MOJO ZINE


THE DIY ZINE
FOR DIY BUILDERS
VOLUME 1
ISSUE 2
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WHAT DOES THIS THING DO?
PART II
BY DAVE HUNTER
INTERVIEWS WITH
EDDIE HADDAD NOT JUST A NASHVILLE PICKER
DONNIE SCEARCE OF SUGAR GUITARS
JOHN SOUKI PRO SHREDDER AND PRODUCER

MOJO ZINE

VOLUME 1
ISSUE 2

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WHAT DOES THIS THING DO?

PART II

BY *DAVE HUNTER*

There are a lot of enigmatic components within any guitar amp, many of which remain mysterious even to hobbyists who have built a DIY project or two. In Mojotone's series ***What Does This Thing Do?*** we're taking a look at what's really going on inside your amp

COUPLING CAPACITORS

Although tube-amp fans often like to think of the tubes as the most significant components in the circuit, it's easy to overlook another small part that usually plays a more direct role in voicing any amplifier: the coupling capacitor (aka signal cap, or tone cap, or just cap for short).

Coupling caps are different from the electrolytic caps (aka filter caps) that we looked at in Part One of this series, in that rather than filtering electronic noise from the DC power supply, they connect signal-carrying components within the main part of the circuit. As such, they pass the guitar signal along in the direction it needs to go while, in many cases, simultaneously blocking DC voltage from heading where it doesn't belong.

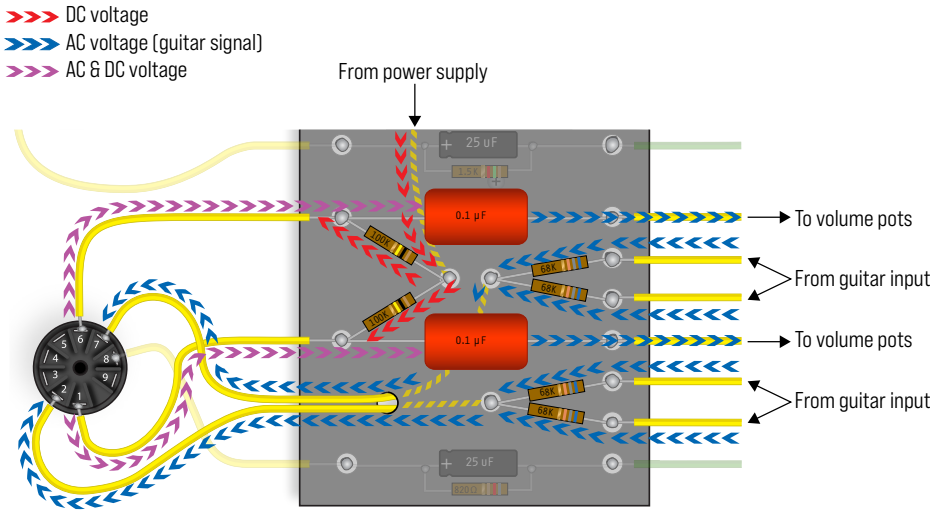
If you look at the schematic for a simple 5E3 tweed Deluxe, for example, you'll see that the power supply is delivering high voltage to the plates of the first 12AY7 preamp tube via a 100k-ohm resistor feeding each half of the tube—resulting in around 150VDC on each of those pins—but none of that DC voltage is present at the volume potentiometer for each channel. That's because the .1µF coupling cap that connects that tube's output to the input of each volume pot is blocking the DC voltage, while passing along the AC voltage that carries your guitar signal. Follow any tube guitar-amp circuit along from start to finish, and you'll see other coupling caps performing similar duties all along the way.

In other places, you'll see similar capacitors—though often much smaller—acting as "bright caps", where they're not asked to block any DC voltage, but simply to pass a certain high-frequency portion of the signal along to the next stage for voicing purposes. As such, these caps are working like bypass caps—the bright cap on a volume potentiometer, for example, which lets more highs into the signal when the knob is in its lower range (as you turn up that knob, the bright cap has less of an effect because more of the full signal is passing through the potentiometer anyway). Such bright caps can be connected directly between the input tab and wiper tab on a volume pot, as with the 47pF cap on the volume control in the Vibrato channel of a Deluxe Reverb, or on a switch that lets you take it in and out of the circuit, as with the 120pF bright caps in a Super Reverb and the like.

Coupling caps in general are often referred to as "tone caps" because they also play a big part in shaping the frequency content of the signal as it passes from stage to stage, and therefore in determining your tone. A lower-value cap passes less low-frequency content in the signal, while a higher-value cap passes more bass. Note that this "low vs. high value" thing can get a little confusing when you start looking at a variety of capacitors: for example, a .01µF cap has a higher value (often referred to as "larger") than a .005µF cap. Because we're often working with decimal-point values, you have to remember to take that "." into consideration. When dealing with caps of the same manufacturer's make and model, size usually follows value, so it's usually easy to note that a .047µF cap is smaller than a .1µF cap, and so on.

In any case, any thoughtfully designed amp will be voiced by the consideration its maker has taken in which coupling caps are used at which stages, according to the frequencies that they accentuate or attenuate, in combination with the frequency response of the tubes affecting that stage, as determined by its plate and cathode resistors, any cathode-bypass caps used (as discussed in Part One), and so forth. The final sonic result of any chain of signal-influence components always depends, however, on the cumulative effects of those several different parts. Swapping a tweed

COUPLING CAPACITORS IN A 5E3 CIRCUIT.



12AY7 pre amp tube

Deluxe's .1µF coupling caps in the preamp for lower-value .022µF caps will certainly help to make that classic combo a little less bassy (a mod that many players undertake with great results), but it won't immediately make a 5E3 sound like a Plexi, simply because the classic Marshall prominently uses .022µF caps in its preamp too.

Some aficionados also pursue specific makes of caps for their perceived sonic characteristics, and the consideration of the "sound" of caps of different compositions opens up an entirely different can of worms. Most thoughtful makers will tell you that the primary consideration is selecting the right value cap for the stage in which it is used; after that, however, many do agree that different makes and compositions of signal caps can influence fine points in the amp's overall sound. Different types and makes might enhance warmth or brightness, perceived depth and richness, or very slightly alter the speed at which the amp reacts to your pick attack, and so forth. A cap that sounds great in one circuit, however, might sound wrong in another—whether it's too dull, too bright, too gritty, too brittle, or what have you—so it's rarely a case of being able to say, "this is the best tone cap there is, end of story!"

The best plan for approaching coupling capacitors for the DIY builder or modder is to follow your schematics for cap values, perhaps try a change or two of value to voice a stage if you're getting a little too much or too little of something in the final results, and not worry too much about the "make and composition" variables if you're using parts of good quality in the first place. Understand your caps and their role in shaping the amp's frequency response, and you're a long way toward dialing in your ideal tone!

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

An extremely simple network that can have a tremendous effect on any guitar amplifier's ultimate sound, the negative-feedback loop remains a rather mysterious thing to many new and novice amp builders and modders. Consider that the entire loop usually consists of just two pieces of wire going from point A to point B with a single resistor in between, and it's incredible that this can be one of the major defining characteristics of some breeds of amp, yet such is the impact of this so-called negative feedback.

Many kinds of negative-feedback loops are used in audio amplification, but where tube-powered guitar amps are concerned a loop positioned around the output stage is far and away the most common, so that's what we'll focus on here. It's important to note that several classic amps have no negative-feedback loop whatsoever, and that in itself plays a big part in their sound and playing feel.

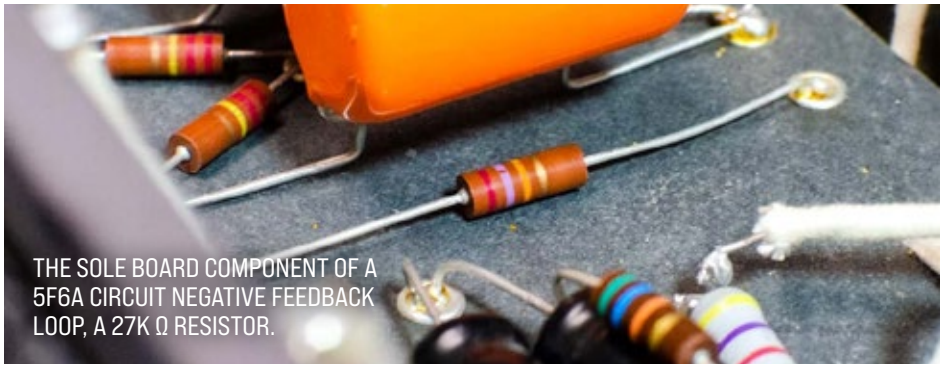
A negative-feedback loop does exactly what the term implies, but it's where that happens and the resulting affect it has on the signal that really matter. Look at an original schematic for Fender's 5F6A tweed Bassman of the late '50s, and in the top-right corner of the drawing you'll see a connection that approximates three-quarters of a rectangle, comprising a line running upward from the output transformer's positive connection to the speaker output jacks, leftward toward the rest of the circuit via a 27k resistor, and downward to connect with a 10k resistor that's part of the long-tailed-pair phase inverter. What this simple loop does is connect the final output signal to an element of the input of the output stage (which is essentially the phase inverter). Within this connection, however, is a resistor that reins in the amount of signal that is fed back.

Presenting this output signal back to the input of the stage generally results in dampening the stage's propensity to distort, which tightens up the overall performance, enhances the low end somewhat, and tips the sound toward clarity and articulation, rather than rawness and harmonic distortion. When you're looking to produce volume and power, as designers of larger amps were striving to do in the late '50s and '60s, all of these might be perceived as good things. And they remain good things according to many design goals today. When a lower-powered, looser, and more complex-sounding amplifier is acceptable, however, amp designers often want to adjust this negative-feedback loop, or eliminate it entirely.

Consider, anecdotally, that the lack of a negative-feedback loop is about 50% of the equation behind the marketing spiel when the majority of amp manufacturers promote a model as being "Class A." Since a genuine Class-A amplifier requires a lot more technical analysis and qualification than most such guitar amps actually allow for, the industry has tended to use this label with any amp that has cathode-biased output tubes, with no negative feedback loop. Whatever you call it, those are two of the main factors behind the sounds of the Vox AC15 and AC30, Fender's tweed Deluxe, and the countless amps that emulate those designs today.

If a negative feedback loop achieves the sonic ends described above, then of course the lack of one accentuates characteristics in the other direction. This means that building an amp without a loop enhances a degree of looseness, harmonic saturation, and an early onset of distortion, at the sacrifice of some fullness in the lows and the addition of perhaps a little more rawness in the tone overall. Be aware that good designers and manufacturers can also taper these characteristics with other elements of the circuit architecture and component selection, so those these are usually degrees of difference, rather than extremes.

For the hobby builder, all of this means you can further temper the personality of your

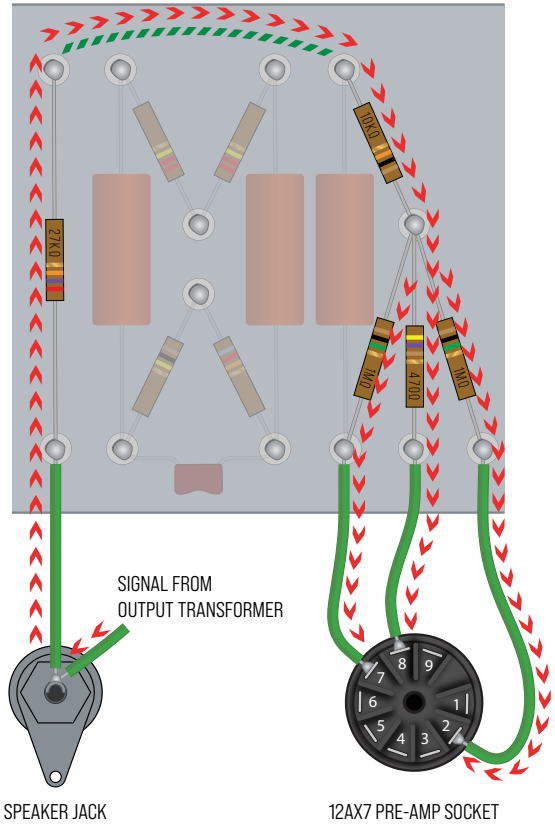


THE SOLE BOARD COMPONENT OF A 5F6A CIRCUIT NEGATIVE FEEDBACK LOOP, A 27K Ω RESISTOR.

amp by altering the amount of negative feedback in one direction or the other, or eliminating it entirely. Be aware that the selection of an appropriate negative-feedback resistor can be confusing: a resistor of higher value means less negative feedback, since it's blocking more of that signal, and a lower-value resistor means more.

In amps with multi-tap output transformers, providing two or three speaker-output impedances, it also matters where you connect that resistor. Consider that Marshall copied the 5F6A Bassman to build their first amp, the JTM45, and used the Bassman's 27k feedback resistor as a result. Marshall, however, used an output transformer with speaker outputs for 4, 8 and 16 ohms, and connected the loop to the latter. The result was almost three times as much negative feedback on the JTM45, which is one of the reasons those amps sound different from the Bassman that inspired them.

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK LOOP IN A 5F6A CIRCUIT.



All of this talk of varying the amount of negative feedback to alter the sound of your guitar amp is probably putting an idea in the head of some DIY'ers already: as simple as this loop is, and given the fact that it only requires changing one resistor to alter its performance, it's easy in most amps to install a three-way switch to give you on-the-fly changes. We don't have room here to provide full instruction—and these mods are pretty easily found on the web—but whether you're modifying or building from scratch, it's pretty easy to install a simple three-way switch that offers two different levels of negative feedback, plus none at all.

Even without such a switch, you can easily experiment with resistor values (observing all safety protocols while working inside any amp, of course) to find what works best for your own sound, then either stick with that as a one-and-done scenario, or make it switchable. Either way, it's worth understanding the surprisingly significant impact the negative-feedback loop, or lack thereof, can have on your amp's sound.

CATHODE-BYPASS CAPACITORS

We've already discussed filter capacitors and coupling capacitors in parts 1 and 4 of "What Does This Thing Do?" so this brings us to the third significant role that capacitors et al have in shaping the sound of your guitar amp. Cathode-bypass capacitors ("caps" for short) are found connected in parallel to the cathode-bias resistors in many preamp stages and some output stages, and to many beginner and novice amp enthusiasts they may well be the most mysterious of all three capacitor usages within the guitar-amp circuit. Even so, at times they can have the most dramatic effect on your overall tone, making a significant impact both on gain and voicing.

Cathode-bypass duties are usually performed by filter (aka "electrolytic") capacitors, albeit usually much smaller ones than you'll find in an amp's power supply because these don't need to handle as high a voltage, and like those larger filter caps no actual signal passes through them from one point to another. Which is to say, they aren't "coupling together" signal-treating stages of the amplifier—gain stages or tone stages—the way coupling capacitors are. They're not working like conventional filter caps either, however, and these parts are used because the same value of filter capacitor is usually available in a much smaller physical size than would be obtainable in a coupling capacitor, which otherwise could perform the same task (more of which below).

In brief, and without getting too technical, cathode-bypass caps are used to counteract some of the frequency and gain-dampening tendencies induced by the cathode-bias resistors they are coupled with. Both preamp and output tubes need to be biased, and while a resistor is used for the technique in the output stages of only a specific class of amplifier (the eponymous cathode-biased amps, often colloquially referred to as "Class A"), almost all preamp tubes in amps from the late '50s onward are cathode-biased.

This biasing is achieved by connecting a resistor of a specific value between the preamp tube's cathode and a ground point (the value of that resistor is determined according to how "hot" the circuit designer wants that tube to run in that stage, relative to operating voltages and in terms of gain factors and so forth). Connecting a resistor to the tube's cathode, however, also induces a form of negative feedback in that tube, which tamps down the gain and flattens the frequency response. The way to achieve satisfactory biasing while avoiding those tone-dulling side effects is to also connect a capacitor to that cathode, which runs to ground in parallel with the resistor, essentially bypassing the resistor's own cathode-to-ground connection and emphasizing certain frequencies in the process.

Such cathode-bypass caps almost universally increase the gain of the tube stage in which they are used, while also revoicing the stage according to their value (which is to say, the "size" of their capacitance capabilities). The rule of thumb regarding the latter—when considered on a gradient of sorts—is that caps of a larger value emphasize bass response more, while those of a lesser value emphasize treble. They don't constrict frequencies as completely as coupling capacitors of different values do, but help to emphasize certain bands within the overall response, while enhancing the gain in the process.

For example, the standard guitar-amp preamp gain stage today usually uses a 25µF bypass cap connected to the cathode of one half of a 12AX7. The legendary tweed Bassman used a 250µF cap in that position, and that's what Marshall copied to build its JTM45. But as the Marshall design evolved toward the Plexi models of the mid to late '60s, they split the first two gain stages to create independent Normal (bassier) and High Treble (brighter) channels, using a 320µF cathode-bypass cap in the former and a 0.68µF cap in the latter. That crispy, sizzly, crackly high-frequency breakup that is a big part of the cranked-Plexi tone is due in large part to that bypass cap, which is of a significantly lower value than the one in the other channel, or in most other amps' preamp stages for that matter. The difference in capacitor values across the bassier-to-brighter spectrum doesn't have to be quite as dramatic as the difference displayed in that example, although small changes (say, swapping for a cap that's only double or half the current value) often don't produce a noticeable change in voicing.

We use the term "value" to denote these capacitors' ratings because, while amp-speak sometimes refers to them in terms of "smaller or larger," that can also be misleading. Often the physical sizes of

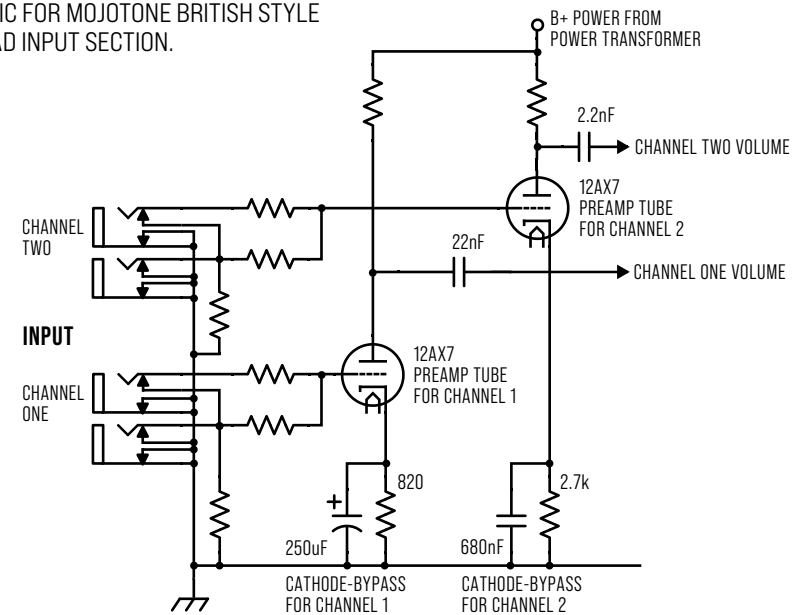
these components—especially when we're not comparing like for like, or parts of the same make—have no direct bearing on their capacitance rating. For one thing, a capacitor's physical size is partly a function of the amount of voltage it needs to handle, and the 25µF filter caps commonly used in this way in preamp stages are generally rated at just 50v or even 25v. That's why they're a lot smaller than the 400v to 600v filter caps used in your power supply, which might also be in the 22µf to 30µf range as regards capacitance.

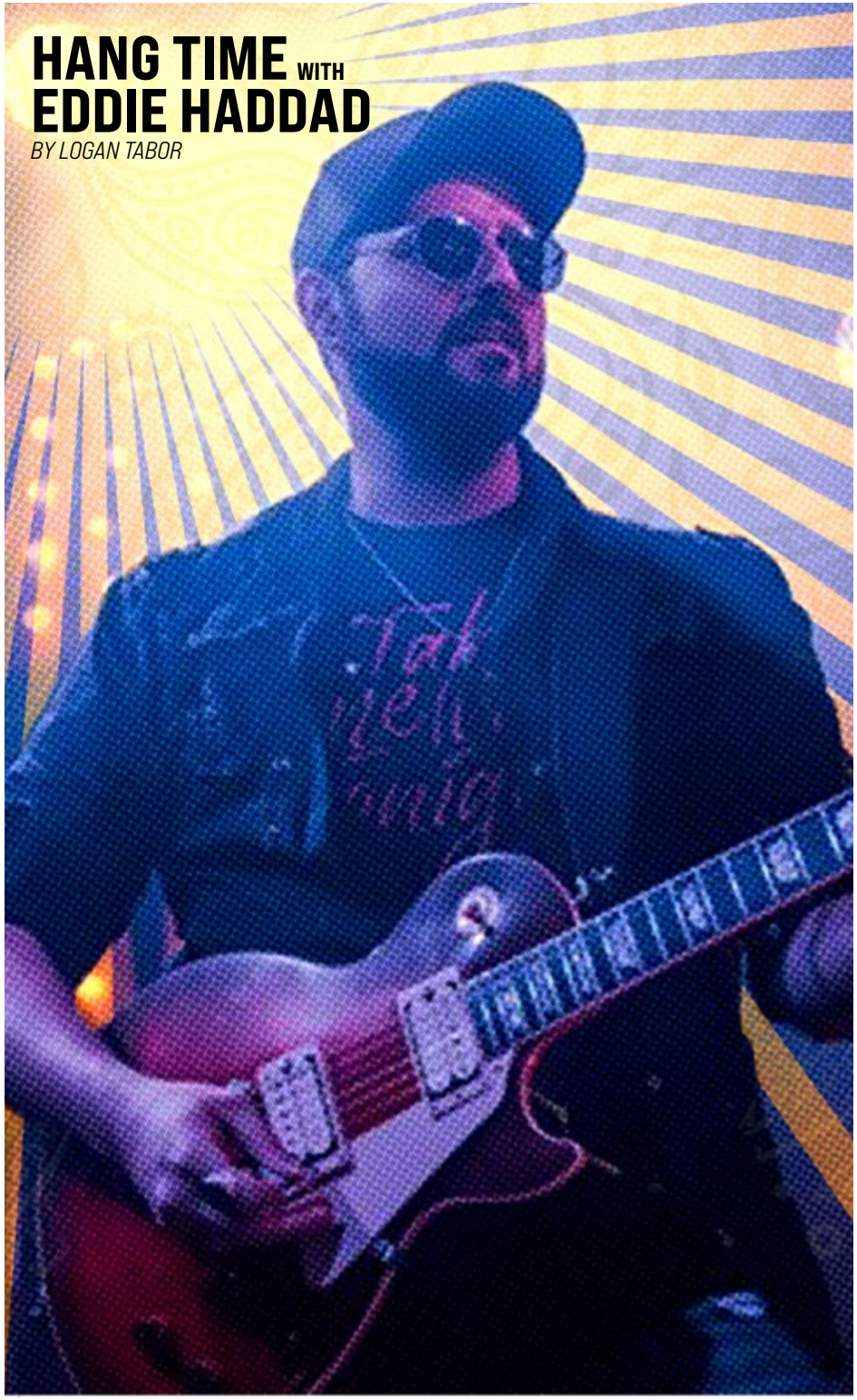
Look at photos of the circuit of a late-'60s or early-'70s Marshall 50W Lead or 100W Super Lead, and you'll see the disparity in sizes of capacitors used in cathode-bypass positions for the Normal and High Treble channel, which are located at the far-right end of the circuit board when the rear of the chassis is facing downward. The 320µF cap in the bassier channel has a value 470.6 times higher than the 0.68µf cap in the brighter channel, but the latter part is generally two or three times the physical size of the former. That's because a non-directional (non-polarized) 0.68µF coupling capacitor is used for cathode-bypass duties in the High Treble channel, and coupling capacitors are physically a lot larger than electrolytic capacitors in the first place, when comparing parts of the same voltage rating. In theory, we could also use coupling capacitors when a bassier voicing is required, but such a part would likely be too large to fit into position on the circuit board (and high-quality coupling capacitors of that size and value are also expensive, and hard to come by).

We have focused mostly on the preamp stage here, but cathode-bypass caps are also used in—unsurprisingly—amps with cathode-biased output stages. In the general sense, they perform similar voicing duties there, but swapping from one value to another in this position usually has a less audible effect overall, and the tonal difference might be negligible under most operating conditions.

When considering preamp stages, however, you can use your understanding of cathode-bypass caps to better voice a DIY project or amp mod to your own tastes, to produce differences between two otherwise similar channels, or to create gain-boost options through extremely simple changes in the circuit. That's a lot of variation available from changing just one relatively small component!

SCHEMATIC FOR MOJOTONE BRITISH STYLE 100W LEAD INPUT SECTION.





HANG TIME WITH EDDIE HADDAD

BY LOGAN TABOR

When it comes to being gainfully employed in the music industry, there are so many paths down which one may wander. At Mojotone, we're obviously miles down the manufacturing and supply path which puts us in close contact with techs, builders, rock stars, producers, and a slew of highly-competent hired guns. One hired gun who has continually impressed us with his dedication to the craft and knowledge of gear is Mr. **Eddie Haddad**.

You've probably seen Eddie featured in a number of videos on our YouTube channel, and perhaps you've even run into him at the Mojotone booth at a trade show or two. We wanted to take a closer look at how Eddie found himself standing right where he is, so we sat down to have a little chat and, as with any great story, we started at the beginning...

"I started fiddling around with guitar at age 10, but didn't really get serious til age 13. My first record was Mr. Big's "Lean Into It" that my mom randomly got for me at a garage sale since I needed cd's for my walkman (man I feel old!) That record changed my life. I never heard guitar work like that before. From there I dove into rock music, Texas blues, and metal through my younger years and was obsessed with being able to play like the people I listened to. My first amp was actually a Crate bass amp that was handed down to me from a friend. I ran a Squier strat into a BOSS Super Overdrive through that amp. Truly humble beginnings! My first "real" amp was a Peavey Valve King head and cab that I got a few years later, along with an Ibanez RG. Boy, have I come a long way (haha)."

Having spent plenty of time with Eddie over the years, I was aware that he was what one might call a "gear nerd." Eddie has always had a great ear for tone and a zest for discovering new gear, so I wanted to know how he started down this particular path.

Eddie Was Quick To Admit...

...that, like many of us, tone was not on his radar for the first few years of his guitar playing; he was much more focused on learning technique and becoming a well-rounded player. But eventually the tone demons find us all...

"...over the years I flipped the script and put much more focus on tone than anything else. I think of tone as the "voice" of my instrument and, by extension, the manifestation of the sound I hear in my head that I communicate to the outside world. Like a ton of guitar players, Eric Johnson's tone quest was a big gateway for me to start prioritizing tone. From there, it was pretty much every record ever recorded out of Nashville. The tone of those session players was something I truly identified with, because it revolved around finger tone and how to truly "speak" with sounds and textures. These days I think about tone like a producer, where it all revolves around the context of the band mix. That was actually a huge factor in what drew me to Mojotone. Literally everything I've played from y'all, pickups or amps, always sits beautifully in a mix."

We'll take the unsolicited flattery any day. That Eddie is one heck of a guy.

So Where Is Eddie Now? Well...

"I guess you can say I offer all manner of services as a guitar player from session work, playing live/touring, writing songs, tone consulting, and teaching."

But More Specifically...

"I was blessed to play for and tour with the great Eddie Money during the last three years of his life, someone I grew up listening to. I've also done session work for artists like the late Erick Morillo, recorded for tv spots, performed live on MTV. These days I'm playing lots of country music and am touring with Martin McDaniel and Craig Campbell."

It's safe to say Eddie is a true working

musician and is evidently a trusted and valued asset in the professional music community. But how did he get to this point in his career?

THE EDDIES
ON STAGE WITH
EDDIE MONEY

"When I was 26 I decided to move to LA to pursue a career in music because I tried being a working stiff and just couldn't accept that for the rest of my life. That nagging voice in my head convinced me to give it an honest shot and if it doesn't work out, I can always move back to Texas and get back into the corporate world. I didn't have a plan, really, and the first couple years were incredibly tough, but I was finally able to get into a groove of staying busy playing music in that scene. From there I made a conscious effort to spend every day working towards getting closer to my goal of making a decent living with music and nothing else."

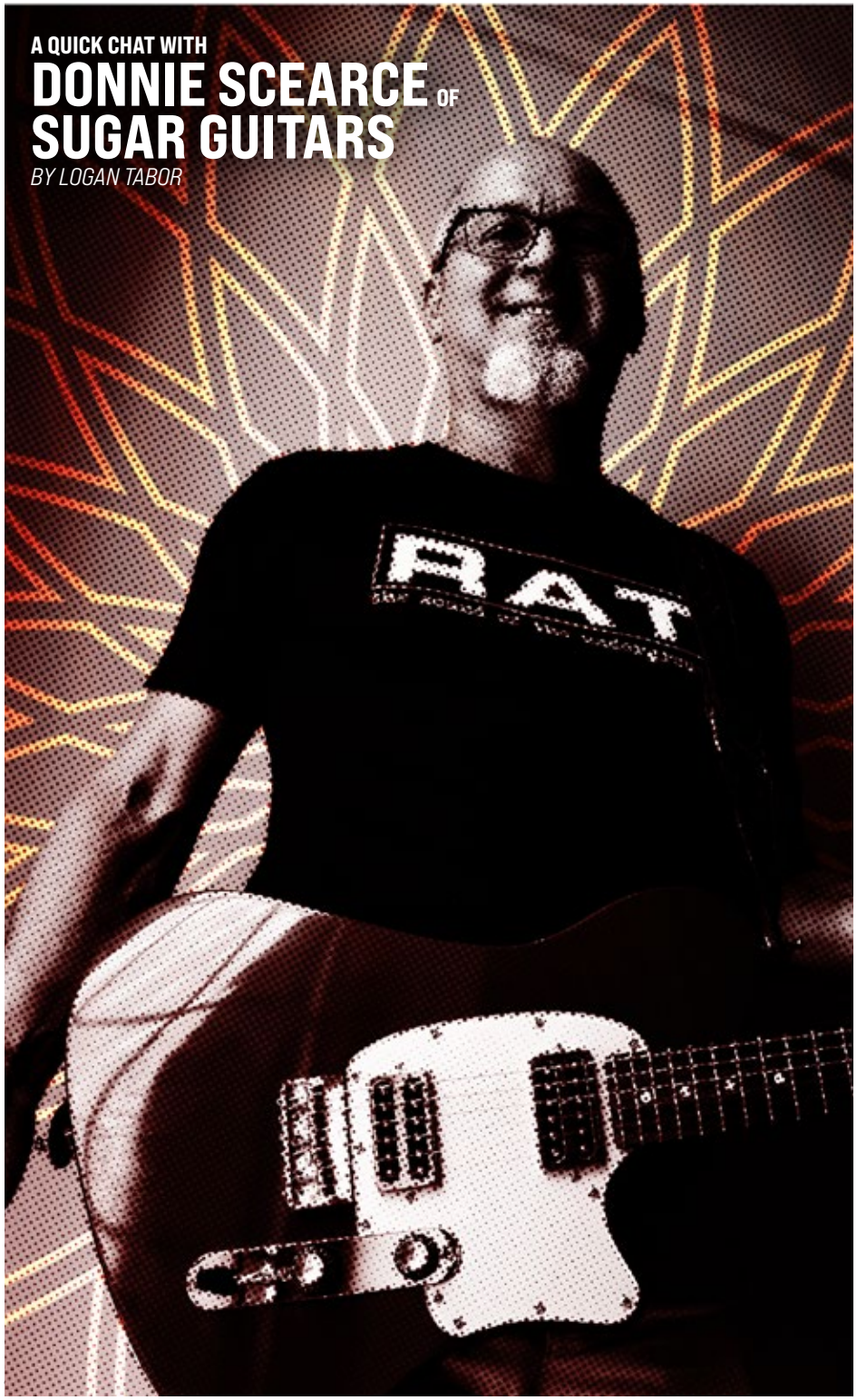
That's a lot of drive, risk-taking, and networking; which I'm sure almost any successful musician would agree are the keys to actually getting somewhere in the music industry. And even though Eddie, as I'm sure we can all agree, is obviously some sort of alien-programmed robot genius guitarist machine, he must reach those frustrating moments of demotivation like the rest of us.

Here's What He Had To Say About Breaking Down Those Walls...

"The struggle is always real, no matter what level you're at! All kinds of things can get in the way from personal responsibilities to time-wasting distractions. I think we live in the best (and worst) time for playing guitar. There are millions of free resources we can find on the internet to help us learn and get better, but at the same time there is so much content out there competing for our attention that it can often get the better of us. What helps me get out of that rut is to put my phone aside (sometimes even in another room), put on some music I like, and grab my guitar and play along with what I'm hearing. This is where fresh ideas really come out and it gets me excited to continue playing."

Well said, Eddie. Well said. This essentially concludes our time with Eddie, for now. But rest assured Eddie will be back very soon for another feature in our Warehouse Jams Series, to help us with gear demo videos, and to just hang out at the shop and be an all-around rad guy.

We feel privileged to have Eddie on our team as an ambassador of Mojotone products, and we're all super proud to call this guy our friend. Keep an eye out for Eddie on tour with Martin McDaniel (martinmcdaniel.com) and Craig Campbell (craigcampbell.tv). Eddie also has a ton of course material on **guitarmasterymethod.com** already and will be publishing more content regularly. He's a great player to learn from so we definitely recommend seeing what he has to offer.



A QUICK CHAT WITH

DONNIE SCEARCE OF SUGAR GUITARS

BY LOGAN TABOR

Oftentimes, whenever we get enthusiastic about an artform (say... "playing guitar," or something crazy like that) we eventually find ourselves diving deeper into the craft than we ever thought we might. This was definitely the case for Donnie Scearce, the founder/creator of Sugar Guitars.

Donnie Designs And Builds Some Incredible Instruments, which he has managed to put into the hands of some equally incredible musicians. I knew Donnie was something of a virtuoso in the guitar realm, but I wanted to find out how he got from point A to point B, so recently, we sat down and had a nice chat.

I Wanted To Start At The Beginning, So I Asked Donnie How He First Became Interested In Music/Guitar Playing In General...

"I started playing guitar at age 13. I had a friend in school - Doug Sellers - who was an incredible musician. Doug inspired me to take my playing seriously. During my music career, I have been a guitar player, writer, producer, tech, and engineer. I stay inspired being in these roles revolving around guitar. Now I build the guitar that I would want to play."

Pretty well said in my opinion. This initial inspiration probably doesn't sound too different from many of our stories. It's obvious Donnie was the type of person to take an idea and run with it in as many directions as possible; a mentality that tends to provide efficient fuel for this particular industry.

But Again, How Did We Go From Jamming On Guitar With Doug To Building World-Class Instruments?

"As a kid I was a tinkerer of sorts. I would take apart electronics and speakers to see how they worked...and then my parents would freak out and make me put their stereos back together. In high school shop class I built a huge guitar cabinet. It was probably 5 ft. X 3 ft. X 1-1/2 ft. with a Realistic 15" speaker from Radio Shack. It lived in my bedroom because I couldn't fit it in my VW bug to take to gigs or band practice. Lesson learned!"

Another relatively familiar story, but we are definitely starting to see how Donnie progressed from a guitar player to a connoisseur of all things 'music'.

"Throughout my guitar player career I would replace pickups and pickguards on my guitars. I basically learned out of necessity how to do various modifications whenever I wanted to try something different. I did the setups on all my guitars myself and would also do setups for friends. Woodworking skills also help! Being a full-time musician means having a part-time job in most cases. My part-time jobs gave me the woodworking skill set."

Well said, once again. I like this guy! Sometimes you've just got to dive in and get your hands dirty; I feel like the best techs I've met over the years were all self-motivated and took the initiative to just learn the craft out of necessity.

But On A More Personal Level, As It Pertains To Music, Where Did Donnie's Inspiration Come From?

"My aim was to create a guitar that I would want to play. In my formative years as a player, I was into Van Halen, Iron Maiden, Ozzy, and the other rock guitar hero bands of that time. At the same time, I was into The Fixx, Del Amitri, Hoodoo Gurus, The Cure, and some Indie bands. I think the broad spectrum of guitar-driven bands helped me understand a lot of the signal chain complexities and capabilities you can have in a guitar rig to get the soundscape for the style you want to play. The guitar should be the gateway for your expression. The look and feel are part of your artistic expression. I wanted to create a guitar that looks like it has been "woven into the fabric" but is still unique. There's a fine balance, as anyone who has

ever tried to design a new electric can attest."

Sounds about right to me. So after all of this inspiration, after all of the jamming, producing, tech'ing, etc., where have his guitars landed? I did mention he had managed to get his guitars into the hands of some pretty great players. So let's talk about it...

"Right now it's Jordan Lawson with Carrie Underwood, Josh Reedy with Thomas Rhett, and Michael Westbrook - YouTube guru and hired gun who plays or has played with Noah Guthrie, John Hopkins from Zac Brown Band, Crowder, and Corey Smith. Corey Smith plays one of my guitars as well."

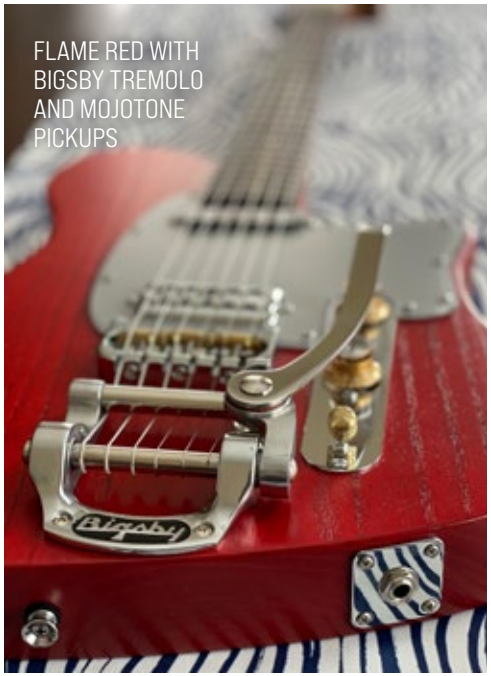
Pretty darn cool. So what does Sugar guitars bring to the table?

What Are The Defining Characteristics Of These Super Sweet Guitars?

"My guitars are unique yet traditional. If you are a player who feels connected to old school but wants to be unique at the same time, try a Sugar guitar. There are a ton of companies making great guitars that are their versions of the same S or T designs. Sugar guitars are 25" scale length, so they sit between the traditional S/T or LP designs which inherently makes a tonal difference because of that. I also use a compensated neck radius that feels great at both ends of the neck."

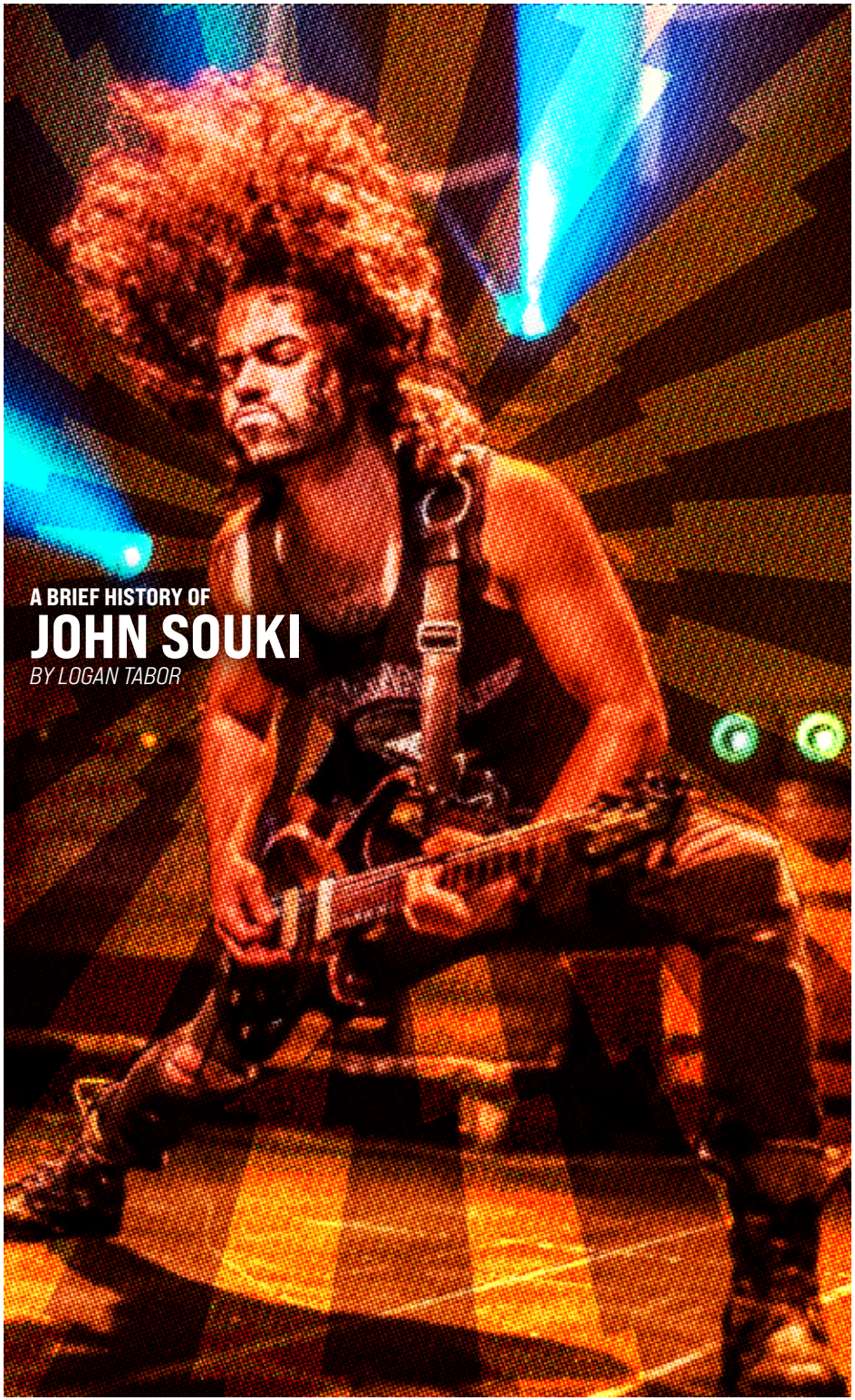
My curiosity has officially been piqued. I'm ready to get my hands on one of these axes and get to shedding. What about you?

I really enjoyed my time with Donnie and want to thank him for sitting down with me. We sure hope this article has given you some further inspiration for your playing and tinkering. Make sure you keep with us for more insight into the builders and players that make this the best industry in the world.



FLAME RED WITH BIGSBY TREMOLO AND MOJOTONE PICKUPS


MERMAID BLUE WITH WHITE PEARL AND FAT MOJOTRON PICKUPS



A BRIEF HISTORY OF

JOHN SOUKI

BY LOGAN TABOR

The music industry is full of big names, bright lights, and massive crowds waiting with baited breath to be blown away by the power of live music. And with all of those big household names out there, we tend to forget that there are tons of astonishingly talented musicians on stage making those big names sound even bigger.

Today, we'll be sitting down with our good friend **John Souki**. John is a versatile and intimidatingly-talented industry professional -- a hired gun, if you will -- who has been seen on stage with such acts as Chase Rice, Breland, Gavin DeGraw, and Colbie Caillat. I've always had a deep interest in these highly sought-after musicians who have spent years working as hard as they can to master their craft, make connections, and find high-profile gigs. Naturally, I was excited to speak with John and find out just how he reached this point in his career.

As always, we started with a little background.

"I was raised in a household of music lovers. My parents got me into rock and metal from early on. My dad played guitar and taught me my first 3 chords on his nylon-string when I was 8 (which was twice my size back then haha). Seeing him pick it up and play songs really inspired me to wanna play and get good at it, but it wasn't until we moved to the US from Venezuela and turned 14 that I picked up the guitar more seriously. I briefly attended music college right out of high school and started touring with local bands and doing studio work in my city. I got the gig with Chase Rice in 2015..."

A vast majority of players were exposed to music in their own homes at an early age where the captivation instantly ensued. In our younger years we practice constantly and learn as much as we can on our own, and then we begin playing with other musicians. I believe it's around this time that we start to consider our sound. You get in a room with other players and realize that tone, dynamics, adaptability, and knowledge of your gear are just as important as technical skill.

So what did John's tone journey look like? How did he find his sound?

"Growing up in a rock oriented household, I remember wanting to sound like Eddie Van Halen but could only afford a Crate 30-watt combo and Digitech GNX processor when I was starting out haha. It wasn't until I discovered John Petrucci and Dream Theater that made me want to dive deeper in tonal exploration, so I got an Axe Fx 2 and started tinkering until I got close to what I thought his tone was. Playing country for the last 6 years has reshaped how I find tones, so I started using the 4-cable method with some of my amps (Mesa Mark V:35 and Mojotone Deacon), which yielded me amazing results. The tone-seeking journey never ends!"

I think that last line really says it all: "The tone-seeking journey never ends!" That's why we're all here right? There is no limit to gear configurations, amp mods, guitar mods, etc., and while this can get overwhelming at times, it's important to remember that these options exist to help us do our jobs BETTER.

Now that we know John is something of a gear head, and has a pretty intricate and particular way of routing all his equipment together to produce his final sound, I wanted to know what parts of his rig he absolutely couldn't live without...

"I'd say my Kiesel A6X guitar and AX8 are the most crucial parts of my rig. Until very recently, we were using amps, cabs, and traditional pedal boards and I heavily relied on my Mojotone Deacon and Hatteras heads through my custom Mojotone 2x12 as the centerpieces of my sound (and they get plenty of use in the studio!)"

I must say, I'm glad some of our Mojotone gear made the cut... sounds like John is a very smart guy! Speaking of which, John also works in a recording studio called Round Table Recording Company, where he produces and engineers all kinds of recording projects...


JOHN SOUKI ON STAGE WITH CHASE RICE.

"I had been doing my own productions outside the road and wanted to dive deeper in that world. My friend and Round Table co-owner contacted me 2 days before the official opening to co-produce a project for Bubba Sparxxx, and I have been working as a resident producer/engineer there since. Round Table is built on collaboration; everyone has a voice and is a key part of decision-making for collective growth. Joining the team has opened a myriad of creative doors that continue expanding my production knowledge daily. Currently producing a few exciting albums in various genres that I can't wait to release soon!"

Sounds like a busy dude with a rad life. When he's not performing incredible music in front of giant crowds, he's in a recording studio surrounded by creativity and rooted in diverse collaboration.

But with all that time on the road and in the studio, how does one find time to practice their instruments? How do you continue to broaden the spectrum of your craft?

"Free time is a bit of a luxury these days so all of my practice happens either at shows or in the studio working on projects. Genre variety in the studio has opened up many doors of learning and personally I find it a lot more fun and engaging than running through exercises. This way helps me stay creative and keeps the ideas flowing."

That's a really good point. Just being exposed to and involved in all these different styles and working with so many different musicians in various settings has to open literally every door creatively-speaking. It's easy to get stuck in patterns and develop stylistic habits that are hard to break, but if you're constantly challenged with the task of adapting to new ideas and new musicians, you've essentially found the musical fountain of youth.

We definitely want to thank John Souki for taking the time to chat with us. He has been a steadfast ally in our effort to showcase our gear and find new talent to work with. Check out John on instagram via **@johnsouki** and also take a look at **@roundtablerecording** to keep up with all of his work.

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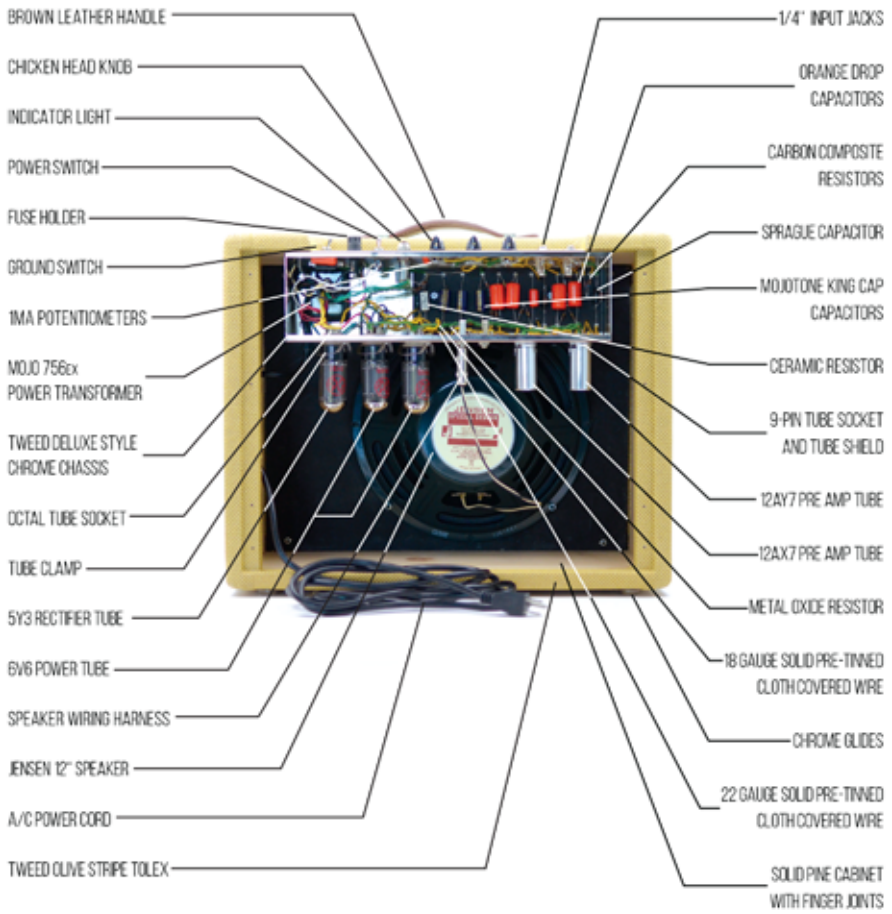
IT STARTS WITH THE PARTS.



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