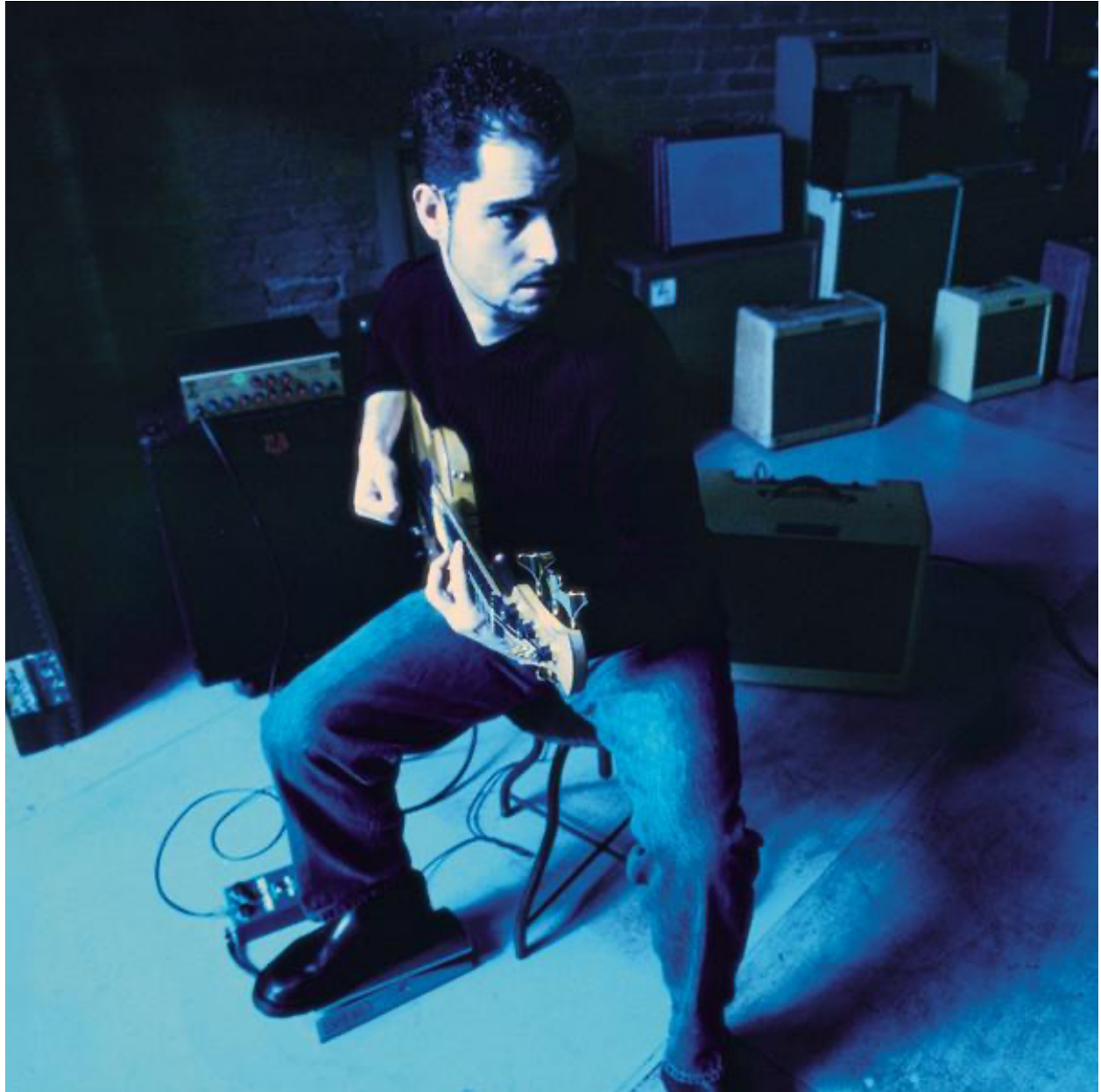


The Evolution of the Hybrid Guitar: From Charlie Hunter to Hybrid Guitars Co.

Charlie Hunter's Early Background







Before Charlie Hunter became known for playing bass lines, chords, and melodies simultaneously, he grew up around instrument repair. His mother repaired guitars professionally, and Charlie has often credited that environment for shaping his fascination with instrument design and modification. He spent part of his youth in Northern California before settling in Berkeley, where he eventually studied guitar and began experimenting with extended-range instruments.

One interesting piece of Hunter history is that his first custom instrument was not the famous 8-string. In the late 1980s he had a custom 7-string built that combined bass and guitar functions. That instrument allowed him to perform solo while covering both roles simultaneously and became the foundation of everything that followed.

Unfortunately, detailed documentation and photographs of the very first guitar he and his mother modified or built together are scarce online. Most publicly documented information begins with the custom 7-string era and then transitions into the Novax period.

The Novax Era (The Instrument That Changed Everything)





The breakthrough came when Charlie partnered with luthier Ralph Novak, inventor of the Fanned-Fret® multi-scale fretboard.

Novak received the patent for the Multiple Scale Fretboard in 1989 and began producing instruments under the Novax name. Hunter became one of the most visible players using the technology.

The Charlie Hunter 8-string was developed through years of collaboration between Hunter and Novak. The instrument combined:

- 3 bass strings
- 5 guitar strings
- Separate pickups
- Separate outputs
- Multi-scale (fanned fret) neck

The result was essentially a bass and guitar sharing one neck.

The Novax CH-8 became Hunter's signature instrument throughout the 1990s and early 2000s and arguably introduced the hybrid guitar concept to a global audience.

Why Fanned Frets Matter





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The science behind fanned frets is fairly straightforward:

Bass strings want longer scale lengths

Longer scales:

- Improve string tension
- Improve note definition
- Reduce floppiness
- Produce clearer low notes

Treble strings want shorter scales

Shorter scales:

- Reduce tension
- Improve bends
- Feel more comfortable

Traditional guitars force all strings to share one scale length.

Fanned fret instruments allow each string family to have a more appropriate scale length. This is especially important on hybrid guitars because bass strings and guitar strings have dramatically different requirements.

For Charlie's instruments, the longer bass side helped create convincing bass tone while the shorter guitar side maintained normal guitar playability.

Pickups Used on Charlie Hunter Instruments

During the Novax years, Charlie's instruments commonly used custom Bartolini pickups.

According to equipment documentation:

Bass Side

- Custom Bartolini Precision-style pickups

Guitar Side

- Custom Bartolini guitar pickups

The key concept was not merely the pickup design but the separation of the bass and guitar signals into independent outputs.

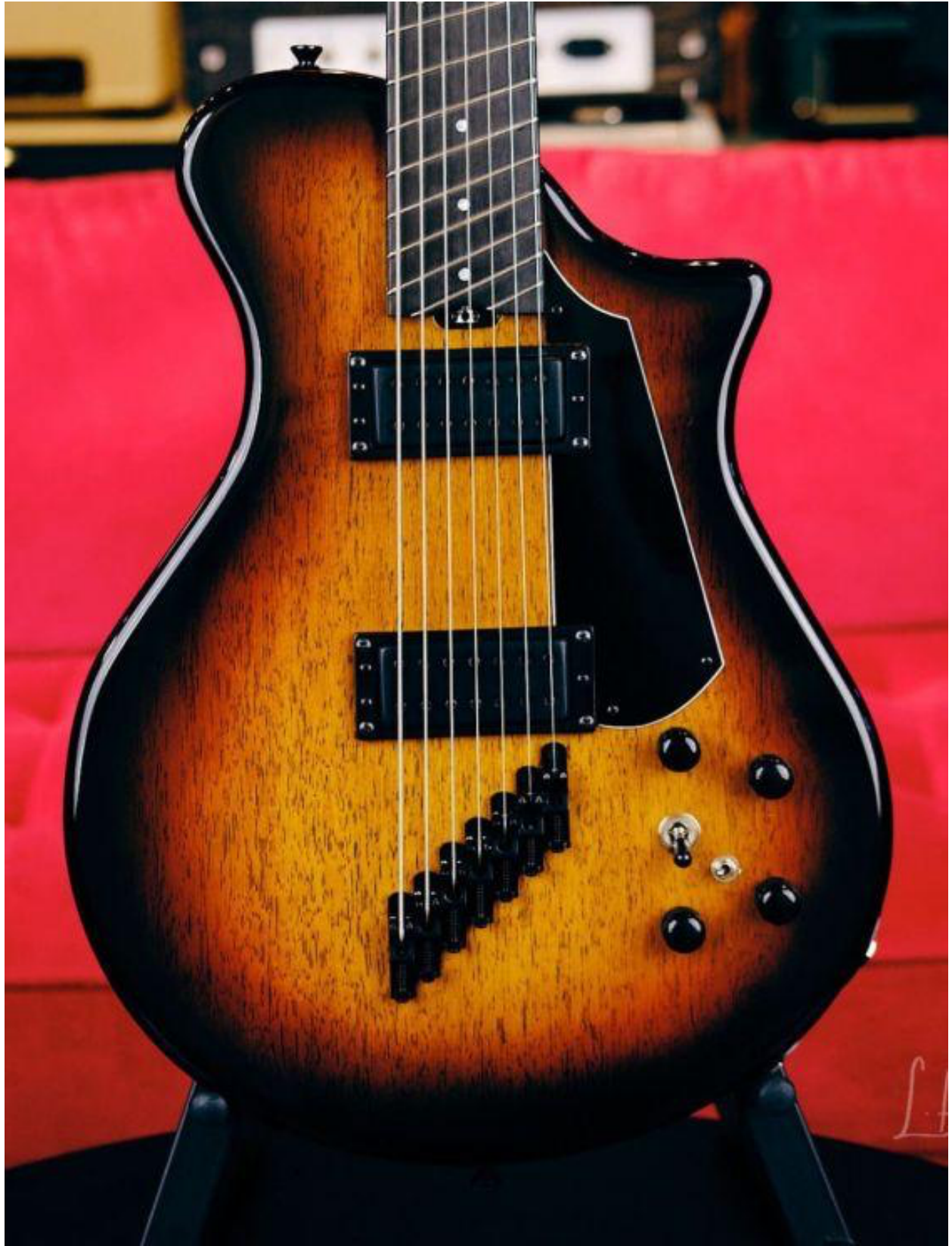
This allowed:

- Bass amp for bass strings
- Guitar amp for guitar strings
- Independent EQ
- Independent effects

That stereo approach remains a defining characteristic of hybrid guitars today.

Transition to Hybrid Guitars Co.







In 2015 Charlie partnered with luthiers:

- Clay Conner
- Wes Lambe

to form [Hybrid Guitars Co.](#).

The company continued the hybrid concept while refining it into more practical modern instruments.

Current offerings include:

Hybrid 6 (Big 6)

The instrument you play.

Features:

- 3 bass strings
- 3 guitar strings
- Dual-output electronics
- Mono/stereo switching
- Carbon fiber reinforced neck
- Kent Armstrong stereo pickups
- Baritone mode capability

Hybrid 7

Typically:

- 3 bass strings
- 4 guitar strings

Hybrid 8

The closest descendant to the classic Novax Charlie Hunter design.

Musicians Charlie Hunter Has Recorded or Performed With

Some notable collaborators include:

- Norah Jones
 - John Mayer
 - D'Angelo
 - Kurt Elling
 - Mos Def
 - Michael Franti
 - Greg Osby
 - DJ Logic
 - John Ellis
 - Derrek Phillips
 - Lucy Woodward
 - Silvana Estrada
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