

What's in Your Case?- Quotes

I was recently taking a stroll down memory lane and re-reading some of the old "What's in Your Case?" columns from a couple of years back. I thought I might share some interesting quotes I came across. Butch talking about his eclectic arsenal of mando-family instruments, Sam with a good Jethro Burns story, Jesse with an interesting strap idea and Dempsey talking about tone and mics. Makes me want to go out and find an RE-20 ElectroVoice to try! Plus, Dempsey's comments on tone are pure gold. Let's all read that part over and over.

I wish Jesse would get his electric mandola and Echoplex out again. He might end up on tour with White Stripes, who knows? Anyway, hope you folks enjoy revisiting some of the bunny-trails these guys went down when asked about strings and picks, etc.

Butch Baldassarri: My main mandolin for most of the last 20yrs. has been my 1925 Gibson F-5....some folks call it an un-signed Loar. I bought it at the McDonald's in Barstow, CA. from Randy Snoddy for \$6,700 and an old Gibson A model...so I've got \$7,000 in it!!! Everybody thought I was absolutely crazy in 1984 for paying that much...the funny thing was that I tried to buy one about a year and a half earlier for \$6,000 and let my father talk me out of that one...nobody bought instruments back then for an investment...times have sure changed. I used my 1984 Blonde Nugget almost exclusively from around 1999 - 2002 mainly because it was SO LOUD and I was doing a lot of playing on one mic. I also have a 1994 Gilchrist 5C that I use for playing Classical and Mandolin Orchestra work.

What does interest me are new instruments that are being built by Will Kimble, Sim Daley, Dave Cohen, Peter Sawchyn and others...I guess I'm always looking for somebody to build us a better mousetrap...more volume, better tone, incredibly figured woods and gorgeous colored stains. I also like odd-ball mando-family instruments like my Vega 4-string mandolin-banjo, Blue Comet resonator mandolin, Sobell Big-Body Octave Mandolin and my Spruce top Paramount mandolin-banjo.

Sam Bush: Jethro once told me, probably about 1975, "why don't you plug that thing in? I can't hear you." And I said something like, "I've got this great-sounding mandolin and I love this tone."

And Jethro said, "*#@* tone. No one ever told me I had great tone, they just told me they could hear all my notes. Why don't you plug that thing in? Who do you think you are, Bill Monroe?"

And I kind of stood there and thought about it and said, "well, you know, I wouldkinda like to be Bill Monroe." And he said, "Well, get over it. One's enough."

Jesse McReynolds: Right now I just use the regular Gibson strap that came with the mandolin. I used to use a dog leash.

BC: A dog leash?

Jmc: Yeah, a dog leash and a fish tank cord. I went for a long time using that. I would thread the cord through there and it would make your strap last forever and it wouldn't wear out your shirt or anything. During cold weather those things would get pretty stiff, you know.

I also played an electric mandola I saw in a pawnshop in Alanta. A nice looking instrument, I got and then plugged it in to this little Echoplex to add to number of licks you could play on it. I took it into the studio. If you got it adjusted right, you could play one lick, and get three! So I did one album with that. Man, I liked to have run everyone in the studio crazy with that thing! [Editor's comment: As far as I know, Jesse invented this "echoplex trick" that was adopted by electric guitar players including Albert Lee in the 1980s. Any one out there have more details? JC]

Dempsey Young: The one major compliment I've seemed to get the most over the years is, "How do you get that tone?". I tell people the first step to getting a good tone is: first you have to have a desire to get it. A lot of people are up there playing and thinking about the notes, or how many more notes they can get in there, but they never stop to think about the tone of each note.

It may strike you as kind of odd but the place I learned about tone was from Earl Scruggs. I learned to play guitar and banjo before I learned mandolin, and I used to slow down those Earl Scruggs records and learn them note for note. I got to where I could play the notes Earl played, but they still didn't sound like he did. Then one day I moved my right hand away from the bridge a little and it started sounding more like Earl. That's what I do with the mandolin, move my right hand to where the tone is.

Dempsey Young: In the studio, when people ask me in advance if I have a (mic) preference, I ask them to locate a RE20. Of course when I get there, the engineer always has a microphone he wants to try instead, and he'll have the RE20. And I'll say, "Okay, but let's try the 20 on one cut and see what it sounds like." And after he hears it, he'll usually say, "For some reason the RE20 works on that instrument." It's just kind of a natural thing, I guess.

A condenser microphone, for me, just seems to amplify the pick noise, unless you can get back 3 or 4 feet from it, which you can't always do (because of leakage from the monitors or other instruments).