

# THE RISE AND RISE OF THE MAGNATONE GUITAR



1960 Burst and an all gold 56 Les Paul that a that were to be sold to the highest offer at the show. The gold top changed hands 2 years ago at \$100k and could probably have been had for \$45k. The burst was purchased for close to \$500k a few years back and the owner was looking to get \$350k for it. There was a clean no issue '58 Tele that sat at the show for \$20k..Most remained unsold at the end of the show. The only strong part of the market was for items under \$10k range. This is a far cry from previous years when electric guitars were fetching infinite prices and some would argue, brought by idiots for idiots. This was where lots

of the Wall Street and City Bonuses were being spent. Instead of flashing the Phillippe Patek watches they flashed the '56 Gibson Les Paul. Now these are offered for sale at vastly reduced prices as the credit crunch hits the world.

Strangely however, the Vintage Acoustic Guitar market is still steady and on the rise and certainly outperforming the stock markets. Unlike it's cousin the electric. it never experienced the high and lows of speculative buyers and has continued to be valued by serious collectors and players, possibly because they are older and wiser. There are bargains to be had in these uncertain times and many collectors are now focusing on Kay's, Harmonies and Valco's of the 50's and 60's. Arguably some of these guitars produced the best Blues sounds to date and the likes of Eric Clapton, Jimmy Paige, Jimmy Reed, Lonnie Johnson, cut their teeth on these in the formative stages of their careers. They are certainly on the rise

with prices doubling plus over the past few years. They are still however, relatively inexpensive for the great sounds they produce.

The one make that is rocketing in price is Magnatone. The **Magnatone Mark V** first launched in 1957 could be had a few years back for under the \$1000 dollar mark. Now if you can find one, they are on sale between \$5 and \$10,000 dollars in vgc.

Why the fuss ? who were Magnatone ? Well, they in the main, produced some great valve amplifiers which are much sought after today, especially by American session players. As is the old UK Watkins Dominator amp. Selling in the States for around the \$4000 mark. I had one in the 60's as did lots of other guitarists as a start up amp. I soon traded it in for a Vox AC30, which was THE amp to own at the time. As the course of time progressed, other generations see things with different eyes and therefore that's what stimulates the collecting fads today. Basically the Magnatone guitar models of the 50's and early 60's were designed by



either **Paul Bigsby** or Paul Barth. Both these names are heralded for their contributions to guitar and amplifier design. In fact, they are near the top of the A list for

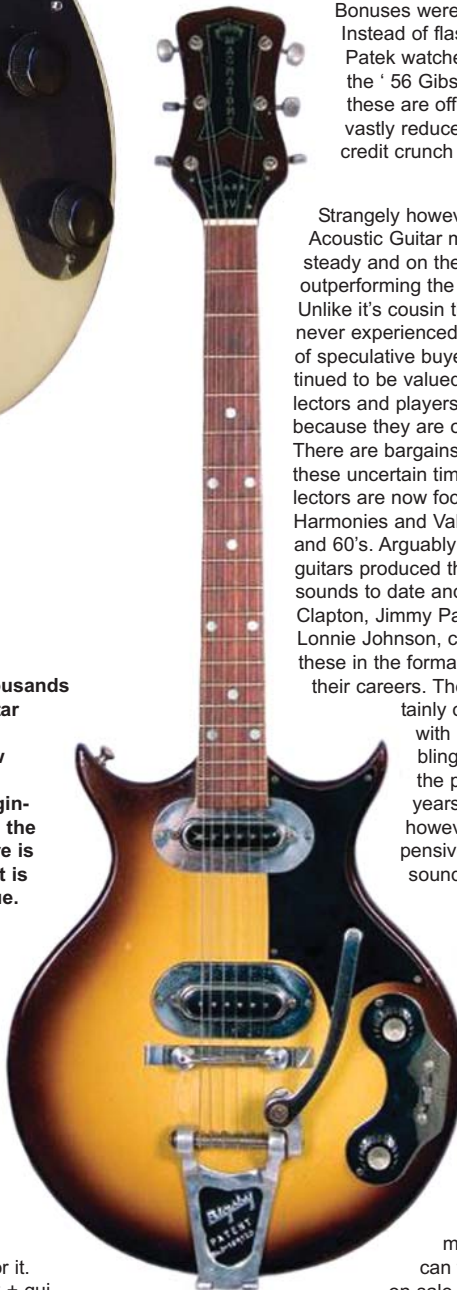


this. Bigsby gave the world of music the famous "**Tremolo Unit**" and Barth ( ex national Executive) designed later for Rickenbacker. Rarer than the Bigsby designed Mark V is his first offering, the **Mark 111**. These are as rare as Dodo droppings and I was extremely fortunate to acquire one in excellent condition a few years ago. They look a bit like a Telecaster but smaller and lighter. They are designed with internal acoustic chambers and one of the best single coil pick ups I have heard to date. Only one, but one to kill for. The later two pick up Mark V was considered a professional model and was an entirely different design and concept. In the late 50's, Paul Barth designed the Mark V1, which I also have. Again a one pick up model which will hold it's own against anything I have played. Whilst the Bigsby designed Magnatones are not considered in the same vein as Bigsby's own made and designed guitars, of which there were very few, the Mark 111 is described by Michael Wright, who had written many fantastic books on guitars as follows "*When you push the large single-coils through True Vibrato, you get a*

by Paul Brett

With the rush to spend thousands in the Vintage Electric Guitar market by all kinds of investors over the past few years some of the more inflated prices are now beginning to fall away. Out of all the recent highs and lows there is one brand in particular that is continuing to fly up in value.

No, it's not a Gibson or Fender, those doyens of electric players dreams have just about reached their zenith and some have lost 30% of their value of a year ago. For example, at this years Philadelphia Guitar Show, there was a mint 65 Stratocaster in that a dealer had for sale at \$17.5k and probably would have taken less than \$15k for it. Two years ago it was a \$25k + guitar. There was also a super clean



Magnatone Mark V



*magnatone mk 111*

*classic '50s sound that takes you to paradise! "* Whilst a true Bigsby guitar would set you back a quarter of a million dollars or so, the Magnatones are far less expensive and from my own perspective, if you drive these through any effects or overdrives as well as true tremolo, especially from an Ampeg Gemini twin reverb, you have a wall of sound at your fingertips. It is true to say that the Mark 111's are like pirate treasure to find, especially in any kind of original condition. The Mark V1's are virtually as rare. The Mark V's are sparsely available, but all are escalating price. Still much cheaper than their Fender and Gibson counterparts, but there were not that many made and it's hard to ascertain exactly how many came

ongoing place in the annals of guitar history. When you consider the price of many early guitars that cost but a few dollars in the 20's and 30's, that today are fetching thousands and even millions, you have to keep an open mind when you are looking for a vintage instrument. No one can predict what will become collectable in the future but the rule of thumb is always rarity and condition with provenance if possible. Don't pay top dollar for something that is already at the apex of it's value, unless you really want it from a playing point of view and you can afford it. If anybody wants to post questions on their vintage guitars on my website, I will be quite happy to offer you any advice I can regarding collecting, free of charge. [www.paulbrett-guitarist.com](http://www.paulbrett-guitarist.com) click on Q&A and leave your questions and a photo of your guitar there. You will also see lots of other peoples guitars and questions which may help in some way to enhance your knowledge of vintage guitar collecting.



*Magnatone Mk V1*

onto the market way back then.

So, if you spot one of these rarities at a Car boot sale anywhere, don't pass it by because it's not a god given household name. Snap it up. The same applies to the valve driven amplifiers. What is collectable with a historical provenance, will always have an