

BUDDY

THE ORIGINAL TEXAS MUSIC MAGAZINE
MAY 2017
VOLUME XXXXIV, NUMBER 11

The confluence of all things guitar.

The Dallas International Guitar Festival Looks at 40.
By S.D. Henderson

WITH JUST SIX MOVING PARTS, THE guitar accomplishes more as an icon and an instrument than just about any other tool or tradition known to man. Emblematic of the principles of democracy, all players hit the same six strings, but equality ends at the E string.

This month, from May 5 through May 7, the Dallas International Guitar Festival will open for its fortieth anniversary year, showcasing almost every facet of this singular icon for thousands of players, collectors and admirers alike. It is the confluence of all things guitar, a staple in the Dallas music scene since its inception in 1978.

There was a time when the only thing vintage came in a bottle. Before there were vintage guitars, there were just old guitars. Charley Wirz sold guitars. Jimmy Wallace loved old guitars. On a guitar playing Sunday afternoon sometime around 1977, Charley and Jimmy had one of those “wouldn’t it be cool if” conversations about old guitars and a place to buy them.

“It be cool, if”

ÖTHE CONVERSATION WITH Wirz, “Charley used to kid me, the actual conception of the show happened when Charley and I were talking, he said, ‘Wallace, you and (Walker) like those old guitars, why don’t we get some tables and do a show?’ That spark turned “wouldn’t it be cool if” into something really cool.

Originally established by the late Charley Wirz as cool place to swap, buy or just plain covet old guitars; the festival has evolved into a two-fisted juggernaut,

equal parts showcase and show-place. The original festival took up just enough space with twelve vendor tables to fill a small smoky meeting room of a non-descript Dallas hotel back in 1978. Since then, the show has steadily grown from smoky hotel rooms and successively outgrown each venue as DIGF continues to reach new audiences.

The motor of the machine behind the festival can also be found in the middle of the list of notable festival performers. Local legend, Stratoblaster guitarist and DIGF impresario; Jimmy Wallace devotes the bulk of his attention and time ensuring that the DIGF continues to reach new heights while capturing the original spirit of the first Dallas guitar show. Part of that spirit is drawn from the instrument itself, as Wallace explains, “A guitar is meant to make music, I don’t care if it’s played in a living room, or the basement of a church or on stage, I hope the show continues to inspire people to play.”

After the untimely passing of Wirz in 1985, the show was acquired by another Dallas guitarist and friend of Wirz, Mark Pollock. The core nucleus of incubators is pretty small. As a part of the DIGF DNA from conception, Wallace witnessed the birth of the baby, and the growth and transition under Pollock until



They were perfect partners: Mark Pollock and Jimmy Wallace posing for a Buddy cover

becoming partners with him in 1989. Wallace related, “Mark Pollock was a successful guitar player in his own right when he acquired the show. He was very industrious, loved the organizational aspect, the details, the logistics of putting on the show. I loved the promotion and the playing, it just worked.”

The Partnership

THAT PARTNERSHIP SPARKED the explosion of the festival’s growth that continues through this year’s big Fortieth anniversary. To put the DIGF in perspective, Wallace frames it without an ounce of Texas hyperbole, “This year’s show is the biggest guitar show that’s ever taken place, literally in the history of the world. NAMM (the North American Music Merchants trade show) is a private industry thing, which is great, but this is open to the public and there are buyers and dealers here from all over the world.”

The International part of the DIGF is as true as the name suggests. Dealers come in from all parts of the globe; you’ll find people from South Africa, the Netherlands, Japan, France, England, Australia, Spain and Brazil each looking for the unique environment that can only be found at the festival. There is no other place on the planet that brings all these things together

under one roof.

Regardless of whether you play, or just like the sound of a power chord; there is something at the DIGF for everyone. There are few places in the world to see as many cool guitars on display for sale, manufacturers and vendors from across the guitar universe would love to send you home with one or two for your collection. Love is lost and found at the show, the man who walks away with your 1958 Sunburst Les Paul will be as happy as you are sad to watch her leave. The festival is perhaps the only place on the planet with a collective empathy for your plight.

The holy Grail

THIS YEAR, AMID THE thousands of guitars on display for sale, trade or salvation; you’ll be able to see several candidates for your own Holy Grail of Guitar list, including the Stratocaster that Jimi Hendrix’ played at the Monterey Pop Festival. In the hands of lesser genius, it might have been just another Strat, but this one painted the Sistine Chapel live at one of the most historic and iconic moments of rock history.

There is always an element of history, a thread that still runs from the early days to the present at DIGF. Locals Jimmy Wallace and Dr. Tom Van Hoose were

vendors at the first festival, and the only two guitar men to have been present for each of the forty guitar shows. Generations of guitar players from across the country have made and continue to make the pilgrimage each year. Zach Myers, guitarist for Shinedown, used to come down to the show as a kid with his dad. Over the years, Myers has built an impressive collection of his own, and the DIGF has become a tradition handed down from father to son like baseball for rock and roll.

If you can’t make history with your Strat like Hendrix, you can buy a piece of it already made by others. “I’m really excited to have Ted Nugent selling a part of his collection at the show,” Wallace mentioned after I asked him about some of the cool guitars he knew were available at this year’s show.

The thing that sets the DIGF apart from all of its peers in lesser parts of the world is the weekend long opportunity to experience these guitars in the only real environment that makes sense; in the hands of extremely accomplished and legendary players. “Guitars were meant to play music on, to bring out the passion for the music. We are celebrating the guitar here, whether it be your passion to collect or play or just listen.”

Each year, the list of DIGF

performers blends deep locally flavored roots with internationally respected credentials. It’s actually a lot easier to list the guitarists who haven’t performed at the festival. If you made a quick list of the most amazing players in history; Clapton, Satriani, Malmsteen, Chet Atkins, Billy Gibbons, James Burton. Check, check, check, check, and yep check; they’ve all played the festival, and you’d still be leaving the majority of the list of legendary DIGF performers off your list. You’ll find combinations of guitarist on stage that you never dreamed about, think Chet Atkins standing next to Ted Nugent, only at DIGF.

The 2017 lineup of just a few of the on-stage performers reads like a laundry list of legendary guitar men: from headliner Ted Nugent and Derek St. Holmes, Paul Reed Smith (yes, the guy that made your PRS SE22 for young readers), Jimmy Wallace, Monte Montgomery, to Andy Timmons and Rob Balducci are just a few of the dozens of virtuoso slingers with their skills on display throughout the weekend. To ensure that the roots of Texas guitar grow deep, the festival also celebrates 10 Under 20, a showcase of ten young guitarists who will be the next generation to pick up where current legends leave off.

The Dallas International Guitar Show truly reflects the confluence of all things guitar. Starting May 5 at Market Hall in Dallas and running through May 7, you’ll have a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in 140,000 square feet of the singular icon that is the guitar.

Whether you just want to look, buy, sell, trade or listen; there isn’t going to be another opportunity like this one for another 51 weeks.

For Wallace and the small-dedicated army of folks who pour their efforts into this celebration of the guitar, May 7 isn’t the end. At midnight, the clock will turn over to May 8, which will mark day one of preparing for year 41. The thread that started with a conversation in Oak Cliff will begin weaving through the next incarnation of the Dallas International Guitar Festival.

It’s all a part of the celebration of the guitar, as Wallace puts it, “It’s been such a journey. I just love the celebration of it all.” Dallas is a richer place as a result. ■

Mark Pollock was a successful guitar player in his own right when he acquired the show. He was very industrious, loved the organizational aspect, the details, the logistics of putting on the show. I loved the promotion and the playing, it just worked.”

—JIMMY WALLACE