

# ROOTS RADICAL

**CLASSIC GEAR REVISITED**

**SOUND CITY AMPS**



Once upon a time in jolly olde England, an epic battle raged between two crosstown rivals. The battle was fierce and in some ways continues on to this day. We're talking (of course) about the battle between Marshall and Vox amps. At one point, a new challenger entered the arena and put its stamp on the skirmish. That brand was Sound City.

Back when Arbiter was into the manufacturing and distribution game, it had wild dreams to enter the amp market and corner it, as it had begun to do with its Fuzz Face pedals. Arbiter owned a number of music shops in London at the time, and like Sola Sound and Macari's before it, Arbiter got into the amp manufacturing racket, using the back room of one of its music stores, called Sound City. The rest, as they say, is history.

The core of Sound City's design team was something of a supergroup, especially if you have your ear to the ground of the boutique amp scene. Among the core group of designers was Dave Reeves, Dennis Cornell and John Prideaux. You might know them as the progenitors of Hiwatt, Cornell Amps and Crest Audio.

Reeves himself, who had actually started Hiwatt before the Sound City days with seed money from Mullard, ended up designing the first Sound City amp, the One Hundred, also known as the Mark 1. Cornell, then Reeves's assistant, helped design the Mark 2 and Mark 3, the first Sound City amps to bear the company's familiar block logo.

To see the plan of cornering every facet of instrument manufacturing and distribution, certain concessions had to be made, mostly involving cutting manufacturing costs for the

Sound City line. Reeves had a falling out with the company for this reason and left to pursue Hiwatt. Most of the Reeves-built Sound City amps heavily resembled the meticulous wiring jobs for which Hiwatts are known. In fact, before the dissent of Reeves, many Sound City amps resembled early Hiwatts, inside and out.

Knowing the profile of Hiwatt amps and the kind of craftsmanship Dave Reeves brings to the table, it's easy to guess what kind of sound that the early Sound City amps

possessed without even hearing one: They're big, bold, semi-clean, undeniably unique, and loud enough to euthanize your eardrums before reaching halfway up on the volume knob. They play extremely well with pedals, eating up any gain box you might throw at them, no matter how gnarly. The Reeves-designed Sound City amps devour dirt boxes and then asks for seconds.

Just ask Electric Wizard, whose punishing tones on *Dopethrone* consisted of two elements: a redlined Sound City amp and a Boss FZ-2. That's it. Few amps

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ever made could withstand the impact of a cranked FZ-2, but the Reeves-era Sound City amps are certainly among the few.

In the modern day, Sound City has recently been revived, with the intention of continuing onward from the marked point in history where Dave was working at the bench. That is to say, anything from the post-Reeves era is shown the door, and the new Sound City amps will continue the quality, tone and craftsmanship that Reeves honed within the limits of Sound City.


Today's Sound City fans fall into two categories: those who prefer the pristine, yet undeniably burly tones of the Reeves era, and those who prefer the latter, where they want amps to be dirty and harsh—essentially to “sound bad on purpose.” The new SC100 amps straddle the line between both types of players, serving up an increased harmonic range and much broader tonal palette.

The Sound City build quality extends to its speaker cabinets as well, with the original cabinets holding a clip of Fane speakers, widely regarded for their amazing tones that Reeves had working in beautiful harmony with his amps. The revamped Sound City line recreates the character of those original Fanes but with the employ of more modern technology to achieve the finest amp-and-cab enmeshment.

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The newer Sound City amps are already found within the backline of Converge's Kurt Ballou and Candiria's John LaMacchia—two extremely heavy players who rely on pedals to get the job done. If you haven't heard *Jane Doe*, *When Forever Comes Crashing* (shoutout to "Lowest Common Denominator") or *300 Percent*

*Density*, listen and imagine that an amp exists that is able to cover everything from classic rock staples to anything on either of those three albums. 

***"The revamped sound city line recreates the character of those original fanes..."***

