



BY PETER MURRAY

# AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM MARSHALL



**Did you have any idea where it would all lead, when you made your first amp in 1960?**

"Not really. I had no intention of becoming what we are today—all I wanted to do was satisfy the customers in my retail store, which included Pete Townshend, Richie Blackmore, and many other famous ones, because I taught all the drummers, you see.

That's how they all came to me. But with Pete Townshend it's slightly different, I used to play with his father in the big bands. So I've known Pete since he was... that high!"

**Why did you start making amps?**

"In response to the boys saying that nothing was made to suit their type of music. In those days, the Fender was my favourite amplifier, but it was too clean for them. It's okay for jazz or country and western, but for rock and roll, no. It's too clean a sound. They said what sound they wanted, and I could only surmise at the time that it was the driving of the tube. You see, if you drive the EL34 enough, you get harmonics. A lot of people call it distortion, but really it's the harmonics of the tube or valve. We knew what they were talking about, so I got together with two electronic engineers. I did all the exterior design work and all the metal work, because I'm an engineer by trade as well. And a lad called Dudley Craver, who was eighteen years of age, produced the first Marshall amplifier with the right sound."

**How involved were artists like Townshend and Hendrix?**

"They were not. Jimi Hendrix didn't come along until about 1965-66. Whereas I produced the first amplifier in 1962. The first amplifier was put in the store in September '62, the very first one. And there's this rubbish been written about Pete Townshend designing the stack! No way, I

did! First of all, I designed the 2x12 cabinet. And although we were only producing a 45W amplifier at the time, and these speakers were supposed to carry 25 watts each comfortably, we blew every one. Then the only thing I could think of was putting four 12" speakers in a cabinet. There was nothing smart about designing the cabinet, because all I looked at was the sort of transport the lads had, and I designed the cabinet as small as I possibly could to put four 12" speakers in it! And that's why it's that size—for no other reason. But I hit upon the right size!"

At some point Pete Townshend said he needed more power.

"Initially, he bought just the standard amplifiers we produced. But then in about '66, he said he wanted 100 watts instead of 50 watts. So we built him the first three 100W amps.

**Did he go on to destroy these amps, like he did so many?**

"He didn't destroy amplifiers. People thought that he destroyed a lot of guitars and speaker cabinets. No. He was too clever for that. As a matter of fact, his father and I thought the kid had gone stark-raving mad when he first started that. But it paid off, it was a new form of showmanship that his father and I did not understand. We thought it was stupid. But he was right in what he was doing. And his Rickenbackers, you see, he did destroy two, which he used to bring back to me and I used to glue them back together again, and they were the ones that he used to break—not the new ones! So he was not as destructive as everybody thought. Over the years he probably destroyed no more than two, when he got excited on stage and used the wrong one. But other than that, he just damaged the speaker frame, which we used to redo for him on a fairly regular basis, so he could do it all over again. But he never caused much damage to anything."

**Is there a specific point where you thought the amps were particularly good?**

"The 1987 50W, with an 8x10 cabinet, was the sound that I really liked. And the 8x10 cabinet never took off."

Ironic, considering your legacy has been with 12" speakers!

"That's right! The first people actually to copy the 8x10 cabinet I designed was Fender! And theirs didn't sell either!"

Do you have a preference in tubes?

"Oh yes. The ECC83 is the best one for pre-amp use, and the EL34 is definitely the best one for power amp. And the EL34 gives off harmonics at an earlier stage than the others, you see. The ones we're using now

are produced in Russia—they're the tubes that are still used in Russian fighter planes. The EL34s we get now are the best we've ever had, 'cause they're to military spec. But the ECC83 is also the best we've ever had, and they're only made in China, funnily enough. We've never had a great deal of problems with EL34s, but a hell of a lot of problems with ECC83s—they go microphonic. Or, they did. But since we've had them from China, we don't have to throw away so many. We used to throw thousands away."

**What do you personally think of rock and roll?**

"I will say that I prefer the '60s rock and roll. I must say that. Mind you, there's a lot of stuff I do like. I like the sounds that the boys get, especially Gary Moore, I think he's great, probably one of the greatest. Going back, of course, my old friend Les Paul—a great guitarist. And there's many great guitarists. A lot of people think that the modern guitarist is just a one-off thing in a group, but many of them are very, very good. Take for instance Slash. He is a really good guitarist! American jazz players will invite him to play with them. And they'll invite very few of the rock end to go up and actually play with them. So Slash is very good. And he's a very nice lad, very nice indeed."

**Do you worry about damaging people's hearing?**

"I think the only damage that is done, actually, is from the P.A. speakers. Because people go out there and put their heads in the bins! That's asking for trouble! But with normal volumes that the people use, I don't think it would cause much damage to anybody's hearing."

**What's left to accomplish?**

"It's difficult to say really, because way back in about 1959, when rock and roll was just about breaking, two of my pupils got on to me, 'teach me this new rock and roll stuff!' I said, well, it's quite simple. Basically it's Latin American: even quavers. There's nothing new in it, just accentuating the second and fourth beats; as we always did in music, but not in dotted quavers that you use in jazz or dance music. And I said, no problem at all. But I'll tell you what, this rock and roll will only last about six months! I'm so glad I was wrong—I've never been so wrong about anything! On the other hand, I ended up being right!"

PETER MURRAY IS A BASS TEACHER, SESSION PLAYER PRODUCER, AND IS THE AUTHOR OF ESSENTIAL BASS TECHNIQUE. HIS BAND, SURRENDER DOROTHY, HAS INKED A WORLD-WIDE DEAL WITH UNIVERSAL RECORDS, AND HAVE COMPLETED A LENGTHY EUROPEAN TOUR TO SUPPORT THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, SERUM.