



Breedlove

M A G A Z I N E

HUMBLE VIRTUOSITY

**GRETCHEN
MENN**

+

THE REAL STORY BEHIND

BREEDLOVE

+

LTD CONCERT

**PREMIER
BRAZILIAN**

+

PLAY LIKE THE PROS WITH

FORD THURSTON

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FROM TOM BEDELL

As winter wanes, I find myself pondering the differences between shift, change, evolution, and progress—a semantic, navel-gazing exercise, sure, but words do matter. We've agreed to the richness of vocabulary for good reason.

Shift, to me, indicates a steady turning, a natural, cyclical development that carries at least some weight of significance. Seasons shift. Winds shift. Currents shift.

Change feels less timebound and less clearly defined. Changes can occur over eons or instants, can be generative or entropic. The past couple of years should encourage all of us to take a moment of reflection, to think about where we've been, where we are, and where we're going. When I took over at Breedlove, nearly 15 years ago, I could not have imagined where we'd be today as a company, an industry, and a community. More people have joined our rag tag allegiance of string pluckers in the past two years than at any other point in history since the Beatles' cropped torsos graced Ed Sullivan's stage. Guitar manufacturers around the globe are racing to put resonant wood soundboxes in as many eager hands as possible. Some are calling this the "golden era" of acoustic guitar.

I can't speak for other manufacturers, but I can say with confidence and certainty that our days here at the Breedlove, shaded by the nearby Cascade Mountains, are indeed golden. So many of the dreams we conjured a decade ago are now progressing into reality. We're building more gorgeous, exceptional, Sound Optimized guitars here in our workshop than we ever have before. We're redefining what an accessible guitar can sound like with our integrated Eco Tonewood technology. Most importantly to me, we've finally realized our goal of eliminating all clear-cut woods from every single instrument we manufacture. I'm so proud to tell you that every Breedlove guitar is now genuinely sustainable, helping to improve global forest habitats instead of degrading them. And we're not finished, we have lots more to show you in the months and years ahead.

Does all of this amount to progress? I'd like to think it does. Some might call that hubris, but I call it optimism, and optimism inspires us to remain hopeful, joyous, and motivated. I wish all those things for you as we shift into a new spring.

Peace, love, and Rock and Roll
Tom Bedell

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**GUITARS SHOULD
NOT BE YOUR
RETIREMENT
STRATEGY**

IAN COOK

NAVIGATING ACOUSTIC MOSH PITS

January's Featured Artist is also the guy who hand voices every Breedlove.

January's featured artist is Ian Cook, lead guitarist and vocalist for the infamous Oregon band Larry and His Flask (LAHF). LAHF has been around for almost two decades, evolving from a teenage "crappy punk band" into an all-acoustic sextet that channels the punk ethos and energy into a mature sound grounded in American roots music. They recorded over a dozen albums and toured all over the world before putting the project on pause in 2019.

Ian also just happens to be the Sound Optimization tech here at the Breedlove workshop. He brings decades of experience as a songwriter and working musician into the shop every day. Ian sound tests every Made in Bend guitar we produce. (In other words, he'll get to play your dream guitar before you ever lay eyes on it.) We sat down with Ian to learn a bit more about his musical journey, his legendary band, and how all that experience and insight helps us build better guitars.

Ian Cook on Playing Blues Bar Gigs at 11

I started playing guitar when I was nine. My dad was a player, and my parents were totally supportive. I was really into blues at the time, and they'd take me to local bars to play in open blues jams when I was probably 11 years old. I would sit in with these dudes, work on my chops. I got a good feel for music in general just by doing it, just being thrown in the fire.

The Origins of Larry and His Flask

When I got a little older and the teen angst started to kick in, I found punk rock. In high school, I met the dudes that ended up being in Larry and His Flask, who became the band that I spent most of my musical career with. We formed that band when I was a sophomore. I was 16 on my very first tour. I can't believe my parents let me go, but we went to California one summer. I think we were gone for two weeks. We played about five shows.



Folk as Proto-Punk

We were just a really crappy punk band for a long time. As we got older, we were all growing out of the punk thing. We started looking deep into the history of American music, roots music, traditional folk stuff—Jimmy Rogers, Woody Guthrie—and getting into the movement aspect. Because folk was punk before punk was punk. It was protest music. It had the same fighting spirit but there was more musicality.

Musical Evolution

I was a more advanced player than most people my age, certainly most punk guitarists. From a technical aspect, we were listening to some of the bluegrass guys, like Doc Watson and Norman Blake, all the flat-picking stuff, it was just insane. We were drinking everything in. Gypsy jazz, like Django Reinhardt. I was immersing myself in more traditional acoustic guitar playing. And we started to infuse that into what we did. So, we decided to break the band down and go completely unplugged. Over that winter, our bassist brewed a bunch of apple cider that was pretty over-fermented. We just passed the jugs around, and passed the songs around, and jammed throughout that whole winter. And by the time we emerged on the other side, we had something approaching a cohesive band.

The Post-Americana Label

Folk-punk or folk-rock is what you could call our music, really, but that was so generic. We eventually landed on the post-Americana label as a joke, the degradation of American music, essentially. It's like an elliptic version of American music with everything but the kitchen sink thrown in. There's no clean differentiation between styles; it's all just this weird amalgam.

Acoustic Mosh Pits

Acoustic mosh pits can get a little hairy. There's a reason heavier bands play sturdy instruments. We had a few feet punch through the standup base, some holes in the acoustic guitars. A few broken banjo heads. [Stuff] happens. Most of the time we found ourselves in environments where mosh pits were a norm. We'd be the only acoustic band on a punk show. There really wasn't a place for us in your typical, sit down, folky vibe kind of show. We were a little early on the whole punk infusion into acoustic music. The bluegrass community wanted nothing to do with us, and at the same time, the punk community didn't really know what to do with us either.





Songwriting on the Clock

Here at Breedlove, I have constant access to guitars, so I'll write riffs at work. I've actually come up with the structure of a song and then written all the lyrics at work. There's a handful of songs on my new record that I wrote here. I'll be testing a guitar, work little parts out, go do something else, pick up another a guitar and work out another section. While I'm building and testing guitars, I'm also piecing together songs. I've never been able to do that at a job before, so that's amazing.

Ripping On Other People's Dream Guitars

Being an experienced guitarist, I understand the qualities and the details that are important to a professional guitar player. I'm involved with our American guitars all the way from the beginning of the process to final shipping. I pick all the sets of wood. I sand them down. I test their frequencies as raw wood. Once the bodies get put together, I test the frequencies again before they have any finish or anything on them to make sure every guitar is on track to be as close to perfect as we can get it. And then I get to actually play them once they're finished and strung up. I play every guitar before it leaves. If it's not right, I'll do very delicate chiseling or sanding until it is. Once they've passed my play test, I do a final clean up, and bag them for shipping. I get to rip on people's dream guitars before they even get to touch them.

Learn more about all the Breedlove craftspeople





THE REAL STORY

(OF BREEDLOVE GUITARS)

Born in a Barn

In 1990, pioneering California luthiers Larry Breedlove and Steve Henderson did something crazy. They left stable jobs at Taylor Guitars in sunny San Diego County to start their own business in the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. The duo landed in tiny Tumalo, Oregon, just northwest of Bend, opening shop in an old barn.

But this was no simple mountain aerie. They were not trying to immerse themselves in a pastoral landscape to practice archaic guitar art. They wanted a laboratory, a place with the freedom to test out their wildest concepts. Breedlove and Henderson built better guitars through experimentation—challenging assumptions about lutherie with completely original concepts like graduated tops, unique tonewoods, bridge trusses, asymmetrical headstocks, and winged bridges. Not all of those experiments survived the test of time. Breedlove no longer builds guitars with graduated tops, and the bridge truss is only used in a handful of specific models. Those early creative efforts, however, yielded groundbreaking fingerstyle instruments and established Breedlove as a guitar manufacturer grounded in tradition but looking toward the future.

In 1994, two years after the company officially launched their new designs, Larry's brother Kim joined as master luthier. Kim eventually steered the brand through nearly 25 years of sonic metamorphosis, facilitating breakthrough after breakthrough. Breedlove refined traditional assembly methods and invented radical new body shapes.





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Bought by a Hippy

Two Old Hippies Guitars, led by Tom Bedell, purchased Breedlove in November 2010. Stories of innovative, boutique brands getting gobbled up by corporate ownership, stripped of their souls, and perverted for profit feel all too familiar in the 21st Century. But that was never Bedell's intention, and that's not what he's done. The past dozen years have seen Breedlove maintain its roots in central Oregon. The company continues to innovate in sound design while also realizing new visions for the brand that have nothing to do with profit.

"Breedlove has continued, really, from the dreams of Larry and Steve," Bedell says. "Everything we're doing today is still based on innovation and customization. Those are the themes that inspire us. We're constantly learning. It's just this real passion to create the best sounding instruments possible."

Breedlove HR Manager Terri Hensley was there not long after the start, in the Tumalo days.

"Many of our craftspeople," Hensley says, "have been here for years. They'll stop us as we walk through the workshop just to show us a remarkable piece of wood, almost giddy, saying, 'I can't wait to see and hear this when it's done.' They're just so excited, still, which I love, after so many years."

Design meets science in Bend, just as it did at the beginning of Breedlove. As innovation demands, some of the founders' concepts have been altered or left behind, with fresh ideas building on core principles.

"Every day," says Bedell, "we're continuing the tradition of looking forward that Breedlove started with back in 1990."

Enhanced by Science and Technology

Breedlove is the only guitar manufacturer to utilize Sound Optimization. This meticulous and carefully monitored process ensures that raw wood sets realize their greatest potential as guitars. Builders combine the ancient art of tone tapping—tapping on raw wood and listening for particular properties, used by icons of the stringed instrument craft like Stradivari—with modern technology and proprietary software. Builders can account for the specific densities of discrete wood sets as well as top and back frequency separation. The result? Guitars that embrace and harness the unique characteristics of the living wood from which they were fashioned rather than constraining those woods to a preconceived design.

When chief product designer Angela Christensen (who apprenticed under Kim Breedlove) thinks about guitars, she is always thinking about Sound Optimization. She's also thinking about the unique relationship between an instrument's body shape and size and the dimension of the soundhole, and how those parameters will interact with different species of wood cut to carefully determined specifications.

Continuing to Innovate

"A big part of Breedlove's history," says Bedell, "has to do with redefining body shapes. We keep the very first Concert (which Bedell acquired from Larry Breedlove) ever made on display in the lobby!"

"Before we developed the Breedlove Concert, Concerto, and Concertina [Breedlove's proprietary body shapes], you had to compromise between volume, projection, overtones, and complexity. We've worked really hard at giving you all of that in an instrument that feels natural and easy to play."

In addition to optimizing the sound of individual instruments and inventing new acoustic guitar body shapes, Breedlove has also successfully integrated new tonewoods. They were the first acoustic guitar brand to realize the potential of myrtlewood, which produces an ideal sonic blend of rosewood, mahogany, and maple. Myrtlewood also makes sense for an Oregon-based business because it only grows in the Pacific Northwest.

"Myrtlewood has been a real breakthrough," Bedell says. "Of all the tonewoods that exist on earth, myrtlewood is one of the top two or three in terms of the sound it creates."

"When we were introducing it in the '90s," Hensley, an eager Breedlove historian, chuckles, "nobody knew what it was. It's a great tonewood and other builders weren't using it. Half of our USA Breedlove guitars now feature it."

Understanding our Impact

Bedell didn't drastically alter the identity of the company, but he did add his values. One of the primary changes that Bedell instituted when he took the helm was to focus on where the source materials came from and what impact they have on the environment.

"The owner before me had no idea where the wood came from," says Bedell. "It never occurred to him to think about, 'Where did the tree grow? What impact might the harvest have had on the sustainability of our forests?'"

Tom Bedell cares deeply about environmental stewardship and set a goal for the company to become leaders in the industry.

"We set a policy of using no clear cut trees in any of our guitars, of only individually harvesting trees, and doing everything

we could to protect the forest community and neighborhood. And we made a policy that any mill we work with would protect the [local] wildlife, human habitat, and forest."

Bedell's goal is to push every guitar manufacturer in the hope that they too not only do less harm, but help protect and restore our world's forests.

"I thought, if I could sent an example that others would follow, I could make a difference."

Building Guitars for Everyone

In addition to sustainability, Bedell also set a goal of access and inclusivity. Breedlove started out as a boutique manufacturer, individually building custom guitars by hand. While that produces exceptional instruments, it also limits the number of people who can enjoy them. Over the past few years, Breedlove has released several new lines of guitars, like the Organic and ECO collections, that are accessible to players who can't afford custom shop price tags. While not produced in the Bend, Oregon workshop, these instruments' design DNA can be traced back to those heady days in a dilapidated barn. Not only do they benefit from the pioneering sound research that has been part of Breedlove Guitars from the beginning, they also maintain the modern Breedlove demand to use only sustainably sourced materials.





STILL Building Guitars in Bend

Though Breedlove has expanded its offerings to include players whose bank accounts can't cover triple digit instruments, the brand and headquarters have never left central Oregon. The workshop is still right there in Bend, where a growing team of builders, designers, sound engineers, and luthiers are still making guitars and innovating new ways to make them sound even better. Unlike many of the major American guitar makers, instruments crafted at the Breedlove USA workshop are still made largely by hand, with nearly three dozen craftspeople, many players themselves, imprinting every guitar they touch.

"We're able to build 2,000 guitars a year here in Bend," Bedell says. "Every one is uniquely dimensioned to whatever the characteristic of that wood is and whatever we want that instrument to play like and sound like. We couldn't do that if we didn't hand build every guitar. It would be impossible."



GRETCHEN MENN

➔ OVERACHIEVING TO AVOID RECREATIONAL SELF-LOATHING

Breedlove's featured artist for February, Gretchen Menn, might be described this way: humble virtuosity. Her music is a constellation of dedicated practice, meticulous form, scrupulous perfectionism, creative ambition, and raw talent. Gretchen, however, would never describe herself that way. She'll just tell you she's lucky. And, in many ways, she is. Her day job—honoring Jimmy Page in the all-female Led Zeppelin tribute band Zepparella—pays for her groceries, allowing her solo projects complete creative freedom. *Abandon All Hope*, an instrumental concept album based on Dante's *Inferno*, paints face melting guitar riffs onto a canvas of classical and orchestral composition. We stole a few minutes of her time to learn about her background, dream jobs, and how the fear of public embarrassment can drive exceptionalism.



Gretchen Menn on Her Musical Origins:

My first instrument was the flute. The music teacher at my elementary school told a cautionary story about the flute being really difficult. And because I was feeling especially petulant that day, I decided I was going to play that instrument. I played for about three years, and then I went to a Joe Satriani show with my dad. Eric Johnson opened for him, and I heard "Cliffs of Dover." I was like, "That's it... I need to pick up that instrument."

Her Hesitation about a Music Career:

I intended to get a responsible job after college because I knew music was a difficult way to make a living. I also noticed many musicians were completely jaded about music. While I wanted their skills, I didn't want their attitudes. I decided to make decisions in furtherance of growing my love for music, learning more, and expanding creatively. I hoped that if I took the expectations of making money off the table, I could keep loving it and pay the rent some other way.

Giving Up Someone Else's Dream Job:

Because I graduated from college a year early, I felt like I owed myself another year of education. I assumed a relatively fun, interesting day job would help maintain the purity of my love of music. Turned out that flight school was about a year, if I worked hard, and about the same price as another year of college. So, I went to flight school, then right into flight instruction, and put in my resume to airlines as soon as I had the minimum hours. Mitch Hedberg has a great joke about baked potatoes: They take so long to cook that sometimes even if he doesn't want a baked potato, he just puts one in the oven because by the time it's ready, who knows? I didn't expect to hear back for months, maybe longer, but I ended up getting a call the next week, and an interview

a couple days later. I got hired at the interview. I figured, "I gotta give this a go. Even if I don't want to stay at an airline, somebody's going to pay me to learn how to fly a jet? Sign me up. That'll be a more interesting chapter in my life than the time I didn't do that."

Four months later, I was really bored. I stuck it out for about a year, and then it occurred to me that flying jets was not my dream. Music was. Moreover, I was occupying somebody else's dream. So, I decided to step away and pursue my passion more directly.

The Origins of Zepparella:

I'd studied classical guitar in school, which I still love, but I wanted to play rock, and I wanted to play lead, and I wanted to force myself to learn stage presence. I met Clementine in the first professional band I played in, AC/DShe, an all-female AC/DC tribute band. We played in that project for about a year before we realized that we had different goals from some of the rest of the band. Clementine said to me, during a drive to a gig, that she had always wanted to learn the music of Led Zeppelin and was thinking of starting a band. She booked our first gig eight weeks later. I locked myself in my room and just learned Led Zeppelin songs like a maniac.

It's wonderful, honoring Jimmy Page's part of led Zeppelin's music. Not only do I get to play heavy, iconic, in-your-face guitar riffs, but I get to play interesting modal solos. I get to play beautiful ballads, and heartfelt blues-based stuff, and gorgeous acoustic pieces. I have to play with a slide, and I have to beat the crap out of a Les Paul with a violin bow. It's a guitar education with immense accountability, because I'm doing it on stage for fans. And it actually helps me buy my groceries. Isn't that awesome?





Being Called an Overachiever:

I'm not an overachiever. I'm incredibly lucky—lucky for the parents I have, the opportunities that have fallen in my lap. I didn't graduate early from college because I was an overachiever. I was uncomfortable socially in high school and spent a lot of lunches studying in the library rather than dealing with social politics. I got advanced placement credits without really thinking what they meant, and started college with a year of credits. Yeah, I work hard, but I don't minimize the advantages I've had.

I get embarrassed easily—I always have—so going on stage and screwing something up probably upsets me more than somebody who doesn't have that tendency. I prepare for things a lot and try not to botch opportunities given to me.

The Rock and Roll Lifestyle:

I'm the most un-rock and roll person you've ever met. I'd be a huge disappointment for anybody who thinks that hanging with me is going to be a raging party. My dad's a writer, my mom's a psychologist, and my sister's a doctor. None of them are heavy drinkers, and all of them can drink me under the table. I'll enjoy an after-the-show drink with my friends or bandmates, but I'm very, very moderate.

Basing an Album on a 14th Century Italian Epic Poem:

Zepparella has become a fun day job that earns me the ability to do whatever the hell I want for my own music. Ultimately, we all have to decide what are we meant to be as artists, as humans. Until I embraced the direction for *Abandon All Hope*, I felt this duality between my two musical sides: the geeky side—my classical background, studying classical guitar, earning a degree in music—and my love of screaming electric guitar and more modern styles. I realized I don't have to pick or apologize for either. Our

contrasts make us interesting.

I also love literature—I come from a family of writers and academics, and was raised reading Shakespeare and other classics. The idea behind a concept album based on Dante was not to be edgy or difficult. It was a genuine creative offering, a merging of influences. I inhale inspirations, and this is what comes out when I don't have to edit myself with commercial aspirations. I'm not in danger of having a massive, commercially-successful album, and that's never been my goal.

Maybe Being an Overachiever After All:

I enjoyed part one of the Dante journey so much, and I was having some postpartum album release depression. Then it hit me: *The Divine Comedy*! I have Purgatory! I have Paradise!

I've been making good headway on the next album, which will be based on Purgatory [part two of Dante's *Divine Comedy*]. It feels so right, because I'm not a dark person typically. Tapping into a darkness [for *Abandon All Hope*] in order to honestly portray Dante's underworld was a little uncharacteristic, but it happened to coincide with a very difficult time in my own life, so it became an outlet.

With Purgatory, I'm excited to explore material that may come a bit more naturally, and this pandemic has felt decidedly purgatorial. I am excited to write something unabashedly pretty for Paradise [part three of Dante's *Divine Comedy*] when I get there.

I certainly don't make things easy for myself. I didn't just decide to make a concept album...It had to be super long and really intense, and now there's gotta be three of them.

Maybe I am a bit of an overachiever.



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Her Relationship with Guitars:

I think my relationship with my instrument is as complex and as nuanced as my relationship with myself. The best moments express my higher self and allow growth—personally, musically, even spiritually—but it's not an uncomplicated relationship. The lower self is always there, ready to jump in with ego or insecurity. As a guitar player, faced daily with amazing guitarists, it's easy to succumb to negative self-talk. I really try to avoid recreational self-loathing, and yet discerning critique is essential for getting better. It's a delicate balance. I do my best to see my guitar as an opportunity for growth rather than some cruel beast presenting insurmountable challenges.

Though I primarily play electric—at least in public—these days, classical guitar was where I started. Playing acoustic takes away all the excess stuff. It's just your hands, your ears, and the sound of the instrument. I love that. I really love that.

Why She Plays Breedlove's:

I play Breedlove guitars first and foremost because of the sound. They're beautiful sounding instruments. Combine that with the mentality of the company—eco-conscious manufacturing, making guitars accessible to beginners as well as immaculate, top-shelf instruments for professionals—I love that they're non-exclusive. I'm a pretty rational, science-based person, but I feel like Breedlove instruments have a spirit that somehow comes through. Maybe it's the people who build them, and maybe it's the forests from which they were harvested. They just have a wonderful feel, sound, and vibe.





Fingerpicking Fundamentals: Tutorial Video with Gretchen Menn

Gretchen's passion, work ethic, and ability have allowed her to master a huge range of music and play styles. She's also a gifted speaker, and exceptional educator, so we're very pumped to kick off our video collaboration series with her.

Fundamentals matter, ask any self-taught player who's had to unlearn bad habits. In this detailed instructional video, Gretchen explains foundational hand and finger positioning, tone production, basic terminology, and common mistakes. She also provides a complete two-week lesson plan with a custom practice tracker sheet to help you master these skills and prepare yourself for the next lesson. Though this is an introductory lesson, we think everyone can benefit from some fundamentals.

Download the Practice Tracker Sheet!



Fingerpicking Fundamentals Lesson 2: Learn to Play Led Zeppelin's Bron Aur Yr


In lesson 1 of this series, Gretchen Menn explained essential techniques and terminology for learning or improving finger style guitar play. She also laid out a full two week lesson plan to get your hands warm and your mind-muscle connections strong.

Now, Gretchen's going to show you how to apply all that practice and learn to play one of Led Zeppelin's lesser known ballads: Bron Aur Yr. Not to be confused with Bron Y Aur Stomp off Led Zeppelin III, Bron Aur Yr is a delicate fingerpicking melody from the Physical Graffiti album.

Gretchen walks you through all the various parts of the song. We suggest learning and practicing each one individually before moving on to the next, and then putting them all together once you have each part well established in your fingers and your brain.

This tutorial will benefit novice and experienced players alike. If you follow Gretchen's instructions and advice, you might ultimately decide, as she has, that learning to play this song is far easier than learning to pronounce its name.





NYLON OR STEEL STRING GUITARS

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT
INSTRUMENT FOR YOU.

If you're relatively new to acoustic guitars, you may have encountered instruments with different strings, different shapes, and different profiles. This article will help you understand the differences between nylon and steel string guitars. First, you should know that they are very different instruments. One is not superior to the other, but understanding their individual attributes will help you decide which instrument is best for you.

If you're a more experienced player, familiarizing yourself these differences will help you expand your guitar consciousness and maybe convince you to try something new.

"Guitar" is a Category, Not an Instrument

Guitars are not a monolith; they're an archetype. The "guitar" you picture in your mind shares similar structure to the one that I conjure in my head. They both have strings, a wood body, and a fretted neck, but the details might vary dramatically. That's part of the instrument's appeal—a Stratocaster warped through a synth pedal is just as much a guitar as a Legacy Concertina played purely acoustic—guitars can produce a universe of sound.

Even if we discount electrics, acoustic guitars offer expansive tonal variety—more than enough for a lifetime of experimentation and play. One of the ways you can experience that variety is through different string materials, namely steel or nylon.

Most modern guitars are designed for steel strings. American music—from blues and bluegrass, to rock and country—rings through steel. But steel is not your only option. In fact, steel strings are relatively new inventions in the annals of guitar lore.

A Brief History of Guitar Strings

“Gut” Strings

The first guitars, dating back to mid-thirteenth century Europe, had strings fashioned from dried animal intestines. In fact, intestine strings were the norm for nearly 600 years—the vast majority of guitar history. You may have heard the term “catgut” strings, but their origins are not actually feline. The original “gut” strings came from sheep or cows, both of which were once referred to as “cattle.” “Catgut” is simply shorthand for “cattle gut.” The intestines were cleaned, steeped, scraped, sanitized, dyed, and dried, before being wound together to produce strings of different sizes. There’s a reason catgut strings are no longer fashionable beyond their potentially off-putting origins. In addition to being tonally inconsistent, gut strings were difficult to tune, very sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity, prone to breakage, and prohibitively expensive.

Steel Strings

The exact provenance of steel guitar strings has been lost to history, but they emerged in the United States sometime in the mid 1800s. The steel string guitar is a wholly American instrument, popularized during the time of Western expansion when extruded steel for fencing the vast tracts of land in the territories was readily available and cheap. Cowboys strung their guitars with the same wires they used to contain their cattle. The evolution of modern guitars and modern music can be traced back to this moment in U.S. history when an iconic industry came to life. You can read the whole story in a series published by our friends at Premier Guitar Magazine. It’ll be worth your time.

Nylon Strings

While Americans shifted to building new guitars that could handle steel strings, classical players in Europe continued to pluck dried gut. During World War II, demand for surgical sutures—also made from catgut—soared, making the source material

difficult to find. DuPont had invented nylon in 1935, but no one thought to use the new material in instruments until catgut became scarce. The classical guitar Maestro, Andres Segovia, worked with New York luthier Albert Augustine to produce the first commercial nylon strings in 1948. Nylon proved capable of mimicking traditional strings in sound and feel while being easier to produce, more consistent, less impacted by humidity, far more durable, and significantly less expensive.

Today’s players can enjoy all the different string options, even gut strings, though they’ll set you back a few extra dollars.

What’s the Difference?

Nylon and steel string guitars may look similar on the outside, but internally, they’re quite different. As the luthier and writer Ervin Somogyi wrote, “From an engineering standpoint, these are different instruments that share the same name.” Steel strings are under much greater tension than nylon, which means that a steel string guitar’s top and neck must be able to withstand much more force without warping, and the bridge has to be sufficiently anchored to avoid ripping off the soundboard.

To go back to the words of Somogyi, a great guitar must exist, “on the cusp of disaster. That means that it is NO STRONGER than it needs to be to hold together under string tension and the rigors of being played; and it is NO WEAKER than that either, because to make it so will ensure eventual failure (breakage or collapse). One can understand that a soundbox that is built to that balance point will be able to vibrate and resonate as fully as possible.”

Both nylon and steel string guitars, if well built, teeter on the cusp of disaster in order to produce great sound without crumbling. But, they each have very different cusps. For that reason, you cannot put steel strings on a guitar that was built for nylon, and vice versa.

How Do They Sound?:

In addition to having very different construction, nylon and steel string guitars also produce vastly different sounds. Most of the music you're accustomed to hearing was produced by steel string guitars. Steel string instruments, such as the Rainforest S Concert, produce a sharper, crisper, and louder sound familiar to contemporary audiences and players.

On the other hand, nylon string guitars (such as the Pursuit Concert Nylon) aren't intended to be strummed or played aggressively. They're subtle, fingerpicking instruments with distinctive feel and tone. They produce a soft, warm sound often found in folk, jazz, Flamenco or, of course, classical guitar.

Which Should I Buy?:

Choosing a guitar is a deeply personal and subjective decision. Most players want to experience the feeling of participating in the music they love. They want to transition from being a passive listener to an engaged creator. To that end, you should purchase the guitar that allows you to create the music you want to hear. For the vast majority of players, that means steel string instruments, but there are other factors to consider.

Nylon strings are somewhat gentler on the fingers. Some sources, even expert ones, suggest that players should begin with nylon strings to avoid some of the finger pain that comes with the guitar learning curve. For what it's worth, we disagree with that advice. Finger pain is mild and fleeting. After a few weeks of consistent playing through nominal discomfort, your fingers will develop callouses and will stop hurting. If you can't push through a short period of slight sting, you probably aren't all that serious about playing guitar and won't be committed enough to stick it out into proficiency.

More importantly, if the guitar you learn on can't produce the appropriate sounds for the

music you want to create, you won't get to experience the satisfaction of playing your music. That satisfaction and joy is what makes most players stick with the difficult rigors of learning the guitar. We suggest starting out with a guitar that emulates the songs and artists you want to play. For most people, that means starting out with steel. If, however, your personal tastes draw you to subtle fingerpicking—folk, jazz, Flamenco, or classical guitar music—nylon will be your preferred material.

Diversifying Sound:

More experienced players may want to diversify their sonic palettes, and adding a guitar strung with a different material opens up a whole new world of play. Since steel and nylon strings are, as noted earlier, "different instruments that share the same name," guitarists enjoy a unique opportunity. Our fundamental muscle memory can transfer to what is, essentially, a different instrument and allow us to play very different music.

If you're a well-heeled strummer looking to add finger style to your repertoire, consider adding a guitar made for just that purpose to your collection. On the other hand, if you cut your teeth learning classical guitar, like our good friend Gretchen Menn, and want to expand into the universe of rock, blues, bluegrass, and country, pick up a new axe strung with steel.





THE PREMIER CONCERT CE LTD

EUROPEAN SPRUCE - BRAZILIAN ROSEWOOD

The stuff of legends—mighty European spruce, rich Brazilian rosewood, an accent of lustrous Hawaiian koa—combine in this limited edition, tried and true tone machine. Featuring Breedlove's revolutionary soft cutaway Concert body, this guitar produces a versatile, mesmerizing sound guaranteed to haunt you every moment it's not in your hands. A classic European spruce top, ultra-rare Brazilian Rosewood sides hand selected from the largest collection of legal Brazilian rosewood on the planet, and a three piece Brazilian rosewood back accentuated with a master grade piece of figured Koa. Own a piece of guitar history—an heirloom quality investment you can enjoy every day of your life. It's the sound of rosewood now—and forever.

»» [VIEW GUITAR PROFILE ONLINE](#)



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THE BRAZILAIN ROSEWOOD COLLECTION

BREEDLOVE HOLDS THE WORLD'S LARGEST
CACHE OF THIS FAMED TONEWOOD.

In acoustic guitar circles, Brazilian rosewood reigns as the world champion of prized tonewoods. If you've played a guitar made with Brazilian rosewood, you know. The highly resonant tones, the chime-like ring that seems to sustain itself indefinitely, the rich colors and intricate swirls. When cut, Brazilian rosewood actually produces a delicious floral scent, similar to roses; hence the name. The only problem? The wood itself is now nearly impossible to find.

Brazilian rosewood's appeal in art and industry created a huge demand leading to mass over-harvest. In 1992, the trees were declared endangered by CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Since then, both the wood and its end products have been banned from international trade—kind of a huge bummer for guitar aficionados.

Luckily for all of you, Breedlove holds the world's largest collection of legal, documented Brazilian Rosewood. Not only can we ethically build instruments from that mana of acoustic sound, we are allowed to ship those guitars anywhere in the world, something most other guitar companies cannot do. How Breedlove acquired this incredible cache of raw materials is an interesting tale that dates back half a century.

In the 1960s, a church ornament company on the outskirts of Madrid, Spain imported a shipment of rosewood logs from Brazil to make elaborate adornments for the continent's copious cathedrals. The ornament company went out of business soon thereafter, and the logs were sold to a tonewood supplier for high-quality stringed instruments named Madinter. After the 1992 ban on rosewood trade, the wood became very difficult to sell internationally, so Madinter shelved it and kind of forgot about it. For another two decades this trove sat and waited.

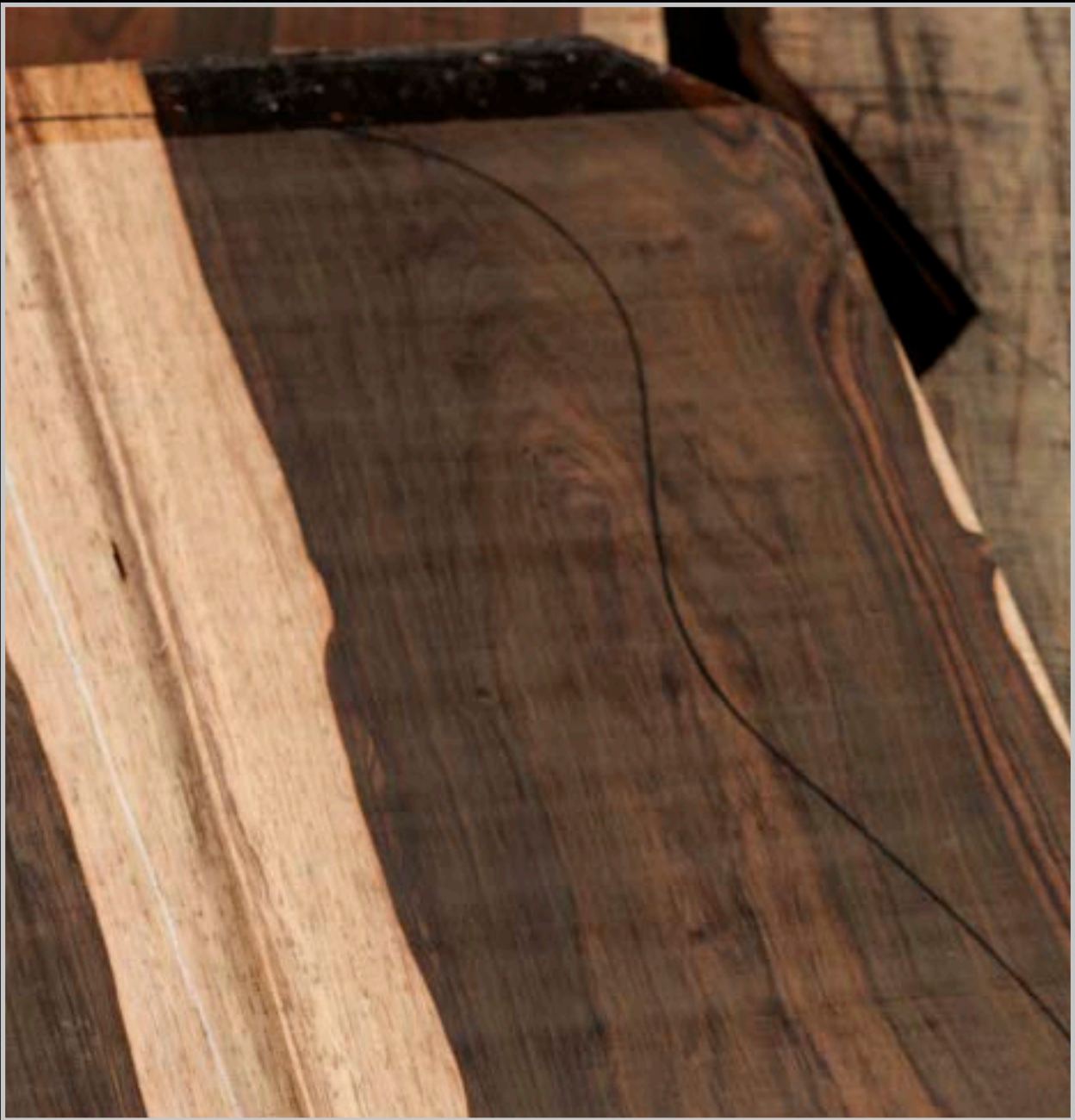
In 2013, Breedlove approached Madinter and offered to acquire all of the remaining Brazilian rosewood. Because the wood was purchased and imported well before the 1992 prohibition, and because Madinter possessed all of the documentation confirming its mid-20th-century arrival in Spain, it could be legally exported to the United States with full CITES compliance.

With this large, exclusive treasure of Brazilian tonewood sets, Breedlove crafts fully legal, completely ethical rosewood guitars at half the cost other companies are charging. Those instruments can travel throughout the world with a guitar passport issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At Breedlove, we talk a lot about our two primary focuses: building exceptional guitars, and valuing natural ecosystems by being very thoughtful about our wood harvest and sourcing. Because we hold the world's largest stash of Brazilian rosewood from trees that were harvested before the species became endangered, we can build you guitars from this exquisite tonewood without any guilt, shame, or hypocrisy.

View the NEW Premier Brazilian
Limited Edition model!





KEEPING YOUR GUITAR HAPPY DURING THE COLD MONTHS

Dry air and fluctuating temperatures can be dangerous—here are some simple, inexpensive tips for cold weather and winter care.

Winter is hard. It's long and it's cold.

Guitars don't like winter. They can't ski. They can't skate. And they can't do that New England thing where you heat up the maple syrup and pour it on the snow.

Guitars, when they are not in your loving hands, tend to want to snuggle up for the winter, in a nice hard case or gig bag, preferably with a little humidification.

Seriously, though, winter can be a challenge for guitars, especially acoustic guitars. And a little knowledge can go a long way in keeping your instrument safe, happy and ready for the next playing session.

Winter air, even in sunnier climes, can be a bit dry. Up north, it's just frightful, with enough moisture pulled out of the air to sting the nose and create static charges as you walk along the carpet.

The simple way to fight that, for both you and your guitar, is through humidification. Guitars are made from trees. Therefore, in ways more than just metaphorical, a guitar is a living thing. Wood interacts with its surroundings, literally drinking in moisture when it senses it's in danger, much the way you fight the wooziness of dehydration by slugging a glass or two from the faucet.

If it gets too dry, say below 40 percent relative humidity, the very thin wood used in guitar tops, backs and sides, can crack or sink. Not only that, but a desperately low level (below 30 percent) can even make for a buzzing action, loose bridge or sharp fret ends at the edge of the neck.

And, let's remember, many favorite tonewoods, like mahogany, rosewood and granadillo, come from regions that don't experience winter to the same considerable degree, meaning those woods can be especially susceptible to humidity-related issues.

If you're playing one of Breedlove's *Organic Collection* models, you may have a torrefied European spruce top. Are you loving the aged sound—that comes from a process whereby the wood is essentially roasted, removing much of its native moisture content, and making it sound great, of course, while also making it less susceptible to fluctuations in weather.

But that doesn't mean a Breedlove *Organic Collection* model doesn't need to some tender loving care, too.

So, having established that dry air—particularly in desert locales or during the late fall to early spring heating season—can be a tricky situation for instruments, what do you do about it?

First, when you're not playing it, put it away. More than ever, in winter a guitar wants to be in its case or in its bag. If you don't have something to keep it safe, or if you just can't bear not seeing that beautiful Breedlove axe out in the open, keep it away from heaters, stoves, windows and outside walls, where the temperature difference of the surface and the air inside the house can get confusing.

Some serious collectors dedicate a closed room as a music studio, and display their favorite instruments on stands. You can almost bet they've also got a room humidifier keeping things at a steady, safe level.

Guitars can handle different temperatures, within reason, but have a very hard time changing quickly from one environment to another.

If, in the winter, for example, you receive a new guitar by mail or by delivery, you will want to keep it in its box—we know, it's not easy to be patient—for 24 hours to let it acclimate to the new atmosphere in your house. Similarly if heading out for a gig, let your Breedlove warm up a little at the venue before opening the case.

The big danger here is causing a crack in the instrument's protective finish by shocking it with a temperature change. It's heartbreaking to pick up your prized possession only to find it "crazed" like a broken mirror, even if that condition rarely affects the sound.

That room humidifier is a fine idea for everybody, and usually inexpensive, too. It's good for you and your guitar, and it's an absolute requirement if you have a number of instruments—in or out of cases. Many have built in hygrometers, which measure the amount of moisture in the air. Again, for guitar health, a relative humidity target between 45 and 50 percent, inside the house, is good. Too much will make it sound like there's a blanket over your guitar and brings its own consequences, like high action, swollen tops and loose braces.

You can also easily find a small digital hygrometer at the music shop or hardware store.

For one or two guitars, or for traveling, there are a bevy of humidification systems available these days, much more so than in the not too distant dark ages when a green rubber tube with a sponge in it was pretty much the only option.

You can still find the latter, but we're not fans of it—the way the sponge and the plastic can come in contact with the unfinished wood inside the body is a little scary.

Better are case humidifiers and soundhole units that can be suspended in the strings (rather than covering the soundhole) without touching anything else. These come in a variety of styles and you can choose which best suits you, but in each case carefully follow instructions so that water is never leaking into or onto the instrument. And be vigilant about keeping track. It's worth it.

The equation is simple. Take care of your guitar, and it will take care of you—for a lifetime.



CREATE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

Content surrounds us. We're immersed, sometimes inundated by posts, videos, songs, blogs, articles, episodes, series, clips, GIFs movies—an endless, boundless ocean of pixels and noise. While the ravenous machinery of algorithms and consumerism can deface the drive to make something beautiful, creativity remains divine.

Creating to fill the void feels overwhelming and vulgar; creating to seduce the muse fills us with profound satisfaction. Makes us human.

In this very short (three minute) video, Breedlove artist Jon Torrence of the Native Heart Band calls you to dance with your muse, be that through a camera, a pen, or a beautiful acoustic guitar. He asks you, simply, to go out and create something beautiful for yourself.



FOR
ASSISTANCE



43



42

A collection of acoustic guitars hanging on a wall. In the foreground, a hand holds the neck of a guitar. A tag with the 'Music Farm' logo is attached to one of the guitars. The background is dark and textured.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES WITH THE MUSIC FARM

About an hour south of Cleveland, the city of Canton is known chiefly as the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. That said, Canton's The Music Farm is no slouch. Since 2004, The Music Farm has given musicians in the community—and the rest of the country—a chance to grow their passion for music through the support of their vast inventory, knowledgeable staff, and inviting brick and mortar and online shop.

Founder Brian Robinson has been working in the music business since 1992, but he never planned to sell instruments, let alone open one of Canton's most reputable music stores. His passion for music began with audio engineering.

"I was 14, and I started off at church as the janitor and then they promoted me to the janitor and the sound man," said Robinson. "My dad would press me to say, 'what do you want to do with your life?' and I said, 'Dad, I don't want to go to college, I just want to do music.' So that's what started the recording and production side of things."

Robinson followed his dream and went on to study it at The Recording Workshop in Chillicothe, Ohio, but found there were no jobs available for him in the industry once he graduated—so he answered a classified ad from a music store looking for a keyboard salesman.

"They took a chance on me. I never intended to be a salesman, I wanted to be a cop, but being a cop and salesman are kind of the same thing. At least according to all my cop buddies," said Robinson. "They try to sell the criminal to get the truth out of them and we try to get the truth out of the customer to get them the right product."

He quickly took to sales and ended up becoming a top salesman with Akron Music, which was part of one of the biggest musical instrument chains in Ohio at the time. By 1998, Robinson was a trusted and highly-desirable salesman in the industry. A few months later, Akron Music asked him to run their Cleveland store, which he excelled at.

"I went up there and turned it around from doing \$100,000 a year, by the fourth-year we did \$1.3 million," said Robinson.

So, Robinson decided to part ways with Akron music and go out on his own, at first selling, packing, and shipping instruments from the living room of his 22-acre rural Ohio farm he called The Music Farm.

"In '99, I started selling guitars on Ebay and when we bought the 20 acres I wanted to have a marquee above my driveway that said, 'The Music Farm' because I'm into music and I'd just bought the farm," said Robinson. "I sold the guitars out of the dining room up until probably November and then I moved to our house garage and then I was shipping drum sets and guitars out of there, and then I built a warehouse in our front yard."

When Robinson outgrew all the rooms in his house and the warehouse, and decided to open a location in Orville, OH, the hometown of Smucker's Jam, in 2007. But that didn't last long due to the remote location, so they relocated to the heart of Belden Village in Canton, Oh in 2012, where they've remained ever since.

The Music Farm supplies the surrounding

community with new and used musical instruments and gear, from acoustic and electric guitars to pro audio gear and accessories.

Now, Robinson focuses on big picture market trends, and relies on his highly-educated staff of 14 when it comes to selling their vast collection, which has long-included Breedlove instruments.

"I first saw Breedlove when a used one came into Cleveland Music back in the '90s and it was signed by Kim Breedlove himself I believe. I looked at it and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is an amazing guitar,'" said Robinson. "I always liked the unique woods and the price points for an American-made guitar, and then they started coming out with fantastic imports that are at great price points also. So, you get a lot of quality for not a lot of money."

By selling high-quality inventory and remaining knowledgeable about the industry, The Music Farm has built a strong base of loyal customers. Those relationships are one of Robinson's favorite things about the business, along with the Canton showroom, which he has decorated in a vintage farm style.



"We try to create an environment where it's really inviting, so we created this acoustic guitar room," said Robinson. "I designed it while I was playing PlayStation, Call of Duty. I'd play on PlayStation for an hour and a half or two hours every night after work just to decompress and then in between games I would look on different sites and look for materials to buy, so I ended up making an acoustic room with this beautiful barn siding that I put on the floor and added a red leather chesterfield sofa."

Looking ahead to 2022, Robinson is entering a new phase. Though he has no plans to close or step away from The Music Farm, he and his wife are now empty nesters and just sold their farm. For now, plan to head to Nashville, where they have another home.

"This farm was where the The Music Farm started and where I had to support my family and raise them and make sure I had a roof over their heads," said Robinson, "Now we're going to bounce around and see what's next."

Visit themusicfarm.com



PETE MROZ

CHASING THE DREAM ... RESPONSIBLY ➡

Pete Mroz on His Origins:

I was born in South Bend, Indiana to an engineer, Marine, Vietnam vet, race car driver. My mother was a waitress. So, I come from classic Indiana, blue collar stock. Go fast. Don't think twice. That's what a race car driver has to do, shuck and jive with the best of them. But you have to keep moving.

I started playing when I was 18 years old. A guy loaned me a thousand dollars to buy a motorcycle. I took part of that money, bought an acoustic guitar and never bought that motorcycle.

Self-Sabotage:

I thought I was going to be the next Garth Brooks. I had the big Stetson hats with the Mo Betta shirts tucked in my Wranglers. I cut my teeth writing songs in Nashville. I was in a group with Blake Shelton called the Young Riders. He wasn't Blake Shelton at the time. He was just Blake. People would always talk about, "Who's gonna make it first Pete or Blake, Blake or Pete?" Well, it was Blake.

In my twenties, I was my own worst enemy. I built it up to tear it down. I self-persecuted to write another song. I was cocky. Sony records wanted to sign a deal with me as a country singer. I showed up to this showcase for Sony, and I decided I was going to take my cowboy hat off, untuck my shirt, and play the blues on an electric guitar. My manager was like, "What are you doing?" I looked at the record label guy and I said, "Hey man, are we going to work together, or what? Let's cut to the chase." And he just kinda laughed at me like, "stupid kid." But that was me at the time. I can think of many relationships I sabotaged just so I could write another song, or create drama. It's a common thing I've seen with a lot of young artists.



Starving:

I've never really been a starving musician. Sleeping on a buddy's couch and eating ramen noodles, that wasn't me. I was always working other jobs, making money. Eventually, the other jobs became my main jobs. I started to develop my business acumen, worked in sales, worked in media production. I kept playing music, but I never sacrificed being able to pay my bills to live the life of a musician. I started a Kickstarter program to raise money for my album, *Will Rise Above*. I kept on playing music. I recorded more, released another album, toured a little bit more.

The Late Life Big Break:

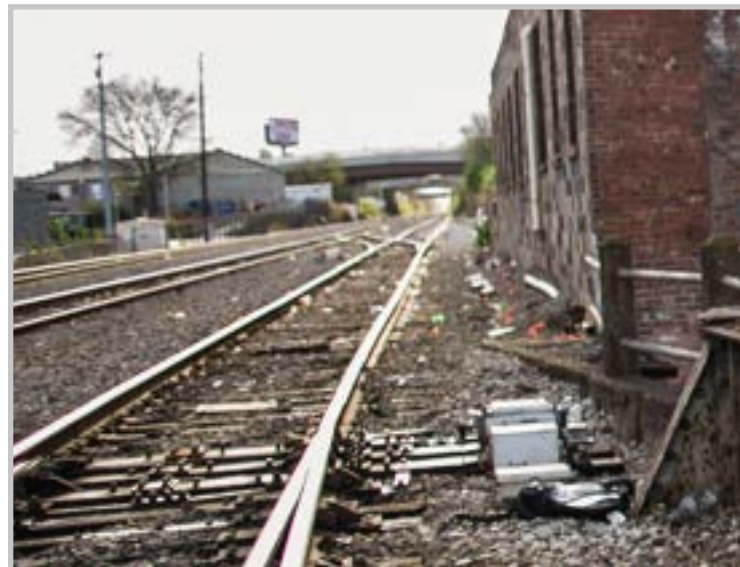
Fast-forward to the pandemic. That's when *The Voice* on NBC called me and said, "Hey, we want you on the show." I had auditioned and been rejected twice before, but then they changed their minds and wanted me on the Nashville season. I hadn't seen Blake Shelton in 25 years, not since we were in the *Young Riders* together and everyone was wondering which of us was going to make it. He turned his chair around for me on that stage, and if you've seen the show you know this, but, he didn't recognize me at all. Anyway, I had to choose between John Legend and Blake Shelton, and I decided to go with Blake and get the band back together, so to speak.

I didn't win, but I made the top ten. It was an incredible experience and I got to actually enjoy the ride. When I was on the show, different production people would ask, "Are you nervous? What if this doesn't happen for you?" I had the luxury of saying, "Well, when I leave here, you know, financially, emotionally, I'm good. It's not going to affect my livelihood." I've worked really hard, and in some ways I paid a price for that, because I didn't pursue music full-time. But here I am on *The Voice*.

Life After The Voice:

The Voice is a rocket ship, but it's a conflicting rocket ship. *The Voice* is not my life. I've led an incredible life, met amazing folks, and I've accomplished a lot. *The Voice* is just a part of it now. But since it has such a huge audience, people perceive me differently. I could be talking to somebody in my current job, and they look at me. They start staring at me. And I'm thinking, "Oh, no, here we go." And then they say, "Hey, tell me what Blake Shelton's really like." And I'm thinking, "Not now." Because I'm trying to accomplish something completely separate with them. I'm selling them something for their business. But I also don't want to squash their excitement, and their dream, and their entertainment. So, I say, "Oh Blake, he's a good dude. You want to hear a story?" I get into it a little bit but find a way to bring the focus back to what I'm there to do.

And that goes the other way, too. I'm sure it's a little confusing to fans of the *Voice* when I say I manage a \$4 million territory for the number one brand in golf. They're probably like what? I thought you're Pete the musician guy, the singer *Voice* guy. I really am just an average person.





Being a 46-Year-Old-Social Media Hustler:

You know what I like about social media hustling? I'm always in search of a heartbeat and every once in a while, you find a heartbeat in social media. I've enjoyed watching us try to learn how to truly communicate with each other through social media. It's not easy. I have a love-hate relationship with it. The creative side of me loves making content and posting things, but I have the hate because I feel like I have to do it. I hate to say it like this, but sometimes I feel kind of like a slave to it, you know? Last night was a great example. I still interview contestants for *The Voice*, so when the show comes on, I feel like I need to watch it. When I do that, I've got my phone in my hand and sure enough, here come the DMs. I'm talking to fans; I'm talking to artists back at their hotel; I'm sending them messages and they're talking back to me. And then I realize, my son should have been in bed 45 minutes ago, but here I am on my phone, dinking around in the vortex.

What He's Listening To:

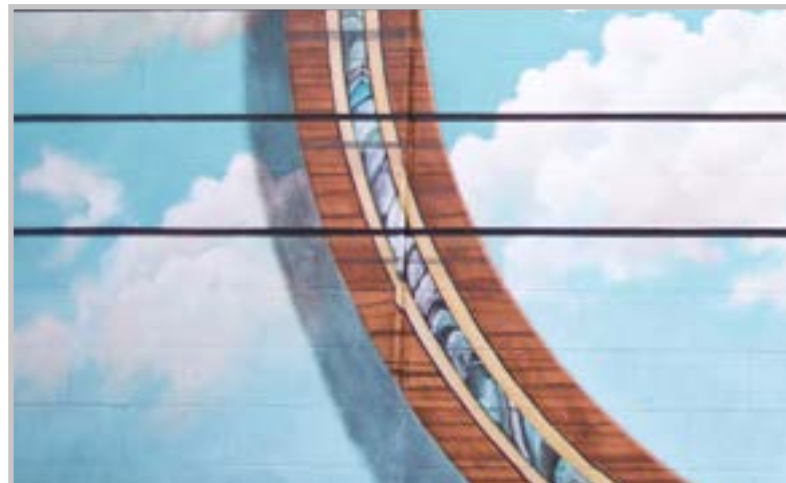
This week in the rotation it's Alyssa Bonagura. She's amazing. She got this song called *New Wings*, and I've been listening to the slow version. Speaking of slow versions, I've been listening to John Mayer's slow version of *Last Train Home*. He does this guitar solo at the end. My. God. And I've been listening to Mary Chapin Carpenter. On her last album she's got this song called *Note on a Windshield* and it is so good—the emotion, the quietness, the vulnerability, everything. Mary Chapin Carpenter is my goddess. She has this way of whispering in your ear and playing these beautiful tones. And that's her playing. That's not a studio cat. I've watched her play live and she has the most graceful, beautiful, brilliant right hand of anyone I've ever seen.

Guitars:

I'm not an elitist, but I know a great guitar for me. It has to sound good when the frequencies of my voice combinewiththat specific instrument. I got two things: I got my voice and I got the guitar. They have to meld and complement each other. I need something balanced.

I've always had a marriage with my voice and a love affair with guitar. So many people have told me, "Stop focusing on playing guitar and just sing, Pete; you're a singer!" But I love guitars and I love playing the guitar. If I took the care of my voice like I take care of my guitars, oh my God, maybe I would have made it.

The first time I played a Breedlove was at a shop in Nashville. I thought, "Wow, this thing sounds really good." I grabbed another one and went into a private playing room. And then I went back and played another one. I must've played ten of them. And I thought, "Wow, these are really great." I wanted one, but at the time I was working with Martin [guitars], and it didn't make sense to buy a guitar that I could only play in the privacy of my own home. But I never forgot playing those guitars, and so when the opportunity to work with Breedlove came up, I just jumped on it, man.



What “Chasing the Dream Responsibly” Means:

I was one of the oldest contestants that’s ever been on The Voice. I was on there with 16-year-olds who have the luxury of being irresponsible. I have to chase that dream and be responsible—make sure I keep in check what is really important to me. That’s my family, raising my kids, loving my wife, providing for them. It’s very rare in the music world that we talk about retirement. I don’t know if I’ve ever had that conversation with musicians other than as a joke.

But I made different choices. I didn’t prioritize my musical career above all else. I may not be Garth Brooks or Blake Shelton, but I have stability for my family and I have a music career. I get to do both. So, living the dream responsibly for me is playing more shows, connecting with more people, making more music, being a brand ambassador for a company like Breedlove, reading my son books at night, and knowing that I achieved all that without having to risk a stable future for myself and my family.





Play Like the Pros: Ford Thurston—Foundational Chords and Runs for Rock, Country, and Bluegrass

Veteran Nashville session guitarist, Ford Thurston, has backed up and played with many of the the icons of American music. In this two-part series, Ford explains a standard three chord progression used in rock, country, and bluegrass. He then shows some classic runs and licks. Put them all together (with a bit of practice) and even an intermediate player can sound like a seasoned studio pro.

What's Ford Playing? Breedlove's Discovery S Concerto. Sitka spruce, from the mighty wilds of the Pacific Northwest, creates the classic voice of the acoustic guitar—bracing, rich, and sonorous, with a shimmering tone that lingers long after every strum. This sustainable Designed in Bend Breedlove Discovery S Concerto—a first guitar that will last a lifetime—is crafted with earth-conscious, sonically superior EcoTonewood technology, and rewards heavy strumming with a bold, lush sound. A slim, fast neck and narrow nut width facilitate easy, comfortable play, while a pinless delta bridge makes string changing a breeze. A simple natural finish allows the solid top's raw beauty to shine and African mahogany back and sides add warmth and clarity. Discover the Breedlove ECO Collection—where the guitar meets the forest.



Play Like the Pros with Ford Thurston #2: Intermediate Licks for Rock, Country, & Bluegrass

Nashville guitar icon and professional musician, Ford Thurston, is back for part two of this intermediate series on the fundamentals of rock, country, and bluegrass. In this video, Ford builds on the D, C, G chord progressions he explained in lesson 1, and teaches you some additional licks to tie them together. It's amazing how three chords and a few killer licks can make you sound like a professional studio player.



GUITARS SHOULD NOT BE YOUR RETIREMENT STRATEGY

What is a guitar?

A stupid question, I know. Something a sub-adult stoner would ask, staring down the sound hole and succumbing to the existential succor of substance. But the question is actually more about economics than philosophy. Many smart, educated, cold-sober adults have been seriously pondering of late, what is a guitar?

Is it a utilitarian tool for music making, no different than a carpenter's hammer? Is it the conduit for a player's sonic sensibility—a muse from which she can coax her truest representation of self? Is it a piece of visual art, emblematic of a time period, a cultural movement, a paradigm shift in American and world history—something meant to be hung up and admired but never touched?

Or, is it an asset? Are guitars just fluctuating commodities—sexier versions of municipal bonds, real estate holdings, or Game Stop stocks? Are they becoming yet another means of generating and acquiring wealth?

The idea of guitars as investments has influenced the vintage guitar market for years. Certain instruments, like a 1960 Les Paul Burst or a pre-war Martin, for example, are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Had you bought one of these rare models long ago and meticulously preserved it rather than making music with it, you'd have earned yourself a tidy sum. Not retire-to-Ibiza-and-spend-your-life-staring-down-a-sound-hole rich, but a decent chunk of change.

Recently, conversations about guitars as investments have ramped up, in part because the value of just about all guitars has risen dramatically. An article in the Wall Street Journal claims that over the past year and a half, the price of select models has increased by nearly 30%. According to the online music marketplace Reverb, whose sales grew 50% from 2020-2021, a pre-1985 Les Paul Custom Silverburst that was worth just north of \$3,000 in 2017 could now sell for close to \$5,000.

Earlier this fall, Gibson announced that it would partner with the online collectibles dealer Rally to sell shares of a select few of its most expensive prototype guitars. The guitars, which are limited to a few hundred of each model and retail between \$65,000 and \$95,000, are now being sold in shares as low as five bucks each. Thousands of individuals can purchase a small stake in these instruments, but those owners will never actually hold, let alone play, the instruments. The guitars will be kept at the Gibson Garage in Nashville. These instruments, theoretically worth so much money because of the music potential they hold, will never play a note.

It's official. We've upended the idea of a guitar as a physical object of ownership and brought musical instruments into the vast and chaotic realm of the virtual share marketplace.

Chris McKee and Cooper Greenberg discussed the tension that this share selling scheme has created among the guitar community in a video posted to Alamo Music Center's Youtube channel. As working, gigging musicians, they found the idea of buying part of a guitar they would never play perplexing. Greenberg said, "I don't think my share will help me at the gig tonight."

McKee responded, "As musicians, we think this is stupid, because you and I buy a guitar to play the guitar, because we can. But arguably, there are people buying guitars not for that purpose. They buy them because they see them as artistic objects. I struggle with that a bit, because I think a guitar is made to be played."

Recently, our friends at Premier Guitar published an article that questions the move toward treating guitars as commodities, "The price of a vintage or boutique instrument is not tied to the playing pleasure it can bring."

That author, Jol Dantzig, compares the vintage guitar market to a critique on art commercialization by avant garde artist Piero Manzoni. In 1961, Manzoni filled 90 cans with 30 grams of his own, uh, excrement, sealed them, labeled them, and sold them for \$34 each—the exact price 30 grams of gold would then have fetched at market. Though one might argue that Manzoni's piece lacked subtlety, his statement remains powerful—art is meant to be experienced, enjoyed, and appreciated,

not traded and hoarded like something as crude and utilitarian as bonds or precious metals.

Dantzig feels the same about guitars, and frankly, we agree with him. The value of gold is a matter of faith. We believe that it's precious, valuable, and rare, so we ascribe this relatively soft and mostly useless mineral a high worth. Guitars, on the other hand, have historically derived value from their utility, how they play, how they sound, and how they look.

Why has the idea of guitars as investments become alluring? Many of us love guitars beyond any measure of their utility. We love them wholly and sometimes irrationally because of the way they make us feel. So, the idea of them as valuable, meaningfully valuable—validated by the commodities market—calls to us, because it makes our love of these objects seem just a little less crazy.

That said, personal aesthetics don't usually make for sound, long-term investment strategies, and we are not planning to turn Breedlove Guitars into a hedge fund anytime soon. We tend to agree with Chris McKee, "My piece of advice to anybody out there who's trying to make guitars that will appreciate over time: Make super good guitars, have great quality control, and make them sound great and last forever, so that you can pass them on to people in the future, and you've got your next pre-war Martin on your hands."

That's exactly what we do every day.

Breedlove

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