

# RAGTAG

by Roger Deitz

Parting Shots

## HAND ME DOWNERS

Secondhand, used, retro, vintage, whatever. I do have a history of obtaining broken-in instruments, and the occasional well-worn castoff. My student accordion was a rental while my piano came from a neighbor who relocated to a small apartment. The first guitar I owned was passed to me via a series of friends. The Martin M-38s I played for decades were secondhand. I traded a used Paramount Silver Bell tenor banjo to get one M-38 and two older guitars for the other. My medical school microscope was purchased from an upper class medical student. It turned out to be quite a deal, a Leica (microscope-speak for Rolls Royce), not that it did much to help me focus on my studies. Dad gave me my first camera, his 1950s Graflex 4x5 press camera (like the bulb flashers in the newsreels) that I hauled around during my travels. And, my first automobile was a '58 Chevy for which I paid \$25. I spent more than that on rust remover and Bondo body filler. At least the radio worked.

As a youngster, within my family's network of friends, there existed a coordinated system known as the waste-not, want-not clothing exchange. On up through high school, I was "fortunate" to have been just one size smaller than a couple of fellows beyond me in age and grade. On a regular basis, I would receive care packages, or supermarket grab bags (*garb* bags?) of shirts, sweaters, shoes, belts and pants. Hey, I was ahead of the curve on recycling as I discovered crib sheets and stains of unknown origin (spaghetti sauce? blood?). Always there was the faint aroma of cigarette smoke, something that never left me. My folks and their friends smoked as did the hand-me-downers ... oh ... *would that make it secondhand smoke?* Anyway, "new" outfits kept coming. Of course, school dress codes being what they were, pants were black and shirts sort of white. Sweaters, I recall, were frumpy. I was a well-dressed second stringer on the high school golf team. Fortunately, my sister was eleven years older (I am a second child), so I wasn't made to wear *her* castoffs. Honest.

When performing in the early 1980s, I was overjoyed to find a NEW, yes, a *new* C.F. Martin guitar hanging on the wall at Victor's Music in New Jersey. One 0-16NY. It was so affordable, I loved the small-bodied 0-16NY, a lovely folk guitar strung with silk and steel strings. It had an open headstock and

a nice wide rosewood fingerboard. I played it everywhere, including when invited by Mike Agranoff and Dan Ruvin to join them at the smoky campfires in the campgrounds at the Philadelphia Folk Festival. Yes, they had the gig before I joined for a few years. Three hours of hickory-smoked folk following the end of each evening concert. The guitar smelled of wood smoke until the day I retired it for that first (secondhand) M-38. The problem was – Roger was 6'3" and the 0-16 was a small "parlor guitar." The pairing looked a bit like "Mutt and Jeff" according to Mike Longworth, then at C.F. Martin. A "mismatch" – or was it mishmash? Over lunch, Longworth suggested I switch to an M-38. I took his advice, debuting it at the PFF evening concert (as second banana), emceeding with Gene Shay (a job Michael Cooney held for years before me, the same Michael Cooney whose column appeared in *Sing Out!* long before my sniveling scribbling). I was *third* night emcee along with Vin Scelsa and Pete Fornatale at the NCC Long Island Folk Festival, finding my calling as a master of ceremonies. I seem to have developed a pattern of crossing the finish line looking at someone else's back. Did I mention *Sing Out!* is publishing my second book ... *15 Years of RagTag?*

There was one used instrument I coveted. It was a vintage Vega Whyte Laydie banjo circa 1921. I ached for it when a friend at college put it in my hands to play. "Some-day," I hoped, "I'll find one." It never happened. My buddy Michael Moore purchased this old beauty for a few dollars at an estate sale. I was holding *my* first banjo. A secondhand Harmony ... a molded plastic-rim embarrassment. Not quite a vintage Vega, it was a hand-me-downer worthy of *The Graduate*. "Plastics!" There is a singular tone molded styrene imparts to folk music. The banjo landfill it is dumped in will be non-biodegrading "Old Dan Tucker" for the next 50,000 years. Song for the day? I call your attention to "Second Hand Rose" written in 1921 by Grant Clarke and James F. Hanley, introduced by Fanny Brice in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1921*. It was an extremely popular tune around the time that coveted Whyte Laydie banjo was being crafted in Boston. Probably played on the very instrument back then. Goodness, the second hand on my watch tells me this column is at a close, and as we all know, close makes the man. Just seconds to go.

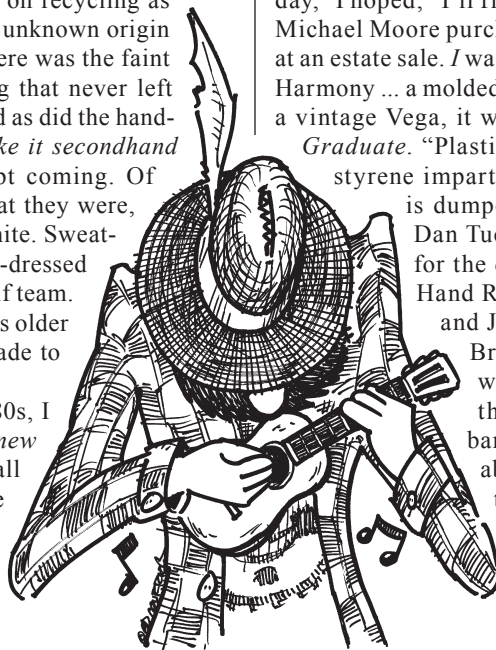


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