

Bob Boyd's World of Music

Such a strange place for a king to be born! In a nasty stable with stinky cow and sheep critters standing around! But this little baby boy was no ordinary kid. Most people missed what was happening that night he was born. First some sheep herders showed up because some angels had clued them. Later, because some guys from across the border knew a king had been born, and brought him some expensive gifts. 20 centuries later, here we are gifting each other every Christmas. Most of the time we don't even think about why we do it.

He would study in school just like every other little boy. True, he would grow up to be a working man, cutting pieces of wood and stone and fitting them together. But his real work was more important than anybody who ever lived.

His real work would begin when he was about 30 years old. His preacher cousin John baptized him in the local river, and he set about getting ready for his final work. He began touring the countryside. He rounded up 12 guys who liked the way he talked and taught. They were a mixed crew of fishermen, tax collectors, regular guys from working families mostly. But he saw they would be the right ones to keep his work going on after he...but I'm getting ahead of myself.

One of the first guys he picked was Simon. Simon was a loudmouth fisherman. We would probably call him a redneck. His name meant "soft" or "squishy." When he would pop off and get in trouble, his new boss would call him "Simon" again, but when Simon got it right, his boss always called him "Peter," which means "rock." He knew Simon/Peter would make a good leader for the other guys. By now you've probably figured out I'm talking about the guy whose birth and life we're celebrating this month again. His name was Jesus, and he did more to change the world, and how we live today, than any other person ever. He did it with his words, which we can still read and learn from today. He was always kind to comfort and heal folks.

But the most important thing he did was the way he died. The authorities couldn't put up with him and his teachings. He threatened to end the way they made their living. They finally caught up with him, thanks to one of his crooked students. They cuffed him and railroaded him into a phony mockery of a trial. The judges couldn't find a rap to pin on him, but they beat him up and made fun of him anyway. "Some king! He can't even save himself!" They laughed. They finally trumped up a phony rap and got him sentenced to hang.

In those days they had figured out a really horrible way to execute criminals; they nailed them up and let them hang by their hands and feet until they died. When all that happened, his buddies and students were pretty scared, disappointed and discouraged. They were expecting their teacher to become king and give them important jobs. Only one or two stuck around until the bitter end; the rest hid out un-

til the heat was off. While he was dying nailed on that tree, he forgave everybody there.

Then a really scary thing happened. About noon that day, it got as dark as night! That even shook up some of the religious leaders who had railroaded him. (Historical records from other nations around the world, who had no idea of what was happening, reported the 3 hours of darkness that day, too!) Then there was an earthquake. The huge curtain hanging in the Jewish temple ripped from top to bottom. No, this was no ordinary king. Even the commanding Roman officer, who had been in charge of many executions, was blown away by these events.

A couple of rich judges liked Jesus and what he had to say. Their names were Joe and Nick. They threw away their reputations as members of the Jewish Supreme Court. They went to the governor and asked if they could take Jesus' dead body down and give him a decent burial. It had to be done pretty quick; he died at 3 and the law said he had to be buried by 6. So they packed him away in Joe's new tomb.

But you can't keep a good man down. He had told everybody who would listen, "Nobody can take my life. I give it up myself, and I'll pick it up again myself." And he always did everything he said he would. A couple days later, the women folk came bringing more spices to put on his dead body. They got another shock. "Where is he?" "He's gone!" During the next 6 weeks or so, he started showing up, first to his buddies and friends, then to as many as 500 people. Yes, it was him, as Tom, one of his students, found out. The others said they'd seen Jesus, but Tom told them, "Naw, you guys. I'll believe it when I see it!" Next time Jesus showed up in their hideout, he said, "Go ahead, Tom. Put your hand into my side, where they stuck me with a spear. Feel the nail holes in my hand. It's me, in the flesh."

Pete and his bro Andy the fishermen, had gone back to fishing. One morning as they were coming in off the lake from a dry run, there was Jesus, on the bank. He'd just cooked them a mess of fish for breakfast. After they ate their fill, Jesus got Pete off to himself. When they hauled Jesus in that night, Pete had got scared and told everybody he didn't know Jesus. Well, Jesus wanted Pete to know he was forgiven, too, no hard feelings. Just keep the faith and do what I taught you to do.

Four guys wrote down their own stories of Jesus. Their names were Matt (the tax collector), Mark, Luke and John, the guy who stayed when Jesus was nailed up. There it all is, in black and white. You can read it for yourself.

So we give gifts to each other every year in his honor. But what he has to offer us is the greatest gift of all. We can accept it by believing he is the Son of God, that he lives today, and that he died for you and me. In return, he gives us a better life than we could ever make up for ourselves. And it goes on for ever and ever.

Frets about Frets Bryon Knight

The one thing that all stringed instruments have in common is... of course... strings. I've seen many instruments in my little repair shop. As you might imagine, the severity of damage or distress varies greatly... But, by far, the most common culprit is... the use or abuse of strings.

This month I will begin a three part series focusing on the details of Musical instrument strings.

Many folks are under the impression that the age of the strings are "incidental" to the health of their instrument. The fact is...any stringed instrument can be damaged just by leaving the strings on too long.

We all know that strings stretch when they are installed on an instrument. You know...it's that, sometimes annoying, "honeymoon" period when you have to tune your instrument between EVERY song. Then comes the "sweet" time when the string has reach a nominal elasticity point when you can go several songs without having to tune too much. What many musicians DON'T know is that there is a MAXIMUM point of elasticity. For strummed instruments this begins around 4 - 6 weeks after installation when the string "effectively" stops stretching.

I say "effectively" because one of the interesting things about metallurgy is that all metal will keep stretching until it breaks...but for instrument strings, the stretching slows to a point that tuning the string begins to add more tension than is released through string stretching. This causes the instrument to undergo stress. The neck begins to bow... the bridge begins to lift...the tuners begin to lean...the saddle will crush...and...(no laughing)...the stress can cause crushed nuts... Ouch!

To better understand the dynamics of stringed instruments, let's start with a little *Strings 101*...

A string is the vibrating element that produces sound in string instruments, such as the guitar, harp, piano, and members of the violin family. Strings are lengths of a flexible material kept under tension so that they may vibrate freely, but controllably. Strings may be "plain" (consisting only of a single material, like steel, nylon, or gut). "Wound" strings, on the other hand, have a "core" of one material, with an over winding of other materials. This is to make the string vibrate at the desired pitch, while maintaining a low profile and sufficient flexibility for purposes of playability.

String Gauges...

The gauge is a measurement of the average string diameter. Many guitarists buy their strings by the gauge. However, the gauge only tells part of the story about a string. Other parameters such as alloy, silks, nylons, and wrapping are just as much a critical factor. In the very early days of guitar, towards the later part of the nineteenth century, gauge did not receive the attention as it does today. There is not much documentation about gauging from the early years, but most historians believe the guitar gauges were derived from the same gauges used on the violin.

String gauge plays a factor in the frequency, playability, volume, tone and strength of a string. In general, heavier gauge strings will be louder and fuller sounding than a thinner string. Heavier gauge strings tend to work better with acoustic and archtop guitars as they have more mass per unit length. This additional string mass allows for better energy transfer between the string-to-bridge-to-top configuration. Thinner gauge strings will not be louder as their mass per unit length is small, but will give considerable ease in playability for bending and pressing against the frets. Many of today's electric guitars come with highly sensitive pickups that enable guitarist to get the desired volume they need from a thin string.

Bass guitar string sets do not typically offer as many choices in string gauges like standard guitar sets. In addition, their gauge differences are less incremental than standard guitar sets. Heavier bass strings have a much fuller sound and are more responsive to thumbing. Thinner gauge strings will result in a thinner sounding bass with less tonal depth. Some players like the thinner gauges for a brighter sounding bass, and ease of certain string popping techniques.

Well, for most of you, this is about as much information as you can absorb in one sitting... so I will continue the discussion on strings in next month's Frets About Frets Article: "It's About Metal."

'Til then...

Bryon Knight owns Little Rock Frets, a stringed instrument and amplifier repair shop in Little Rock, Arkansas. For questions or suggestion on future articles, please feel free to call 501-223-FRET(3738), or email at bryon@littlerockfrets.com.

---BK



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