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NEWS

Competition



Meet the Strat® King of Europe...

Earlier this year, we invited everyone in Europe to enter our most exciting competition ever. The rules were simple: we asked you to record yourself playing your Strat® and send the finished results in to us. The response was overwhelming, and after listening to every single track, our expert panel of judges selected six players to go through to the finals of the competition.



And so, on Sunday 29th August 2004, the stage was set. Against the picturesque backdrop of Arundel Castle in England's beautiful Sussex countryside, these six guitar gladiators did battle to see who would be crowned Fender®'s Strat® King of Europe and walk away with the most unique prizes we have ever offered.

The Prize

The one eventual winner would go on to win an American Deluxe 50th Anniversary Stratocaster® AND a '57 Twin Reverb® Amplifier and be presented with a one-of-kind Strat® trophy! The lucky winner would then be invited to join some of the world's most famous Strat® players at London's famous Wembley Arena for the Miller Strat® Pack concert, celebrating 50 years of the Fender® Stratocaster®.

The Six Contestants

Before we find out who the European Strat® Player of the Year is, let's find out a bit more about our six exceptional contestants:

1. Miki Birta

The first player to step onto the Arundel stage in front of a 1,000-strong audience was 34 year-old left-handed Hungarian, Miki Birta. Miki's career began in musicals and progressed through tours and sessions with many Hungarian pop groups until he found his niche in Jazz-Fusion, which enabled him to play with the likes of Mike Stern and Bill Evans. After a stint in New York, Miki now teaches jazz guitar and theory professionally and has released two solo CD's.

On the night of our competition, Miki impressed both the judges and the crowd with his faultless performance, set against a backing track called *Center Street* taken from his second solo album.



2. Marcus Deml



Miki was followed by 37 year-old Prague-born German contestant Marcus Deml. Prior to the competition, Marcus spent time learning his guitar playing skills in America, Germany and Austria. Marcus, now a resident of Hamburg, has played on albums by Saga, Rick Astley, Nena and Kingdom Come. Amongst his album releases are *Thoughts In The Past Future*, with Earth Nation and his solo release, *Errorhead*.

Marcus stepped onto the stage in his wide-brimmed hat, clutching his '57 Reissue Stratocaster® and gave an entertaining and theatrical performance, playing one of his own songs, *The Dealer*.

3. Olivier Wursten-Olmos

Our second left-handed guitarist, Olivier was born in Marseille in 1971. He started guitar at the age of 12 and turned professional at the tender age of 16. He has done TV, studio and club work and his influences are very diversified, from BeBop and Jazz rock, through to blues and rock. Nowadays, in between the courses he gives in Paris and a heavy gigging schedule, Olivier is currently composing songs for his new album.

On the night, Olivier gave a spirited, emotional performance on his 1994 American Standard Stratocaster®. His chosen track was the self-penned, *Stratified*.



4. Paul Rose



Next up was England's own Paul Rose. Born in Newcastle in 1966, he started playing guitar at the age of eight. He played his first gigs when he was just fourteen, and has since released a number of CD's that have won much critical acclaim.

Paul's track of choice on the evening was one of his own, entitled *Rise and Shine*. This gritty Blues Rock number was deftly handled and proved to be a real crowd pleaser. This raucous tune was performed on Paul's trusty '62 Reissue Strat®.



5. Pontus Borg

Born in 1970, Pontus has been a freelance guitarist for the last ten years. He has worked with many of the most famous Swedish artists during this time, and is also an accomplished singer and keyboard player. Last year, Pontus released a CD with his band Simson DuPont. The album spawned a number one single in Sweden; testimony to the quality of his writing and playing.

Pontus chose a track from his band's album, called *Kom* ('Come' in English). Halfway through his track, the heavens opened and the rain came down in thick sheets, sending the crowd scrambling for umbrellas, ground sheets and trees to stand under! Pontus remained unruffled, and like a true professional he played immaculately despite the downpour.



6. Thomas Blug



The final contestant, Thomas Blug is a very well known guitarist in his native Germany and has appeared with countless 'name' acts including Percy Sledge, Snap! And Hazel O'Connor. Born in 1966 he has racked up a staggering amount of live performances, including appearances at Music Trade Shows all over Europe. His choice of axe for the evening was his faithful 1961 Stratocaster®, which has accompanied him throughout his colourful career.

Thomas was given his cue by the evening's compère, TV personality and former Bond girl Helene Hunt and gave a confident performance, showing great control which won him praise from both the crowd and the judges. (©Photo by Mike Eddowes)

Ladies and gentlemen...Paul Carrack!!!

After a short interval, the Arundel crowd were treated to a show by international recording artist Paul Carrack. Paul has had a successful career spanning four decades and is best known for his hits *How Long* (with his group Ace, reaching number 3 in the U.S Billboard Charts), *Tempted* (with Squeeze) and his Mike and the Mechanics collaborations *Over My Shoulder* and *The Living Years*. He has also collaborated with artists such as The Pretenders, The Smiths, The Undertones and Elton John. (He played on the latter's *Candle in the Wind '97* single, which still holds the record for being the biggest single of all time).



Paul and his band gave an outstanding performance which got the crowd on their feet. Songs such as *The Living Years*, *Harvest For The World*, *Over My Shoulder* and *Tempted* set the crowd up for the triumphant finale - an electrifying rendition of *How Long*.

[Visit Paul Carrack's official website here.](#)

And the Winner Is...

For the final part of the evening, the judges' decision was announced. The glamorous Ms. Hunt assembled the nervous contestants on the stage and announced that the winner was... **THOMAS BLUG** of Germany! Thomas was presented with his Strat® trophy by the Managing Director of Fender Europe Martin K Brady and the Fender Europe Marketing and Promotions team and was crowned our European Strat® Player of the Year.

Thomas will be joining our gathering of Strat® legends at Wembley Arena on September 24th 2004. Make sure you don't miss out! [Click here to find out how to purchase tickets.](#)



(©Photo by Mike Eddowes)

Fender® would like to say a huge thank you to Thomas Blug, Miki Birta, Marcus Deml, Olivier Wursten, Paul Rose, Pontus Borg, Paul Carrack and his band, Helene Hunt and of course everyone who entered our competition.



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