

CBG REVIEW

A man with a beard and a bandana is playing a guitar. He is wearing a dark jacket and a chain necklace. The background is dark with blue lighting.

July 2020

VAN WOLFEN

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

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Editorial

Key word “versatility”...

Welcome to the July 2020 issue of CBG Review, with another great line-up of performers and builders. Our first interview is with *Van Wolfen's* Micky Wolf in Germany who mixes blues guitar with modern beats and effects to create his own ever-popular unmistakable sound. Since 2016, Micky has been playing and experimenting with cigar box guitars, which he says have opened up a whole new world of music for him.

Trevor Abraham from Chough Guitars in Australia writes how his “insatiable desire to build stuff” and his background in fine arts has resulted in a marvelous range of cigar box guitars, resonator guitars, banjos, ukes and more. His workshop is replete with recycled and native timbers and his interests stretch from balsa wood resonators to replicas of vintage banjolas or just putting a pickup on a slab of wood or even a tree root!

For years now, French guitarist and teacher Jérôme Graille has been turning out one amazing cigar box guitar video after another showing just how versatile three and four-string CBGs can be – blues, rock, heavy metal, movie music – you name it, Jérôme plays it! One of his goals is to create a small CBG and blues guitar community in France. For Jérôme, a cigar box guitar sums up what guitar playing is all about – simplicity, good humor and feeling!

According to Yuri Serebryakov at Lee Custom Shop in Moscow, cigar box guitars still only cater to a select audience in Russia, but you'll see people play them at times in bars, clubs and blues festivals. As a builder, Yuri finds it very satisfying to mix art with a “centuries-old” way of building using whatever materials are available or come to mind. If you ask him, cigar box guitars are a lot of fun and definitely here to stay.

In “Touching bases,” we catch up with old building friends who contributed to CBG Review in 2017 – George Parfitt from Dockyard Guitars in the UK, Rob Wrobel from Rob's Cigar Box Guitars in the USA, and Mikolaj Sikorski from Miku CBGs in Poland. To say the least, they are still going strong – take a look at what they've been up to these last couple of years and be inspired. 😊

Best regards

Huey Ross

Cover photo: Boese Woelfin

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VAN WOLFFEN



Uncharted territory

Interview with Micky Wolf, Hamburg, Germany

Photos by Boese Woelfin

In 2016, a friend called me and asked if he could show me three homemade cigar box guitars. When he came over and I saw what he was talking about, I immediately became a fan! What really appealed to me was the extraordinary sound...with Stratocaster or Les Paul, slide guitar just sounds the way you expect it to. But with each cigar box guitar, every song sounds different and unique.

CBGR: , Micky, how long have you been playing now?

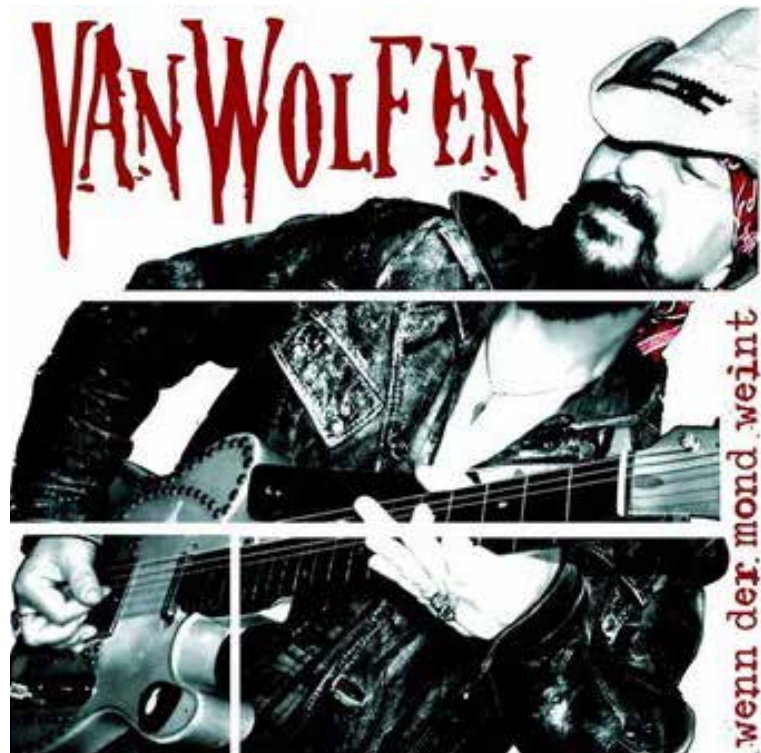
Micky Wolfe: I started quite late, only at the age of 12 – when I heard “Hey Joe” on the radio, I knew I had to learn guitar!

When did you start performing?

Five years later.... I left home at 17 and was lucky to find a professional band that hired me as a guitarist. That was all still in Berlin.

What was the music scene like in Germany when you were younger?

The main difference from today was that there were record companies. You could go to dozens of companies with one of your recordings and if successful you could get advances and promotion and PR budgets. And you'd be played on German radio – today's radio stations often only play releases of major artists. There's also a lot of promotion dollars from the labels floating around.





Micky Wolf and Martin Petersen

Where did you learn to play guitar like you do?

Mostly at home, self-taught without a teacher, copying licks from LPs, and of course lots of practice.

And the big question – which artists influenced you the most?

Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan, J.J. Cale, Ry Cooder, Dave Edmunds, Tony Joe White, Dickey Betts, Derek Trucks (today).

You founded the Van Wolfen Band in 2009 and toured for five years...

Actually it's closer to ten years, always with changing band members, and also solo – I write the songs, record them and then look for great musicians to back me on tour. In 2005 there was a break because I had major

problems with my record company – one of the worst experiences of my career! I was conned and still haven't received any settlement since 2004!

Who are some of the people you've played and performed with?

Once I was in Hamburg at a concert of *Robert Randolph & the Family Band* and one part of the show was where Robert took a guitar to the edge of the stage and held it up to the audience asking who wanted to come on stage and jam with him. I didn't think long and jumped on stage. At first Robert was a little apprehensive, but then we jammed together for ten minutes with his fantastic band. After we finished, he shook my hand and shouted into his mic: "Micky – my man!" that really made my day!

When I first moved to Hamburg, I was playing in four bands at the same time. I also had a lot of guest appearances and studio jobs with people like *Die Ärzte*, *Rammstein*, *Zeltinger*, *Ohrenfeindt* and *Lilli Berlin*. In 2014, I spent three weeks on tour with Southern-rock legend *Molly Hatchett*.

Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top once said you were born in the wrong country!

When *ZZ Top* played in Hamburg in 1986, I was invited to the after-show party because I also had a contract with RCA Recordings. The DJ played some of my music and Billy liked it. When he asked the RCA people whose music it was, they told him I was also at the party. So he came over to pay his respects and said to me, "Hey Micky, you were born in the wrong country".....

Do you think you were born in the wrong country?

Yes! I think Billy was right – if you listen to German Radio you'd understand. ☺

Musically I would prefer living in Texas because a lot of my favorite artists come from there – *Stevie Ray Vaughan*, *Fabulous Thunderbirds*, *Chuck Berry*, *ZZ Top*, *Johnny Winter*, *Albert Collins*, *Jimmie Vaughan*....

When exactly did you start playing cigar box guitars?

In 2016, a friend of mine, Martin Petersen, called me and asked if he could show me three homemade cigar box guitars. When he came over and I saw what he was talking about, I immediately became a fan! What really appealed to me was the extraordinary sound. Since then Martin has built all my guitars.

I mostly play slide/bottleneck and, with Stratocaster or Les Paul, slide guitar just sounds the way you expect it to. But with each cigar box guitar, every song sounds different and unique. Since I'm a sound and studio freak, I immediately saw uncharted musical territory! Today cigar box guitars are a standard part of my performances.



Just how versatile are they?

That's up to you. From the selection of pick-ups to the strings, you have a free choice. I always have three-, four- and classic six-string boxes with me when I perform. When I play "Voodoo Child," for example, on a three-string guitar, the audience is always surprised and gets a big kick out of it.

"I have to feel my audience breathe"

And these days you prefer smaller gigs and festivals?

That's always been the case. I don't really like playing on big stages where the audience is 20 meters away. I have to feel my audience breathe.

What other instruments do you play besides guitar and harmonica?

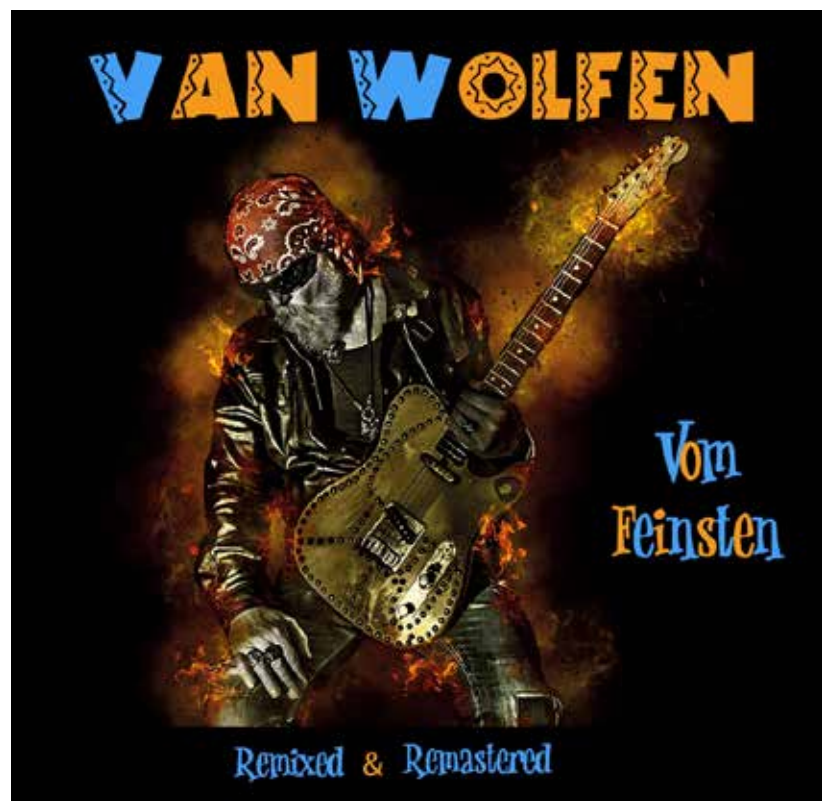
I play bass and am not too bad at drums.

As a master of many music genres – what's your favorite?

That's very hard to say – I like everything that's done with heart and soul. It can be funk (like *Prince*) or even intelligent house music. But rock 'n roll, rockabilly and Texas blues are my favorite kinds of music.

Do you compose a lot of music for film and television?

Yes, that's what pays the rent and is a lot of fun for me. It's why I don't have problems switching styles because I'm constantly faced with new themes and subjects.



How much of your film music is produced with CBGs?

It depends on whether it fits the job, but I just made an entire album for the Munich Intervox music publishing house with cigar box guitar music for film producers.

You produced a new CD this year of your best songs – that must have been quite a trip down memory lane?

There've been three Van Wolfen CDs over the last ten years, from which I selected and partly remixed the ten most popular tracks and included another three unreleased instrumentals. Two of them are live songs that our fans like a lot, "Peter Gunn" and "Ghostriders in the sky." Both were recorded with cigar box guitars and I'm really proud of them!

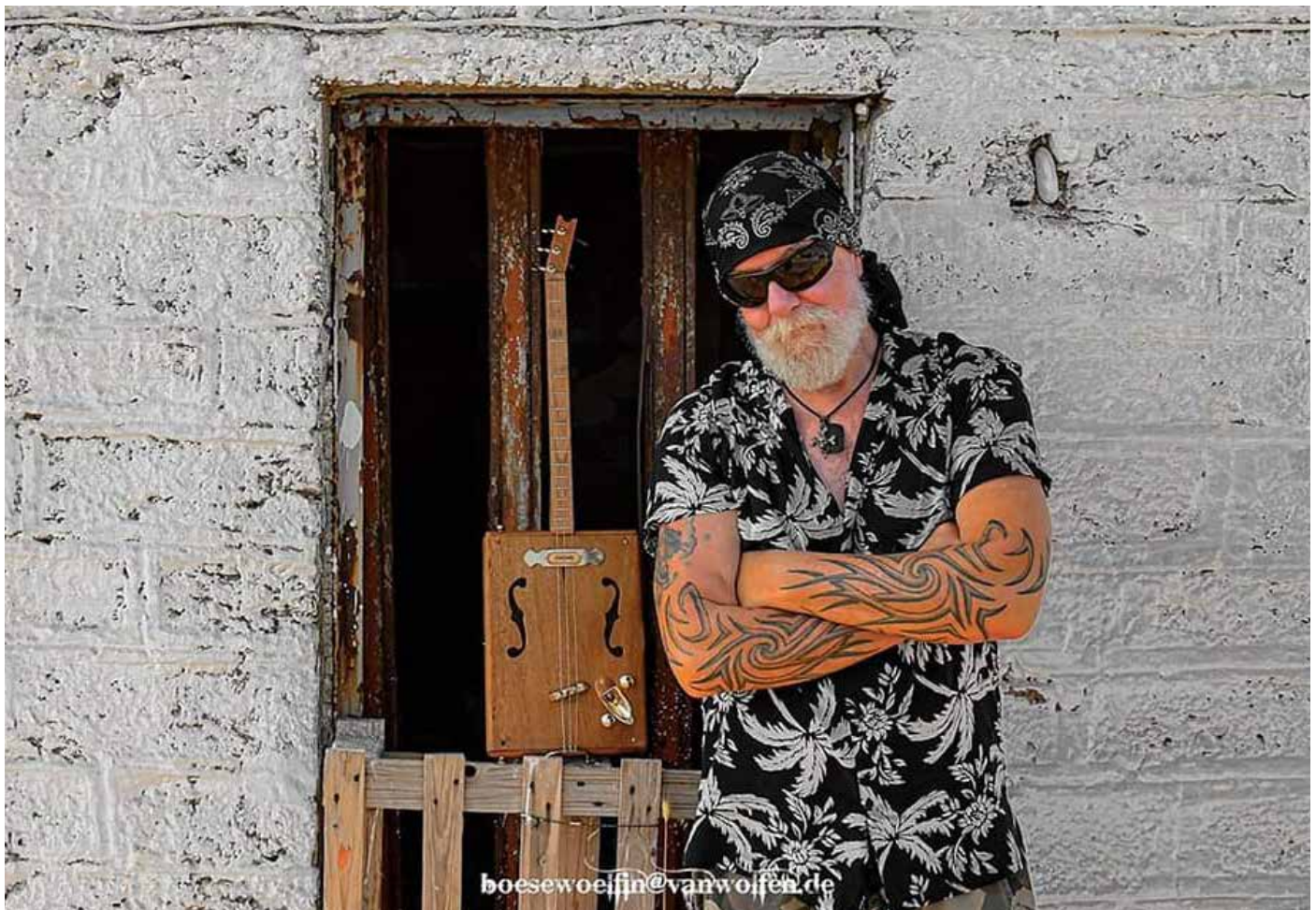
And you had to postpone the tour?

Yes, unfortunately, but there are still the online sales through my record company Sireena Records.

How about an EP with English songs for your overseas fans?

Fortunately, I have a lot of friends in the USA who find the music with the German lyrics quite appealing! ☺ ■

<http://www.vanwolfen.de>
<https://www.facebook.com/wolfsmusik>
<https://www.youtube.com/user/vanwolfen>



Pronounced "chuff"



Chough guitars

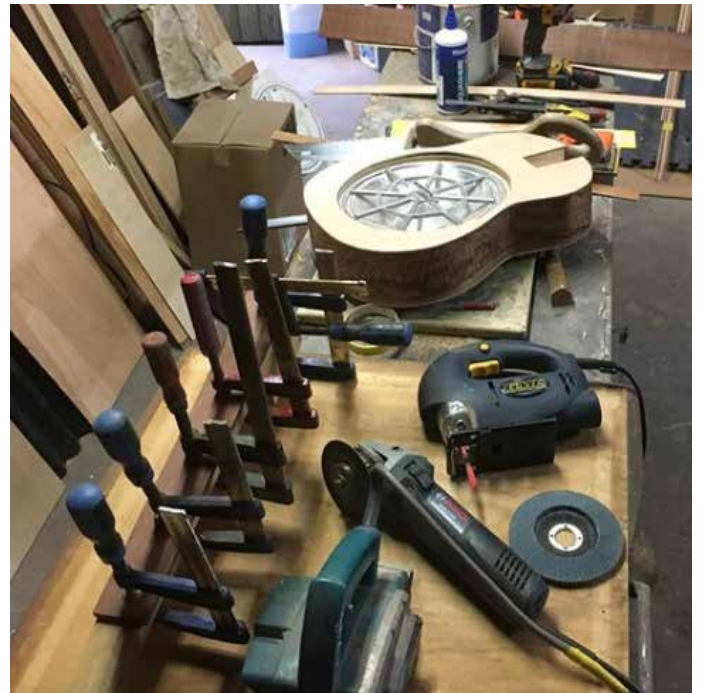
Trevor Abraham, Buninyong, Australia

Photos by Trudy Burney

As we live in the bush, we're surrounded by koalas, wallabies, echidnas and all manner of birds, especially the white-winged choughs (pronounced "chuff"). They wander in and out of the workshop regardless of whether the welder is going or even the angle grinder. They are funny little characters with their own distinct personalities. They're loud, playful and a perfect name for my instruments.

As a young fella I was lucky to have been brought up in Western Victoria near the Merri River and fantastic beaches around the Warrnambool region. To be able to swim, canoe and explore this region was a great way to grow up. My "old man" had a small workshop well equipped with hand tools and there was always something on the go, sometimes to his chagrin. As a young bloke pushing the limits, this meant broken tools and using stuff that was not supposed to be touched. A neighbor had a huge collection of Popular Mechanics magazines that I read cover to cover. So more than one attempt was made to construct musical instruments with no understanding of what I was doing. But an insatiable desire to build stuff was born.

After finishing secondary school, I developed a new fascination for the art world. I completed a Diploma of Fine Art, majoring in painting, but also learned ceramics, printmaking, sculpture and photography. These skills gave me the confidence to really



have a go at anything that required eye/hand co-ordination and I still use these skills 50 years later. I purchased a mandolin from Steve Gilchrist,¹ a fellow student during these university days. Years later I gave it back to Steve as it was the first mandolin he made – I fear it went through the band-saw, but I can relate to that. Student days were rich with live bands performing and lots of impromptu sessions.

Being a naive youth, the desire to paint cars/bikes emerged and that's what we did for some time along with real jobs. After a period of teaching art, the urge to be creative was overwhelming and I started a new career in ceramics. For a number of years the desire to form, throw and glaze meant long hours and mixed results. During this time, the odd painting and etching would also emerge. However, it became clear that it cost more to produce work than to earn a return on it.

"I started building CBGs, mandolins, tenor guitars and ukes with a fever"

As time passed, painting vehicles soon became my main employment again, so many bikes/cars went through the workshop. A good mate at some stage introduced me to the performer Steve Plater from "Salty Dog" who was one of the first players and builders of cigar box guitars in Australia. Steve wanted some boxes made for instruments and from that a long-time friendship resulted and fueled my interest in instruments even more. I started building CBGs, mandolins, tenor guitars and ukes with a fever.

1. <http://www.gilchristmandolins.com>



Steve introduced me to the music of David Eugene Edwards (*16 Horsepower, Wovenhand*) and I developed a new passion for banjos, especially the vintage August Pollman Banjolas that Edwards played. It took several years to acquire one of these instruments, but for a long time I built many banjos trying to achieve that Pollman sound. These were frustrating years of trying so many different sorts of bracing, body neck joins and types of woods, but in hindsight this was great training in thinking things through and understanding resonance.



During this time I met my Russian friend Mikhail Luzyanin on Instagram. Mikhail owned a Pollman, and was also a 3D digital artist. He was able to draw me up a three-dimensional file of his instrument that was hugely helpful at the time and pointed me in the right direction. I'm pleased to say after much angst, searching and sleepless nights, a genuine 1880s Pollman Banjola found its way to Buninyong from the USA. I found out later that Mikhail made one of the first cigar box guitars in Russia and it is now in a musical museum in Moscow.



"The earthy and full sound of the balsa really rang my bell"

Social media has opened up a whole new world – I'm currently enjoying posts from Gary Waldman in New York and his collection of instruments . He posted a 1930 Regal Tenor Resonator with the resonator made from balsa wood. By the end of that day, a balsa resonator could be heard being strummed in my workshop. Since reso's



have been a passion of mine for quite a while, the earthy and full sound of the balsa really rang my bell. Jake Wildwood at Wildwood Guitars² had restored Gary's Regal Tenor Resonator and his site has been a goldmine of information on this unique instrument. So far, all the instruments I've made with a balsa resonator are CBG-based as this allows me to try lots of variables in balsa thickness, sound hole size, cover to balsa distances, bracing and body size, which are all factors in the resonance.

"I get to work with Blackwood, Victorian Ash, Kauri, Australian Native Pine, Oregon, Jarrah and even Baltic Pine"

The vast majority of my builds are constructed using recycled materials – being an old goldfields township, Ballarat has an abundance of old timbers well over 100 years old. When builder mates do restoration work around town, they collect the old timber and drop it off to be reused. I get to work with Blackwood, Victorian Ash, Kauri, Australian Native Pine, Oregon, Jarrah and even Baltic Pine (I have a stash of this wonderful tonewood timber that is well over 160 years old). I'll also source old furniture from the auction houses (antiques that are no longer in vogue), so I can purchase all sorts of well-dried timbers at ridiculous prices.

2. <https://wildwoodguitars.com>



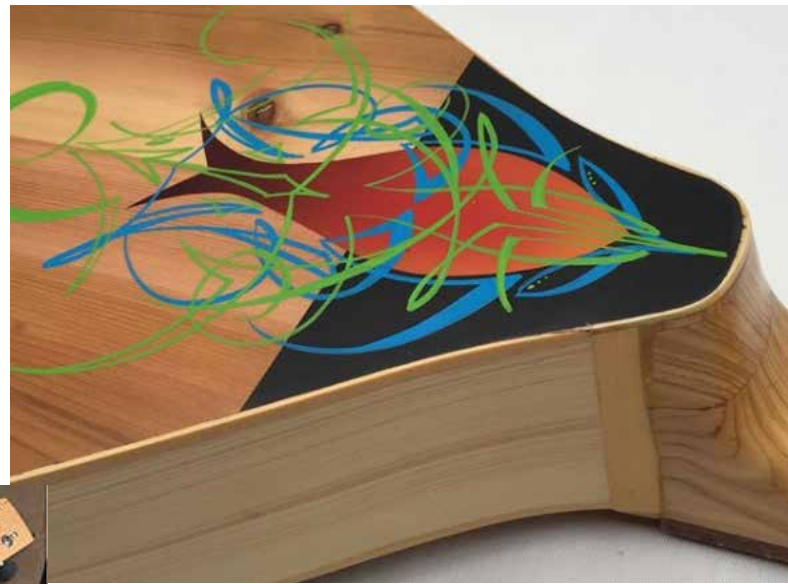
The rectangular box has been an accepted format for what counts as a cigar box guitar in Australia, but it's jolly expensive to purchase and ship original boxes from overseas. Making my own boxes has been a deal breaker for me. It has allowed me to use native timbers and to indulge in natural finishes. Using old timbers with flaking paint and battle scars has driven some of my builds. Using different timbers in the CBG format has provided a good basis for how to respond to the use of recycled timber and basically every build is a one-off and no two are ever the same, which is good for me as it makes for interesting work.

I don't always stick to the box format and build instruments with unusual shapes. I guess the most unusual are the freeform sculptures I make out of branches and roots from dead trees around our bush property. Or I love to put on a pickup on a solid slab of Huon pine, and create this amazing resonant sound. This tends to confuse people as they expect to see a cigar box.

"I'm constantly playing around with timbers and thicknesses to get the best sound"

What I call my "Axel" line is inspired by the shapes of other instruments and has its roots in a workshop I did with a Swedish exchange student called Axel who set out to build his own violin-shaped guitar. The technique involved cutting a shape out of





solid timber then removing the inside to leave just a ten millimeter thick complete side shape. I've used this technique ever since with F5 shaped instruments.

On my builds I don't use a through-body neck set up – I like a heel block arrangement as this allows the full chamber to work and I'm constantly playing around with timbers and thicknesses to get the best sound. I still enjoy working on a box arrangement and people still can't believe that a mandolin, tenor guitar or banjo can be constructed using a box that works just as well as the traditional format.

“People still can't believe that a mandolin, tenor guitar or banjo can be constructed using a box”

I'm lucky enough to have acquired good mates in the music business through building instruments. As I mentioned, Steve Plater is a good friend and is renowned for his slide-guitar playing and expertise in playing a range of stringed instruments. I'm very lucky to have Steve as a multi-instrumentalist demonstrate a number of my builds. I have a YouTube channel where Steve can be seen sampling some of the Chough guitars, along with other well-known performers.³

3. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWg5U1v-j2cZH_Q_pyFhEtg



Salty Dog's Steve Plater



Anna Scionti



Stringybark McDowell

Anna Scionti is another one of those muso's who plays anything from a didley bow through to a resonator. She has a collection of Chough CBGs with a couple named after her Boston Terrier dogs, and it gives me great joy to hear her play. Anna is a very generous person in that she supports builders by purchasing their instruments, and we are lucky to have such a wonderful musician plying her trade. Stay tuned as Anna has a new album due out soon and played entirely on CBGs.

I have met some wonderful people over my musical journey through sending instruments overseas and here in Australia. On the odd occasion while showing my wares at music festivals, young people will admire the CBGs and it gives me great delight saying to them: "if you like it, take it home and drive your parents mad." 😊 There is always an amazing range of young people who can play really well and this all bodes well for the future. ■

Stringybark McDowell & Molly Coddlecream are also great ambassadors of CBGs and hand-built instruments. Stringy builds his own and has quite a few Chough builds as well. And to Stringy's credit, if it has a string on it then he can get a tune out of it. On their album "Madder Than A Backward Flying Crow," Stringy plays a wire fence and it's awesome.

<http://www.choughguitars.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/choughguitars>

<https://www.facebook.com/saltydogblues>
<https://www.annascionti.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/StringybarkMcdowell>



A man with a beard and short dark hair is playing a red electric guitar. He is wearing a black t-shirt and a silver chain necklace. He is looking down at the guitar with a slight smile. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a tree and a metal fence.

**Guitariste
exceptionnel**

Different directions

Interview with Jérôme Graille, Montpellier, France

I discovered the CBG on YouTube with Seasick Steve – for me it sums up what guitar playing is all about – simplicity, good humor and above all feeling... My view counter gives me a little over one million views, which makes me happy. At the same time it's not so much compared to other artists, but I'm satisfied. I just like to hear the feedback from the people who follow me, and if one person likes a video then it's already a success.

CBGR: , Jérôme, how long have you been playing guitar?

I've been playing guitar since I was 13, so it's been quite a while now!

Have you ever been on tour?

Yes I've been in two bands – the first one *DarkShine* was a death metal band. We did a lot of gigs and a European tour. I also had the chance to play some lead spots for bands like *Trust*, *Morbid Angel*, *Moonspell* and others. My second band was *Mephisto*, which was more of a rock style influenced by groups like *Foo Fighters*, we played a lot in cafés and bars and came out with an EP and a really nice album.

When did you start producing guitar videos?

Well I have to admit I originally didn't like making videos. 😊 But I needed to do it a few years ago to make myself known as a

guitar teacher. People like to see what you can do before taking lessons, which is fair enough. It didn't take long before I realized that the videos were a magical opening to the world. Since then I've had a lot of practice, although I'm always looking for a way to make videos as spontaneous as possible.

How many views would you say you have overall?

My view counter gives me a little over one million views, which makes me happy. At the same time it's not so much compared to other artists, but I'm satisfied. I just like to hear the feedback from the people who follow me, and if one person likes a video then it's already a success.

"I always get a smile when I tell them they're made out of cigar boxes"

Being in France is funny because almost no one around me knows about cigar box guitars. 😊 Not many people know that I play them and I always get a smile when I tell them they're made out of cigar boxes. That

said, I've seen some French guys on YouTube who make some pretty cool CBGs. They're also starting to crop up more and more in the guitar shops here.

You play all kinds of styles – how many would you say?

Since I started playing guitar, I've tried my hand at blues, rock and heavy metal, but I like lots of different styles of music. For example, I play a little flamenco and even took flamenco lessons for a while. My favorite guitarist is Vicente Amigo who I've seen several times live in France.

When did you discover CBGs?

I discovered the CBG on YouTube with Seasick Steve – for me it sums up what guitar playing is all about – simplicity, good humor and above all feeling.

***“Simplicity, good humor
and above all feeling”***

You've produced about 40 cigar box covers on YouTube?

Yes 40 CBG videos, but I have lots of ideas and I would like to gradually arrive at something more personal. I think doing covers is the best way to learn and develop. When you think about it, our musical identity is just a mix of everything we have absorbed from the artists who influence us.

Your ACDC “Thunderstruck” video on a three-string guitar has had around 400,000 views...

Yes, but I can't take all the credit because the song is monumental and stands on its own. 😊



How do you tune them?

Actually I just made a video about it. I like open G and C on a four-string CBG. But I often invent different tunings depending on the song.

What gauge strings do you use?

Heavy gauge strings that retain a good amount of tension, 12/54 or something that sounds good whether clean or heavily distorted. It depends on the guitar and especially its size.

How many CBGs do you own?

I don't have many anymore because I tend to give them to people when I see they're keen to play them. Thanks to some of the kind builders who give them to me from time to time to use in my videos, I get to share my gifts with others. At the moment, I have my three-string Arturo Fuente guitar from Shonky Guitars and my four-string Macanudo from CBGitty. Both of them feature in an article about my "Hysteria" video a couple of years ago in Guitar World Magazine.¹

"I like to go in different directions with my music"

When will the next track in the "Zaros" series come out?²

That's what I meant before when I said I like to go in different directions with my music. For instance, I like film scores and the music that comes out of common patterns and harmonies. I like the film music by the Argentinian composer Gustavo Santaolalla

1. <https://www.guitarworld.com/artists/guitarist-rips-through-muses-hysteria-two-cigar-box-guitars>

2. <https://jeromegraille.bandcamp.com/releases>



(Babel among others) who's self-taught and doesn't read or write music. I love simple musical loops, simple things that grow and get bigger and bigger.

Tribal music has always existed across civilizations and uses a lot of strange unusual string instruments and I like this very textured sound. When I discovered it, I felt like I was hearing what I always wanted to do – it's accessible, moving and majestic at the same time. But I promise to try and not copy the master too much. 😊

Why a three-string Balalaïka?

Everything that has strings interests me and when I was given this Balalaïka I was immediately drawn to the sound because, in relation to its size, the resonance is quite powerful.

“What I like about YouTube is the small community that develops bit by bit”

How does YouTube work – what happens if more people subscribe to your channel?

YouTube is my main showcase. I chose not to monetize my videos, meaning I refused to have ads on my videos to earn money. The more people who wish to subscribe to my channel for free, the more popular the channel becomes and of course the more my videos are seen. What I like about YouTube is the small community that develops bit by bit, and the discussions that follow. I remember



when someone sent me a message saying that she had just bought her first cigar box guitar thanks to one of my videos. For me it's rewarding to know that she's learning and progressing by following me on Patreon.

How does the Patreon site work?

Patreon lets you find patrons to fund your projects. I wanted to use it because people often ask me to provide the scores for my covers in tab form. I noticed that, unlike standard guitar, there aren't many tabs for cigar box guitar.

In addition, we guitarists have the Guitar Pro software, which is pretty awesome since it reads music scores and tabs and lets you slow down, pause and so on, which makes it easy to learn. So for each video I put together a Guitar Pro file and a pdf file for people who don't have the software. Everything is available for 1 dollar/month and comes with tips and video tutorials.

I use the money raised to create videos and tabs that I have written by a professional and then double-check. My goal is to create a small cigar box guitar and blues guitar community. It gets a little lonely here in France when everyone in the United States plays the cigar box guitar! ☺

Can fans make requests?

Always! And speaking of fans, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all the people who support me in one way or another and CBG Review for this interview. ■

<https://www.youtube.com/user/jeromegraille>
<https://www.patreon.com/jeromegraille>
<https://www.facebook.com/pg/jeromegrailleguitariste>
<https://www.coursguitareperols.fr>

<http://www.shonkymusicalinstruments.co.uk>
<https://www.cbgitty.com>



Blues lives in Russia



Lee Custom Shop

Yuri Serebryakov, Moscow, Russia

When I finish a guitar, I give it a name and a little certificate on the back saying "Blues lives in Russia." This is actually the title of a song written by a friend of mine – it goes on to say "we do it not for money, we do it not for fame..." That's how it is with Lee Custom Shop.

I don't even know what got me into the blues. It just happened. Step by step. In Moscow (where I'm from) there is a lot of blues and great live music, with some incredible local and international players. But the first time I heard and got into blues was listening to John Lee Hooker!

Not that many musicians play cigar box guitars in Russia. It's still a select audience. But you see people playing them off and on in bars and clubs. And then we have the blues festivals in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Georgia. Personally, I think cigar box guitars are a lot of fun and definitely here to stay.

When I finish a guitar, I give it a name and a little certificate on the back saying "Blues lives in Russia." This is actually the title of a song written by a friend of mine – it goes on to say "we do it not for money, we do it not for fame..." That's how it is with Lee Custom Shop.



I don't do it as a business, especially not like a factory, I just do it for the pleasure of it. As it says on the "About" page of my website, I'm passionate about all kinds of stringed instruments from didley bows and lap steel guitars to standard electric and acoustic guitars, but my main passion is cigar box guitars.

It's so simple – a box, stick and strings – and the idea goes back for centuries! They sound good and it's easy to play them, although they can sound magical in the hands of advanced players and professionals. You can play all kinds of music on them, not just the blues. You can play with or without a slide.

*"I take my time
and let my hands
do the rest!"*

Me, I don't play very well because I have a problem with my left hand. That's basically what got me into building CBGs. I need a guitar with a wider distance between the strings, so the cigar box guitar is perfect for me.

When I'm building, I always like to try something unusual. I find it very satisfying to mix art with tradition. Everybody has an inner artist, otherwise life would be boring. Some people spend a lot of time planning their CBGs, but me, I just picture an instrument in my mind and build it. It's like poetry or daydreaming – I take my time and let my hands do the rest! I kind of lose myself in each guitar.







"I kind of lose myself in each guitar"

I like the custom tailpieces and handmade pickups, and making resonator guitars with unusual cover plates and sound holes. The adjustable bridges take a while, but they look good and the little Russian coins fit perfectly. ☺ I'll use whatever materials come to mind – newsprint, images, bits and pieces of clocks and gauges and anything else I can lay my hands on, depending on the idea in my head.

I love to see other people play my instruments and have posted a few videos of local musicians playing them in a small Lee Custom Shop channel on YouTube. For example, you can see two great musicians – Sergei Voronov and Gia Dzagnidze – at the BB King Club in Moscow jamming on two of my guitars – a resonator and a license plate guitar. Just like we said before – the blues lives in Russia! ■

<https://en.cigarboxguitar.ru/>
<https://www.facebook.com/CigarboxGuitar.Moscow/>
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0YuTzADWW-1cUjPCjtReTg>



Touching bases...

New from Dockyard, Rob's and Miku

Dockyard Guitars, UK

George Parfitt from Dockyard Guitars featured in CBG Review in July 2017.¹ That year George traveled around the USA to research the "Cigar Box Guitar Revolution." Since then, he has hosted workshops at festivals and community events and exhibited his work in galleries throughout Wales and England.

CBGR: George, what's the latest from Dockyard Guitars?

George Parfitt: For the last two years I've been studying Historic Musical Instruments at West Dean College of Arts & Conservation, learning various traditional decorative techniques and how to make a viola da gamba and a 19th century style parlor guitar. In between studying, I have made guitars out of a whole range of up-cycled materials, but am slowly straying away from the primitive and haphazard style of cigar box guitars and focusing on traditional handcrafted instruments, though the serendipitous ethos and resourcefulness remains.

In my second year of studying I received a Queen Elizabeth Scholarship, which supports British craftspeople of all ages and backgrounds. It's great to know that there is support for young craftspeople, as I would not have been able to complete my second year without it. This has also

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



introduced me to a level of quality in crafts that I felt was so far away from the humble cigar box guitar, and opened up a whole new world of exciting ideas for musical instrument design.

It's been interesting to compare the techniques and habits we form when teaching ourselves to make cigar box guitars, with those taught in traditional guitar making. Many of them come naturally through trial and error, which is often the best way to learn. I've learnt to slow down in some aspects of making to be more decisive without wholly removing the creative chaos, to avoid becoming sterile like a violin-making robot. I think the biggest change since we last spoke is how sharp my chisels are now! I've also started measuring with an accurate ruler, which is something I'd never actually owned until my second year in college. 😊

I'm back in my workshop on the coast of South Wales now and straight back to work on orders, whilst carefully designing a new range of instruments that will hopefully find the balance between quality and resourcefulness. I have a great stock of reclaimed timber that I can't wait to cut into, and some beautiful boxes that I've picked up on my travels which are destined for a new life at Dockyard Guitars.

More at:

<https://www.dockyardguitars.co.uk>

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

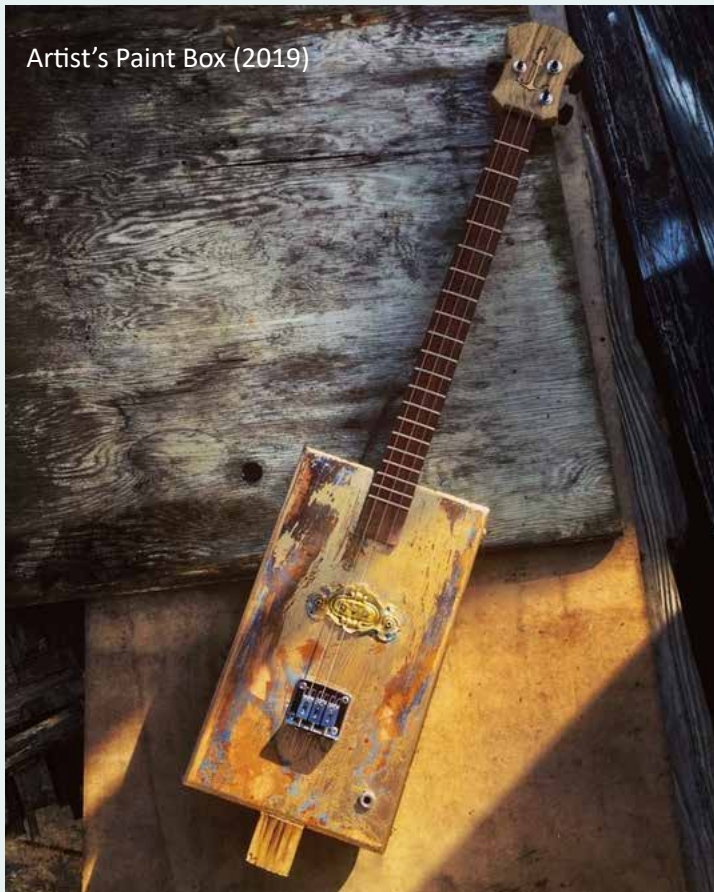
Viola da Gamba (2019)



Six-String Wardrobe (2019)



Artist's Paint Box (2019)



Desert Sun (2019)



Golden Blues (2019)



Mancala (2019)



Honey Teak (2018)



A Violet Coat (2018)



Rob's Cigar Box Guitars, USA

Rob Wrobel and Rob's Cigar Box Guitars first appeared in CBG Review in October 2017. In that article, Rob said his aim was to build guitars that "bring a new weapon to the gig set of performers and smiles on the faces of shed players!" Since then, he's built over 300 guitars and tried to make each better than the last one...

CBGR: Rob, still turning out those classic high-end CBGs?

Rob Wrobel: I like to say "I don't build cigar box guitars, I build guitars into cigar boxes!" While I do have different custom models like my hydro-dipped line of CBGs, you just can't beat some of those beautifully designed cigar boxes out there, which I love to embellish even more with hardwood necks (oak, mahogany, walnut, maple), walnut fretboards, maple inlays, black or white side dots, layered head stocks and heels.

Add to this bone string guides, chrome tuners, roller bridges, knobs, jack plates, strap buttons, long board style control plates and tail pieces, and black or gold corner guards – I also have my own-design rattan-screen sound hole on the side, rather than drilling into the front of the box...

I've used a range of pickups over the years and have now partnered with Bill Wiggins of Wiggins Brand pickups who builds very high-end stuff for six-stringers. Bill builds three- and four-pole pickups for me and they are sweet! They're expensive, but the tone is worth every penny.

I'm lucky that I have so many great players playing my guitars, and now have a good following on social media – between Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, I have over 7,000 followers now. I even have a following on my Reverb store page. So I'm keeping busy to say the least.



The main thing is that I'm still enjoying it, and the thrill of building bad ass guitars and seeing the faces of customers when they play them for the first time is priceless!

More at:

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

<https://reverb.com/shop/robs-cigar-box-guitars>







Miku CBGs, Poland

Mikolaj Sikorski from Miku CBGs first featured in CBG Review in October 2017.¹ Mikolaj has always said you have to have a good sense of humor and be a little crazy if you want to build what he calls “low-end instruments with a rustic touch.” The thing about Miku CBGs, however, is that the more you look, the more you find! So let’s see what he’s been up to since 2017...

CBGR: Mikolaj, what’s new at Miku CBGs?

Mikolaj Sikorski: Since 2017 I have built several instruments that I am proud of, but it was hard to choose which ones to show. I have left out all my experimental sound creations and classic CBGs and come up with a selection that makes me smile, starting with **Build no. 118**, which was inspired by medieval and renaissance books and some ancient mechanical toys. It is an electric instrument with a lot of stories and surprises...

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



Build no. 117 was inspired by medieval Slovenian bee-hive folk art and equipped with a built-in three-watt Blackstar amplifier, batteries, speakers and custom knobs.



Build no. 116 was quite a challenge for me. It's an archtop (I call it an "archbutt") CBG, where I used top-quality wood and hand-sculpted bronze elements, including the magic mushroom dots on the headstock.



Build no. 110 was inspired by 20th century *Bauhaus* design and has smoke coming out of the fretboard! The sculpted wooden hand in the sound hole is to give it an added taste of mystery. I built a smoke generator inside with a switch to turn the system on and push the smoke out through markers on the fretboard.



Build no. 103 is an electric cigar box ukulele with an adjustable sound hole. On each side of the box there are stories depicting adventures in a fantastic land called *Moon Mine* and the *Battle of Pudding Forest* against an army of *gastronauts*.

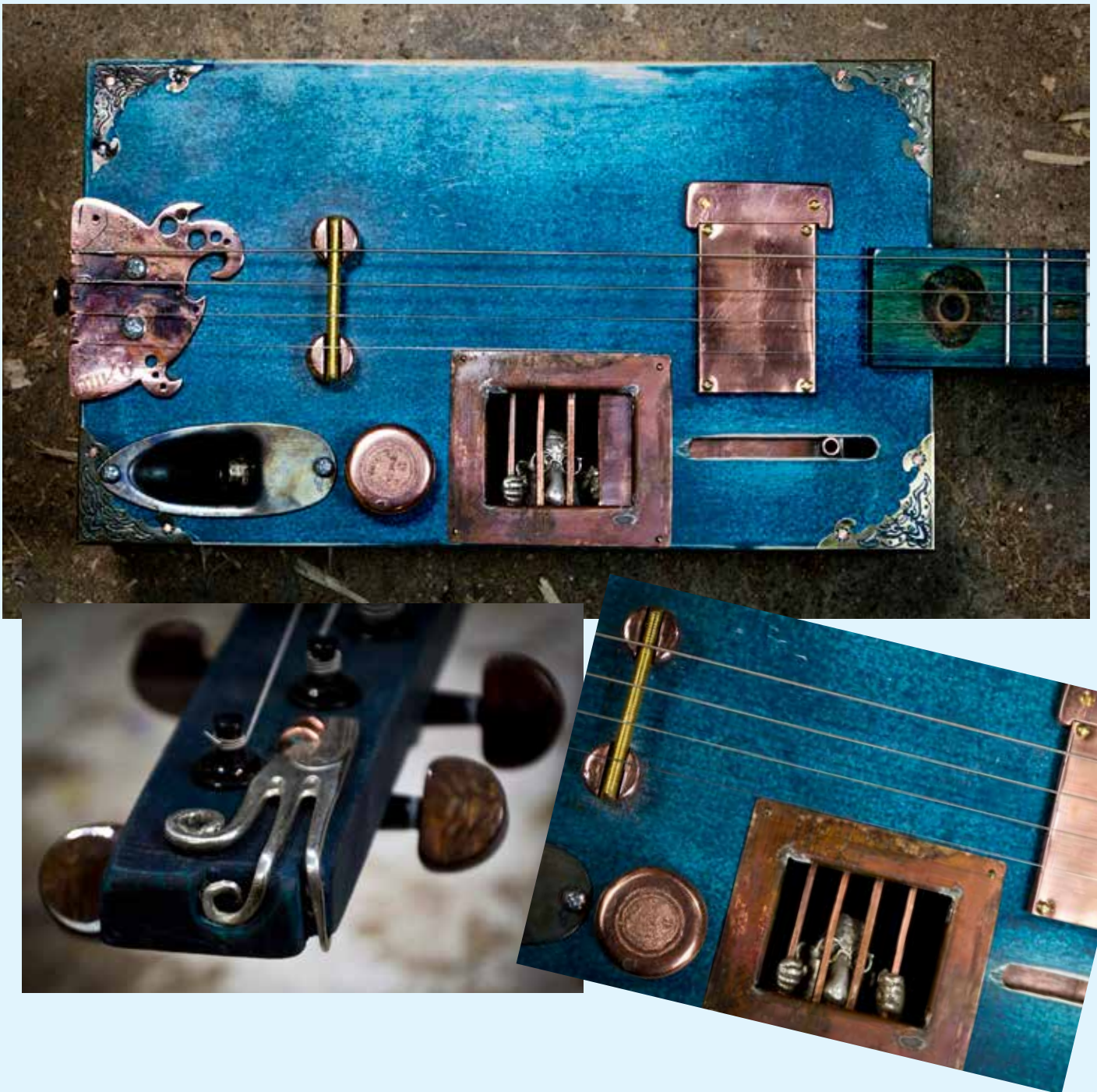




Build no. 98 is a four-string electric guitar combined with an electric six-tone kalimba. It has two separate signal routes and jacks. The guitar is tuned in open G and the kalimba is tuned in the G blues scale. It has a maple body, but instead of painting, I used an old Japanese method called Shou Sugi Ban where you burn the wood with a torch and then brush it and seal it with oil. There is magnetic head in the headstock taken out of my old tape recorder, which played hundreds of hours of the best music ever ! 😊



Build no. 93 was built for my friend Dusan Kastelic who is known around the world for his 2017 animated film called “The Box” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNVqRC4mcSI>). It has a silver fork for the headstock and I used pure silver and forged copper to sculpt his portrait inside the sound hole, which has an adjustable door like in the prison.



More at:
www.cigarboxguitar.pl
www.facebook.com/MikuCigarBoxGuitars
www.instagram.com/miku_cigarboxguitar

Contributors

Micky Wolf founded and spent many years touring with the band *Van Wolfen*. He has also performed solo with many well-known artists and bands as a session musician. As well as being a popular singer/songwriter in his own right, Micky also writes for other performers and composes music for film and TV. In recent years, he has turned to cigar box guitars for additional inspiration due to their originality and versatility – what he calls “unchartered musical territory.” Today cigar box guitars are a standard part of Micky’s music.



Trevor Abraham’s aesthetic has roots in his Fine Art training and automotive/motorcycle fabrication and spray-painting. He has long had a personal interest in stringed instruments and began building cigar box guitars and related instruments 20 years ago with recycled timbers. His repertoire now includes the wooden-bodied banjo, resonators, tenor and six-string guitars. He designs and builds Chough Guitars at his bush property in Buninyong, Australia accompanied by mobs of “loud and playful” white-winged choughs.



Jérôme Graille is a “guitariste exceptionnel” with years of experience playing and touring in Europe before settling down to teach guitar in the south of France. Since he started playing guitar at the age of 13, he has tried his hand at many styles ranging from blues, rock and heavy metal to classical, film and flamenco. For Jérôme, cigar box guitars represent “simplicity, good humor and above all feeling,” and his video/tutorials are testimonial to the versatility and resourcefulness of these homemade instruments.



Yuri Serebryakov is passionate about all kinds of stringed instruments, but his main passion is cigar box guitars. In 2014, he started Lee Custom Shop in Moscow, where he mixes art with tradition and whatever materials he can find to bring his CBG ideas to life. Musicians like Sergei Voronov and Gia Dzagnidze can be seen jamming on guitars from Lee Custom Shop. When he finishes a guitar, Yuri gives it a name and a certificate on the back saying “Blues lives in Russia.”



George Parfitt began Dockyard Guitars in 2014 in Wales, UK. Since then he has been making guitars out of reclaimed materials and has sold them worldwide. George received a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship in 2017 to research CBGs in the USA, the Janet Creasey Scholarship for Stringed Instrument Makers in 2018, and the the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship for British Craftsmen in 2019. He hosts workshops and exhibits his work in galleries throughout Wales and England.



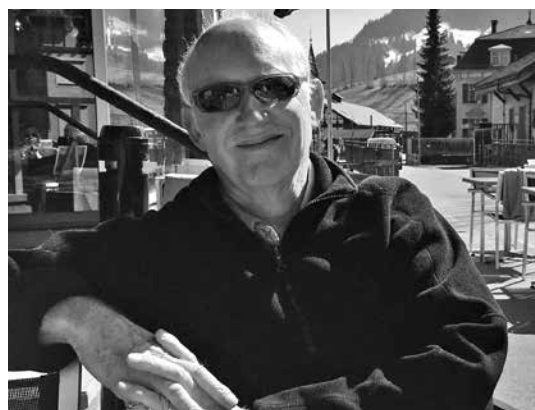
Rob Wrobel was born in California and raised in Montana, and has been living in Florida for the last 28 years with his wife Lena. A sheet metal man by trade, and a perfectionist at heart, he threw himself into building CBGs five years ago and they really have changed his life. Rob loves to build them and promote the CBG nation, and is on a mission to expose all standard guitar players to the fun and simplicity of three- and four-string guitars. He says “I don’t build cigar box guitars, I build guitars into cigar boxes!”



Mikolaj MIKU Sikorski lives with his wife and two daughters in Leszno, western Poland. He built his first CBG nine years ago, but has always been curious to see how they sound. Miku aims to keep building instruments for pleasure and as a creative hobby rather than a business. That way he still has the freedom to enjoy them and experiment with different builds. He says that CBGs are proof that music can be fun as well as serious.



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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