

# Meet the Maker: John Jordan

by Paul Schmidt



**T**RAFFIC WAS FEROCIOUS. “Where the hell did all these cars come from? It never used to be like this!” That was me talking to myself on a trip down to Sonoma to have Steve Klein look at a guitar that needed attention. I’d known Steve for years and did a book, *Art That Sings*, about his work in 2004. I’d been taking everything to him since 2000, but it was getting to be kind of a trek; thanks to traffic, the less-than-an-hour trip was “less than an hour” no more. Steve said, “Why don’t you take your stuff to John Jordan? He’s way closer and does great work.”

I pondered his advice on the ride home. Here I was, complaining about driving through wine country’s rolling green poetry undulating beneath a quiet immensity of blue billowy-saffron sky on a Tuesday morning as it smiled upon proliferations of sweet-scented vine rows of innocent nectar visions — sunroof open, Neil Young’s *Harvest* album on the CD player, and just moments from an always-good visit with my friend Steve. I guess my heart was still too full of shrapnel to resist letting something as tedious as thickened car patterns irritate me. But amidst all of that rested my introduction to the world of John Jordan, a man who stayed at home and touched the world.

Back in the 1970s, when the Guild of American Luthiers was in its infancy (charging \$5 for membership!), a teenage would-be luthier apprenticing to a Berkeley, California, maker was ardently following the deep voice within him that spoke with a simple and peaceful, yet authoritative and resounding voice, “I want to do that.” After a lifetime of work in lutherie spanning five decades, he’s “done it.”

Making a living at lutherie is not such a common thing in the modern era, nor was it in the ’70s, ’80s, ’90s, 2000s, or 2010s, but by dint of masterful skill, exploration, responsiveness, frugality, business acumen, variety, authenticity, clarity of vision, and a friendly down-to-earthiness evidenced in both his work and his interpersonal skills, John Jordan is still doing it.

Born in 1961 in Walnut Creek, California, to a recently widowed mother of three, he grew up drawn to the music of his sisters’ piano-playing, most of which was typified by Western European art music transcriptions of the classics. John recounts:



JILL JORDAN

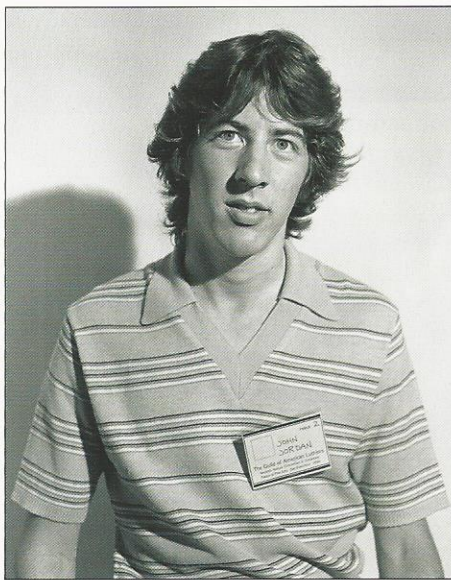
*My grandmother taught piano, and my mom was quite a good pianist — classical stuff and pop hits of the ’20s through the ’50s. My older sisters both played and I remember being touched most by the melodies.*

Simultaneously, he was drawn to the earliest incarnations of what was later to be designated “progressive rock.”

*When I was six, I recall sitting in front of the stereo — looking at it like people used to do in the early days of radio — listening to the Moody Blues’ *Days of Future Passed* album. I loved all the early (mid-’60s) rock music that had a progressive/symphonic character. There was real value in having older siblings bring then-new musical culture into the house.*

During these same formative years, “building things” enthusiasms were similarly stirred, as he and his older brother built wooden model airplanes together. And it is perhaps noteworthy and telling that his late grandfather had built some zithers as a hobby.

*When I was nine or ten I remember seeing the airplanes my brother was building and having the thought, “I could do that... I want to do that.” I loved the high level of precision required to make them. I learned that accuracy made for a great model — cutting 1/16" square struts out of balsa wood, and keeping other pieces to 1/32" tolerances — these made the*



DALE KORSMO

final product obviously superior. I loved the detail and technical prowess of the process. And, there was also a self-esteem thing involved. I was decidedly not a sports guy, and got picked on for it, but I would win trophies for my model building. That was meaningful to me. It was a way for me to have some sense of "place" in the world. It was a good combination — the process, the product, and a feeling of being part of something I valued.

The context of school revealed that John was also smart, and gifted in the realms of math and the sciences. Pulled out of regular classes in 4th grade to do advanced math, he was following in the footsteps of his late father. John's dad had been in nuclear physics and had worked at high levels in the early days of that realm. Indeed, it was while installing a particle accelerator at Cornell University in New York that he was electrocuted and died at the age of thirty-five, just months before John was born. Genetically predisposed to math, science, and music, the combination of these gifts became enhanced and ripened by John's attraction to the land of imagination.

When the other boys were playing basketball, I was playing "Pioneer Days" with the neighbor girl next door in the creek behind our house. We made a rope swing on the hill and we'd make up stories and create scenes of what we imagined the early pioneers would've been up to. We were just kids being free and creative. When you're a kid you don't affix terms to your behavior, you just enjoy the lack of boundaries. It was so great. As I reflect now, that same spirit has fueled a lot of my work.

In addition to the piano, there was another instrument inhabiting the Jordan household — a nylon-stringed guitar, which John discovered at the age of thirteen. He strummed chords and tried (with success) to learn tunes off of records.

I was really into Yes and Queen, but those recordings weren't so easily adaptable to the nylon-string guitar. I couldn't exactly replicate four sides of Tales from Topographic Oceans with it, so I learned other things I liked that were easier — songs by the Who and rock radio hits of the day.

In high school John had the unique distinction of owning a PA system — he'd found bits in need of repair and brought them to life with his knowledge of electronics and his aptness for figuring things out. At that time, a PA system was a costly and relatively exotic item for a high school kid to own, and being in possession of it drew a number of classmate/musicians to him, which forged new artistic relationships and broadened his interactions with players who could teach him things. It was at this same time that he started building guitars.

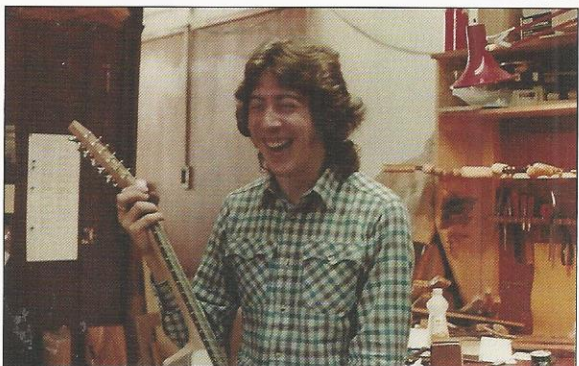
What ignited that was the fact that I'd scratched the hell out of my sister's guitar by pretending to be Pete Townshend. I'd made a contact pickup and converted a tube clock radio to make a little system so I could "play electric." I wanted to fix all the scratches before she came back from college and noticed what I'd done. I felt kind of bad about it and wanted to remedy my error. At first I tried covering the scratches with nail polish — not a good idea. Then I took it to Mario Martello (early West Coast luthier of note who'd done restorations for the likes of Andrés Segovia and David Crosby), but Mario didn't really want to bother with such an inferior instrument. He was very kind about it, but it was obvious.

So I then took it to Ervin Somogyi in Berkeley. Ervin was willing to refinish it, which was the only real solution to the problem, for \$125. I couldn't afford that, and offered to pay him half in cash, and work the balance off by cleaning up his shop, as it was a complete mess. He agreed. I remember the first time I walked into his shop, I said to myself, "I want to do this." A pivotal life moment, really.

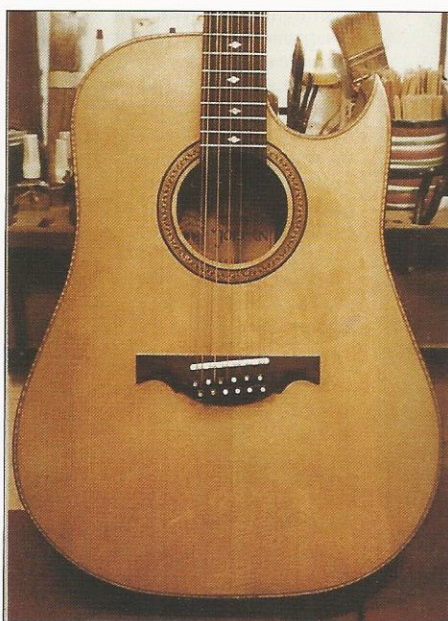
And that was the start of my time working with Ervin. After I'd paid off my debt with cash and work, he kept finding stuff for me to do, so I stayed around. Even in those early years (this would have been circa 1977), Ervin was teaching lutherie, and he always had inferior wood for students to use for projects. I'd trade him labor for spruce soundboards, and other things like an old stereo he wasn't using, a lute body, an old violin that I rebuilt and refinished — situations and instruments I'd never have had



ERVIN SOMOGYI



ERVIN SOMOGYI



ALL BY JOHN JORDAN EXCEPT AS NOTED

Facing page, top: John Jordan uses a pantograph carver to rough out an electric violin. Bottom: Young John at the 1980 GAL Convention in San Francisco. This page: John apprenticed with Ervin Somogyi in 1980 and '81, and this cutaway 12-string guitar is the first instrument he built there. John says, "The picture was taken immediately after I strung it up in the white. I'm hearing its first notes. It sounded pretty good!"

access to otherwise. I was there for two years while I was in high school, and that was important. It gave me a unique experience and perspective that informed what was to come next.

Jordan continued with Somogyi soon after high school as well.

After high school I was taking electronics courses at Diablo Valley College, which was the local community college. I was building tube amplifiers and effects pedals. After a year there I realized that the only classes that interested me were the ones involving audio, so it was then that I went to apprentice with Ervin full-time. This was in 1980 and '81.

I was young, bright-eyed, and full of wonder, and Ervin shared everything — he didn't hold anything back. He was keen on teaching me how to do things accurately and correctly, not fast; to focus on doing the work with patience and intentionality. And he was always encouraging and supportive. All of that together made for an atmosphere that was meaningful to me. I always looked forward to going to work in his shop.

I stayed with him until I was twenty, and would have stayed longer had it not been for a downturn in the economy — the Reagan-era recession of '81. Part of our arrangement had been that I'd do repairs and he'd build, but he started to do some of the repair work during lean times, and that wasn't working for me. We visited about it, and I understood his circumstances. There wasn't anything acrimonious about it, it just became apparent to me that I needed to make a change.



Left: In 1982, John played a wedding for a friend. The groom's mother was just learning guitar and her husband commissioned him to make an instrument for her. John went over to discuss the details and brought the Luthiers Mercantile catalog with the intent of showing her premade rosettes to choose from. John says, "She saw the LMI logo on the front with the circle of rope and decided that was what she wanted for a rosette. I never even got the catalog open."

Right: The Jordan family car got totaled in the early 1980s, and when they got another car, John's upright bass would not fit. He built this flattop bass to fit in the car. The Guild published a photo of it in 1983.

I found a job with a scientific instrument company the very day I left Ervin. I was still living with my mom, so I took over her garage as my own workshop. Her only caveat was that I had to move things back to make room for the car at the end of each day, which I happily did. Well, sort of happily. My plan for my new format was that I'd work four ten-hour days each week at the scientific instrument company, and have three days left in the week to do lutherie. I had hopes that in time, the lutherie would be enough to leave the electronics gig. And that is what happened.

To get his lutherie practice going, John would introduce himself to local music stores and show them examples of his work — things he'd completed while apprenticing with Ervin. By 1984 he was a full-time luthier. One of the busier shops in the East Bay for whom he worked always had a plethora of violin work. That was a familiar realm for John as he'd done violin restorations at Somogyi's shop.

I kept getting violin work. There were shops in San Francisco, but not so much here in the East Bay. There seemed to be a real need for it where we were. Violins are complicated to dial in, and I really enjoyed that. Plus, there were enough skilled and experienced classical violinists in the area for me to get really detailed feedback about what would be effective and what would not. In the violin field, players tell other players about good experiences with repair/restoration people, and my workload simply blossomed from that.

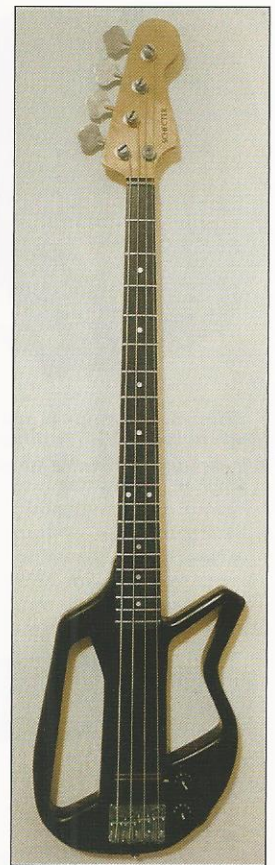
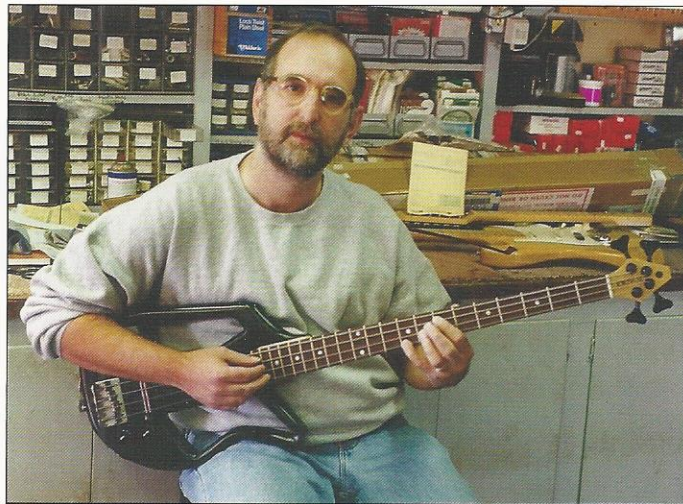
Along with all the violins, I was simultaneously getting acoustic steel-string guitars, electric guitars, cellos, and upright basses, as well as lutes and other early instruments, and ethnic instruments like the tamburitza. I really liked the variety, and my business grew organically. The closest thing I had



to a "business plan" was that I was both a builder and a repair person; a client would come in for repairs, see that I did building, and order an instrument. I always kept my fees just slightly below the "going rate" to be appealing. I was good at saving money, and since I was in my mom's garage until I got married in '88, my expenses were always low.

Keeping his work his own and interacting with a broad variety of musicians continued to be appealing and rewarding, and his open attitude to problem-solving is precisely what took him into the realm of electric violin making, something he has become known for internationally.

There was a violin teacher at one of the stores who was also a highly skilled player. He'd studied at the Peabody Conservatory and would fill in for major orchestras. But he started to go blind, which precluded him from doing the orchestra work, so he started playing jazz and doing gigs at restaurants. These new venues often required that he use a pickup, but he wasn't happy with anything he was finding commercially. Either the tone was good and the volume wasn't enough, or the volume was fine but the tone wasn't to his liking; so he asked me if I could build him a solidbody violin. I did some designs and drawings, made one, and he liked it. As he showed it around, I started to get some orders. With each new incarnation I'd make adjustments to the design. Some refinements were small, and some were not, and the designs kept evolving and improving. It was fun to see how I could make it more functional, more comfortable, more musician friendly. By '88 I'd filed



Bassist Shelley Rosen was a protégé of Charles Mingus in Mingus' later years. Shelley had been a regular customer of John Jordan before a near-fatal car accident left him with permanent skeletal and nerve damage. Standing with a strap was no longer feasible. Shelley's Schecter bass had an ash body and weighed over ten pounds. He asked John to make a light-weight body for it that he would only ever play sitting down. John's design used large empty areas to reduce weight, a feature that he still uses with many of his electric instruments. That configuration is shown at right. Later John cut even more weight by making a new neck with a tiny peghead. Thus, the project became an original Jordan bass, shown above. John says, "Shelley would introduce me to his friends and bandmates as 'John Jordan, the man who saved my life.' I've made a lot of nice things for musicians, but only a handful of times has my work allowed them to return to playing professionally."

(See *Jordan* on page 16)



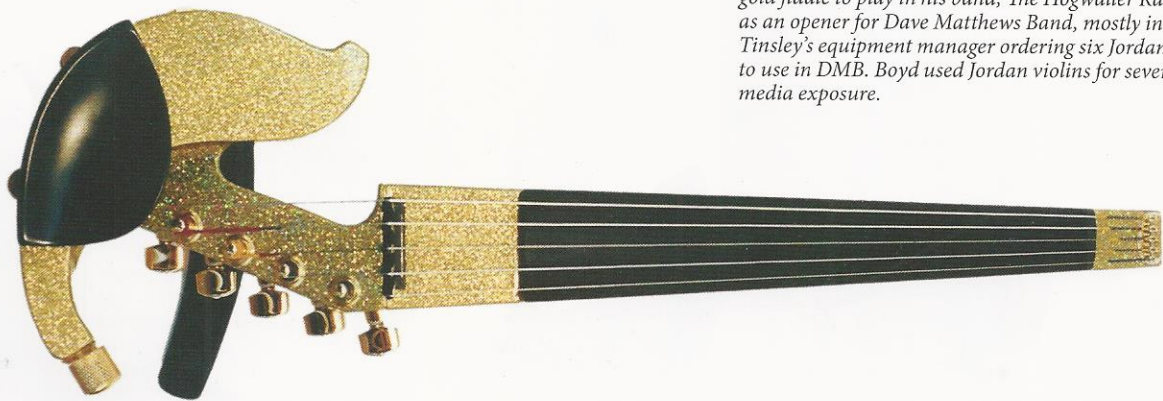
These three images represent the design evolution of Jordan electric violins. The first version had two tuning keys on each side of the body. It was slender, but players found it a nuisance to reach over the body to get to the other two tuners. In response, the second version used Steinberger vertical-draw tuners so the player could reach all of them at the same time, but they were awkward because the tuning was behind the body. The third and present configuration, which is well accepted, has an Eastern-European connection. John explains, "There's a Serbian Orthodox church near me and I maintain their tamburitza ensemble instruments. The same idea was used by Paul Bigsby and later Leo Fender and zillions of others: Put all the tuners in a row on the side most easily reached by the player's hand. If there was something 'innovative' about doing it this way it was recognizing that the peghead could be flipped backwards and integrated behind the bridge."



How many strings can you put on a violin? Here's the answer. With nine strings, it goes both lower than a string bass and higher than a violin. The two lowest-pitched strings were developed in cooperation with John Cavanaugh at Super-Sensitive, who was also responsible for making strings for the Hutchins Octet instruments.



A 6-string electric violin in quilted maple. John says, "I have mixed feelings about fretted violins, but I do make a few of them. There's a lot of expression given up in going away from the fretless fingerboard, but it makes it easier for guitarists and mandolinists to get into violin playing."



Rolland Colella is a friend of Dave Matthews. Rolland ordered a sparkly gold fiddle to play in his band, The Hogwaller Ramblers, when they toured as an opener for Dave Matthews Band, mostly in the South. This led to Boyd Tinsley's equipment manager ordering six Jordan electric violins for Boyd to use in DMB. Boyd used Jordan violins for several years and got a lot of media exposure.



Left: Isaac Stern's last violin protégé was Miri Ben Ari. Then she heard a Charlie Parker record and veered off into jazz. Currently she plays hip hop and rap. She walked up to the Jordan booth at the NAMM show and said, "These violins are so ugly I just have to pick one up and see how awful it sounds." But forty-five minutes later she had ordered one.

The violin was made of paulownia veneered with flamed maple. Paulownia is very light in weight and can result in an electric violin lighter than an acoustic violin. Jordan violins made of paulownia have allowed some players with neck and shoulder problems to continue playing even when their acoustic violin seemed too heavy. And since the hardware on Jordan violins is behind the bridge, the center of gravity is closer to the support of the chin and shoulder, resulting in a "lighter-feeling violin," even if the weight is the same as an acoustic violin. Recent lightweight tuners such as Gotoh's Stealth model can make them even lighter.

John says, "I'm a lousy violinist and I'll die happily that way, so working with a superb player was very helpful in refining the overall design. I had to match every tactile point on her 18th-century Italian violin so it would feel the same as the violin she was used to playing. She was very demanding but I found that useful because she was able to articulate why certain little features mattered so much. This has improved all the subsequent violins I've made."

Above: John Jordan planned a violin of this design to celebrate making his 500th violin. By the time he was ready to start cutting it out, he was already past violin #550. A viola player named Connie DeHaan ordered it scaled up to viola size, which is shown here. John is now past violin #650 and still hasn't made that violin.



Despite traditional violins having just four strings, Jordan sells more 5-string violins than anything else. He says, "I think if you look at my designs and are willing to accept that 'this is a violin,' you are probably open-minded enough to explore possibilities beyond a traditional violin." These instruments feature inlay by Craig Lavin. At left is "Moth" and at right is "Bioluminescent Jellies."





Yes, it's a Jordan nyckelharpa, mostly traditional, but with a few of John's special touches. The body outline is more baroque than folk; old nyckelharpas have straight sides in the lower bout, but John's eyes are drawn to curves. How did he come to make a nyckelharpa? John explains: "My wife, Jill, is half Swedish. I took her to hear one of my electric-violin customers playing nyckelharpa. I asked her if she'd like one, and she said she would. I started looking for a good one, but when I saw that they cost \$10k or more, I decided to make one for her. On Christmas 2018, I told her I was making it, and I got it test strung by Valentine's Day, 2019. In my world, that is working at light speed! She's been playing it since then in bare wood, but soon I'm going to take it apart and varnish it." Several local players have been impressed by it, so he'll be making more.

*(Jordan from page 13)*

some patents and had placed an ad in *Strings* magazine. In the early 1990s I set up a website with the help of a Microsoft friend in Seattle. In those days, having a website was very unusual, and it proved quite helpful. I started to get orders from all over the world, and the electric violins became the bulk of my work. It's interesting, because I would never have made an electric violin unless I'd gotten an order for one.

The foray into electric violins brought about dealer inquiries, as did attending the NAMM shows in the early- to mid-1990s. John also got queries from the manufacturing side of the instrument business.

I would get major manufacturers visiting with me about making knock-offs overseas, but the conversations were always about "dumbing down" the designs — making them cheaper and "less than." I didn't see that as a good thing, so I never

entered that world. Some enquired about licensing my patent, but, again, it was always to create an inferior instrument. Didn't want to do that. I didn't refine it just to have it made "worse." I could have become a manufacturer, but I didn't want to. I had investors approach me with all kinds of business plans, but if I followed those trajectories, I wouldn't be doing what I enjoyed doing, and the instruments would have suffered. Those pathways simply did not appeal to me.

Though the electric violins were a focus for John, he never ceased any of the other work. He kept adding new experiences by working on ethnic instruments of all sorts, which he found to be esoteric, often complex, and always intriguing.

My interactions in the shop with a broad array of musicians about an even wider variety of instruments have always been fun. It's been interesting, and at times it's been surprising. I have great conversations with creative people from diverse musical styles — jazz, classical, rock, ethnic, folk, and more. The variety



ROBERT DESMOND

Among his many accomplishments, John Jordan can boast of a pivotal role in the saga of a treasured icon of GAL culture. At the 1990 GAL Convention, member David Freeman donated a broken and sorry bit of clay art, an action-figure-sized sculpture of a rock guitarist. It looked like *The Little Man* would not get a bid, until guest auctioneer John Jordan took the mike and rallied the crowd to form teams to collect pocket change and outbid each other. After a boisterous battle, the winning team made a final bid of \$6. Since then, *The Little Man* has been sold for remarkably inflated sums at the Benefit Auctions of eleven GAL Conventions, each time to be taken home by a GAL member who has elaborated him and donated him back at the next Convention. In this photo, *Little Man* donator David Freeman and John Jordan enthusiastically auction him off for the third time at our 1995 Convention. Since 2017 he has been in China, where he must remain until the Great Virus Hunkering has ended and we can once again gather for our Convention.

is illustrated by what's in the shop at any given time. I remember the week I was working on a Gibson Melody Maker, and I had a three-million-dollar Nicolo Amati violin from the 1660s on my bench. How cool is that, to be handling an instrument made by Stradivari's teacher! Things like that could only happen with the ways I've chosen to be with all of this."

Jordan's partial list of well-known clients include Gregg Allman (who offered him a job as his road tech, which he wisely declined), Michael Hedges, John Lee Hooker, Ronnie Montrose, Jean Luc Ponty, Herb Ellis, Kenny Loggins, John Denver, and bands such as Metallica, Chicago, Tower of Power, Santana, Jefferson Starship, and Steve Miller.

Almost all of the more-known players are great people, as are the not-known people who are fine players as well. I get just as much joy from working with a little kid getting their first violin as I do from working with a noteworthy professional; sometimes even more. After all these many years, it is still the variety of work and people that keeps it interesting. I still enjoy my work a great deal.

No one's life or profession is always a bed of roses. Or, perhaps to nuance it a bit, roses are typified by thorns as well as by their visual beauty and compelling fragrance.

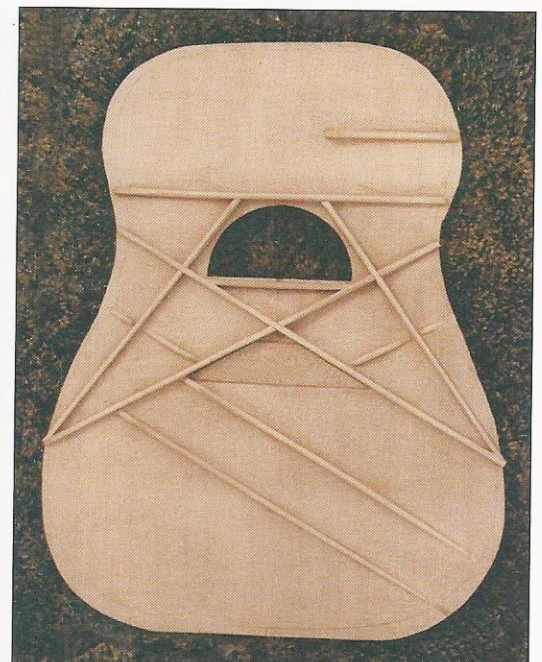
The down-economy times affected me just as everyone else. In the early '80s, when work at Ervin's shop got lean, it affected me to the point where I had to get the electronics job and start my own thing. That was a disappointment at the time, but then it turned out not to be. After 9/11, I didn't get a commission for six months. I lost

several orders when Enron went away, and I really noticed it when the crash of 2008 happened. But I've always been frugal, and I never looked at my work in the classic sense of being a "business." Yes, I deal with money, make things, sell things, and all that. But it really just is what it is, and it does what it does. I made conscious decisions about what I would do and would not do involving money and work. Some of the offers I received could have garnered me a much higher income — but that was never the primary impetus. Quality of life commensurate with who I understood myself to be was a greater priority. My income is modest, but I raised a family, provided work for people (Jordan has had employees in the past and now typically has two to five apprentices at any given time), and have been able to interact with so many people and situations that were rewarding. One of my clients was a collector of "famous" guitars, and I remember showing my son a guitar and saying, "Remember that song you liked by Bill Haley — 'Rock Around the Clock'? This is the very guitar that Bill used." Events like that could only take place by organizing my work as I have.

I asked John if the modest living and unorthodox pathway posed challenges to any of his relationships.

My first wife (Margaret, to whom he was married from 1988 until 2014 when she was taken by cancer) was fine with it. She worked, and we were a great family. Her folks were a little skeptical of me at first. Fortunately enough, once when we were visiting her parents early in our relationship, I got a call at their house from The New York Times wanting to interview me about my electric violins. That comforted them. (laughs) It was like, "Maybe he doesn't make a lot of money, but he's not a bum."

John made this 29-fret flattop guitar in the mid 1980s. With the long fretboard and deep cutaway, there was no place for a traditional round hole, so he designed a D-shaped hole and changed the bracing to accommodate. His work was original, but he soon got a surprise. John explains: "I was going to write a GAL article on this bracing variation until I saw it in a fifteen-year-old Maton guitar made in Australia, although the Maton had a round soundhole. Often we reinvent old ideas."







Along with the rich fabric of a life in lutherie, John was also a musician. In the mid-1980s, as a fingerstyle guitarist, he'd opened for Michael Hedges. He submitted recordings to Will Ackerman's Windham Hill Records, who requested additional music.

*I really liked the Windham Hill stuff. I had a four-track reel-to-reel deck and I'd made some recordings they liked. But I never followed up on it. It's not that I wasn't interested in the music — I was. It's just that my work as a luthier was pretty full-time, and I didn't see myself leaving it and my family to go out on the road as a solo fingerstyle guitarist. Embarking on lonely road trips and staying in unfamiliar hotel rooms — it wasn't a lifestyle that appealed to me. I still play cello and bass and guitar, mostly now at church, and every once in awhile I'll do a gig with someone. I still quite enjoy playing.*

And if that isn't enough to comprise an interesting life of authenticity, Jordan has other artistic forays that nourish him as well:

*For many decades I've really enjoyed glass blowing. I really love the glass. It's a beautiful material. The process is also wonderful; the person blowing the glass needs an assistant, and there's real beauty in the choreography and teamwork. Good communication is essential, or the piece you are making will end up broken on the floor. My son and I used to do glass blowing projects together when he was a teenager. Certainly this shared activity was a great bonding exercise between father and son. I also like painting, and for a few years I was into ceramics.*

*And I liked being married. Like anything, it takes time and effort to create a good marriage. It was very important to me, and still is. (Jordan remarried several years ago.) Margaret and I used to be marriage encounter presenters on the weekends. I'd close up shop, which of course would affect the business. But I felt it was meaningful — it helped others, and it helped our own marriage flourish. It was priceless, really.*

Working on this article reminded me of some things. When I did my book *Acquired of the Angels*, I remember noting the significance

*This solidbody electric 4-string mandolin (seen in these two photos) has a flamed walnut neck-through core with illuminated cast-glass body wings. LED strips below the glass can be lighted either continually, or in response to the music being played. John says, "I've been blowing and casting glass as a hobby for more than thirty years. I wanted to make a glass-bodied instrument, and since glass is heavy, it had to be small. I set up my kiln in the backyard and cast these with a grain that resembles wood."*



*Here's a work in progress; a 7-string upright electric bass with dichro-lam side markers, drum triggers in the fingerboard and on the body, and a fiber-optic side-emitting cable on a trigger circuit that lights up the diamond-shaped cutout under the bridge. Not yet installed is a hand-ground dichroic-coated glass prism that fits in the cutout to shoot out laser-light patterns. John says, "This is the bass I have been gigging on for the past year. At some point I'll disassemble it to do a proper paint job, but for now it's just white primer with a few experiments painted in acrylics. Since I don't make something for myself very often, it has to incorporate all the wacky ideas I've wanted to try on some unsuspecting customer, but that no one has gone for yet."*



*This 6-string electric cello went to a cellist who was the son of a San Francisco Symphony violinist. The father subsequently ordered a Jordan electric violin.*



*This quilted maple instrument with rainforest frog inlays by Craig Lavin is the only fretted 6-string cello that John has made so far, and it has a special story. John says, "I was losing my first wife to cancer at the same time the woman I was making it for was losing her spouse to cancer. It took longer than I said it would to complete, but we were both OK with that, and we shared much more of a bond over this cello than I do with a typical customer."*

of the fact that both John D'Angelico and Jimmy D'Aquisto had done only that for all of their adult lives, and in D'Angelico's case, since boyhood. The sheer longevity of that and all of the experiences that accompanied it were part of why they were able to create what they created. One can only reach certain places by that unique combination of gift, inclination, circumstance, and longevity. Not a lot of people have had an uninterrupted profession of lutherie for nearly half a century, and it is only such a pathway that can produce the level of skill and knowledge possessed by one such as John Jordan.

When I asked John what inspires him these days, and if there's anything else he'd like to engage with, he was quick with an answer:

*Science Fiction. I love Sci-Fi because it's outside the box and filled with possibility. I thought it was interesting that the Star Trek communicators we all saw in the 1960s are not unlike the footprint of modern cell phones. And nature is a tremendous inspiration for me as well — reflections on a lake, shapes of clouds, the fractal patterns of the veins in leaves — all of that is very important to me. Investing time in nature has always proven to be life-giving.*

*As for as my lutherie bucket list, I'd like to make a double-manual harpsichord from scratch. That's one that still intrigues me. I'll get to it when I get to it. —*

*Neyveli S. Radhakrishna plays the double violin John made for him about fifteen years ago when Neyveli was Ravi Shankar's violinist. He's now at a university in Germany finishing what will be the only doctoral degree in double violin ever awarded. John recalls, "When he took me backstage and introduced me, Ravi was very excited to meet the man who made Radha's violin! At age 88, to still have a sense of wonder and amazement about the world and what was in it after everything he had seen and experienced in a very long and productive life, touched me deeply. I'm just some guy making sawdust in my garage; who'd get all excited about meeting me?"*

