

# Signature Series

by Wolf Marshall

**Fender has taken the celebrity/artist instrument concept to unprecedented heights; offering more than mere mock-up copies of drool-worthy guitars. Here are the stories of the men, the music and the machinery behind three of the newest entries in Fender's dream brigade!**

A bonafide living legend in contemporary music and American pop culture, James Burton's contributions as leader, accompanist and sessionman are immeasurable. In addition to his lengthy tenures with Ricky Nelson and Elvis Presley, Burton's "A team" recording credits include Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, the Byrds, Johnny Cash, Tom Jones, the Supremes, Ray Charles, John Denver and Kenny Rogers. With the same gusto he harnessed to virtually invent the rock guitar idiom, James re-invented a classic rock guitar—the Fender Telecaster.

Some factors were immutable: it had to have the traditional Telecaster body and the same late-1960's vintage "oval"-shaped, 21-

Robben Ford merges jazz, blues, rock and pop to redefine the term "fusion" music. But make no mistake, his sound, delivery and conception are all his own—as unmistakable and personal as a



fingerprint. He chose a deliberate re-interpretation of the unusual Fender Esprit Ultra as the basis for his instrument the Fender Robben Ford Signature model, which reflects



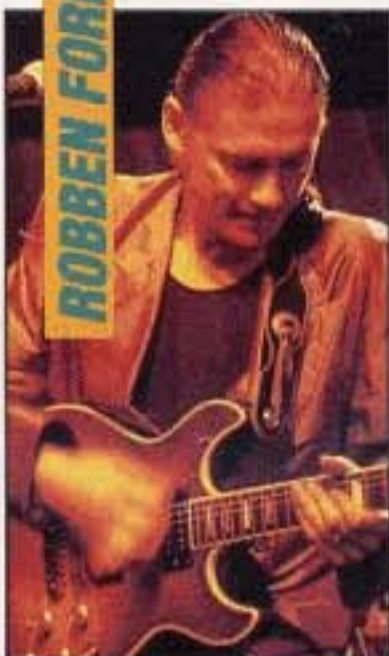
fret Maple neck as on his treasured pink paisley (Burton's inseparable instrument from the Elvis period on). But in quest of an expanded tonal spectrum, James settled on a real departure from the conventional Telecaster—a three Fender-Lace Sensor pickup configuration somewhat like a Strat in Tele clothing. The Burton model incorporates a Blue in the neck position for an extra-warm front pickup tone, a Silver in the center for a new "fat Tele" sound and a Red in the bridge position which delivers both the classic Tele lead bite and a



JAMES BURTON



Fellow Tele-master Danny Gatton calls Jerry Donahue "the string-bending king of the planet" and one look at his incredible facility—



ROBBEN FORD

Robben's discriminating and diverse needs as both a soloist and rhythm player.

Designed in the mid-1980's, the Esprit effectively reconciled the differences between a blues, jazz and rock guitar, making it ideal for Robben's varied musical tangents. He was originally drawn to the smaller body size, double-cutaway comfort and remarkable playability of the Esprit as an alternative to the larger, honky-sound-



JERRY DONAHUE

which transcends contrivance or gimmickery—will tell you why. Mirroring his well-balanced, eclectic style, the Jerry Donahue Signature model from Fender's Custom Shop is an eminently versatile animal, answering the question: "How do you get the best aspects of both the Telecaster and Stratocaster in one single package?"

Through an ingenious two-pickup, passive wiring scheme and a five-position switch, the Jerry Donahue Signature model does it by acting as a true sonic chameleon; adding two decidedly "Strat"y tones to the original three Tele sounds. The neck pickup is a vintage Strat unit while the bridge pickup is a classic 1950's-type Tele lead model—both are custom-wound by Seymour Duncan. The flawless

articles continued on page 43

8

## Signature Series

continued from page 8

### James

more modern humbucking tone. The Silver Sensor in the middle works with both neck and bridge pickups to provide improved Strat-like timbres.

A five-position selector switch, non-tremolo American Standard bridge with six individual steel saddles and Basswood body are further modern innovations. James summarizes by saying, "All I'm doing is adding. The way I look at it, Fender made two of the greatest guitars in the world: the Tele and the Strat. I'm just combining the best of the two classic designs."

Of course the Burton model is available in eye-catching paisley graphics: Gold on Black and Red on Black, in honor of the instrument played behind Elvis.

### Robben

ing semi-hollow-body he had been playing. Though the Esprit was discontinued by the late 1980's, Robben remained an ardent user.

In its present incarnation, it has retained many of the Ultra's significant features and deluxe appointments, as specified by Robben, including the Ebony fingerboard with fancy Mother-of-Pearl split block inlays, Ebony tuning key pegs, multiple binding on the headstock, neck and body and gold-plated hardware. The solid Alder body with a carved Spruce top and built-in acoustical tone chambers is a clever variation on the classic solid-body construction theme of mahogany-and-maple and is a vital component in producing the rich and consistent sustaining Robben Ford solo guitar voice. Another is the two-humbucker pickup configuration which yields both a mellow, neck-pickup jazz sound as well as a robust, bridge-pickup blues-rock tone. The coil-splitting switch provides interesting thinner and twangier single-coil timbres ideal for rootsy rock and roll, R&B and funky rhythm comping.

### Jerry

design includes a Basswood body with a handsome bookmatched birdseye Maple top and back, a birdseye Maple neck fashioned in a special 1956-style "V" shape and gold-plated hardware.

The Donahue guitar comes in two versions. The Custom Shop model just described and an offshore model based on a 1962 Tele reissue. This lower-priced JD alternative contains the same clever "two-in-one" electronic circuitry but has a bound body and standard Maple neck.