



HTMA President's Notes

Hello everyone it's me again and wouldn't you know it I'm recovering from the massive wonderment of seeing the Chocolate Drops last night and Andy May the night before, two wonderful evenings. I'm sure glad there are people in the world who feel the call to keep all this old time music alive. I hope in our own little way we are part of doing that.

We are making a difference at our little gigs on Saturdays, every once in a while I bump into someone who sees us there and they always comment on how much they and those at the facilities enjoy our take on the musical past. We certainly are having fun doing it so it is doubly as good.

Hope to see you there and keep practicing and performing.

Ellery Curtis



Next Meeting - April 13th
2:00 P.M.

Huntsville/Madison County
Public Library Auditorium

HTMA Coffeehouse Music Series

Presents

The Blue Velvet Band

APRIL 27TH
7:00 PM



OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

Inside this Issue:

- Page 1: President's Notes
- Page 2: April Events / Exe Board
- Page 3: The Berry Patch
- Page 4: The Cigar Box Guitar

- April 2014 Area Events -

New Hope Saturday Night Jam
Every Saturday night in April starting at 6:00 PM
New Hope Senior Center, New Hope Alabama

Elmcroft Retirement Home
April 5th - starting at 3:00 PM
8020 Benaroya Ln. Huntsville, Alabama

The Devere Pride Trio
April 6th - starting at 6-9:00 PM
Straight to Ale Brewery Tap Room
Huntsville, Alabama
<http://www.straighttoale.com/>

Harbor Chase Retirement Home
April 12th - starting at 10:30 AM
4801 Whitesport Cr.; Huntsville, Alabama

HTMA Meeting
April 13th - 2:00 PM
Huntsville Public Library
Huntsville AL

Regency Retirement Village Gig
April 26th starting at 3:15 PM
2004 Max Luther Drive;
Huntsville, Alabama

HTMA Coffeehouse - The Blue Velvet Band
March 27th 7:00 PM
Burritt on the Mountain Old Country Church, Huntsville, AL

HTMA Executive Board

President

Ellery Curtis 256.684.3153 ellerycurtis@hotmail.com

Vice President

Jim England 256.852.5740 harpatune@yahoo.com

Sec/Treasurer

Pat Long 256.539.7211 plong@hiwaay.net

Publicity Chair

Bob Hicks 256.683.9807 hsvfolk@gmail.com

Performance Chair

!!!Position Available!!!

Public Service Chair

Jim England 256.852.5740 harpatune@yahoo.com

Operations Co-Chair

George Williams george.p.williams@pobox.com

Webmaster

Jeri Ann Payne 256.714.4611 jeriann3@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Jeri Ann Payne 256.714.4611 jeriann3@gmail.com



Position of: **Performance Chair**
Needs to be filled for 2014

Please contact

Ellery Curtis ellerycurtis@hotmail.com

or

Jerry LeCroy jelecroy@knology.net

if you wish to help the HTMA in a very
important position!

Visit our website www.huntsvillefolk.org





The Berry Patch

We all have warts. Let's leave it to others to determine if our warts are genetic or environmental in nature and agree we all have them.

Just as I thought. If you are less than age twenty, you deny having warts. If less than thirty, sometimes when no one is looking, you suspect you may have a wart, but you make no mention of it. By forty, privately you are almost certain you have had a wart or two in the past and strongly suspect you have, maybe, two in the present. But either past or present, it is not for publication. Oh, it's alright to joke about having a wart, but you always confess it in a jovial manner.

By age fifty, the choke-hold of having warts begins to lose its grip. You know others have warts, you've been seeing that for fifty years and you strongly suspect that others have seen some of your warts too. So, what the heck, you take a chance and tell you sister, minister, lover, barber or hair-dresser that you have a wart, or two. And, you confess this in a serious manner.

Age sixty seems to be the turning point for warts. About this age, you realize that you have present warts, past warts, and will have future warts. And, you realize the other person is much like you. You start to laugh, really laugh, at some of your present and past warts. Others, your age, start laughing in the same key, you're both singing from the same page.

By seventy, you have revealed most of your warts. Most, but not all. There are some warts you do not disclose, and likely never will, but those are warts of the past and no longer heavy to carry.

By the time you're eighty-four, that's me, you're prone to say, "This is me, warts and all." By this age, warts are not a burden and those you'll never disclose are things of yesterday.

Joe

The History of the Cigar Box Guitar



Cigars were packed in boxes, crates, and barrels as early as 1800, but the small sized boxes that we are familiar with today did not exist prior to around 1840 (Hyman, Tony (1972). Handbook of Cigar Boxes New York: Arnot Art Museum.). Until then, cigars were shipped in larger crates containing 100 or more per case. After 1840, cigar manufacturers started using smaller, more portable boxes with 20-50 cigars per box.

Trace evidence of cigar box instruments exist from 1840 to the 1860s. The earliest illustrated proof of a cigar box instrument known is an etching of two Civil War Soldiers at a campsite with one playing a cigar box fiddle copyrighted in 1876. The etching was created by illustrator and artist Edwin Forbes who, under the banner of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, worked for the Union Army. The etching was included in Forbes work Life Stories of the Great Army. In the etching, the cigar box fiddle clearly shows the brand 'Figaro' on the cigar box.

In addition to the etching, plans for a cigar box banjo were published by Daniel Carter Beard, co-founder of the Boy Scouts of America, in 1884 as part of 'Christmas Eve with Uncle Enos.' The plans, eventually re-titled 'How to Build an Uncle Enos Banjo' as part of Beard's American Boy's Handy Book in the 1890 release as supplementary material in the rear of the book. (Beard, Daniel Carter (1882). The American Boy's Handy Book. New York: Scribner. ISBN 0879234490.). These plans omitted the story but still showed a step-by-step description for a playable 5-string fretless banjo made from a cigar box.

It would seem that the earliest cigar box instruments would be extremely pure and primitive: however this is not always the case depending on the maker's personal budget. The National Cigar Box Guitar Museum has acquired two cigar box fiddles built in 1886 and 1889 that seem very playable and well built. The 1886 fiddle was made for an 8 year old boy and is certainly playable, but the 1889 fiddle has a well carved neck and slotted violin headstock. The latter instrument was made for serious playing.

The cigar box guitars and fiddles were also important in the rise of jug bands and blues. As most of these performers were black Americans living in poverty, many could not afford a "real" instrument. Using these, along with the washtub bass (similar to the cigar box guitar), jugs, washboards, and harmonica, black musicians performed blues during socializations.

The Great Depression of the 1930s saw a resurgence of homemade musical instruments. Times were hard in the American south and for entertainment sitting on the front porch singing away their blues was a popular pastime. Musical instruments were beyond the means of everybody, but an old cigar box, a piece of broom handle and a couple wires from the screen door and a guitar were born.



Modern revival

A modern revival of these instruments (also known as the ***Cigar Box Guitar Revolution***) has been gathering momentum with an increase in cigar box guitar builders and performers. A loose-knit tour of underground musicians tour the East Coast (US) each summer under the banner “Masters of the Cigar Box Guitar Tour.” These musicians include Doctor Oakroot, Johnny Lowebow, Tomi-O and many others. Also, there is a growing number of primitive luthiers adding cigar box guitars to their items for sale.

Modern revival is sometimes due to interest in jug band and the DIY culture, as a cigar box is relatively inexpensive when considering other factors, such as strings and construction time. Many modern cigar box guitars can thus be seen as a type of practice in lathery, and implement numerous personal touches, such as the addition of pick up and resonator cones into it. Luthiers Ted Crocker is instrumental in assisting cigar box guitar builders and players through his network Handmade Music Clubhouse.

Another factor in the current revival can be attributed to many musicians’ desire for a more primal sound. Blues guitarists, in particular, have picked up the cigar box guitar in an attempt to play Delta Blues in its purest form.

The modern revival of cigar box guitars is documented in the 2008 film, “Songs Inside the Box” which was shot primarily at an annual Huntsville, Alabama event called the Cigar Box Guitar Extravaganza.

Shane W. Speal (*King of the Cigar Box Guitar*)

Sigh. The quote above was how the article started in the cover story about my cigar box guitars (March 1999 issue of EMI magazine). Sure, I was thrilled to death to see my instrument grace the front of this sacred publication, but that opening line of the article irked me...”None of the major musical instrument encyclopedias have an entry for cigar box guitar or banjo.”

I just didn’t understand why nobody has noticed this beautifully simple instrument. Hell, I still don’t! We’ve all heard the stories and legends about sharecropper’s sons building their own cigar box guitars. Guitar snobs frequently refer to the lowly cigar box guitar as a measuring stick for bad sounding acoustics. And a few of us have actually wrapped a couple rubber bands around dad’s empty box of Swisher Sweets and added a cardboard tube “neck” just to make it fancy.

The cigar box guitar has such an awesome pedigree. Blind Willie Johnson made a one-string when he was five and learned how to play melodies up and down that lonely string. Later, he would record the monumental Dark Was the Night (Cold Was the Ground) on standard guitar. The song is an instrumental classic that has droning chords laying the background for a haunting melody played up and down on the high E string...a technique he learned on his original one-string.

Not only does the cigar box guitar have a great history, but these little suckers are so much fun to play. I’ve made a bunch in my life (over 200 so far) and each one has its own unique sound. Mine are played with a slide and have a great whining blues sound...one that just cannot be emulated from another guitar. They’re small, portable and almost indestructible. And let’s face it...they’re weird looking and attract major attention.

So maybe none of the major music encyclopedias have an entry for the cigar box guitars. Screw them. With this site and a constantly increasing word-of-mouth campaign, this instrument is finally having her well deserved day in the sun.

<http://cigarboxguitars.com/about/history>