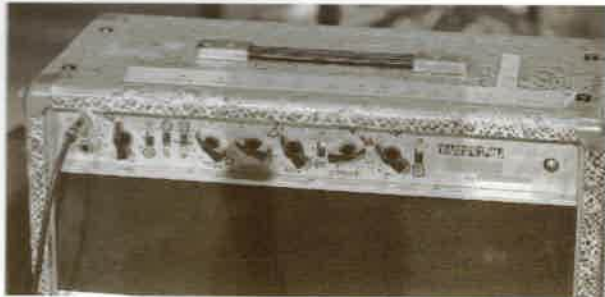




Bill and Ben - 1999

Gary Clark Jr.

Sure, it doesn't hurt that Ben rocks his signature Ashers through the eighth Dumble ever built. A 50-watt snakeskin tolexed version that he got from David Lindley over ten years ago. We know Lindley also owned #2, among others in his Dumble quiver.



Ben Harper Lindley Dumble

There are many great backstories as to how Bill's world progressed and where it has taken him, but it is clear that he got on his path early and has stayed there. We mutually agreed to sandwich Bill's career and talk early days in combination with his most recent endeavor, a collaboration with Doug Irwin, who famously built Jerry Garcia's Wolf, Tiger, and Rosebud guitars. Jerry rarely strayed from Doug's creations starting in 1973.



Jerry and Wolf

Yes, there were the Travis Bean years that were also amazing, but Jerry loved Wolf and played that guitar on and off for well over a decade. John Mayer got up on stage in Mexico this past January with Dead & Company and played the first of what is now affectionately known as the Asher-Irwin Wolf 2.0.



John Mayer playing Asher-Irwin Wolf photo by Jay Blakesberg

The ride to that reality is a fun one for all involved here. So cue up that late '73 bootleg cassette, and let your freak flag fly loud and proud, my bruthas and sistas. Welcome to ToneQuest, Bill.

TQR: You're a Californian, born and raised and still around Los Angeles to this day.

Yes, and I would say that growing up here had a great influence on me becoming a guitar maker and repair tech. So many custom guitar companies started here in California in the early days of custom guitar making. On top of that there were a great deal of influential guitar players and bands making incredible music around here in the seventies that it was impossible for that not to have an effect on me and certainly guided my direction.

TQR: Are there certain custom builders, players and bands that come to mind that would you point out as having direct influence?

Well, there was Schechter who started up in 1976 in Van Nuys and Tom Anderson in the early eighties who has been a friend for a long time. In high school I was lucky in that I saw Social Distortion and Van Halen play a number of times.



Social Distortion

Jimmy Page, Hendrix and Gilmour were big influences, and I purchased a black Strat because I saw Jimi playing one. Laaz Rockit was this metal band from Berkeley, who had this amazing guitar player named Phil Kettner. I would see live bands all the time at the Whisky A Go-Go and The Roxy, which were just down the road. There was a local player named Randy Hansen who did these incredible Hendrix tribute shows, and since I never saw Hendrix, this was as close as I could get.

TQR: Take us back to the early days for you and from where the inspirations came.

In high school during the early eighties I was playing guitar with friends. We put together a jam band and we'd play in my buddy's garage. We played parties and had a blast just learning Stones songs and I was heavily influenced growing up in the seventies by those guitar driven rock bands. Players like Hendrix and Clapton were it. I was a big Zeppelin fan too and Jimmy Page made an indelible impression on me. Guitars and music in the seventies were just a primary part of my life.

The impetus for becoming a woodworker happened in eleventh grade at University High School, which is here in West L.A. They had an incredible wood shop class, taught by a master woodworker, Mr. Rosenthal. I joined the class

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because I loved art, loved working with my hands, and while academics were not my strong suit, I was always very ambitious and hardworking. At the start of twelfth grade a new kid named Phil Kettner, who I mentioned a minute ago, shows up to class. He grew up in San Francisco and at a very young age had studied under Joe Satriani. We started hanging out and became good friends.



LAAZ ROCKIT
 Phil Kettner and LAAZ ROCKIT

I recall one day we were at his house, and he says, "You have to check out this Flying V guitar that I bought from Moonstone Guitars." He opened the case, and I was like, "Holy shit!" It was the first time I had ever seen a boutique, custom built guitar. I was used to going to Westwood Music and West L.A. Music, and I knew all the typical guitars hanging on the walls there. This guitar was so different. It had a multi laminate, neck-through body construction. The V wings were spalted burl and maple. It had this wild headstock design. I'm trying to remember the builder's name at Moonstone...I think he's still going.



Kettner Flying V

I was blown away and thought, I would love to build something like that. So, I asked Mr. Rosenthal if it would be possible to do a guitar build project. He said, "Well, for your senior project you can build what you want, provided that we approve it and it's not too intense." The next day I brought in my Fender Stratocaster. He looked at it and said, "Well, I think you can make a body here and at the same time we realized that making a neck may be a bit too involved. To keep it simple we decided that I'd just build a Strat body. So that's what happened, but I was haunted by this wild looking Flying V. Even then I was aware of what the Alembic guitar company was building, and I had fallen in love with this purpleheart wood that was in the wood shop stash, so that's what I used for my build. I did a nice job of shaping it, milling it and once the body was almost done and ready for the neck I took it to Guitar Center on Sunset Boulevard, to try and find an aftermarket neck. Sure enough, they had parts that were made by Charvel, and they had a maple neck

with a purpleheart truss rod plug. I thought, "Perfect!" So, I bought it, brought it to class and we made the template for the neck pocket. I was able to mount the neck, and so now I have a body, sanded to 220, with a nicely shaped neck, and that was it. That was as far as I could get in high school woodshop class.

My parents saw how excited I was about all of this and how I was not thrilled about the idea of college, because I had no idea what college would have for me that high school didn't. They agreed to give me a year to search for a career before I'd have to commit to what in those days was a more typical path.



Rick Waite - West L.A. Music

Motivated by that, I took the guitar to West L.A. Music and Rick Waite, who ran the store, said to me, "Wow this is really cool, but we don't work on guitars here. But down the street is a guy named Jeff at L&M Guitar Repair and you should take it over there.

So, I did and there I met Jeff Lundsford. He was from Kentucky, and he was doing all kinds of repair work, working on local pro musician's guitars. He did fretwork and pickup installations, setup work and that type of thing. He wasn't a guitar builder per se, but he knew how to do some custom work. I introduced myself, told him my shop class build story and he seemed to be somewhat impressed, so he said, "I think you've done a nice job here and I'm pretty sure we can finish this for you." I paused and then said, "If there's any way I could come in while you're working on it and get a feel for what you do here because my parents have given me a year to figure things out, that'd be great." I did my best to sell him on my ambition, ability to work with my hands and my college sob story. He said, "OK kid, let me think about that, I'm busy here, but we'll see." So, he wrote up the job and I left. He calls me two weeks later and tells me that my guitar is going to hit the bench tomorrow, so come on by. I showed up and that started what became a five-year apprenticeship.

TQR: Meant to be.

It was meant to be for me for sure, considering where I am now. I was able to hang out at the shop, didn't ask too many annoying questions, stayed out of his way and he invited me back, day two, day three. I swept floors, I put drill bits away, and understudied with him. I would say my apprenticeship was a good three years where I just learned to do basic setups, installed upgraded tuners, back then everyone had to have Schallers or a brass nut. He did lots of refrets. I remember being in his shop and one day in walks Tony Iommi's guitar tech.



Mike Clement, Tony Iommi Guitar Tech

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He had Tony's SG in the shop, and he was describing to me how Tony had to play with these tips on his fingers so he would wear through the frets quickly and had to refret his guitars all the time. I was totally enamored and blown away that all these rock star players' guitars were coming through the doors. After year three I got to be pretty dialed, in fact my eye for seeing straight lines was good, so Jeff would have me do all the type of work where getting things symmetrical was critical, like installing tuners. My fretwork and setup work got really good. I learned how to evaluate guitars and would listen to the musician's input for what they thought they needed. I learned a lot about how to run a small guitar shop business. In addition to learning the craft, I learned how to interact with the musicians and players as well as how the numbers needed to work. That's where it all began, in that little shop in West L.A.

TQR: Very cool. Alright, so we're going to jump like thirty years, and by no means is the intent to undermine or diminish all your other work, which we can't wait to get to, but on another day. Tell us about the Doug Irwin commissioned Wolf and how this whole thing comes about.

Right. It's interesting. by 1996 I had been at this a while now. I worked for Rick Turner, the co-founder of Alembic, from 1993-1996 at his shop in Topanga Canyon.



Rick Turner

That provided a lot more influence into the world of high-end boutique guitar builds, and him coming from the Alembic world enabled me to learn first-hand what it took to craft high-end guitars. During my stint with Rick, we worked on basses that he made for John McVie of Fleetwood Mac. Lindsey Buckingham would have us work on his guitars.



Lindsey Buckingham - Turner Model 1

Crosby, Stills and Nash would have us maintain all the electrics and acoustics that they used on tour and for studio sessions. It was around this time too that I was reintroduced to Jackson



Bill and Jackson

Browne. I started installing FRAP (Flat Response Acoustic Pickup) acoustic pickups, now owned by Trance Audio in Santa Cruz in his guitars as well as maintaining those instruments for the road.

My skill level on guitar construction started to become well refined. Rick moved to Santa Cruz in late '96 and worked out a deal for me to take over his shop. He brought me in originally to take on the majority of the heavy repair work off his plate so that he could focus on guitar making. I did that for the three years I was there and when he decided to move, he just said, "You might as well carry on what we have here." So, I did that, stayed in Topanga Canyon for a while, but ultimately moved my shop into Santa Monica to have more of a regionalized, local guitar shop presence. As well as being a go-to repair shop in L.A., I had also started to do custom builds.

One day a kid by the name of Jim Shank, who played for a band called the Rum Runners, a Grateful Dead tribute band, came into the shop and asked if I would build him an Irwin inspired Tiger guitar. I told him that I thought I could handle that, but said, "Isn't Doug Irwin still around and making guitars?" He said, "Yeah, I've talked to Doug, he's up in Sonoma and he's not taking in any new build requests and is not interested in building me a Tiger style guitar."



Redtail Hawk Build

I told him I liked the idea and challenge of it but didn't feel right about copying anyone else's work. I suggested he call Doug and if we had his blessing to do it, I'd be happy to build it as long as we came up with some different artwork, so it would not be an identical copy. I also suggested that Jim compensate Doug directly as we were using his design. He called Doug and they hashed out a deal over the phone and Doug was fine with me building the guitar. We did this beautiful cocobolo rosewood top Tiger build, with similar fretboard inlay work, but a little different and rather than a Tiger we came up with a with a red-tail hawk flying over the mountains on the ebony cover plate as I've always loved seeing those flying over the hills as a kid. That was that. I never built another one and never felt compelled to build anything like it. I just treated it as a one-off.



Redtail Hawk Cavity

Shortly after that in 1997 Ben Harper called me to see if I would design for him and electric lap steel. I built the prototype, which blew his mind, and he ordered two more for the tour. That is what started the Ben Harper Signature lap steel. I was off and running doing my own thing, building,

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repairing and doing vintage restoration, which continues to this day. Jump way ahead to early 2021, I get a call from Doug Irwin and his stepson Demian inviting me to meet Doug in his shop in Ukiah, California.



Doug Irwin's Shop

While Doug had slowed down on building in recent years, he was still deep into his craft, and felt that an opportunity existed to bring in another luthier in order to work in tandem.



Doug Irwin with Wolf 2.0

Doug's builds have always been unique, inspired by him or a specific player. They're handmade, one-off guitars and he never built the same guitar or bass twice. It became pretty obvious after speaking with Demian,

that Doug was somewhat upset about all these copy-cat builders out there. I said, "That's funny because I built one in 1996, but refused without his blessing and never made another one." They replied with, "Perfect, Doug would love to meet you, he's looked at your website and your builds and maybe we can work together somehow." I drove up there, met Doug, and we hit it off. I loved seeing his shop. He has his original thickness planer there with all these old Grateful Dead stickers and DiMarzio pickup stickers from the eighties.

Meeting this guy whose work I had admired for so many years was very cool. We discussed the possibility of building a limited run of Wolf guitars. I loved the idea of doing that with Doug, but I told him that I'd first have to build one to see if I could even do it



Wolf 2.0 at Doug's Shop

at his level. So many guitar shops are CNC oriented, with machines that can help the build process. I've always built by hand using templates and routers. In 2019 I did buy my first CNC machine, however I suggested to Doug that I first wanted to know that I could build his Wolf guitar by hand.



First Build Wolf 2.0

I was confident that I could and that if he liked the end result and we did go on to build a limited run of ten, that only then would I be comfortable implementing some CNC in order to handle things like cutting the inlays. He was totally fine with some innovation, and there's still so much work by hand that happens. I then asked if he had the original templates from which he built Wolf for Jerry. He said, "Well, sure I do." And when he said that I could see the look on Demian's face, the "Oh god, here it is..."

TQR: Oh man, the moment of truth.

Demian was telling me that so many people have approached Doug and wanted to work with him, but that he never wanted to form a company with anyone else. He said something to the effect, "He's a solo builder, but he's getting to an age now where if he wants to get back in the game, he has to work with someone like you and he's never handed his templates to anyone." I suggested that I could trace them and take measurements if he didn't want them to leave the shop. He said, "OK, let's do it." The headstock template is made from this really cool, old Baltic birch plywood.



Irwin Wolf Headstock Trace

Here I am looking at these originals from the early seventies and it's a bit mind blowing, when you consider the magnitude for whom this guitar was made. I traced the body and headstock, got the neck-through dimensions and thicknesses, all the veneering, and together we went through many photos.

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Templates and Tracings at Irwin's Shop

I rolled it up, stuck it in a tube and I left by saying, "Doug, I'm going to do my best for you on this and it might take me a year to build it." His response was, "Great, no problem, as long as we're having fun, let's do this." I finished the guitar sometime in March of 2022, so it did take about a year to complete. While very happy with the way it turned out, I wanted to hold on to it for a few months to let it settle in and to ensure all the structural elements held strong. The look, playability and tone was all there, and I felt it was an amazing replica of his original build.

Thanksgiving of 2022 presented a perfect opportunity to drive up to see Doug as his shop was directly on the way to our relative's place. I called ahead to let him know that I had the guitar with me and was excited to unveil Wolf 2.0 for him. I brought



Playing Wolf 2.0 for Doug

a little amplifier to demonstrate the tone of the guitar to ensure that he felt that it delivered the authentic Jerry tone. Doug was thrilled with it and as I played it for him, he got a bit emotional. It was one of those rare and amazing indescribable moments. He said, "Wow, this...wow, you did an amazing job Bill."

We agreed that it was time that we announced the building of a limited edition of ten Wolf 2.0 guitars. While excited about this limited production run, I still had the other guitars and lap steels that I build that would prevent me from immersing myself entirely into an Irwin guitars endeavor. Doug had also been working with his friend Leo Elliott of Scarlet Fire Guitars and Leo had been building Tiger, Wolf and Rosebud replicas. This presented an opportunity for a three-way certified Irwin team. I interviewed at Fender fifteen or so years ago for a potential master builder position. John Suhr had left Fender to go do his thing and threw my name in the hat. I met



John Page

John Page and the guys down there and I almost took the gig but decided to stay on my own path per John's guidance.

It dawned on me that we could take that same concept that Fender had and start Irwin Guitars with master builder Bill Asher or master builder Leo Elliott. We have a solid plan moving forward to carry Doug's legacy with his blessing and build Irwin Guitars again as a team. This past December we came up with an agreement and it was then that I announced via my Instagram page and Doug via his, that we were building ten limited edition Asher-Irwin Wolf guitars and to everyone's elation, they sold out in three days.

TQR: I saw that post, messaged you that day and you quickly responded with the details.

We really struggled on how to price these guitars.

They're a lot of work and take hundreds of hours. Doug's guitars go for a lot of money these days and much of the reason is that Jerry was the man that made



Garcia Guitar Wolf Auction

these guitars so iconic. I believe the actual Wolf sold for \$1.9 million including the buyer's premium, plus another \$1.6 million which was an anonymous charity's match of Brian Halligan's, Co-Founder of HubSpot, winning bid.

Doug had offers over the years to build Wolf and Tigers for upwards of sixty thousand dollars and so it was confusing as to how we would reach a fair price, but we landed on twenty-two thousand dollars. It's higher than other replica builders are asking, but it does set it apart due to that higher price but more importantly the quality of the build and attention to detail will be unreal. I build guitars for players, so the tone, weight, feel, and playability for me is everything. It's not just a piece of art with six strings on it. Everything must be in balance and to deliver a masterful playing and sounding instrument is critical. That is extremely important to me. It's far more than just building something that looks like the original. I'd go to NAMM and I'd see these radically embellished guitars with all this highly intricate inlay work. I'd pick them up sometimes and think to myself, that wow it looks great, but it doesn't feel great and the tone, when strummed acoustically just isn't there. So, first things first is these must be great instruments.

Part of our collective dream was to get John Mayer to catch wind of this collaboration and be interested in one of these Wolf guitars



Mayer Rockin' Wolf 2.0 - photo by Jay Blakesberg

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for the Dead & Company shows. I know what a connoisseur of guitars he is, and the collection is deep in the vintage guitar world. Typically, those that are into vintage guitars are particular about what they like and unless you build something that's mind blowing in their hands and through the amp, it's not going to fly. With that I was a little intimidated, but I felt confident that this Wolf 2.0 build was going to deliver.

TQR: Before we go there can I ask you a few questions about the build?

Sure.

TQR: Did Doug have a stash of the old, original wood from which he built Jerry's guitar that you are using for these ten guitars?

No, he didn't have anything from the seventies or anything that was that old. He has moved shops and worked through his stash, but what he did have was at least a thousand board feet or more of beautifully cured curly maple that is about



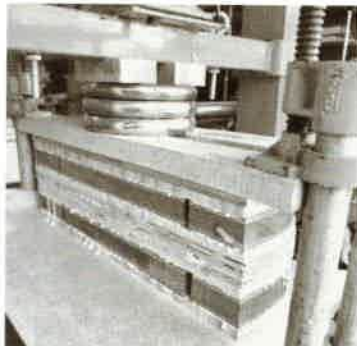
Curly Maple Boards for Necks

twenty years old. The story behind the wood is kind of funny. He met this guy up in northern California who made rubber stamps and was using this great hard maple for the handles. In all that wood he was buying, every ten boards or so would be curly and he'd throw that aside because he knew better than to use that for handles. He and Doug

became friends and Doug ended up buying a whole load of it. This is probably fifteen, twenty years ago and it had been sitting around for a while before Doug got it, so we estimate that it's probably twenty-five to thirty years old at this point. We'll use that for the neck wood on these ten guitars.

TQR: And there is some purpleheart in there too?

He wouldn't give me any of his purpleheart (laughs). He has some purpleheart and some padauk along with some lacewood, but his quantities are small and he's holding onto it for now. I paid him a fair price per board foot we'll be using for the ten that we're making.



Gluing Up Body Wings, a.k.a. Hippie Sandwich

The body is curly maple?

The neck is curly maple with purpleheart stringers. The top and back is quilted maple. When I looked at the original photos of Wolf, it's more quilted maple than curly maple, so I found some beautiful, quilted maple from Hearne Hardwoods for the top and back and used Doug's curly maple for the neck. I was able to source purpleheart locally from Bohnhoff Lumber, which is in downtown L.A., and they've been around since 1910. I've been buying wood from them for years.



Bohnhoff Lumber

TQR: In essence then, the build spec is as exact to Jerry's Wolf as possible?

Yes, and it was a little difficult because I never was able to get the original Wolf in my hands and Doug doesn't have all of the specs written down. For example, it's hard to tell what certain thickness measurements are, but from the photos you can get close, and I did reach out to Leo Elliott to get some of the missing details. I knew that the purpleheart veneers were 1/28th of an inch thick, he was very specific about that. And that is very hard to find as I learned because most veneer companies make it to .020 and it's most often offered with a paper backing, which won't work. It took me a while, but I finally found a veneer company that would cut and make me the right thicknesses for the sandwiching. I learned how to do headstock and veneer sandwiching while working with Rick Turner because that's how he built his necks during his time with Alembic. On the Lindsey Buckingham guitars he does six veneers on the headstock and when you shape out the back of the headstock you get those beautiful lines of the different laminations. It's tricky to do, but the outcome is gorgeous and adds significant strength to the headstock. The initial Wolf 2.0 build was as close as I could get to the original, but I found out, during the process, that the core of the original Wolf was slightly thicker than what I did. The next ten guitars will be a little closer still.



Laying Out the Metal on Wolf 2.0

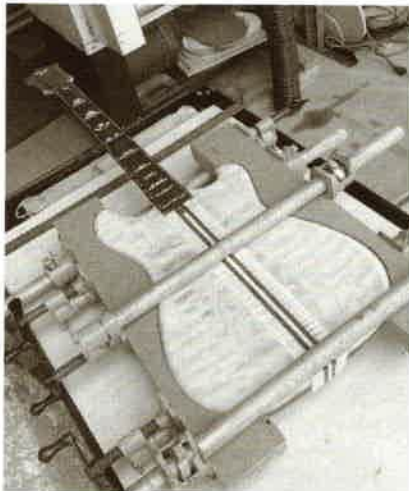
That will result in the maple tops being slightly thinner, which in turn accentuates the beauty of the purpleheart veneer lines.

TQR: Let's talk about the weight of these guitars since we know that's important to players.

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Most people don't know this, because it looks like a solid-body guitar, but Wolf has a chambered core. If it was a solid purpleheart core all the way through that guitar would probably have weighed over fifteen pounds. I learned that when Doug pulled out the template for the purpleheart core and said, "Yeah, this is hollow, a semi-hollow guitar." He had the tracing template for the purpleheart core spec there which gives the shape of the interior structure so I could mimic

it. I believe the original still weighed close to thirteen pounds. Our target weight for Wolf 2.0 is a little north of nine pounds. Wolf has a 25.5-inch scale length with 24 frets. Jerry and Doug wanted easy access to that 24th fret, so the neck and body



Gluing the Neck Through

cutaway meet very close to the 22nd fret. That in turn makes the neck seemingly feel longer when you put it in your hands, but there is no trade-off with balance as it's perfectly balanced and feels great. Weight is one thing, but balance is equally important.

TQR: Slight tangent. Are you building and doing everything yourself or do you have a team?

It's just me and my brother Bo in the woodshop and my wife Jessica, who is a general partner in the business. She wears many hats, which includes being the CNC and laser programmer and operator, designing and fabricating fixtures and templates. She also learned Rhino, which is the CAD program we use and plugs into the CNC. Her work is invaluable because it allows me to focus all my attention on the building details and repairs.

TQR: It's great that you all have complementary skill sets. The electronics in Wolf are fairly elaborate and I assume exactly like the original.

Yes.

TQR: What typically presents the biggest challenge when it comes to that part of the build?

I can tell you that the pickups and electronics on Wolf went through several iterations. It originally came with three Strat single coils. Jerry allegedly wanted more push and that's why the DiMarzio humbuckers were put in. If you want detailed insight into how all that functions and the series of changes that happened with Wolf over the years, you may

consider touching base with Mike Wald of Waldotronics. He obsessively chases these tones and builds his version of the buffer/preamp. He knows everything about how it all works. I basically follow the very detailed schematic and wire them all up myself. There's a good thirty-five or so connections and I like making it look really neat and clean. Every time I finish one, I hold my breath when I plug it in. It's pretty involved and can take an hour plus with each. For the first one I used a clear plexiglass plate over the cavity so that you can see the wiring. It's like an exhibition plate on the back. John Mayer loved that detail.



Wolf 2.0 Cavity

TQR: What pickups are in the Wolf 2.0?

My initial Wolf 2.0 build has DiMarzio Super 2s in it, which is what I believe is currently in the original Wolf.

TQR: And the single coil in the neck is a DiMarzio as well?

Yes, it's a DiMarzio SDS-1.

TQR: Back to the flow of events. You and Doug put the word out that you'll be building ten Wolf guitars.

Once we announced the limited edition, we were inundated with messages of interest and curiosity. It was an overwhelming response, which was exciting. It was validating for Doug, along with his stepson who had been wanting to see this happen for a long time. When they sold out in three days, we were all pretty blown away. I specifically held number one of ten in hopes that we might get John Mayer's attention. We had not spoken with him, had no idea if he knew anything about what we were up to and so I only sold nine of them. I suggested to Demian and Doug that perhaps sending John a DM on Instagram may



Bill, Doug, and Demian

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be a good way to get in touch in order to gauge his interest. Demian reached out and got a response back within the day. It was something to the effect, "I just noticed in my IG DMs that you sent, that there is one from two years ago asking if I was interested in a build and I never saw that until now, I'm so sorry. Yes, I am interested in seeing the guitar and thank you for thinking of me." He forwarded his contact number so Demian gives John a call.

John finds out that I'm here in L.A. and that I have the guitar in my shop. He's in L.A. too at the time and wants me to call him. I got a call from Demian telling me that I need to call John Mayer. That feels and sounds kind of surreal. "OK, alright, what's the phone number?" (laughing) I take a few paces around the shop, get my bearings and make the call. He picks up, I introduce myself, we have a few minutes of intro conversation around guitars and things and about the Wolf project and how he'd played the original on stage in 2019 and how he struggled a bit, because the frets were well



Wolf 2.0 Finished

worn and one of the pickups wasn't working right and it was pretty heavy. He then went on to say that the idea of having a beautifully built, new one sounded intriguing. I said, "Well I can bring it to you, and you can play it through your amps at home to get a feel for it or you can come by the shop." I barely got the words out and he said, "What's the address. I'm coming over." He literally showed up an hour later. I called Doug, "Yeah, he's coming over right now." Doug was a bit blown away and he gets a little emotional these days. He's at that age, you know. He's been through a lot, and he was really excited. I told him I'd call him back later that evening.

John pulls up and I gave him the ten-minute shop tour. He was having a good time looking at some of the builds and the lap steels and what was on the repair bench. We both geeked out a bit. I opened the demo room door, where I had the Wolf guitar sitting in a stand with the dual cables for the effects loop going into the pedalboard and my amp. When the door opened his eyes immediately tracked and locked onto the guitar and he lit up. He said, "If you didn't tell me that that wasn't the real thing..." And there are differences as I explained, but the vibe is clearly captured. I said, "Let's plug this thing in. Oh

yeah." He picks it up and immediately commented on the weight being nice. The guitar has a 1-1/16th inch nut width, which is what he likes too. The neck is a C shape carve that goes from .88 to just over .90 at the 12th fret, so it's not one of those slim to fat tapers, rather a nice consistent C carve. I could immediately tell, and he confirmed that the guitar felt really great to him and sonically it just has the sound. I sat there on the couch as he went through many of the Jerry riffs and lines, "Bertha," "They Love Each Other," "Deal," etc. When he stopped, he said, "OK, what's the deal with these? I'd like to have one."



Mayer Holding Asher Wolf at Bill's Shop

I let him know that we had one with his name on it and that they'd be done in December of this year, too late for the Dead & Company tour, but that I'd be happy to lend him mine. He looked at me and said, "OK, huh, borrow your guitar. OK." He stopped talking and went back to playing for a minute or two, connecting with the guitar a little more. He stopped and looked at me, "Hmmm, can we talk about this guitar? I'd take this guitar on stage! I'm sure number one of ten, in fact all ten are going to be great if it's anything like this, but if I get used to playing this guitar on stage, I'm not going to be able to give it back to you. Can we talk about...how much are they?" "Well, they sold for twenty-two thousand dollars." "OK...Alright, well...Would you sell me this one?" I said, "It was our dream to have you play one of these Doug Irwin guitars, of course we can work something out with this one." He made me an offer above what the others had sold for, and we shook hands. I told him we were honored and that this was an amazing moment. He said,

"I want to support what you're doing. This is a beautiful guitar and I'm happy that you and Doug are working together. I'm excited to have my own and not borrowing and playing somebody else's guitar. In my crazy and perfect world, it would be a different color or something so as not to be so close to Jerry's thing." I know that he's sensitive to that. He also said, "I know I'm taking your guitar and I hope you're OK with that." I told him that I'd just keep number one instead, no problem. So, he left that day, guitar in hand.



Wolf 2.0 Finished Body

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As soon as he left, I called Doug to share the news and he was overcome with joy. I did get this text from John later that night, "I've been playing your guitar for hours and putting it down and coming back to it. I love it, it's incredible." He then told me he had something to show me, which was a close-up framed photo of Jerry playing Wolf and right below it a close-up framed photo of just John's hands playing the original Wolf on-stage for the first time in 2019. He reinforced how



Dead & Company

amazing it was to have this guitar and this back and forth went on for the next few days. He brought it to Cancun for the Playin' in the Sand make-up shows and he planned to sound check it.

Now we're on pins and needles. Here we go...Do you want me to carry on or do you have questions?

TQR: I know a bit of the story because I saw his post about playing the guitar in Mexico, but absolutely, please go on.

In the shop here I asked for a picture with him, and he was cool about it, but asked that I sit on the photo, which was totally fine with me. All in confidence. Before Cancun he got back to me and said that he planned to announce something but was still deliberating on how best to do that. He sound checked with it and came back to me with "Bill, it sounds phenomenal, I'm definitely playing this guitar on stage." I shared that I was so thankful and happy that it was hitting the mark for him. I asked if he thought he'd play it on just a few songs and he responded with an "I don't know, I'm going to play it and I'll play it the whole show if I can." He then, day two down in Cancun, literally two hours before show time, lets me know that he's going to post that he's playing the Asher-Irwin Wolf and during the van ride to the stage that he'd write the post. So, you, me and potentially six million people saw that, with three hundred sixty thousand of his subscribers liking the post. That post generated over 2,865 comments, which validated for John that the fans were accepting of him playing such an iconic looking instrument.



John Mayer IG Post Holding Wolf 2.0

One that was so close to Jerry. He hit the stage with that guitar and didn't put it down during any of those six sets over the three days. Jay Blakesberg was taking these mind-blowing photos and posting them. It was so cool to see that all happen. Dreams do come true.

TQR: What are you able to share, if anything, as to what's next with the Asher-Irwin collaboration and you as a master builder under that brand?

Right, well a couple things. The price of these guitars unfortunately narrows the number of potential buyers, but if you look at it from a comparative perspective your fifty-thousand-dollar car becomes worth very little over time, where guitars can often retain much of their value and ideally appreciate, like we've seen for decades, particularly over the last three years. Not to mention that you get to enjoy these beautiful assets while you own them. It's funny, for so long I've lived in this guitar shop world where everybody haggles over guitar prices, and I've always had to give discounts and breaks over the years. I've struggled with pricing my guitars so that I don't price them out of players' hands, which is why my other line of guitars, which are more affordable than these, are still amazing, hand-built instruments. With these Irwin builds, we're at a level of iconic design and craftsmanship, where they'll be relatively expensive, but again, they're investments that can be enjoyed along the way for many lifetimes.

Here's the gist of it. I'm not going to build another identical Garcia-Irwin Wolf guitar, which is a little sad to say in a way, but we did commit that this was going to be a limited run of only ten guitars built by me. Leo Elliott with Scarlet Fire has a slightly different arrangement with Doug, and people can buy an Irwin certified Wolf guitar from him. When Doug and I met at his shop a second time in early 2023, we sat down to discuss what was next and what he envisioned.

I shared that these types of builds were fun, extremely challenging in a good way and that I wanted to build more. While I love the guitars that I make, I'm seriously considering sunsetting my bolt-on neck builds altogether and continuing to focus just on my neck-through Electro Sonic, and the Irwin builds.



Marc Ford with an Electro Sonic

I enjoyed building that Wolf guitar so much, with those elaborate laminations. It has always been my dream as a luthier to focus on these types of beautifully made instruments, so what we've decided to do, as far as my builds go, is to offer limited run Asher-Irwin guitars each

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year. I may build a Tiger or a Rosebud at some point, but I lean more towards Wolf. Doug built a lacewood Wolf style guitar shortly after building Jerry's. I said, "Really, do you have a picture of it?" He showed me. It is so cool looking, and I am currently working on a lacewood build right now.

TQR: What does it look like?

I don't know if you know what lacewood looks like, but it's a warm caramel colored wood and the grain structure is trippy. It looks like snakeskin in a way. Doug had an eye for exotic woods. He only built one of these. There's a photograph of it. It doesn't have any inlay on the face like Wolf and it is neck-through. It's laminated lacewood and purpleheart with thin maple strips. I thought, maybe what we could do is a 50th Anniversary Wolf in lacewood like this one and everyone liked that idea. The next edition will likely be that.

TQR: Will that be a limited run as well?

Yeah, although we're not final on how many. At first, we were thinking that maybe just five is the right number, but after seeing what went down with the ten Wolf 2.0s, we are trying to figure that out and at what price. That part is always a challenge.



Working with Purpleheart

TQR: Since it's a Wolf type build, do you imagine that it will sound similar sonically?

Yes, it likely will and to offer further customizations we are thinking that perhaps whoever is interested will be able to choose their own pickups and configuration, which then makes them unique. The lacewood guitar that Doug made is just two humbuckers and they're mounted in rings instead of the brass plate like Wolf. The construct will be like the Wolf spec, just with lacewood and mahogany instead of purpleheart. Back to the sound, a big part of those tones in all of Doug's builds for Jerry is the brass hardware, the preamp buffer and the OBEL wiring. I had this conversation with John. He mentioned that he and Paul Reed Smith had worked hard to nail some of those Jerry tones with the guitar they worked on. It was maple, 25.5 inch scale, not built like Doug's guitars, but had the DiMarzio pickups, but just wasn't quite there. He's come to realize that it has a lot to do with all the brass, active, low impedance electronics and obviously there's unique DNA in the Irwin guitars.



Mayer Alembic Further

TQR: That surprises me to some degree, because he owns an Alembic Further with active pickups and he's played that on stage. Back in 2014 he used it live for "If I Ever Get Around to Living" and that's the sound, that bell-like sparkle and clarity, you can immediately hear it. Did he ever mention the Alembic?

No, he hasn't.



Irwin Wine Country Guitar - photo by Jay Blakesberg

TQR: This has been great. Any last news?

There has also been some discussion that we may build a limited run of a guitar that Doug was commissioned to build for Jason Scheuner, a huge Grateful Dead fan and historian. The guitar is affectionately known as the Wine Country guitar.

It was based upon what Doug considered to be his next iteration of Wolf. In his words it has a more elegant body shape, which he had been refining for years. We may consider that one for future builds too. It has elements of Wolf's DNA, but it's different and we're starting to refer to it as Wolf 3.0. Nothing is carved in stone yet, but it's all fun to think about and bounce around. TQ—*Scott Ulrichs*

asherguitars.com
irwinguitars.com

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WALDOTRONICS BUFFERS

Key Component of Jerry Garcia's Sound

We were fortunate that Bill mentioned Mike Wald's name during our conversation and so we reached out and found one of us. Yet another serious tone seeker.



Waldo Soldering Buffers

TQR: Is building these small buffer circuits your full-time gig?

No, I wish it was and someday I'm hoping that it will be. I work for a railroad as an FCC licensed radio maintainer. We ensure that nothing goes wrong with their communication equipment. We work on everything from the landlines for the networks, to the switches to the locomotive radios. I and one other do this work so that the interlockers for the signals of the radios stay up. There are four hundred miles of track within a twenty-five-mile stretch around Lake Michigan, from Indiana to out by O'Hare Airport. We're like a big tollway for all the Class 1s, for example Union Pacific, BNSF, that come through. The guitar stuff is still on the side, but again, I hope it can be my entire professional life someday.

TQR: The music's not going anywhere, especially this type of music. The scene is strong.

The Jerry nerds are out there. I wish I could have gotten out to Skull and Roses recently, but the timing didn't work out. Unlike other years, they didn't bring and display the iconic instruments that Jerry and other members of the band owned. I love it when they do that. Last year they had a little museum that you could walk through. Alligator was there and Rick Turner had some instruments there, amongst Phil's basses and Bobby's guitars.



Skull and Roses Festival Flyer

TQR: At a festival like that, I imagine it's a parade of your customers that are on stage.

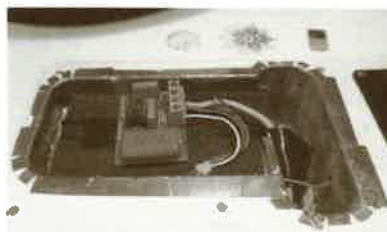
I think about that, and yes, for the most part they all have my buffer in their guitars. Some don't, but those are the ones that typically don't play with an OBEL (On Board Effects Loop). The argument still rages on that it really was all in Jerry's hands and his phrasing that created his sound

for the most part. Some have gotten pretty close, but there will never be another Jerry. There's footage out there where Jerry is sitting in with Los Lobos and he's playing one of their guitars, perhaps a Les Paul through a Marshall half stack and while it's dirty and crunchy, it's still Jerry all day but at the same time it does sound like he is playing a Les Paul through a Marshall. (We found a YouTube video of Jerry and Los Lobos on a 335).

TQR: Let's start with the basics here. What are a buffer and OBEL designed to do and why were both necessary?

For Jerry, the buffer was necessary because he had these long cable runs with the OBEL. With the buffer he could effectively roll his guitar volume up and down and combat the cable capacitance and not lose the clarity or high end of the signal. The OBEL is to ensure that a consistent level of signal is being sent to his effects pedals, regardless of whether he was at 4 or 10 on his guitar. That's especially important with an envelope filter as the signal level significantly affects the way that pedal responds to pick attack.

TQR: What were your motivations for building the Spud buffer?



Waldo Guitar with Spud Buffer

I first started playing guitar when I was in the Marine Corps. I played acoustic and the dream was to build a studio and get into playing and recording. But I got married, had kids and that plan took a back seat. I went into the Corps the same year Jerry died, 1995, so I literally went from his memorial service and spoke with a recruiter. My dad was in the service, so it felt familiar.

When I got out, I started playing the electric and just wanted to try and cop that sound. Like everyone else I went online, searching for the answers. Dozin.com was this gearhead site and forum that came about because there really wasn't much information coming from the Grateful Dead organization directly. Most of what was out there was hearsay and second hand. Often the information was inaccurate. I'd wire my rig up like the information suggested, but it just wasn't there. Coming from an electrical background I'd ask myself, what am I just not seeing and what I was not seeing was the truth. That began my own personal deep dive with those that actually knew and know. I started knocking on doors, trying to get hold of Dan Healy, Doug Irwin, John Cutler—

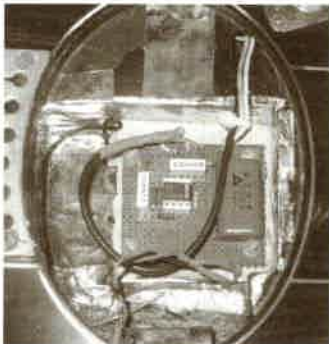


Dan Healy

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anyone I could. I sent written letters to Dan Healy that had schematics that I'd done, only to find that I had the wrong mailing address.

As I finally started to break through with these guys, the pieces began to fall in line. For example, we just recently found out that the Alligator guitar did not have a buffer in it even during the Europe '72 tour. For all these years we thought it did. Healy confided to me that the buffers with boost didn't make it, and that the Blaster was a short-lived experiment. The Travis Bean was the first to have an OBEL and subsequently get the first buffer. I started firing off emails to the Colts owner, Jim Irsay who is the owner of Jerry's Tiger. He directed me to his curator with my requests for pictures of the electronics cavity and he sent them to me. I was a bit surprised. This is the kind of stuff that nobody, but the insiders have seen. It's detective work.



First Tiger Buffer Picture Sent to Waldo

TQR: It seems that gaining insight from Dan Healy and other folks that have information can present a challenge.

Yes, it has been incredibly difficult to crack that egg. They think you're just another fanboy and they don't want to deal with you. Understandably so. I got ridiculed by Cutler and Dennis "Wiz" Leonard.



Dennis "Wiz" Leonard

Dennis told me that if he shared the information that I had requested with me that it would be like giving a student driver a formula one car. He would tell me to just go learn to play the guitar. Or Cutler would tell me that he could tell that I was off my meds, but ultimately, they

would answer my questions because I was persistent. I slowly checked the boxes. When I got the pictures of Tiger from Irsay and actually saw the buffer, I went immediately to CAE Sound because they had been selling their buffer for years claiming that it was the one Jerry used based upon a schematic from Cutler. It wasn't. When I made my first few buffers, I would put them up on eBay and they'd sell right away. Cutler apparently saw that and reached out to tell me that I had the parts wrong. I was able to contest his position because I knew better based upon what I actually saw in the Tiger cavity. What I didn't have was a picture of the bottom of the perf board where the connections are made. I only had a picture of the top, so I had to reverse engineer it. It ultimately wasn't that difficult. I compared the CAE Sound schematic to what I had and while the two were pretty similar, they were not exact.

That became my original Spud or Spud I. As I had known about but had no verification with Jerry's early buffer use, my spud was set at -1.7 dB from unity. You wouldn't necessarily notice that unless I told you or you A/B'd that with the straight through signal. I verified years later, and this is recent, that the buffers Dan Healy installed, starting December 31, 1976, with the Travis Bean, through Wolf when it came back into rotation, were in fact JFET source followers. A JFET source follower buffer has inherently slightly less than unity gain. When Cutler went to an op-amp based circuit in Tiger, which is different than a transistor-based circuit, I tried to mimic the loss in gain with the Spud with the details I had at that time. With my Spud circuit there is a way to build it, so it is at unity gain, but the parts didn't fall in line and that's where the Spud II came in.



Spud II in Mayer's Asher Wolf 2.0

That said, I finally got to the bottom of the real deal Tiger Cutler board and have all the details of Tiger's buffer.

TQR: Is your Spud II the one with a trim pot that allows you to go from -1.7 dB up to 12 dB of boost?

That is the Waldo buffer, but I'm having a difficult time sourcing the op-amps. I tried an alternative to what I was using, but one of my customers found that he couldn't get a distorted sound with a certain pedal. That op-amp kept the signal too clean. The parts matter. I continue to search for a replacement as the ones I had been using are no longer in production. To note, any player that only plays their guitars on 10 and don't have an OBEL, don't need a buffer in their guitars.

TQR: How long have you been building the Spud buffers?

Fifteen years now, maybe more.

TQR: And what led to the collaboration with Bill and Doug for these ten Wolf 2.0 guitars?

Doug had been working with Leo Elliott of Scarlet Fire Guitars. To back up, my buddy Erik Larson, who used to go by the online name "Cryptical Fingers" was part of the team that started the Dozin.com site. He used to hang out with Jerry and Healy. I introduced Leo and Erik and then Doug came into the picture. Once I showed Doug my work, I think he felt comfortable that these were built correctly.

TQR: What other elements to the Jerry sound would you suggest are primary contributors?

When you play with the right gear, you can get really close. Jerry loved the McIntosh 2300 power amp so much he kept it up until the end.

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Waldo Repairs MC-2300

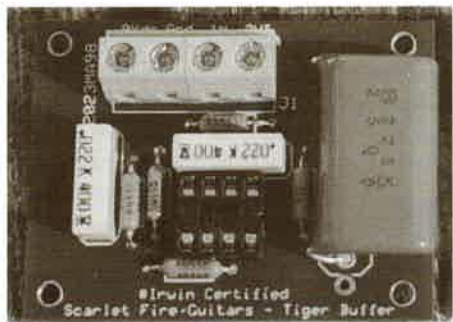
It didn't matter that it weighed one hundred twenty-eight pounds. It's certainly not for everyone, but when you

hook up three JBL E120s, or K120s in the right cabs, with that power amp and a good Twin Reverb preamp to it, along with a Jerry inspired guitar, it's his tone all day. That slices through a mix and through a room. You're not too loud. I got Healy to admit that Jerry only played the McIntosh at 100-watts. Those JBLs have 103 dB SPL rating, so if you go to a decent sized venue and put a 57 on the cab, the JBLs will crush that mic.

Now, if you mic the speakers with a Sennheiser 421, which is what Jerry used, you won't have that problem. Those mics can work with that setup beautifully. I hipped Josh Olken from Terrapin Flyer to this and that change made a huge difference. Jeff Mattson, who has played in the-Donna Jean Godchaux Band and currently in Dark Star Orchestra is using the 421 as well. I feel like I can shed light on this for the players of this music because I've been to the top of the mountain. I've put in the time and can say these things for certain. Once I got there, I could effectively help folks or point out where they were missing elements because they'd only been part of the way.

TQR: Which of your buffers will go in the Wolf 2.0s?

Spud IIs, the unity gain buffer. They are going with the two humbuckers and the single coil in their necks. DiMarzio Dual Sounds I believe.



Waldotronics Tiger Buffer

TQR: Bill mentioned that the first build has DiMarzio Super 2s.

Ahh. OK.

TQR: How do the Dual Sounds compare sonically to the Super 2s?

The Dual Sounds are thicker. The Super 2s that Jerry used had no brass base plate. They were plastic throughout the enclosure. The poles had to be lifted up through the magnets, which will degauss them a bit. During that period, you have to understand that Jerry started to mismatch his speakers from

an impedance perspective too, which added more bass and power. He found a pickup that worked with him tweaking the taps on the power amp. Those became known as the "loud years" (his diabetic stage). Those were the Super 2 years, and he was playing his rig really hot then. When he dialed back by '89 he was down to two speakers, then ultimately no speakers on stage. He took his stage volume way down and that's when the Dual Sounds came back.



Early '80s DiMarzio Super 2

They're similar pickups, but the Super 2s are brighter and the Dual Sounds are thicker. I love the idea of having a Super 2 in the middle and a Dual Sound in the bridge and wished he would have tried that.

TQR: You really have gone all the way on this stuff. I imagine we've only cracked into a small part of what you know.

That's true. Not only was this passionate exercise an effort in tracking the information down, but it was also me buying all this gear and trying things out..I did so many experiments that I probably should not have done (laughs). When I was messing with a Twin, I must have tried 1500-2000 mods. I made my Twin into a Mesa Mark I, then a Mark II. I've tried so much in the quest. It has all come full circle and most of what I tried didn't make it. I'd come home from work with an idea that had been burning in my head all day, go right to the basement and start tinkering. My wife would be yelling down that I needed to come up for dinner. I'd try so much and kept changing things up if it wasn't working. Until I got a hold of Healy and wrestled the information from him it was experimentation based. It took a long time. I don't know many who would have done what I did but know of a few like David Fontaine and Erik Larson who were doing it since the end of the seventies into the early eighties. Sure, you can distill it down to a Jerry setup guitar, JBLs, a Twin and a MC-2300, but it wasn't just that. There's so much more to it and as they say the devil is in the details. I would say that Healy is just as much of a Dumble type as Alexander was, he just never went the Dumble route and sold his amps to specific artists. He could make Fenders sing in rare ways. He tweaked them for Jerry, but he would tell me that he liked the sounds of what he built and modified more than what Jerry wanted.



Steve Kimock

He was a tinkerer from his childhood. It started for him in grade school. I'm grateful for the time he spent with me, as difficult as it was. Even with the berating I had to take, I'm so thankful that I was able to tap it

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out of him, because now it can be shared and given to others so that they can use it. Twenty years ago, no one had it. Sure, great players had it in their hands, like Steve Kimock, but they were not as close with the gear as the players of this music are today. There was some magic that was missing.

TQR: Where can we find your products?



Waldotronics New Buffers

At the jerrytonestore.com. I build the Spud and Spud II in batches, so if folks are interested and the current lot is sold out, there is likely a new lot coming. TQ—*Scott Ulrichs*

jerrytonestore.com

JANNIS ANASTASAKIS JAM Pedals The Real Grecian Formula



Jannis Anastasakis

Last month Ryan Wariner mentioned his love of JAM pedals and while TQ has danced with a couple JAM creations in previous issues, with that endorsement we decided to go deeper. Built and painted by hand, vintage inspired, and sound driven, these Greek tone explorers at JAM have found their way to an exceptional number of player's boards, Nels Cline, Bill Frisell, Joey Landreth, John Scofield and Andy Timmons to name only a few.



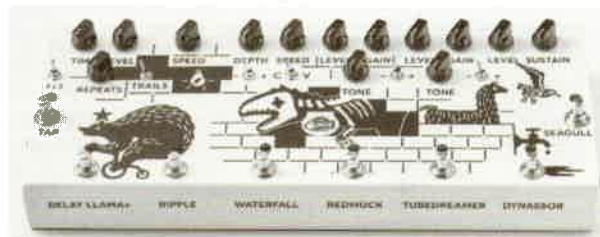
John Scofield



Joey Landreth - photo by Isabelle Lussier

There's no shortage of pedal makers on the planet and as we've all seen, more and more are internationally based.

Jannis Anastasakis, Founder, Ilias Pantoleon, Emmanuel Vourakis and team, design, build, and tune pedals that serve tradition, but with twists and angles to their offerings to keep their clients and prospective customers intrigued, like the Pink Flow, a Gilmour inspired combination of seven JAM pedals housed in a single enclosure.



JAM Pink Flow

No setup, tear down and patch cable failure challenges here. It's much smaller than even the smallest pedalboards and there's even an additional loop to add other effects like your envelope filter. If you can't cover most styles of music with this genius setup, you may be doing it wrong. JAM goes the distance to source the right NOS transistors, chips, cells and other critical components and they assemble everything in house, by hand with all analog circuits. The attention to detail and build quality is at the top and one can't go wrong exploring these creations. We enjoyed our chat with JAM and anticipate that you will too.

TQR: Jannis, you founded JAM, Emmanuel has been with you since the early days and Ilias, you run operations so to speak, correct?

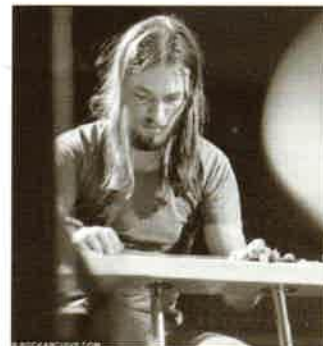
Yes, we started the company in 2005, Emmanuel came on in 2007 and Ilias joined in 2017.

TQR: You've been at this a little while, I'm sure there's a good story as to your motivations, intentions and how your company came to grow.



Jannis and Bill Frisell

I began my journey as a guitar player at a very young age, initially receiving classical guitar training. This soon transitioned to playing the electric guitar when I was twelve. My earliest and most significant influence were the Beatles, and to this day, they remain my favorite band. It was around the same time that I became obsessed with Pink Floyd. David Gilmour was my hero and I strived to emulate his playing and capture his sound.



David Gilmour - photo by Jill Furmanovsky

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