

COVER SHEET

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Transcriber: Amanda Fickey, PhD, Independent Contractor
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Interviewees: Roy Bowen, Scott Leedy, and Monty Weaver
Interviewer: Amanda Fickey
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Transcription Notes:

AF: Amanda Fickey

RB: Roy Bowen

SL: Scott Leedy

MW: Monty Weaver

SA: Sean Anderson

In some cases, words such as “um”, “uh”, “and”, “so” and “yeah” have been excluded.

Time notations have been included at approximately 2-minute intervals.

... Indicates pause, delay in conversation, or, weak transition/no transition in themes.

The names of musical styles are capitalized throughout the transcript.

Attempts were made to verify the names of all musicians and geographical locations referenced throughout this interview.

0:00

AF: Well thank you for sitting down with me today, Roy. I appreciate your time.

RB: You are very welcome.

AF: I thought we would start with just some basic biographical information first off. So, tell me a little bit about where you grew up.

RB: I was born here in Winchester.

AF: Ok, and so you've been here pretty much the majority of your life?

RB: All my life.

AF: Were you interested in music when you were younger growing up here in Winchester?

RB: Um, you know, I didn't really have any family background in it, but I've been interested in music since 1979. I've just always kind of had a love for it, so I've been doing it for a long time.

AF: Now why does '79 stand out as an important year to you?

RB: I guess just because, for whatever reason that's the year that I got my first guitar.

AF: Oh ok. Now was that a gift, or did you go out and buy it?

RB: It was a birthday present.

AF: A birthday present. Ok.

RB: After harassing my family for years, trying to get it.

AF: Yeah. So, where did you go to elementary school here?

RB: I went to Victory Heights Elementary School.

AF: And were you really involved in music classes?

RB: No.

AF: No? So, it was mainly just something you were interested in on the side?

RB: Yeah, my interest in school was always in arts and history, and I don't know, I guess...

[Interruption – outside noise]

1:50

AF: Ok, so tell me about your experience in elementary school. Were you interested in music?

RB: You know, I hadn't found that yet. I was very interested in art and being creative, but not, I hadn't, I think it was, I'll blame KISS for music.

AF: Same thing through high school?

RB: By the time I was in junior high I didn't care about anything but guitar. So all through high school I was playing in bands and just really, I did ok in high school, but it wasn't my main interest. I was way more interested in where we were going to be playing that weekend, later that night, or whatever.

AF: So by the time you got to high school you were actually doing gigs.

[Interruption – videographer stops momentarily]

2:54

AF: Were you more interested in music during high school? What was that experience like?

RB: I definitely, starting in junior high, had already decided that guitar was all that I was interested in and school was something I was trying to get through to get to a gig or whatever I had going as far as a band.

AF: Right, and so, what guitar were you playing? What was your role in the bands you were in?

RB: I played bass.

AF: You played bass. Ok. These were paid gigs?

RB: Mhm... Some of them.

AF: Some of them? Some of them were paid? Tell me about that your experience. You're a teenager and you're actually going out and doing gigs. What was that like?

RB: Well it seemed like a really big deal, even though you weren't playing anything significant, you were just playing a party for somebody, or a benefit for something, but it was still, it didn't matter, you were in front of people when you were playing so that was all that really mattered.

AF: Can I ask what the name of the band was that you were in?

RB: There were too many.

AF: Too many? Oh ok...

RB: I think it varied from week to week just about.

AF: Ah. When did you start to shift from having a desire to perform to actually wanting to build guitars? How did that take place?

RB: That was pretty early on. That was probably about half way through high school, and I was always just kind of fascinated with how one musician sounded different than the other one. I would see guys who were playing what appeared to be the same guitar, but they sounded different so I just kind of got fascinated with why.

AF: How did you start to explore that? Were you involved in shop class?

RB: I did take electronics classes in school and I took woodshop. More than any of it just came from me reading magazines. I would read, "Eddie Van Halen did this to his guitar," so and so did that to their guitar, and without fail that was the first thing I was doing was trying to do that same thing to my guitar and usually failing miserably at it.

AF: Did you feel like most of this learning process took place on your own? Through some classes, but you were really doing a lot of research, you were tinkering with things, is that right or did you work with anyone specific?

RB: No, I actually apprenticed with a gentleman. When I was determined that I was going to mess up my own guitars I basically, I would always have to take them, there was a repairman at Carl's Music in Lexington named Tom Jones, and Tom was the guy that I'd always take the guitars to after I'd messed them up, and he'd fix them. He would always tell me, you need to stop doing that, I didn't know what I was doing, and probably after two years of destroying guitars he looked at me one day and he said, "Well it's obvious that you are going to keep doing this, so do you want to learn how to do it right?" And so I started apprenticing with him and that was '87. That's been all I've done since then. So, well, you don't really make a great living as a guitar repairman at a music store, so there were always other jobs that had to happen, but that's been the main goal since then.

AF: Well let's talk a little bit about that apprenticeship. Was that a paid apprenticeship?

RB: At first it was just a percentage of whatever jobs that I helped him with. Then in '90 it turned into, he retired from doing repair and I took over for him and then it turned into a full-time paying job.

AF: Ok, so you started doing repair work at Carl's music, and you slid into that position?

RB: Mhm.

AF: Ok, so throughout this experience, you mentioned it was hard to have repair work be sort of steady work and that you've done jobs on the side. What were some of those jobs on the side that you've done?

RB: I've done a lot of retail work. I was an assistant manager for Office Depot for about four years. I've done a lot of cabinet making, a lot of construction. Things that are still involved in woodworking.

AF: So you have a skill set that is easily transferable? Right, so you can make the bodies of guitars, you can make cabinets, tell me a little bit about that.

RB: Well I think, you know, I think a lot of people, if you like doing woodworking and you're good at woodworking it is easy to shift that from, the basic principles of it are the same regardless of what you are doing, whether you are making a clock, or a table, or a kitchen cabinet.

AF: And are you using pretty much the same equipment?

RB: Yeah.

AF: Yeah.

RB: Most of the basics, you know, there are a lot of specialized pieces of equipment that are in the guitar industry. Most of those we don't actually use. Our stuff is still very basic tool stuff.

AF: So you were working this job at Carl's Music, you were doing retail on the side, and you were doing some carpentry, making some cabinets and things using the same skillset. How did you go from being at that stage in your life to actually having RS Guitarworks?

RB: That start in, I think '96. I was running an ad, I had actually left Carl's in '94 and had started running ads in the paper for doing repairs and one day I got a call from a guy that had a guitar that he had been working on and he couldn't quite get it fixed right and he had just moved to Winchester and he wanted me to look at the guitar and so he came over and that turned out to be Scott and we wound up finding out that we pretty much had everything in common. We had played with a lot of the same people, we had owned a lot of the same equipment, we played in a lot of the same bands, but we never met each other.

So it almost seemed like the whole time we were kind of orbiting each other, you know, alternating in and out of stuff. He actually helped me get a job at the time, but while we were working that job we would get off work and come straight to the shop at my house and start building guitars, or refinishing guitars or whatever because we were both so interested in it. We did that part-time for years until it literally got to the point where, we put up our first website in '99, and started getting work in and I think it was 2002 or 2003 we wound up, we looked around the shop one day and we had enough work to pay ourselves for about six months and at that time we just kind of made the decision, let's try it. So it started with just him and me in the basement of my house.

AF: Let me step back for just a second. I think it's interesting that in '99 you started developing your own website because I know that's something that a lot of artists and crafts producers, you know that can be really challenging for them. So how did you and Scott make that decision and what did that decision mean when you put yourself out there on the web, and what sort of knowledge did you have about web design going into that?

RB: I had absolutely; it wound up being a very pivotal point for the company, it made us, because it got us on a national and international basis that we would have never achieved without it. As far as having knowledge of it, I had absolutely none. I didn't know anybody who did it. The internet was so, that kind of marketing tool was so new, it was just literally a deal that, I literally bought a book about writing code and it was just a deal where I sat down and wrote out or website by going through this book; How do you get it to do this? How do you get it to do that? I wrote our whole first website out in a spiral notebook and then literally opened the page on the server and started typing code. Surprise of surprises it actually worked. It had a couple of glitches in it, but when you consider the fact that it came out of a

code for dummies book it did pretty good. So, you know, that was a huge, it wasn't very long after we put it up that we started getting calls from people.

AF: Right. Now did you have to pay for the space, the Internet space, to be able to run the site?

RB: No, the first one that was one that was on a homestead site, so it was a free site.

AF: I think it's interesting that once you have that national and international market you immediately started to get phone calls, and that's something in the past individuals that I've spoken to, they don't always anticipate just how much more traffic that their business will start to get once they put up a website so they can't always meet production. So talk a little bit about those challenges. Once that website went up, what changed and how quickly did it change?

13:40

RB: It didn't really, I mean, you know, I think we got a call from a gentleman in South Carolina I think about two days after the site went up with questions about having a job done and he was happy with what we did for him and then he recommended to a dealer friend of his who started having us do work and it just kind of, it was a slow thing but it was kind of amazing to us still every time for the longest time we were just amazed anytime you'd get a call from New York or California or wherever. We both pretty much fell over when we got our first job that was from a different country. Didn't know what to think of that. Our first international job was from New Zealand. So, you know, like I said, we've got blindsided a few times by putting things out there that we thought would be a cool idea that we weren't prepared to get bombed by, but it's always seemed to work out. It's been stressful at times, but you know, we're lucky that we've got through it.

AF: So the folks from New Zealand. Who were they and what were they requesting?

RB: It was a refinish job and I don't remember the gentleman's name. I do remember, because I think I still have the card, he sent us a postcard with the guitar from Auckland City and that was always just amazing and always stuck out in our mind, but that many years later I don't remember the gentleman's name but I don't think we ever did another job for him, I think we've done other jobs for people in New Zealand. But not him again, I don't think.

AF: After this point you started to get pretty steady work, and then by 2002/2003 you had pretty much enough work to sustain yourself for six months. So that's when you made the decision to open up RS Guitarworks. Talk a little bit about that decision and what that meant for you and Scott and what you had to think about.

RB: It was frightening to give up, to say ok, there's not going to be a safety net. There's not going to be any steady income. There's going to be whatever comes in, whatever you do. Whatever you do is what you are going to have to deal with was a frightening thing. But you know, it's been a very tough business but we both love it. So, you know, we're both glad we did it. It's just like any other business, as it grows there are times when you go, man I wish we could go back to you know, when it was easier, but it's been a really cool thing so far.

AF: Did you go through the process of making five or ten year business plans or?

RB: No.

AF: No, so you took a shot in the dark and went with it?

RB: That's it.

AF: Yeah. Looking back on that, if you were talking to an entrepreneur now, who given the economy was thinking about jumping into something like that, what advice would you give?

RB: I think the way we did it was the only way that a business can survive. I think that if a business starts off in debt, it's in trouble right off. You don't want to be trying to establish a new business and new clients with the pressure of making that mortgage payment, with the pressure of repaying that bank loan, I mean, we were very lucky that I had the shop at the house so there was zero overhead. Scott and I already had the tools, you know, so it was just a matter of, ok, you kind of have to tighten things up a bit, don't spend as much money, and every dime you get in that isn't required for the two of you to exist has to go back into the company.

[Interruption – train]

18:29

AF: So, every dime you make, you have to put back into the company?

RB: Yep, and yeah, we were able to, the money, because of not having the overhead we were able to let the company grow. Having parts done, having different things done, getting inventory in without having to worry about how to we pay the rent, how do we keep the electric on, how do we, for the longest times the phones for RS Guitarworks on the business cards were mine and Scott's cell phones and that's an important part when it's just two people because what you have to do is, you don't want to miss that chance, you don't want to miss that order, I've lost count of how many times we would take, somebody would place an order in a restaurant on the back of a napkin because that's where you were. But if we would have, it allowed us to grow, we were able to move into a shop before this one that was very low overhead, the utilities were included, and we got our first employees there and then when we grew out of that we purchased this building, but it's let us grow the business in steps instead of jumping out there and here we are, we owe a half million dollars and good luck. If anybody can start a business and do it part-time and build it, you are going to have a whole lot better chance of being successful.

AF: I think those are good points to bring up and I think a lot of craft producers find themselves, they'll go to workshops or trainings and they're encouraged to jump in very quickly, but sometimes it is better for them to build up and to do it part-time and to still have wage labor on the side and give yourself time to make that change.

RB: Yeah, I think you need to establish your product before you wind up going in debt. You know, going out there when you already owe a lot of money and trying to get people to be familiar with what you do, or to create a demand for a product that you are doing is not where you want to be. You want to have people already beating the door down for what you are doing, that way you have a better chance of making it.

AF: So, thinking in terms of producing good quality product and getting that out there, what have you and Scott done since you started working together to improve your own abilities as builders? You mentioned you had an apprenticeship for a period of time. Have you continued to do any apprenticeships or work with anyone else or take any workshops?

RB: No, no I haven't. I've been very fortunate to; one thing is, in the industry everyone wants to make out like there is a rivalry between companies. The truth is, some of my best friends are builders and/or owners of companies that people consider our competition. We call each other all the time. We visit each other all the time and we share how we do things. There's not the big secretive thing that everybody wants to make, "Oh don't let so and so know I did this," it just doesn't work that way. It's a very open industry, which is a good thing. There's a lot of open information out there, which you can very easily get.

AF: Ok, so you're part of a vast network of other builders and other producers that you can talk to and you can gain access to information. It seems like it would be really important to be a part of that network and, do you think craft producers in general are part of networks like that?

RB: I think there is... I know when we were doing furniture and cabinetwork we dealt with other shops and I think that goes with everything. I think there are always going to be people that are willing to share what they do.

AF: Now, let's talk a little bit about the shop. How long have you had this shop open?

RB: It's been almost five years.

AF: Almost five years. So when you opened this shop it was you, and Scott, and how many employees did you have at that time?

RB: There were five of us when we moved here.

AF: Five. Now, Roy, your employees, are they all male?

RB: Yeah, we had a female office manager.

AF: I'm just curious, do you think that tends to be the case for most guitar shops? They just bring in more males? Do you think that's true across the industry?

RB: Um, not necessarily, because I know quite a few of the shops that we deal with that you know, have office managers, or shipping managers, or the such that are female, but I don't, I can count on one hand the number of ladies I know who are interested in guitar repairs or building, so I think there's less of that for sure.

AF: I think that's interesting. Any ideas why that might be?

RB: I don't know why, but I do know that as a whole there are probably less female guitarists.

AF: Yeah.

RB: So maybe because there are fewer guitarists there are just less of them that have an interest in being hands on in it.

AF: So, thinking in terms of the staff you have here, the five of you, describe a little bit about the process. What does it take to build a guitar? Where do you start and how many people are involved in that and then talk a little bit about throughout.

RB: Ok. Obviously, I think when we first, we have to find a product that, a guitar that we feel there is something unique about or a need for. There's never any telling who, sometimes that comes from looking at the Internet and repeatedly go, "Why doesn't anybody do this?" Ok, well, and a lot of times there isn't a clear answer for that. Why doesn't anybody do this? Well let's try it, and sometimes you try it and you find out why nobody does it because it doesn't work. You know there are a lot of prototypes that just fail and a lot of ideas that seem like they would be good that just don't work. Sometimes you have to look, if you have fifty to sixty years of the guitar industry, the electric guitar industry, why hasn't anybody done this. Well it's not that they haven't it's just it didn't work and you know, every body has moved on. But once you get a design, whether that comes from a customer's request, a need on the Internet we are finding out about, or if it's an idea, it can be, we've got guitars that are a design idea from pretty much everybody in the shop. I mean, somebody may just go, "Hey, I had an idea. I think this would be a cool guitar." And we'll try about anything, We'll do a prototype of it and if we think there is merit to it or it needs to be worked on some more, if it doesn't work out then we will just move on. But I think you know, past that it all just comes down to trying to build the best guitar you can through the materials you select and the attention to detail and building it, the parts that you chose to use. All of that is very important.

27:02

AF: Where do most of your parts come from?

RB: We have probably, currently I think, probably eighty percent of our parts are exclusively made for us and most of them are being made in the US.

AF: Will you talk a little bit about what parts are included? I'm sure that there are lots of parts, but just generally speaking.

RB: Well, the things that we've been known for more than anything, you obviously have the wooden parts, the guitar body and the neck which is where you have to be really selective about the weight and the tone of the parts that you are using, the wood that you are using. Also the weight of guitar is really important to most people. Once you get past that, the one thing that has really established us in the industry is the electronics of the guitars. RS was a industry leader in, honestly, we were probably the first company to ever come up with the idea to approach the companies that make the capacitors and the potentiometers inside the guitars that make them work because prior to that everybody had always approached it like, well, let's use what's on the shelf, which is what may have been developed for generic electronics use. Works great in a radio, works great in a car, it's not the ideal part for a guitar. So we approached the companies with clear designs and said look, we want to do parts that are made specifically for a guitar, and that's really done wonder for the company, not only in establishing us for our guitar building, but for our electronics kits. We offer a lot of kits to where people can upgrade the electronics in their guitars, other company's guitars.

AF: That's great. So they can buy a lower model if they need to, and then upgrade as they have the extra cash to do so. Ok. That seems like a smart business move too because then they are always coming back in, they are always buying additional products.

RB: Yeah, that's just it, I mean, we kind of approach the company like its three different companies. There is the guitar building side of the company, there's the restoration and repair part of the company, and then there's the retail/parts side of the company. Because between those three things, if somebody wants what we do, and they have the money and they want a guitar built the way they always wanted it, that part is there. If they have, like you said, a lower end guitar and they want to use better electronics or hardware or whatever, those parts are there and available for them. Then, even if the intermediate thing, if they like a certain fret size that we use in our guitar, or they've seen one of our guitars that's a color they like, then they can have their guitar refinished or re-fretted here as well to get it. So there are pretty much all stages and that's really benefited us a lot because it has given us the ability to, you don't have the down time. There are times when the economy gets tight and what we find is when the economy gets tight people really don't have the money to spend on building a guitar as a whole, but they have that one that they've had all their life. They can afford to spend fifty or a hundred dollars to make it better, until they can afford to buy a new guitar, or they can spend two or three hundred to have it refinished and repaired to make it better or new to them. So that's cool because it gives us all of the different avenues of income.

AF: And, I think for a lot of producers that diversification is really important. Did you start out thinking that you wanted to have that diversification or did you just kind of start to realize that you could make those things available over time?

RB: We fell into it.

AF: You fell into it. Ok.

RB: It was one of those deals where we actually started off with the idea of doing the repairs, and then when we started, we came up with our first guitar ideas and built those and started getting some interest in them. We did a lot of work on the hardware that we wanted to use on those guitars and the electronics that we wanted to use in our own guitars. We literally had a gentleman send a guitar in for a refinish and he said he wasn't happy with how the electronics were in his guitar and he said, "Do you know anything you could do about it?" and I said, "You know, we have these electronics that we use in our own guitars." He said, "Well, can you put that in mine?" It was like, yeah, sure, we put it in it, sent it back to him, he gets on an Internet forum and says, "I just got my guitar back from RS for being refinished. Their refinish looks great, but it's not the same guitar that I got back because they put their electronics upgrade in it and now it's a totally different guitar." All of a sudden you start to see people on this forum go, "Tell me more about this upgrade that they did to your electronics." He said, "Well, I don't really know what it is, but they changed the capacitors and the pods with their own stuff and it's amazing." The next day we had orders for a hundred electronics upgrade kits and we had people contacting us asking, "How do I get one of these kits?" We may have had enough stuff in shop to do maybe two. We didn't know how to price it. We had no idea how to sell it, how to package it; the first ones literally went out in Ziploc bags with hand-drawn schematics of how we hooked them up. We didn't have anyway to take their orders, didn't have any way to run a credit card, you know, and so the whole parts end of this business created its self. We just rode along. Ok, now we need to figure out how to take credit cards. How do we set-up an online store? How do we do all of that stuff? I won't take any credit for the online store stuff. That was something way out of my realm so it was like, ok we need to

hire somebody. Yeah, that's something Scott would say as well is that we've been very lucky at finding trends where there is a need for something and we filled that need before anybody else has. So we've kind of wound up being the leader in a lot of stuff.

34:34

AF: But I mean, that's where it's worked out really well and you guys are part of national and international markets now. Talk a little bit about the extent of customers that you have contacting you and the individuals that you work with and sell products to.

RB: Well I think right now Joey, our office manager would know better than I do, but I think we sell to, right now, better than one hundred and fifty countries.

AF: Wow.

RB: We have dealers in, probably... I'd say fifteen countries. We have a major distributor in Japan. We have a distributor in Europe. We have a distributor now in Singapore. So, you know, we have been very lucky to get to deal with people growing up that you considered being an idol. You don't know how to act the first time you pick up the phone and Joe Perry is on the other line, or Joe Walsh is on the other line. For me, being a big blues fan, the first day I answered the phone and Buddy Guy was on the phone. How do you even, is somebody messing with me? That's pretty much how you have to approach it and try to not sound like an idiot when they are on there. Like I said, we've been very lucky. Our customer base has gotten to be huge. The electronics upgrades that started as just off one post, I think as of two years ago we had sold over a hundred thousand. So, it's been amazing how things have grown.

AF: And to think about the next five or ten years down the road, what do you anticipate as far as changes to the business, changes within the guitar industry? Just speculate...

RB: The business is still growing. We are actually talk right now, hopefully within four to five months, we are talking with a builder right now about building a building that's roughly twice this size because we honestly have outgrown this. We are currently looking at hiring at least two more possibly three more people right now. We our getting ready, we actually just purchased our first CNC machine, which is a computer numeric controlled machine. It's basically a computer-driven router that will help us to keep the consistency of the guitars and the production speed of the guitars a lot better. So we are buying a lot of new equipment here recently and trying to get it, what basically happened is we started it off with, three years ago us building thirty guitars in a year turned into by last year us building I think two hundred and eighty. We've probably almost done that this year. So, we're getting to the point where you know, we need to get other people, we need to get better equipment to keep the same quality, but to keep up with the demand.

AF: So the shift towards more computerization won't lessen the quality of the guitar?

RB: No, because people have a misconception about the computer controlled machines. There's really no difference between whether I take, or Scott takes a piece of wood and you cut it out on a bandsaw or a router by hand, it's still a machine doing it, you're just guiding it. The only difference is, with the CNC the computer will guide it. The work that makes a guitar will always come from your hands. It's the job that you do of doing the fine sanding, the job that you do of hand-shaping in the neck, the job that you do of applying the finish or doing the fret work, that's stuff that you are never going to be able to get,

that's all about feel. So the computer is just another tool. I mean, yeah, it will give you a thing that's roughly shaped like a guitar, but all the work that's actually going to turn it into a guitar still has to be done by hand.

AF: Yeah. And are you engaged in the community in anyway in passing down some of your skills?

RB: Not at this time. Now I actually did teach a mentoring program for a guitar building at Henry Clay. I did that for two years. It was a fun thing, but it can be a frustrating thing because the kids thought, hey, we get credit for learning to build a guitar. It's work.

AF: Yeah.

RB: You have to do things on time and they only had so long to get the guitars done. I think the first time that I did it I think out of the seven students I had, I think four of them got their guitars done in time. The second time I did it I think I only had six and only one of them got it done in time because they wanted to go out with their friends and they wanted to do what teenagers do. They don't want to go home and sand on a guitar so they can bring it back the next day and be ready to move on to the next step. They thought it was just going to be a big blast, get a grade for building a guitar. Unfortunately, they got a failing grade for not attempting to build a guitar. But we've talked about it and because of Tom being willing to apprentice me I've though several times about if I could find somebody that I thought really had the drive... I've had several people talk to me about doing it, but I've always had that feeling that they just thought it would be something fun to do. I didn't see the passion that it really takes.

AF: But that's something you are open to? Bringing someone in.

RB: Mhm.

AF: Are there any other ways that you are active within the community here that maybe I wouldn't know about, or wouldn't think to ask about?

RB: Well we've done a lot of support with the community. I mean, we've been involved in the local college here in town helping in their fundraising. We are involved in the Better Business Bureau. We are involved in the Chamber of Commerce. We've been involved in several charities here locally. We try to be involved as much as we can.

AF: Well and I think that's great, to have a locally-owned store by a native of Winchester, and that you guys try to be as involved as you can be and work with different organizations and different groups. I think that's really a good and positive point for us to end on Roy. Is there anything that I didn't ask about today that you think is important to bring up or for us to cover?

RB: No, I think that's pretty much it.

AF: All right, well thank you for the interview.

RB: Well you're welcome.

AF: Thanks for sitting down with me.

43:09

[End interview with Roy Bowen]

[Additional footage – not interview related]

[Begin interview with Scott Leedy]

43:29

AF: Ok, well let me start Scott by saying thank you for sitting down with me today. I thought we would start the interview with covering a bit of your biographical information. Tell where you grew up?

SL: Well I was born in Lexington, Kentucky, and lived there for probably six years and then lived in Louisville for a little while and then Richmond, so I've kind of been all around. Georgetown. I've kind of been all around Central Kentucky all my life. Then I moved to Winchester in '95 and that's when I ended up meeting Roy.

AF: Ok, well at least you've always been a Kentucky boy though.

SL: Right.

AF: You've bounced around some. So growing up in these different places, when you were in elementary school and high school, were you interested in music?

SL: That didn't happen to me until probably about the age twelve or thirteen when my older cousin turned me on to KISS and records and music and all that stuff and my mother, she always listened to the Beatles and stuff like that. Old school kind of stuff. My grandmother, she played guitar, mandolin, and piano in church and stuff like that, so I've always kind have been around it all my life, but it never really hit me until my mom took me to a KISS concert when I was a kid and then I decided that looks like a lot of fun. I started playing then.

AF: Well that sounds like it's a fantastic story in and of itself, right, the KISS concert that your mom took you to!

SL: Yeah, me and about five of my friends. It was quite an experience for my mother I'm sure, but she ended up liking the show too after she saw it.

AF: So that's kind of what inspired you to become interested more in playing.

SL: Right.

AF: So what experiences did you have throughout your teen years with actually playing the guitar and what guitar did you play?

SL: Well I liked playing the bass guitar. I messed around a little bit on guitar and on drums a little bit as was naturally drawn to the bass and started playing that, just as a hobby around the house as I was a kid, just messing around with it you know. Next thing you know my friends are getting guitars and

instruments too and we are kind of getting together and making noise together you know for years, and that just never seemed to stop from there. It just kept growing as I got older and getting in bands and getting better opportunities to play and travel and I had a lot of fun with it.

AF: So tell me about the transition. You're a teenager, you're playing some gigs, you're in some bands, how does the transition take place between being a performer and being a builder.

SL: Well, I guess I would say, as I got older and was still playing music, I had a day job working construction and working in cabinet shops and things like that, and then it just kind of hit me one day, hey, guitars are made out of wood too. So I would like to try that. I started doing it as a hobby, just messing around with it and doing a little research on my own and stuff and talking to people and then I ended up moving to Winchester in '95 and was working on a guitar and was having some trouble with it and I noticed an add in the paper, in the local paper, a guy who did painting and repairs and refinishing, and that turned out to be Roy. So, I met him there at his house and we had a lot of things in common together, the same interests, and that's kind of what started the whole building transition right there. We kind of self-fed off of each other's energy and excitement as far as wanting to learn more about it and our interests in it kind of grew together. We kind of fanned each other's fires to create this entity now.

AF: Well you brought up a lot of good points that sound very similar to Roy's story, so let me ask you a bit more. So at one point you are doing construction work, and you're doing cabinet making, and you start making guitars on the side, and was it important to you that you didn't just jump right in to guitar making, that you were still engaged in some wage labor and making guitars on the side?

47:58

SL: Yeah, I'd say so. I wanted to just jump right in, obviously, but there was a lot of knowledge involved that I had to absorb and a lot of money that I didn't have so yeah.

AF: Well and I think that's interesting, a lot of crafters and artists that I've talked to, sometimes they feel like they have to jump right in. One of the things that Roy emphasized was that it is better to take that strategy of building a name for yourself and a product and developing your product. So when you're learning and trying to become a better builder, you mentioned that you did some research on your own and you talked to some other builders. So tell me about that network? Who do you talk to? How do you get in touch with them? What sorts of research did you do? What's out there?

SL: I just started cold calling out of magazines. Talking to some of the other boutique builders in the industry, some of the other guys who were well established and some of them were really nice and helpful and some of them were too busy and really weren't interested in being so helpful. So Terry McInturff was a big help for us in the beginning as far as helping us out, getting our finishes to look right, and giving us a little parental guidance if you will, so he was a big influence on us.

AF: Now have you ever taken certain classes or workshops, or in high school did you take shop class?

SL: I took woodshop in high school, but that was about it. I really got all of my fundamental skills out on the jobsites, building houses and cabinets and things like that and I just kind of worked my way up the ladder from there.

AF: So those skills that you had constructing houses and cabinets, those are skills that are easily transferable.

SL: Yes.

AF: Will you talk a little bit about those skills?

SL: It was a good thing. You get familiar with table saws and bandsaws and how to adjust and use them, so it definitely helped me out a lot as far as getting started. I felt like I had a head start versus somebody else who wanted to build guitars and they'd never even been in a wood shop before. So I had a little bit of background as far as wood species and tone woods and things like that and Roy, he knew a little bit more about it than I did, he really helped me out a lot and then we just started self-feeding off one another's energy you know, it was a really good thing and if we couldn't figure it out then we'd go look it up on our own and learn together at that point.

AF: So what were the first few years like then?

SL: A lot of fun, I'd have to say, because it was really exciting because you are learning new things and you are getting new tools in to play with and new toys and things like that and sometimes it was discouraging, you know, trial and error, there were always ups and downs with that, but it was a good learning experience for us to actually go through the mistakes and everything because when we first got started we didn't have any overhead, we just did it as a hobby out of Roy's basement, so it didn't really matter if we messed anything up, there wasn't really anything involved. That was a big plus, to really experiment.

AF: Now what were you still doing, did you still have a regular 9-5 job?

SL: Yeah, and actually, whenever I first met Roy he was looking for a job and the company I was with was doing some hiring so I got Roy a job and we started working together during the day and then we'd come home at night, eat dinner, and then meet back at his basement and work on guitars and things like that at night and on weekends. So it was fun. We used to, we would sneak little projects in at work and whenever the boss was gone one of us would stand guard while the other one would go do something at the shop. If the boss was coming back, we would give the other one a signal and put it up and go back to work. So even if we were at our 9-5, our minds were still on the guitars. Our hearts were still there.

AF: You think a lot of artists exist that way, where they are working 9-5 jobs to make ends meet and sustain themselves, but really they'd much rather be in the shop making the product.

SL: Yeah.

AF: So then it must have been a big shift for you and Roy to decide ok, we're going to give up that 9-5.

SL: It was scary. It was concerning. It was a little scary to think, oh my gosh can we really do this? I think we had an advantage over a lot of our competition though because we didn't have any overhead once again.

[Interruption – sirens]

53:02

AF: So, talk a little bit about that transition. What it was like to go from that 9-5 job to having your own?

SL: It was a little bit scary. Obviously a lot of concerns – How are we going to pay our bills? Can we really do this? When we were working a 9-5 job, we started doing it as a hobby, and then people started offering us money if we could do that to their guitar. That got our attention, obviously, and Roy and I decided at that point that we would go for it, we would give it a try, we look around at his basement and, now I think I have something close to seventy-five guitars in there at the time for customers that we were working on, so I grabbed my calculator and a piece of paper and started figuring up how much money was actually sitting here in the basement right now and I told Roy, “If we live off of peanut butter for the next six months, we might be able to make this fly.” So we gave it a shot. We quit our day jobs. It was a bit nerve-wracking and a little unsettling going through the change of that, adapting to the new mentality of self-employment, but we just got in there and we just did what we loved and did what we loved to do and it all seemed to kind of come naturally from that point and we just kind of started evolving in baby steps as far as our growth. We set-up a little website, put an ad in a magazine, went to some vintage guitar shows and set-up a display booth and showed what we could do, and the phone started ringing more, and the business increased, and we outgrew the basement probably within a years time, and pretty much had to find a shop, a bigger facility to be able to accommodate everything that we wanted to do. That seems to be an ongoing thing too, we kind of outgrown this shop and are kind of looking for a bigger one now because we are still growing.

AF: One of the things I’d like to ask you about, a lot of the crafters and artists I work with, when they go through that step of setting up a website, that can have either good or bad repercussions right, either they can meet the demand that’s generated through that website, or sometimes they don’t.

SL: Right.

AF: What was that like to make yourself part of that national and international market by making that website?

SL: It was a whole new world for me. Roy was a little bit familiar with it, and I didn’t really know, but I kind of had the mentality you know, what the heck, put it out there, see if any fish nibble, and let it run it’s course from there. It was neat to see the response that you got because we were getting responses from countries I never knew existed, so it was kind of neat to see where all of our hits from our website were coming from and watching the business grow all around the world instead of just locally.

AF: Now if you were to talk to another craft producer about creating a website, are there words of wisdom or insight you would...?

SL: Not too much from me, because I’m not too much the computer-oriented guy, I’m the termite, the woodworker, so I kind of trust them to make those decisions and those calls on that so thank goodness I’ve got people who are much wiser than me on that subject.

56:25

[Interruption – videographer changes battery, tape, and checks room tone]

58:05

[End Track 1]

[Begin Track 2]

0:00

AF: You left that 9-5 job. How did you make the decision to go from the basement to having a shop with five employees? How did that transition take place?

SL: Well it kind of happened and developed all on its own. When we outgrew the basement, of course, as the demand was there to do different things to people's guitars for them, we would have to buy tools and we would take the money we earned from the last customers and we would go out and buy the things that we needed and we saw ourselves slowly getting congested.

[Interruption – outside noise]

AF: So you starting to outgrow the basement, and you had to buy new tools...

SL: Right. Getting new tools and equipment in, and the basement became rather congested and it got to the point where we had to move tools and move things out of the way just to do one specific job that took us about thirty seconds took us fifteen, twenty minutes of re-arranging the shop. So, that's when I decided to go look around, to rent a building, a bigger facility and we found a bigger facility, and we got some help from a couple of other people, hired a couple of other people to help us out to meet some of these business demands and that's when things just started growing and growing in baby steps. The phones started ringing more, the website got more hits and orders, and it just kind of took off from there. Then we kind of outgrew that last facility and that's when we decided to buy this place and design it on our own and get it set-up the way that we wanted for our needs. We had to hire a couple of more people. Now we've outgrown it again. I guess that's a good thing.

AF: Well yeah, that's a good thing. I'm interested in whether or not you and Roy have continued to be the primary builders though.

SL: Yes.

AF: Is that right? So regardless of the staff that you've hired on, you've continued to make guitars.

SL: Right. Even though our staff will approach us at different times with different ideas, we will still all work creatively as a whole, as a group, but the other people will approach us with these ideas and stuff and then we'll go to work on that from there.

AF: Will you talk a little bit about the process of building a guitar and where your materials come from that you use?

SL: Oh my gosh. Materials come from all over. We get a lot of our woods from Paxton out of Cincinnati. Some of it is special ordered. Roy has a few sources online. We've made a few connections over the years and we will order some pieces, and we will gather our material from all our different suppliers. We

get the wood in and start cutting in into the sizes, pieces, shaping it, gluing it up, just so we can basically create a canvas for us to design a guitar on.

AF: So that's the portion that you and Roy are primarily responsible for is shaping and painting?

SL: Right, new components, new features, new designs, just all the research and development, trial and error.

AF: What do the rest of the staff do in the process?

SL: Well, it seems like this job has grown into many positions as it keeps growing. We've definitely got to have an office manager now because the phones are ringing all the time. The office manager now is also doing the shipping, things like that. Billy, he's one of our techs in there, he does a lot of tech support on the phone, he does a lot of our electronic components, you know, a lot of input as far as repairs, things like that, so everybody here has several jobs that, I'm sure that these jobs will also get busier as time goes along and we will have to end up hiring more people to accommodate those other jobs.

AF: In what ways do you use computers in the actual building process?

SL: Well so far it's just the power of the Internet, getting the name out there, the website, the online store. That's our main thing, the central nervous system. And then here lately, we just got a computer CNC machine that will help digitally cut our bodies and everything for us perfect every time versus the variance you experience doing things by hand. Roy and I will develop things by hand and get it to where we like it and we can program the machine to cut it out from that point forward which we just bought that machine and are looking forward to getting it set-up and running here really soon.

AF: So will you tell me a little bit more about that machine? Are there differences in quality between the ones that you and Roy make by hand and the ones that are produced by the machine?

5:03

SL: Not really. The prototypes, the ones that Roy and I make, they're very fine tuned to make sure that we get everything, every little fine curve, every little part where it needs to be. There is something to be said about totally hand-made. Then, after that point, they go into production. Then that's when they are cut out.

[Interruption – outside noise]

5:47

AF: So there is something to be said for totally hand-made versus...

SL: ...versus the production line. Yeah.

AF: So most of your buyers, do they ever ask about things like that or are they just, the name RS Guitarworks just has an authenticity to it so people don't ask about computers?

SL: Not really.

AF: Ok. I think, for a lot of craft producers, sometimes that becomes an issue, but that's not something you and Roy are concerned with?

SL: No.

AF: Because to meet production demand you are to the point where you have to use machines?

SL: We pretty much have to. Yeah. We have someone who is doing our computer work for us now, on the CNC for us now just because we don't have it set-up you know, and running ourselves yet, but without those guys it would take us a lot more time, a lot more time.

AF: So tell me a little bit more about your consumers. What countries are you selling to? How many guitars are selling on average?

SL: Oh gosh as far as the countries go we'd have to find out from some of the other guys. I know in Japan and Sweden and Europe and a couple here in the States. You've got your average people that will call in, just like you and I who are hobbyist and enthusiasts that play guitar and want to improve their tone or a part or a repair. Then we've got you know, the celebrities who call in and need things done. Then you've got your business people, people that want to carry RS Guitarworks products, so it's kind of a broad spectrum of who all is going to be calling in on a day-to-day basis.

AF: And you offer a diverse line of products and development that you can do for a guitar – you can do restoration, change electrical components, will you talk a little about that?

SL: Yeah, we can do repairs and all of that stuff, and it seems like every now and then we are challenged with something we've never had to repair before or do before and I think that helps to push the company a little bit more, to strive for more, and that really helps the company as far as growth too, it just makes us better.

AF: Now Scott, you know, you've got a unique skillset in being able to build a guitar. Are you worried about passing that on, or transferring that skill to anyone here in the community?

SL: Not really. We've kind of been threatened by that once before by a former employee who is now doing his own business somewhere else. We kind of felt like we showed him a lot of things and taught him a lot of things and he took that information and went on somewhere else which is fine, but then he became one of our competitors and started basically copying a lot of the things that we had, so that was kind of a sore subject there.

AF: Yeah I hadn't thought about it that way, I was thinking more in terms of school programs or an apprenticeship program, but no, you've actually had issues with, it's almost like industrial espionage.

SL: In a sense, yeah.

AF: So you've had that happen once. Was that once pretty much the only time that something...?

SL: Yeah, yeah.

AF: That's interesting, Scott. So that must have been a bit of an ordeal?

SL: It was, but I don't think he's doing quit as much as we are right now so he's not really that big of a threat anymore, but we didn't really expect it you know, because when you bring your people in and become friends with them and become close with them it's almost like getting a knife in the back. But then again, it's almost like when you worked at a job before, and you take the skills you learned at that job and you move to another job. But I don't know, it's kind of a touchy subject I guess.

AF: Well yeah, it is, because I guess there's a push for you to transfer those skills so that people continue to build guitars, but then when you transfer them and someone joins the market and becomes a competitor very quickly, yeah, I see how that...

SL: Kind of discouraging.

AF: Yeah. Well I see how that could be tricky.

SL: Kind of makes you look at the next guy when he comes through the door, you know, and make sure... we've even thought about making up a like a non-compete with new employees and stuff like that.

AF: Do you ever talk to other guitar producers about this? Is this something that happens commonly?

SL: Yeah, it's happened before. There's nothing really that you can do about it.

AF: Well how do you feel about apprenticeship programs then? Is it something you've considered for you? Would you still be open to it if it were a younger musician?

SL: Yeah, I'd say I would be open to something like that.

AF: Ok, but so far you haven't done any actually apprenticeship with an actual musician?

SL: Not really, we've been approached by that a couple of times before with a couple of people but we just didn't feel like it really fit the part for us at the moment. So, we just passed on it for now, but in the future yeah.

AF: So in what ways are you working with the local community here, and is that important to RS Guitarworks to be involved in the community?

SL: Well that's another sensitive subject too, and I don't know how much to elaborate on that.

AF: Whatever you are comfortable with.

SL: You know, we try to do our part around here as far as the community goes. We make donations to the local fire departments, and charities, and fund raisers, and things like that you know, just to try to help out and stuff like that. Everything from, we've even got a street person that lives over the train tracks that passes through occasionally and we'll help him out every now and then with something. We try to help out and try to do our part in the community you know...

AF: Ok. So thinking in terms of the future, five or ten years down the road, what are some of the changes that you see for RS Guitarworks, you know, within the context of the current economy.

SL: Wow, that's a really good question. You really don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. Every day you just try to strive for excellence and do the very best you can. By doing that, the company has got this far and grown this much just by that attitude and that mentality right there. As far as five years or so down the road, I would hope that RS would have more to offer and have more things to be able to bring to the table and supply and help out the consumer and the customers out there.

AF: Ok. Scott is there anything that I didn't bring up, or that we didn't cover that you think is important for us to talk about in terms of the shop or your experience?

SL: I can't really think of anything right off hand.

AF: Ok, I just wanted to make sure I asked you in case I had forgotten anything. So yeah, we will go ahead and stop there and thank you for setting down with me today and giving me your time.

SL: Do you want me to send Monty in next?

AF: Yeah, send Monty in because I'm interested to see how his story and his experience differ from you and Roy.

SL: Yeah, me too, when it's all done it would be neat to see what he said, you know. Do what?

[Stop interview with Scott Leedy]

13:05-13:14

[Silence/audio unrelated to interview]

13:14

[Begin interview with Monty Weaver]

AF: Well Monty, thank you for sitting down with us today, and allowing me to interview you. I thought we would start with just some basic biographical information. So where did you grow up at?

MW: London, Kentucky.

AF: London, Kentucky, and did you stay there most of your childhood and teenage years?

MW: Yeah, all the way up through high school.

AF: So you've grown up in London. Were you interested in music?

MW: Yeah, I grew up listening to music. Playing a little bit with friends.

[Interruption – outside noise]

[Interview restarted]

14:08

AF: Well Monty, thank you for sitting down with us today. I thought we would just start with basic biographical information. So tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

MW: I grew up in London, Kentucky.

AF: And stayed there all through childhood...

MW: All through childhood and high school.

AF: So you are growing up in London, and you are at elementary school and high school, were you interested in music when you were younger?

MW: Yeah, I played with friends and stuff growing up, just garage band stuff.

AF: So what guitar did you play?

MW: I think my first one was a Stratocaster copy.

AF: Oh ok. So, even when you were younger you were really getting into not only playing, but thinking about what guitar you were buying, what brand you were buying.

MW: Yeah.

AF: Yeah, and did you take music classes?

MW: No, I never took music classes. I was always a tinkerer so I got more into trying to figure out what made them work, taking them apart and stuff.

AF: So did you take shop class?

MW: Yes. I had shop class all through school.

AF: So what skills did you learn in shop class that you think prepared you?

MW: Woodworking, all around. I used to build bookshelves and stuff like that.

AF: So that's a skillset that you can transfer easily to making guitars?

MW: Guitars take it quite a bit further. It's a lot more intricate than building furniture and stuff.

AF: Will you talk a little bit more about that? What are some of the different tools that you use in guitar making that you don't use in woodwork?

MW: There are a lot of specialty tools for doing the fretwork and stuff like that, but it's a more precise woodworking I guess you would say than building furniture.

AF: Ok, so you're in high school and you are playing some gigs you're in some bands and you are taking shop class. So, what was the next step? Did you take that any further once you graduated high school?

16:14

MW: No, no, I got out of music for several years. I went through vocational school and started doing bodywork.

[Interruption – outside noise]

[Interview starts over – initial footage remains in video]

16:31

AF: So you had been really into music in high school, and had some shop class, did you take that any further?

MW: No, I got out of music for quite a few years. I went through vocational school and started doing auto bodywork and painting cars. Then I got out of that and had a few factory jobs and then found out about this place and came in, started out here and then ended up being the painter full-time here. I guess that's been six or seven years ago.

AF: Ok.

MW: I left here for a couple of years and got another job for a few years and ended up coming back probably a year and a half ago.

AF: So lets talk about that transition a little bit more. So you're doing some factory jobs, painting some cars, you are always doing something with your hands.

MW: Yeah. I built houses for a while.

AF: So you are still using those carpentry and woodworking skills too.

MW: Well here you are inside and you don't have to deal with the cold and rain. That's the bad thing about building houses.

AF: Yeah, so did you work for RS Guitarworks for a while and then leave and come back?

MW: Yeah.

AF: Ok, where did you go when you left?

MW: I installed telemetry systems in hospitals; the heart monitors systems.

AF: Yeah. Ok.

MW: Too much traveling.

AF: Oh. So was your home base still in Winchester?

MW: It was in London at the time.

AF: In London, ok, but still you are using your hands. That's interesting that you're always engaged in some sort of handwork. So you came back. Were you the full-time painter before?

MW: Yeah.

AF: And then you came back to that position?

MW: Yeah.

AF: Do you do any building?

MW: Yeah. I'm back here in the woodshop a lot too. I'm all over the building.

AF: All over the building! So by the time you came to RS Guitarworks, the location was here?

MW: No, it was on Winn Avenue then. I worked over there. I was here during the move and worked here for about a year after we moved to this location.

AF: Ok.

MW: That was probably two and half, three years over at the Winn Avenue location.

AF: Ok. Well then let's talk about what you do here at RS Guitarworks since a lot of that transition and moving took place with Scott and Roy. So you did a little bit of everything?

MW: Yeah.

AF: But your primary function is to paint the guitars?

MW: Painting and building. I'm back here doing a lot of the woodworking too.

AF: You are? Ok, so you are doing a lot of the woodworking too. So do you help with the design of the guitar as well?

MW: Kind of. In the brainstorming process everybody you know, everybody gets involved a little bit, throwing out ideas and stuff.

AF: And do you enjoy that?

MW: Yeah.

AF: Will you talk a little bit more about that creative process and what happens during that?

MW: Usually somebody will just throw out an idea or something different and everybody jumps in – try this, try that, before you know it you’ve got something new you know, that we’ve come up with.

AF: And do you do most of that by hand? Are you trying to switch to computer?

MW: We have a CNC now, but as far as right now it’s all hand. We prototype it and stuff like that.

AF: So how do you feel about that transition, as someone who does a lot of handwork? Is that something you just see as necessary?

MW: Yeah, it’s getting to the point now where the volume is, we do so much that, a lot of it we still have to do by hand, but there’s a lot that can be a lot quicker and easier with a CNC.

AF: Now how do you feel about authenticity or quality? Is it still the same with the CNC? In what ways?

MW: The CNC roughs it out, but you still have to do all of the final sanding and fitting of the body and neck together by hand. It just speeds up the process a little bit, the CNC does.

AF: Ok, so do you, because you are still doing those key things like you are still sanding, you are still putting frets on, you are still shaping the neck, things like that, that still makes it authentic?

MW: Yeah.

AF: And then I guess you go into the next portion of that where you are adding the paint? Will you talk a little bit about that?

MW: Well, I don’t really know where to start. After you get the body sanded, it’s got to be smooth and stuff, then depending on what kind of finish is on it, it’s all different. For a different kind of wood you have to do a grain filler and stuff. Sometimes a sparkle paint job takes a lot longer because of a big flake you have to get it all smooth. Then there is a month of drying and then I get to do my favorite job, wet sanding.

AF: So it has to dry for a month?

MW: Yeah, nitrocellulose lacquer isn’t a hardened product. It has to air dry, so it takes a while.

AF: And then you get to sand it?

MW: I hate wet sanding, but it’s a necessary evil.

AF: So what does that...? Does that just make it look better?

MW: Yeah, the lacquer when you spray it, it has a texture to it. Before we buff them out, we sand it smooth with fine grit sand paper and then buff it. It just makes the surface flat so it reflects evenly. Looks a lot shiner that way.

AF: Well I’m curious about the colors that you use, because I walked back through the room where you have the guitars up and there are some really lovely colors, but colors I guess I didn’t expect to see but I

really like them, like there is a sky blue one and a couple other ones. How do you determine what colors to paint them?

MW: Some of the colors are vintage colors that were used in the 50s and 60s. The guitar manufacturers at the time used stock automobile colors, so most of those are 50s car colors.

AF: Now do you let people choose? Can they make special requests?

MW: Yeah.

AF: How difficult is that to accommodate?

MW: Usually when someone makes an order they just call in with the model of guitar they want. They have the option of fret size, neck shape, what color they want, if they want it aged or not, and what level of aging they want. It's all total custom order guitar.

AF: But if someone had just an older guitar, and they wanted you to change the color on it, can you do that too?

MW: Yeah, we do a lot of restoration work on vintage instruments.

AF: You think more restoration work than new?

MW: Yeah. Well no, not anymore. When I first started it was more restoration work, but now it's a lot more custom built than anything.

AF: Why do you think that is?

MW: Honestly, I think that our guitars have just, people have seen the quality and people are starting to catch on. More and more people are learning about them.

AF: You just think there is a better sound? Better design?

MW: It's just a higher quality product. I mean, most of the guitars, the vintage guitars, they made them cheap to make a profit. They were factory built, high volume. We are more of a smaller, custom built I guess.

AF: So what are some of the customer likes that have ordered?

MW: I don't really deal with many of the customers. That's the other guys on the phone. I'm mostly in the shop and stuff.

AF: So you are rarely necessarily aware of whom you're building for.

MW: They tell me the names. I keep track of them on my records. During the painting process I have their name and everything that is going on with the guitar, but I rarely talk to a customer.

AF: So you are building this guitar for someone and you know that in a lot of cases they've made this custom order and you finish putting the paint on it and you finish sanding it. Can you talk a little bit about what that feels like, to see that finished product?

MW: It's a gratifying, it's a very gratifying thing to take raw lumber and make an instrument out of it. That's why I do this. I enjoy making something. That's why I left the factory work and stuff because you know, you do the same thing all day, but you never see the end product. Then after I get through with it, it goes into Roy and he ages it or whatever and it gets put together and then you actually get to play the thing that started out as a piece of lumber back here.

AF: Yeah.

MW: So yeah, it's a pretty cool process.

AF: Yeah. Does the customer know that you were a part of it?

MW: Yeah.

AF: I mean is your name included? How is the guitar sold and packaged at that point?

[Interruption – outside noise]

27:06

AF: So when you have the finished product and they give it to the customer, do they know the individual's names that worked on it? I guess, is there a sense of ownership for you in that and how?

MW: I don't know that the customer actually knows everyone's names. Some of them do. We've met some of the customers. Some of them come by the shop and meet everybody. Yeah, it's a proud moment I guess you would say when you see someone satisfied with something that you had a big part in building.

AF: And that kind of makes it all worth it for you to be involved in the process?

MW: Yeah.

AF: So thinking in terms of the future, and where RS Guitarworks might go, what things do you see changing over the next five years?

MW: Probably getting a lot busier.

AF: You think so?

MW: Yeah. Well, when I first started I think we built twelve guitars in a year and did a lot of restoration. Now we do, I mean we've done fifty or sixty in a month now. So that's been six or seven years since I first started I guess, something like that. So yeah, it's growing pretty rapidly.

AF: Now why do you think that is?

MW: I guess more and more people are getting ahold of the guitars and finding out. We've picked up several dealers and stuff since then. When I first started they just sold them through the website, the RS website.

AF: I ask that question because I'm a teacher and so many of my students are so wrapped up in their iPods, you know, the Internet and things like that, it's hard for me to think you've got an increase in guitar sales. I think it's great, but I wonder what age group it is, and who is buying them, and why they are buying.

MW: I don't know. There are a lot of older musicians that buy our guitars right now. As far as kids, young people, I have no idea if that's who is buying them.

AF: Ok. Do you do anything with young musicians here in town?

MW: No, no. I have a nephew that's ten now. I've got him. He plays guitar a little bit.

AF: Really?

MW: Yeah, yeah, he's getting into it. Big Johnny Cash fan. For a ten year old, that's odd.

AF: So what are some of the ways that RS Guitarworks are involved in the community?

MW: You would probably have to talk to Roy and Scott about that. They do some benefit things. We've done a couple of guitars that they are going to donate to UK, the Kentucky guitars that Joey was involved big in that project. I think last year Scott and Roy donated a guitar to Winchester that the city auctioned off. I think there is a newspaper clipping of it in the gallery in there.

AF: So that's one of the biggest ways, just donating products to generate money.

MW: Yeah.

AF: Well, Monty is there anything that we haven't touched on that you think it really important to know about the guitar making process or about your experience here at RS Guitarworks?

MW: Not right off. I think we've about covered everything.

AF: Well I think it's interesting that you left and you came back. I think that speaks volumes for what the community must be like here at the shop.

MW: Yeah, we're all friends, and we all hang out together it seems like. We all get along. It's never a job when you enjoy what you're doing.

AF: You know, I think that's probably a great quote for us to end on, and we are looking forward to getting some footage and seeing you painting.

MW: Yeah, I'll be back there.

AF: Ok. So with that we'll wrap up. Thank you, Monty.

MW: Thank you.

AF: So we really would like to film you painting. Is there like a better time to do that?

[End interview with Monty Weaver]

[Begin footage of shop area and painting studio]

31:36

RB: You are just going to stand there for moral support.

SL: I'm just going to stand here and go, "Uh huh."

RB: Yeah.

[Begin footage of parts and process]

SL: Well, we basically get the wood in and we cut it down into useable pieces and useable sizes like this, and then it will get cleaned up in other stages with other machinery and down to the thickness sizes and then it will get opened up, all the cavities, all the control templates and everything will get formed into that, and then, the next stage will be probably the contouring, the round over, getting all the sharp edges broke on it, figuring out where everything is actually placed on the body, and where things actually go and, show them this one here if you want to. This is one of our models, our solar flare model.

RB: Yeah this is actually one of our models that we call a solar flare. The first one of this guitar was done for Joe Perry of Aerosmith and the idea of actually inlaying an aluminum front that's acid edged. So all this has to be routed out to allow this to fit correctly. These guitars are also; there are two different styles of guitars that we do. One is called, "bolt-on neck," and the other one is called a, "set neck." This neck is actually glued in the guitar when it's actually ready to go as opposed to these where they are actually screwed in. It's just a lot more complicated of a design of a guitar. You know, just like the bodies, these necks all start off by just being a basic blank of wood that we cut in size and then a fingerboard that gets slotted for the frets. So, there's a lot of steps that go into getting from the raw wood into this step here, and then after than, once they are all sanded up, the next step is to actually go into paint.

34:12

AF: Will you talk about some of the differences when you shift to computer production, so what that machine is actually doing and what portions it will be producing and what portions will still be by hand?

RB: You can probably grab a telepattern over there...

AF: I think it's interesting that you are shifting to a CNC machine.

SL: You want to show them some of the, how we hand-make the, just flatten it as much as possible.

AF: I promise I won't hit you [with reference to the overhead mic].

SL: El Kabong!

RB: What's different about how we are doing it now versus what we are getting ready to move to, in the fifties and the sixties the way that guitars were produced was to take a bandsaw, cut the profile, then you would take a, you would make a master pattern that would get attached to the body and it would be ran on what would be called a pen router, which you guide by hand and it will follow this pattern to make sure that this body is cut down to this size every time. Then once that's done, the same locating holes that mounted it will mount a pattern that shows where all the controls and parts are going on the guitar. This is really a time consuming process because it has to be done by hand. Somebody has to sit here. You have to measure the depth of cut of everything every time you do it. And it always has the variable, what if something moves? By shifting to the CNC controlled machines, when you do this original pattern you are actually going to do it in the computer. Then, the computer, the CNC will follow that computer file depth, speed of cut, everything that you would have done by hand, to make sure that every time they are accurate within ten thousandths of an inch. It still leaves a lot of work because once the body comes off of the CNC and it's at this step, or at this stage, the edges are still very rough, the edges are still very square, many of the mounting holes are still not drilled, so all that has to still be done by hand. So it just kind of takes the guess work out of, or the risk, out of producing the guitars and keeps their consistency very close, but they will all still be handmade because they will have to be hand sanded, hand shaped, and that's really the most important part, making sure that that neck feels right, because the computer is never going to know that. You can get it close.

SL: It has to be sanded perfect too; because when they go to the spray both and they are not **[sanded well]**, when the finish hits them it will show every little scratch and every little thing. Still a lot of man-hours involved even with the CNC machine.

SA: Oh I see. So the question we asked Monty, but we didn't ask either of you, just on a personal or aesthetic level, when you've made a guitar that's really sounds good or you hear somebody play it or you play it, what's that like?

SL: We always refer to that as the lightning hitting Frankenstein effect. In other words, a piece of tree that comes alive. So whenever that finally happens that's kind of the magic moment, because when you first string it up after you've worked on this piece of wood and you've polished it, you've got a beautiful finish on it, and then when you finally put all the components on it and get it set-up and you plug it in for that first time and hit that first note, it really feels good, if you are into building guitars obviously, it's a sense of pride in what you've created by hand. Usually from that point we will do some refinements and fine tuning, but it's usually an exciting moment and usually when things like that happen, usually the guys will gather around to hear it as well and want to try it and play it a little bit too. It's a lot of fun because it takes a good two or three months to complete one, so that's kind of a lengthy time to wait around and whenever it's done and it's finished and you hear it for the first time it's really rewarding for people like us who love building guitars.

RB: Yeah, the whole time you're hoping that you've hit the mark. The customer says, "I want to get a certain sound, I need it to do this, and you go on by your best knowledge and choice of woods and parts and all that you are going the direction that they are wanting, but for three months it's just a guess. You

don't know whether you are going to hit it and that first time you plug it in you go yeah, we got what they wanted, you know.

SL: And when you miss your mark it can be disappointing. Start over and try again. So it's not always...

[Interruption – outside noise]

SA: So what is that like, when you've done all that and it sounds, it's not right?

RB: It's heart breaking because you spent three months of time and putting the passion into it only to find out that it's for nothing. I mean, we've had guitars where literally we've had to bring them back here after three months and take a bandsaw and cut them in half.

SL: If it's something like the tone or the sound of the guitar we can do something to change some components or some features on that to make it sound better, but if there is something wrong on the guitar physically then yeah, it's time to go back to square one.

[Interruption – UPS delivery]

40:22

SL: So from there we've still got a lot of physical man-hours, hand-hours.

RB: Well that's like, we don't make, from the computer files, we don't make the bodies fit perfectly because you want to take that down by hand because that ten thousandth that that machine could be off could be the difference. If the body is ten thousandths too big then the body can be ten thousandths too small then you've got a huge gap. So it's always better to let them run oversize and then by hand finesse it in because you know, people have always considered, they think hand-made, and I think honestly some people have this idea of a guy with a chisel and a pocket knife and it's really, in the music industry, it's not that way. People have been using routers, bandsaws, table saws, and all that, electric sanders, since the 40s, so it doesn't really matter whether it's a computer pushing the board through that router or whether it's a guy. It's still the router that's doing the work.

SL: All depends on your level of quality that you set for yourself as well. A lot of people will accept other things, some things that we won't, we're always striving for excellence and always trying to make every little detail perfect and flawless on it, so we've got a really high bar you know, as far as quality goes. I think that's a lot to be said for whether you are making pottery or painting or whatever, you set your own bar for what your standard should be. We've got a pretty high bar.

AF: Well I think that's good. I'm glad that you're willing to talk about that because some craft producers they... **[cut in film]**

42:24

AF: [resume filming] ... since the '40s, and so in some ways that is traditional and authentic to include computers in the process.

RB: Yeah, I mean, power tools went all the way back to the '40s and I mean computer controlled equipment has been used in the guitar industry since the early '70s, so it's not new. It's new that the stuff is getting towards more affordable to a small person because that machine back in the '70s might have cost two million dollars is now down to where two knuckleheads that crawled out of a basement can afford it.

SL: And then, I think Roy wanted to sing a little for you.

AF: You want to sing some on the camera, Roy?

RB: No, no I'm good.

AF: Well I think that's good unless, Sean is there anything?

SA: No.

43:21

[Additional footage of guitars]

43:19

AF: Now you did this for Aerosmith, is that what you said?

SL: We actually ended up doing two for him, and he takes them everywhere. He takes like 60 guitars with him on the road and that one that we built for him goes everywhere. This guitar tech said it's like his woobie. It goes on the tour bus with him; it goes with him everywhere he goes.

RB: It goes to his hotel room with him.

SL: He used it on the MTV Music Awards, Ellen DeGeneres, and the Late Night Show. He's done a lot of interviews and stuff with it in magazines with it.

AF: Yeah.

SL: It's everywhere you see Joe now he's got that guitar that we built for him and that's really cool.

AF: Yeah, that's fantastic.

SL: It's good to get paid for the job to help pay the bills, but that fact right there is so self-rewarding. I mean, we are talking Troy, Jon Shaffer's lead guitar player in Iced Earth and he said, "Man, the stuff you guys have done for Jon is amazing. Tell me about your guitars." Well now we've got him interested and he is wanting to buy two of them and they are getting ready to do a live concert DVD in Athens, Greece this summer, so our guitars are probably going to be in that too.

AF: Yeah.

SL: So it's like, ah, thank you. They slowly keep getting a little more recognition, you know, getting them in the right hands.

RB: It's been a huge thing since we got them with Marty Stuart and his band.

SL: Yeah, the whole band is now using them, which is really cool and we are talking to one of the guys now about doing an actual signature series model. So, it's pretty cool.

AF: Yeah. **[Cut in film]**

44:56

AF: ...At Berea, they have the student craft program and I've been working with the director and we submitted an abstract to go to a conference at the Smithsonian and talk about the student craft program and what some of the difficulties are for those students to be both a studio artist and to yet be a student who is in that position as part of a job and so, but Berea has been one of those places where they have introduced computer...

45:24

[Cut in film – move from shop to paint studio]

45:25

[Paint demonstration]

MW: It gets pretty loud.

AF: That is loud. That's an interesting color.

MW: Burnt orange is what we call it. It's actually an old gretch color, and that's the grain of the wood.

AF: Yeah.

[Conversation about placement for filming]

46:05-48:08

[Painting demonstration]

48:09

[Additional footage of guitar bodies – did not transcribe background noise/conversation]

End of Track 2 – End of Interview

52:00