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GITTLER IN THE AIR: THE MINIMALIST GITTLER GUITAR MAKES A COMEBACK

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By Chris Gill

Solidbody electric guitar makers in the mid-Seventies became obsessed with the notion that greater mass equals increased sustain, resulting in multilaminate neck-through-body "hippie sandwich" instruments with brass hardware that tipped the scales at 12 pounds or more.

During this era, New York City designer Allan Gittler conceived an entirely different idea: a minimalist design that reduced the guitar to its bare essentials. Crafted from stainless-steel bars, and resembling a fish skeleton, the Gittler guitar weighed less than five pounds and featured 31 frets, individual pickups for each string and a revolutionary tuner design.

Gittler made only 60 guitars and three basses during his initial run before moving to Hebron, Israel, in 1982, and changing his name to Avraham Bar Rashi. He licensed his design to Israel's Astron Engineer Enterprises, which made another 300 Gittler guitars with a slightly different design that

featured a plastic body surrounding the pickup area and uppermost frets.

Gittler's original guitars were prized more as eye-catching oddities than stage or studio instruments — Andy Summers appears with one in the Police's video for "Synchronicity II" — and several museums like New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts acquired Gittler guitars for their collections.

After purchasing an original Gittler guitar at auction several years ago, guitarist/metallurgist Russ Rubman sought to revive the line. Although Gittler died in 2003, his son Yoni still owned the rights to the design, and he agreed to work with Rubman to bring the guitar back into production.

Rubman's version is aesthetically faithful to the original design, but now the guitar is made of titanium and features several improvements, including staggered tuners (for easier access), a locking headstock, LED fret lighting and modified electronics with both hexaphonic and standard 1/4-inch outputs. This new version of the Gittler guitar will start shipping in summer 2013.

For more information about Gittler guitars, visit gittlerinstruments.com.

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