

▶ original cardboard carton. A banjo player had had it made, and it had banjo headpegs on it, but he'd never actually used it. So it was an absolutely brand new 1929 guitar and had no marks on it whatsoever, and it sounded *absolutely wonderful*" he smiles. "So I think it's the ageing of the wood which has a lot of effect. When they get older, guitars get a lovely clear treble sound, which doesn't come immediately. I think these two are getting better now, because they're about ten years old. It just comes with age."

What are your own built of?

"Just the usual, really – rosewood, mahogany necks. These are Indian Rosewood because it's so difficult to get Brazilian rosewood these days. The one I built for Brendan was Brazilian, but even then it was getting very difficult to get Brazilian wood and if you did, it had lots of wormholes all over it. This one has a Sitka spruce top which is really nice. Some Sitka spruce is just too hard, but European wood is very soft which gives you lots of volume, but can be a disadvantage for a clearer treble sound. But for this 12 fret and the 14 fret, the tops were consecutive pieces of Sitka and these are a nice density, not too soft and too dense."

How are you miking those up?

"Well I've just had these LR Baggs pickups fitted under the bridge."

Did you base them on particular models by other manufacturers?

"One's based on 12-fret Martin, like the triple-0 that I own. I've arched the top a bit, but it's much the same dimensions. I particularly like them as a picking guitar – they're perhaps not a great strumming guitar, because in a way they don't have that jangly sound. But when guitars get bigger than that in terms of cubic capacity, they aren't actually any louder – they're bassier, but no louder. And if you go smaller – although double-0s can be great – you generally find they lack a bit of bass, and this is a nice compromise between bass and treble. I think that's what you want when you're picking, because you want a rich sound, but with a strong treble."

Have you any plans to build more?

"I haven't made any for the last four years because I've been too busy..."

"Guitars are really odd, aren't they" interjects Brendan. "They're built for various jobs, like that Martin D-18 is just great for putting down a steady strumming track – it's just the best."

What did you use on the Hillbillies album?

Steve: "A Gibson L5, a late fifties one, and a Gibson L3, which is an early archtop, about 1926. A few of mine have been used for the acoustic guitar tracks – Mark's Pensa-Suhr guitar and his J-45 for the strumming. Brendan used his old D-18... I don't think we actually used any Nationals did we?" he laughs.

The Notting Hillbillies album brings together some of their favourite songs, including Lonnie Johnson's *Bewildered*, Jesse Fuller's *Railroad Worksong*, the Delmore Brothers' *Blues Stay Away From Me*, and *Feel Like Going Home* by Charlie Rich – someone usually associated with the more glitzy end of Nashville. Croker, an unshamed

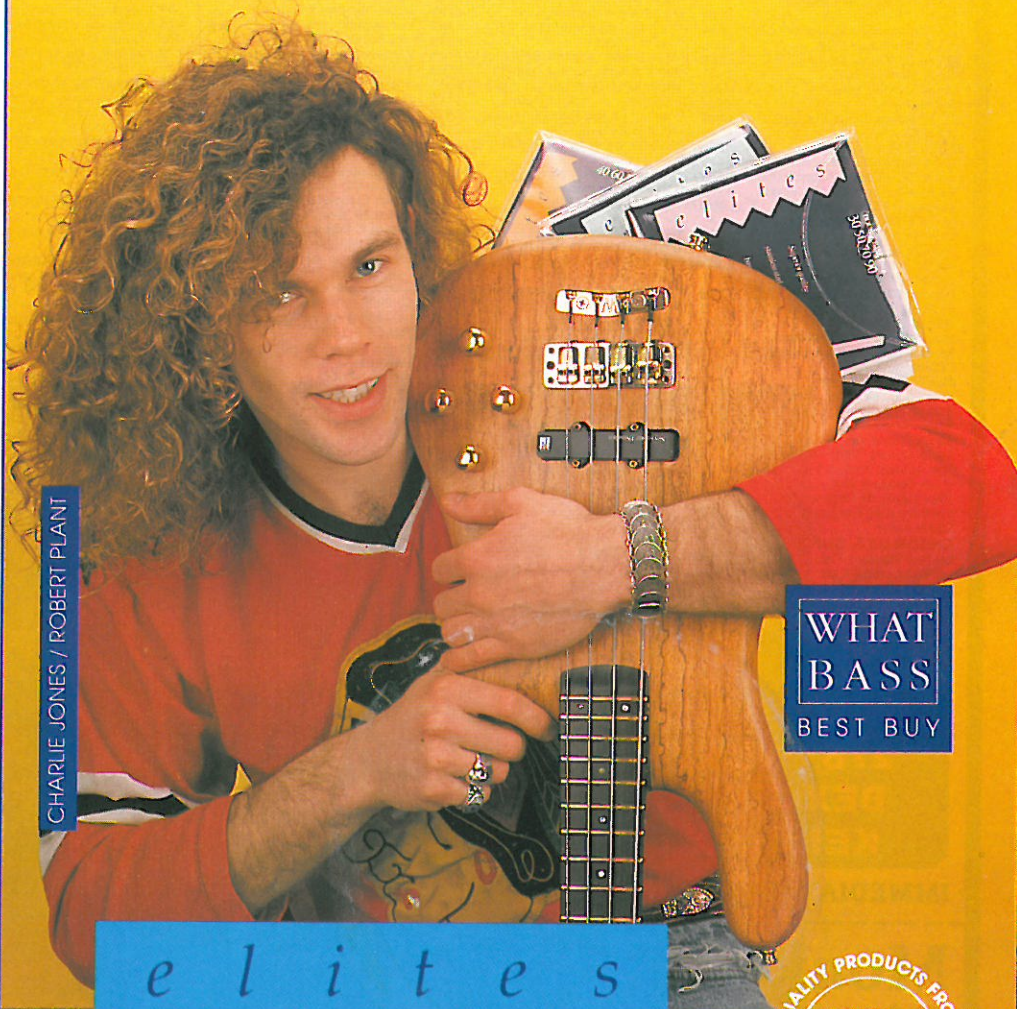
nostalgic, explains.

"The covers were songs that we always wanted to do, and when we had those we just decided to write some new material as well that would fit in. The record is a mixture of old and new, because we've got

Blues is just good-time music. Just because new things come along doesn't mean what's gone before loses anything.

Guy doing all the stuff on the Synclavier, and it's also obvious that we're not American Hillbillies, so we just wrote a few songs in a fitting style. The Charlie Rich song we'd all ▶

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