

lower bar allowing the ball end of each string to slip into its own slot. Much faster and easier if you don't mind a 'modified' vibrato. Worried about weight? The entire B7 Bigsby and VibraMate assembly weigh 15.9 ounces on our digital scale.

We do have one quibble with the B7 Bigsby... The height of the arm over the body is higher than we'd like. We actually tried cutting a spring down and took it too far, but we may try again, cutting only one coil off instead of two next time. We've made some inquiries with two members of our advisory board, so expect an update on this modification soon.

Will the Bigsby ever surge in popularity again? Only if the breadth and scope of music played on the guitar emerges from the derivative doldrums we're in now. Oh, sure, you can find players capable of exploring the full range of the guitar, but you gotta know where to look. Jim Campilongo in New York... The Malone Brothers in New Orleans... Mark Goldenburg in Los Angeles... Jinx Jones in San Francisco... Kid Ramos wherever he may be... Gordon Kennedy in Nashville... We could go on and on with our picks for the most *interesting* players we know, but the point is, the Bigsby requires a calm, reflective and creative mind to be used well. As Riverhorse would say, "No jacky-jack allowed." Now that the Vibramate allows a guitar to be retro-fitted with a Bigsby with little more skill than an ape peeling a banana, we're simply suggesting that you slap one on and boldly Quest forth.

Vibramate units are also available for Bigsby B5 vibratos and Telecasters. B7 nickel Bigsby, \$189.00, B7 Vibramate, \$58.25.

www.vibramate.com www.bigsby.com

Goodsell



We first interviewed Richard Goodsell in the November 2005 issue of TQR featuring Les Paul's long-time sidekick on guitar, Lou Pallo. Richard continues to build amps here in Atlanta, and his

background as one of the top Hammond organ technicians and restoration experts in the country provided a solid launching pad for his guitar amplifiers, attracting clients that have included Billy F Gibbons, Peter Dinklage, Sonny Landreth, Oliver Wood, Vince Gill, Sean Costello and Atlanta producer Brendan O'Brien (Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Korn, Stone Temple

Pilots, Bruce Springsteen and the Black Crowes). Goodsell's success can be directly traced to his fondness for Hammonds and simple circuits, and his early amps were all based on a 17 watt chassis, many built with leftover Hammond output trannies and chassis. He's expanding a bit now, but not abandoning his preference for simplicity. Here's his story, including excerpts from his introductory interview for context. Our review of the new Valpreaux model follows...

TQR: When and how were you first exposed to electronics and guitar amplifiers specifically?

I had always been electrically clever as a kid with batteries and light bulbs and such, and when I was 13 or 14 I started tearing up record players and stereos to see what made them work. I remember my high school AV department retiring a bunch of tube gear to make way for the "new and improved" solid-state stuff and one of the pieces I salvaged from the trash was a working Dynaco 70 power amp. It would turn up in projects several times in the years that followed. About the same time, I got my first guitar amp although I only owned an acoustic guitar at the time – it was a '68 Bandmaster head with purple velvet grill cloth and a green pilot light jewel, but I never used it for guitar. I cobbled together some kind of preamp for a turntable and used an Altec A7 type cabinet for the speaker, and it was only used outdoors for parties where we would play Peter Frampton until the cops came. It was loud. That was 1975 and I was 16.



Many years later after college, rehab, and more college, I had a suit-job at a TV station that allowed me to afford to indulge in toy purchases that included a '64 ES-330 with nickel P90's and a Bigsby, a master-volume silverface Twin,

and a couple of Hammond B3's with a Leslie 145. I didn't really know what to do with the Hammonds... I knew that every record I ever loved had B3 on it, and I knew the Leslie was an essential part of the formula, plus, they were just plain damn cool. When I eventually started a basement band there were six or seven of us who wanted to play guitar, plus a drummer. Somebody switched to bass, and I learned some chords on the organ. What I lacked in chops I made up for in tone, and being able to spin the Leslie didn't hurt either. That was the late '80s, and while more accomplished musicians were buying the latest Yamaha DX-whatever, I began snapping up every Rhodes and Wurlitzer piano available, along with Hohner Clavinets, Moog synthesizers, and still more Hammonds and Leslies. Back then all of this stuff was relatively cheap, as the retro craze was still a year or two

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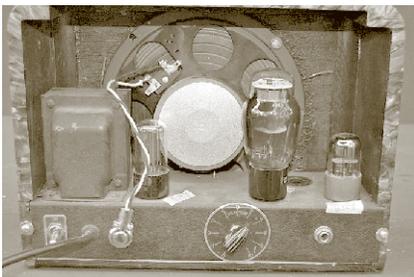
away. Of course none of this was “retro” to me. As far as I knew, this was how music was made. It absolutely required the presence of wood and tubes and metal objects vibrating in magnetic fields. All of the music store owners in town would call me to come pick up this “junk” that they would buy back for five or ten times as much a few years later.



By late '93, I was getting a divorce and quitting the TV business, and when the dust cleared all I had left was a huge pile of bizarre musical assets. Chuck Leavell had already purchased one of my Wurlitzers

when the word started to get out that I was the go-to guy for what was just beginning to be called “vintage” gear. R.E.M. was a huge early client as was Sheryl Crow. It was then that I realized I should continue to buy this stuff as I made sales. In a matter of months I was making weekly trips to Nashville, where there was an endless appetite for the “old school” gear at the time, as well as New York and the West Coast several times a year. You can't sell it if you can't fix it, so I eventually became somewhat of an expert in the area of weird analog, transistor, tube and electromechanical keyboards. After about ten years, I had amassed a huge client base across every musical genre and had sold, repaired, and/or custom built literally hundreds of organs and electric pianos. By then I was becoming exhausted trying to keep up with all of the different instruments – you could easily spend five times the effort to make one-tenth of the money fixing Wurlitzers as opposed to Hammonds and Leslies, which always yielded a predictable and positive result. Consequently, I abandoned everything except A, B, and C-model Hammonds and a handful of tube Leslie models, most notably the 122 and the 147. The organs have a fairly elaborate 8-tube pre-amp, and the Leslies have a pair of 6550's with an OC3 gear regulator tube.

TQR: What are some of your favorite *guitar* amps?

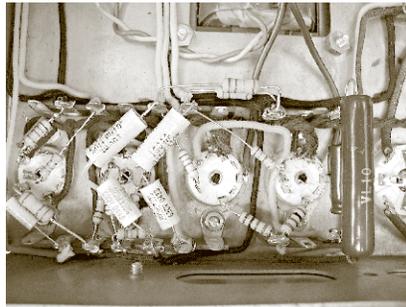


I have always been drawn to fundamentally simple amps. An early favorite was a single 6V6 Silvertone; it just had three tubes and two knobs

and was wired point-to-point. There was nothing to it! You could almost watch the electrons go in one end and come out the other, and it sounded great! The 5F6 Bassman and the

AB763 (blackface) Deluxe Reverb are both “desert island” amps and may very well be the best amps ever made – ever. As far as contemporary designs go, it's hard to beat any of the Mark Sampson stuff – he's probably the one most responsible for making it “okay” to go low power, especially the 15 and 30 watt models. The DC30 should be a modern benchmark for tone and excellence of execution, and made it socially acceptable to use cathode-biased EL84's again, plus, each channel only has three knobs...

TQR: When did the idea for the Super 17 emerge and how was it inspired?



The idea solidified about two years ago in my Hammond shop. There were several “home” models that shared most of their parts with the B3 and they were excellent

sources of repair parts because as home organs they hadn't been beaten to death like so many of the rock and church organs. After you salvage the keyboards, tone generator, and pre-amp, there are still two EL84 amps, three 12" speakers, and a reverb tank left over. I had accumulated several sets of these “leftovers” for a couple of years and before that I must have thrown away hundreds. Hindsight is always 20/20. Anyway, I've had the schematics for these in my big Hammond factory book for years, and I never really paid them any attention until one day on the Internet I stumbled across schematics for a Marshall 18 clone, and they were strikingly similar in their overall architecture. Further research turned up many more inspiring models – Traynor YGM-2, Vox Berkeley/Cambridge, and the Matchless Spitfire and Lightning, to name a few. Of course, the Hammond chassis were over 40 years old, had no knobs, pots, switches or jacks, and were designed to be fed by an extremely hot, balanced line-level signal from the organ pre-amp, so extensive modification would be required. There were six or seven versions before the amp that came to be called the Super 17. It quickly became apparent that it would be easier and result in a better amp if we just stripped the thing down to the bare metal using all new components except for the trannies. Originally, I thought it would be cool to use only organ parts, including the caps, resistors, tubes, and the Jensen P12N speaker that often came in the organ, but that turned out to be a stupid idea. Only one of those made it to the street like that; serial # 0001 belonging to producer/guitar hero Brendan O'Brien, and he wouldn't let me change it for fear the magic might go away.

TQR: So for practical reasons you abandoned the idea of

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using Hammond parts, yet in some very meaningful ways those old amps still inspired your new design...



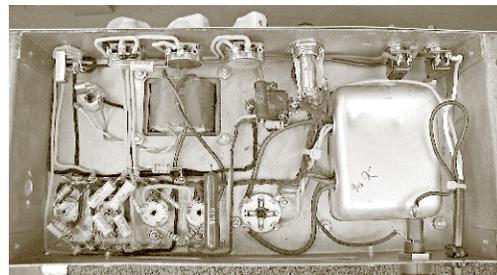
The oldest Hammond organ in my shop is 70 years old, predating most of the vintage stuff any of us are likely to encounter in our guitar lives. Point-to-point wiring, cloth wire, precision engineering, and excellent materials

are the only way an instrument could survive like that. There's no way we could expect any digital or PC board shit to still be around in 70 years. I think of all of the 40- or 50-year-old Leslies I've worked on every time I assemble an amp and try to visualize that amp still in service that many years from now. My amps are very simple, time-tested concepts made with parts that are better than what was available 50 years ago, except for the transformers, and many of those are already at least 40 years old.

Most of the amps we currently offer are based on the 17 watt chassis, and there are two different versions of that – a short, stout version with laydown trannies used in 8 ohm applications (mostly the 1x12 combo), and a lighter one with a 4 ohm output we put in all of the heads and the 2x12's. They are otherwise identical. There's a single 12AX7 gain stage, followed by a 12AX7 long-tail phase inverter with the gain and tone controls in between. The volume control is between the phase inverter and the power section where some folks might be tempted to call it a Master Volume, but it is absolutely necessary on these amps. I had built about 20 of them before I learned that Dr. Z's Carmen Ghia started out with the same Hammond chassis, but his had only two knobs. I've always admired his work, and his amps are generally a great value. The '33' is essentially the same amp only with four EL84's and bigger transformers. I suppose on paper the back end would somewhat resemble a Vox AC30, but functionally they have little in common. All of my amps have the exact same front end, although I've made a 33 with reverb once I figured out how to do it without interfering with the original signal path. Currently, in the secret laboratory we are building the same two amps using 6V6's, which will yield a 22 and a 44. I think that Carr may be the only other builder doing a quad of 6V6's, and it'll be interesting to see how it turns out. Some players just won't have an EL84 amp no matter how good it really sounds, so I think I need to offer 6V6's for those folks. Everything else, including the transformers, will be identical.

TQR: What makes the original Hammond transformers so good for guitar amps?

The wire, the iron, the paper – just the way they did things when quality was taken for granted. I realize there's a finite supply of the old ones, but I've already sourced a new 8 ohm U.S.- made output transformer for the 17. We've built six or eight of them and they sound as good if not better than the old ones. The 4 ohm is a different story; we'll eventually have to reverse-engineer it and have custom replacements made. I don't know who the OEM supplier was, but they resemble blackface Deluxe iron with different part numbers. There are no old transformers at all in the 33, and eventually I suppose they'll all be new before too long.



Everything about my approach is non-traditional, coming

from Hammond/Leslie land, and I bring no guitar amp preconceptions to the table. In a typical B3/Leslie rig there is no such thing as a tone stack, and the pre-amp section is usually 30 feet away from the driver tube with gain controlled by a variable capacitor. Leslie amps are cathode-biased 6550's, a tube I'd probably never use in a guitar application, but I am a strong believer in cathode biasing. It's the most serviceable topology by far and keeps the amps from coming back to the shop. I like to run my tubes hot, and they may not last as long as they would in a more conservative scheme, but they for damn sure run better longer than if inexperienced hands were able to get in there and diddle around with the bias.



My other thing is knobs. Three is all you're ever going to get unless I decide to offer reverb, and then maybe four. Sure, I can do a 3-knob tone stack like

the next guy; it would be no trouble at all to have a presence control – but it'll never happen. No second channel with an EF86, either. As long as the three knobs I put on there are as versatile as these three I don't think I need any more. If you've got to have a lot of knobs to make it happen, then you should probably go buy a Mesa. Most players seem to feel they can control all of the parameters on the Super 17 with just their touch and the knobs on the guitar itself. Alternative-

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ly, for less money than a lot of “boutique” amps you can buy two of mine and put an A/B box between them.

TQR: How have you approached speaker selection?



Man, that was the most critical thing... At first I thought it was going to be all about AlNiCo Jensens, and I had plenty of them saved up. I just automatically thought the P12N would be the way to go. I was wrong. It was Will Owsley from

Nashville who schooled me on the virtues of the Celestion Vintage 30, which I still use, but I’ve found a few other ceramic speakers that I really like, specifically the Eminence Private Jack and Governor, and now the new Celestion Heritage G12H. There were times when I had five Super 17’s lined up in a row, each with a different speaker. Dozens of players auditioned them and I sent some out on the road and dropped off others at studios and music stores. A lot of serious players (Owsley, Vince Gill, Randall Waller, Dan Toler) showed a preference for the Vintage 30, and still others were just as happy with or preferred the Private Jack. Oliver Woods’ 17 is equipped with the new Celestion Heritage, and is just as at home in an archtop/upright duo setting as it is in a blues trio. I tried some asymmetrical installations on some of the 2x12’s, but dual V30s always sounded better than a mix. The one consistent finding was that nobody’s AlNiCo ever flattered the Super 17 – at best they were dark and at worst they just plain sounded like ass.

TQR: How much does your preference for specific tube brands matter?



I’m not a tube snob, and I’m getting great results with the EH EL84s.

I buy them in quantity in matched quads and I have to pay attention to the plate current number printed on the box. Above 35 the plates can glow with the GZ34 rectifier and a 120 ohm cathode resistor. I have RCA 7189’s and I can’t tell the difference. I have lots of pulls that are either Mullards or Amperex, most with a lot of hours, and they usually sound pretty great,

but when you buy the amp it comes with the EH’s. I like the new Russian TungSol 12AX7’s in the pre-amp and phase inverter positions, and I use a JJ GZ34 for the rectifier. You can always go to a 5Y3 if the plates get too hot. All of the amps are awakened slowly either with a variac or a light bulb limiter and then given 6-8 hours of burn-in time after which they are tested for changes in voltage and any mechanical artifacts. If the plates glow on the EL84’s we replace them with a set that has tested for lower current draw and burn in again. Rarely, we will increase the value of the cathode resistor by 5 or 10 ohms or increase the screen resistors slightly. Most of them seem to improve noticeably after 20-30 hours of actual playing.

TQR: For those that haven’t heard one of your amps, how would you describe their sound?

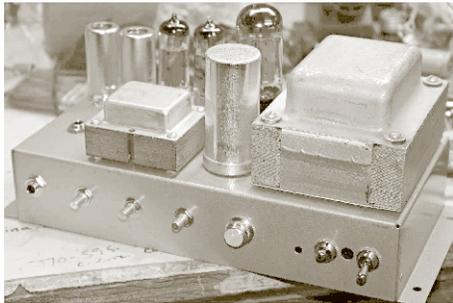


Of course, like anyone else’s amp, the ultimate sound is determined by a combination of factors including output topology, cabinet, speaker, guitar, and the player’s hands. There’s the harmonic richness you associate with EL84’s, without necessarily being jingle-jangly. They can bite and they can crunch, or you can dial in a crystalline clean tone that really flatters single coil pickups. Sometimes it sounds like it has reverb or light chorus on it even when being fed a bone-dry signal, but it doesn’t color the fundamental nature of whatever you plug in. Strats sound extra Stratty, Ricks are unbelievably Ricky, and Gibsons are thick yet articulate – it sounds and feels like a natural extension of your instrument with truly astonishing tone. Is it the organ transformers? No question that they sound great, and it’s cool that they’re old, but fortunately I have found some new ones that yield the same result. I think it’s the uncluttered signal path, the voltages that we’re running have something to do with it, but it’s mostly the simplicity of the gain structure.

TQR: When we last spoke in 2005 Richard, we left you on a steady roll building amps using the basic 17 watt chassis as reviewed in the Super 17. A lot has happened since then, so let’s pick up where we left off. Describe how you expanded into new designs and please describe the various models you have built since we last spoke in terms of their unique features, design and sound...

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Well, the last time we did this, I was still fully involved with the Hammond organ business, though I knew it was winding down – my first daughter was just born, and I had pretty much stopped playing in a band, trying to stay closer to home and keep more regular hours. The amp shop was in the basement of the house, while two or three employees kept the organ shop running in a commercial space.



Most of the first one hundred or so amps were built in the basement, with a lot of prep work done at the organ shop

in terms of removing transformers and drilling, priming, and painting, and at that point we were still using organ chassis. Virtually all of those amps were the 3-knob Super 17s like the one previously reviewed, and they had a large serial plate on the back that read “CLAIRMONT SUPER SEVENTEEN Manufactured in Atlanta, GA by Numerous Complaints Music”. The cabinets were made locally, and most of them were black, with maybe ten or twelve each in red and Carolina blue, and some of those were 2x12s. There was a very rare handful of 6V6 amps, maybe ten altogether, four of which had four 6V6s, and two of those were blue 2x12s built especially for Dangerous Dan Toler, who by then had already been recording with a Super 17 head.



The first significant departure from the 17 was the 33, which was (and still is) basically the same amp with twice the tubes and power. These were

made on a modified Marshall 18-watt chassis with extra holes punched. This chassis was also the basis for what became known as the Super 17 Mk2, and to this day it is still used on my larger builds, including all of the Black Dog series, and the new Thunderball, as well as all of the variations of the 33. The cabinets at this point were variations on the 1974x style.

This chassis eventually facilitated the reverb and tremolo that is now found on most of my models, but ironically it revealed the need for a smaller chassis, and thus the Super 17 MkIII was born. This was in early '08, and pretty much the end of my involvement with Hammond organs. The Goodsell Elec-

tric Instrument Company was formed, and it was all amplifiers from that point forward.

The new MkIII chassis allowed me to build a Super 17 in a 5E3 tweed deluxe cabinet with a 12" speaker that weighed at least ten pounds less than its predecessor. This chassis/cabinet combination became the foundation for the Unibox (a new-and-improved take on the Univox U45B), the Dominatrix (inspired by the Watkins Dominator), and the Valpreaux, which needed to be built just to utilize the overlooked 6973 power tubes.

TQR: You have also worked with a lot of artists over the years... How did that experience inspire you as a builder? What did you learn from working with musicians?



I have been fortunate when it comes to artist relations. The vintage keyboard business left me with a lot of contacts from here in Atlanta to Nashville and

beyond. In the very beginning, I was able to get my amps in front of artists I met through producer Brendan O'Brien, who, as far as I know, still owns Super 17 #0001. The late Will Owsley was a big supporter – I had built him a Wurlitzer back in the mid-'90s for a record he was working on, and he was the guitar player in Amy Grant's band. That eventually led to an introduction to Vince Gill. Johnny Colt was my landlord at the organ shop, and I had been in every studio in town to drop off or repair a B-3, and somehow Butch Walker became a fan of the Super 17, especially 2x12 combos, and all of these contacts branched into other contacts, and so on. I am inexplicably huge in Australia.



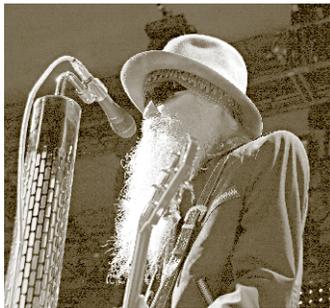
Probably the most important inspiration I drew from working with various artists was the validation that I had a viable product, and that it was good enough to pursue as a full-time vocation. Pretty much

everybody in the music business that I had been dealing with knew what to expect from a well-oiled Hammond B-3, but the guitar amps are a much more individual thing, exposed to the subjective opinions of a myriad of artists across dozens

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of genres. Sitting alone in the organ shop with a Stratocaster plugged into a rat's nest of organ guts, I thought I might be on to something, but it wasn't until I started to hear back from recognized artists that I began to believe that what I was doing might be special.

A pivotal point came unexpectedly one Sunday afternoon, during the final round of the Master's several years ago. I was watching Tiger Woods putting a green jacket on Phil Mickelson when the phone rang. "Unknown Caller" was displayed on the caller ID screen – I was a little annoyed because I generally eschew any kind of weekend call – most calls like that are a church with some sort of organ emergency that I didn't want to deal with. This time, for whatever reason, curiosity got the best of me and I picked it up. The man on the other end of the line identified himself as Billy F. Gibbons. I don't think he said "Reverend", but I do remember the way he said "F". My first thought was "yeah, right who is this?" But after a couple of more syllables it was apparent – this was the real deal. How did he get my number? Why was he calling me? We spent a little more than an hour on the phone, discussing tone in general, and then specific applications for an amp he wanted me to build. He was extremely articulate in his ability to communicate detailed technical ideas, and by the end of the conversation I had a couple of legal pages of notes, and an unsolicited order for an amp from none other than the Reverend himself. He gave me his contact info – the amp was to go to Texas, and the invoice to Hollywood.

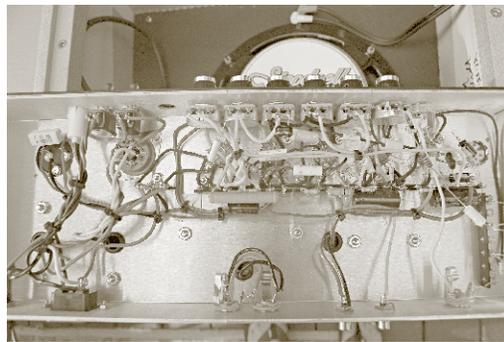


I was still well inside my first one hundred units when I got this call, and I was absolutely stunned that Rev. Gibbons knew who I was, let alone that he would phone in an order to the house on a Sunday night. My wife, who is tragically one full musical generation

younger than me, didn't immediately grasp the gravity of the situation, but I knew then and there that my newly chosen profession had been validated – hell, it was *sanctified*.

TQR: Yes, well, he has done that for a lot of builders, quietly supporting people that make righteous tones. Let's talk about the Black Line Super 17, Valpreaux 21, Dominatrix 18 and the Unibox 10. What was your intention in creating the Black Line, and how do these amps differ and compare to your past work?

The Black Line was an experiment in the economy and logistics of a larger scale of production, outsourcing some of the more expensive "non-tone-critical" parts, like the cabinets,



and some of the tedious, non-creative labor, like the wiring of the fila-

ments on the tube sockets, a part of the process I particularly despise because it's boring and repetitive. Other items falling into this category were most of the cosmetic parts, like attaching logos and face plates, installation of the reverb tank and bag, and most of the pots, jacks, and switches. If I could do this for one hundred amps at a time, I could save hundreds of dollars and several hours of labor on each amp, while still preserving an honest "Made In USA" vibe as all of the critical parts, like the speakers and output transformers, and all of the "tone" assembly were US-sourced and completed by me alone here in Atlanta.

The poor economy forced many amp builders at all levels and sizes to examine ways to offer an affordable "boutique" quality product. For some that meant going to Asia to build a parallel product line. As we have seen before so often in the guitar business, you can buy a Strat from no fewer than six different countries at all price points. At one point I was tempted to offer a made-in-China version of each of the four models in the 5E3-type packaging, and there was even one completed prototype that still sits in my man-cave. But by the time the prototype was delivered, neither myself, nor the offshore folks were interested in pursuing the project any further, as my insistence on point-to-point hand-wiring was a deal-breaker for both parties. To hit the crazy-low prices, you need to be prepared to make thousands of units on PCBs, and I just couldn't do that to the brand.

Looking back, the Black Line fulfilled it's original intent, which was to bring affordable, hand-made Goodsells to a depressed marketplace, and they are selling extremely well. However, when the current stocks are depleted, it won't be possible to continue to build them at that price point. Since the original introduction, the price of the overseas components has gone up by more than 30%, which, from a builder's perspective, makes them far less attractive as an alternative to the 100% domestically-sourced original recipe. If you can still find a Black Line 17, Unibox, Dominatrix, or Valpreaux, they are an exceptional value – they give up nothing tone-wise to their color counterparts, and you still get access to the same customer service – me. That means fundamentally if it breaks, I fix it, and you don't pay – which so far is the deal on everything I build. I'll keep doing that as long as I can,

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though I'm now around 1,200 amps into this journey. Fortunately, their simplistic designs have held up really well.



Even with a price differential of \$500 or more, the demand for the solid-pine “custom” versions never went away, (the Black Line cabs were a heavier birch/pop-

lar laminate) and the demand for the 33-watt amps has never been greater.

TQR: From our perspective, you have enjoyed a nice ride as a custom or ‘boutique’ builder that seemed to grow exponentially since we first spoke in 2005. With the benefit of your experience and hindsight, how has the custom amp business changed since you began in terms of player preferences, popularity, and the overall nature of the business, and how have those changes changed you and your approach to building and design?



Experience and hindsight have been educational and humbling – remember, I don't come from a technical background per

se. I gained tube electronics chops as a post-career survival skill to keep my own gear running, because nobody else was doing it at the time. I don't know how many amps I built – at least a dozen – before I ever cracked the RCA Receiving Tube Manual, which has become the de facto bible for hobbyists and boutique builders.

I was completely dedicated and loyal to the EL84/cathode-biased school for a very long time, and those amps, the 17 and 33, are still the anchor of my business. But in the years since we did the last interview, it seems like everybody is in the boutique business these days – new builders are sprouting up all of the time, and the EL84 is still the go-to tube for a lot of guys, and it's no wonder; it is a very forgiving tube to work with and it is easy to coax beautiful sounds out of it – you just have to keep your design super-simple with that tube to get the maximum benefit. I see a lot of stuff that is, in my opinion,

over-engineered. I have a reverb and tremolo that I can adapt to any of my amps, as well as a “good” master volume, as long as it has a long-tail phase inverter. But I also have a very myopic view of what an amp should do – if you want more than one channel, you either need to buy a 17 and a Valpreaux or Dominatrix, and switch between them, or talk to another builder. You'd be surprised how many choose the former over the latter – last year Chris Pelonis and Jeff Bridges had A/B Goodsell for the Crazy Heart tour...



Nevertheless, recent years have seen me stepping off the beaten path and dabbling with more obscure power tubes, starting with

the 6BM8 in the Unibox, and the 6973 in the Valpreaux. Also, for the first time, if you don't count the bigger Black Dogs, I'm just now starting to warm up to the octal-socket stuff like the 6V6, 6L6, EL34, 5881, and the KT66 – the new Thunderball will run any of those without any internal adjustment or re-biasing. Even though my reputation was largely built on the EL84 products, I now enjoy the name recognition and brand equity to the extent that I can try new, different, and even downright weird designs and still be taken seriously. I think that's one of the things that sets me apart from a lot of the new guys who have just set up shop in the last two or three years.

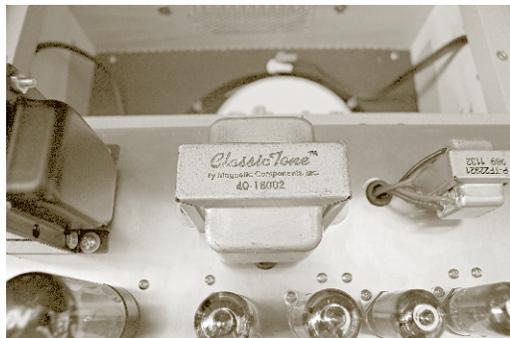


There are times when I wonder if I'm missing the boat by not having an ODS clone – that's probably the thing I get asked about most often that I don't have an answer to yet – and I have the schematic right here on my desk, I just can't bring myself to build it. It's just not my thing...

TQR: Obviously, you place a lot of stock in the role of the output transformer in coloring tone...

Like every cool vintage and current production tranny, all of the good ones come from Chicago; Stancor, Triad, and Schumacher among others were used as OEM in Fender and

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Hammond organ products. There is/was also Heyboer, United,

and Magnetic Components. There is typically an EIA code as the prefix to the date code just like on speakers and pots.

Over the years there has been a lot of consolidation of the Chicago transformer makers, and I don't know who owns who, but Magnetic Components, I'm told, is the latest iteration of a company that made a lot of the original Valco trannies, and my Thunderball uses a drop-in replacement Thunderbolt OT that has evidently been in continuous production since Valco was around.

Anyone who studies the innards of my amps will find that the entire product line utilizes only two output transformers: The Big One and The Little One. The big one is made by Heyboer and goes in every amp I make over 20 watts. It has a 3400 ohm primary with 4/8/16 ohm secondaries. It can be used with four EL84s and two EL34s. The Thunderball is the only amp that does not conform, using the Supro iron from Magnetic Components. The little tranny from Magnetic Components is amazingly versatile if you build the rest of the amp around it. It is made identically to my original Hammond organ trannies, the way the coils are wound with paper. In the Unibox it must be used with a 16-ohm speaker to get the correct reflected primary impedance. But every 17, including all of the Black Line, and the Valpreaux, Dominatrix, and Black Dog 20 use the exact same iron. It is essentially a drop-in replacement for the one used in the original blackface Deluxe Reverb. It is ideal. I have used both Heyboer and Schumacher versions of this tranny in the past; that's who makes them for New Sensor and Mojotone, and CE Distribution, but the Magnetic Components has marketing momentum as they are gaining the type of brand recognition enjoyed by Mercury, and they have a huge price advantage. And they come from Chicago.

TQR: What's ahead, Richard? What would you like to accomplish in the future?

Well, even as we speak, I'm introducing the first major revision to the Super 17 since 2008 – The Mark IV. I'm fully aware that the "Mark IV" moniker has been applied in this business as well as many others – remember the Lincoln? But it is important to preserve the continuity of the series, as it is still a Super 17, but with some important changes – the basic



personality of the amp remains, but now you have bass and treble controls, and a mid-range contour switch. This was achieved by

incorporating a '59 Bassman-inspired cathode-follower circuit, which provides the current to drive the tone controls, while having relatively little effect on the original signal amplitude. It is unmistakably a Super 17, but now you can take a little off the top, or fatten up the bottom, or even notch the mids. It makes it friendlier towards a greater range of pickups – it always had a (deserved) reputation for being a single-coil lover, but what was already a versatile amp is now eligible for "desert island" status (or so says me). The other noticeable change is the Fender-style pilot light, 'cause every amp geek knows the violet jewels sound best.



The other thing on the front burner is the Thunderball. It started as a basic T-bolt copy, but so much of that amp's personality comes from the crispy 15" Jensen. If you modernize the power supply,

add screen resistors and upgrade the cathode resistor, it will safely run nearly any octal power tube with any octal rectifier tube or solid-state plug. It hasn't been tested long-term with 6550s – they scare me. But with 6V6s and a 5Y3 it puts out 12 watts, and at the other extreme, EL34s with an SSR, it puts out 42 watts. Other combinations yield other results. It only has volume and tone knobs, but for the most part it can do Princeton in the morning and Plexi in the afternoon, with Deluxe and Pro in between.

As far as the future goes, I will be conducting beginner and intermediate tube amp classes, probably in the one-night-a-week-for-a-month format, wherein "students" will learn basic tube theory and build an amp during the course to take home – probably a tweed Champ for beginners, and a Deluxe for the intermediate. That'll be an important move for me and I'd like to get the word out to your readers. I don't know that classes could form before the first of the year, so January 2013 is my target start date...

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REVIEW

Goodsell Valpreaux



Richard Goodsell emerged from the pack of custom amp builders at the perfect time, and those times were perfectly suited for what Goodsell was sell-

ing – hand-built, moderately powered, portable one-hand amps with a pure and simple tone that would appeal to the usual fans of booteek amps, and perhaps most importantly, to working pros. Aside from word of mouth recommendations, being associated with musicians known for their tone is a powerful asset, but not one so easily acquired. Sure, you can give amps away, or even pay people to play them, but those relationships never last. It's the people who *choose* to play your stuff when they could play anything they wished that makes the most potent statement, and we (that includes you) can usually smell the difference.



We mention 'pros' here because it was the first thing that came to mind as we played through the Valpreaux. "Pros would love this amp." Why? We'll get to that in a minute. First,

let's hear Richard Goodsell's take on the Valpreaux...

The name "Valpreaux" (pronounced "Valpro") is a fictitious word designed to evoke associations with various amplifiers of yesteryear – namely Valco and Supro. While these amps were ubiquitous back in the day, it is tough to go back and identify a "signature" sound that was common to most of the models, but a lot of them shared the 6973 power tube, and it is this distinction that provides the rationale for the naming of the Valpreaux. As a bonus, the pseudo-Franco spelling allows Goodsell to end yet another model name with the letter "x"... The similarities between the Valpreaux and any existing amp begin and end with the 6973 tube. The design has far more in common with the Super 17, which has an identical layout, and about 90% of the same hard parts. The now-familiar

Goodsell reverb and tremolo are present, as is the same pre-amp. The current-production 6973 from Electro-Harmonix falls somewhere between a 12AX7 and an EL84 in size and shape, though the NOS versions are typically the same size as the '84. The old Tung-Sol data sheet would lead one to expect an output power just north of 20 watts in a push-pull pair under the right circumstances, but in real-world applications the new ones make about the same power as the EL84. The pin-out is completely different from the EL84, so they cannot be interchanged, but like all Goodsell amps, they are cathode-biased and never need adjustment. By comparison, the 6973 is more hi-fi, less harmonically complex, and has a different distortion curve than the EL84, so the "Voxy chime" is largely absent, inviting some to compare the 6973 to the 6V6.



The Valpreaux typically ships with either the Goodsell-by-WGS RG-65 or RGH. The RGH is ev-

erything you would expect from a G12H-spec speaker; articulate, efficient, and friendly in every way, except maybe its 11-pound girth due to the massive magnet. The RG-65 draws its inspiration distantly from the Celestion/Rola G65; slightly darker, about 2 dB less efficient, sturdy bottom, and 4 pounds less. Either way, the street price is \$1995.

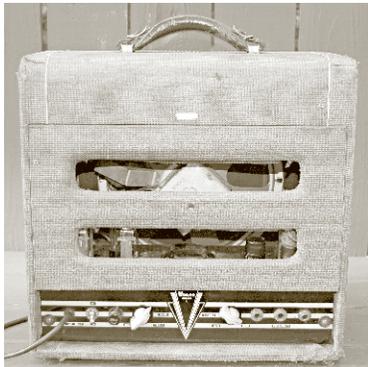


There is a lot to be said for simplicity, especially in these com-

plex and complicated times. Is anything easier than it used to be? More straightforward... clearer... less complex? No, we are all multi-taskers now, and no one wishes they received more e-mail. We're a little jaded, too, taking technology for granted, but also shackled and distracted by it. In this regard the Goodsell Valpreaux offers a welcome break from our otherwise complicated lives. It's so simple that you don't have to think much at all, just play. Six knobs are liberating. Two can set you free.

The Valpreaux sounds a lot like our 1952 Valco National.

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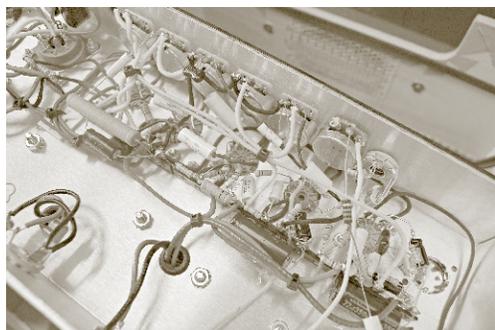
Trust us, we picked up on this immediately, plugged into the National and nothing else in the room was gonna get near the Valpreaux. Goodsell's amp has more low end and more power and volume by a little bit, it's a little cleaner even with the Gain

and Volume cranked, but that's a good thing, because you could play an entire gig with it. You could play an entire gig with the National, too, but you'd be just a bit more limited stylistically. The reason we immediately thought of 'pros' loving the Valpreaux is because it possesses a very pure tone that would go with just about any kind of music you might play through it. Not a vague or vanilla tone, but neutral enough to be extremely versatile. It has character in a very straightforward, uncomplicated way. There we go again, talking about simplicity, but it's true. The Valpreaux has a very agreeable tone, approachable, clear, and clean, but not pristine, nor is it grating or grinding in the least turned up.

The reverb is lush and spacious with a long, slow ramp up in depth, and the tremolo is swampy, deep and real. Something a



pro would like, certainly. A 'pro' tremolo. What else can we say? For a more overdriven tone the Valpreaux shines with pedals because of its cleaner character. It is also not one of those amps that only sounds good, or 'right' with single coil pickups. The Valpreaux seems to have an 'old' soul compared to many new amps. Simple, yet complete. For small club gigs and rooms where you can put a mic on it, it's probably the one



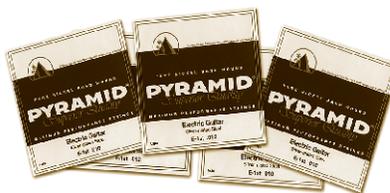
you'd carry out the door more often than not, because it isn't going to limit you to

one narrow sound or impose a low threshold for cleaner tones. Like we said, it's a *pure* tone, uncomplicated by multiple gain stages, 5 position EQ switches, or other affectations commonly found in contemporary booteek amps. Entirely unique in the style of a Swart AST or BC Audio's Amplifier #7 or #8... Simple, yet complete. Could this be the new 'old' amp for you? Yes, especially if you feel the urge to *simplify* your personal Quest for tone. We love this amp for what it isn't as much as for what it is. \$1995.00 street. Quest forth...**To**

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