

# CBG REVIEW

July 2021

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# Editorial

## Connecting people...

Welcome to the July 2021 edition of CBG Review. Our first interview is with US multi-instrumentalist Justin Johnson who talks about past experiences, current projects and musical trends. With his deep understanding of roots music, Justin continues to play for, teach and inspire fans all over the globe, showing just how much music acts as a bond to connect people from different worlds and cultures.

Also from the USA, Allen Bieber loves designing and building custom resonators and tele guitars, and how Copper Cigar Box Guitars was a logical extension of his traditional line of guitars aimed at offering “next-level” electric solid-body CBGs to working musicians and hobby guitarists. Another one of Allen’s guiding principles has been to connect and involve the community by donating guitars to charity each year.

A couple of years ago, French musician Lio Giardina added a cigar box guitar to his collection as a source of new sounds and new vibes. He says he enjoys trying out different tunings and “playing in a different light.” According to Lio, the most precious moment is when a new idea comes to you and reminds you why you keep on making music!

When we talk about connecting people from different cultures, the Mongolian band “*the HU*” is a fitting example. Our next interview is the fascinating story of the master craftsman behind the HU’s instruments, P.Baigalijav, and his passion for Mongolian traditional music and

building ancient world instruments. Don’t be surprised if more people around the world start playing three-string bow-and-arrow-shaped “tovshuurs” or two-string “morin khuurs” like The HU!

Phil Thomas from the UK is an *ethnomusicologist*. If that’s already not enough to make you curious, read about how Phil stumbled into the world of CBGs and single-stringed instruments, and his journey back to the origins of music and subsequent ebook “It’s Been A Long, Hard Road – How the diddley bow got here and stayed.” Read on to see more about how CBGs and the diddley bow have helped Phil in particular connect with people.

Finally, in “Origins in the key of G,” Cathy Mullaert interviews Germany’s Fabian Fahr about his travels and experiences and how they reflect in his “not-so-ordinary” CBG album, which mixes US rock and blues with Latin and European influences to come up with an interesting mix outside of the CBG “mainstream” – another example of the wealth of diversity behind roots music and ultimately the CBG community.

As always – read, enjoy, and be inspired!

Best regards

*Huey Ross*

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**Justin Johnson, USA**

# A unifying bond

## Interview Justin Johnson, Nashville, TN, USA

**After touring the world for years, I really came to appreciate how similar everyone is, and how, even in very different cultures, every community has the same proportion of values, viewpoints, interests, motivations and lifestyles. I also really came to appreciate how much music bonds people from completely different worlds.**

*CBGR: Justin, you've been particularly busy lately with "Rough Edges" and the "Bootleg series"?*

Justin Johnson: Definitely! 2020 and Covid really changed the way a lot of people had to work. It made it a lot harder to get into the studio and collaborate with other musicians. Luckily, I have a guitar tracking studio at home with around 300 guitars, so for me the "forced isolation" of 2020 ended up becoming one of my most artistically productive periods yet.

My full-band "Rough Edges" album was about 3/4 complete when Covid hit, and I had most of the drum and vocal parts already recorded, so I had to complete that album on my own in my home studio. I sent session files back and forth to the other musicians on the album and to the engineer in order to complete the project, but the isolation gave me the chance to get more creative with my parts, spending more time with them, and focusing in a way that's harder to do when you just have a block of time in the studio and are "on the clock." I love the way it turned out.

*And the "Bootleg series"?*

I released three solo guitar albums, "The Bootleg Series 1-3." These albums really came in response to countless requests for me to release recordings of my online video performances. I have hundreds of solo guitar video performances that I've been posting to YouTube and I post new arrangements a couple of times a week. With over a million subscribers now, the demand for me to make these recordings available in album format was overwhelming, so I started remixing the recordings from these performances, and choosing the best and most popular tracks for this collection. I'm currently working on "Bootleg Series Volume 4," which will have a deep, dark, swampy blues vibe, and "Bootleg Series Volume 5," which will feature a more back-porch delta blues vibe on a wide variety of instruments. Those should both be released this summer 2021.

*You said once "the road has a heart of gold" – what did you mean by that?*

I wrote a song on my "Turquoise Trail" album called "Black Heart of Gold." That title represents the light and dark side of living on the road. In one sense, the road has a heart of gold and the experiences of living on the road can bring adventure, new friends and family, and a beauty and richness that is hard to find in any other circumstances. But that life can also be dangerous, dark, and unforgiving. It's the balance of beauty and danger that makes that kind of life

compelling and romantic, but if you don't respect the dark, you won't be around long enough to enjoy the light.

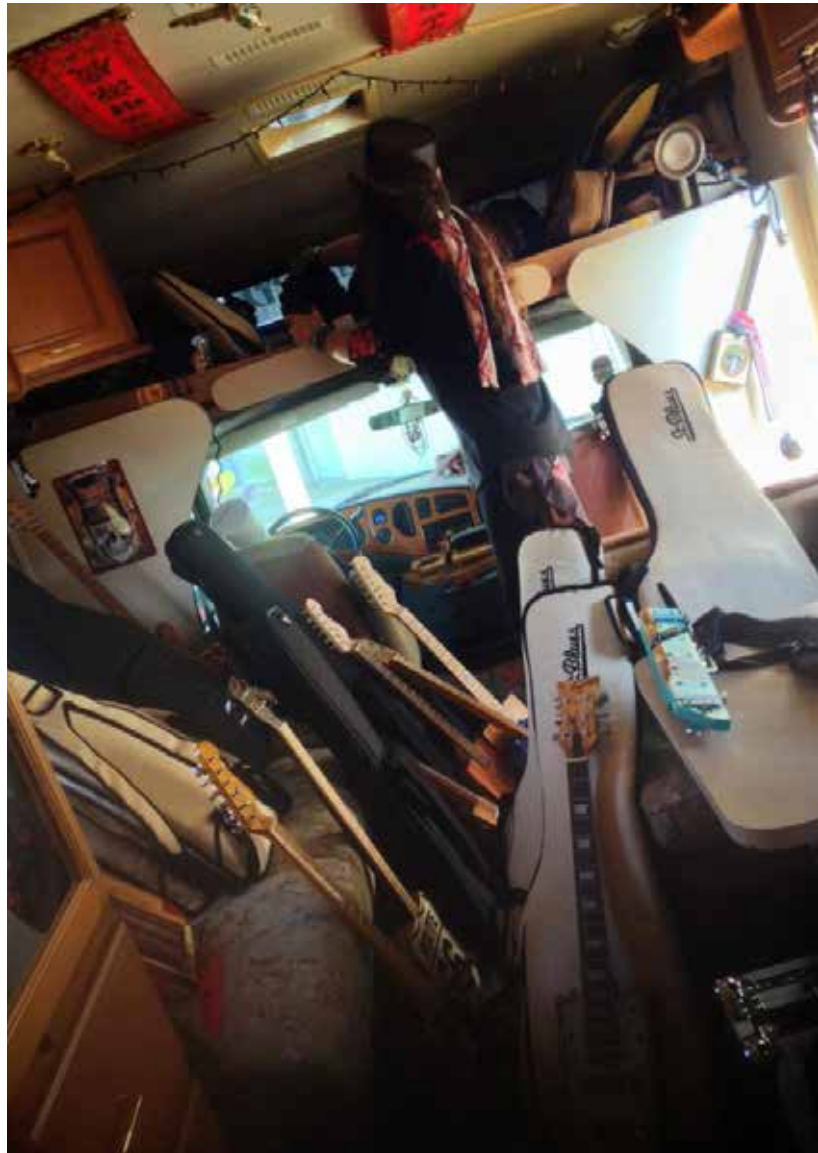
*How long did you travel around with the "Gypsy Van"?*

My wife, Nikki, and I lived in the Gypsy Van for five years, traveling full-time, living gig-to-gig. At one point, we had filled this tiny RV with 30 guitars, a full PA, two guitar amps, an upright bass, and a full-sized ceremonial Chinese dragon that we were gifted. It was like living in a rolling magic attic!

*"It's that passion and drive that's the fuel for making music and turning it into a living"*

*Do you agree with the proverb "choose a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life"?*

Absolutely! I think that passion is the most motivating factor. I've never had to "make myself" play guitar because it's what I've always wanted to do since I first picked it up. I can't "not" play guitar! Even when I'm not actively playing guitar, my mind is playing guitar. I find myself working out techniques and fretboard patterns in my mind...fleshing out arrangements, thinking of new riffs, dialing in amp tones, etc. Even when I'm exhausted and have already been recording all day, as soon as I'm done I still have the urge to play something else. It's that passion and drive that's the fuel for making music and turning it into a living.



What about “behind every great man is a great woman”?

Everything I do, I do with my wife Nikki. Since we met in 2009, we have been inseparable, and have spent every day creating art, music, and a life together. We both share the same drive to create and to say she has been an amazing support and inspiration would be an understatement! She also has an incredible talent for musical production and has produced every one of my albums with me – she’s filmed all of the hundreds of videos we’ve created, she’s been the foundation of all the social media presence we have, which has connected millions of people with our music, and – most importantly – she’s just a fun and inspiring soul. As rewarding as it is to make music for a living, none of these adventures would ever be the same if I couldn’t share them with her.



*“In my experience, the path to luck is a long road of practice, work and facing your insecurities”*

Would you agree that people need to have a bit of luck in life?

I think that luck is the kind of thing you shouldn’t ever depend on, but you should always be ready for. A “lucky break” is only going to benefit you if you are ready and willing to take the opportunity, and probably only after you’ve spent years tirelessly honing your talents and crafts in order to take advantage of whatever



opportunity lands on your doorstep. I think that “luck” seems to find people who are ready for it and who are looking for it. A lot of people say that they haven’t gotten “lucky,” but, in my experience, the path to luck is a long road of practice, work and facing your insecurities.

Was the Smoke & Mirrors Tour your first overseas tour?

After I released my “Smoke & Mirrors” double album, I toured the US, Australia, and Europe, but I had already toured Europe and UK the year before the “Smoke & Mirrors” tour.

*“People who share a similar love of music have a unifying bond that is amazingly strong”*

How did touring abroad change your perspective?

After touring the world for years, I really came to appreciate how similar everyone is, and how, even in very different cultures, every community has the same proportion of values, viewpoints, interests, motivations and lifestyles. I also really came to appreciate how much music bonds people from completely different worlds. Whether you’re northern, southern, old, young, old-fashioned, millennial, whatever... people who share a similar love of music have a unifying bond that is amazingly strong, and can easily bridge wide cultural chasms.



*You're a successful independent artist, but you've always collaborated with some amazing musicians too...*

Definitely. I love collaborating and have had the opportunity to play with some of my musical heroes and some of the most talented musicians in the world. I think the thing I love the most about collaborating with other musicians is that it always brings new ideas out. I might have a concept in mind for a song, but then when I hear how it's being interpreted by another musician, the expression of the song changes and adapts to the combination of approaches and influences. That's when the magic happens, and the performance can take on a life of its own. The key is to be in the moment and not so rigid that you stifle the creative moments like that.

*Who are some of those musical heroes and talented musicians?*

One of the great things about traveling as much as we have and then settling in Music City is that I end up collaborating with incredibly talented musicians, film makers, sound designers, actors, you name it.. just about every week. Some recent projects that I've had a lot of fun with were writing and recording a song with Robin Zander of Cheap Trick and John Carter Cash, on a song named "Heart Made of Steel" for the soundtrack of the film "The Ice Road" (featuring Laurence Fishburne and Liam Neeson). That film was just released on Netflix this June, so be sure to check it out... and pick up the soundtrack album! ☺

I also collaborated on an upcoming compilation album being released on Bootsy Collins' label, Bootzilla Productions, that will include legendary musicians like Eric Clapton, Peter Frampton, and Delbert McClinton, just to name a few. These are players who





really shaped my understanding of and appreciation of music growing up, so it's really kind of mind-blowing to be creating music with them now...and hopefully, in turn, that music will be inspiring the next generation of musicians coming up...and so the circle continues!

*After the great response to your albums, do you still think there's a lack of mainstream appreciation for instrumental music?*

Not at all. I think a lot of people really underestimate how much instrumental music is out there, and how much demand there is for it. The ability to tell a story without words, with music alone, is an art form that will never fade or become any less relevant. I think a lot of people believe that pop music, which is almost exclusively what you hear on the radio, represents the whole music industry and that music is predominantly created "for" radio, and to fit into a consumer category as a product. But the demand for music outside of the pop music context is huge, from my experience. In fact, I find that most people are so tired of the monotony of modern pop that their enthusiasm for quality music outside of that paradigm is even stronger and more passionate.

I always create music based on the philosophy that "if I want to hear it, so will other people." The more authentic my music is, the more that authenticity will be felt by others, and translate into an emotional response. Plus, the fact that I've organically built a following through YouTube and social media allows me to make music and have it shared directly with my listeners, without any filters. This is a totally new and exciting era for the music industry that allows listeners access to independent music that's closer to what they actually want to listen to, as opposed to being restricted to only what's on the radio.

*You've created a lot of music for film and television...*

Yes it's one of the things I love the most. Most of the music in film is instrumental and I've always been inspired by composers like John Williams, Danny Elfman and Ry Cooder, who are all just mind-blowing in their talent for creating emotional landscapes through music. If you ever watch the special features on a film and see the scenes while they were being filmed, before the music was added, you realize how flat and lifeless the storylines become without music. The instrumental music in the background is easy to miss, but it really is a massive force that drives and inspires the emotions you feel when watching a movie. I've recorded hundreds of songs and musical cues for film and TV, and the demand for instrumental music for film in all genres is never-ending.

***"The demand for instrumental music for film in all genres is never-ending"***

*You've shown tons of people how to play, but it comes naturally to you, right?*

I've always been drawn to music and I feel like I specifically felt at home on the guitar when I first picked it up, but I don't think any kind of natural talent is ever a substitute for practice. I've seen players that have extremely rare natural gifts for music, but never develop them and take them for granted, and they never stand out. Conversely, I've seen people who

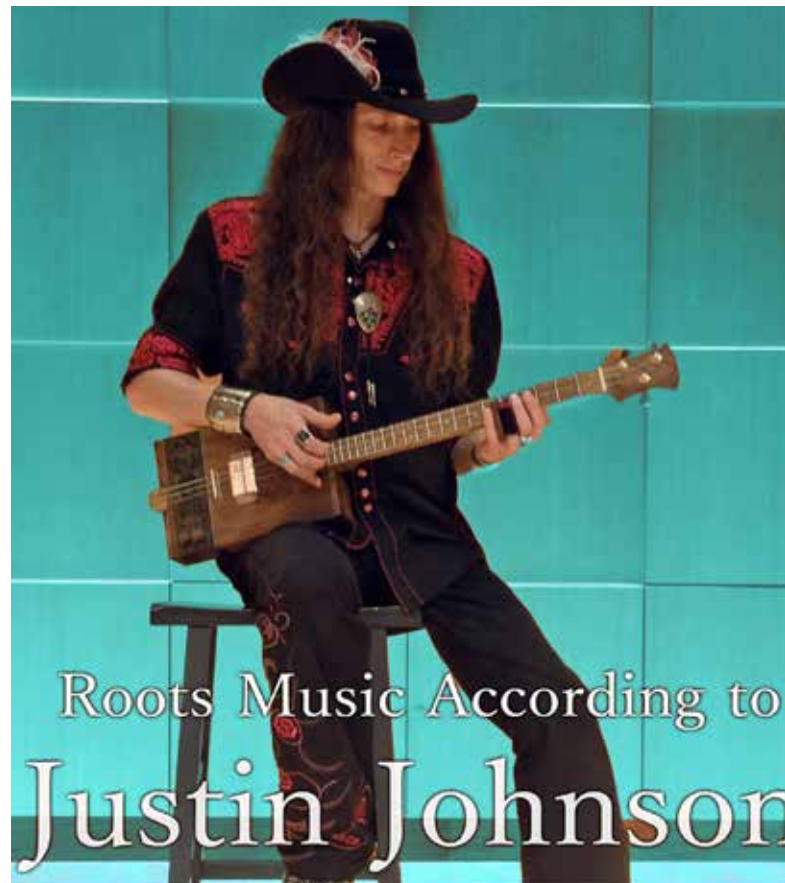
struggle to play, who may feel like they have no “natural talent,” or may even have a physical condition that makes playing music more difficult, but through practice and dedication, and maybe a little stubbornness, they become amazing players. I’ve practiced thousands of hours and performed thousands of gigs, and I feel that no level of natural talent is a substitute for experience and dedication.

*“I feel that no level of natural talent is a substitute for experience and dedication”*

So what’s the secret of teaching kids and adults to play guitar?

I think most people pick up the guitar with a goal to have fun and play songs they enjoy. That might seem obvious, but a lot of teachers seem to overlook that, so their students can quickly lose interest. If people are bored, they won’t want to practice...if they don’t practice, they won’t get better. If they don’t get better, then they think they’re just not talented. This whole cycle can be reversed just by keeping practice fun, by finding ways to create some instant gratification along the way, and by getting them to make music quickly, as opposed to just running through exercises, scales, etc.

The three-string guitar is particularly good for starting out because you can enjoy making music very quickly. You can pick up a three-string guitar, tune it up, and actually start playing songs the first day. Then, as



you develop a little more muscle memory and confidence, it becomes a lot easier to transition over to a six-string guitar.

*Homemade instruments can range from simple to highly sophisticated, but you can still produce some great music from the simplest of instruments?*

Absolutely! I think that learning to play music on only one string is one of the best ways to develop faster on guitar. If you can play a melody on one string, and create emotion, rhythm, mood and melody from that, then you will always be able to pull more music from a six-string guitar. Some of the best practice I've ever had was closing my eyes and playing slide on a one-string diddley bow, learning how to listen and respond to the instrument while creating melodies. If you close your eyes to practice like that, you can't see the fret markers for the slide, so you really have to develop your touch, ear and vibrato in order to stay in tune. Doing this always makes me think of some of those early blind musicians who learned that way. The special touch and intuitive feel for the music developed in that way is always hugely inspirational to me.

*Any plans for later this year?*

I'm just now starting to book live shows again after the 2020 Covid hibernation, so next up is the St. Louis Cigar Box Guitar Festival, which is a festival I've headlined every year since it started about a decade ago. That'll be at the Hwy 61 Roadhouse in Webster Groves Missouri, and it's a two-day festival with a kick off concert there at the Roadhouse on Friday, September 24 from 7 to 10pm. Then that Saturday September 25, I'll be starting the day with a guitar workshop from 10-noon and then playing all day long. The Roadhouse has been a feature on Guy Fieri's "Diners, Drive-Ins, and Dives" so you can count on some really great Cajun food, BBQ, and drinks, and then there will also be everything you could ask for in the world of DIY homegrown instruments...builders, parts vendors, build-your-own workshops, playing workshops, jams, raffles...all kinds of fun! That festival in particular is always a blast, but I think this year will be extra special, since everyone will be eager to rock out after being pent up all year! You can contact the venue for tickets and info at [www.hwy61roadhouse.com](http://www.hwy61roadhouse.com)! ■

<https://www.justinjohnsonlive.com>  
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**Copper Cigar Box Guitars, USA**

# Look for the penny

## Allen Bieber, Copper Cigar Box Guitars, Tucson, Arizona, USA

I have always loved cigar boxes. I have used them to keep my most precious objects in since I was a young boy. So it was a joy when I saw my first cigar box guitar and that's when I decided to create my version of the cigar box guitar. I wanted to create an instrument that would stand the test of time.

My goal at Copper Cigar Box Guitars was to make a solid body six-string professional quality instrument in a cigar box. I take great pride in building professional quality instruments for working musicians. The idea was to create a durable multi-generational instrument that took the cigar box guitar to the next level. I am a certified luthier who attended Roberto Venn luthier school in Phoenix AZ.

*“The idea was to create a durable multi-generational instrument that took the cigar box guitar to the next level”*



Four-string tenor resonator on display in the International Blues Museum in St Louis

I apprenticed for two years under Gordon Groves at Groves guitars in Tucson AZ (<https://groves-guitars-llc.business.site>). I recently built my new shop with a separate mechanical room. I am a one-man shop with a traditional guitar line at [www.balanceguitars.com](http://www.balanceguitars.com) and my Facebook page for Copper Cigar Box Guitars.

I truly love designing and building custom resonators and teles (I have a resonator guitar on display in the National blues museum in St. Louis), and have built guitars for performers such as singer songwriter Brian Wright (Nashville), Jason “Slim” Gamble (Lady Antebellum), Travis Bowlin (Nashville) and recently for Steve Arvey in Florida. I hope you get to play one in the near future.

*“I truly love designing and building custom resonators and teles”*

My latest build is a co-build with Chuck Hanabarger guitars for Steve Arvey. Chuck came up with the name “Double Trouble” because the guitar is a double-neck CBG with a three string and a six-string side. The box is made from three different woods: the top and necks are recycled mesquite flooring from Wilcox, Arizona (over 100 years old), the sides are cherry, and the back is black walnut from the crossroads in Clarksdale, Mississippi (and over 125 years old). The fretboards are Indian rosewood, the headcaps are real Brazilian rosewood, and the fret markers are mother of pearl.





Steve Arvey and “Double Trouble”

It has two f-holes with Steve’s initials lit up by a mega pixel light source powered by a rechargeable lithium battery. The three-string side has a tele neck pickup hand-wound by *Miss Julia* from Vail, Arizona. Julia’s father James Sanscrainte owns Jam guitars USA and Julia has been winding pickups for him since she was 11 years old; they call them Jewels. The six-string side has a stacked humbucker in a tele bridge with a coil split. We designed this guitar with Steve in mind to be an iconic guitar following in the footsteps of the great Bo Diddley’s box guitar.

At Copper CBGs, we make a highly over-engineered professional quality solid-body guitar in a cigar box. At Hanabarger guitars, Chuck makes traditional CBGs with hand-carved necks, pro setups and

high-quality parts. His attention to detail and clean building style is unparalleled among traditional CBGs.

Chuck and I are both one-man shops. Mine is located in Tucson Arizona, and Chuck has two: one in Chicago and the other in Nashville. We have built guitars donated to support the CBG community for the Georgia international CBG festival for three years in a row.

When I build a cigar box guitar, I take a different approach, making it a solid body guitar by filling the box with solid wood, usually poplar, pine or swamp ash. I then glue it in the box. After it dries, I glue the top down. I have four basic models – “one penny,” “two penny,” “three penny” and custom. The one penny model is the

entry-level guitar with one pickup and is usually a tribute to the Esquire. The penny is the year the guitar was built. The two penny model also has the month engraved on a second penny hidden on the guitar. The three penny model also has a hidden third penny.

*“When I build a cigar box guitar, I take a different approach”*

The electronics are all made in the USA (CTS, Bourns and Alpha pots) Switchcraft output jacks and Electrosocket jack cups. The necks on all models are attached using four threaded inserts in the neck and anodized Allen head cap bolts. I use at least 15–1 ratio tuners on the one and two penny models and Kluson tuners 18–1 on the three penny and custom models. The three penny models are all in Undercrown cigar boxes and filled with poplar wood. Natural and burst nitro finishes. Solid brass corners and strat style necks. Placing the control plate on top allows for more strumming room.

The cutaway model featured below is a custom model with the cigar box under the figured top. It has a black walnut top with tobacco brown back and sides and a single cutaway. Eldridge Esquire circuit





with a Lollartron pick-up. The custom model underneath is a tribute to the great Les Paul, with two humbuckers volume, tone and a three-way switch. The headcap is rosewood and a silver dollar is inlaid in the headstock.

Another interesting effect is when I use Bisbee turquoise from Arizona, ground down and mixed with clear epoxy to make truss rod covers or fill cracks or knots and blemishes on highly figured wood, etc.

I consider it a privilege to build these guitars for clients, professional musicians and charities. Last year, between Copper Cigar Box Guitars and our traditional line at Balance Guitars, we donated to the Atlanta International Cigar Box Festival and Special Olympics and Steve Arvey. This year's donation guitars include: "Guitars 4 Vets" (I myself am a disabled veteran with Parkinson's disease and can attest to the healing power of music) and "Women Who Rock," "The Fox Foundation," and the Atlanta Cigar Box Festival. I guess besides building professional quality instruments, my aim is to go further and create truly one-of-a-kind instruments that stand out and bring people together and maybe make some dreams come true along the way. ■

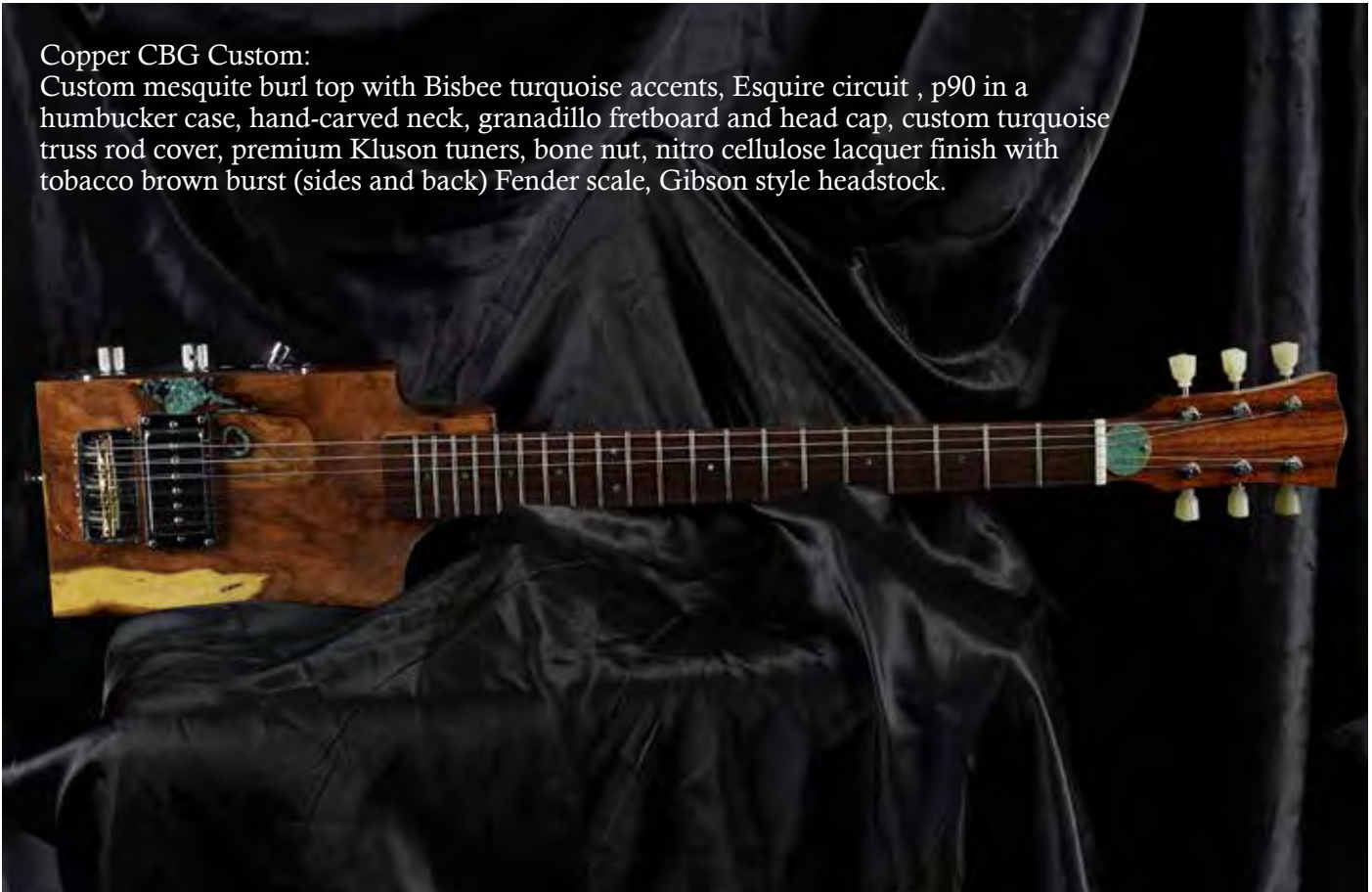
<https://www.facebook.com/ccbg1>  
<https://balanceguitars.com>

Builders mentioned :  
Chuck Hanabarger  
<https://www.facebook.com/chuck.hanabarger>  
Jam Guitars, USA  
<http://jamguitarsusa.com/index.html>



**Copper CBG Custom:**

Custom mesquite burl top with Bisbee turquoise accents, Esquire circuit , p90 in a humbucker case, hand-carved neck, granadillo fretboard and head cap, custom turquoise truss rod cover, premium Kluson tuners, bone nut, nitro cellulose lacquer finish with tobacco brown burst (sides and back) Fender scale, Gibson style headstock.



Photos: Chris Reynolds



Donation guitar



Collaboration with juju designs



Day of the Dead Hawaii donation guitar, [www.balanceguitars.com](http://www.balanceguitars.com)



**Lion Says, France**

# New sounds, new vibes

## Interview Lio Giardina, Lion Says, Lyon, France

**He was born in Rennes, he lived in Paris, and he is now settled in Lyon. A descent to the south that goes well with its music. Under the name Lion Says, Lionel Giardina plays a raw music, drawn from blues and folk and carried by a rocky voice. – Le Progres (2019)**

*CBGR: When did you get into music?*

Lio Giardina: The person who definitely attracted me to music was my life-long and best friend, today my arranger and producer, Fred Woff. When we were kids, we were the creative type. We messed around with all sorts of things, including recording fake radio shows, parodies of songs or shooting funny videos (we were lucky enough to get to play with one of the first digital video cameras). In fact we had a great childhood; we really had a lot of fun doing our things, recording miles of material on tape. We also made school newspapers and I was into comics and drawing a lot. So all these things were kind of connected at the time I think, music was one of those things I needed to get into, to have more fun and try something new. It doesn't mean we didn't take it seriously – cos we did, straight away, even if it was part of the game.

*So music got the upper hand?*

When I met Fred, we were eight-year old schoolboys (I had just moved from the city of Rennes to the countryside in a small

town). Fred was already a musician, he played the organ and he had a synthesizer. He impressed me straight away since he already played with sounds, he had understood harmony and was able to play pretty much anything he heard. I simply joined him and began to sing songs with him. We went on trying to compose music using whatever lyrics I managed to write. Soon enough we got into rock music. Our dads had plenty of records from the seventies and we just plunged into that period. I remember our first multitrack cover was Riders on the Storm by *the Doors*. Fred was brilliant trying to imitate *Manzarek's* style and sound.

***“It was all about trying things and experimenting”***

Music began to take up more and more space and pretty soon it became what mattered most to Fred and me. We bought our first guitars together – a cheap folk guitar for me first, an Epiphone Les Paul guitar a year later. At about 17 years old, after a year of discreet hard work, we released our first “concept album” for our



Photo: Michel Celso

mates and girlfriends. We probably took ourselves a little too seriously at the time, but on the other hand we didn't feel ready to release something for real, it was all about trying things and experimenting. Everything was fun, learning to play of course, but also getting to try pedals and effects, multitrack recording, trying to sing loud or even recording multitrack choirs. Fred was on all instruments, including drums, while I decided to focus on guitars and singing.

*When did you pick up the lap steel guitar?*

Quite recently in fact. I had used bottlenecks before or would put down my Stratocaster down on a chair... at the time I found my first lap steel I guess I

was definitely looking for something new. As I said before, this is how most of our projects get started. A new guitar, a banjo, a cigar box guitar, a dobro guitar, new pedals... new gear always gets me to try something a bit different – new sounds and new vibes. So I bumped into that ad on the web and the lap steel looked really cool; old fashioned art-deco style. I checked and realized it was from the forties: it was an American Supro lap steel with great pickups (made by National at the time). As it happened, the seller lived in France, actually precisely in my old mate Fred Woff' neighborhood, in French Brittany. Funny hey? This guy is on every crossroads I get to! I lived in Paris at the time, so Fred got to try and buy it for me. Anyway, straight away, I fell in love with

the lap steel and completed a few tracks with it on the first *Lion Says* album; it was in 2015. The tone bar gives you that incredible feeling, it truly opened new horizons. I began to try all sorts of tunings, with new effects...

*You mentioned Paris – was Paris different in the nineties?*

Actually, I only moved to Paris in 2003. Before that, I would pop over there on a regular basis to visit family on my dad's side or get to big shows like Pink Floyd or the Stones in the late nineties. So I lived in Paris from 2003 to 2015. Thinking about it, I can't help feeling a bit nostalgic. So many things have happened since then. The attacks, lots of blockades and demonstrations paralyzed the city for almost two years under Macron and I don't need to tell you about the Covid crisis, do I? So yes, to answer your question, it's a very different world right now.

*“It's a very different world right now”*

When I got to Paris, I began to meet all sorts of musicians, took part in various projects, played in many pubs and small concert halls. Today all the musician mates I'm still in touch with over there do their best to survive, but they don't have a clue when Paris may get back to the Paris we've known and loved. Actually, my last concert in Paris was in early March 2020, right

before the beginning of the first lockdown. It's crazy when you think about it now. A week later, everything shut down. It reopened for about four months and then, boom, it was all over again. We still can't have a real gig today, no more in Paris than in Lyon - where I've lived for six years now. It's really painful and tough for so many musicians. We had to stop our small tour as well. Our last concert was in October 2019 in Bourg-en-Bresse. It was awesome, all the more since all the team knew that it might be the last one for a while.

*What bands did you play in when you lived in Paris?*

First, I joined *Moonman and the Unlikely Orchestra*, an indie rock band, on stage. They had just released a pretty good album called “Necessary Alibis.” We played a few gigs in Paris and other concerts in France. After that, we founded a recording studio with Fred Woff near Paris. In addition to the artists Fred recorded, we recorded new songs ourselves and ended up putting a stage band together. We played a lot in Paris, and here and there in France. It was called Two the West and I'm still proud of that project. We were kind of flirting with different styles, somewhere between pop rock and progressive rock some would say. Unfortunately, the team in charge of project promotion was bad. It's hard to get reviews and take off when you don't have a good team in charge. I spent my last year in Paris recording my first solo project, which would be called *Lion Says*.

*So when did the current Lion Says band get together?*

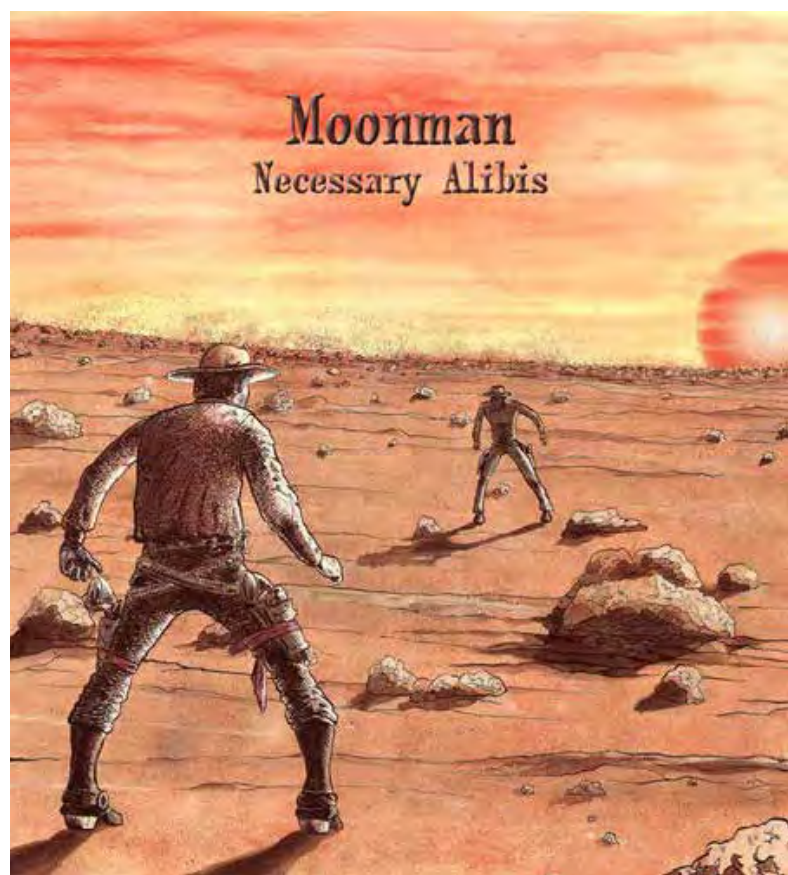
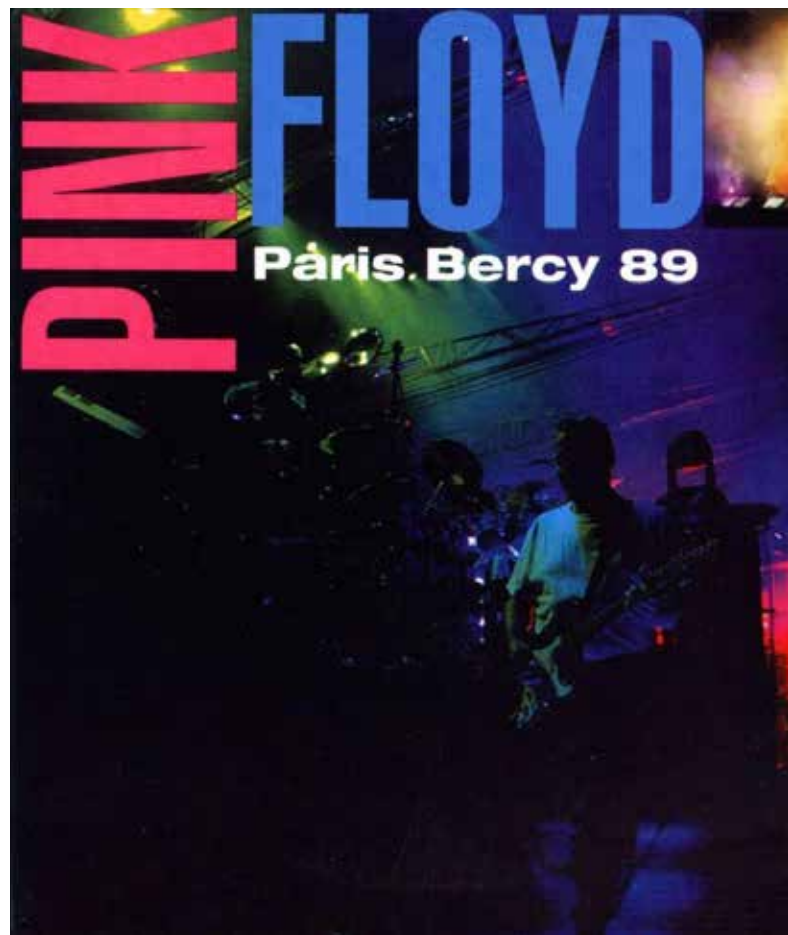
As I told you the project began like something very personal. When I started recording the first four soundtracks, I didn't have a name for the project. I was just enjoying myself recording old

stuff and a few new things. I wanted to do something acoustic: no instrument plugged, apart from the bass guitar. I invited mates to play the violin, resonator guitars, drums, and of course my old friend Fred, on the bass mostly. After a few songs I began to realize I had to try and release that record that sounded a lot like me and the stuff I felt like listening to at that time. After we finished recording most of the songs, I moved to Lyon with my family (my girlfriend Emanuelle and our three sons). Emanuelle is from Lyon, so the town really appealed to me after a few years visiting relatives and friends down there. I must say we haven't regretted that choice after Paris became a much more complicated place to live in.

So once in Lyon, I found a new team to help me release and promote *Lion Says'* first album, "New Folk." I met amazing musicians after spending a year planning the whole thing. Thomas Hoegy was on the violin, Judi Massonnat on the drums and Léonard Sandre on the bass. We toured around France and of course we played many gigs in the Lyon area. Since then, we've changed drummer and no longer have a violin in the band. Today's band is Paul Relave (drums), Christophe Roche (guitar, backing vocals), Léonard Sandre (bass guitar) and yours truly (vocals, lap steel and CBG).

*Now would you describe your music as neo folk?*

To be honest and without playing the smart ass, I'm not too sure what "neo folk" or even "post folk" means. – In a way, I think calling the first album "New Folk" was also a way to have fun with all the labels we try to stick on pieces of music. And, of course, I was the new guy in the folk rock department, the "new folk" in town...



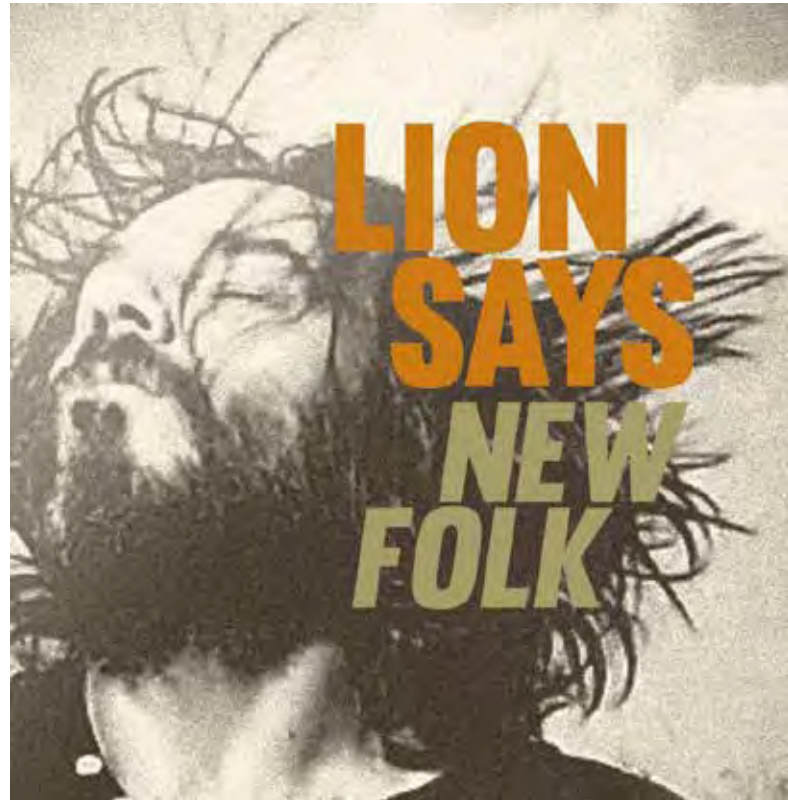


People compare your sound to the likes of Bob Dylan, Nick Drake or Neil Young – was that your aim?

I can't say it isn't flattering to be compared with the legends – even if it mustn't be taken too seriously. Still I don't think it's ever been the point to sound like this or that particular artist or even album. Somehow I can't deny this music is part of my life. So at some point during the writing process – or even during the recording process – it must have an influence on me because it's simply the way things work I suppose. On a very different scale, since these guys are geniuses, Dylan was himself heavily influenced by Woodie Guthrie and Young had his masters too, didn't he? It's the thing about folk music. It's a music you're passing on, a spirit you transmit, trying to add up your personality along the way and looking for new paths sometimes. Nick Drake's music has something powerful and uncanny that makes it more difficult to trace. His eastern influences, his string arrangements... But hey, sorry, I could go on forever talking about those guys...

A couple of years ago you added a CBG to your collection, why was that?

Again, I often need to try new stuff and feel new vibes to be driven by. This was precisely the case with the CBG. I was trying to buy a good one on the web – CBGs are pretty rare in France in fact. I'm familiar with blues musicians like Samantha Fish: she was one of the artists who made me feel like trying a CBG. I had bumped into Rob Wrobel's name a few times searching the web. I finally contacted Rob (he's based in Florida) and we had a nice chat. He uses classic wooden cigar boxes and top-quality hardwoods for his necks and fret boards to make beautiful guitars.



I wanted a CBG equipped with a mini P90, the famous soapbar. That's how I had a lovely Feral Flying Pig IV shipped to my place. It has a mahogany neck, an Ambrosia Maple fret board, maple and walnut fret markers, chrome tuners and knobs and is truly a fine instrument. Funny thing, and I didn't pick up on it straight away: the Lion on the box reminds me of the lion on the city of Lyon's coat of arms, where I live. Since I'm called Lionel and my artist's name is Lion Says, you must admit it's quite a coincidence. I had a lot of fun straight away playing this guitar, trying different strings and tunings...the feeling was new and it triggered new ideas. I play it a few times on the last album. The last song, called "Peace at Last (the Boxer)" is played on Rob's CBG. It's just me on the guitar, naked, so to speak. Something very intimate. If you're interested, the

tuning was C G E G I think. We keep exchanging messages with Rob, who's a keen music lover. Rob always shares my CBG posts and he's the one who suggested we take part in the Samantha Fish CBG Festival video playoffs.

*"The feeling was new and it triggered new ideas"*

*Is slide guitar easier on a three or four-string guitar?*

I'm not familiar with the three-string guitar, I've only tried one once, but never had one at home. I might feel a bit limited on a three-string model, but I should try

Left to right: Judi Massonnat, Christophe Roche, Lionel Giardina, Thomas Hoegy, Léonard Sandre



one a little harder I guess. I can only say a four-string instrument is quite different from a guitar. I enjoy trying different tunings, playing in a different light. I had a nice blues feeling on stage playing the CBG in A D G C.

*Which other songs include the CBG in your latest album "Other side effects"?*

Apart from "Peace at Last," I've recorded many additional guitars, so I'm not sure I can remember all of them. You can hear my CBG on "Through The Storm," "Mamas," "Never Let Go" and possibly on "Part Of he Lie."

*What about playing CBG lap style, it would give you an excuse to buy another guitar? – What about a canjo or a diddley bow? Or maybe build one yourself?*

Hey, please don't tempt me! Honestly, I'm always after new stuff so, yes, I should definitely try out a canjo or a diddley bow next. And no, I confess I don't feel like building one myself. So, if I purchase a new instrument next week, it'll be your fault! Talking about new gear, I recently got a banjitar though: it's basically a six-string guitar, a Gold Tone GT-500. It sounds great and bigger than a banjo. It has nice quality finishings and the maple resonator sounds crazy, the kind of instrument you don't want to amplify.

*There's a big CBG community in France, do you bump into many other CBG players?*

Again, CBGs are pretty rare in France. To be honest, I've not met any CBG players in real life ☺. So it's mainly on the web. Every time I post a cover playing the CBG, I get lots of messages; it's always quite nice. If you go to our Lion Says Facebook page and our YouTube channel, you'll see I recently recorded covers like

"All Along the Watchtower," "I hate the White Man" or "Personal Jesus" on the CBG with the guys – Christophe Roche on the guitar and backing vocals, Léonard Sandre on the bass and Judi Massonnat on the drums. We recorded that last one for the Samantha Fish International CBG Festival, where we got into the top 10; it was fun!

***"Opening to vibrations, getting ready to listen..."***

*Tell us about the new vinyl you released in June...*

Well it's all about that period when proper gigs became impossible. We recorded a few videos online and after a while we were contacted by Christophe Goffette, a record company executive, who organized that online festival called Crossroads Confined Countdown Festival. About a hundred bands played for more than a month; it was pretty impressive – groups recorded from all over the world. So when our turn came, we really enjoyed ourselves and played our set very loud. In the end, people apparently enjoyed it and Christophe suggested releasing a vinyl record with our gigs and bonus tracks, including our Personal Jesus cover for the Samantha Fish Festival. Fred remastered all the recordings and I must say he did an amazing job once again. So here we are, fans' pre-orders made it possible and we are indeed very glad to release this live album thanks to Goof Prod and Found Guilty Records.

When do you think you'll be able to play gigs again? And the BSA festival?

Not so sure about the next gig to be honest. Most our gigs were canceled since they were indoors. I've heard of the BSA through fans on Facebook. We may try to contact them some time... if they don't get to reach us first ☺.

Anything else in the pipeline for 2021?

Well I am currently recording new material. It may surprise you, but I've recently felt like getting back to French lyrics. Many French artists like *Bashung* or *Gainsbourg* are part of my DNA too. So I'm basically back to my cave, generally late at night, surrounded by my instruments and messing around a lot ☺.

Since playing in a band is so complicated, I haven't really had to force myself much. And I must say I'm thoroughly enjoying these moments. Creation is a gift. I don't want to sound loony, but it's a bit like making oneself available. Opening to vibrations, getting ready to listen... Trying to deliver things that have come to you. If nothing comes, you'll just put down your instrument for a while and get back to your life. If something's there, it can be a few wonderful minutes or even hours. It doesn't matter. It may mean you'll have to work hard afterwards, recording or arranging what you've got. But the most precious moment is when something comes to you, that one moment that reminds you why you keep on making music! ■



<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=lion%20says>

<http://www.lionsays.com>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyHABcfO8dsNICwunW22eeA>

Builders mentioned :

Rob's Cigar Box Guitars

<https://www.facebook.com/robscbgs>



**Mongolian master craftsman:  
P.Baigalijav**

# Created for the HU

## P.Baigalijav, Egshiglen Studio, Mongolia

Extract from original interview courtesy of [Mongulai.com](http://Mongulai.com)

Interview by [Isee.mn](http://Isee.mn)

My teacher/master's name was Indre. He gave his heart and soul to traditional music. I try to do the same. I emphasize working with patience to craft something that can satisfy the customer. Though I feel tired after working long hours, I think all that fatigue gets washed away thoroughly when I see my end-product.

*Isee.mn: Mr. Baigalijav, when did you start making instruments?*

P.Baigalijav: I started in the Socialist era. At that time, there were just a few master craftsmen at "The experimental laboratory of traditional music instruments and tools." I started from there, and after the fall of the Socialist regime in 1990, I opened my studio "Egshiglen" in that very risky period of the economy. In the beginning I had only two pupils, whereas now I have over 50 employees.

*What was the reason you dived into the universe of traditional music?*

I'm an ordinary person from the Gobi. When I was a kid, growing up herding our animals with bare feet, I had so much interest in music and used to try

\*The morin khuur or horse-head fiddle is a traditional Mongolian instrument that can play a wide range of notes with only two strings.



The HU is a band from Mongolia formed in 2016 that blends heavy metal with Mongolian throat singing and traditional Mongolian instruments like the morin khuur (horse-head fiddle), tovshuur (Mongolian guitar), and tumur khuur (jaw harp). Their songs have chalked up well over 100 million views on YouTube.

The band calls their music "hunnu rock," "hu" being the Mongolian root word for "human." The members of the band are called Gala, Jaya, Enkush and Temka. The HU's first album, "The Gereg," was released in September 2019. That same year, The HU were awarded the highest state award for Mongolia, the Order of Genghis Khan, for promoting Mongolian culture around the world.

The band has toured throughout Europe, North America and Australia, and plans to release their second album in 2021.

making instruments. Winning the first prize at the first “Morin Khuur Crafters Championship”\* in 1989 was such a big encouragement for me. From there, my career journey really started. That khuur is now kept at the Museum of Theatre.

*How many types of instruments do you make? Which one is the most common?*

We make pipes, horns, zithers (yatga), dulcimers (yochir), lutes (shanz, tovshuur), fiddles (morin khuur, khuuchir), etc. We also contribute to restoring ancient music instruments found during archaeological research. Since we started, we’ve made more than 40,000 morin khuur, over 300 of which I made.

*“The high-quality delicate ones can take as long as a year”*

*Where do you sell them? Maybe fans around the world might be interested to learn the morin khuur and other instruments.*

We have two stores operating in Ulaanbaatar. One in the State Department Store, another store located near the National Museum. Also Mongulai.com is our official distributor for international customers.

*How long does it take to make one instrument?*

An experienced professional can make the simplest khuur in three to four days. But the high-quality delicate ones can take as long as a year.



*You've crafted the instruments of The HU band. Tell us about it.*

In 2017, the HU's producer B.Dashdondog came to me with a drawing and said, "Please make these instruments." The bow-and-arrow-shaped tovshuur and the morin khuur with the sideways-looking head seemed pretty impressive.

*How long did it take? Could you talk about the materials used?*

With one of my pupils, we completed the work within two months. We used birch and spruce grown in Mongolia. Mongolian traditional instruments are usually made of bamboo, spruce, pine and such.

***"It's an honor to introduce and spread our traditional music"***

*The HU band is recognized throughout the world playing the instruments you crafted. Do you feel proud?*

Of course, I am proud of that. All Mongolians are proud of it. I think the most beautiful thing about my work is that seeing the instruments we make getting into the hands of the owners and listening to the melody they emit. When The HU started to be noticed by the world, our younger generation started to become interested in traditional music. It's an honor to be part of this work to introduce and spread our traditional music.





Were there customers who wanted to get the same instruments as The HU?

People started to request the exact same or similar instruments to The HU's. But those instruments are patented and protected by copyright. So we can't make the same ones against the copyright. The idea of these instruments belongs to Mr. Dashdondog, and I only converted that idea into physical form.

What do you pay the most attention to when you make an instrument?

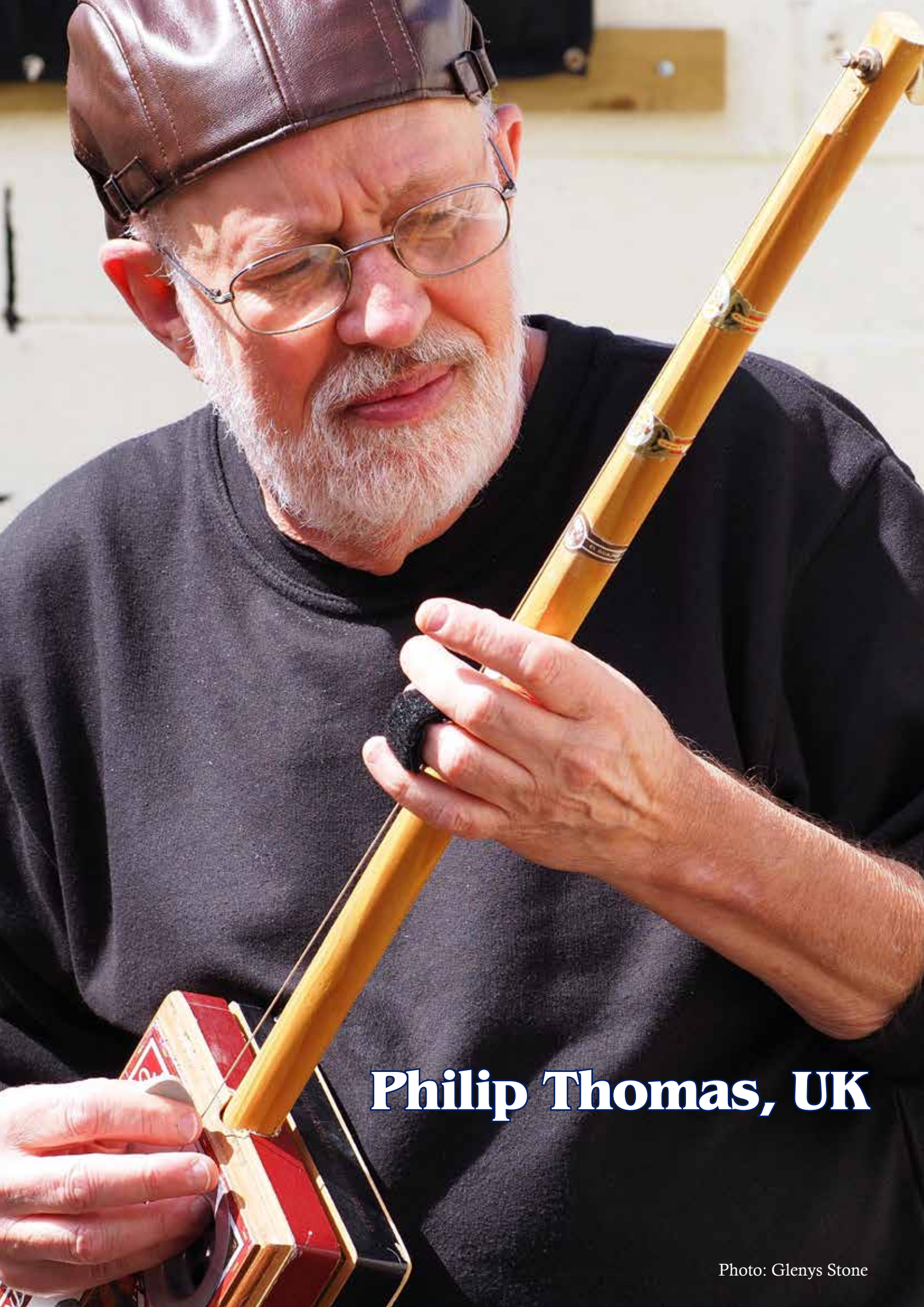
Material. When it comes to material, I don't mind spending a fortune. I want to make a quality instrument with quality material. And then, from the beginning of sketching till the very end, every stage is essential. There are two factories in Mongolia and one in Inner Mongolia that mass produce morin khuur using machines, whereas our instruments are all hand-crafted. I even made our tools too. Machine-produced khuur can never be the same as hand-crafted ones.

What qualifications should a musical instrument crafter have?

I never studied at a music institute. I make instruments based on my passion, practice and experience. The most important thing is to give your heart to it and have a good taste/sense. My teacher/master's name was Indre. He gave his heart and soul to traditional music. I try to do the same. I emphasize working with patience to craft something that can satisfy the customer. Though I feel tired after working long hours, I think all that fatigue gets washed away thoroughly when I see my end-product. ■



<https://mongolianstore.com>  
<https://www.facebook.com/mongulai>  
<http://isee.mn>  
<https://www.thehuofficial.com>



**Philip Thomas, UK**

Photo: Glenys Stone

# One string to rule them all!

**Philip Thomas, Wenvoe, Wales, United Kingdom**

**That was going to be the title of the book: “One String To Rule Them All”...a little nod to JRR Tolkein and “Lord Of The Rings.” In the end, I felt that Tolkein’s estate might have a view on the matter so I changed my mind. It’s a shame, really. It would have been a good title because the story of how the book came to be was certainly an epic tale.**

People will often say that their first run-in with the world of cigar box guitars was just that. A run-in, meaning it felt a bit like being hit by a truck! I recognize that feeling. For me it happened in 2012 in the city of New Orleans. I was at a Tomato Festival in the French quarter. That’s right, a tomato festival. It seems that in “The Big Easy” they have a festival every weekend and it don’t much matter what for. Sitting outside in the market were two buskers – one playing a cigar box guitar and one playing a diddley bow made from a can and a broom handle. We talked a while and several beers later I was hooked! If you are reading CBG Review you probably know that feeling! 😊

But I’m getting ahead of myself. I’m Phil Thomas from the little village of Wenvoe, a little north of Cardiff in Wales and I’m an ethnomusicologist. In some circles that’s like declaring that you are an alcoholic. But it means that my interest lies in the way music and musicians fit into society, having taken a Masters Degree at Sheffield University. I have been a music journalist

and reviewer for specialist music magazines for about 30 years and for about seven years I was the director of an arts festival. It was while doing that job that I was awarded a travel fellowship to visit the USA to study the arts there. New Orleans was part of that trip. While I was there the bug bit. And how! When I returned to the UK, I began building CBGs and diddley bows.



So far so ordinary. But, being an ethnomusicologist, my curiosity was piqued by the fact that most countries have a single string instrument in their culture somewhere, but some, among them Britain, do not. To an 'ologist (anybody with a specialist area of study) that's an itch you can't scratch and so began a year of research that culminated in my ebook "It's Been A Long, Hard Road – How the diddley bow got here and Stayed." It became a journey of discovery going right back to the origins of music itself and working forward to follow the early humans out of Africa and around the world on this crazy ride that ended up with a diddley bow, as Mick Jagger would say, "...in a market down in New Orleans."

*"There is an endless amount of musical and emotional depth that springs from its simple design" – Justin Johnson*

In the course of creating the book I encountered some great people. Dafydd Owen from North Wales did marvelous illustrations featuring the redoubtable Professor Beau Dudley, the 'ologist who guides us through the tale of the origin and development of the diddley bow. He is a cross between the Nutty Professor and a musical Indiana Jones who is there to stop me taking myself too seriously. One of my early heroes in the world of the diddley bow was the wonderful Justin Johnson, who was kind enough to read the

# IT'S BEEN A LONG, HARD ROAD!

HOW THE DIDDLEY BOW GOT HERE...AND STAYED!



Foreword by  
Justin Johnson

## PHILIP THOMAS

Illustrated by Dafydd Owen



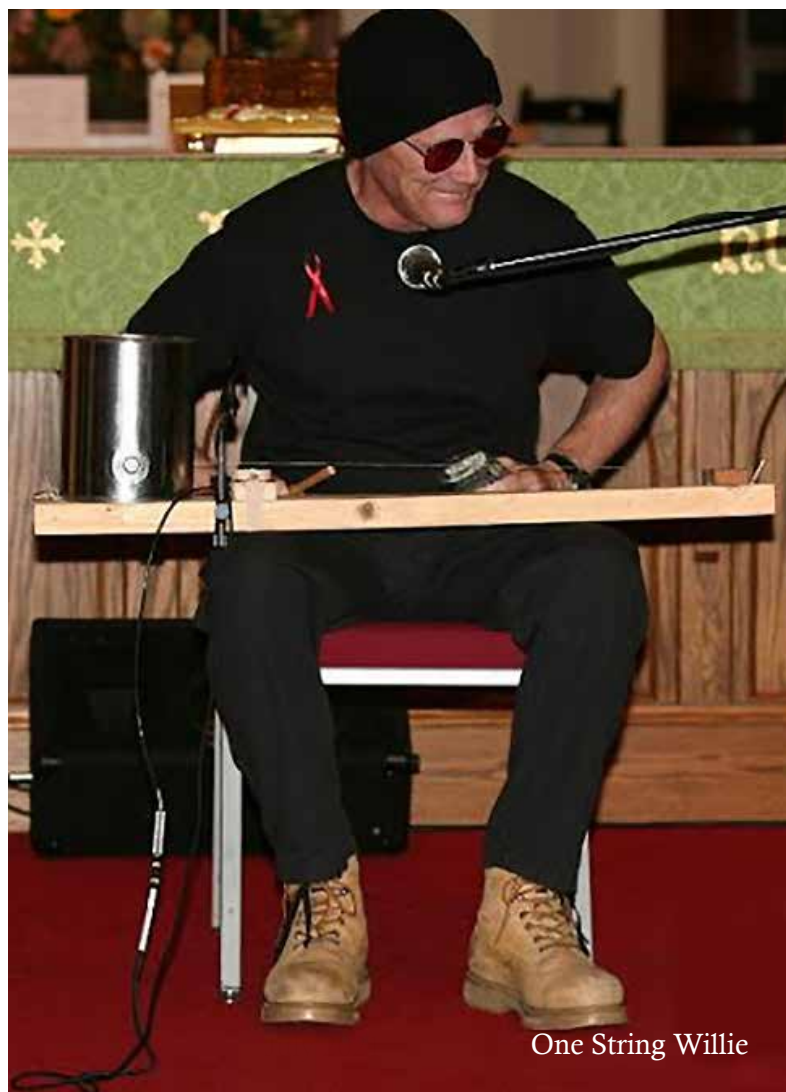
book and write the foreword. He told me “...I see the diddley bow as a distillation of the guitar. It’s the simplest form of stringed instrument, with just one string and no frets. However, there is an endless amount of musical and emotional depth that springs from its simple design.” Justin was an inspiration to me at the beginning of this journey and I still class myself as a fan. That man can play anything with strings on it!

*“I find that the most simple blues progression can be a kind of meditative practice” — Paul Smith*

Makers and players from all around the world, like One String Willie (a.k.a. Dave Williams from Pennsylvania) contributed their insights and experiences to make the writing of the book a pleasurable experience for me. Those who shared their thoughts opened up whole new areas of research for me. Some of these makers and players have a truly philosophical approach to what they do. Paul Smith from “Stompin Hogg Cigar Box Guitars” in Worcester, UK told me “...I find that the most simple blues progression can be a kind of meditative practice. Perhaps the vibrations from the d-bow put us in tune with our heartbeat and the essences of life itself...” and this was echoed by my buddy Trashmun Johnson (a.k.a. Kevin Lassiter from Tennessee) who said “...I feel that those who play these forgotten gems, or even those who just listen to



Justin Johnson, CBG Review, July 2017



One String Willie

*the music made from them, are drawn to them because we all have a vibration that resonates within our souls and diddley bows ride the frequency of this vibration...".* Maybe from this you can understand why I came to believe that the diddley bow, and the music played upon it, deserves to be taken seriously.

*“We all have a vibration that resonates within our souls and diddley bows ride the frequency of this vibration...” — Trashmun Johnson*

Writing the book took more than a year of my life. I took a pause from being a gigging musician and storyteller in places like Canada, the USA and Australia, and writing the book eased me into an early retirement from the world of work. Or so I thought. A project such as this can take on a life of its own if you let it. I made the ebook available online for free. It still is available and it is still free. You can download a copy in various formats under <https://homemadeblues.wordpress.com> – no catch, I promise. I hope you will enjoy reading it and spread the word. It was, and remains, my way of giving something back to this community of makers and players that have given me so much pleasure. But then the train kept on rollin’.



Paul Smith



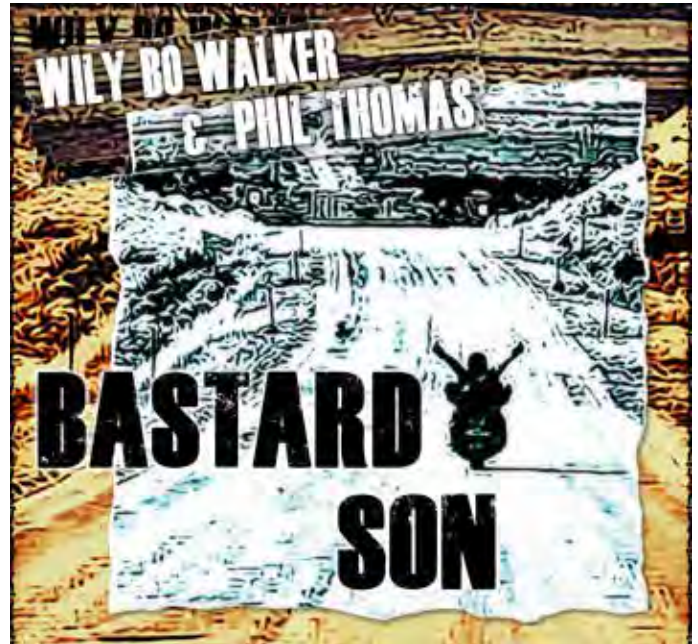
Trashmun Johnson

People began to read the book and I found myself spending time running workshops to help people of all ages from eight to 80 to make and play the diddley bow. I have run sessions at schools, community centers, libraries, festivals, music shops... you name it...I've been there. It was a lot of fun, but...retirement? What retirement? But the journey didn't end there.

*“The diddley bow should step out of the shadow and take its place in the spotlight a little more” – Philip Thomas*

After a few years I took a break from the workshops and went back to making and playing for a while, and to writing songs again. Songwriting was something I did for a long time, but in recent years seemed to have found itself on the back burner... along with an idea that began to form that the diddley bow should step out of the shadow and take its place in the spotlight a little more. It doesn't seem fair to leave it all to Seasick Steve!

Coincidence is a funny thing. I was sent a CD to review for Fatea Magazine (a fine specialist online music magazine not unlike CBG Review - you can find it at [www.fatea-records.co.uk/magazine](http://www.fatea-records.co.uk/magazine)). It was by legendary Scottish Bluesman Wily Bo Walker ([www.wilybo.com](http://www.wilybo.com)). I was bowled over by his music and his voice and, with tongue firmly in cheek, I sent him a song of mine to consider,



with the suggestion that it might suit his voice rather better than mine. So began a collaboration, exchanging recordings via the internet, one of which featured my playing of one of my favorite diddley bows. Wily Bo worked his magic in his studio and the result was that the song, entitled “Bastard Son” (*philthomas1.bandcamp.com*) was released as a single in May this year and has been doing really well with assorted radio plays and a gratifying number of streams on Spotify!

*“So I guess what I’m saying is don’t give up on your dreams”*

At the age of 67 years, I had my first successful single reaching number 33 in the Hit Tracks Top 100 chart in the Netherlands. That may not sound much to you, but I can tell you my mum was impressed! Who would have thought it?

Artistically speaking, I also find it interesting that an instrument that has a reputation for being raw and rough can sit comfortably and subtly in a band setting. So I guess what I’m saying is don’t give up on your dreams. Build them and play them and who knows what might happen?

If you want to follow my journey as it takes its next steps you can find me on *Twitter @philsongwriter*. I hope to hear from you. My research is ongoing and if you want to be a part of that research after reading the book then by all means reach out. I want to find out how and why some of us respond so strongly to the sound of instruments played with a slide. The brain is an incredibly complex organ and, when we listen to music, we use a lot of its capacity. I’ve got some theories, sure, but if there’s a neurologist or other brain scientist out there somewhere who makes and plays cigar box guitars, I could sure use your help! ■

Builders mentioned :  
Stompin Hogg Cigar Box Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/stompinhoggcigarboxguitars>



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# ORIGINS

## IN THE KEY OF G



EDVSN  
*Edwards*



# Origins in the key of G

## Fabian Fahr a.k.a. Capt'n Catfish," Pleutersbach, Germany

Interview by Cathy Mullaert

Singer/songwriter Fabian Fahr a.k.a. Capt'n Catfish" is known for his license-plate cigar box guitars and traveling CBG workshops in Germany. The Capt'n has released his first delightful album of new original songs reflecting his life and times. The music ranges from Latin and folk to southern rock and blues. Congrats to all for a remarkable "must hear" album!

– Cathy Mullaert

*Cathy Mullaert: Fabian, when did your passion for CBGs and license plate guitars start?*

Fabian Fahr: I teach carpentry at a trade school and, beside our normal lessons, we undertake different projects every year, some of them international; for example, we visit Romania where my students renovate antique Saxon churches. One night I was smoking a cigar and one of my students told me that his father was a professional street musician who built his own guitar out of a cigar box. First I couldn't imagine how this would work, but I was curious and started looking into it. A friend of mine in Georgia recommended David Sutton's books, so I ordered those and read them.

I found the Cigar Box Nation on the web and soon my first cigar box guitar, a Romeo & Juliet box with a piezo pickup on the outside was finished. Most of you know what happens next when you become an addict – soon a couple more



guitars were on the bench. Then I had the idea to build them with my students, so I presented my builds at a teachers' conference.

They liked the sound, they liked the style, but then the question came up whether we might be paving the way for our students to start smoking because of the cigar boxes. No comment there, ☺ but to prevent further guesswork, I changed the plan to build license plate guitars instead of CBGs. This turned out to be a good decision for our workshops because, over the past few years, we've built more than 250 guitars and I don't know where we would have found the boxes to build CBGs. Another point is that every workshop result is different, both in appearance and sound.



*“Most of you know what happens next when you become an addict – soon a couple more guitars were on the bench”*

### Who comes to the workshops?

We have a very broad range of people of all ages. They're mainly people who have heard about CBGs, most of them playing guitar already, but who don't have their own workshop or tools yet. Some of them are just looking for a new hobby. We travel around the country with our workshops to places like Heinsberg, Hamburg, Berlin, Freiburg, Saarbrücken, and so on, with bookings at schools, festivals and public events. We take all the material and tools for a maximum of



ten people. After the workshops, we teach people how to tune and play their first songs, sitting together, jamming and having fun with the instruments. It's always a lot of fun for everyone.

*And you organized the first CBG festival in Germany?*

Yes, we talked about this in your other article about the 2018 Smokin' Guitars CBG Festival in an earlier issue of CBG Review.<sup>1</sup> My first CBG event was the Delta Calluna Festival in the Netherlands in 2015 organized by Cigarbox Henri. I met Justin Johnson and he played my polar bear guitar on stage, and I was so impressed about the location and the atmosphere that I decided to organize a festival in Germany.

*“I was pretty nervous, but fortunately the people came...”*

I first posted my idea on the Cigar Box Nation website and after a month we had our line-up and the Smokin' Guitar Festival was born. I was pretty nervous, but fortunately the people came – not so many from around the area, but German CBG enthusiasts from all over the country, as well as players from Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and USA. Tents and cars along the river, jam sessions and music on every corner – the festival is a very enjoyable and peaceful event with wonderful people from everywhere.

1: <https://www.cbgreview.com/back-issues>



*You've traveled a lot around the world – which are some of the most memorable trips and how did they influence your music?*

Each trip was impressive in its own way, I think the one that had the biggest influence on my music was my trip to the States as a journeyman carpenter in the nineties, especially traveling around the South. I was in Macon Georgia, home of the *Allman Brothers*, and met Derek Trucks, I think he was ten and by this time he already played great guitar. I spent some time with Ronnie Hammond from *Atlanta Rhythm Section*, met Bruce from *Doc Holiday* and Chris Hicks from *The Outlaws* and went to a backstage party with *38 Special*. A lot of good stories and memories! But I think that would take up too much space here! 😊

*Your latest project is a vinyl album called "Origins in the Key of G." Why did you choose vinyl as a format and not a CD?*

Tobias and I are vinyl lovers. For us, its still the best medium to listen to music. I imagine most people listen to digital music on playlists, but vinyl is special and is seeing a comeback these days. For me, listening to an LP is like being in a live concert. The sound is somehow different and if you're going to own a physical copy, you want something tangible with a big cover to look at where you can see your band or their artwork.

Maybe *Yellow Snake*, our record label, will decide to produce a CD, but at the moment you can listen to us on Amazon Music, Apple Music, Itunes, Spotify, Deezer, Napster, and Tidal. Check it out, and if you want to have the absolute best sound quality, buy our LP.



Which musicians are featured on the album?

We have Tobias Langguth who is a professional jazz, rock, bossa nova and blues artist from Karlsruhe, playing the six-string winebox guitar. We met the first time at the festival, where he also became addicted to CBGs and started building them.

Our bass player is Jordan West from Minnesota. Jordan met the love of his life in Germany and, while she was studying at university, he used the time to join the trading school where I teach to become a carpenter. During those three years of school, we grew to be good friends and later met up for BBQs, went fishing, built his two-string “salmon box bass guitar,” and started to write the lyrics for our songs.

Marcos Jesùs Gonzàles Jimènez is from Cuba. He’s been living in Germany for 12 years now. He teaches percussion at public school and plays drums and percussion instruments for different projects. He’s another guy in the neighborhood.

Before we put the whole band together, Nicole Guida and I had the duo Capt’n Catfish & Mrs. Nicky, with both of us singing, and me playing my license plate guitars and the stompbox. All our songs have been interpretations of southern rock and blues songs.

I think the pandemic brought us all together – no gigs, so we used these days to create something new of our own.

We also had some special guests on the album. Jordan’s brother Trevor played a bad-ass guitar solo in “Yggdrasil.” Willy Burgos, a great luthier and classical guitarist, played the charango (a small



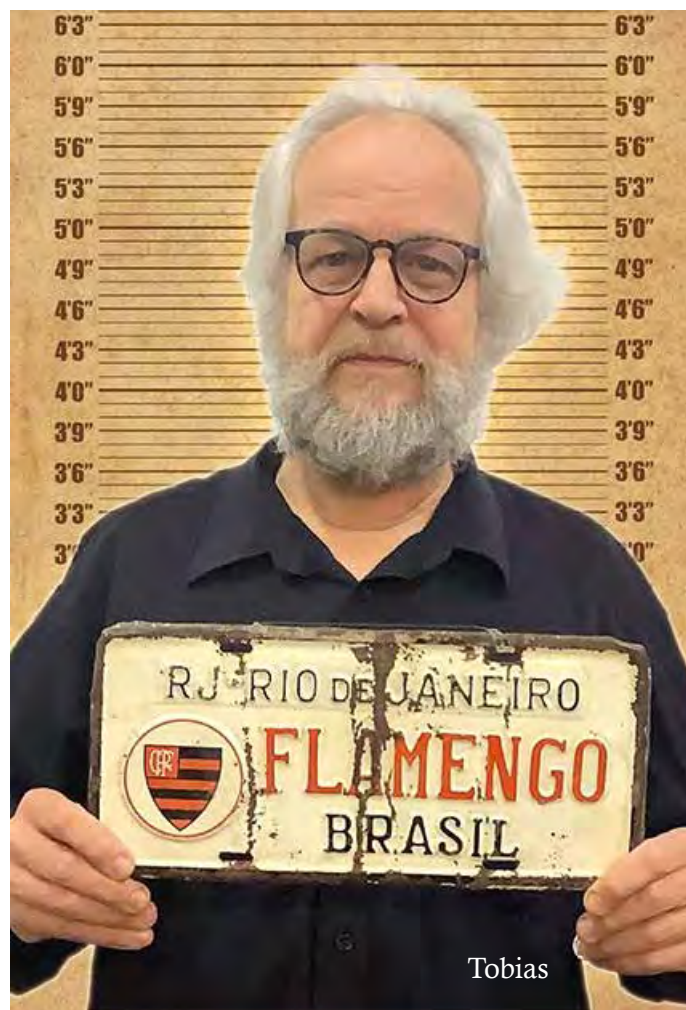
Andean instrument like a lute) on “Smiley’s World.” My daughter Shana threw in some cigar box violin riffs for “Poor Man’s Guitar” and “BBQ,” and my son Falk did the sound effects. And of course there’s Ina, the horse! You can hear her “hoof rattle” on “Bounty Hunter.” Last, but not least, we have our festival mascot and lifetime member, Hansi the Rooster. You hear him on “Bounty Hunter” too.

*“I think the pandemic brought us all together – no gigs, so we used these days to create something new of our own”*

*So it’s not a blues album, but a combination of your musical influences?*

Yes, that’s it – “Origins in the Key of G” is not your ordinary CBG album. We named it *Origins* because the lyrics are based on my life and experiences with songs about traveling, fishing, BBQs and my foible for comics. There’s also “Yggdrasil the Viking,” which is probably more about Jordan’s hope that the Minnesota Vikings will make it to the Superbowl some day. ☺

The album is like building a CBG, where you take different parts and put them together. You never know how it sounds till you’re finished. We all put in our own styles. My music is southern rock. Tobias’ roots are in jazz and bossa nova, and you’ll also hear that he is a big fan of the *Rolling Stones*. Jordan has a very lively



range of styles from polka to *Manowar*, and Marcos is from Cuba, which says it all. Add in some soul from Nicole and we have a very nice mix outside of the CBG “mainstream.”

*“The album is like building a CBG, where you take different parts and put them together”*

When will we be able to see you on stage again?

Well, if the pandemic restrictions ease enough for us to open everything up again, we’ll have our LP release in September at the next festival. Fingers crossed and hope to see you there. And thanks Cathy for the interview! ■





# Contributors

**J**ustin Johnson has been hailed by *Guitar World* as a “must-see act,” dubbed “The Wizard” for his mastery of stringed instruments, and recognized as Slidestock International Slide Guitar Champion. He has toured extensively in North America, Australia, Europe and the UK, and currently lives in Nashville. He has produced several acclaimed albums, books and instructional videos, and founded the “Roots Music School” in Nashville.



**A**llen Bieber lives in Tuscon, Arizona in the USA and is the owner and founder of Copper Cigar Box Guitars and owner at Balance Guitars. A certified luthier who attended Roberto Venn luthier school in Phoenix AZ, Allen loves designing and building custom resonators and tele guitars. His aim is to create truly one-of-a-kind instruments that stand out and bring people together.



**L**io Giardina spent 12 years in Paris, during which time he collaborated with *Moonman* in the mid-2000s, then launched the rock project *Two The West* in 2011. After moving to Lyon, he formed *Lion Says* and has since released two albums called “New Folk” and “Other side effects.” Always looking for new sounds and new vibes, Lio has added a cigar box guitar to his collection of instruments to further shape his music.



**P.** Baigalijav grew up in the Gobi region of Southern Mongolia. Since winning first prize at the first “Morin Khuur Crafters Championship” in 1989, he has gone on to build over 40,000 traditional Mongolian instruments at his “Egshiglen” studio. He is the person who crafted the unique instruments for the pioneers of Hunnu rock, The HU band, combining both traditional and modern styles using symbols of nature, sky and fire.



**Philip Thomas** is an ethnomusicologist studying world music. Formerly director of an arts festival, he now researches and writes about topics in the world of music that interest him. He has been a working musician and performer for over 35 years, traveling around the world as a musician and storyteller. He has toured New Zealand, Australia, the USA, Canada, Argentina and Europe, and has contributed to specialist music magazines and journals for over 20 years.



**Fabian Fahr** is a master carpenter and luthier from Eberbach, Germany, specializing in licence plate guitars. He also organizes the Smokin' Guitars CBG Festival each year in Pleutersbach and travels around Germany holding CBG workshops. Fabian and Nicole Guida make up the musical duo Capt'n Catfish and Mrs. Nicky whose latest project is a vinyl CBG album called "Origins in the Key of G," performing with Tobias Langguth, Jordan West and Marcos Jimenez.



**Ross Hewitt** a.k.a. Huey Ross was born in Australia in 1953 on BB King's birthday – the same year that color TVs and transistor radios appeared for sale in stores and the first James Bond novel was published. Over the years he has worked as a tennis teacher, journalist, translator, editor and graphic designer, and now lives in a village in Switzerland. He enjoys building and playing cigar box guitars, as well as editing and contributing to CBG Review.



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