

6 SONGS TO PLAY

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"California Stars"

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TRADITIONAL

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...and more

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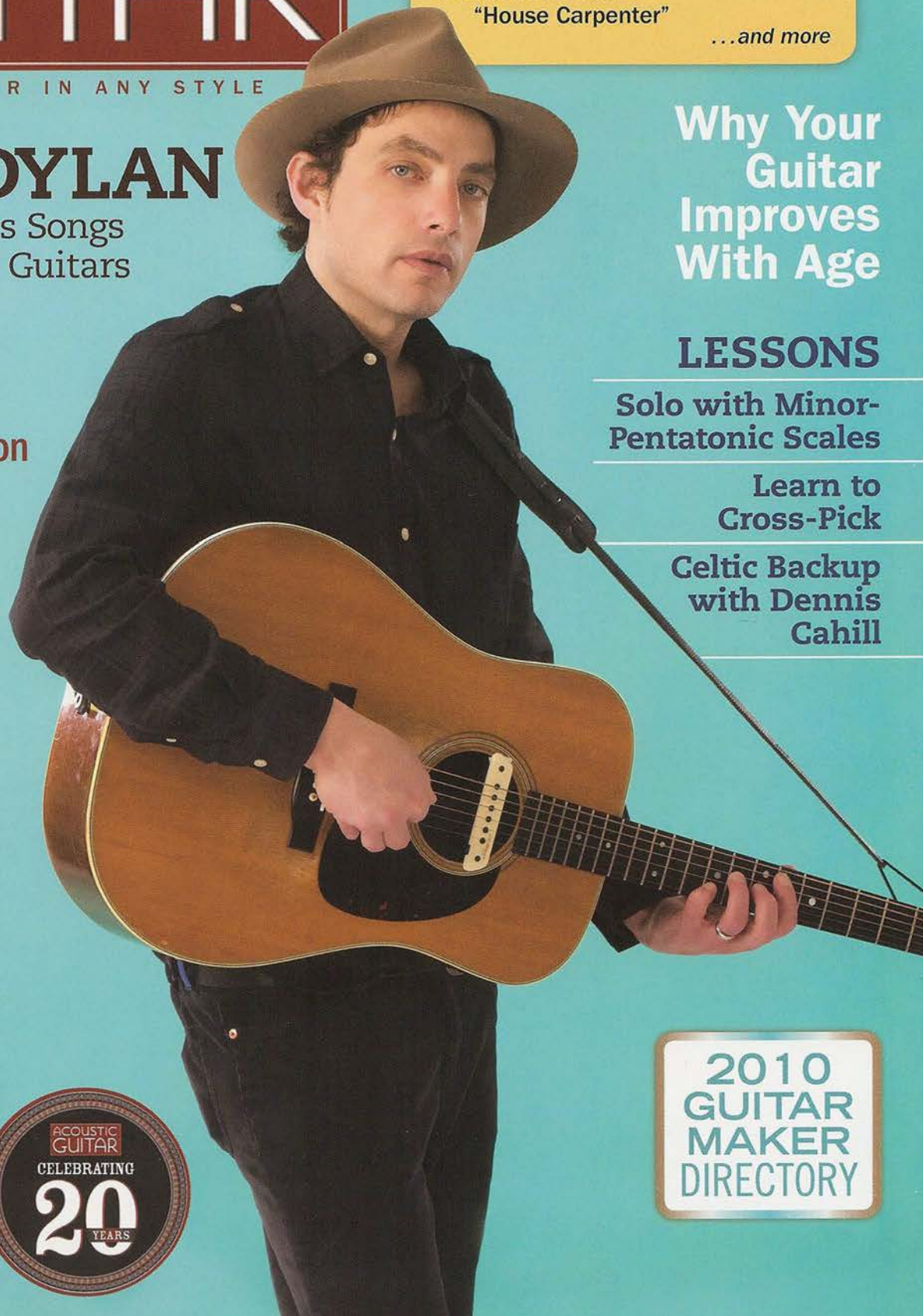
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PHOTOGRAPHER: Jayme Thornton

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GREAT ACOUSTICS

1974 Gibson SJ Deluxe. *By Teja Gerken*

1974 Gibson SJ Deluxe

By Teja Gerken

Some guitarists spend decades chasing their ideal instrument, while others find a guitar they like early in their career and stick with it. Matthew Montfort, who leads the world-fusion group Ancient Future (ancient-future.com), has not only had the same guitar for almost four decades, but has significantly modified the instrument to suit his evolving playing style.

Purchased around 1974 for Montfort by his father when he was attending high school in Denver, Colorado, the Gibson SJ Deluxe pictured here is hardly a collector's dream. Built during Gibson's Norlin-owned period, not generally considered a high point in the company's history, the guitar has a Martin-style square-shoulder dreadnought body that bears little resemblance to Gibson's famous SJ ("Southern Jumbo") models of earlier years. And yet this instrument has not only served Montfort through dozens of recordings and hundreds of concerts, it has helped him develop a unique playing style that merges the sounds of the South Indian vina with that of a flatpicked steel-string guitar.

Having moved to California to study at the Ali Akbar College of Music after graduating from high school, Montfort began studying sitar but decided that he wanted to be able to bend notes on his guitar in the same way that he did on the classic Indian instrument. He had seen pictures of the scalloped-fingerboard Wechter guitar used by John McLaughlin with Shakti, and Montfort began looking for a local luthier to modify his trusty Gibson in a similar way. This involved scooping out the area between the frets so he could do bends by pushing down on the strings, not pulling or pushing them to the side. In 1978, Montfort met Ervin Somogyi, who was still early in his career as a luthier, and together they began experimenting—first lightly scalloping the guitar's existing rosewood fingerboard, then installing a scalloped replacement fingerboard made out of ebony.

To further facilitate string bending, Montfort uses extremely light strings, with gauges ranging from .0095 to .042, on the guitar, and Somogyi modified the stock Gibson bridge to accommodate a wider and highly compensated saddle for improved intonation. Montfort amplifies the guitar with a combination of a Dean Markley soundhole pickup and an old Barcus Berry Hot Dot. To see video of Montfort playing this guitar, check out AcousticGuitar.com/GibsonDeluxe. **AC**



TEJA GERKEN



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1974 Gibson SJ Deluxe With video.

By Teja Gerken

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