

# Wood & Steel

# Ben Harper

**LIMITED  
EDITIONS**  
**Sassafras 814ce**

**Koa/Cedar  
500 Series**

**Figured Ovangkol  
200 DLX**

**NEW  
GRAND PACIFIC  
Blackwood &  
Mahogany 327e**

**BEATIE WOLFE'S  
ALBUM  
INNOVATIONS**

QUALITY  
**Taylor**  
GUITARS



# Letters

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## V-Class: Even Better with Age

I bought a new V-Class 714ce a little more than a year ago. As I play it in and it ages, it has warmed up and developed more bass, as I would expect for this guitar is different. Most guitars develop more bass as they age, but it often sounds slightly “muddy.” But with this guitar, as it develops a warmer, slightly more bassy overall tone, the sound is what I can only describe as “transparent” – very clear, non-muddy bass and midrange. That’s one noticeable difference about this guitar, and I really like it.

**David Sippel**

## Doing the Right Thing

I just finished listening to the Taylor podcast featuring [Taylor Chief Financial Officer] Barbara Wight. I enjoyed hearing the stories from her travels to Cameroon and Taylor’s ebony mill.

I bought my first Taylor a few months ago. I initially thought that I wanted an acoustic from another manufacturer, but after much research was convinced to turn to Taylor. I have not regretted one second of my decision. And then after getting to know the company and the people who founded and currently work for Taylor, I must say that every acoustic purchase I make from now on will be a Taylor. I admire and respect the philosophy of doing the right thing, as in the stories of the ebony mill, as well as the idea of Taylor’s general approach to business in this hectic industry and world. I was delighted to hear the approach Bob [Taylor], Barbara and others at Taylor took to better the

conditions of the mill, the people who work at the mill, and the community that supports the mill in Cameroon.

**Scott McCord**

## Acoustic Jewel

I started getting serious with my music again a couple of years ago after an unintentional break for around 30 years. I have owned many guitars over those years, but never a Taylor. I did a lot of research and played a boatload of guitar models from various makers. I settled on a koa T5z. I couldn’t be happier with my “Nani” and have been making sweet music with her since we met. The versatility is outstanding, and I would recommend this guitar to anyone.

Now Andy comes forward with the Grand Pacific, and I was intrigued with all of the innovations. After waiting patiently, my local dealer received a 517e and I got my hands on it. Without exception, each new feature made it clear that the Grand Pacific was on another level and fit me to a T. I especially loved the compound-carve neck, which is incredibly comfortable.

Although I liked the playability of the 517e, I decided to wait for a 717e because everything I had read convinced me I would love the sound of this particular rosewood Builder’s Edition. I saved my money for this special purchase, and, along with trade-ins of my others, I was finally able to pick up “Jewel” last week. I’m so very happy I waited for her.

The richness of tone is even more satisfying than I’d imagined. She’s comfortable to hold and visually stunning! I’ve gigged with her a few times already to rave reviews for her smooth tonality and projection.

Thank you for creating “Nani” and “Jewel,” and for continuing to explore and expand the boundaries of the musical universe.

**Clifford Davis, Jr.**

## Believe in the V

I’ve loved Taylor guitars since I started playing guitar a decade ago. My first real acoustic guitar was a Taylor 714ce, which I still play today. I’ve played dozens of Taylor models over the years and owned a few of them. I love the tone,

the playability, and the ease with which music flows from me through the guitar. I also love their consistency! Although there are tonal changes depending on wood or body shape, you always get a distinctive feel and sound, no matter what model you are playing.

When I first read about V-Class bracing, I was less than impressed. I already felt that my Taylor guitars were perfect – how could that be improved by this new bracing? Would my old guitars be “obsolete”? The whole idea made me unhappy, and more importantly, unwilling to try the new bracing.

Fast-forward a year. I walk into my local guitar store and what do I find? An absolutely beautiful 414ce-LTD, black limba back and sides, Sitka spruce top, and the Expression System 2. However, it had the dreaded V-Class bracing – do I dare play it? Well, I did, and instantly fell in love with it! It had that consistent Taylor playability and distinctive sound, and yet the new bracing gave the guitar an even tone and more volume across all the strings. The sustain and intonation were simply amazing. I found that the V-Class bracing was everything that had been advertised...and after spending a couple of hours playing it, I bought it on the spot.

Thanks for making such a great guitar, and making me a believer!

**Dean Daniel**

## Builder's Edition 717: A Masterpiece

I wanted to let [Andy Powers] know that after seeing his video on the Sweetwater website and reading a customer review of the Builder’s Edition 717, I bought one on a gamble that everything he and the reviewer said was true. Well, I sure got lucky because everything said was more than true. I am 76 years young and have been banging on guitars for 64 years or so. My first guitar was the ever popular, mighty Stella, which cost around \$15 and required a fist of steel to pull the strings down. Over the years I have had Yamahas, Gibsons, Martins, Guilds, etc. I had one dreadnought guitar for over 10 years; the problem was that with medium strings the bass strings drowned out the other strings.

My comments on the 717: The back is gorgeous! The case is a work of art. I have played several high-end guitars over the years but have never heard anything like this before. The sounds at the eighth, tenth and twelfth frets are incredible. Just tuning it up string-by-string is incredible because of the Elixir medium strings. Play the G chord (holding down the B and E strings on the third fret) when playing and singing “Tequila Sunrise” by the Eagles. Wow – full, over-the-top fantastic sound. You can make it soft and sweet with the Brazilian tune “Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars” and “How Insensitive,” or you can make it growl with “Proud Mary” in the key of A. And it has improved my singing, too. It’s everything a guy could want in a guitar!

Andy, you have my full gratitude for creating a masterpiece.

**Greg Liptow**  
South Lyon, Michigan

## Family Values

I am an eight-time Taylor guitar owner. From my GS Mini Mahogany (my first) to my 524ce and all those in between, I have enjoyed them all, as they have helped me to progress as a guitar player. I also belong to several Taylor-oriented Facebook groups, where I network with other Taylor owners around the world. The amount of praise I hear for both your/our guitars and your customer service is incredible, not to mention those with whom I interact at gigs and jams. Actually, in every encounter I have with other players I find that Taylor is highly respected and praised by both Taylor and non-Taylor owners! I live in proximity (Palm Springs) to your El Cajon showroom/factory, have visited there several times, and have always been greeted by a friendly and enthusiastic staff. I feel compelled to share these thoughts with you because however you are managing your company, you are doing it very well, and all your caring and consideration for us, your customers, does not go unnoticed. I hope you will continue to be there for all of us who are a part of the ever-growing Taylor “family” of owners and players. I look forward to my next visit to El Cajon and to my next Taylor guitar.

**Gary Nadeau**  
Palm Springs, California

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#### Ebony Project Update:

##### Stella Falone Kitchenware

In Cameroon, our desire to find other socially responsible uses for ebony inspired Bob Taylor to develop a line of kitchenware products, starting with beautiful cutting boards.

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We've made some stylish updates to the Taylor line: a satin sunburst top for the 100 Series; an all-black 12-string in our 200 Deluxe Series; an all-koa Baby Taylor; and a walnut Big Baby.

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Our line of Taylor guitar accessories features premium guitar straps, guitar care products, and plenty more.





## The City of Light: Beacon of Music Retail

*Ed. Note: Taylor co-founder Kurt Listug invited our Vice President of Marketing, Tim O'Brien, to contribute a guest column this issue.*

While traveling through Europe on business in September, I visited a small neighborhood on the north side of Paris called Pigalle. Within it lie the world-famous Moulin Rouge and white-domed Sacré-Cœur church, but for guitar players, Pigalle is best known for its abundance of small, guitar-centric retail stores.

One particularly colorful street, Rue de Douai, is a guitar player's paradise. Lining both sides of the lane is a series of small specialty guitar stores, one right next to the other. You'll find a store that only stocks tube amps bumped up against Metal Guitar, a shop that caters exclusively to metalheads. Bass Maniac only sells basses, of course, while La Pédale specializes in effects pedals. One corner houses Guitar Legend, a store that's well-known among French guitarists for its incredible selection of high-end custom-shop electrics, while up and down the street, many stores specialize in acoustics. One of them, Centrale Gallery, has dedicated the entire first floor of its tiny, high-end shop to a beautiful display of Taylor guitars. Though the stores vary, their goal is the same: brick-and-mortar guitar sales.

While there, I enjoyed lunch with the owners of Star's Music, one of Taylor's strongest French dealers. Proprietors and brothers Patrice and Jean-Pierre Aillot shared with me their passion for guitar retail, which includes more than

10 specialty stores in just that neighborhood. With excitement and vision, they explained their plans to continue to invest in guitar shops, creating unique experiences that guitar lovers crave. In the eyes of Patrice and Jean-Pierre, the future of guitar retail is bright.

Back in the U.S., if you follow the news, your view of the future of retail stores might be less rosy. Stores are closing. Retail is dead. Long live Amazon. Every day we read about store closures, as America's historically high rate of brick-and-mortar retail expansion has lately been trending toward retraction.

Despite the grim headlines, I believe that physical retail is far from dead.

What's true is that "bad" retail is dying. And it probably should. Consumers like you and me are demanding more from the stores we enter. We expect a friendly and knowledgeable staff. We want stores to be clean, comfortable and inspiring. And we expect prices to match those we can find on the phone in our pockets. And if we don't get these things, we will happily shop elsewhere or buy online. It's the bar that has to be met.

The great news for guitar players, especially Taylor owners, is that many of our dealer partners around the world are investing in their stores to the delight of musicians everywhere. Like Patrice and Jean-Pierre, our dealers are creating outstanding guitar shopping experiences by investing in their staff, refining their guitar selection, and reinventing their in-store presentation.

Since 2015, our team has been partnering with dealers to create

"flagship" Taylor destination stores with entire rooms or walls dedicated to our brand and guitars. Today, there are more than 150 of these destination stores around the world, and that number grows monthly as more and more dealers become inspired by the promise of retail greatness. At the same time, we've created one of the most comprehensive online training platforms for our dealers' sales people. This platform ensures that when you enter a store with questions about our guitars, you are met with a knowledgeable, expert response.

Late last year, also in partnership with our dealers, we began selling guitars at our Visitor Center in our El Cajon factory. We use this unique store environment to understand what it really takes to sell a Taylor guitar, learning about the most important questions and concerns you have during your shopping journey. The insight we glean from our store is in turn used to improve the tools and training provided to that local Taylor dealer near you.

If you are ever in the San Diego area, feel free to stop by our factory, take our free tour, talk to our welcoming staff, and browse our great selection of guitars. Most importantly, let us know how we can improve so we can do our part to keep guitar retail alive and well.

— Tim O'Brien  
Vice President of Marketing

# Wood&Steel

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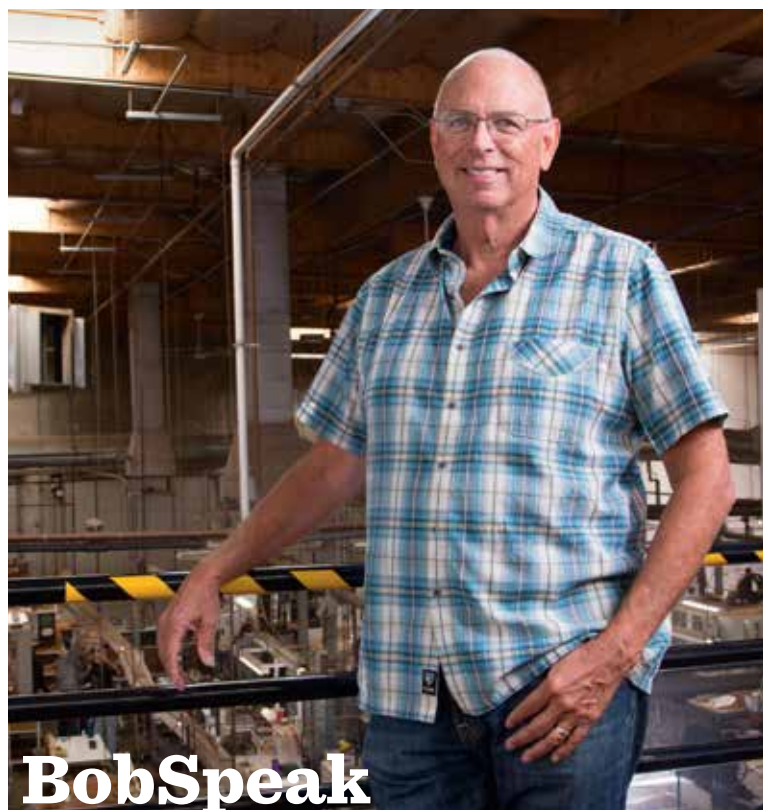
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# BobSpeak

## Built to Last

Nearly 50 years ago, as a teenager, I bought my first Buck knife, their famous Model 110, a folding hunting knife. In those days things were different, and a knife like this was viewed as a tool that nearly every boy owned and carried. I wore it on my belt to school each day. I used it in my job at the gas station to cut hose and tape, punch holes in oil cans, or pry things loose when I worked on a car. I used it night and day, even at school wood shop class as I made my first guitar.

The knife had a wood handle made of some sort of ebony, which was the standard handle on their early 110 knives. I think they invented and began producing that model only about five or six years before I bought mine. All us boys had one. After some years passed, the company found it hard to find the ebony and import it, so they switched to some man-made substitutes, similar to the fingerboards on some of today's guitars. My knife was well-made, and I still have it today.

What is especially satisfying to me is that now we make ebony handles for this model for Buck Knives. Yes, they have ebony on them again because I have access to ebony through our company Crelicam. These ebony pieces are too small for guitars or even violins, but there is value for our employees in Cameroon, and that wood deserves to be put to good use. So, I called Buck, and about a year ago we began production. Buck was an El Cajon company

making ebony parts for our guitars, they trust us to deliver a handle (which they call an inlay) that's ready to go. They need ultra-precise production, which is easy for us. So here I am, having a piece of the current production of this legacy knife made by Buck Knives, a solid American company that's over 100 years old, well over twice the age of Taylor Guitars. We make hundreds of thousands of these each year, and their customers are very happy with the natural ebony appearing on the knives again.

My 50-year-old Buck knife is as solid as can be. I'm thrilled to have it, especially after it's aged over half a century. It's older than some of the managers, directors and executives at Buck Knives now. They like the connection as much as I do. The blade on mine is slim from being sharpened so many times, and I altered it a long time ago by grinding finger grooves into the handle.

There are two reasons I bring this up, besides being interesting and making me proud to be a part of their company like this. One, it's a "buy-once" product. It'll last a lifetime. And two, because of that, it's super-economical and sustainable. Throwaway items are not sustainable. They use up your money and the world's resources.

It reminds me of a column I wrote in *Wood&Steel* 15 years ago extolling the virtues of a good guitar – I noted that a good guitar is not expensive; it's actually cheap if you consider the whole story.



Bob's 50-year-old Buck knife (top) and a new knife featuring Crelicam ebony



Bob's 1978 810

## 2019 Taylor Factory Tours & Vacation Dates

A free, guided tour of the factory is given every Monday through Friday at 1 p.m. (excluding holidays). No advance reservations are necessary. Simply check in at the reception desk in our Visitor Center, located in the lobby of our main building, before 1 p.m. We ask that large groups (more than 10) call us in advance at (619) 258-1207 or email us: [privatetours@taylorguitars.com](mailto:privatetours@taylorguitars.com).

While not physically demanding, the tour does include a fair amount of walking. Due to its technical nature, the tour may not be suitable for small children. The tour lasts approximately one hour and 15 minutes and departs from the Visitor Center at 1980 Gillespie Way in El Cajon, California.

Please take note of the weekday exceptions below. For more information, including directions to the factory, please visit [taylorguitars.com/contact](http://taylorguitars.com/contact).

We look forward to seeing you!



## Factory Closures

**November 28-29** (Thanksgiving Holiday)

**Monday, December 23 - Friday, January 3** (Company Vacation)

At the time I talked about my own model 810, which was made in 1978 and cost about \$1,299 new. I compared it to computers, which at the time cost \$2,000 for a desktop, and which needed to be replaced every two or three years. Or a business suit that a person may own five of and spend \$250, \$500 or more to buy each, and they don't last long like a guitar. Shirts, ties, shoes. So expensive. Cars. Dinners out on the town. Drinks. All those things I mentioned I've spent untold money on over the 40 years that have passed since my 810 cost \$1,200. And that guitar still exists today, is viable, somehow cooler, ready for another 40 years of service, just like my Buck knife, which hasn't failed me in all those years of use.

Andy Powers' current guitar designs are the best we've ever had the pleasure to build here at Taylor. When I look at a brand-new Buck knife, it's even better than my 1970s Buck. When I look at a new Taylor guitar, it's even better than my old 810 from the '70s. I'm confident that whichever Taylor you buy, whether tomorrow or whenever, if you keep it and use it, it will prove to be a trusty companion that in the end costs less than many of the other things you buy, because it will last, and get better, and cooler, and more valued over time.

— Bob Taylor, President

## Finding the musical connections between different genres opens the door to fun family music sessions

By Shawn Persinger

**T**his past February, intrigued by the size and sound of my Taylor GS Mini-e Bass, my 10-year-old daughter asked if she could try playing it.

“Of course!” I responded – a bit overexcited. She had been singing in choir for a couple of years and had begun playing violin in the school orchestra five months earlier, so I knew she had some basic musical ability. Still, I was shocked at how quickly she took to the bass. She had no trouble picking out the melodies to “Hot Cross Buns” and “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” – songs she had learned on the violin. From there, I showed her how to fill the more traditional, accompanimental

role of the bass by playing root notes of chords using steady quarter notes. This she also appreciated, realizing how it made it easier to sing and play at the same time. I quickly recognized that the GS Mini’s bass strings – due to their thickness and relatively loose tension – were much easier for her to play than violin strings, and that the frets allowed her perfect intonation compared to the fretless violin. It was also obvious that the short scale of the bass was ideal for a child.

Excited by her ability to play in time, with a solid sense of rhythm, I asked my daughter if there was a song she wanted to learn. “‘Better in Stereo’ by Dove Cameron,” she enthused. I must say, a

theme song to a Disney Channel show wasn’t exactly what I had been hoping for. (I prefer rock to pop, and the weirder and more progressive the better.) However, I was eager to encourage my daughter, so I quickly made a tablature chart and was delighted that she was able to play along almost straightaway. I could hardly believe it, yet I did appreciate that the combination of a pop song – with a formulaic I IV vi V chord progression (Fig. 1), emphasizing the downbeats (beat one of each measure, accented in Fig. 1), repeated with minimal variation – and the GS Mini Bass was ideal for a beginner musician.

“Another?” I asked after we had played it a few times. “‘We’ll Be the



Stars' by Sabrina Carpenter," she requested, and inside I groaned. Did she want to play songs by Disney stars exclusively? But as I transcribed, I observed, "Oh, this is the same chord progression in a different key, and it's even slower and easier to play!" Thus, I transposed the bass line (Fig. 2) – thanks to the symmetry of the fretboard, the pattern didn't change, just the strings on which the progression was played – and my daughter was thrilled to double her repertoire within minutes of learning her first song. As musically snobbish as I am, I was half-smart enough to know that even though the chord progressions for the two songs were the same, the melodies were considerably different, and the vocal ability of both singers was undeniable, with Carpenter in particular having control over an admirably wide vocal range. So, even though the songs were not my preference, we began to jam on our first two father-daughter songs. I strummed chords while my daughter played straight eighths. Her rhythm was even solid enough that I could improvise over her accompaniment.

Fortuitously, I noticed that the progression we were playing was the same as Tracy Chapman's "Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution," albeit in another new key, with two chords per measure instead of one, and a slight syncopation on the changes (Fig. 3). Suddenly we had a third song we could play – and one I could get excited about as Chapman left behind the prosaic lyrical content of the previous two songs and offered some intellectual nourishment. Even better, my daughter seemed unconcerned that the song was stylistically and thematically a world apart from her pop songs; she was happy playing music. This was promising.

## Complex Layers

My daughter played these songs for a few more days and then asked, "Is there a song similar to these but maybe a bit more complicated?" Now we were talking! This I had been hoping for. As a music teacher, I have always strived to find a balance between giving a student what they want – songs they like – and what they need – techniques, skills and exposure to new musical ideas that will help them become the best musician possible. In the here and now of teaching bass to my daughter, I understood that if I taught her pop songs – with predictable forms and unwavering rhythms – she would be gratified, practice more, and then perhaps be agreeable to working on more elaborate or stylistically diverse songs as she progressed on the instrument. I also had the ulterior motive of hoping she would grow to judge for herself whether

songs with the same four chords performed formulaically were of the same, more or less creative character as songs that had more harmonic, melodic and rhythmic variation. (My music snobbery aside, I'm still striving to figure this out myself – my opinion vacillates from song to song.) And here we were, a few days into her bass adventure, and she already aspired for a challenge.

Gratefully, I did have a similar song, "Hit Me with Your Best Shot" by Pat Benatar, which once again uses the I IV vi V progression in the chorus, although the verses are different and the rhythms are considerably more syncopated. As I suspected, she found the Benatar bass line more formidable, but thanks to the foundation the easier songs had built, she stuck with it, learning the song over the course of several days.

So it is that my daughter continues to request current pop hits while I suggest rock, country and folk songs that possess comparable harmonic movement, melodies, feels/grooves or other analogous features. Granted, she does enjoy the luxury of having a musically obsessed father who has learned thousands of songs in the past 30 years, can hear musical connections beyond surface appearances, and will create a chart for any song she desires. More importantly, I have, reluctantly, set aside my musical biases and learned more myself. Unbeknownst to me, half of the "classic" repertoire I taught to my daughter was inspired by former Disney stars.

For example, we found access to the ubiquitous I V vi IV progression (Fig. 4) with Demi Lovato's "Made in the USA," which connects to countless other songs, most notably, as they are so repetitive, The Police's "So Lonely" and U2's "With or Without You."

I also was delighted to hear Selena Gomez's "Bad Liar" for the first time and immediately recognize The Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer" bass line, either sampled or interpolated. (Contemporary songs with samples in them are an excellent gateway to older material.) I also noticed that Gomez's vocal phrasing on that song is suspiciously similar to Joni Mitchell's "California." We learned all three songs.

And though I suspect the bass line for the funky, glitchy "Replay" by Zendaya was programmed, it is nonetheless perfect for endlessly practicing a highly syncopated bass groove not unlike those of James Brown or any number of devotees of the Godfather of Soul, from Funkadelic to The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

## Why So Many Connections?

It's understandable to think that these connections exist because pop music is formulaic and derivative, which

**Fig. 1**

C F Am G

I IV vi V

**Fig. 2**

F Bb Dm C

I IV vi V

**Fig. 3**

G C Em D

I IV vi V

**Fig. 4**

C G Am F

I V vi IV

**Fig. 5: C Major Scale**

C G C G

**Fig. 6: "Ode to Joy" Beethoven**

C G C G

frequently is true. Still, there are other musical reasons as well. Most popular/commercial styles of music – this goes for pop, rock, country, folk, even classical, any version of those styles that is mainstream – tend to: 1) be diatonic (played all in one key), which gives the ear a sense of stability (Fig. 5); 2) include step-wise melodies, i.e., melodies that move up and down scale degrees via close intervals that are predictable and thus memorable (Fig. 6); and 3) follow short, formulaic chord progressions (all figures). The biggest differences between commercial styles tend to be production and instrumentation – although there is a trend for pop performers to strip arrangements down to acoustic guitar or piano, thus reinforcing the similarities between genres. It takes no effort to dismiss a pop song with slick electronic production and clichéd lyrics as subpar, but if you take a bit of time to listen beyond superficialities – this frequently requires actually learning how to play *and* sing, or at least learn to play the vocal melody – you'll conceivably find some redeeming value. That doesn't mean your tastes

will change, but it can give you a better understanding of music beyond your personal preferences.

## Moving Forward

Gradually my daughter has learned more sophisticated pieces. She became fixated on the *Harry Potter* theme ("Hedwig's Theme"), learning it from a tab chart I made her and eventually memorizing it after days of incessant playing. Danny Elfman's "The Simpsons Theme" came next. (Maybe starting with a Disney television theme song wasn't such a bad idea after all.) Additionally, she's been taking my weekly Beatles class for the past eight months – that's more than 30 McCartney bass lines! Rest assured, she now appreciates the difference between generic and creative pop, though, justly, she still likes to listen to and play both.

So here are the self-evident suggestions I impart to all generations of musicians as a means of creating a more musically engaged world: Embrace all musical styles, look for the parallels, not the distinctions, and (this can be the most problematic for many people, myself

included) practice songs you don't like – you might just learn something!

Finally, lest you think this has primarily been a self-serving essay on the talent of my daughter, I can reassure you that she is no prodigy. Her ability is that of any child with an inclination to play music, basic resources, support and a regular practice routine. What's most important to me is that she is having fun playing a variety of musical styles – by herself, with me, and with others – and any child can do that with the right encouragement. **W&S**

*Shawn Persinger, a.k.a. Prester John, owns a Taylor 410, two 310s, a 214ce-N, an 8-string baritone, and a GS Mini Bass. His music has been described as a myriad of delightful musical paradoxes: complex but catchy; virtuosic yet affable; smart and whimsical. His book The 50 Greatest Guitar Books has been hailed as a monumental achievement by readers and critics.*

([www.GreatestGuitarBooks.com](http://www.GreatestGuitarBooks.com))

# Ask Bob

Stump wood, guitar weight differences, and why we don't torrefy koa tops

I notice you are always looking for ways to conserve and utilize wood in the most responsible way. Can you successfully use any wood of the tree from below ground? I have seen some absolutely amazing wood figure from stump wood. I read that it can be rough on saws, but I figure you have some water jet cutters. It might be worth it for the beauty of this wood. It would also utilize more of the tree.

Randy Sitz  
Gadsden, Alabama

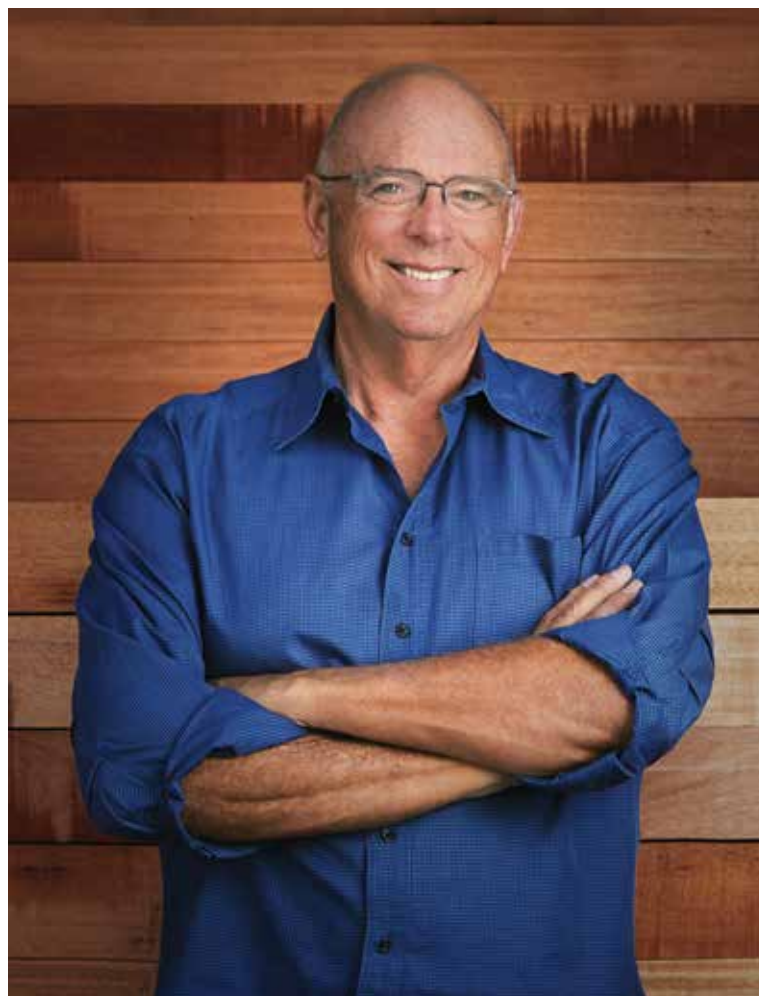
Randy, yes, we can use that wood, in a theoretical sense. We can get stump wood, cut it on a saw, and make a guitar from it. If it were koa stumps and the grain was straight and strong, we'd do it. If it were spectacular walnut stumps, we might do it, unless it was burl, in which case we wouldn't be able to use it. If it were odds-and-ends stumps, we wouldn't do it. The deciding factor is if we make a model where that wood will fit and what effort we have to expend to get a few guitars worth of wood. When you make as many guitars as we do, there are restrictions. But if I made guitars alone in a workshop, I'd seek out stumps for really cool wood.

I bought a V-Class 914ce in April 2018. Let me first say that I love it! My question is about the very light color of the top. Will UV light cause it to darken, or does the finish block UV light? I am keeping this one in the case and carefully keeping an eye on the humidity, but I would like to see the top age.

Dave Gunter

Dave, thanks for buying the V-Class 914ce. I agree, it's a fine guitar! Your top will darken both from UV light and just, well, age. It will darken more slowly if it's always in the case, but it will darken nevertheless. And thanks for keeping it in the case. That's the best place to store a guitar.

I'm very happy with my recently acquired 414ce-R, but I was wondering if it ever happens that a com-



pletely finished guitar going through final inspection before being shipped does not meet the sound quality standards that it should have. If so, what happens to those guitars?

Marc Peters  
Schinnen, Netherlands

You'll either be surprised or relieved, Marc, to know that this never, ever happens. The guitars always turn out to sound good. If there's a little problem it would be in the playability, like a fret buzz, or maybe a pickup malfunctioning, and we correct those issues. But never does a guitar strangely not sound good.

I'm proud to be the owner of two awesome 814ce Taylor guitars. The

newer is an 814ce DLX, and the older is a 1999 814ce, both beautiful and amazing instruments. Every time I pick up the new one, I notice it is significantly lighter than the older one. I'm curious if your manufacturing process and computer-aided engineering have allowed the ability to produce the same and even better-quality instruments over time while conserving valuable tonewood resources. No grumbling here — the 814ce DLX sounds and plays like a dream, and certainly seems sturdy enough — but is it my imagination that it feels so much lighter?

Chris Mac

Chris, it can absolutely feel much lighter. But that would be inherent in the woods used, not because one has less

## Do Taylor guitars have a radius built into the top bracing?

Don Anderson

Yes, Don, we have very well-thought-out radii built into the tops and backs. Different models of guitars have different geometry according to the needs of that model.

or more wood. When we test designs and have to make guitars that are as identical as possible, we use sister pieces of wood between guitars and weigh each and every part so that we match the weight perfectly. We do other sorting as well, but it just shows that there can be inherent weight differences. The other consideration is that you can perceive a few grams or ounces of weight difference easily, and one will feel much heavier, or lighter, when in fact the real difference is just a very small percentage.

Bob, who actually builds the Builder's Edition guitars? Production associates or Andy or you? Are the accoutrements on each model

designed by you or Andy? I also note I never see these models in left-hand versions. I realize there is only a small market for left-handed models, but it would be nice to see one grace the pages of *Wood&Steel*.

Eric Hiltunen

Eric, Andy designs them. They're built in the factory by people who have the skill and training to do the intricate work required. We strive to have more people up to that skill level all the time, but it takes some serious experience and skill to get to the level of the Builder's Edition guitars. Thus, the lower production numbers of those. We can only grow our output as we train more people. We've made a left-hand version of nearly everything at Taylor, but the Builder's Edition cutaway guitars



require very intense and expensive tooling to make the left-hand version. The non-cutaway Builder's Editions, of course, are available in left-handed versions, but we have not been able to make the required systems yet to do the cutaway versions.

**I have a 31-year-old 12-string 555 (signed by you) with a straight-as-an-arrow neck. (I hope I fare this well in 31 years.) My question: There was an article in *American Lutherie* that basically said one of the reasons we like old guitars is that over the years they are less than perfect. They go out of intonation, they're "broken down in just the right way," and "The intonation of a guitar is always going to be a little off by nature, but that's the sound we've grown to love and want." It reminds me of the desire to hear vinyl records rather than perfect CDs. Do you think this is true about humans — that we enjoy less-than-perfect [sounds] because we are all less than perfect?**

Jeff Bolek  
Ohio

Well, that's a good theory, Jeff. I won't argue with that. We also get used to certain things or conditions. I mean, we can get used to being cold, or hot, to an extent that the opposite feels uncomfortable until you get used to the new situation. Just bring a relative from Alaska to San Diego for summer vacation — the only thing they notice is how hot they are! Guitars don't really develop worse intonation over the years unless they've pulled into a new shape that shortens the string length, but you've already stated that your guitar is straight and true. Andy has designed wonderfully accurate intonation on our V-Class guitars, and people are now getting used to that. Some are having a problem going "back" to their other guitars they've played for years. I do know this: The brain looks for patterns. So much so that it can predict. I could end one of my sentences short here while I write, and, chances are, you'd be able to finish it without my words because your brain knows what's coming. And I think we do get used to things. The problem is living with a better and a worse one at the same time. A good guitar makes a beautiful tone that your ear loves. That's the wonderful thing about that. The nuances make it special, and improvements need to be absorbed slowly, often, because they upset the patterns the brain has memorized. It's all endlessly interesting, don't you think?

**I currently play a Taylor 314ce. I love it, but I only play it tuned one whole step down (D-G-C-F-A-D) so that my vocals sound better. Naturally, the intonation suffers because of this. I was wondering if you have any tips for me to improve this issue. I was thinking maybe a bridge saddle that was cut to accommodate that tuning.**

Rob Chewning

*[Ed. Note: Taylor Customer Service Manager Glen Wolff answered this question when we originally received it.]*

Rob, we put light-gauge strings (.012-.053) on the 314ce. If you're still using those when tuning down a whole step, I'd try some heavier strings like mediums (.013-.056). They'll be a little stiffer and more stable than lights. You may find that a custom saddle isn't needed.



**I recently laid some teak flooring in a room in my home and didn't know until I got it home how heavy and how hard it was. I cut it with a miter box saw in my garage, and when a scrap piece would fall out of the saw and onto the concrete, it "rang." It reminded me of when I worked in a music store in the '70s. We sold rosewood claves (probably Brazilian), and the teak hitting the concrete sounded very similar. Have you ever**

**considered teak wood for the sides and back of a guitar? Is it workable, and if so, is there enough available to use?**

Charles Vance

*[Ed. Note: Andy Powers replies.]*

Charles, there was a time when I never would have considered using a wood like teak, because I was most familiar with guitars made from rosewood, mahogany or maple. In the decades since then, I've realized there are fewer rules about which woods can make interesting-sounding instruments, so long as a maker understands the material and how to work with its characteristics. As you point out, teak has a great ring to it. There are a few challenges to working with it: It has a high silica content, which is very tough on cutting tools; it can be tricky to glue due to its oil content; and the large open pores can be difficult to finish. Despite those difficulties, it has a great density for a back and side wood, and once seasoned, is respectably stable. As with so many of the woods used in guitars, they were never traditional instrument woods until a maker started to work with them and designed instruments around their unique qualities. While woods like teak or oak may not be today's marquee woods for guitars, they may very well be woods we work with regularly in the future.

**I love what Taylor does with koa, and I'm happy to see the new Builder's Edition K24ce. With the koa top's reputation for taking a long time to "open up," I'm curious as to why torrefaction isn't appropriate for this model like it is on spruce-topped versions. I would imagine you tried it. What happened?**

G. S. Thompson  
Indianapolis, Indiana

*[Ed. Note: As the designer of our Builder's Edition guitars, Andy Powers responds.]*

G. S., a simple answer is because we don't like the way torrefaction works with koa. Essentially, torrefaction is an oxidation reaction. That can happen over a short time in higher heat, or over a long time with lower heat. Both approaches have different side effects. We can roast a piece of wood in a special oven fairly quickly, or we can let the piece of wood age at room temperature. The difference is that high heat tends to partially break down the lignin in the wood and redistribute it. In woods like spruce, this can offer

some benefit. In koa, doing this tends to weaken the fibers, which are further loosened up with the presence of any figuring like curl. When you combine those two factors, the resulting piece of wood doesn't have the long-grain fiber strength we want to see in a top. If we

let the wood age naturally with playing time, the fibers retain their integrity but do see an improvement in internal sound velocity. So, for a koa top, it's better to play the heck out of the guitar for a long time and let it naturally "ripen."



## Got a question for Bob Taylor?

Shoot him an email: [askbob@taylorguitars.com](mailto:askbob@taylorguitars.com)

If you have a specific repair or service concern, please call our Customer Service department at (800) 943-6782, and we'll take care of you.

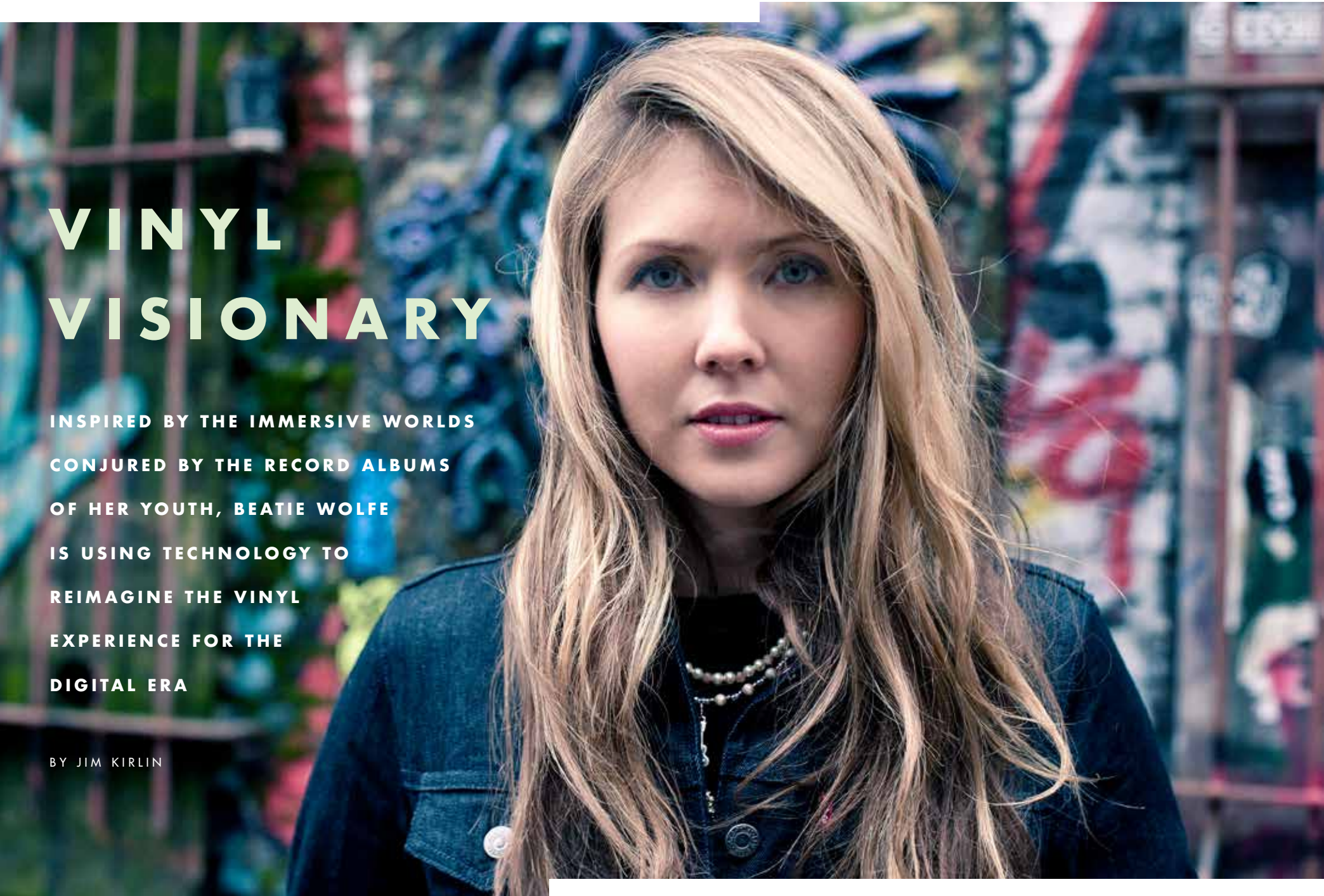


[Artist **Spotlight**]

# VINYL VISIONARY

INSPIRED BY THE IMMERSIVE WORLDS  
CONJURED BY THE RECORD ALBUMS  
OF HER YOUTH, BEATIE WOLFE  
IS USING TECHNOLOGY TO  
REIMAGINE THE VINYL  
EXPERIENCE FOR THE  
DIGITAL ERA

BY JIM KIRLIN





B

Beatie Wolfe is making the most of her first visit to the Taylor factory. So far, she's spent time with our artist relations and marketing folks, sampled our new Grand Pacific, had her workhorse 110e tended to in our service department, toured the factory, and obliged us for a quick photo shoot along the way. At the moment she's tucked into in an armchair and holding court in "The Shed," a room in our product development building where we record our "From the Factory" podcast. Co-hosts Cameron Walt and Jay Parkin lead off the conversation by getting her impressions of the tour.

"I loved every minute of it, being a super geek," she says in her velvety British accent. "A big part of it was realizing how many processes go into making one guitar, and how each of those processes is a thing of love and quality and precision. That attention to detail is something I admire and value because when things are made well they last, and that's with everything — music, architecture, science, literature."

Wolfe especially relates to Taylor's unique marriage of tradition and innovation.

"There was that lovely balance between embracing the best of the old...but also realizing how you can use tools to enhance and streamline that, which is essentially what I do — try and figure out the optimum blend of the old and the new, creating something that is made well but also feels different and magical and has an aspect to it that people haven't seen before."

It's no surprise that this creative approach resonates with Wolfe. The

London-bred singer-songwriter is quite an innovator in her own right. Named by *WIRED* magazine as one of "22 people changing the world," Wolfe is not only a gifted tunesmith, but also a tech visionary who has introduced groundbreaking new interactive formats through which to experience her music, bridging the physical and digital realms in transformative ways. Each of Wolfe's three albums was developed in tandem with a different interactive technology that draws the listener into a unique multi-sensory musical storytelling experience.

For her debut release, 2013's *Sight*, Wolfe collaborated with a design studio to create an interactive album app that delivers a "3D vinyl" experience for the phone. Her second record, *Montagu Square*, was released as the world's first NFC (near field communication) Album Deck, allowing listeners to tap a series of song cards to their phone to play tracks and access an array of multimedia content. Her third release, *Raw Space*, was recorded in the quietest room on Earth — an anechoic chamber on the campus of historic Bell Labs in New Jersey — and released as the world's first live 360° AR (augmented reality) experience. Featuring real-time AR animations, the record was conceived as a "Fantasia experience for the album in the streaming age." (For a closer look at each project, see "Beatie's 'World-First' Album Experiences," p. 12.)

Wolfe traces each of these groundbreaking amalgams of music, art and technology back to the same source: her experiences with record albums as a child.

"I can remember writing songs when I was 6 or 7, and then discovering my mom's album collection and just seeing these records as musical books," she says. "And I was obsessed with storytelling anyway. For me, songwriting was just another form of storytelling, but it was the one that made the most sense. And vinyls were these musical books that you could read like a story — you had the artwork and the liner notes and the lyrics — and there was this ceremony to listening, and this whole world that opened up from simply opening the gatefold. And I was just imagining, what worlds will I create for my albums? What will they feel like? What will they look like?"

When the tangible, immersive, ritualistic experience of consuming record albums later gave way to the digital revolution, Wolfe felt like much of that storytelling magic was lost.

"Everything I loved became kind of irrelevant in some ways," she suggests.

This impacted her not only as a listener, but as a young artist embarking on a career in music.

"I felt like we'd missed a trick in going from one to the other so fast and not really celebrating the best of the old formats and what they had to offer," she adds. "There wasn't even an interesting dialogue between the two. It was literally like physical is out, and now it's all digital downloads. And I just couldn't accept that. I thought, that's so boring and uninspired. I want it to physically exist in this form, and I want it to tell a story, and I want there to be a ceremony around it. So, I essentially have been using technology as a way of reimagining what the vinyl experience for today could look like. How could I create something that makes people feel like they're stepping back and opening up a record again like I felt as a kid, but it's not just something nostalgic; it's triggering a different pathway and making them see music differently. It's cutting through the noise of music just existing as part of the background."

### Finding Her Musical Voice

Compared to the pioneering media formats Wolfe has created with each of her albums, her approach to songwriting is fairly traditional, typically composed on her Taylor acoustic. Her songwriting influences include John Lennon, Elliott Smith (her song "Little Moth" from *Raw Space* pays tribute to the late artist, and she performed and produced it in a similar, intimate style), and Leonard Cohen, whose poetic lyricism is imprinted on her own lyrical sensibility.

Wolfe's musical talents were noticed early on — she was offered a recording contract at age 15, but upon realizing that she wouldn't have creative control, instead opted for college, where she studied English literature. She wrote her final thesis on the poetry of Leonard Cohen, which was later published online and even led to correspondence with Cohen and his team.

Wolfe recalls having an instinctive feel for writing songs at a young age, and found that the limited guitar instruction she received, though well-intentioned, imposed too many constraints on her blossoming musical ideas.

"I remember a teacher saying something like, 'You can't use that suspended chord,' and at that point I thought, I'm not interested, because I was writing songs; I wasn't trying to be some music genius," she says. "I already had a natural ear, and I didn't want to start doubting that."

Years later, when she was 20 and working on her first record, she made the acquaintance of jazz musician, composer, bandleader and educator Wynton Marsalis, who became a mentor and helped validate her natural musical instincts.

"When I met Wynton, I had pretty much all the recordings for the first album, and it was super DIY," she says. "I didn't know what I was doing. He's this musical purist and really only likes jazz and classical, but he was a fan of my music and what I was doing. We played through all my songs; he was on the piano, I was on my guitar, and he analyzed them. He was talking to himself and making these annotations and figuring out what I was doing, and [he'd say things] like, 'This is an amazing written song [where] you answer this inversion....' I was so *not* on that same page, but it was nice."

The interaction gave her the confidence to trust her musical intuition with other projects that followed.

"After that, when I'd work with producers and they'd say something like, 'You know, you should have gone to the A-flat,' I'd be like, 'Shut up, Wynton says it's fine,'" she laughs. "It's that idea of, if you're going to learn it, learn *all* of it, which is what he's done. He knows *all* the rules, and he knows how you can bend them and intuit around them. Or just have an ear. But don't be in-between, where you think you know enough, and you don't really have an ear, [because] then you become confined by these not-very-helpful ideas of what music should be."

*continued next page*

"IT'S NEVER  
ABOUT THE  
TECHNOLOGY;  
IT'S ALWAYS  
ABOUT THE  
EXPERIENCE."

## Beatie's "World-First" Album Experiences

Beatie talks about the interactive formats created for her albums

### **8ight** (2013)

**Format:** 3D Interactive Album App and Palm Top Theater

"Everyone had shifted to their phones to listen to their music, and digital downloads were the primary new thing – this was pre-streaming. I just found that so dull. The idea was, how do you turn the phone into a magic box, with the inspiration being the '80s View-Master. So I came up with this sort of 3D vinyl experience for the phone, where you had the liner notes and artwork, but then you could slot your phone into this little Japanese device and it turned it into a theater for the palm of your hand. So then you were able to watch this performance, kind of like the '80s View-Masters, stereoscopically, and it felt like holograms were jumping out of your phone. And it was magical. It was nostalgic, but it was new."

GQ magazine premiered the release across its print and iPad editions. Impressed by the 3D innovation, Apple invited Wolfe to be the first artist to tour its global event theatres in New York, London, Berlin and Tokyo.

### **Montagu Square** (2015)

**Format:** Musical Album Jacket with NFC Album Deck

The conceptual format for Wolfe's second release – a play on the idea of an "album jacket" for the 21st Century – has a fascinating origin story with several interwoven threads (quite literally). Wolfe had bumped into British fashion

designer David Mason, an acquaintance who had revived the heritage fashion brand Mr. Fish (whose namesake had famously designed clothes for the likes of Mick Jagger, David Bowie and Jimi Hendrix in the late '60s). Mason invited Wolfe for tea at his home, which turned out to be an historic building in London (on Montagu Square) where John Lennon and Yoko Ono had lived. While sitting in the living room, she noticed a series of black and white photos on the walls – pictures of Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, and Jimi Hendrix – that revealed more of the room's history. Over tea, Mason filled in the details, which Wolfe shared during her Taylor podcast.

"It turns out that the place was bought by Ringo as his home and his drumming rehearsal space because it was near Abbey Road, and then he leased it to McCartney, who wrote and recorded 'Eleanor Rigby' in that room," she says. "And then McCartney also has his Apple Studios out of there. He's

recording William Burroughs, all these Beat poets, and Hendrix comes to London and needs somewhere to live, and McCartney's like, 'I'm moving out. Do you want to stay here?' So, Hendrix moves in, and he has a terrible argument with his girlfriend one night, she runs out, and he writes and records "The Wind Cries Mary" in this living room, and then gets evicted for whitewashing the walls when he's high on acid. By that point Ringo was like, enough's enough. And then Yoko and Lennon move in. That's where they do the double virgin naked cover shot and a lot of other stuff."

Wolfe says she could feel the sense of musical history while sitting in the room.

"I felt like there was a way of telling the story of the house, the tailor, and the record in this fashion that was an album jacket," she says.

Coincidentally, the day after tea with Mason, Wolfe met textiles design-

er Nadia-Anne Ricketts, founder of a company called Beatwoven, which uses software to convert sound into visual pixels that form graphic patterns, and ultimately, woven textile prints.

"The idea was to record in that room live, and the architecture of the music [from the recording] then was translated into a piece of fabric by this textiles designer and tailored into a musical jacket by Mr. Fish," Wolfe explains. "So it was this idea of music being seen as art and having this jacket that was an album jacket, but it told these multiple stories. The jacket was also embedded with an NFC chip, so you could tap your phone onto the fabric to hear the music that was woven into it."

To make the concept more consumable to a mass audience, Wolfe had the idea to release *Montagu Square* as a deck of beautifully designed cards also embedded with NFC technology.

"You opened it up, you had a card for each track off the record, you tapped that card to your phone, and you'd instantly get the song, the lyrics, the liner notes, the artwork, the music video, all of that content."

### **Raw Space** (2017)

**Format:** Live 360° AR (Augmented Reality) Stream

Whereas Wolfe's first two albums were created during a time of digital downloads, *Raw Space* was developed at a time when streaming had become the norm. So she began to think about an artistic reinterpretation of streaming. Around the same time, she began working on a project with Nokia Bell Labs (formerly Bell Labs), a renowned research institution that has produced numerous breakthrough technologies over the years, including radio astron-

omy, the laser and the transistor. The facility also has a rich history of pioneering collaborations between artists and technologists as part of its Experiments in Arts and Technology (E.A.T.) program and had recently revitalized the program. During the project, one of their engineers offered to take Wolfe into their anechoic chamber – which had been the quietest room on earth for many decades.

"This is the room where they invented the foil microphone," she says. "They figured out rogue frequencies, psychoacoustics here. It was the original anechoic chamber. This room is so core to our understanding of audio as we know it."

Wolfe, "being a nerd and loving all that stuff," readily agreed.

"And the engineer says, 'OK, but I've got to warn you – you'll probably only be able to stay in there 20 minutes because you can hear the blood rushing through your veins.' So, we go into this space and he closes this door that's several feet deep, and the room itself is this gigantic space, like 40 feet by 40 feet. You're walking on a wire-suspended floor that puts your ear in the center. Instead of freaking out, I found it to be the most peaceful, reconnecting experience – I was just drinking in this silence and realizing that we have noise around us so much off the time. And then hearing music in that room – no autotune, no EQ, no reverb, super pure – I felt like this anti-echo chamber was just meant to be."

This sparked the ambitious idea of creating what would be Wolfe's most immersive, multisensory experience yet – what she dubbed the "anti-stream" from the anechoic chamber. With the songs for the album recorded, she worked closely with the design agency Design I/O, which specializes in developing



Palm Top Theater



Musical Jacket by Mr. Fish



Performing in the anechoic chamber with Augmented Reality animations



interactive installations, and Nokia Bell Labs to create spatial audio with live 360-degree Augmented Reality animations for each song.

"I had the idea to have a physical record player playing the album on repeat 24 hours [a day] for a week, live 360 streaming that," she explains. "It was actually the first live 360 video, amongst other things, and people could log into that space and hear the music played in that pure, focused way. They couldn't shuffle; they couldn't fast-forward. And then using live augmented reality, as the record was spinning the lyrics would be [graphically] streaming out of the vinyl; the artwork for that particular track would surround you in the chamber and transform that room into the visual landscape of each song. And that was happening in real time. For me, that was the closest thing to being a 7- or 8-year-old and opening up *Abbey Road* and just having this feeling of the artwork, the lyrics, everything coming to life around you."

As part of the project launch, Wolfe performed live from the anechoic chamber.

"Instead of the record player coming to life, I was coming to life," she says. "I was being mapped and tracked and the lyrics would be streaming out of my mouth, and the artwork would be coming off the guitar."

### **Raw Space: The Raw Space Beam** (2018)

**Format:** Space Broadcast

During her work with Bell Labs, Wolfe made the acquaintance of Nobel Prize-winning scientist, radio astronomer Dr. Robert Wilson. In the 1960s, Wil-

son had discovered cosmic microwave background radiation (CMB) using the Bell Labs' historic Holmdel Horn Antenna, and in the process validated the "Big Bang" theory of the creation of the universe. The two hit it off, and in the course of explaining her *Raw Space* project and the anechoic chamber, Wolfe inspired Wilson to update the antenna to beam the music of the album into space.

It turned out to be the first update to the antenna in 50 years, and the first time it was used to transmit rather than receive. In the end, the *Raw Space* Beam transmitted the raw anechoic version of the album (recorded in the chamber with no reverb, EQ or audio enhancements) into raw space. Wolfe's conceptual idea was that for the first time, raw sound would enter raw space as a true reflection of our humanity at a time of increased airbrushing, auto-tuning and AI.

### **The V&A Exhibition**

Wolfe's pioneering album projects earned her an invitation to exhibit at London's Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum as part of the London Design Festival in 2018. Her exhibition, "The Art of Music in the Digital Age," recreated some of the interactive experiences she developed, this time in a more portable, accessible form, including a "Raw Space Chamber" where visitors could immerse themselves in a variation of her 360 AR album stream with the help of a vintage coin-operated binoculars viewport and spinning vinyl.

One of her favorite parts of the exhibition was being there and seeing firsthand the reactions from everyone from kids to grandparents.

I heard so many people coming out of there saying things like, 'I've never seen anything like that,' or 'I'll remember this forever,' she says. These kinds of experiences can make a deep impression when we're present, there's something physical, and you have a story."

### **Working with Linda Perry**

After her V&A exhibition, Wolfe found herself craving a different type of creative collaboration, which led her to work with legendary producer and singer-songwriter Linda Perry (Christina Aguilera, Gwen Stefani, P!nk), who had launched a combination record label and publishing house called We Are Hear with music manager Kerry Brown. The company's mission is artist empowerment and development, providing a mix of tools, guidance, freedom and other resources to evolve artistically and professionally. (We wrote about Perry in "Soundings" last issue.)

Both Wolfe and Perry admired each other's artistic accomplishments and embraced the chance to work together. The irony for Wolfe was that for all her rich collaborations on the tech and design side of her art, writing songs had never been a collaborative process.

"I have many songs because songwriting was never difficult," she says. "I had always done it entirely on my own, and I mixed, produced, arranged. I've always been very protective about the music because in the early days there would potentially be wrong deals

or wrong management. As a result, I thought, I'll keep this pure, and then I'll collaborate on the other stuff."

Initially Wolfe wasn't sure if she and Perry would gel creatively.

"Linda had asked me to come with a bunch of songs I'd already written, which I had," she recalls. "One of the first things she said to me was, 'I feel like you have your music behind your hand. Why is that?'"

When Perry suggested they write together, Wolfe's first instinct was to bail.

"I hate jamming, I hate improvising," she says. "For me, [writing songs] always happened naturally, and it does for her as well. But I just hated that artificialization of that, and I didn't know her at that point. And then she starts playing the Mellotron, and I'm doing this bad Elvis voiceover just to try to get through the exercise...and she's like, 'Beatie, just loosen up.' And suddenly it was like there was a hymn sheet here and I'm singing a song that's already been written – words, melody, arrangement. That's happened to me on my own, but it's never happened with someone else. And within three minutes of the first 10 minutes of our first session we had this track. We talked about it afterwards, and she told me, 'I've done that exercise with everyone I've worked with, from Christina to Gwen, and no one has been able to do that.' And that's not me patting myself on the back; it was just that obviously something was working where the channel was open. Since then we've

written everything like that, where it just happens completely naturally. And we're both getting as much out of it, which is really lovely because it feels like true collaboration, and it's pretty magical. We show up and a song comes out."

Wolfe elaborates on the experience during the podcast.

"For me, music has to be devoid of ego in the writing process. You can jump onstage after and give it some Mick Jagger or whatever, but in the writing process, it's not about ego. Even in the production process, it's like, what does [the song] need? What is that story? How do you authentically tell that story the best way possible? And that's the same with her. So that's where the compatibility is."

The two have released one co-written, Perry-produced track so far, the dark and languid "Barely Living," in which Wolfe's brooding vocals float above a sultry, haunting groove.

Wolfe expects to release a new album next year. She was also invited by curators from the Art Institute of Chicago to bring her exhibition from the Victoria & Albert Museum to Chicago. The show sparked an idea for a new interactive medium for visitors to experience her new record there.

"It pays homage to this woman Hedy Lamar," she says. "She was this bombshell actress who everyone knew as this kind of glamour woman. But she was also an inventor and an amazing pioneer who came up with this binary code called frequency hopping in World War II, which was a way of sending missiles undetected. That code has gone on to influence everything that we now use, like Wifi. And I thought, wouldn't it be amazing to pay tribute to her by creating a way of listening to music that is this sort of 3D secret communication system, where you'd be able to listen to the album in its individual frequency bands, with the liner notes as these fixed-signal radio stations. We'll also do some interesting stuff in the recording process."

Sounds like a good reason to stay tuned. **W&S**

*You can hear our conversation with Beatie Wolfe on the Taylor From the Factory Podcast, available via most podcast players. Learn more about her album innovations and other projects at [beatiewolfe.com](http://beatiewolfe.com)*



The Holmdel Horn Antenna



Wolfe with her well-seasoned 110e





**Our latest limited edition collection reveals a bundle of bodacious woods: blackheart sassafras, a sweet koa/cedar combo, and figured ovangkol**

By Colin Griffith

*L-R: Backs of the koa 514ce LTD, sassafras 814ce LTD and layered ovangkol 214ce-FO DLX LTD*

**I**f you tour the Taylor factory at our company headquarters in El Cajon, California, chances are you'll be struck by the variety of tonewoods making their way through our production process, on their way to becoming finely crafted instruments. Choosing the right combination of woods – the ones that together create an inspiring mix of elegant aesthetics and sonorous sounds – is part art, part science, and in the case of our limited edition guitars, often part luck.

We love having the freedom to venture outside the boundaries of our

standard guitar line and offer players something uniquely appealing as a limited edition release. Inspiration can strike from different angles. While working with our suppliers, we might discover a unique trove of wood that speaks to us. Or we might find a reason to revive a tonewood pairing we don't typically offer. However it happens, we do our very best to honor the materials we select in order to create something truly special.

This autumn, we've turned our latest inspiration into a new collection of limited edition guitars. Stunning

blackheart sassafras makes a dramatic return, for the first time powered by our V-Class™ bracing. We're also excited to lend our V-Class architecture to the tonewood pairing of koa and cedar, in both 12-fret and 14-fret configurations. Last but not least, we've brought a new layered-wood option – figured ovangkol – to our 200 Deluxe Series.

We hope our inspiration is contagious.

Read on for more details, and look for these guitars in stores starting in late October.



**Model: 814ce LTD****Back/Sides:** Blackheart Sassafras**Top:** Sitka Spruce

As with songwriting, sometimes the best inspiration for building a guitar comes when we least expect it. That pretty well sums up this limited release, a cutaway Grand Auditorium 814ce LTD featuring back and sides of magnificent blackheart sassafras. In this case, we discovered a handsome batch while sourcing blackwood for other guitars.

In terms of both internal structure and sound, sassafras is radically different from Indian rosewood or any other tonewood we typically use for guitars. Sourced from Tasmania, sassafras varies wildly in color and quality, and individual trees can be as distinct as humans. In fact, sassafras can be so diverse that even within a single tree, neighboring sets of the wood can look very different.

"A timber's color and figure typically relate to the way the tree grew and are connected to markers like the tree's growth rings," Andy explains. "With this blackheart sassafras, the coloring occurs independently of the way the tree grows. As a result, the color pattern is completely unique to each guitar set, because the hues can vary so greatly throughout a single board."

The "blackheart" label refers to the dark coloration that runs through the blonde-hued heartwood, a result of fungi that propagate inside the tree after branches break off during storms, which allows water to drip down through the tree as it grows.

Musically, sassafras has a tone profile that's hard to pin down because it varies from player to player. In general, it blends the midrange warmth of mahogany, the top-end sparkle of rosewood, and the clarity of maple. Also like maple, it tends to respond to the unique nuances of a player's attack. In other words, a guitarist playing softly will coax a dramatically different tone out of one of these 814ce LTD models than a player who really digs in to produce high volume.

"It's an enigma of a wood," Andy says. "If you play it with a bright attack, it's a bright wood. If you play it in a dark way, it'll respond with this dusky tone. If you play it lyrically, it sounds like it's whispering or humming. One guitar might sound very different among five players."

This chameleonic quality makes the 814ce LTD a versatile option for guitarists who like to dabble across different genres and playing styles. The presence of V-Class bracing intensifies the sonic character of the spruce/sassafras pairing. In this case, beyond the expect-

ed increase in volume and sustain, the bracing makes this guitar more expressive and player-reflective than ever.

"As a guitar maker," Andy says, "it is a genuine thrill to know there will be music coming out of these guitars that you won't hear anywhere else."

Visually, the unique character of each set of sassafras in this batch means that each guitar will look as distinct as the person who plays it. In addition to the "blackheart" accents, the heartwood displays subtle touches of olive, black, yellow, brown and even hints of rosy pink. The swirls of light and dark color are also complemented by the color variegation in the ebony pickguard and fretboard.

Many of the guitar's appointments are borrowed from our standard 800 Series, including rosewood top edge trim and mother-of-pearl fretboard inlays in our Element pattern. One exception is the choice of West African ebony for the binding and backstrip (rather than maple), which provides a pleasing contrast against the lighter-colored sassafras. The guitar comes with onboard ES2 electronics and a Taylor deluxe hardshell case.





**Models:**  
**512ce 12-Fret LTD**  
**514ce LTD**

**Back/Sides:** Hawaiian Koa  
**Top:** Western Red Cedar

Though the tonewood pairing of Hawaiian koa and cedar isn't currently offered in our Koa Series, the two woods have a harmonious history at Taylor, a special sonic kinship that traces back to the early days of our Grand Auditorium body style in the mid-1990s. Andy is excited to reunite these complementary woods on this limited edition offering, in the form of Grand Auditorium and Grand Concert models dressed in our 500 Series appointments.

"Those two woods are a heavenly match," he says.

Though koa brings instant cachet thanks to its exotic beauty, Andy is quick to emphasize cedar's virtues: soft-touch responsiveness and broad,

harmonically rich tone, which together have traditionally appealed to finger-style players.

When you marry cedar's traits with koa's midrange mojo and then add our V-Class bracing to the mix, you have a recipe for a new dimension of acoustic sound. Andy describes the impact of V-Class on a cedar top in terms of its ability to spread the soundboard energy in a way that allows a note to bloom and develop.

"We want the sound to disperse evenly over the top so it vibrates in a cohesive way," he explains. "Cedar tends to be relatively stiff across the grain in proportion to its resiliency along the grain, which makes a mechanically efficient sound transmitter. As a result, only a little harmonic content is absorbed, making the overtone content rich and full. It feels like the guitar lights up without the need to hit it hard."

It's a "smoky, thick, complex" sound, to use Andy's words – a natural coun-

terbalance to koa's sweet, bell-like response. The result is a beautifully dynamic sound in which overtones can resonate and sustain while the fundamental note remains clear.

"For me, the magic is in the mid-range," Andy says of koa. "In a way, it sounds like the Hawaiian language: sweet, lyrical, melodic. The way the notes flow from the guitar makes them sound effortless."

In the Grand Concert 512ce 12-Fret, those qualities are even more pronounced. The compact body/neck configuration gives this guitar a featherweight feel, and the bridge has been shifted toward the center of the lower bout, which alters how the cedar top is articulated. Sonically, this allows the small body to punch above its weight, producing a bigger, more powerful voice. That change affects the player, too – the strings feel slightly more slinky under your fretting hand, making it easier to bend notes and form difficult chords.



*The back features a two-piece bookmatched Simons wedge*



*514ce LTD*

The Grand Auditorium 514ce LTD, meanwhile, blends versatility with the modern-sounding clarity that you might expect from a Taylor, but with a bit of sonic sweetener added. Koa brings more presence in the midrange, and with the cedar top, players can expect a pleasing mix of warmth and sparkle.

The koa sets we selected for the backs of these models incorporate what we call a Simons wedge, named after its creator, Spanish luthier Jorge Simons from Madinter, one of our wood suppliers and our ownership partner with our Crelicam ebony mill in Cameroon. Both Andy and Bob Taylor prefer the symmetrical look of the back's four-piece bookmatched configuration, featuring a two-piece bookmatched wedge, along with other structural benefits for players.

"The reality is the four-piece setup gives you a more consistent back

plate," Andy explains. "By using narrower pieces, we have the luxury of matching for grain consistency and stability, rather than being constrained by the wood's width, or having a center wedge with uneven characteristics from side to side. We'll be using the bookmatched Simons wedge design more in the future because it looks and functions so well."

Aesthetically, the guitars feature our 500 Series appointment package, including faux tortoiseshell binding and grained ivoroid Century inlays, along with one additional finishing detail that sets these models apart: a beautiful shaded edgeburst finish treatment that wraps the entire body and neck in vintage warmth and complements the golden-brown color tones of the body and neck woods. Both guitars ship with our proprietary ES2 electronics and include a Taylor deluxe hardshell case.





**Models:**  
**214ce-FO DLX LTD**  
**254ce-FO DLX LTD**

**Back/Sides:** Layered Figured  
 Ovangkol

**Top:** Sitka Spruce

If you're familiar with the Taylor line, you know we use solid African ovangkol for our 400 Series. Recently, we discovered some richly figured ovangkol veneer and knew it would make an attractive limited edition offering within our 200 Deluxe Series. In fact, we

loved the look so much that we chose to design a pair of companion 6- and 12-string models, both in our Grand Auditorium body style.

The figured ovangkol veneer is more than just beautiful – its physical qualities are well-suited for our guitar-making needs.

"This wood has the right kind of workability, grain structure and density," Andy says. "All the qualities are right in the 'Goldilocks' zone of instrument wood characteristics."

Visually, the ovangkol's warmer, complex appearance blends chocolatey

browns and other earth-toned variegation that players might recognize from our 400 Series – only here, they're naturally embellished with elegant, rippling figure. The guitars feature crisp white binding, gold tuners, Italian acrylic Small Diamond inlays, a full-gloss body, a Venetian cutaway, and ES2 electronics.

The 12-string edition (not shown) finds a sonic sweet spot thanks to the Grand Auditorium body, which delivers gorgeous octave shimmer without oversaturating a mix. One of these will make a compelling tool for any guitarist

looking to add some 12-string sounds to their repertoire.

Though visually distinct from other standard 200 Deluxe Series models, these guitars share many fundamental design elements, like a solid Sitka spruce top and similar internal bracing. The payoff: a big sonic punch, with the clear, balanced response that continues to make our Grand Auditorium a favorite body style of guitarists around the world. Working musicians will love the reliable performance of these guitars on the road and in studio, while players focused on their development and

songwriting will find these guitars to be inspiring tools to expand their musical palette.

Our 200 Deluxe Series Limited Edition models come with a Taylor deluxe hardshell case.

*For more details on all of our limited editions models, including complete specifications, visit [taylorguitars.com](http://taylorguitars.com).*

## The *Wood&Steel* Interview

### BEN HARPER REFLECTS ON HIS ECLECTIC MUSICAL JOURNEY, WHAT HE'S LEARNED FROM HIS HEROES, AND WHY THERE'S NO TRUTH LIKE THE BLUES

By Jim Kirlin

**STEP** through the doors of the Folk Music Center, located in the leafy Los Angeles suburb of Claremont, California, and you'll find yourself surrounded by an assortment of exotic musical instruments and folk artifacts from around the world. Part store and part museum, the shop, located about 30 minutes east of downtown LA, has been dedicated to preserving international roots music culture since its founding in 1958 by Ben Harper's maternal grandparents, Charles and Dorothy Chase. For years, Dorothy, a talented musician, taught guitar, banjo, dulcimer and autoharp. Charles repaired instruments and put the repair shop on the map as a go-to spot for the restoration of vintage instruments.

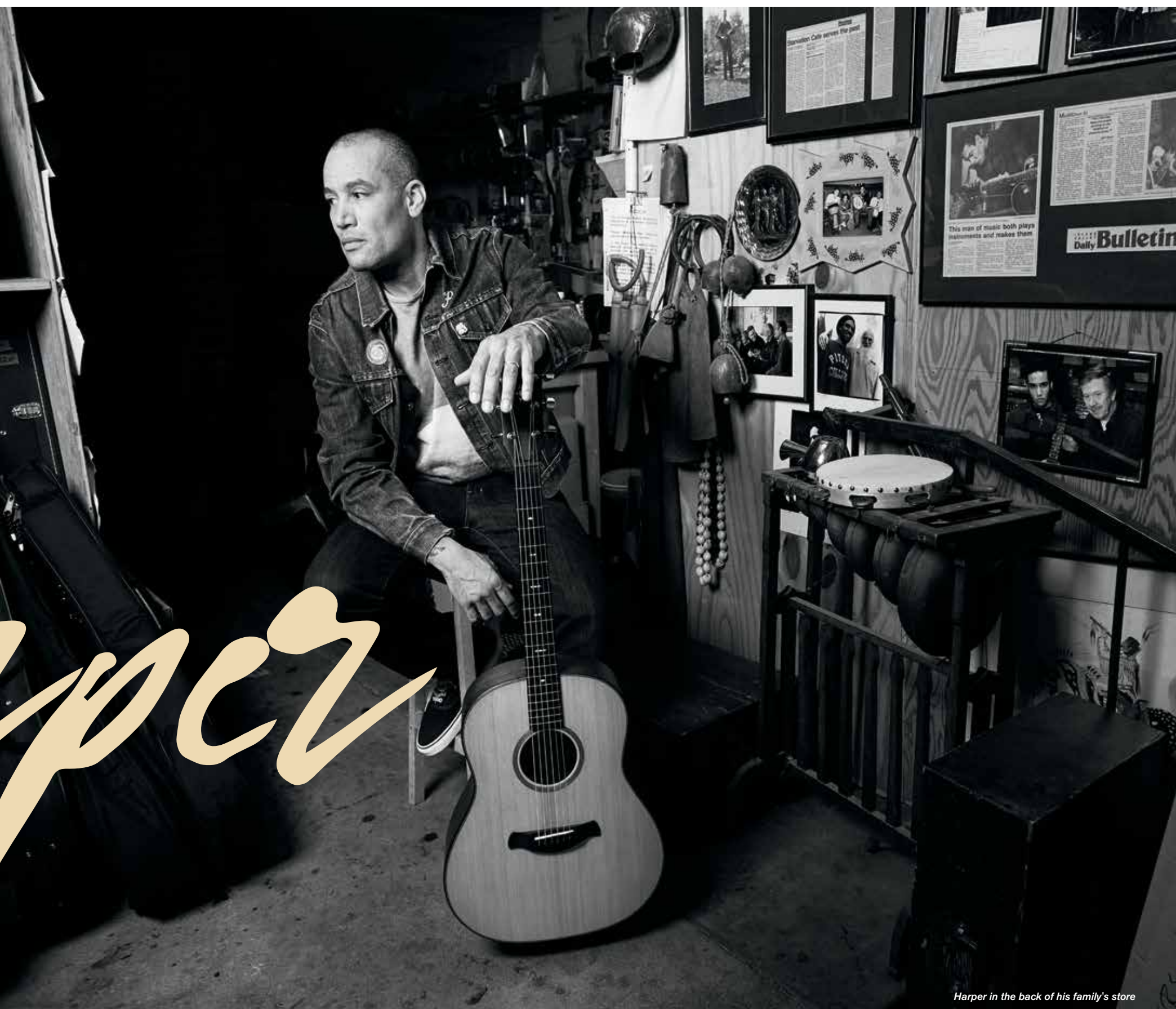
Over time the family store grew into a hub of the community. It was also a second home to Harper, who grew up working there, learning to play guitar and other instruments, and getting an immersive education in American roots music and the social issues that informed it.

Harper was exposed to guitars and other musical instruments most people will never see or hear, and learned to repair them. He also heard many of those instruments brought to life in the hands of the skilled musicians who visited the store – some unknown, others renowned, like world blues icon Taj Mahal, guitarist Ry Cooder, singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, and virtuosic multi-instrumentalist David Lindley, a

regular customer who lived nearby and introduced a young Harper to the Weissenborn lap slide guitar he would later master.

Those years would stoke Harper's desire to decode the mesmerizing guitar sounds he heard on blues records, like the syncopated fingerpicking techniques of Mississippi John Hurt and the slide work of Robert Johnson. Both the store and the family record collection would nurture Harper's eclectic musical journey across the broad landscape of roots music. The genre-blending musical exploits of his 30-year career, spanning 14 studio albums, draw deeply from his knowledge of blues, folk, gospel, soul, funk,





Harper in the back of his family's store



reggae, rock, hip-hop and other musical connective tissue. Wherever Harper's musical instincts have led him, his songs have tapped into the essence of a great folk, blues or country song: They come from the soul, tell a story, and empathize with the struggles and hopes of the human experience.

The breadth of Harper's catalog reveals him to be a tireless musical explorer, and no matter what genres his songs inhabit, they always resonate with deep conviction and soulful humanity. He's done the work of absorbing – and often seeking out – his influences and putting in the time to carefully hone his own musical point of view. And it's a process that's ever-evolving, which is why one of the key attributes he says he looks for in a guitar is whether he can grow with it.

At this stage of his career, Harper has pretty much done it all – he's been a guitar magazine cover boy; he's sold scads of records and played stadiums with his bands the Innocent Criminals and Relentless7; he's won multiple Grammy Awards; he's worked with many of his musical heroes, including Taj Mahal, reggae/R&B kings Toots & the Maytals, gospel gurus The Blind Boys of Alabama and Mavis Staples (he wrote and produced Staples' latest record, *We Get By*), and blues harmonica legend Charlie Musselwhite (with whom he made two critically acclaimed records). He's rocked out with longtime friends and peers Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam. He was among the invitees who performed a tribute to Bruce Springsteen as part of the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors. He and his mother, Ellen, even made a beautiful folk record, 2014's *Childhood Home*, which showcased her talents as a songwriter and singer. Yet, for all his musical successes, he says he has managed to stay grounded by his failures along the way.

Harper connected with Taylor last year after finding a rosewood/spruce 810 he liked in a music store. He and Director of Artist Relations Tim Godwin already knew each other but hadn't been in touch in a while, and as they caught up, Godwin suggested that Harper might like the Grand Pacific guitars we were developing. We sent him a couple of prototypes, and Harper felt a musical connection – the feel, the sound, and the new avenue of expression they offered.

The conversation continued, and a few months ago, we met up with Harper in Claremont to shoot some video with him both at his home and in his family's music store, where he talked about a range of topics: his musical influences, his relationship with guitars, how listening to records inspires his creative process, and the parallels between the music business and another passion of his: skateboarding. We encourage you to check out those interview segments, which you'll find at [taylorguitars.com/artists](http://taylorguitars.com/artists).

In early October we followed up with another conversation via email, when Harper was fresh off a string of tour dates with the Innocent Criminals. He'd had an opportunity to play some shows with his two rosewood Grand Pacific 717 guitars (he also owns a 517), so we thought we'd check in with him on his impressions of the guitars.

**Wood&Steel:** Your family's music store seems like a special place. Can you paint a picture of the kind of environment your grandparents set out to create and what it meant for you to be immersed in that growing up?

**Ben Harper:** My grandparents opened the Folk Music Center with financial help from my maternal great-grandparents Albert and Bessie Udin. Up until that point, my grandmother had been teaching guitar in the living room of their family home, and my grandfather had been repairing her students' instruments in the basement. After a couple of years, it was taking over the entire house, so they decided to open a music store. They rented the small back storage room of a real estate agency. The owner of the building told my grandfather they'd never make a go of it in music retail, so they could rent it for cheap. The early '60s folk boom happened, and before long, there were way more people coming in for guitars than houses. The real estate agency

complained, and they soon had to find a larger space. I realized, even as a teenager, that music and instruments may have been the currency, but social progress and politics were the business. Literature, poetry and art were the language. I wish I could converse with my grandparents today. Every day in that environment was a cacophonous symphony from the minute the door opened at 9:30 until it closed at 5:30. Not only was it my home, but it was home to every artist who cared to walk through the doors – David Lindley, Chris Darrow, Jackson Browne, Taj Mahal, Leonard Cohen, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee...the list is just so long.

**W&S:** I've heard you say that the family store was largely responsible for popularizing the term "world music."

**BH:** Customers would often comment that coming to the Folk Music Center was like taking a musical journey around the world. We were one of the

first places that housed music and instruments from all over the planet. The term "world music" was coined in the '60s, but at the Claremont Folk Music Center, it was not a genre or catchphrase; it was a way of life.

**W&S:** Was there a particular artist or record or experience that first inspired you to play guitar?

**BH:** Hearing Mississippi John Hurt for the first time did it for me. My grandmother played one of his records, and I asked her who "they" were. I was sure there were two guitar players. She assured me it was one man doing all the guitar playing and singing at the same time. Right then and there I knew for myself there was nothing on the planet that was going to be better than that.

**W&S:** How did you learn to play different styles, from acoustic fingerpicking to slide? Your mom? Other players who showed you things in the store? Or



In the store's instrument repair area



was it simply your own obsessive drive to figure out how the players that captivated you did what they did?

**BH:** I studied and obsessed over the music that moved me. In my early twenties I made it my life's work to sit at the feet of as many legendary blues players that would take me in. Brownie McGhee, John Lee Hooker, Louis and Dave Myers, Blind Joe Hill, Taj Mahal, David Lindley, Chris Darrow. And the

**W&S:** How old were you when you knew you wanted to make music for a living? And because of the environment in which you grew up, did being a professional musician naturally seem like an attainable profession?

**BH:** I never knew it was something I wanted to do for a living. I simply never thought it possible. I was surrounded by extraordinary world-class musicians, humble working-class heroes whose

**W&S:** What did you learn being out on tour with Taj?

**BH:** Touring with Taj was the single greatest moment in my creative life, on par with getting my own first record deal. Taj is the keeper of the flame, and has one-of-a-kind depth and a wealth of firsthand knowledge of the music that is most important to me. His musical instruction and guitar tutorials, as well as [his knowledge of] how to stay true

knowing them inside and out. However, I rarely work on my own instruments. It's the theory of the doctor not having himself as a patient, but sometimes I just can't resist.

**W&S:** Social justice has been a strong through-line of your music throughout your career. I imagine this naturally resonated with you because of your family values and your immersion into the stories and messages in blues, folk, reggae and soul music. Do any particular experiences stick out as catalysts (for example, seeing Bob Marley perform when you were a kid), showing you the power of music to amplify these themes to the world?

**BH:** Social justice was a major part of my upbringing, so it's always been instinctual for me to represent that musically. Seeing Bob Marley at a young age definitely spoke to me as to how deeply that could resonate, and I was also raised with a healthy dose of Joe Hill, Woodie Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Those voices solidified how important and inextricably linked music and social justice could be.

**W&S:** When you were 20 you spent time in Chicago hanging some of the old blues players – people like Brownie McGhee and one of the members of the Aces. It's obvious that you have great respect for their music and stories. Why was it important for you to seek them out? What sort of truths were you after?

**BH:** There's no truth like the blues. I felt it to be priceless that these older cats would let me spend time with them. I was just a 20-year-old kid who deeply loved and lived their music. They were all so gracious with me, and this was well before I had released a record. They wanted nothing from me, and good thing because I had nothing to give them other than wide-eyed enthusiasm.

They literally took me in. Louis Meyers from the Four Aces let me stay with

him in his apartment! Winter, South Chicago. Wild.

**W&S:** Along similar lines, you have a rich track record of working with some of the legends of folk, blues and gospel. Besides Taj Mahal, you've collaborated with The Blind Boys of Alabama, Charlie Musselwhite, and Mavis Staples. Can you talk about the unique musical connection you have with each of those artists?

**BH:** The Blind Boys of Alabama record [2004's *There Will Be a Light*] recalibrated my entire trajectory. I was coming off two of the bestselling records of my career to that point (*Burn to Shine*, and *Diamonds on the Inside*), and it was naturally expected of me to follow it up with something that could build on that commercial success. It was at that time that the opportunity presented itself for me to work with The Blind Boys. Three of the five original members of the group were still alive. They were old, but their singing was stronger than ever, and I knew the opportunity wouldn't come around again. I felt a sense of urgency, as if there was no choice but to do drop everything and make that record.

Working with Charlie Musselwhite is life-affirming. A rare and exciting experience, one that is still being lived and written every day. My entire adult life has somehow been aimed at collaborating with Charlie, and we have a lot of work still to be done.

Mavis is the sister I always wanted. She and I are like brisket and bread, a coat and top hat, Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. I still wake up every day and am overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation for having the chance to know her and to collaborate with her.

**W&S:** Anyone (living) come to mind who you'd love to collaborate with but haven't had a chance to yet?

**BH:** Bill Withers, Bob Dylan, Alison Krauss, Paul Simon, Chuck D.

## “WHEN DAVID LINDLEY WOULD SIT DOWN AND PLAY THE WEISSENBOHN, IT WAS THE SONIC EQUIVALENT OF WATCHING MICHELANGELO SCULPT THE PIETÀ.”

ones who had long since passed, like Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson, Furry Lewis, Reverend Gary Davis (who was a friend of my family's and played at the music store). I studied them as if my life depended on it. This music was so lonely yet hopeful, so desperate yet confident, I had to get close to it and stay close. I looked at the world as clearly as I could at age 20, and nothing made as much sense to me as the blues. I took all that and applied it to my own material that I was writing at the time, filtered it through my own instincts, and that's what ended up being my first album on Virgin Records, *Welcome to the Cruel World*.

**W&S:** I understand that David Lindley, who lived nearby and was a regular at the store, first introduced you to the Weissenborn. What about that instrument spoke to you?

**BH:** Growing up in an eclectic music store, I developed a recognition of sonic and tonal uniqueness at a young age, so as a kid, I knew the Weissenborn sounded special even before I heard anyone play it professionally. But when David would come in, sit down and play the Weissenborn (which to this day is a regular occurrence), everybody in the store would immediately stop whatever they were doing to listen and end up slack-jawed, barely breathing while marveling at his playing and sound. For me it was the sonic equivalent of watching Michelangelo sculpt the Pietà.

names you won't know, and many of them don't want you to know it. They all had their hearts broken beyond repair by music, or more so by the music business. But business be damned, they did and still do it anyway, because we have to. That's the school I'm from. When I was in my early 20s, Taj Mahal saw me play and brought me on tour with him to play lap steel in his band as well as to do some writing and recording with him. That was the first time I was paid real money to make music, and once that happened, once I had a glimpse of that as reality, it was over, there was no going backwards, there was no backup plan – matter of fact, there was no plan. I just knew I had to find a way to either survive by making music, or discipline myself to live so very simply, so that I could afford to make music the driving force in my life above all else.

And something else happened. Early on I passed through Nashville on my way back from playing *Austin City Limits* with Taj, and I made a point of going into Gruhn Guitars. This would've been 1992 or '93. I went in, grabbed an acoustic lap steel off the wall, sat down and started playing. I looked up and saw a man with a massive snake around his shoulders. It was George Gruhn! He was so kind to me in regard to my playing, and in the many ways he wanted to support me. This stood out to me as a signpost that I might be able to get somewhere.

to one's creative visions, were exactly what I needed at that exact moment for me to take a next step, if there even was a next step. Taj revealed to me a world I could've barely dreamt of up until that point.

**W&S:** People might not know that you're also a skilled luthier and repaired instruments at the store. How did your understanding of how instruments were made impact your relationship with them?

**BH:** I grew up learning to repair instruments, and in my late teens apprenticed with the late, great Jack Willock. Jack worked for Gibson in Kalamazoo, Michigan, through the late '30s and early '40s. Becoming friends and apprenticing with him are some of the best times and memories for me. The cats who would drop into his shop to have him work on their instruments were wild! One day it would be John Collins, the next day Howard Roberts, or Al Viola. Crazy! It has definitely impacted my relationship with guitars,

## “THE BLUES WAS SO LONELY YET HOPEFUL, SO DESPERATE YET CONFIDENT, I HAD TO GET CLOSE TO IT AND STAY CLOSE.”



With his mom, Ellen

**W&S:** Not many artists can say they cut a record with their mom. The record you made with your mom (2014's *Childhood Home*) is a beautiful collection of folk-flavored songs, and showcase your mom's vocal and song-writing chops, not to mention sweet vocal harmonies between the two of you. One thing that impressed me was that it really felt like a genuine 50/50 collaboration — your mom is the real deal. What was the most satisfying part about making that record?

**BH:** Thank you. It was a 50/50 collaboration. The most satisfying part above all was that we were able to actually accomplish it after talking about it for so many years. Another very satisfying aspect of it for me is how it will always be there for my kids and their kids and so on down the line. A sonic family heirloom.

**W&S:** In one of your previous conversations, you said: "A lot of writing is just about interpreting silence with as much soulfulness as you can." What does soulfulness mean to you, and is that something that anyone can learn to express, or do you either have it or you don't?

**BH:** That soulfulness for me is where experience and imagination meet. Where rules and structure fall away and are replaced by learning what can't be taught.

**W&S:** You've mentioned three things that you consider when you pick up a new guitar: sound, feel and potential. You've obviously owned many different types of guitars over the years, so I'm curious about your initial impressions of these Grand Pacific guitars. And then speaking to the idea of potential, now that you've had the guitars for some time now, what have they been revealing to you musically, both at home and on stage?

**BH:** The Grand Pacific guitars seem to resonate even when not being played. My favorite instruments tend to do this. Also, when I'm doing something else non-music-related, I tend to find myself thinking about playing them. On stage they have a massive, full-bodied sound, and at home and in studio they have that intimate clarity that for me is a requirement with acoustic guitars.

**W&S:** You've got the mahogany/spruce 517 and rosewood/spruce 717. How

would you compare the sonic personalities of each?

**BH:** Rosewood and mahogany tend to favor their own set of frequency/wave forms and respond accordingly. More importantly, the 517 and the 717 are both sonically at the top of the food chain, so at this point it's more about which one the song tonally requires.

**W&S:** What type of strings do you use on them? And when you play them, are you in standard tuning or do you use different alternate tunings?

**BH:** I use D'Addario strings. Always. I do a lot in standard tuning as well as alternate tunings. If I'm writing in standard tuning but not finding what I want to say, I take that as a sign that it's time to shake it up tuning-wise and explore.

**W&S:** Not only have you made records in different styles, but you seem to have a unique ability to connect with each instrument you play and find the best of what it has to offer. Do you sometimes feel like an instrument tells you what it wants to say and you become the interpreter?

**BH:** Instruments have personalities that are often more interesting and

informative than people. Sometimes the instrument leads the charge and you follow. It's great when that's happening because it's often uncharted territory.

**W&S:** What has kept you grounded throughout the high and low points of your career?

**BH:** Failure and fatherhood.

**W&S:** Having absorbed so much musical knowledge and experience from older established artists and collaborated with them, at this stage of your career, do you find yourself starting to become the "older established artist" that younger artists want to collaborate with? After all, you've become a next-generation torchbearer of American roots music.

**BH:** Well, if that's the case, I'm honored to be that, and yes, I have noticed this shift starting to happen. It's cool to have that much road behind me and still to this day feel like it's all brand-new and the best is yet to come.

**W&S:** Skateboarding is another passion of yours, so much so that when you recommitted yourself to it in your 30s, it sounds like you made your management a little nervous! How does

the exhilaration of executing a move compare to the feeling of playing a great show?

**BH:** Yeah, that definitely was an issue early on until everyone recognized my skill set, and even still it's always high risk, but that's what it's gonna be. My dentist is a skater, and he needs his hands every bit as much as I do.

More important than the connection between a good show and landing a skate trick is the correlation between falling off the board and humility. The best thing I've ever done is fall off a skateboard in public. I mean slam really hard. Skateboarding is by far the most humbling endeavor in my life. I owe a huge amount of my humility to skateboarding. Not the makes, but the falls. Don't get me wrong, landing a skate move and playing a song well are nearly identical emotions for me. Those rare moments where you feel like you're doing something you're born to do with no compromise. But all the falls that it takes to earn the makes, all the shit you have to deal with to just sing your damn song, who you become out of that is what matters to me. **W&S**



On stage with a 717. Photo: Mathieu Bitton





# Soundings

## Taylor at AmericanaFest

In September, the Americana Music Association hosted the annual gathering of musicians, fans, and industry pros known as AmericanaFest, one of the nation's largest genre-based music festivals and an event that Taylor Guitars was proud to sponsor. The 20th annual festival and conference, held September 10-15 in Nashville,

Tennessee, flowed into dozens of music venues throughout Music City, featuring nightly showcases and music industry panels, culminating with the gathering's Americana Honors & Awards at the historic Ryman Auditorium.

The festival celebrates the rich melting pot of American roots music, taking a big-tent approach that welcomes

country, folk, bluegrass, R&B, the blues, and other rootsy styles that have cross-pollinated and evolved over the course of generations. Artists including Emmylou Harris, Keb' Mo', John Prine, Steve Earl, Gillian Welch, Sturgill Simpson, Jason Isbell and Loretta Lynn are mainstays of the genre, which continues to grow in popularity as new creators step forward to raise their voices and bring new flavors to the mix.

Thanks to the efforts of our marketing and artist relations teams, working in tandem with experts from across the Taylor factory and the folks at AmericanaFest, this year's event was a wild success. It was an opportunity not just to share the Taylor creative philosophy and show off some of our newest guitars, but also to form connections with emerging artists whose sound will define the future of roots music. Many of those artists, both new and established, were honored at the festival's awards ceremony, where trophies designed by local Nashville artists were handed out to some of the genre's most influential musicians. It was a night for celebrating accomplishments and ushering in new voices, some of which made special appearances to perform their music at the show. Taylor artist **Jade Bird** was among them with her custom-built all-white Grand Concert in tow, while others like Brandi Carlile, Mavis Staples, Bonnie Raitt and Elvis Costello stepped up for performances of their own.

After the awards ceremony, the Taylor team spent the rest of the festival chatting with artists, fans, and guitar players about the Grand Pacific and some of the other major innovations developed here in El Cajon over the past year. More than 100 players came to demo various Taylor guitars, while other members of the Taylor team set up a video studio at a nearby hotel to capture performances by Taylor players like **Maggie Baugh**, **Brent Cobb**, **Rising Appalachia**, **Trey Hensley**, and many more.



Jade Bird - Getty Images for the Americana Music Association



Brandi Carlile with bandmates Phil and Tim Hanseroth  
Getty Images for the Americana Music Association



Steve Poltz



Brent Cobb



## Wolfe's Acoustic Darkness

Enigmatic singer-songwriter **Chelsea Wolfe** has carved a niche for herself in between the ruts of established genres with her smoky, apocalyptic soundscapes and darkly poetic lyrics. This past summer found Wolfe at her haunting best with the release of her sixth studio album, *Birth of Violence*. The collection of mostly acoustic tracks showcases her keen, piercing voice, an asset that draws a stark contrast against the subdued guitars and channels of electronic noise that characterize all but her most stripped-back recordings. From start to finish, the album's songs are poignant and personal, with Wolfe's light but confident touch on the guitar serving as

a backdrop for the intimacy and vulnerability of her words. As an album, *Birth of Violence* is more than just her latest release — it's evidence of a musician taking a major step toward the clearest embodiment of her artistic self.

Wolfe has been a Taylor player for years, and for this record and the accompanying acoustic tour, she's been relying on her **416e-R**, a rosewood/spruce Grand Symphony model with a custom-made pickguard, the product of a collaboration between Taylor and Glaser Instruments. Wolfe will be playing her Taylor live throughout her North American tour, which began in October.



## 50 Years of American History

What were *you* doing 50 years ago? **Gerry Beckley** and **Dewey Bunnell** were living in London and on the verge of launching what would turn out to be an enduring, hit-filled career as the band **America** that continues to this day. Beckley (**multiple 6- and 12-string custom maple Grand Auditoriums**) and Bunnell (**custom 614e**), whom we profiled back in our Fall 2015 edition, are revving up for the band's golden anniversary in 2020 with a series of special releases that long-time fans are bound to love.

The first is a multi-format anthology. *America – 50th Anniversary: The Collection* (Warner Bros./Rhino) dropped this summer as a 3-CD, 50-track box set; a vinyl 2-LP set (24 tracks); a single-disc greatest hits compilation (for big box retailers); and digital versions.

Here at Taylor, we've been spinning through the 3-CD box set, soaking up the band's classic vocal harmonies on tracks like "A Horse with No Name," "Ventura Highway," "Tin Man," "Lonely People," "I Need You," "Sister Golden Hair," "Sandman" and more. Devoted fans will enjoy hearing some of the other, more obscure cuts in the collection, including rarities, demos ("Sister Golden Hair"), alternate takes ("Ventura Highway," Take 4), and live recordings (a couple of tracks from the BBC's *The*



*Old Grey Whistle Test* TV show).

Though founding member Dan Peek left the band in 1977 (he passed away in 2011), Beckley and Bunnell continued to write, record and tour, and they still play about 100 shows a year. In the liner notes for the box set, Beckley reflects on the band's longevity.

"We've had more success than many artists achieve, but we've never flown so high that we've been scorched beyond repair," he says. "On the other hand, we've never bottomed out or had to reform. It's a consistency we're quite proud of."

Beckley will be adding to his robust Taylor collection soon. As of our press deadline, he had just ordered a Grand Pacific with a custom star inlay to match his other custom Taylors. Meanwhile touring guitarist **Steve Fekete**, who handles much of the lead work on stage, has been playing a sunburst-top Grand Pacific **517e**.

Coming soon from the band: a concert DVD and 2-CD release, *Live at the London Palladium* (recorded in 2018), and in 2020, a 50th anniversary tour, an authorized biography and more.

## Mon Laferte's Alt-Latino Ascent

Several members of Taylor's marketing team spent time with Chilean singer and Taylor artist **Mon Laferte** before a captivating performance at San Diego's House of Blues in August as part of her *La Gira de Norma* tour.

Since launching her career in 2003, the singer-songwriter has established herself as a powerhouse in Latin pop music, currently sitting at the top of the streaming charts among all Chilean artists and selling out venues in California, across the United States and beyond. Her star has continued to rise over the course of six studio albums. After earning Latin Grammy Award nominations in 2016 for Best New Artist and Best Alternative Music Album on the strength of her release *Mon Laferte: Vol 1.*, she followed with 2017's critically acclaimed *Le Trenza*, which scored her five Latin Grammy nominations, including a win in the "Best Alternative Song" category for "Amárame," featuring Colombian singer Juanes. On her latest release, *Norma*, which debuted to critical and popular fanfare in November of 2018, Laferte puts her own stylistic spin on classic Latin music genres and dance rhythms.

At her San Diego show, Laferte performed with a full band, complete with a boisterous horn section that made itself known from the opening notes of her hit "Por Qué Me Fui a Enamorar de Ti." Laferte showcased the dynamism and diversity of her music throughout the evening, with highlights including the smooth jam "Cumbia Para

Olvidar" and the up-tempo, ultra-catchy "El Beso." The show also gave fans to experience some of the singer's more subdued, emotionally affecting music, including the acoustic breakup anthem "Funeral," which both she and her guitarist, Sebastián Aracena, each performed on a Taylor nylon-string **714ce-N**.









# Taylor Notes

## Rosewood Musical Instruments Exempted from Requiring CITES Permits

*Taylor's Director of Natural Resource Sustainability, Scott Paul, reports on the recent amendment to rosewood's CITES listing, what it means for musical instrument makers and owners, and the new normal of instrument manufacturing looking ahead.*

On August 28, 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland, the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the International Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) voted to

exempt finished musical instruments, parts and accessories made with rosewood from requiring CITES permits. The vote, taken during a two-week CITES conference (CoP18), amended the original CITES listing made in 2016, which had mandated permits for commercial trade of *Dalbergia* rosewood products in any shape or form. The new exemption will take effect 90 days following the August vote – November 26, 2019. The exemption does not pertain to Brazilian rosewood

(*Dalbergia nigra*), which was listed separately in 1992 on the much stricter CITES Appendix I.

Manufacturers will still be required to secure all necessary permits for rosewood material used in making instruments – a policy they have always supported – but they will now be free, for example, to ship finished musical instruments to stores around the world without permits. Further, owners of instruments made with rosewood components will once again be able to ship an instrument internationally for service, or to sell, without needing a permit. And traveling internationally with a musical instrument made with rosewood will now be easier. The new CITES exemption ends what has been a tumultuous three-year period for both the musical instrument community and the Convention itself.

has resulted in a global run on many red-colored rosewoods, decimating several rosewood species in Asia and thus sending would-be traders into tropical Africa and the Americas in search of similar-looking species. It's definitely a problem. However, it should be noted that in the lead-up to the original 2016 Johannesburg rosewood listing, the focus was almost exclusively on this market, and at that time no one was thinking about musical instruments.

Regardless, in the grand scheme of things, the decision to act was appropriate, but the manner in which CITES did so had profound unintended consequences on a very unexpected target – the manufacturers and owners of musical instruments – and indeed on the Convention itself. In short, the new listing generated the need for tens of thousands of new permits for musical instruments, both new and old, which quickly overwhelmed many national government Management Authorities who are responsible for reviewing and issuing all manner of CITES permits.

To give one example, prior to the listing, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service processed on average roughly 20,000 CITES permits per year for plants or animals, alive or dead, in parts or extracts covered by the Convention. Two years after the 2016 rosewood CITES listing, that permit number spiked to over 60,000. The vast majority of new permit requests were for musical instruments, mostly guitars, but also other instruments used by touring orchestras. And trust me, the good people at U.S. Fish & Wildlife did not receive increased budget or staffing. It was a similar story for many other CITES Management Authorities around the world, and as the permit requests piled up, frustration mounted. All this fuss for an industry that was never considered part of the problem when the listing was originally made, and that I estimate uses less than one one-tenth of one percent of the global rosewood trade.

To be fair, it was not so much the listing of the *Dalbergia* genus itself on Appendix II that caused the trouble, but rather the listing's accompanying annotation. Let me provide context. Any species listed is placed on one of three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need. The majority of listed plant species are also assigned a governing "Annotation" that defines when and in what forms trade in the listed species requires CITES documentation. The rosewood Annotation

created in Johannesburg was hastily drafted with insufficient consultation. In contradiction to CITES' own guiding principles, which state that Annotations should address impacts on species that first appear in international trade and on those that dominate trade and demand for the wild resource, the new Annotation covered the entire genus in any form, new or used, from now to eternity. Regardless, in 2016 it passed.

So, for the last three years a small ensemble of music industry interests, including representatives of instrument manufacturers, associations and touring orchestras, attended CITES meetings, met with various governments, and participated in countless conference calls. Finally, after three years, the CITES Conference of the Parties formally reconvened in Geneva and revised the rosewood annotation to exempt musical instruments, parts and accessories, and also sought to accommodate handicrafts, both shipped and as personal effects, which were also impacted unintentionally.

I wish I could tell you that's the end of the story, but it's really just the beginning. The CITES Secretariat is mandated to undertake a study to assess the impact of the musical instruments, parts and accessories exemption, as well as the language designed to exempt handicrafts. Of course, the musical instrument community, as represented at CITES meetings, welcomes any such review, but, personally, I hope that CITES spends at least as much time attempting to understand the Annotation's impact on, for example, the Asian furniture trade that appears to have started all the trouble in the first place. This said, instrument manufacturers are held to a high standard, and rightfully so. Further, in the years to come, CITES will continue to discuss additional tree species, and it is only logical that some of these will be species used by musical instrument manufacturers. It doesn't matter what percent of the trade we use. It's the new normal. And that's OK. It only matters that the sector is transparent, acts responsibly, and is a partner in forest conservation and restoration moving forward. The music community, as represented at CITES meetings, fully supports CITES and looks forward to working closely with the Convention in the years to come.



Photos by IISD/Kiara Worth ([enb.iisd.org/cites/cop18/27aug.html](http://enb.iisd.org/cites/cop18/27aug.html))

### What CITES Does

CITES is a multilateral treaty designed to protect endangered plant and animal species by subjecting their international trade to certain controls. Participation is voluntary, and countries that are signatories to the Convention are known as Parties. Currently, there are 183 Parties, and the body has met faithfully more or less every three years since 1976. It's a good thing. In fact, a very good thing.

### What Happened in 2016?

Prior to this recent meeting in Geneva, the CoP had last met in 2016 in Johannesburg, South Africa and, as many musicians know, approved a rather dramatic proposal subjecting the entire *Dalbergia* (rosewood) genus, excepting Brazilian rosewood, along with several *Guibourtia* (bubinga) species, to CITES Appendix II. The decision to act was justified. However, the manner in which it did so was another matter altogether.

To be clear, the outlook of many rosewood species around the world is indeed dire. As I chronicled in the Winter 2018 and Winter 2019 editions of *Wood&Steel*, many rosewood species are being seriously over-exploited, often illegally. The primary culprit is the seemingly insatiable appetite for rosewood furniture, principally a style called hongmu, produced largely for Asia's emerging middle class. The word "hongmu" means "red wood" in Chinese, and the term refers to a range of red-colored tropical hardwoods used to produce a certain style of furniture. Escalating demand for this furniture



## Andy Powers Named Ownership Partner



We're happy to share that Taylor master guitar designer Andy Powers is joining founding partners Bob Taylor and Kurt Listug as a third ownership partner of the company. Andy's ownership stake underscores Taylor's commitment to industry-leading guitar design for decades to come.

"I'm thrilled to continue this fascinating work I've been pursuing since I was a young boy," Andy shared with Taylor employees in conjunction with the announcement. "It's a genuine pleasure to be able to design the best instruments I can and, within the context of Taylor Guitars, have an opportunity to serve musicians around the world for years to come."

As many readers know, Andy has been the creative wellspring of our guitar development here at Taylor for some time. When he accepted Bob's invitation to join the team, setting up shop in early 2011, Andy already had carved out a reputation as an immensely talented guitar builder – not to mention a great player – even though he was only 30 years old.

Since then, he has delivered a steady stream of innovative and musically inspiring guitar designs to the Taylor line. In addition to revoicing vir-

tually every series in our line, including the flagship 800 Series in 2014, Andy introduced our Grand Orchestra body style, 12-fret Grand Concerts (including our small-body 12-strings), the Academy Series, the GS Mini Bass, our patented V-Class™ bracing, the Builder's Edition collection, and most recently, our new Grand Pacific body style. With each new design, Andy has given the world another compelling reason to play a Taylor guitar and expanded the expressive range of our instruments in playability and sound.

"Andy is the best guitar builder I have ever met and I believe the best alive today," says Bob. "If anyone ever deserved to be called 'partner' with me and Kurt, it's Andy. He's vital to our future, and together as we combine our talents, we can continue to bring a great musical experience to our customers."

Kurt notes that a strong partnership with Bob has been one of the keys to Taylor's success, and that neither he nor Bob would have grown the company into an industry leader without the complementary skill sets of each.

"What's unique about our partnership is that one of us is a guitar maker and engineer, and the other is a busi-

nessman and sales and marketing person," he says. "That combination, together with our shared ethics and values, is what has set us apart. Bob on his own would have been a successful guitar maker, but probably at a smaller level. I would have created a sales and marketing success, but without a uniquely great product."

For his part, Andy has great respect for what Bob and Kurt have accomplished and how they've done it.

"For decades, Bob and Kurt have exemplified what quality craftsmanship looks like," he says. "With integrity, attention, effort and creativity, they have developed a company that rests on these ideals. They've built a vibrant business that values every touchpoint along a guitar's journey – from those who plant trees to wood harvesters and suppliers; from Taylor employees to retailers, and ultimately, to musicians."

Andy is excited to build upon Taylor's heritage of innovation for decades to come.

"We have the opportunity to continue lighting a way in our industry, and I'm thrilled to embrace the work leading us into a bright future."



V-Class Bracing



800 Series



Grand Pacific



## The Ebony Project: From Fingerboards to Cutting Boards

If you've been following our work with ebony in Cameroon, you'll recall that there are several different initiatives under the banner of what we call The Ebony Project. (For an introduction, check out our multimedia series at [taylorguitars.com](http://taylorguitars.com).)

One is our ongoing transformation of the Crelicam ebony mill, which we've owned with our partner, Spanish wood supplier Madinter, since 2011. We've made major renovations, installed better machines and tools, and brought skills training to employees in an effort to reduce ebony waste and enable Cameroonians involved in our supply chain to increase in-country value-added processing. As guitar makers, we've also committed to reducing waste by adopting and promoting the use of ebony with coloration, which traditionally has been eschewed by instrument makers for aesthetic reasons. (It turns out that a lot of ebony has some coloration in it.)

Meanwhile, we've also committed resources – including private funding from Bob Taylor – to ebony research being conducted by the Congo Basin Institute, a forest and agroforestry research center located in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The research is producing groundbreaking scientific insights into the basic ecology of West African ebony, including a better understanding of the pollinators of the ebony flower and the distributors of the ebony seed. Elsewhere, advancements in plant propagation have jump-started a community-based planting program. As we shared in our summer edition, in April, members of five different Cameroonian communities participated in the planting of 2,000 ebony trees and hundreds of fruit trees as part of a promising agroforestry program. That brings our total ebony tree-planting count to about 4,500, and we're on track to exceed our goal of planting 15,000 ebony trees by the end of 2020.

Our latest initiative, led by Bob Taylor, has been to develop other socially responsible products and markets for ebony pieces at the mill that are either too small or otherwise don't meet the particular specifications for instrument components such as fingerboards. Doing this allows the mill to create more value with existing wood, which helps support the livelihood of the mill's employees and their families.

In our summer 2018 issue, we introduced ebony guitar slides, which we've been selling through our dealer network. In Bob's column this issue (p. 5), he talks about making ebony knife handles for Buck Knives. Another market he has pursued is ebony kitchenware, inspired by his love of quality kitchen tools that blend elegant design and functionality.

### Introducing Stella Falone Exotic Kitchen Woodcrafts

In late 2018, guided by Bob's efforts, we quietly launched a company called Stella Falone (named after two women who work at Crelicam), which produces a premium line of socially responsible ebony kitchenware. Our first product offering is a cutting board collection, crafted from fingerboard blanks that can't be used for musical instruments.

"Stella Falone is an outgrowth of our commitment to the Cameroonian communities who contribute to the ebony trade," Bob said shortly after the company's official debut. "After traveling to Cameroon for more than eight years and working with employees at the mill and others involved in sourcing ebony, I'm in love with the people. Their ability to add value to an important native natural resource with Stella Falone products gives them a greater stake in their future."

No additional ebony wood is cut to craft the cutting boards; Crelicam



simply use pieces they already have on hand at the mill. Currently, the ebony selected for each cutting board is cut and processed there, and the manufacturing process is completed on the Taylor campus in California. This allows us to leverage our sophisticated manufacturing capability in order to meet Taylor's high standards of quality and performance.

The cutting boards are two-sided, featuring dark coloring on one side and beautiful variegation on the other.

Visually, each board is truly unique. So much so, in fact, that each available board is photographed and displayed on the Stella Falone website. This allows customers to view and select their personal favorite.

Currently we're making the boards in two sizes: large and small. The large version has a carved juice groove on

one side. They also make striking serving boards for entertaining.

Eventually, Bob would like to add other ebony kitchenware products to the mix, including pepper grinders and tongs.

To learn more about these boards and the mission behind our new venture, visit [stellafalone.com](http://stellafalone.com).



### Coming Soon: Ebony Guitar Wall Hangers

Another ebony product we've been developing and plan to release soon is a line of Taylor guitar wall hangers. Also crafted with wood from our Crelicam ebony mill, the hangers feature an elegant curved design and will be offered with several Taylor inlay options. Look for these at your local Taylor dealer in the coming months.



## Fall Refresh: New Looks Refine the Line

This fall we've rolled out some new eye-catching aesthetic updates



### 100 Series: Satin Sunburst Tops

A sunburst adds artful aura to any spruce top, and for our 100 Series, we've formulated a new satin sunburst. The color gradient is slightly lighter than our tobacco sunburst, featuring toasted amber hues that complement the layered walnut back and sides. Available on all 100 Series models, from the versatile Grand Auditorium 114ce SB to the vibrant 12-string 150e SB to the nylon-string 114ce-N SB, the stage-friendly look is matched by our signature playability and clear, balanced tone.



### 200 DLX Series: All-Black 12-String

Depending on your aesthetic tastes, an all-black guitar can come across either with bold outlaw swagger or elegant understatement. Our new 12-string Dreadnought, the 250ce-BLK DLX, offers a lush-voiced companion to our all-black 6-string Grand Auditorium 214ce-BLK DLX. A full-gloss finish adds a rich sheen to the jet-black body (layered maple topped with solid spruce) and neck (maple), and the dark-hued theme continues with an ebony fretboard, bridge and peghead veneer, plus a black pickguard. White binding and a single-ring Italian acrylic rosette supply crisp finishing details. Onboard ES2 electronics prime this 12-string for room-filling amplified tone.



### Baby Series: All-Koa Baby Taylor

How does a pint-sized guitar make a big impression? By sporting a body crafted with soul-stirring Hawaiian koa. This handsome model (BTe-Koa) features a solid koa top and layered koa back and sides, so from every angle, you can count on musical inspiration. A thin varnish finish preserves the natural beauty of the wood grain while allowing the guitar to resonate to the fullest. The onboard ES-B electronics include a built-in tuner, while a lightweight, protective gig bag makes it a ready travel companion.



### Baby Series: Walnut Big Baby

While our Baby Taylor might draw more immediate attention due to its ultra-compact form, the larger Big Baby (15/16 scale) has long been a staple among new players and guitarists looking for a portable, affordable, not-too-precious instrument that can pump out a full-bodied voice for practices and jam sessions. Our latest iteration features layered walnut back and sides, a solid spruce top, and a maple neck, plus optional onboard ES-B electronics. While the body's footprint is nearly full-size, the slightly slimmer body depth translates into a more intimate and accessible feel, making this an endlessly playable favorite.



## The Craft

### The Questions Behind the Question

Sometimes a simple guitar question isn't quite so simple. The more we embrace this idea, the more we open ourselves up to a deeper level of understanding.

**L**ike many people, there are times when I crave a definitive yes or no answer to a question, especially one that's specific in nature. But in so many aspects of life, the more we learn about a subject, the less binary an answer becomes – at least a satisfying one. Perhaps this reflects the beauty of a curious mind that aspires to a new level of understanding.

I witness this constantly with our three kids in a scenario every parent is surely familiar with. One of them will ask a question and get a response. But rather than resolving things, the explanation prompts many more questions.

I've noticed that musicians tend to be similar when it comes to the guitars we love. We'll ask a question and expect a specific answer, like it's an elementary arithmetic problem. Often, what seem like straightforward questions actually lead to answers that feel more like a story, because the answer demands more of the question.

Years ago, an experienced musician was weighing the merits of a cutaway and whether or not to include that feature

in a guitar I was about to build for him. This player wanted to know how much sound was lost by including a cutaway. I was younger, with only a few years of guitar-making experience at the time, so I wasn't really sure how to answer.

"It's just a little different," was about all I knew and could say. As it turns out, this is a common question. And my decades of learning since then, I've discovered that my original response remains a wholly viable answer. It seems like this question cannot be directly answered in the form in which it was asked. As far as a cutaway goes, sound isn't lost, or reduced, in a manner measurable with something like a percentage. Instead of a deduction, the guitar's set of resonance responses shift in a direction that complements the high notes we gain access to by having the cutaway. In other words, the sound isn't reduced, or made better, or worse. It's just...a little different.

Another frequent question among guitar enthusiasts: Which is the best-sounding wood to make a guitar from? Again, this seems to be a straightfor-

ward question, but it's one that can't be answered in the form in which it was asked. Sure, a great instrument does many things very well, and there are woods that function very well for various parts of a guitar, but there is no one best wood for a guitar. In place of a single best wood, there is a story involving the function each part of the guitar performs, the different characteristics of woods, and how those influence the particulars of a guitar's design. This query is closely related to what I think of as the king of guitar questions: Which is the best-sounding guitar? I'd love to be able to answer this question, both for the musicians who ask and for myself. But I'm convinced that there is no single answer, and that each attempt at an explanation only leads to more questions.

While there have been times when I was disappointed to learn there was no definitive answer, I've also discovered there is vastly more richness and interest in the story lurking behind the question. The narrative of each musician's experience, their fondness of specific

sounds, the impact one performer or song had on their musical life, and a listening experience they can never forget all contribute to a highly individual and engaging criteria of a best guitar.

Within the realm of guitar construction, there are similar questions to face. How do we make a guitar sound one way versus another? Which sound is best? An answer is rarely as specific as saying make this part thinner here, and that part thicker. An instrument functions as a system, in which each part affects every other part to some degree. It's like a sheet of fabric – to change an attribute is like carefully pinching and lifting one area of the sheet. The elevated area may be exaggerated, but it certainly isn't cut off from its surroundings; those closely related attributes are influenced as well.

Playing music itself can be like this. We might be tempted to ask which are the right notes to play. When a musician learns the mechanisms of music and the way notes, chords, keys and rhythms function together, they can improvise and create new music using those tools as guidance to intentionally steer their compositions however they desire. Rather than rules to limit their creativity, within these parameters, they find that their ideas connect together and lead in a direction, an aesthetic, all their own, reflecting their personality and expression. To ask which are the right notes to play isn't nearly as useful as asking which direction we want to go.

Recently, I made the acquaintance of a fellow guitar enthusiast who has assembled an incredible collection of

some of the finest classical guitars built by makers of every era. Over the course of an afternoon, we played all these guitars next to each other. While each was technically wonderful, what stood out was the unique personality each guitar had, and the way its sound and feel reflected the maker and the choices each made in building the instrument. Each builder, within the boundaries of the guitar's mechanics, had linked their ideas together in a way that took the finished instrument in a unique and personal direction. Was there a best within the collection? Not to me. Each one had a story to tell.

Sure, we all like a clear answer, or at least the idea of a clear answer, when one is available. But in the world of guitars and music, stories seem to give us far more than simple answers. Whether building a guitar, a song, or trying to gain a better understanding of what catches our attention, asking the unanswerable questions is worthwhile, so long as we are willing to hear out the story.

This season we're deep into the process of making all sorts of new instruments. Some will be ready to play soon; others are for further down the road. Is there a true best among them? I don't think so – we love them all, along with the stories they will tell.

– Andy Powers  
Master Guitar Designer

“  
**An instrument functions as a system, in which each part affects every other part to some degree.**  
”



# TaylorWare

CLOTHING / GEAR / PARTS / GIFTS



## Guitar Straps

Made in North America, our new line of premium guitar straps features a range of all-natural materials that include genuine leather, suede and natural cotton, plus vegan materials, in a variety of colors and designs that complement the aesthetic diversity of the Taylor line. Strap widths include 2-inch, 2-1/2-inch, and 3-inch options, and all are slotted to easily fit the tail-end strap pin on a Taylor guitar. Choose from series-specific styles with embossed inlay motifs and other designs that will complement an array of models. Each strap is comfortable, durable and uniquely Taylor, ensuring that you'll wear your guitar with renewed pride.



## Guitar Picks

A new assortment of Taylor guitar picks expands your acoustic palette with materials that produce greater warmth and sparkle. Available in several shape, color and thickness options.



### Featured Picks Taylor Thermex Ultra

The unique composition and tapered edge produce a rich, blended tone with enhanced warmth and sparkling highs. Thicknesses - 1.0, 1.25 and 1.5mm

Blue Swirl, Ruby Swirl



### Original Trucker Hat

One size fits all.  
(Black/Khaki #00390,  
\$20.00)

### Men's Cap

One size fits all.  
(Black #00378, \$25.00)



## Guitar Care Products

Our guitar-friendly care products will help you polish, clean and condition your guitar to keep it in great condition. Our new Satin Finish Guitar Cleaner is the first of its kind, and the ultimate product to preserve the original satin sheen. The wax-free formula removes residue from finger oils without leaving silicone or waxy residue. Our new Premium Guitar Polish enhances the luster of your high-gloss guitar. Our Fretboard Conditioner cleans and nourishes your fretboard, leaving it looking new, playing great, and feeling smooth. We also have two new polish cloths – a suede microfiber version that folds up small to fit in your case compartment, and our premium plush microfiber towel.



### Aged Logo Thermal

Long Sleeve 60/40 cotton/  
poly waffle thermal with gray  
Taylor logo on front with  
contrast stitching. Slimmer fit  
(sizing up recommended).  
(Black #2022X; S-XXL,  
\$35.00)



## Guitar Stands

New and improved Taylor floor guitar stand in Danish beechwood with rubber pads to protect your guitar's finish. Some assembly required. (#TDS-02, \$69.99)



Mahogany guitar stand features a laser-etched Taylor logo, a rich satin finish, and rubber pads to protect the guitar's finish. (#TDS-01, \$240.00)



## Tuners

With our new line of genuine Taylor replacement hardware, you can easily customize the look and feel of your guitar. If you have a 100 or 200 Series guitar, you might consider upgrading your 14:1 gear ratio to a tuner with an 18:1 ratio. Choose from different plating finishes, including satin black, polished gold, polished nickel, smoked nickel, and polished bronze. (It's easy to change the tuners yourself.) Premium options include Gotoh tuners (18:1 or 21:1) in Antique Gold or Antique Chrome (professional installation recommended), or for guitars that already feature Gotoh tuners (800 DLX Series and up), you can upgrade to beautifully engraved Gotoh luxury edition tuners (quantities are limited).

Visit [taylorguitars.com/taylorware](http://taylorguitars.com/taylorware) to browse our complete line of Taylor apparel, guitar care products, parts and accessories, gift cards, and more. 1-800-494-9600



# The Taylor Line by Series

A snapshot of our series framework, tonewood pairings, and current models. For complete details, including photos and specifications, visit [taylorguitars.com](http://taylorguitars.com).



PS12ce

## Presentation Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Figured Blackwood  
**Top:** Adirondack Spruce or Sinker Redwood

### Available Models

PS12ce, PS12ce 12-Fret, PS14ce

## 800 Deluxe Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Indian Rosewood  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce

### Available Models

812ce 12-Fret DLX, 812ce DLX, 814ce DLX



814ce DLX

812ce DLX  
12-Fret



Bambaata Marley, 814ce

## 800 Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Indian Rosewood  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce

### Available Models

812e, 812ce, 812ce-N, 812ce 12-Fret, 814ce

## Koa Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Hawaiian Koa  
**Top:** Hawaiian Koa or Torrefied Sitka Spruce (Builder's Edition K14ce)

### Available Models

K22ce, K22ce 12-Fret, Builder's Edition K14ce, Builder's Edition K24ce, K24ce



Builder's Edition K14ce

## 700 Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Indian Rosewood  
**Top:** Lutz Spruce or Torrefied Sitka Spruce (Builder's Edition)

### Available Models

712ce, 712ce-N, 712e 12-Fret, 712ce 12-Fret, 714ce, 714ce-N, Builder's Edition 717, Builder's Edition 717e



Builder's  
Edition  
717e  
Natural

714ce



914ce

## 900 Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Indian Rosewood  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce

### Available Models

912ce, 912ce 12-Fret, 914ce



Brennley Brown,  
Builder's Edition 614ce

## 600 Series

### Woods

**Back/Sides:** Figured Big Leaf Maple  
**Top:** Torrefied Sitka Spruce

### Available Models

612ce, 612ce 12-Fret, 614ce, Builder's Edition 614ce, Builder's Edition 614ce Wild Honey Burst



# 500 Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Tropical Mahogany  
**Top:** Mahogany, Lutz Spruce (GS), Cedar (GC, GA) or Torrefied Sitka Spruce (Builder's Edition)

## Available Models

512ce, 512ce 12-Fret, 522ce, 522e 12-Fret, 522ce 12-Fret, 552ce, 562ce, 514ce, 524ce, Builder's Edition 517, Builder's Edition 517e



# 100 Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Layered Walnut  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce

## Available Models

110ce, 110e, 114ce, 114ce-N, 114e, 150e



# T5z

## Specifications

**Body:** Sapele (Hollowbody)  
**Top:** Koa or Cocobolo (Custom), Figured Maple (Pro), Spruce (Standard) or Mahogany (Classic)  
**Electronics:** Proprietary 3-pickup configuration (magnetic acoustic body sensor, concealed neck humbucker, visible bridge humbucker), 5-way switching, onboard tone controls



T5z Pro  
Borrego Red

## Available Models

T5z Custom K, T5z-12 Custom K, T5z Custom C, T5z Pro (Tobacco Sunburst, Molasses Sunburst, Pacific Blue, Borrego Red, Gaslamp Black), T5z Standard (Black, Tobacco Sunburst, Honey Sunburst), T5z Classic, T5z-12 Classic, T5z Classic DLX

# 400 Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Ovangkol or Indian Rosewood  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce

## Available Models

412e-R, 412ce, 412ce-R, 414ce, 414ce-R



414ce-R

# Academy Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Layered Sapele  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce or Lutz Spruce (Nylon)

## Available Models

Academy 10, Academy 10e, Academy 12, Academy 12e, Academy 12-N, Academy 12e-N



Academy  
10e

Academy  
12e

# GS Mini GS Mini Bass

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Layered Sapele, Koa, Walnut or Maple  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce, Mahogany or Koa

## Available Models

GS Mini, GS Mini-e Mahogany, GS Mini-e Koa, GS Mini-e Walnut, GS Mini-e Bass, GS Mini-e Maple Bass



Slightly Stoopid

# T3

## Specifications

**Body:** Sapele (Semi-Hollowbody)  
**Top:** Figured Maple  
**Electronics:** Proprietary high-definition humbuckers (optional vintage alnicos), 3-way switching, onboard tone controls, and coil-splitting capability



T3/B  
Orange

# 200 Deluxe & 200 Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Layered Koa, Rosewood or Maple (BLK Model)  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce or Koa

## Available Models

214ce, 214ce DLX, 214ce-BLK DLX, 214ce-SB DLX, 214ce-K DLX, 224ce-K DLX



214ce  
SB DLX

214ce

# Baby Series

## Woods

**Back/Sides:** Layered Sapele or Layered Walnut (BBT, BBTe)  
**Top:** Sitka Spruce or Mahogany

## Available Models

BT1, BT2 (Mahogany Top), TSBTe (Taylor Swift Model), BBT, BBTe (Big Baby)



BT1

BBTe

## Available Models

T3 (stoptail bridge), T3/B (Bigsby vibrato tailpiece)

To see our full range of top options, color finishes, and other appointments for each series, visit [taylorguitars.com](http://taylorguitars.com).





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# Wood&Steel

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## Old Soul Made New

We're thrilled to introduce a new sonic flavor to our Grand Pacific family. Meet the 327e, featuring blackwood back and sides, a richly-grained mahogany top, and a soulful personality that channels the past, only it's wiser from experience. With our V-Class™ bracing shaping the sound, you can expect a warm, blended voice with all the signature tonal traits of other Grand Pacific models — enhanced volume, sustain and intonation, with clear low-end power. This marks our first Grand Pacific model with a hardwood top, which evens out the sonic edges, while blackwood delivers plenty of acoustic horsepower and woody midrange muscle. A satin finish and shaded edgeburst top, accented with a black pickguard and satin black tuners, conjure a rootsy vibe that's as inviting as your favorite pair of jeans. Look for the guitar in stores starting in November.

