

# CBG REVIEW

January 2023

## TWISTS AND TURNS

*WHEN RIVERS MEET / U.K. / P.3*

## MUSIC AND MAGIC

*Charles Atchison / U.S.A. / p.16*

## WHY WE ALL DO IT!

*Fiona Boyes / Australia / p.28*

## C.B.G. THROWDOWN

*Scott Lindsey a.k.a. Janky / U.S.A. / p.39*

## FOOT STOMPIN', TOE TAPPIN' AND BOOGIE!

*Brett Littlefair / Australia / p.48*

## TOUCHING BASE

*Ray White / Haystack Box Guitars / U.K. / p.56*

*CONTRIBUTORS / P.64*

# Editorial

## Why do it?

Welcome to issue number 23 of CBG Review, which coincidentally also happens to be the very first edition of 2023.

Once again, the magazine continues to highlight two recurring themes in the cigar box guitar world – the pleasure that people derive from building homemade instruments and the pure enjoyment musicians have playing them.

No exception to the rule, and first up in 2023, we join Grace and Aaron Bond of the UK band *When Rivers Meet* as they discuss their progression from folk-blues to blues-rock music, the work behind the scenes, and how the cigar box guitar fits into their on-stage chemistry and rapid and steady rise in popularity.

We then talk with multi-talent Charles Atchison in the USA about his love for folk art instruments, magic and music, and how they are connected. Charles has set out to put the same feeling and care that has gone into homemade instruments over hundreds of years into his own builds in keeping up with an age-old tradition.

Australian Fiona Boyes joins us once more to celebrate her life as a musician and artist as she reflects on why music is so important to all of us, and why cigar box guitars have become so much a part of her act and opened up her understanding of blues. For Fiona, playing for the roots and blues music community is undeniably a calling.

Scott “Janky” Lindsey lives in Texas, USA, but is a juke joint blues devotee. His favorite place to play on the planet is Red’s in Clarksdale, Mississippi! For Janky, juke joint music is about having a good time and making people feel good, and his latest album “C.B.G. Throwdown” is a tribute to cigar box guitars for their simplicity and underlying beats and grooves.

Brett Littlefair from Adelaide, Australia, has come out with the second album in a trilogy called “Toe Tappin.” If Brett can make his audience tap their toes or stomp their feet, he’s totally happy. His motto is “melody first,” which is where his cigar box guitars enter into the equation with their rich tones and unique sound.

Finally, we touch base with Ray White from Haystack Box Guitars in the UK. Whether building guitars or writing music, Ray likes to create things and have people see what he’s created. Besides the satisfaction of seeing musicians like Aaron Bond play his creations on stage, Ray hopes that whoever ends up with one of his guitars will “love it and play its heart out!”

As always – read, enjoy and be inspired!

Best regards  
Huey Ross

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# When Rivers Meet United Kingdom

Image: Lloyd Evans

# Twists and turns

Grace and Aaron Bond, *When Rivers Meet*,  
Essex, United Kingdom

Since bursting on to the UK Blues scene in 2020 with debut EPs. Grace and Aaron have been going from strength to strength. The British husband and wife duo currently has an ever-growing online fan base. Also, receiving regular play on BBC Radio 2. So, it's no surprise that people are taking notice of them! With their unique harmonic vocals and the innovative approach to song writing. Then, with the dirty electric guitar, slide resonator mandolin and fiddle, there's no stopping them! – Blues News, 2022

*CBGR: Grace and Aaron, your journey together has taken quite a few twists and turns over the last few years, starting with quitting your day jobs and heading off for gigs in a VW van – what made you decide to take the plunge?*

Grace: Ever since we've been together (we've been together for 18 years), we've been involved in different projects. But when we started playing together is when we first started writing together and it really quickly became a passion. We were struggling to travel and find more gigs further afield and get back to work on Monday morning ☺ and we knew we had to jump in feet first, otherwise we were never going to reach our potential. When we were married, we weren't really ready to settle down, so we started traveling in the VW van.

*Do you still have the van?*

Aaron: Yep, we do! It's sitting in the driveway right now.

*How did the progression from folk-blues to blues-rock music come about?*

Aaron: When we started out, I was sort of acoustic finger-style guitar, and Grace played mandolin and violin. It wasn't until we saw Guns N' Roses and Tyler Bryant in 2018 that we thought "Oh this is what we should be doing – this rock-blues kind of thing!"

***“We knew we had to jump in feet first”***

Grace: Even though we were enjoying our own music and doing a lot of functions and cover gigs to pay the bills, we were finding we were getting our kicks out of doing the cover gigs because the music was a bit more rocky and “meaty.” So we decided to make the switch.

Aaron: I went out and bought a Les Paul and that was it really, where it all started.

You're the first blues artists to walk away with four awards at the 2021 UK Blues Awards including "Best Blues Album Of The Year," "Blues Band Of The Year" and "Emerging Blues Artist Of The Year" – what do you think makes you so popular?

Grace: We like to think we have a bit of a different sound because we have the mandolin and the violin and the two voices. Aaron is very much a rhythm and riff-based guitarist and doesn't do a lot of guitar solo. We try and keep a bit of space in it as well, and hopefully that gives us a different sound and approach.

And Grace's perpetual mile-wide smile?

Grace: Ha ha. Can't help it!

Aaron: That is true!

That's great though, it's all part of the chemistry and you clearly love what you're doing...

Both: oh absolutely.

Grace: We've worked for a long time to make playing our own music viable and the fact that people are really digging it means a lot.

Aaron: It means everything!

The award for "Most Inspirational Online Performance Of The Year" for the "Rock The Lockdown" series tells another story about all the work behind the scenes – did you ever expect to build up such a huge online fan base?

Grace: I think they added it into the awards because of the pandemic and it was such a new thing and very new to us. We hadn't long given up our day jobs and when the lock-down started we



saw everyone else jumping in and doing livestreams and thought maybe we need to give it a go. We had this horror of nobody being on there, but it went to being a thousand people every week.

Aaron: And also when you look at the really early livestreams we did in the first few weeks and how it developed over the next couple of years, it really became something and we're just so thankful that people wanted to come and see us. And it gave us a gig every week, which was really cool.

*“Keep it simple,  
that’s the best idea”*

And you’re still doing it on the iPhone,  
right?

Aaron: Yeah, that’s right. Keep it simple,  
that’s the best idea ☺

Well it’s working, would you say a  
definite unexpected consequence of the  
pandemic is that music has become more  
independent and personalized?

Grace: Yes I think it has. We were lucky we were able to still go into the studio – we locked down with our producer who also played bass, drums and keys, so we didn’t need to bring a lot of other people in. We had to kind of “DIY it” to a certain extent and were trying to make the best out of a very bad situation. But for us it really was a gamechanger in growing our fan base because, before lock-down, we were playing in pubs and would have a handful of people come to



see us, compared to now when we've just finished a 24-day headline tour where most of the venues were sold out.

*It's hard work talking to fans all over the world...*

Aaron: I think one of the good things about it is that it makes us accessible. I mean we want to talk to people and getting to know people all over the world is a great feeling.

Grace: And what's so cool is that all of our records have been crowd-funded. So when we go into the studio we're not thinking what does our record label want from us, we're thinking what do our fans want to hear and basically that's what we want to hear. It feels so much better – we go in and want to make a great record for ourselves, but also because people have invested in it and we want to make great records for people. So it's the right way around.

*Last year must have been like a breath of fresh air after the lock-down?*

Aaron: Yes, like going to America, for instance, we didn't know what to expect at all. Obviously, we knew there were people in the States that liked our music, but to actually go over there and play in front of a lot of people we didn't know and see their reaction to our music – we were just blown away by it. It was phenomenal!

Grace: One of the craziest things was when we arrived at the soundcheck and there were like 30 people there with our t-shirts on. Like we had just traveled thousands of miles, and again it's like the power of the internet, we're seeing people and going "Oh my god, Pauline, Dawn!" – it was amazing.

*What about a tour down under?*

Both: Byron Bay, one day for sure!



Photo: Will Carter



Photo: Will Carter

The song “We Fly Free” from your debut album of the same name is about embarking on a new frontier – are the lyrics about the two of you?

Aaron: Absolutely, yes, absolutely.

Grace: And about being independent. We’re going to do it our own way and be free.

Aaron: Exactly.

Why did you choose to play it on a cigar box guitar?

Aaron: What happened was that we had another song that we were going to put in the album, but it really wasn’t working. So Grace went off into the camper van and took the cigar box with her, and all of a sudden came up with a riff.

Grace: Aaron had already written the lyrics and it was probably like half an hour and we’d written the last song and had a title for the album.

Aaron: So that’s how “We Fly Free” came about. Sometimes these songs just come like that and other times they can take so long, like weeks.

And you both write all your own songs?

Aaron: Most of the time, yes. Adam co-wrote three or four songs on the last album.

Grace: It’s quite scary for us to think about writing songs with other people to some extent because we’ve gotten into this pattern or system of working together. In one way we’d love to do it, but on the other hand we want to keep in our little safe bubble. 😊



Who introduced you to cigar box guitars?

Aaron: Well, ah, Seasick Steve and also Samantha Fish. It was those two artists who made us think “wow, we love the sound and love what they do,” so we had one made and it was just great! It really spoke to me – I’d recommend a cigar box guitar to anybody – just get up there and start riffing if that’s what you like doing. Totally! The first one I got was from Alan Rogan at “Dust and Bones Cigar Boxes” and the ones that we use for our giveaways are “Haystack Guitars” from Ray White. I have a couple of my own that I use and we have another couple for giveaways, which is our way of saying thank you to people for supporting us. We thought “what can we do?” and “let’s give away unique guitars” and, obviously, being a cigar box player, it would be the right thing for us to do. I’ve had a few given to me too, which is so cool!



So you’re building up quite a collection?

Aaron: It keeps growing, I think I must have between 12 and 15 of them now, counting the giveaways.

Grace: Which I have to tear out of his arms! ☺

So despite all your other guitars, the CBG has become a permanent part of the show?

Grace: They’re so simple, just tune them, get a slide and just enjoy it. You can do so much with them. With our music and the way we write, we like to keep things simple with music you can grab hold of and not something that runs away. We like music you can anticipate to some extent and that’s what’s great about the cigar box because of its simplicity.

Aaron: The good thing about the cigar box as well is the fact that you can really give it



something and get these amazing sounds out of it. I saw Seasick Steve play a one-string hubcap guitar once and it was so cool!

*“They’re so simple, just tune them, get a slide and just enjoy it”*

Can you imagine a time when every good blues guitarist will own one?

Grace: I actually hope not! 😊 Because there’s something special about them when they come out. We went to see Samantha Fish a couple of weeks ago and we’d seen her before the pandemic too, and as soon as that cigar box comes out, everyone like lights up and is excited about it. And I think it’s because she doesn’t play it all the time and, when it comes out, it’s a real treat. As much as we like Seasick Steve who’s mostly digging on the cigar box, it’s kind of nice to keep them a little bit special so that people are really listening for it. So my hope is that not everyone does it. 😊

Aaron: Keep it special, I agree. 😊

You posted a photo of you and Samantha a while ago?

Grace: We did, we were lucky enough when we met her when she came and played London about three weeks ago. She’s lovely and Aaron got proper starstruck. 😊



Aaron: Yep I was a bit starstruck. We went up to the VIP area and had a chat with her. Obviously, I was talking about cigar box guitars, funnily enough, and I told her she was one of the reasons I got a cigar box and that put a smile on her face. And Grace was talking to her about women and the rock and blues kind of thing and the challenges they face.

*She seems to be one of a relatively small group of women guitarists who play CBG?*

Aaron: Yes, I think that her style of play really suits it, and you can see when she's playing it, she's really feeling it! That's what it's about, isn't it?

Grace: She can do the shredding, but she goes a lot for that emotional exciting style of playing that really lends itself to cigar box guitar. She's one of our favorite guitarists because her style really resonates with us. You can feel what she's doing. She's not just technically clever, but it's emotional as well.

*Grace, what led you to take up the violin and the mandolin?*

From a young age, I've been playing different woodwind instruments – flute, clarinet, saxophone – and then I played a little bit of guitar (I started with piano actually), so I kind of went through all these instruments. Then a friend of ours was selling a really nice mandolin, which looked like a small guitar, and I thought I really like the idea of it. So I started playing that one and then I got an acoustic mandolin, which I really like, but I didn't love them, until I found a resonator mandolin and plugged it into Aaron's electric guitar pedal board, and it was like "yes!"



It had a really high action, so I got a slide and started playing around with it, and all of a sudden it became like the most fun instrument ever! Also the way it tunes works well for my brain. 😊 More so than a guitar. From there I decided I would play violin because it was tuned the same as the mandolin, and I love the American kind of country-rock sound like Vassar Clements and the bluegrass stuff. Now I've also cranked my violin to a pedal board so I can shred a bit on it too. 😊

*So it doesn't bother you when some people call it a fiddle?*

Grace: No I vary a bit between the two. I've never sort of played like classical violin and I think that's what a lot of people assume is where everybody starts, but I certainly didn't. So I would say more fiddle as well because I started from the bluegrass and that's what I love.

*The fiddle and mandolin also have a long-standing tradition in early blues like the cigar box guitar...*

Grace: Yes the mandolin is really rooted in blues as well. And even though not many people play mandolin in the blues scene that we know now, it was definitely there and there are some amazing musicians if you go back into blues history. The mandolin can sound epic!

*There are some wonderful cigar box mandolins and violins out there, you're not tempted yourself?*

Grace: Well I think there is a slight restriction imposed by Aaron, 😊 but there might be one time when I have to play a cigar box because I love messing around with them, it's just so much fun! And Aaron does all our lyrics and I do music, so I also come up with the riffs

before Aaron takes it up and does his own thing with it. One of our songs does have guitar *and* cigar box on it, and we haven't recreated it live yet, so I vote that Aaron plays the guitar part and I play cigar box.

Aaron: Redo the vote! 😊

*Why don't you get one of your own?*

I think that's a very good point actually. I've not really seen many to be honest. I'll have to look more closely because at the moment my violin is getting very old and it's getting unhappy going on tour, 😊 so I've been looking at different options. We'll definitely have to look into it.

***“There might be one time when I have to play a cigar box because I love messing around with them”***

*Moving along, “Saving Grace” was your second album in 2021...*

Grace: Yes it was our second, we have to say studio album now, because we've since released a live album, which is very cool. It's definitely linked more into rock. I think because, when we recorded “We Fly Free,” none of us had any idea

when, or if, live music was going to start up again, so we thought we could be a bit more indulgent with that album and we were finding our feet as well as it was our first album.

Aaron: I think because we were coming out of like the Americana kind of style as well and to a certain extent moving into blues-rock, it was a bit more of a gentle transition. But, with “Saving Grace,” we had our tour booked, a band that we were setting up and we knew we were going to be playing our songs on big stages. That was definitely in our minds when we were writing it. It ended up being much more rocky because we wanted to rock out. 😊

Grace: It feels like a really long time ago because, in the last two years, we’ve released an album in November. So we’d normally be releasing another album now. But, because of the touring, we kind of pushed it on and won’t be releasing another album till summer now. But we’re deep into writing it and getting a good vision for it at the moment.

### And the live album?

Aaron: Yes it came out in September and it’s a double vinyl album called “Flying Free Tour Live.” We recorded it at one of our shows and wanted to capture our first tour. We actually sat and listened to it the other night because the test press came back and it’s so cool because there was a lot of emotion during the first tour. It was bigger than anything we’d done before and it took us right back to it. There’s something about a live recording – you know like “we were there!”



So it's basically your fourth album you're working on now?

Grace: I guess it is, yes, although before we release our debut album, we put out two EPs, which we've now put onto one CD. So in a way I guess it's our fifth album now. That's crazy!

Are you going to give us a little sneak preview of the Number 5 album?

Grace: Well it's very early days, so no sneak previews available yet. We have so many ideas that we're throwing around at the moment, so it's all still under wraps...☺

Still on the "One Road Records" label?

Grace: Yes, which is our own record label. We're very much like a cottage industry – my sister's our manager, Aaron's best mate is our merchandise shop manager

– we're really lucky that we have such an amazing team and it's like we all really care. We're all like family and we want it to be great, and we've all got good intentions, which is lovely!

And you'll be promoting it in spring with full-band shows around the UK?

Aaron: Yes, that's right, we're waiting to finalize other things we have lined up outside the UK. We're also booking some really cool festivals and going on tour with the rock band *Reef* just before our "Breaker of Chains Tour" kicks off. So there's loads happening!

Who was in the full band for the "Flying Free Tour"?

Aaron: It was Roger Inness on bass and James Fox on the drums, who also does keys and backing vocals.



Aaron, Grace, James and Roger; photo: CPE Foto

*So all in all it's going to be an exciting year ahead?*

Aaron: Well you never know what's around the corner. We're working hard on booking in other things if we can, with a lot of different gigs in the pipeline. We really want to tour Europe too – it's literally just a case of trying to open certain doors and knocking other ones down. 😊

Grace: Because we're independent, there's a lot of work behind the scenes we have to do to make things happen, so it's going to be a really busy year again and we're looking forward to it.

Aaron: Slightly terrifying, but exciting! 2022 has been our best year ever, and we're hoping 2023's going to be even better! ■

<https://www.facebook.com/whenriversmeet>  
<http://www.whenriversmeet.co.uk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/whenriversmeet>

Builders mentioned:  
Dust n Bones Creations  
<https://www.facebook.com/dustnbonescreations>  
<https://dustnbones.co.uk/>

Haystack Box Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/people/Haystack-Box-Guitars/100057598052881/>



Photo: Eloise Harris

CharlesAtchison.com





# Music and magic

Charles Atchison, Kansas City, Missouri, U.S.A.

In addition to being a magician, a master of sleight of hand, and an avid collector of haunted artifacts, Charles Atchison is a killer guitar builder. We met on the road about ten years ago, and he has built me some crazy instruments over the years. – Justin Johnson

*CBGR: Charles, you've tried your hand at many different trades over the years?*

Yes, I have. By day I am a Director of Information Security and Risk Management. When my primary job is not consuming me, I am a magician, musician, writer, folk artist, inventor, actor and producer.

*Which came first – magic or music?*

I was consumed by both magic and music the very instant I knew each existed. I had access to my grandmother's small electric organ as well as a plastic toy guitar, pretty much since day one, but without doubt I was able to understand and perform a magic trick before I was able to understand and play a song. My first magic book I received at age seven. A few years later, after a bit of begging, my mother bought me the *Roy Clark Big Note Guitar Songbook*. That was at age eleven and that was when I began learning to play guitar. I still own both of those books. ☺



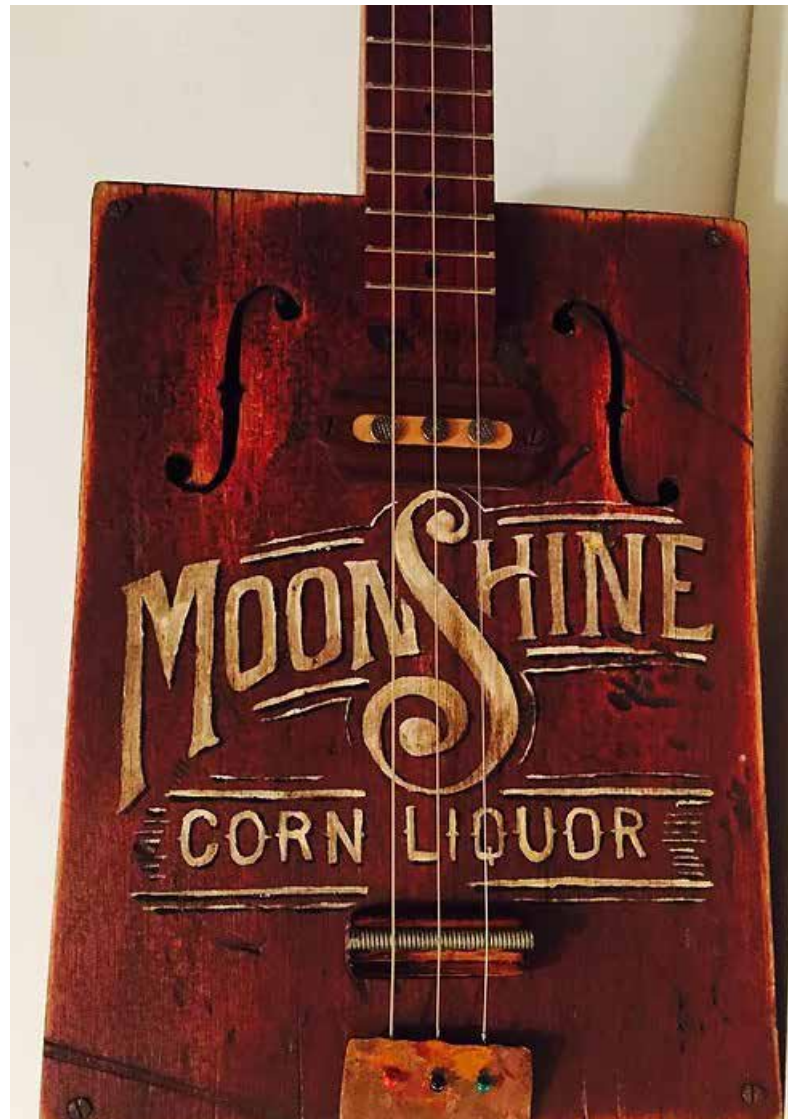
### Are they connected?

To me magic and music are connected, if by nothing else by the comfort and joy they bring. I nearly always listen to music while I practice magic routines and several of the instruments I have constructed (while listening to music) have had little magical secrets built into them. I will add little secrets either hidden inside the instrument or utilized somehow as part of the instrument's overall construction. Then there are the few pieces that I really go the extra mile on and place lots of hidden gems.

“Emily” the name I gave to the instrument Justin Johnson is playing in his video “Lap Steel built by Magician sounds HAUNTED!”<sup>1</sup> has numerous secrets of which I have revealed to Justin, but few that I will reveal otherwise. I will share though that for this instrument I designed a method whereby the pickup can be repositioned to any point between the end of fretboard and the bridge even while being played. Admittedly, moving it while playing requires a little bit of a knack, and perhaps a Justin Johnson level of skill, but the ability to instantly set your pickup to any position before every song is super cool just by itself.

### You're definitely a guy who wants to know how things work?

Both of my grandfathers instilled this in me. Monroe, my grandfather on my mother's side, grew up exceedingly poor and to just survive he was forced to be creative. I remember a lawn mower of his where he had replaced its rusted muffler with a modified metal can, coat hanger wire, and various and sundry other ingenious replacements. It looked odd,



1. <https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zgqn24mju8&list=PLjklvXETDCHBi-Krx6vyMwzegXdWW8F8u>

but it worked exceedingly well. This had a massive impact on me. Over the years he taught me a million ways to just make do with what you have.

My other grandfather, Joel, repaired clocks and was always giving me old clock movements and then asking if I could take them apart and put them back together again. I was doing this as a young kid and those old movements have steel springs in them that can just about kill you should you fail to use the proper tools and/or haphazardly release one of them. I pretty quickly learned to focus deeply, problem solve, innovate and find band aids.

*“It’s funny how dreams will find a way to play themselves out”*

Beyond that, as a child I kept my “laboratory” in the cellar of our home where I would invent things (mostly with string, wire, buzzers, radio components, and of course clock parts), and I would dream that I was following in the footsteps of Alexander Graham Bell. Later in life I was granted several US patents for software solutions I developed while working for BellSouth. It’s funny how dreams will find a way to play themselves out.





CharlesAtchison.com



*You used to play in tribute bands?*

Yes, many years ago, back when I still lived in Alabama. I have an over 20-year old video clip of me playing lead guitar with *the Good Rockin' Tonight Show* which was a tribute to Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly and Johnny Cash<sup>2</sup>.

*What was special about the artists you covered?*

Using their music, we could demonstrate the roots and birth of rock and roll and show what Rockabilly truly is – a blend of blues, gospel and country summoned by rebellion.

*So you've always been into the history of music?*

To some degree, yes. We can have a solid discourse over 1840–1940's homemade instruments, Appalachian music and 1950–1990's rock and roll, blues and country. If Brahms or Schubert come up, I will be tongue tied.

*Making it no surprise that you love the old instruments that people have made and played in the past...*

I love the craftsmanship and care that went into those mid-1800's and early 1900's homemade instruments. These were instruments typically made by a family member or local craftsman for a child that could not otherwise afford one. These I can hold and feel the love emanating from them. This is the care I try to put into the instruments I build.

Over the years I have sought out, held, played and purchased a large amount of genuine antique cigar box instruments. Each instrument carries its own magic, its own story, its own journey.

2. [https://youtu.be/VRChd9\\_HuwU](https://youtu.be/VRChd9_HuwU)

*Other people first learned about CBGs on YouTube and the internet, but you first heard about them on the radio?*

Yes, at that time I was making my hour-long commute home from work and NPR had a story going about cigar box guitars. It caught every ounce of my attention. They gave a brief history and then I heard one being played. I immediately knew I had to learn everything I could about them and ultimately try my hand at building them. It just so happened that I was friends with someone who worked at a cigar shop. Synchronicity I suppose. Kismet, perhaps. ☺

***“Each instrument carries its own magic, its own story, its own journey”***

I would eventually have cigar shops around Atlanta and North Georgia buying and reselling my instruments. I would offer to custom inlay a cigar shop's name on the fretboard, show them an example photo of the one I did for the cigar shop down the road and then suddenly \$250 was in my hand.

*Did you frequent thrift and antique stores and flea markets before you got the homemade instrument bug?*

Yes, when I was a kid my mother would go to yard sales and estate sales nearly every Friday morning, and I would tag along searching for Hardy Boys and Tom Swift books. My mom would search for hidden gems, rare pieces of

pottery, furniture, jewelry and so forth. As an adult, I regularly seek out thrift stores and antique stores looking for objects to collect and/or repurpose.

*What's some of the other art that you've made out of "junk"?*

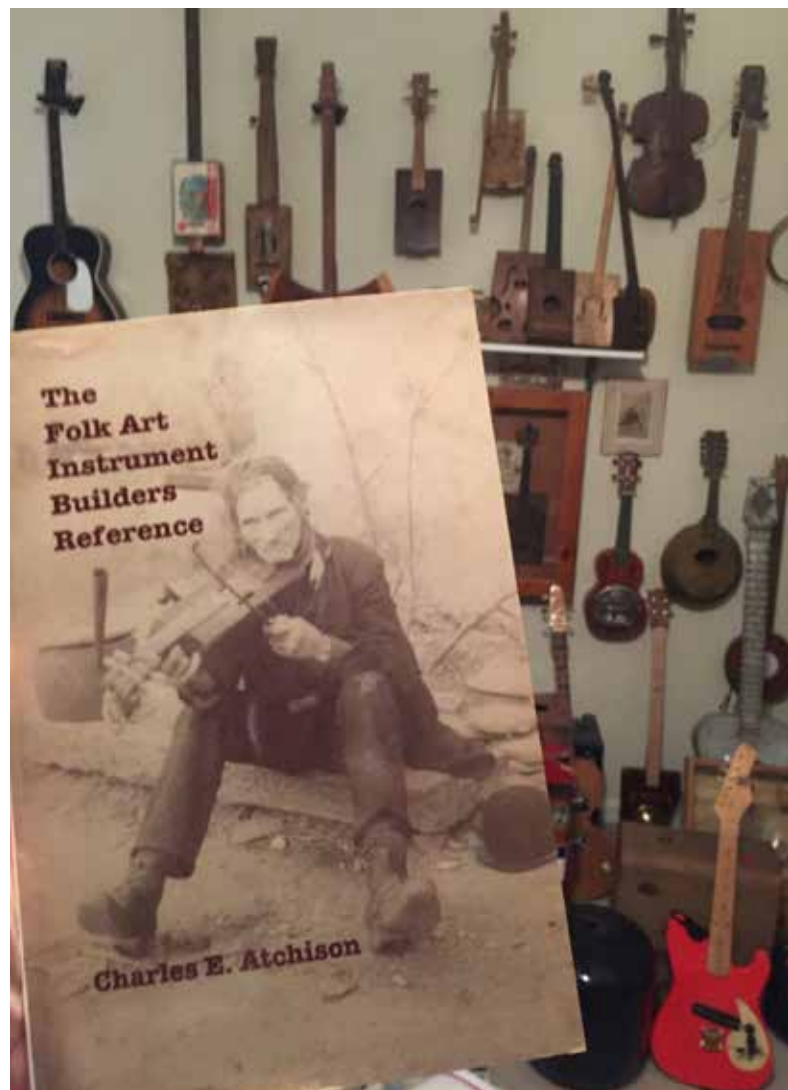
I have built numerous whirly gigs (garden windmills), Limber Jacks, Acrobats, chip art/tramp art, and countless other things of the folk art variety.

***“It’s a small workshop, but quite cozy and definitely inspiring”***

I consider my workshop itself to be art. Inside my garage, I constructed a dividing wall to create my workshop using mostly antique doors, and have a functional screen door for entry. Inside you will find homemade crystal radios, handmade wind turbines, homemade solar panels, Van der Graaf Generators, Wimshurts machines, a guitar graveyard of parts, antique locks, old clocks, and vintage toys from my childhood. It's a small workshop, but quite cozy and definitely inspiring.

*You've also written a 200-page book on building unusual instruments?*

In 2012, I wrote “The Folk Art Instruments Builders Reference” and I explain how to build a one-string diddley bow, relic style four-string cigar box guitar,



tenor hubcap banjo, cajon drum, kalimba, and a washtub bass (Gutbucket). It is available globally and can be found at most online bookstores, and some libraries. Signed copies are one of the few items you can still find on my website.

*Do you still do the Relic Instrument Contest?*

No, unfortunately I stopped that around the same time I stopped spinning resonator cones. My goal was to get folks building instruments in the style of the Uncle Enos banjo from the early 1900's. I wanted them to make instruments using mostly simple hand tools and limited parts. I wanted to see the same type of ingenuity occurring that I was finding in the antique instruments I was collecting. I wanted to see wooden tuners, nails or toothpick frets, screen door wire for strings, this sort of thing. It really brought together a unique and wonderfully talented group of builders. There were some really wild submissions. One, for example, was made from twisted shrub branches, while others were nothing short of elegant, stunning, beautiful... It was inspiring for me. I hope it was for others. Maybe one day I can bring that contest back, but it is extremely time consuming.

*Of all the instruments you've made since you started, which ones are your favorites?*

Over the years (about every seven years) I have built a lap steel using an antique barometer for the body. I call them "Baromitars." Currently Justin Johnson owns two of them and I maintain the third. In the video I mentioned before, Justin is playing "Emily" (the most recent Baromitar) I have had a lot of people reach out to me because of Justin and those Baromitars. Those by far are my favorites.





*And which ones have you kept for yourself?*

I still have my ironing board lap steel, where I have a video of me playing Ry Cooder's "Feelin' Bad Blues."<sup>3</sup> Beyond that, I have a four-string resonator (with one of my first hand-spun cones) that Mac Arnold and Justin Johnson both played and autographed on the same night. Finally, I have my full recording arsenal, which is my homemade six-string plank guitar, four-string cigar box guitar, three-string plank, winebox stand-up bass and suitcase drum – all of which I would need to be offered a ridiculous amount before I would ever part with. ☺

*You tune your guitar's D G D, why not just standard D G B tuning?*

For my three-string guitars, yes, that is correct. I tune D G D using the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings from a regular light gauge pack of strings. Perhaps it helps to think of it like a Drop D tuning, except in this case it is the high string being adjusted and being brought up (rather than dropped) from a B to a D. An Open G Major tuning is D G D G B D, and a three-string requires the D G B notes to create that same open chord.

The D G D tuning I use, when strummed open, is technically a G power chord with a D bass note. It brings out that wonderful "drone tone" that a major tuning can never provide. I believe if you learn one good song tuned this way you will understand exactly why it is so freaking cool.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8ODGRixRig>



*And you can transcribe any song with just three strings?*

I have done Stairway to Heaven, which was called out by Guitar World and I have done Stevie Ray Vaughn's Pride and Joy, Love Struck Baby, and Lenny. Jimi Hendrix's Hey Joe, and Voodoo Child and I have also posted a medley where I knock out 20 or so more classic songs in three and half minutes<sup>4</sup>.

***“I often play things like Johnny B. Goode more easily and more accurately on a three-string than I do on a six-string”***

*You don't have any problem playing lead or solo on a three-string guitar?*

I often play things like Johnny B. Goode more easily and more accurately on a three-string than I do on a six-string.

*And you prefer that to slide guitar?*

I love slide guitar and would use one more often if I were more proficient, but I think way too much when I use one. I would rather relax into music and let it carry me somewhere rather than me feeling like I am having to land the plane.

*And you write music as well?*

These days I typically only create little instrumental pieces. I have a stockpile of songs written that I hope to record and share someday. All writings of recent have been instructional content for the magic community. I have some “effects” currently being distributed at *PenguinMagic.com* and, if everything aligns, there will be additional magic secrets of mine published in the coming months.

*Justin Johnson plays a couple of your guitars in his recordings – are there any other artists taking them on stage?*

Christopher Ameruoso bought and recorded with one of my relic style three-string creations back in 2015 and since then most of my creations have been purchased by working artists. Justin has owned and recorded several of my creations and I must say it was awesome seeing images of the guitar I made being played and recorded at Sun Studio. That was spectacularly cool! Instrument building and interacting with the cigar box guitar community has been one of the most fulfilling and magical things in my life.

*So we can safely assume you have some interesting projects on the table for 2023?*

I will likely do a couple of commissioned builds and I want to build another nylon string classical guitar. Beyond that, I plan to be one of the executive producers on a documentary featuring two-time world champion magician Shawn Farquhar. You may have seen him fool Penn & Teller two or three times. Anything else will be as unplanned and spontaneous as humanly possible. Right now I am focusing as much as I can on friends, family, and health. ■

4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NldmlEXqU-Y>



*“Instrument building and interacting with the cigar box guitar community has been one of the most fulfilling and magical things in my life”*

<https://www.facebook.com/CharlesAtchisonFolkArtisan>  
<https://www.charlesatchison.com>  
<https://www.youtube.com/@charlesatchison>



**Fiona Boyes**  
**Australia**

# Why we all do it!

Fiona Boyes, Bega, NSW, Australia

One listen, and well, yeah, she's blues alright, that and then some. There are not enough acoustic blues women, and even less who compose their own songs at her level... Boyes is at once eloquent and passionate, fierce on the guitar and enchanting as a singer.

– Frank Matheis, Living Blues

*CBGR: Fiona, congratulations on being inducted into the Blues Music Victoria Hall of Fame last year!*

Thank you, it was a real surprise and I was very honored. Blues Music Victoria is a reasonably new organization, but it has come out of a long tradition of blues in my hometown of Melbourne, Australia, and it's allied with Music Victoria, which is a wide industry body that's been really influential in recent years, actively lobbying for musicians and for arts-based people and for the night economy.

They had a couple of years where they couldn't have awards because of the pandemic. Dutch Tilders and Chris Wilson were inducted into the inaugural BMV Hall of Fame in 2019 and Dutch was my mentor and inspiration as a Melbourne player. I'd been listening to all this early blues, particularly Big Bill Broonzy and things like that. But this guy, Dutch Tilders, was the first live musician I ever saw who was actually playing that stuff.



**BMV**  
BLUES MUSIC VICTORIA

**THE VICTORIAN  
BLUES MUSIC  
HALL OF FAME 2022**

**MEMO MUSIC HALL**  
88 ACLAND ST, ST KILDA 3182

**PEOPLES  
CHOICE NOMINEES**

PAULIE BIGNELL  
SHANNON BOURNE  
IAN COLLARD  
SWEET FELICIA  
MIKE ELRINGTON  
JIMI HOCKING  
JEFF LANG

**WEDNESDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 7:30PM**

THIS YEAR BLUES GUITARIST FIONA BOYES WILL BE INDUCTED INTO THE HALL OF FAME, ALONG WITH THE WINNER OF THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE BLUES LEGEND AWARD FOR 2022 (WINNER TO BE ANNOUNCED IN NOVEMBER)

PBS 108.7 FM ROOTS OF RHYTHM PRESENTER HELEN JENNINGS OAM AND MUSICIAN BARRY HILLS TO BE INDUCTED INTO OUR NEW CATEGORY FOR 2022 AS INDUSTRY ICONS.



And to see him in a small venue – he was a very powerful player and great singer. So to be asked to be part of that in 2022 and to be the first woman was really a great honor. It was a fantastic event and there were a lot of very heartfelt and meaningful speeches and great performances. It was a very special night!

*You wrote on Facebook that you felt “humbled, delighted, and a little bit sheepish” about being inducted?*

I think it's a bit like the old saying “it's hard to be a prophet in your hometown” because, although I feel very Melbournian and was born and raised there, and musically grew up in Melbourne, I realize that I've lived in several different states in Australia and in America for a couple of years. So it's actually been coming up to ten to fifteen years since I've lived at home in Melbourne, and to be recognized where you grew up is important because those are the people who actually saw your first gig and your first fumbling attempt at your first solo, and sometimes people can see you and say, “oh yeah, I've seen her and I know what she does.” But they might not have actually seen you for ten years while you've been busy doing your job, being passionate about your craft and learning it. So, yes, it did feel important.

*And you're the only Australian musician ever to be recognized in the American Blues Foundation Blues Music Awards.*

And that truly is an honor because, you know, when you are playing an American-based art form, then to be to be recognized in the home of the blues is incredibly special, and in some ways I might have even a better profile there than I do at home. For all the great Australian blues players (and there are a lot of great musicians in Australia), I can still make claim to be

the only Australian to be recognized in the BMAs in Memphis, which is the big body for blues in the world. Not only is it an incredible honor, but I've got to say the eight times or so that I've been nominated entitled me to a ticket and to be part of the performances at the ceremony, and it's a gala event. It is really one of those events where everybody gets dressed up, and it's red carpet, and I've not only had the opportunity to be honored and to perform, but also see some great performances by some of the stars of the genre.

You know, like I'd always dreamed of seeing Koko Taylor and when she was supposed to come out to Australia, she was unwell and that tour was canceled. So the one time I actually got to see her perform (in fact, it might have been her last performance) was at the Blues Music Awards in Memphis one year. She was quite unwell and fairly frail, but she hit that stage and as soon as she started seeing “Wang Dang Doodle,” she was so present and so powerful. To see Bonnie Raitt and Koko Taylor and all sorts of people at those awards ceremonies is a complete bonus.

*You came out with a remastered 20th Anniversary Edition of your debut solo album “Blues In My Heart” – no doubt that was a trip down memory lane?*

“Blues In My Heart” was my very first album that I recorded under my own name and it was recorded live to analog tape in 2000, with me playing acoustic country blues and finger picking. So years later, I was on tour in the States not long before the pandemic and having dinner with a dear friend of mine, Suzanne Holmes, and she happened to put the album on. It had been so long since I'd heard it and I thought the performance had really stood up well (you know, sometimes you

revisit albums and they don't). But I really did like it and thought wouldn't it be fun re-releasing it in "2020" as a "20-year" anniversary celebration.

*“It made me reflect on why music was important to me, why I did it then, and why I still do it. Why we all do it!”*

Of course it did coincide with lockdowns. And that actually was quite a therapeutic activity because that year the best part of three or four months of international touring was suddenly canceled. We were all stuck at home and suddenly I had a lot of time on my hands, and it made me think about that album in 2000 and why I wrote and recorded the songs. So I ended up getting out all these boxes that I'd hauled round endlessly for 20 years and actually writing a 24-page booklet to go with the album with memoirs and photos from back in the day and across more than 20 years of my experience as a player.

And I had the album beautifully remastered by a guy called Joe Carra who has mastered all my recent projects – and that actually coincided with him being nominated for a Grammy for his mastering work that year! So it was a really good project to be doing in those dark and uncertain days. It made me



reflect on why music was important to me, why I did it then, and why I still do it. Why we all do it!

*What about your online classes and zoom performances during the pandemic?*

Well, you know I didn't do that many of them, but I did do some lovely online performances. I recorded a performance for the Durban International Blues Festival because I had a history of playing at that festival in South Africa, and although I wasn't due to play there in person, I wanted to send them a song. And I did a gig for the Blues Society in Nepal and for some blues societies in the States. So it was kind of more boutique I guess.

I did some private concerts for people where they all sold tickets among themselves. We all got together online like little Zoom concerts and it was interesting because I think, like a lot of musicians, we all had to jump through a lot of technical hoops and try and work out how different platforms require different things, and I actually had little cheat sheets of how to set up a Zoom performance – you know, put your amp here and put that there... it's probably going to sound better if you have that, and so on. It was actually quite stressful trying to figure out how to make all that stuff work.

I set up a guitar tuition site, which was an awful lot of work and didn't end up getting much traction, but the funny thing is that I ended up having to do so much digital technical stuff that I started studying online and I now have a certificate in screen and media production, which I did during lockdown! ☺ I also started to play with cigar box stuff on my YouTube channel and started exploring how to make my own little videos with some early attempts at animation and things.

*All because of the lockdown?*

I think it was like a lot of people. I was surprisingly busy and it was funny because I think for musicians it was very hard to stop and then hard to start again. You start realizing how many decades you've been living on adrenaline and crazy schedules and lots of travel. I think it probably was and will continue to be quite a difficult space mental-health-wise for a lot of performers as it was stressful not doing what we normally do.

*“You start realizing how many decades you've been living on adrenaline and crazy schedules”*

You have to ask yourself “why do you do what you do?” and, for me, like a lot of people who are into the long haul, it's because you feel like the music has chosen you and there's something about not only the music and performing it, but performing it for an audience. I think that's the toughest bit about being in the pandemic. For most of us, it's performing for an audience because there's something about roots music and blues music that draws people together and creates a community, and it's being part of that community and being able to perform for an audience that makes you feel like you do it because you're called to do it, otherwise it's all a bit crazy.



*You finally made it over to Canada and the USA again in 2022?*

I flew to Canada for the Edmonton Blues Festival, which was fantastic because there'd been two or three years that we hadn't been able to get out of Australia to do festivals. And it was wonderful that Cam Hayden, who does Edmonton and who runs a fantastic festival, honored the booking and rolled it over.

*“...it's being part of that community and being able to perform for an audience that makes you feel like you do it because you're called to do it”*

*You went down to San Diego too?*

San Diego – now that was another story – the year that everything got closed down I was supposed to be going to some other festival gigs on the West Coast and then to Edmonton. And the gig in San Diego was fascinating because it was actually a couple who have had very high-profile players play for them, but it was essentially a private gig. They asked me to come and play the year of the pandemic and then I couldn't come. Last year, Australia still had closed borders and I could leave, but there was no real guarantee I could get back in. So our beautiful hosts in San Diego said “well, that's OK, just come next year!” So my husband Steve and I flew over and I played the private party, and we were their guests in a gorgeous house right on the waterfront in San Diego!



Photos: Edmonton Blues Festival 2022, Canada,  
by Marilyn Stringer

Does Steve “The Preacher” perform with you too?

No, he’s a lapsed saxophone and clarinet player who played a little jazz in his youth. But no, he hasn’t played for many years. He’s been endlessly and wonderfully supportive of me over the years. At different times he’s been my booking agent and support person, my driver and guitar tech.

When did Steve get the bug and start making cigar box guitars?

That came out of touring around with my three main cigar boxes that I use. There’s the “Box and Dice,” which was my very first one from Shayne Soall and is a six-stringer. And that was really what got me started, I guess because it was a bit more like a normal guitar. That was the entry drug and then I got the four-string lap cigar box, also by Shane. More recently, I added my Steve Plater three-stringer. Steve is a builder from Ballarat who makes “Salty Dog” cigar boxes.

As wonderful as those instruments are, after a lot of heavy duty road time, touring, traveling and flying, and throwing them into tour vans, they eventually started to come apart at the seams and have all had to be rebuilt or strengthened, or braced, or generally had open heart emergency surgery in green rooms and backstage at various times, and that led Steve to having an interest in how they were built and the idea of experimenting with building something for me. And he’s also now built a commission cigar box bass for someone, which was a really cool instrument.



And you hand-paint some of them?

Well, my Mississippi-style folk art has been a real interest and a wonderful way to unwind. It's another way of expressing creativity I guess and so far I've only painted one of the cigar boxes. That one was designed to be a tenor-style guitar, but I changed the tuning so that it's like a three-string with a bass string. But seeing it was a "tenor," I painted an Australian ten dollar bill (a "tenner") on the back of it. In fact, I'm just in the process of recording this guitar for the first time on an album I'm hoping to release soon, and the title track "Ramblified" is on this guitar.

Anyhow, I would like to have painted more, but in the meantime Steve also got into woodworking and chose to build some other instruments out of particularly gorgeous bits of wood, in which case he did not want me to paint them. ☺ It's actually beautiful wood that he scavenged from Maton Guitars, the famous Australian guitar builder, because I'm an endorsed player from Maton. So every now and again they'll have pieces of wood that are beautiful grained timbers, but just a little bit too short or, for one reason or another, is sort of set aside. And Steve goes and raids their reject pile and has come up with some great results! That's why I now have a beautiful one-of-kind resonator guitar from Steve that sounds great!

And the Blue Empress All-Stars?

We were looking to put together something perhaps a little more than a "women in blues" thing. The idea behind the *Blue Empress All-Stars* was to put together an ensemble for your high-profile festivals where you had a 7-to-9-piece band of women who were all band leaders in their own right. And we really had a ball! We played the East



Coast Blues and Roots Festival, which is of course our biggest blues festival in Australia, and we did a couple of shows there and it was great. We were all singers so everybody got to sing and we all played each other's material and just brought it together. And of course I played cigar box with Anna Scionti, who has really made her mark in Australia in the last couple of years, which is great to see. She's such a lovely gal and a strong performer who's been championing cigar box guitars and getting out and playing a lot.

We also had *Hussy Hicks*, the duo made up of Julz Parker, who is a great guitarist, and Leesa Gentz who's the other half of that act and plays some guitar, some percussion, and is a powerhouse vocalist. They're currently on tour in Germany I think. We had Sweet Felicia, on bass, Cara Robinson (drums and vocals) from *Hat Fitz and Cara*, and Ali Penney, who's a wonderful piano player. So we had three guitars already in the mix, plus bass, drums and keys. It was really good to be able to throw the cigar boxes in because they have a totally different voice. That way you could have two guitars and a lap cigar box, which really cuts through in a different way, even in a large ensemble like that. We so often think of cigar boxes as being the one-man band or a small swampy ensemble, but to actually hear the cigar boxes in a big band is so cool!

### *And your new album?*

It's called "Ramblified," which is a Mississippi Fred McDowell expression for that kind of feeling like when you wanna go rambling and travel around. The song "Ramblified" is about being stuck in the pandemic because I was stuck in another state and couldn't get across to my band and a lot of my side of the family and my usual engineer and my usual studio.



Blue Empress Artists is proud to present Australia's finest Blues and Roots Artists in the spectacular nine-piece Blue Empress All-Stars. Fronted by seven Blues sisters, Fiona Boyes, Anna Scionti, Cara Robinson, Leesa Gentz, Julz Parker, Alison Penney, and Sweet Felicia, they are joined by Hammond B3 and sax maestro, Tim Neal, and drummer/percussionist Mark Grunden. With more than 120 national and international awards between them for their individual performances and recordings, they are a force to be reckoned with! From the Classic Era of the great 1920s Blues women, they will take you on a road trip from New Orleans, up the Delta and through the Mississippi Hills, to Memphis and Chicago via Appalachia and the Piedmont, with a swing out to the West Coast and down into Texas. Whatever your style of Blues is, you'll hear it from these artists. But don't get fooled into thinking this is a Blues cover band. While these various Blues styles are apparent, from vintage to contemporary, they are clothed in the original songwriting and virtuoso performances of these celebrated Aussie artists. They've often shared the stage with each other, sitting in, guest appearances, and through their bands. Now, they bring their combined talents to the bandstand as the Blue Empress All-Stars.



Photo: Ant Ritz Photos  
left-to-right: Anna Scionti, Fiona Boyes, Leesa Gentz

They were all in Victoria and I was stuck in northern New South Wales. So when I finally got to Melbourne, I went to the studio and put down this album, which is about half solo and about half cigar box with my drummer, Mark Grunden, doing funky percussion. He likes to invent sounds, so I'll just say to him what I hear in my head and he'll do it. When I said to him one of the tracks needed more "trash," he went out to his van and came back with a metal rubbish bin lid and a drill and drilled holes in this rubbish bin lid and bolted it onto his symbol stand. Then he hit it with mallets, so it was literally a rubbish bin lid with rattles in it. Perfect!

*Well, you asked for trash, you got it! 😊*

Yes! He's a great percussionist. The title track "Rambilified," though, is a solo performance, with just the cigar box guitar, quite spacious and eerie, and my vocals. And I had an idea to have it at the end of the album and add swamp sounds to it. As it turned out, Mark's brother, Bryce Grunden, is a sound recordist and does field recordings – and so he did this

wonderful field recording of the central Victorian swamp with cicadas and frogs, and all sorts of funky little sounds and water. So we've done a track which is just Australian swamp sounds with cigar box.

*When can we expect the new album to be released?*

I'm pretty set on the idea that I'll get it out early this year at the end of February or early March.

*You'd actually talked about doing a whole dedicated CBG album?*

Yeah, I sort of got sidetracked on that because, this is what often happens, I often have a lot of projects in my head and sometimes I'll have songs written that I sort of set aside for another project. There's a fair bit of cigar box on it and some solo stuff, and it was like revisiting some songs that I recorded like 20 years ago, but that have developed and evolved, but have always been in my repertoire along with some new songs, which are the cigar box songs and one on the baritone.

But what sidetracked me was that in lockdown I wrote a lot of fun songs, and what I had really hoped to do was a more uptown album with horns and big arrangements. At that point, everyone's life was looking pretty drab and I thought what we really needed was some fun. So I wrote a bunch of songs and things like "Never Sleep With Someone With More Problems Than You," "The Church Of What's Happening Now," "Too Lazy To Work, Too Nervous To Steal," which is about, you know, the life and how people think musicians are. ☺ But anyway, I've kept them all aside and hopefully I'll get a chance to record them later in the year. But in the meantime I did have some nice new cigar box tunes and some fun ones like "My Turnip Patch," "One Day Late, One Dollar Short" and "Ramblified." So there'll be some featured cigar box tunes with funky, unusual percussion on the new album for sure.

*So do cigar box guitars motivate you to do some things differently?*

I must say that, at my induction into the Hall of Fame, I did make a point of playing some cigar box because it's become so much part of my act now. They gave me the opportunity to play and I actually chose the songs quite consciously. I started with a song about my mentors and then I did a song which was very much influenced by Dutch Tilders. And then I sang a song written by Chris Wilson (the only cover I did) who was great mentor to a lot of people in the blues scene. So I played my cigar boxes and thanked Shane and the builders who inspired me by making those instruments and opening up my understanding of blues.

And because I think the thing about cigar boxes is that, compared to the whole notion of blues guitar being all about the

guitar slinger and the guitar hero, what the cigar box does is strip things back – it's the joy of the instrument, the simplicity and the limitations. And people are saying I can't believe what you can get out of that – out of three strings and I think it makes you approach things a bit differently.

***"What the cigar box does is strip things back – it's the joy of the instrument, the simplicity and the limitations"***

Guitarists often find that there's certain licks that fall under their fingers, and they can do that, but you have to rethink those habits when you get on a cigar box. And I think that's part of why you can sometimes get a freshness and inspiration out of it, you know? Certainly that's been the story in my case. ☺ ■

<https://www.facebook.com/FionaBoyesMusicPage>  
<https://www.fionaboyes.com/>  
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Builders mentioned:  
Shayne Soall, Oz Blues And Roots Music Store Cigar Box Guitar Emporium  
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<https://www.facebook.com/SaltydogCigarBoxguitars>

Steve "The Preacher" Clarke  
<https://blueempressart.com>

# Scott (Janky) Lindsey U.S.A.



# C.B.G. THROWDOWN

Scott Lindsey a.k.a. Janky, Austin, Texas, U.S.A.

Janky shows his love for hill-country blues, cotton patch blues in his life and his dedication to bringing something new to the table on this record. He's got just as much cross-over potential as any musician playing in those genres. Very focused production. Wishing him lots of success with spreading this hard work. – Richard Johnston

*CBGR: Janky, Texas has a long tradition in the blues. What got you started?*

I am originally from Shreveport, Louisiana. I started playing guitar when I was 15 and found my way back to the blues around 2002, forming a Dallas-based punk-blues band called *The 1969s* where I fell in love with open tunings, which was my road into CBGs. We released two CDs.

*Coming from Texas, what steered you into the North Mississippi juke joint sound?*

I love the whole idea of a Juke Joint. It is there to just have a good time. And that's what I love about the music I play. I like to think I'm at a juke joint playing the music that makes people feel good and want to dance. I prefer a little corner of a room over a big stage. It feels right, and the audience feels it as well. My favorite place to play on the planet is Red's in Clarksdale, Mississippi. It is the real deal and 100% about having a good time. I often invite a lot of musicians to join in, which is a

big ingredient of the juke joint sound. The last time I played Red's, I shared the "stage" i.e. corner of the room, with Robert and Kinney Kimbrough (Junior Kimbrough's sons), Cameron Kimbrough (Kinney's son), Duwayne Burnside, Terry "Harmonica" Bean, and Yella P, and then Kingfish walked in. I handed him my guitar and watched in awe. That is a real deal juke joint where songs last ten or more minutes and the whole place is dancing right there with the band.



Photo: Greg Ponder



### Is Hill Country Blues the same?

Hill Country blues is probably the closest form of Juke Joint blues to me because it still sounds today much like it did in the old days. That's where it started. Mississippi Fred McDowell, R.L. Burnside and all those cats. They would set up in a house somewhere out of town. There would be one guy with a guitar. They usually got free corn liquor and the only drums were usually boots stomping on the hardwood floor and a church tambourine. I feel that not having a drummer created the guitar style of Hill Country Blues as it is so percussive. You basically play drums within your guitar riffs. The beat is implied in the riff. This is why I love the CBG. It goes hand in hand with that percussive style being open tuned. I have a double-neck CBG with two outputs. One goes to a bass amp and one goes to the guitar amp, which allows me to play bass and guitar at the same time. I used it on a few tracks on my new CD. It just loves those percussive Hill Country riffs.

***“Hands down, the Hill Country guys would always win”***

Then there is Cotton Patch Soul Blues, made famous by Junior Kimbrough. It is more of a trancey/hypnotic sound that never leaves the one chord in most cases. It is super fun to play and has an irresistible groove. Terry “Harmonica” Bean once told me a story that, when he was young, the

Delta guys would always battle the Hill Country guys. The crowd would always judge who could get them most excited. He said, “Hands down, the Hill Country guys would always win. They have a groove that just makes people move.”

### You toured all around the USA and overseas with Reverend KM Williams?

I have toured with the Rev, but never went outside of America with him. I called him “Bossman.” He took me to Clarksdale for the first time. He drove us from Dallas. He talked about the blues for a few hours, and then he moved onto the Bible as we drove through the night. It was such an exciting time of my life. I was a sponge and learned so much. That guy is epically cool and was my mentor both biblically and musically. He heard my band, *The 1969s*, and requested that we open for him at a very cool venue in Dallas, Texas.

***“It’s all in your feet”***

After I met him, we became friends and I asked him to teach me guitar. He replied with, “guitar? What I’m gonna teach you on guitar?” I answered, “I want to learn to play simple.” He then told me, “It’s all in your feet.” I said, “My feet?” His reply: “Go listen to side four of John Lee Hooker’s ‘Hooker in Heat.’ You can hear his feet. You get your feet in the groove, everything else will fall in line.” I then decided to play bass for him, not guitar. That way I could lay back in the groove and keep it simple. He played a lot of the great Hill Country Blues (R.L. Burnside)

as well as Cotton Patch Soul Blues (Junior Kimbrough). He introduced me to the CBG and is one of the best CBG players I have ever seen. His main CBG was a 2-string Lowebow tuned to DD.

*And Robert Kimbrough?*

Robert and I met years ago when someone referred him to me since I am a producer and love helping great blues musicians. I have produced six CDs for Robert. We won the AMG (Artists Musicians Guild) Album of the Year for “I Been Fixed,” which I played lead guitar on as well. We are great friends to this day and play together every chance we get. He also played drums on my “Holly Springs, TX” CD. I have been to Switzerland twice playing lead for Robert Kimbrough. The second time my band *The 1969s* backed him.

*And you're just as happy at both small and large venues?*

I do prefer smaller venues. Here in Austin, there are a lot of outside stages which feel a lot like a juke joint. There are no cover charges, but everyone tips well and the venues pay well. The juke joint feel does not come off that well on big stages, and I feel small.

*And not a stranger to busking either?*

My favorite place to play other than Red's is on a street corner. That's where I write most of my music. I get to see what grooves work best with a live audience. My whole first CD, “Them Grackles,” was written on the streets of Deep Ellum in Dallas. It's called “Them Grackles” since they are the pesky birds that hang out on the street annoying everyone by pooping all over the place. It was super fun since all the homeless guys that can dance well



Photos: Janky

would dance to our music and put out their hats to get their own tips at the end of each song. I actually had a homeless guy try to tip us which gave me the tagline, “We busk so good even the homeless tip us.” We did not take the money, of course, and usually gave them our tips as well.

*“My favorite place to play other than Red’s is on a street corner”*

What are some of your best memories along the way?

Once I was playing with the Rev at the New Roxy in Clarksdale. I had a few beers and was feeling the groove. With KM, we never practiced or knew what he was going to play. He would just start playing. He went into “Rollin’ & Tumblin’” and I said to myself, “Ahhh, this is easy 12 bar blues stuff.” I closed my eyes, leaned back, and started feeling it. I came out of it and looked over and he was looking at me with this face like something smelled really bad. He wasn’t happy and was shaking his head. Then I realized KM’s version of Rollin’ & Tumblin’ was true to the old way it was done – Juke Joint Style. Like John Lee Hooker or Muddy Waters would play it way before the British Invasion 12-bar-bluesed everything. I feel that too many blues musicians rely on the 12 bars today.

He did not play the 12-bar blues much. He might roll on the one for as long as he felt the people liked it. There is no absolute structure other than the I chord, the IV chord, and the V chord. He then taught me what I call “leaning into the 1 [beat].” Before a great blues singer switches chords, he or she will lean into the microphone and precede the 1 beat with something like, “Well,” or “Hey” or “Well I...” [1 beat] “Roll and I Tumbled...” This non-12-bar blues is the way I play it to this day. I tried to play it this way at a blues jam once and it was a miserable failure. I am sure they thought I was horrible. “I mean that Janky guy can’t even play a 12-Bar blues.” The music of today has used the 12-bar blues so much it’s just second nature to us in America.

*“This non-12-bar blues is the way I play it to this day”*

And some of the obstacles you’ve had to face?

Teaching myself to record and mix has always been a struggle. I feel it is hard to listen to my music when I mix it. My past two CDs were mastered by Grammy winning producer Chuck Ebert at The Cabin Recording Co. He does such a great job that it sounds disconnected from me enough for me to enjoy it. It sounds good but is still Janky.

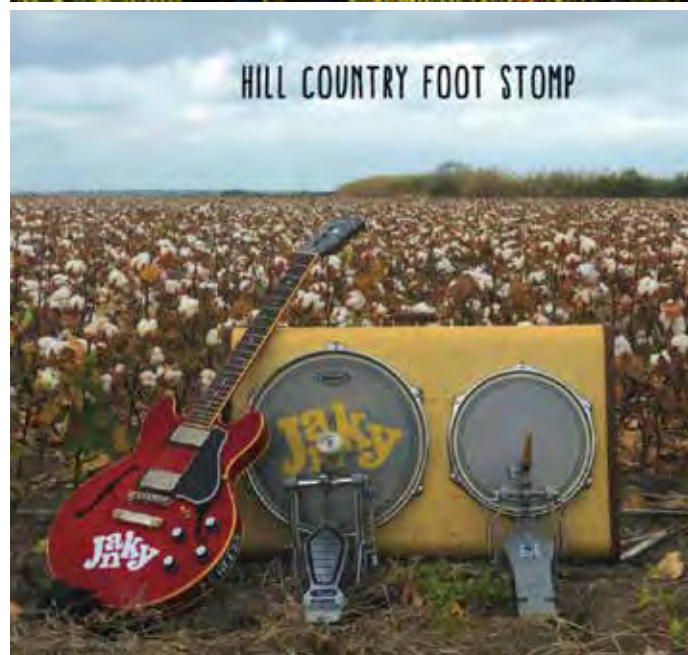
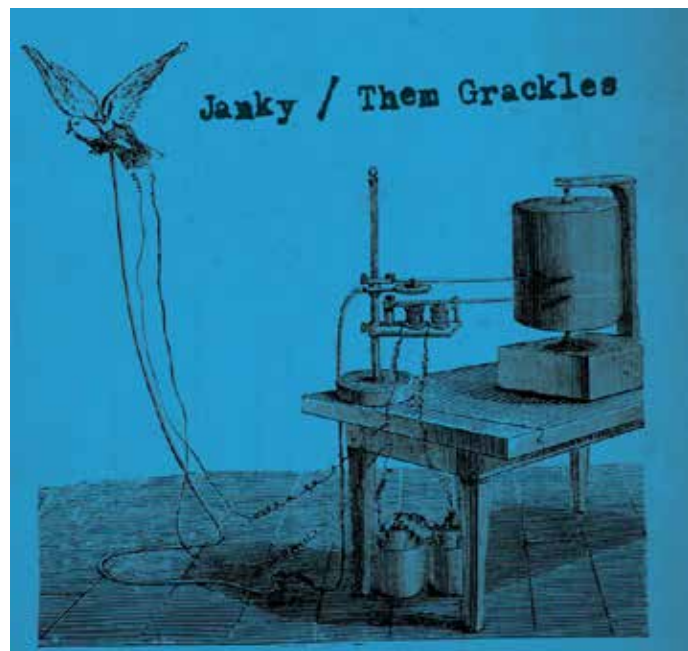
I feel that the drums have become the most important ingredient in Hill Country Blues. That gospel drumbeat makes a body want to get up and move. It is always a challenge for me to play without a drummer. I rely so heavily on the pocket of a beat. My riffs feed on the beat. After playing Hill Country with a drummer, it is so hard to play without one. I learned to play foot-drums to help in the absence of a drummer, but I loathe playing them. It is not fun for me, but the beat gives it such a life. I am spoiled by all the great drummers in Austin, Texas. The drummer that played on C.B.G. Throwdown, Cole Koenning, added so much to the feel of that CD. He needs very little guidance, but accepts any with open arms.

Besides four albums of your own, you've engineered and produced many albums for other musicians under your ReverbUnit label?

As I mentioned before it is fun recording others — just hard recording me. There is more coming up – next year I am recording Duwayne Burnside and a new Robert Kimbrough Sr release. I recently recorded Lil' Joe Ayers (Junior Kimbrough's bass player), which should be out soon. It is mind-blowingly good – the realist blues I have ever recorded. I also recorded and played guitar on Peggy Sue Hemphill's, a.k.a Lady Trucker's, CD, which will be out soon. She is Jessie Mae Hemphill's cousin.

And you also expand into other styles of music?

Yes, I have a lot of projects where I have recorded jazz, funk, metal, surf and electronic. I have 143 works on ASCAP. I'm also working on a new-age/ambient approach to Junior Kimbrough called "Meet Me In The Sky."



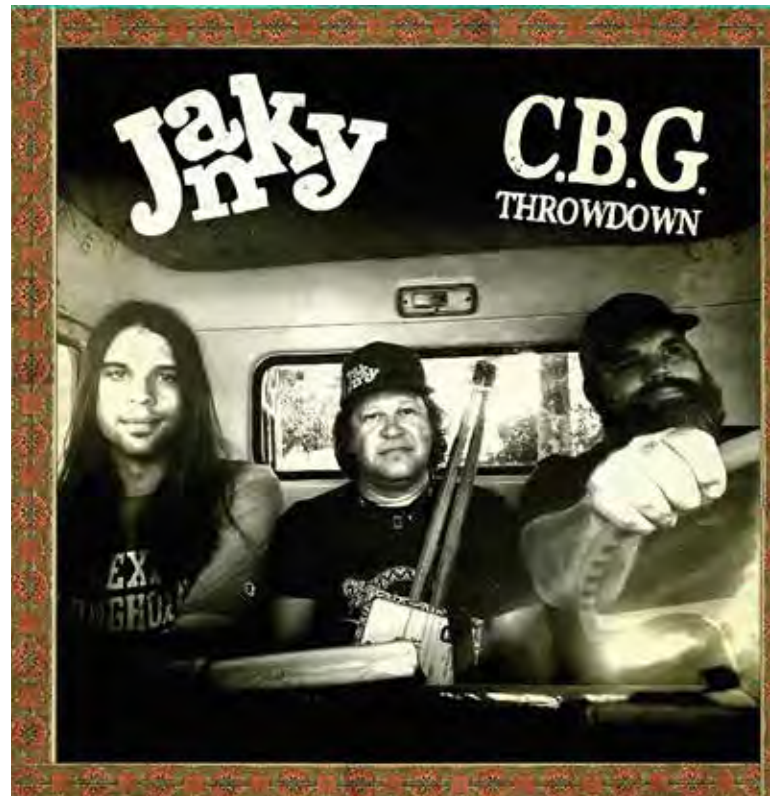
You produced your fourth album “C.B.G. Throwdown” purely with cigar box guitars, which is somewhat of a departure from your other albums – why the focus on CBGs?

I do have some CBG tracks here and there as well as some singles. I have this problem of hyper-focusing. I tell myself to record some CBG songs and then the next thing I know I have recorded 19 songs and become obsessed with this different type of music I can write on a CBG. It all comes back to the simplicity of playing the CBG. I recently tried to learn some of my Hambone 3-string CBG on a guitar. It just doesn't work. It's not the same. I call that Hambone “the riff writer.” If I pick it up, I can write a song. It is tuned Eb Ab Eb. Just three strings lock me into simplifying a groove or riff. A good example of this is “You Must Be the Devil's Favorite” off the new CD or “The Love Reflector,” which are both done on the Hambone and have very different voicings.

*“It all comes back to the simplicity of playing the CBG”*

We can see four CBGs proudly displayed on the album sleeve – when did you first start playing them and who built them?

Robert Baker at HiTone Guitars made my first one. Really great design. I fell in love with his craftsmanship. It's an open G four-stringer called “The 69,” with a flat four humbucker (coils laid flat) I got from



overseas somewhere. When I got it, I was so into Open G. I was playing in *The 1969s* and knew he was making them. Once I played one, I was instantly sold and haven't looked back since. I now own five CBGs – a Lowebow Double with a G Bass String and GDG three string; a Lowebow Cuban two-stringer like Reverend KM Williams – DD octave: a Hambone New Orleans three-stringer (Eb Ab Eb); a HiTone 69 four-stringer (G D G B) and a Gilbert & Roth Bible Box six-stringer (EADGBE/ Open D/Open G).

*You also managed to fit a festival in France into your 2022 agenda – how did that come about?*

They found my music online. They love Hill Country Blues over there and they had all my music. They brought me over there strictly on the love of my music and it was a great time. They really treat you well and are great people. One tip, though: when in France, if it looks like really big kalamata olives, it is actually blood sausage (boudin), which is very different. 😊

*What other festivals did you play in 2022 with the pandemic behind you?*

It was a great year! I made four trips to Mississippi and one to France. In Mississippi, I played the Kimbrough Cotton Patch Fest, Juke Joint Fest, and the 72nd Annual Otha Turner G.O.A.T Picnic, as well as a trip to record blues legends. I am looking forward to many more in 2023. I am also scheduled to play Blues Rules in Crissier, Switzerland next year, which is honoring Jessie Mae Hemphill.

*And you also started a non-profit organization to help blues musicians?*

I recently started <https://BluesFund.com>, which helps blues musicians get their music out there. I'm trying to get 501(c)(3) non-profit status next year. I have recorded six Reverend KM Williams CDs, six Robert Kimbrough CDs, an E.J. Mathews' CD, the Kimbrough Brothers, Lil' Joe Ayers, and Lady Trucker. All for free. No charge and no royalties. Just free because I love the music and the people!

***“I hope to create a network of producers that are willing to help blues musicians get their music out there”***

I hope to create a network of producers that are willing to help blues musicians get their music out there. I'm reaching out to CD Baby to see if they will agree to give a big discount on physical CDs, which will give these musicians something to share and make some side money on. There are a ton of great musicians in Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana that just cannot afford to record. I want to set up at some of the festivals as well and allow these cats to record, and CD Baby would get them some CDs for a very minimal charge.

Based on all the work you put in last year, you must have big plans for 2023?

I have a second “C.B.G. Throwdown” CD coming out. It has all the CBG songs that didn’t make the first CD due to time. It will also include other CBG songs I have recorded over the years.

I also have a full CD called “Mr. Junior” coming out next year with Kinney Kimbrough on drums. He is Junior’s son and drummer. During the session, I would come to a song part that wasn’t fully worked out and I would ask Kinney, “What would Junior do here?” He would help me work through the riff, and that’s what you will hear on the final product. He recently played drums on Hank Williams Jr’s new CD with Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys. I am also working on a

straight acoustic blues CD to be released next year, which will be close to what I sound like acoustically in a juke joint setting with a harp player. ■

<http://www.GetJanky.com>  
<https://getjanky.com/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/@ScottLindsey>

Builders mentioned:  
HiTone Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/hitoneguitarspage>

Johnny Lowebow  
<https://www.facebook.com/JohnnyLowebow>

Hambone Cigar Box Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/HamboneCigarBoxGuitars>

Gilbert and Roth Cigar Boxes and Luthiers  
<https://www.facebook.com/GilbertRothCBG>





# **Brett Littlefair Australia**

Photo: Connie Smith



# The bare essentials...

Brett Littlefair, Adelaide, SA, Australia

Photos: Debra Welk Littlefair

The cigar box guitar has become the en vogue instrument. It can add a twang and raw feel to a guitarist's repertoire. But not many people solely deploy it. That's where Australian Brett Littlefair swoops in... (he) has found something with his cigar box guitar magic. Doing the raw Rock Boogie with this unique instrument, he is able to make the style his own. – Bucky O'Hare, Blues Blast Magazine

CBGR: Brett, you talk about the bare essentials – what are they in your view?

I always remember a comment on my “Broadsided” video. The post sharer said, “You don’t need a lot of amplifications or instruments to make good music. All you need is heart and soul.” He’s right and I sing about that in my song “2-String Blues.” You only need two hands and a whole lotta soul. Without soul, all the expensive equipment in the world isn’t gonna make your music sound good.

In fact your new “Toe Tappin’” album is just you with a suitcase drum, homemade guitars and harmonica?

That’s my livestream set up. I wanted to see if I could capture that one-man-band sound on a decent recording. I had a bunch of songs left over from years gone by that were suited to this kind of album. Then I ended up adding another four

that I wrote specifically for Toetappin’. I was going to put some snare drum in and experiment with different percussions but it sounded right as it was, so I left it.

It had a great review from Steve Jones at Blues Blast Magazine...<sup>1</sup>

A dear friend of mine (pretty funny guy) took out the key words from that review and wrote this – “brooding, driving, gritty, somber, thumping, throbbing, powerful, dispair, hopelessness. Phew, I think you deserve a beer mate.” Hahaha. I am happy with that. Steve Jones obviously “got it.”

1. <https://www.bluesblastmagazine.com/brett-littlefair-toetappin-album-review/>



## Any new guitars since our last chat?<sup>2</sup>

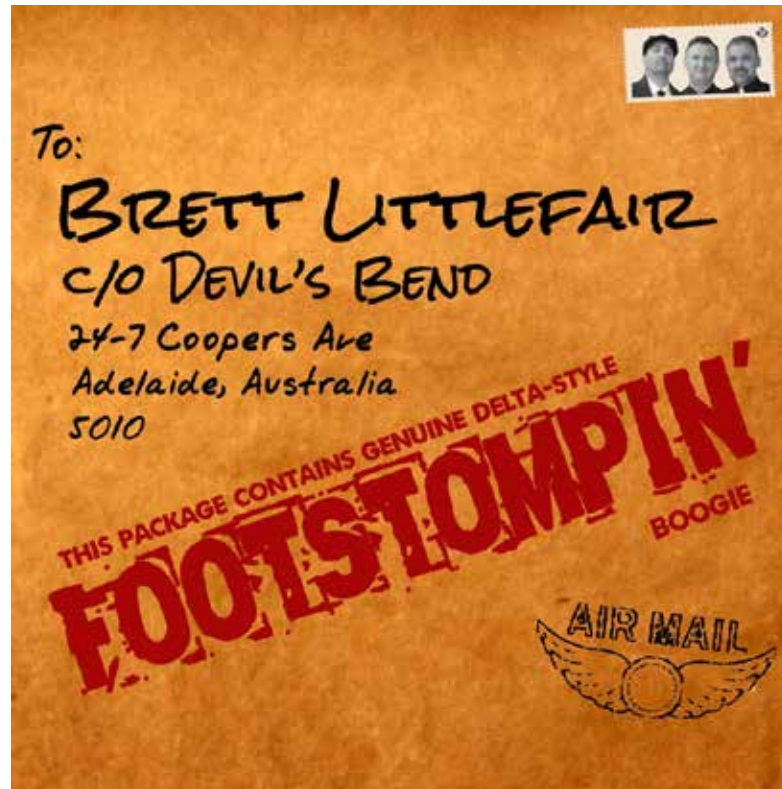
Two new ones since our last chat. For the first one I drove 600 kilometers to play interstate and, on arrival after over six hours of driving, I was presented with a new guitar from Steve Plater. He's a legend in the scene of Victoria and makes CBGs (*Salty Dog Guitars*). In fact the first two CBGs I owned were made by him. It's a nice little three-stringer with a thin body, great neck feel and twang up the wazoo. 😊 I was quite shocked at such an awesome gift. He said he has had people ask him to make Anzac Biscuit tin guitars like "Brett Littlefair," which is really cool. I hope I can help him sell more. He deserves it, he's a top bloke!

The second one was made by my main guitar maker, Craig Koen, from *CK Instruments*. It was supposed to be another smaller-sized license plate guitar to save room in the gig bag for travel. I sent away to the states for a Batman plate? Yup...I'm a Batman tragic. Haha. But it was vinyl covered and couldn't be earthed. So we went for a Ford tin plate instead. It's a six stringer with an SG-styled neck. The idea was to be able to pack a smaller size guitar in the kit that could be used with normal guitar tuning if I needed. With that guitar I am now fully CBG at shows – no more Strat...

## Do you still give them names?

Of course. 😊 The Steve Plater one has Whiskey written on it. So that one is Jack. The Ford one is just Ford. I had a Great Uncle Milford and everyone called him Ford.

2. CBG Review, April 2022, <https://www.cbgreview.com/back-issues>



You play the song “Broadsided” on your biscuit tin guitar?

You mean “Zac.” Yup. Ya know I didn’t really like that guitar too much when I first got it. Then I adjusted the bridge a little further back on the body and tuned to E B E and voilà it just sounded great – dirty, heavy and full of tenacious tone. It’s dented and beat up. It feeds back badly sometimes and can go out of tune easily, but it really is my favorite guitar “tone wise” in the collection.

*“I am now fully  
CBG at shows – no  
more Strat...”*

What about the hubcap and two-stringer?

Warwick (the hubcap) didn’t get a run on Toetappin’. But I used it on the “Whiskey Blues” video because it looks so cool. ☺ The Deuce (two stringer) was used on “Baby We Can Burn” and “See You At The End.” They were two of the four I wrote specifically for the album. I thought to myself, “Ya can’t just play one song on this guitar.” I wanted to justify carting this guitar around to gigs and just using it for one song wasn’t enough. It’s got the funkier sound with that vertically aligned pick up. Very unique.

The dual vocals on “Broadsided” are also a unique touch...

My voice was wrecked after 12 takes of doing that song. I was gonna try again the



next day and had this idea to put a low vocal part sporadically throughout, but wasn't quite sure exactly where I wanted it. So I sang over the entire 12th take to get an idea. It kinda hid the parts where I was breaking up and sounded really deep to me. So I kept it.

*“My motto is always ‘melody first’”*

You decided to sing “Judgement Day” acapella?

I bounce everything I do off my label guy Dave “CC” Mallette from *Stompbox Records*. He thought the handclaps I normally use to accompany the vocals should have been multiple rather than just the single one I originally recorded. I wanted this album to be as close to one take as possible and it didn't resonate with me to overdub more handclaps. Plus I would have made a mess of that anyway. ☺ So I decided to re-record it in my bathroom. The reverb and echo you hear are my bathroom tiles. Haha.

Despite some somber lyrics in some of the songs (Scratchin' for Scraps,” “Ten Long Years,” Poor ‘Ol Me”), they still make us tap our toes, which is a credit to your guitar work, right?

Are you trying to catch me out with that question? Haha. “Poor Ole Me” has no guitar...so it can't be that. Haha. My motto is always “melody first.” Melody (vocally)



has to be like another instrument. So even if I was farting into a tuba instead of singing, it would have to have something that catches the ear and some kind of rhythm that moves the listener. Haha. If that's at all possible in that scenario. ☺

Which would also explain why the first album in the trilogy (“Footstompin”) was the Adelaide Roots & Blues Association Blues Album of the Year in 2022?

Well I have no idea why that album won an award for blues really. Haha. I am extremely grateful that I moved those folks who judged it enough to vote my album number 1. For sure. But I don't consider myself a blues artist per say. I love blues and have done since I first heard it as a teen. I've listened to it more than any other music genre, but when I listen back to

“Footstompin’,” I hear rock, folk, country and blues all mixed up and blended. Maybe you could call “Footstompin’” blues if you call ZZ Top’s first albums and Canned Heat blues. It kinda reminds me of that stuff a bit.

“Toe Tappin’” is your third album, but the second album in a trilogy – logically the next one would have to be called “Boogie”?

Damn it! Haha. That’s supposed to be top secret. Hahahahaha.

And when can we expect it?

Well that depends on a few factors. I’m keen to start recording it asap, but we are currently negotiating with a world-class producer in the USA to see if we can record it there sometime next year. Either way, it will be different again (with a different band) from Footstompin’ and Toetappin’ and will hopefully live up to it’s name. Wink, wink. Haha.

Which songs on your first three albums are your personal favorites?

That question could be answered in a number of ways. I love “Where’ve You Been” because of the love and attention it’s brought my way. I love “What’s Shakin’” because people in the crowd start moving their head like a chicken when I play it live. I love “Forever True” because it makes me move my head like a chicken when I play it live. Hahahahahaha. I love “How Long” because Speedy (the bass player) came up with this idea for a driving rhythm at the end and Jimmy has this great drum roll to finish the song. From Toetappin’ I like “All Night Long.”

Which ones do the fans especially like?

In Canada they really like “True North” from Red Devil Lye. I think the lyrics work for them. I have always had a great response from “Step Back Boss” on Toetappin’. “Two-String Blues” gets a few folks *really* fired up. But honestly I think “Where’ve You Been” from Red Devil Lye is still the one that folks relate to the most. Maybe because of the one-take live video on the farm that introduced so many people to my music on Facebook. It’s had over two million views.

Seasick Steve has had an influence on you, do people ever compare you to him?

Yeah...literally last week that happened. ☺ But to be honest I think Seasick Steve *motivated* me more than influenced me, if that makes sense. I really like his first two albums and (like a lot of people) totally bought into the whole “hobo” story. I was disappointed to hear that it was all a smokescreen. Haha. Sure, I wear a cap like him, but I was doing that from 12 years old. I’ve always loved ‘em. And I started my “plaid” shirt (called a “flanny” in Australia) when I was in a CCR tribute band. That had nothing to do with Seasick Steve. The CGBs were definitely inspired by him, but the biggest spark came from *The North Mississippi Allstars* playing a version of Rollin’ and Tumblin on an episode of “Jam in The Van.”<sup>3</sup> Luther had an old can of beans (or something) as a guitar body. Haha. It was that North Mississippi sound and CBG mix that hit me like a ton of creamed-corn cans. Hahahahahaha. But Seasick Steve certainly motivated me because I saw him as this older guy (like me ☺) that started later in life.

3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZ2o5-yRTDY>

*No doubt the Clangang is still growing and motivating you?*

The Clangang are like family now. I recently did a tribute to a Clanganger who passed away. I knew him from the early days and we had many chats over two years. I never met him in person, but I woke up one day, when I was on tour, to find a post to say he was gone...I cried. The very next livestream his son came on. Everyone picked up on his name and he chatted with the group. Just to see that family name come up and be part of the Clangang meant the world to me. I know it sounds weird but I really feel the love between these people online.

*“All that really matters to me is how I make the listener feel”*

*You said you had zero interest in putting out an album for personal admiration or posterity?*

That is unequivocally, one hundred percent correct. All my answers about what songs are my favorites are really based on the zone I'm in when I'm playing. Kind of like a mantra, Buddhist chant or meditation. All that *really* matters to me is how I make the listener feel. When I see folks tappin' their toes, stompin' their feet or boppin' their heads like a chicken...it makes me happy. I like bringing joy and happiness to people of the world via music. And the more the better.



*The pandemic's still going, but is it getting easier to make plans for 2023?*

It's easy to make plans, but not so easy to implement them. Haha. I am finding that folks know who I am online because I started online during Covid times. But the folks in the industry pre-covid are like "who is this guy?" Haha. So I am trying to book live shows and tours without the connections that a lot of artists in my scene have established over many years. It's a weird situation to be in. I am reaching out to booking agents and hopefully I will get something happening interstate and international in 2023.

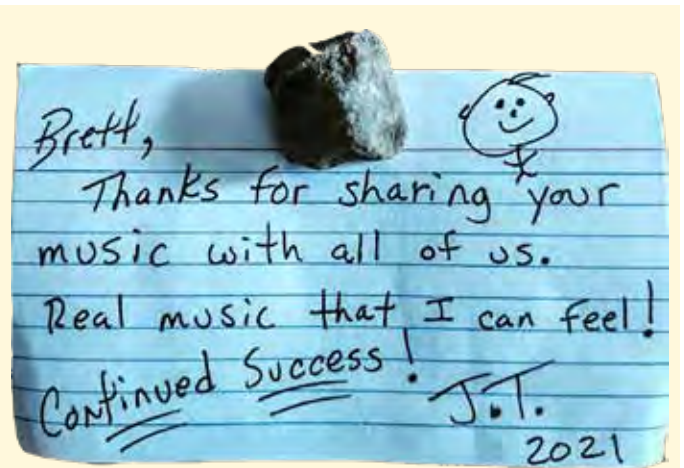
*Is there a chance you'll be coming over to Europe any time soon?*

I will be looking into it over the coming weeks. So stay tuned. 😊 ■

<https://www.facebook.com/brettlittlefairmusic>  
<https://www.brettlittlefair.com/>  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfdd\\_OnhJPhfpsGVvhAy9UA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfdd_OnhJPhfpsGVvhAy9UA)

Builders mentioned:  
Salty Dog Cigar Box Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/SaltydogCigarBoxguitars>

C K Instruments" Guitar Steampunk Slide Cigarbox  
<https://www.facebook.com/STRINGLUTHER>



*February 2021: This means more to me than you could imagine.*

*This is a rock from the legendary Crossroads where, legend has it, Robert Johnson traded his soul for supernatural abilities to play the blues.*

*I live a LONG way away from Mississippi down here in Australia and I've only been able to dream of visiting the spiritual heartland of the music I love most. And now with Covid preventing international travel... 😞*

*Then today a parcel arrived from Mississippi. I opened it up to find this rock and some other very cool stuff from a Mr JT Richardson.*

*Thanks JT...you are a bloody top bloke (Aussie for fantastic fella) for sending this to me.*

**Ray White**



**United Kingdom**



# Touching base...

## New from Ray White Haystack Box Guitars, Diss, United Kingdom

Every one of my guitars has to be completely different from the others, and once you get beyond 100 builds it becomes less obvious coming up with ideas of how to make something different. I just want it to flow naturally and I've filled up the wall with original pieces till now. From here on, apart from finishing the next handful, I want to get into playing them better and write songs just for my own enjoyment...

CBGR: Ray, what have you been up to since you last appeared in CBG Review?<sup>1</sup>

Ray White: Because of the pandemic my wood-turning customers fell away in the spring of 2020. I had a workshop but no work. I did, however, have about 20 guitar builds that I'd planned to work on over the following ten years, so I worked on them instead. There were drawings and little piles of timber sort of put to one side for each build, and the start of the collections of components that we're going to go with them. Various necks had been glued together and so on. So I had these 20 builds that I had ideas for and were on the drawing board. Then, out of the 20 that I originally set out to build, I probably built ten of those and about another 15 that hadn't even been planned because I kept coming up with different ideas to what was already on the table.

1. April 2021; <https://www.cbgreview.com/back-issues>

You built the shack right?

I only had about four to five guitars in there at that time. And it was supposed to be a combination of my music, shared with my wife Jan's art. In the meantime, Jan's share has pretty much gone by the wayside and it's full of instruments now. 😊

*“It's just something I have to do for the sheer fun of it”*

And people must be coming to you and asking you to build guitars too, right?

Yes they do and I appreciate it, but I always say no, I'm sorry, I don't build to order because it's not really a business. It's just something I have to do for the sheer fun of it, not because of money, not because it's a business. I don't look for customers. Customers only come to me having seen me showing them on Facebook. Last May, I did my only festival where I had a stall at the “Weird and Wonderful Wood” festival in Suffolk and just got so much interest that I've booked

up next year as well, which is going to be my cut-off point. I won't be building anything more after that. And that will be my last festival as well. After that I'll obviously still have guitars to sell, but hopefully not that many.

*Knowing you, it's still not the end of the road, though?*

About six months ago, Jan said “you need to stop and retire, 'cos you're not getting any younger” (it's my 73rd birthday this month) and the guitars take a lot of work and can be pretty physically demanding! I said, “well, I've got three more that I've got to complete and then I'm done.” Then, within a couple of months I found that I had nine I had to finish. I put it down to the “pixies” coming in at night and, you know, sort of throwing another few on the bench for me to finish. But now I've got six that need to be finished, and those six will be the last ones. ☺

*“I just like creating stuff!”*

I'm probably going to enjoy not building them once I've actually finished because then I can enjoy playing them and sort of concentrate on the songwriting even though I have absolutely no ambition to record anything or be the next Stevie Wonder or anything. It's purely for my personal pleasure. I just like creating stuff!



Another reason to finish is that every one of my guitars has to be completely different from the others, and once you get beyond 100 builds it becomes less obvious coming up with ideas of how to make something different. I just want it to flow naturally and I've filled up the wall with original pieces till now. From here on, apart from finishing the next handful, I want to get into playing them better and write songs just for my own enjoyment.

*“I'm chuffed that there's some good players out there taking them around the world”*

*You can look back and be pretty satisfied about what you're done with the guitars and the banjos.*

Yes, I'm quite proud of what I've created and I'm chuffed that there's some good players out there taking them around the world. I mean they might be in Spain, Holland, Scotland or the USA. I know that they're out there traveling too. One guy took one of my banjos right the way around visiting places like India and Sri Lanka and so on. I didn't sort of stop to make a note of all the people that bought them and where they were going and what they did with their lives. So, of the first 50



or so instruments that went off into the world, I have very little information feeding back to me. I'm the sort of person who always looks forward rather than backwards, you know, so I'm more interested in what's gonna happen rather than what has.



*“I'm the sort of person who always looks forward”*

*When did you meet Grace and Aaron from When Rivers Meet?*

Funnily enough, it wasn't that long ago. They got in touch with me in summer 2021 and said they'd seen my stuff on Facebook and wanted to come over. It took a while because they had to go on tour, but they came over in October and Aaron got stuck into some guitars – the “Ace of Spades” and a few others. Then he said, “yeah, we'll have these three please” and “we'll be back!” Last spring, they contacted me again and said they'd like to come over to look at some more guitars and ended up buying three more. 😊

So I'm chuffed that they think enough of them to buy them in the first place and that they're offering them out as part of a competition where I know that somebody is going to get one who absolutely loves it and will play its heart out! I've had people ask me or say, “I can't play guitar, but that would look





absolutely brilliant on the wall,” and I've actually refused to sell it to them because they're really “made to be played.” 😊

*“I know that somebody is going to get one who absolutely loves it and will play its heart out!”*

*And which ones are you keeping for yourself?*

Well that does change. “Punisher” looks like that's one for myself, the one I now own now is a four-string. A lot of it is purely down to feel. Some of them I just absolutely love the sound. I've got arthritic fingers and they don't bend too well. So it's also how my fingers can work the strings. Also, the electrics have an extra bit of grunt or an extra little bit of subtlety depending on what songs I want to play with a particular instrument.

Whereas I can be a lot more subtle with the “Punisher,” which really suits minor keys, my three-string that I've chosen is quite a little animal really. I call it “Easy Rider” because it's got an Easy Rider belt badge on it, and it's quite a rock machine. So different songs suggest different instruments. I've got about eight different tunings that I use. The three I use a lot are an alternative open G, an alternative



G minor and B minor. Obviously each tuning has a whole bunch of different chords, but I get around that by giving them emotions rather than chord names. So I tend to go on an emotional journey when I'm playing.

*You said in the last article that after having built guitars, you felt more like playing yourself and doing open mics and stuff?*

Oh absolutely – it started off with me taking them out to open mics to show them off – not me as a player. I mean I've played very bad guitar for 40 to 50 years, you know, sort of just a porch player, nothing fancy. But I started to get hooked on it and we've got a local pub called

“The Banham Barrel” that's a couple of miles down the road with one of the best venues going for local music. It's got such a good set-up and professional sound men and video people. And the audiences are such a good crowd too! I know most of them because I go every week. 😊 I'd find it very difficult to move away from here because of that venue. The landlord, Brian McAlister, does such a good job – he's a unique individual with a passion for music. Grace and Aaron have also played at the Barrel in their early days. Among the other musicians, you really should check out the CBG players performing in “The Barrel Sessions!”<sup>2</sup>”

2. <https://www.facebook.com/TheBarrelSessions>

So you've got *The Barrel* and that's an incentive to write your own music?


I think I'd write it anyway, even if nobody heard it, but it's nice to have somewhere to actually go and play it. And, once again, it's not because I want to be on stage, it's because I like showing off my guitars and trying out my songs. I don't think it's an ego thing, I just like to create stuff and I like people to see what I've created, whether it's a song or a guitar. ■

Haystack Box Guitars  
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100057598052881>



The PHillbilly and The Barrel sessions present a

**CIGAR BOX GUITAR**



**Barrel Sessions Special**

A Live streamed event featuring...

The PHillbilly,  
Alex Moore, Big Marc,  
Tom Mally, Metfield Slim  
and Ray White

**Wednesday October 12th, 7.30 pm**

Live stream:  
[www.facebook.com/thebarrelsessions](http://www.facebook.com/thebarrelsessions)

Live from the Banham Barrel,  
NR16 2HE




Photo: Simon Wilkins

# Contributors

**When Rivers Meet** were the first band to win four awards at the UK Blues Awards in 2021 and another three awards in 2022, including Blues Band of the Year on both occasions. With a distinctive and contemporary blues-rock sound, husband and wife duo Grace and Aaron Bond captivated fans around the world in the UK and the USA in 2022. This year promises to be no exception with the “Breaker of Chains Tour 2023” and a new album already in motion...



**Charles Atchison** is a folk artisan, magician, writer, actor, producer, experimental luthier, inventor, songwriter, and aspiring hobo. In 2012, he wrote “The Folk Art Instruments Builders Reference,” which is available globally. For Charles, magic and music are connected. Several of his instruments have little magical secrets built into them. Charles says instrument building and interacting with the cigar box guitar community has been one of the most fulfilling and magical things in his life!



**Fiona Boyes** is an Australian blues artist, influenced by a myriad of traditional regional styles. She has carved an international reputation as a blues guitarist, bandleader, vocalist and songwriter. Her soulful, authoritative style has earned her unprecedented recognition overseas as an Australian artist. Winner of the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, she has toured widely, performing at acoustic, guitar, jazz and blues festivals, clubs and cultural centers in more than 20 countries.



**Scott “Janky” Lindsey** is an Austin, Texas-based, singer/guitarist who plays an underground style of blues that originated in the juke joints of North Mississippi, and is on a mission to bring the juke joint-style blues back. Janky was mentored by the great Texas original, Reverend KM Williams with whom he has toured extensively. He has also toured with Robert Kimbrough in the USA and Europe. In 2022, he released his “C.B.G. Throwdown” album focusing exclusively on the cigar box guitar.





**Brett Littlefair** has been playing guitar and writing songs since an early age and has always loved the blues. After a period of experimenting with open tuning, he fell in love with the feel and tone of cigar box guitars. He says each of his guitars has its own personality. Today, Brett plays both solo as well as shows with Devil's Bend. He has a very dedicated and globally dispersed online group of fans known as "The Clangang" and his "Where've You Been" video has been viewed by over 2 million people.



**Ray White** has been working with wood for around 60 years. His fascination for timber and his wood-turning skills ultimately led him to start building banjos with intricate and elaborate inlays. When he discovered cigar box guitars, no one warned him how addictive they could be – especially when his aim was to make every build a unique work of art. Ask Ray, and he'll say it's simply about the pleasure of creating and showing people what you've created!



Photo: Laurence Harvey

# Back issues of CBG Review

⇒ [www.cbgreview.com/back-issues](http://www.cbgreview.com/back-issues)

**CBG REVIEW**  
October 2022

**GENA COLEMAN**  
MISTY BLUES BAND  
*Katy Redmond / U.S.A. / p.3*

**THE BOX AT A TIME...**  
*Richard Howarth / 1948 Guitars / U.S.A. / p.11*

**LET'S GOO SHOUT FOR A COVER SONG**  
*Wesley Shrub / Callahaver MusicShop / Subscribers / p.26*

**THOSE BROTHERHOOD TO BROTHERS**  
*Roberto Mattiace / Dittmann's CBG's / Italy / p.26*

**TOUCHING BASE**  
*David Lawson / Music Glass / Portugal / p.42*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.42

**CBG REVIEW**  
July 2022

**TRAVIS BOWLIN**  
HEAT OF MY OWN DEER  
*Pedro Luis / U.S.A. / p.3*

**MUSIC AND CREATIVITY**  
*Archie Guitars / Canada / p.11*

**ON THE ROAD AGAIN**  
*James Dixon / U.K. / p.24*

**TROUBLE...**  
*Tim Young and Ben Macdonald / Scotland / p.27*

**TOUCHING BASE**  
*Richard Howarth / U.S.A. / p.33*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

**CBG REVIEW**  
April 2022

**HOLLOWBELLY**  
THE MAGIC AND THE ALCHEMY  
*John Fahr a.k.a. Hollowbelly / U.K. / p.3*

**MUSIC IS WHAT I AM...**  
*Bill Jantsch a.k.a. Bluesboy Jig / U.S.A. / p.12*

**FOOT STOMPIN' DOWN UNDER**  
*Ben Littlefair / Australia / p.24*

**IT'S ALL POSSIBLE...**  
*Elias Chandra Schröder / Elias Box Guitars / Chile / p.26*

**MADE BY RED...**  
*Red Cachon / Mexico / p.33*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

**CBG REVIEW**  
January 2022

**R.B. STONE**  
ALL DAY EVERY DAY!  
*Interview R.B. Stone / USA / p.3*

**BOXSTOCK 2021**  
*Paul Atkinson / UK / p.12*

**ROCK 'N ROLLING!**  
*Interview Steve Davis a.k.a. Dogleg Steve / UK / p.18*

**FEELING THE BLUES**  
*Interview Paula Moura / Brazil / p.25*

**BLOWING YOUR BLUES AWAY**  
*Guy Strydom / GUITARSCO / Brazil / p.32*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.38

**CBG REVIEW**  
October 2021

**JACOB GREEN**  
NO END IN SIGHT  
*Interview Jacob Green / USA / p.3*

**PUSING THE BOUNDARIES**  
*Ben Gilman / Dutch Guitars / Australia / p.12*

**STILL SHOWING US WHY...**  
*Mac Arnold / USA / p.19*

**WHAT HAPPENED TO ELMO LEE?**  
*Interview John Stax / Black Diamond CBG's / Australia / p.25*

**JUST GLAD TO BE BACK!**  
*The 9th BSA Cigar Box Guitar Festival / p.33*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

**CBG REVIEW**  
July 2021

**JUSTIN JOHNSON**  
A UNIFYING BOND  
*Interview Justin Johnson / USA / p.3*

**LOOK FOR THE PENNY**  
*Allen Heber / Copper Cigar Box Guitars / USA / p.12*

**NEW SOUNDS, NEW VIBES**  
*Interview Lio Giardina / Lion Says / France / p.20*

**CREATED FOR THE HU**  
*Interview P.Baigaljav / Mongolia / p.29*

**ONE STRING TO RULE THEM ALL!**  
*Philip Thomas / United Kingdom / p.34*

**ORIGINS IN THE KEY OF G**  
*Interview Fabian Fahr (Cap'n Catfish) / Germany / p.41*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.41

**CBG REVIEW**  
April 2021

**GHALIA VOLT**  
GHOST SPACES  
*Interview Ghalia Volt / Douglas / U.S.A. / p.3*

**MADE TO BE PLAYED!**  
*Alexandra Casale / Hahn Wood Guitars / The Guitars / p.11*

**SOUNDS LIKE GARBAGE**  
*Interview Brock Gardner / USA / p.21*

**TIMES CHANGE...**  
*Interview Alvin Anderson / UK / p.33*

**END OF THE ROAD?**  
*Ray Miller / Daystack and Jay and Mac Guitars / UK / p.41*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.41

**CBG REVIEW**  
January 2021

**CHICKENBONE JOHN**  
THE ITCH THAT WON'T GO AWAY  
*Interview John Wormald / UK / p.3*

**A LINK IN THE CHAIN**  
*John McNair / Red Dog Guitars / USA / p.14*

**MOTHER NATURE'S MOJO**  
*Jason Mills / Highwood Guitars / USA / p.23*

**ALWAYS THE BLUES**  
*Interview Anna Schmitz / Australia / p.29*

**NOTHING LIKE THAT FEELING...**  
*Interview Alan Galbraith / Fox Box Guitars / New Zealand / p.36*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.45

**CBG REVIEW**  
October 2020

**CIGARBOX MAN**  
A WAY OF LIFE  
*Interview Felipe Ubeda / Chile / p.3*

**A SPLASH OF COLOR**  
*Jason Galison / Jitters Jax's / USA / p.11*

**KEEPING LIFE SIMPLE**  
*Interview Jazze Smith / Australia / p.18*

**IT ALL STARTED IN IRELAND...**  
*Robert Maczas / DaShlick Guitars / Poland / p.26*

**TOUCHING BASES**  
*The Little Shop Local Rocks / Australia / High Bird Handcrafted Instruments, Boston / p.30*

CONTRIBUTORS / P.41

# CBG REVIEW

July 2020



**VAN WOLFEN**  
UNCHARTED TERRITORY  
Interview Micky Wolf / Germany / p.3

**CHOUGH GUITARS**  
Trevor Abraham / Australia / p.9

**DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS**  
Interview Jérôme Graille / France / p.18

**LEE CUSTOM SHOP**  
Yuri Seredbrakov / Russia / p.24

**TOUCHING BASES**  
Pete from Dockyard, Rob's and Mika / p.29

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

# CBG REVIEW

April 2020



**SWAMP ROCK**  
FLY HIGH SING LOUD!  
Interview Christopher An / France / p.5

**SHONKY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**  
Antony Hoggridge / UK / p.11

**KYKALA VAZO: MIXING OLD AND NEW**  
Interview Nirana Nodogiasar / Madagascar / p.18

**TONGUE TIED TWIN ONE-MAN BAND**  
Interview Christian Nieblmann / Switzerland / p.23

**BEESPRIDE GUITARS**  
George Kneibling / USA / p.29

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

# CBG Review

January 2020



**MEXICO TO THE MIDWEST**  
INTERVIEW WITH JEFF POWERS, USA / P.3

**THE FIVE R'S**  
MARK CLARK, MIL OGDEN'S CUSTOM MUSIC AND ACCESSORIES, USA / P.9

**GIRLS WITH GUITARS!**  
SAMANTHA FISH CIGAR BOX GUITAR FESTIVAL / P.19

**WINE AND CBGS**  
INTERVIEW WITH FILIPPO MARTINI, GENERAL MANAGER, PIRELLI TI GUITARS, ITALY / P.22

**TRAVELIN' MAN**  
INTERVIEW WITH JEFF JIS KYTTARIS, GREECE / USA / P.27

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

# CBG Review

October 2019



**HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS...**  
INTERVIEW WITH TYCHOARD THE UNDISCOVERED / P.9

**HANDMADE MUSIC AND THE TEN FACTOR**  
TED CROCKETT, USA / P.14

**AFROBEAT AND THE KOLOCC**  
INTERVIEW WITH TITO ALAMBELE, GAMBIA / P.20

**NOT JUST TAWBUTY**  
GURU KANSEN, DENMARK / P.22

**GENERATION TO GENERATION**  
WIN KURFAS, SEATTLE, WASH. / P.29

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

# CBG Review

July 2019



**FEEL GOOD MUSIC FROM THE HEART!**  
INTERVIEW WITH MATT FISHER, GHOST TOWN BROS BANGOR, USA / P.3

**MAGICAL MARVELS!**  
INTERVIEW WITH RICH KENNEDY, PIRELLI GUITARS, USA / P.9

**CUSTOM PLAYABLE ART**  
DICKY KOLES, CA INSTRUMENTS, AUSTRALIA / P.21

**WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT!**  
INTERVIEW WITH GABRIELE DODIERO, ITALY / P.27

**PEOPLE AND PLACES**  
INTERVIEW WITH TODD CECIL, USA / P.32

**PRESS RELEASE**  
DAVID (DR. EAST) REED / P.38

CONTRIBUTORS / P.39

# CBG Review

April 2019



**THE AGE OF DISCOVERY**  
WHO KNOWS? / P.3

**WHEN I SEE YOU I SEE YOU!**  
INTERVIEW WITH ROMAN ONE MAN BAND, FRANCE / P.4

**TRANS-PACIFIC BLUETMAN**  
INTERVIEW WITH COLEIN JOHN, HAWAII, USA / P.9

**MADE WHERE IT ALL STARTED...**  
INTERVIEW WITH GREG MULLER, WANA BROS GUITAR WORKSHOPS, USA / P.15

**SHOULD NOT BE MUSICAL...**  
STEPHAN WAHL, AUSTRALIA / P.21

**PRESS RELEASES**  
DISK BROTHERS / P.26  
HONA BOYIS / P.27

**POST SCRIPT**  
ABOUT THE CHALLENGE / P.28

CONTRIBUTORS / P.29

# CBG Review

January 2019



**AND NO... I DON'T PLAY RECCA!**  
INTERVIEW WITH PABLO ALONSO, UK / P.3

**IN THE ZONE**  
DUSTY GIBSON, UK / P.9

**DIXIEBY GUITARY, RECYCLE, REUSE, REJOICE!**  
ILLIACOTT, USA / P.14

**GOIN' TO GERMANY...**  
EMMO STEINERT, USA / P.21

**STREET LEMON AND 'GRICOTWING'**  
INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE DISHAVES, SWITZERLAND / P.26

**FOUR STRINGS 'ACROSTUBENO' BLUES!**  
INTERVIEW WITH MANDUO LAND, SPAIN / P.31

CONTRIBUTORS / P.33

# CBG Review

October 2018



**HERNSMER, GUY AND SCENOLOGIST, STORYTELLER**  
INTERVIEW WITH HENRI, USA / P.3

**THE HOBBY THAT ENRICHED MY LIFE**  
TIPACAO, AUSTRALIA / P.9

**SHONKY ROOSTER GUITARS AND SUCH**  
GUY AND SCENOLOGIST, USA / P.14

**LETTERS: YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD!**  
SCOTT HESBRO, USA / P.21

**ALIAS 'CUTTING EDGE'**  
INTERVIEW WITH GUY BRACH, SWITZERLAND / P.27

**LEAVE IT TO THE SWISS!**  
NOLAN NORBY, SWITZERLAND / P.32

**EVERYBODY SHOULD HAVE ONE...**  
SARVEN AVANIGUARIAN, USA / P.38

**WHERE IN THE WORLD...**  
PAXX / P.38

CONTRIBUTORS / P.39

# CBG Review

July 2018



**BLACK RIVER BLUETMAN & BAD MOOD BLUETMAN**  
INTERVIEW WITH JUKKA JUHOLA, FINLAND / P.3

**HIGH BIRD HANDCRAFTED INSTRUMENT!**  
DAVID VAN DEN BERG, NETHERLANDS / P.9

**BROOKWOOD CBGS**  
GREG MCKINNON, AUSTRALIA / P.17

**DR. PATT'S TONIC BOTTLE**  
DAVID REED, USA, BRIGEN ISLANDS / P.23

**REDIOMUSICAL WEST BAND**  
INTERVIEW WITH JEFF BLAISE LA FARGE, FRANCE / P.29

**THE FAT DOC CIGAR BOY**  
SERGIEN MARIEN, GERMANY, SPAIN / P.37

**WHERE IN THE WORLD...**  
PAXX / P.38

CONTRIBUTORS / P.39

