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## SXSW, An Instrument Showcase

URL: <http://www.eqmag.com/article.aspx?id=110473>

Contrary to what you may have heard, SXSW is in fact an instrument show.

Sure, it's not the sprawling mega collection of all new gear and musical instrument manufacturers contained under one roof like a NAMM show, but there's still plenty of music gear to gawk at. You can get your instrument fix at the Austin Convention Center's Gear Alley exhibit, which is, admittedly, infinitesimal compared to NAMM, but features booths and demos by manufacturer like [Ableton](#), [Audio-Technica](#), [Dean Markley](#), [Fender](#), [Korg](#), [Moog](#), [Taylor](#), [T.C. Electronic](#) and more; and the jaw-droppingly awesome [Texas Guitar Show](#), which is packed with a staggering collection of mostly vintage guitars, basses, amps and accessories.

To really get into the gear scene at SXSW, however, you need to get into the action outside the Austin Convention Center, in the clubs and outdoor venues of the festival. From the outdoor stages at The Scoot Inn, The Mowhawk and Emo's Annex to the club stages at Soho, The Headhunter, The Independent, the Red 7 and every place in between, we saw some very solid trends in the equipment bands are using these days, with a few curve balls.

When it came to guitars, Fender and Gibson reigned supreme. From Strats and Mustangs and Jazzmasters to SGs and Les Pauls, the classics are still the standard. Of course, we saw some exceptions: High On Fire's Matt Pike plays a custom 9-string First Act; The Blind Shake's Blaha brothers, Mike and Jim, play Danelectros (Jim also has a bright red Gibson 335 that he plays on a couple of numbers); one of the guys in Man...Or Astroman? also plays a Danelectro, the other a Mosrite; and Voivod's Dan Mongrain played a Liberator during the afternoon set we caught at The Scoot Inn, though he's been known to play Hagstrom and Jackson as well.

In terms of amps, Marshall ruled the stages all over SXSW 2010, but we did spot an old Acoustic on stage at the F\*\*ked Up show, being played by one of the three guitar players with a Gibson SG; the The Blind Shake had a full complement of old Music Man amps on stage; Naam's Ryan Lugar was playing through a full Laney rig; and the

guitarist with The Park, an SF band backing up rapper TruthLive, was playing a Strat through a Peavey Classic. We saw some cab / head hybrid setups, and in every case, the heads were Marshall and the cabs were Mesa Boogie. As far as pedals go, from Boss to Vox to Electro-Harmonix to special custom and indie stompboxes, effects were the most wide range of rig components at the whole show.

In the SXSU world of bass players, Fender and Ampeg were the ruled the stages. In fact, the only players we noticed who weren't playing Fender basses were Motorhead's Lemmy and White Denim's Steve Terebecki, who both play Rickenbackers; Voivod's Jean-Yves Thériault was hammering on the most evil looking Liberators we've ever seen; and Man...Or Astroman? bassist Birdstuff, who was playing a Danelectro.

Ampeg was the gold standard of bass amps at SXSU, the only variation we can remember throughout the whole show was the classic Acoustic rig that Voivod's Thériault played through. John Bundy from Naam rocked a pedal board full mostly Electro-Harmonix effects, but bass players at SXSU this year were largely effects-free on stage.

The most notably low-fi piece of bass gear we saw was being used by the bassist of a three piece alt-blues outfit in the lobby of the hotel (of all places), thumping away on a washtub bass, which he had run through a distortion pedal. Only in Austin...

Electro pop and key-driven pop-rock were big at SXSU this year, and we saw a decent range of keyboards and controllers, all pretty much what we expected, from Roland to Nord to Moog, but we also spotted a couple of Dave Smith Instruments Prophet synths, a Rhodes or two, and even a Zendrum wielded by Gordon Voidwell band member Guillermo E. Brown, who was using it to trigger sounds from his laptop on stage. Infinite Response was also at the show, not only showing in Gear Alley, but they had an awesome showcase. All of the hip-hop groups we saw were using Techniques 1200 turntables in tandem with laptops loaded with Serato, and we saw some guys with Akai controllers like the MPK25 and the MPD24 to enhance the musicality of the sound.

In nearly every venue where people were dancing (as opposed to moshing, headbanging or shoe-gazing), the bands were built around the keyboards.



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