

# CBG Review

January 2020

The  
**TIME  
TRAVELERS**

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# Editorial

## What's next?

Welcome to the January 2020 issue of CBG Review, where we once again delve into the rich and varied world of cigar box guitars and related instruments.

To start the year off, our first interview is with Jeff Powers who has devoted his life to music – from classical to blues, and from Mexico to the Midwest! Among other things, Jeff talks about why he switched from classical music to blues and what turns a blues/rock guitarist into a one-man cigar box guitar band. What's next? Another cigar box guitar album and maybe hit the road performing?

Mark Clark at Meloddities has always been an inventor and good with his hands. Little wonder that he found his way into the CBG world, where he applies the “five R's” to all his builds, i.e. “repurpose, reimagine, restore, reuse, and recycle.” Along with box-style guitars, Mark is influenced by other parts of the world and aims to keep building novel instruments that give him a “new and unique buzz!”

The number of CBG festivals around the world is growing along with the interest in them. This year, the Samantha Fish Cigar Box Guitar Festival in New Orleans is an unexpected development and a potential milestone in CBG history. By teaming up with the festival organizers to host this event, globally renowned blues artist Samantha Fish is helping to establish a new model for similar festivals going forward.

Filippo Martini at Paoletti guitars describes yet another variation in the art of handmade instruments. Last year, Paoletti presented the first cigar box guitars made out of chestnut wood from 150-year-old wine barrels – the Christopher Ameruoso Signature series. They're back at NAMM again this year expecting another successful year in 2020.

Giotis Kyttaris spends half the year in Europe and half the year in the USA traveling and playing CBGs and other homemade guitars. He does his fair share of busking when he's not playing in festivals, bars and clubs all over. And when asked what's next for 2020, he answers “Keep traveling and play more blues – what else!”

As always, read, enjoy and share with your friends...

Best regards

*Huey Ross*

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*Mexico to the  
Midwest*

# Interview with Jeff Powers

Cleveland, OH, USA

*I write songs because I love songs and I love to write them. Usually I don't need a big important reason to write one. My big reason is that I love songs and the art of songwriting. I think that's a big enough reason and maybe more profound than just looking for the "big story"...one's expression and life work is the big story...at least for me. – Jeff Powers Album Notes*

CBGR: Jeff, tell us a bit about living in New Orleans in the old days...

Jeff Powers: A couple years out of high school and after one year of college at Ohio University I started hitchhiking south with a friend of mine (Jay). We eventually headed for New Orleans because my friend said he met a girl

somewhere near there on a previous trip and maybe we could find her and have a place to stay for a while. We had three dollars and thought it was a good idea...

When you're about 20 years old, you don't worry about much, so we hitchhiked for three or four days through the south and got to this town Jay was talking about (Mandeville, Louisiana), which was on the other side of Lake Ponchartrain from New Orleans. I'd never been in the South and everything looked and seemed so different. Spanish moss hanging off the trees, dragonflies swarming and little shanties on blocks to protect from flooding). We had just started walking into the little sleepy town and were wondering how we



were ever going to find this girl when, lo and behold, she's in the first car that came down the little bumpy road. Jay yelled out that's her and waved her down... She took us to one of the shanties and introduced us to a little old lady, Mrs. Pettigrew, who cooked us up some real Creole southern food...

That night we had to sleep in a cemetery on flat stone graves. But the next day she gave us a room and cooked for us every day. After landing a job working on a boat on Lake Pontchartrain, I went to New Orleans and rented an apartment with a girl I'd met. I started hearing the New Orleans funk jazz and horn bands, and experiencing the unique architecture, the southern people, the Creole food, Jax beer, the French quarter, the parks, and couldn't help but fall in love with the place.

*"Here was a down and dirty blues tune that I still play in gigs to this day"*

*And you picked up a taste for the Blues in New Orleans?*

While I was there I met someone who taught me my first real cool blues tune, "Taint nobody's bidness." That was the first authentic blues song I'd ever learned, although when I was younger I had a guitar teacher who taught me some Clapton and Freddie King riffs. But here was a down and dirty blues tune that I still play in gigs to this day.

Anyways, I eventually went back to Cleveland and started taking jazz lessons from a guy named Ralph Russo. He was kind of a Johnny Smith big jazz chords solo style guitarist.

*You later earned a degree in Classical guitar from the Cleveland Institute of Music, which is no small feat...*

A couple of years later, I attended a classical guitar recital and was so impressed that I decided then and there I wanted to play classical guitar. I signed up for lessons and this turned into a life pursuit for 12 years – non-stop classical guitar practicing five or more hours a day. After a couple of years of practice, I made it into the Cleveland Institute of Music, where I mixed with other students from all over the world. One of my friends came from Mexico (Alberto Muñoz Flores) and he invited me to stay at his home and studio, where I ended up teaching for a year before finishing my degree at the conservatory.

*"I overstayed my visa by five and a half years"*

The day after my final recital, I jumped on a plane and went back to Mexico, where I stayed for about six more years. While I was down in Mexico, someone called me just based on my guitar lessons and my name, which sounded American. He asked me if I played the blues and I said yes (although I didn't play very much because I had spent all those years playing classical). But I wanted so much to play blues ever since I had heard Stevie Ray Vaughan in concert while I was a master's student in Cleveland. So I really learned how to play blues in Mexico – the singer Pip was British and had a great collection of blues records from Robert Johnson to Freddy King and everything in between. So we were performing great blues by Elmore James, Jimmy Reed and many others... I overstayed my visa by five and a half years, which made me an illegal alien....

And you decided not to pursue a career as a classical guitarist?

I knew I had to go back to the States where I could live and work legally and pull my life together. As I was playing blues, my classical studies suffered, and my recitals were getting nerve-racking and shaky, so I pretty much stopped doing classical guitar as a profession. I found it too difficult to play classical and blues as they are two different animals – besides the songwriting – which I had put a lot of time into...

*“We’ve suffered for our art now it’s your turn!” ☺*

When I returned to Cleveland, I went out and booked a couple of weekly gigs and started looking for a bass player and a drummer. That was the start of the Dead Guy Blues garage blues/rock band with Chris Boross and Steve Zavesky. We released three albums (“Dead Guy Blues” in 2005, “Cold Wind in Cleveland” in 2009 and “Hideaway” in 2015). For the last one, we had a nice tagline, “We’ve suffered for our art now it’s your turn!” ☺

We played CD release parties, opened for many bigger touring acts, and performed at tons of gigs and small festivals. We were getting good feedback on the music from different places in different parts of the world, but unfortunately Chris and Steve were unavailable to tour. The band kind of morphed into two bands – one with original music that was *Dead Guy Blues* and one named *Clarksdale* that did more surf garage rock and classic blues songs. It probably went on for ten or so years before I started doing my solo thing.



Left to right: Chris Boross, Jeff Powers, Steve Zavesky  
Photo: Tate Davidson

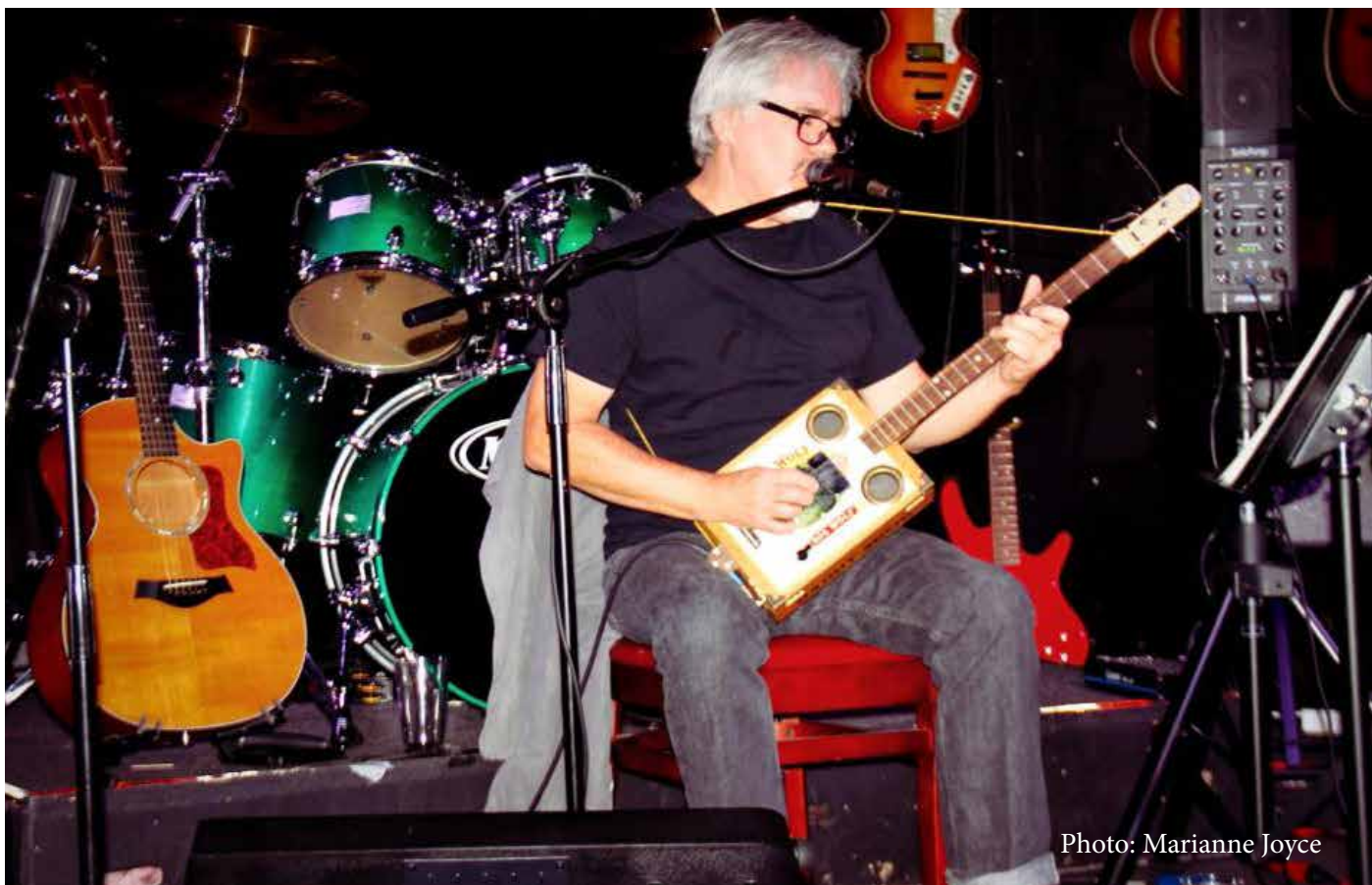


Photo: Marianne Joyce

*So the sixty-four-dollar question – what turns a blues/rock guitarist into a one-man cigar box guitar band?*

I was getting burned out playing in bars and drinking till 2:30 in the morning, so I switched to playing solo acoustic guitar, writing songs and singing blues. Around 2010, I saw a little cigar box guitar for sale online and I thought it looked really cool, so I purchased it. But it laid around my house for about a year until one day I picked it up, plugged it into my Dr. Z amp and it sounded awesome... A friend of mine played blues guitar and stomped on a tambourine, so I picked up on that idea and later I heard of band where the guy played his guitar and used an old trunk as a kick drum. I put a tambourine and a kick drum together and sometimes used a telephone for a microphone. Then I started booking gigs doing my one-man-band thing. I did three tours besides my local gigs, but then went back to doing singer-songwriter stuff, including writing material for the cigar box guitar.

*“One day I picked it up, plugged it into my Dr. Z amp and it sounded awesome...”*

*You’ve definitely got your own style...*

I’ve always loved the pure energy of garage rock like *The Sonics* and of the rawness of the three-string cigar box guitar, which I often play with a slide and cranked up through a good tube amp. My cigar box guitar style is centered around playing a three-string cigar box guitar using a kick

drum and tambourine under my feet. I love the three-string because it's primitive and you really have to play it differently. I like to think of the cigar box guitar, license plate guitar, canjo, etc., as another animal. Every song that I play or write on the cigar box guitar is designed with the one-man band idea in mind. So the songs I write can stand up solo without any other instrument.

I've experimented with using a looping pedal/station so I can layer cigar-box guitar parts and do a separate solo but it's very difficult to coordinate especially when I'm kicking a drum and tambourine. It has to be arranged in a manner that I can have a moment to step on the loop station (the pedal that records what you're playing on the fly and can loop back seamlessly in the middle of a song or wherever you would like it so you have freedom to play along with it)... I've only done that live a few times. My latest singer-songwriter CD is kind of like a mix of Neil Young and Stevie Ray Vaughan or the Black Keys.

*What about the line that says "protest songs aren't dead – at least no one told Jeff Powers"*

I grew up with a bunch of songwriters that were very political and I found the songs very powerful. John Lennon's musical style might not have influenced me a lot, but his anger, frustration and need to change the world is palpable in his songs and is what impressed me about him. He taught me that you can use anger in a song too. He definitely influenced me along with other artists like Jimi Hendrix (because of his guitar playing and his open mind and lyrics), Neil Young and Bob Dylan. My last CD had three or four political songs and lyrics that are political even in some love ballads. Some people may say these songs are out of date, but they're very important to me and meant to cause an impact (that's why there are more political songs on my new CD too).

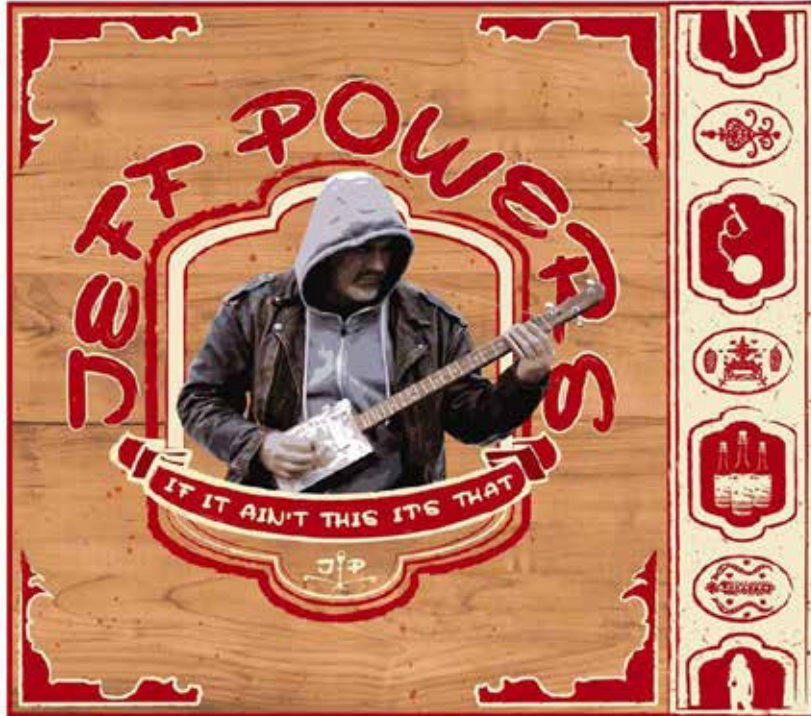
Jose Alvarez and Jeff Powers





How many albums have you put out since the Dead Guy Blues?

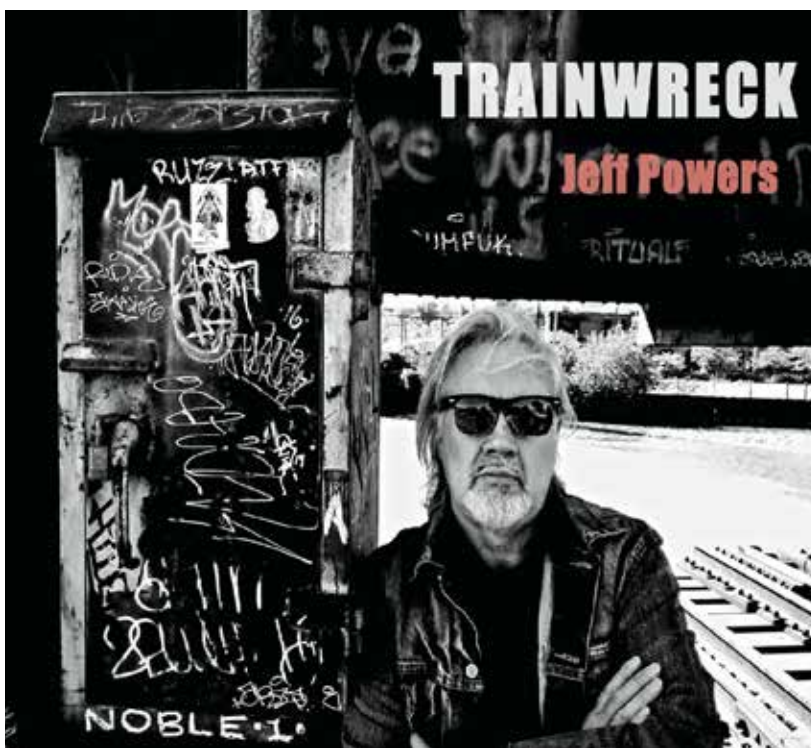
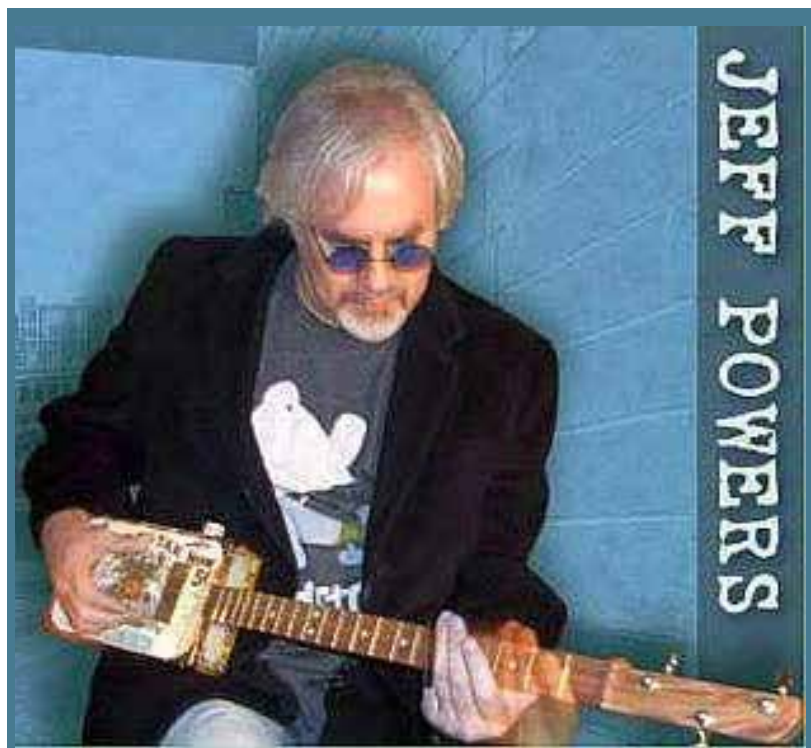
Well, there's my "If it ain't this it's that" album on the cigar box guitar and my "Jeff Powers" singer/songwriter album. And, as I mentioned, I just finished my second album of singer/songwriter music, "Trainwreck." I also have a CD of material ready for the three-string cigar box guitar now, but I have to wait a few months before I put it out (I can't put out two CDs at the same time).



*"I heard a lot of great blues there, but eventually moved back to Cleveland"*

You've teamed up with Jose Alvarez on occasion?

Jose is a friend of mine that I met in Mexico City. His mother signed him up for lessons with me when he was 14 years old and within a year he was playing in bars and parties with me with the blues band...Jose got hired into a cool blues band and moved to the States (Syracuse NY) when he was about 17 or 18, and one day bought me a ticket so I could get out of Mexico. I stayed with him in Syracuse and did some recording... I heard a lot of great blues there, but eventually moved back to Cleveland. We stayed in touch for years and did some gigs in Texas and in Cleveland. On one visit to Cleveland he met a girl and got married, so now he lives here. He's won quite a few awards including two Grammys, and is a kind of straight-up blues guitarist who likes to swing a lot in the style of Ronnie Earl (who he's friends with), though he's also played in world beat, zydeco and roots bands.



Who makes your cigar box guitars?

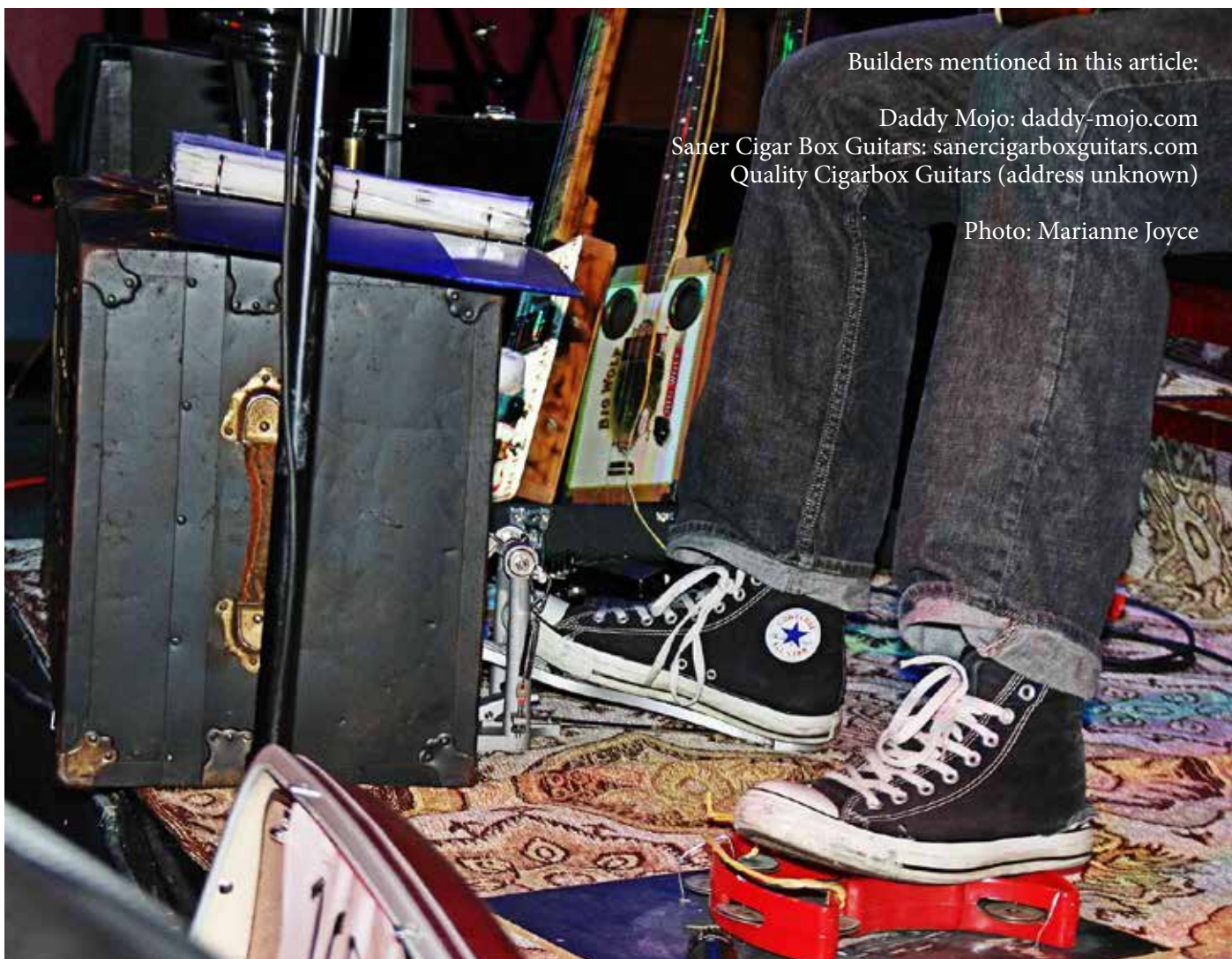
My cigar box guitars are from Daddy Mojo, Brian Saner and a guy that used to make them called Quality Cigarbox Guitars... I can't find him anymore, but I really love those guitars. All I know is his first name is John... I tried to make one myself, but ended up needing a friend to put it together and a guitar repair guy to set it up properly, so I guess all I did was buy the parts. It looked pretty cool, though.

*“My plan is to buy a van...and hit the road performing”*

What other plans do you have for 2020?

For 2020 I will have a CD release party in either January or February, and hopefully start a tour around March. My plan is to buy a van to live in for a year and hit the road performing. I'm also going to do a songwriting blog and put instructional videos up for other guitarists – it will be based around songwriting, with help in creating and developing songs, and using the guitar to create songs. Somewhere in that time I plan on doing another cigar box guitar album. What I haven't decided is whether it will be a one-man band or with bass and drums. Most likely I'll mix it up! ■

jeffpowers.net  
jeffpowers.bandcamp.com



Builders mentioned in this article:

Daddy Mojo: [daddy-mojo.com](http://daddy-mojo.com)  
Saner Cigar Box Guitars: [sanercigarboxguitars.com](http://sanercigarboxguitars.com)  
Quality Cigarbox Guitars (address unknown)

Photo: Marianne Joyce



# *Melodivities*

Custom Musical Instruments & Accessories

# The five R's

Mark Clark, Flower Mound, TX, USA

Photos: Mark Clark & Chassity Lane Clark

*Like many young Americans, on February 9, 1964, I found myself sitting in our living room in Tyler, Texas. I was six. The Beatles were making their US Television premier on the Ed Sullivan Show. Between the sound of the music, the strange mop-top coolness of the Fab Four, and the girls going ape-shit, I knew I needed a guitar. Soon after, my parents bought me a \$5.00 Silvertone acoustic guitar, complete with airbrushed cowboy and cattle drive.*



Lessons soon followed. Later in life, I played regularly in bands and other informal jam settings, and added banjo and square neck dobro to my abilities, along with a love of bluegrass.

## Out of the woods

As a kid, I was always inventing stuff. I had no problem with keeping myself entertained. As an adult, I added wood working as a mainstay hobby. I enjoyed restoring antiques, building furniture and working with tools. The love of antiques, garage sales, thrift stores and dumpster diving produced other treasured trash such as furniture, wall art, and various sculptures. The five R's became an obsession: Repurpose, Reimagine, Restore, Reuse, Recycle.

After being in awe of an artist/musician friend who began building his own instruments, I came across a cigar box at a garage sale. From that one-dollar purchase, I began the journey of designing, building and playing my own creations.



Though familiar with guitars and other stringed instruments, I really didn't know the rules. After discovering the CBG community, I realized there are no rules. A single-string "diddley bo" can translate the blues as effectively as a six-string guitar-type. I came across literally dozens of tunings and playing styles. I could finger pick, use a standard pick, play with a slide, play in my lap or whatever I wanted.

The first build led to the second, third, and so forth. Each time I tried to do something unique. I don't have the patience to build the same instrument over and over. I also try to avoid closely copying others' styles, although I sometimes adapt certain builder's techniques. In the end, I always try to put my own spin on it.

*"The five R's became an obsession: Repurpose, Reimagine, Restore, Reuse, Recycle"*

My manifesto is simple. Though I want my pieces to be visually compelling and unique, each instrument must sound good and be relatively easy to play. I won't be satisfied with something that looks cool but doesn't produce good sound or is difficult to play. They are musical instruments. You have to play them, not just hang them on the wall. Additionally, the element of using found objects, either for visual or auditory effect, was also an attraction. And the buzz of playing an instrument that you built yourself was irresistible.



## Know them by their names

My builds were, and still are, personal. They all have names. They are all, in my mind, unique living beings. I'm primarily an acoustic player, and over time I became a slightly disenchanted with the low volume of cigar boxes. True, you can put a pickup on practically anything and make it louder, but I wanted more in terms of natural acoustics. I began experimenting with several types of resonators using steel cat bowls, drum practice pads, sterling trivets, poached egg tins, etc. Most of these were successful in not only producing more volume, but also delivering a one-of-a-kind sound.

I also began using other objects in my builds. I discovered antique silverware boxes, wooden salad bowls and wooden violin cases provided a much bigger, bolder sound. I combined my resonator experiments with the larger containers to see what could be produced. In addition to CBGs, I've built banjos, lap steels, and mountain dulcimers. To this day, I see guitars everywhere.

*"I wanted more in terms of natural acoustics"*

I also enjoyed watching American Choppers and loved the idea of a "theme" for each build the way they did for custom motorcycles. "Dinah" had a kitchen/silverware theme. "The Hunter" featured a camouflage paint job, bullet casings, deer horn, wild game feathers and claws. "Dixie" combined a banjo resonator with trumpet parts paying homage to Dixieland jazz.



“Big Ben” uses repurposed antique clock parts on the exterior and clock chimes internally for added reverberation. “FrankenCello” is an upright bass made from a cello neck, electric bass fretboard and violin case body. “Magnolia” is a lap steel (get it??? Steel Magnolia!!! Ok, I’m no comedian ☺). The violin case I used for “Magnolia” is 100 years old.



## Accessorize

Continuing the repurpose/recycle mode, I made accessories such as amplifiers from old radios, clocks and drive-in movie speakers. Men’s leather belts became guitar straps, spark plug sockets became slides, and smaller cigar boxes became tambourines.



## Meloddities

In 2017, I began attending art fairs, joined a local artist's guild and launched "Meloddities.com". Later, I opened my online store (MelodditiesMusic) on Etsy. Probably the most rewarding thing (besides actually selling them) is the reaction people have when seeing my builds for the first time. "How long does it take you to build?" "What can you do with just three strings?" "How did you come up with *that*?" "Can you really play them?"

## Think global

Along the way, I started taking influences from instruments that originate from other parts of the world. The first other-worldly creation was a "hurdy gurdy," and later a version of a "rubab", a multi-stringed instrument from Afghanistan. My next adventures include a Swedish "hummel" and an African "Goje."





## “Better Late”

Also in 2017, I began collaborating with a fellow songwriter, Greg Bridges, on a collection of original songs. Fortunately, I was able to blend some of my homemade instruments into the process. The end result, “Better Late” by Bridges & Clark, was released in August, 2019 (available on iTunes, Spotify, CDBaby, and Pandora...and of course, YouTube). The format is “Americana” a mix of country, rock, blues, bluegrass and folk. Currently, I am working on songs that incorporate homemade instruments exclusively.



## Daddy’s favorite

Yes, unlike my human children, I have a favorite. “Olive” is the first six-string banjo I ever made. For some reason, it came together with such a sweet sound and playing ease that I’ve never put her up for sale. I feature her in the song, “Brand New Morning” off the Better Late collection. Actually, I love them all, but would prefer they bring joy to others instead of hanging in my studio.

*“My next adventures include a Swedish ‘hummel’ and an African ‘Goje’”*

## The community

In general, I’ve found the CBG/homemade instrument community to be open, receptive and supportive. There doesn’t appear to be a lot of competition and one-upmanship. People reach out for assistance and are offered guidance. Newbies are welcomed. Sharing is the mainstay. My competition is



*“Olive” is the first six-string banjo I ever made...*

with myself. I want my next addition to give me a new and unique buzz. I don't want to become complacent. I need to keep one foot in and one foot out of my comfort zone.

*"I want my next addition to give me a new and unique buzz"*

## The future

I would imagine, like many trends, the current interest in building original instruments may wax and wane over time. I find the process therapeutic and meditative, cheaper than a therapist. Problem solving, inventing, working with your hands, it's all great for the brain. Some people count sheep to fall asleep. Me? I'm laying out my next build, figuring out how to fix my latest screw-up, wondering what to make of my recent thrift store find. At this point, I can't imagine not building new instruments as long as I keep it fresh and challenge myself. ■

[www.meloddities.com](http://www.meloddities.com)

[www.etsy.com/shop/melodditiesmusic](http://www.etsy.com/shop/melodditiesmusic)

Featured in CBG documentary, "Strung Together,"

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/strungtogether>



A woman with voluminous, curly blonde hair is shown from the side, playing a red electric guitar. She is wearing a black, low-cut, sleeveless top. The guitar has a red body with a white pickguard and a black bridge. The background is dark, suggesting a stage setting. The text "Girls with guitars" is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

*Girls with guitars*

# Samantha Fish

## Cigar Box Guitar Festival 2020

Huey Ross

*“Girls with Guitars” is a song written by Mary Chapin Carpenter and recorded by Wynonna Judd in 1994 about a young woman who wants to become a rock musician as a guitarist. It was also the name given to three artists picked to tour around Europe, the USA and the Caribbean by Ruf Records in 2011; namely Samantha Fish, Cassie Taylor and Dani Wild.*

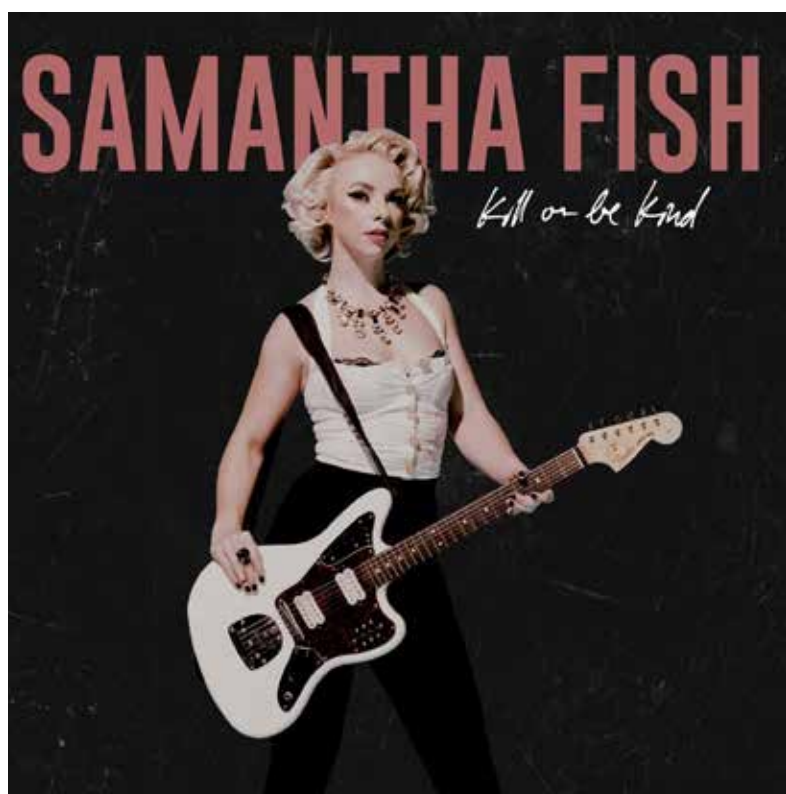
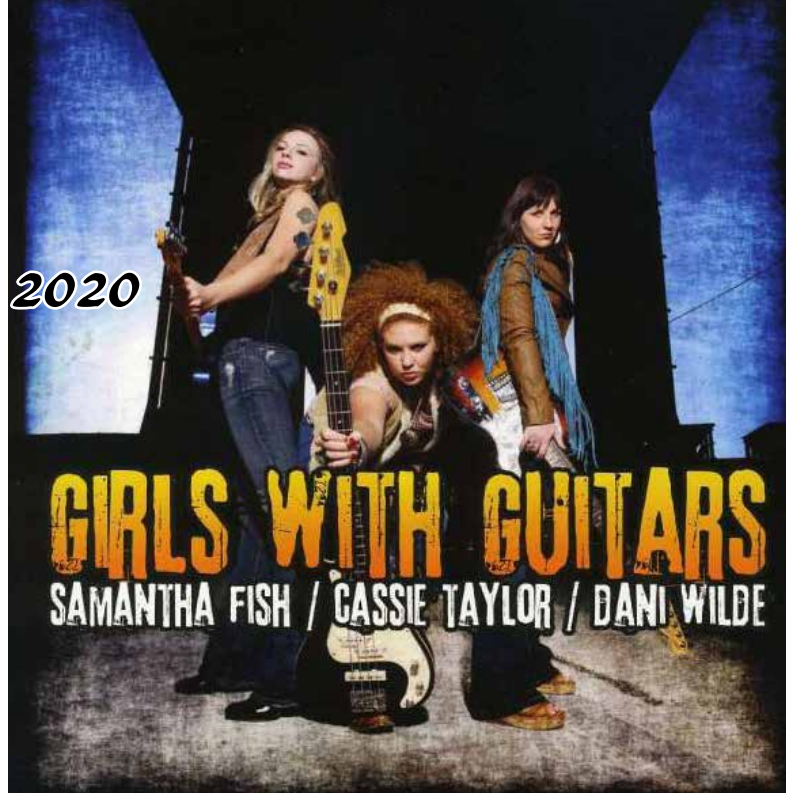
According to Samantha Fish, in a 2012 interview with Matt Marshall from American Blues Scene in 2012<sup>1</sup>, it worked: “...I think we surprised a lot of people. They came for the legs and stayed for the talent!” and more importantly “...it got me out there and it got me a lot of attention. I get to do my thing now!”

*“They came for the legs and stayed for the talent!”*

Her “thing” at that time was her 2011 “Runaway” album and the 2012 Blues Music Award for Best New Artist Debut. After that, Samantha came out with “Black Wind Howlin” in 2013, “Wild Heart” in 2015, “Chills & Fever in 2017,” and “Kill or Be Kind” in September 2019.

Like the young woman in the song, Samantha has become a renowned blues artist and guitarist. But, unlike her partners in the “Girls

<sup>1</sup>: [www.americanbluesscene.com/spirit-of-the-blues-festival-interview-with-samantha-fish/](http://www.americanbluesscene.com/spirit-of-the-blues-festival-interview-with-samantha-fish/)



with Guitars” tour(s), she’s been bringing her trusty *Stogie Box Blues* guitar to her performances around the world since she bought it in 2012. Why? She likes the heavy “buzz-saw” sound and the ideas for songs that spring to mind when she plays it. And, of course, her fans “connect” with it and will understandably go home disappointed if they don’t see it and her six-string oil-can guitar when they go to a performance.

Just like her past albums, “Kill or Be Kind” is receiving all manner of favorable reviews (*Variety*: “by far her most mature and diverse album,” *Blues Rock Review*: “eleven Fish-written tracks of soulful rhythm and blues,” *American Songwriter*: “quality, well-crafted material that should help attract elusive radio play and more importantly a crossover audience outside of her established blues base”). True to tradition, the opening single “Bulletproof” is played with that same red cigar box guitar, which Samantha says would break her heart if something happens to it (the official video has had over 320,000 views on YouTube since July 2019). “Shake ‘Em On Down” videos with Samantha playing her red *Stogie* have had over five million views on YouTube since 2013.

Everyone knows Samantha Fish is evolving. This includes the surprise announcement that she and the New Orleans Cigar Box Guitar Festival are teaming up to host the *Samantha Fish Cigar Box Guitar Festival* in New Orleans from 15 to 18 January 2020. Needless to say, the event is a milestone in CBG history – not just because of the promise of some great music, but because of the added boost in awareness of the appeal and versatility of CBGs and similar instruments that Samantha and friends will provide with this new festival model. As Festival Producer Collins Kirby describes it: “...spreading the word about the art and music of handmade instruments.” ■



[www.SamanthaFishCigarBoxGuitarFestival.com](http://www.SamanthaFishCigarBoxGuitarFestival.com)

Builders mentioned: *Stogie Box Blues*  
[www.facebook.com/Stogie-Box-Blues](https://www.facebook.com/Stogie-Box-Blues)



*Wine and CBGs*

# Interview with Filippo Martini

General Manager, Paoletti guitars, Quarrata, Italy

*“Italian-based builder Fabrizio Paoletti crafts guitars and basses in the shape of classic models. They even make cigar box guitars and amplifiers...Making a guitar out of wine barrels has to be the most Italian thing I’ve ever heard of – the only thing that could one up it might be if the fretboard is treated with olive oil.” – ultimate-guitar.com*

CBGR: Filippo, you must be the only guitar company in the world that makes guitars out of century-old wine barrels??

Filippo Martini: Yes, we are an Italian company that pays homage to Fabrizio Paoletti’s family history. The family once produced Chianti wine in the Tuscany region and now the 130- to 150-year-old chestnut wood from the wine barrels is being repurposed to make one-of-a-kind instruments.

What special properties does 130- to 150-year-old chestnut wood have?

Mainly the sound of the guitar. When it’s aged a lot, chestnut wood has a high level of sustain. That would be the main feature. But also the frequency spectrum is very wide. The density of chestnut makes it very suitable for rock and blues, with a lot of attack and voice. Fabrizio always says that chestnut wood lives and breathes...

And you ship all over the world?

Yes, if you go to our website you’ll see we currently have dealers carrying our guitars in the USA, Switzerland, Finland, Holland and Japan.



*But it's not just about the wood – a lot of imagination goes into the instruments?*

Right, we have four different main designs handcrafted by Fabrizio – the Wine series, the Loft series, the Leather series and the Lounge series. Besides the sound, we see each one as a work of art with a distinct Italian appearance mixing the “old” and the “new.”

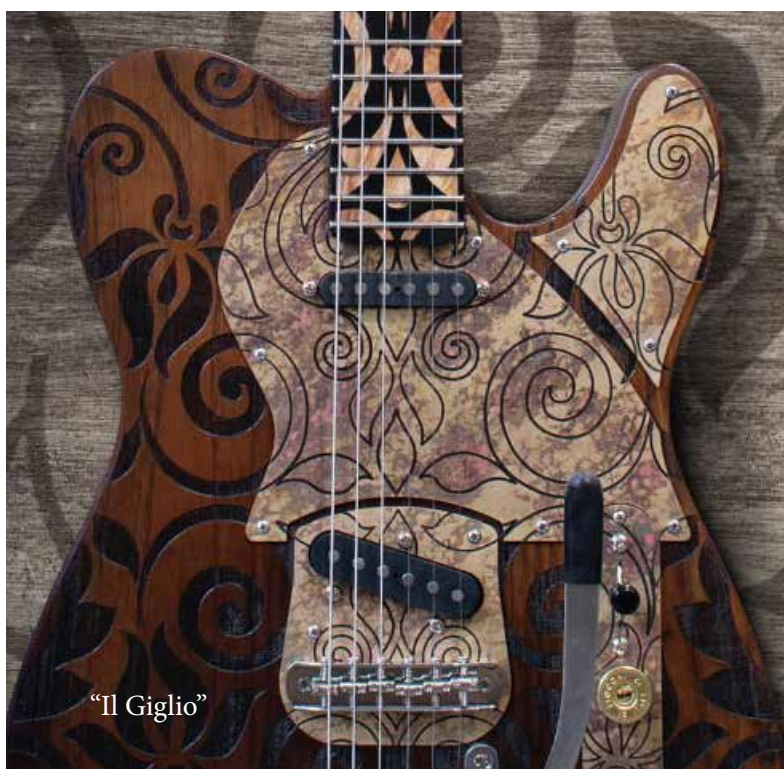
*Depending on the series, you use leather, brass rivets, antique brass pickguards, teak and ebony fretboards, shotgun shells for control knobs – did I leave anything out?*

Well there's the roasted maple necks...we import the wood from Canada and then we roast it in our oven. When you roast wood, it changes its properties by taking out moisture and sugar, and you end up with a stronger, more stable wood.

*“Learn how to see.  
Realize that everything  
connects to everything else”*

*“Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else” – tell us about the limited edition of “Il Giglio” guitars?*

Well, 2019 was the 500-year anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci and that quote is from him. The limited edition came about from an opportunity we had to obtain wine barrels not far from us that belonged to the Da Vinci family and were probably over 200 years old. We only had enough to produce ten guitars. Four of them have already been sold (three in the States and one in Canada) for around \$20,000 each.



“Il Giglio”





How much of the hardware for the guitars is made in-house?

All of the hardware except for the tuners – from the bridges to the pickguards and pickups, the wiring, the nut at the neck and the brass around the guitars. We make it all with machines that work with brass from Germany. We buy the tuners from Kluson. Oh, and the shotgun shells are from the Italian ammunition company, Fiocchi.

And you make custom-made tube amps out of the same wood?

Yes we make six-, 18- and 45-watt amps. The six-watt amps are standard production and the larger ones are made on request because they take a little longer to produce.

Do you make guitars on request as well?

Sure, customers can ask to have their guitars personalized with names and logos or, for example, other colors. It's always something we can talk about.

Is everything still made by hand?

Yes, we turn out 30 to 40 guitars a month, all hand-finished by Fabrizio and his three assistants.

We're talking electric guitars, basses, double-necked guitars and recently cigar box guitars – what made you decide to introduce a 4-string box guitar?

The Christopher Ameruso Signature four-string cigar box guitars in the Loft series are designed by photographer/musician Christopher Ameruso who is an old friend of ours. We decided to make something special together. We know that cigar box guitars are not that common, so we wanted to give our clients the opportunity to test something new. The action is a little higher, and people can play slide or regular on them.



Using the same materials that you use for the other models?

Absolutely.

*“We expect a very successful year for the cigar box guitar in 2020”*

What’s the difference between the two models?

Basically just the different look. The Rooster II has a Canadian maple neck and is tuned to open G. The Rooster III has the roasted maple neck and is tuned to open E with

heavier gauge strings. Both models have the same hardware.

How do customers like the idea of alternate tunings?

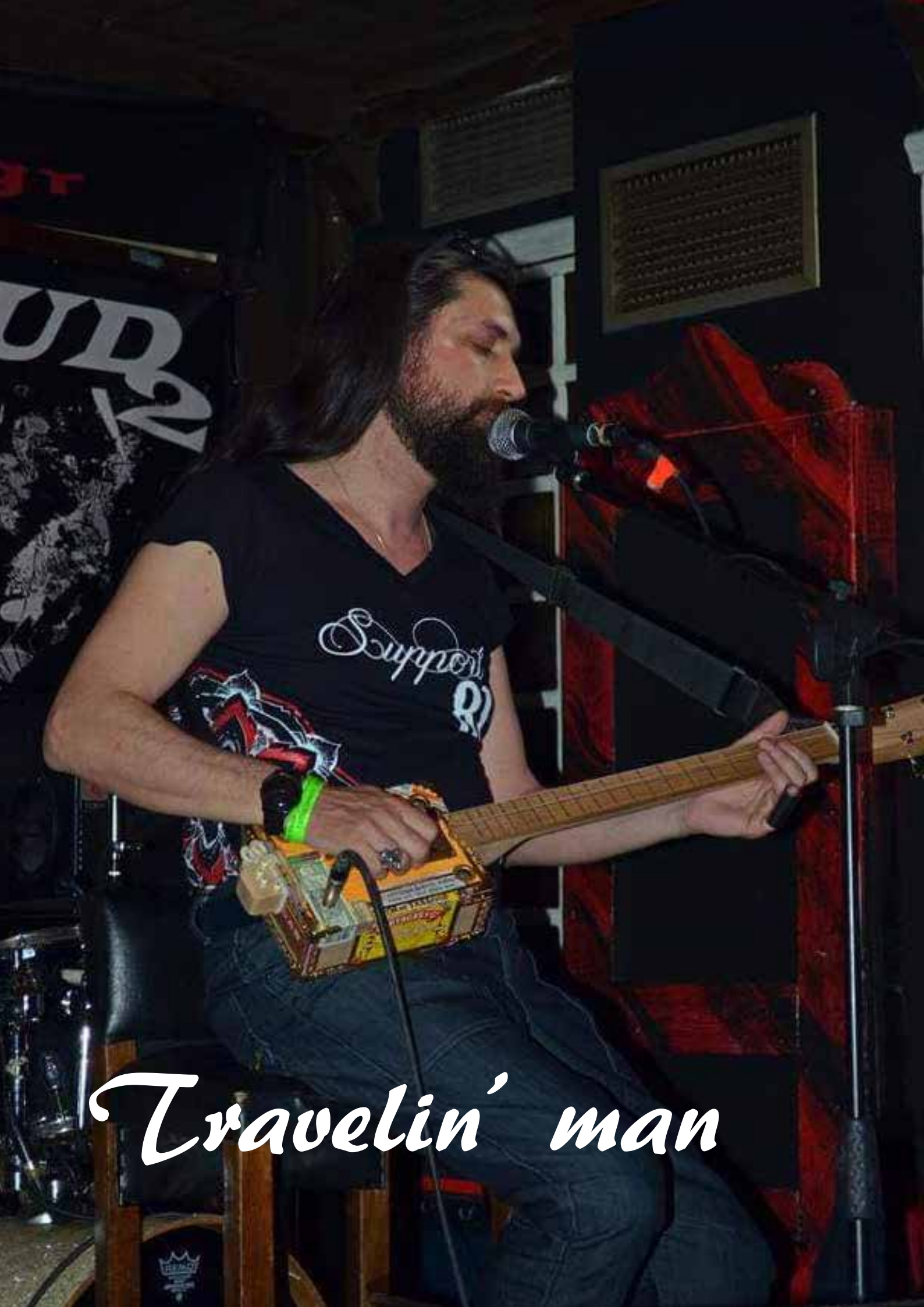
They really like it. They also like playing the light-weight cigar box guitar and the reception has been good, especially in the USA.

So building a cigar box guitar was worth the challenge?

It was really an experience – the first time we had ever done anything like it! We introduced it at NAMM last year, with Christopher playing and demonstrating. We’ll be back again this year and we expect a very successful year for the cigar box guitar in 2020. ■

Left to right: Filippo Palagi, Filippo Martini, Christopher Ameruso and Fabrizio Paoletti  
paolettiguitars.com





*Travelin' man*

# Interview with Giotis Kyttaris

Athens, Greece <-> Nashville, TN, USA

*Giotis' second album is distilled and flavored with plenty of blues, authentic sounds, soul and plenty of passion... All this is enough to take you on a beautiful journey to America and the old west. – Nikos Grammatos, rockap.gr*

CBGR: Giotis, when did you first start playing guitar?

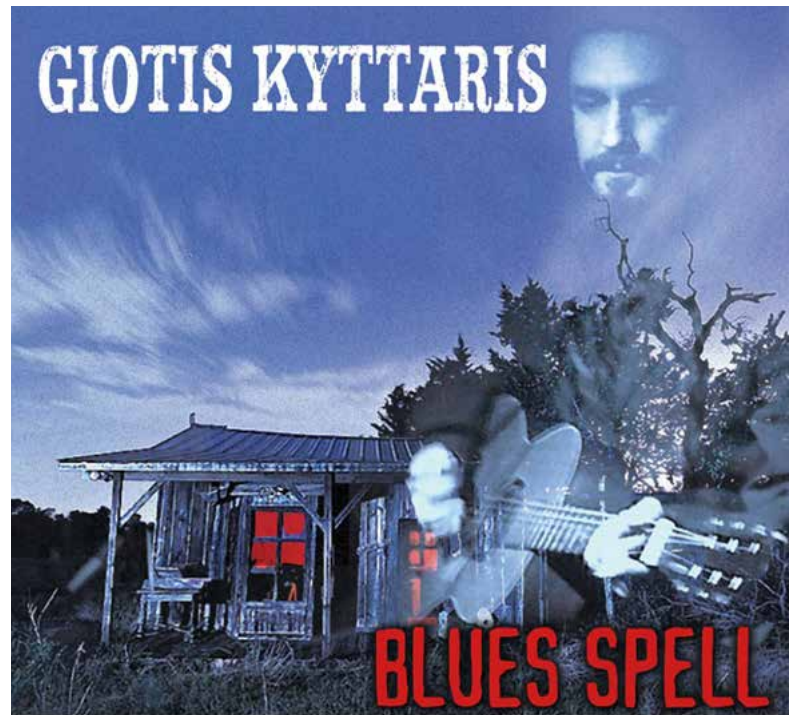
I started playing the guitar seriously when I was ten years old, but I had my first encounter when I was five.

What made you choose the blues?

Giotis Kyttaris: My grandfather was the reason I chose this kind of music. He used to listen to blues on the radio and, although I listened to many kinds of music, blues became one of my favorites. I have also felt a lot of emotion when I listen to the way blues musicians play the guitar.

*“Of course, playing blues is even better!”*

There's no doubt to me that listening to traditional blues can have a healing effect, helping us get on top of everyday problems that we all have to deal with at one time or other. Of course, playing blues is even better!



*Did many of your friends play blues in those days?*

Thanks to the internet, I had many friends all over the world that were playing blues in those days. These days you'd be surprised how many bands are playing blues in Greece. It became my way of life because it makes me truly happy.

*Who has influenced you along the way?*

For sure all the blues players like Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Howlin Wolf, and all the others. And then there's my own personal experience in the global music scene.

*Traveling, busking and playing gigs?*

Busking for me is a big piece of my life and music. It makes me feel alive! It lets me try out new songs and homemade instruments, as well as help me to pick up first-hand reactions from people I meet.

For me, busking also goes hand in hand with traditional blues. I mostly travel alone apart for the few times I hook up with friends and collaborate with other musicians.

*These days you spend half the year in Europe and half in the USA?*

I love to combine music with traveling. In 2019, I played in USA for five months. The rest of the year I played in Holland, France, Italy and of course my home country Greece. I always go to Holland a couple of times a year because the people there are really open to my kind of music, especially with the cigar box guitar style. I really feel at home in Holland. Also French people always make me feel welcome and at ease when I play there. And I had a great time in Rome – beautiful city, beautiful people – they have an open-air festival in Villa Celimontana park, near the Colosseum, where musicians perform live every day during the whole of summer!



*How did you settle on Nashville as a place to live?*

This was completely random. A friend of mine lives in Chattanooga so I took the opportunity to play in Chattanooga and in nearby places. I had a really good reception in Nashville, with offers to come back, so I made Nashville my base for my music excursions to the surrounding states, where I play in festivals, bars, clubs and of course on the street.

*How has your music changed over the years?*

Blues and roots music doesn't really change much, so to be honest I just follow the music and see where it takes me.

*"I just follow the music and see where it takes me"*

*Why did you start playing homemade guitars?*

Like a lot of people, I like the sound and ease of these instruments – and I had to try my hand at building them. And, since each guitar you make has a unique sound, you have to keep building them! I can make guitars with any material I like. Whenever I see something unusual, I think to myself: how can I make it into a guitar? Usually, when I finish a homemade guitar, I am so happy with the result that I can't stop playing it! For example, I've used skateboards, frying pans, disc brakes, air filter covers, cans and boxes. One of my guitars was made by Stamatis Strigaris at



Dustbowl guitars in Athens, who is a very good friend of mine. It's one of the first cigar boxes he made and one I still love to play.

*How do they affect your music?*

It's interesting, they give me a contemporary feel and at the same time a traditional sound to my music – a sound that's very close to my heart.

*Your last album, "Blues Spell," was in 2014...is there a new album in the making?*

Yes, I'm currently working hard on two new albums with my own compositions, where I play cigar box guitars, canjos and other homegrown instruments. They should be out soon!

*And what are your other plans for 2020?*

To keep traveling and play more blues – what else! ☺ ■

Giotis Blues Kyttaris  
[www.facebook.com/giotisblues.kyttaris](http://www.facebook.com/giotisblues.kyttaris)

Builders mentioned in this article:  
Dustbowl Guitars: [dustbowlguitars.com](http://dustbowlguitars.com)



# Contributors

Jeff Powers grew up in the 60's listening to early garage bands and old school blues artists. He developed his own brand of blues and roots after a seven-year stint in Mexico teaching classical guitar, but performing in local blues bands. After years of songwriting and performing with the Dead Guy Blues, Jeff began creating music with a 3-string cigar box guitar and a more primitive lo-fi approach. His latest singer-songwriter album "Trainwreck" is a return to the 6-string acoustic guitar, but Jeff plans to follow it up soon with a CD of three-string cigar box guitar songs.



Mark Wendell Clark is a writer and photographer with a love for antique restoration and wood working. After picking up a cigar box for one dollar at a garage sale years ago, he began designing, building and playing his own homemade instruments. Mark's manifesto is simple. "I won't make something that looks cool but doesn't produce good sound or is difficult to play. They are musical instruments. You have to play them, not just hang them on the wall."



Filippo Martini is General Manager of Paoletti Guitars, responsible for sales/artists/global marketing. Prior to joining Paoletti in 2014, he worked as a guitar teacher in Florence. He attended the Lizard College of Music and the Giuseppe Verdi College of Music, and has a degree in electric guitar, classical guitar and sound engineering. Filippo grew up with a passion for music and joined Paoletti Guitars to participate in and develop the Paoletti project and help bring Italian craftsmanship to musicians around the world.

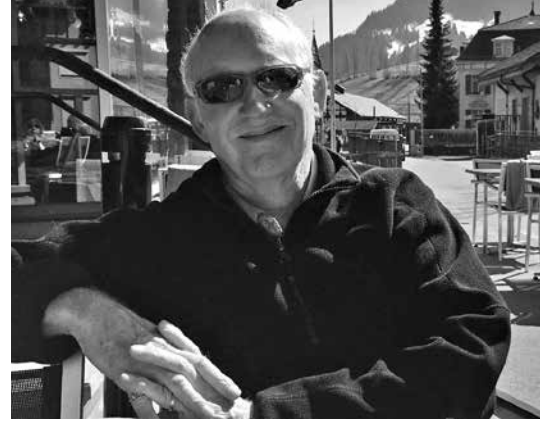


Giotis Kyttaris has lived the life of a wandering musician for more than two decades. As a solo artist, he plays in festivals, bars, clubs and on the street (for Giotis, busking is an important part of his life and music). These days, he divides his time between Greece and the USA, based in Athens and Nashville, respectively). He released his "Blues Spell" CD in 2013 and is currently working on two new albums featuring cigar box guitars, canjos and other homemade instruments, most of which he makes himself.



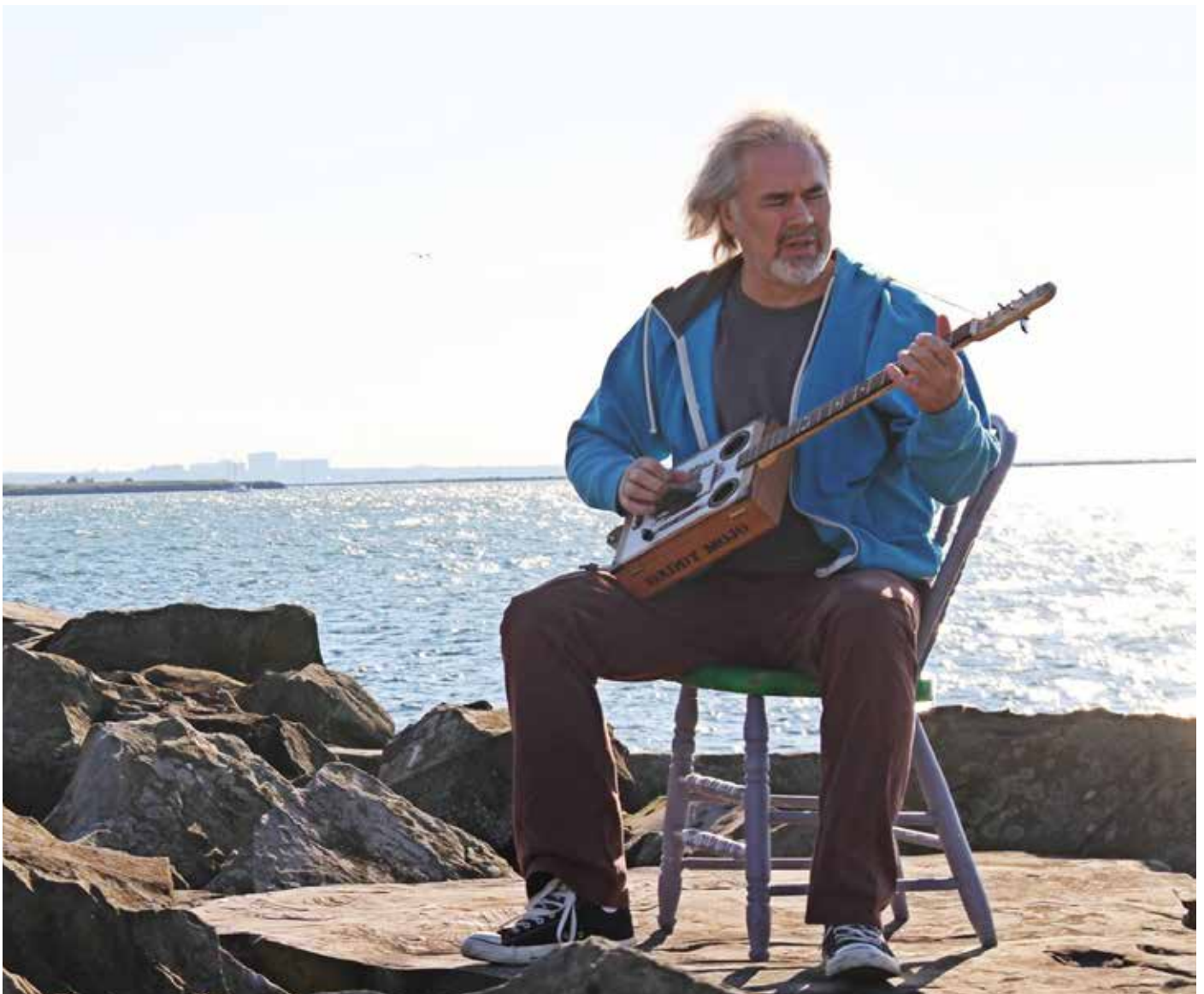


Ross Hewitt a.k.a. Huey Ross was born in Australia in 1953 on BB King's birthday – the same year that color TVs and transistor radios appeared for sale in stores and the first James Bond novel was published. Over the years he has worked as a tennis teacher, journalist, translator and editor, and now 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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