutely.”

I started working with my people in Japan, and we released the Jim Hall model in 2004, and it’s pretty much based on Jim’s D’Aquisto. Sixteen-inch body, 2¾” deep, short scale, 24¾. 1¾” nut. By the second prototype Jim gave us thumbs-up, and he’s been playing that guitar ever since. Hasn’t stopped playing it.

Since then I’ve added four additional models. From smallest to large we have the semi-hollow, the SS-15, the Jimmy Bruno, the Jim Hall, and the LS-17.

**The Guitar Note:** What’s the difference between the semi-hollow and the Jimmy Bruno?

**Roger:** The semi-hollow began as basically the same body as the Bruno. The Bruno is obviously a smaller body than the Jim Hall, with a slightly narrower nut at 1-11/16th. So the semi-hollow is the same body shape as the Bruno, but narrower and it’s got a very lightweight spruce block in the center in which I’ve removed wood where I don’t need it.

I was not trying to make another 335. We have tons of 335s, and 335 style guitars out there. I was looking to make something that’s still got a very traditional jazz tone from the neck pickup, but could perform at higher volumes for a bigger band setting, or stadiums, or large venues. The bridge pickup just gives it more versatility in terms of blues, blues rock, all that other kind of stuff. But, my goal was still to get a very good jazz sound out of it.

One of the more recent models is the SS-15, which is basically the semi-hollow, but totally acoustic with just one humbucker. The big baby on the right (Roger points at the guitar at the far end of a row Sadowskys) is the LS-17 which stands for Long Scale 17”. It’s a 17” L-5 size body, but also only 2¾ deep. It’s got a long 25½” scale like an L-5. And, it’s got a 1¾” nut.

**The Guitar Note:** And, because of the laminated tops, you don’t have the feedback issues?

**Roger:** Absolutely. When I prototyped the original Jim Hall model, I made prototypes with both a pressed spruce top, and a laminated maple top. I will say the spruce top one sounded a little louder and warmer acoustically, but amplified, it was dark and muddy compared to the maple, and it fed back at a much lower volume level.

So, I’m really quite convinced of the laminated maple construction, and that’s all I do. That’s my niche. Anybody who wants a hand-carved acoustic, well, I have lots of colleagues I’m happy to refer them to for those builds. That’s not what I’m looking to do. I’m looking to do a moderately priced laminated instrument, and that’s all.

**The Guitar Note:** So, after the Jim Hall, what came next?

**Roger:** The Bruno was next.

**The Guitar Note:** Did you have a similar relationship with Jimmy Bruno?

**Roger:** No, I didn’t. I was exhibiting in 2004 at an event called the World Guitar Congress in Townsend, Maryland. It was a failed attempt at an international guitar conference. They never held a second one, but I did exhibit at that one. Jimmy had just stopped his relationship with Fender and Benedetto. What was going to be the Bruno model after Jimmy pulled out ended up becoming the Benedetto Bravo, and other companies were also chasing him. He was one of the players at the show, and he came by my booth. He picked up the Jim Hall guitar, and he asked if he could borrow it on a gig he had at the conference. I said absolutely. He took it to the gig, totally fell in love with it, and so we started to work together.

But you know, Jimmy’s not a large guy. Even a 16” guitar for Jimmy seems really kind of big. So we designed a smaller instrument for him with a slightly narrower nut width, and that was our second model. I was not looking to do another signature model after Jim Hall. I’ve always felt that if you have too many signature models, it dilutes the value of having signature models at all.

**The Guitar Note:** If you’re going to do any signatures, those are the two guys.

**Roger:** That’s the kind of way I felt, too. So, even though I wasn’t looking for another one, Jimmy just fell into my lap, and we fell in love with each other like a couple of long-lost buddies. It’s been a wonderful relationship.

**The Guitar Note:** Tell us about the relationship in Japan. How does that work?

**Roger:** The instrument is built there. Then, here, we do the fret work, and all the final setup work.

**The Guitar Note:** The gentleman in Japan, he actually worked here for several years. Right?

**Roger:** Yoshi Kikuchi is my head builder in Japan, yeah. He was working for a bass company called Atelier Z, which is still in business. He was their head builder. He was so enamored with my work that he approached my distributor in Japan about coming to work for them and becoming an authorized technician for my instruments in Japan.

So, my distributor hired him, and Yoshi left his wife and two small children to work for me for just under a year. He learned everything about how I do what I do. Then, he went back as my authorized technician for service and maintenance of Sadowsky instruments in Japan. Eventually, he became the person to oversee the Metro bass project and the Archtop project.

**The Guitar Note:** And, the rest is history. Thank you for taking the time with us. 🎸

## Sadowsky Shop Tour

by Matthew S. Richter

One of the great pleasures in developing the two articles on Roger Sadowsky was visiting the shop. Not only were Roger, Kevin, and crew hospitable and welcoming, but they were prepared to solve my inadequacies as an interviewer and fledgling journalist.

I thought I came prepared. I had an SLR camera, a video camera, a field recorder, notebooks, pens, prepared questions, etc. I even brought extra batteries for the field recorder. The night before I even made sure both SLR and video cameras had charges and space on their drives. I did not, however, anticipate leaving the SLR turned on with a completely drained battery. Roger came through, though, providing his own camera-- which was much better than mine.

I took tons of pictures. Here are just some of the highlights from a great day at a great shop.



This opening picture is taken right from the entrance. That's Dan on the left. He fulfills orders and takes care of customers. Center is Roger, himself. On the right, closest to me (out of shot) is a door that opens into the Bass Room. The door on the right, just beyond Roger, is the door for the Guitar Room. Both rooms house all of the instruments listed on the Sadowsky In Stock page as well as some demo models and a plethora of different amp options for customers to try. The door straight back, leads into the workshop area. The boxes behind Dan are Sadowsky strings and other accessories available for purchase.



Here is the wall of Basses. Between this room and the Guitar Room, GAS is unavoidable. Remember my qualifying statement above-- about my general incompetence at journalism? I held my interview with Roger in the adjacent Guitar Room, the one location (head banging on the wall) I did not take a picture. But, imagine this same shot below, only with guitars. The solidbodies on the left and the archtops on the right.





Here is the Sadowsky Bass Amp. Only 100 of these were made. A true collectible.

If you walk through the Workshop door from the front room, straight back and to the right is Roger's work area.



Roger also builds acoustics in his spare time. Here's one of them in process. He gave up making them when his son was born. Now that he is in college, Roger is getting back into it. He wants to build about six more to refine the process, and then, maybe, he'll sell one or two a year.

Here's another Acoustic drying.



These instruments are waiting for a final setup before going to their new homes.



The Crew. From Top Left, Moving Clockwise: Alex, setting a bridge. Dennis working on an Archtop. Lisa cutting a pickguard by hand. David, working on a fretboard. Rob, working on a bass.



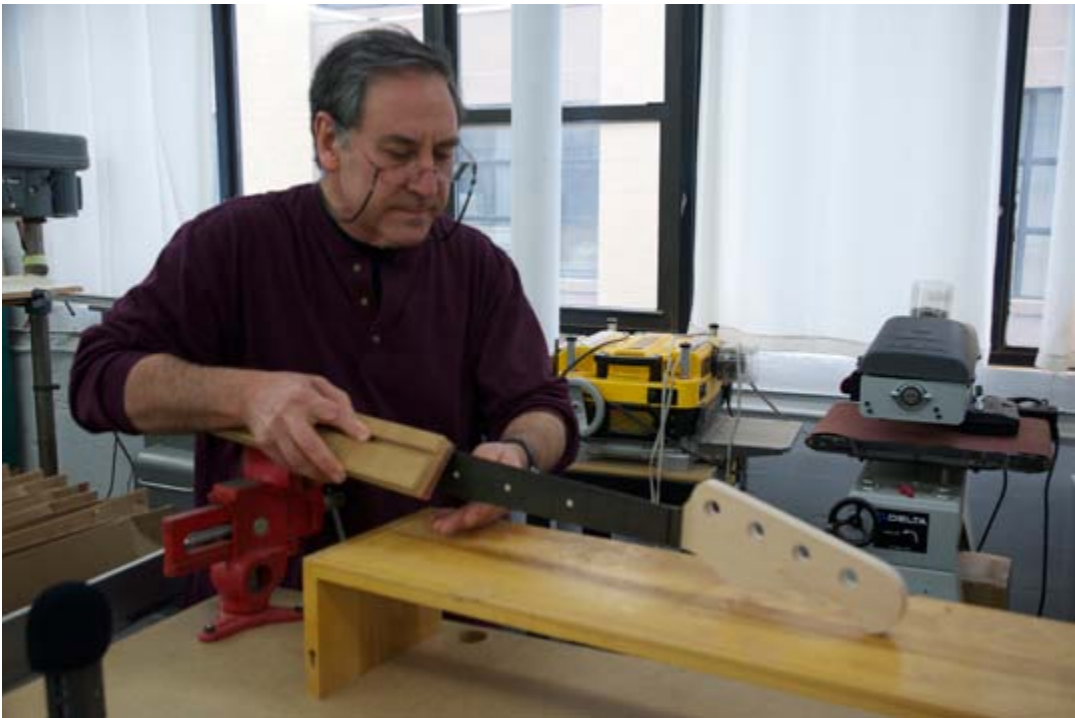


Roger, holding up one of his Antiquity Series. The process uses an aged lacquer where they induce finish checking and age the hardware. When Fender did it, he initially thought it was a marketing gimmick, but Roger has to admit, it adds a certain mojo. They don't go crazy with the distressing, though.

A Spalted maple top. Spalted maple, by nature, has some imperfections. So, procedurally, Sadowsky builds it up with an epoxy and sands it back down to get the right look.



Roger working on a fretboard.





A lot of cutting goes on in this room.



A bunch of necks...



The Wood Sorting Area. When you talk about a top being bookmatched, you are talking about a piece of wood like this.



You slice it in the middle and spread it open like a book.



Lay out the templates and draw the outline...



Tons of wood.





Fingerboard Woods. A piece of ebony for Archtop tailpieces.



And, last, but not least. The store room, with lots of cases ready to go. 🎸

The Spray Room.



# The Dabbler Builds a Pedal

By P.T. Hylton

**The Task:** Build a single loop switcher guitar pedal.

**The Mentor:** Alfie Llanos, pedal builder, modding guru, and creator of the Tone-Kicker Internal Guitar Pre-Amp.

The only thing I have ever built is a bird feeder. I made it at camp the summer before I started third grade. I remember sweating over the outdoor workbench long after my fellow campers had headed for the baseball field. One of the camp counselors stayed behind to make sure I didn’t saw off my arm. A look of mild nausea crossed her face every time I picked up a tool.

The most memorable part of that build was proudly presenting the finished product to my mother. The look on her face was all too familiar: a thin veil of feigned delight not quite successfully masking utter confusion. That look was still fresh in my mind from the previous Christmas when I had given my dad ‘soap on a rope’.

“Oh,” said she. “It’s a beautiful... it’s... What a great... I can’t wait to put it in the... kitchen?”

I was thrilled with her enthusiastic if somewhat baffled reaction to the gift. A few years later I stumbled across the bird-feeder and saw it for the misshapen abomination it really was. I silently promised myself to stay away from all tools – for the good of mankind.

I mostly kept my promise. My current toolbox includes a hammer, a few tiny nails for hanging pictures, a random collection of Allen wrenches, three screwdrivers, and a soldering iron (a relic of the brief era in the late ‘90s when I was brave enough to change my own pickups). My only other tool is a drill I received as a present a few years back. I don’t change my own oil. I never build anything that can be bought. I call my apartment building’s maintenance man at the first sign of trouble and make no attempt to investigate the problem myself.

Still, when I recently found myself in need of a loop switching pedal – one that would allow me to switch multiple effects into or out of my signal path with the stomp of one button – I began to reconsider my aversion to all things ‘Home Depot’.

How difficult could it be? I already had most of the tools I would need, and, if I ever wanted to get into the world of DIY building, this was the easiest project I was likely to come across. But I knew I couldn’t do it alone.

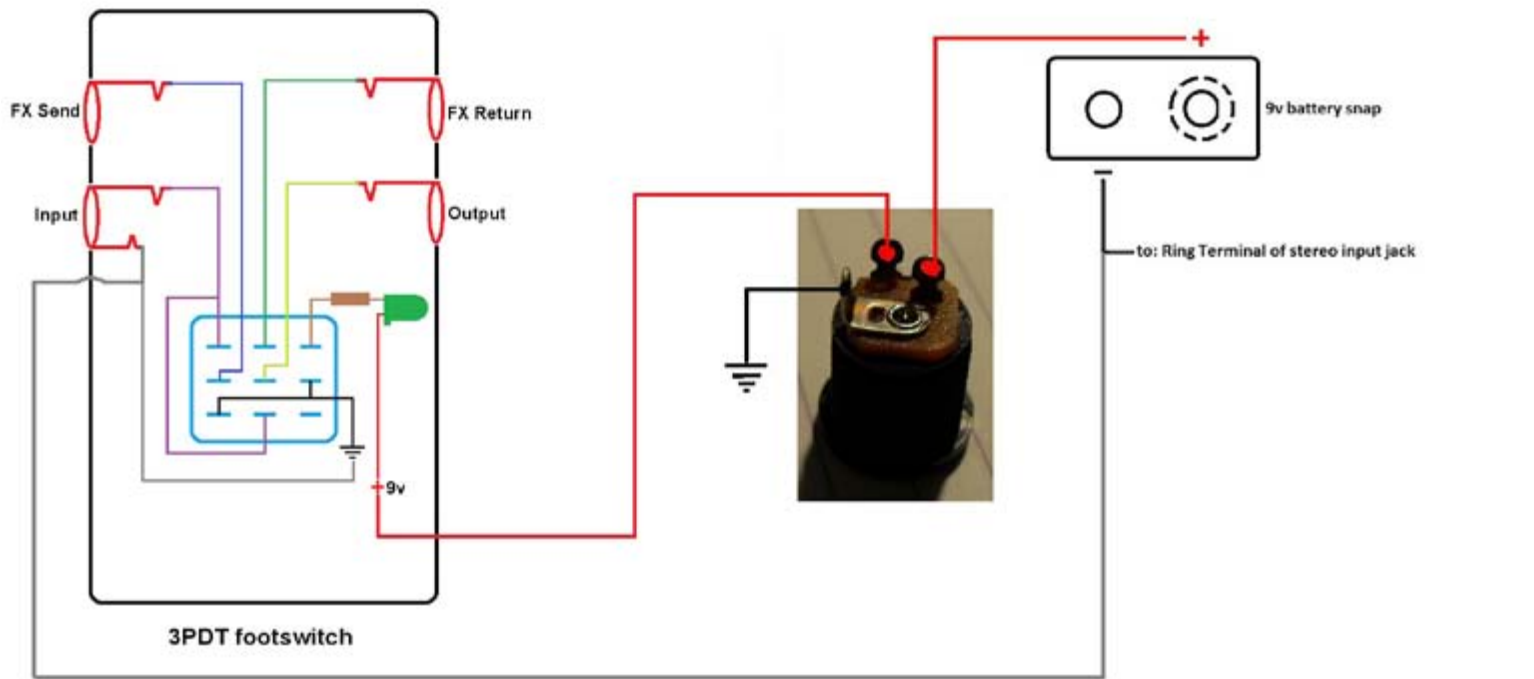
The secret to being a great Dabbler is to surround yourself with great mentors. A jack of all trades and master of none has no time to put in the man-hours and sweat equity needed to handle all the potential pitfalls in a given project. No, a living resource is required in these situations. They must be generous with their knowledge, but also firm enough to tell you when to buck-up and finish the job at hand.

A great mentor is hard to find, but I knew just the one for the Loop Switcher Pedal project.

Alfie Llanos is an Australian pedal builder, a modding guru, and the creator of the Tone-Kicker Internal Guitar Pre-Amp. I have two of his pedals, and both are of exceptional quality. He is knowledgeable and patient

– two traits he would need when guiding me through this project from half a world away.

My hunch that I had selected the perfect mentor was quickly confirmed. Less than 24 hours after sending Alfie a brief e-mail explaining my plan, he sent me back a detailed wiring diagram and a shopping list of all the supplies I would need. He also sent me a link to an online electronic supply store that carries all the necessary items. Alfie even offered to send me a LED and resister so I wouldn’t have to buy them individually. Score.



Ten minutes and \$28 later, I had ordered the parts.

The package arrived a few days later. Everything looked great, but I suddenly realized there was one component I was missing: the wire. I had no idea what type of wiring I should look for, so, feeling a bit lame, I once again turned to my mentor.



I received a quick e-mail back:

Your question is not lame at all. Actually it’s very important, seeing as this is a passive circuit and a guitar signal is less than a few millivolts. You want to use thin wire as thicker wire will cause capacitance, which is



bad (but we won't get into that). If you want to save some cash, you can use an old network cable. You will get eight sets of wires out of some RJ45, and it works great as it's pure copper (in most cases). However, if you want to purchase wire, you can get something like 18 to 22 gauge (AWG). Get stranded wire and not solid core, as stranded is much more flexible. Also ensure you tin the wire ends before you start soldering as it will guarantee a good connection. Do not blow on each join to make them dry quicker, and do not agitate the join once your iron leaves the solder. Make sure each join is 'still' and bonded with no movement. Use 60/40 rosin core solder and take your time.

Alfie also had a few words of wisdom about drilling out the holes:

When you drill it, make sure your drill bit is sharp and use some low tack masking/painter tape. Put a strip or two over where you will be drilling the holes. The tape will hold down any potential chipping of paint and should give you a cleanly drilled hole if you take your time.

Do you have drill bits large enough to drill the required holes? The footswitch will need a large and very precise hole. If you overshoot, the nut will fall through when you try to install the switch.

I also recommend drilling the box far away from the house / apartment as the tiny metal shavings will go everywhere. It's amazing how many shavings a few holes will produce, and they can be sharp. I drill everything inside a large cardboard box to minimize clean up time.

These are the kind of tips I was looking for! Thanks mentor.

I was ready to begin the build.



I grabbed a large cardboard box, headed to the porch and drilled out the holes in the enclosure. Okay, so I dropped the enclosure on the concrete once, creating a giant chip in the paint. But I hadn't expected my pedal to end up pretty. The fact that I hadn't already drilled a hole in my leg was a pleasant surprise.

The drilling went smoothly, and I was pleased with the results. So what if the LED light didn't exactly line up with the footswitch? I could always say I did it on purpose for that offset look, right?

That night, I wired up the pedal. It turns out that soldering within the confines of a guitar pedal enclosure takes a bit more finesse than soldering the leads on a pickup. Things quickly got tight in there. I also lacked a real wire stripper, so I had to resort to an old utility knife and my teeth. This made for some imprecise stripping. The night's only real tragedy was the glob of solder I dripped on my wedding ring. I later received an earful from my five-year-old daughter for that one.



When everything was wired up, I plugged into a power supply and stomped on the footswitch. I nearly leapt with joy as the tiny yellow light flashed to life. Now only one thing remained: to test the pedal.

Pedal test I

I picked my heart up off the floor and sheepishly pulled out my camera. I was going to have to send my mentor some pictures so he could help me troubleshoot. I concluded the e-mail by saying: Aside from the fact that it looks like it was wired by a blind 6 year old, can you tell what I did wrong?

I waited for a response, hoping I hadn't let Alfie down too badly. Thankfully, his response was both insightful and overly kind.

Thanks for the pictures. Attached are the same pictures modified with additional wiring and one terminal change.

From what I can see, you have wired your main input 'hot' signal to the 'Ring' terminal of the main input jack, which means when you plug a guitar lead into your pedal, you are connecting the input to ground. Thus no signal will pass...



If this does not help, it could be the 6yr old blind kid you hired to wire it up, as it is a bit on the messy side. But from what I can see, everything is connected. Just keep in mind that if you're actually going to use this at a gig, you may want to get all the same gauge and type of wire and then practice soldering a bit so you have all smooth corrections. It really does make a difference in sound for passive switchers if the solder joints and wire are clean. I know this is you first pedal, and you have done a great job... much better than the crap I churned out when I started making effects. I had solder drips everywhere, and I think I still have a few scars on my hands from burning myself.

I knew that last bit was self-deprecating BS, but it did make me feel better. Twenty minutes later, I had made Alfie's recommended changes, and I was ready to retest the pedal.


### Pedal test II

The most surprising part of this project was the overwhelming sense of accomplishment I felt when it was complete. What I accomplished was not very difficult. I was provided with a list of parts, detailed instructions, and expert troubleshooting. It would almost have been more impressive if I had somehow managed to fail.

I know all this, but I still feel proud. Where there was a pile of electronic supplies, there now sits a functional guitar pedal. I will build another pedal. Maybe not soon (there are far too many worlds left to dabble in, after all), but eventually.

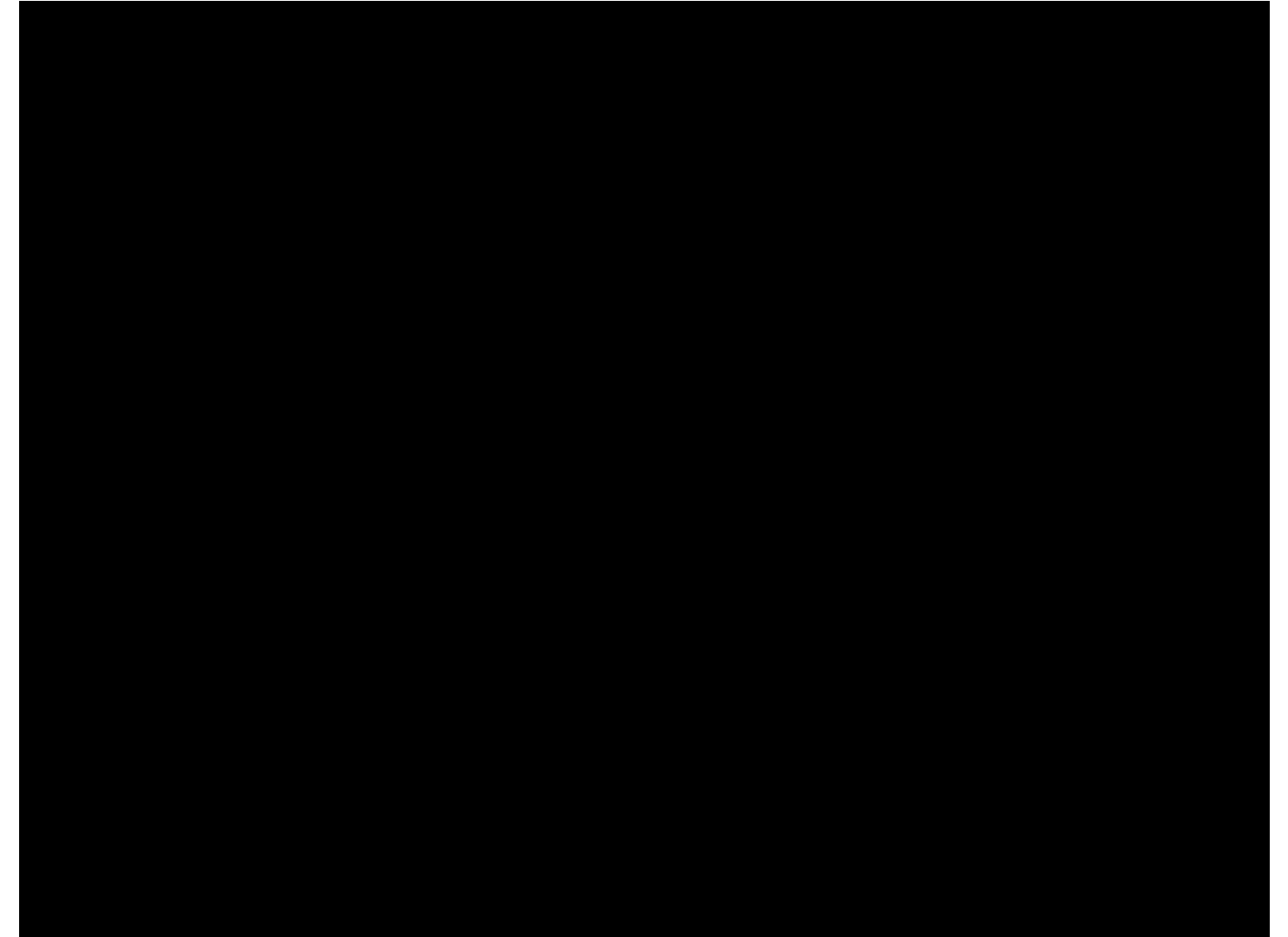
Before I move on to my next dabble, I have one more task left to complete. Yes, my pedal works, but it still looks like it was wired by a blind six-year-old. I want to redo the wiring. I want to have clean, strong connections I can be confident in. I want to make my mentor proud. Most of all, I want to once again feel the sense of accomplishment that comes from a job well-done.



Next Issue: The Dabbler Plays a Comic Book Convention. 

## Soloing Concepts

By Steve Benford



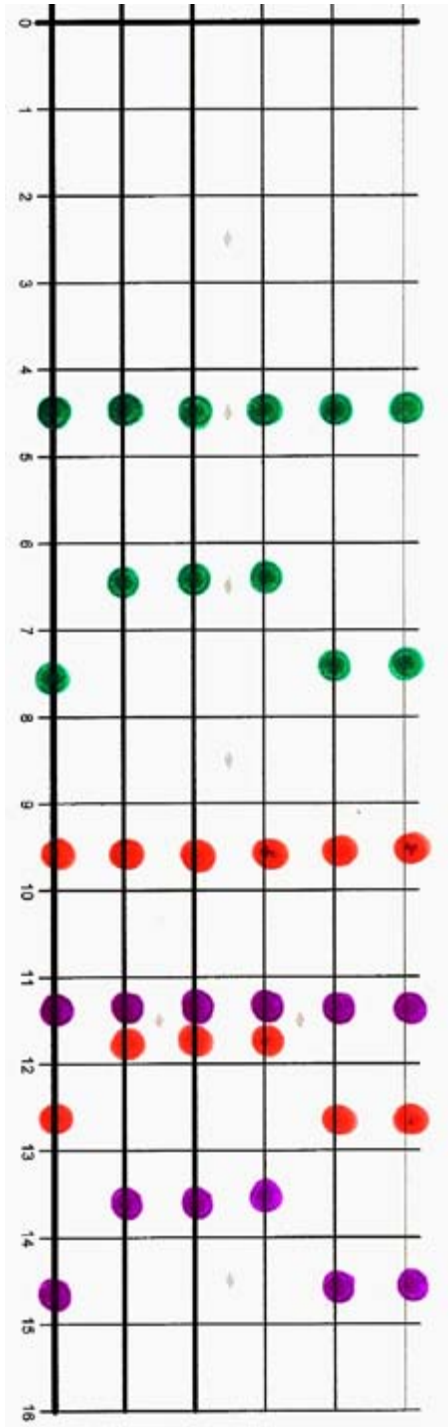
### Soloing Concepts with Steven Benford

In the Soloing Concepts series, Steve Benford demonstrates several down and dirty methods to improve your guitar soloing and improvising skills. In this installment, Steve presents 'Practical Pentatonics', a thoughtful and fresh approach to a familiar topic.

AM JAM by Steven Benford



Steve Benford has been playing guitar for 25 years. He is a guitar teacher of 15 years, a solo artist, and the founder of Benford Guitars, a custom guitar building shop near Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Benford Guitars specializes in creating one-of-a-kind electric guitars, basses, and lap steels. Check out their work at [www.benfordguitars.com](http://www.benfordguitars.com) 🎸



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*...for something completely different...*

**Malinoski** Guitar



## Tone on a Budget

By Russell Southard

I feel good. I have reached a rational decision that all guitarists and musicians have made one time or another. Please join me for a quick jaunt through my psyche while I share with you the mind of someone who has wholly succumbed to Gear Acquisition Syndrome (GAS). That physiological and insidious attack on all common sense. This journey should feel familiar and scary; illogical and dissonant to the healthy; and totally sane and rational to the afflicted.



Figure 1: Taylor 616CE (Mine will look different).

Yes, there was no doubt, this was THE acoustic guitar for me. This guitar was the ideal goal to work toward getting. My acoustic soul mate. I even decided to purchase the guitar directly from the Taylor Custom Shop. I figured if I was going to save up and buy a guitar that sounded perfect, it should look perfect as well.

GAS struck me in my youth. After twenty-plus years of trying out different techniques for saving money, all of them ending up with me spending dollars on stuff I ultimately regret and never use, I found a method that works for me. I don't have a good acoustic, and getting one certainly fit into my purchasing process. I am happy to say I am on track to buy my custom guitar.

This is not solely an exercise to buy an amazing guitar, though. This is also my effort to break a bad habit where I am unable to save money. I won't lie, I'm awful at saving money and the hardest part of saving is the ever-increasing coolness of OTHER gear I could buy as my jar of change grows. Temptation is hard to resist. So far, I have been able to resist any and all temptations that have come up.

My meta-plan has been to save up and get my Taylor, and then save up and buy an Orange TH30 amplifier head. The TH30 is an amazing amp that showcases all guitars excellently and contains, somewhere in its awesome amp guts, MY sound. To me, it speaks with the most authority, and is easy to use. It has so much tonal versatility. In short, it is my dream amp.

But, I am a patient guy. Sort of. The Taylor first, then the Orange. Right? I do not currently gig. I use amp simulators on my computer to record anything I want. The desire for the TH30 is strong, but the need is lacking. I'm trying to increase my patience and resolve here, so the idea of delaying my gratification is one I thought would be worthwhile. Until now, anyway.

Dilemma time.

A friend of mine started a band recently and asked me to help cover the song "Tequila." They aren't a huge band. They're just a bunch of friends having fun. But there is still going to be a public recording of me playing guitar. I would like to sound like me, or the version of me that comes out when pumped through an Orange TH30.

Note how the mind generates excuses. Notice how sinister GAS can be...

There are several reasons to get this amplifier, or (at the very least) pretty good grounds to indulge myself. I could rationalize that I am helping my friend (how nice of me). Or, I would feel better about my own playing as the sound would match what is in my head (how tonally conscious of me). At the end of the day I would go home with a sweet amp—just in case I ever got called into the same situation (that's just good preparation).

But, as sanity pops its head up, I cannot ignore that one of the benefits saving up for the Taylor is actually delaying gratification for something of great value. I certainly wouldn't feel very good about myself if I broke open the piggy bank to buy something else—even something as cool as the TH30. I would be left feeling pretty guilty and angry at myself, having seriously delayed my delayed gratification. (I would have a cool amp, though!)

The saving dam would be broken permanently, however. Right now I have my eyes focused pretty strongly on the Taylor and if I gave in early and purchased the Orange, would I get back on track? Would I be able to resist the temptations that inevitably come to a gear-head like myself? There are so many cool things out there that are just waiting to be picked up, from Billy Zoom's hand-wired reverb/tremolo unit called the Little Kahuna, to Lee Ranaldo's signature Jazzmaster, to something as low-cost as a Squier Classic Vibe Telecaster that would make for an excellent project guitar.

If I give in now, will I ever be able to save as much as I need to in order to get my ultimate Acoustic? I would like to think that I could strong-arm the temptations, or at least put them on the back burner.

This recording project is not an immediate need. My friend bravely serves in the United States Air Force and will be deployed until later this year giving me time to think about my predicament—which may not be the best thing in the world.

In the meantime, I came up with what I think may be a good compromise. I have saved up a significant chunk of money for my Taylor and it is highly probable that, even if I loved the amp, the guilt would not feel good. Therefore, I decided not to touch my Taylor fund, but I will put it on the backburner. Between now and the time my friend arrives back from the desert, I will try and save up enough money for the Orange. If I succeed, I will buy the amp. If I do not succeed, I won't buy the amp and will put the money into the Taylor fund. If that happens, I will either borrow some gear or make do with what I have.

I hope to a few of you, the above logic is indeed familiar. I am aware that if I look a little harder at my plan, it contains plenty of holes. But, part of coping with GAS, and getting away with it is being able to trick yourself—not thinking too hard about the logistics of getting what you want in the moment.





Temptation often does not follow logic or attack at times convenient to a GAS-inflicted buyer. There is no reason I should want another Telecaster as I already have two, but since when does reason factor into GAS?

One coping mechanism is the GAS list. For example, I WILL get a Telecaster, but at a time down the road. I prioritize the entries. Like telling a child “maybe” or “some other day.” Perhaps postponing a decision might actually lead to forgetting about the desire. I try and let GAS run its course thinking, “maybe after the Taylor.”

As an impatient patient guy, I want one thing now and another later. This is just one more reason I am trying to hold onto this dream Taylor as a behavioral modification exercise, and not just a saving exercise. I write lists, forget them, and revisit later thinking, “I’m so glad I didn’t buy that particular piece of gear! I have no need for it now and my tastes have changed.” Knowing I have a tendency of going hot to cold on gear—with actual examples, I feel better about saving for these one or two pieces that I genuinely want and will wait to buy.

Make no mistake: I WILL buy my dream Taylor and I WILL buy an Orange TH30 head. Those two pieces of gear have been the highest entries on every GAS list I’ve made since I experienced them. It’s just a matter of time.

But, that is the sickness that is GAS. Needs, wants, and reality all merge together into one big blob of cognitive dissonance. There are all sorts of political and social reasons GAS is so prevalent in the music scene (as well as all fields), but what is most interesting is how the mind develops coherent stories that permit us to succumb to temptation.

Hopefully, my mind isn’t all that different from yours. And, your GAS journey isn’t all that different from mine.

Russell “Pappy” Southard is a guitar enthusiast most likely to an unhealthy degree. He thinks the guitar is the pinnacle of art, appealing to all the human senses that matter, and he is constantly lusting over new finds. He is also the head writer for the guitar/music blog The Fifth Fret (<http://www.fifthfret.org>) where he spares his wife his ramblings, sharing them instead with his readers. 🎸

## Cool, Non-Guitarists You Should Know: Alex Freeman



*This is a regular feature where The Guitar Note will interview an interesting, innovative, and great musician—who doesn’t play the guitar. These profiles will focus on people you may never have heard before, but definitely should take a listen to.*

**Our first Non-Guitarist is singer/songwriter front man, Alex Freeman. Alex is also professor of music at Carleton College in Minnesota. He splits his time between the United States and Finland, where his band Alex Freeman Popshow is about to issue their new EP. You can find Alex and his music (CDs and downloads) at [alexfreemanmusic.com](http://alexfreemanmusic.com).**

### Background

I started out studying composition at the Eastman School of Music. I got my Master’s degree studying more composition at Boston University, and then I took a couple of years off. After that, I did a Doctorate at Juilliard School, and from there I got a Fulbright to go to Finland and I did my Doctoral document. My research focused on one of the symphonies of Jean Sibelius, the Finnish composer.

I ended up just staying in Finland for six years after that, partially because I was teaching, and I liked it there. Something about the atmosphere, and the community, and the quietness of nature kept me there for

quite a while. And, then of course, just as I was ready to leave, I met somebody and have gone back and forth since.

## POPSHOW

I think it started at the Sibelius Academy, which is a conservatory. They had a karaoke night and I did a couple of songs. Some of the musicians I ended up playing with enjoyed my singing and thought it might be fun to do a show. It's a little club that the Academy runs called Feeniks (Pheonix), and we thought it would be fun to put together a concert of songs that I know. The plan was to do all covers.

I made little arrangements of a bunch of my favorite songs for bass, drums, and me (piano/vocals)— just the trio. We did a bunch of my favorite stuff. Some Elton John songs, some They Might Be Giants type stuff, Elvis Costello, and a lot of Ben Folds. But, it was when we were rehearsing and just jamming on grooves and chord progressions that I really started to think I should write some of my own songs while we're doing this. I was dealing with a giant mess of personal stuff at the time, so writing torch songs came pretty easy to me and I churned out dozens of them in just a couple of months. Some written at the guitar, some at the piano, and a lot in the shower. So we ended up doing a few originals in that first set, and then we just kept going from there. Then, the next times we played it was almost all-original stuff, and we kind of scrapped the covers for the most part.

## Balancing Classical Composition, Songwriting, and Teaching

It amazes me how much teaching music has affected my compositions, and a lot of the teaching that I do, is related to songwriting. I find that I approach my work asking myself the question, “What would I tell a student if they brought this to me?” I didn't used to do that.

My classical training can get in the way sometimes when writing my songs. In the academy you are trained to do more than you need to do, whereas with writing songs, often less is more. And that's hard for somebody with academic training to unlearn. I think the poster children for this were Bernstein and Gershwin—the former always tried to deny his tendency to do excessively “learned” stuff all the time and write clearer music, while the latter, who wrote great big tunes but had not as much training in form, per se, always tried to embed his great melodic stuff into a musical argument that held up beyond just sounding great in the moment.

## Upcoming Song

There's one song that I made a really, really super low fi, Garageband type demo of a few years back that we've always wanted to make a proper version of. But, we are working on it now. It's called Paul Simon. It's a song about a dream I had about meeting Paul Simon, showing him my songs, and talking to him about songwriting. It's a fun song in a way, but I think it's really an honest tribute.

## The Band

Lauri Schreck, Drums; Jomppa Kuhlefeldt, sound; Sara Suvela, bass; and Tuuli Saarnio, accordion.

## Paul Simon

I've always loved Paul Simon. I probably remember his music before any other music since I became a living organism on this planet. I think his music is really interesting in that it got more and more complex

in the '70s harmonically. Then, in the last fifteen or twenty years it's gotten less and less complex. You're back to two and three chord songs. He still does interesting things within that structure, but he's really, really streamlined his harmonic language in a way that I think is fascinating. And I think it has something to teach to somebody learning in the academy. Not that you can't write harmonically complex songs and have them turn out well. But Paul Simon in particular, proved the power of simplicity over and over again.

The other thing that Paul Simon does is to just take a single line of lyric—that in of itself could be very plain— elaborates on it so poetically. I think that's something that interests me.

## Writing Lyrics

Writing lyrics is really terribly difficult for me. A lot of the best songwriters don't write directly about their personal experience. They're more like people who write creative fiction. They invent a character, and they tell a story from that character's point of view. There's a universality in the story that they're telling so everybody who listens to it thinks that song's about them. I think that's really hard to do. It's a really fine balance you have to walk between telling all the pertinent personal information that nobody knows and the stuff nobody really cares about. But, you also have to say something that does connect in a personal way. It's gotta be earnest. Something that's real.

I've yet to figure out how to do this in an efficient way. It takes me too long to get lyrics done. It's the hardest thing. I think if I found a really good lyricist I would probably have an easier time.

## Simple As It Is

*“Simple as It Is”*

My song Simple As It Is. was one of the hardest ones to write. I spent so much time. We played that song over and over again with me just kind of improvising stuff. How that song started out and how it ended up are really very different. I had an idea of what the song was about, but it was a really vague idea. It wasn't a particular thing, but somewhere in there – there was a musical idea. Just that ascending scale, and having it end up in different harmonic places, that was a technical thing. The first time I sang “Simple As It Is” over a recurring melodic fragment, I said okay, well maybe that's the line that I want to keep. And then I built the song around that.

That was a particularly difficult one. It's a long tune, and I wanted it to explode there near the end. With all that “goodbye” stuff. You have to set that up if you want there to be a really good payoff.

## Listening

What I try to do is not listen to a piece of music in a way where I'm trying to decide whether I like it, because then, I think I'm listening to it too technically. These days when I listen to songs, there's some little learning motor in the back of my brain that's always wondering if this is a good song for one of my classes. I'm always thinking, “Is this a teachable song?” Which, I think, has fundamentally changed the way I listen to music. Not necessarily for the better or worse. But, I certainly don't listen to songs without thinking of them in terms of what's going on and what aspects of them are new. Or, what aspects of them are conventional? Or, what aspects of them can be identified easily?



I really know I like something if I'm listening to it and I'm not thinking about any of that. Perhaps, I've become too analytical. If I don't become analytical, then maybe that's a good sign.

#### What Are You Listening to Now?

Right now I'm actually listening to a lot of 19th Century music because I'm teaching a class on art songs next spring. I'm trying to rediscover some romantic art songs that aren't depressing. My problem is that I keep giving them these art songs to analyze, and they're all about suicide, or death. I think it bums them out.

There's plenty of really happy 19th Century music. Personally, I've been drawn towards those Schubert songs from his song cycles where the main character is peering into the river and deciding whether to drown himself and that kind of thing. This is at least in part because I am better able to play them than the faster tempo stuff. So, I'm trying to find a few new examples in that area.

Otherwise, I've just been listening to an album by a band called Future Islands called *On The Water*, which is great. I've been listening to the New Pornographers a lot. They're also really great. They keep bubbling back up to the top of my list.

I just listened to a couple of Simon & Garfunkel albums for the first time in a long while. I think I over-listened to them when I was an undergraduate. And, then a whole lot of classical music. Stuff from my composition class.

### Considering the Guitar

The first thing I would consider is that somebody else should play the guitar because I'm a terrible guitarist. I only have the kind of chops that someone needs to strum through a few songs.

I like a good, lush guitar sound. For me, the guitar serves two purposes. It has a melodic ability that can reinforce the melody. And, then it's an endless source of sound material. I think in a way it's a daunting instrument to me, because I don't have all those gadgets. If I were to just monkey around with an electric guitar and a bunch of pedals— filters and all sorts of thing— then I might feel less impeded by the guitar. Certainly being in the room when somebody plays guitar, I get a real sense of how that instrument can work in my songs.

I usually like to leave it to the guitarist. I often, when we rehearse with the band, have a few ideas. The same thing with drums. I'm usually more specific with bass. I usually have a really clear idea of what kind of bass line I want, but with drums and guitar— those are such micro-manageable worlds— I usually just leave it to the person playing it.

But, I will have an opinion and sometimes that gets interesting. That's too much, or that's not enough. When I think of guitar I try to imagine how its sound is going to fit in more than anything else. 🎸



## Schooled in Luthiery

By P.T. Hylton



Few things in life can match the intimacy of playing a guitar. Striking the strings, feeling the instrument respond, and hearing it sing – this is a visceral experience.

Maybe the only person with a deeper connection to the instrument than the player is the luthier. Many guitarists dream of having both experiences. They aspire to see their own name on the headstock, run their hands over wood they have carefully and lovingly worked to perfection, and play an instrument they willed to life.

At the Lehtela Guitar Craft School of Luthiery in Charlotte, North Carolina, Ari Lehtela has been turning guitar players into guitar builders for more than a decade. Before taking on a new student, he sits them down for an important discussion.

“I tell them: ‘This is not going to be all fun and games. I don’t want to mislead you. I don’t want you to think we are going to listen to jazz, chit-chat, and maybe move a chip every once in a while. It’s going to be work. The more you get into it, the more work it becomes.’ Most students are completely unaware of that. They think it is going to be all fun. Fun is part of it, but it is work.”

Lehtela is originally from Finland, but he began his career as a musician in the Florida panhandle in the 1980s. “I did the usual things that most musicians do in a regional situation: bar bands, all styles. Mainly jazz, but I did my share of country, rock, and beach music. I tried to weasel in as much jazz as possible.

“I went through a lot of different guitars, which probably led to my guitar building. There would have been 335s, some other Gibsons, your usual Fenders... a lot of them probably really great guitars. But, at the time I wasn't really aware of what to look for. Back then I was just a player, and I didn't know anything about the mechanics of the instrument. You go through a lot of guitars when you don't really understand what makes a guitar good or bad.”

Lehtela remembers a specific encounter that changed everything for him. “It's probably true of a lot of luthiers. They are musicians with instruments that leave something to be desired, and something happens along the way that precipitates a shift. For me, it was meeting a certain guitar builder here in North Carolina. It sort of sparked something in me. Before I knew it, I had a tool in my hand, and I was trying to build something. I think that builder wanted me to buy one of his guitars, and he was a little disappointed when I started building. But then he took me under his wing and said, ‘Why don't you give me some guitar lessons, and I'll teach you how to build.’



“I didn't set out to do it for a living, but, little by little, word got out about my guitars. I was a guitar teacher, and I would bring my guitar to the lessons. My students would ask, ‘What is that? Can I try it?’ Eventually someone wanted to buy one.”

Ari came to guitar building from the fine arts world, and it shows. His guitars are masterful examples of clean lines and intricate attention to detail. “In addition to music, my background is in graphic design and

illustration. That is very helpful for anybody in any type of a craft, being able to identify nuances and subtleties and realize them in wood. If you don't have that, the products that you build are going to lack something. “

Lehtela Guitars straddle the line between the familiar and the exotic. The body shapes are recognizable and welcoming, but distinctive enough to invite a closer look. He uses top quality woods and showcases them in unique ways. His Tango Petite, for instance, is a 7/8 size guitar with a Redwood top and a neck built from a single piece of Macassar Ebony. His other models commonly include features like adjustable soundholes on the side of the guitar and movable floating pickups.

The School of Luthiery held its first classes not long after Ari began building professionally. “The school has been running for almost fifteen years. Originally it wasn't as organized. Now we have a very specific schedule of classes. It used to be a lot more informal. We would take an individual and teach them to build a Telecaster. You know, with two pickups and a bolt-on neck. It's probably the simplest solidbody to build. There's not as much challenging stuff going on there as with most other types of instruments.”

The program has grown up since those early, Tele-building days. “Little by little, year by year, I would tweak the program, adding more teachers, including my former apprentice, Bil Jones, of Fret Garage in Gastonia, North Carolina ([www.fretgarage.com](http://www.fretgarage.com)). He and I are the two main teachers today, and we have one more specialty teacher for acoustic instruments. We now have two locations where we teach. It seems to just keep growing. Some years we've had to turn away students, and other years we are waiting for the classes to fill when the schedule comes out in January. But mainly it has been very successful.

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“We try to keep the class size at two to four people. We prefer two as opposed to four. Then we also have private instruction available, which is one-on-one. We have also had people from surrounding states who are able to hang out in Charlotte for a weekend or two. In those situations, we can do condensed classes or run classes on back-to-back days for them. They just need to have their own accommodations.”

The current School of Luthiery program is a two-year curriculum that progresses from basic guitar maintenance to hand building an instrument.

The first year is comprised of eight courses covering the knowledge and skills Ari feels a student must have before embarking on a full build. Topics include guitar setups, fret leveling and crowning, nut and saddle making, electronics, refretting and more.

“The classes start out short. Early on, they are literally one afternoon, but, as they get into the third class, fourth class and so on, it becomes a whole weekend. Then two weekends. It may be more than that for certain individuals depending on their learning curve.”

The final course of the first year is ‘Intro to Guitar Building’, where Ari works with the student to design and plan their first instrument. By this point in the year, Lehtela is familiar enough with the students’ abilities and working styles that he is able to guide them toward an appropriate first build.

“I will definitely discourage certain things if I know an individual doesn’t possess the skills to do it because otherwise we are going to fight it the whole way. If they are overshooting, I’ll tell them, ‘Maybe that needs to be your second guitar. Let’s build something along those lines, but simplified.’ But the opposite can happen too. I may have an individual that has a really good skill set, and they just want to build a solidbody or something very basic. I may tell them ‘Hey, you’ve already got a solidbody. I think you’re ready for something else. Even though it may be your first guitar, don’t be afraid to take on a challenge.’”

Year two of the program is the ‘Guitar Building Master Class’. “When they get into phase two, the guitar building part of it, that pretty much takes the whole year. Now, it’s not like we meet every day. We usually have one 2-3 hour meeting per week. If you do the math, that adds up to a lot of hours. It may be shorter for some people if they have their own woodworking shop or a background in building. They may be able to knock it out in half that time.

“It is very much within the realm of possibility that a first time builder can craft a very good sounding instrument, and it also may be true that a good builder might take seven or eight or twelve tries to get one that is to his satisfaction.”

Ari points out that there are many factors at play in a guitar build. When a first timer does produce a superior instrument, it may not all be natural talent. “Keep in mind that we are dealing with organic material. It’s not necessarily a situation where a student, because of their skills, can just magically transform the wood to sound good. In those instances, they more than likely just had really good wood. Very responsive, highly vibrant, resonating wood.

“Then someone may build ten guitars, all following the textbook, and they might all be crappy. Or, they might build one, think it is going to be just another guitar, and it all comes together. They think, ‘Oh my God, what happened here?’ Sometimes, when you are not expecting it, it happens.

“The main thing at first is just to enjoy the process. Enjoy what you’re doing and be into what you are doing. It’s going to be what it is going to be.”

While prior guitar or woodworking experience is helpful, Ari says it is not the most important quality he looks for in prospective students. “The prerequisite is really just the preceding class, just like in any school. I do get students with a pretty extensive background, and that does make it so much easier. But I am not going to turn anybody away as long as they are committed. If they are committed, it doesn’t matter to me if they are a slow, medium, or fast learner.”

Ari’s students aren’t the only ones who get something meaningful out of the experience. Taking students into the shop and sharing the hard-won knowledge that has come from years of luthiery is rewarding for the teacher as well.



When the feeling is good, he is going to feel better about his playing. It's all integrated.

"I don't want to give anyone the impression that I've got it all figured out. Even after doing this for many years, I am still trying to figure things out myself. I think it's kind of a trap to build a certain model a certain way and then say, 'Boy, that sounds good. I am going to build ten more exactly like that.' A painter is not going to paint one really good painting ten times. A guitar builder is an artist. He's like a painter who works with wood. You keep on moving. You acknowledge what you've done, and that doesn't mean that you are never going to do it again, but you keep moving forward.

"If it doesn't work out, there is always the bandsaw. Cut it up, move on, and try again."

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*To learn more about the Lehtela Guitar Craft School of Luthiery and to see more of Ari's guitars visit <http://www.lehtelaguitarcraft.com/>. 🎸*


"When you're in teaching mode, you are in direct contact with the student. It's not only the building of that instrument, but you are dealing with the person too. When you are building for a client, you might never even meet the client. In some ways it is less personal. You are focused on the instrument. When you are teaching, you are focused on the person."

One of the key principles Ari strives to teach his students is this: a guitar is not just an object used to create art; it can be a work of art itself.

"One could say that the aesthetic is just the aesthetic and doesn't affect the function, but the two are highly connected. You have to design from a standpoint of the mechanics and structural type of things, and most really nice sounding instruments have a very good aesthetic, too. The execution of certain lines and shapes is going to affect the way the guitar sounds. If you put a curve in a certain place, it is going to increase or decrease the mass or the volume of air.

"But, then beyond that, if a player has an instrument that sounds good plus they like the aesthetics and the way it ergonomically sits and balances against their body, it is going to make them play better. There's almost a mysterious quality to it. We can't quite quantify what's going on there, but there is something beyond just the physical dimensions of that instrument. It's the whole package and how the person feels about the instrument.






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