

CBG REVIEW

April 2021



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Going places...

Welcome to the April 2021 edition of CBG Review. In this issue we start with the Brussels-born “adopted daughter of the American roots scene,” Ghalia Volt, who has traded the old world charm of Belgium and Europe for the allure of New Orleans, Louisiana and the Bayous. While the list of her travels is as long as your arm, her talents and pure energy are without doubt the real reasons why Ghalia is going places! And she’ll take her license plate and cigar box guitars with her...

In contrast, Italian-born Alessandro Cesale considers himself lucky to be living in Brussels where he started WornWood Guitars some years ago. Alessandro describes building homemade instruments as a deep-rooted passion, involving time, care, precision and quality materials. He says his guitars are made to be played, and the more touring musicians that take and display them on stage, the better!

Brett Gardner is another gifted musician who has moved to New Orleans, where he spends his time playing guitar and banjo, building homemade instruments, and promoting his upcycled musical instrument band, the Cigar Box Serenaders. Brett combines music, physics, sustainability and community into his “Trashtronaut” philosophy, whereby everything around us becomes a potential musical instrument that can be used to heal, transform and unify people.

If you ask Dusk Brothers, Gray and E, the music business has always been a fast-paced industry continually adapting to new trends and technology. But who ever thought musicians would be challenged with a global pandemic that would put an end to gigs for months on end? Their answer was to transform their “Rum Shack” into a fully functioning streaming facility, enabling them to connect with people all over the planet.

According to Ray White, it’s often just one thing, or one moment, that sets you on a journey that changes your life. After discovering homemade banjos and guitars, Ray has done his best to make each one of his “Haystack” builds a work of art in its own right. Even after downsizing, Ray still has a home workshop full of instruments and a head full of ideas for new builds. And the journey goes on...

As always – read, enjoy, and be inspired!

Best regards

Huey Ross

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YORCKSCHLÖSSCHEN
JAZZ & BLUES LIVE



YORCKSCHLÖSSCHEN

A rectangular board with a white background and a black border, displaying the name 'YORCKSCHLÖSSCHEN' at the top and a menu or poster below.

Ghalia Volt
Belgium / USA

Going places...

Interview Ghalia Volt, New Orleans, USA

"I remember the first time I came to the United States in 2014. I was 21 years old with a backpack and a guitar, and how I discovered the "land of the blues." I travelled from New Orleans to Chicago, St. Louis, Nashville, Memphis, the entire Mississippi, Austin Texas, Baton Rouge – all the cities that all the cool blues songs talk about."

CBGR: Ghalia, who were the people (family, friends) in your life who influenced you growing up in Belgium?

Ghalia Volt: I've been lucky. I have an amazing family. None of them were really in the music world, but my parents always encouraged the kids to do whatever they want, you know like sculpture, painting, music...we tried a bit of everything. My grandmother used to play flamenco guitar and sing traditional Spanish music for me all the time. She always loved to say I sang because she sang. 😊 I tried to learn flamenco, but it's pretty hard. And then my aunt was into music, playing guitar and singing, but nobody really sang blues or rock and roll.

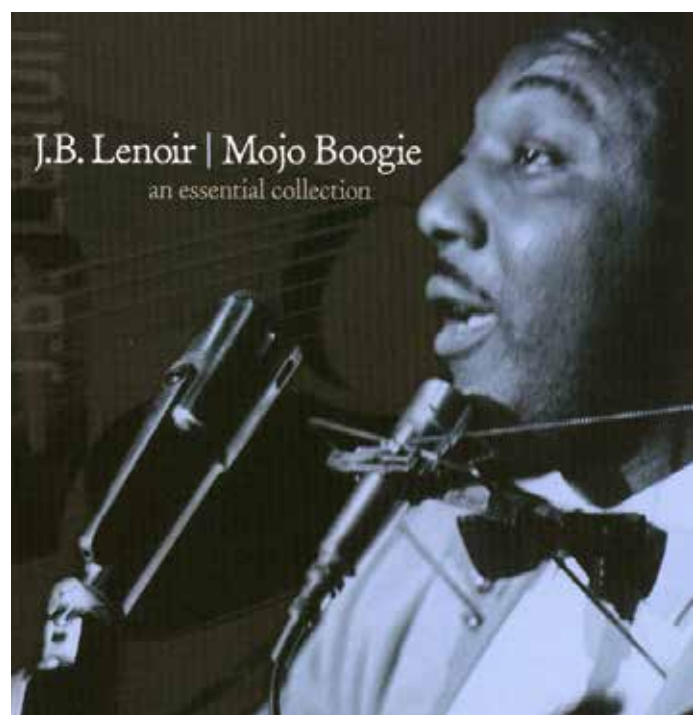
From punk rock and psychobilly back to roots music – do you think you are mellowing?

Definitely! I used to be a wild kid and did my crazy stuff. When I was finishing high school, I had to do an end-of-year thesis paper and I wrote one about "the roots of rock and roll music in the 50s," talking about the social

historical aspects and the music. Anyway, from listening to psychobilly, you realize how it comes from rockabilly and punk, and how rockabilly is based on jump blues and early blues and country. So going back like that, I got stuck into the blues world and discovered all the other genres that led to rock and roll, like jazz, boogie and gospel.

So name a couple of your favorite musicians...

Well there's a couple of ways to look at it... the way I discovered the blues was with two main artists, J. B. Lenoir and Skip James. I'm a big fan of the ladies in blues music...there's so many and I really got a lot of inspiration from them.



Ruth Brown was my favorite; she's such a brilliant blues singer from the 40s and 50s, and then ladies like Lavern Baker and of course Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Maybelle, Big Mama Thornton. And then when I started coming here to Mississippi and listening to the local musicians, I got to discover Fred McDowell, Son House and got into that slide guitar frenzy by seeing musicians around here play that kind of music.

You were busking and playing blues clubs in Brussels as Ghalia Vauthier before you changed your stage name to Ghalia Volt?

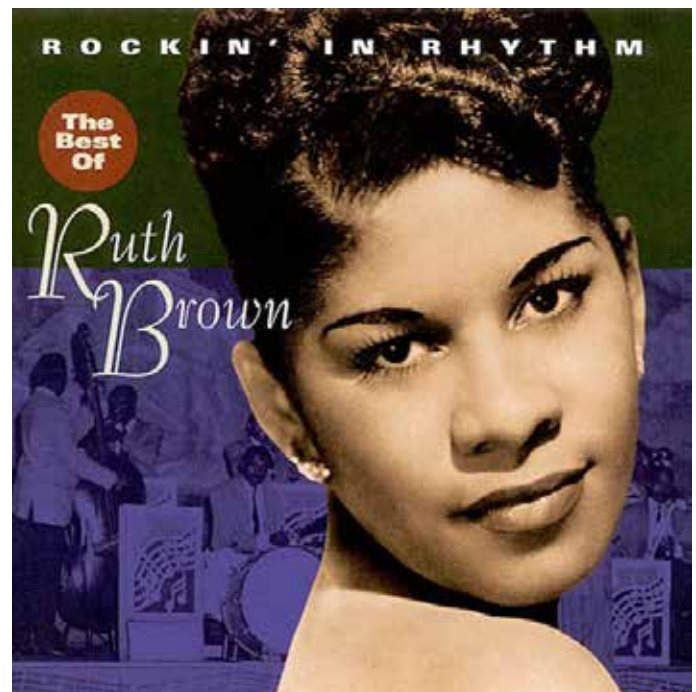
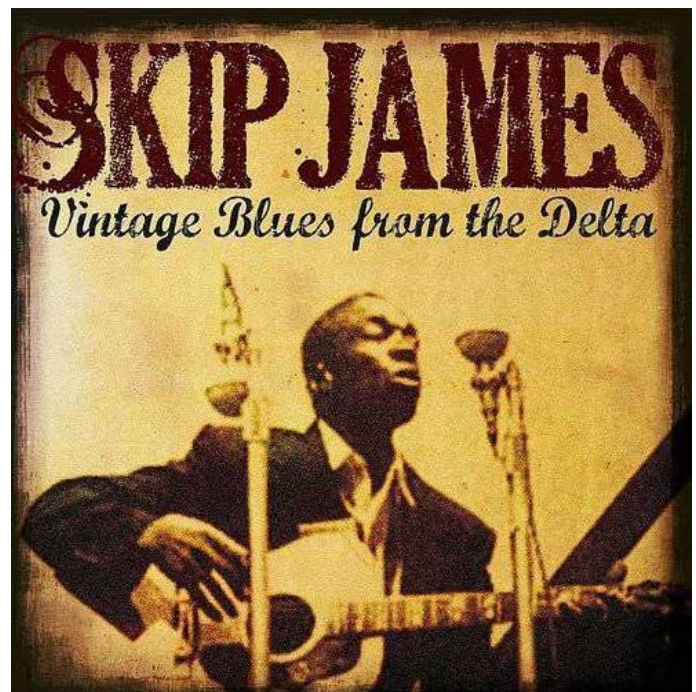
Well Ghalia Vauthier is my real name, but I didn't really think it was a good stage name. Volt makes sense in so many ways because it's close to Vauthier and easier for people to pronounce. Also the night I was born there was a big thunderstorm and my parents actually wanted to call me "Tonnerre," which is French for thunder. And the city said no, you can't call your baby "Thunder," so they said, why, and then how about "Zeus"? The city said no again, and then they called me Ghalia. So, since "Volt" has to do with electricity, it also makes sense in my story. It kind of represents my energy on stage too! ☺

Does Ghalia have a meaning?

Yes it's Arabic for "precious."

At one time you had a band called Ghalia and The Naphtalines (naphtalines means mothballs, right)?

Yeah, mothballs ☺ Well, like we said, I used to busk a lot in Belgium. I was 18 years old and working in a music store and really into blues and rock and roll from Elvis Presley and Little Richard to Eddie Cochran, Wanda Jackson and all the other classics. So, anyway, there wasn't much opportunity for



me to start a band because all the people my age played different kinds of music. So I'm at the store behind the counter and a couple come in and ask to put up an ad. And I read the ad and it says "looking for a singer who can sing rhythm and blues, boogie and rock and roll." And I said, no, you can't put that ad up. And they said why? And I said 'cos it's me, I'm your singer! And they laughed because they're like in their 40s and here I am, 18 years old, answering their ad. So it never went up and I went to try out and after that played with them for about six years and learned a lot. But at some point I realized for them it was more for fun, and for me, I really wanted my music to grow.

*"... 'cos it's me,
I'm your singer!"*

Do you still have some favorite venues when you go back to Brussels?

Not really, most of the places where I used to play are closed. There's one place I like to go called the Bizon Blues Bar, and I always stop and play a show if I can. The money's not great, but it's all about participating and soaking up the atmosphere. Not to mention those amazing Belgian beers! 😊 There's also a jazz club in the south of Belgium close to Luxembourg and France called Ferme Madelonne that's been there for like 50 years. I love that place – amazing people! You know, it means a lot when you're a touring musician if you have a host that looks after you, cooks a real meal for



you, pays well, puts you in a good hotel, and the stage and the club is just beautiful! It's a farm with a big park and a rustic kind of environment.

What about other places in Europe?

There's many places I really enjoy touring in Europe. I think for the most part Europeans are very hospitable people. I had an amazing time at a blues festival in Norway and a bunch of places in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

“Living in New Orleans is like living in a poetry book”

What's it like living in New Orleans?

Living in New Orleans is like living in a poetry book. I just really love it, it's beautiful! The old neighborhoods (although 1900 isn't that old when you come from Europe) and the swampy kind of weather. You know I'm half Spanish, so I grew up between the city of Brussels, but also the mountains and the sea in Spain. I've seen a lot of landscapes and travelled a lot. I was 16 years old and I would jump on trains to places like Greece, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and so I've seen a lot. But, at the end of the day, New Orleans, Louisiana and the Bayous, with the swampy landscapes, rivers, Cyprus trees and Spanish moss are just magical. A lot of people ask me if I like mountains better or the sea. For me it's skip that, let's go straight to the Bayous!

And the music in New Orleans?

Well, think about it, there's 20,000 musicians in New Orleans, so the competition is hard... and it teaches you how to be a good musician and to hustle. Anybody that goes to New Orleans knows about the hustle. As soon as you leave your home or hotel, it's like how are you going to earn a living today? It's good because it teaches you a lot. Busking's a good school too, but remember when you start playing gigs in New Orleans, you have to play for around four hours and have a long repertoire.

“I've evolved as a person and a musician”

“Paris move” magazine talks about your “saga being like a fairy tale.” Why's that?

Well I've had so many things happen to me in such a short time. I've evolved as a person and a musician. I can tell so many stories. Like we said, I don't have a driving license, which is crazy, especially in the United States. So I'm jumping on rides and borrowing things like drum sets and guitar amps when I get to places. Then I might be staying in a cheap motel right on the highway, and I don't have a car and I have all this equipment that I have to carry. And then I'll take a train for 40 hours from, say, Salt Lake City to Chicago because I don't like taking planes with guitars and suitcases, where you're fighting for your life to keep your guitar with you and not have to check it. So I prefer to take a train even though it takes much longer. On a train I feel at home and can relax.

after that everything shut down. Another great memory I have from 2020 is my train trip for a month writing my new “One-Woman Band” album. Imagine taking a train almost every day, all the things you see and the people you meet! And then after that going to Memphis to record the album with Boo Mitchell at the Royal Memphis Studios.

“The beautiful thing about blues is how it’s carried on and passed down”

And before last year?

Before last year, I remember the first time I came to the United States in 2014. I was 21 years old with a backpack and a guitar, and how I discovered the “land of the blues.” I travelled from New Orleans to Chicago, St. Louis, Nashville, Memphis, the entire Mississippi, Austin Texas, Baton Rouge – all the cities that all the cool blues songs talk about. I’d jump on a ride or take a train or a Greyhound bus to get to little places like Monticello where J. B. Lenoir was born, or Bentonina where Skip James was born. Then I went to Clarksdale Mississippi, which pretty much changed my life because I met a lot of the friends I have now and musicians that introduced me to another version of the blues, you know like Fred McDowell, Son House, R. L. Burnside, Junior Kimbrough and so on. I met the grandsons and granddaughters and family members, and people who worked with them.



The beautiful thing about blues is how it's carried on and passed down. In Bentonia, Skip James taught Jack Owens who taught a guy like Sean "Bad" Apple who's a good friend of mine in Clarksdale. There's no music sheets – we don't know how to read music, but we know how to share it, along with feelings and emotions, guitar licks and riffs. That's what I appreciate about the blues world.

Jimmy "Duck" Holmes (whose been nominated for a Grammy this year) owns the Blue Front Café in Bentonia and learned from those guys. If you go there and sit around for a while, Jimmy might teach you the Bentonia style. What I do is put what I learn into my songwriting, that's how I get influences into my music.

"What I do is put what I learn into my songwriting"

What about a t-shirt in your store saying "I survived the Arizona Desert"?

Ha ha, that's an idea. That's not such a great story, but a good idea about the t-shirt. I wrote a cool song about it, about how being a woman on the road is not just cool and safe. Sometimes you trust someone and they let you down, and you think "alright, I'm out of here," but you don't have a car and you're stuck nowhere in the middle of the desert without a bus or a train. But I got out of there eventually. 😊

"All About Jazz" talks about your spirit-of-the-moment concept for your "One Woman Band" album – what did they mean by that?

Well with the pandemic going on and knowing that the live music industry was totally falling apart, it was a big struggle to put a whole band together and put them in the studio to practice, so "One Woman Band" was my answer to that. Now I'm touring by myself and, like I said before, carrying all my equipment and suitcases from hotel to hotel doing the one-woman band thing.

Sounds like hard work...

Yeah, it's always hard work. Everything is hard work in life if you want to succeed and get somewhere. There's hardly any agencies booking tours right now, so I had to make it happen myself and book my own gigs and hotels and stuff.

"I have to admit I'm something of a perfectionist"

Who worked with you on your "Last Minute Packer" and "Meet You Down The Road" videos?

I had two of my Belgian friends helping me out with that. For "Meet You Down The Road," it was Lola Reynaerts who's also a blues fanatic like me. She comes to the United States a lot and last time we went on a road trip through Mississippi just having a good time.

The “Last Minute Packer” video was made in Belgium with another friend of mine. I’m very happy with the videos, although I have to admit I’m something of a perfectionist. There’s not a lot of money for videos in the blues world, but I make the best I can with what I get.

“One Woman Band” is getting great reviews and radio play (#1 in France, #1 in Louisiana, #7 in Australia)...

Yeah, I’m thankful for that. It’s nice to have your work shared and appreciated.

“Getting a good sound out of a slide guitar is something you practice”

You built a stomp box years ago out of a cigar box. When did you decide to introduce the license plate and cigar box guitars into your performances?

I’ve always been messing with it, but I won’t do anything if I’m not sure about it. I want to sound good and getting a good sound out of a slide guitar is something you practice. I’m never totally satisfied with what I’m doing and want to get better. Getting a good sound is hard and a cigar box guitar for me is the same thing – you want it to sound good, not just ok. So that’s why it took me a while to introduce all those beautiful creations into my performances, because I wanted to do it well.



Where did you find them?

The first one was given to me by Ken Pfalzgraf of Paul Mero Junkpile Guitars. He lives in southern California and works in Hollywood. He discovered me at the Juke Joint virtual festival in 2020 and decided to send me a guitar. Since then, he sent another guitar to me in Europe and one to my gig in Chicago last month. The other guy is Brian Davis from Alabama. He also met me through the Juke Joint Festival. He built that guitar and brought it to me personally. So I've been lucky to have music friends and fans giving me such great gifts.

Why does the license plate guitar features on the cover of "One Woman Band"?

Well because it looks so good! That's the one I wrote Espiritu Papago on about the desert in Arizona, which is my personal favorite song of the album.

Have you also started planning for after the "One Woman Band" tour?

I will keep touring as a One Woman Band for this year, until things get better. Then I would love to have a band join me and play all my original songs, my new ones and the ones from my previous albums. The next project will be to record an album in Chicago for 2022, but, who knows, plans always can change! ☺ ■

<https://www.ghaliavolt.com>

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

<https://www.instagram.com/ghaliavolt/>

<https://www.youtube.com/ghaliavoltmusic>

Builders mentioned:

Paul Mero Junkpile Guitars: <https://www.facebook.com/kpcigarboxguitars>

Brian Davis: <https://www.facebook.com/brian.davis.7777>





**WornWood Guitars,
Belgium**

Made to be played!

Alessandro Cesale, WornWood Guitars, Brussels, Belgium

I feel lucky to live in Brussels as the music scene is pretty active (at least before COVID came along), and there are a good number of bars and clubs regularly hosting open mic and jam sessions. Although I have never played in a blues band, blues music has always been part of my background. I have listened to a lot of Texas and Chicago blues, but it was only by embracing cigar box guitars that I went back to the very roots and learned about the great Delta masters we all love!

I grew up in the Piedmont region of Italy in a small village in the Alps. I picked up my first guitar when I was 14 and, since many of my friends played instruments, it was quite easy to join a punk rock band and keep myself busy with music until I decided to move to Brussels back in 2006. There I was lucky enough to meet a friend and songwriter who wanted to put together a band...well, the story was a bit more complicated, but it was time to get the dust out of my acoustic guitar and play some folk music. We ended up playing gigs together for many years in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and a mini-tour in Italy in the summer of 2014.

I discovered cigar box guitars in 2016 after having seen Justin Johnson playing a weird square guitar on YouTube. I didn't know anything about CBGs before that moment, but I was blown away and I couldn't



believe what this guy could do with just three strings...but well, after all he was Justin Johnson! Right after that, I started compulsively searching on the internet for any kind of information about this rudimentary, yet beautiful instrument and decided to try to build one for myself!

Actually, the idea of building an electric guitar was in my mind since I was a teenager, but I never dared, the whole thing was too intimidating...if you think about it – shaping the body, installing the truss rod, carving the neck, soldering electronics, setting up the instrument properly and so on requires some knowledge and a good set of skills. Also, at that time, access to information was not as easy as it is nowadays...internet, blogs and free instructional videos on YouTube came only later as well as online shopping and the possibility to source parts from basically all around the world.

“I couldn’t believe what this guy could do with just three strings”

So, when I discovered that a simple wooden box could have such a mojo, building an instrument seemed suddenly more approachable and I gave it a shot! At the beginning I didn’t have any hand or power tools, so I paid a six-month subscription to a FabLab here in Brussels where I could have access to a workbench and some power tools (and a bit of training on how to keep your fingers safe!).



The first four guitars I built at the FabLab were quite rough and basic...for some reason it was not easy to source actual cigar boxes and upcycle them, so I had to build my own boxes out of oak and plywood. Also, the necks were quite thick and definitely too square; however, these first guitars made me soon realize that this was not just a passing hobby, but a veritable passion worth investing some more money!

The turning point was when I set up my own space in my basement and bought proper tools (I mean luthier tools like fret-crowning files, nut files, a notched straight edge, fret rocker and so on...). I started building jigs and templates to help me gain more accuracy with some steps in the building process, and there was a huge leap in both the craftsmanship and the quality of the materials I used.

“This was not just a passing hobby, but a veritable passion”

From that moment I started using more “noble” woods that you would normally find in regular guitars such as mahogany, maple and rosewood, but also some exotic woods such as purpleheart, pau ferro and wenge. Also, when I could not score quarter sawn blanks, I started playing with laminated necks to give more strength and stability by mirroring grain patterns. Furthermore, to improve the playability, I started tapering my necks to give players additional feeling and comfort.



A couple of years ago I started building solid body tenor guitars with a 24.75" scale, tuned in open G. In my mind I like to consider them as an extension of a cigar box guitar, even if they don't have that much in common besides the number of strings and the tuning. One of my goals is to create guitars for touring musicians to take and display on stage. In between projects, I have also built a couple of guitars for myself and a bass guitar with a gorgeous seven-piece laminated neck that I gave to my brother. All this helped me to build up skills that translate into my CBG builds.

“One of my goals is to create guitars for touring musicians to take and display on stage”

I don't really have a CBG “signature” model; each build is unique in its dimensions, materials and details. The only thing they might have in common are the headstock shapes and the f-hole design; so I guess my guitars are not immediately recognizable unless you see my “W” logo on the headstock. I tend to prefer humbucker pickups to single coils or piezos; I like experimenting and this led me to build a couple of hybrid CBGs with both magnetic pickups and under-saddle piezos powered by a preamp. I believe this gives great versatility to the instrument as it allows the musician to go via a 3-way switch from the authentic and “basic” sound of the piezo to a “beefier” sound of a humbucker.



Also in my builds, I am trying to use veneer as much as I can. I normally place black/white/black or white/black/white 1.5 mm veneer sheets sandwiched between the necks and the fretboards, or as a contour around the control plates. Also, I tend to recess the knobs into the body, especially when I place the controls on the side of the box and use chrome dome knobs (which are taller than those strato-style plastic knobs). I think this not only makes the instrument more proportioned and aesthetically pleasing, but also makes it more durable as the knobs are not too exposed.

So I guess you could say that the use of veneer and recessed control cavities are somehow my signature! All my builds also come with a bespoke wooden hard case lined inside with cork. With their rustic look, I think the cases are not only great to protect the guitars during shipping, but also serve to give their new owners the “whole experience” of a handmade root instrument.

“I want my guitars to be used and get worn out!”

To me, building guitars is somewhat like therapy...I normally don't work on commission because I consider building instruments a deep-rooted passion more than a hobby and I believe it should stay like this. I am afraid that having emails going back and forth to understand what customers want and deadlines to meet would take away the pleasure and turn it into more like a second job. Also, I like the creative process and prefer to be free to do what I want and put my work on Reverb or eBay and see what happens!



I have nonetheless been lucky enough to sell some of my builds to performing musicians, mainly in Belgium and France. My very first two customers were Leo Fuster, a good friend of mine and a multi-instrumentalist (who showed me that CBGs are not only about blues music) and Juju Vagabond, a talented singer/songwriter and guitarist with many musical projects under her belt.

A couple of years ago, one of my first solid body tenor guitars went to David Koczij, another artist involved in some interesting projects and, more recently, a tele-style tenor guitar went to Gary O' Slide, a French guitarist creating dreamy western/bluesy atmospheres with his slide style...I am grateful to all of them and I hope to continue selling to more artists because there is no bigger reward than seeing the instrument you built in the hands of a musician. After

all, I called my brand "WornWood" because I want my guitars to be used and get worn out!

My latest build was a three-string CBG with purpleheart bindings and a lot of black/white/black veneer in it. I have never put so much time into a build like this one, but I guess you can tell from the details. Also, I mounted my first hand-wounded custom pickup in that guitar – a three-pole pickup made out of purpleheart to match the fretboard and the bridge. Building pickups was a new world compared to woodworking – a new learning curve that started from building my own winding machine out of recycled parts to understanding magnets, wires, the number of winds and how the interaction among all this affects the output...I have to say that I was pretty pleased with my first pickup and there will definitely be more in the future!



I guess that to be considered a complete roots blues instruments builder you must have a license plate CBG in your curricula, so, I have recently built one featuring a vintage 1941 Illinois license plate that deserved something better than to be just hung on a wall! A cool detail is the ebony block where the strap button is anchored that I outlined in the shape of Illinois. This guitar is a nice addition to the dog-bowl resonators and lid resonators I have built in the past.

In the near future, I plan to build a couple of six-string CBGs and three solid-body tenor guitars based on the LesPaul Junior DC shape; I already have three walnut blanks that my father milled more than 20 years ago waiting for me to pick up in my hometown in Italy. After having lived abroad for about 15 years, using this unique timber from my backyard makes me feel more “responsible” about building the best instrument I can since I can’t just go and buy a new blank if I screw, something up! Stay tuned! 😊 ■

<https://www.facebook.com/WornWoodGuitars>
<https://www.instagram.com/WornWoodGuitars>



Artists mentioned:
Leo Fuster: <https://vimeo.com/256675009>
Juju Vagabond: <https://jujuvagabond.bandcamp.com>
David Koczij: <https://www.facebook.com/davidkoczij>
Gary O' Slide: <https://garyoslide.wixsite.com/garyoslidesite>

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie, is playing a light-colored acoustic guitar on a stage. He is looking upwards and to the right. The stage is lit with warm, reddish-orange lights. In the background, there are several large amplifiers. One of the amplifiers has a logo that says "TRUE SOUTH".

Brett Gardner, USA

Photo: Tom Dellinger

Sounds like garbage

Interview Brett Gardner, New Orleans, USA

Down in New Orleans, I've been focused on the Cigar Box Serenaders for the last four years. The repertoire covers a wide range of music that inspires me: Thelonious Monk, The Meters, Louis Armstrong, Danny Barker. I perform the melodies and improvise on cigar box guitars and canjos. The bass looks like a double bass but is made out of a dresser drawer and has three strings. The drum set is made from the ground up using all upcycled and salvaged materials: a five gallon jug, beads, pots and pans, a storage crate, an HVAC pipe flattened into a cymbal, and more.

CBGR: Brett, you grew up in Florida and the first band you played in was called the Pink Dinos?

Brett Gardner: Ah, yes, those were the days! Much simpler times. In sixth grade band class, I started my musical journey with the alto saxophone, which I thought was the coolest band instrument. That year, I also asked my parents for an electric guitar (even cooler) and I practiced everyday in my room after school. In seventh grade, I finally got the courage to bring the guitar to school. My friends and I started a band and we named it the Pink Dinos. At the height of our modest success, we performed songs by MxPx, Weezer, and Blink 182 at a school party in the cafeteria to celebrate the end of a week of standardized testing. It was thrilling. I had my first taste of playing electric guitar through a distortion pedal and the rest is history!

Now you're based in New Orleans...

Yes, flash forward 19 years and I currently have made New Orleans my home. I am truly blessed to have the opportunity to make learning, discovering and performing the music of this city my full-time job. My time here is spent playing guitar and banjo, building homemade instruments, and promoting my upcycled musical instrument band, the Cigar Box Serenaders.

You were an award-winning classical guitarist in your school days...

After middle school, I chose to attend Howard W. Blake High School, a public magnet school with a focus on the arts. To my 14-year-old self, all that mattered was spending a quarter of my school day in guitar class. I had some great times at that school. For four years, I studied the classical guitar repertoire under the direction of John Parris.

During my senior year, I competed in the American String Teachers Association guitar competition, won the Florida state round and had the honor to be chosen to compete in the National Championships. I traveled to Detroit, saw snow for the first time and performed pieces by J. S. Bach, Agustín Barrios, and Fernando Sor. I learned so much about expression, efficiency and performance preparation. In those high-school years, I also studied jazz guitar and theory with Geoff Caputo as well as



classical guitar with Thomas Coffey. Also, shout out to my parents Penny and Tim for supplementing my passion with access to lessons and instruments.

Today, as a master of many different genres, how would you best describe your Americana “groove” music?

I’m flattered to be called a master of *any* genre and instead consider myself a lifelong student of music and sound. When it came time to describe the style of music that my band plays, I couldn’t quite put my finger on one term. We play music from many different genres but we always aim to groove. That was it! Groove is what links everything in our repertoire. The rhythm, feel and pulse of the music all contribute to our groove, but the term groove also holds a deeper meaning. We are heavily

influenced and pay homage to many styles of Black American Music: swing, blues, funk, traditional New Orleans music, and rock and roll. These styles of music are deeply connected to the culture and tradition of the people who created them. We are traversing our musical landscape on paths well traveled by many before us.

Clearly influenced by music from other cultures as well?

I have a great curiosity for music of other cultures although I have merely scratched the surface for now. In particular, I’m fascinated by the interconnectedness of specific rhythmic patterns that define grooves around the world. There is an evolution of rhythm that connects everything from the drumming of West Africa to the clave patterns of Cuba to the

tambourine of New Orleans. As an upcycled musical instrument builder, there is a universe of knowledge in the designs of musical instruments from around the globe. If you are ever in Phoenix, AZ, you must visit the MIM: Musical Instrument Museum. There are 15,000 musical instruments from over 200 countries that paint a very clear picture of the depth and breadth of human ingenuity and resourcefulness. It's easy to take modern musical instruments for granted.

Eyedeas – “The Many Faces Of Oliver Hart”
Duke Ellington – “Far East Suite”
Andrew Bird – “Break It Yourself”
Tom Waits – “Blood Money”
Bill Evans & Jim Hall – “Undercurrent”
Jaylib – “Champion Sound”
Five Iron Frenzy – “Proof The Youth Are Revolting”
Danny Barker – “The Fabulous Banjo of Danny Barker”

So who are your favorite musicians, or is the list too long?

The list is long so I will list of few of my favorite albums:

Wes Montgomery – “The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery”

Vijay Iyer – “Historicity”

“It’s easy to take modern musical instruments for granted”



You graduated university with a Physics degree and won the Gunter Schwarz Memorial Scholar award in 2011. What's so special about this award?

After high school, I attended the Florida State University to study physics. Although I continued to play and study guitar, my studies in math and science took precedence for a few years. In the FSU physics department, The Günter Schwarz Memorial Scholar award is given to a student who also significantly participates in the arts and music. Günter Schwarz was studying to be a musician until the German government forced him to study physics because of his aptitude for science. It was an honor to be recognized for this award and I'm grateful to have had the freedom to ultimately choose to be a musician for my career.

"I'm grateful to have had the freedom to ultimately choose to be a musician"

After graduating, you founded the Trashtronauts, playing "found sounds" on instruments you still build from repurposed materials?

After graduating, I once again had a change of heart and doubled down on a life in music. This meant paying my rent with music, buying my food with music, and connecting with new people and places with music. It was exhilarating and every moment was new. As I was taking it all in, I was also formulating a new concept for myself. My goal was to combine the pillars of music,

physics, sustainability and community into a program called Trashtronauts. I remember sitting on my couch, dreaming about teaching someone to build an instrument out of repurposed materials and then learn to play it with their neighbors. My mind said "eureka!" At that moment, a bird flew into my living room through an open door and flew around in circles. I took that as a sign and the rest is history.

"It's a compliment to say it sounded like garbage"

I began learning to build and play instruments out of upcycled materials: fishing line canjos, bottle xylophones, rice shakers, a washtub bass. I recruited my friends to play them and demonstrate their potential at local conferences and marches promoting sustainability. I hosted weekly jam sessions at a park where members of the community could play together and explore these unorthodox instruments. It's a compliment to say it "sounded like garbage."

You'd remember the Paraguay Landfill Harmonic orchestra?

Absolutely. The first documentary came out the same year I started experimenting with homemade instruments. Their instruments were immaculate, despite being made from objects destined to a landfill. If you make it out to the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, you will see some of these instruments in person. They are amazing.

The first “tenet of Trashtronaut philosophy” states “A musical instrument is not defined by what it is, but how it is used” – can you elaborate a bit on that?

My background in physics inspired me to define the Trashtronaut philosophy with succinct language. I wanted to boil down all these ideas and see what was left. After all, the simplest explanation is usually the right one. After countless nights of musings, I formulated the Four Tenets. The first Tenet states that “a musical instrument is not defined by what it is, but how it is used.” Here, we boil an instrument down to its function and intent of use.

“...a musical instrument is not defined by what it is, but how it is used”

Simply, an object becomes a musical instrument the moment a human uses it to create music! It is so simple. Under this paradigm, everything around you becomes a potential musical instrument. Remove your shoelace, stretch it up to your ear and pluck it. That is such a magical sound and you always have it with you. Vibrating a string to create sound waves is the exact same mechanism that creates the sounds of guitars, violins, harps, and pianos!

And the other three tenets?

In their entirety they are:
(1) A musical instrument is not defined by what it is, but how it is used.



- (2) Every individual inherently possesses an ability to play music.
- (3) Collectively, playing music together is a powerful means of unification.
- (4) Individually, playing music is a powerful means of transformation and healing.

I believe these tenets to be generally and especially true for all humans. In defining them, I wanted to account for the entire human experience: externally and internally, objectively and subjectively, individually and collectively. Enough philosophy, let's talk cigar box guitars!

"The Drone-O-Mode is my 'poor man's sitar'"

You make CBGs, tea box fiddles, drum kits out of pot lids and other junk, canjos for kids, bottlenecks, wind chimes, door harps and more. What's a "Drone-O-Mode"?

The Drone-O-Mode is my "poor man's sitar." It is a three string cigar box guitar that features two drone strings and moveable frets and was born out of my curiosity to explore Eastern tuning systems and intervals. I was reading a book about the scales used in classical Indian music and by Greek philosophers like Pythagoras. In the West, we divide our musical octave into 12 notes using a tuning system called "equal temperament" (think pianos keys and guitar frets). On these instruments, these notes are more or less fixed and we read and write music using these 12 note divisions too. In other cultures, the musical scales are derived differently.





I needed an instrument where I could essentially “move the frets.” I wrapped zip ties around a drum stick and attached that to a cigar box guitar and the Drone-O-Mode was born! The zip ties move up and down perfectly and an infinite number of scales can be formed, so that all of the “in between” notes were now accessible.

And a “Pipepraphone”?

The Pipepraphone is made from salvaged materials and modeled after the vibraphone. The Pipepraphone has 25 keys made from different lengths of electrical conduit piping and shower curtain rods that make up a 2-octave chromatic scale. The instrument is played using mallets. Each key has its own resonator (a LaCroix aluminum can) which amplifies and sustains the vibration of the pipe. Like a vibraphone or piano, there is a dampening system which

allows the player to let the keys ring out or sound short. This instrument is absolutely magical to play. It’s made from stuff that literally makes up landfills, but sometimes, if all the conditions are just right, these materials can make the most harmonious sounds.

First, each pipe is cut to its rough, approximate pitch and then a bench grinder is used to fine tune it to its exact pitch. Next, each aluminum can is cut and tuned to the perfect length so that it resonates with and amplifies the sound waves of its respective pipe. While I was cutting the last of the pipes, I remember walking past a construction site dumpster and finding over 20 feet of EMT piping. I dragged all of it home and it became the last pieces of the Pipepraphone puzzle. This instrument will be featured on my band’s upcoming album “Monk On Junk”.

The “Stampourine”?

The Stampourine is a tap board which has essentially a foot activated tambourine built into the top of it. A few years ago, my roommate approached me about designing some creative surfaces for tap dancers to play on. We experimented with a few things: sand, pots, pans, and jingles. As long as I can remember, I have collected orphaned tambourine jingles off of stages and this was finally my opportunity to give them a new purpose. In true Trashtronaut fashion, I built the first Stampourine using jingles, flattened HVAC pipe, zip ties, and salvaged plywood. You can see the Stampourine brought to life by tap dancer Kimmie Allen on footage from our performance at the 2020 Samantha Fish Cigar Box Guitar Fest on Youtube.



“I feel most alive when I pick up the cigar box guitar and improvise”

But your main homemade instrument is the cigar box guitar?

Yes indeed. In many ways, it feels like my main instrument in general. I feel most alive when I pick up the cigar box guitar and improvise. When you play these homemade instruments, you have to make compromises. For example, a six-string guitar player who sits down with a CBG in Chicago tuning (DGBE) is immediately forced out of their comfort zone. With the absence to two strings, the chord shapes are more limited, the licks you practice no longer work, the string spacing / action / scale length is not the same.

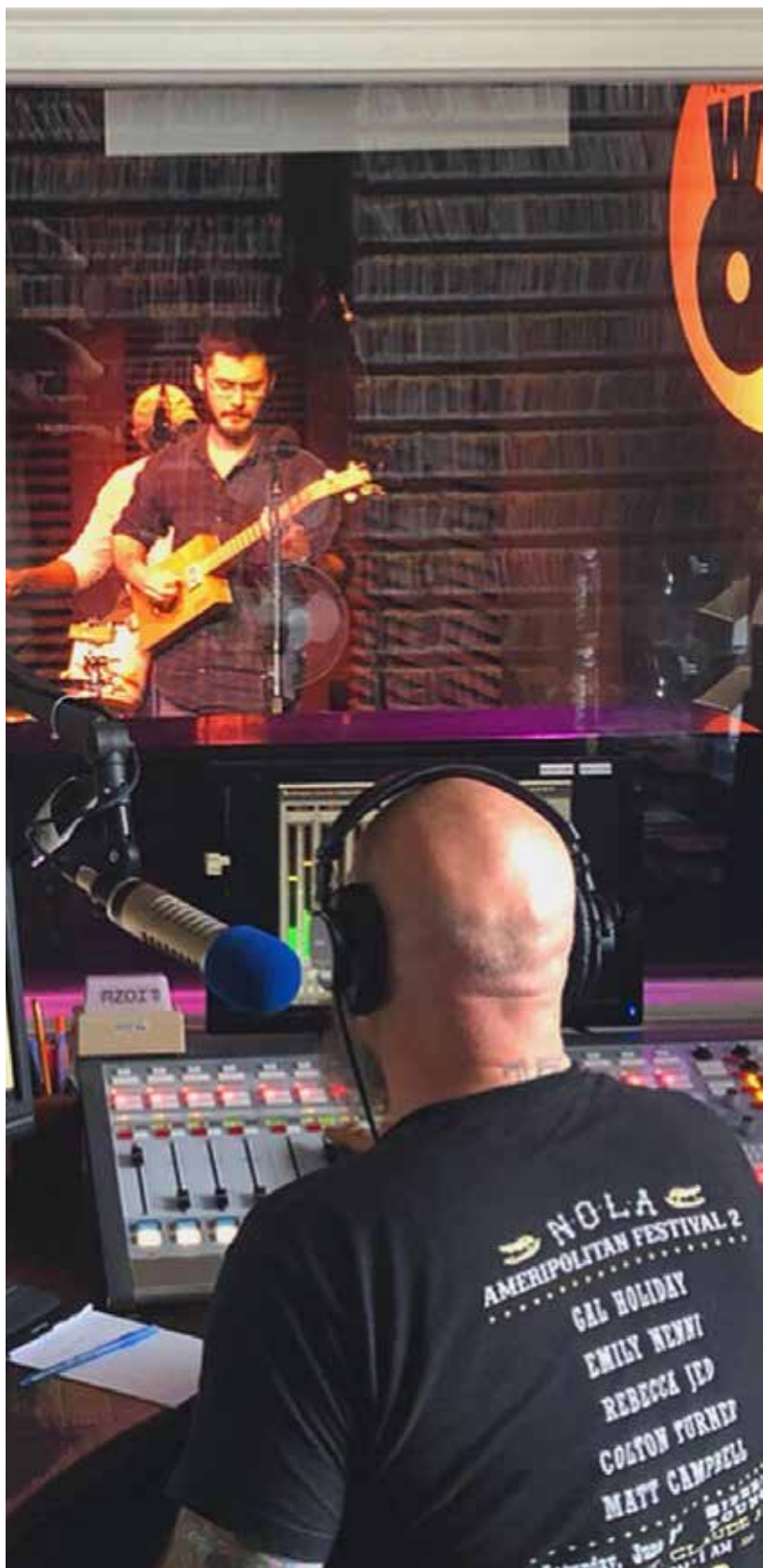


At first, it feels like you are held back from what you want to play. But when you dig deep into the philosophy of it, you find that maybe there are actually NO compromises – that instead, having muscle memory and memorized licks on your instrument was compromising your freedom in each moment while improvising. The limitations of unconventional homemade instruments can guide me to play music that is more authentic. Of course, this is only sometimes the case.

“The limitations of unconventional homemade instruments can guide me to play music that is more authentic”

What happened to that video of you playing Django Reinhardt on a three-string CBG?

That video was recorded at a very special time for me. For the first time ever I was recognized as a cigar box guitar player and builder, and by none other than the King Of Cigar Box guitars, Shane Speal. I remember meeting Shane Speal outside the Festival on Frenchmen Street in 2017. I showed him my newly built Drone-O-Mode that I was entering into the homemade instrument building contest. He said “we have a lot to talk about, come on!” The rest is history. It has been



an honor to work with Shane as well as Ben “Gitty” Baker of C. B. Gitty whenever the opportunities present themselves. The video is currently unlisted on YouTube, but can be found at Cigar Box Nation’s article *Three Strings of Django Fury: Brett Gardner’s Gypsy Jazz Cigar Box Guitar*.* The band I was playing with at the time was *the New Orleans Swinging Gypsies*.

Your band in New Orleans is the Cigar Box Serenaders...

Down in New Orleans, I’ve been focused on the Cigar Box Serenaders for the last four years. We play a wide variety of the music we love: The Meters, Louis Armstrong, Danny Barker, Thelonious Monk. I perform on cigar box guitars and canjos. The bass is based on a double bass but is made out of

* <https://cigarboxnation.com/m/discussion?id=2592684%3ATopic%3A2778600>

a dresser drawer and has three strings. The drum set is made from the ground up with all upcycled and salvaged materials: a five gallon jug, beads, pots and pans, a storage crate, an HVAC pipe flattened into a cymbal, and more. The bass drum pedal is made from scrap wood, a tennis ball, PVC pipe, a spring and a car engine belt. I am grateful to be surrounded by so many amazing musicians in this city who know exactly how to bring these instruments to life.

Our first album is titled “Cigar Box Serenaders” and features a Brazilian choro piece, Louis Armstrong’s solo on “Stardust” performed on a CBG with a bottleneck slide, a Drone-O-Mode feature inspired by Indian classical music, and a Prelude to a Bach Cello Suite. The Prelude was originally written for the cello which has strings tuned in fifths so I found it fitting to perform this one on a tin canjo tuned in fifths that I built



Left to right: Barnaby Gold, Cassidy Holden and Brett Gardner

to imitate the four string tenor banjo used in New Orleans music. Our second studio album “Monk On Junk” is on it’s way and as you might have guessed, is a tribute to the great Black American composer and pianist Thelonious Monk.

This was our fourth year performing at the Samantha Fish Cigar Box Guitar Fest (previously known as the New Orleans Cigar Box Guitar Festival). The promoters Collins and Kathy Kirby and Paige and Will Davis have been doing amazing work here growing this event into one of the best showcases of homemade musical instrument performances. This year, the show was hosted virtually, but we cannot wait to return to the live stage next year! We hope to see you there!” ■





THE **DUSK**
BROTHERS
SHOW

Times change...

Interview Dusk Brothers Graeme (Gray) and Iain (E) Moncrieff, Bristol, United Kingdom

Blues as a genre is meant to leave you feeling emotionally broken and bruised and the Dusk Brothers put your soul through a bar brawl...they are cowboy-hatted shamans capable of eliciting a fierce and frenzied reaction in their listeners and are just as capable if not more so of replicating that magic live...it's easy for me to make the promise that this band is going global...
– Matt Miles, whatculture.com

CBGR: Guys, 20 years ago your band “Halo” had a record deal with Sony*. Remember when artists made more money from album sales and less from touring?

Gray: Yeah things were certainly very different back then. I'm not sure if artists made less from touring, but there was certainly more money in record sales. I think the record companies generally saw the lion's share of that though.

What did musicians do before YouTube, Facebook and Instagram?

Gray: We were pretty naive to the whole thing back in those days. For us, the band's job was mainly to write music and play shows. Other people dealt with everything else. We did gigs, radio, TV, magazine and fanzine interviews, but all of those things are still around these days too, there are just more ways to reach people now.

* Read the full story in the October 2017 issue of CBG Review under <https://www.cbgreview.com/back-issues>

With streaming services, people don't own their music anymore, but just pay for access...is that good or bad?

Gray - If you invest in a specific record, particularly if you have a physical item like a CD that you then own, I think you feel more of an attachment to that piece of art and that adds a certain value that isn't there when you have a huge world of digital music right there at your fingertips.

“People can listen to and enjoy more than ever what they like”

Are people getting inundated with too much music these days?

E: Nah, we don't think that way at all about it. People can listen to and enjoy more than ever what they like.

Are they getting too lazy to search for new music?

E: I would say percentage-wise it's about the same as it ever was.

Are there too many new musicians and songs out there from all over the world?

E: There has always been a vast amount of music and musicians....its probably more of a shame that some incredible stuff that was around before online music platforms existed is gone forever without many people getting a chance to hear it.

So a lot of good music gets lost or forgotten?

E: A lot of great music gets lost and forgotten, but that's not because there's too much music.

“...the issues are the same as they've always been; we just have a different landscape now”

Gray: It's easier than ever now for artists to get their music on platforms where it's accessible to almost anyone on the planet with internet access. The challenge for musicians is in getting people to actually listen to their music. It can be extremely difficult to stand out and be noticed among the hundreds of artists that any individual sees or hears in their day-to-day life, which means great music can go under the radar and be discovered only by a very small number of people. Again, the issues are the same as they've always been; we just have a different landscape now.



Are a lot of musicians losing their individuality because the competition is coming out with the same kind of songs all over the world?

Gray: For artists operating under their own steam, it's totally their choice. The more unique, the better in our opinion, but people also love to emulate their own favourite artists and that's fine. For larger signed artists there is definitely pressure for homogenization to be applied by record companies and mainstream media, and that seems to be increasing...but the ones who stand out for whatever reason will always make the biggest impact.

“...it's always been a fast-paced industry”

Do you think listeners lose interest faster these days?

E: No, it's always been a fast-paced industry. Very few people have made more than a couple of successful records.

Gray: On a song-by-song basis, people now have more control over what they listen to. The days when people had to fast-forward a cassette tape or move the needle on a vinyl record are long gone. If a song doesn't grab someone's attention quickly, they can easily skip to the next track. Even radio stations can be easily switched with the press of a button or the click of a mouse, rather than having to search through frequencies using a dial. Particularly with more mainstream music, there is now consideration for this in the way music is being produced and written.



Did you ever think you would face something as disruptive as a global pandemic?

E: Well we definitely didn't see it coming. It's been a shocker of a year!

Virtual interactive shows from the Rum Shack – what are the pros and cons?

Gray: The pros are that we can broadcast from our own studio under our own terms and we don't need to transport our gear anywhere or rely on anyone else. We've been very lucky with the rules allowing professional musicians to continue streaming during the second lockdown and we're fortunate that we only need the two of us to make these shows happen. We appreciate that we've had an advantage in this respect and it's been much harder for many musicians.

The cons are that there's a lot of learning involved in getting the technical side up together. We've had to do it as cheaply as possible, so we're using multiple smartphones instead of dedicated cameras and it's surprising just how complicated it is to get them all working with the software each time.

Even getting the audio to happen is a can of worms, if we unplug something from the PC, settings automatically change, which can be a nightmare when you don't really know how everything works together, which we don't. And our set-up is becoming ever more complicated as we push our boundaries. But, if we didn't do that, we wouldn't be the band we are.



Tell us a bit more about the set-up, especially the “bar guitar”?

E: We built our own streaming PC – that way we could choose the components we wanted and could afford. Plus it’s the Dusk Brothers way! We had no need for a pricey graphics card or the LED lighting you often find in gaming PCs, so there were savings to be made there. Plus if you build it yourself you don’t pay for someone else to do it. It’s actually not that difficult. The hardest part was working out what components to use and getting hold of them. People all over the planet were suddenly working from home and PC components were in high demand and short supply.

The bar guitar was something we built on one of our live streams last year. We screwed a magnetic pickup onto the bar in the Rum Shack and placed a bolt either side to form the nut and bridge. We screwed in three eyelets on one side for the tuners and a small door hinge on the other to act as a tail piece to hold the strings. We strung it up, tuned it and played a song on it. It shows just how easy it is to make a basic stringed instrument. We edited the video and uploaded it on our YouTube channel, you can still watch it there.*

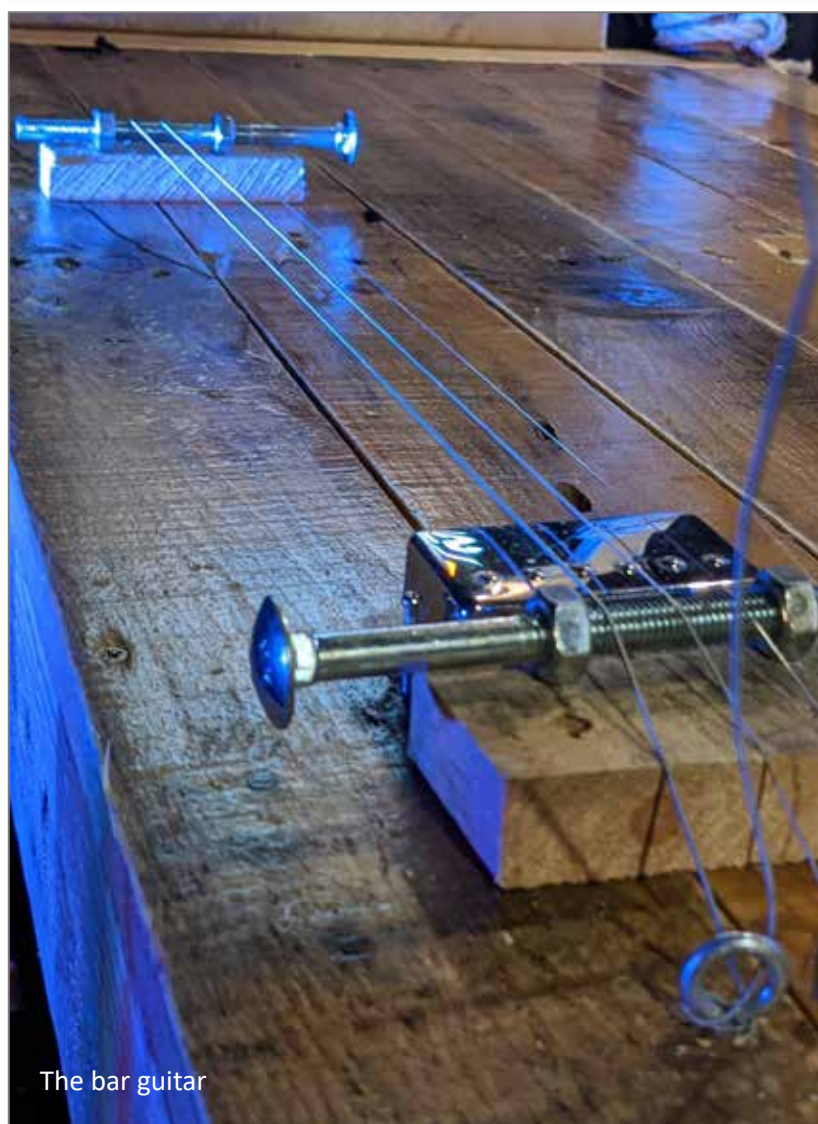
What’s the best way to pull a group of artists together virtually?

Gray: We’ve never tried it, but we’ve seen and participated in virtual festivals and similar events where artists stream from various locations into a Facebook group or event. We featured as part of the Samantha Fish Cigar Box Guitar Festival in March. It had to be a virtual festival this year. We didn’t play live – they streamed

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8ROwSeiddY>



The Rum Shack



The bar guitar

some of our videos. It was an honor to be a part of it and it would be amazing to play there in New Orleans for real. They've kindly asked if we'd be interested in doing exactly that next year, so we'll have to see if we can make that happen.

“The only thing missing was having the live audience”

Last year we were invited by Bristol production company T.H. Collective to be the first musicians to be streamed live from their brand new “T.H. e.Space” studio for virtual events. It was a big production in a huge space and we had the time of our lives, particularly as we'd been locked down for so long and the set had the feel of a proper live gig. The only thing missing was having the live audience in the room with us, but it really was the next best thing.

What do you think lies ahead for the music industry?

Gray: Music is food for the soul and it's always going to be a commodity. The trouble is it's often taken for granted that we can all access it for free, and that includes live music. I think this most affects the musicians who are trying to make the jump to going professional. Many will do low-paid gigs and tours which only just break even or end up costing them more than they make

because they feel they have to do it to build their audience and progress their career. But, again, I think that has always been the case and I'm sure there will continue to be very successful artists and everything in between the extremes too.

“People tune in from all over the planet!”

And for the Dusk Brothers?

Gray: Until the pandemic happened, everything was heading in the right direction. We've made the best of it in transforming the Rum Shack into a fully functioning streaming facility while we've had no gigs. We've learned a lot during this time, we're very critical of everything we do and we always watch our shows afterwards to figure out what we can do better next time. We've come a long way since we started streaming and we reckon our real-life gigs will benefit from what we've learned too. We've also kept the connection going with our fans – in fact we can now interact much more and the folks who tune in to our weekly show always create a fantastic and fun atmosphere.

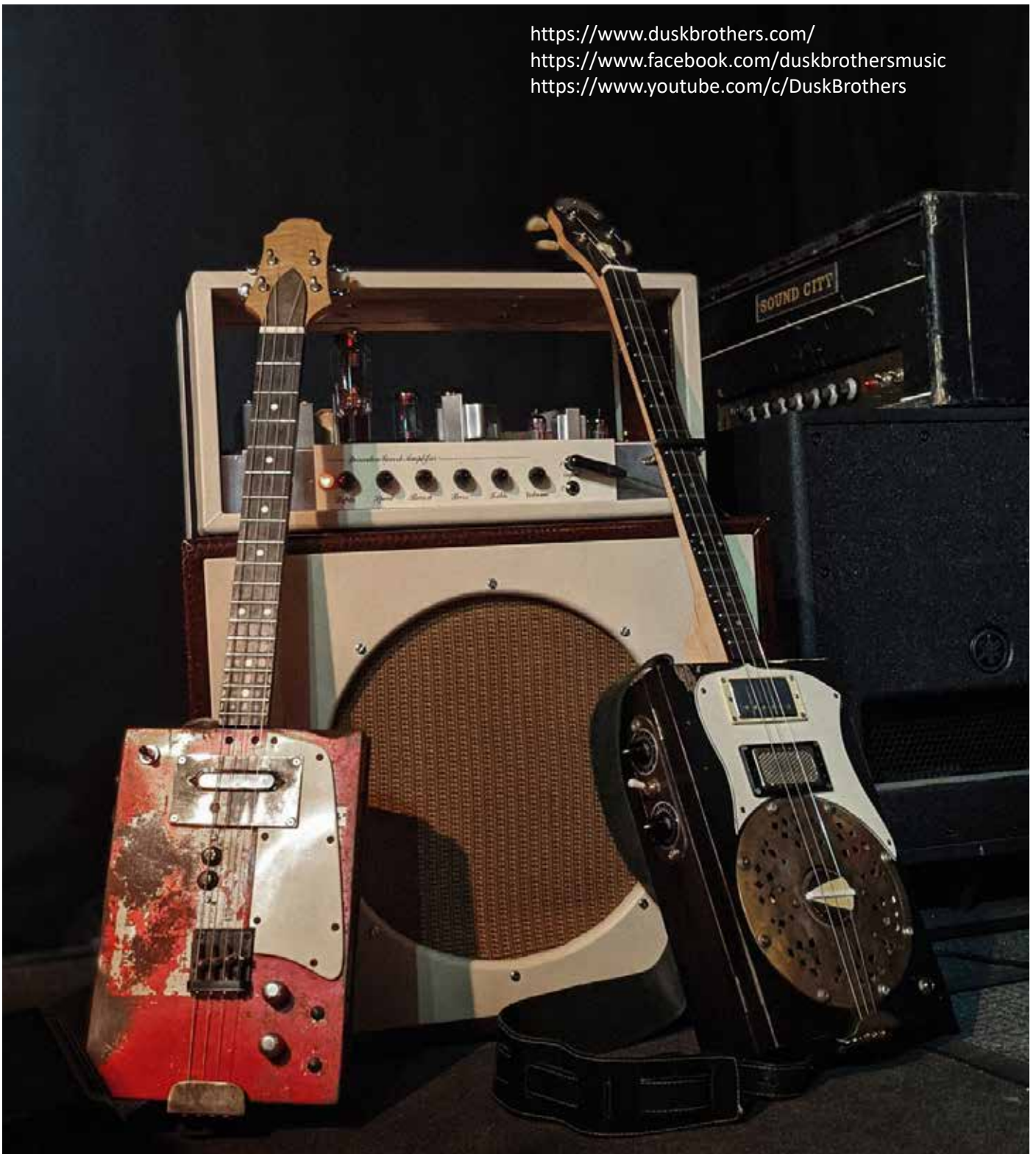
E: We now have a way to give a live Dusk Brothers experience to people who wouldn't be able to come to a show in person, and people tune in from all over the planet! Of course it's not the same as a real gig, but there are pros and cons to both.

So you'll keep the live shows going when the pandemic goes away?

E: Yeah, we enjoy our weekly shows and expect live shows to continue being a very useful tool for us in the future.

Gray: Aside from the lack of gigs, we're now in a stronger position so that once that side of things starts rolling again, we'll definitely benefit from the work we've put in during this period. And we're about to get back in the recording studio, so we'll have new material to release soon. And we can't wait for that. It's been a long time coming! ■

<https://www.duskbrothers.com/>
<https://www.facebook.com/duskbrothersmusic>
<https://www.youtube.com/c/DuskBrothers>





**Haystack banjos
and guitars**

End of the road?

Ray White, Haystack Banjos/Haystack Box Guitars,
Diss, United Kingdom

I was often asked “why banjos and not guitars.” My answer was always “I’m a woodturner, if guitars were round I’d make them too!” Dozens of my banjos are with new owners around the world and I would have carried on just building them but for Facebook! Facebook changed everything. I became aware of cigar box guitars and had to build one...

It’s normally a mix of many things that take you to your eventual destination, but often it’s one thing, or one moment, that sets you on a journey that changes your life. An example of that being my finding a rather nice orange bamboo wind chime that led to my creating a magical tropical garden. That wind chime ended up costing me thousands! 😊

My build journey started in a similar way, with my acquiring an old English Zither banjo. It was very old, in very poor condition, very warped and almost unplayable, but it was cheap. At that time, about 1967, I was living in an attic bedsitter, and that banjo was all I could afford. In an attempt to “improve” it, I decided to put steel strings on it and that was the moment my build story started.

Yes, the added tension caused the instrument to disintegrate. It fell apart! That could have been the end of the story, but it had a very nice brass head hanger assembly, that I couldn’t throw away. I



vowed to create a banjo for it and put it in a box for safekeeping. Since I had no workshop or tools and few skills at that time, it was going have to wait a while. I never dreamt it would be a wait of 42 years!

“...often it’s one thing, or one moment, that sets you on a journey that changes your life”

My early years: my dad was an excellent musician, playing the mouthorgan in the style of Larry Adler. One of the advantages of being older, I was fortunate to enjoy the 60s music explosion as it happened, and I wanted to be part of it very early on. At the age of 12, I wanted to form a band with my close mates. Paul McCartney probably had something to do with my choosing bass guitar. I was left-handed and thought four strings would be easier to play. I was also shy, never wanted attention and probably thought I could hide at the back. Yes, I got my guitar, but never got an amp for it because my parents didn’t know it needed one.

The group never materialized and my experience with the bass left me musically frustrated. So, when I gained my freedom at 16, I bought as many instruments as I could, including a flute, fifes, acoustic guitars, clarinet and the banjo. All were cheap versions, but I was trying to find my place in the world of music. I even joined a trad jazz band, playing clarinet. From then on, my musical addiction fed on the London music scene, festivals, folk clubs, and the amazing musical talent in my home town of Southend on Sea.



The missing years: when I say “missing years,” I’m referring to my build story. They were actually full to overflowing as marriage, two kids, and starting a business became my life. My careers had been mainly woodworking and electronics, and even though electronics offered a better future, I loved creating something from nothing so I chose working with wood. The focus of the business soon became bespoke woodturning, supplying the furniture and building trades.

My relationship with wood has spanned many years, and even though I’ve had the machines to do the work I’ve always got the most pleasure working it by hand, both on the bench and the lathe. With its amazing variety of colors and grains, the astonishing beauty of timber, has always attracted me. Nature’s art is unbeatable and I’ve always tried to work with it.

“No one back then warned me how addictive building these was”

It started in ‘82 and by the early 2000s my turnings were being used all over the world. One day I was gifted a huge lump of lacewood by a retiring customer and I immediately knew what to do with it. It had only waited 42 years, but the banjo brass finally came out of its box. Three years later the banjo was finished and I was over the moon with it. I had only intended to build one, but before I knew it three more were made! No one back then warned me how addictive building these was. I soon had a



foundry casting the brass parts and many banjos followed.

At that time, I was often asked “why banjos and not guitars.” My answer was always “I’m a woodturner, if guitars were round I’d make them too!” Dozens of my banjos are with new owners around the world and I would have carried on just building them but for Facebook! Facebook changed everything. I became aware of cigar box guitars and had to build one. I found one on eBay and ordered it. They were hard to find in the UK.

“I became aware of cigar box guitars and had to build one”

The trouble was that, by the time it arrived, I had seen so many examples that I felt I would just be copying other people’s work, which is not my way. So it went in a drawer and I built my own. Of course it was never going to be just one and before long many were underway. I vowed they would all be quality one-of-a-kind unique instruments. My aim was to make every build a work of art in its own right. After creating about 100 instruments, the ideas for new builds keep filling my head, and, of course, I’ve realized that guitars can be any shape, including round. The cigar box did become a guitar four years later by the way. 😊



We all need encouragement: I was fortunate to have several banjo-playing friends that, having tried my builds, encouraged me to build more, saying they were unique with a sound of their own. I was also lucky enough to be invited to a house concert featuring the Canadian banjo player Leonard Podolak. The organizer knew of my builds and suggested I take a couple along to show Leonard, which of course I did.

The concert was great and Leonard asked to see my builds at the interval. I was expecting a “very nice” and then putting them back in the car, but, to my surprise, he couldn’t put one down and ended up playing it for the whole of the interval. Not only that, he also insisted on ending the concert with that banjo and left me with the parting comment “keep building these!” From that moment on, there was no stopping me. I had the workshop, tools, timber, skills, a burning passion to create them and now confirmation they were worth building.

“The result was a music cabin overflowing with instruments”

The year everything changed: up until the end of 2019, I had been too busy woodturning to create more than eight instruments a year. I had never built to order or advertised them for sale, but they all sold, so I kept building. Then 2020 arrived and everything changed. The woodturning slowed to a standstill, I turned 71, and I finally had to consider retirement.





It was clear that the workshop had to close. The problem was I had dozens of instruments at various stages of construction. I had planned to finish them over several years, but this was an opportunity I couldn't waste and threw myself 100% into my builds. I gave myself a year and worked nine hours a day almost seven days a week month after month. The result was a music cabin overflowing with instruments.

End of the road? Of course I couldn't keep working at that pace and the workshop has just been let go. A kind of retirement had arrived. Everyone that knows me has said "I can't see you retiring!" and of course they are right. I have set up a home workshop with about a dozen builds already underway. My building journey hasn't stopped, just slowed, but now I have more time to play too.

"Now somehow it's different having built my own instruments"

I do get out to play at open mics, etc., and my builds always attract attention.

Building commissions, selling for profit, seeking attention, performing to get notoriety had never been my intention. A line from one of my songs sums it up: "it's just something I've got to do before I die." I've always enjoyed playing and writing my

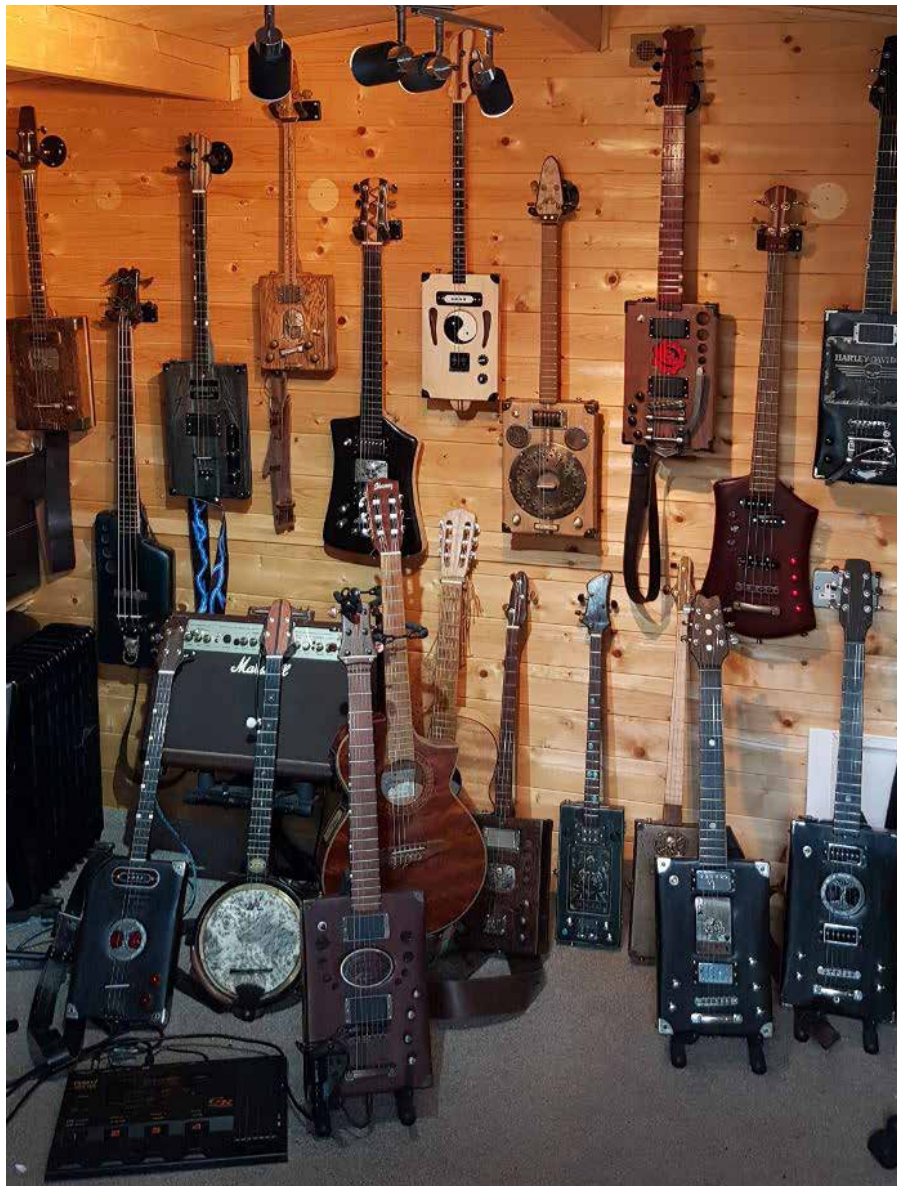


own songs, but shyness has always prevented me from getting in front of a mic. Now somehow it's different having built my own instruments.

It's a small world: the group of people I haven't mentioned are the community of CBG players and builders all around this blue marble of ours. I have made many friends from this amazingly supportive community and it's a privilege to be part of it. Thank you one and all! ■

<https://www.facebook.com/Haystack-Box-Guitars-405320286662720>

<https://www.facebook.com/Haystack-Banjoes-1588971564667161>



Contributors

Ghalia Volt began her musical career as a street musician in Brussels, Belgium and singer in the band Ghalia & the Naphtalines. Her debut album “Voodoo Casino” was released in Europe in 2016, followed by “Let the Demons Out” in 2017 released under the name “Ghalia & Mama’s Boys” in the USA. In 2019, Ghalia performed with local musicians in her next album “Mississippi Blend” before going back to basics with “One Woman Band” in 2021, released in the middle of a global pandemic.



Alessandro Cesale comes from a small village in the Alps in the Piedmont region of Italy. He later moved to Brussels, Belgium. He discovered cigar box guitars in 2016 after seeing Justin Johnson play one on YouTube. For Alessandro, the creative process of building quality guitars is somewhat of a therapy, whereby building instruments is a deep-rooted passion rather than just a hobby. His brand is called “WornWood” because he wants his guitars to be played and worn out by music lovers and artists alike.



Brett Gardner is a guitarist and creative reuse artist living in New Orleans, USA who specializes in performing on musical instruments created from repurposed materials. Brett grew up in Tampa, Florida, where he studied classical guitar and physics in school. After graduating, he founded the Trashtronauts, a group focused on building and playing homemade instruments. Brett currently performs professionally with several bands including his own, the Cigar Box Serenaders.



Since 2015, brothers Graeme (Gray) and Iain (E) Moncrieff have been building their trademark dark swamp blues music from the ground up. The distinctive *Dusk Brothers* sound derives from self-built instruments including box guitars (one of which also functions as a bass), percussive stomp-boxes with foot operated cymbals, various percussion instruments made from anything they can get their hands on, and valve guitar amplifiers built from scratch in their own workshop to their own specifications.



Ray White grew up in Southend-on-Sea in the UK. Today he lives in Diss and has been working with wood for 55 years. In 1982, he started a woodturning business sending products worldwide. Not surprisingly, his fascination for timber and woodturning skills ultimately led Ray 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 unique and a work of art in its own right.



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



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