



Guitarmusic Makes the World Go 'Round

With One Phenomenal Voice

by [Richard Gilewitz](#)

Over the past decade I have attended and also participated in several trade conventions, including the sizeable winter sessions of the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) held in Anaheim, California, and the more compact summer sessions, which have been hosted in Nashville, Tennessee, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Austin, Texas. This last February, I was honored to be a Performance Alley Artist and showcase performer at the International Folk Alliance in Memphis, Tennessee. Outside my American borders I have joined our Canadian musicians at the Music Industries Association of Canada (MIAC) in Toronto.

It would be simple enough to say that nothing could have prepared me for my first visit to Musikmesse in Frankfurt, Germany- but actually, that is not true. If anything, attending the many shows mentioned above prepared me very well in anticipating what to expect during one of the largest music-based events in the world. Exposure to a truly international cosmos of sounds and sights, instruments and equipment, shows and demonstrations was an experience in navigating through crowds, unfamiliar streets, languages, and many cultures.

The four-day Musikmesse or Music Fair, held March 12-15, 2008, is reportedly over twice the size of the Winter NAMM location in Anaheim, California. I suppose I could compare the Musikmesse environment to a very large multi-level airport complex, teeming with adjacent escalators, elevators, food courts, walkways, breezeways, restaurants, and hotels. One source insisted that the exhibition hall areas, program facilities, and stages were nearly four hundred percent the size of Winter NAMM.

For example, on the Musikbiz Stage, outstanding young bands showcased, while numerous internationally acclaimed musicians played live on the Agora and Acoustic Stages. A Musikbiz Studio provided a series of seminars for musicians on video and audio productions, and the SchoolJam and Music4Kids events filled up the rest of the program offerings. These events, together with all of the exhibits, provided solid evidence that the voice of music is a genuine international phenomenon. In an overwhelming sea of participants, brought together for the purpose of expression through sound, there was total acceptance and tolerance of the mixture of cultures and multitude of languages spoken.



In this frenzied environment, taking care of oneself is of utmost importance. Whether networking, conducting business, or performing as a live act, you want to be at the top of your game. When paths cross unexpectedly, you should strive to enjoy an early dinner with new acquaintances and old friends without drooling in your food due to lack of sleep. Eating right, drinking liters of water, and washing your hands fifty-two times a day are all great ways to stay healthy. Those new friends you just made may not last

long if you decide to spontaneously combust with a sneeze in the general direction of their mashed potatoes.

Day One - The Set Up: Or more along the lines of wake up and stay up. My friend Gary Mobley with the Shubb Company, maker of my favorite capos, invited me to represent them on this trip. Performing in their booth and on the Acoustic Stage was a real delight. The wakeup part was departing Tampa on a Monday, arriving before 7a.m. on a Tuesday, and staying alert until checking into my hotel that evening. The staying up part was necessary to fool the jet lag gnomes in order to adapt to German standard time. Not always a simple trick, especially when I travel back to the States from New Zealand this coming May, departing Christchurch at 3 p.m. on a Friday, and landing in Los Angeles at 10:45 a.m. the same day!



I was astounded by the number and variety of exhibition booths. In literally a 24-hour period, what had appeared to be utter chaos turned into a stunningly exquisite environment loaded with guitars of all shapes and sizes, banjos, amps, drums, pianos, all kinds of accessories, sheet music publishers, and over 100 booths containing accordions!

At this point, a logical progression would be to break down the Musikmesse experience day by day. But quite honestly, almost everything became a massive blend of days, times, vast exhibition halls, people, sounds, and smells. (Ah, the freshly ground coffee!) However, there were some specific highlights when my good friend Tommy Leddy, owner of The Sound Shop in Drogheda, Ireland, appeared in my hotel breakfast room one morning, and then again as I watched him tirelessly hold court to nearly a dozen of us at dinnertime. Tommy can convince an entire group of the origin of nearly all jokes, words, phrases, and limericks in the world. Gary Mobley remarked that Tommy had a real "twinkle in his eyes!" An authentic Irishman, Tommy is so engaging that Michael Choy and Hozen from Maestro (who are the



Singapore distributors for my American sponsors D'Addario and Planet Waves, Mel Bay Publications, and Shubb) could not stop laughing all night.



I was delighted to meet with Chris Statham and Maria Evangelou from Mel Bay Music, Ltd., the UK arm of Mel Bay Publications, who helped to convince me that, no, I CANNOT salsa dance on our last evening out! Mr. Bill Bay demonstrated his crafty sense of humor on two occasions, making me feel right at home. When I arrived at his hotel to meet with Gary Mobley, Mr. Bay gave me a teasing look and said, "I didn't know this hotel had lowered its standards." While visiting with him at the Mel Bay booth, as I was munching down on some

tasty candy, he playfully threatened to take the cost of his jelly beans out of my royalties.

I cannot thank Breedlove Guitars enough for the loan of a stunning Atlas 12-string guitar to use at the show and for our time spent together. I was thrilled to finally meet InJae Park, President of Crafter USA and Sungeum Music Co., Ltd., the maker of my new Breedlove Atlas series signature 12-string guitar. My specifications for a performance guitar were fairly stringent and with the expertise of Breedlove Guitars President Pete Newport and InJae Park, the final product has been a joy to play.



It was comforting to see the faces of my other friends and sponsors, Peter D'Addario from D'Addario Strings and Ryan Angle from L.R. Baggs. There is nothing like being far from home base and knowing that many welcoming and familiar faces are just around the corner.

Some other highlights were in the many new friends and contacts I made from all over the world ranging from Israel, to Vienna, Austria, Finland, Australia, Romania, and of course, Germany. And the music and musicians! As I was steering toward the Breedlove Guitars booth, I stopped in my tracks. Heike Matthiesen, performing the Chaconne by J.S. Bach, played with such technique that it was a beautifully controlled and relaxed rendition of the piece. Afterwards, we had an all too brief discussion on fingernail care (hey, what else is there to talk about amongst guitarists!) and I came to find out she studies with classical guitar legend Pepe Romero.

I also had an absolute blast picking some old standards such as Elizabeth Cotton's "Freight Train", "Anji" and "Windy and Warm" as well as some early John Fahey numbers with my new friend and top picker from Italy, Franco Moroni.



One of the most mesmerizing moments of the entire week came when I encountered Jan Ackerman and Lulo Reinhardt (apparently the grand nephew of the legendary Django Reinhardt) and friends jamming away at the Saga booth. While speaking later with Lulo, I was stunned to discover that he and Jan had just met the previous day yet played together as if they had known each other a lifetime. Once again, clear evidence that music is truly the universal language that transcends all borders.

