

## INSIDE

Meet the Mighty  
Tone Kings...  
Eric Johnson &  
Sonny Landreth  
on Nailing It the  
First Time, Gear,  
Tone Technique  
and More...

13

The Face of Fuzz...  
Vintage Fuzz  
Faces and two  
modern  
alternatives

14

Wee Heavy &  
Bold As Luv...  
Our 1968  
Marshall  
basketweave cab  
meets the 4x12 TV  
reissue

15

Victoria Sovereign

17

CR Coils... The  
Crossroads Set  
Reviewed

# the ToneQuest

*The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone*

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## Report™

## Eric Johnson

*Walk this way as we breeze through the zany throng at the mega-music-thrash known as Jazz Fest in New Orleans, cold Abita Turbo Dogs and fried oyster poboyos in hand. From a distant stage we hear a singing, soaring guitar, and there is no doubt about who's playing — and we mean none... In our world, signature tone that is immediately identifiable from 100 yards away is the mark of a master, and we've got two waiting in the wings for you in this issue — Eric Johnson, of Austin, Texas and Sonny Landreth, from Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.*



*Is there a more legendary tone freak on the planet than Eric Johnson? No. But his reputation as a virtuoso with flawless, magical tone hasn't come cheap... His quest for tone has always been rooted in vintage Stratocasters, 335's and plexi-era Marshall amps — a necessary and considerable professional expense to be sure — but there have been other costs, too. Creativity and perfection can be dissonant moving targets, and by his own admission, Eric has grappled with both — particularly in the studio. Having experienced the mind-numbing effect of repeatedly tracking a guitar part until the tape heads were loaded with precious oxide (and cymbal sizzle), we understand. Thanks to digital recording, that pesky oxide problem needn't exist today, but as you are about to hear from two very different, yet equally discriminating and incredibly talented players, sometimes... if but to keep the magic alive... you gotta just walk in, set up, hit that little red button and keep whatever happens to come the first time. It is an honest way to make music, and when you think about it, we love our heroes for their willingness to take risks, for it is at those moments that their greatness is most vividly revealed.*

We send our sincere thanks to guitarist Mike Brannon for making his interview with Eric available to TQR, to Eric Johnson for delivering a typically inspired and toneful performance at Atlanta's Variety Playhouse, and to Sonny Landreth for rocking the house at the Mercy Lounge in Nashville. It's no coincidence that two of our favorite guitarists share a very down-to-earth, bemused sensibility about playing the guitar for a living. Enjoy...

*If you flew into Austin and were to drive around the city, you'd barely have an inkling of the musical talent hidden in these hills. Among other things, you'd see Dell and Intel as well as the clubs lining the streets below the Capitol and possibly surmise it to be Texas' center of technology and government. And it is. But what's not as evident is that Austin also holds the title of live music capital of the US — and possibly the world.*

*In the near orbit to planet Austin are Dallas and Houston — larger, more gravity-intense masses — yet possessing far inferior scenes. Even LA and NYC's annual music conferences are dwarfed by Austin's SXSW, where music dignitaries and hopefuls rub elbows each Spring in the hopes of making the deals that will supply consumers with what they think we want to hear the rest of the year. Rising above all the hype, posturing and clatter is a guitarist and musician beyond categorization offering an incendiary answer for what's missing most in music today: substance, character, originality, tone, clarity, truth. From classical piano as a kid to progressive rock guitar prodigy as a teen and now Grammy winning, poll-topping solo recording artist and composer, Eric Johnson now steps out of Austin much more regularly, but sonically, he never really leaves. His carefully cultivated blues roots remain intact, retaining their integrity regardless of venue, country or language. And like music itself, Eric Johnson's music speaks directly to the soul of those fortunate to hear and experience it.*

**TQR:** What was Austin like when you were coming up in the '70s?

Like San Marcos is now — laid back, and it was great. Now that I look back on it, I realize how nice that was. It was a real special time to be here. Austin still had all the things that it does now, but it was more of a *private* scene. There wasn't the traffic, but it was a bustling music scene. Even when I was 14 years old, it seemed like there was always a lot going on musically in Austin. When I was 18 or 19, I'd go to LA and the first time I was ever there I thought, "I'm from Austin and there's more of a music scene there." I mean, not starting with the record industry, but just bands and clubs in the '70s, it seems there was more of a music scene here than there was in LA in certain ways.

**TQR:** Is that where you tended to go for the session work you've done?

A lot I did here...Carole King, and some in Florida and some in New York.

**TQR:** How did they hear of you?

Well, I was working with a guy that worked with John McLaughlin and Lenny White. Stanley Clarke and I got involved with him and he got me some session work with Cat Stevens. I'm not sure...Carole King came to Austin and did a couple of records and they just called me to do some tracks. I like doing that.

**TQR:** You recorded with Steve Morse at one time, right?

We did a couple of tunes together. I'd love to work with him again. He's definitely a *great* player (laughs). He's such a well-rounded guy, too. He can do anything. And he's just wonderful on acoustic guitar. His concept of acoustic guitar is so great. He just writes these beautiful things.

**TQR:** How much of what you do is intuition?

I think a *lot* of it is intuition — a kind of spontaneity, improvised on the moment — and then even the stuff that *isn't* still is intuition in a way, because you've intuitively worked it out before. I think the best music for me is intuitive, but then you have to be available and adjusted — psychically or experientially — adjusted to be available for that. If you do that part, then you are available, and that intuitive thinking happens, and you make the best music you possibly can.

**TQR:** Tell me about *Alien Love Child*...



It's something that started about four or five years ago. We just got together for fun 'cause we were all doing different stuff. We thought, "Why don't we come up with this premise of a band where we rehearse for two hours and play a show and it's all improvisation, and we thought, "Well, we'll make it kind of *bluesy*..." Those were our roots... and one thing led to another and we just kept doing gigs now and then. We decided to do some shows and we recorded three.

**TQR:** At Antone's...

Yes, and then we went through the tapes and decided which

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night had the best takes and just put the record together. So it has morphed into a thing where at this point we're doing the record and we already have a lot of material for a second record and we decided to go out and do some touring and see what happened — just have fun.

**TQR:** I think a lot of people may have been surprised that you were able to do a live record.



A lot of people had asked me to, and it was a good outlet. It wasn't as hard as I thought it was going to be (laughs.)

I was talking to somebody the other day and I was saying this was a very cathartic record for me to make because it helped me get over some glitches that I'd encountered in the last few years. I think it's good that I've averted going that way, which is succumbing to and being so *mental*. It's funny — I think there's a place for everything, and there's a place to be a perfectionist, you know? Wes Montgomery's place to be the perfectionist was when his wife went to bed and the house was quiet. He would sit and just work real hard, and that allowed him to walk through that corridor of freedom to where he could go play gigs and...

**TQR:** He had to deal with the fact that the neighbors insisted that he keep it down, and it became part of his playing — the sensitivity of it. He worked 16 hours a day as a welder. I don't know how he did it.

I don't know how he did it either. He slept four hours a day. Isn't that amazing? And talk about intuition... But you know, I think that's what I was heading toward... I was putting it in an inappropriate place, which is sitting in the studio and fiddling with stuff. So doing the live record was a reality check for me.

**TQR:** Perhaps this group helped you break out of some habits...

I think so, and to address and take a frontal look at stuff that I needed to work on — trying to get to the point where you spend your time practicing and working on your music so

that you're more free to play spontaneously instead of sitting in the studio. But the moment you make a rule of how it needs to be done, the next time you're gonna need to bust the rule. You have to be *malleable*. The general rule of thumb for me was not to adjust that style of just getting too micro-focused... So it was a good record to make for that.

**TQR:** Were you thinking '60s power trio — *Cream* and Hendrix — that kind of thing?

Yeah, if I'm going to be completely intuitive and spontaneous and do a rock thing, it's gonna have blues roots, 'cause that's what I grew up on. It's gonna be a little reminiscent of *Cream* and Hendrix, 'cause *that's* what I grew up on. The premise of the band was to do just what came absolutely natural from your roots and your heritage. What Clapton did at that period, like "Spoonful" and that effect where you just floor an all-tube amp that has a great tone... there's a lot of room and more places you can go with that. I'll be the first to admit that there's some stuff on that recording that's very derivative of Clapton from the *Wheels of Fire* era, and personally, I don't have a problem with it because, well, to me it's what really turned me onto guitar in the first place. So if you add to that, OK... now where can we take that? Because I think you *can* take it somewhere. It's like you can listen to Benny Goodman and think, "Oh, what if he did a little of that stuff?" You know, a lot of the acoustic instruments of the 40's have an amazing sound when they're really jammin' out, and Clapton had an amazing sound during that period. So there are all sorts of little genres that you could put together that could become an arrow that can go into the future.

**TQR:** And what they have in common is the fact that you're pushing those respective instruments to the limit, like you do with the Marshalls cranked...

That's what got me interested in playing, *completely*.

**TQR:** How do you go about composing?

A lot of times it's cool, and it can be agony. More often than not the agony stuff never pans out, 'cause you're laboring over it. The best thing is to kind of just go with what the muse says and then there will be a bit of post-work where you'll have to put the pieces together, but I think that the most fun is when you just see what happens, and then once you can get the biggest section of natural stuff, let the lexiconic part of the mind come in and put the pieces together. But the longer you can hold off on doing that, the more of a pure kind of thing you'll have, and that varies. A lot of times I'll want to jump in — "Ok, I want to put this here and then we'll repeat this part," and if you do that too soon, you get too mentally involved and you can spoil that natural thing a little bit.

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**TQR:** Do you allow for some feedback from band members?

Yeah, it really helps to do that. You can even get feedback from your audience. It's interesting... I think audiences are actually very hip, because they just listen to how their heart feels, and just because they don't know the ABC's of music doesn't mean they're not extremely hip about knowing simply what they like and what they don't like — what moves them and what doesn't move them. If I do new songs live, some songs get a lot of response... others, you know right there — well, this one needs work, or throw it out. It tells you a lot.

**TQR:** How about your instructional videos? The first one is probably the best I've seen. Do you pick up from where you left off?

The premise of those instruction videos was that I tried to cover all the bases, so I don't know where I would go except to maybe elaborate more or take a definitive style and elaborate on it or come up with some explicit kind of lessons. I thought about doing one on trying to help people get their sound and how to work on that, but that's so complex...

**TQR:** How *would* you go about that?

(laughs) That's exactly what I was saying. I'm having enough trouble with that, personally.

**TQR:** What inspires you? Are there certain subjects that inspire you to write a vocal tune?

*Anything* can inspire you. You have to come up with a little inertia — take a couple of steps. Take the discipline to come up with a little bit of fundamental inertia so that you can get that inspiration. I don't think it just falls out of the sky. You have to take the necessary steps to be in tune with letting that inspiration happen. At that point, if you're attentive, inspiration can come from a lot of stuff, because you've adjusted to be available to *see*. The inspiration is actually raining down 24 hours a day for everybody — it's just whether we're open to it or not. So, the thing is to try to get *more* open to it.

**TQR:** We're probably more practiced at disregarding it. Do you meditate daily?

Yes. Anytime you're able to just concentrate and still your mind, it's always going to help you. I think that's why people do TM — for the benefits of it. If you draw yourself in and focus and channel your energy, then all of a sudden you are a little bit more empowered. You're reaching more for that empowerment in your center where you can think more effectively or feel more effectively or see what it is you want or



need to do more effectively. Its not a question of necessarily whether or not you've succeeded in being clear or

not... it's the fact that you are attempting to reside in a place that allows you to *become* clear, because it's all relative, and it comes in a certain percentage. It's an ongoing process that takes a whole lifetime.

**TQR:** What do you tend to practice these days?

A lot of times, acoustic guitar — like writing songs on acoustic or just trying to work on my fingerstyle.

**TQR:** You used to put quite a bit of time in between records. To toss them and re-record them must've been agony. What was it you were going for?

I've always found it really difficult to play in the studio. It's just such an *austere* situation, because the audience helps you forget about yourself. And having that microphone inches away from your cabinet just makes everything sound... it's hard to *get* a sound in the studio. You want everything to sound great, and you want to *play* great. But I think it's more of that concept that I'm working on changing, where if you just look at everything like this, you're always going to find what's not quite right. If you just back up and try not to look at the grain of the wood so much, not only will it look better, but you'll find yourself starting to become aware of a dynamic that you can tap into when you quit looking at the grain so closely. So it's a lesson and an experience for me. Until you learn that lesson, which I'm still trying to learn, you just try to do the best you can in the studio. And if you listen to records and the band just sounds killin' and the guitar sounds great and the songs are great and you say, "Well, I'll put a "Strawberry Fields" composition in with cool "All Along the Watchtower" guitar in it or whatever" — then you just set yourself up for such high expectations and... *nothing*. You know what I mean? Feeling that way is all well and good — there's nothing wrong with feeling that way and going for that — but it's really important how you *approach* that challenge. And I think in the past I've approached that challenge in a way that's just... to be really honest with myself, I think some of the ways I've approached it have been self-sabotaging.

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**TQR:** It's a valid temptation for all musicians.

Yeah, we all kind of limit ourselves in some small or big way, and there's no question — the main limiter of me is *myself*. So, if I can start learning to re-adjust the way I approach what I want to do, I think that there won't be as many instances where I'm having to re-do stuff a million times and all that, because that's a dead end. You just wear yourself out. It's like spending a year farming the land and coming up with four potatoes (laughs). But, at the same time, somebody who only does a record every few years — Peter Gabriel... Kate Bush... Jeff Beck... there's nothing wrong with that. I have a tendency to get sidetracked a lot. I'll be recording and a lot of times I'll spend two or three years making a record, but it's not that I'm working on the record

*“All of a sudden your life can go by while you're sitting there trying out speakers.”*

every day. I'll spend a week on the record and week trying to figure out a way to make my amps sound better, which is another Pandora's box in itself. All of a sudden your life can go by while you're sitting there trying out speakers.

**TQR:** People have said that you can tell what type of batteries are in your effects.

You know — I've done tests with people. The interesting thing is that they would automatically say, “There's no way you can tell the difference.” So, I've done tests with other people and I've let them decide, and *they* heard a difference. I don't think it's any big deal that I hear that. A lot of people would hear it. It's a matter of setting up a scenario where you do an A/B comparison. All that stuff adds up — every little piece.

**TQR:** Are you still using George L cords?

Yeah, it's the only stuff I like to use. It's a drag to deal with because it kinks up and it's kind of noisy, but I've never found a cable that sounds better for guitar.

**TQR:** Do you have trouble keeping vintage gear together on the road?

It's really pretty reliable and I don't have a lot of trouble with it — just replace tubes, you know? I used to have tons of speaker trouble when I used 100 watt Marshalls. I was constantly blowing speakers, but now, most all of the time I'll use 50W amps and I don't have so many speaker problems.

**TQR:** What made you back off from the 100W amps?



I damaged my ears four years ago. Fortunately, I just caught it in the nick of time and I'm doing better now. I'm OK, but it was such a shock when I was going through it. I had ringing in my ears and it took a long time to get better. I was not hearing high end as well, and I was sensitive to loud stuff. I usually wear ear protection now. I don't play as loud as I used to, so sometimes I don't wear ear plugs if its not bugging me, and sometimes I'll break out the 100W amps if it's a big enough gig. If it's an auditorium or an outside gig, I prefer the sound of them, actually. I've tried to figure out what it is that makes them sound better. Is it just the volume, or what? I don't know.

**TQR:** Are you using more cabinets when you do that?

No. I think it's driving the speakers harder and you're able to... it's like driving a car and you get more of that rack and pinion thing if you're really driving it, rather than just letting it coast, you know?

**TQR:** In the past you played Dumbles (Odysseys.) There are few amps more powerful or expensive.

They're wonderful amps, and he has new amps he's building — 40W amps that are wonderful, too. I don't have one of those, but I'd like to get one some day. I sold the old ones — they were like 150 watts and it just wasn't part of my thing to use that high wattage. But Alex is doing a lot of 40 and 50 watt amps now, and they have a beautiful sound.

**TQR:** What are you using for effects?

Just the same thing — TC Chorus, (Chandler) Tube Driver and (Dallas-Arbiter) Fuzz Face and one Echoplex.

**TQR:** I remember in that first video, you had racks of rackmount stuff and that nice Fender hum (laughs).



I'm not using as much as I used to. I would love to get where I just didn't use *anything*. I'd love to find a tube pre-amp that

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would gain-up a Strat to work a Marshall amp. The Tube Driver is the best I've found, but there's stuff about it that still frustrates me. I'd like to find something totally transparent that would just raise the saturation gain.

**TQR:** So you're trying to limit noise... That's a rough tradeoff — *tone versus noise*.

It really is.

**TQR:** It's really all about tone. The thing I like about the TC stuff is the signal to noise ratio is so incredible (90+ db). Who makes your A/B switches?

Bill Ussery. They're just passive A/B switches — totally passive.

**TQR:** As far as the equipment situation and signal chain, what are you using these days?

Well, let's see... an SG and the Strats, and just the Marshalls and the Fender Vibroverbs.

**TQR:** Do you have any trouble with the single coils at all?



The trouble I have is obviously they make noise, and the main trouble I have is they aren't powerful enough for a lead.

**TQR:** Have you tried stacks?

No, I don't want to unsolder guitars, because they work pretty good. It's a roll of the dice. I wouldn't really mind unsoldering

and putting other pickups in... I'm not real freaked out about whether it's the original pickup or not if it means getting one that sounds better, but when you do that, you roll the dice

and, "Oh, whoops," it doesn't sound as good as it did before. Then you go insane with it. But I wish that the bridge pickup of a Strat was a little hotter.

**TQR:** You're using a '56 now?

No. Its a '58 Strat, and I have a '60s 335 that I really love. That's a really nice guitar.

**TQR:** How about acoustics?

Just a couple of Martins. I've been searching for another. I just sold an older Martin and I'm going to try to replace it.

**TQR:** What's coming up next for you?

Well, I'm going to try to finish the studio record and we have a couple of offers to tour outside the US as well as the US tour, so I'm trying to finish the solo record.

## Gear

**Guitars:** Fender: '57, '58, and '61 Strats, and a Bass VI

Gibson: '65 335, '66 Flying V and Les Paul

Martin: D28, Takamine: nylon string acoustics

**Amps:** Two 50 watt ('67 and '68) Marshalls with 4x12 straight and slant cabinets — one amp modded to '66 specs. Two Fender blackface Vibroverb 1x15 amps

**Signal Chain:** Three amp set up, one each for lead, distorted rhythm, clean rhythm.

**Lead Channel:** Late '60s 50 watt Marshall Super Lead head w/ Marshall straight 4x12 cabinet bottom with a Y cable into both channels

**Dirty Rhythm:** Late 60's 50 watt Marshall Super Tremolo head w/ Marshall 4x12 slant cabinet. Only the first channel is used.



**Clean Rhythm:** Two Fender blackface Vibroverb amps w/ the stereo outs from the TC Chorus going into each.

Two passive A/B Splitter boxes are used (w/ Carling Double-Pole-Double-Throw switches installed.) Ground loops are avoided by the circuit technique used.

**A/B 1** — The signal goes to the TC Chorus and splits to stereo to the two Fenders. The other switch on A/B 1 routes to the Cry Baby wah.

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**A/B 2** — The signal routes between the Fuzz Face, which goes to the Marshall used for crunch rhythm and the Tube Driver/Echoplex combination which goes to the lead Marshall head. Afterwards, the rhythm Marshall is miked with the signal going to the MXR digital delay. A volume pedal then sets the delay saturation in the monitors. An accompanying footswitch controls the delay (on/off) and looping (on/off.)

**FX:** TC Electronics Stereo Chorus (one out to each Fender Deluxe for clean rhythm), Dallas Arbiter Fuzz Face Chandler Tube Driver, Vintage Echoplex MXR 1500 Digital Delay (early 80's), Vox Cry Baby wha Passive A/B switches by Bill Ussery

**Other FX:** Lexicon PCM-70 Reverb, TC Electronic 2290 Digital Delay/multi effects controller, TC Electronics 1210 Spatial Expander, Prescription Electronics Experience pedal

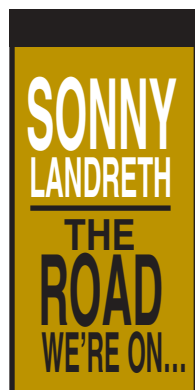
**Cables:** George L thinline cables

**Strings:** GHS gauge: .010, .013, .018, .026, .038, .050

**Batteries:** Duracell 9v only. **To**

*For information on current shows and Eric's entire catalog, visit: [www.ericjohnson.com](http://www.ericjohnson.com)*

*Mike Brannon is guitarist/writer for the award-winning Synergy Group ([www.cdbaby.com/synergy](http://www.cdbaby.com/synergy)). Their latest release is *Barcodes* with members of King Crimson and Grammy-winning Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. The follow-up, "Later," with special guests Bill Evans, Harvie Swartz, Paul Wertico and others TBA will be released in early 2004.*



**W**e caught up with TQR board member and Louisiana slide wiz Sonny Landreth at Nashville's Mercy Lounge. The venue was cozy-neon-funk-casual — perfect for Sonny and his outstanding 3-piece band, and whatever Sonny is channeling from the universe is coming in stronger than ever. He just keeps getting better. If you need a quick refresher on Mr. Landreth, just visit [tonequest.com](http://tonequest.com) and turn your speakers up!

**TQR:** *The Road We're On* is another great recording, Sonny. It sounds like everything was pretty much cut live.

I wanted to get back to the blues and be more representative of what we do live as a three piece band.

**TQR:** Did you literally cut most of the album doing a few takes with minimal overdubs?



Yeah, in fact, we recorded at Tony Dagle's studio instead of at the beautiful Dockside Recording Studio, my all-time favorite. In terms of location and vibe and all I guess we sacrificed the anthem of the trees for the back-

fire in the streets. It's a funky but great-sounding studio upstairs, next to a diner in downtown Lafayette (Louisiana.) So where you walk out and have all the gorgeous acreage of oak trees at Dockside, you walk out upstairs and look down at a dumpster. It's kind of in keeping with, as Clifton Chenier used to say, "You have to get down in the alley blues." That's what we were shooting for. We started bringing out some of these songs into the set each night so that when we actually went into the studio to cut them, we'd have a head of steam. I have always done it the other way around — write the songs, go in and work it out in the studio first. This time around there is definitely that element of flying by the seat of your pants, but that gave it an edge that we wouldn't have had otherwise.

**TQR:** It's more spontaneous, where *Levy Town* is much more produced.



Most of the albums I've done have been more production pieces in that regard. Interspersed would be a tune that was more spontaneous than the others... Thinking back on

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## interview

*Levy Town*, a good example is the instrumental “Z-Rider.” *The Road We’re On* is really more of a blues album, and in looking back on all of the other albums I have done, there has always been a blues tune involved. I wanted to see what would happen if we just took that approach for the entire album. I’m real happy with it, and I think there is that rough and tumble vibe about it. The sounds are bigger, because it is very stripped down. I did go back and add a few National tracks, and Steve Conn added keys on a few of the tunes, but basically you’re hearing a three piece band.

**TQR:** The last couple of times I’ve seen you play you were pretty much sticking with Stratocasters, although you played a Les Paul with John.



I do both. A lot is with the Trans Performance Les Paul. My co-producer, Bobby Field, came up with this name for it — the *Shape Shifter*. It’s got the Trans Performance tuning bridge system that enables me to pre-program all of my open tunings. The retro-fitted computer controls a mechanical arm for each string that moves via servo motors. It’s not a virtual system — it literally moves the strings.

**TQR:** It is an amazing thing to see work. Given the number of tunings you use, it’s a great guitar for you to take out on fly gigs.

Right, it’s perfect for the *commando combo* approach. Sometimes it’s just me and Dave on bass and Kenneth on drums. I’m really going back to having my tech with me as much as I can because it enables me to concentrate on playing which, believe me, is best. Don’t give me any more variables or any more opportunities to shoot myself in the foot than necessary, please. I can just take the *Shape Shifter*, my *Dumble* heads, a couple of cables and maybe a *Dynacomp* and a delay, and that’s it. The festivals usually have a stage crew that will help out, or sometimes I just hire someone locally to come out and help with setting up. Nonetheless, it’s still on my head to make sure things are set up right. It just makes it way easier.

**TQR:** Speaking of the Les Paul, what kind of pickups do you have in it?

I still use the DiMarzio Bluesbucker in the bridge and their PAF in the neck. I’m constantly trying something different, but I have had these in there for a while. Steve Blucher sent them to me. He is a good friend of mine and he always graciously allows me to try out different pickups. I plug this guitar into the amp and just go. I’ve kind of gotten back to that. Pedals are fun, but one of the beauties of the *Dumble* is that I can just take it and a guitar and go for it.

**TQR:** You don’t need an overdrive pedal...

Don’t need an overdrive pedal. Really, I don’t need *anything*, but I do like to use a compressor on a couple of the songs that need a clean tone. Usually, those are songs that have more complicated finger picking parts and the compressor does its thing. You can work that in such a way that it will float finger-picking patterns with more bounce and add a shimmer to the upper harmonics.

**TQR:** Which *Dumble* do you have?

It’s the *Overdrive Special* that Alexander has tweaked for me. I’ve been in his shop many times, so I always plug in and he tweaks it while I’m playing. He’s got an amazing ear for that. Stephen Bruton made a good point in your interview when he talked about the scope of the amp. On mine, he has worked it out so I can not only change the channels, but also different modes in the *mans-amp* section. I can switch all that and the combinations with clean or overdrive to give me a broad spectrum to work with.

**TQR:** *Mans-amp* is a term for some kind of circuit?

It’s the section that colors and voices the overall sound. It has three individual switches on the front panel for bright, mid boost and rock/jazz. Also, if you open up the amp, there is the HRM circuitry with trim pots for treble, mid and bass for the overdrive section, specifically. You can custom tailor it even more, and each control is interactive to make them...

**TQR:** They overlap, in other words.



Yeah, so when you look at the front of my amp, it’s treble straight up, mid straight up, bass probably straight up, but there is a lot more going on inside. Kind of sneaky.

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## interview

**TQR:** So you pretty much just left it the way he set it the last time you were in Dumble's shop?

(Laughs) True to my nature, I brought it home and started experimenting with it like crazy and trying every conceivable combination, only to wind up right back where he had set it in the first place. There is a lesson in there somewhere.

**TQR:** Is that the amp that you primarily use in the studio?

Usually, but since I was coming back to more of a blues thing for the new album, I thought it would be cool to pay homage to my roots, so to speak, by reviving my original rig that consisted of a Dynacomp, 50 watt Marshall head and 2x12 Bandmaster cab loaded with Vintage 30's. Holgar Notzel, of the great Komet Amp team out of Baton Rouge, did a terrific job of resurrecting my old Marshall, so I was able to rekindle the sound that fired me up long ago. Of course, we also used delays — studio delays — and I had the tape delay machine.

**TQR:** The Plex?

Yeah, the Plex, and I used the Fuzztone "Promised Land."

**TQR:** Which Fuzztone?

Michael Fuller's '70 pedal. I also have a few Fuzz Faces and three Big Muffs — two vintage and one later issue. I love all of them, really, and any one of the lot works well on gigs, but the Fulltone '70 pedal is the one I settled on for the album.

**TQR:** So for *The Road We're On* you used the 50 watt Marshall and which Stratocaster?

I decided to use the '66 Strat this time. By featuring one guitar for most of the tracks, I think it makes the overall sound of the album a bit more thematic. It's like having a second narrator to the singer for the story songs. Otherwise, I used the '60 Les Paul on "Gemini Blues" and a couple of old '30s Nationals on a few other tunes. Believe it or not, I didn't slide at all on two songs. I played a new Strat on "'Ol Lady Luck" and a '70 Les Paul Custom on the title track.

**TQR:** How about *The Goners* record — what did you use there?

I used different guitars, but it was mostly the '64 Firebird through the Dumble. I did use my road Strats with the Matchless DC-30 on a few cuts, including "How Bad's the Coffee" and a metal body Dobro on "Missing Pieces." It's interesting to note the cross-over point with all the gear because John wanted a live sound for his album, too. Since I had already gotten into that frame of mind with my own project, it made for an easier transition.

**TQR:** Well, they both have a very *live* sound.

John's *in particular*, because you had one shot to learn the song when he sat down with the acoustic guitar and that was it. We went in and cut the songs on the spot, so that is the ultimate *by the seat of the pants* experience. On his songs, I didn't even really know them as we were recording. He was going for the ultimate rough and tumble vibe, *believe me* (laughing.) It's like sink or swim. You have to pull whatever you have to offer out of the ether and get it down to the table quick. You are on your own.

**TQR:** Well, it worked out better than just OK. I think that's a great record too.

It's always a special thing to get the chance to interpret those wonderful Hiatt songs, and I'm proud of the fact that it's the first official Goners' album. I'm also especially happy with *The Road We're On*. Everyone stepped up and did a fantastic job.

**TQR:** Back to gear for a minute... don't you also have a Matchless Chieftan? Isn't that the red one you had here in Atlanta?

The Chieftan is a wonderful amp that I ordered directly from Mark Sampson years ago. But in Atlanta, I had his red 2x12 cabinet with my Dumble head. I'd discovered that the Dumble and that Matchless cab are a good combination because it gives me that open back style, which works better with Hiatt. For my gigs with the trio I usually prefer a closed back cabinet. Back to the concept of the commando combo, when we fly, the backline provided consists of drums, the bass rig and a 4x12 Marshall slant cab for me. The newer ones give me the flexibility to run stereo or mono. If it's a smaller club, I just use two of the 12's. In fact, most of the



time when we're indoors that's what I will do. If we are outside at a festival, I'll use all four, and it sounds huge.

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**TQR:** Are you still using the DiMarzio pickups in your Stratocasters?

I have Virtual Vintage pickups in my two road Strats and they sound great. I still love my vintage single coils, but the old dilemma will rear its ugly head on many stages. You want to step on that Dynacomp, but you don't want to render your delicate ballad on a bed of neon buzz. The DiMarzio pickups definitely take care of that.

**TQR:** Sonny, where do you live mostly in terms of your pickup selection? Do you stay on the bridge pickup?

If I'm using a Strat, I do stay on the bridge a lot, live. I tend to go in the middle position more for recording certain songs and I found myself moving around a lot more on this last album because I stuck with the '66 Strat most of the time. When I record, I tend to lean towards vintage pickups, and the same with my Les Paul — it sounds fantastic. It's got the sweetest high end — it's effervescent in a way. They are not high output pickups, but they are very open.

**TQR:** That's what we always hear in the good ones and the best reproductions.

And with the Shape Shifter, I find that I do move around. I go for the lead sounds on the bridge position and then I will jump into the middle position and roll the volume down.

**TQR:** You also move around a lot in terms of where you are addressing the strings with your right hand. You are all over the strings, from the bridge right up the neck, to *behind* the slide.

That's the source of it all for me. In other words, the touch-tone factor is where that is for me. I found that by touching different places on the guitar and how you place your hands — your fingers, the angle — all of that changes the sound. I would say it makes for a lot more interesting sound overall. It gets back to the voice I fell in love with on my jazz and blues heroes. The guitar reinforced the lyrics of their songs and telling their story, and it would create all these different sounds, and I especially found the greater potential for that with bottleneck slide. And it's the same thing with my jazz heroes... Many of them being wind instrument players, you have to take a breath in between your phrasing, and I grew up playing trumpet, so all of that comes into the way I approach the guitar.

**TQR:** And then you took it to a whole other level the way you rake the strings with your palm. That 'up and down' thing you do working the harmonics — it's as if you are just squeezing stuff out of the guitar in

a way that I don't think anyone has ever done before.

Well, one thing that is exciting to me still and has been for some time is when you discover one thing, it will lead to something else. There is a confidence that you build and



actually, a leap of faith. You get a sense of the enormous potential of the slide guitar, and we aren't talking about a great amount of effects or anything like that. It's more about what you can do with your hands and a guitar plugged straight into the amp. There is just so much that you can do with coloring phrases that goes back to the influences of my heroes, which is to support the lyric of the song. When you think more in terms of a lyricist and also playing that way on guitar, it affects you that way. Looking back, I realize that all along, the thing I tried to achieve the most was to learn to *sing* the guitar.

**TQR:** And you are still coming up with new things. Even the intensity level seems different. Now, part of it might have been the set that you played with John, but there was something else there, too...

As time goes on, I realize every moment is so precious, and not to get philosophical, but you do become more aware of that. I mean, I'm 52 years old, and you start looking down the road more and you feel like playing every night as if it's your last. You know what? It might be. It's something that I set out to do a long, long time ago and I have achieved a certain amount of success, which is a really sweet thing. It enables me to stretch out more and really go for it. That's part of it. You don't take it for granted, and you never know who is going to be in the audience. You never know how one thing can lead to another. You open up to that synchronicity and things happen, and then you get caught up in the excitement of it in terms of honoring the moment and what happens at that given point in time. You tap into the energy of the audience. I'm just a lot more aware of it now than I used to be. It's a very positive experience, and hopefully people take some of it away with them when they leave that night. That's the real affirmation for me.

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## interview

**TQR:** When we did your first interview, we spent a lot of time talking about how you played *behind* the slide. It's an important piece and a unique piece, but it is *just* a piece. There are a lot of other things going on...

Again, there is so much you can do, and when you tap into it, it's an inspirational rush and I get excited about playing guitar again. For a moment, I will have that initial feeling I had when I was 12-years old. I remember reading in an interview with Eric Johnson many years ago — it may have been *Rolling Stone* — about being on the road and the onslaught of the grind and the necessity of creating that magic, and he's exactly right. If you can hold onto some of that magic and turn that into something each night, it really does keep you going and it pushes me to do better and to hopefully improve and keep stretching the seam. You have to be willing to go for it. You really do. You have to be willing to take chances in order to hit those moments. That's the essence of improvisation in jazz and blues and bluegrass. Once you get used to that, you get hooked on it.

**TQR:** Where do you write? You told me once before that you don't really write much on the road.

Well, I changed that the year before last, writing all those songs for the new album and this latest one, so I contradicted that. I didn't have any choice. I hate to miss out on anything. That's part of it for me. I think that two things happened... Number one, I made a decision to do more of blues-based album and when I did that, the second thing was that I got all lit up to write songs that started tumbling out. Most of that was written in airports — going through security checkpoints and changing planes and any and all of the above...

**TQR:** So the decision to do a blues record re-inspired you?

Yes, it did. I think I wrote 16 songs in my usual songwriting period, which astounded my former (and I reiterate my *former*) publisher. "You did what? You were with us for two years and you didn't write five!" (laughter)...

**TQR:** Well, you had the trilogy going on...

You're right, and when I finally finished that conceptual trilogy with *Outward Bound*, *South of I10* and *Levy Town*, I wanted to do something different. The timing was right. People have been asking me about that over the years — do you think you will ever do a blues album? I don't think it really turned out to be necessarily the *gutbucket* album that I thought I might try to do but... when the songs come out, there is a certain element — I mentioned honoring the moment. You have to honor the song, too, and say what's true for that and what's best for it.

**TQR:** Agreed. Are you still as finicky as ever about your speakers?

Well, I tell you what, the tried and true Vintage 30's are still my favorites. I like to change things out for parts, like, if I'm doing a session and I will do a lead track, then we may layer that with other parts — some of the techniques that you mentioned. There are things you can do to add color... to give more atmosphere to the song, and I like to change things up and use different speakers or different amps. Try different combinations... it's fun.

**TQR:** But you don't do that live?

Now again, the flip side of the way I do it with my gigs is that we fly and I don't have all my gear with me. I have my amp head and my guitar, but I'm at the mercy of the backline company. We do as much pre-production as we can on the phone and just hope for the best once we get there. Sure, I get a 4x12 Marshall cabinet, but it might be loaded with speakers more tired and worn out than I am. You might have four tired Greenbacks in there and *nothing*... you have no head room and you just have to grin and bear it. That's the worst end of it for me. And other nights, it's a newer cabinet that's been broken in, or like in Austin last month, a wonderful vintage 4x12 Marshall with original Greenbacks that sounded really good.

**TQR:** You wanted to take that home with you, I bet.

Absolutely. I was trying to buy it from them (laughs.) "No, Sonny, we let you use that for the International Festival in Houston last year, and we will have it next time you come to use it. Billy Gibbons likes it, too." (laughter)

**TQR:** That's funny as hell, isn't it? Famous amps and famous cabinets... What was it that you were telling me about the Marshalls in Europe? You said the 220 European Marshalls all sound better than they do over here?

A 100W Plexi head at 220 through a great sounding original Marshall cab is a beautiful thing, damn it (laughing.) Also, regarding impedance — my amps at 16 ohms always sound better, period.

**TQR:** Mark Johnson from Delta Moon called a custom slide builder in England to make a slide for you similar to the Jim Dunlop Pyrex one you use, but hand-blown...

God bless him, and if he wants to make them a little bit heavier, that's cool, too. I mean, ideally, I would use a heavier slide. The more mass you have with that .013 through .056

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set, it's a bigger sound and you will get a bigger, wider, more dimensional vibrato, but because of my tendonitis and because of how much I play the lighter weight has worked the best for me.

**TQR:** Yeah, because the weight becomes cumulative.

It does. I wouldn't change anything about the slide, except glass really feels the best to me. Good-grade glass especially, and a heavier weight, but very linear and exacting. It works better for me because I'm using all six strings much of the time, and I'm finger picking. It's all going on at once, and I need to be able to compensate from top to bottom. Unfortunately, old bottlenecks, which I love to play blues lines on when I play the National, getting old timey, really don't cut it for me. It's a trade-off, because you have that flare with a bottleneck that makes for a better vibrato, but...

**TQR:** But you can't get all six going.

It's hard to get all six strings going with multiple parts at the same time and play in tune without running into problems. You can overcome quite a bit. I have done it, but for me the effort isn't worth it. And I'm fighting enough as it is. I'm basically in a wrestling match for the rest of my life (laughing)... I realized that a long time ago.

**TQR:** Do you have a favorite tuning?

I used six or seven the other night — it depends on the set. Favorite tuning... I'll tell you what, it's funny how you keep coming back to some of the things that you started off on, and I swear, I noticed that I'm writing more and more songs in the key of G. G and D... there is definitely something that goes on with those tunings with me that I don't feel with any of the other ones. There are special tunings that you can utilize for specific songs to give them more character or to give them a different feel, but the slack tension element with those two tunings is great for blues.

**TQR:** G just seems to be comfort food for a slide player.

You know what it is — going down to D on the low string, you have the big low end and you have nice midrange and

enough tension, still. When I'm playing D, I can't help but think of Elmore James. The double-edged sword in using a lot of tunings has a beauty and a beast. The beauty is that you create these different sounds, but the beast is that then you have to do it *live*. You have to be prepared to lug several guitars or tune up in front of people all night, and again, that's what is wonderful about the Trans Performance system... With the virtual systems, your body still feels what is *not* happening. Your guitar is tuned to standard, but you are *hearing* G, and for me it's just wrong. There is a magic about slack key tunings. You can squeeze the frets and get different sounds you just can't do any other way. If you have that tension there like in an A tuning or even E, you don't have that element, so it really gets back to each tuning has its own character and its little quirks... the things that make it and your songs unique.

**TQR:** So what you are saying in one sense is that the difference in string tension among all the tunings creates a tremendous interplay with the slide and what's going on with the guitar.

Absolutely. And each one will tend to respond harmonically in a certain way from the other one. Again, that's what I mean by the nuances and things that happen with each one that enable you to do that.

**TQR:** I saw you pulling harmonics from *behind* the slide with your right hand Monday night.

You can do that. When you open up to what is on the *other side* of the bottleneck, there are actual tones back there. There are actual harmonics in addition to the tones and harmonics that you normally hear on the right. Everything to the left of the slide is one world, and everything to the right is another. The trick is to get used to being able to control the chaos on the other side,



because it *is* chaos at first. My earliest experience and attempts at playing slide were... it was a complete struggle for control. It was awkward and wobbly and desperately, *impossi-*

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bly out of tune. ... All that scraping noise that was so unnerving to me and my family, and especially the pets.

**TQR:** *Chaos* is a great description.

Yeah, you have to learn to control the chaos, and you start out by dampening all that, or by trailing your fingers behind the slide with one or more fingers. Another great thing about playing finger style is that whatever strings aren't being used, your fingers can rest on them enough to mute them, and that's a whole technique in itself.

**TQR:** Damping with the right hand.

Yes, left *and* right hand damping techniques, and once you master or get used to it enough that you can get a decent sound on a consistent basis, then you can start opening up. This is my approach, and it's different for other people. You know, what's right for me wouldn't necessarily be right for Derrick Trucks or someone else, but when you can do that, you learn to control it, you can change the amount of muting, and you can open up all those sounds that come up on the *wild side* of the slide.

**TQR:** Well, it's not as if you can go down to the local music store, grab a guitar teacher and say, "Okay, I want to learn *this*."

I think that's probably true. I don't know if that necessarily has to be the case, but I see the whole thing as an evolutionary process where more is being learned. I have been approached to do instructional videos for years, and I've just fended it off 'til now because I haven't had the time or been ready to do it. I would really want it to be right.

**TQR:** What are your future plans?

Well, we're out on the road, splitting up time between my band and John's, and we will be out playing for the rest of the year. We still co-bill with Robert Cray and his band, and I'm real happy with that. It's great to be out working with them again. As we speak, I'm getting into the writing mode as Fall is around the corner. We will record the next album in '04 and put it out in the beginning of '05. Now if you are going to ask me what that album is going to be, I'm torn, because I really kind of made up my mind on doing an instrumental album next, and I may still do that, but I'm not sure yet. The next album remains to be seen. I have to admit, though, that I'm feeling real comfortable with the simpler format — the simpler approach to recording and more spontaneity. I guess I have actually learned to let go to a certain extent, and it feels good. **To**

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

[www.transperformance.com](http://www.transperformance.com), [www.dimarzio.com](http://www.dimarzio.com)

## THE FACE OF FUZZ

*Perhaps you've noted that Msrs. Johnson and Landreth hold 'fuzz' in high regard. Let's linger then in the Land o' Fuzz and discover what all the fuzz is about...*

*The original Fuzz Face was introduced in 1966 by Ivor Arbiter, who claimed to have been inspired by the round base of a microphone stand when he designed the Fuzz Face. The early models were painted red or gray with 'Arbiter-England' appearing in the smile (Dallas-Arbiter and Dallas Musical Industries came later.) The original circuit consists of nothing more than a couple of transistors, four resistors, three caps, two pots and a switch, however, Arbiter wisely designed the*



*Fuzz Face with true bypass using a double pole/double throw (DPDT) switch. But the real mojo behind the original Fuzz Face is the twin NKT (Newmarket Electronics) 275 germanium transistors. More than any of the variants that followed, the NKT 275's produce a fat, warm, very tube-like overdriven tone that can also be dialed into subtle boost or freaky fuzz-out, yet the dynamic circuit cleans up quickly as you turn the volume down on your guitar. Unfortunately, the original NKT 275's were not matched during assembly, which resulted in each Fuzz Face sounding different — often dramatically so. The performance and sound of germanium transistors is also significantly altered by changes in temperature. You may recall Stevie Ray Vaughan's amp tech, the late César Diaz, relating in our August 2001 TQR interview how he refrigerated Stevie's Fuzz Faces prior to each show and swapped a 'hot' one for a 'cold' one during Stevie's set. Temperature fluctuations aside, understand that merely finding an original Fuzz Face with the NKT 275 transistors guarantees little aside from a \$600 price tag. If you were able to listen to 20 'identical' Fuzz Faces from the early Arbiter era you would probably hear 20 distinctly different sounds ranging from a religious experience, to a slight smile, and in more than a few cases, quizzical disappointment.*



Thanks to Dr. Tim Wilkin, we were provided with two vintage Fuzz Faces — an early red NKT 275 version, and a later '60s blue-gray model that was the

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first shipped with a *silicon* transistor (BC108.) Both fuzzes were in need of a little work; the input jack on the older red Fuzz Face needed cleaning before it would work at all, and Jeff Bakos had to replace the fried battery terminal on the BC108 model. Once that was done,

things got interesting. Our favorite was the NKT 275 fuzz; its sound was warm, heavy, intense and *very foxy*. The BC108 was more aggressive and bright. It lacked the lows and mids of the NKT 275, and it displayed an odd compression characteristic when we pushed it hard, seeming to cave in and shut down slightly rather than bloom and explode like the NKT 275, which was far more musical and complex by comparison. Of course, your results may vary... which is why, like so many vintage effects, you might wish to consider a modern alternative to the Arbiter or Dallas-Arbiter fuzz. We recommend the Analogman Sun Face fuzz previously reviewed in *TQR*, or if you can find one, a vintage César Diaz Square Face fuzz (César sometimes shipped his fuzz with a germanium and taped an extra silicon transistor inside the case.) We compared both fuzzes to the Arbiter models, and we found our Sun Face equipped with a NOS NKT 275 to be very similar, if a little smoother than the original Arbiter. The Diaz was slightly more aggressive, and it also had its own unique tube-like character — subtly different from the Sunface — but *real good* (César also tracked down a supply of germanium transistors and tested each one individually during assembly.) A clean Diaz Square Face was recently offered for sale on eBay at \$175 and received zero bids, while old Arbiter Fuzz Faces with NKT 275 germanium transistors rack up dozens of bids and sell for \$600... Later vintage Dallas-



Arbiter fuzzes with silicon transistors sell for as much as \$300.00. The current reissue Fuzz Faces resemble the originals in appearance

only, but Analogman has a Fuzz Face modification for the Dunlop reissue Fuzz Faces or Arbiter UK reissues that enables them to sound just as good or better than an original, just like the Sun Face. We auditioned all of the fuzzes with our 1969 Marshall 50W and a newly-acquired vintage 1968

4x12 straight front cab with three original Celestion Greenbacks and a 1976 replacement speaker. Let's consider *that rig* for a moment... **To**

## wee HEAVY & Bold as Luw

We've already described our vintage '69 Marshall 50W in past issues, and as *Bluesbreaker* and *TQR* board member Buddy Whittington said recently, "That's the starting point (truth be known, probably the ending point too!)" So, we knew all about the utterly inspiring sound of a late '60s



metal panel Marshall, or at least we *thought* as much... Then along came a '68 basketweave 4x12 cab that turned up at Midtown Music in Atlanta. As soon as we heard that the speakers were original Greenbacks, we snatched it for an

overnight audition, and on the way home we named the stray cab 'Wee Heavy' (cheers to connoisseurs of *real ale* and homebrewers everywhere.) We rolled/grunted the big beast into the music room, where it was positioned directly below our signed Ron Wood print of Clapton. Granted, a vintage basketweave *slant cab* would look better with the small box 50W, but the last clean one we saw with original speakers sold for \$2,500 (and we've since been told by Joe Bonamassa that the straight front cabs throw more bass and low mids — stay tuned for *that* interview!) *Wee Heavy* would do just fine. We checked the ohm setting on the back of the 50W and promptly fired it up with our Olympic white '62 relic Stratocaster (equipped with flat-pole Lollar pickups) and the Diaz Square Face set with the volume on '10' and the gain barely gooched into the 2-3 range (the fuzz 'G Spot' around here.) And then it happened... one of those rare moments



when *that tone* is unexpectedly resurrected and revealed. Suddenly we understood just how much of *Deacon Magic Boy's* tone resided within the

inefficient and under-powered Celestion Greenbacks and that aged birch-ply cab. Until that moment our memorable experiences with Celestion Greenbacks had been limited to modern reissue replacement speakers for our Deluxe, and they were never our first choice. But as George Goumas said as we discussed this magic '68 cab, "By itself, the Greenback is utterly unremarkable, but hearing four in an old Marshall cabinet can be a religious experience." (George knows a few things about nearly *everything*...) The vintage T1221 model 25W Greenbacks are rare today, if for no other reason than they were so often blown up with a 100W head and discarded, but they *will* hold up nicely with a 50W Marshall, and we couldn't help imagining that the Greenbacks in the '68 cab must have been played through a 50W to have survived this long. Well, if you have a cabinet like ours, you know... and if not, there *are* alternatives to the mega-buck collectors' cabinets that turn up frequently on eBay — like the new Marshall 1960 TV (tall vintage) slant 4x12. We asked Mitch Colby at



Marshall to send us one, and he did. Everyone should experience pulling up to the house and seeing a boxed tall vintage Marshall 4x12 sitting on the front porch. Imagine a large brown dog with commercial retreads depositing a

steaming hot pile of pre-packaged whoop ass *in the house*. Now,

where do you *grab it*? We turned the box upside down, let the cab *slide* out and screwed the casters on (you *need* casters with this bad boy.) Now just *look* at it for a minute. Oh, yeah... you want it — *sure* you do... ("Uhhh, honey, I'll put it right over here behind the schefflera...") Can Marshall still deliver the high hard one in 2003? Sure. As good as the '68? No. The '68 was a little warmer, smoother, silkier, and nastier in a good girl/bad girl fashion, while the vintage reissue TV was voiced more in the top end and upper mids, with less bass response and slightly tougher, edgier highs. Mind you, the TV is *entirely* respectable, naughty and satisfying — it's just *new*. It's up to you to make it old, and to be honest, the '68 just has a thing going on that is nearly impossible to describe. Let's just say it's *bold as luv* and leave it at that. And like Joe said, maybe another straight front would get closer to the magic. Either way, your choice of speakers and box *matters*. You may also wish to consider a 4x12 Marshall cab wired for stereo, which enables you to run two amplifier heads in a 2x12 configuration in one cab (another tip from the upcoming *TQR* interview with Joe Bonamassa.) **To**



## the Victoria **Sovereign**

*Like the Fuzz Face, Eric and Sonny also share a healthy regard for vintage Marshall 50W heads. Perhaps you'd like to explore and enjoy the vibe of those timeless classics, but you don't want to jump through the hoops involved in finding and restoring a +30 year old amp. Meet Mark Baier, builder of the Victoria Sovereign. We are proud to be the first to introduce our readers to this outstanding new 60W head — Victoria's first entry in the British rock n' blues genre.*

**TQR:** What inspired you to build this amp, and what did you set out to achieve, specifically?

It was pretty straightforward, really. Making tweed amps is great — there certainly is a market for it — but I didn't want that to be the only thing of value at Victoria Amplifier Co. One market that we were absolutely *not* serving is the harder



rockin' Marshall guys... To look at a gear magazine, you'd think that big heads and stacks are more popular than ever, and there's never a shortage of glitzy ads featuring a behemoth amp stack. I wanted to bring something to the party, but we didn't want to clone any old amp — that had been done by a few people, including Marshall. Their JTM45 offset reissue is pretty damn cool. The challenge then becomes to build something innovative *and* enduring. I chose to keep it really simple. I'll never be in the channel switching-push/pull pot-10-band EQ amp-building business. What turns me on is the beauty of the design... the fundamental... *the core*. I think 'simpler' is more honest and revealing. The most valued (and arguably best sounding) Marshalls and Hiwatts have been the essence of simplicity.

**TQR:** How would you describe the Sovereign in terms that guitarists can relate to?

It's all about doing things that *work*. We had an ideal in mind to make an amp that was able to do many things very, very well, including a good hard rock sound, crystal clear clean tones, bluesy compression without entering into the metal zone, and even metal zone on demand, if need be. The EF-86 allows us to travel in a lot of those places comfortably. There's enough bias travel to allow for the use of both EL-34's or 6L6's driven by a standard long-tail pair using a

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12AT7 rather than the more common 12AX7. I think the 12AT7 drives the power tubes better — it hangs in there and allows them to do the real work, and when you turn it up, you hear the difference. The break up is tighter — not splattery — with better definition and pacing. We used a couple of odd tubes in this one. The obvious one is the EF-86 as the input amp. It's a pentode, and therefore very sensitive and lifelike. The thought was that being a small signal pentode, it would react and have the same (or similar) characteristics as its larger brethren when driven. I had no apprehension about the clean tones, but would it sound big like a well-heated EL-34? Turns out that my intuition was right — you just have to design the amp correctly. The rest of the amp is about mov-



ing that EF-86 through the amp without stepping on it too much. The other weirdo tube is the 6BM8. I liked driving the reverb with a pentode on our (short-lived, too many headaches) Reverberato add-on unit. The key to the great performance was the pentode side of that 6BM8... Turns out it was hyper-sensitive to vibrations — something a tweed cabinet has in abundance. So I'm giving it a second chance. It still can get squirrely in the head, but only at elevated levels of reverb, and no one ever turns the reverb up more than 1/4 on, do they?

**TQR:** Nokie Edwards probably does. The Volume/Gain circuit really works fabulously...

It's a *gain control*. At the minimum setting it's just like plugging into an amp, be it a Marshall or Fender. The volume control controls the overall volume, and the EF-86 is sending a pristine, undistorted signal through the amp. Any drive you get with the gain set at '0' is pure power tube mojo. Turning up the gain drives the EF-86 progressively harder and harder, presenting the clipped signal to the rest of the amp. The distortion and harmonics generated by the EF-86 are very realistic and similar to an EL-34. The idea really works.

## SOVEREIGN RULE

What an understatement... In terms of tone and sheer volume-versatility, the Sovereign smokes. Now, we're not selling our '69 Marshall — but the Sovereign rocks with the best vintage examples of British all-valve blasters, while delivering a superior 'clean' tone and reverb that doesn't suck the guts out of the amp. So listen up, because we aren't screwing around here with your time, your tone *or* your money... If a 50W blues/rock tube head makes you quiver with anticipa-

tion, anticipate a *Sovereign*. It's rounder, fuller, more balanced and smoother than our beloved and finely tuned '69 Marshall, yet the Sovereign avoids sounding like a geeked up, tweaked up, modern day slobber-knocker adorned inside and out with features and power you can't begin to fathom, don't need and will never use. The Sovereign earns our award for unleashing a huge, delicious tube tone at *all* volume levels. Get yours now for rock and blues. You'll thank us later. **To**

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

## Roccaforte 30W

*Or perhaps not... We're gonna confuse things a bit by throwing another truly stellar new head at you — the Roccaforte 30W. Doug Roccaforte has stepped into largely uncharted territory with his four 6V6, 30W head with master volume and gain, and like the Sovereign, the Roccaforte 30W succeeds brilliantly at delivering magical tone at full power and*



*the same rich presence, depth and variable tube distortion with the master volume cut and the gain cranked. This is a wonderful thing for any guitarist who plays a wide variety of venues, or those of you that primarily unwind at home.*

*Neither of these amps suffer in the least from the shortcomings that have often plagued master volume circuits (anemic, buzzy, overdriven preamp distortion at low volume.)*

*Roccaforte's choice of 6V6's produces an incredibly complex and rich midrange character that seems to marry the smooth compression and tone of EL84's, the presence of 6L6's and the dynamic touch-sensitivity and tweed character of a 6V6 amp. Doug has also designed the circuit and transformer specs to enable the amp to be operated with dual EL34's in*

*the center tube sockets (you pull all four 6V6's in this mode.)*



The Roccaforte 30W knocked us out in a big, big way. The Mercury Magnetics custom transformers are Partridge-vintage-Hiwatt huge (check the photo of the "tower of power" tranny) for a 30W amp, which explains why the

-continued-



30W seemed nearly as loud as our Marshall 50W through a 4x12 cab. Controls are straight-up — presence, bass, midrange, treble, master volume and gain, and the four speaker jacks allow for 4, 8 and 16 ohms speaker options.

If you're looking for a shootout decision on these two new amps, you ain't gonna get it here; they're both outstanding, with exceptional tone, meticulous hand-wired circuits, and flawless craftsmanship throughout. Consider both of these new designs "Best of Breed" among new, Marshall-inspired amplifiers. **To**

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

## Gibson ES 333

*Whatzat, you ask? A very affordable and respectable 'budget' rendition of the classic ES335 that's just begging to be personalized. Yes, we are still pushing 335-style guitars... Why? Because we're just plain tired of going to shows and finding the same two food groups represented (Lesters and Strats, with an occasional Tele.) Hey... we're approaching a new year. If you don't own a 335, get one, and shake things up a little bit by actually playing it. A guitarist without a 335 is like an artist without a tube of blue paint. Here's what you need to know about the 333...*

Along with the standard Gibson reissue 335's, the ES333 is built in Memphis with the identical specs, tooling, and materials of the reissue 335, including maple/poplar/maple ply body, mahogany neck, and nickel plated ABR1 bridge and stop tail. However, the 333 is equipped with the cheaper 490R and 498T AlNiCo humbuckers rather than '57 Classics, it has no pickguard, and the very thin *nitro* finish consists of

a faded cherry stain, two clear coats of lacquer and a tinted satin top coat. *And there is access to the wiring harness through a small plastic cover on the back!*

Give the man that dreamed that up a raise. We love this guitar for a lot of reasons: It *looks* cool — more like an old guitar than a new piece of furniture — it's built right (we compared the 333 to a vintage '62 335 and the construction of



the maple center block and long neck tenon were very similar), and with that thin finish, the 333 really sings. Of course, we made a few improvements, beginning with the pickups... TQR board member

Don Butler (Toneman) recently turned us on to James Wagner and CR Coils. We settled on his Crossroads humbucker set, and they are outstanding — open, airy, smooth, balanced and *very* Creamy. Here's the story on James and CR Coils, straight from the crossroads in Soulsbyville, CA.

**TQR:** What inspired you to begin winding pickups?

After doing some research I found that those early Gibson pickups were hand-wound. A lot of people have a misconception about that term... What it really means is *guiding a wire across a spinning bobbin by hand*, rather than machine-feeding the bobbin on auto-pilot. It does *not* mean that I sit in my shop wrapping them by hand, one turn at a time. The concept of hand-winding (or scatter-winding) revealed to me why some PAF's sounded good, a few of them sounded great, but most of them were just so-so. You *might* get a good set, but probably not. I know a few people who literally have a couple boxes of them, and they are using my pickups instead. I guess they are OK if you are doing a restoration, but performance-wise? Not for me. Anyway, I decided to build my own. I suppose it progressed as a result of just never being totally satisfied with my own personal sound. So I would wind a set, play with them awhile, try another, etc. It just kept growing a little at a time. People would hear them and ask me to make them a set. Hand-winding is definitely an art form, and hand-winding styles differ as much as a fingerprint to my ears. Everybody does it differently, and the difference can be heard. I'm just lucky that other people happen to like what I perceive as great sound.

The current line of models I build are inspired by some of my favorite players. *The Allman Brothers Live at Fillmore East* was the live recording that just awed me with the tones they were getting. I have never been convinced that Duane's pickups were anywhere *near* stock, and I started experimenting. I found that I could listen to a particular pickup and just know what it took to get that sound. Even though I may not use the same wire, magnets, potting material, and specs of the originals, I have found ways to replicate that sound using my own formulas. The sounds I emulate are all from live recordings, so I don't have to try to guess at what was being used in the studio and the effects of EQ and studio effects. These live tones were created from not much more than a guitar, a cord,

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and a Marshall or Fender amp. I built the Crossroads set after being hounded for about a year by Mick Lawrence in New York. He's a fantastic player, with ears like I have never encountered before. He wanted a set of pickups that sounded like the 'Fool' SG that Eric Clapton had played. Mick said he had looked for that sound since he first started playing guitar years and years ago. He's a good guy to accept advice on tone from, since he is in the same league as Satriani, and actually toured with him. I built Mick a set of Crossroads, he put them in his new '61 SG/RI, and played the Crossroads Set sound clip on my site for me. He's been using them ever since.

**TQR:** What were the shortcomings in 'high production pickups' that you set out to eliminate, and how?

The shortcomings in production pickups have a lot to do with the fact that they are machine-wound, and *sound* like it to me — *sterile* — and too perfect. The human ear is *not* perfect, and a machine-wind is so close to perfect that the human ear will reject it in favor of a hand-wound pickup every time. Hand-winding produces much better harmonics and overtones, and a much fuller, 'sparkly' sound. The mass-produced pickups are just made too fast and often have feedback problems because of it. The big manufacturers will try to compensate for feedback by using wax, but then tone is lost. There are quite a few small things in my pickups that all add up in the end to sound like they do. Wire type and gauge, winding speed, winding tension (one of those will change the other), winding patterns (*very* important, and unique to me), number of turns (far more important than actual D.C. resistance in the coil), potting material (my own formula) and the application method, magnet type, size, and strength (I have my own buffering technique for them, as well) and how to tape, pig-tail, and mount the assembly on a chassis. Each step is as equally important as the next, and a change in any of them will affect the tone.

I currently have four models, and they cover a great span of tone. The SR Set, which is a single-coil assembly for Strats, the Crossroads Set, which is pretty much in the PAF range (although, unlike a PAF, these all sound good — even better!) the Goodwood Set which is more like the early Duane-Bloomfield type of tone (like a PAF but fatter, more balls), and of course, the Fillmore Set, which does a great latter-day Duane, '70s style rock, killer slide tones in



the middle position, metal — it's really versatile. I now have my sights on another humbucker set, but it will take some time to do this one.

In addition to the Crossroads humbuckers, we replaced the stoptail and ABR1 bridge with TonePros hardware. As we've described in the past, the stud caps on the super-lightweight, nickel plated aluminum TonePros tailpiece can be screwed down, locking the tailpiece firmly in place and preventing it from pivoting on the studs under string tension and inhibiting maximum string-to-body contact. This design significantly improves sustain by transmitting more string vibration to the body of the guitar. Skeptical? Don't be — *just do it*. The TonePros ABR1-style bridge can also be locked down on the posts with two Allen screws. Once your bridge height is set, it will *stay* set even during string changes, and as Dan Erlewine observed in his September 03 interview, the TonePros bridge saddles are precision-machined for a tighter, smoother, longer travel. We are so impressed with the TonePros hardware that we have arranged a special 10% discount on all TonePros products exclusive to TQR subscribers. Just mention the 'TQWD' discount code when ordering online or by telephone from WD Music Products, the distributor for all TonePros bridges and tailpieces.

The fretwork on our new 333 was passable, but we wanted a larger fret profile with a higher crown. Brian McDaniel refretted the 333 with Stew-Mac #154 fret wire and the result was a significant improvement in overall playability, sustain and vastly improved string bending. We also replaced the stock ceramic disc tone caps with Jensen (Denmark) copper



foil/paper in oil caps — a .022 for the bridge and .015 for the neck pickup. For now, the best source we could find for these caps was Angela Instruments, but we'll be informing you of additional sources soon.

If you're interested in acquiring and customizing a 335-style semi-hollowbody guitar (and *nothing* sounds or sustains quite the same) for comparatively light dough, you deserve to check out the ES333. We bought ours direct from Dave's Guitar Shop, and they usually have enough inventory to pick out a good one (and they know 'good.')

*Quest forth... To*

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

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

[www.tonepros.com](http://www.tonepros.com), [www.wdmusicproducts.com](http://www.wdmusicproducts.com)

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

Brian McDaniel, Atlanta, 404-391-2435

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Our ToneQuest guitar straps are hand-made with the world's finest vegetable-tanned German leather in your choice of chestnut brown or black. Each strap features the ToneQuest



logo tastefully stamped in relief on the top. The underside is lined with the same top-quality German leather in a contrasting creme color. These buttery straps feel completely broken-in from the first gig, and they will last a lifetime.

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ToneQuest subscribers continue to rave about the incredible tone, feel and extended life of Pyramid Premium strings. We invite you to discover them now at 20% - 30% off list (they make a great stocking stuffer!) To order, and for details on gauges, please visit our web site at [www.tonequest.com](http://www.tonequest.com), or call 1-877-MAX-TONE toll-free today.



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## Sound Better, Play Better™

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

A Brown Soun Inc. San Rafael, CA  
[www.abrownsoun.com](http://www.abrownsoun.com) 415-479-2124

**AllParts** Top players and guitar builders rely on Allparts for the right guitar and bass parts they need, in stock and ready to ship. AllParts offers a complete range of finished and unfinished guitar bodies in a variety of premium tone woods, including alder and swamp ash, with optional highly figured maple tops. Finishes include all of the most popular vintage colors, including see-through blonde! Premium necks are also available with maple, rosewood, and ebony fingerboards in a variety of neck shape profiles, with or without binding. Custom design your next guitar with AllParts, including tailpieces, tuning keys, bridges, nuts and saddles, pickups, pickguards (that really fit), knobs, hardware, and electronics for many popular models. Bass players and lefties can also find the parts they need at AllParts! You can also rely on Allparts for hard to find parts, along with vacuum tubes and amplifier hardware.

AllParts, Houston, TX  
[www.allparts.com](http://www.allparts.com) 713-466-6414

**Analogman** (Mike Piera) is one of the premier guitar effects dealers and manufacturers serving professional players worldwide. Analogman is unique, since it manufactures, modifies, buys, sells, and repairs vintage and new guitar effects. Specializing in vintage and high-end effects, you won't find cheap Taiwanese "happy meal" style, toy effects there. Analogman is dedicated to helping you successfully pursue your quest for tone, and every customer is treated as a prospective friend. Analogman can meet all your effects needs, including: Buying and selling vintage, new, and custom built effects, and modifying pedals to sound and function better. A full repair service, including referrals to specialists. Creating the best new effects with vintage values, schematics, and original owner's manual copies. FREE help with effects problems by e-mail or in our Web Forum, plus professional consultation and technical services. Analogman specializes in pedal modifications for the Ibanez and Maxon Tube Screamers and several Boss pedals (SD-1, DS-1, BD-2, DD5, etc). They also modify Fuzz faces to vintage germanium specs. Analogman hand-built pedals include the Clone chorus, Compressors, and Sun Face fuzz pedals. There are 3 versions of the Compressors available, based on the Ross style and/or the Orange Squeezer style of compression. Other hand-made pedals available from Analog Man include the FOXROX Captain Coconut and TZF flanger, Teese RMC wahs, Z Vex, Black Cat, Tubester, Ultravibe, Pedaltrain and George L cables. Jim Weider recently collaborated with Mike on the King Of Tone overdrive pedal, which is being introduced in December 2003! Please check the web site for more information, and e-mail if possible. If you must call, please mention ToneQuest and they'll make time to help you.

Analog Man, Bethel, CT  
[www.analogman.com](http://www.analogman.com) 203-778-6658

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# Resource Directory

**Callaham Vintage Guitars & Amps** Bill Callaham is a builder of exceptional electric guitars that exceed the original quality, tone, and beauty of the vintage models that inspire his work. "Better than vintage" is an apt description for the Callaham "S" and "T" model electric guitars that feature premium lightweight ash and alder bodies, custom hand-shaped rock maple necks, and cryogenically treated Lindy Fralin pickups specially wound to Callaham's specifications for true vintage tone. Bill also offers cryogenically treated, pre-wired vintage pick guards for Strat style guitars, and his exclusive formula for cold-rolled steel alloy tremolo blocks continue to delight players around the world with improved resonance and sustain. Callaham vintage saddles also improve sustain while minimizing string fatigue and breaks. Additional Strat parts include stainless steel trem arms, string ferrules, bridge plates and mounting screws, and string retainers.

**Attention Tele Players!** Callaham now offers a complete line of custom Tele parts. Please visit their web site for information on pre-wired control plates with premium pots, capacitors, and cloth-covered wire, specially wound and cryogenically treated Fralin vintage Tele pickups, compensated brass bridge saddles, bridge plates, knobs, jacks, tuners and string trees! **The only thing better than Callaham parts is a Callaham guitar.** We said that, and you can take it to the bank.

*Callaham Guitars, Winchester, VA  
www.callahamguitars.com 540-955-0294*

**Carr Amplifiers** Check out the ALL NEW Carr Mercury! As we said in our recent review, "the Mercury is destined for greatness." No surprise... Since our review of the entire line of amplifiers built by Steve Carr and his merry band of tonefreaks in Pittsboro, NC, Carr amplifiers have continued to receive high praise from reviewers and players throughout the country. Plug into any Carr amp and you'll immediately understand why we said, "Finally, somebody got it right." Right, as in the perfect marriage of classic Fender balance, clarity, and headroom, with innovative overdrive features that produce natural and oh-so sweet tube distortion, but never at the expense of the tone you've worked so hard to capture in your instruments. Lots of small-batch amp builders use premium components and labor-intensive, point-to-point construction, and Carr is no exception. The Solen filter caps used in Carr amps alone cost more than the sum of the parts in many boutique circuits! But in the end, it's the design that counts, combined with quality parts and consistent craftsmanship. We've been to Carr, we've played every amplifier they build, and one year and dozens of reviews later, our opinion hasn't changed. **Carr amps are professional tools and works of art that will inspire you for a lifetime.** Check out the many stellar reviews and dealer locations for Carr amps at their web site, and contact the boys at Carr for more information about which Carr model is best for you.

*Carr Amplifiers, Pittsboro, NC  
www.carramps.com 919-545-0747*

**The Chicago Bluesbox by Butler Custom Sound** is a series of amplifiers built with the blues player in mind, but is also compatible with virtually any style of music — from traditional to progressive blues rock. The Chicago Blues Box delivers clear, clean, harmonic complexity with headroom to spare, to thick, authentic, in-your-face crunch.

The flagship of the Chicago Blues Box series is the Roadhouse model, an all-tube, point-to-point, hand-wired, single-channel 50-watt tone machine hand-built in the USA right in Chicago. The straight-forward design makes this a favorite among players seeking authentic, full-sounding tone across the entire sound spectrum.

Over 60 hours of hand-built assembly goes into every Chicago Blues Box. Butler Custom Sound starts with a sheet of rubber impregnated fiber board, drills and tapes over 150 solder eyelets. The board is then assembled with electronic components and soldered from the bottom side for a reliable connection. The custom-wound, paper bobbin transformers, pots and switches are installed into the 16-gauge steel chassis which provides road-worthy strength. BCS then installs their proprietary Magic Wand ground bar system and the final wiring process begins. Before any tube is installed, each undergoes a stringent hand-selection process. The boards are vibration-tested for intermittent connections, lock-tight is applied to hardware, and wires are twisted and bundled.

Before any amp leaves the Butler Custom Sound factory, each undergoes 60 hours of sound and quality testing. "We're players, not only engineers and technicians, so part of our job is to plug in to each amp and test for output noise levels, vibration and most importantly, tone," says BCS president, Dan Butler. The Chicago Blues Box has captured the elusive 3-dimensional, harmonic rich tone that is missing from so many of today's new amplifier designs. This amp is alive and ready to help inspire any player's art form.

*Chicago Bluesbox, Butler Custom Sound  
chicagobluesbox.com.630-832-1983*

**Dave's Guitar Shop** offers Fender, Gibson, PRS, McInturff, National, Taylor, Gretsch, Guild, Rickenbacker, Martin, Santa Cruz, Lowden, and many other fine new and used instruments, plus new and used amplifiers such as Fender, Marshall, Line 6, Carr, Matchless, Victoria, Bad Cat, and Ampeg, plus hundreds of guitar effects, aftermarket pickups from Joe Barden, Seymour Duncan, and more. Due to their inventory of over 1,000 guitars, amps, and accessories, Dave's is an excellent resource for top of the line Custom Shop and Historic reissues, to intermediate new and used gear. Unlike some dealers' out of date stock lists on the web and in print, Dave's inventory is updated daily. The selection of new and used instruments is truly exceptional, and you can often select among several models of the same new guitars to find that special instrument that was meant for you. Dave's staff is friendly and extremely knowledgeable about the instru-

ments and gear they sell, because they're players, too. Please check the web site for current inventory, and you are welcome to call for more information or an accurate, in-hand description.

*Dave's Guitar Shop, LaCrosse, WI  
www.davesguitar.com 608-785-7704*

**Eminence** "If you've listened to live music, you've almost certainly listened to Eminence." Eminence has been building speakers to custom specifications for nearly every major manufacturer of guitar amplifier and sound reinforcement products since 1967. Their new Legend Series of guitar speakers captures the essence of the vintage American and British speaker designs that are held in such high regard today by so many discerning players. **The Legend Series** includes classic British and American designs for 6," 8," 10," 12," and 15" speakers utilizing ceramic and AlNiCo magnets, British or American cones, and Kapton polyamide voice coils for superior heat dissipation and durability. Best of all, because Eminence has been successfully competing for years with other speaker manufacturers as an OEM supplier, the Legend Series speakers are priced far below those of many other popular manufacturers of "reissue" and custom speakers. The Eminence Legend Series delivers all of the tone and durability you need, at a lower price, with no compromises in quality. To locate genuine Eminence dealers in your area, please visit their web site or call Eminence Speakers.

*Eminence Speaker LLC, Eminence, KY  
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Contact: Chris Rose*

## European Musical Imports

European Musical Imports is the exclusive North American distributor for the very best that Europe has to offer, including:

**T-Rex Effects** - Discover why players such as Matthew Sweet, Shawn Mullins and Pete Drogé love T-Rex! The T-Rex line includes the Alberta ("tweaked" vintage TS-808 circuit), BetaVibe (Chorus/Leslie), CompNova (Compressor), Mudhoney (Fuzz), Tremster (Tremelo/Vibrato) and Replica (2000ms delay) Coming in July 2003 — The Mac1 Midi programmable switching system and BigFoot Midi controller. Users include: John Mayer, Carl Verheyen, Brad Whitford, Neal Schon.

**Lehle Switching Boxes** - The German made Lehle Dual, 3@1 and 1@3 switchers solve all of the vexing ground loop and signal degradation problems forever! Run multiple amps and effects loops with noise-free operation. Your tone will not change and ground loops are non-existent with the solidly built Lehle switching boxes. Lehle is also the best choice for use with non-channel switching amps. Users include: Peter Stroud, Carl Verheyen, Joe Perry, Lenny Kravitz Band. **BSM Treble Boosters** - BSM's models are identical (including the original 1950's germanium transistors) to 5 classic British designs. These include the HS (Hornsby Skewes circuit), HS-Custom (modified Hornsby Skewes circuit), RM (Dallas Rangemaster circuit) RM-Metal (modified Dallas Rangemaster circuit), and the OR

-continued-

# Resource Directory

(Orange Treble and Bass Booster circuit). Acquire the creamy distortion and harmonic overtones reminiscent of Ritchie Blackmore, Eric Clapton, Tony Iommi and Brian May! **Headway Electronics Acoustic Guitar Pickups** - Currently available in the USA are the HE1 G1/FEQ and Snake2 models. The HE1 Series Pre-amplifiers are designed to perform far beyond the typical pickup's "cold replication" by generating a controlled amount of fluttering, even harmonics, perceived as top end sparkle (similar to adding an aural exciter or a warmed up valve stage). The Snake2 is a lower cost alternative which retains much of the HE1 series characteristics. Both offer a simple installation solution requiring minimal modification to your prized instrument, while providing a great, warm, sparkling sound from any quality acoustic guitar. Users include: Dave Pegg, Martin Carthy. For information, images and MP3's visit:

*European Musical Imports*  
[www.europeanmusical.com](http://www.europeanmusical.com), 201-594-0817

**Fishman** For nearly 25 years, Fishman has empowered acoustic players of all styles with extraordinary amplification solutions. Fishman's diverse products share the common commitment of making acoustic musicians heard while faithfully maintaining their own natural tone, for the best possible sound.

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

Since then, Fishman has continued to solidify its leadership position in the acoustic amplification market with ever-expanding pickup and accessories offerings. For acoustic guitar, Fishman offers the flagship Acoustic Matrix™ series active pickup system, the Rare Earth™ series active magnetic soundhole pickup, and the Neo-D™ magnetic soundhole pickup, as well as passive undersaddle, classical, archtop, and resophonic guitar pickups. Fishman pickups are also available for banjo, mandolin, and harp/piano. Fishman violin-family products include violin, viola, and cello pickups, as well as the acoustic bass pickup. In addition, last year saw the release of the Concertmaster™ amplification system for violin, and the Full Circle™ upright bass pickup, two elegant and cutting-edge string amplification solutions.

Fishman also provides an extensive line of complimentary electronics: portable, battery-operated preamps; jack-style preamps and onboard preamps with a wide variety of features to suit different musical needs. In addition, Fishman's acclaimed Acoustic Blender™ technology works seamlessly with Fishman pickups, for ultimate tonal control.

At presstime, Fishman is writing a whole new chapter in its success with the celebrated

releases of the Loudbox™ acoustic instrument amplifier and Aura™ acoustic imaging blender. These powerful and exciting new products continue to blaze the trail of acoustic amplification innovation, leadership, and commitment to the acoustic musician for Fishman. For more information, please visit [www.fishman.com](http://www.fishman.com).

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**George L's** Clean, clear sound is their business at George L's! George Lewis is a seasoned veteran of America's rich musical heritage and an original co-owner of such respected companies as GHS Strings and Sho-bud Steel Guitars. For the past 30 years, George has been dedicated to producing his legendary line of guitar cables, pickups, strings, and steel guitar accessories.

Judged Best in Sound Clarity by *Guitar Player* in 1997, George L cables were also recently elected to the Guitar Player Hall of Fame in December of 2001. George L cables will enable you to eliminate line loss with low-loss cables rated at 19 pf per foot capacitance. George L cables require no stripping or soldering, and with a choice of straight, right angle, or stretch jacks, guitarists can customize their rigs with traditional black or vintage red cable and sound great the very same day! We can think of no tougher critic than guitarist Eric Johnson, who said, "It's my favorite cable ever made for guitar." George L cable is available at fine music stores worldwide, and we invite you to visit their website for the complete story about their products. **NEW! Gold plugs, right angle plugs for George L's .225 cable, RCA plugs for all cable sizes, and the George L's pocket cable checker!**

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## GHS – The String Specialists

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

Please check out the all new GHS web site at [www.ghsstrings.com](http://www.ghsstrings.com) for expert information about GHS strings, including technical documentation on the entire GHS line of strings for fretted instruments, tech tips, string ten-

sion calculations, the "Brightness Bar," and a comprehensive list of the top artists who play GHS strings. All GHS strings are manufactured to continually exceed your expectations.

*GHS String Corporation, Battle Creek, MI*  
[www.ghsstrings.com](http://www.ghsstrings.com) 1-800-388-4447

**Hands On Guitars** Informed and inspired by a 20 year friendship with James L. D'Aquisto, Eric Miller has been building, repairing, and customizing instruments for over 18 years, and has taught guitar repair and construction courses at Boston's Berklee College of Music and the Evergreen State College. Eric is best known for impeccable craftsmanship, extreme attention to detail and client's needs, and an almost clairvoyant ability to bring out the best in an instrument. Meticulous fretwork is done using tension jigs and asymmetrical planing techniques for ultimate accuracy, and Eric has pioneered fingerboard preparation and finishing methods that enhance tone and playability as well as duplicating the look and feel of the finest vintage patinas. He is a dealer for **Tom Anderson, Robin, Gretsch, D'Aquisto, Breedlove, Stromberg, Everett, Larrivee, Rainsong and Garrison instruments, as well as crafting his own Eric Miller Custom Guitars**. Eric stocks and is extremely knowledgeable about most brands of aftermarket and original equipment pickups, both electric and acoustic. Hands On Guitars also carries designer pedals by Roger Mayer, Zachary Vex and Frantone, and maintains a large inventory of guitar "pro" products such as fossil ivory and wooly mammoth nuts, saddles, and bridgepins; Tone Pros locking bridges, tailpieces and studs; and Virtuoso Guitar Cleaner and Polish.

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

**Jensen** Musicians everywhere are thrilled to hear the unique sound of **Jensen Vintage Series** speakers again. The Jensen re-issues of the famous Jensen designs of the 50's and 60's are built to the exact specifications of the originals to achieve the same authentic sound in guitar amplifiers today. Many current manufacturers are using them as well, such as **Fender, Mesa Boogie, Victoria** and many more. Jensen Vintage Speakers are available in both true ALNICO magnet models and ceramic magnet models. The classic Jensen 'P' Series, features highly efficient AlNiCo magnets and vintage style seamed cones, when applicable, resulting in the pure vintage tone loved by guitarists throughout the world. The Jensen 'C' Series provides additional tone choice and the advantages of lower cost ceramic magnets. Originally developed in the 1960's to meet the demands of the emerging pop music industry, the 'C' Series has remained a classic ever since. CE Distribution is the exclusive US importer and distributes the Jensen speakers to distributors and dealers throughout the United States. Write to [info@jensenvintage.com](mailto:info@jensenvintage.com) to find a distributor or dealer in your area, or contact CE Distribution.

*CE Distribution, Tempe, AZ*  
[www.tubesandmore.com](http://www.tubesandmore.com) 480-755-4712  
[www.jensenvintage.com](http://www.jensenvintage.com)

-continued-

# Resource Directory

**Just Strings.com** Now more than ever, guitarists are reaping the benefits of technical innovations in string making that have led to the widest selection of guitar strings ever available. JustStrings.com is dedicated to providing guitarists with the largest selection of acoustic, roundwound, and flatwound strings, complimented by exceptional personalized service and outstanding value. Trying different types of strings often results in amazing new discoveries that not only improve the sound of your instrument, but dramatically enhance your playing enjoyment. From traditional hand-crafted strings to high-tech exotics, JustStrings.com exists to help you get the most out of your instrument. Try a new set today, or order your favorite acoustic or electric sets and SAVE! **Juststrings.com offers the best prices on all of the major and specialty brands, promptly delivered to your door.** Shop online at JustStrings.com, or place your order by fax at 603-889-7026 or telephone at 603-889-2664.

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

**Klon** Since its inception in 1994, Klon has been a one-product company, and given the overwhelming success of that product, the Centaur Professional Overdrive, it's not hard to see why. Designer Bill Finnegan, assisted by two circuit-design specialists, set out in 1990 to create an interactive and ultra-transparent overdrive, one that doesn't put its own stamp on your sound, but rather brings out in a very organic way more of what your rig was already giving you. Bill's premise was that there were many players who, like himself, had great guitars and amps, and who, as he likes to put it, "were not looking to reinvent the wheel," and the fact that he has sold some four thousand Centaur units (as of November 2002) attests to his intuition, as well as to the perfectionism that led him to spend over four years developing a single product. That perfectionism, of course, is also evident in the production unit: Bill builds every Centaur himself, by hand, using only the finest components and assembling them with meticulous care. Each unit undergoes a series of rigorous tests before shipment, and each is backed by a comprehensive ten-year warranty. Given the ongoing demand for the Centaur and Bill's disinclination to let anyone but himself build them, expect a wait of several months for delivery, but also expect your Centaur, when you receive it, to manifest a sonic superiority, a construction quality, a physical beauty, and a conceptual rightness beyond your expectations.

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

**Keeley Electronics - ToneQuest subscribers receive 10% off on all pedal mods and the Keeley comp, java boost and time machine boost!** Robert Keeley's Time Machine Boost, Keeley Compressor, and his custom, state-of-the-art modifications for vintage pedals continue to receive rave reviews from guitarists around the world. Keeley pedals are used by *Aerosmith*, Abbey Road Studios, Steve Vai, legendary producer Bob Rock, George Lynch, Peter Frampton, James Burton, and many, many more guitarists and music pros around the world. **The Time Machine Boost** is a supremely versatile 2 channel, 3 mode pre-

amplifier designed to drive your amplifiers into overdrive or saturation, as seen on the cover of the March issue of VG. The two channels are labeled "Vintage," and "Modern," with the "Vintage" side inspired by rare germanium boosts like the Dallas Rangemaster. The "Modern" channel is a new +23dB gain, dual JFET transparent signal amplifier. **The Keeley Compressor** is a superb audiophile and studio grade compressor with true bypass switching and premium metal film resistors and capacitors for the cleanest Ross clone compressor ever available. Available with a standard Ibanez/Boss style adapter jack and/or battery power, you can say goodbye to that old red Dyna Comp! Robert Keeley pedal mods include 2 versions for TS9's - the TS808 mod, and the "Baked TS9" for searing hot Tube Screamer tone. Keeley uses the original TI RC4558P chip that appeared in the early TS808's, while increasing the bass response and overdrive range. The result is a perfectly voiced 808 that's cleaner when turned down and produces twice the drive/gain when turned up, with all of the stock 808 character in the middle. **The Keeley modded BD-2** is not a fuzz pedal but has the best characteristics of a fuzz pedal, and it's much smoother and more realistic sounding. This is the pedal if you're looking for the cranked Fender Super amplifier sound. It has tremendous volume output, and it can be used as a clean boost, driving your amp into natural sounding overdrive. Other exclusive Keeley modifications include the **Boss Blues Driver BD-2 Tube Mod**, the **PHAT Switch BD-2 Mod**, **Rat Mods**, **Boss DS-1 Seeing Eye Mod**, **Boss SD-1**, and **Boss Chorus CE-2**. For detailed specs, user comments, dealer information, sound clips, and ordering information, please visit the Keeley Electronics website.

*Keeley Electronics, Edmond, OK  
www.robertkeeley.com*

## **K&M Analog Designs — Two Rock**

K&M Analog Designs, LLC, was formed in northern California in 1998 by Bill Krinard and Joe Mloganoski. The company brings a combined 60+ years of experience in tube amplification and guitar tone to the boutique amp market. As talented designer/engineer and seasoned guitarist (respectively), Bill and Joe have developed a uniquely toneful, dynamic and affordable line of hand built vacuum tube amplifiers that are instruments designed to completely complement your individual playing style. Each amp is equipped with proprietary custom transformers and coupling caps, the best available new and NOS tubes, and each model has unique build architecture and layout not found in other modern hand built designs. Each individual unit is personally tweaked by both Joe and Bill throughout the build process. Early K&M customers such as Carlos Santana helped launch the company to the forefront in its earliest days. Current K&M and Two-Rock devotees include Steve Kimock, Mitch Stein, Barney Doyle, Terry Haggerty, Mark Karan, Michael Kang, and Volker Strifler, among others. The company launched its line of Two-Rock amps in the summer of 1999. Past models include the Amethyst Special Indoor

Storm Model, Emerald 50, Sapphire 100, Emerald Pro and Topaz. Current models include the Custom, Custom Reverb, Onyx, Opal, and Ruby. A number of customized versions of the aforementioned have also been built for players seeking the ultimate personalized tone machine. K&M also recently introduced its specialty guitar cables to rave reviews both here and abroad. Currently K&M is also producing a cathode biased limited production amp for Ultrasound Studios in New York City.

*K&M Analog Designs, LLC, Cotati, CA  
www.Two-Rock.com 707-664-0267  
In Japan: www.Two-Rock-jp.com*

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

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

**Midtown Music, Atlanta, GA** is one of our very favorite sources for guitars, amplifiers, effects, and accessories. Midtown offers great deals on new amplifiers by **Dr. Z, Victoria, Savage, Two Rock, and Roccaforte**, all in stock! They also carry the complete line of Blackbox effects, Wha Whas by Geoffrey Teese, and new Jensen and Celestion speakers. Current inventory includes:

*Victoria 35310 "Bandmaster"...1998, Tweed, Near Mint...\$1395  
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Fender Esquire...2002, Custom Shop NAMM Special, Fiesta Red, Excellent, Two*

-continued-

# Resource Directory

Cases...\$1995

Fender Telecaster Custom...1978, Black, Original Humbucker, Very Good, OHSC...\$1495

Fender Stratocaster Relic...Aged Fiesta Red, Maple Fretboard, Mint, OHSC...\$1795  
PRS McCarty...Three in Stock, Call...\$1595  
Marshall JMP 50 Watt...1974, Four Inputs, No Master Volume, Large Box, Excellent...\$895

Fender Super Reverb...1967, Original Speakers & Transformers, Excellent...\$1595  
Fender Tremolux...1964, Head Only, Original Transformers, Very Good...\$450  
Dr. Z, Victoria, Roccaforte, Savage, Two Rock, O'Brien, New hand wired amps...Call  
Aiken Amps Available Soon!

The staff at Midtown is experienced and helpful (they're all great players), and Midtown has been the choice of working guitarists in the southeastern U.S. for years. Highly recommended, and definitely ToneQuest approved!

[www.midtownmusic.com](http://www.midtownmusic.com)  
404-325-0515

**Stewart MacDonald** Stewart-MacDonald offers a complete line of hard-to-find tools, parts, accessories, instructional videos and books for building, repairing, setting up, and optimizing the playability and tone of stringed instruments. Whether you are just getting started or you're a seasoned luthier, you'll find everything you need in the Stewart-Mac catalog, including: fret wire, finishing supplies, glues and adhesives, wood, bodies, necks, binding, tuners, nuts and saddles, inlay, bridges, tailpieces, electronics, pickups, and free information sheets and professional advice! Their friendly customer service and technical support staff are trained to help you make the best product choices, and they also offer an Unconditional Return Guarantee. If you're not satisfied with an item for any reason, simply return it.

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

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

*Stewart MacDonald*  
[www.stewmac.com](http://www.stewmac.com),  
1-800-848-2273

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

*Don Butler, Newhall, CA*  
[www.tone-man.com](http://www.tone-man.com)  
661-259-4544 10-6 PST, Tuesday-Saturday only

**TonePros Sound Labs International** System II Guitar Components distributed by WD Music Products "Making the world a better place for guitar guitarists!" Ever since our first published review article, The ToneQuest Report has enthusiastically recommended the patented TonePros system of guitar components. You deserve to discover why TonePros works! **All TQR subscribers will receive an exclusive 10% discount when ordering TonePros components — just mention the "TQWD" discount code when ordering by phone or online.**

TonePros tailpieces feature a patented locking design. For years, guitars with stop tailpieces and wrap-around bridges have been cursed by "lean" or tilt on their stud mounts. Since string tension was all that held tailpieces on, the only contact area was just a bit of the edge of the bottom flange, just a bit of the lip of the stud top, and often just as little contact with the intonation screws. TonePros® Locking Studs provide 100% of the contact area of the bottom flange, 100% of the contact area of the stud top, no lean, and dramatically improved sustain, resonance and tone.

TonePros bridge and saddle components feature the "patented pinch" — the lateral pressure that is applied from the strategically placed "tone screws" that greatly reduce the play or wiggle of the bridge posts in their inserts. The posts are frozen in place, resulting in a solid connection between the strings, bridge, and guitar top, transferring more string vibration and resonance to the guitar body, resulting in an audibly stronger, sweet-

er, woodier type of resonance and sustain. And once your guitar is set up, it's locked. Bridge height and intonation settings remain intact and exact, even after re-stringing. TonePros® System II Components are found on the world's best guitars, played by the world's best artists.

TonePros Sound Labs International,  
[www.tonepros.com](http://www.tonepros.com)

[www.wdmusicproducts.com](http://www.wdmusicproducts.com)  
239-337-7575

**Visual Sound** Founded by guitarist, Bob Weil in 1994, Visual Sound has become known for creating innovative effect pedals with impeccable tone at a reasonable price. The familiar "home plate" design of the Jekyll & Hyde Ultimate Overdrive, Route 66 American Overdrive, and H2O Liquid Chorus & Echo makes them stand out on any stage. Each pedal is actually two pedals in one, having two completely separate channels that can be used individually or in combination with each other, just like two pedals. However, they are priced substantially less than one comparable "boutique quality pedals, and even less than some mass-market pedals. Visual Sound pedals have been used on stage and in the studio with artists like Eric Johnson, U2, Gary Moore, Phil Keaggy, Johnny Hiland, Jars of Clay, and many others. The latest addition from Visual Sound is the 1 SPOT space-saving adapter — the first 9VDC adapter to require only one spot on a wall outlet or power strip. The 1 SPOT works with almost every pedal in existence and can easily power an entire pedal board by itself with the addition of optional daisy chain cables. It's a fraction of the cost of brick-sized pedal board power supplies and it takes up no space on the board. As if that wasn't enough, it even converts voltage automatically anywhere in the world! For more information about Visual Sound, mp3 downloads, and product information, please visit the Visual Sound web site, or contact Bob Weil personally.

Visual Sound  
[www.visualsound.net](http://www.visualsound.net) 615-595-8232

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Joe Bonamassa  
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