

# SOUND CHECK



## See the Light

**OPTEK FRET LIGHT FG-421 GUITAR WITH GUITAR PRO 6 SOFTWARE** By Chris Gill

**▶ STANDARD NOTATION, CHORD** charts and tablature have served guitarists well for decades now, but for beginners those methods can seem a bit abstract and confusing. Even more-advanced musicians can find notation and tablature a little too removed from the instrument, which can slow down the learning process when all you want to do is fly on the frets instead of decipher fingering patterns.

The Optek Music Systems Fretlight guitar provides the ideal solution for quickly learning scales, chords and, now, even songs, thanks to its array of LEDs located underneath the fretboard that shows the exact notes and fret locations to play. The Fretlight guitar made its debut way back in 1990. Today's version is supported by the optional Guitar Pro 6 software package, which greatly increases the system's versatility and effectiveness by providing MIDI playback capabilities that teach users how to play songs, licks, chords and scales. It also features virtual amps and effects for processing your guitar and instrumental tracks for accompaniment.

**FEATURES** Optek offers a variety of Fretlight guitar models, from the entry-level FG-411 with a single humbucker to the "super-Strat"-style FG-461 Pro with dual custom hum-canceling single-coil pickups. Most of their models are based on beloved Fender guitars, like the Tele-style FG-431, the Jaguar-style FG-441 and the Strat-

*the gear  
in review*



**109**  
**FRAMUS**  
AK 1974

**110**  
**CARVIN**  
V3M micro amp

**112**  
**BEDELL**  
TB-18-G  
acoustic

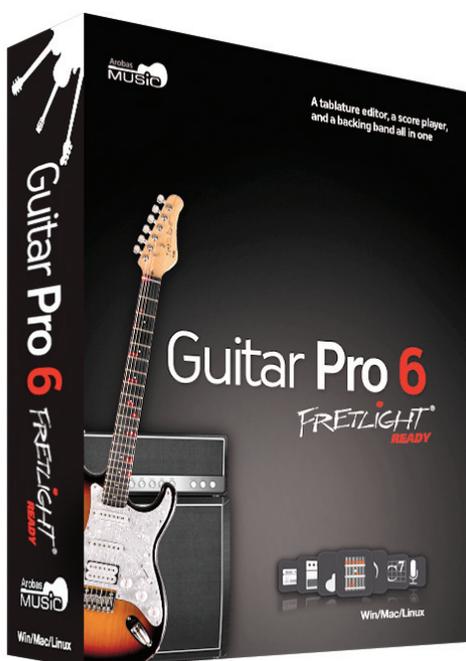
**114**  
**DVK**  
Hair Ball and  
Goldtop pedals

**116**  
**RECORDING  
KING**  
ROS-06  
acoustic



For video of this review, go to [GuitarWorld.com/Dec2011](http://GuitarWorld.com/Dec2011)

\* optimized for iPhone, iPad and Android!



The optional Guitar Pro 6 software works in conjunction with the Fretlight's array of fretboard LEDs.

style FG-421, which is the model I evaluated. Note that all Fretlight guitars have 21 frets—no 22 or 24 fret models are available.

The FG-421 is essentially a good, solid budget-Strat copy with a humbucker in the bridge position, a vintage-style tremolo and a very comfortable modern-style bridge. The neck's LED circuit board is sandwiched between the maple neck and a transparent advanced-polymer fretboard that looks and feels like ebony. The transparent nut glows beneath the appropriate string to indicate open notes.

The Fretlight guitar also features an eight-pin DIN connector that enables a computer to control the guitar's LEDs via the included USB cable. Whereas the original version of the Fretlight guitar was self-contained and allowed users to manually select settings with a variety of rotary switches, the new Fretlight guitar is almost indistinguishable from a standard guitar at a glance. However, now the guitar's fretboard lights up only when it is connected to a computer.

Each Fretlight guitar includes Fretlight Studio software that consists of four programs: Lesson Player, Improviser, M-Player and Video Player. These are great for getting started, but the optional Fretlight-ready Guitar Pro 6 software package significantly increases the system's power. While Guitar Pro 6 works well as a stand-alone package, it's especially effective when paired with a Fretlight guitar, as it lights up notes on the fretboard similar to how a player piano depresses notes on a keyboard. Playing along with songs is now a matter of connecting the dots, so to speak.

**PERFORMANCE** Using a Fretlight guitar with Fretlight-ready Guitar Pro 6 software is easily the fastest and most effective way to learn how to play songs and expand your scale and chord vocabulary. Instead of spending your brainpower translating note symbols or tablature numbers to fretboard positions, you can now concentrate entirely on learning

and memorizing fingering patterns directly on the fretboard. Guitar Pro 6 imports numerous different tablature file formats, so your choice of songs and educational materials are almost unlimited.

Guitar Pro 6 has three modes—Tab, Chord Diagram and Scales—that guitarists can select when playing back tablature. The Scale mode even lets you limit the section of the fretboard that you want to light up so you can learn how to play scales in different positions on the neck. You can also use a footswitch to toggle the lights on and off and step through notes one at a time.

The Fretlight FG-421 guitar itself is a solid instrument that compares well with standard guitars in its price range. Some noise from the fretboard's LED circuit bleeds through when the guitar is connected to a computer and the neck pickup is engaged, but that's the nature of the single-coil beast. The noise is imperceptible when the bridge humbucker is engaged, and it's not a factor when using the guitar without the LEDs.

## CHEAT SHEET



### LIST PRICES

FG-421 guitar, \$499.99;  
Guitar Pro 6 software,  
\$99.99

### MANUFACTURER

Optek Music Systems,  
[fretlight.com](http://fretlight.com)

- An LED circuit board sandwiched between the maple neck and a transparent polymer fretboard lights up scale, chord and even licks when connected to a computer.
- With the exception of its lighted fretboard, the FG-421 is identical to a standard guitar, with all of the sounds, playability, and features players demand.
- Fretlight-ready Guitar Pro 6 software displays songs in real-time playback, allowing players to follow the notes on the Fretlight guitar's fretboard.
- Guitar Pro 6 lets users select Tab, Chord Diagram and Scale modes, allowing them to focus on different aspects of the playing, such as chord progressions or even improvisation.
- **THE BOTTOM LINE** The Optek Fretlight guitar paired with Guitar Pro 6 software is the fastest and easiest way to learn how to play guitar or expand your knowledge and comprehension of the fretboard.