







## FIRST PLAY



**STERLING BY MUSIC MAN  
ST VINCENT STV60**  
£699

**WHAT IS IT?** Affordable version of Music Man signature with three mini-humbuckers



**GUILD T-BIRD ST P90**  
£759

**WHAT IS IT?** Hardtail with soapbar single-coil version of Guild's Newark St T-Bird

# Visions In Blue

Fancy something a little different? Here are two contemporary-made 'shapes' – one conceived back in the early 60s, the other a more up-to-date vision

**Words** Dave Burrluck **Photography** Joby Sessions

**W**e guitarists remain a conservative bunch, don't we? Outside of the classic electric benchmarks, few differently shaped guitars exist and even fewer achieve player acceptance. Of course, Gibson's modernistic 'shapes', the Flying V and the Explorer, have passed into the mainstream despite being ridiculed on their late 50s release, likewise the reverse and non-reverse Firebirds. But many other, err, oddly shaped guitars lie in cupboards, under beds and in dusty shop corners. What were those guitar designers – or in indeed artists – thinking?

Guild happily joined in the alternative shape craze in the swinging 60s with the S-200 Thunderbird, in stark contrast to its 'stuffy' archtops and semis. It appeared in 1964 and ran through to '68 before Guild swapped its shape for a more conservative Gibson SG-like style. Under the current Newark St Collection banner, made in Korea, the guitar was re-released last year as the S-200 T-Bird, complete with its Jazzmaster-inspired



This guitar can really soar, though the mix positions add currency for more textural, funkier voices

dual-circuit controls and the original-style Hagstrom vibrato. Earlier this year, Guild released a trio of 'ST' models with more stable tune-o-matic bridge and stud tailpiece, and a colour-dependent choice of either Franz-style soapbar single coils or Guild LB-1 mini-humbuckers and simplified controls.

Music Man's St Vincent appeared last year, too, and this hugely individualistic statement designed by Annie Clark (aka St Vincent) might well have been conceived to better fit the female form, but it has the sort of cool that should appeal to chaps, too. At the start of this year, Music Man announced an Indonesian-made Sterling version of the instrument at a third of the price, on review here.

The T-Bird, shape aside, follows a very Gibson-esque formula: 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length, dual pickups and that bridge/tailpiece setup along with all mahogany set-neck construction. The St Vincent, again aside from its shape, goes for a more Fender recipe with a 648mm (25.5-inch) scale, a trio of pickups and a five-screw bolt-on maple

1. While the T-Bird and St Vincent have similar neck depths, strapped on, the latter does feel a little neck-heavy, though you can easily adjust to this feel with some playing time

2. These high output Firebird-style mini-humbuckers ape the DiMarzios used on the USA model. They're hot!







neck on a rather non-Fender mahogany body. From the base of their bodies to the tip of their headstocks they're virtually identical in length – around 1,016mm (40 inches), which is about 38mm longer than a Stratocaster.

The St Vincent's angular body with its distinct chamfering is a little thicker in its centre, around 41mm, and tapers down to 26mm at the tip of the bass-side lower bout. The T-Bird goes for a slightly thinner and more uniform depth of 39mm with SG-like edge chamfering along with a noticeably lighter weight. In fact, this one is over a pound lighter than the original T-Bird we looked at last year.

Hardware differs, too, with the St Vincent employing a version of Music Man's 'vintage' two-post vibrato, placed flat on the body with no upbend, bent-steel saddles and a die-cast block. The T-Bird's generic setup appears of equal quality and shoots for open-backed Grover tuners on the back-angled three-a-side head, while the St Vincent goes for sealed tuners with pearloid buttons on the smaller Music Man hallmark four-and-two headstock.

Guild quotes a bone nut; the St Vincent would appear to have a white synthetic offering. Both share a Gibson 305mm (12-inch) radius'd fingerboard: the T-Bird's is cleanly bound with blocks inlays and slightly chunkier frets; the St Vincent's is peppered with the artist's classy double circle inlays.

### Feel & Sounds

The T-Bird's waist is considerably thicker than the more skeletal St Vincent, which creates a very different feel played seated; the T-Bird almost feels like a larger semi in comparison. Strapped on, the T-Bird hangs really well, more conventionally than it looks, while the St Vincent's neck seems to stick out more – about two frets' worth! – and is very slightly neck-heavy. After playing time, though, neither feels particularly odd.

More unusual is the St Vincent's pickup and control setup. The trio of mini-humbuckers apes the custom-wound DiMarzios of the USA version (though these have a huge DC ohm reading that suggests a thinner wire gauge),

3. This four-pole 'super' switch allows quite unusual wiring without the usual neck/middle and middle/bridge selections you might expect. If you're handy with a soldering iron, you could easily wire it like a Strat then add a pull/push switch to voice the neck and bridge and all-three-together combinations

4. This version of Music's Man's vibrato needed a little adjustment and the push-in arm, once pushed in, wouldn't come out. It's easy enough to adjust, but we did have to remove the vibrato to sort it





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## The T-Bird's Franz soapbars retain a clear sparkle yet do a good 'hot Strat' impersonation

while the five-way lever switch offers us, from position one, bridge, middle, neck, all three (in parallel), plus – where we'd expect the neck pickup selection to be – neck and bridge, again in parallel. The Guild is much more straightforward with bridge, both and neck selections via the three-way toggle.

Sonically, then, we're in for some diversity and the T-Bird's Franz soapbars (the long-defunct US company that made the original pickups) present relatively low-output voices that retain a clear sparkle yet do a good 'hot Strat' impersonation, and with a little mid-boost, a thicker classic LP Special grunt. Yes, there's hum pick-up – aside from the mix, which is hum-cancelling – but here's an easy-to-dial-in sound that jangles, retains clarity with crunchy gains and offers a nicely vocal, not overly mushy neck pickup voice.

As we expect, the St Vincent offers a thicker voice than the T-Bird that adds noticeable hair to our previously clean test amps: juicy and fruity on the solo pickup positions, with some welcome hollowness from the neck and bridge position, likewise all three, which actually adds a little Stratty-ness. This is a guitar that likes gain and can really soar, although the mix positions add plenty of currency for more textural, funkier voices.

5. These Franz-style soapbar single coils are very close cousins of Gibson's P-90. Little is known of the company who made them and early original examples are stamped with 'Fransch – Electric Company – Woodside N.Y.C.'

6. Unlike the initial reissue of the T-Bird, this 'ST' version ditches the Hagstrom vibrato for a generic hardtail setup instead. A sensible move in our book!



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Neck depths are similar with the T-Bird measuring 21.5mm at the 1st fret and 22.9mm at the 12th, compared with the St Vincent's 20.6/22.6mm, which has slightly fuller shoulders than the more classic deep C of the T-Bird. The St Vincent has an odd arrangement for its vibrato arm: once we pushed it in, we couldn't get it out again. The T-Bird, meanwhile, has its height adjustment for those soapbars *under* their covers, which have to be removed to access them.

### Verdict

Well, if you're looking for something a little leftfield, both these visions are certainly that. As its 60s origin suggests, the T-Bird is the more classic-sounding piece and in this 'ST' format it's hugely tempting, without the tuning issues we experienced with the vibrato version and with way more simple-to-use controls. The St Vincent certainly packs a sonic punch and proved quite a driver for our pedalboard and Helix LT. It's the more out-there looking of our pair, but the more we play it, that shape is surprisingly comfortable.

Both remain very showy pieces, not for the conservative, shy and retiring among us – and both are well priced and fit for purpose. So are you brave enough to take them for a spin? 



### STERLING BY MUSIC MAN ST VINCENT STV60

**PRICE:** £699 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Indonesia

**TYPE:** Original shape solidbody electric

**BODY:** African mahogany

**NECK:** Maple, bolt-on

**SCALE LENGTH:** 648mm (25.5")

**NUT/WIDTH:** White

synthetic/42.1mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Rosewood,

Custom St Vincent inlays, 305mm (12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium

**HARDWARE:** Sterling vintage 2-post vibrato with bent steel saddles, enclosed tuner with pearloid buttons

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:**

53.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** 3x mini-humbuckers with chrome covers, 5-way toggle pickup selector switch, master volume and tone

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 3.61/7.9

**OPTIONS:** None

**RANGE OPTIONS:** USA Music Man St Vincent signature costs £2,229

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Vincent Blue (as reviewed)

**Strings & Things**

01273 440442

[www.sterlingbymusicman.com](http://www.sterlingbymusicman.com)

8/10

**PROS** Visionary design with a powerful voice; good build and surprisingly ergonomic

**CONS** Pickup voicing and switch options not for everyone; push-in vibrato arm needed some attention



### GUILD T-BIRD ST P90

**PRICE:** £759 (inc gigbag)

**ORIGIN:** Korea

**TYPE:** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric

**BODY:** Mahogany

**NECK:** 1-piece mahogany, 'C' profile, glued-in

**SCALE LENGTH:** 629mm (24.75")

**NUT/WIDTH:** Bone/43.4mm

**FINGERBOARD:** Bound rosewood, pearloid block inlays, 305mm

(12") radius

**FRETS:** 22, medium jumbo

**HARDWARE:** Nickel-plated Guild tune-o-matic-style with stud tailpiece, Grover Sta-Tite (98 Series) open-backed tuners

**STRING SPACING, BRIDGE:** 51.5mm

**ELECTRICS:** 2x Franz-style Soapbar single coils, 3-way toggle pickup selector, master volume and tone

**WEIGHT (kg/lb):** 2.82/6.2

**OPTIONS:** Guild LB-1 mini-humbuckers in Cherry Red and Vintage White, £759

**RANGE OPTIONS:** The S-200 T-Bird with vibrato costs £819

**LEFT-HANDERS:** No

**FINISHES:** Pelham Blue (as reviewed)

**Selectron UK Ltd**

01795 419460

[www.guildguitars.com](http://www.guildguitars.com)



9/10

**PROS** Nicely made repro in hardtail with no tuning or control issues; classic-voiced P-90-style sounds

**CONS** The tuners have dropped in quality from earlier models; archaic pickup-height adjustment