



Innovator of McMasters Guitars - Les McMasters

By Kathy Boyd

In the small eastern Oregon town of Herminston lives a gentle man whose music ministry involves 37 years of performing at cowboy gatherings, bluegrass festivals, weddings, funerals and other events with his wife Leanna. With a smile on his face and an inordinate amount of love for his fellow

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human beings, this fella never forgets a face, and even more importantly, never forgets a pair of hands that have held one of his guitars.

Les McMasters was born and raised on the Washington/Idaho border in the town of Garfield, Washington. His love of blueprint reading and drafting began in high school and was refined during his years of precision wood working as a patternmaker in the United States Navy.

After twenty years of setup and minor repairs on instruments while holding down a variety of different “day

jobs,” a lifelong fascination of music and instruments became a serious endeavor and McMasters Guitars was born in 1982.

Les’s first guitar was a broadleaf maple and Sitka spruce dreadnaught. His first sale was to good friend Ron Broadfoot. His favorite “non-sale” was a gift to his Mother. When she passed away the guitar was passed on to Les’s son Chris, who now plays it in church each week in her memory. In mid-2007 Les began production on 5 new models, his favorite being what he calls “Lady’s Fancy.” It is a smaller short scale slope shouldered Dreadnaught style guitar with a big voice.

When asked, “Why guitars?” Les replies, “Guitar was actually the second instrument I learned to play, mandolin being the first. Guitar has always been my first love, however.”

This fascination with all aspects of the guitar is evident in every step of the

birthing of a new McMasters guitar. Les uses only the highest quality parts and woods available. He spends as much time attending to the cleanliness and detail inside his instruments as he does on the beauty of the outside. Each custom order is tailored to meet the individual’s playing style and personal choices in woods and inlays. Each guitar is shipped in a custom made hardshell case, manufactured for McMasters by TKL in their Cedar Creek custom plant in Virginia. Being a good listener is just as important as being a good luthier... Les strives to build each customer’s story into his or

her instrument.

It takes several hundred hours of intense labor to build each guitar. Stop by the McMasters booth at the next festival you visit and have Les take you on the journey of the making of one of his fine instruments. A natural storyteller, he will keep you spellbound with each step of the process. A humble man, he will tell you that his biggest challenge is to “not destroy the instrument in the process of making it!”

McMasters guitars begin at \$2800 and prices will vary depending on the details each customer wishes to have built into their instrument. Les is currently working on five guitars, and in his spare time is beginning the design work for a line of mandolins.

Featured on OPB’s “Art Beat” in October of 2007, McMasters Guitars are mostly sold by a combination of word-of-mouth and the fact that Les is never bashful about getting one

of his instruments into the hands of a performer or fellow musician. This allows the musician to see how wonderful the instrument is to play and allows others to hear how the guitars sound being played in a variety of styles by a multitude of fingers. (This writer has given up taking a guitar to any event where the McMasters booth will be as she always ends up with one of these fine instruments in her hands!)

For more info on McMasters Guitars check at www.mcmastersguitars.com or call at 541-567-5698. You’ll be glad you did.

