

Mountainview Publishing, LLC

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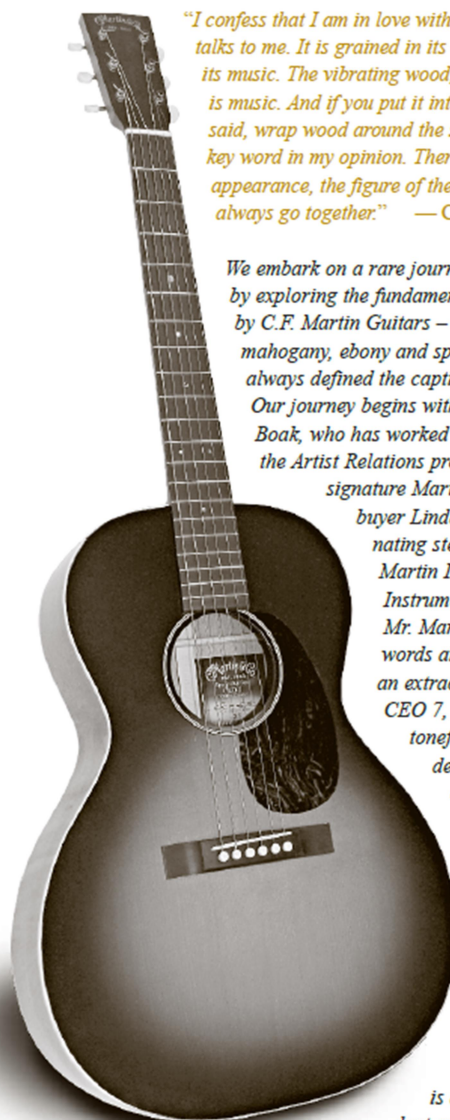
the ToneQuest

The Player's Guide to Ultimate Tone

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Report™

Tone



"I confess that I am in love with wood. Wood to me has personality. It talks to me. It is grained in its consistency, its hardness or softness, in its music. The vibrating wood, just a plain reed vibrating in the wind, is music. And if you put it into a properly designed soundbox, as Chris said, wrap wood around the sound, you get a guitar tone. Tone is the key word in my opinion. There is a tendency to over emphasize the appearance, the figure of the wood rather than the tone, and they don't always go together." — C.F. Martin III

We embark on a rare journey in this edition of the Quest... We begin by exploring the fundamental essence of the beautiful tones created by C.F. Martin Guitars – wood. In all its varied forms – rosewood, mahogany, ebony and spruce – wood cut from living trees has always defined the captivating signature sound of Martin guitars. Our journey begins with a revealing conversation with Dick Boak, who has worked at Martin since 1973 while developing the Artist Relations program that has produced more than 140 signature Martin guitars, and Martin wood expert and buyer Linda Davis-Wallen. We then take a fascinating step back in time, to a talk given by C. F. Martin III at an ASIA (Association Of Stringed Instrument Artisans) symposium in 1985 when Mr. Martin was 91 years old. His thoughtful words are timeless and instructive. We close with an extraordinarily insightful review of the Martin CEO 7, in our opinion one of the most uniquely toneful Martin guitars we have ever played despite its comparative obscurity within the entire Martin line.

From wood and acoustic tone we leap to the mysterious netherworld of guitar effects created by a sonic artist who paints with electronic components selected and assembled to produce tones first imagined in the mind before being committed to a physical circuit board. Robert Keeley's talent for creating truly exceptional guitar effects is a matter of record – what may be less evident are the inspiration and challenges he has

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cover story

2013 Martin CEO-7

A Martin from an Alternate Universe

by T.S. Phillips

Designed by C.F. Martin IV, the new CEO-7 is a 14-fret, slope-shoulder 00 offering a unique variety of vintage guitar specs with a surprisingly affordable price tag. Specs Include: Grand Concert body size with sloped shoulders; all solid wood construction with mahogany back and sides, ebony fingerboard and bridge, Adirondack spruce top with Autumn Sunset burst finish; 1-3/4" Golden Era style modified V mahogany neck; 1/4" scalloped braces; bone nut and saddle; white ivoroid binding and matching tuner buttons; hand-fitted dovetail neck joint.



The CEO-7 is a lovely little guitar with a comfortable short-scale neck, yet with ample volume and projection. It has the versatility found in 14 frets free from the body, but with round shoulders similar to a classical design, offering some of that deep and resonant bottom end typically heard in traditional 12-fret guitars. That sloped-shoulder shape to the upper bout results in the extra sonic depth under

the bass and lower mid-range. The exact dimensions are 14.764" width at the lower bout, 8.635" at the waist, and 10.589" at the upper bout. With a body length of 19.428" the overall size of the CEO-7 is somewhere between Martin's 14-fret 000 and their 12-fret 00. It has the 4-1/8" depth shared by the 14-fret 00 and 000.

Plump and Juicy



The voice has a plump boom to it that is not exactly the same sound that comes from the standard 12-fret Martins. It is not the same voice heard from the deep body 00 design used on the Women in Music models, nor is it the same type of sound heard from the Norman Blake models, which had a 14-fret 000 body matched to a 12-fret neck. For that matter, it is not exactly like any Martin I have

heard before. In fact, the CEO-7 actually has a shape and cosmetics that suggest a Gibson L-00, and yet, it still sounds like a Martin, and an impressive one at that.

When it came down to it, the whole time I was playing the

guitar I kept feeling like the CEO-7 is the Golden Era Series reissue of a pre-war Martin that never existed. One might say it seems like it came from an alternate universe where Martin had been copying Gibson designs from the 1930s, rather than the other way around. But just as Gibson's square-shoulder dreadnoughts like the Dove, Hummingbird, and Gospel sound little like a Martin D-18, the CEO-7 may have a certain trebly ring thing that reminds me of an L-00, but it also has a resonance and sustain unlike any Gibson I have heard.

Old Time Sensibilities



The vintage vibe can be seen in the narrow straight bridge and open back tuners. It can be felt in the cheeky V neck and 2-5/16" string spacing. And it

can be heard in the precise fundamentals, clear chime, and open undertone that come from Adirondack spruce backed by scalloped braces, amplifying and reflecting dry, woody mahogany tone. But while it has that open "wooden box" sound typical of small, mahogany Martins, it is like someone turned up the bass. It has a certain throb that swells out from the wound strings, which isn't usually heard from a 14-fret 00-18 or 000-18. According to Chris Martin, this new model "is a tribute to a time when flat top steel string acoustic guitar design was evolving very quickly...the market was very competitive as demand for fourteen fret neck instruments was rapidly growing. At that time the Dreadnought was not yet the dominant shape and the smaller tight-waisted models influenced by the parlor guitars of the prior century were still quite popular."



In 1900 the 00 was the largest of Martin guitar sizes. In 30 years it went from top dog to being the choice for petite ladies and traveling troubadours who needed something small enough to stow on a train rack, or on their own back. It has remained popular with touring bluesmen and female singer-songwriters ever since.

Gibson's L-size guitars first appeared in 1926. The L refers to the size, so that the L-00 shares the same physical dimensions with guitars designated L-0, L-1, and L-2, each with different trim and price point. The size itself comes in between Martin's 00 and 000. And while smaller guitars have never seen modern sales numbers enjoyed by the dreadnoughts and jumbos, Mr. Martin felt it

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cover story

was time for a smaller model in the CEO series. And it was further decided to include a most-traditional Martin feature on a CEO for the very first time, a hand-fitted dovetail neck joint.

The Dovetail



Martin's dovetail neck joint has a wide V-shape tenon compared to other modern neck joints, which sets tightly into the matching mortise, carved out of a solid mahogany

block. The fit requires precision craftsmanship that can only be achieved by hand tools and keen expert eyes. It is so exact that a dovetail Martin can be strung up and played in perfect intonation without any glue in the joint. But most important, the wide V connection allows for considerable transference of resonant energy between the neck, neck block and the body of the guitar. You just do not have a vintage-style Martin or Gibson without it.



Every time someone claims they can't discern the difference that comes with a dovetail neck joint, I think to myself they need to have their hearing tested. In any event, just as the ratio of balance to boom in the CEO-7 is unique among Martins, its overall voice has that fine violin purity in the trebles, along with the wavering, marrying sympathetics, and a presence glowing

out around the fundamental notes that all add up to classic Martin tone. Otherwise, it shares many other features with guitars in Martin's Vintage Series and the Golden Era series. It has 1/4" scalloped top braces identical to the 00-18V, but made from Adirondack spruce like those on the GEs. Other Golden Era specs include the cloth reinforcement strips on the mahogany sides, and a short-scale neck with 1-3/4" width at the nut, and a modified V profile carved a bit rounder, or cheekier, so it has the shape and feel of the 000-18GE and 000-42 Marquis. Overall, it is a collection of specs found on tried and tested examples of Martin's vintage reissue fleet, but never seen in this exact combination before now.

The CEO Designs

Every so often Chris Martin designs a new limited edition. Named CEO and numbered in order of their release, these guitars combined traditional Martin elements with non-traditional features, as a way of showcasing new trends



and materiel. Examples include a 12-fret dreadnought made out of solid African sapele, and a 14-fret dreadnought made from laminated Macassar ebony. Mr. Martin's most recent ideas have reversed this trend, to offer traditional materials in designs that step outside the Martin box, or at least round off its edges.

The CEO-6 paid homage to the classic designs of Martin's number one rival, Gibson, with a 14-fret mahogany sloped shoulder dreadnought that greatly resembled the venerable J-42, complete with a Gibson-esque sunburst top and slanted headstock logo. But aside from looks, the guitar had little to resemble a Gibson when it came to tone. Martin continued this slope-shouldered theme in a smaller body, with the release of the CEO-7.

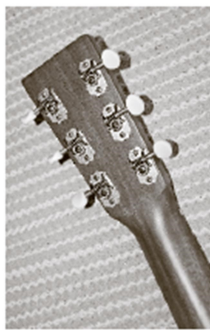
Evolution of the Species from Divergent Ancestors



I spent a good half an hour with an early prototype of the CEO-7, several months before its debut. At the time it looked like they were making a Martin clone of the Gibson L-00. If I closed my eyes and traced the outline with my hand, I could swear it was a Gibson. However, on closer inspection, it had the shallower 4-1/8" depth of a 14-fret Martin 00, and the silhouette was slightly more symmetrical than an actual prewar L-00. But it did

have a Gibsonish sunburst finish, like the CEO-6.

When I strummed a G chord, the voice said "Martin," even more than the CEO-6 that came before it. So I was not surprised when the model appeared



at the Summer NAMM show with some cosmetic makeover, combining Gibson and Martin looks into one guitar, but with all the important structural features still in place that made that early prototype so memorable. The latest version retained the black faceplate on the front of the headstock, but gone was the slanted logo. In its stead is a vintage

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cover story

Martin script logo used on guitars in the Authentic Series. While it still has white, Gibsony tuner buttons and pale ivory-oid binding, and no purfling on the back, it has a transparent Martin toner, so the lovely Mahogany grain is seen clearly. And the jet black ebony fingerboard has the descending "long pattern" dots of a vintage Martin 00-18.

But for all its interesting looks, what makes the guitar such a success is how it feels and how it sounds, thanks to the dimensions of the neck, the combination of tonewoods, the dovetail neck joint, and that new slope shoulder body shape.

A New Voice in the Martin Choir

While the looks may be too different for some Martin fans, others may be attracted to the CEO-7 for just that reason. And while the voice may have the extra umph in the bottom end some folks always wished a small mahogany Martin could possess, others may find the voice a bit too boxy or boomy for their tastes. It is surely a different kind of Martin, but it remains more Martin than anything else.



One of the most curious aspects of this guitar is how pronounced that boom is under the three mid-range strings to the ear of the player, but how different that sounds to someone in front of the guitar. Not unlike how a dreadnought tends to sound more ferociously bassy to the player than to his audience, this CEO-7 made me question the wisdom of this new body size, at first. When I play the guitar, the D string, and to a lesser extent the G and

A strings sound quite wolfy. Basically, they are perceived as unfocused and boomy, and downright distorted in my ears if I strike them too hard. But when I hear someone else playing

the same instrument, viola! The mid-range sounds full yet defined. The fundamental note from the string is clear, even as it nestles in a buoyant cushion of undertone, like a dumpling in rich broth. And the lowest strings were right there with the mids. It has impressive balance, even as those low notes swell, not unlike a 12-fret dreadnought only in a smaller package. And boy, does it like open tunings! A dropped D bass string has the strong and meaty guts of a middleweight prizefighter.



It is often said that a Martin OM sounds more impressive to the listener than the player. I think that holds true for this new slope-shoulder 00 as well. It loses nothing in the punchy mids found in typical 14-fret Martin 00s. If anything, they are given a booster shot and a bassy escort, and the clear trebles are only improved by that warm, full presence humming just below them.

Tempting the Martin Faithful

After I had completed my day reviewing the new Martins slated for Summer NAMM, I enjoyed a leisurely hour sitting in the lobby of the Martin factory, playing the new CEO-7 prototype. And I must say that extra dimension under the lows really grew on me, and I relished how it was set off by those thin, pure fundamentals in the treble, with that open mahogany tone bubble spreading out around them.

What made it so new and interesting, to my ear, was the unique relationship between the fundamental notes, the high harmonics over them, and the woody undertone below, with that pregnant low spot under the center of the wound strings. What made it so Martin was how each of those elements sustained after a chord, or rolled over – and over and over – during picking patterns.



It just goes to show that Martin can make a guitar that looks like a Gibson, but it will never have that abrupt, reflective thunk of a low E string, or those flick-a-flick Bob Dylan/Cat Stevens fundamental strums, or that drop off a cliff decay below the trebles. And being more of a Martin man in my aural druthers, I do not

see this as a bad thing. The voice kept making me want to strum cowboy campfire songs, or move into open tunings to cry out some old timey fingerstyle blues. Seeing that I am a traditionalist, I really didn't expect to like this guitar nearly as much as I do. Then again, there is something so traditional about the CEO-7, despite its unusual newness. But perhaps the most surprising thing about this special edition Martin remains the price. At a list price of \$2,999, Martin's newest mahogany 00 with the slope shoulders has more Golden Era Series features than the 00-18V, including an Adirondack spruce top, for \$600 less than the 18V. And it is \$1,750 less than the list price of the 000-18GE. Talk to your dealer about the real price. You may find it too good to pass up.

The model has proved so successful that dealers have a hard time keeping it in stock. But don't worry, there is no termination date. Martin will make CEO-7s as long as people keep

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interview

buying them. Not that this means you will like the CEO-7. I am sure it is not for everyone. I must confess, I have never been a sunburst kind of guy, and this Autumn Sunset burst is quite similar to many seen on 1930s Gibsons and Kalamazoo's — and that is just not my cup of spruce. But if Martin ever wants to offer this exact same guitar with a plain top and a cutaway, I may be the first person in line to buy it. Then again, shaded tops have started to grow on me. And this is such a successful guitar design that I could learn to love that deep, dark fingerprint magnet called Autumn Sunset.

— T.S. Phillips

THE RETURN OF...

Robert Keeley



Robert Keeley is one of the most well known, accomplished and successful effects designers of our time. In September 2001 he launched his company when he shipped his first Keeley Compressor, and his meteoric

rise as an effects designer was heady and steep. His company has continued to operate from America's heartland in Edmond, Oklahoma, but a messy divorce and addiction to opioid pain medication nearly destroyed the life and career of this remarkably energetic and creative young man in what would otherwise be considered the prime of life. Keeley didn't physically abandon his business, but in many respects he'll tell you that there were times when he wasn't really there even when he was there. Most of the time such stories are buried, discussed in hushed tones by those who might catch the hint of a rumor here and there, but a fully recovered and reborn Keeley isn't hiding from anyone. He's back with a new line of

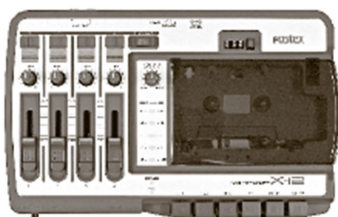
stellar effects and designing more every day. It is our pleasure and privilege to bring Robert back to these pages for a candid discussion of his career and the prolific development of his new Keeley effects. Please join us in celebrating Robert's resurgence, and Enjoy...

TQR: How did you initially become interested in effects Robert? Were you playing guitar first, and how did you acquire your technical knowledge of electronics?



My grandmother got me my first guitar, it was a 1978 Yamaha FG-45 from the Music Gallery in Highland Park, Illinois. I still talk to Frank Glionna and have purchased a couple of Fenders from him.

My first electric was a Danelectro from a garage sale that lasted only a while after my parents got sick of me banging away at "You Really Got Me." My mom and dad got me my first real guitar, a 1984 Fender Squier made in Japan. It was really incredible and I couldn't stop playing. I got to use my dad's college day's amp, a 1974 Peavey Deuce 2x12. Four 6L6 tubes and glorious volume for heavy metal in those days. I got my first effects pedals in West Germany in the mid-'80s. The Boss HM-2, DS-1, Ibanez DS10 and MS10, the Distortion and Metal Charger, and a horrible sounding CP-9! I've found some of my high school buddies on Facebook that had those first effects as I traded them around. My dad was an electrical engineer in the Air Force so he and my high school teacher Gerald Wolf taught me about electronics as a kid. My dad built all kinds of Heath Kit stuff when I was growing up, including a kit TV, so I had plenty of tubes and meters and stuff like that around.



From 1984-1988 all I did was play guitar and record on my little 4 track Fostex. I could easily put in 8 hours a day playing. When I came back to the U.S. I

enrolled in a tech school to build computers and I graduated from UTI in 1989. My first job was in a stereo store named Soundrak where I started working on car stereos, CDs, home amps and receivers, VCRs, camcorders, etc. That was

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