1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You Think

by visserman » 01 Aug 2015, 12:12

Okay it is Strats again because there is that much variation in how they sound, play and look like.

How do we know what a 50s Strat sounds like, thinking most of you have not played one?
Well we have the recordings of the some well-known 50s and 60s artists. Listening to their guitar sound you have to anticipate how the sound was recorded in how it was treated before It arrived on the recording. It may even be enhanced later on, to appeal to today's recording standards. Not easy really as adding a bit of brightness to the overall recording will alter the sound of the guitar a lot.

Maybe a good way to get an idea what those guitars sounded like is to listen to various artists and see how their guitars sound like and see if there are similarities in sound.

I have been interested in the Strat sound for a long long time, and there are a few guitarplayers who I have in mind when it comes to that sound.
One of the being Mark Knopfler and the sound he gets on the first two Dire Straight albums. Mark plays typically on the in-between setting between middle and bridge pick-up. Mark's guitar is a 60s one so not a 50s one, but it is a good idea for how a typical Strat can sound like. Well is it typical?

Another distinctive sounding Strat is Robert Cray's album "Strong Persuader" I mention this one because the sound of the recording is cristal clear, Robert's sound is typically the opposite of Mark's: In-between setting between middle and neck pick-up. Is Cray's a 50s Strat on that ablum? I do not think so but again, it is a typical sound which can serve as an example.

For a good 50s example listen to Buddy Holly and there we get it: Bright tone on all pick-up settings. Much depth? hard to tell, but the sound is clear.

I could mention more examples but I think these three will be very well-known guitar players for most of you.
I leave Gilmore's sound on purpose, as his is processed and treated, and works well for the Pink Floyd Sound, and is not pure as such.

I have a theory about Fender and the 1950s sound: They have used that sound as a template across the board, and anyone building Strats and copies after 1983 has done so, and is still doing today.
Where do I base this observation on? On what I see and hear in the cheap copies I see with my students and my own mod. on another cheap Strat: Most of these pick-ups do sound smooth and bright and most of them carry that distinctive Strat sound.

When I say distinctive I mean sounding like any of the three examples I mentioned before.
Fender during CBS made changes to the sound (and look) the guitars from this period do not sound bad, but different. Again, I have a few of that period and they do sound different, and you can also hear on some 70s recordings similar things.

Of course, any guitar is different and sounds unique, you really need to play and listen. Is it important that a Strat sounds like a 50s one? No, it is just a template for your own thinking when comparing sounds. When the guitar sounds and feels good it is great, that is all what matters. I just find it interesting to see so many similarities in certain Strats.

I think since Fender Musical Instruments took off we see less variation in the sound and feel of the regular Strats, not a bad thing really. They do alter the look from time to time, go back to the past, change a few things etc.

Okay just a few thoughts really, would be great to hear from anyone of you how you see some of this. Oh you do not have to love Strats off course, but most of us will like the Strat, we really like all guitars. I just tend to know more about Strats compared to Gretches or Riks because they are so common. Funny eh? Think of the early 60s and how rare Strats were among European guitar players? Fender was a relatively new company then and did not have any of the distr. network they have these days. Gibson on the other had, was a much older company, and there guitars were quite common in Europe during the 50s and early 60s.

visserman

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Pieces Of The Night** » 01 Aug 2015, 16:29

If you watch the link below you'll see the video dispel a lot of Fender myths you'll see them build strats with 3 piece bodies

Fender factory tour from 1959! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nswcAPvH0P8

also

The First Fender Strat with George Gruhn https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8CvjNxCIO8

Pieces Of The Night

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **visserman** » 03 Aug 2015, 14:30

Thank you Pieces, just watched first link and read some of the comments. It really is a great clip of that factory. Interesting to see, what I saw was what I knew from what I have read but had not seen it in action. Just watching and thinking you see a lot of things which are not any different today: These guitars were made a cheaply as possible. Similar with the new ones and the copies we see today. Think about the work conditions!!!

2nd link: The book mentioned at 9.20 is great, lots of good pictures, another great book is Tom Wheeler's Strat books, there are a few. I have had one and there is a cd with a clip of Leo talking about, not sure what it was, bodyshape or something like that. A great book to read as well.

Here another link to a '54 Strat:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9imsGDdQvpg

About the fretwear: The finish may not have always been that good or unevenly applied hence it wearing out and you will start to see fingerwear.

I have similar things on my 70s Strat but mainly on the body: The finish is thin in some places because it being applied unevenly. Even the Gold Strat does have some of those issues even though it was supposed to be a Custom model for CBS, Lead II----similar things, the finish cracking and showing the undercover because of how it was applied. Mojo or.....? I think it tells you of what went on at Fullerton factory at the time.

visserman

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Pieces Of The Night** » 03 Aug 2015, 21:15

Guitars somehow go from shiny and new to 10 years later being junk to being 25 years old somehow become magical in peoples eyes. I reminded of the story of how Clapton built Blackie and how he bought a bunch of 50's

strats for like $200 or 300 each. Ten years after that those same guitars were in the thousands and now they are tens of thousands if not more. Same with Danelectros. People pay thousands for a vintage guitar made out of masonite and particle board and consider them great yet the reissues which are high quality in terms of hardware,finish,fretwork etc are looked down on. It makes no sense to me.

Pieces Of The Night

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Pieces Of The Night** » 03 Aug 2015, 22:01

As far the the best Start sound a standard strat through a Bassman seems to be the best to me because it very versatile.

Pieces Of The Night

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **visserman** » 06 Aug 2015, 13:48

Well I guess any traditional Fender amp is good to check for the Strat tone. The second link you gave is a Twin, and yes, it gives a good idea how a Strat can sound like. Here another link, more images and stories from the Fender Factory, ever noticed that so many 50s Sunbursts seem to be much darker than the later ones? I think there is something like the 50s, 60s and 70s Sunburst, similar as with Les Pauls. Of course, these days those looks get copied.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKZgVZQEJMY

Have a listen to how some players featured in the video can make the Strat almost unstratlike with a tone much darker and closer to a Gibson than that typical bright Strat sound.
About prices etc. Well it is all about market and how the mood of the market is. Has little to do with the guitar.

Still, it is good to check out older guitars to see what they feel- and play like compared to newer ones. I think we are all interested in that. As how the market functions, I also think we all think that is a bit unrealistic, but it is just a fact and there is little we can do about.

Any stories of people who have tried older Strats and other related things they may want to share, or maybe other older guitars which may fit a similar category?

visserman

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **zentropa** » 06 Aug 2015, 17:57

Viss,

I've always felt the "ultimate" tones were often based upon two different styles, namely before and after overdrive became desirable. Often the signature sounds are based upon before and after these times.

I tend to really like 50's sounding strats for neck/middle but tend to prefer a 60's sound for the bridge but I tend to gravitate towards the extremes: on my strat I want my cleans to be really glassy, chimey, with a touch of quack and when I go dirty I want it to be able to cut and get some punch and grit. My strat is set up with a Kinman '62 in the bridge and kinman '59's in the neck/mid. I definitely use these sounds like a template as you spoke of.

As for the strat design post-'83, it kind of gets all over the place. Many cheap strats and strat copies in the late-80's/early 90's had really terrible ceramic pickups that had the quackiness but were horribly harsh and lacked dynamic response imo. This somewhat corresponds with interest rates dropping (vs. the early 80's) and the dollar weakening on the international currency market. e.g. when it was 380-400 yen to the dollar, we really got some killer guitars from Japan here. By 1990 or so it was closer to 140 yen to the dollar and production had shifted to Korea and Mexico with lower grade electronics. Also worth noting is that around this time people fell in love with pickups like EMG selects and Lace Sensors and strat tone gets all hazy until the late 90's when there was a return to the template tones (and vintage guitars began to really skyrocket in value).

> *Guitars somehow go from shiny and new to 10 years later being junk to being 25 years old somehow become magical in peoples eyes.*

This is actually my "Bedroom Poster at 16" theory. The midlife crisis sets in when the kids move out, the mortgage is paid off, career is in a stable spot, etc. and people have a lot more free time and disposable income than they have in a long time. Who was on the poster that they had on their bedroom wall at 16 and what guitar did they play? 25-30 years later there's a massive spike in demand and prices on those models. This seemed to happen with Les Pauls about 10-15 years ago (vintage ones more than quadrupled in value, Jimmy Page being the bedroom poster). More recently there's been a huge value spike in 80's super strats (Eddie Van Halen being the bedroom poster), e.g. in 1997 you could get an 80's USA Kramer Baretta for like $100 (but get laughed at for playing one) and by the late 2000's they were $1500+. The Marshall Jubilees (Slash's amp) also had a massive upswing in value around this time (~3X value increase).

I turned 16 in 1994 and there just weren't a lot of guitar heroes to look up to. Alternative/Indie was in full swing and there were a lot of crappy low budget recordings and guitar virtuosity was frowned upon. In 10 years I believe there will be a value upswing for Fender Jaguars and Mustangs and some of the weird oddball 90's fender models (Jagstang, Cyclone, etc.) but I think the big jump will be in effects. I will cringe the day that original Digitech Whammy pedals start going for $1000+ but I predict that will probably happen.

zentropa

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Franzoni** » 11 Sep 2015, 19:50

Great thread....

My first really good guitar (my first one is the 67 coronado in my avatar pic good guitar but not great for loud stuff) was 1962 MIJ reissue Strat ...one of my biggest regrets was selling that guitar and not buying my mates 57 reissue when he was selling his...

I read somewhere that Fender gave the Japanese the original blueprints to work off as they had no manufacturing facilities after buying out CBS....i don't know how close they are to the originals but they are damn good guitars if you get your mitts on one....i agree with Zen about the pickups...back then we didn't have much in the way of aftermarket stuff like pickups...if we had i'd probably still own it.....

Only this afternoon have i finished installing upgraded 50's wiring into my Jap Squier strat with US pickups and an old Jap copy strat ..(might be a Tokai etc... no name on it no electrics or hardware) that a mate of mine gave me

he found when cleaning out his shed.,...i put a set of SD pickups i had in the shed plus Gotoh hardware and the Roland Synth pickup on it ...turned out great....!..i'll try and upload some pics....

Franzoni

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Franzoni** » 11 Sep 2015, 19:53

> *Pieces Of The Night wrote:*
> *Guitars somehow go from shiny and new to 10 years later being junk to being 25 years old somehow become magical in peoples eyes. I reminded of the story of how Clapton built Blackie and how he bought a bunch of 50's strats for like $200 or 300 each. Ten years after that those same guitars were in the thousands and now they are tens of thousands if not more. Same with Danelectros. People pay thousands for a vintage guitar made out of masonite and particle board and consider them great yet the reissues which are high quality in terms of hardware,finish,fretwork etc are looked down on. It makes no sense to me.*

100% Bro.....crazy stuff that's going on with prices. .....just because something is old doesn't mean it's good every time....use your ears folks....

Franzoni

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **zentropa** » 17 Sep 2015, 18:06

> *My first really good guitar (my first one is the 67 coronado in my avatar pic good guitar but not great for loud stuff) was 1962 MIJ reissue Strat ...one of my biggest regrets was selling that guitar and not buying my mates 57 reissue when he was selling his...*
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The '57 and '62 MIJ reissues and photo flames from '92-95 were actually very sought after for their pickups. Those pickups were wound from NOS components from the 60's on machines that were from the 60's. Once word of that got out (~'97 or so, this was the first value spike from ~$350 used up to ~$750), people bought those guitars up like mad and gutted the pickups to restore vintage strats. They sound authentic but just like the old pickups, they are noisy as hell.

When it comes to 80's budget strats, I'm not quite sure why they went with those toneless ceramic pickups. I'm guessing it's a mix between the 80's super strat boom and it being cheaper/easier to manufacture them, but it seemed to happen sort of across the board. Same goes with some other guitars... like some of the post-MIJ epiphones that have covered ceramic buckers that aren't potted and are sealed with hot glue... I really get puzzled as to whether this was supposed to make them hotter or just cheaper, but probably a mix of the two.

I'm still really hit or miss on aftermarket single coils. I know the 80's had extremely limited options. I didn't find a set

I truly loved until 1998 or so. I sort of get the feeling a lot of companies stopped caring about creating the perfect noiseless single coil and just went after chasing the templates + variants (e.g. "hotter wound vintage.")

zentropa

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **Pieces Of The Night** » 18 Sep 2015, 04:14

Dimarzio came up with the Area58,61 and 67 series that are truly noiseless single coil pickups. They're awesome

Pieces Of The Night

Re: 1950s Strat Sound as Ultimate Strat Sound, What Do You T

by **zentropa** » 18 Sep 2015, 05:02

They are pretty good. The Virtual Vintage line preceded those and were probably the best large manufacturer ones in the late 90's. Seymour Duncan noiseless single coils are fairly spew, as well as Fender's.

IMO Kinman has the best noiseless single coils.

I would say at least 50% of the responses I get when I ask someone what their favorite single coil is, is "single coils are supposed to be noisy." I always hate that response.

zentropa