

# Heritage KB Groove Master Archtop

## Old-School Quality Lives On

**H**eritage Guitars' KB Groove Master archtop, named for Kenny Burrell and crafted in one of America's most iconic guitar factories, is a beautiful example of the company's commitment to tradition and quality.

The Heritage story began in 1984 when Gibson decided to close its Kalamazoo, Michigan, plant and move production to Nashville. The idea to launch a new company in the old location came from several employees who chose to not make the move. Heritage was incorporated in 1985 and, having purchased Gibson's original tools and machinery, set up shop in the oldest of the plant's five buildings. According to Pete Farmer, production supervisor and master builder at Heritage, "We build our guitars with the same recipes and in the same kitchen as in the '50s."

Heritage maintains a very basic business philosophy: to design and build handcrafted, high-quality guitars in small batches. The KB Groove Master is part of the company's Hollow-Body Laminated line, but Heritage also offers a higher-priced Super Kenny Burrell model, which is a fully carved guitar.

The design of the KB Groove Master is a bit reminiscent of the early 1950s Gibson EH

series archtop electrics, with a 16-inch laminate maple body, mahogany neck and a single neck-position pickup. Heritage designed the guitar with a shallower body depth of 2¾ inches and a rounded Venetian cutaway. It also features a fixed Tune-o-matic pinned bridge instead of the more traditional wooden floating bridge. Normally, guitars use a solid wood block mounted inside the body to support a pinned bridge. Heritage, however, has designed a unique floating block system that uses a patch suspended underneath the top and does not extend to the guitar's back, allowing the instrument to remain fully hollow. A six-finger tailpiece is another addition to the design. It allows for fine-tuning of individual string tensions, something that Burrell himself uses on his guitars.

The KB Groove Master is an attractive guitar with a nicely figured maple body finished off in a tasteful sunburst with cream-colored bindings that really make the dark, stained wood pop. All hardware is gold-plated, and the rosewood neck features attractive pearl block inlays and Grover Rotomatic tuners. Weighing only 6.6 pounds, this guitar is extremely comfortable to play either sitting or standing. And its 24¾-inch scale length makes easy work of fretting. Not only is the guitar extremely easy to play, it has a voice that is warm and full yet cuts through the band extremely well. The single Seymour Duncan humbucker seems to be a perfect match for the instrument, producing clear notes in every register. The guitar has a surprising amount of acoustic resonance for a laminate.

The Heritage KB Groove Master offers players an opportunity to own a true hand-built guitar at an affordable price. Considering its impressive lineage, this is quite an appealing instrument.

—Keith Baumann

[heritageguitar.com](http://heritageguitar.com)



# Peter Ponzol ProReed

## High-Performance, Long-Lasting

**I**f you're a saxophonist who likes the durability and ever-readiness of synthetic reeds, you should check out the new ProReed for alto and tenor saxophone by mouthpiece merchant Peter Ponzol.

I've had success with synthetic saxophone reeds in the past, so I was eager to play-test ProReeds for alto and tenor. They performed far beyond my expectations. I found that the ProReeds responded with ease and produced a vibrant sound that was noticeably rich in harmonics and surprisingly pitch-steady. I usually prefer medium-strength cane reeds, so I went with ProReeds that had ratings of 2.5 and 3.0 (they are also available in strengths 2.0 and 3.5). I got more use out of the tenor reeds, playing the fourth chair on an acoustic big band gig and doing some horn-section work on a James Brown tribute show.

ProReeds sounded great over the full range of the horn, and they gave my altissimo more body and stability than natural cane reeds. With a little encouragement, they proved willing to follow my cues on bends, growls and other expressive gestures, and a tasteful vibrato came almost naturally. On alto, I was able to make the horn sing while employing a full range of tonal colors, from r&b bright to cool-jazz dark. Resistance was just right—I never got that stuffy or fatigued feeling you sometimes get with synthetics. The reeds benefit from being perfectly flat on the bottom, the result of a planing process that involves a CNC machine and a software program, according to Ponzol.

Ponzol, whose prowess on saxophone is well known, refined the ProReed design until he was comfortable playing one himself. It took him more than 20 years to find the right material—which has properties similar to cane in the way it vibrates—and determine the proper dimensions. Then, he happened to run into Ernie Watts, who has since become Ponzol's number-one endorser. Watts currently uses two ProReeds on tenor: He practices using the prototype Ponzol gave him a year-and-a-half ago, and he performs on a regular production model he's had for one year.

The ProReed works brilliantly and promises to last an extremely long time. With a list price of \$34.95 for both alto and tenor versions, they could also prove to be a tremendous value for saxophonists. Even if you have little interest in reeds made of anything other than real cane, you might be surprised at the level of performance you can get from a ProReed.

—Ed Enright  
[peterponzol.com](http://peterponzol.com)

