



GEAR SETUP

Beck's main axe that's been with him for quite some time is a well-worn Jeff Beck Stratocaster® signature model. This surf green warhorse is named "Little Richard" in token of the fact that the rock 'n' roll legend signed his name on the body in mile-high letters. Said body shows signs of having been completely split apart in two places, and carefully glued back together.

"I've been playing this same Strat," Beck shrugs. "...It's just the one I always pick up and use. It's completely broken in. In fact, it's all bashed up."

In the early '60s, Beck became one of the first guitarists to experiment with feedback.

"I had a terrible amp that fed back anyway," he recalls. "When we started playing big ballrooms, you'd turn up the volume and wheeeeeee. And everybody would start looking at me thinking I wanted to be dead 'cause I'd made this mistake. So I had to turn a horrible sound into a tune to make them think I'd meant it. That's where it all came from."

By the Yardbirds era, Beck had abandoned the Strat he started on. He experimented with a few Telecasters before settling on a '54 Fender Esquire as his main guitar. He played his Esquire through two Vox AC30 combo amps positioned "on two chairs commissioned from whatever sources," he notes, "so that they were at waist level where I could get to the controls easier and hear them better. They were linked together in series."

Jimi Hendrix became a friend and confidant of Beck's during the Jeff Beck Group period (1968). Hendrix gave Beck several pieces of guitaristic advice. "On my early stuff, I was playing the thinnest strings you could get," says Beck, ".008s. And then the Jimi man came along and told me, 'You can't play with those rubber bands. Get those off there.' So my string gauges have been creeping up ever since. Now I've got .011, .013, .017, .028, .038, and .049. I'm trying to get heavier on the top end."

It was also Hendrix who rekindled Beck's interest in the Strat. For much of the early '70s, he fluctuated between Strats, Teles and Les Pauls.

Beck's right hand technique is highly idiosyncratic. He's one of the only full-on rock guitarists who picks with his bare fingers rather than a plectrum (pick). "When the tailpiece of the Strat is properly set up, for me, I can feel the spring balance," he says. "There's a balance between the tension of the strings and the counter-tension of the springs on the back. I have it set so there's just enough tension to bend the arm up a whole step. That's about it. If the bridge is leaning forward too much because of string tension, then you're not going to get the downward press you need. So it's about 75% down, 25% up. That will do it for me."

In 1989 Beck began collaborating with Fender on a Jeff Beck signature model guitar, having overcome some initial reluctance. After some reflection, though, he came up with a few designs based on his playing idiosyncrasies. "I had them alter the saddles,"

FENDER PLAYERS CLUB JEFF BECK

he says. "Because I use my palm for vibrato, just pressing the bridge. And I was cutting great ribbons of flesh out of me with the original saddles. So they made that much smoother for me."

To accommodate Beck's vigorous string bending, a double roller nut was devised. "The top three strings have a double roller," Beck elaborates. "It stops that extraneous ringing noise you don't want, and helps the intonation as well."

Beck has used a variety of amps over the years, often with a wall of cabinets. For his now legendary "The Fire and the Fury" tour with the late Stevie Ray Vaughan in 1989, he went a different direction.

"I had a couple of Fender Twins and that was it," Beck says. "Stevie couldn't believe it. He had a huge stack with about 15 different amps, all gaffer-taped to a rolling platform. At the end of each night's gig, we'd alternate between him coming on to play with me and my band, and me going on with his band. The volume coming out of those amps was so unbelievable. And every night he'd say, 'You know man, I'm talking to my guys about getting your setup.' And I said, 'I'm talking to my guys about getting yours.' With a good sound guy and 20 million watts of PA, you don't really need to be loud onstage. But he sounded amazing."

-- Alan di Perna, from *Fender Frontline* Vol. 26 (1999).

The Jeff Beck Stratocaster® features an alder body, rosewood fretboard, deep '50s neck shape, two Gold Fender-Lace® Sensors in the neck and middle positions, and a Gold Dually® Fender-Lace Sensor in the bridge position.

[Check out the guitar at the Fender website.](#)