

LOOK GOOD, SOUND BETTER

BY ALEX HARRELL

Deco designs make a comeback as manufacturers mix old favorites from the Dirty '30s with 21st century technology



Ken Peveler Sales | Ken Peveler and Levy's Leathers | Harvey Levy and Glen Booth

Vintage revivals are nothing new in this industry. But what sets this year's round of resurrections apart from the rest is the recurring theme of art deco-inspired designs from the 1920s and '30s.

"The original guitars from the 1920s weren't that great," said Jim LaPlaca, The Music Link's director of marketing. "So, we took that styling, and we're building a great instrument."

LaPlaca is referring to Recording King's Series 7 line. Recording King was originally a 1930s Montgomery Ward brand; TML brought back its depression-era acoustic guitars 10 years ago. The Series 7 line features Single O body styles with distinctive checkerboard styling, cross lap bracing, and comes in a Tobacco Sunburst finish with art deco-inspired stenciling.

"It's not just having that cool styling but having a really good, quality instrument, too," he said.

Washburn released a remake of the Solo Deluxe — a company model from 1939. The Solo Deluxe features a fully tormented top and bracing to create a vintage tone, according to Gil Soucy, USM Music's vice president and general manager.

"We changed the playability of it because the older ones tend to have a real fat neck, so this one is very playable," he said.

Epiphone Guitars is also making beloved acoustics from the 1930s and modifying them with 21st century innovations to make them sound just as good as they look.

"The Masterbilt Century Collection guitars are like what we used to do in the 1930s and '40s," said Epiphone's brand ambassador, Will "Dr. Epiphone" Jones. "Except now we have the technology to amplify them correctly to where they still sound like a lush, acoustic instrument."

The Masterbilt collection comprises three size varieties of archtop, acoustic-electric guitars: the Olympic, the Zenith and the De Luxe.

"It's a fad right now to play these guitars, so you look cool [and] sound amazing," Jones said. "And unlike paying \$10,000 for a vintage guitar that you're scared to take out of the house, these things are brand new and good to go."

Epiphone replicated them exactly from the '30s to look their age on the outside, according to Jones, but on the inside they feature Epiphone's Deluxe 18:1 Ratio tuner



D'Angelico's Justin Friedman

— making them sound much more accurate. They also have the Shadow NanoFlex HD pickup embedded in the floating bridge system.

“We’re just putting out what we used to make,” Jones put simply. “We’re not posing; we’ve done it before, and [now] we’re doing a modern version that’s even better.”

SHOE STRINGS

On the accessories side, Levy’s Leathers debuted two straps that both evoke and honor the past.

“The running shoe is about the same age as the guitar industry — the rock ‘n’ roll industry — as both started in the 1940s, and both are still going strong, so we thought this was a nice compliment to that,” said Harvey Levy, vice president of Levy’s Leathers.

The Running Shoe Strap features garment leather on the backside of it, catering to electric guitar players.

“This has been a winner as well,” Levy said, referring to the MH17-Billy strap. “This is hemp with complimentary art deco ends on either side that look beautiful on an acoustic guitar.”

And, D’Angelico Guitars re-released Electrozinc Strings ... Sort of.

“They’re brand new,” said Justin Friedman, D’Angelico’s artist relations and marketing rep. “And when I say they’re brand new, they’re not new at all.”

In the late 1930s, founder John D’Angelico worked with John D’Addario and made electro-zinc coated strings — suited for hollow-body guitars — through the local Bethlehem, New York, steel plant. In the mid-60s, the steel plant shut down and D’Angelico died. As a result, the strings essentially went extinct, Friedman explained.

“It wasn’t until the last few months that we rekindled our relationship with D’Addario and found a steel plant in Europe to replicate exactly what the Bethlehem steel plant did,” he continued. “And not only replicate but improve; the process and technology are so much better now.”

BEFORE & AFTER

Although not from the depression-era of guitars, Supro and TKL both revived old favorites at The 2017 NAMM Show.

While Supro was founded in 1935, it went



Epiphone's Will "Dr. Epiphone" Jones



EarthQuaker Device's Anna Blumenthal and Joseph Golden with Lisa Bella Donna (center)



Marshall's Nick Bowcott



Line 6's Henri Froelich



Supro's David Koltai

out of business in 1968, according to President David Koltai. But before the company went under, Supro was a “prolific guitar manufacturer” in the '50s and '60s.

“Vintage Supro guitars had a very unique and identifiable art deco look to them,” Koltai said. “However, they were very difficult to play because they’re fairly clunky.”

So, the brand has reissued 10 of the original Supro “reso-glass” guitars.

“They look the same and they sound the same, but they’ve been mechanically redesigned to be considerably more stable and resonant, and more affordable to manufacture,” he said.

Jumping back a few decades, TKL has announced that it’s relaunching Harptone — America’s oldest case company that dates back to 1886, according to Tom Nicholson, product specialist.

“We’ve launched an entire line of historically accurate cases that go all the way back to 1910 with the Harptone name on them,” Nicholson said.

The cases are made in Virginia, and TKL will have a limited number of vintage dealers throughout the United States.

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Vintage guitars and strings weren’t the only things resurrected at this year’s show. The most important element making a comeback in the music



TKL's Tom Nicholson and Tom Dougherty



The Music Link's Chris Lekas and Jim LaPlaca

industry wasn't necessarily revamped archtops or upgraded tuners.

"This might sound obtuse, but my favorite new product is the enthusiasm I'm seeing for music again at this show because I haven't seen it in a while," said Nick Bowcott, Marshall Amplification's marketing and artist relations director.

"This industry needs people to not only love music, but love to make it. We make the tools that they want to be creative," he continued. "And that's what I'm most excited about — the genuine enthusiasm for wanting to be creative."

And he wasn't the only one who noticed the upbeat energy infecting the show floor.

"The main trend we're trying to set is facilitating the way people make music and to aid them as musicians by giving them the tools they need in simple and easy-to-use formats," said Henri Froelich, Line 6's media marketing manager.

Even manufacturers were pumped up.

"There's a lot of really creative people here and also people that are so passionate about the pedals, which are built by people who are super into playing," said Anna Blumenthal, sales and artist relations rep at EarthQuaker Devices, which released its modulated delay pedal — the Space Spiral — as well as updated versions of its Bit Commander Levitation, Organizer, Hoof and Cloven Hoof pedals.

"I believe you get what you give," Bowcott said. "And what I'm getting from people is that they're excited to be here for the right reasons." **MI**



Schecter's Ashley McCade, Jake Handler and Christina Godepski



D'Addario's Steve Mucciolo



Daisy Rock's Tish Ciravolo



USM Music's Gil Soucy