

STONE REPORT

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WEEKLY

PLAY 'TIL YOUR FINGERS BLEED



THE HOLEY-EST OF THE BOARDS

A CHAT WITH CHEMISTRY DESIGN WERKS



Pedalboards, although a necessity for many guitar players, are typically not on the cutting edge of guitar gear. Many designs have been around for years, with the only updates being expanded or contracted dimensions. Enter Christian Trifilio, the mastermind behind Chemistry Design Werks, the company that gives us the Holeyboard. Based out of St. Paul, MN, Trifilio applies his knowledge and skills in industrial design to create incredible, innovative pedalboard solutions for the modern player. His vision to create a pedal-friendly pedalboard that doesn't require Velcro or other messy adhesives came to life with the Holeyboard, and like all great innovators do, he has continued to expand and modify his designs based on customer feedback. I had the pleasure of talking with Mr. Trifilio about pedals, pedalboards, the source of his inspiration, and music in general - let's take a look into the mind of the man that gave pedalboards their groove back.

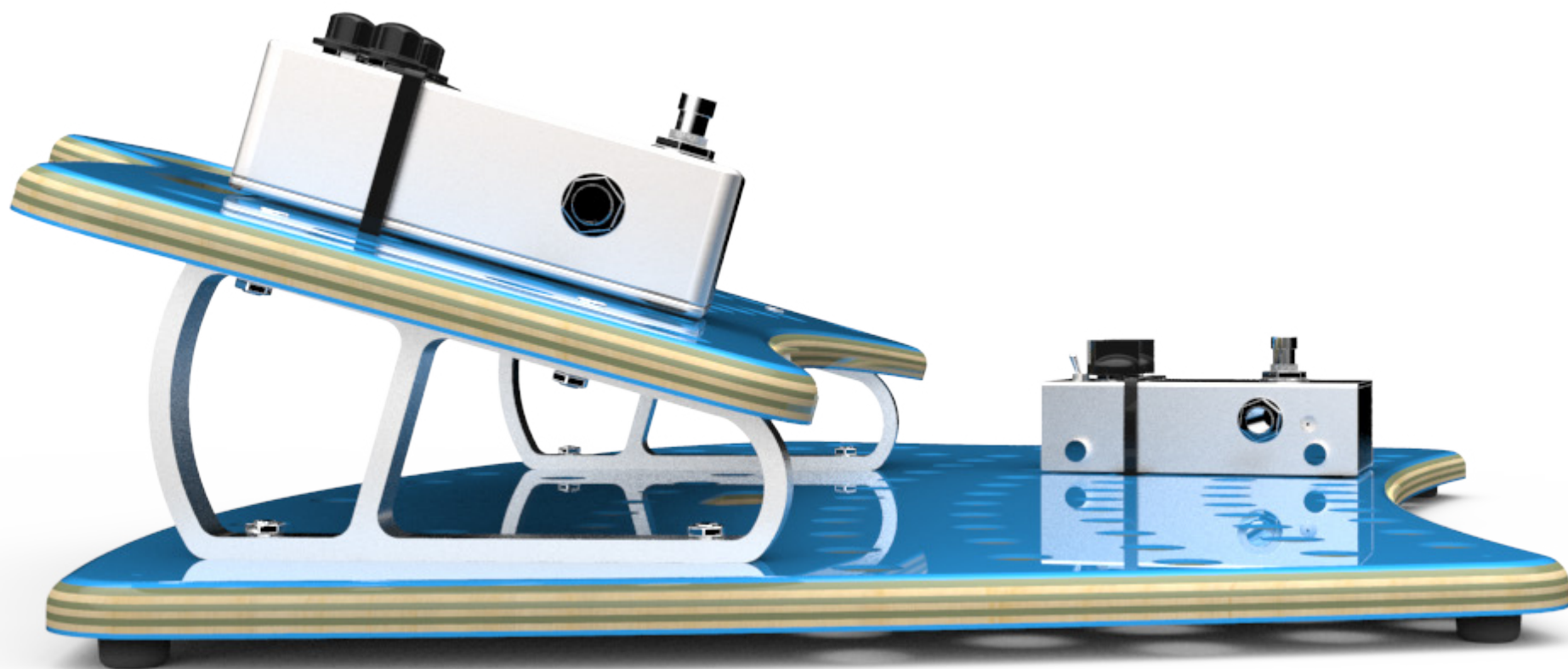
TONE REPORT: *Tell us about your musical background.*

CHRISTIAN TRIFILIO: I have two wonderful parents, but due to them simply not knowing better, I grew up listening to Muzak over the radio. I'm



the youngest of four, my two sisters and my brother all took piano and lessons and they hated it. It made my parents' lives miserable so I wasn't signed up for anything. I actually begged to play piano, and finally I was able to start trumpet later. I took private lessons for a year then joined concert band and jazz band at school, it was awesome.

My musical awakening came on a snowy day in northern Michigan, there was a blizzard coming in and I was driving in my '83 Honda Civic to go to my first job, making pizzas at a local ski mountain. I remember the



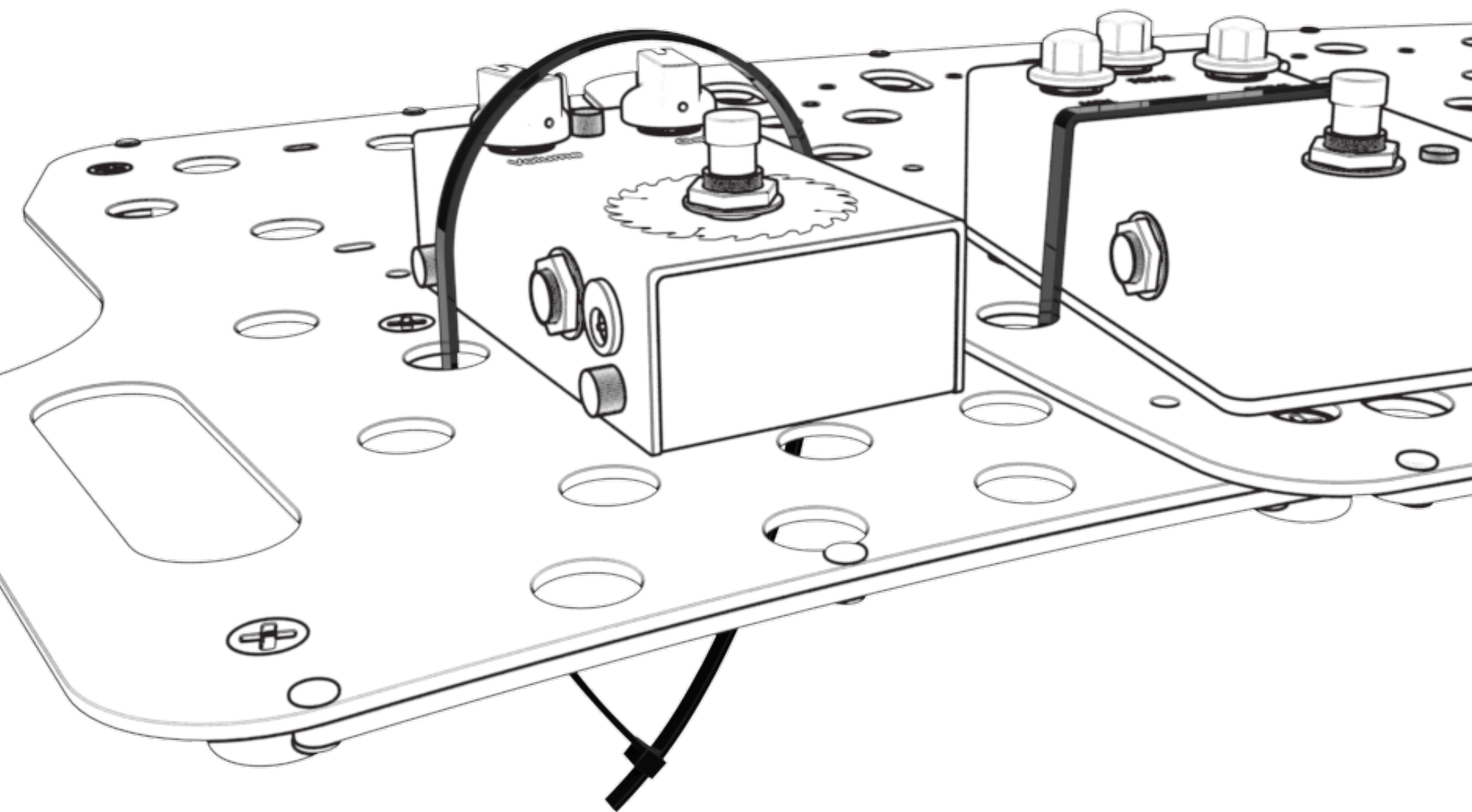
cold and seeing my breath, the silence of the car on the snow-covered road, and I turned on the radio and heard “Let it Be” for the first time. It blew my mind and I never looked back.

I actually had a guitar when I was 18 but only learned three or four chords. It wasn’t until I was 28 that I decided to be like a Jedi and build my own guitar and learn how to play it better. I made a Tele-style guitar that I still have. I’ve rewired it 40 times, put on new necks, and replaced everything, but it still has magic. I took lessons from a guy who was a working musician and he had a way of teaching that opened up the neck for me and I immediately started writing songs and started a band. I read a great interview with the Black Crowes 20 or so years ago and they said when they started,

they weren’t good enough to play covers so they wrote their own songs. I liked that idea a lot and took the same path, although I skipped the part about being in a famous rock band.

TR: *When did you decide to enter the competitive arena of pedalboards, and why?*

CT: Well, I never started because I wanted to compete, and I think that is important. I really started just wanting to create something that worked better for myself. I come from a long line of craftsman, tinkerers, builders of stuff; my favorite character growing up was Q from James Bond—I wanted to be an inventor. My actual career path took me through a degree in Industrial Design and Ethnographic Research and 20 years of designing products for other people from blow torches



to orthopedic instruments for knee surgery. I learned and practiced how to creatively solve problems and I think maybe that's the answer to the question. My greatest strength is problem solving and it's what I enjoy the most. I was in a band and tried Velcro, was appalled, and started building prototypes and constantly evolving the design, which I still do to this day. I was then sitting on a plane three days before Christmas and the toilet was overflowing. We were on the tarmac for three hours and I just wanted to see my kids. It was at that point that I said "This is not a way to spend the rest of my life, I need a big change." I got back home and started planning the road that led to where I am now.

TR: *What, if anything, inspired your designs?*

CT: Charles and Ray Eames, their work with molded plywood and new materials in the '40s, inspired me to be a designer. Also, the truth to materials and truth to construction from the Arts and Crafts period early in the 20th century, showing what something is and how it's constructed can be beautiful. The semantics of the Bauhaus movement—how can an object tell you how to use it through form, color, texture and materials? And skateboard decks and the punk movement of the early '80s. I love the DIY aesthetic and attitude; everyone should be able to express themselves.



Patagonia, as a company, and Yvon Chouinard has been a lifelong inspiration. They have made bold steps in being leaders to make the things we use and live with more sustainable as well as make them more functional and beautiful. That's a big deal to me, although I am disappointed that they no longer make anything in the US. Which would leave me to say that I'm inspired by the other little companies out there like mine who are doing it here at home and giving it their best. You all are awesome and I know how

hard it is—you rock.

TR: *I'm surprised there aren't more alternatives to Velcro-based boards. Did you have any concepts prior to the Holeyboard design?*

CT: Yes, Velcro! Funny, but true. I actually started a new blog on my website so people can get a better feel for what is going on at Chemistry and I think I am going to show some of the history and early prototypes, they are fun to see.

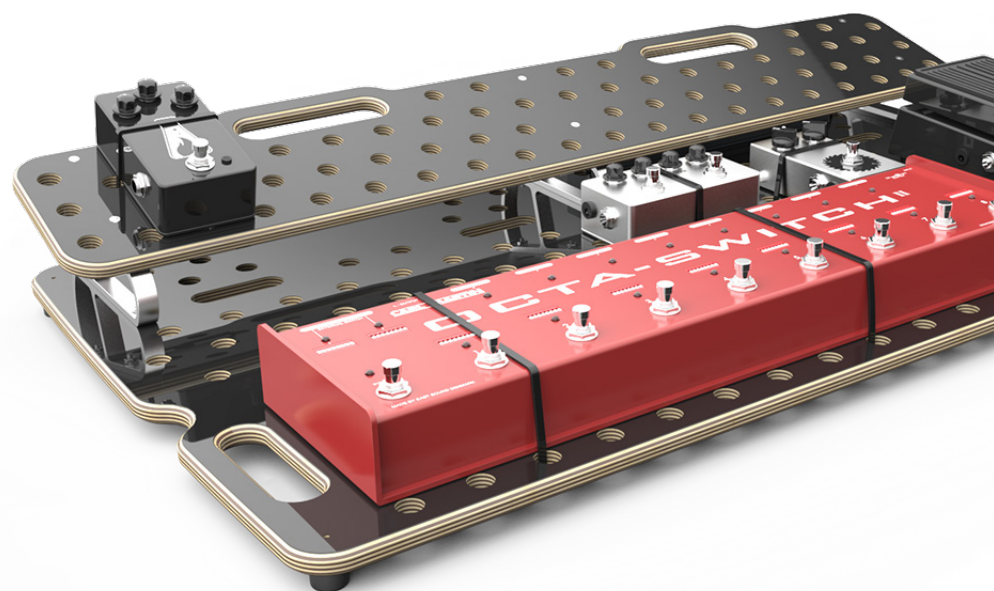
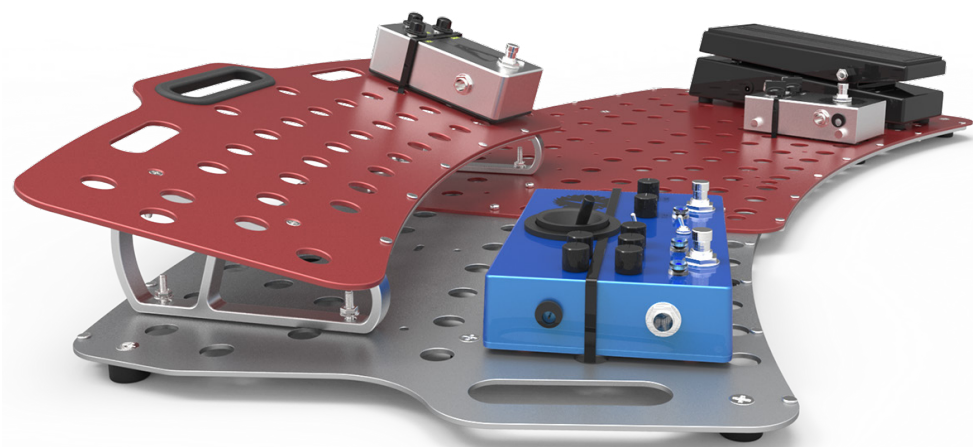
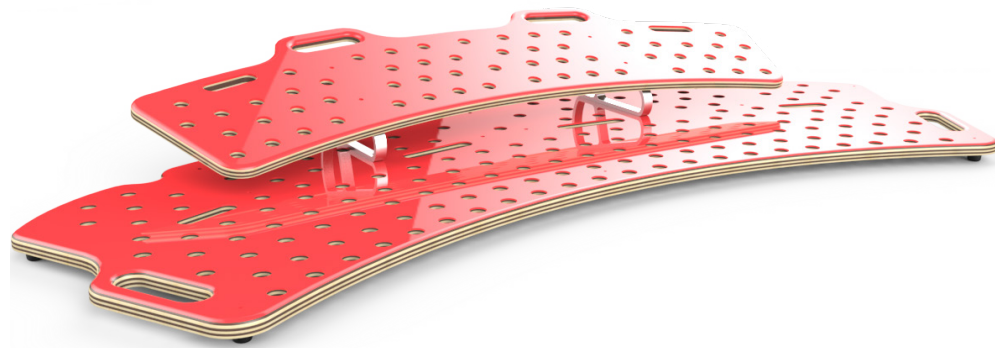
You know, in my experience, you can give the exact same problem and

design brief to five different people, the same research to review, and the same tools to use and they will come up with five completely different solutions.

Also, it depends on your approach. I think the fact that I approach the design of Holeyboards from starting with the right problems to solve drives the fact that they are so different. An alternative way to approach designing a pedalboard would be to start with what else is already out there and try to improve or modify that. I think that is the approach most companies take with many products, and it leads to iteration rather than innovation, and a lack of differentiation. It's a lot harder to start from scratch but a lot more fun.

TR: *Since you are a pedalboard builder, I'm assuming you enjoy pedals. What are some of your favorites? Are there any pedal builders that inspire you?*

CT: I like what Catalinbread has been doing a lot. I have the Echorec at the beginning of my chain—it's fantastic—and the Belle Epoch at the end. One of the things that I like most about them is their manuals, have you read them? They are like Mesa Boogie but even better. I love nothing more than sitting down to a good read about everything my pedal can do, it's fantastic. It's a



**CHEMISTRY
DESIGN WORKS**

tragedy that the founder (Nicholas Harris) was killed in a car accident this spring, I hope their ethos continues on.

Z. Vex is wacky and local, and I appreciate what it's done for the industry creativity-wise. Based on what I use the most with the band, Fulltone just sounds amazing to me when live and loud. They nail it every time so I have about every pedal they make except for the Tube Tape Echo . . . which I want very, very badly.

Walrus Audio, I think, is the new Z. Vex—innovative, pushing the envelope, ridiculous quality and the character of the founder and all the people there is top notch. It's important to me who the people are behind the company and the people there are excellent.

TR: *Desert island pedaboard: If you can only take three pedals, which ones are coming with you?*

CT: My EP Booster up front from Xotic, my PolyTune Mini, and my Way Huge Supa Puss, a ridiculously organic delay. All mounted nicely on a Holeyboard AmpTop in Super Bee Yellow with a Walrus Audio Aetos power supply attached to the bottom!

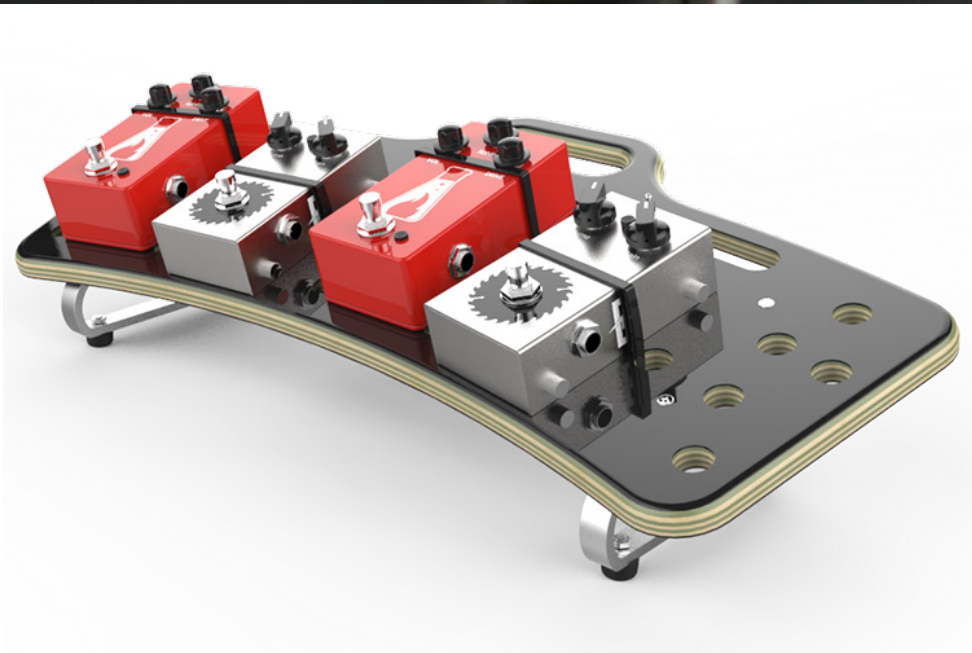
TR: *Outside of stompboxes, do you have a favorite piece of music gear?*

CT: I'm also an amp junkie, and I am currently infatuated with my Marshall 100 watt Vintage Modern with an early '70s basket weave cabinet that I put two Scumback M75s with the paper voice coil and two vintage UK Greenbacks. My prediction: just like the trend of amps getting smaller and smaller, I think all of the people, like me, that missed the full stacks of the '80s, are going to discover what rock actually feels like. It feels good and I like it.

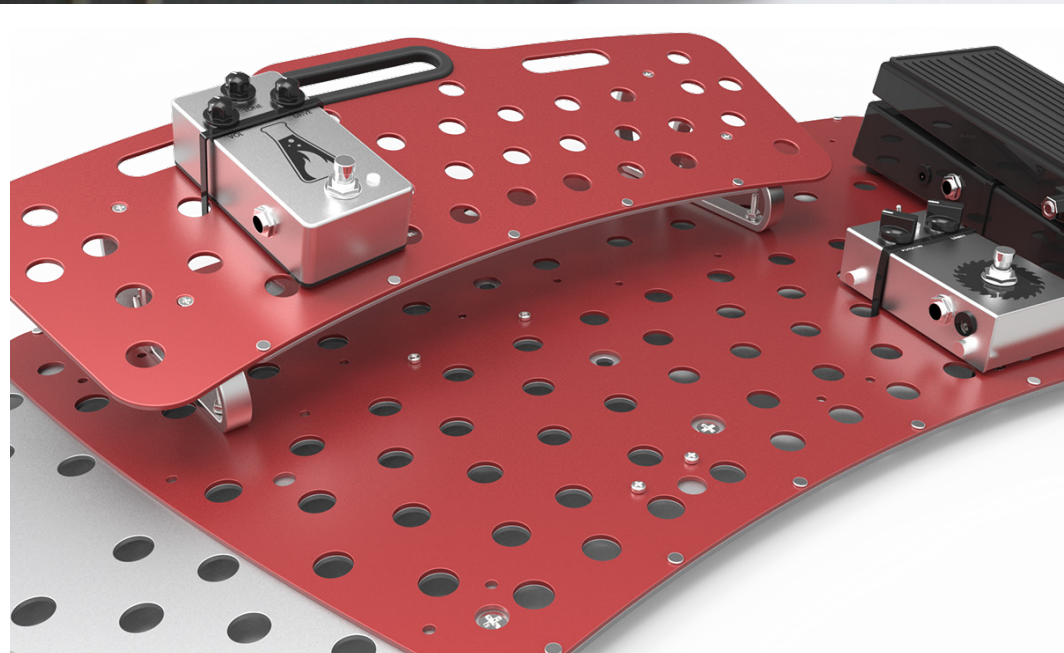
I am equally enjoying my little 14 watt Victoria Chicagolux (made by Victoria amplifiers in a collaboration with Chicago Music Exchange)—basically a '59 tweed Vibrolux—is the most incredible amp I've ever played and it's made me such a better player. They must sprinkle some sort of pixie dust because it just is above and beyond. I trade amps all of the time and that has never left the coveted slot of being right next to my bed (my wife is very guitar-friendly, thank you sweetheart!).

TR: *Do you have any upcoming developments you can tell us about?*

CT: Yes! I just released Dragonfly, a two-and-a-half-year project that consumed me, and I think it's awesome. People ask me all of the time which size Holeyboard they should get and they stress over



whether everything will fit. I took that and ran with it to make something that was a better user experience. Dragonfly expands and contracts as your mood dictates. There aren't additional parts or modules to buy, it just works, it's easy and it's all aircraft-grade



aluminum. I think it is super cool.

I also just released The Square. I sketch every morning at coffee with my wife before our five kids get up (you have to take the time where you can get it) and I was thinking, "You know, people keep asking me if their pedal switchers will fit and they say

that for really long pedals like that the curve doesn't work. Is the Holeyboard defined by the curved deck or is it defined by trying to make life easier and better for guitar players? I went with the latter. It fits in all of my cases and holds a billion pedals, so check that out, I'm proud of it.

I have a huge pipeline of ideas, so there is a lot coming. My next release is going to be on expanding my material options. Let's just say we are working with the most eco-friendly and bad ass material I've come across and it's a game changer for manufacturing. So stay tuned!

TR: *Do you have advice for people looking to become an entrepreneur in the realm of guitar gear?*

CT: I have a ton of advice and am always happy to chat. Keep your day job and start slow. Slow and steady wins the race. I actually read a lot of books and followed people in software startups because that's where I think product development is going. Get functional fast, and get it in front of real guitar players. Then stop talking and watch and listen, do that again and again and never stop. Design, build, use, test, watch, listen, refine and start over again. I think the days of making a product and just letting it sit there for 15 years unchanged are over. If it's not

interesting to you and doesn't get you excited it won't be interesting to anyone else.

Don't take loans, at all, ever. Don't go into debt. Don't get an SBA loan. That's the best advice I can possibly give.

Be honest, kind and generous to everyone. You get back 10 times the energy you put out, so give freely without expectations—did I mention I'm a certified yoga teacher? I judge character by how people treat others who can do nothing for them. I also secretly watch how people treat servers and tip in restaurants. I did seven years in restaurants through high school and college and those people work their tails off, tip well!

And lastly, the world is changing. The business models are changing. Be a leader, be bold and try things that are different that work for you.

If you don't consciously make a change to your life, it will not change. You control your destiny. I'm not a sports guy, but I read a quote from Wayne Gretzky where he said you miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take. Go for it, just don't double-mortgage your house. If it's a good idea it will get legs, if not, try something else.

-TR