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THE AUSTRALIAN MUSIC MAGAZINE

MAY/JUNE 1987

# SONICS

SPECIAL  
GUITAR FEATURE

## THE THE

*Blues perception,  
hi-tech perfection*

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VOLLENWEIDER**  
*Harp, body and soul*

**EURHYTHMICS/OMD**  
*Live in Oz*

**BIG PIG**  
*Power of percussion*

### REVIEWS

- Kinman guitar
- FX pedals
- Akai digital mixer
- Roland MIDI guitar converter
- Yamaha bass

### PLUS

- BUILD OUR MIDI PATCH CHANGER
- MAKING THE MOST OF STUDIO TIME
- SYNTH EQ TIPS

The Epiphone Casino



## BUDGET BUYS

PETER CEREXHE gives his recommendations to guitarists chasing a new electric for less than \$1000.

**B**ecause the style of the instrument is at least as important (if not more important) than its features I'll give them to you by reference to their shape and style.

### TELECASTER STYLE

While Tokai produces some excellent copy Telecasters — including a paisley version! — my preference is the Profile

Telecaster custom in its Vintage series.

It's a bit cheaper than the Tokai and the sound is perhaps a shade purer in the classic sense. It's got that lovely muted cream binding on top and bottom, a rich and warm yellow stain along the maple neck, a light alder body and pickups which carry that pure Telecaster tone a little way past the point at which a real Fender Telecaster starts to squeal uncontrollably.

Note that the pickup selector switch is a bit dodgy and should be replaced. Price is \$695.

### STRATOCASTER STYLE

If you want a straight vintage style Stratocaster copy then go for the

## READY ... SET ... PLAY

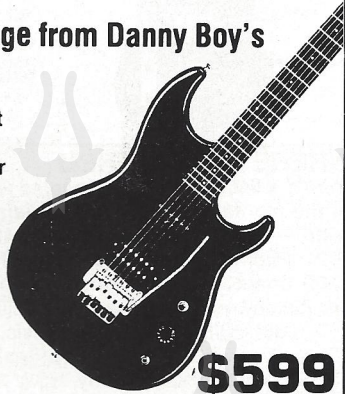
### A Custom Guitar Package from Danny Boy's

At last an electric guitar designed for beginners that will take you where you want to go.

A guitar that gives the first guitar buyer an instrument that not only masters rock music and contemporary sounds but will permit progress into professional playing.

The Yamaha SE 250 is the guitar and it offers

- A Superb Bridge and Locking Nut
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- A Resilient Tough Finish
- Recessed Neck Plate for Easy Access to High Frets



**\$599**

and polished to improve its playability (something we'll do again free of charge six months later) and we've replaced the front pickup with a Seymour Duncan SSL1 vintage replacement pickup to give even greater sustain, sound and tonal quality. Put all this in a quality guitar case and you have it **ready ... set ... play.**

While the Yamaha SE 250 represents a sound investment in your future career aspirations, Danny Boy's have taken it a step further.

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## GUITAR FEATURE

Fender Squier (\$795) or the Profile Vintage (\$720).

There's not much to choose between these two. While the Strat copies all sound like Stratocasters, they have their individual tonal differences . . . just like the original Fenders! What separates the Profile and Squier Stratocasters from the pack is that their finish is excellent and that the tone doesn't start breaking up when you push up the volume. You can still get that smooth, rounded Strat sound when many of the other copies lose their edge.

The custom colours — especially with the Profile Vintage series — are excellent too!

### LES PAUL STYLE

Again, there are two front-runners here; the Tokai (\$880 plus) and the Fernandes 'Revival Les Paul style' at \$850. Both emulate the late 1950s classic flamed-maple Gibson with mahogany neck and body.

The detail and finish are excellent and the tone is a little more balanced and consistent than on many original Les Pauls.



### WHERE TO GET THEM

*Here's a list of guitar companies with models at the cheaper end of the market, and their Australian distributors:*

ARIA — distributed by Music Link, 42-48 Victoria St, Richmond, Vic 3121. Phone: (03) 429 9299; DAION — Central Musical Instruments, 570B Chapel St, South Yarra, Vic 3141. (03) 240 0242; EAGLE — distributed by Venue Music, 72 Druitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000. (02) 267 7288; EPIPHONE — Pro Music, 18 Railway Tce., Milton, Qld 4064. (07) 369 8144; FENDER (Squier, Bullet) — Fender Australia, 13-15 Pemberton St, Botany, NSW 2019. (02) 666 3929; FERNANDES — Central Musical Instruments, HONDO — Pro Music; IBANEZ — Australis Music, 2 Powells Rd, Brookvale, NSW 2100. (02) 938 3466; KRAMER — The Electric Factory, 188 Plenty Rd, Preston, Vic 3071. (03) 354 3987; LEGEND — Music Link; LA GRANGE — Australis Music; MARINA — Pro Music; ONYX — Musical Merchandisers, 100 Old Pittwater Rd, Brookvale, NSW 2100. (02) 93 0311; PROFILE — Dynamic Music, Cnr William and Short Sts, Brookvale, NSW 2100. (02) 939-1299; RIVERHEAD — The Electric Factory; SESSION — The Electric Factory; TAKAMINE — Wayne Music, 21 Percy St, Heidelberg West, Vic 3081. (03) 45 2275; TOKAI — Tokai Music Australia, 39 Richmond Rd, Flemington, NSW 2140. (02) 76 0225; TORCH — Australasian Music Supplies, PO Box 230, Blackburn, Vic 3130. (03) 879 4642; VALENCIA — Australasian Music Supplies; VANTAGE — Dynamic Music; WASHBURN — The Electric Factory; WESTONE — F. Payton and Son, 12 Waltham St, Artarmon, NSW 2064. (02) 439 1822; YAMAHA — Yamaha Music Australia, 28 Kent St, Belmore, NSW 2192. (02) 750 8999.

## SEMI-ACOUSTICS

There aren't many of these under \$1000 and what there are seem patchy in quality and features.

The two which I would recommend — but only for the person who *really* wants a guitar of this style — both need serious customising to turn them into good guitars. This is possible and practical because of the low price of the guitars.

Check out Epiphone's Casino or Sheraton (about \$695 with case) and the Hondo H-935 (\$499 without case).

If you recall the review in *Sonics* (Jan/Feb '87) of the Casino, you will remember that there are many outstanding features to work from to make a truly personal instrument; like the slanted inlays, trapeze tail-piece, distinctive pickup covers.

At its slightly lower price, the Hondo is not as good a guitar.

It needs more work on the neck and certainly the machine heads need replacing — but the pickups are a little more powerful and, while sounding nothing like a Gibson 335, it still has a big, full sound.

## WITH TREMOLO ARM

The Fernandes 'head crusher' fine-tuning tremolo system is good and rests on a hot guitar, with various pickup configurations. It'll cost about \$1000.

At \$1099 (though this includes the case!) you could be lucky enough to find a Kramer Focus series guitar with a fine-tuning Floyd Rose tremolo. This guitar has a Van Halen style, with Explorer headstock and slanted humbucker at the bridge, and is a powerful, reliable rock 'n' roll beast! While the tone is not particularly distinctive or memorable, at the volume you're likely to play it this don't mean a hoot! This'll put some madness in your metal.

## BASSES

For a cheapie, have a look at the Aria X-1 bass with Precision pickup and bridge Jazz pickup. Great value at around \$400 and really pleasing to play and look at.

If you've got some more dollars, have a look at the Washburn WF-B2 and WF-B10 basses — good pickups and upmarket machine heads and brass bridges (\$484 to \$614 including case). Or try the Fernandes FRB-44 Revolver Cutaway to \$895. Solid stuff!

Beware: some of the oriental copy basses have short-scale lengths and these don't seem to combine well with the pickups to give a powerful bottom end.

# ECLECTIC ELECTRIC

**In the age of the silicon chip, samples and CD, the instrument that heralded music's entry into the electronic age is as popular and versatile as ever. And guitar-maker IAN NOYCE envisages a few refinements yet!**

**T**he electric guitar has come a long way in Australia since Col Joye and the Joyboys did their first big club gig, ending when Col jumped off his rubber mat to shake hands with the ecstatic manager, electrifying him and blowing the gig away, all in one enthusiastic handshake! (Col was playing a homemade guitar that was dangerous if not used in conjunction with a rubber mat.)

Electric guitars were pretty thin on the ground in the land of Oz in the 1950s and weren't even readily available until the mid-60s, when the Japanese started exporting in earnest. (They had been on the scene for some time by then though, 'cos I remember my first sight of an electric was an Ibanez

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**'The Koreans and Japanese have catered for demand and can produce a guitar in two hours!'**

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f-hole, at the 1955 Irymple State School fancy dress ball — I was Peter Pan.)

By the late 60s there was no shortage of Gibson and Fender copies available, from the barely look-alike 32mm plywood Canora 'Strat copys' and ply-bodied, screw on neck, ply-top Les Pauls, to some pretty well-made guitars. Also by this time the real McCoy's; Fender, Gibson, Guild and other US guitars were readily available.

By the mid-70s we had a very broad selection of guitars on the market from the US, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, England, Germany, Italy, Australia and probably more! We also had a growing wholesale/retail music industry geared up to import, distribute and retail a broad range of guitars. But the 60s guitar boom had set the pace.

## KOREAN CONNECTION

Now, on the verge of the 1990s, the state of play is quite clear. The steel-string guitar (particularly the electric guitar) is an American invention, made mostly in Korea (even the

Japanese companies use Korean factories) and consumed in bigger numbers in the US than anywhere else. Several of the top American brands now sell their US-made product as well as similar alternatives coming out of Korea (Japan now being too costly).

As the popularity of the electric guitar has boomed in the short 30-odd years of its history, so too, naturally, has the demand for cheap guitars. The Koreans and Japanese have catered for this, and these days can produce a guitar, using computer-controlled technology, in two hours!

That's packed and ready to ship to Australia, where it will sell for maybe \$500. The overheads of these hi-tech production lines are enormous, but the volume of sales keeps the price down. The larger companies can have several different brand names for the same

## MUSICAL REPAIR & TRADING CO



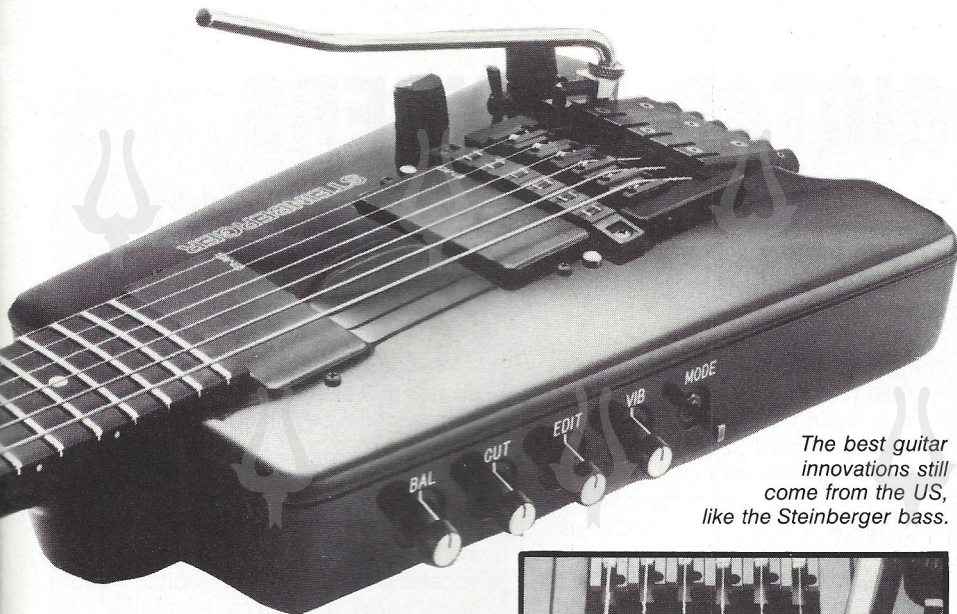
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*The best guitar innovations still come from the US, like the Steinberger bass.*

model guitar, depending on the importing customer's requirements. So what's in a name anyway? The main thing here is that the customer is getting the benefit of the efficiency of these hi-tech, hi-volume, low-wage factories.

## FURTHER UPMARKET

In the \$1000-\$2000 price bracket, the market turns back to the small companies, anyone from the US Fender or Kramer down the to *real* small firms such as my own.

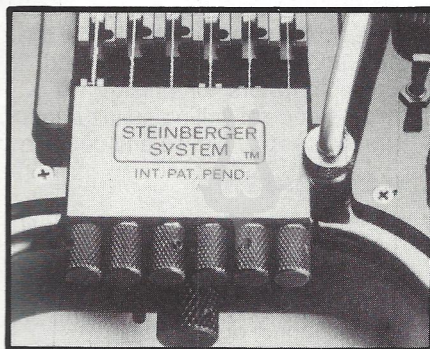
There are good Japanese/Korean guitars in this price range, but generally they compete with the smaller US makers in this section of the market.

The best inventions on the guitar still come from the US. EMG pickups, the Floyd Rose bridge and the Steinberger bass are arguably the most significant innovations since Leo Fender invented the Stratocaster.

I can't imagine a non-Westerner developing the sound of EMGs, or going to the trouble Floyd Rose did to lock down his strings or invest in and sell something like the Steinberger, with its nut-and-bolt style tuning gear.

Although the American guitar manufacturing industry has taken a hiding over the last few years it's not in danger of extinction. The large conglomerates such as CBS and Norlin, who swallowed up companies like Fender and Gibson and many more in the 60s and 70s, have since sold them back; usually to people on staff. These relatively small companies are now run and owned by people with commitment to the guitar, not the parent company's balance sheet.

Musical instruments change and develop because individual musicians



demand new facilities and new sounds. Other musicians try the new thing out and find they like it, and so it goes — the guitar and the music played on it grow hand in hand, each evolving and influencing the other.

## THE FUTURE

The cost of quality woods for guitar-making will only accelerate even faster. Growing demand, acid rain, diminishing forests; all suggest that new materials will ultimately replace wood to some extent in guitar production.

Man has always made musical instruments out of the most appropriate materials of the time. As silicon chips and sound synthesis become even more commonplace in our musical and everyday lives, it's easy to imagine the electric guitar of the 90s running off 240-volt power, with automatic servo-tuners (or at least a built-in tuner for the standard model) and a wood/kevlar (carbon fibre) composite body with a choice of three densities. There could even be LED fingerboard displays of the notes your guitar's logic and memory banks think you should play more or less often!

The future of the guitar seems strong. A Japanese yen is four times dearer now than it was a decade ago, but the same guitar isn't four times the price. As the world becomes a smaller place, we can expect to see a greater variety

of guitars to choose from as computer technology becomes more accessible to smaller manufacturers.

Much of the work making a guitar can be done on a computerised mass production basis, but to produce a fine instrument, most of the later stages of work *must* be done by hand. These days, these two extremes of production technique are accommodated side by side on the factory floor.

Clearly the Fender Strat-type guitar looks like remaining the 'standard' electric rock guitar design. But its evolutionary refinement will continue, involving guitarists, roadies, repairers, late-night ravers and a few others besides the backroom boys at the factory.

What instrument could equal the guitar's versatility?

Even from one design such as a Strat we can choose a maple or rosewood fingerboard, ash or alder body, and at least one pickup option; eight different possibilities, without counting colour options.

Yep, it's a versatile instrument, the guitar. That's one of the reasons we love 'em so much, isn't it?

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