

Professor's book pays tribute to legendary guitar

Tom Wheeler's new 'The Stratocaster Chronicles' explores the cultural history of the Fender Stratocaster

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Eric Clapton recorded "Layla" on one. Jimi Hendrix lit one on fire using lighter fluid, and played "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock on another. The energy and spirit of these historic performances were captured on a Clarence Leo Fender invention, the Fender Stratocaster guitar.

The 50th anniversary of this iconic electric guitar is upon us, and the event is being marked by the recent debut of Tom Wheeler's new book "The Stratocaster Chronicles." With this book adding to his ongoing portfolio, Wheeler is bringing guitar

prestige to the University of Oregon and the School of Journalism and Communication, in which he is an associate professor.

Wheeler, himself a musician, seems to be the perfect author for such a book. He was a longtime editor of Guitar Player Magazine and is the author of other books about guitar such as "The Guitar Book: A Handbook for Electric and Acoustic Guitarists" and "American Guitars: An Illustrated History."

Looking past Wheeler's qualifications, the story of the Strat is not as simple as knowing Stevie Ray Vaughn created a form of electric blues playing one. The prestige and adoration for this guitar, especially in America, demands attention to detail.

It is Wheeler's journalistic approach to detail that allows "The Stratocaster Chronicles" to be interesting for most audiences. No aspect of the Strat's history is sidestepped, however it is the

stories and anecdotes that make this book special.

The Strat has come a long way since its debut in 1954. Initially a dismissed new guitar that was labeled as trendy and impractical, guitarists soon found it to epitomize practicality while providing a sleek and sexy new style. Leo Fender, a facilitator of ingenuity, primarily sought to make an electric guitar that provided universal functionality.

Wheeler documents every adjustment and transition the Strat made in the past 50 years. There are almost 300 pages of pictures and text dedicated to precise accounts of the Strat's evolution. The authenticity of the documentation lies within first-hand stories told by Fender administrators, designers and builders. This wealth of information comes from three decades of interviews conducted by Wheeler. The question-and-answer format not only tells the

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me. We're hooked up with City Hall Records, which is an international distribution company, so you can type my name into any computer and the CD will come up. They recently put me on the cover of their catalog and because of that we sold about 600 CDs in two days. All those record stores decided they should have a couple Tom Heint CDs. Not that that means any customers are buying them, but the record stores are, so that's good.

Emerald: What was recording the album like?

TH: I laid down some scratch tracks, sort of guide vocals, with just

me and a guitar. Then a parade of musicians came through and recorded the album, then when that was done I came back and recorded over what they had done in a karaoke style. I got to learn about being in a studio and how everything works. A lot of eating doughnuts and watching other people play instruments for me. Normally I'm in my basement recording on a four-track.

Emerald: You have a heavy country influence on the album. Do you consider that your primary style?

TH: I would say that. Certain people are attracted to certain kinds of music. I love polka music and I love country music. I love all kinds of music, but those two get me excited and make me want to drink beer. I've

always been attracted to country. I was just in Nashville and it was like heaven there. All the musicians who play there are studio musicians and they're all really good. You don't have anything like that in Eugene, there are no country bars or anything. I was really enjoying myself there. You can go out to the gift shops and buy Hank Williams Jr. playing cards and George Jones drinking water.

Emerald: What first attracted you to country music?

TH: I don't know how to describe that. I like truck-driving songs, CB songs. I like to follow the story in a song. Country music tells a story. I like to follow that story. Some kinds of music is based on bass or drums, but country requires a story. That's why

I'm so lyrically oriented.

Emerald: Speaking of your lyrics, what sort of events inspire your songs?

TH: Basically, I'm at work and I think of something, or I'm walking down the street and hear somebody say something and I think, "That would be a good line in a country song."

Emerald: Let's take the song "Three-Way." Comedic invention or real experience?

TH: That song is a combination of truth and fantasy. It's a metaphor from reality. Let's just be safe and put it that way.

Emerald: What seems to be your most popular song?

TH: Well, "Three-Way" seems to

grab people. Also, "I Love" is popular. With that song everyone has their own favorite line.

Emerald: So you're coming back to Eugene on Saturday. Are you looking forward to coming back home for your show?

TH: I have only one mistress, and it is Eugene, Oregon. My sweet lady. Yeah, I'm looking forward to coming back.

Tom Heint will be performing at Sam Bond's Garage this Saturday with Bobby Bare Jr. The show starts at 9 p.m. and there is a \$5 cover charge. Sam Bonds is located at 407 Blair Blvd.

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FAIR

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demonstrating innovative ways to understand power needs. Workshops will feature topics on fuel cells and the reuse of gray water. Another section of the fair, the Community Village, is a place to learn about the environment and social-profit organizations and opportunities.

Tayla Biehler, a Eugene native, has attended the Oregon Country Fair for the last eight years. She said it is the eclectic variety of food that brings her back each year.

"You can get food here that you

can't find anywhere else," Biehler said.

The fair boasts more than 70 food stands ranging from falafels and artichokes on a stick to vegan desserts.

"My favorite treat is Oregon berry juice," Biehler said. "I drink that all day long."

The fair began as a fundraiser in 1969 to benefit a local alternative school in Hawkins Heights. A year later, the fair moved to its current wooded 350-acre site in Veneta, 13 miles outside of Eugene.

In its 35-year history, the Oregon Country Fair has maintained a strong relationship with both the community and the environment.

"The fair is not a non-profit organization," Newton said. "It is a social-profit organization."

In the last decade, the Fair donated more than a quarter of a million dollars to public organizations including arts programs, health care and low-budget schools.

Newton said the Oregon Country Fair is a "waste-free event" and an award-winning recycler. Last year, the fair composted or recycled 15 tons of waste, which is more than it threw away. Newton said the cooperation of the Recycling Crew, the food booths and the visitors, who might find themselves eating with

disposable cornstarch silverware, is essential for a waste-free event.

"That's the fair way," Newton says.

Lane Transit District provides a shuttle service to and from the fair. Angie Sifuentez of LTD said that last year, more than 23,000 fairgoers used the shuttle and she anticipates as least as many this year.

"We encourage people to use the bus because the one-lane highway out to the fair gets backed up," Sifuentez said.

The service begins Friday at 10 a.m. at both the Eugene Station and the Valley River Center and runs every 15 minutes until 5 p.m. on all three days.

Each day, the last shuttle leaves the fairgrounds at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets for the fair are available through TicketsWest or at the Valley River Center shuttle pick up. Tickets are not available at the fairgrounds. Ticket prices range from \$13 to \$18 depending on time of purchase.

"Whatever you are trying to find, you just might stumble upon it here," Newton said. "There is something for everyone. I love the surprises like seeing people on stilts in mosquito costumes. They have no other reason but the pursuit of joy."

Kenneth Mendribil is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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