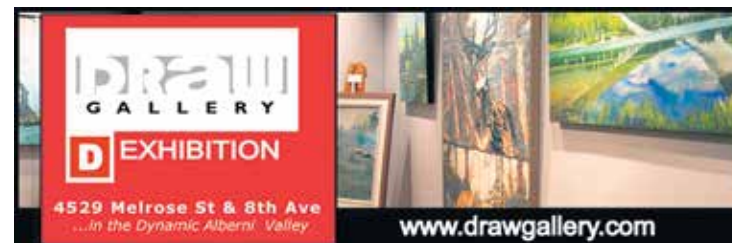


THE ARTS



Port Alberni artist makes recycled music

Glen Henderson's cigar box guitars are headed to the Filberg Festival this month

ELENA RARDON
Alberni Valley News

A Port Alberni artist will be headed to the Filberg Festival this month with his unique collection of cigar box guitars.

Glen Henderson formed "61 Nickel Guitars" a few years ago after stumbling across a website featuring homemade cigar box guitars.

"I thought, 'I can do that,'" Henderson said.

He started with a single cigar box and a piece of oak for the guitar neck. He did his research on luthier concepts like intonation and scale length and managed to create his very first three-string guitar, which he took to the Five Acre Shaker in Port Alberni in 2019. It is now displayed on the wall of his workshop, inscribed with the signatures of all the artists who played at the Five Acre Shaker that year.

Since then, he has made more than 100 guitars, as well as a few other "interesting" musical instruments, amplifiers and objects using old cigar boxes. All of the strings and tuners on his instruments are new, but the rest of the guitar is built using repurposed products, from old hinges and handles to an assortment of "odds and ends." He uses a length of hardwood for the neck and gets most of his wood as cut-offs from Port Al-

berni-based TGT Studios.

(Kyle Miller of TGT Studios was also planning to have his work on display at the Filberg Festival this year, but was not able to attend due to a scheduling conflict).

Cigar box guitars date back to the mid-1800s and the emergence of small, portable cigar boxes. Musical instruments could be expensive at the time, so creative people taught themselves to build their own using household items.

"They've been around for 150 years, and every once in a while they have a resurgence," Henderson explained. "They're not a toy, they're an actual instrument built to specifications."

A number of famous musicians, from Steven Tyler of Aerosmith to Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top, have played cigar box guitars on stage. While none of Henderson's clients are quite so well-known, he has sold his guitars to a number of recording artists.

Each guitar he creates is completely different, said Henderson, although they all have a 1961 Canadian nickel (from the year he was born) displayed somewhere on the instrument—hence the name "61 Nickel Guitars."

He has a large collection of cigar boxes in his workshop that he has acquired over the years, most of



Glen Henderson of 61 Nickel Guitars plays one of his cigar box guitars. (ELENA RARDON / ALBERNI VALLEY NEWS)

them with unique graphics and artwork.

"I find them wherever I can," said Henderson. "Friends will donate

them, or I'll pick them up at flea markets and garage sales. It's really an amazing part of artistic history." Henderson has never attended the

Filberg Festival before, but he will be heading there July 29-31 with a few months' worth of guitars to display and sell. Filberg Festival is hosted each year in Filberg Park in the Comox Valley and showcases three days of music, art and vendors from all over North America.

This will be a busy summer for Henderson, who has three festivals scheduled over three weekends, starting with the Filberg at the end of July. He will also be at the Nanaimo Blues Festival in August and the Five Acre Summer Concert Series in Port Alberni from Aug. 5-6. This is a change from the past two summers, where COVID-19 cancelled most music and art festivals.

"The idea is to get some visibility," said Henderson.

Henderson also has an online presence at www.61nickelguitars.ca and has also had his work on display at a number of businesses in Port Alberni. His work can currently be found hanging up at Dog Mountain Brewing on Third Avenue.

Henderson said he comes from a fairly artistic family, and 61 Nickel Guitars has been a way to combine his love of music, art and woodworking.

"This is a great way to put all three together," he said. "I'm creating functional art."

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