

A Curmudgeon Goes on Vacation

During a recent vacation in New England, I bought a pink shirt. I prefer to call it “salmon-colored.” If 20 years ago a fortuneteller predicted I would someday own a pink shirt, I would have asked for my money back. Evidently, my clothing tastes have changed.

My sartorial preferences aren't the only things that have evolved over time. My musical tastes, and what I consider a “good-sounding” acoustic guitar, have also broadened during my tenure with *Vintage Guitar*. I used to be strictly a big-bodied guitar guy. I had no use for anything smaller than a jumbo or auditorium-sized flat-top. Archtops, parlor guitars, and 12-fret mid-sized guitars were for other people. Now that I've matured, I recognize that there's more than one “ideal” acoustic guitar sound. Just because someone doesn't love a particular sonority doesn't mean another person won't.

Given the gradual but inexorable broadening of my sonic tastes, you may be surprised to discover that nowadays when someone claims that a particular guitar “sounds great!” I take it with an even larger grain of salt than when I first began collecting acoustic instruments. Frankly, that statement doesn't mean anything other than that particular person likes the sound of a particular instrument. Just because they like it doesn't mean anyone else will. Sure, there are a handful of knowledgeable folks whose critical faculties I trust enough so when they say that an instrument has “outstanding sound,” I believe them. But 99 percent of the time someone else's sonic evaluation, especially when it consists of only one or two words, means only slightly more than an unintelligible grunt.

Where am I going with this? I'm simply trying to point out that when it comes to sound there's only one person you should listen to—you. Depending on anyone else's sonic evaluation of an acoustic instrument is a surefire recipe for buying, and then selling, a lot of instruments. A far better stratagem is to listen to the sounds in your head and heart and try to find them in the real world.

A Thoroughly Depressing Retail Musical Experience

While I was on vacation, I didn't go into many music stores. Sure, I passed by some big-box emporiums, but one looks pretty much like another, and perusing rows of shiny new instruments doesn't make my heart go pitter-patter. But while I was in one northern New England state, I chanced to walk into a music store that should have had a sign that read “Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter” over the front door. No, it wasn't a national chain. It was a local retailer who had managed to suck all the life and fun out of the musical shopping experience. How had this been accomplished? By exhibiting a total lack of any kind of marketing effort.

Entering the store, the first thing I noticed was the illumination level. I found myself in a manmade cave lit by only the oldest, most green-hued fluorescent lights. Even my new pink shirt looked green! The next thing I noticed was that half the floor space was barren. I think I could have rolled a bowling ball down the center of the room without hitting a musical instrument. Sure, there was a single rack of acoustics and electrics along the edge of the room, but the instruments looked completely forlorn and forgotten. The overall effect was one of total neglect. A fine layer of dust on everything reinforced the impression that nothing had moved in this place in a long time. An indifferent sales clerk sat behind the counter and acknowledged my presence with an almost imperceptible nod before returning to his newspaper. I remained in the shop for a total of two minutes before I fled back to the yuppie bead shop, where my wife was slowly making her way among the trays of glass baubles. After that music store, even the overly patchoulied bead emporium seemed inviting.

Buying a guitar, or any other musical



le jazz hot. Available in bone, horn, ebony, and rosewood, each has its own particular sonority. I've been using them on my mandolin with the bone and ebony getting the most playing time. I like the remedial shape, which prevents me from holding the pick improperly.

I also like the thick, round tone that I get from these critters.

Brooklyn Gear's website lists dealers, or if you don't mind buying in bulk (on the plastic picks), purchase directly from them. Their exotic picks are available individually, as well they should be at \$18 apiece for the stone series. The gypsy jazz picks are only \$5. Try one, if you dare. As I will readily attest, no guitar player ever has too many picks.

instrument, is a discretionary purchase. It should be a fun, or at worst, slightly pleasant experience. In this particular store, making a purchase would be nothing short of dismal. Given its mood, I can't imagine the store will be around much longer.

Just for giggles, I'll give a prize to the first VG reader who correctly identifies the store and its address (send it to my e-mail address at the bottom).

Peter Piper Picked A Pickboy Plectrum

The best thing about picks is that anyone and everyone can afford to own scads of 'em. If I had a dollar for every pick I owned, I'd be substantially richer... but I wouldn't have all these cool bits of plastic, nylon, metal, carbon fiber, wood and stone. It's a tough choice, picks or money, money or picks... I guess I've already made my choice – picks!

Given their mellifluous moniker, you'd suspect the folks at Pickboy favor picks almost as much as I do. Brooklyn Gear distributes Pickboy products, and they had a booth at the Dallas guitar show, where they displayed a plethora of plectrums. I discovered a number of picks that deserved some journalistic attention. My faves included the translucent red Pos-a-Grip model PB36R100. This 1-millimeter plastic pick features a series of perforations so it won't slip, no matter how much you glisten during a hot picking session. For those pickers who favor the blues, Pickboy has the blue 1mm Pos-a-Carb pick, made of a more flexible material. Pickboy also has a line of picks with a raised grip. For pickers who find their picks rotating or migrating away from the ideal picking position, these picks offer an elegant solution to that pesky problem. They're available in ceramic or nylon in thicknesses ranging from .5 mm to 1 mm.

For gypsy-jazz aficionados (or anyone else who wants a super thick pick with indentations for their thumb and index finger) Pickboy has four that epitomize

Capo a Capo

Brooklyn Music isn't content to merely export picks from distant lands. They've also developed a new and very cool capo. False modesty doesn't go over very well south of Manhattan, which is why Brooklyn calls its new capo “The Perfect Series.” It uses a patent-pending flexible spring system to clamp down on a guitar's strings. The Perfect capo uses K5 steel construction and a premium TPR rubber damper. I tried one out on nearly every 6- and 12-string in my collection, and in most cases the capo performed up to its sales claims. On some of my guitars, capoing above the 5th fret still required a bit of touch-up tuning. One feature not mentioned in the brochure is that you can store the capo above the nut for quick access. Because it uses rubber side grips, which can react with certain finishes if left in direct contact for long periods, I don't recommend storing the capo on your guitar.

Frankly, nothing – whether capo or coconut – is really *perfect*, but the Perfect Capo comes as close as most other man-made devices I've seen. Considering its list price of \$19.99, it should satisfy many capo converts.

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