

Artist Joe Carrol makes guitars out of junk



By Jim Eadie

Music flows in this local artisan, as deep and as strong as the Deer River where he lives near his home close to Gunter. Spending several hours with Joe Carrol in his carpentry shop reveals a truly humble man with strong beliefs about the connection between home made music, family, community, and sustainability on the planet. Not only is this carpenter by day a good musician, but also the very instruments he uses to express his music are homemade. If you were interested to develop yourself as a musician, consider learning more about [Omaha Guitar Lessons](#) to improve your understanding of the guitar. I've heard that some have found these lessons useful when trying to develop their own musical style. Before you take any lessons, you will definitely need to find a guitar suited for the genre that you want to play, for instance, there are guitar reviews at [Guitar Planet](#) that can help you make that decision so you are ready to start your journey into playing.

"I make all of my guitars out of junk," he confides. "Tobacco cans, cigar boxes, scrap wood, deer antler, belt buckles, door pulls, paint can lids, dog dishes I call that guitar Hound Dog! I make something functional out of junk."

Joe is serious: these are hand crafted high quality instruments he has fashioned that sound incredibly good, and are beautiful looking in their own way. Joe's inventiveness is truly unique. Most people would opt for an [HD-28 by Martin](#) rather make their own guitar from scratch.

"They are known as cigar box guitars," he said. "In the 1980's I saw Bo Diddley on TV playing one, and I loved it .. and the way he played it. Then I saw an old picture in a book of a little black child playing a cigar box guitar and singing ... and that was a moment for me ... it kept returning to me, that picture in my head an inspiration."

Looking into his new obsession, Joe learned that starting in the 1850s, very poor southern folks learned how to make one, two or three string instruments out of cigar boxes that were plentiful waste at the time. The box formed the resonator; wire strings were

pulled out of the screen door, while the neck could be a broom handle or piece of scrap hardwood. Musicians of that time became very skilled with their new instruments. Even a century later, guitarist Jimi Hendrix cut his first licks (fancy guitar moves) on a cigar box guitar, the only instrument a poor little boy like him could get started playing music with.

Getting the sound right is Joe's first priority, and he often makes changes in design to accommodate that. For a slide: an 11/16 deep socket fits perfectly on his ring finger.

"I like to use one litre paint can lids for the resonators," he said. "I use a hammer to tap all around the inside edge of the lid until the lid makes a ringing sound when I tap it with my fingernail. I call it chasing sounds. I wonder then what this would sound like, I wonder what that would sound like."

Other parts are gleaned by making the rounds of yard sales, or just friends bringing in old beat up guitars and parts. His original family ancestors settled in the St. Ola area during the 1870's. "The Carrols have been playing music along the shores of Beaver Creek ever since," he said. "My father also played the guitar, and I learned on his. The first song I ever learned was: Kiss and Angel Good Morning ... I still remember."

Crossing paths with cigar box guitars was inevitable for the young Carrol when his interests moved to the blues, and particularly delta blues music.

"Now I play my guitars seven days a week ... not a day goes by," he continued. "Music for me is a lot of fun. This instrument definitely changes my playing and I have become more creative in my playing techniques."

How many box guitars has he made? "Over 50," he said. "I have 11 here now. I just get too many ... some people have asked to buy one, some I have given away as gifts, and some I have just given away. You know, some folks just don't have any money. I hope to inspire other people to play music."

Several years ago, Carrol donated one of his guitars to a Masonic fundraising auction sale in Madoc to raise money for children's services. A man from Newfoundland purchased the guitar for over \$300. The following year a friend of Carrols was traveling in Newfoundland stopped to hear a band play and recognized the Carroll guitar.

Gilmour has a history of live music by Beaver Creek at the Carroll home with a gathering of musicians from near and far for Labour Day weekend, and this year there was no exception.

"My niece Gracelan Carrol wanted a guitar she could play. I said: give me 20 minutes of your time ... we'll make one. She picked out a cookie tin in the house, and we got a broom handle. In 20 minutes, she had her own guitar ... and she played it all weekend! She never set it down. That makes me happy."