



By Phil Keaggy - GJD Contributor

In the 60s, I had a Gibson acoustic guitar. I can't remember the model, but it was a small body type. In 1971, a friend of mine in the San Diego area, gave me a Mark Evan Whitebook guitar. This was a very fine instrument and Mark was one of the best independent luthiers at that time.

This guitar was a standard dreadnought non-cutaway. I don't even think they made cutaway acoustics yet, but I could be wrong. I owned this guitar for about 16 years, then sold it to a person who was very interested in it. That person turned out to be Mark Evan Whitebrook himself. He insisted in buying it from me. At the time, Mark didn't even own one of his handmade guitars. I struggled with the decision to sell the guitar, but he was eager and happy to pay the price and I needed the funds.

In 1983, I was playing in Minneapolis MN, and Jim Olson came to the soundcheck, hoping to show me his guitars. I played two or three of them and found them to be very nice. The size was perfect for me. The one I played, Jim had built for his wife Sue.

He then went home and we talked by phone about him making me one. The one that he made was a prototype of the 1984 model he built for me. This first Olson guitar had a spruce top and a wide neck. I used it on my *Underground* and *Getting Closer* CDs.

Then we discussed him building me a cedar top guitar like the Whitebook, only smaller like his SJ model, and with a cutaway. That guitar turned out to me my number-one guitar for nearly 20 years.

In 2004 Jim made me a new Olson guitar that I now use in most of my concerts and recordings. I have also recorded and toured with a Del Langejans acoustic guitar. The first was an R-6 dreadnought cutaway—a very rich-sounding guitar! Like the Olson, the Langejans was set up with an LR Baggs Duet pick up/mic system. Del has also made me a classical guitar that I used on the *Lights of Madrid* CD.

As I recall, these guitars had Brazilian sides and either a cedar top (Olson) or spruce top (Langejans acoustic and classical).

I no longer have the R-6, so Del made me a grand concert guitar that I often have traveled with in tandem with my Olson. (Honestly I can't tell you the neck sizes.) I do favor the cedar tops however.

Bill Wise of Charis guitars has built me an acoustic that I have lent to guitarist Mike Pachelli (see Solid Air CD The Two of Us). I also recorded with that guitar on some of the tracks from my CD Freehand.

It is exciting to discuss with guitar luthiers specifics as to how they fashion the guitars they build. I am more of a player and don't have a clue how these gifted people make these instruments, but I stand in awe of their expertise.

The McPherson Guitar Company has also made me a guitar to use for a special recording I did called The Song Within. This CD was released in late 2007 and shows how well the McPherson records. The guitar, however, is a little large for me as a concert guitar, so I don't travel with it.

Recently, William McLachlin of Corban guitars made one for me to sample. It is built very similar to the old Martin 000 non-cutaway. I have recorded a song with it and it sounds very good and is different from all the others I have used. It has that old Martin meets Gibson sound and is very appealing. I can't remember the type of wood he used, but it has a old rustic look and feels like an instrument my granddad David Keaggy would've played—he was a picker of sorts.

AS I mentioned earlier, I have my Olsons, Langejans and Charis fitted with the LR Baggs Duet system. The McPherson has a different Baggs system also with a mic inside. The Corban has no electronics per my request.

I'd like to mention also that I have become friends with Swiss guitar luthier, Lukas Brunner, who has made me a special collapsible guitar called "the Outdoor Guitar." It is really amazing and sounds too good to be true. I appeared on a local TV show and demonstrated it. I assembled the guitar from its carrying case in 20 seconds and it was 90% already tuned. The strings are locked in at the headstock and attach to a removable bridge. It even comes with its own backpack. I have recorded with this instrument. You can hear it on the Brunner guitar website <http://www.brunner-guitars.com/flash/>.

Lukas has also created a bari 12 string acoustic that I played on my recent Master and The Musician Tour.

I'd also like to commend the Taylor Guitar Company for their Guitars, as I was invited to contribute a composition on their Wood And Steel Vol. 3 collection called Cajon Pass, which can also be heard on my Freehand CD and viewed on my live DVD Phil Keaggy St Charles 2004. <https://www.philkeaggy.com/store/home.php?cat=249 > I presently do not have a Taylor but have recommended them for their tone and affordability.

Here are the websites of the Luthiers I have mentioned:

<http://www.charisacoustic.com/>

<http://www.langejansguitars.com/>
<http://www.olsonguitars.com/>
<http://www.brunner-guitars.com/flash/>
<http://mcpersonguitars.com/acoustic-guitars-1080.asp>
<http://www.taylorguitars.com/guitars/>

I would like to make mention of guitar pickups and set-ups in general. I believe it is important for a guitarist to be clearly heard in a concert setting—that is, a good internal pick up/ mic connection be applied. I used to use a magnetic pickup in my guitar and I sometime miss the tone of that, but at present I use the piezo/mic configuration.

When I saw Michael Hedges and heard his tone, I felt it was extraordinary! He used a Sunrise mag pickup, like the one I had set up in the late 80s and early 90s. I needed the mic for the percussion aspect of the guitar. I believe Michael also used a mic in his guitar as it was very live sounding.

At one period in my career, I had 3 outputs from my Olson guitar: A Fender mic, a Baggs Piezo and a Sunrise pickup going through a Pendulum pre-amp. It was cool but sometimes there was a phasing issue, so I opted for a two-way set up and that simplified things for me. If you listen to my Roundabout CD, you'll hear how full the fidelity is from the Baggs Duet system—clear but punchy.

Truth be told, I am most impressed with guitarists who use nothing but their pickup systems and no other effects. I use a Jamman or a Line 6 DL4 for loops, and it is fun, but truthfully, I am blown away by the likes of Hedges (God rest his soul), Laurence Juber, Tommy Emmanuel, Pete Hutlinger, Martin Simpson and similar guitarists who display true talent without gimmicks of any sort.

Speaking with my tongue in cheek—I feel having 9 fingers gives me license to play with the loop machines. All kidding aside, some of my own best moments have been with just the guitar and nothing else but some grace from Heaven.

All the best,
Phil Keaggy