

The Vintage Kay Reissue Story

Kay reissues the Fabulous 1950's series of "Kelvinator Kool Classics"?

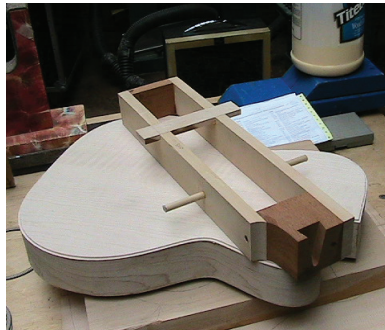
The Kay Guitar Company has always been the major producer of guitars since 1890. Most players may not know that, in 1928, Kay was the first company to start production of electric guitars in the USA. From 1952 through 1964, The Kay Guitar Company excelled at producing quality professional electric guitars with unique designs and features. The Kay Gold Line professional series became synonymous with that rich gutsy Blues/Jazz sound that eventually became rock. This unique blues sound was not available from any other guitar of that time. For the past decade vintage Kay instruments have been fetching high prices and have had increasing interest from collectors and players because of the cool, campy look and that unique Blues/Jazz sound. Part of this special Blues sound came from the triple chamber design and the hand wound blade pickups on the Think Twin and the Kay Electronic "Pro Bass" guitar.



Kay

Chamber Music

The triple chamber interior construction coupled with the blade pickup gives the Thin Twin and Electric Pro Bass that one of a kind sound. Enclosing the chamber creates a natural resonance that allows sustain without feedback in the guitar and that deep gutsy sound from the bass.



Chamber block with bracing used on both K161V Guitar and K162V Bass



Raw KB161V Guitar before setting the dovetailed neck



The "guts" of KB162V Bass (Left)
The "Naked face" of KB161V Guitar (Right)

The vintage Kay Thin Twin has been dubbed the "Jimmy Reed" or "Howlin' Wolf" model because of the artists that played them in the early 1950's. The features that made this guitar the choice of Blues players was the sound of the hand wound pickups and separate center chamber that allowed an extra biting natural distortion without feedback. The combination was a mellow clean gritty sound with natural sustain.

The pickups are so hot they needed to be contained in the center chamber, which is why the Twin Thin and Pro Bass had made anyone who played it feel there was nothing else that was like it. The Pro Bass had a unique feature of a switch that cut off the high frequencies to reproduce that "up-right Bass" sound but in the off position the Pro Bass gives that punchy Jazz sound. The Pro Bass comes with electric flatwound bass strings.

So why now?

At Kay, we knew it was not just assembling parts and a Kay "Kel-von-ator" chevron headstock logo and calling it a Kay Vintage Reissue. The 1950's guitars of that time, have not only a special look, but a special sound. To just make another mass-produced vintage looking guitar, as other companies have already done, was not enough. Only an electric guitar that could duplicate the 50's sounds would be successful. To remake the products in the United States was a challenge, but it was more of a challenge to reproduce the instrument off-shore and still maintain the strict quality control necessary. The Vintage Reissue Line sat on the back burner for many years until one day when all the components were able to come together. The Vintage Kay Reissue project came alive when Roger Fritz came into the picture.



Roger Fritz, Fritz Brothers Guitars

Along comes Roger Fritz.

Roger Fritz is a professional luthier, who makes guitars and basses for names like George Harrison and Randy Jackson. Roger is also a bass player who fell in love with the old Kay 1950's bass after having a friend recommend he play one. Roger, who had worked for Gibson in Nashville on their bluegrass instruments, created his own company, Fritz Brothers Guitars in Northern California making custom hand made instruments for professional players worldwide. Roger was so enamored with the sound of the Kay Electronic Pro Bass that he developed a clone and made them available for sale under the Fritz name. Roger Fritz was the missing link that was needed to make the project a reality, a Luthier that had a love for the instruments to be produced. Roger joined our team in early 2007 to help create and develop all the parts and features that made the Kay products different from all the rest.

Most of the parts and molds were no longer available so everything had to be created from scratch. The pickguards, the knobs, the hand wound pickups, the tailpiece, even the baseball bat style toggle switch cover all had to be manufactured from scratch using original parts as templates for the new reissued versions.

Finding the parts was difficult and surprisingly expensive since we needed to search stores and eBay, contact collectors, etc., to find perfect originals to reproduce. The going price for a good vintage Jazz Special Bass today is \$7,000. But after finding the parts and vintage instruments from avid collectors, contacting Vintage Kay historians like Michael Wright and Jay Scott and dozens of avid fans, the project was able to take form.

The Rebirth of a Legend

The Kay Guitar Company will reissue 12 models of **Kay Vintage Reissue Series** starting in the summer of 2008, with the 50's **Thin Twin** and the **Electric Pro Bass**. Two versions will be available:

The Street Series

The **K161V Kay Thin Twin**, available in three finishes, Vintage Cherry Sunburst, Blonde or Black. **List \$899** (case extra). The **K162V Kay Electric Pro Bass**, also in three finishes, Vintage Cherry Sunburst, Blonde or Black **List \$999** (case included). Limited quantity will be available in Europe and in the USA from selected dealers and Musician's Friend.

The Recording Studio Series

The hand-made USA version of the Kay Thin Twin and Kay Electric Pro Bass will be made exclusively by Fritz Brothers Guitars on a custom order basis, prices starting from \$2,999.

10 other models will be released over the next 18 months and include the Jazz II Guitar and Jazz Special Bass, the Upbeat Gold Line Electrics, and in the spring of 2009 the Barney Kessel Gold Line Artist, Barney Kessel Pro and the Barney Kessel Jazz Special.

For more information: VintageReissue@KayGuitar.com or <http://KoolKollection.KayGuitar.com>

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Parts is Parts--Not always....

There are many unique and original parts that were needed to create the Kay Thin Twin and Kay Electric Pro Bass.

Pickups: The Kay Blade Pickups were hand-wound. So what? Hand-winding gives gaps in the wiring which helps create that warm sound which is not found in machine wound, less expensive pickups. The center is a bar that gives a uniform almost microphonic smooth sound. The Thin Twin pickup is neck mounted slightly higher than the bridge pickup for a brighter sound.

The single pickup on the Electric Pro Bass has a selector switch which cuts the high frequency range.

Recreations of the following parts were made especially for these instruments:

Kay Headstock Logo Chevron, original **Crested Cream** and tiger striped **Tortoise Shell Pickguards and Surrounds**, **Trapeze Tailpiece**, **Vintage Volume and Control Knobs**, **Baseball Bat Metal Selector Switch** and more.

Crested Cream Pickguard with twin blade pickups

Pro Bass Controls

Thin Twin Tailpiece

Baseball Bat Selector Cap

Vintage Volume & Tone Knurled Knobs

Kay "Kel-von-ator" Headstock Chevron

Pro Bass Pickup & Surround