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The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone **Report™**
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Steve Soest—The Guitar Man

There are but a few truly legendary names in the world of guitars when it comes to collecting, repairing, designing and playing rare vintage guitars, and one of them is Steve Soest. In addition to being an avid collector, and a lifelong player, Steve has worked with many companies and artists



as they endeavored to capture the magic of their instruments and he most notably worked with the Danelectro Company to help design reissues of their most seminal models.

During the past 45 years, Steve has assembled an impressive client list of over 100 legendary artists including Ry Cooder, David Lindley, Eric Clapton, John Fogerty, Buddy Guy, Mike Campbell and The Smithereens. He possesses an encyclopedic knowledge of guitars and serves the music and film industry as a historian, technical consultant, and designer.

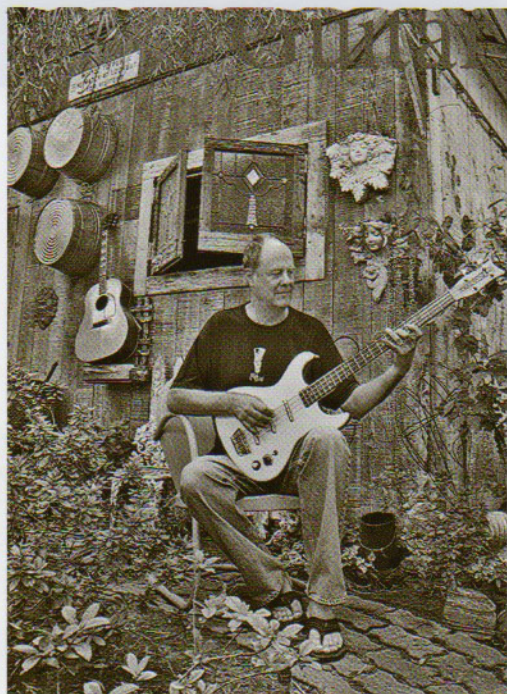
Yep, Soest is the Danelectro Man of record in the guitar world and he was more than happy to talk to us about his personal journey that began at an early age and one that continues today. He answers his shop phone with the good humor of a man who found his calling in life long ago and has made a success of it. Modest, humble even, Soest quietly walked us back in time explaining how and why things were done a certain way at Danelectro, what was preserved in the reissues and

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improvements he made to the original building process. This iconic American company that could produce a boxcar load of guitars a day and more simply took the creative ideas of Nathan Daniel to their natural conclusion, all the while making the electric guitar and amp affordable to for all.

It is with great pleasure that we share the following conversation with Steve Soest. Enjoy!

TQR: So you're working in the barn?



Yep, I've got property that's about 105 years old with an old carriage house that I converted, a loft up above where the hay was, and there's room

where the horse was, I put a floor and a window and that's where the power tools are, and the main room where the carriage was, is my bench and stuff, full of wood.

TQR: Sounds like heaven.

Yeah, wish I had done it sooner. I've been here five years. The other places were always off a busy street, right on the railroad tracks or bus stop and people would come and bug you while trying to get work done and they wanted to ask questions about picks.

TQR: I'm really glad I got in touch with you and that you agreed to submit yourself to the probe. It should be fun. Well, I wanted to start out by asking you to give me a little overview of your career in your words.

Well let's see, where do you want to start? Playing music, repair and all that? I was in junior high in Westminster, California and it was a mixed P.E. class, seventh and eighth grade and we'd seen the Beatles on TV like everybody else and one

of the guys in P.E. class said "oh yeah, I've gotta band". And it was a guitar and a drummer, kind of like pre White Stripes, I guess. I said "oh, yeah" and he asked "do you want to come and join?" I told him, "Well, I don't have a guitar". I went home from school that day and my grandpa owned race horses and he had been out at the race track. A guy owed him some money on a side bet and gave him a Kay guitar – a little two pickup Kay cutaway. He brought it home and asked me "do you want this guitar? I don't have any use for it." I said "Ah, man, how fortunate".

So I took it over to the guy's house and he showed me where to put a couple of fingers to play chords for songs that he had written, and that was the beginning of it. We played at a hamburger stand that next weekend, playing the same three songs, over and over for three hours – your know one of those gigs.



I just kept playing through high school, different bands and had a band called Der Zeppelins, before Led Zeppelin. We had to change the name when they came out because everybody goes "you're copying them" and we said "no, they copied us." I played all the way through school and college at Marine bases, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and corporate stuff.

I started working on guitar stuff because nobody did. My dad had tools because he was a carpenter and so, I would try to take pickups apart and see what was in this pickup and how does this work – just started putting things together, gluing up broken necks, replacing tuners. We made a pickup winder off an old sewing machine my Mom had thrown away.

TQR: All self-taught?

Yeah, there were no books. I think Irving Sloane's book on Classical Guitar Building was the only thing out there and it was like — "this the only way you do it" ... "this the way you have to do it" and I did not like all of these rules. And then

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Don Teeter came out with his book and it was light and day. He was a machinist and fabricator and he knew how to make tools. So I built all the tools from his book and started using that stuff. Then more and more, Wheeler's book came out on vintage guitars and started seeing guys like Stew Mac, Dan Erlewine and more stuff—making videos. But boy, there was really nothing. You would ask people and nobody knew anything. There was Fullerton, I was born and raised right here in Orange, but Fullerton on a bicycle was a still half day ride. (Laughing) I could never get up there to ask questions. I started my shop on the back of a pawn shop in '72. The pawnbroker was a musician, so we partnered up and I'd go out to the swap meets and buy guitars, amps, pedals and then we'd resell them at the shop. I fixed them up in the back. After a little bit of that, I moved into another barn. I had a barn out in East Orange up in the hills. My grandparents had their horse ranch up there, so that's why I started there.

TQR: That sounds nice.

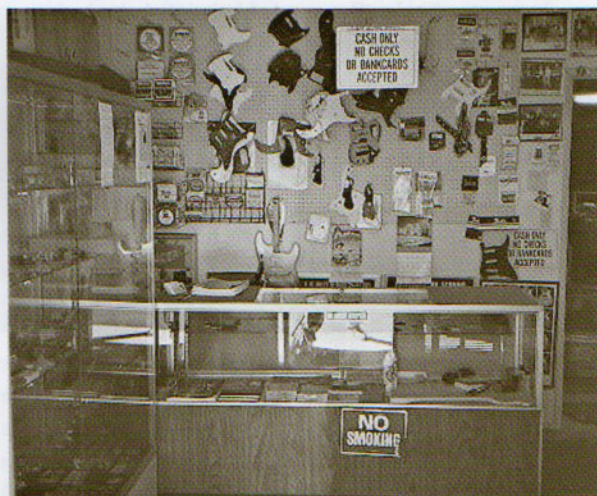
It was beautiful. You know, I would go out one day and there would be a rattlesnake on the floor in the shop or owl sitting in there looking at the snake—always some sort of wildlife, fox and other weird animals coming around. Then I got hooked up with Fender as their regional service center for about 34 years, so I moved here and dropped all my warranty stuff. I was Gibson's service center, Fender, Gretsch, Guild, Ovation and I decided I didn't want to do that anymore. So when I moved the shop over here about 5 years ago, I dropped all that stuff.

TQR: And throughout your career, you are entirely self-taught!

Yeah and I worked my first year right out of high school. I applied at a bunch of places and F.C. Hall at Rickenbacker hired me. I drove from my all night senior party right to Rickenbacker, in Santa Ana, my first day there in the warehouse, inspecting and shipping. It was interesting to see the corporate end of it, you know.

TQR: What an amazing journey.

I've gotten to go and do things I probably would not have normally done, playing and getting to go to shows. You know when the vintage thing started happening in the late '60s I



started buying and reselling stuff and I got hooked up with guys that would come here from Europe for NAMM shows. There were a couple of Swedish and Japanese guys that started exporting and would always call me when they got into town and say what do you got, they'd come over and buy all the Gretschs, Fenders Mustangs, and Mosrites or whatever I had at the time. Then they started making orders, "This is what I need, 6 Fender Mustangs in Olympic white," and I would go out buy 'em and they'd send someone, a shipper to pick 'em up. That started the whole buying and selling thing for me around '69, just when I got out of high school.

TQR: Only in America. Let's talk about Danelectros. When was your first introduction to Danelectro Guitars?

When I was buying and selling stuff, I always found that I could buy them really cheaply and sell them for a little more money and for some reason, I was buying a lot of Harmonys, Kays and Supros. They didn't seem to hold up as well. The Kays and Harmony archtops had dovetail joints that failed and it would cost more to reset the neck than the guitar was

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worth. But the Danelectros always had straight necks, everything val-ways worked, never saw one with bad electronics. They had pretty good sized frets, nice flatter radius on

the fingerboard, so they were pretty much playable and you could still buy them for \$15 to \$20 bucks at pawn shops. They just thought they were junk. So I bought a bunch. I was a big fan of the band Spirit and Randy California. The first time I saw them at the Golden Bear, probably in '68, he's playing this copper Silvertone, dolphin headstock, single pickup, so I talked to him about it. I found a really nice one, went back and sold it to him...I think I sold him two of them over the years. He always played the same one with duct tape over it...the boss tone plugged into it with duct tape on it.

After that, I just started looking for them. At any time in my barn I would have 10-12 of them hanging up, missing parts or ones I would fix to sell. I always really appreciated them, using them on gigs and people would come up and say "What is that guitar...that's from Sears?" "Yeah, Yeah they sold them, it's a Danelectro" ... and I would get into the history of it.

I tracked down Nathan Daniel when he was retired, living in Hawaii and he was working on a design for a super outrigger. It was similar to a ferry used to take cars over the rough waters between the islands. I don't think they ever got the funding on it while he was still alive. He was just such a brilliant engineer. We started talking about guitars. I met up with him when he came over for



business one day, so we went over to interview him. I believe the article in Guitar World Magazine was the first time anyone had written anything about Danelectro. Jim Washburn and I interviewed him and took pictures and did a historical thing about the company and him and what he was up to at that time.

After that, the reason I got involved with the new company,

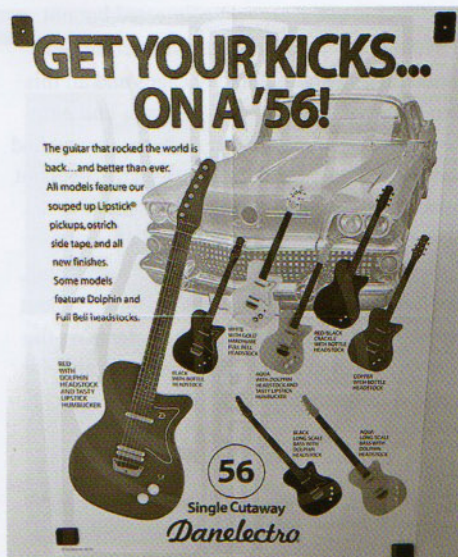


Evets was Michael Campion, who was working for Steve Ridinger who owns Evets Corporation. He got a hold of me and said "We understand you're into Danelectros" and I said "Oh yeah, that's my weak

spot, I love 'em and I've got a ton of 'em...you know I'm taking them apart and I've done all sorts of things". He asks "Would you be interested in working with us, we going to bring the line back?" I said "Boy that's it man, that's my dream gig". They made some pedals, took them to NAMM and everybody loved the pedals and asked "Where are the guitars?" They hadn't even thought about making the guitars, they just got the name. A guy named Anthony Marc in New Jersey had registered the name because it had fallen out of use after MCA was no longer using it and Evets bought it from him. I'm not sure what they paid him, but he was wearing a really nice leather jacket and driving a new Porsche the next time I saw him. (laughing) They paid well for the name.

They were just going to do pedals, didn't know anything about guitars. Steve at Evets had done things like Gorilla Amps, BC Rich NJ Series and Fox amplifiers, FOXX pedals, bringing in Vox stuff from England and rebranding it. He was always one of those kinds of guys, so he said, "let's just do guitars." We started out by running an ad in Vintage Guitar Magazine that they were buying Danelectro guitars. They bought a bunch of U2s and brought them all over to me and we spec'd them out. We found out that the '58 or '59 reissue, they liked the features on that the best. I got busy and spec'd everything out and made a combination of the best features as far as the neck shape, the fret height, and the fingerboard ra-

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and had the magnets recreated. We spent about a year on the pickup from '97... I'm trying to remember... I think '98 was the first year the U2 debuted at NAMM. I believe at that time NAMM had gone to L.A. for a while because the Anaheim Convention Center was being remodeled and enlarged. It was at one of the L.A. NAMM shows when we first unveiled them. People went nuts – they'd never seen anything like it... everything was Strat copies or Les Paul copies and here's something totally different.

In the beginning we had five factories in South Korea working full time. We got samples from China and tried different places. I still have a bunch of those in boxes... just stuff that people would send us. And we had some pickup manufacturers make the pickups and they would send them to us so we could compare them. But we really didn't like anything – they wanted to do it differently and the lipstick tubes were too big.



I said "If we're going to do this, let's make it so the parts are interchangeable so a guy who's got the old '50s one, can buy tuners, knobs and pots and replace the stuff he's got and can't get it." So, they agreed to that and Allparts became our parts distributor – anything that was leftover, necks, pickguards... everything but the bodies they got, and you could still buy the stuff. We thought it was a good idea that you could put the old knobs on the new pots and vice versa.

The first run had way too many colors... about twelve and the

dius. I had a bunch of old pickups that I kept over the years, so we put them on a winder and we wound them so we could get how many winds were on there, and sent the magnet to a metallurgist to find out what it was

necks were solidly painted. We decided for warranty purposes it was too tough to keep necks of every model and color in stock, so we went back to the natural finish neck after about two years or so. For the first ones there were a few things we had to change. You know in Asia, all they wanted to do was cut the bodies out of plywood or solid wood. We said "no, no we are going to use Masonite". They said it wasn't a good idea, and it was a real fight to get them to use Masonite. But they did and because it's used for building materials in Asia, they didn't have problem and it's so heavy you really couldn't ship it from here to there to have something made.

Albert Garcia who worked for Fender in Asia in their different factories knew the whole routine over there and the secret hand shake. We sent him to the factory and he would spend a week or two there and go around to each guy on the line and



1955 Silvertone U1

say "Yes, this is what you are doing right... this is great... or do it this way," tip them \$5 bucks in US money and they were all happy. We really did well. But you notice some of the head stocks are slightly different shape and that meant different factories. They were all supposed to be doing the same thing but some of them slipped a little. It was a little hard to track. Somewhere I have on a sheet of paper saying which factory was which by a certain code and serial number. After a while we narrowed it down to three factories.

At some point they decided to go to China... I think 2002-03 and that was a disaster. China wasn't quite ready then. They're great now and they're making some wonderful stuff. At that time it was still too early and the quality control... the necks were all going bad and there were problems in the shipping because they weren't sealing them correctly and everything was getting rusty in the ships.

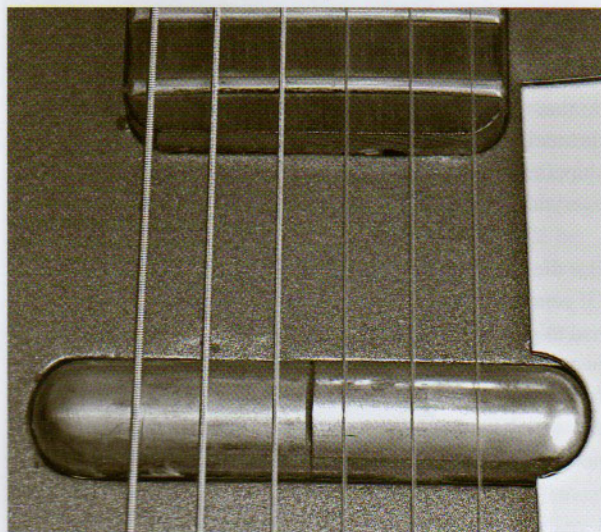
But the quality was really good... I was real happy with those. Of course the original bridges were machine brass, but we had to go with a pot metal injection mold, because it costs just as much as the guitar to machine a piece of brass into the bridge shape we needed, so a few of those things. But along the way they would say ok, if they were still making guitars now, what would they do and what improvements would they have done? I told 'em I've got some little improvements that I've done over the years as far as a bridge, a back nail on

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the thing to hold the strings otherwise you're trying to catch that little slot. The strings they make now have bigger winds on them and don't want to stay in the slots, so you have to modify it or put something under there to hold it. So we did an upgrade to the bridge and I made it tunable. I'd taken old Danelectro bridges put some Fender bronco saddles on them that were radiused and adjustable so you could intonate it. So we copied that idea for some of the upgraded models, the DC3s and the U3s. I designed a rotary switch where you could get all the pickups in combinations and still have them in series. That was another thing...everyone else wanted to run them in parallel and I said no because that's part of the unique thing. They all said it's louder in the middle position when two pickups are on...and I said that's just the way they were and that came from Nathan Daniel when he was working for Epiphone. If you look at the old Epiphone two pickup guitars they're wired in series not in parallel.

He worked with a guy named Herb Sunshine at Epiphone doing the wooden amplifier designs...it was Nathan and Herb Sunshine who did those. A lot of the Epiphone stuff moved forward into Danelectro by the early 50s up to the war. Nathan was a brilliant guy. When we met and interviewed him, he had a little notepad in his pocket that he pulled it out...we asked him "Why did you make the truss rod the way it was, not adjustable?" He goes well you know there were patents on that and we wanted to see what we could do – there is a theory in metallurgy that if you turn a piece of metal sideways instead of flat it won't bend. He showed me that he still had it written down on that notepad in his pocket. He was 80 years old at the time we met him. But that was his whole deal.

When we talked about the lipstick tubes and asked him why he used them, he said they were available and he was trying to do something to avoid the shorter turn effect. He said if you totally shield the pickup it turns into a big capacitor and you attenuate all of your high frequencies. But if you use



two pieces so the shield is still there and connected but not touching, it will avoid that – he called it the shorter turn effect. Then he started talking about Faraday cages and all this cool stuff. He also said that he developed the push-pull amp circuit, but at the same time someone else had done it and had already gotten the patents on it. And then we asked him about the neck tilt adjustment on the Danelectro and asked him why he didn't get a patent on it...he said it was just a simple idea. I said well, Fender got a patent on it later. He said yeah, I'm surprised, but I did not have it patented. He told us about designing their reverb unit. Hammond had the patents on the reverb spring stuff so he had to come up with something else – just a brilliant and all around guy.

TQR: Going back to the original Danelectros, I know you've had a ton of them. How consistent were they tonally?

Pretty good. The good and interesting thing about Nathan... people were starting to use hide glue back then, but he didn't like the way it worked. He said your arm hairs would be stiff by the end of the day, your nose would be full and you couldn't get rid of the smell. So he used an early version of an epoxy that is pretty much totally transparent like hide glue. It dries really hard and crystalline so it will pass frequencies.

Copyrighted Material

Deciphering Serial Numbers

Serial numbers on Danelectro and Silvertone logo'd instruments are ink stamped on the body and/or neck. In some rare instances they can be handwritten (Fig 7) or a combination of both. They can be from three to six numerical digits in length. A dash or extended space between digits may also be present. They may also be stamped more than once on the same instrument. A letter may also be present. There are also instances where no serial number is present at all. They can be found in one or more of the following locations:

- (Fig 1) On the neck heel.
- (Fig 2) In the neck pocket.
- (Fig 3) On an interior brace in the rear control cavity.
- (Fig 4) On the underside of the control cavity cover.
- (Fig 5) On the control cavity cover Masonite clamp brace.
- (Not shown) On the underside of the top through the control cavity.

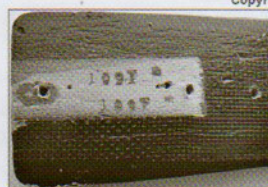


Fig. 1

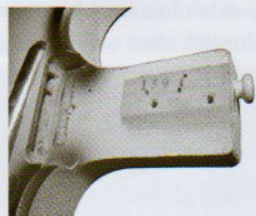


Fig. 2

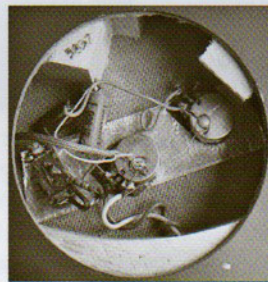


Fig. 3

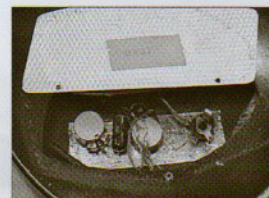


Fig. 4

He said that was a consideration because everyone started using yellow carpenter's glue. But that's like putting a rubber boot over the thing because it just stops all the vibration. You

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Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

(Fig. 6) On the rear of the headstock (1967-1969 Coral Instruments).

On instruments with a 3 digit number the first two digits represent the week in the calendar year, the last digit represents the year in the decade. Example: Serial number "119" translates to the 11th week (11) of 1959 (9).

Post 1967 instruments with 3 digit linked numbers translate in reverse, with the first digit representing the year in the decade and the last two digits the week in the calendar year.

On instruments with a 4 digit number the first two digits represent the week in the calendar year, the 3rd digit's meaning is unknown, the 4th digit represents the year in the decade. Example: Serial number "1804" translates to the 18th (18) week of 1964 (4).

Instruments with 3 numerical digits plus 1 letter serial numbers translate the same as a 3 digit numerical serial number. The letter's meaning remains unknown.

On instruments with a 5 digit number, use the 4 digit translation above using the first 4 digits and disregarding the last digit (or letter) which meaning is unknown.

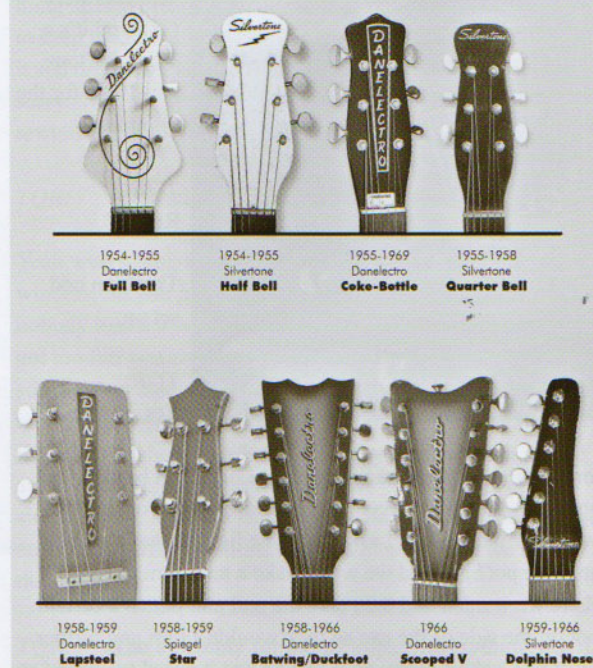
All Coral Instruments were built in 1967, 1968, and 1969 and have a silver metallic tag with a six digit impressed number glued on the rear of the headstock. The first digit will be on 7 (1967), 8 (1968) or a 9 (1969). The remaining digits meanings are unconfirmed.

Determining additional key features such as model, body style, and headstock profile is also helpful to establish your instruments build date. Acquiring the date codes from the volume and tone control pots (assuming they are original to the instrument) is yet another option. Combining all of the above listed methods will yield the most accurate dating results for your particular instrument.

know Gibson found that out finally – get rid of anything that is rubber, or plastic and that really helps. But I think they were pretty good. He was using pine, Douglas fir for the frames and the Masonite was consistent. He said it was wonderful

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Headstocks



because it had the same moisture content, same amount of sawdust and glue in it, no variations. He said that one sheet of Masonite weighs exactly the same as another sheet back then and that was another of the reasons he liked it. You could get it with a wood grain print, like they did with some of the mid '60s ones – the deluxe models, where you had three different colors, a honey walnut etc. He said that made it kind of cool, but the reason they did it was that they could primer it up, it would take paint and you wouldn't have to worry about knob holes or grain variations. The frames were basically just stapled together. They would cut sections and if you ever take the top off a Danelectro you see rusty staples under the glue lines where they just stapled the bodies together and glued them.

With everything I've seen the inconsistency is probably what changes in the models. The original ones had a block continue from the neck block to the bridge block, the bridge block is glued to the top and the base. There's a gap between the top and that block until it gets up to the neck block where you have a little bit of floating air there that's not connected. So I think it gave it a more of a resonance. Some of the one's that are solid up to the top sound a little bit different. They wanted to make sure they knew when they made the new ones that this may make a difference and so we should probably go with it because he had a reason for doing it.

Neptune Bound

The Ultimate Danelectro Guitar Guide



by Doug Tulloch

Foreword by Vincent Bell

Introduction by Howard Daniel

CENTERSTREAM

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TQR: Well, this is interesting because when you look at the inside of one the old Danelectros it looks like it wasn't done by accident and everything appears deliberate to me and pretty consistent. If I remember correctly, I think they had about 500 people working there at the time...production was prolific to say the least...

I don't know. The guy who wrote the Danelectro book, Neptune Bound, The Ultimate Danelectro Guitar Guide, Doug Tulloch was a local there and he actually found people who worked there. The only guy that I ever talked to who worked at Danelectro was Bruce Springsteen's, E Street Band bass player, Garry Tallent who worked there when he was in high school during summer vacation. Of course, Howard Daniel, Nate's son is still alive. He's fluent in Russian and writes for "Pen-for- Rent". He moved back from Hawaii a few years ago and now lives in California. He would know because he worked there too when he was a kid.

When we did the interview for Guitar World Magazine we asked him about production and how many did he run a day. He said they had a railroad track spur behind the building. There would be an empty box car there in the morning, with just the stuff we made for Sears the box car was full and they would come to hook it up and pull it away—that was 5 days a week. All he could tell me was that he would head up to the Sears Chicago warehouse and that they weren't keeping track, just making guitars and Montgomery Ward had commissioned amplifiers...those amplifiers with the squirrely grille cloth—that was his stuff. And he did actually make, not too many guitars, but they did make a 6 string bass for Wards and if you see the one with the point on the head, that's the Wards one—it doesn't say anything on it. They were usually in copper and I've never seen a black Wards bass. They did do that and they were pretty much tied into Valco, Kay and Harmony already... he just made that one instrument because they didn't make a 6 string bass.

The amplifier stuff was all pretty much his designs. The idea of the aluminum chassis was to keep the heat down—aluminum dissipated heat better and to keep the weight down for shipping.

TQR: Are there any records that would indicate how many of those guitars were built?

Not that I know of—we really grilled him on that and he said no, if they had anything when MCA bought them in about '66...he said he looked around and everyone was selling, so he thought it was a good time to get out and MCA got everything, lock, stock and barrel. We asked him what was the important thing he did for the guitar industry and he said "I think we made a quality instrument, that was affordable and

it would suit a beginner or a professional for some time to come". It wasn't disposable and I told him a lot of people go back and try to buy them now because they remember having it as a first, good, quality instrument and they've held up well.

TQR: Do you know what type of paint they used?



I don't know if we ever got into that...there's one color sheet from 1955-56 where they still have the kind of Mercury capsule headstock on them and they had all these beautiful colors and I think it says automotive enamel on the color sheet. I don't think it was what Fender was using. It could

be enamel... I've never tried to wet sand one of them—I've stripped them before and there is usually a primer, a grey sealer underneath, white or grey.

TQR: How about the pots, do you know who made them?



The pots were CTS and it's a 1 meg for tone and 100K for the volume.

TQR: Really?

That's an odd set up.

TQR: Yes, it sure is...

Some of the stuff... like the original Long horn basses, the top knob—that little lever pointer knob, was an on and off switch for the pickup. I asked how he figured that out using the same pot? He said we would take a nail, turn the pot where we wanted and then take the nail and punch a certain spot on the side of the can so they wouldn't turn any further. It just had a short throw on it and he had it wired to ground so

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when you turned the thing on it would shut the pickup off. He was still able to maintain the series wiring using the stack pots which was brilliant.

TQR: Do you have a sense of how those guitars were assembled?

They had these wide clamps and I made them after he described them to me – a 2 foot wide, 2 X 4 turned into clamps, after the body was made, they would cut the frame out, glue the back and the top on, put them in these jigs and applied pressure all the way around. If you look inside you can see the squeeze out where the epoxy was and when that was done, you run the outside of the body through the sander before they applied the sealer to the pine, so the outside vinyl would stick to it. Basically, just a set of clamps...he invented this thimble sander because he said on the Longhorn bass it was hard to get in there and sand and you couldn't use a belt sander. So he took a piece of sandpaper and wrapped it around a thing that went up and down on the table so he could get in there and sand them really nice. He described that and his pickup winders that are owned now...some at Subway guitar, up in Berkeley... FatDog's gotta 'em. That's what I was told. And I know Vinnie Bell had one in his basement. He was interviewed and the guy went down into his basement and saw some of the Danelectro stuff he worked on with them and said Vinnie had a pickup winder too. It's a really weird deal because there's no form...the coil is wound right onto the magnet – they used that black cloth friction tape, almost like an electrical tape but a cloth embedded with rubber and that's wrapped around the magnet nicely. And they just had one thing coming in from one side and another from the other side and clamped it to hold it in place. They would wind the thing up and before taking it out they put scotch tape around it to keep the winds from running errant. Then they would wrap it and drop the whole thing in the lipstick tube. It was pretty scary...you would look at it and go...there was no way to rewind this thing (laughing) but they could do it.

TQR: Interesting, but you say they were pretty consistent.

Yeah, everything I saw. I think they used an egg timer for the winders. So you just ran it until the bobbin was full...yeah, nobody said a word until the bobbin was full...because if it got too full you couldn't fit into the lipstick tube. I've got someone on tape, a friend of mine who is a D.J. in Hawaii who actually sat down with Nathan in his backyard and I think I have about four hours. The guy that owned it passed away, and I am trying to find his wife or son to get permission to use it. It would make a great documentary because he answers specific questions that tied in with what we did for the magazine.

TQR: The assembly for the pickups...everything was all done in-house?

Yeah, all those little springs, they made their own...you know the way they have the pickups mounted from the back where they have those leaf springs – that was brilliant. They just built those things and it applies just the right amount of pressure.

TQR: When did the frets go in?



He told me about the machine they made...I said the fingerboard is totally flat and he said no, the fingerboard does have a radius to it and told me how much it was – very slight. He made a machine that the fingerboard blanks could swing through and it would sand the radius into the board. So the frets were pressed in...let's see I've got a neck blank that's got no frets, but the fingerboard on it...so the frets went in after the fingerboards were glued to the neck. I've got a bass neck blank...remember the Vinnie Bell and the Coral stuff that had a rosewood headstock on them? That was a separate piece of Brazilian rosewood flitches they had left over from something he got, said he bought them by the pound and they would cut the neck off, make a joint and just push that thing on and glue it in. So, I've got one like that and there's no frets in that either – it's the rosewood, the neck blank and the headstock isn't even shaped.

TQR: So the pickups are wound on sight, he must have had a winding room.

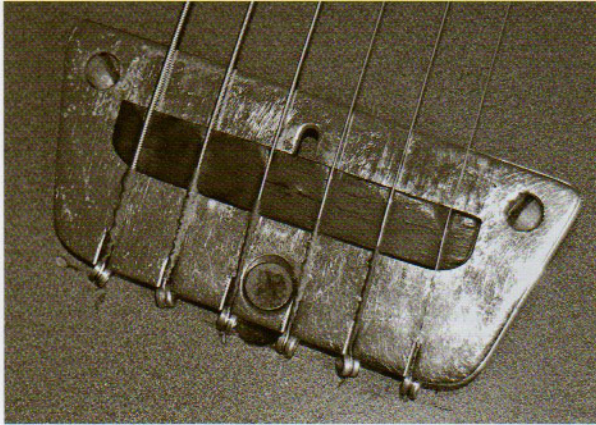
They must have had something...he had two different factories, one in Red Bank and one in Neptune. They started in Red Bank and he said they outgrew it. Apparently one of the buildings is still standing, I think Doug Tulloch, or someone went out and took a picture of it standing on the steps. I went looking for it when I was in Red Bank a few years ago and I asked a lady if she ever knew about a guitar company Danelectro and I had the address of the factory...she was a really little old lady standing behind the counter in the antique mall and she goes "Oh, you don't want to go over there"...I said "Why not?" She said, "That's where the dark people live." "Well, lady you've been here a long time". (laughing) I thought that was so weird. She said it was not a good part of town. There's

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some soap or candle factory there now.

TQR: How did they test everything in final assembly – Probably just plugged every guitar, hit a chord and if it sounded good, it went?

Yeah, like I said I've never seen a dead Danelectro pickup in all the years or bought one and went "eh, pickups open... when am I going to replace it?" The stuff just held up over the years. The pots didn't go bad... you'd spray 'em and they clean right up. Once in a while the little rosewood saddle



would get worn and you'd have to reshape, clean or replace it. The aluminum nut wasn't obviously a great thing for keeping strings in tune because they would catch on the aluminum. He said he started using a material called Oilite in the '60s for the Coral stuff. Oilite is an oil impregnated bronze material and he said it kept the guitars with the tremolos that they made later... they even had stuff with Bigsby's on it ...and that would help keep it in tune. Then they went to Kluson. Those skate key tuners... he said they made the machine. They wanted a tuner that they could use for anything – use the same components. So depending on how long the little carriage was or what the spacing was like, they used the same one for right or left hand, 12 strings or 6 strings. That was his idea and those are steel. He had a machine to make it, but I don't know the name.

I think by the time they had the Coral stuff they started using Klusons because the price went up on those. I've got a lot of pictures of just weird prototypes. I bought a guitar from an estate years ago that I showed to him. It was just the frame with no Masonite top or back on it, but it had the bridge on it, a giant lantern battery mounted on the inside to one of the sides and a tube preamp in it. I said ok, what's this? He said "Oh, I was trying to make an electric classical guitar." I asked him "How did you get the strings to pickup?" He said "Well, we were using what is now called piezo electronics. I was using that early technology and it didn't really fly and nobody wanted electric classical back then, so we didn't do it." I said, "Gee everybody wants one now." (laughing) He was early in

on that, and that thing had a big, old striped Eveready lantern battery in it ... (laughing) I said, Ok what were you doing and he started explaining the preamp... it's a little low voltage preamp tube in here and told me what the output was – he remembered all of that.

I lot of weird things have turned up over the years, you know things he didn't make, a lot of it in New Jersey because I guess everybody was local. There was a guy named Phil Patillo, Bruce Springsteen's guitar tech, he ended up with several 55 gallon drums full of pickups at an auction. They were basically electric sitar harnesses, so you got 3 pickups in a copper package with 6 controls and the jack – that's how I met FatDog. He found out that I had 'em and maybe bought 20 sets or so from me and that's when he told me he had the winders. That was kind of fun, that guy sold me all kinds of stuff, fingerboard blanks, neck blanks, bridges, things...

TQR: All from the Danelectro factory?

Yeah, apparently some of the stuff was sold to a guy in Florida and Dan Armstrong told me he bought a bunch of stuff from this guy and it was stored in a chicken coop on the back of his property. A lot of the stuff had gotten wet, so it was just ruined. But he bought a lot of stuff from him. All this stuff came from a couple of different auctions in New Jersey when MCA closed them out. I guess they had a liquidator come in and they sold everything off.

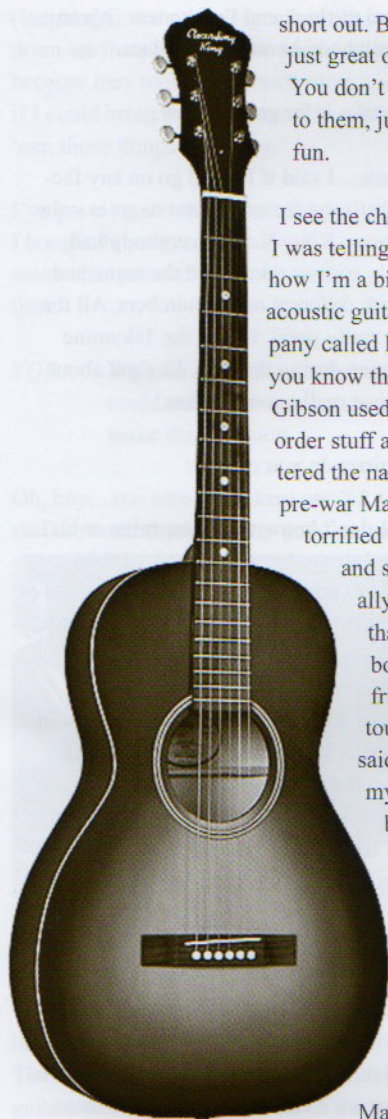
TQR: What were you all-time favorite vintage instruments from those days?

Specifically Danelectros?

TQR: Not necessarily...

The cool thing about being in the repair end of it, you get to see a lot of stuff, to see what worked, what didn't, what held up, what didn't, construction things...like what were they thinking...like Fender's bulldog neck acoustics and the neck blocks cracked on every one of them and they wanted to compress them by putting a steel bar in the middle to try to keep the neck and the tail block from cracking. And Epiphone did the same thing again, in the '70s repeating the same mistake and they all came apart. You see things like that and you ask yourself, couldn't they have looked back a little and had done a little research. But my favorite stuff, I don't know. If somebody asks me about buying a Gretsch, I say definitely by a new one. The stuff that Terada is making in Japan is way better than the old ones. I mean, the old Gretsch is a case of stuff not holding up, their neck joints didn't work, the fretwork was terrible and the inlays had so much filler around them there was hardly any pearl in them. The wiring they used – the insulation on the rubber rotted away so the pickups

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short out. But the new ones are just great out of the box, man. You don't need to do anything to them, just play 'em and have fun.

I see the changes, you know and I was telling somebody about how I'm a big fan of new Chinese acoustic guitars. There's a company called Recording King, do you know them? It's a name that Gibson used to own for their mail order stuff and somebody registered the name and their making pre-war Martin knock-offs with torri-fied tops, scalloped braces, and solid wood. I had a really exceptional 3700018 that everyone wanted to borrow for sessions. A friend of mine who's a touring guy came in and said "I don't want to take my Martins out"...so I bought this Recording King. I told him, I'd heard of them, sounds pretty cool. I sat down and played it and there was no comparison, it sounded so much better than the Martin – just everything,

the depth, the tone, the balance and the sweetness. So I sold my Martin – "This doesn't make any sense, why am I hanging onto this guitar, when I can go down and buy this one for \$700 dollars?"

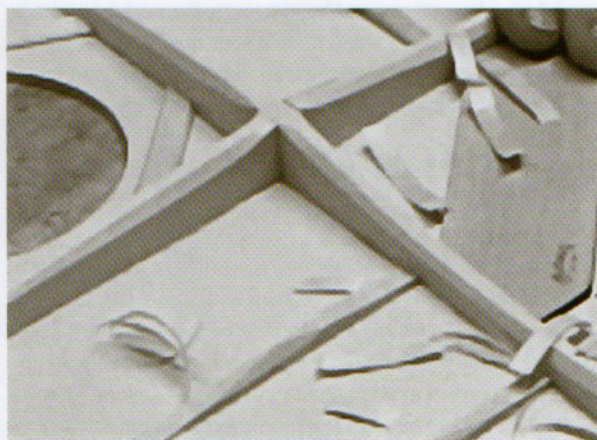
TQR: It was that good?

There's a pawn shop locally that has the lower end Recording King. They are making copies with the little Stellas, you know with the fake flames painted on 'em and little campfire guitars.

TQR: But the real guitars are \$700 bucks?

I know, isn't that crazy? The little Stellas are going for such stupid money and they are so common. You can go to any swap meet on any Sunday and find one.

TQR: I can promise you, I'm going find one and do an article on it.



Yeah, and then those old Harmonys... like the solid mahogany Harmony from the '60s when they started putting truss rods in 'em – there's that guy in Denver who taking them and rebracing 'em and resetting the necks...he says it's the best Triple O Martin you've ever heard and it's a Harmony. He takes these Harmonys apart, buys them for \$50 - \$60 bucks resets the neck, pulls the back off, and rebraces them like a Martin Triple O. He said every producer in the country has one in their arsenal now and that's what they're using in the studios. He says he is so backed up on these, so I started buying 'em. I bought 4 and have them up in my loft. I haven't done one yet and thought if I ever retire that's my first project, I going to do those...they're on my Goodwill website for \$80 bucks. Right away I figured I'd get the ones with the adjustable rod because the others ones you can't E jig them because they've got a piece of steel in the neck and they just spring back. So you have to either have to pop the fingerboard and change the truss rod...normally you just have to take the back off and you lose the tortoise shell binding, but you can still get that...

TQR: What original models are these?

I've got a catalog right here because somebody contacted me about that...got 3 Harmony catalogs...some of them are Sears, some say Airline from Wards or Silvertone but it's all the same guitar – it's like the little secret...I just let the secret out of the bag...that guy will strangle me now...ok, it's a Model 165 and \$47.50 new in 1965. There's a Spruce top version of it, he likes the mahogany version and the Spruce top is a Model 162. They're all real sweet and solid tops – a regular pin bridge, looks like an old Martin bridge and with a little tortoise shell pickguard.

TQR: So, explain how you take the back off and rebrace it...?

Rebrace the top like an X brace... ladder brace like all the cheap guitars were back then and you "X" brace it with the forward X, whatever it's called – the 1939 Martin style bracing. He says they are just amazing...they already got old

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wood, hide glue on 'em, and he just resets the neck because they seem to all need it – and there's your magic guitar. He showed me one, hanging on the wall, handed it to me and this is that feeling when you pick up a real good Martin – that's it!

TQR: What other stories do you have like that...this is good!

I'm better if you ask me something specific and it will remind me of ten things. If I have to come up with it, it's like the Magic 8 Ball...the details have to be prodded. You know you asked me about what old guitars I liked. As far as being a Gibson guy...I was never a Les Paul guy. I owned several '50s Les Pauls, I've had two '59 Bursts and I just thought "you know what, I would never take these out and play 'em." I was always a 335 guy... I thought the 335 was the pinnacle of Ted McCarty's achievement. Basically when you look at a '59 335 and '59 Les Paul it's the same except for the body and the hollow wings...same bridge, same pickups, and same tuners. I think the 335 when you turn it up and you're soloing, has a third overtone that you're not getting from a Les Paul. People argue all day about that...ok, you can spend a half a million and the 335 is still only about \$25,000.

TQR: If that...

Yeah, everything has gone down, the whole vintage market... talk about tanking, whew! I know the guys doing the shows.



I go there and it's the same guys and just trading stuff with a guy across the aisle... they've got a different guitar. I think they're facing the same thing with the companies that are still in business making the classic stuff that people want. The Asian companies, starting with the stuff that Jeff Hasselberger did with Ibanez back in the '70s that was a shock to Fender and Gibson. Hey wait a minute...they're making a flying V and we don't make one (laughing). Ok we need to do it too, let's get on this. Just the quality you know – the Fujigen factory in Japan

that makes the Ibanez and the high end Epiphones...it's an amazing factory and quality comes out of that place.

TQR: And they just take it for granted now...

Yeah, their white lab coats...I said if I could go on any factory tour in the world, that's the factory I want to go to – the Fujigen. They made Grecos, Kopy Kat ...everybody had Ibanez and Greco already so they reinvented the name and make the same guitar with different model numbers. All the stuff from that period is really good. I liked the Takamine guitars coming out of Japan during the '70s. I've got about five of 'em and they're just really good guitars.

TQR: How many guitars do you own?

Between my son and I, I don't know which are mine or his... and I keep thinking I don't have that many until...I think every room in the house has guitars and in my loft, a bunch of Danelectro first year NAMM stuff, color samples that nobody wanted that we didn't end up doing and things like that. So, I probably have less than a hundred. I'm trying to picture what's here...off-hand, maybe sixty. I have some in the studio where I work in Long Beach so it's handy, some in storage, some in the barn, some in the house (laughing) and stuff out on loan to other people because I didn't have room for 'em. I liquidated a lot when I moved, because I went from a 1200 sq. ft. space to an approximately 450 sq. ft. barn.

I got rid of most of my amps so that was good; they take up the most room. I had six blonde Showman amps. I played with Dick Dale for about 8 years. I was his band leader and I started buying the Showmans up then. Next I was in a band called the Torquays, did three records...you know we had to have all matching gear so we'd take six blonde Showmans and line 'em up across the back. We were only plugged into 3 of them, but the pilot lights were on so it looked cool



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(laughing)...matching Jaguar and Jazzmasters and P bass and drum set from the era...the whole deal. But I got rid of those because they took up so much room and everyone kept asking if I could bring the Showmans. I said "no you come and get 'em, those things are heavy."

I've got a Fender Silverface Princeton reverb under my bench I bought 40 years ago for a testing amp and it's still there – never changed a tube in it or anything...stays on a week at a time.

TQR: Well, let's say somebody passed a law that you could only have one guitar and one amp, could you make that decision

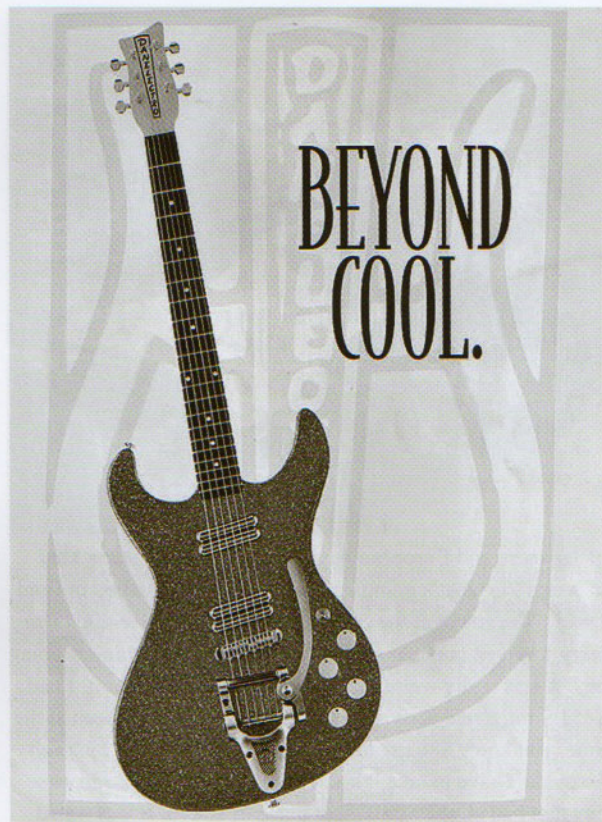
Oh, boy...one electric? I kept my '62 Jazzmaster from my old surf days and that's a pretty good guitar. My favorite guitar...I



have a Fujigen Orville 335 dot neck. It's an amazing guitar. The only bass I use anymore...it's funny, one of the first guitars that I got new right out of the gate is a Danelectro, the Hodad. They named it, I didn't like the name and don't take responsibility for it. We did a Hodad bass with three pickups and I made a sample, sent it over, they look at it and approved it...but I never really played one, until about two or three years later. I ended up getting one for Michael Campion and now haven't played any of my Fender basses in about seven or eight years. It's got the rotary switch so you get all the combinations and it sounds like a Rickenbacker, a Jazzmaster, a P Bass, its light...

TQR: And it's a Hodad. Do they still make it?

...And it's a Hodad. Well, they reissued it. I remember Steve called me about four years ago to let me know they reissued it, but they only made it a 2 pickup and they did away with the rotary switch and that was the magic of the thing – all the combinations you could get. I remember after designing the rotary switch I was so proud of it, but the switch did not exist to do it. So I sent it to my guy in Korea and he sent me back a



sample so I could do the finish shop model prototype. Steve said it was great but they want to have them all "on" at the same time too and you don't have that option. You've just got back, back and middle, middle, middle, front and front. He said "You know like you have on a Tom Anderson guitar, like a blower switch". I'm sitting in my back yard with a piece of paper trying to figure out how to make this work. And it worked...we figured it out so that everything stays in series. If I had to keep one bass, it would be that one. I sold off most of my vintage Fenders in the mid 2000's before the tank happened when everything was still jumping. Some of the stuff, I wasn't touching and I felt really bad and besides it was worth some money, so might as well put them in somebody's hands that might get a little more use out of 'em.

TQR: So when do you think everything tanked?

I think it was concurrent with the whole housing thing, the stock market, and the subprime loans in 2007-08. I was at the Dallas show in March 2008 and we were walking around looking at the booths and I noticed nothing was selling like it was before. A year before that a '54 goldtop Les Paul had peaked up for about \$50 grand...I thought wow, that's really amazing it really jumped up from the high 20s. "And then we were looking around and there were a bunch for sale at \$40G. On Saturday they marked them down to \$30G and nobody was buying anything. I noticed there was an absence

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of Japanese and European buyers and I thought "that's kind of weird too what's going on?" Gil Southworth called me and I said "You're not at the show, where are you?" He said "I'm sorry, I stayed home, nothing is selling and something is going on." It was really weird and we started talking about it. I had a '54 Strat, a real early one with me, it would have been at the time, you know \$80 grand and I ended up selling at \$32G so I wouldn't have to take it home. It was going to the Japanese guy that had all the Strats- that place in Tokyo. It was weird and nothing was selling.

I noticed over the next few years, as I was watching prices I would see the Blue Book still pushing prices up and I said "No, that's not realistic, show me some actual sales prices." At one point, I figured the market was off by 60% of what it had been in 2007.

TQR: And it hasn't come back...

No, and everybody says "oh, it's going to come back, it's going to come back." I did an interview with Jackaboutguitars and he asked me "Why don't you think it will?" It's like a perfect storm. First of all, the economy is not there, so there's no money to support these \$200,000 guitars.

The second thing is the kids that are coming up – it's a generational thing...they don't want to be caught dead with the same guitars and they don't have the same guitar heroes we did. They don't have a Jimmy Page and a Jeff Beck and a Clapton and so they have to have that gear. Their guitar heroes, if you look on Palladia or MTV2 at the festivals in Europe the guys are playing Epiphones, Schecters, Asian made guitars and reissues.

Nobody is playing vintage guitars on stage. Bonamassa is probably the great hope for that, but nobody's taking it out and the guys that did have the stuff, the bands are getting to

the point that they are not working as much...and then you have the whole thing about the record sales, no one's paying money for music anymore. So I think these guys are like wait... "We're making our money on "merch" and touring... it's downloads and someone's stealing and they're not going to pay for it." So I think that was a big wake-up call.

The third thing was the companies started making good stuff again. Fender custom shop was making some great stuff... Gibson...they were slowing figuring out the secret of how they made guitars before – they reissued the Les Paul in '68, took them 30 years to get 'em close again...(laughing).

TQR: That's true...

They crack me up. Then they bring in guys like Tom Murphy and people that really know the inside out... and said "Hey, get rid of the straw and the truss rod, start using hide glue"... "Oh, wow." Then they figured out the pickups and then wait a minute...there was no big mystery anymore you can build a vintage guitar new and "Gee, they are not as much as the vintage ones." So that's what I think were the three main factors, the economy, the generation thing, and the companies making good guitars again.

TQR: That's a really good point. I think you just nailed it.

And they say "oh it's going to come back"...well look at hot rods. If you had a '57 Chevy you were tits man...the Asians folks starting buying and exporting them and all but now the



vintage cars are really hard to sell. Again, same thing... the older guys all in their 70's and 80's now who appreciated those and the kids, who knows... an Opel GT is vintage. (laughing). College kids get out of college and the back at home with their parents, working at Starbucks. The whole scene changed and it was pretty abrupt.

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I thought geez, you know half of my income is dealing guitars and that just disappeared, so I gotta work harder now. I started playing more again and taking more work on, but it was fun. I really enjoyed going out and buying stuff, meeting people, taking buying trips and doing the shows. There was a time I was doing both Texas shows every year and going to the New York show. It was profitable then but lately the show around here, they're still doing 'em but I go out to the show and look around and say geez I'd be better off at home and watching reruns of the Rifle Man. Seems like everyone's gotten so serious – nothings fun anymore..

TQR: You can go to a vintage show, and guys like us would say, "Well, I don't see anything vintage here".

Yeah, everything's from the '80 or the '90s. I just wonder about the collections. People ask me what to do...they say "I have a serious collection here and nobody in my family plays, and I'm 68 years old." If you bought the stuff in the early '70s or 80's your fine – you can sell it and make a profit. If you



bought your stuff in the 2000s, when everything was peaking and open to turn it for 10% more, like all these dealers had popped up just working out of their house. Everybody was doing it and you could, but now you can't – the pyramid crumbled. I told them to slowly sell off what you don't really love, if you bought some for an investment, get rid of it. If something happens to you, your wife, your family, somebody is going to have to deal with it and they are not going to know anything and they'll may just put it in the driveway or have a garage sale. At least, if you get rid of what you don't want you can have a happy retirement and hopefully live comfortably for a while. I see guys are just sitting on these collections of 400-500 instruments...it's pretty scary.

TQR: I agree. So what are you doing?

I'm basically playing music a lot and really enjoying it. Wish I could play full time but there again, no playing gigs. I'm doing repairs and some consulting. Companies will call to see where the glitch is in their line or what's wrong with this

pickup – I do a lot of that stuff. The shop has been here for five years and it's just me.

TQR: What kind of repairs are you doing?"

Everything but finishing. I've got a couple of good finishers here. Grover Jackson is back in business. He sold the "Jackson" name to Fender, so he couldn't use it and had to stay out of the loop for a while. He's back with a new line called GJ2 (Grover Jackson 2) and he's down in Lake Forest. And when he opened up, he said "I don't have a lot of business, but I've got a spray booth that's grandfathered in and I can spray nitro here." So that's great and now I have a good finisher – he has one of Fender's finisher guys that had been with them for 40 years. He's got a booth and they can do all of the old Dupont colors...they spray acrylic. He's working with a guy, I believe named Friedman whose an amp builder and they are bringing out a line of guitars. I think his niche will be building stuff for himself and other people because he's really set up down there with a whole crew and all the machinery and everything he needs to build. So, I send finish out to him. Everything else I can pretty much do here – wiring jobs, set up jobs and refrets... a little bit of everything. It seems to be just enough work, to where I got rid of all my advertising. I've been doing it for so long now, a lot is word of mouth.

TQR: Send you a guitar for repair with a note, a phone call if necessary and you'll take care of it? I have a feeling some people will be sending you some things...

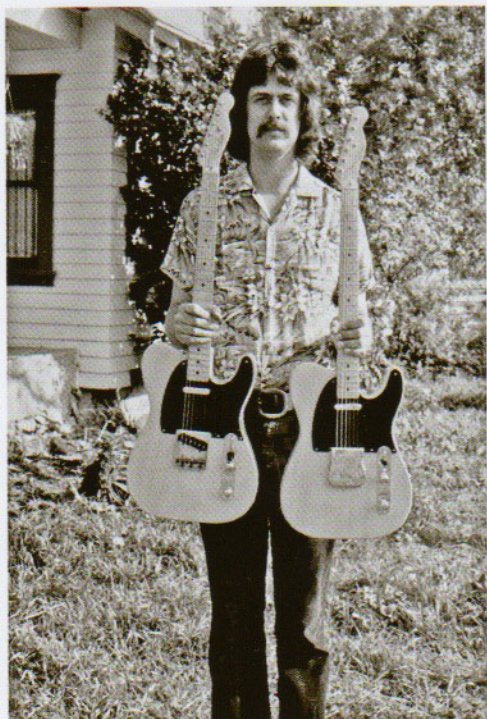
Yeah, I get a lot of that and often thought, "Geez, should I move somewhere else?" I live in Orange County, by the city of Orange and five miles southeast from Disneyland. But no, there is still a bit of a music scene here, but not like it was before. All the stores are pretty much gone and the only thing left here is a Sam Ash and Guitar Center.

I usually get calls and say "Hey, I've got this, can you do it?"



with SRV

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In my left hand: a mint condition Fender Broadcaster, serial #0213 (neck date 12/18/50 - now owned by Graham Nash) bought from the son of the original owner in Billings, Montana. Right hand: Fender No-caster - 02/51.

band called AFI. They did their showcase family and friends thing and are heading out to Coachella Valley Music Festival. Their album will be out mid-May and they're the first band to play Coachella without a record out. (laughing). It's really good stuff - I work with guys like that...they call and come by with a truck load of stuff before the tour. It's been a fun thing.

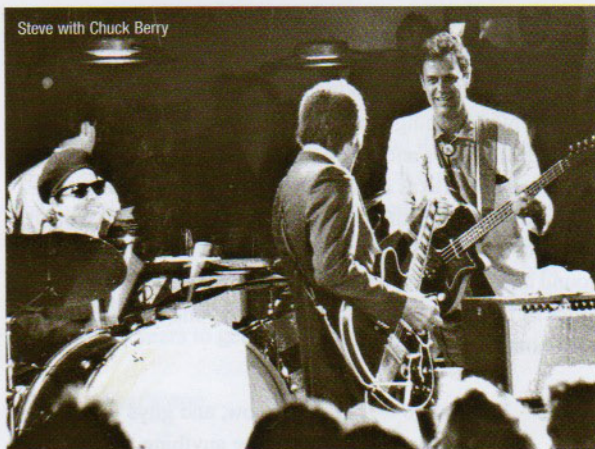
When I was still doing all the warranty work and consulting work, the week before NAMM I would have Fender, Guild and everybody show up with stuff to get ready for NAMM and I would say to myself 'C'mon, it's like the teacher who thinks they are the only one giving you the homework. They don't want it for NAMM, but wouldn't bring it to you until a few days before and there would be forty guitars in here and I can't do that... so I just told 'em all... "I like working with you guys but that's just too much for me. I gotta to sleep and eat sometimes too." So January is a little quieter here now.

TQR: You're in a unique position where you get to see a lot of things, new and old...I would think you would have a unique perspective on the gear world these days...

I don't know much about new stuff...digital. I'm still an analog guy. Your hear stuff when people come in they've re-

I give 'em a quote and tell them how to send it. I've been working with some bands since they were kids, you know. Just the other night...you remember the band No Doubt, right? The three guys have a new band called Dream

Car with a guy named Davey Havok, who's in a



Steve with Chuck Berry

searched everything, they've got a little extra money and they don't spend much time practicing, can't really play but they want the best pickups, frets, pots and they'll spend \$200 on a capacitor and I say you know this capacitor just looks like the old one, right? And they say "Really?" Yeah and 50 cents is pretty good for a capacitor. If you can hear the difference in a passive tone control, let me know, I'll hire you for something. (laughing)

It is good, seeing all this stuff because people bring in vintage stuff. My dread is now... I'll be on the phone telling somebody about a collection of guitars and the phone will ring and I hear an old lady over the phone, so I always have to pull my stool over and sit down and say ok...which one of my customers died - it's getting to be twice a week now that I'm getting these calls. They say "well your card was in his case and there are about 20 guitars here, these little pedal things and cables." And I thought well, I could have helped you fifteen years ago, I don't know about now. What do you do? You gotta put it on Reverb, eBay, and Craig's List or take it to a show and cross your fingers. There are way more guitars than there are guitar players that's for sure. Go in to any Guitar Center store and there's stuff hanging all the way to the ceiling and you wonder...will all of these guitars ever sell?

TQR: I wonder what that means for this business...

I don't know and they keep making 'em and I don't think there are buyers for every guitar there is...and It's just crazy, you know. There's gotta be somewhere... like a warehouse and at the end of the Indiana Jones movie full of new guitars that never sold. GC has been threatening for years that they are going out of business. It's all going to end up at Musician's Friend, if that happens. There will be a lot of empty, broken leases on buildings and warehouses everywhere full of guitars and the prices will go down to nothing. **TQ**

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