

Ted Greene on Guitar Amps

From a letter written to Allan Whiteman, August 03, 1990

Transcribed and edited for clarity by Dan Sawyer

with additional comments by Allan Whiteman

I tried to make this more readable and clear up the meaning. Occasionally I added words for meaning [usually with brackets]. I'm using Ted's spelling of "tremolo." Use of the word "very expensive"—prices are outdated, of course. "Don't tell dealers" lol! And I added consistency with the use of parentheses in prices.

— Editor's note

Dear Allan,

8-3-90

My sincere regrets at not responding sooner. I've had a torrent of responsibilities and other, which have made [me] think as each week rolled around, 'maybe this week I'll get to Danny Boy - Bill Evans style,' but alas....

I'm holding hope for next month (actually this one, August) as having more time for me. I wasn't going to cash your \$40 check till I filled your request, but I noticed the date and figured my bank might not take it if I wait too long so I'll put it through today.

As for your second letter on amps, let me try to answer your questions.

1) Favorites:

A) Fender Tweed amps →

- * Warm mid-range
- * Edgy or silky highs depending on speaker,
- * Gorgeous tremelo
- * Not as tight bass as I usually would want, but with the right speakers maybe.
- * *Very* expensive (\$1000's for some)

[note:] The 4-10" Bassman [is] about to be reissued.

B) Fender 'Browns' and golden colors [amps] [models with] (controls on front) 1959 to 1963

The quirkiest amps ever. Can sound out of this world or hard and terrible. Factors: these amps are far *less* midrange-y, from the Super (2-10"s) on up: Pro 1-15", Vibrasonic 1-15" JBL, and Concert 4-10"s. [They have] deep bass, lots of power, gobs of *lower* treble (not the extreme sparkle of the tweeds and others, and sometimes with certain guitars, [they] have more upper midrange than I wish. [They] also [have] a *most* unusual 'Vibrato.' (It's more like a tremelo (volume shift) with a tone shift... almost like a Leslie speaker.

The medium small ‘browns’ (the [Fender] Deluxe and Vibrolux) are sweet amps with the most gorgeous tremelo circuit. The Deluxe has very little bass and a truly beautiful midrange with the right speakers. (Jensen Custom Design from Fender are out of this world.) The Vibrolux has a nice deep bass with a JBL or similar [speaker]. Usually a JBL can be a bit harsh for guitar, but not in the ‘Brown’ Fenders. The Vibroverb is Fender’s first reverb amp and *very* expensive (\$1500... about to be reissued).

Recommendations:

\$300-400	Deluxe	} wonderful amps with certain guitars and the prices are skyrocketing fast on these
\$400-500	Vibrolux	
\$600-800	Super	
\$900-1200	Concert	

C) The [Fender] ‘Blackface’ ‘Pre-CBS’ 1963 to 196? (black face plate, silver grill cloth) Reverb Amps all are wonderful, but my favorite is the Vibroverb (1-15"). [These] are hard to find... not many [were] made. [They can be] expensive; (\$900 and up). What a *sound* though; deep bass, clear midrange (not *too* much here either), gorgeous top-end [and] sweet, deep reverb.

Also *very* close [to my favorite is]: the Pro Reverb 2-12"s (approximately \$600 and up). The ultimate [amp] in a way, is the Twin Reverb 2-12"s but make sure you can dial in the mid-range to your liking. These and the Super Reverbs often have too much mid for some [people]. The same [can be said] with the smaller Deluxe Reverb (\$550 and up) and the Vibrolux Reverb (\$600 and up). But see below:

D) The Fender Silverface (silver face-plate), 1968 to present [1990]

Allan, *these* are the bargain. Many of the comments above apply to these but these amps don’t have the snob appeal status. They’re often half the price of equivalent earlier models [and] can have an even nicer top-end (*with* the right guitar). And, sleepers abound. Example: the Princeton Reverb 1-10" (replaced with a heavy duty 10), can have the prettiest reverb and fine tremelo too. Not that the black face doesn’t [also have these things], it’s just that for \$150 versus \$300 and up, it’s worth thinking about.

Whew... Fenders! Don't tell dealers, but keep your eyes out also for old Ampeg amps such as the Reverbrocket; the prettiest reverb sound going. Walter Woods [amps]? Emmett Chapman uses [them] with [the] Stick. [I] don't know. I love warm sounds and haven't tried enough solid state [amps], but one of the best amps I ever heard was an early 1980's Fender prototype solid state 200 watt amp. [I] think they gave up on it. But try and see.

Negotiate if you think the price is too high on older amps and make sure the seller can and will back his claims of originality of parts or lack of same as factored into his price. Old amps are currently absolutely going berserk price-wise, so if you hear one you love, buy now if price is right. They'll all be [worth] double in two or three more years easily.

Hope this helps and hope to ship you some music soon.

Ted Greene

Additional comments from Allan:

1) Ted refers to "Danny Boy – Bill Evans style"

He had mentioned to me once that he wanted to work out such an arrangement, and I said I'd be really interested in that one, since I love Bill Evans. He would say from time to time that he was working on it, but wasn't getting it the way he wanted. At one point I had an idea: why not send a tape of whatever he had, and talk about the places he was getting stuck, and we could look at it together. That sounded like a lot of fun to me. He said he really liked the idea, but never followed through.

2) About the "\$40 check"—

I studied through the mail with Ted, and he charged \$10 a lesson. I couldn't stand it. This was the best guitar player I'd ever hear in my life—by a lot—and he was charging nothing. So I would send larger checks and just ask him to send more material than he ordinarily would. I think it made him uncomfortable, and would say he was "agonizing" over what to send me. In spite of my reassurances that "If it's interesting to you, it'll be interesting to me," and "if you like playing it, I'll like playing it," I think he never really felt right about it.

Dear Allan,

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I'm holding hope for the next month (actually this one = Aug.) as having more time for me I wasn't going to cash you # to check ^{with a fitted your} but I noticed the date & figured my bank might not take it if I wait too long so I'll put it thru to you.

As for your 2nd letter on amps, let me try to answer your questions.

- ① Favorites: a) Fender Tweed Amps → warm midrange, edgy or sobby highs depending on speakers, gorgeous tremel not so tight a bass I usually would want, but w/ the right speakers maybe. Very expensive \$1000's for some
- + 126 ^{goldman} about to be reviewed
- Fender 'Browns' (golden control on front) '59-'63

The quirkiest amp ever, can sound out of this world or hard & terrible. Factors: these amps are far less midrangey, from the Super (2-10"5) on up (Pro 1-15", Vibrasonic 1-15" 30L, Concert 4-10"5). Deep bass, lots of power, gobs of lower treble (not that extreme sparkle of the Tweeds & others & sometimes w/ certain guitars, more upper-mid than I wish. Also a most unusual "VIBRATE" (more like a tremelo w/ a tone shift....) almost like a fastie speaker. The medium & small 'browns' (the Deluxe & Vibratone) are sweet amps w/ the most gorgeous tremelo circuit. The Deluxe has very little bass & a truly beautiful midrange w/ the right speaker (Jensen Custom Design from Japan are out of this world)

The Vibratone⁻² has a nice deep pass w/ a JB similar. Usually JB can be a bit harsh for guitar, but not in the 'Brown' Fenders. The Vibroverb Fenders 15+ reverb amp and very expensive \$1500... about to be reissued.

c) The 'Blackface' Reverb Amps - CBS '63-6? Silver Face

Recommendations:
\$3-400 DELUXE
\$7-500 VIBRALUX
\$6-800 SUPER
\$9-1200 CONCERT
WUNDERFUL AMPS w/ CERTAIN GUITARS

All are wonderful but my favorite is the VIBROVERB (1-15")... hard to find.. not many made expensive \$900+ up ... what a sound tho' deep bass, clear midrange (not too much) gorgeous top-end, sweet deep reverb

and the prices are skyrocketing fast on these

Close: the Pro Reverb 2-12" \$600+ up

the ultimate in a way is the TWIN REVERB 2-12" but make sure you can dial in the midrange to your liking; these & the Super Reverb often have too much mid for me. Some w/ the smaller Deluxe Reverb (\$550+ Vibratone Reverb (\$600+ up). But see below:

d) The Silverface (plate) Fenders: Alas, these are the bargain. Many of the comments above apply to these but these amps don't have the knob appeal status. They're often 1/2 the price & equivalent earlier models, can have an even nicer top-end with the right guitar. And sleepers abound. EX: The PRINCETON REVERB 1-10" (replaced with a heavy duty 10) can have the prettiest Reverb & tone to boot. Not that the Blackface doesn't, it's just that for \$150 versus \$300+ up, it's worth thinking about.

Whew... Fenders! ... Don't tell dealers, it keep your eye out also for old Ampeg amps such as the Reverb Rocket. The prettiest reverb sound going. Walter Woods? Emmett Chapman w/ Stick... don't know. I love warm sounds & haven't

tried enough solid state, but one of the best amps I ever heard was an early 80's fender prototype solid state 21 ~~7-17-15~~ 200 watt amp. Think they gave up on it. But try & see. Negotiate if you think price is too high on older amps & make sure the seller can & will back his claims of originality of parts or lack of same as factored into his price. Old amps are currently absolutely going berserk pricewise, so if you hear one you love, buy now if price is right. They'll all be double in 2 or 3 more years easily.

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