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How I Did It: Playing A New Tune

BY [MARSHALL GORDON](#)

Hendersonville's Jack Hastings is widely recognized for his finely crafted world-class Windsor chairs, having honed his skill in wood working over the past 20 years. Now, he's literally taking a new turn, testing his expertise by building hand made guitars — from scratch. While he's plied his new found craft for a scant seven months, the half-dozen guitars Hastings has built so far, including those being played regularly by local recording artists Larry Keith and Terry Wetton, are considered sonorous masterworks in their own right. *Bold Life's* Marshall Gordon recently spent an afternoon with Jack to find out what his secrets are and where he wants to take his newly discovered vocation.

How did you start building guitars?

Last December I went to the Warren Haynes pre-Christmas jam concert. I just decided that building guitars is a lot like building a chair. I thought I'd try it just to see if I could make one that sounded good.

You had never built a guitar before. How did you know what to do?

The first two guitars I built were kits so I could get the blueprints. After that, and with help from Wayne Henderson, one of the world's premier guitar makers, and by reading a lot, I just figured it out for myself.

Is there a secret to building a guitar?

I don't play a guitar and that might be an advantage. A lot of guitar players have preconceived notions about how a guitar should sound and be built. I'm thinking more about the wood and how the wood goes together.

The quality is based on the selection of the wood and how you construct it, just like it is with a chair. I started buying wood — spruce for the tops, African mahogany for the backs and sides and began building them from scratch, making all the pieces myself, doing all the shaping and the cutting and laying in the rosettes around the sound hole.

It's very similar to chair making. I understand the engineering principle behind it, and wood and wood grain, and which way to orient the wood so that you get the most strength out of it.

Larry Keith says the guitar you built for him sounds really sweet.

A lot of the sound is dictated by the shape of the body. The way a guitar works is when you pluck a string, it creates tension on the string, which is transferred to the front of the guitar, the soundboard, and it vibrates. Larry wanted a large big-body guitar that reverberates and could be heard well on stage with a single mike. The number of growth rings in the wood can affect the treble and bass sounds. With Larry's, I used fairly wide grain spruce. That apparently has produced this real strong bass, which Larry's guitar has.



Rimas Zaitkas

What's the hardest thing about it?

When I started, the hardest part was the finishing. With my chairs, I make my own paint and finish and I've been doing it a long time and I figured it out, but on guitars, learning to do the old time lacquer has been a real challenge and still is. Every layer you put on affects the vibration of the wood. It takes almost as much time to apply the finish as it does to make the guitar.

What makes your guitars unique?

The guys that play them say it's something about the tone quality and the way it feels and the way it sounds. I think it's a combination of how much of the wood I decide to leave or take away.

Physically, there's a distinctive shape to the headstock, the top of the guitar where the tuners are. It's a shape I just made up, a simple s-curve, which I use in my chairs. I put my initials inside the guitar — JDH. I also sign the guitars down in the bottom where nobody would ever see unless they took the guitar apart or looked inside with a mirror.

Where do you want to go with this?

I'd like to be like Wayne Henderson. He doesn't charge a lot of money for his guitars. He wants to build a guitar that you're going to keep and play and maybe give to your kids. I hope that one day when a guitar player picks up one of my guitars, he or she will tell right away that it's a Hastings because of the way it sounds and feels...that it will be different from anything they played before.

What would you do if someone bought one of your guitars and decided to smash it on stage?

He wouldn't get another one.

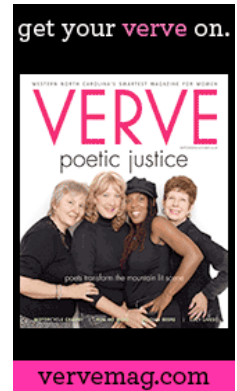
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