



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.

Hey, speaking of shows this month is open mic for a tribute to the late Pete Seeger who just departed this world a few weeks ago and we would like anyone who would like to play some of his favorite music at the Coffeehouse. If you would like to participate, call Jerry Le Croy and give him your list or song or whatever and you are in. It should be a fun night.

Hope to see you there and keep practicing and performing.

Ellery Curtis



**Next Meeting
March 16th
2:00 P.M.
Huntsville/Madison County Public Library
Auditorium**

HTMA COFFEEHOUSE MUSIC SERIES
PRESENTS

HTMA Member Open Mic Tribute to Pete Seeger



**MARCH 27TH
7:00 PM**



OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

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March Area Events

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

Elmcroft Retirement Home
March 1st 3:00 PM
8020 Benaroya Ln. Huntsville, Alabama

Brewgrass Jam
March 5th
Straight to Ale Brewery Tap Room ~ Huntsville, Alabama
<http://www.straighttoale.com/>

Bluegrass Jam session with Tangled Strings
March 6th 6-9PM
Valley Conservatory ~ Huntsville, Alabama
<http://valleyconservatory.com/pages/calendar>

Mandolin Orange
March 8th 7:30PM
Straight to Ale Brewery Tap Room ~ Huntsville, Alabama
<http://www.straighttoale.com/>

Harbor Chase Retirement Home
March 8th 10:30 AM
4801 Whitesport Cr.; Huntsville, Alabama

Rhonda Vincent and the Rage with Gene Watson
March 14th
Hartselle High School Theatre ~ Hartsell, Alabama
<http://phpromotion.com/concerts/rhonda-vincent-gene-watson>

HTMA Meeting
March 16th 2:00 PM
Bailey Cove Branch Public Library ~ 1409 Weatherly Plaza SE,
Huntsville AL

Del McCoury Band
March 21st
Birmingham, Alabama
<http://delmcouryband.com/dates/>

Regency Retirement Village Gig
March 22nd 3:15 PM
204 Max Luther Drive; Huntsville, Alabama

HTMA Coffeehouse
March 27th 7:00 PM
Burritt on the Mountain Old Country Church, Huntsville, AL

Executive Board

President
Ellery Curtis 256.684.3153 ellerycurtis@hotmail.com

Vice President
Jim England 256.852.5740 harpature@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 harpature@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

MUSHING

My work as a trial lawyer brought people and their problems to my door. With many clients I laughed, with more than a few I cried.

No trial provides more questions and fewer good answers than a contest over the custody of a child. Ironically, the better the parents are qualified to have custody, the more difficult the judge's decision may be. So it was at the courthouse that day when the judge heard testimony about a four year-old girl I will call "Anna."

Both of Anna's parents were respected, honest, law-abiding people. They were good neighbors and good parents. They loved Anna and she loved them. Both trial attorneys knew the judge would have a difficult choice in deciding which parent Anna would go home with when the case ended.

A lady I will call "Mrs. Simmons" was called as a witness. But, she was more than a witness. In a very real way she was part of Anna's family. Mrs. Simmons was eighty years old. She had little formal education, but a head full of good sense. In the witness chair, she twisted the handkerchief in her hands as softly spoke.

Mrs. Simmons told the judge about her experiences in life, her children, and her grandchildren. She explained that she had worked in the home of Anna's family several years before Anna was born. She was at that home when Anna was born and she had lived there as Anna's nanny since that date. As if stating a universal truth, she looked at both parents and said, "*Anna is my baby, too.*"

Mrs. Simmons described a common occurrence—as the years passed by, these parents, instead of growing together, had grown apart.

I said, "*Mrs. Simmons, this judge has to make a decision about Anna. He has to decide who she will live with. It is important that he make the best possible decision. I'm sure you want him to do that.*"

She answered, "*Yes, I understand, I pray for him. I pray for Anna and her mama and daddy.*"

I said, "*Mrs. Simmons, realizing the judge must make a decision about Anna and her future, is there anything about either her mother or her father that you think the judge needs to know in making his decision? Is there any way you can help him?*"

For a few moments Mrs. Simmons looked at Anna's mother and then she turned to the judge, saying, "*Judge, I hope this does not cost me my job, but there is one thing you need to know. Anna's mama don't mush up to that little girl the way she ought to.*"

The judge knew what she meant, but wanting to be sure everyone else knew, he asked, "*What do you mean by 'mush up to'?"*

"Judge, I mean she don't love on, pet on, hold on to that baby enough. She don't pat on, squeeze on, and kiss on that baby enough. Everybody needs mushing. Even judges need mushing."

"*Mrs. Simmons,*" the judge replied, "*you have brought more wisdom to this courtroom than the combined total of all experts who have testified before me in the past thirty years.*"

On occasion cases have a happy ending. After Mrs. Simmons explained a basic need of life, the judge adjourned the trial for several weeks. Before the trial resumed, the attorneys had the case dismissed. Rather than divorce, the parents had decided to take a refresher course in mushing.

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>