

# JAMES GOODALL GUITARS



BY JOHN SCHROETER

James Goodall approaches guitar making in the way he approaches most things in his life—with perfectionism, intensity, resourcefulness, persistence—and vision. At one time, he set out creating and building modern symphony flutes. He wasn't content to build fine instruments, though. He had to raise the state of the art in the process, working out his ideas to improve the various mechanisms involved. He has also built and plays Baroque oboes, English horns, mountain dulcimers, hammered dulcimers, mandolas, as well as other instruments of his own invention. "When I have a desire to do something," he says, "I'll go down to the library and read everything I can about it, and then I'll teach myself how to do it. I think sometimes my drive for perfectionism is a curse, though, because I tend to notice too much detail and yet, I have to be that way to produce the product I make. It's just so exacting." Fortunately for us guitar pickers, Goodall has settled on applying his gifts to guitar making.

In addition to his mechanical, woodworking, design, and business talents, Goodall is also an accomplished artist. In fact, in 1972, he traded one of his seascape paintings for the wood he needed to build his first guitar—a curly maple Jumbo replete with fancy Mexican mother of pearl inlay. His local resource in those early days was a small shop in Lemon Grove, CA called American Dream Guitar, an enterprise that would subsequently be acquired by a pair of its employees, Bob Taylor and Kurt Listug, who renamed the small operation Taylor Guitars. Today, Goodall is amazed to witness the unfolding careers of his numerous instrument building friends who lived in the area: Greg Deering, Geoff Stelling, and Larry and Kim Breedlove. "When we were kids," Goodall recalls, "Larry and Kim took art lessons from my mother. Kim Breedlove and I were

on the same little league team, and his father was the coach!"

When Goodall undertook his initial guitar building project, it was without any previous wood shop experience, and was completed with minimal assistance. His father, though, was a wood carver and picture framer and loaned James his a table saw, router, and bandsaw. Confidence gained from working with his hands making surfboards throughout his high school years also helped.

Spurred on by the success of that first guitar, James was inspired to continue in his newfound craft. Soon, orders from friends began to build a backlog. "By the mid seventies," he says, "I needed to make a decision: was I was going to be a seascape artist or a guitar maker?" By 1978, Goodall had painted his last painting, and the guitar making operation was in full swing.

James set out to teach himself metal machining and metal fabrication, he purchased a metal lathe and other metal working tools and began to design and build numerous machines, jigs, and fixtures to aid and streamline the labor-intensive guitar building process.

In '81, Goodall relocated his operations to Fort Bragg, CA, where for the next eight years he would turn out about forty instruments each year. In '92, he moved again, this time to his

current location in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, where he now employs four full-time apprentices, and ships up to five instruments per week.

Despite the increase in production, though, Goodall remains driven by a singular quality goal: "I want every guitar to come out as if I made it entirely by myself," he says. "I want it to be perfect. My intent is to have every one be consistent to my ideal—to have that same quality of Goodall tone across the board."

So just what is Goodall tone? "Tone is really the signature of the maker," James answers. "You can almost pick out what kind of guitar you're hearing just by its tone. I'm looking for something that I would describe as lyrical—a word used in the classical music meaning very musical. For example, someone can play a concerto, and while it might be technically perfect, it might not have a musical depth to it—it doesn't move you inside; it's not lyrical. With regard to our guitars, I'm excited because we're very close to capturing what I hear in that sense: a full, rich harmonic sound. When someone records our guitars in a studio with high quality mics, I like what I'm hearing. I hear music. I don't hear guitar. I don't hear mid-range, or treble, or bass, I hear music. That's what I mean by lyrical, and that's what I strive to build into each of our guitars."

The unique shape of Goodall's instruments is yet another outgrowth of his independent streak. Dating back to his first guitar, he chose to modify the Jumbo pattern he obtained from the American Dream Guitar design. "It was similar," he says. "I took measurements of the length and the width, but I created my own shape. On the Standard model, I really had no desire to copy the Martin dreadnought. Ours is a little more rounded—not as much as a classi-

cal guitar, but in that direction."

Goodall's guitars are as unique on the inside as well. Owing to the influence of Arthur Benade, the author of *Fundamentals of Musical Acoustics*, and one of the foremost figures in acoustic engineering, Goodall's soundboard and bracing design takes a sharp departure from the traditional X-brace approach.

Goodall refers to Benade's concept of "the hinge"—the point at which the top meets the sides. "It's like a drum," he explains. "The tighter the drum head, the higher the pitch. Conversely, as the drum is loosened, the head vibrates more toward the edge of the drum, and the resulting frequency is lowered."

Goodall emulates that effect by graduating the thickness of the top in specific areas to allow the top to flex more near the edges, and hence, gain more of a deep, fundamental tone. On the treble side of the equation, Goodall explains, "The fact that I don't scallop the braces allows the bridge and the saddle and the pin plate to transmit treble throughout the top more efficiently. In that sense, the top is a little tighter. But I don't have a lot of meat on the bridge, so I'm not dampening tone in that area. And the rosewood pinplate inside the top isn't overly thick or overly large—but it's not too small, either. There's a balance that needs to be realized at the input of the strings going through the saddle. If you have too much rigidity in that area, you lose power and fundamental, and end up with a bright, nasal sound. But if you have too little, it doesn't transmit the midrange and the treble harmonics properly throughout the top. So I'm gaining the warmth and the richness around the edges of the top in the belly area, and also by not having too much mass in the bridge and pinplate, but just enough to transmit overtone harmonics in the right manner."

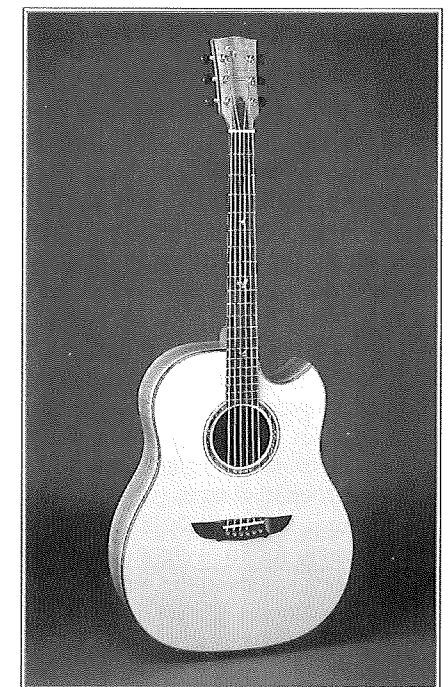
The result is a combination of brilliant harmonic overtones, but not overly bright—a quality of tone that Goodall likes to describe as a three dimensional "O" sound. By way of contrast, he describes the sound preferred by many blues players as an "E" sound. "A lot of blues players like that eeee," he says. "It's cool for them. But there are plenty of guitars around with an 'E' sound. I think of an 'O' sound as lending itself to music that has a more serious tone to it. Classical music would be a good example. I really like to hear our guitar played in the manner of a beautiful,



Grand Concert



Jumbo



Standard



James Goodall at work in his shop



well-written piece that has a depth and richness to it."

With regard to tone woods, Goodall strives to find the combination that will best complement the player's

music, style, and playing technique. In getting to a common description of sonic qualities, he's most likely to talk of focus ("each note on each string plucked individually will have more power and penetration to cut through a mix. For a fingerstyle player, it means you can get more volume and power and fullness, as well as string to string balance"), brightness ("midrange/treble response

and clarity"), and brilliance ("lots of harmonic overtones").

Practically speaking, "If the player is primarily a flatpicker," he says, "I will almost always recommend rosewood. That seems to be the darkest in the midrange, but is also warm and full and responsive. And the top will be most flexible Sitka spruce we can find. Mahogany is also a great choice. For someone who plays like John Renbourn, I might pick a cedar top Grand Concert cutaway. For someone with a more aggressive fingerstyle approach, the Standard would probably be the better option. For him, the woods could vary from koa to rosewood for the back and sides, with a harder Englemann or Sitka spruce top. It depends on what gauge strings he's using. If the person has a light attack and uses light gauge strings, then Englemann would be an excellent choice, or even possibly redwood or cedar. But for the person who is going to use light or medium gauge strings, or isn't sure, then it's best to go with Sitka; it's stronger, and will hold up better. Sitka spruce, for its weight, is one of the strongest woods in the world."

Goodall notes that the choice for the back and sides really comes down to personal preference. "If the player wants more focus and crispness, I'd say

koa. If he wants a sweetness, I would say walnut. If he wants more richness, I would say rosewood. If he wants an even response from the bass, midrange, and treble, maple is an excellent

choice. And there are always exceptions to guidelines like these. Doug Smith, for example, is a fingerstyle player, and he plays a rosewood Jumbo!"

James feels there is no single ultimate tonewood. In discussions about spruces, he recommends Sitka spruce for most players, but he does use a significant amount of Englemann spruce. "Englemann is a softer wood, generally, so I try to

find the hardest Englemann I can, but I also like the sound of a slightly more flexible Englemann for certain applications, especially on a small body with light gauge strings. There's more of that 'O' sound with Englemann, I think. I can generally find somewhat of a crossover between Sitka and Englemann, depending on the stiffness-to-weight ratio. If it's stiff and light in either of those, there's going to be an overlap. Sitka seems to have more midrange and midrange harmonics, and perhaps more balance across the board. Also, for the larger models, I tend to prefer the pieces with the highest stiffness to lightest weight ratio for clarity and treble balance."

With regard to cedar and redwood, "That's a whole different story," Goodall says. "I like to find the stiffest cedar and redwood I can—first, because of strength concerns, but also because I'm gaining a whole other spectrum of sound that I think a fingerstyle player would like. It's very focused and very clear and very filled with harmonics, but again, coupled with our design, you're also getting that lyrical fundamental tone. It's a very impressive sound. But you've got to be careful with cedar, because it is a soft wood, and you cannot use medium gauge strings on those guitars."



Living in Hawaii, Goodall enjoys a particular guitar maker's advantage. "Koa only grows here in the Islands," he observes. "It's getting harder to find, but we've got a good selection. I feel that Koa is good across the board with respect to bass, mid, and treble, but it has more clarity than rosewood. Koa can be obtained, but it is very expensive. I'm patient, I look, hunt, and find what I want."

When not used for the back and sides, Goodall likes to use curly koa for its visual impact in trim and binding. He uses no plastic or celluloid on his guitars, working instead with a variety of woods, orchestrating them to create a visual work of art, in addition to being aural works of art.

Goodall Guitars are available in Jumbo, Standard, and Grand Concert body sizes, with a number of wood, trim, inlay, and cutaway options. A 12-string option is also available. Prices start at about \$2,500. Goodall Guitars can be found at the major high-end acoustic guitar dealers. For more information, contact Goodall Guitars, PO Box 3542, Kailua-Kona, HI 96745, (808) 329-8237.

## DOUG SMITH: A Player's Perspective



Doug Smith, whose two American Gramophone albums, *Order of Magnitude* and *Labyrinth*, made a splash in guitar lover circles, is probably James Goodall's biggest fan. He discovered Goodall in the process of recording his first project. "I recorded the demo with my Takamine and Mark Angus guitars," says Smith. "But when we went in to record the album, John Archer, the producer, asked me to do the project with a guitar that he knew how to record really well, and would be well-suited to my music. Well, it turned out to be a Goodall Jumbo. He had me borrow it for a while so that I

could get used to it—which didn't take long at all; it fit me really well. I ended up recording the whole album, with the exception of one tune, with that guitar, and another Goodall Jumbo with a cutaway."

The guitar left more than a lasting impression on Smith. Today he plays his own Goodall, a Jumbo with rosewood back and sides, Sitka spruce top, and koa binding.

On the guitar's special attributes, Smith says, "It has an extremely uniform sound—just a wonderful tonal balance. The bass response is really good, but it's not boomy or overpowering. I've played jumbos where that was a problem. Having been a bass player, I do tend to concentrate on the bass lines, but it doesn't overpower any of the melody or accompaniment. All six strings sing equally up and down the fretboard, and I don't have to worry about accenting something differently than I would normally have to. I also find that I can have a wide range of expression on it, whether I'm playing something very delicate, or a jig, or a two-handed tapping thing. It really responds very well to the kind of music I play."

In addition to being a loud guitar that often requires no amplification in smaller venues, there's another reason Smith prefers the jumbo size. "Being 6'5", the guitar just fits me," he says. "When I was in classical guitar school, I was told that I was too tall to major in classical guitar. My teachers suggested that I invest in a jumbo classical, which for a starving classical student wasn't the greatest thing in the world. But nonetheless, I've ended up with a Jumbo, and it's so comfortable. While I'm not a classical player per se, given my classical upbringing, I like to think of this Goodall as a steel string extension of how I might express myself on classical guitar. It really has that same depth of tone."

Smith adds that the aesthetic quality of the instrument is equally pleasing. "It sounds hoaky to say, but James Goodall is an artist for the eyes as well as the ears."

Doug Smith's latest CDs, *The Best of Doug Smith* and *Deep Heart*, are produced by *Honest Entertainment*, 33 Music Square West, Nashville, TN 37203, (615) 242-4452. The two American Gramophone releases are available from Mark Hanson's *Accent On Music*. Smith lives, records, and teaches in the Portland, OR area.

## DEALERS, MUSICIANS, COLLECTORS, MAKERS ...

### Specialized Insurance Coverage for the Classical & Vintage Musical Instrument Trade

- The most comprehensive protection at reasonable cost.
- Underwritten by a financially sound A-rated company.
- Call Toll Free today for information and quotation.

**ELLIS W. HERSHMAN**  
Heritage Insurance Services, Inc.  
826 Bustleton Pike, Suite 203  
Feasterville, PA 19053  
**800-289-8837**  
FAX: 215-322-5854



### Martin Simpson says of his Daedalus speaker, "Sounds like God in a box."

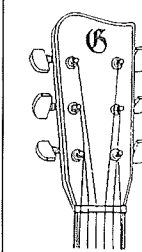
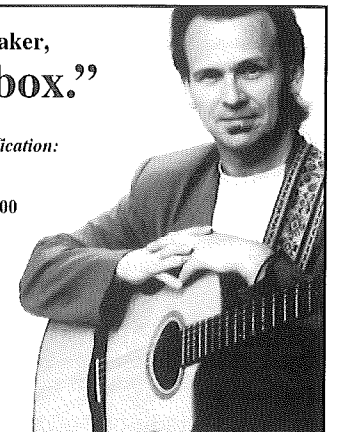
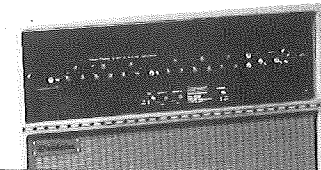
Find out what he means.

Send \$2 for our brochure on acoustic instrument amplification:

**Daedalus Cabinets™**

P.O. Box 124 / Newfield, NY 14867 / (607) 564-0000

When you plug in, the speaker is what you hear.



Est. 1965

## GALLAGHER GUITARS

### THE WALNUT VALLEY FESTIVAL

A Musical Tradition Since 1978

Congratulations and thanks to the following contestants for selecting a Gallagher Guitar as their prize.



1978-Flat Pick, 1st	Steve Kaufman, Alcoa, TN	1987-Finger Pick, 1st	Joe Miller, Oakland, CA
1979-Flat Pick, 2nd	Steve Hanson, Lincoln, NE	1988-Flat Pick, 1st	Peter McLaughlin, Tucson, AZ
1980-Flat Pick, 1st	Roy Curry, Chattanooga, TN	1990-Finger Pick, 2nd	Ron Brooks, Orlando, FL
1981-Flat Pick, 1st	Richard Guley, Canada	1991-Finger Pick, 1st	Ed Hall, Harvard, IL
1982-Flat Pick, 2nd	Robin Kessinger, Mason, W. VA	1992-Flat Pick, 2nd	Matt Lindsay, Dunbar, VA
1983-Flat Pick, 1st	Robert Shafer, Walton, W. VA	1992-Finger Pick, 1st	Charles Alexander, Renton, WA
1984-Flat Pick, 1st	Steve Kaufman, Alcoa, TN	1993-Flat Pick, 2nd	Kenny Smith, Estill Springs, TN
1985-Flat Pick, 1st	Robin Kessinger, Mason, W. VA	1993-Finger Pick, 2nd	Mark Cruz, Oklahoma City, OK
1985-Finger Pick, 2nd	Geoff Bartley, Cambridge, MA	1994-Finger Pick, 1st	Steven King, Renton, WA
1986-Finger Pick, 3rd	Eric Lugosch, Chicago, IL	1995-Finger Pick, 1st	Pat Kirtley, Bardstown, KY

Catalog  
\$2.00  
(615) 389-6455

**J.W. Gallagher & Son**

Box 128 Wartrace TN 37183

Visit our  
Booth at  
Winfield, KS