

Great Gretsch
Chet Atkins
guitars from the 50's

*Quit
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Serie



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Introduction

In the late fifties, Gretsch Chet Atkins guitars were among the absolute top-of-the-bill all-American hollowbody guitars in the world, and the flag-ship 6120 even were to become one of the most popular and sought-after guitars ever. Until this day, the Chet Atkins series is still the most successful Gretsch guitar series ever and the 6120 is still the most popular Gretsch guitar model ever.

This booklet aims at describing these great Gretsch Chet Atkins guitars in a nutshell, and in an easy-to-read way. It covers not only key guitar specifications, but also famous guitarists who played these guitars, including (of course) Chet Atkins as the most important endorsing guitarist. It also covers information such as a brief Gretsch Guitars company history, and Gretsch amplifiers from that era.

The booklet contains many great pictures derived from the ClassicRockGuitars Gretsch collection, completed with additional information from other sources. It was not intended as a reference guide or to be exhaustive in any respect, but merely as a pleasure to read and complete within 30 minutes. We hope you will enjoy this booklet!

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Gretsch Guitars

In 1916, Fred Gretsch moved the Gretsch Manufacturing Company, founded by his father Friedrich Gretsch who produced drums, banjos and tambourines, to 60 Brooklyn, NY. By 1920, Gretsch had become the largest music instrument manufacturing factory in the world. In 1933, Gretsch introduced a line of acoustic archtop guitars, the Gretsch American Orchestra series and a line of acoustic flattop guitars including the Broadkaster. In 1939, Gretsch introduced his first electric guitar – the Electromatic – and his first line of Synchronatic guitars. In 1930, Gretsch had also opened a Midwest branch in Chicago, Ill to cover the west part of the US. During WWII, Gretsch produced some musical instruments, but concentrated predominantly on the government war contracts. In the late '40's, new archtops such as the New Yorker and flattops such as the Rancher were introduced; in the early '50's, hollowbodies such as the Electro/Country Club and the White Falcon, and new solidbodies such as the Duo Jet, Jet Firebird, and Roundup were introduced.

Separation of the guitar factory and the drums factory

In the mid-sixties, Gretsch sold almost 1.5 million instruments per year, and delivery times for popular guitar models such as the 6120 Nashville and the 6122 Country Gentleman were one year or more. To create a greater guitar production capacity and to shorten delivery times, Gretsch moved their drums department from their Brooklyn factory to another facility.

The Baldwin era

In 1967, the Gretsch Company was sold to Baldwin, one of the largest music instrument manufacturing companies in the world at the time. Without the dedication of the Gretsch family, the company and reputation of Gretsch began to falter. In 1985, Fred W. Gretsch bought the Gretsch Company back from Baldwin and moved it to Savannah, Georgia where the company successfully introduced a whole new line of guitars on the market.



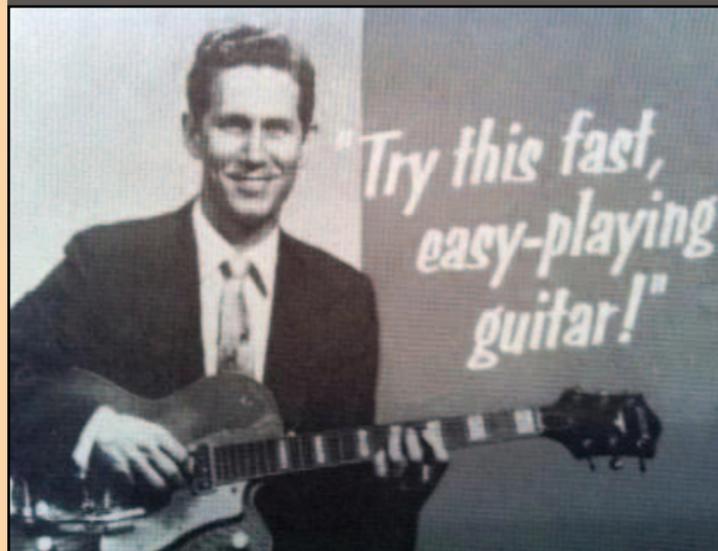
Jimmie Webster

Jimmie Webster, a professional pianist, guitarist and guitar innovator, had joined Gretsch in 1939 as their leading guitar designer and engineer. Jimmie played guitar like he was playing his piano, with a special tapping technique of his left hand. He invented many guitar features and gadgets such as the back pad, the tone muffler, trestle bracing, the space control bridge, the floating sound unit, and the stereo guitar principles. Jimmie Webster became the ambassador for Gretsch in the fifties and early sixties, promoting Gretsch at guitar shows worldwide.



Chet Atkins

Chet Atkins, a famous American guitarist in the fifties and sixties, created the smooth country music guitar style, more commonly known as the Nashville sound, which made him world famous. He received fourteen Grammy awards as well as the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, nine Country Music awards, and was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Chet Atkins made over 50 solo albums (for a brief selection refer to the Appendix) and he recorded with artists such as Hank Snow, The Boston Pops Orchestra, Les Paul, Jerry Reed and Mark Knopfler. In 1954, Chet Atkins became a design advisor for Gretsch who wanted to introduce a Chet Atkins Signature line of electrical guitars into the market. The combination of Chet Atkins'



ideas and Webster's guitar construction know how resulted in a distinctive line of guitars that put Gretsch "on the map" and would become the most successful guitar model series within Gretsch ever. Chet Atkins died in 2001 at age 77.

Chet Atkins developed various instruments for Gretsch such as the popular Country Gentleman and other Atkins-branded Gretsches such as the single-cutaway 6119 Tennessean, a stripped-down and hence lower-priced version of the 6120. All Chet Atkins models had specific characteristics, including a deep cutaway; twin, built-in DeArmond Dynasonic pickups (later replaced by Gretsch Filter'Tron or Super'Tron pickups); built-in Bigsby vibrato tailpiece; metal bridge saddle and nut; shorter scale; slim, fast "Miracle" neck; rosewood fingerboard with engraved western motif MOP (later replaced by (hump) blocks and thumbnail markers) and gold plated hardware.





The Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody

The first model Gretsch introduced in the Chet Atkins series was the 6120 Hollowbody, which would become the flagship guitar of the Gretsch guitar company until this day. The first 6120 model was a real western guitar, with engraved western motives such as a “burned” G-brand into the lower bass bout; MOP steerhead logo on the peghead; steerhead, cacti and (later models) fences engraved fret marker inlays on the fingerboard, and a Chet Atkins “signpost” signature on the pickguard (another idea of Gretsch’s engineer Jimmie Webster). The 6120 prototype was even equipped with the ornate cowboy wagon-train engraved buckle tailpiece and fancy Synchro-Sonic (Melita) bridge from the 6130 “cowboy” Roundup, but for the production model these were replaced by the Bigsby tremolo tailpiece and the bridge. The 6120 had a vivid western orange finish (referred to as “The color of a Flagstaff sunset”).



To complete the western image, the 6120 Hollowbody could be delivered with a tooled and jeweled leather cowboy strap, and in a white “rawhide effect” cowboy case with a steerhead and cacti tooled leather bound top.





The 6120 had a single round cutaway, 16 inch maple body and neck, an arched laminated spruce top (in 1955 changed to maple) with a stylized G-logo on the lower bass bout, double bound top and back, double bound f-holes and all gold hardware. A 22-fret bound rosewood fingerboard with MOP western motif engraved block inlays, bound blackface headstock with steerhead/logo inlay, open Grover tuners, adjustable bridge, and a fixed arm (swivel arm in later models) Bigsby vibrato tailpiece. A raised gold pickguard with Chet Atkins' sign post signature and Gretsch logo. Two DeArmond Dynasonic pickups, three knobs on the lower treble bout, one knob on the upper treble bout, and one switch on the upper bass bout. The 6120 could also be delivered in cherry red finish.

Chet Atkins TV-appearances with the **Gretsch 6120**

Chet Atkins appeared on US national TV many times in the mid to late fifties, playing his Gretsch 6120 or 6121. On YouTube, many great clips can be found of these appearances, most of them in a country & western like setting to emphasize the western cowboy image of the Gretsch Chet Atkins Hollowbody or Solidbody, including the following 1954/1955 clips:



Arkansas Traveler



Franky & Johnny (with 6121)



Mr. Sandman

Chet Atkins would do many TV appearances in the years to come using the Chet Atkins 6119 Tennessean, the – 6120 Hollowbody, the – 6121 Solidbody or the – 6122 Country Gentleman.



Chet's Fingerpicking Technique

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It starts with a D major chord and features a melody of eighth notes. The bottom staff is in bass clef, showing a bass line with a mix of single notes and block chords. The notation includes various fingerings and fret numbers (e.g., 5, 1, 2, 3, 2, 0, 2, 0) to illustrate the specific fingerpicking technique.

Chet Atkins had a distinct fingerpicking technique. Chet's guitars were set up with a very high action, which allowed the strings to vibrate without rattling against the fingerboard for a cleaner sound, but which is more difficult to play. He practiced his tremolo and vibrato to strengthen his left hand's little finger. He was well known for his strong, alternating bass line in his music, using one chord for the bass line and shifted octaves from one beat to another and back, alternating between two octaves.

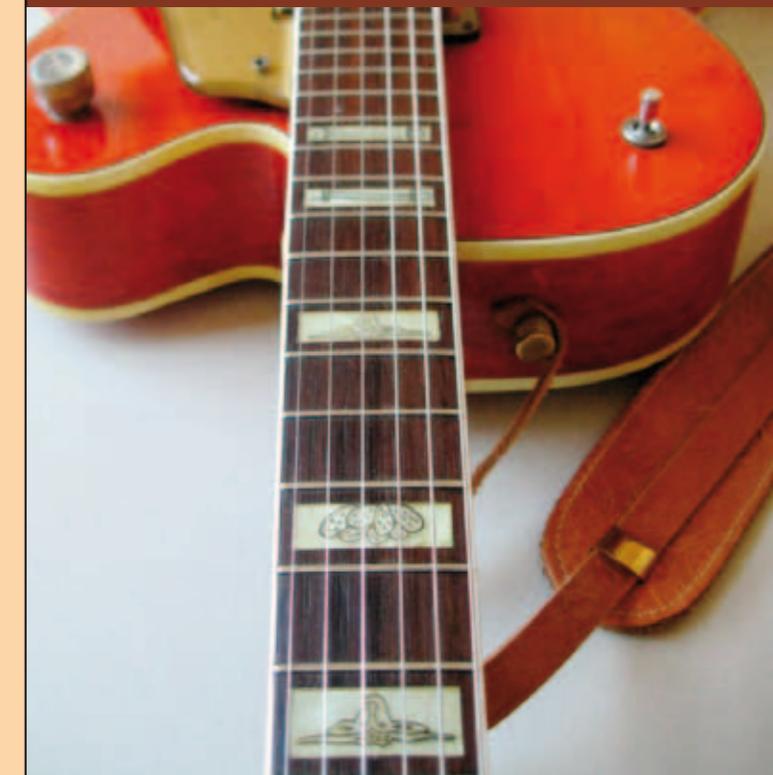
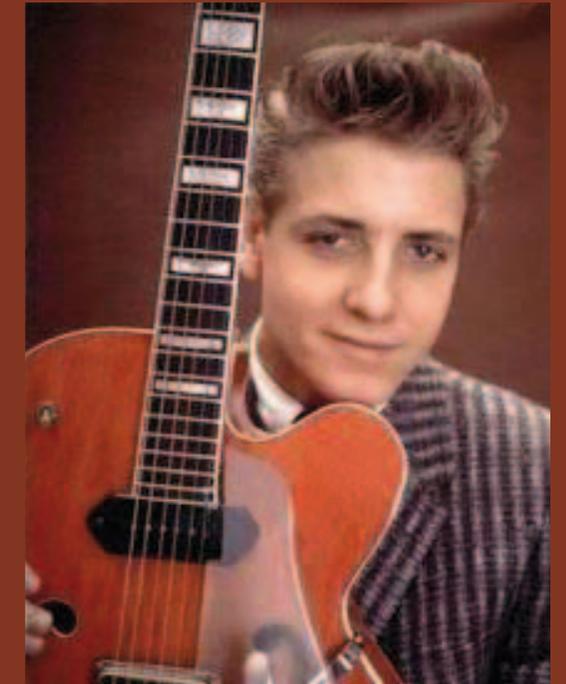
Chet would either use a thumb pick or a regular pick between the thumb and the index finger to play both block chords and single note lines at the same time. He would often use his left-hand thumb fret for the 5th and 6th strings. He created the melody with the pink, ring, and middle fingers while he kept the bass line going, which is a very difficult technique. This technique is illustrated by the part of See See Rider depicted above.



The Eddie Cochran Gretsch 6120

Eddie Cochran had – with his distinct rockabilly guitar music – a great influence on the rock & roll music of the late fifties and early sixties. Eddie formed with Hank Cochran (no family) the Cochran Brothers in 1955, but started his solo career one year later. His breakthrough came with “Twenty Flight Rock” which he performed in the movie “The Girl Can’t Help It”. Eddie modified his ‘55 Gretsch 6120 to create a special, individual sound. He changed the neck DeArmond Dynasonic pickup for a Gibson P-90 pickup. Eddie was also the first guitarist to use an unwound third string for easier bends. He died, 21 years of age, in a tragic car accident on tour in the UK in 1960 with Gene Vincent.

Despite his short career, Eddie had a significant influence on rock and roll music. Various artists or bands such as The Who, The Beatles, Brian Setzer, Rory Gallagher and others were influenced by his guitar techniques and rock and roll music. Eddie Cochran's music is well known, including “C'mon Everybody”, “Summertime Blues” and “Three Steps to Heaven” which became a number 1 hit in the UK one month after his death. Paul McCartney, who is a big fan of Eddie Cochran, played “Twenty Flight Rock” when doing his audition to John Lennon for joining the Beatles. To recognize his contribution to the popularity of the 6120, Gretsch introduced in 2010 a 6120 Eddie Cochran Signature model and – in addition – produced a limited number of exclusive 6120 Eddie Cochran Tribute guitars in the US Custom shop.



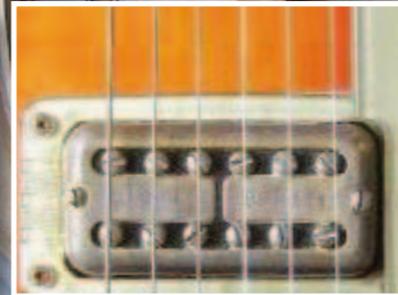
The evolution of the 6120

during the late fifties and early sixties

The western motifs disappeared from the MOP block fingerboard inlays, which were replaced by humptop inlays. The steerhead inlay on the peghead was replaced by a horseshoe inlay, the G-brand disappeared, and the DeArmond Dynasonic pickups were replaced by Filter'Tron pickups.

Starting with the 1959 models, Gretsch used trestle bracing (depicted aside), a system of two trestles that worked with the parallel braces to make it possible to play a guitar at very high volumes without excessive feedback. The incorporation of trestle bracing into the 6120 models brought new life into the archtop guitar. Also, the body depth reduced from almost 3 inches to slightly more than 2 inches, and various other modifications to the vibrato tailpiece, bridge, fingerboard, knobs and switches configuration, and other components were introduced. Another considerable style change was the introduction of the double round cutaway semi-hollowbody with

painted f-holes and the backpad. A further significant change was the introduction of the thumbnail (Neo-classic or half-moon) fret markers which are continued until today and became one of the distinct Gretsch features. By 1961, the 6120 had changed from a distinct western cowboy guitar into a more Gibson ES335-type of hollowbody guitar which was becoming very popular at the time. In 1964, the 6120 was renamed Nashville.



The 6120 Chet Atkins Nashville

the ultimate rockabilly guitar

The 6120 Chet Atkins Nashville guitar became a very popular guitar, especially in western orange finish. The headstock shape changed, the hardware became chrome plated, a string mute was introduced, and the name "Chet Atkins Nashville" appeared on the pickguard and on a nameplate on the peghead. Other than that, the guitar remained mostly unchanged.



The success of the Chet Atkins 6120

The colourful Gretsch Chet Atkins 6120 drew a lot of attention in the guitarist's world, and many famous guitarists have played the Chet Atkins 6120 in the sixties and seventies.

Pete Townshend from The Who got his '59 6120 as a gift from his friend and Eagles guitarist Joe Walsh. And unlike other guitars, Pete Townshend never smashed his 6120 after the show!



Duane Eddy (a Grammy award winning rock and roll guitarist, above and on the page aside depicted with a '57 6120) became famous with his Gretsch 6120 and his distinct “twangy” guitar sound.



His album “Have Twangy Guitar, Will Travel” became a big hit, especially in the UK. Duane Eddy’s “twangy” sound consisted of a style in where predominantly open string tunes on the D4, A5 and E6 strings are played, with substantial tremolo effect and/or string bending techniques. Of course the Gretsch 6120, with its Bigsby vibrato, was perfectly equipped to support the twangy playing style of Duane Eddy. Duane became one of the most popular artists in the US during the early sixties and, according to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he is the “most successful instrumentalist in the history of rock music”. To recognize his contribution to rock and roll music and the success of the Gretsch 6120, Gretsch introduced a Duane Eddy signature model of the 6120 in 1997.



Brian Setzer and the “rockabilly” 6120

The Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody/Nashville turned out to become the rockabilly guitar in the music scene, and numerous rockabilly guitarists have played and are still playing the Gretsch 6120, including Brian Setzer who became famous with his rockabilly band Stray Cats in the late seventies. As shown in the picture of their first album, Brian Setzer played a ‘59 6120 Hollowbody with Filter’Tron pickups; the ultimate rockabilly sound.



In the nineties, Brian and his Brian Setzer Orchestra played swing and jump blues and did many performances all over the world until very recently (2010). Brian Setzer has earned three Grammy awards. He played the Gretsch 6120 from the beginning of his career. Gretsch endorsed Brian Setzer as the successor to Chet Atkins, and to recognize his contribution to the popularity of the 6120, Gretsch introduced a 6120 Brian Setzer Signature model (recognizable by the dice knobs) and – in addition – produced a limited number of exclusive

6120 Brian Setzer Tribute guitars in the US Custom shop.

Other famous 6120 players include Neil Young, who initially played a Gretsch White Falcon in the early years of his career, but changed to playing a Gretsch 6120 as of the eighties, and Reverend Horton Heat, who plays a new 6120RHH model.



The 6121 Chet Atkins Solidbody

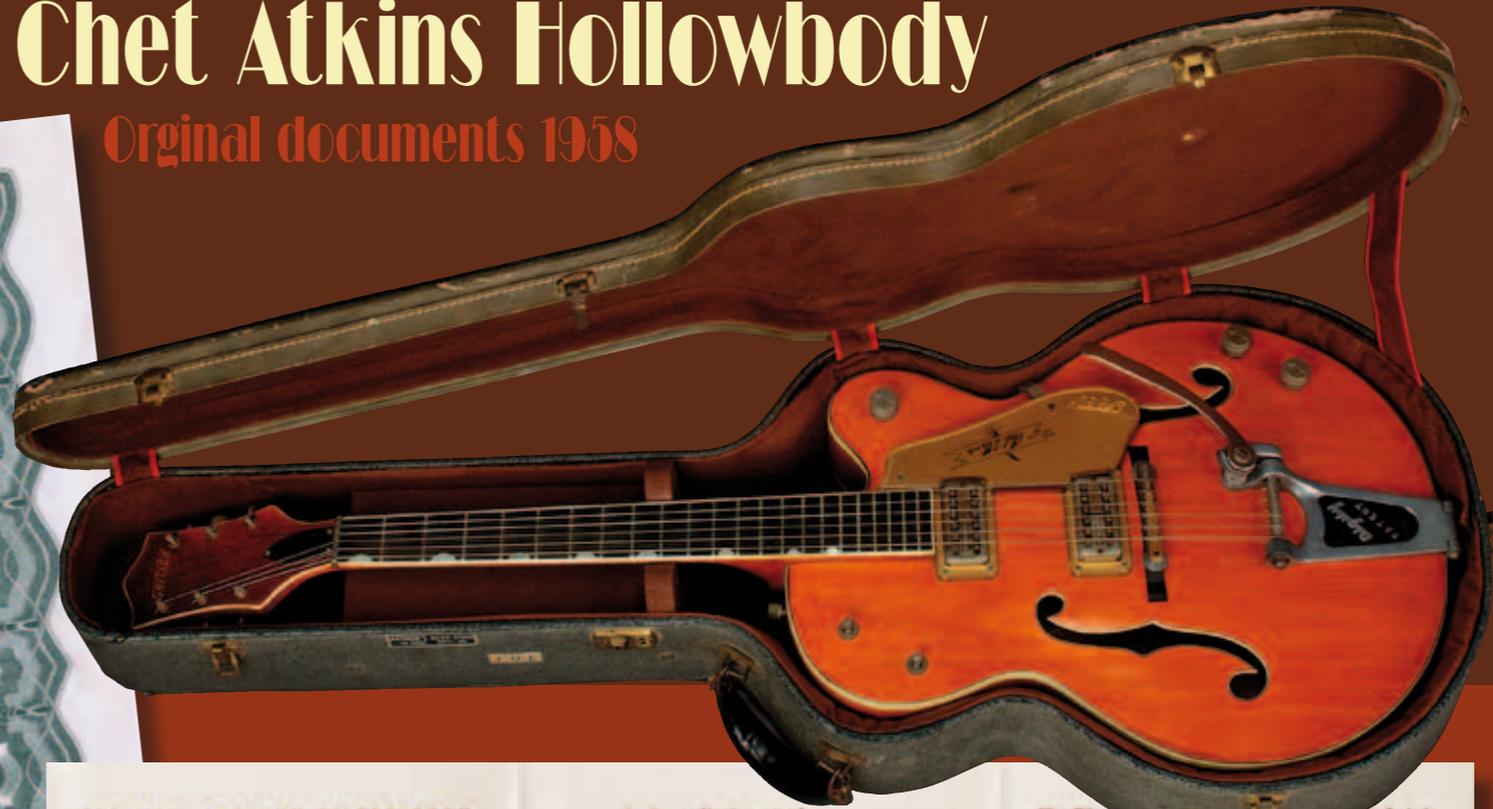
The success of the 6120 moved Gretsch to introduce a solidbody version on the market, the 6121 Chet Atkins Solidbody. The 6121 was almost similar to the – even more cowboy like – 6130 Round-up, but did not have the wagon-train buckle tailpiece and the leather steerhead and cacti trim of the 6130, but instead a Bigsby vibrato tailpiece. It also had a Chet Atkins Signature signpost pickguard (not depicted) instead of the steerhead pickguard of the 6130.

As can be seen on the next page by the cavity caps on the picture of the back side of the 6121, the solidbody version was chambered and routed to accommodate the electric harness. The 6121 could also be delivered with the white rawhide, tooled leather trimmed cowboy case and strap. The 13,5 inch 6121 had a single round cutaway body (similar



The 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody

Original documents 1958



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 BAND INSTRUMENTS — SOUV. — GUNS — BELMOR
 MUSIC OF ALL PUBLISHERS — FOREIGN & DOMESTIC

Customer's Order No. _____ Date Feb-26 1958
 Name Mr. Will Joseph Adams
 Address Sherwoodville & P.

QTY	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	TAX	TOTAL
1	6120 Hollowbody	390.00		390.00
1	Case	37.00		37.00
1	Amplifier	370.00		370.00
1	Headset	10.00		10.00
Subtotal		837.00		837.00
Tax			40.00	40.00
Total			877.00	877.00

Method of Payment Check
 To be paid March 1, 1958

GRETSCH GUITAR GUARANTEE

original retail purchaser as registered with us by the return of the attached card, WE GUARANTEE THIS GRETSCH GUITAR to be a perfect instrument, structurally and tonally. If at any time during your ownership of this instrument, it should develop any defect due to faulty workmanship or defective material, we agree to make good the same at cost to the registered purchaser, provided that the instrument is shipped to our factory carrying charges prepaid. \$\$\$ This guarantee does NOT cover damage resulting from misuse or accidents nor does it cover impairment of tone due to use of improper accessories.

THE FRED. GRETSCH MFG. CO.
 Musical Instrument Makers Since 1883
 BROOKLYN CHICAGO

MODEL NO. 6120 SERIAL NO. 27641

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GRETSCH
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Keep your Gretsch Guitar like new by using this new, chemically treated polishing cloth. It brings up the original gloss. And does not leave a film to catch dust.

DIRECTIONS:

- Use the cloth dry; don't dampen it.
- Rub the guitar until the brilliant lustre is fully restored.
- When cloth becomes dirty, wash it in a mild detergent solution, rinse thoroughly. Don't use it until it is completely dry. It is good until the fabric is worn out.
- This cloth contains no harmful ingredients and may be used on any surface — wood, metal, or plastic — without injury.

PRICE: \$1.00
The FRED. GRETSCH MFG. CO.
 Brooklyn Chicago

THE NEW GRETSCH FILTER'TRON ELECTRONIC HEADS FOR GUITAR

THE FILTER'TRON STORY

Never before in the history of music have people been more aware of good sound than today. Good electronic reproducing units such as Hi-Fidelity, Stereophonic and such, have created a demand for perfect sound and performance. No longer will people take second best. It is with this knowledge in mind that we present the New Gretsch Filter'Tron electronic playing heads for guitar. The finest engineers in the country were engaged in the development of Filter'Tron and their main object was to produce the greatest sound with as many color combinations as possible.

Equally important was to filter out all unpleasant electronic noises, such as neon buzz, fluorescent hissing and line hum which have always been a disturbing factor to the guitarist and listener alike.

They did their job well, for they solved all these problems and many more besides. Only in the New Gretsch Filter'Tron Electronic heads will you find the results of this superb engineering feat.

Filter'Tron Heads Offer:

1. Nine pre-set color combinations.
2. Full Hi-Fidelity playing range.
3. Stereo-Singing sound.
4. Brilliant Highs.
5. Mellow Lows.
6. Ultra Modern Sounding.
7. Extra lively response.
8. No hum.
9. No neon buzz.
10. No electrical disturbances.

JUST PURE SOUND!

Follow these simple instructions and illustrated chart for the best FILTER'TRON results.

Note: Illustration viewed as the guitar is held for playing.

The Filter'Tron (A & B) Switch has (3) positions — Center and Right — numbered #1, #2 and #3 on the diagram.

Position #1 puts both heads (A & B) in operation.
 Position #2 puts only the fingerboard head (A) in operation.
 Position #3 puts only the bridge head (B) in operation.

What you will hear in these three positions is as follows. (Note: Leave Tone Color Switch (C) in Neutral central position.)

#1 Position — Gives a full range blend of two playing heads giving rich depth with blended brilliance (sound oftentimes used in solo and rhythm.)
 #2 Position — Gives a rich normal guitar sound with deep resonance (sound used in progressive jazz groups.)
 #3 Position — Gives sparkling brilliant highs (sound oftentimes used in country western music — banjo effects, etc.)

The Tone Color Switch (c) has (3) positions, Center, Left and Right, numbered #1 — #2 — #3.
 Position #1 Normal full range neutral tone.



to the popular Gibson Les Paul) and had more or less the same hardware specifications as the 6120. It had a maple top and was delivered in brown mahogany orange finish, which gave the guitar a distinct western look. Due to its solid body, the sound of the 6121 is more “electrical” than the

sound of the 6120 with its hollow body. However, both sound astonishing when played over a period-correct (Gretsch) tube amplifier. In addition to Chet Atkins, various other country music artists endorsed the 6121 in the late fifties, including Martha Carson, a well-known Kentucky country singer/songwriter.



Chet Atkins models

on the forefront of the Gretsch guitar line-up

As can be seen on the first page of the “Gretsch Guitars for Moderns” brochure from 1955, Gretsch was putting the Chet Atkins models on the forefront of its guitar line-up. Both the 6120 and the 6121 were priced \$ 385.00, and the cowboy cases were priced \$ 58.00 for the 6120, and \$ 54.00 for the 6121. Today, an all original late fifties 6120 or 6121, with cowboy case and in excellent condition, would require an investment of 30-50 times the combined amount!

To illustrate the unsurpassed quality of the guitars, Gretsch promised that: “As long as you own it this iron-clad, written guarantee assures you against any defect of workmanship or material – ever! And standing back of that guarantee is the 73-year Gretsch record of honorable, generous recognition of all valid claims”. What a statement!

CHET ATKINS with his thumb pick and his four fingers plays in his inimitable "modern-country" style to produce a tone that delights the listener. It's so wonderful, so melodious, so enhanced by Chet's own clever improvisations! Every Chet Atkins appearance, whether in person or on TV (you should see and hear his reception at Grand Ole Opry!) and every new album he cuts for RCA Victor, wins new admirers to swell the vast army of Chet Atkins fans.

CHET ATKINS ELECTRIC GUITARS
by **GRETSCH**

Chet Atkins' own ideas combine with Gretsch "know how" to produce these two truly distinctive guitars. For real country-style tone, for exceptional playing convenience and comfort, and for regular human good looks, it's mighty hard to match them—anywhere! In both models you find every one of these important construction features:

- Deep cutaway bodies for easy fingering of the entire scale.
- Twin, built-in Gretsch-Dynasonic pickups (no other comes even close for sensitivity, fidelity, and power) with five controls, including two-way, fingertip switch to cut out either pickup or combine them—conveniently!
- Built-in Vibra-tailpiece for exciting "vibrato" effects; single tones or full chords sustain with no artificial tremolo under manipulation of the lever!
- Metal bridge saddle and nut, perfect for real cowboy and country-style tone.
- Special thin-gauge strings.
- Chet Atkins-designed shorter scale.
- Dual resonant fingerboard with pearl positions overlaid by Western motifs, an ever-famous Gretsch "Miracle Neck".
- Individual machines with slip-proof metal buttons.
- Metal parts heavily gold plated.

CHET ATKINS SOLID BODY GUITAR

Compact 13 1/2" body and neck of selected brown mahogany, hand polished finish. The slim "Miracle Neck" joining at the 14th fret and the deep cutaway help you get those high in brilliant fashion. Western style decorations including curved saddle leather body binding and shoulder strap. For ultra-fine tone projection and sustaining power, this is your guitar! (Illustration "A")

PX6121—Chet Atkins Solid Body Electric
Guitar ————— **\$385.00**

CHET ATKINS HOLLOW BODY GUITAR

Conventional style but a little narrower (13 1/2") and a little thinner (2 1/2") to give you that Gretsch new look, new feel, new playing comfort. Body and neck are choice curly maple finished Westernstyle in amberred, highly polished by hand. The neck joins at the 14th fret. Complete with curved saddle leather shoulder strap. Here's a wonderful combination of modern tone with brilliance when you want it! (Illustration "B")

PX6120—Chet Atkins Hollow Body Electric
Guitar ————— **\$385.00**

(See Page 16 for Chet Atkins Guitar Cases)

The evolution of the 6121 during the late fifties and early sixties

As the 6120, the 6121 also endured a number of modifications during the late fifties and early sixties. As the 6120, the western motifs disappeared from the MOP block fingerboard inlays, which were replaced by humptop inlays, which were replaced by thumbnail inlays. The steerhead on the peghead was replaced by a horseshoe inlay, the G-brand disappeared, and the DeArmond Dynasonic pickups were replaced by Filter'Tron pickups. Various other modifications to the vibrato tailpiece, bridge, fingerboard, knobs and switches configuration, and other components were introduced. And in 1961 – as the 6120 – a double round cutaway model and orange finish were introduced. The 6121 Chet Atkins Solidbody was discontinued in 1963.



The 6119 Chet Atkins Tennesseean

In 1958, Gretsch expanded the successful Chet Atkins signature guitar line on the low end with a stripped down version of the 6120. It shared the same body dimensions, but had one bridge pickup instead of two pickups, and no binding on the fingerboard, headstock and f-holes. The Tennesseean also had a unique cherry red finish instead of the western orange finish of the 6120. Also, the pickguard with Chet's signature in a signpost was black lucite instead of the gold color of the 6120:



Gretsch
Chet Atkins Serie
6120 & 6119



6119

It also featured a zero fret, a “Patent Applied For” (PAF) Filter’Tron pickup, a “V” cutout Gretsch Bigsby vibrato, and a body depth of 2½ inch. The Tennessean costed \$ 295,00 in 1958, and a jeweled, western strap was included in the price. The Tennessean remained virtually unchanged until 1962, when the entire Chet Atkins guitar line was redesigned and a two-pickup – and slightly more luxurious version of the Tennessean was introduced. The Tennessean then stayed unaltered during the remainder of the sixties and the early seventies. The well-constructed, straightforward and great-sounding Tennessean became one of Gretsch’ best-selling guitars and is still in the catalogue under the name “Tennessee Rose”. Chet Atkins played the Tennessean a number of times to produce records (e.g. “Workshop”) or on stage during the early sixties.



The 6122 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman

Later in 1958, Gretsch completed the Chet Atkins line with another very successful model: the 6122 Country Gentleman. The Country Gentleman was an elegant, 17-inch, single-cutaway, semi-hollowbody guitar that featured FilterTron and SuperTron humbucking pickups, a V-shaped Bigsby vibrato tailpiece, gold hardware, simulated f-holes, single or double mute mufflers, a gold plated “The Chet Atkins Country Gentleman” name plate with serial number on the headstock, gold Grover tuners and a soft coated back pad. The back pad (another Jimmie Webster invention) covered a plastic cap which –when removed– gave easy access to the pickups and harness inside, and was also a convenience to avoid buckle rash and possible wear of the guitar player’s clothing. The Country Gentleman was larger and thinner than the 6120, and had better woods. It was priced \$ 525,00, about \$ 100,00 more than the 6120/6121 would cost in 1959. The Country Gentleman was Gretsch’s second most expensive guitar, next to the ornate White Falcon, and was Gretsch’s aim at reaching a wider audience than the Chet Atkins adept. Prices raised to \$ 650,00 on the 1968 price-

list. One great feature of the Country Gentleman was the introduction of fake (painted on) f-holes, which significantly reduced feedback during stage performances. It also had the two trestle braces that were earlier applied on the 6120, which improved the sturdiness of the guitar and also reduced feedback. Gretsch referred to this type of (slim, double cutaway) guitar body as “Electrotone”.

The Country Gentleman remained mostly the same throughout the remainder of the sixties and seventies. As with many other models, Gretsch did not strictly comply to their own guitar specifications; many 1960 and 1961 Country Gentlemen were produced with real, bound or unbound, f-holes, and there are also Country Gentlemen who bear the text Country Gentlemen on the pickguard, instead of Country Gentleman. In 1962, the Country Gentleman changed into a slimmed-down, double-cutaway hollowbody. Hereafter, the walnut version (front) and the mahogany version (back) are both depicted, respectively to the left and to the right of the headstock:



George Harrison and the 6122 Country Gentleman

George Harrison – who was a big fan of Chet Atkins and who had played a Gretsch Duo Jet for a number of years, bought a new '62 Country Gentleman in London which he used to record many Beatles hits, including “She Loves You”, and of course for life stage shows. One year later, his Country Gentleman was damaged in an accident and – after shortly playing a 6119 Tennessean – George replaced it by another Country Gentleman.

After George Harrison appeared on the Ed Sullivan show in the US in 1964, playing the double-cutaway Country Gentleman (George Harrison played both a walnut guitar and a mahogany guitar, as can be seen on the pictures), sales of the Country Gentleman exploded. Many new formed band in the UK and the US now wanted to play with a Gretsch Country Gentleman. The '62/'63 (George Harrison) model, especially with the screw-down mutes of the guitar George had, became hugely popular until today, with (vintage) prices being twice the '64 and on models!

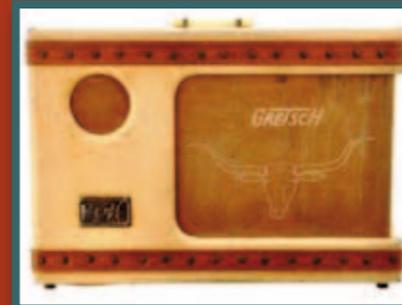
Gretsch tried to expand on the success of the “Harrison” Country Gentleman by launching a 12-string “George Harrison” model, but the idea was quickly abandoned when George himself kept using his Rickenbacker 360/12.





Gretsch amplifiers from the late fifties

During the fifties, Gretsch introduced a number of Electromatic amplifiers, designed to go with the Chet Atkins guitars and other Gretsch guitar series, including the 6161/6169/6169W “Twin” (160 \$ in tweed and charcoal gray, and 175 \$ in white rawhide western trim), the 6166 “HiFi” (485 \$!), the 6163/6163W “De-Luxe” (250 \$ in tweed and 265 \$ in white rawhide Western trim), the 6155 “Artist” (110 \$ in tweed), and the 6151 “Standard” (82.50 \$ in tweed). In the early sixties, Gretsch introduced the 6160 Chet Atkins amplifier. Occasionally these and other vintage Gretsch amplifiers are still being offered for sale against high prices. Especially the Western trimmed 6163 and 6169 with their wagon trail buckle and leather steerhead&cacti trim are very rare and highly wanted by collectors, with prices staggering up to 10,000 US\$ for all complete originals in excellent condition!



The 6120 Chet Atkins Hollowbody

A legendary guitar

This all original 6120 from 1958 has the early famous Filter'Tron PAF pickups that give the characteristic rockabilly sound (earlier models, that have the DeArmond Dynasonic pickups, give a more country-like sound. This 6120 also features a "tone-switch" knob- and switch configuration with two pickup – and tone – selector switches on the upper bass bout, a master volume knob on the upper treble bout, and two pickup volume knobs on the lower treble bout (earlier models had a tone-pot configuration with one pickup selector switch on the upper bass bout and three volume- and tone knobs on the lower treble bout). This 6120 is also less deep than the earlier models (two inch instead of three inch). All-in-all, this 6120 version was a better fit for swinging rockabilly-guitarists such as Brian Setzer than the earlier models.



Gretsch amplifiers specifications

Electromatic Twin

Two (11" and 6") oval speakers + additional tweeter

- 6 Tubes, 14-18 watts output
- Built-in tremolo with foot control
- Three instrument inputs
- Tweed, charcoal grey or western white covered



Electromatic Artist

Single (10") round speaker

- 5 Tubes, 10-12 watts output
- No tremolo
- Three instrument inputs
- Tweed covered





Gretsch amplifier

In close-up



The very first version of the Electromatic Standard amplifier: Three instrument inputs, including extra amplification for microphone (input 3); Volume - and Tone control; Single 8" Jensen 9847 speaker; Three Electromatic tubes (one dual-purpose giving the effect of a 4th tube). True output 5-6 watts. Size of cabinet: 12" wide, 13" high, 7.5" deep. Weighs 11 pounds.

Modern Gretsch Chet Atkins signature guitars

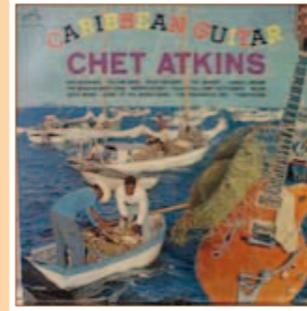
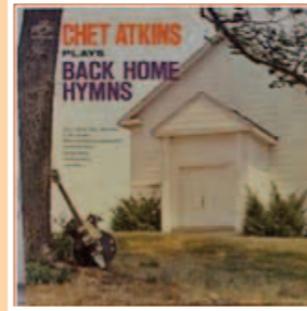
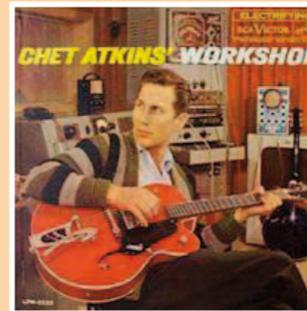
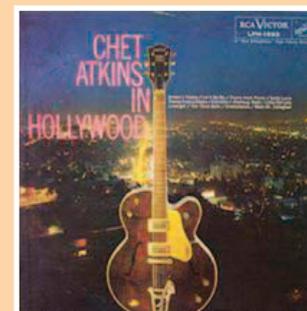
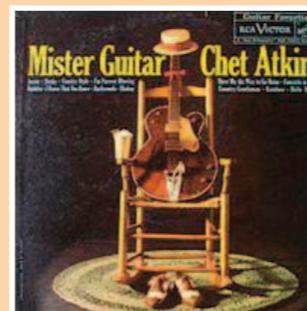
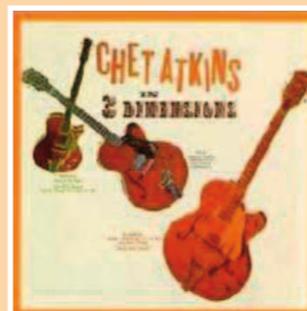
Today, Gretsch still sells a number of Chet Atkins signature guitars, including the G6119 Tennessee Rose, the G6120 (single and double cutaway) Hollowbody, the G6121 Solidbody and the G6122 Country Gentleman, all in various versions, including the Eddie Cochran and the Duane Eddy signature 6120's.

Chet Atkins signature guitars are still the best Gretsches!

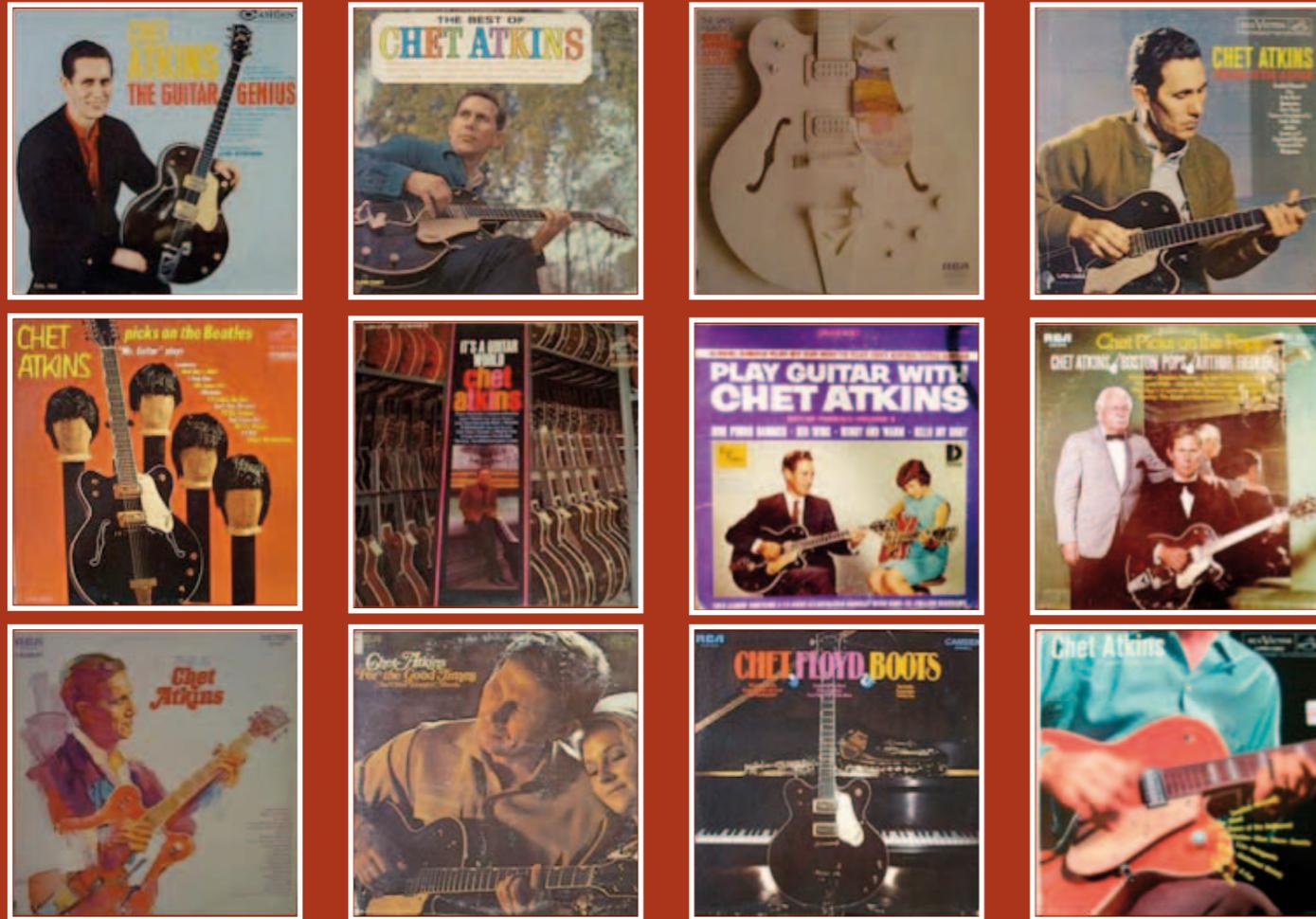


Appendix

Chet Atkins played his Gretsch guitars (predominantly his '59 Country Gentleman) for more than a decade, as illustrated by the following selection of Chet Atkins LP's which he recorded during the late fifties and sixties that also depict the 6120 Hollowbody and 6119 Tennessee:



Chet Atkins LP's



Gretsch in Modern Poster GuitArt Serie



This booklet is part of the exclusively designed and photographed GuitArt Gretsch poster serie. This poster serie provides a detailed and arti look at the Gretsch guitars as illustrated in this booklet.

You can select from a variety of Gretsch Art posters, Gretsch Art canvasses, and Gretsch Art calendars from the GuitArt Series. GuitArt products can be purchased at www.classicrockguitars.nl and www.viewbox.nl.

Gretsch Chet Atkins signature guitars SPECS

6119 serie

Tennessean

16 inch
single cutaway
hollowbody
Real f-holes
1 / 2 pickup(s)
Bigsby vibrato tailpiece

General Gretsch Chet Atkins
decoration

Cherry red finish

6120 serie

Hollowbody / Nashville

16 inch
single / double cutaway
hollowbody
Real / fake f-holes
back pad (later models)
2 pickups
Bigsby vibrato tailpiece
Cowboy western decoration
(early years)

Western orange finish

6121 serie

Solidbody

13,5 inch
single / double cutaway
chambered solidbody
2 pickups
Bigsby vibrato tailpiece
No f-holes
harness cavities in back
Cowboy western decoration
(early years)

**Brown or mahogany
orange finish**

6122 serie

Country Gentleman

17 inch
single / double cutaway
hollowbody
2 pickups
Bigsby vibrato tailpiece
Real / fake f-holes
back pad (later models)
General Gretsch Chet Atkins
decoration

**Walnut or
mahogany finish**

The Gibson Competition



Of course **Gibson** was – and still is – the fiercest competitor for Gretsch, and the 6120 Hollowbody / Nashville and 6119 Tennessean were in competition with the 16-inch **Gibson ES-330/340/350 hollowbody series** (depicted aside is an ES-335). The ES-335 has become the industry standard for slim hollowbody blues guitars, and numerous guitar builders have built similar guitar models.

“**ES-335**” is often referred to as a distinct guitar model, and many famous blues artist (most specifically BB King with his named “Lucille” model) and other guitarists played a Gibson ES-335 guitar or similar models from other brands.

The **6121 Solidbody** was in competition with the **Gibson Les Paul Model** (depicted aside is a Les Paul Standard). Together with the Fender Stratocaster, the Gibson Les Paul has become the industry standard for electrical solidbody guitars, and almost every guitar brand on the market has introduced a Les Paul shaped solidbody model in their offering until today.

Like the ES-335, the “Les Paul” is more known as the Gibson guitar model than as the guitarist and guitar engineer. Together with the Fender Stratocaster, the Gibson Les Paul is played by numerous famous artists and guitarists worldwide, including Eric Clapton, Neil Young, Peter Dinklage, Mark Knopfler, and many, many others.





This booklet aims at describing and depicting the great Gretsch Chet Atkins guitars from the fifties and early sixties “in a nutshell” and with an attractive and easy readable content and style. We produced this booklet to contribute to the preservation of the heritage of the great Gretsch Chet Atkins guitars and amplifiers, and it is by no means intended to be a complete reference book about Gretsch Chet Atkins guitars and amplifiers.

This booklet is the first in a series of booklets about famous vintage guitars, including Fenders, Gibsons, Martins, Rickenbackers, Eko's and other guitars from the fifties and sixties.

We believe that we carefully acknowledged all sources that we have accessed for fact gathering and other relevant information about the musicians, instruments, and aspects described in this booklet. All text paragraphs, art pictures, and audio clips in this booklet package are original GuitArt productions. To explain descriptions, we occasionally added small thumbnail size pictures or illustrations derived from other sources which are acknowledged in the sources section. Please contact us if we may have violated any publication rights with this.

Gretsch Booklet GuitArt Series

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