

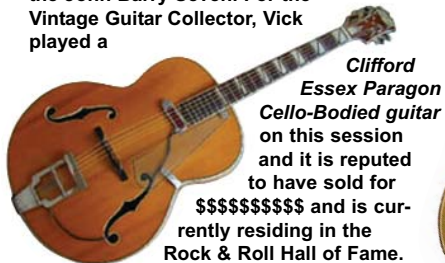


Big Jim Sullivan - The Ultimate Guitarist

In the late 50's early 1960's, two guitarists led the field in the UK's session market. One



being **Vick Flick (John Barry Seven)**, probably most noted for his memorable guitar riff on the Original James Bond Theme tune written by Monty Norman and recorded by the John Barry Seven. For the Vintage Guitar Collector, Vick played a

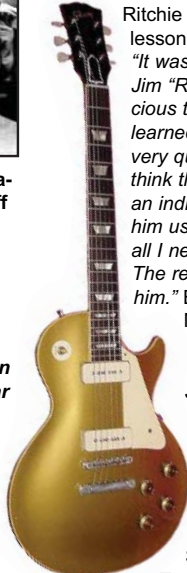


Clifford Essex Paragon Cello-Bodied guitar on this session and it is reputed to have sold for \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ and is currently residing in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

The other heralded guitarist was Jim Sullivan, Big Jim as he became known. As in all pioneering periods in anything, everyone was in the formative stages of learning and developing the

styles that were at the forefront of the new Rock and Roll revolution that was sweeping the Globe. Jim started playing guitar at the age of 14 and was playing professionally by the age of 16. Coincidentally, that age of learning time frame mirrored my career as well. In fact, my first pro band was Neil Christian and the Crusaders who Jimmy Paige and Ritchie Blackmore had played with.

Ritchie actually took the odd lesson from Jim. Jim says "It wasn't that odd" said Jim "Richie was a precocious talent even then, he learned to be an individual very quickly. To be truthful I think that telling him to be an individual and making him use his little finger is all I needed to tell him. The rest was natural to him." Early Rock Star Marty Wilde recognised Jim's talents and at 17, Jim joined the Wildcats, Marty's band. On Jim's first session with Marty in 1958, he used a **1955 Gibson Gold Top** which Marty had brought from Gospel Singer Sister Rosetta Tharp. 55 Gold



Tops are fetching mega bucks these days but at the time, it's value was probably in the hundreds. Jim says "I used this guitar until 1959 when American guitars were allowed



Marty Wilde

to be imported into the UK. I then brought a Cherry Red Gibson 335 stereo model from Ivor Mairants, it was magnificent."

After leaving the Wildcats, Jim's talent on guitar was widely used by a whole host of notables. Jack Good the producer of one of the first Rock and Roll TV shows used Jim on many sessions as he loved the sound that Jim produced on his 335. The older session musicians used to call Jim 'The Electric Monster' because of the way he made the guitar 'moan' by pulling and bending the strings. You have to remember that the early session players came from a different genre. Rock and Roll was as new to them as it was to the World. Jim specifically remembers one session for Oh! Boy, he recalls "I remember one session, this little girl was screaming and shouting with incredible dexterity, she made my hair curl. The track was 'Shout' and the little girl was LuLu, she was 14 years old." Jim also sets the record straight for the world of 'who played on what and when' anoraks when he states "I remember making quite an impact with the tone and volume pedal when I used it on Dave Berry's 'Crying Game' ". Even to this day people still argue as to whether it was me or Jimmy Page playing on the track. Also before that I did the solo's on P.J Proby's 'Hold Me' and 'Together'. It


caused the same argument because this was the first **fuzz box** used in this country. Lots of people think it was Jimmy Page who had the first fuzz box. It wasn't, No! it wasn't me either. Eric Ford came to a session one day and produced this little gold box with Gibson written on it. It had one button for off and on and he wasn't quite sure about what it did. I knew what it was because I knew Chet Atkins had used such a gismo on one of the Everly Brothers tracks.

Eric lent it to me and I used it on the track we were recording at the time. It blew the mind of Keith Grant, the engineer at Olympic studios, and we only did one take of that particular track. It was 'Hold Me' and it put Jim Proby on the way to becoming a big star."

In 1969, Jim joined Welsh Superstar, **Tom Jones**. Tom featured Jim extensively in his TV Series with his Special Guests.

Perhaps the low key features of backing musicians were not featured by show producers of the day and Tom was and is, one hell of a performer, but I think that these shows brought Jim to the attention of the wider public. I remember my Dad saying whilst watching one of Tom's shows " Tom Jones's has got a bloody good guitarist ". Albeit my Mum was more interested in the physical side of Tom's performance, as were millions of other ladies at the time! Jim played on literally hundreds of ses-





sions over the years including work for Small faces, Freddie & the Dreamers, The Kinks, The Tremeloes, the list is endless. Funnily enough, Jim has only made six albums in his own right, including one on Sitar entitled 'Sitar Beat'. In 1974, Jim formed a label with Derek Lawrence, the producer of Deep Purple and Wishbone Ash. The label was called Retreat. They produced Labi Siffri, Chas & Dave, McGuinness Flint and Glam Metal band Angel, who were successful Stateside. After the label association, Jim joined the evergreen James Last Orchestra in 1978 and stayed for nine years. Brief spells with Olivia Newton John led Jim into writing music for film and jingles. It happens to all of us guys who have spent virtually all our lives on the road that we suddenly have to have a respite from the travelling and that's exactly what Jim did, taking a break for a few years and then just drifted back into playing in a nearby pub, which playing locally and without the pressure, Jim found he enjoyed. I can absolutely empathise with that, as in the end, you just don't want all the hype and it makes total sense to return to the simplicity of how you began. I noticed in Jim's Jazz Group US; he had ex genesis Keyboard Player Derek Austen on Keyboards. Derek also played on my 'Interlife' LP which was a very successful seller Worldwide. Recently Jim has worked with Van Morrison. Jim says of his time spent. *"Just recently I worked with Van Morrison and I came to realize that money can't make a decent human being out of you. Here is a man worth 50 million pounds and is as unhappy a person as I have ever seen". "He is so unhappy that he treats everybody as if he had bought them and they belonged to him to do what he likes with them". "My stay with Van was very short lived and the lesson learned from him will stay with me for a long time". "A nice way to spend the rest of my life." said Jim "Would be to work for Love instead of Work to Live". "I am a very lucky man. I am living my life with my hobby as my profession."*



Jim is currently working with **Duncan Mackenzie** as a duo. Duncan is a long standing friend of Jim's and they work as a duo covering Jazz Standards to Jimi Hendrix. With such a long and successful career to date, you have to draw the conclusion that Big Jim is truly the UK's number 1 session guitarist across many decades. He has his own signature model guitars named after him and I guess that he will always be active in music regardless of trends or genres.

Paul Brett