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Canadian guitarist and former member of Canadian rock groups The Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Randy Bachman, is pictured during a question and answer session for the media.



Canadian guitarist and former member of Canadian rock groups The Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, Randy Bachman (left), performs with his original Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins guitar with Japanese musician Takeshi during a Canada-Japan Friendship Concert after a guitar exchange event to coincide with Canada Day at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo on July 1, 2022. — AFP photos

Anonymous bust turns out to be long-lost Napoleon

An anonymous marble bust picked up in a Paris art market has turned out to be a 200-year-old sculpture of a young Napoleon Bonaparte, Sotheby's said Friday. The auction house said the once-famous bust was going for sale on July 5 in London, expected to fetch between £120,000 and £180,000 (\$145,000 and \$217,000). "It was discarded as an embarrassment after the fall of the empire, deemed valueless and eventually lost without trace for two centuries," Christopher Mason, a Sotheby's specialist said in a statement.

The bust was carved by Italian sculptor Giuseppe Franchi in 1797, commissioned by a 28-year-old Napoleon in Milan after a series of stunning military victories. An unnamed collector came across the sculpture at an art market in 2020, where it was described simply as an "anonymous man in the 19th century style". Olivier Ihl, a researcher at Sciences Po Grenoble Institute, used archival documents and comparisons with other works by Franchi to confirm it had rather more illustrious origins.

A letter even allowed him to pinpoint when it was commissioned: a dinner held by Napoleon at the Palazzo Serbelloni in Milan shortly after his victory over the Republic of Venice. Ihl found evidence that the sculpture was displayed at the Society of Arts in Geneva as part of efforts to bolster Napoleon's image ahead of the region's annexation, and that the emperor saw it himself later that year. After his ignominious fall, the sculpture crashed in price, Sotheby's said, eventually being flogged for a pittance to an unknown Englishman. — AFP

'American Woman' rocker reunited with stolen guitar

They say you never forget your first love, and after pining for his stolen guitar for almost half a century, Canadian rock star Randy Bachman has finally been reunited with the instrument which an eagle-eyed fan tracked down in Japan. Bachman, who wrote the original "American Woman" with his band The Guess Who, was in Tokyo for the emotional handover on Friday - 46 years after his cherished orange Gretsch was snatched from a Toronto hotel.

"Wow," a stunned Bachman said, holding the guitar lovingly and tuning it up on stage before playing in a special concert at the Canadian Embassy. The 78-year-old told AFP he had been "pretty much devastated" by the theft. "With that guitar, I wrote many million-selling songs... it was like my magical guitar. And then when it's suddenly gone, the magic is gone." The rocker bought the now vintage 6120 Chet Atkins model as a teenager in

the early 1960s with \$400 painstakingly saved up from mowing lawns, washing cars and babysitting.

He had long admired the instrument, spending hours staring at it in a shop window in Winnipeg with his friend and fellow musician Neil Young. It meant so much to Bachman that he would chain it to hotel toilets on tour. "Everybody in the band made fun of me, but because I worked so hard to get this guitar, I didn't want it stolen." But in 1976, he entrusted the guitar to a roadie who put it in a room with other luggage while the band was checking out. Before they knew it, it was gone.

Some sleuthing and a handover

Over the decades, Bachman hunted for his Gretsch, which has a small, dark knot in the wood grain on its front, but to no avail — until a Canadian fan decided to help with the search from his home in 2020. William Long compared old images

of the stolen instrument with new and archived pictures of the model on guitar shop websites around the world.

"Yeah, I'm a sleuth," Long, 58, told AFP. "I was confident I was going to find it. I got the process down so quick — I went through 300 images of orange Gretches." None were a perfect match, until he found one on the site of a Tokyo guitar shop with the tell-tale mark. More searching pointed Long to a Japanese musician called Takeshi, who he spotted playing Bachman's beloved guitar in a YouTube video. Takeshi, who had always wanted a vintage Gretsch, says he bought Bachman's guitar in 2014 for around 850,000 yen (\$6,300).

Long alerted Bachman to his discovery, and the musicians arranged to meet in Tokyo to swap Bachman's original guitar with another of the same type, also made in 1957. On Friday, at an event held on Canada Day, the pair shared a

big hug and then jammed together. They performed songs including "American Woman", the 1970 hit later covered by US singer Lenny Kravitz, and "Takin' Care of Business" by Bachman's other band, Bachman-Turner Overdrive.

Bachman is not the only rock star to be reunited with a long-lost guitar: last year, Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page also tracked one down that went missing at an airport decades ago. But Bachman, who had given up ever finding the guitar after four decades of searching, said he had been touched by Long's "random act of kindness". "When I was playing it, I looked down and figured - time has stood still, or 50 years has just flown by really fast," he said. "I couldn't have written this if I wrote it as a script. Nobody would believe it. But it's true. It's really great." — AFP

Germany signs deal to return bronzes to Nigeria

Germany has signed an agreement to begin sending hundreds of Benin bronzes back to what is now Nigeria, rubber-stamping the biggest effort yet by a European country to return the looted artworks. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Culture Minister Claudia Roth signed the deal with their Nigerian counterparts in Berlin after Germany first announced that it would begin returning the bronzes last year. The first two artworks - the head of a king and a plaque depicting three warriors - were on Friday handed over to representatives from Nigeria. "Today we have reason to celebrate, because we have reached a historic agreement - the Benin bronzes are returning home," Baerbock said.

"These pieces are not only magnificent artefacts - they are some of Africa's greatest treasures. But they are also telling a story of colonial violence," she said. Thousands of Benin bronzes, metal plaques and sculptures that once decorat-

ed the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin are now scattered around European museums after being looted by the British at the end of the 19th century. Germany has around 1,100 of the 16th- to 18th-century artefacts, split between some 20 museums.

The biggest collection is held by the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, which has 440 - considered the most important collection outside London's British Museum. Negotiations are still ongoing as to which of the bronzes held by the Ethnological Museum will be returned to Nigeria, and which will remain in Berlin on loan. Nigeria has been negotiating the return of Benin bronzes from several European countries and plans to build a museum in Benin City in southern Edo state, where it hopes to house them.

France in November handed back 26 of the treasures, while two were returned by Britain earlier this year, with talks ongoing for more to follow. Nigeria's Minister of Culture, Lai Mohammed, thanked Germany for having "taken the lead in correcting the wrongs of the past", hailing "the dawn of a new era of cooperation". "This will go down as one of the most important days in the celebration of African cultural heritage," Foreign Minister Zubairu Dada added. — AFP



Sculptures known as the 'Benin Bronzes' are pictured at a ceremony for the signing of an agreement of intent to return them to Nigeria at the German foreign ministry in Berlin, Germany on July 1, 2022.



Guards watch over sculptures known as the Benin Bronzes during a ceremony for the signing of an agreement of intent to return them to Nigeria at the German foreign ministry in Berlin, on July 1, 2022. — AFP photos

NYPD unit that inspired 'Law & Order: SVU' faces gender bias probe

The US Justice Department will investigate the New York police agency that inspired the hit TV show "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," over its treatment of sexual assault victims. Two federal prosecutors in New York announced Thursday in a joint statement that the Special Victims Unit (SVU) would be investigated to determine whether it "engages in a pattern or practice of gender-biased policing."

Allegations against the agency "include failing to conduct basic investigative steps and instead shaming and abusing survivors and re-traumatizing them during investigations," the statement said. "Victims of sex crimes deserve the same rigorous and unbiased investigations of their cases that the NYPD affords to other categories of crime," Damian Williams, the US attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in the statement.

His Eastern District counterpart Breon Peace added that in recent months "we have learned concerning information from a variety of sources of historical issues about the way the Special Victims Division has conducted its investigations for many years." The Justice Department said it plans to conduct a comprehensive review of the SVU's policies, procedures, and training for investigations of sexual assault crimes. New York Mayor Eric Adams, who is the city's former police chief, as well as the current chief Keechant Sewell said they will cooperate with the probe.

The NYPD is the largest municipal police force in the United States with some 36,000 uniformed officers and 19,000 administrative employees. "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" is part of the wildly popular "Law & Order" TV franchise, and has been on air on NBC since 1999. With no fewer than 23 seasons, it is the longest-running prime-time series in US TV history - and NBC said on Wednesday that season 24 will launch in September this year. — AFP



A large quantity of rubbish floats next to houses at Sao Jorge neighborhood in Manaus, Brazil. — AFP photos

Waterways in Manaus choked by tons of trash

In Manaus, the largest city in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, tons of stinking trash fill the canals and streams, giving one the feeling that they're visiting a post-apocalyptic wasteland. On the west side of the city, in a poor neighborhood where homes have been erected on stilts, a worker uses an excavator to scoop up a bucket-load of bottles, pieces of plastic and even home appliances that have been tossed in the water.

Not far from the city's main port, municipal workers wearing orange uniforms gather garbage from a boat and pile it onto a big barge floating on the Rio Negro, one of the Amazon River's main tributaries. With the rising water levels signaling an end to the rainy season, the mounds of trash are often intermingled with leaves and tree branches. Each day, nearly 30

tons of debris is plucked from the water. In some areas, the water is almost completely covered.

The massive influx of trash to Manaus's waterways occurs around this time every year, but city authorities believe the situation has gotten worse in recent weeks. From January to May, city workers have removed 4,500 tons of trash, most of which could have been recycled instead of being thrown in the river. "The people who live on the water's edge throw garbage straight into the streams... few people put it in the trash," says Antonino Pereira, a 54-year-old Manaus resident who complains that the stench is unbearable.

According to the city's undersecretary of sanitation, Jose Reboucas, if the population was more aware of the costs associated with littering, the city could save one million reais (about \$190,000) per month. "The awareness of the population will be very beneficial for our city and especially for our environment," he told AFP. The Amazonian region is also facing a major threat from deforestation, with more than 3,750 square kilometers (1,450 square miles) of jungle chopped down since the beginning of the year. — AFP