



*By Paul Schwartz - Peekamoose Custom Guitars & GJD Insider*

Some of you may have heard of my company or myself. I'm not as famous as many of my contemporaries however; I've been a part of the Guitar/Bass manufacturing and repair industry for twenty-seven years. Because of this quiet presence, I'd like to treat my first column as an introduction and giving you a feel for how I think. I'll be very happy to go on about all kinds of guitar geek subjects in future columns. But I think for starters, you'll probably want to know a bit about myself, and how I gradually established my company over a span of roughly 25 years.

I started Peekamoose in 1983. Like many other people in my field, I started small, doing mostly repairs and building an instrument whenever the opportunity to make one for a player presented itself. One thing about my company that stands out is that we have never been a full-blown retail store supporting itself with sales of brand name guitars, amps, etc. We've stayed afloat doing two primary functions, building custom instruments and repairing almost every style of guitar and bass out there.

I've been recognized since '83 for doing very high level fretwork, establishing a very consistent signature feel to my shop's work, and have focused on trying to make every instrument which passes through our doors to become as touch sensitive and dynamically expressive as possible. Creative wiring solutions have always been a specialty. We've excelled at working on all kinds of instruments. We have ties to many major manufacturers, and worked for some huge names over the years. I've become the "go to guy" when it comes to Steinbergers because they totally captivated my curiosity when they first arrived on the market.

Peekamoose has become a staple referral source for major manufacturers because we care about our clients and their instruments. We are willing to take the time needed to figure out effective solutions; making sure the owner ends up with an instrument that fulfills their needs. I can't say it was a conscious goal to accomplish these things. It just happened because I enjoy the challenge of cracking a puzzle, and I know what it's like to encounter mechanical problems on stage or in the studio. So, with the desire to make musician's lives easier and more fun, these other things happened along the way. At the core of this longevity is our client base of professional, aspiring pro and recreational players; plus basic credo equality for all clients and instruments. Meaning we treat everyone regardless of stature or skill with equal importance. We treat every instrument regardless of book value with the mind-set of doing our best to

elevate the performance characteristics to its optimal level.

We have learned through practical experience that beginner players need peak performance with almost greater importance than seasoned musicians. The reason being beginners have no frame of reference. A natural reaction for an inexperienced player is to exert greater force whether fretting or striking the strings. This generally fosters inappropriate playing habits to become part of muscle memory. Experienced players understand playing an instrument is more about finesse than brute force. They have the skills to compensate when an instrument does not play well. In most cases experienced players can exert their will over an instrument to achieve a pleasing sound. They may not enjoy having to exert that much control, but the ability to do so is at their disposal. Certainly they would have more fun playing a very touch sensitive instrument. A truly responsive guitar or bass would provide a wider pallet of tonal colors that would enable a more expressive performance. But in a pinch, experience affords the skill to hit the marks and get the job done with a less cooperative instrument. The bottom line is everyone gets more enjoyment playing a very expressive instrument; but what that level of quality means to players of varied levels of skill translates into different things. In the simplest terms a novice will have a faster rate of basic skills acquisition and development of better playing technique. An accomplished player will discover they can do more with less energy.

I've been told I am a little offbeat in my approach to instruments. I am known for figuring out how to help my clients achieve better performance both live and in the studio. In addition to building and repairing all styles of instruments, I've been providing top tier product and artist relations support to major manufacturers for over 25 years. My participation in Warranty and Artist support became a significant influence regarding instrument design work. Working directly with manufacturers to arrive at solutions that achieve positive results for clients continues to influence every instrument design and every repair modification I develop.

Discovering how specific design characteristics impact the physical approaches of close to 20,000 players is an education of boundless value. Ultimately I think most of the classic designs each have valuable things to offer. They have proven themselves over time. And it's why most new designs stem from classic origins. However, I have found almost every player wants a little custom tweaking to improve performance and stability. In most cases these tweaks are to facilitate a better union between the laws of physics; which govern all stringed instruments and an individual players needs in response to their physical approach. Almost everyone's technique is a little different and the variations found in different styles of instruments each demand little adaptations in physical technique to control the instrument and achieve the desired tone. Most people learn to accommodate the mechanical characteristics of how a given instrument design will play. (Although it may not always be a conscious adaptation.)

*Stay tuned for part 2 next week!*