



Sony's Cigar Box Guitars

Pretty piece of art that's easy to play

By Deborah Moon

A lifetime of skills and interests converged with circumstances last year to launch Sony Felberg's ChickiBoom Cigar Box Guitar business.

Sony sold his first cigar box guitar last summer. By year-end he had sold 100 of his handcrafted creations. Three models of his solid, arty, easy to play guitars now are available in five retail outlets in two states, and he is gearing up to greatly expand production this year with a dream of "capturing the West Coast market."

A first-generation American (his mother, whose "cloudy" heritage will be explained later, emigrated from Hungary after World War II), Sony says the idea of running a cottage industry type of business has long appealed to him. But he began his working life as a sound engineer. He worked as a music engineer in a recording studio before going on tour with Pearl Jam and Red Hot Chili Peppers as part of their sound crew, and he did the sound effects for Bill Nye the Science Guy. He still has his own recording studio in his Multnomah Village home, where he and his wife, Jennifer Felberg, typically work with one band a year to record an album.

For 10 years he detoured into the digital world, working as director of video services for Realnetworks. But he continued his home studio work and kept his artistic juices flowing through painting.

About a year and a half ago, he saw a guitar, bass and amplifier for \$180 at a pawn shop that was going out of business. He decided to try, for the third time in his life, to learn to play guitar. The complex fingering of a traditional six-string guitar proved elusive (though he says he continues to improve). So when he stumbled on an online video of how to play a three-stringed cigar box guitar, he was intrigued.

"I'm a music engineer, so I can't do anything without knowing how it works," he says.

So when Jennifer balked at him buying more guitars, he decided to make his own. Since cigar box guitars don't have the curved bottom of standard guitars, his first model slipped off his lap when he tried to play. On his second try, he extended the solid stick through the cigar box to create a butt that grips comfortably under the arm or rests on the lap securely.

"It's fun acoustically, but guitar players like to be loud," he says, so he added electronics so his guitars can be plugged into an amplifier. His new 2014 design has full pickup and volume and tone knobs – "ready to go on stage."

Laid off from his digital job, he kept crafting and refining his instruments. Soon he had a basement full of guitars. He posted one on Craigslist, but discovered it took more work to sell it online than to make. So he decided to explore the retail market.

Sony took a few of his guitars to Trade Up Music. The manager was impressed by the solid construction, beauty of the guitars and the sound quality, so he agreed to stock them on commission.

"I got halfway home and I got a call from Trade Up," says Sony. "The manager said the owner had come in and seen the guitars. I was sure he was going to tell me to come and pick them up, but instead my first sale was to the owner of Trade Up."

Not wanting to be wasteful, Sony soon added another model to his repertoire. In addition to the three-string cigar box guitar, Sony now makes a mini cigar box guitar (acoustic only) that sells for just \$59 or \$69.

"You use the top three strings of the standard six-string package for cigar box guitars," says Sony. "The bottom

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