



KITHARA HARLAND
From £2,299

WHAT IS IT? Strikingly original retro mash-up by new Northern Ireland-based maker Chris Moffitt

New Wave

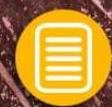
Bored rigid with clones of past glories? Well, here's something a little different in looks, style and sound to further showcase the talents of the small 'shop guitar maker

Words Dave Burrluck Photography Phil Barker

While the mainstream über-brands continue to fill our musical instrument outlets with new versions of the same, many of us have to search a little further for something we find inspiring. Increasingly, it seems it's the small 'shop makers that offer a very much new style, even though it can quite often look like something you can't remember from yesteryear.

We have to thank Ariel Posen for the birth of this Kithara Harland. "After some fans of Ariel pointed him in our direction, Chris Moffitt met with him and there was an immediate click around a shared philosophy of guitar building," explains Matthew Cordiner who looks after Kithara Guitar's business, while Chris builds the guitars.

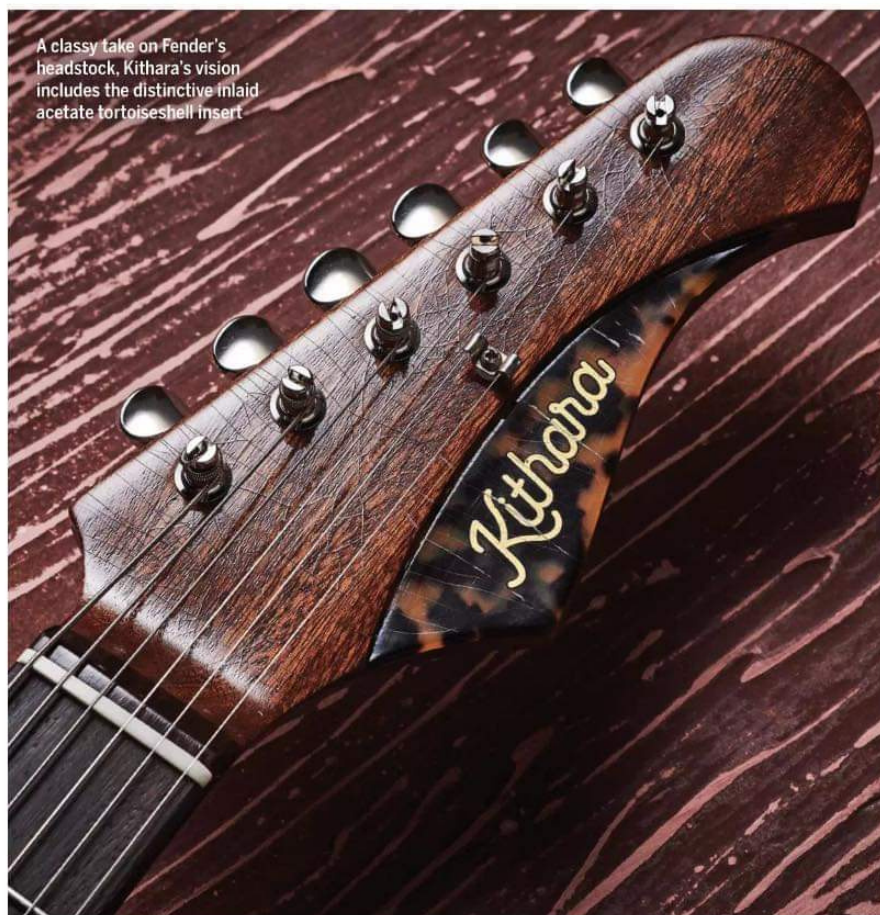
"From there, a conversation was born around designing something together," Matthew continues. "Ariel wanted to explore using his signature 648mm [25.5-inch] baritone style while incorporating a Bigsby. And after months of back and forth the Harland model was born, with Harland #1 residing in Canada with Ariel. Since then we've adapted it to also be offered in standard tuning as well as the baritone and it's currently our bestseller!"





BUILDER PROFILE

NAME: Kithara Guitars
EMAIL: kitharaguitars@gmail.com
PHONE: 07833 464597
WEB: www.kitharaguitars.com
FOUNDER: Chris Moffitt
LOCATION: Belfast, Northern Ireland
STATUS: Fully professional
EMPLOYEES: One – Matthew Cordiner
FIRST GUITAR SHIPPED: January 2018
CURRENT OUTPUT: Approx. 30 per year
STYLE: Bolt-on and glued-neck solid and hollowbody electrics
CAD/CNC: None
PICKUPS/HARDWARE: Gotoh hardware/Mojo and Deacchi pickups
FINISHING: In-house
REPAIRS: No
CUSTOM ORDERS: Mainly custom options on base models
DEPOSIT/BUILD TIME: £700 deposit/10 weeks
WAITING LIST: Not outside build time
DEALERS: Windmill Guitars (www.windmillguitars.com), Some Neck Guitars (www.someneckguitars.com)
PRICE RANGE: From approx. £2,249



A classy take on Fender's headstock, Kithara's vision includes the distinctive inlaid acetate tortoiseshell insert

Opening the hard case we're taken back in time. This is hugely characterful guitar making, full of top-quality craft and parts, yet it looks like something you might have found in a loft. It's alluringly odd. The design is based around a Strat, of course, although the treble half is more Tele with a tight edge radius. Meanwhile, the bass side of the body adds an elongated chamfer to the top edge and a longer rib-cage contour

on the back. But it's the heavily cracked black nitro finish that'll be the talking point. It's not relied as such (although you can order that), and on one hand looks like a gloss finish that's gone wrong. In defence, though, the interlocking crazing looks like a studied work of art.

The neck has a similar cracked and glossed finish to the headstock face with its attractive relief and tortoise-shell insert with a sympathetic gold transfer logo. The back has a lighter satin nitro finish and, despite it looking like a darker chocolate roasted maple, it's actually mahogany topped with a deep and rich brown Indian rosewood fingerboard, devoid of face markers. In fact, the only position markers are the very small side dots that might prove, er, fun on a dark stage.

The hardware and pickup style moves the Harland still further from the mainstream. The antique Bigsby brings its own vibe to the build, contrasted by the way-more-modern and beautifully engineered Gotoh Tele-style bridge with its 'In-Tune' brass saddles and relaxed side walls. And while that holds a flush pole Mojo 52, the GTone at the neck is based on a Guyatone 'gold foil' and, frankly, even if it sounds pants we'd keep it on as it looks like something Kithara nicked from



Specifically designed for use with a Bigsby vibrato, this Gotoh bridge with In-Tune compensated brass saddles is about as good as it gets. Same goes for the Mojo 52 single coil



This Mojo GTone single coil is "built to vintage 60s Guyatone spec". Trust us, it sounds just as good as it looks

a radiogram... which is clearly where the control knobs come from. The retro style is accentuated by the beautiful slice of acetate tortoiseshell that's used for the pickguard, the same material found on the control cavity coverplate.

Feel & Sounds

The feel of the Harland is again a little unusual but far from unlikeable. It's not the lightest instrument of this style we've encountered, but the weight gives the instrument a very centred strapped-on feel. And yet the neck seems almost delicate in comparison with a thin-depth shape that isn't a million miles away from the Charvel we evaluated last issue. There's virtually zero taper to the depth, which measures 20.9mm at the 1st fret and 21mm at the 12th, with a shallow C profile rather than the more shouldered flat D of that Charvel. As Matthew points out, though, "neck profiles can be carved specifically to the customer or retailer's preference. The black demo model you have showcases one of our thinner necks, but the majority of what we do would be a standard or chunky C shape neck. We can, however, do a very wide range of profiles/thicknesses, which is one of the many benefits of each one being hand-carved in-house."

The Jescar medium frets take it a long way from feeling like a shred machine, and while the work is excellent, slightly smoother tops to the frets would enhance the feel. Again, like that Charvel, we have the open-wheel-style truss rod adjuster, which makes any tweaks quick and easy, although the setup feels quite firm with a string height of 1.78mm (0.070 inches) and 0.011 to 0.052-gauge D'Addarios. It invites you to dig in, and the unplugged response is certainly lively. Once the strings have been stretched tuning is stable – although, oddly, the tuners themselves feel rather stiff.

But with its simple drive and a balanced low output from the two disparate pickups, there's nothing to get in the way of the important bit: your playing. And if you live in the clean-to-lighter crunch area, you're in for a treat here.

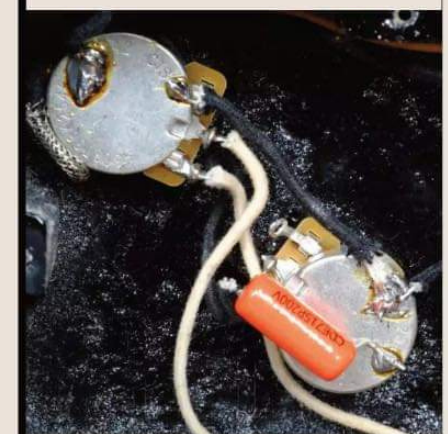
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UNDER THE HOOD

Inside the simple, spacious cavity

In what is quite a large back cavity, the two CTS 250k pots and the Switchcraft toggle switch look a little lonely. The components are hooked up with vintage-style cloth covered wire, the top cap is a .047 microfarads Orange Drop, and the simple circuit is wired modern style. There's no shielding whatsoever in the cavity or on the coverplate, but it's nice to see an Electrosocket output jackplate.

Both pickups are single coils with DCRs of 5.52kohms at the neck and 7.39k at the bridge. "The GTone is faithfully built to vintage 60s Guyatone spec," states Mojo and uses a "reproduction ceramic magnet". As supplied, it sat a little low without usable height adjustment, something that was quickly cured by placing some hard foam underneath it, meaning both pickups could get a little closer to the strings. The Mojo 52 at the bridge is wound with 43AWG wire and uses Alnico III magnets and a copper baseplate.



The Harland's circuit (top) is very simple, but there's plenty of room in the cavity to try some mods

The Mojo GTone's underside (above). Those 'adjustable polepieces' are clearly for show!





Dominated by its Bigsby vibrato, here you can clearly see the intentionally cracked finish and the simple volume, tone and three-way pickup selector controls



KITHARA HARLAND

PRICE: From £2,299 (inc case)

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Double-cutaway solidbody electric

BODY: Alder

NECK: 1-piece mahogany, bolt-on

SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")

NUT/WIDTH: Bone/43.1mm

FINGERBOARD: Indian rosewood, small side-dot inlays, 305mm (12") radius

FRETS: 22, Jescar medium jumbo (47095)

HARDWARE: Gotoh 'In-Tune' bridge with compensated brass saddles, Bigsby B5 vibrato, Gotoh vintage-style tuners nickel/chromed-plated

STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 54mm

ELECTRICS: Mojo 52 single coil (bridge) and Mojo GTone single coil (neck), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.67/8.1

OPTIONS: Include maple neck, ebony fingerboard, Deacci TeleTone (at bridge), brown control knobs, baritone setup and colour. Contact Kithara for pricing confirmation and custom options

RANGE OPTIONS: Other Kithara models include the offset Fifty-Six, the Tele-inspired Astral and the chambered non-cutaway Ormsby (all from £2,249)

LEFT-HANDERS: Yes

FINISHES: Piano Black – aged nitro to body with satin nitro neck back.

8 standard colours plus custom colours on request



PROS Nicely competent build; excellent component and pickup choice; characterful, evocative sounds

CONS Aside from a few minor issues there's very little not to like here

Both pickups are quite a bit further from the strings than we might normally set them. The high E response of the GTone is consequently a little soft, but that was quickly sorted (see Under The Hood) and it's the character of this pickup, a warm single coil, that keeps you engrossed with an excellent dynamic range that really reacts to pick strength and position. Kicking in a bit of dirt or fuzz adds bite, and it sounds both grungy and defined at the same time. It's a welcome alternative voice and one we'd like more time to explore.

The bridge pickup also has that subtly rounded high-end that sounds a little smoother, certainly when compared with a Fender American Vintage Tele's bite. But, of course, it's still very much in Tele territory and, sound-wise, quite a contrast to the neck pickup. But it really broadens the range of the Harland with plenty of

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country lead bite if you need. With that little bit of height adjustment, this pickup really does the job, sounding nicely raw but not too thin. From the 50s jazz voice at the neck to roots-rock at the bridge, and a simply beautiful mix, its characterful roots-rock Americana voice is superb and banishes any Charvel-like thoughts from our minds, not least with some light shimmers from that Bigsby. Some players might prefer a slightly more graduated volume taper as so much of the sonic appeal is the subtle shading of the tones and it drops off a little too quickly. The tone, meanwhile, is nicely tapered as you pull it back.

Verdict

This is a very nicely made instrument with plenty of custom options. Its polarising style is exactly the point, but if your taste nods back to the glories of the 60s you might well be attracted. We certainly are. Yet it's the combination of the seemingly disparate elements that's the appeal: the alder body with its mahogany bolt-on neck pairs down the Tele 'bite', while that GTone 'gold foil' takes us off in another direction altogether... particularly with the Bigsby's specific feel and tone. An inspiring instrument for the creative musician. **G**



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