

My Guitar Story – Bruce Wood



Guitar League member since:

I think I joined at the second meeting, way back in 2005. Dick Ward and his wife, Carol Bryant, lived a few doors away from me. I've known Dick all my life and thought (correctly as it turned out) the Guitar League would be great way to meet other players.

When did you start playing guitar?

In early 1970 during my freshman year in college at Oswego.

What was your motivation to learn the instrument?

My older brother was (and still is) a very good guitarist so I was exposed to his playing ever since the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan. Then there were several guys in my dorm at college who played. At the time Led Zeppelin II had some out and I was itching to learn the Whole Lotta Love riff. So I picked up my roommate's guitar and after a few days I was able to muddle through that riff. The next week it was Cream's Sunshine of Your Love and once I figured out that riff I was forever hooked. To this day, I tell people who want to learn the guitar to learn a song – any song – to get motivated.

What style(s) do you play?

I consider myself a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. These days it's mostly jazz with the Carol Bryant Quartet, but we also play some pop and rock stuff. When I first started playing it was all rock. In the mid-70's I befriended a big band jazz guitarist named Parke Hill who was a Disney World musician where I worked for 5 years. He was kind enough to give me some lessons (I was his only student). Later, while still at Disney, I bought a nylon string guitar and started to learn the classical guitar and its repertoire. In 1999, I bought a flamenco guitar and

spent the next 10 years concentrating on that genre. I really met my match with flamenco! It was very technically demanding but a great experience and I learned a lot of good right hand technique. Then I got pretty heavy into finger picking and learned quite a few songs by Jerry Reed and Chet Atkins. I like all styles of playing, but I more comfortable with using my right hand fingers than playing with a pick even though so much of our jazz repertoire is more suitable for a pick.

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

I have about a dozen guitars but as a member of the quartet I play a nylon string (with mic pickup) made for me by Paul McGill, a luthier in Nashville, and also an archtop jazz guitar. For the past several years the archtop was an Eastman AR371, but I recently purchased an Ibanez GB10 (George Benson signature model) which will be my primary jazz guitar.

What kind of strings do you like?

I'm not all that particular but for several years I have been using D'Addario strings. On the nylon string I typically use Extra Tension strings because the tone and fidelity are better with high tension. On the electric archtop I usually have .011's Half-Round strings – that's a compromise between regular round wound and the flat wounds (which I sometimes use).

Do you play out?

Yes. I was a living room solo player for the first 40 years of my playing but about 10 years ago I convinced Carol Bryant to try working with me as a duo. We did that for a couple of years and then added Dave Arliss on bass, and 3 years ago we added Steve Orlando on drums and vocals. The quartet plays about 20 gigs a year and we try to rehearse for 2 hours every week. It's a real blast working with such competent bandmates. I only wish I'd gone down this road decades ago because playing in a band, in front of an audience, is the best way to take your playing to the next level.

Do you like to jam with others?

Oh yeah! I love to jam. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen as often as I would like mainly due to the time commitment for the quartet. My most frequent jams have been with Mikal Serafim, the awesome guitarist in CNY (originally from Pompano Beach) with his band the Funky Blu Roots. In fact, we have had a ritual of jamming at my house on Halloween night every year since 2011. Occasionally we get through a whole song before it's our turn to hand out candy to trick-or-treaters.

What is your practice routine?

I practice every morning from about 8am to 9am, and then sporadically at later times in the day. The morning routine is about 50% technical exercises – scales, arpeggios, chord progressions, picking exercises and stuff like that. The other part of the practice is working on repertoire – both current and new – for our band. I also have tons of books, both hard copy and e-books on guitar technique, harmony, melody and songs. I enjoy studying music theory which I try to apply to my playing in the band. I'm particularly interested in jazz improvisation and reharmonization. I get very bored if I'm not trying to improve and learn something new.

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

To continue the lifelong learning process. My near term goals are to have at least 100 jazz standards memorized. As my mentor Frank Vignola has said many times, everything you want to know, especially about improvisation, is in the tunes. You just have to dig it out.

I cannot emphasize enough how much the Guitar League has positively affected my musical life. As I said, I was a living room guitarist for my first 40 years of playing. I remember how nervous I was the first couple of times that I played in front of others at the early Guitar League meetings. But the support and encouragement of the GL leadership and all members helped me immensely in getting comfortable with performance. I have no doubt that I would not be a gigging musician today had it not been for the personal and musical growth that I experienced through the Guitar League. I owe it a lot.