

# MARKETPLACE

photo by Vic McFadden



*Mansel Davies*

## FRIENDS REVISITED

Grit Laskin continues to impress with his instruments—and, incidentally, a very fine album recently released on Stan Rogers' "Fogarty's Cove" label. Grit is already well-known in the east. His instruments are now becoming highly sought after in Britain and in western Canada. The presence in Calgary of two Laskin guitars, one six- and one twelve-string, has led to many other orders from this part of the country.

I received my six-string Laskin a short time ago and must admit that it has forced nearly all of my other guitars into early retirements. It is quite definitely the best six-string I have owned in terms of workmanship and overall balance of sound. The quality of the inlay work is superb—an original design for the fingerboard

is available as a custom feature—and it consists of a number of Celtic designs cut in abalone. The headpiece design, which took seventeen hours to complete, will probably not be available; Grit's eyes are still crossed after working in such detail!

There is presently a 16 month waiting list for an instrument. I imagine that this will become longer as more people see and hear the guitars. It is quite common for buyers having received their first Laskin to put in an immediate order for a second. The prices have gone up since I first wrote of Grit (May/June 1979) but they are still not exorbitant.

A feature of interest to people in the west and mid-west is that Grit's instruments are built in a shop where humidity is controlled at the mid-thirties—most other instruments are built in an environment of 40-45% humidity. This means that Laskin guitars are not as likely to suffer because of climatic conditions.

Grit will make available a limited number of ebony-bodied guitars in the near future. The tonal possibilities of such an instrument are very exciting; a prototype meets all expectations and bodes well for the future. Because of the nature of the wood, these instruments will require a great deal of care and will probably be available to the discriminating and discerning buyer only (my thanks to the real estate industry for the superlatives!). So, at the time of writing, the Laskin guitar seems destined to

become the most highly sought after guitar made in Canada.

There are other very fine guitars available to the more specialized players who play bluegrass flat-picking or finger-picking styles. Two of these makers, described in earlier issues of the *Bulletin*, are J.W. Gallagher & Son and Franklin Guitars.

Gallagher guitars, deemed by many—including Doc Watson—to be the finest bluegrass guitars available, are made in the United States in limited quantities. In fact, between 1965 and 1980 only 1340 Gallaghers have been made. This is indicative of the time and care taken during construction.

A feature of these guitars that might appeal to the folk musician is the power of the bass end of the dreadnought models. Guitarists who use open tunings appreciate the depth and warmth of the instruments. The G71 Special, when tuned to an open C, sounds like a cathedral organ—a huge sound.

J.W. Gallagher died recently and the operation is now run by his son, Don. Don Gallagher has obviously inherited J.W.'s expertise; the guitars now being made are as good if not better than the earlier models. Don likes musicians' feedback on his instruments, and will heed suggestions that might improve the guitars.

The new G72 Special, an abalone-inlaid model, came into being following such a suggestion from a family friend. The Ragtime Special, a guitar specially designed for finger picking, has been very well received. This guitar is made of mahogany, with a Sitka spruce top, ebony bridge

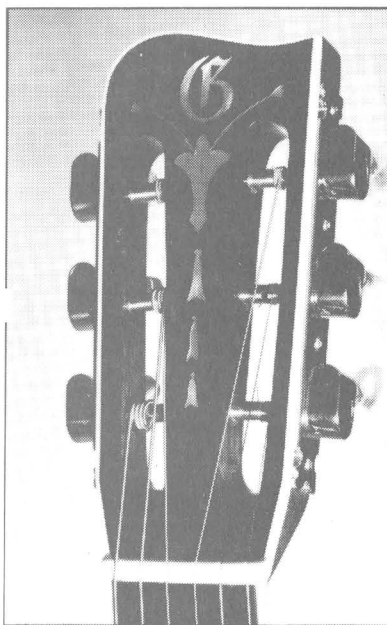


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*GC 71 special headpiece—Gallagher Guitar*

and fingerboard, and is specially braced for lighter strings. The body size falls between that of an 00 and 000 Martin.

Even with the two new models, Don Gallagher plans to keep the yearly total down to 150, thus keeping alive the very high quality/low output policy determined in years past by his father.

The first Gallagher Guitar Festival of Music was held in Wartrace, Tennessee in the summer of 1979. This year the festival will take place during the third week of August and promises to be a fitting memorial to J.W. and his guitar, who between them put Wartrace on the map and into the vocabulary of those who appreciate the finest in bluegrass guitars.

Franklin guitars are made by Nick Kukich and Tom Ruthenberg in Sandpoint, Idaho. They are well on their way to establishing nationwide recognition for their product. The Franklin OM-28 guitar is the most popular model. It is based upon the Martin OM guitar which was made between 1929 and 1932. This guitar was a 000-size instrument with a slightly longer than normal scale. It is prized for its exceptional response and balance between bass and treble. Franklin's adaptation of this rare guitar includes many innovative ideas and it is a winner.

There have been two developments since I last wrote about Franklin guitars; one is the use of koa wood and the second is the introduction of a new model. Koa wood comes from Hawaii. It is a fine-grained, reddish wood with excellent tonal qualities. For the sake of comparison, most luthiers place koa wood between rosewood and mahogany in terms of tone wood. The koa tree is traditionally used for making ceremonial canoes—stands of trees are carefully guarded—and it is somehow gratifying that a tree to which so much folklore and significance is attached is also a tree which produces excellent instruments. The koa guitars I saw were very responsive and loud.

Like the Franklin OM-28, the new model is based on a guitar built in earlier times—the Prairie State. This was a very big but shallow-bodied guitar—about 17 inches wide and four inches deep. The sound is something between a dreadnought and the OM model. It is well worth considering if one can afford only one guitar and wants the best of two worlds.

So far Marketplace has been dominated by information concerning guitars. What follows may be of more general interest. In Britain, one of the most highly respected stores specialising in folk instruments is Hobgoblin Music. During a recent visit to England I visited the store in Crawley, Sussex (only two miles from London's Gatwick airport) and was amazed at the number of concertinas, melodeons, hurdy-gurdies and other folk instruments which were to be seen. This store carries just about *any* folk instrument used in Celtic and North American folk music. Incidentally, good quality tenor and plectrum banjos are at a premium in Britain—good trading possibilities here!

The next best thing to visiting Hobgoblin's store is to take advantage of their new mail-order store recently opened in South San Francisco, California. Many of the hard-to-find instruments are available there at reasonable prices. A very pleasant man, Cody Grundy, will be pleased to handle requests for information. I intend to visit Cody in the near future and will provide further information in a future issue of the *Bulletin*.

Since writing about harps in this column (Jan/Feb 1979), I have received my Caswell Celtic harp—it's beautiful! Mine is made of maple with a spruce sound board. It matches up to and is probably better than the majority of harps I saw in Wales in the summer of 1979. This climate—Alberta zone—is not too kind to the instrument's construction but has no effect on tone. In fact, many visiting musicians think their instruments sound better in this bone

dry environment. The Caswell harp is powerful throughout the entire four and a half octave range. Chris and Teresa Caswell are now working on triple-strung harps and a large metal-strung harp—these should be great sounding instruments.

All of the above described instrument makers or suppliers welcome inquiries. Where applicable a self-addressed and stamped envelope would be appreciated.

- ☐ **Grit Laskin**, 192 Dupont St. (Rear)  
Toronto, Ont. M5R 2E6,  
(416)923-5801.
- ☐ **J.W. Gallagher & Son**, Wartrace,  
TN 37183, (615)389-6455.
- ☐ **Franklin Guitars**, Box 232C,  
Sandpoint, ID 83864 (208)263-  
8713.
- ☐ **Hobgoblin Music**, Box 5311,  
South San Francisco, CA 94080,  
(415)583-8323.
- ☐ **Caswell Harps**, 15095 Fruitvale  
Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070,  
(408)354-2548.