

Don Meixner

Guitar League member since:

I have been a member since the start. If not the very first meeting but certainly from the second one. Those early meetings were at The Red House Theater.

When did you start playing guitar?

My friend Terry Morgan showed me a few chords on his 1954ish Gibson Archtop. I was able to connect with those chords fairly easily. He'd play the Gibson and I'd follow on a Century House guitar he bought from a mutual acquaintance called an Ensenada. Not a terrible guitar as I recall.



What was your motivation to learn the instrument?

In the 60s it was music from the radio. I was not a big Beatles fan but I really liked the music of The Lovin' Spoonful, The Byrds, PPM. Most of my friends played. Cathy Brothers, Jim Main, Gary Wilson, etc. all played and I felt a bit left out. Then around 1968 Dick Ward moved in next door. I heard some of the best music coming from his house. Dick was as generous with his time back then as he is now. Between Dick and his friend Ken Harris and then one night only with the late Karl Onchen I was exposed to both great music and great playing.

Next came the early 70's. That was when I really began to get the guitar itch. There was some amazing music left over from the 60's and some excellent music found only on FM radio. I played Autoharp which I had gotten as a graduation gift from my Mom. I could play along, sort of, with friends in High School. The first song I learned to play was "Where I'm Bound" by Tom Paxton. I was heavily influenced by Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, The Weavers, The Clancy Brothers, Carolyn Hester, The Smothers Brothers... Then later on in the mid 70's by Utah Phillips, Jim Ringer, Mary McCaslain, Robin and Linda Williams, Gordon Bok. I can't leave out the friends I had who were players. They were influenced by the same people I was but by others as well. Terry Morgan aimed me at Tom Rush and Randy Frech pointed me at Watson.

It became imperative I have my own guitar.

What style(s) do you play?

Like everyone I knew we started as strummers. Three chords and the truth was all a song needed. I left the fingerpicking to Joan Baez. But then it snuck into my playing. I was playing folk, country, Irish, jug band, whatever suited me at the time. There was too much out there not to be interested in more than one style.

What make/model guitar(s) do you play?

My first guitar was a 1972 Yamaha Red Label FG-180 which is a Dreadnought. I played that guitar for years. Early on the name flaked off the headstock so I replaced the name with a train decal. Phoebe Snow of the Delaware and Lackawanna Line. I was doing a lot of train songs (Utah Phillips) at that time. I have a Martin 0-16 NY, a Martin JC-16, A pair of Taylor guitars. A 312 and a 712. I have a new Eastman E60 W that I use for stage work but my preference is the two Guild F-30s I own. One is a 63 built in Hoboken and the other is a Westerly guitar. Because of injuries I do prefer the smaller guitars these days. My Yamaha is at Mark Wahls getting worked over so I can play a 1972 Red Label while I am 72.

What kind of strings do you like?

Bronze lights. Elixer poliwebs are fine. So are Martin 80/20 strings.

Do you play out?

I play in two bands, The Flyin' Column with Jimmy Flynn and Jim Sheridan. Both good friends and great musicians and singers who find harmonies that I just don't expect. Jimmy and I play as a 50s duo, Two Feet Short. I do singles, open mics, and Erie Canal history events.

Do you like to jam with others?

I love to jam with others but with playing in two bands and running a jewelry business I rarely have the time.

What is your practice routine?

For me practice isn't the same as it likely is for others. Because of an industrial accident I play with two reattached fingers and two severely lacerated fingers on my left hand. The index finger is nearly a 1/2" shorter than it should be. The muscle damage is such that muscle memory needs to be re-established nearly every time I play. Lately I am following this process: I listen to the song I want along with a few others in a similar style until I can sing along with them on the cd, usually in the car or the shop. Next I download a lyric sheet with the simplest chord pattern possible in the Key I can sing it in. I can't stress the importance of a readable font like Comic Sans. I play the first chord once to establish the key and sing the song lyric to the next chord and play that chord once and so on through the song. I don't try for rhythm or tempo until I can do the whole song in that manner. Then I start after the rhythm.

What are your current goals? How does GL support them?

My goals are to keep playing. The Guitar League offers a group of likeminded people to offer suggestions to and from. I get support from Jim Flynn and Jim Sheridan who tolerate my diminished ability. Can't find better support or friends than that.