

# PERSONAL SKY GUITAR MANUAL

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[WWW.DEANGUITARS.COM](http://WWW.DEANGUITARS.COM)

# DEAR NEW OWNER OF A SKY GUITAR!

You have just joined the club of an elite few, and we hope this guitar will fulfill its promises to you over many years to come.

We would like to apologize for your having to wait for so long after having placed the order. May it console you to know that the waiting queue is only bound to get even longer in the future... These instruments are much more intricate and more difficult to build than normal electric guitars and a lot of love and care went into building them. That is one of the main reasons why it took so long to complete them.

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# THE SKY IS THE LIMIT!



It is true to say that no expense was spared in the making of the Sky Guitars.

Most instruments are built with the intention to make money – and therefore the thought to keep the production cost as low as possible is a major factor in the resulting quality - or lack of it, for that matter. Business interests drive the markets, and that means the concept of making money is always at the bottom line of all these decisions. The dollar rules with an iron fist. That is why there are so few truly great instruments on the market.

The applied philosophy in building the Sky Guitars was rather the opposite, and I am proud of that! For once the iron fist of the dollar got soft like a bud of cotton-wool, and - somehow and miraculously - the Sky Guitar managed to escape the clutches of this ever-hungry, grey-eyed monster. Often the demands of true Art and Spirit – are diametrically opposed to those of Mammon and Greed. These concepts don't go together well most of the time. Instead, they tend to cancel out one another.

Over the years, many commercial guitar manufacturers had been keen to try and produce Sky Guitars for me to go the market. But I had always had far too many reservations to get excited about this. I didn't want to end up with a lousy compromise, which wouldn't have been worthy of the lofty concept and my aspirations for the spirit of the Sky Guitar.

I wanted it untarnished and unfettered from commercial aspirations as much as possible. True top quality and commercial interests are usually contradictions in terms – even with many so-called high-end products...

There had also been many illegal and incompetent copies in several countries over the years, which had been made without my consent and which were Sky Guitars only in name... They were not authentic, they didn't play well, they didn't sound right, most of them looked wrong or even atrocious... I even have a few of them at home, because they were given to me, so I know what I am talking about.

Here is why I chose to go with Dean Guitars; it was because their CEO, my friend Elliott Rubinson, gave me carte blanche to come up with the best possible guitar – rather than the most profitable guitar!

We don't see the Sky Guitar as a means to make lots of cash, but rather as an exciting new project, which brings forth something phenomenal, which all those involved can be proud of for a long time to come.

The result of this refreshing approach, which flies into the face of any self-respecting business man's mental tool box - was that we actually managed to produce the guitars that I had wanted, rather than some watered down, compromise-ridden tool of sadness; which no doubt would have resulted, had we chosen the one-way route prescribed by business acumen. Therefore - although the guitars may seem expensive – in fact they ARE expensive – the current cost of bringing them to the market is actually not much less than what their purchase price is! From this you can see that the Sky Guitars are not primarily a business venture, but that there is something else, which is much more important; this is to produce new instruments for the future, which will stand the test of time and which can be a strong and lasting source of inspiration for years to come.

Another crucial factor was also that Elliott allowed me to choose my own master luthier for the project, and this was a lucky, but shrewd move. My choice fell on Boris Dommengot, who is truly gifted and who was the only luthier known to me who was in the same league and had the same magic touch as Andreas Demetriou has had, who had unfortunately given up building guitars a long time ago due to problems with his back.





# THE SKY IS THE LIMIT! *(continued...)*

That was the reason why – after a period of almost 20 years (!) - there had been no further authentic Sky Guitars since the original five prototypes built by Andy in the Eighties.

During that time period quite a few people had tried to build Sky Guitars over the years, but they always fell way short of what I had in mind and what I was searching for. The project “Perfecting the Sky Guitar” had come to a grinding halt and it went into hibernation for many years.

I simply never came across a builder to fill Andy’s shoes until Boris came along.

Due to their intricacies, Sky Guitars also take way longer to build to perfection than other hand-built guitars – about four times as long, we reckon, which is one of the main reasons why the waiting list is so long.

I have personally played every single one of these Limited Edition Sky Guitars, have spent a fair amount of time with each one of these, and checked them through thoroughly in my studio before sending them on the journey. And I love them all! If anything wasn’t to my satisfaction, the guitars were modified until they were right.

It is maybe unusual to have an extensive manual for an electric guitar, because most things should be self-evident. However, Sky Guitars are different in certain respects.

I am sure you will find your own way of exploring its possibilities, but it may still be helpful to share some of my experience regarding this. I have played Sky Guitars for 27 years now, and you might benefit from a few personal tips regarding how to get the best out of these amazing instruments.

I cannot explain ALL the features - most of which

are kind-of self-evident to experienced players anyway - but will mainly concentrate on those features which makes the SG different from other guitars, and I will sometimes explain the reasoning behind certain choices we made.

Sky Guitars are not for every one. For instance, they are also not really for beginners, it appears to me. I believe that they respond best to a certain mind-set in order to get the most out of them. A player who doesn’t rise to the occasion will not be able to unlock their full potential, which is vast.

This instrument has the ability to humble us – particularly the 7-string ones...

It is not an ordinary guitar by a far cry, and therefore it is advisable and important to spend some time exploring its possibilities and to try and rise to the new challenges by striving for a new level of mastery. Let the instrument speak to you.

The Sky Guitar can take you by the hand and guide you in this process, but only if you allow this to happen, will you manage to establish a personal, individual relationship with this powerful instrument. Each Sky Guitar is different and has a distinct personality of its own - as you will soon find out, hopefully.

But you may have to walk the extra mile to unlock its hidden mysteries and potential.

Otherwise there is a good chance that the instrument will not respond amicably and may stay either indifferent towards you, or possibly even reject you, which would be deplorable.

“The wand chooses its wizard...” (not that I believe it is advisable to practice magician-ship or other forms of sorcery – as evidenced by the lyrics to “Sails of Charon”, he he.)





## THE IDEA

The idea for this new instrument came to me at the end of the year 1982, pretty much 28 years ago, while I was living at Little Thatch in Seaford, Sussex.

The first Sky Guitar was built by master luthier Andy Demetriou in Brighton, England, in 1983. This one already had virtually all the typical features regarding the shape, but in other ways there was still quite a bit of room for improvement.

But although it may look similar, the first-ever Sky Guitar - the Dolphin Sky - which is in a museum now - did nowhere near have the same sonic abilities that the new instruments have. The guitar you are holding today is the latest incarnation of Sky Guitars, and they have come a long way since those early days.

The first thing that defines a Sky Guitar is the characteristic shape with the S-shaped scratch plates. The intention behind the whole design was to combine a practical necessity – that of obtaining a more comfortable access to the top registers of the guitar – with an equally strong aesthetic demand. I wanted to design a guitar, which not only went way beyond existing models in terms of natural range, but I also wanted to do full justice to the aspects of ergonomics, sonic prowess and overall response; and last - but not least – I wanted a guitar that looked beautiful at the same time.

The Sky Guitar was intended to be a true virtuoso guitar. It was designed to be the most versatile, most powerful guitar on the planet at the time.

The original aim was to take the concept of the Fender Stratocaster as a departure and then

create a new instrument, which would go way beyond that and would offer way more range and versatility. The Sky Guitar was the first guitar that provided a vastly extended upper range and thus opened the doors to a new dimension of guitar playing. It was brimming with innovation, but some of that was subtle and not instantly visible.

But from the very beginning I was also intending to eventually achieve a guitar that would be able to produce the creamy rich tones of a Gibson Les Paul, as well as having the incomparable clarity and precision of a Strat. Initially that seemed like an impossible undertaking, because there were many hurdles to overcome, but I can now honestly say that this goal has not only been achieved, but also been surpassed. This is something of a tight-rope straddle that – to my knowledge – no other guitar has achieved so far. And it took many years to get to this point.

The idea for the Sky Guitar was also partially inspired by the concept of the classical violin. It has always been an aspiration of mine to give the guitar the same kind of wings a violin has – meaning to extend its potential into that direction... There is no instrument which has mastered the art of singing and sheer playful virtuosity the way the violin has. Of all the guitars on the market that I have played – for me, at least – Sky Guitars are capable to produce the most singing tone. Perhaps their closest counterpart in the violin world might be the priceless Guarneri del Gesù violins, which were built in the 1700s in Italy by the amazing pupil of the venerated master builder from Cremona – Antonio Stradivari.



# PLAYING POSITION – BALANCE – GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE SKY GUITAR

The violin is best played while standing. That stance adds a certain amount of energy and composure/attitude which is hard to match when sitting down. Therefore I made the choice to play Sky Guitars mainly standing up and they are designed that way. The flow of energy through our bodies is totally different when standing, as opposed to that of sitting or lying down. Standing up makes for a way more energetic and interactive flow and definitely enhances the rhythmical impulses in a particular way.

Sitting down has its advantages, too – but Sky Guitars are not built for rest and repose. They are built for action – flow of energy – activity. They are built to fly and they challenge you to be a good pilot in more ways than one. These guitars have the power to make you grow as a guitarist, even as a musician, if one knows how to benefit from this challenge.

One thing that has always bothered me about many electric guitars is the fact that - when one is standing, instead of sitting down - the body of the guitar rests against the player's body in such a way that the finger board is pointing upwards to a certain degree. That leads to a less than perfect posture, meaning the left hand has to constantly overstretch in an unhealthy and unnecessary way. This violates the beautiful law of economy in motion.

The Sky Guitar is perfectly balanced so that this doesn't occur. The knobs which hold the straps are strategically placed to achieve a perfectly comfortable position for the left hand. This gives you ultimate control over your positions and it won't tire the hand either.



# THE SHAPE – THE SCRATCH PLATES & PLAQUES



The shape of the guitars is still largely the same as it was in my first design, but while the original S-shape scratch plates were just made of either white plastic or wood, all new Sky Guitars of this limited edition have scratch plates made of solid brass and which are fully gold plated with 18 karat gold as are the springs in the back. The first such guitar was Mighty Wing – which also was the first-ever 7-string Sky.

A minor draw-back with these plates is that they do scratch relatively easily – hence the name

“scratch-plate” I guess, he he, but there is nothing that can be done about this, because I don’t want to have the plates laminated with a lacquer of sorts.

Having said that, I have had golden plates on Mighty Wing for over twenty years – and only in recent years the gold has come off in the place where my pick hits the plate the most. If one is bothered by this, the solution is to fit a new lower scratch plate after some years, if we feel that is a problem. I personally have still the original on Mighty Wing, because I prefer the continuity of things.

On the back of the guitar you will find two oval, gilded plaques.

The first of these – in the spring cavity – displays the date the guitar was finished (hand-crafted Sky Guitars usually take several months to be completed), the name of the builder, Boris Dommenget - and the manufacturer who licences it, Dean Guitars.

The second plaque tells you the name of the guitar, which I have personally chosen after spending some time playing it and checking it out thoroughly. I strongly believe there is a name hidden in all things – we just have to find it. I hope I found the right name for your guitar. Each guitar has its own individual something, I believe – almost like a little mind of its own. To me, instruments like these are alive in more ways than one – particularly when crafted by an artistically gifted crafts man. They take on a persona. It’s like an invisible energy field, which you can sense if you are hip to these things.





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## HE WOOD

Most Sky Guitars are made of alder, which is a preferred wood for the Strat.

The present series uses mainly Bavarian alder. Some guitars come with quilted maple tops – very few with a flamed top.

Most 7-string Sky Guitars are made of mahogany, and most of them feature a quilted maple-top – even those which don't show the pattern of the wood, like the Blue Infinity Sky, which is one of my recent preferred prototypes. These guitars sound amazing – as do the 6-string ones – but in a different way.

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## HE FINISH

Sky Guitars come in many different finishes, but I am making sure that they all comply with certain important parameters and they must be pleasing to the eye. The colours need to be in tune with the instrument so-to-speak. The first Sky Guitar prototypes, like the Dolphin Sky, the Purple and the Emperor all had a stylized spiral galaxy pattern on their bodies, while some - such as Mighty Wing and the Rembrandt Sky - had jewelled broaches on top of that. The current edition is different in that respect, but all of the new guitars feature the Sky Academy spiral & stars symbol in gold, which is located on the front at a distance behind the bridge.

Every Sky Guitar is slightly different, and that includes the colouring, because they are all hand built. To me this is desirable. These are not identical Sky Guitar clones. Therefore - although made to perfection - they are not as predictable and uniform as CNC-machine built guitars, which nowadays make the bulk of instruments on the market to make them more affordable.



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## HE VARNISH

The varnish on the first models of this edition is nitrocellulose lacquer, which is the same that is used on Gibson guitars. There are advantages and disadvantages to this – as with all things. The use of nitro is going to be outlawed soon it appears, because of environmental concerns – a lot of the gas just evaporates when applying it.

The Sky Guitars from number Eight onwards are varnished with polyurethane – which is the varnish that was also used for Mighty Wing.

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## HE NECK

The necks on most of the present Sky Guitar edition are made of maple with a flamed maple finger board with abalone inlays. Very few necks are made from ebony.

The head-stock uses my favourite tuning-pegs, which are basically Strat style. I really dislike pegs that make it necessary to clip the string and leave disorganized ends of strings dangling into all directions.

Inside the neck there is a truss-rod, which can be adjusted into both directions by turning the screw, which is hidden under the little golden brass cover on the front of the headstock.

Depending on temperature conditions, the neck may move a little over time and may need to be re-adjusted. If you are not comfortable about how to do this, please consult a qualified guitar builder. It is just part of general maintenance to check through the guitar every once in a while.

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# THE NECK

Talking about long-term maintenance: most of my Sky Guitars have been “pleked” by now. If you are not familiar with this ingenious invention, you may want to take the time to read up about it on the web. The Plek machine effectively measures all the height and detail of each and every single fret on the guitar.

It analyses the perfect curve and shows the result in 3-D. Then it polishes each single fret to the perfect height that is wanted. It is an amazing process and really works. This is particularly helpful, when – after much playing – certain frets become worn down more than others. Rather than completely re-fret the guitar, which is a somewhat drastic option – the Plek process can make sure that there is no unwanted string-buzz and other abnormalities.

At this point a word of caution: we strongly advise against changing or personalizing any of the features of the Sky Guitar. This instrument has been conceived as an organic whole, and any type of changes may detract from its quality, apart from the fact that it would definitely devalue the guitar seriously. You can be assured that these limited edition guitars will one day become very expensive collector’s items. Their value will never diminish – as long as they are in good condition. Instead, their value will increase substantially over time, because there are so few of them around, and they are extra-special.

Most new Sky Guitar necks are scalloped from the 5th or 8th fret onwards. I personally much prefer scalloped necks for lead playing for several reasons; first of all, one has so much more micro control over the string, because there is no friction with the fret-board.

Secondly: scalloped simply sounds better! The

finger does not dampen the string in the same way as when we are in direct contact with the wood, and the result is a more resonant, a more freely vibrating string. If one listens closely, this is quite obvious.

The scalloping, however, is a definite drawback when it comes to the intonation of certain complex chord patterns. Since the majority of chords is played on the lower half of the neck section and lead is predominantly played in the higher positions – at least this has always been my personal preference for reasons of sonority - my solution was to leave the first positions unscalloped.

*Should there ever be any questions regarding the guitars which you may have, feel free to contact Boris Dommenget at [info@guitarmaker.de](mailto:info@guitarmaker.de). He will gladly assist you and answer your queries.*



# STRING SPACING – 6-STRING VS 7-STRING



Another idiosyncrasy, which you may notice upon closer inspection, is the fact that my top E-string has considerably more distance from the edge of the fingerboard than you will find on other guitars. Armed with a real Sky Guitar you will probably be the only kid on the block (or man in the city) who manages a decent full-depth vibrato on the top E-string!

This is something that is simply impossible to achieve on most electric guitars. Don't ask me why nobody seems to have ever questioned this, because it seems a very obvious defect, but 99.9 percent of guitars seem to suffer this deficiency. Sky Guitars finally put an end to that sorry state of affairs.

Another advantage of this is that the string also sounds much better, because it isn't as close to the edge of the neck as on a standard guitar. And even the B-string benefits by allowing for an even wider and more secure, resonant vibrato, because it is further away from the edge, where the tone gets thinner and more brittle.

So, the placement of the nut is not a sloppy accident - as an observant luthier would probably

comment on, because it is slightly asymmetrical - but was made by design and is fully intentional.

The 7-string Sky Guitars implement a somewhat narrower string-spacing than the 6-string ones. In certain respects they are even more virtuoso guitars and are "geared" slightly differently. Due to the narrower string spacing, it is easier to play extensive arpeggios and to fly over the strings like one can on a violin. However, this type of spacing may take some getting used to. It demands a greater picking precision and is more generally unforgiving of any kind of sloppy playing. On the 7-string guitars there is very little margin for error.

One simply HAS to be precise with those. Therefore they really are made for expert hands, who can get the best out of them. The 7-string also allows for easier access to the very top notes, because the bridge is in a different position altogether. The 7-string Sky Guitars are based directly on Mighty Wing, which has always played like a dream, but which is taking a sabbatical right now.





# THE FRETS

## TOP NOTES - WHOLE TONE SPACING

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In general, I do prefer frets to be super jumbo – I don't want to feel them. You may have noticed that the width of the fret wire on these guitars is not the same throughout. That is intentional. The fret wire on all Sky Guitars gets less wide as we go up the neck in order to guarantee space for the fingers on the higher frets.

The extended finger board is, of course, one of the main features on Sky Guitars.

The actual number of frets may vary between the different models. Theoretically, there could be a few more frets on these guitars, but we have experimented a lot with this, and I opted against it. The main reason for this being the fact that it is pretty high-on impossible to get musically convincing sounds out of these highest notes on the guitar.

We also deliberately left a space between the bridge pick-up and the fingerboard to allow for some deep picking. It is an idiosyncrasy of Sky Guitars that, when picking closer to the neck, the depth of the picking needs to be adjusted a little, because one is effectively picking over the finger board.

This also very much depends on the height of your action. I personally have always favoured a high action for reasons of tone, increased dynamic range - and sheer physical control over the string. With a higher action, it is possible to really lay into the strings, when it is desirable. And one can achieve any dynamic shading from double pianissimo to triple fortissimo without the string collapsing, as is the case so often with low action.

The control over vertical vibrato is also so much better with a high action guitar.

Most tone-conscious players do favour a higher action. The downside is, of course, that guitars with a high action are harder to play and therefore somewhat "slower" when it comes to fast playing.

Further cons are that the intonation becomes more

difficult and the whole instrument becomes more temperamental, less even and less predictable. But - on the plus side – a high action guitar is definitely more individualistic in terms of overall response.

You will have noticed that the fret spacing suddenly doubles from the top A onwards (on some guitars from the top B). This is due to the fact that on the very first Sky Guitars it was virtually impossible to create a truly singing tones on the very highest notes, because there was simply not enough space for my fingers to fit comfortably between the top frets.

We overcame this problem by settling on a compromise – but a compromise that definitely works very well. Most good solutions to problems involve a compromise of sorts. That is a design law. Every gain incorporates a loss – and the opposite holds true as well: in every loss there is a gain...

The solution was to – for want of a better expression - "change gear" and to change the spacing by switching to whole-tone steps, instead of semi-tones, which is the standard for all guitars. That worked. Mighty Wing has beautiful singing tones from the top A upwards, and it is a joy to play those notes with comparable ease. When I say "comparable ease", it must be taken with a pinch of salt, because it will never be as "easy" to play up there in these regions as it is in the centre of the neck – and why should it?

In terms of music – to me these are the extreme regions – the Himalaya of guitar craft - and they are best treated with the respect they deserve... One needs extra oxygen up there and the sun-light is so intense that one needs shades...

It would also be artistically unsavoury to constantly play up there – and it would go on every one's nerves, too. To me these high notes are more like the end points of a potential journey and I use them sparingly. That way they stay more precious, too. An operatic tenor doesn't constantly fire off his precious top C's all

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# HE FRETS *(continued...)*

## TOP NOTES - WHOLE TONE SPACING

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the time. The result would be an inflation and the value of something that is extra special would decrease and become cheapened and common place, by over-extensive and indiscriminate use.

When I first started playing “up there”, my hands had to develop a new approach, because very different ergonomic rules apply. Depending on the shape of one’s hand, it may be best to bring forward the thumb and to play in a hovering position. This is, of course, unusual at first and takes some getting used to, because the thumb is the master controller behind the scenes in normal playing. New muscles come into play – or, at least, the muscles have to perform in a different way and in a different sequence. But after some time this will become second nature.

Another hurdle is the fact that – when playing fast – the chromatic notes seem to have disappeared at first. But they have not – they are only harder to come by... There are two ways to deal with the absence of the chromatic top notes: the first is – to simply play them on the B-string, instead of the E-string. That means that a chromatic run would have to criss-cross between the E- and the B-string in an alternating fashion. Somewhat cumbersome, but doable. Hey, no obstacle is too great for a great tone, right? A second way is to pre-bend the required notes to the desired chromatic pitch. But that habit may take a little practice.

Have I already said that the Sky Guitar will challenge you to rise to a new plateau?

Finally, an ever-recurring question regarding Sky Guitars, which I have often been asked:

“How many frets do they have?” I am still giving the same answer that I have always given:

“I don’t know!” I don’t think in terms of frets, but in terms of musical tones.

The truth is that a lot of Sky Guitars have slightly different numbers of frets. This may seem odd, but can be explained easily: we have always experimented with the number of top-frets, and very often I have asked the guitar builders to take away or add certain frets.

Furthermore – I would count the top frets – which are whole-tone steps – as two frets per step, although physically there is only one fret there. It depends on this decision how one counts. If I count the frets on the new Sky Guitars, the number is 37, although some have 35, which is my current preferred state. I may still change my mind about that, though. I like to have the extra space there for the deep picking angle. There have been attempts to go as far as 40 frets, but I wasn’t happy with the results, and had them removed. The string just gets too short up there to produce meaningful results.

The second Sky Guitar ever built – the Purple Sky from 1985 – even has a fretless section at the very top. Again, this was an experiment. While it yielded some interesting musical results, I eventually decided against using that approach on other guitars, because the fretless section produced a diminished sonority and the response was poor – unless one actually turned ones’ finger upside down and played the note with the nail, which I did sometimes.



## THE PICK HOLDER

It has always bothered me to have to put my guitar pick into my mouth when switching to finger picking and back. That's why I didn't used to employ the finger picking technique a lot when playing live. Finally, after 40-plus years, we found the perfectly simple solution: a spring-loaded pick holder at the top of the bridge-pick-up. Try it for yourself! It works a treat! Just snap the pick into position and retrieve it when needed. With a little practice this is very easy and it makes the change-over super-fast.

## THE SCALE LENGTH

Regarding the scale length, I have decided to have almost all Sky Guitars fitted with the long scale length of Fender guitars, which is approximately 65 centimeters long. The reason for this is greater sonic clarity. However, a shorter scale-length has some advantages, which is why on a few select instruments we will implement this option. For example, my Blue Infinity 7-string, which I am playing a lot these days has a slightly shorter scale length. While certain things are definitely easier to play on this guitar – such as super wide stretches – the drawback is that the top notes are definitely harder to play, because the string becomes physically more taut and simply shorter. It simply doesn't resonate quite as well in the highest regions, which is why I tend not to play there as much on that guitar, which is otherwise phenomenal with a beautiful tone and response.





# THE STRING GAUGES

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The instruments are currently fitted with slightly thicker gauge strings than I am using personally. The action is also slightly lower than mine, but still fairly on the high side. Most people would not be happy with the height of the action on my personal guitars. It is definitely harder to play like that, and many a guitarist may not want to give up vital points in the department of ease and dexterity for the sake of tone alone.

The way the guitar responds is also very much connected with the particular tuning you choose. The guitars do react completely differently as soon as the tuning changes. Even tuning down a semi tone from standard E-tuning to E-flat totally changes the overall response of the guitar in more ways than one. Furthermore, this is also directly related to string gauges and scale-length.

Here are the string gauges as I currently use them; over the years I have tried many different gauges, but certain gauges seem to be my favourite constant.

In general, I tend to prefer lighter strings on the top while leaning towards the more heavy types for the bass range. To me that gives the guitar a nice grounding, and I prefer chords that way with a distinct, clear-cut bass, but with a more shimmering, slightly softer ring towards the treble register. I also don't want to have to overcome too much physical resistance while manipulating the top strings during solos.

My favourite E-strings for Sky Guitars are definitely 008s. I sometimes use 009s, particularly when tuning down, but the top 008 gives a more "shiny", more alive vibrato. Though there have been albums, where I used top 010 E-strings, but with hindsight I can tell the difference in the tone of the vibrato and I don't like it.

Of course on a Les Paul, with a shorter scale length, even I would use heavier top-strings.

But on Sky Guitars – due to the length of the headstock – strings feel a little harder than on most guitars. This will also give you greater clarity. An 008-string on a Sky Guitar may feel like a 009 on a Strat or a 010-string on a Les Paul.

My favourite B-string has always been the 011.

G-strings have always been either 014 or 015 – these both have advantages and disadvantages.

D-strings are always wound. They tend to vary from 022 to 024 to 026.

A-strings tend to vary a lot with me. Currently they are either 030 or 032, but in the past they were sometimes as thick as 036 for the Electric Sun sound, which was slightly harder and tighter.

The bottom E-string is varying a lot from 042 (rare) to 046, 050. In Electric Sun days they used to be 052 sometimes, whereas during early Scorpions days, I remember them being as light as 038 (!) at first. I don't really remember when I migrated to heavier bass strings, but when I did, the sound of the guitars improved considerably. I guess it was during the "Earthquake" period of Electric Sun in the late Seventies.

The bottom B-string on the seven-strings can also vary a lot. One has to find the right kind of type of string. You will get good results from 050-058, possibly thicker, but sometimes these are too slow in response because of their thickness.

It also depends on the pitch you tune it to. I sometimes tune it to C, to D, or to a low bass A, which results in an actual 6-octave instrument (!). A Stratocaster or a standard Gibson guitar has only three and a half octaves in comparison... The 7-string Sky Guitar is virtually a different instrument altogether.



## LED POSITION LIGHTS IN THE FINGER BOARD

As I got older, my eye sight gradually started to deteriorate... The finger board became more and more blurry, and when the light was low I saw even less.

I never used to look much at my guitar necks while playing, because I often played with closed eyes. But there are certain songs, which contain more technically demanding leads that feature wide position changes and skips such as *Sky Overture* and the *Vivaldi Four Seasons*... For these pieces it is very advantageous to be able to see what your fingers are doing and where the frets are.

When I was younger I was used to having perfect vision, but there came a point when I couldn't see the frets on the finger board any more. Nowadays, particularly with those glaring lights the finger board is nothing but a shiny, reflective blur. I actually grew to like this state of super-soft vision. It is very relaxing, but a definite drawback when aiming for certain skips on the fingerboard at top-speed. Ever since then I dreamed of having lights in the fingerboard.

Now all new Sky Guitars come equipped with beautiful blue LED position lights in the top edge of the neck. I LOVE the position lights and don't ever want to be without them.

Apart from the obvious advantage of giving totally clear positions – even in a pitch-black room – it also has a nice little psychological side-effect – at least for me. As soon as power comes to the guitar, one feels one is entering a different dimension. The instrument is ready to fly! We have lift-off always makes me feel good. I don't get that on a “normal” guitar...

The brightness of the LEDs can be adjusted with a screw driver or a pick, by twisting a small screw which is on the plastic sheet that covers the electronics cavity. The LED lights are fed through the 18-volt power supply.



# THE TREMOLO SYSTEM & BRIDGE

All Sky Guitars come equipped with free-floating tremolo systems and don't have a locking mechanism. When the guitar is set up properly there will be no problem to keep the guitars in tune, even when using the whammy bar extensively. I prefer to have a subtle and accurate response of the whammy bar, and the systems we use give me exactly that.

However, it is not a Floyd Rose system, which is more extreme. The basic idea of the Floyd Rose is appealing in one way, but the sound they produce is awful. By clamping down the strings in such a "brutal", unforgiving way, the guitar loses a lot of its overall resonance and beauty of sound. Floyd Rose and similar systems always deaden the sound of the guitar. To my ears that is totally unacceptable. The sound of an unamplified electric guitar is small enough in physical terms; the last thing we need is to make it even smaller...

To help the guitar stay in tune, I use a simple, yet effective method: I either use a Graphite solution, which is easily obtainable or "Nut Sauce" on the nut, sometimes also on the tuning pegs and even the saddles of the bridge sometimes. That eliminates any potential points of friction, where the string might get stuck in one position which leads to tuning instabilities. It is not necessary to do this often in my experience, because the stuff lasts for quite a while once it has been applied. Since I don't change my strings often, I need to apply the stuff only rarely.

The bridge allows you to change the intonation of each string with a small Allen key, which is provided. This may become necessary, when using different gauge strings.

My tremolo systems are always free floating with the ability to go up as well as down.

This allows a better tremolo vibrato as well as pulling up to achieve upward glissando sounds or downward dive bombs.

If one prefers the tight approach of a flat bridge, an easy solution is to insert a locking spring.

I personally prefer three tremolo springs - instead of five or two - to balance the system, the tension and the sound.

The choice to have no rear plate to cover the springs is a deliberate one.

Each guitar has a resonance of its own, usually several, depending on the propensities and density of the wood. But the springs also have definite pitches of their own which are close to a B-flat, a B natural, sometimes higher. While this can be very desirable, because it leads to some kind of cathedral effect, particularly in certain keys, it can also be a nuisance, when one is looking for a super-tight, super-clean sound. I usually hold the SG in such a way that the springs are muted by my body. However, sometimes I will consciously use the "reverberation" of the springs and will keep the guitar away from the body. It then works almost like some kind of eerie echo chamber.

I dislike having to tune a guitar, because of many reasons. Just like I want to drive a car without having to first calibrate the wheels each time I prefer to just pick up the guitar and play. There is a tuning system which I love, which was developed by my good friend, Chris Adams, in Hamburg. It was originally called Tronical Powertune. These systems are already available on many of the new Gibson guitars and are fantastic and are even getting better all the time. I was hoping to include them on the first guitars of the new series, but so far they are not yet available for Sky Guitars unfortunately. When they are, they can be retrofitted, and we will let you know, in case you are interested. I will certainly have all of my guitars equipped with these, because you can change to any desired tuning in split seconds. Since I often play in either standard tuning or E-flat tuning, I will be able to do this on the fly on stage, which is veritable dream.







## THE PICK-UP SYSTEM & ELECTRONICS MEGA WING III

It took many years to get the Mega Wing system perfected.

The electronics were designed by none other than my old friend John Oram, aka “the father of British EQ”. The Mega-Wing project began in the late Eighties, when John asked me the loaded question: “If you had the chance to dream up the perfect pick-up system – what would it have to be like for you?” A dream question, to which I didn’t hesitate to reply with a whole string of unreasonable demands. In short, I was deeply dissatisfied with existing pick-ups and could think

of a whole host of improvements right away.

Well, today – some 23 years later – most of these have been implemented on the Mega-Wing III. But the project went through several stages of research and development, before we arrived at the “perfect” solution for the electronics.

To the best of my knowledge the MEGA-WING III is easily the currently most powerful and most effective and versatile pick-up system on the planet. Please correct me if I am wrong, and you will make your own opinion about that.



## THE 18-VOLT POWER SUPPLY

In order to achieve the incredibly high 100 dB maximum output of the MWIII system a dedicated 18-volt power-supply is needed. For more than one reasons no other power-supplies than the ones that come with the guitar can be used. The power-supply is fine tuned to enable the best possible performance of the Mega-Wing system and it also powers the LED lights in the guitar neck. If it is not calibrated perfectly and matched to the guitar, the power-supply intelligently adapts itself to international voltages. It does not need to be manually switched from 110 volts to 230 volts when traveling from America to Europe, for example. Earlier Mega-Wing incarnations - the M-W1 – used two nine volt batteries inside of the guitar. But the latest Mega-Wings are simply too powerful to be fed by batteries. They would empty far too quickly and not even last a show. Hence the necessity of the power-supply. The Mega-Wing receives power through a stereo-cable, which connects from the jack in the front of the unit, which says “Mega-

Wing”. Because of this it is not possible to play the guitar with radio transmitter units. They sound bad anyway...

It best to avoid “hot-plugging” the guitar – which means to try and avoid plugging the instrument in, while the power-supply light shows the “on” position. Nothing will usually happen, if by accident one plugs in while the power-supply is already in the “on” position, but a freak current might potentially fry a capacitor in the system, which might result in unwanted noise. In all my years this has only happened once, but it did, and therefore I am always cautious to be on the safe side and I make sure that the light is in the “off”-position before I plug in the guitar. Once plugged in safely, we can turn the safety switch to ON, so that the lamp on the unit emits a steady light. Only then is the guitar ready to produce a sound through an amp. Remember: no power-supply, or no stereo-lead: no sound. It is actually quite simple. Even I have learnt it.



# THE MEGA-WING PICK-UPS

All MEGA-WING III pick-ups are hand-wired by Boris Dommenget, who is a superb and very experienced maker of pick-ups. What is more, Boris has developed an amazing patent, which actually changes the magnetic field of the pick-up and manages to achieve a perfectly clear single-coil Strat type sound as well as a super-fat hum-bucker Les Paul type at the flick of a switch from one and the same pick-up. And this totally works! If you look at the Sky Guitar, you will see a little toggle switch on the lower scratch plate below the pick-up position switch.

When the toggle points downwards, the whole guitar is in perfect single coil mode – and it has a beautiful single coil tone, which is not harsh or grating, but pleasing to the ear.

When you flick the switch upwards you will be greeted by sweet roaring thunder: a very powerful, creamy, warm, but singing hum-bucker will be music to your ears. Enjoy!

There are three pick-ups: the first is actually hidden under the finger board. This gives you the warmest and richest tone, because it is positioned exactly over the sweet spot where the string modulates in the richest fashion and where the overtones are the sweetest.

This is pretty much the 24th fret or second octave position. Note: on the 7-strings we found a slightly different solution regarding the placement of the pick-ups.

The pick-up under the neck was an idea of Andy Demetriou's who was the original builder of all the first SG prototypes. Amazingly, there is no deterioration of sound, because the wood doesn't affect the magnetism of the low impedance pick-ups. The tone is loud and clear. It is, however, important to keep the neck pick-up flush against the fingerboard, because it physically supports it from below, but - more importantly - because microphony would arise if there were air-pockets allowed to develop due to an empty space.

As it is – Mega-Wing systems on Sky Guitars are not microphonic at all (within reason), but will give you tremendous amounts of natural and desirable feedback from the amps.

The actual noise levels are also very low, even at full blast. But it is obvious that any form of EQ that you dial in and a raise in the master gain level will result in a slightly higher noise level. If you step on a Wah-Wah pedal or switch on a gain-boosting stomp box you will know what I mean. The Mega-Wings – in comparison - are much quieter than that, although the actual output is enormous. We have opted against a noise limiter, because the threshold settings are volatile and don't allow for truly dynamic playing. I always immediately turn off my guitar volume knob as soon as I stop playing. It is a very healthy habit, which I was forced to acquire in my early days of playing super-noisy, hum-sensitive Stratocaster single-coil pick-ups.

One extra comment: when one starts to play higher than the 24th position, it is best to switch to the bridge pick-up, because the first pick-up will by design be out of range.

It will still pick up a little bit of the signal, but won't be able to give you a great tone.

The centre pick-up does not actually turn into hum-bucker mode. It is always a single-coil.

This has a great advantage: if you quickly need to switch to a very different tone while playing (which is sometimes the case), all you need to do is switch the pick-up toggle switch from either 1st or 3rd position to the middle – or reverse. The middle pick-up on all Sky Guitars sounds beautiful – much better than those on a Strat, to my mind, which tend to be somewhat fleshless and nondescript. This is because of its placement and because of the Mega-Wing system.

The bridge pick-up is very powerful, but not piercingly bright, and gets even stronger when the pick-up is raised up with its screws.





## THE FIVE-WAY POSITION TOGGLE SWITCH

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The 5-way toggle switch is currently wired to achieve the following constellations:

- Position 1: neck pick-up
- Position 2: neck & centre pick-up (resulting in an out-of-phase sound)
- Position 3: centre/middle pick-up
- Position 4: centre & bridge pick up
- Position 5: bridge pick-up

Note: some of the older 7-strings - including Mighty Wing - came with two pick-ups only.



## THE ELECTRONICS MEGA-WING III SYSTEM

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The electronics are hidden inside a so-called “black box” inside of the electronics cavity on the back of the guitar. Please do not try to open that box, which is sealed – doing so would irreparably damage the system.

I have used Oram electronics ever since we had the first Mega-Wings in 1987 I believe and the old systems are still functioning fully. I have never had a problem on stage with them, although they were all only prototypes - knock on wood. That is a pretty good testimony to their durability - and it is true.



## THE FIVE CONTROL KNOBS

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There are 5 control knobs on all new Sky Guitars.

*These are – from top to bottom:*

- 1st control knob: volume
- 2nd control knob: treble/high end EQ
- 3rd control knob: mid-range EQ
- 4th control knob: bass range EQ
- 5th control knob: master gain

Before I shall explain the various functions of the five individual control knobs, I would like to make a general observation. Most knobs of this kind on standard guitars have either numbers or markers to indicate their respective positions and values. Since all stages and environments are different, I simply use my ears for my eyes and dial the sound in completely just by listening. Therefore we don't have any markers.

I do this during the sound check, but it is a process which is ongoing during the show even. I am always looking for the best possible tone that

is achievable under the respective gig conditions. Some stages and halls simply don't sound good – some are too bright, some too dead, some too booming, some too ambient, some too loud, some too quiet, and so forth...

The list is far from comprehensive. Finding a perfect stage is relatively rare, but the Mega-Wing gives you the ultimate power tool to deal with a very wide variety of sonic conditions and can smooth out many a potential problem. The trick is to listen carefully and to learn how to get the best results. It doesn't always work, but it works most of the time.

Certain combinations are simply magical. I use a lot of additive EQ combined with subtractive EQ and thus can achieve a huge variety of organic colours with that guitar. A lot of that is in finding the right EQ settings. It is a rather subtle process of fine tuning while playing, and I am not saying it is easy, but it is worth learning how to do it.





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## THE VOLUME CONTROL

The volume works just like a normal volume control. Nothing fancy there. It is conveniently located so that the player can control the volume while picking. This also allows for convenient and smooth swells and decrescendos.

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## THE TREBLE CONTROL

The second control knob is a treble sweep EQ. The zero position is in the middle. If you turn the knob up beyond that point a pleasant, but powerful treble will be added across the spectrum. You can add up to 20dB. But you can also roll off twenty dB of treble if you turn the knob anti-clockwise. We have therefore the option of both additive, as well as subtractive EQ. For instance to achieve a Strat type sound you need to roll off some of the “yellow” mid range and dial in more “blue” – more treble.

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## THE MID-RANGE EQ

The third control knob fades in or out an extremely strong mid-range sweep filter. The frequency range has been chosen by myself with great care and centres around a definite sweet spot which is kind of “yellow” in my mind at a precise centre frequency, where the EQ is most effective. I hardly ever dial it in to the maximum, but for example, if you want to obtain a Les Paul type of sound, a certain combination of the three EQ knobs will give you that, as long as you know how to dial it in. These things take a little practice, particularly when you have to do it on the fly during a gig. Most environments or amps will require different EQ settings. You have to trust your ears and experiment. Whatever setting you have, it is almost impossible to create a bad sound – the EQs are powerful, but very musical and have an organic, natural response. Therefore they are also very forgiving, unlike some of the modern techno type EQ on some recent mixing consoles or equalizers. This is state of the art technology, but the design concepts are organic and “old school” – solid.

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## THE BASS EQ

The fourth knob is the bass control. The previous Mega-Wing systems didn't have a bass control yet, but I have always wanted one... All new systems have a separate bass control – and what a difference it makes... I found that now it is a lot easier to control an amp through the guitar. Some amps have very different bass responses. With the new Mega-Wings 3, I am able to compensate for either too little or too much bass. It works a treat!

Usually I have the bass dialled in at about twenty to thirty per cent all the time. This makes a big difference in most environments and on most amps. It gives a really pleasant and warm grounding to the overall tone and sets off the two other EQs perfectly.

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## THE MASTER GAIN

The last knob is the master gain control of the MEGA-WING.

This is our turbo charger, in effect. It can be likened to a seamless kind of gearshift and it turns the guitar from a normal, well behaved lounge lion into a roaring tiger.

This gain control is absolutely unique in electric guitars and makes all the difference. You have to experiment with it to see its incredible advantages. When the knob is turned anti-clockwise all the way, the guitar has the out-put of, say, a standard Strat. It will react like any guitar. But as soon as you increase the gain amazing things are happening.

The guitar will start to sing at even very low amp settings such as 1 or 2!

Because it is an integrated fully calibrated system the sonic quality of the overdrive thus achieved is far, far superior to any available gadget in the field of gain. That includes tube screamers – which are certainly not bad - and it most definitely wipes the floor with all those high gain channels of all modern amps. All that  
*(continued...)*



# THE MASTER GAIN *(continued...)*

is required to obtain a great singing tone is an amp with lots of head room – the clean channel on most amps is the preferred option. And you never need to switch channels again, which in itself for me has always been an unacceptable compromise – and one that delivers very poor results.

Truly great guitar tones cannot be achieved in the way most amp manufacturers are aiming at these days. In fact, today, most of these amps are built in such a way that it is impossible to get a fantastic sound. They are built for convenience of use, or to cover up for players' potential deficiencies with super-high, but comparatively crude gain. Some of these sounds may sound impressive to untrained ears at first hearing, but they tend to wear off quickly, because they tire the ear and are usually pretty useless when one seeks for individual expression and character of tone.

The concept and the road map with most modern amplifiers is totally wrong in my eyes.

An artistic dead end – a death trap, which results in people getting used to guitars sounding primitive and one-dimensional.

While the Sky Guitar equipped with Mega-Wings may not be able to reverse that deplorable trend - which is one that guarantees mediocre results at best - you are now free to create your very own great tone! You have the power tool in your hands. All you need to do is to find your own way to get the very best out of it.

To achieve this it is important to get the kind of amplifier and cabinets that will respond best to the power and the resources of the Sky Guitar. You will find that when you plug into virtually any amp with a half-way decent clean or crunch channel the Sky Guitar will give you superior results... The more the amp distorts by itself, the higher the gain on the amp channel – the less distinctive quality you will get from the Mega-Wings.

But to get the very best results, only certain types of amps will deliver those. Please feel free to experiment.

I can certainly tell you about my own experiences, because I have come across many an amp on my travels, and not all have lived to tell the tale...

Truth is: Sky Guitars with MEGA-WINGS can be amp killers...

Therefore one word of warning: when you are turning all the knobs clockwise – the kind of setting that I almost never go to – the guitar resembles a raging volcano and is much harder to control on certain amps. In that state it delivers an incredible 100 dB of signal – pure plasma – that is more than ten times the output of a standard Strat! Some amps simply cannot handle this kind of abuse and they will soon cave in, they may get oversaturated with gain, may not have enough headroom – or may simply implode and blow a fuse.

Having said that – some amps, like old Marshall Plexis, Superleads, can handle that kind of input and still sound great without giving up the ghost. But this is not true of all amps. For instance a VOX AC 30 will sound sweet and beautiful with a Sky Guitar, but if you turn it up too much, it won't last long.

I once blew up an AC30 in 10 seconds by turning it up all the way. It sounded great while it lasted... The same happened several times to a poor Fender Bassman amp, which also sounded great before it gave up the ghost... Peavey graciously sent me two 51/50s after I had jammed with Deep Purple and played Steve Morse's guitar and amp set-up and liked it... Nice sounding amp, but same story: one lasted 30 seconds – the other one expired terminally after a few seconds – sounding best just before dying...

Fender Twins last from between 1 hour to three days...

Don't get scared now: I have learnt to not destroy amps any more (or at least rarely so)...

And usually it is "only" the fuse that blows anyway.  
*(continued...)*



## THE MASTER GAIN *(continued...)*

It is actually quite simple: just don't turn up the amps beyond 50 per cent of their capacity!

What's more: they sound best when not cranked to their fullest. This was, of course, fundamentally different in the olden days of my Strat with its tiny single-coil output going straight into the Marshall Plexis... In order to get any singing whatsoever one simply HAD to crank the amp and turn it to "ten".

With the Mega-Wing system this approach is usually counter-productive.

However, it took me some time to realize this, I have to admit, because – as caring and careful I am by nature when it comes to handling guitars – when it comes to amps I used to be an ogre – a brute – don't ask me why, but I never used to treat amps with respect. Hence the long list of broken amps. In my old age, however, I have finally come to my senses and have learnt to give amplifiers the respect they deserve.

Should you want to be abusive to amps – for whatever reason – here are the recommended ones which will last even if you crank them AND give them the full-on Mega-Wing treatment:

- 1) Most older Marshalls, particularly when they have new valves and have been properly biased. The newer Marshalls, such as the 2000 series will last, but don't last as long as, say the Plexis.
- 2) Framus amps also last when going all out. I often played the Framus Cobra in conjunction with a Marshall Super Lead and obtained great results. It is like a huge Fender Bass Man, but doesn't break easily, although it sounds a little hard and Germanic.
- 3) My latest discovery are BlackStar amps, which sound amazing and which I am going to play

on my next tour. I particularly like the 100Watt Artisan, and it is even better in conjunction with a 200W BlackStar head. I even get a great tone out of both channels by just setting them to as low as 1 or 2! This is because they have plenty of head-room and are not over challenged.

They are built to a very high standard and they follow the philosophy of the old Marshalls, but incorporate very important innovations. They sound more musically gratifying to my ears than most of the recent Marshalls, which tend to sound very hard and unforgiving with the exception of certain signature models and the KT66 based Vintage modern. This one sounds beautiful, but belongs to the category of amps, which need careful handling, otherwise the Sky Guitar/ Mega-Wing combination will put an untimely end to their sweet singing voice.

Instead of a summary: like a thoroughbred stallion, a Sky Guitar does not like confined spaces. It needs plenty of headroom to soar into the sky above. It also loves a powerful amp with resources; just like one can't drive a Formula One car without certain pre-cautions, it may be necessary to keep the Mega-Wing in check on certain amps.

Having said all that – it also depends on the strength of your right hand attack, whether an amp lives or dies. If you are a soft or mellow picker by nature who generally favours a more piano or pianissimo picking approach, you are much less likely to cause damage, because you will create less violent peaks in your playing.

Don't come crying to me if you blow up any amps after having read this: in the words of John Cleese: "I warned you"!...





# CERTIFICATE OF AUTHENTICITY

Certificate of Authenticity to follow, signed and dated by Boris Dommenges, Uli Jon Roth, John Oram and Elliott Rubinson, CEO of Dean Guitars.



## SKY GUITAR WEBSITE & COMMUNITY

We are planning to launch a dedicated Sky Guitar website.

We want to devote a separate page to each and every authentic Sky Guitar ever built and would therefore also include the instrument you obtained. Each guitar has its own story to tell and there would be a space for this. You could update it any time with a list of gigs you played, recordings that you made using the SG.

There will also be a Sky Guitar user forum - for members only - where you can exchange your experiences and where you can give tips to the other users. It would also be nice to have a picture of yourself with the guitars, or perhaps even music that you performed or recorded with the Sky Guitar. The website will be launched in the not-so-distant future, and we will send you an e-mail regarding this, should you be interested.

Thank you for becoming a member of the "Ring-of-Sky-Guitars".

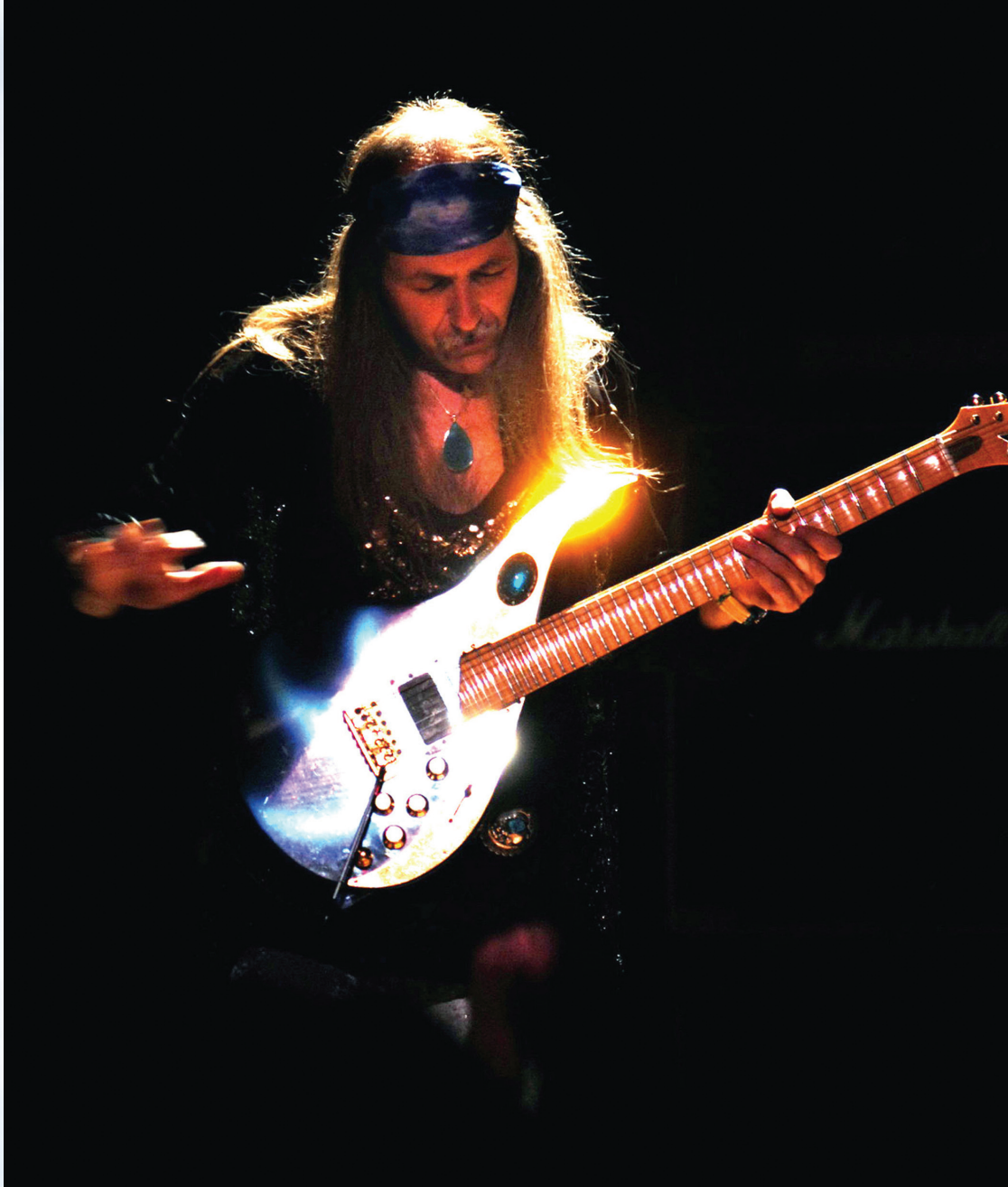
I hope you will be as satisfied with the instrument as I am, and that it will give you great pleasure playing it and filling the air with beautiful sounds.

For this I wish you lots of inspiration, as well as good luck. May the Sky Guitar help you to be more inspired. It comes with a positive blessing towards you. May the force be with you!

I also hope to meet you one day! You are always welcome to visit me back-stage at any of the shows in the world, and if you like - I will play your guitar at one of the concerts. I would love to see it again, because it wasn't easy for me to part with it. I feel connected with all Sky Guitars. They are special to me in a very personal way. I hope they respond to you in the same way they do to me.



DEAN  
GUITARS



God bless!

**Uli Jon Roth**

*Schloss Rietzneuendorf, Germany, September 2011*



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