

do it all at the guitar.

Playing through the PRS humbuckers required dialing bass down a touch, to keep the speaker from bottoming out when driving the amp hard. The absence of a master volume means the Kingston has to be pushed hard to get its max overdrive tones; its 18 watts of output *do* get loud, but not uncontrollable or unfriendly onstage. Even cranked, with the Harmonic Boost switch on, and attacking pretty hard with my pick, the amp didn't get overly distorted, which means it'll serve up good blues overdrive with focused overtones.

To add more serious sustain and push, we dropped a Home Brew Electronics Power Screamer overdrive pedal into our signal chain. The combination of the PRS, the Power Screamer, and the Kingston produced an outstanding, very musical distortion that maintained note separation and clarity while spewing all the sustain and controllable feedback we wanted. Again, as with the Strat, I could clean up the PRS and soften the tone with just the volume and tone controls on the McCarty, so the lack of a master volume or channel switching isn't a major concern with the Kingston. The

tube-driven reverb has a snappy, shimmering sound, though it's equipped with a slightly touchy depth control that could perhaps benefit from a potentiometer with a different taper. Still, the reverb is mere icing on the cake for the Kingston's excellent tone.

The Kingston sounds as good as it looks, and with its straightforward design and rock-solid tone, it's no wonder it and its CBB stablemates are being played by the likes of Ric Hall and his boss, Buddy Guy, as well as Omar Dykes, and Henry Garza of the Los Lonely Boys. —*Phil Feser*

Entry-Level Tube Surprise

Epiphone Valve Junior and Valve Special amps

THROUGH THE YEARS, a number of amplifier manufacturers have tried their hands at producing budget tube amps. The problem with the vast majority of these items was that they were not primarily *tube* amps, they were primarily *low-budget* amps. Their main audio function was to give the listener the distinct feeling that a knitting needle was slowly being shoved through their eardrum.

If any of these had survived – and very few did – they could have been used to great effect by military intelligence to elicit volumes of information from Al Qaeda detainees at little more than half volume. So when not one, but two inexpensively-priced amps recently showed up from Epiphone, the emergency jar of ear plugs was put on standby.

The first indication that this reaction might have been uncalled for was the fact that, upon opening the carton with the Valve Junior, we found the amp was properly shipped – upside down – to keep the

tubes from falling out. In its inverted state, the Junior's chassis could be seen, finished in a thick, vintage cream enamel. Very nice. Also, the power transformer,

mounted to the bottom of the chassis to assist cooling, looked large enough to power a 30-watt amp without working up a sweat.

EPIPHONE VALVE JUNIOR

Features	Five-watt, Class A single-ended 12AX7 circuit design, 8" speaker.
Price	\$199.

EPIPHONE VALVE SPECIAL

Features	Five-watt, Class A single-ended (using two 12AX7s and one EL84) circuit design with master volume, three-band EQ, DSP effects plus separate digital reverb with level control, 10" speaker.
Price	\$219.
Contact	Epiphone Guitar Co., 645 Massman Dr., Nashville TN 37210; www.epiphone.com .



GEARIN' UP



GIGSKINZ RACK BAGS

Gigskinz soft rack bags are built of plywood and covered with water-resistant carbon-fiber-style fabric. They feature a zipped back panel, shoulder strap or briefcase-style handle, felt-lined interior, lockable rubber zipper pulls, rack rails, and mounting hardware. Read more at gigskinz.com.

GRETSCH G61361 BONO IRISH FALCON/SETZER BLACK PHOENIX

The Gretsch G61361 Irish Falcon is a single-cutaway, 17" hollowbody electric with laminated maple construction, two-piece maple neck, ebony fingerboard, mother-of-pearl hump-block position markers, Filter'Tron pickups, and "tone-switch" circuitry with Master Volume. Finished in Irish Green, it's accented with a gold G tailpiece, gold hardware, gold sparkle binding, gold Grover machine heads, and a pickguard graphic declaring "The Goal is Soul."



The Brian Setzer Black Phoenix features a 17" body with 1959 Trestle body bracing, two TV Jones Classic Filter'Tron pickups, "Hot-Rod" circuitry, Adjusto-matic bridge, Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, and Grover machine heads. Its gloss black nitro finish is accented by silver sparkle body, neck, and headstock binding. For more, go to gretsch.com.



KORG TM-40

Korg's TM-40 is a multi-function digital tuner and metronome in a single, compact, package. Designed as a practice tool for wind, string, keyboard, guitar and other instruments, it allows players to use the tuner and metronome functions simultaneously or independently. Visit korg.com.



PEAVEY CLASSIC SERIES AMPS

Peavey Classic Series amps feature three 12AX7 preamp tubes and four EL84 power amp tubes and are available in two 50-watt designs as well as a 30-watt combo and 30-watt head. All include footswitchable channel selection



“Okay, let’s plug it in and get it over with,” I thought to myself. The nearest six-string victim, a recent Gibson Les Paul Junior with Rio Grande Bluesbar and Jazzbar pickups, could not escape before a George Ls cable linked it, with no mercy, to the Valve Junior. The red “On” switch was clicked and the volume knob was set at 12 o’clock.

A slight hum from the amp indicated it was ready, and an A chord was struck.

Wait a minute... What’s this? Smooth distortion... super-clear note definition? Let me try that again. E chord. Decent low-end response. This can’t be. A quick Freddie King solo. Nice sustain on the notes. Turn up the volume, more grind. Turn it down, nice warm jazzy sounds from the neck pickup. What’s the list price? \$199? They sent the wrong amp!

Next up was a newer Fender American hardtail Strat with DiMarzio Virtual Vintage pickups. The first test is the check for decent cluck in the notch 4 position. Dang! Robert Cray, get on out of town.

Where’s that other box? This one held the Valve Special, which has a 10” speaker instead of the Junior’s 8”, and has six more knobs and two more switches on front. While the Junior gets by with just the On switch and a Volume knob (like a Fender Champ), the Special has Gain, Treble, Middle, Bass, DSP Mute, DSP dial, Reverb, Master Volume, and Standby.

The Standby is a nice touch that should increase power tube life, while the Master Volume and Gain controls allow a wider range of distortion at wider volume levels than the Junior. The three-band EQ is also useful for dealing with guitars of various tonal responses, while a separate Reverb knob allows for precise adjustment of this effect – most commonly used by vintage guitar players. Although this reverb does sound distinctly digital, it’s fairly warm and devoid of that annoying “plink” sound some have on the initial attack.

Epiphone added three common DSP modes to this amp: Delay, Chorus, and Flanger. Mounted on the same dial, it’s only possible to use one effect at a time. Each effect has a setting that clicks in rather than being continuous. The Delay has eight settings that go from over a second down to a quick echo that could be described as “hyper reverb.” The attack and treble fade out on the Delay, so it’s more like a vintage echo unit than a strictly digital delay, and it sounds fairly warm.

The Chorus has four settings, going from Pretenders to rotating speaker. Again, the effect is fairly warm. The Flanger also has four settings for different speeds. While all three effects do introduce some noise into the mix, the Flanger introduces the most, and was my least favorite in terms of sound quality. However, it’s there if you



need it, and clicking the DSP Mute button eliminates virtually all noise.

Both amps exhibit a surprisingly good sound quality considering their prices, and the same would be true if they each cost twice as much. The Junior has about 85 percent of the sound quality of a good ’50s Champ, while the Special offers the same tones with more bass and presence, courtesy of its larger speaker and box. Compared to boutique and vintage amps, both do give up points in shimmer, bass depth, and definition, and just plain prettiness of the treble notes. But they don’t give up many points. Will these amps make you sell your point-to-point treasure? Very unlikely. But if you have a solidstate practice amp shoved under the desk in your home office, it’s time to call the recycler. Also, because of the variety of distortion levels available at low volume and their great note definition, these would both make great home recording amps. Buy one before someone in the accounting department at Epiphone comes to their senses. – **Bob Dragich**

GEARIN’ UP

and reverb, as well as three-band EQ, and are outfitted with Blue Marvel loudspeakers. Read more at peavey.com.

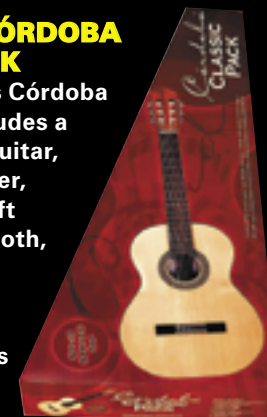
PLANET WAVES PREMIUM POLISH

Planet Waves Premium Polish uses a three-step system to protect electric guitars, acoustic guitars, basses, and mandolins. All three are in PVC bottles that the company says will not react with the polish, and are safe on all guitar finishes. Check it out at planetwaves.com.



TORNAVOZ CÓRDOBA CLASSIC PACK

Tornavoz Music’s Córdoba Classic Pack includes a CP110 classical guitar, an electronic tuner, string winder, soft case, polishing cloth, and instructional book with CD. The CD includes musical examples from the book as well as full performances of beloved classical guitar pieces. Visit tornavozmusic.com.



Finally, a Stompbox Synth

Roland GR-20 Guitar Synthesizer

BACK WHEN I WAS a younger and less-diplomatic music journalist, I would often rail in my columns about how guitar synthesizers were too complicated, too gunked up with MIDI stuff, and too keyboard-ish. Baby, we’ve come a long way. Roland’s recently-issued GR-20, I’m happy to say, is really just a big ol’ guitar stompbox – albeit one loaded with *hundreds* of useful synth presets (and if you cover the bottom end, there’s also a GR-20S, optimized for guitar and bass).

While you may wonder why we’re covering a guitar synth in *Vintage Guitar*, this gear category actually goes back nearly 30 years and, of that, Roland has dominated for at least 20 of them. What I like about the GR-20, right off the bat, is that Roland has clearly talked – and listened – to lots of guitar players about what they like or

dislike about older synths. To that end, this new box has a truly user-friendly interface and runs basically like a normal multi-effects processor. The only difference is that you need a Roland GK pickup and cable, which is usually included with the unit – be sure to ask your dealer.

To play the GR-20, you attach the pickup to your electric or steel-string acoustic guitar with double-stick pads, plug in the accompanying synth cable and, with just a little setup, you should be ready to play in a jiffy. I’ve done it loads of times without a problem.

Once you’re in Synth-land, the fun starts. For this entry-level unit, Roland has gotten rid of the scroll-down digital buttons and those dreaded menus, and replaced them with guitarist-friendly knobs. In the upper left face, you’ll see one selector for



ROLAND GR-20 GUITAR SYNTH

Features	Expression pedal, Glide switch, Hold Switch, Patch Link (to interface with other Roland units), multi-instrument presents (piano, organ/keyboard, guitar/bass, brass, winds, strings, synth, voice/pads, ethnic, rhythm/percussion), controls for individual effects (attack, release, chorus, reverb/delay, output).
Price	\$749 (retail).
Contact	Roland Corp, 85 Wythe Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11211, phone (323) 890-3700, rolandus.com .