



Coming out of the Closet ...

After work the other evening, I was sitting at my kitchen table chatting with the young man who has been working here for a couple of months helping me on the construction of the cases for my woodblock prints. Because he lives quite some distance away, he has been in the habit of sleeping here a few days a week, to save time and money on commuting.

Our conversations have been mostly based on the work we have done during the day, but have roamed wider afield too. On this occasion, we had been talking about the problems we were having on the varnishing of our cases, and I mentioned at one point that I had encountered similar problems back when I was a guitar maker. He looked a bit askance, and asked "A guitar maker? What do you mean? You're a woodblock printmaker ..." I replied that many years ago, long before I had ever heard of such a thing as a woodblock print, I had made a number of classic guitars, and - at the time - considered that to be my 'job'. He looked even more askance ... although politely, of course.

So I excused myself, went upstairs and dug into the back of one of the closets, and returned to the kitchen with the 'evidence' in hand - the first guitar I made. The label inside tells the story:

Feb~Apr 1971

Guitar #1

David Bull, Luthier

(Who would possibly think of calling himself a 'Luthier' even before finishing his first instrument, which is what I must have done when ordering those labels from a printing company!)

I was 'Grad '69' from high school, and thus entered university in the fall of that year, but by next spring the university adventure was over, and I was 'at liberty'. I was still interested in a career in classical flute performance, but that certainly wasn't bringing home any bacon at this point, so I began to teach some of the students at the small local music shop that my father ran in those days.

He had been asked at one point by the local school system to run some night school classes in popular guitar, and because he needed everything he could get, had accepted, even though he didn't play guitar. But these classes of course frequently conflicted with his evening work downtown as a sax player, so on those occasions he delegated me to take the class, and suddenly there I was in a new 'career' - a night school guitar teacher, frantically trying to practice and keep a week ahead of the students!

One thing led to another though, and I developed quite some interest in the instrument. There was a vacant room upstairs over the shop, and over the course of that fall and winter I set up a workbench there, acquired some simple tools, and had a go at making a guitar.

I have to say that - for a first attempt, working completely on my own, with only a simple book to guide me - it turned out not so badly. I showed it around, and all these years later I can't remember whether or not I was

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surprised, or nonchalant, at what happened next - I began to get orders for custom instruments, including one from a professional studio/session guitarist, who requested a model with a special cutaway shape.

All together I made five instruments, of which numbers 2~5 were sold, before the little adventure came to an end when I moved to England to attempt to 'crack' the professional flute scene there.

And here in my kitchen, Guitar #1 came out of its case for the first time in more than thirty years, of course asking to be played, even just a little. One of the strings was missing, and the nylon of the upper strings had decayed to the point where they couldn't be tuned, but I put tension on the lower strings, and then sounded it.

And hearing the beautiful rich bass sound that then filled our kitchen, and seeing the smile on the face of my guest, I understood just why that young David had found it so easy to get orders for his instruments ...

I wonder if I still have any of those labels in a box somewhere ...

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