



*Greg Howard has been a multi talented technician for dozens of bands since the early 1990s. His role has included setup and maintaining all instruments, amplifiers, and sound systems. Greg has also been a tour manager and stage manager for several acts. His resume includes working for such artists as Aerosmith, Green Day, The Black Crowes, Linkin Park, Hall & Oates, Kings X, and many more.*

GJD: Back then did you have any idea that you would become a guitar tech for pro players?

GREG H: In college when there were campus concerts, I would be involved in the outdoor festival committee which usually meant working backstage during the show. I ended up helping a lot of random bands, changing strings, and setting up the backline (guitars, amps, drums, etc).

GJD: How did you learn to do set-ups?

GREG H: I always liked playing guitar and I wanted my guitars to play well so that forced me to learn how to do my own set-ups. I've always loved Strats and I learned about shimming up the neck and proper neck angle so I was able to get low action and have my guitars still sound great.

GJD: Did you ever read any books about setting up guitars?

GREG H: Yes, I did read a few books but it was mostly by experimenting that I figured out what works best for me.

GJD: How did you learn to please all the different artists in terms of their preferences and how they wanted their guitars to be set-up?

GREG H: Actually most guys are not that picky and as long as the guitar stays in tune they are pretty happy. Basically I'll do a set-up and tell them to let me know if they want it tweaked one way or another. But as I said, all in all most guys are pretty happy with my work.

GJD: What brand of strings do you like? Is there a brand that is most consistent for you?

GREG H: I've tried many brands over the years but I really like Ernie Ball Strings. They seem to stay in tune really well and don't break very often. But a lot of the big artists that I work with have their own string endorsement and in that case I'll use the strings from that endorsement company.

GJD: How do you do a quick string change and get it to stay in tune? I mean a lot of times it goes from you straight to the stage in 5 minutes.

GREG H: Absolutely, it's definitely a big issue for a tech. Over the years I've picked up many tricks to help me with that. On a Gibson-style guitar I usually remove 3 strings, replace them, and then do the other 3. That way I don't have to worry about the tune-o-matic bridge falling off. And you know obviously you don't want your bridge falling off in the middle of a show. Another thing is that if I'm treating a fingerboard with lemon oil on it I'll leave 1 string on to hold the bridge, that way I can access the rest of the neck. With a Strat, I'll remove all 6 strings and then put a new set on because I don't have to worry about the bridge falling off. In terms of keeping a guitar in tune, I have a certain way that I wind the strings. I don't do the typical bend in the string that a lot of guys use. I feel that if I have to change a string quickly that bend can really slow me down. I also have been jabbed too many times and we know how much that hurts so I find other ways to wind the strings.

GJD: Tell me a little bit more about that.

GREG H: I worked with A. J. Dunning who is in The Verve Pipe and he is pretty technical guy. We did a lot of experimenting together. We found a really cool way of stringing the guitar by alternating the string windings on the tuning peg. One string wind will go above the hole and the other string wind will go under the hole. On plain strings I will add a couple of more winds under the hole as well. I have found this technique really works to help the guitar stay in tune.

GJD: Well that sounds really cool. We appreciate all your answers. Next time we will go into further detail.