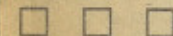


## GUITAR SURVEY

**TONY ZEMAITIS** joined the exclusive world of the guitar manufacturer quite by accident some sixteen years ago. Unable to afford the price of a guitar he decided to make his own; and that's where it would have ended had not word of his ability spread through the business.

Spencer Davis, John Baldry and Davy Graham were among the early customers, and today this highly respected craftsman serves such worthies as Peter Green, Eric Clapton, Jo-Ann Kelly and the Faces — the best customers of all.

Today Zemaitis might possibly have been a millionaire by now. But he has scorned the commercial success which a mass production line and a series of models would have brought him. Instead he works diligently through the day at his Balham home, taking great personal pride and never repeating the same guitar.



Zemaitis works on one guitar for two or three months, and at the end of the process he has the self satisfaction of knowing that he has been totally responsible for every stage in the production.

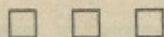
"I taught myself to make guitars; before that I was a professional cabinet maker and used to work on antiques. My early guitars were all acoustic 12-strings but more recently I've made about eight instruments for the Faces — electric 12-strings, 12-strings and basses. I'm also making a guitar for Peter Green at the moment".

Tony Zemaitis's biggest order was the famed 12-string for Eric Clapton, nicknamed Ivan the Terrible on account of its power and size. It took about

two and a half months to complete and is insured for around £1,000. The model illustrates the perfection and meticulous design which goes into all Zemaitis's products, this one being inlaid in "silver, ebony, adamant, sweat and blood".

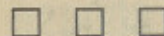
For a while Zemaitis got hung up with classical guitars which brought Freddie Phillips round to his house. In fact he would like to indulge himself to a greater extent in the manufacture of such guitars.

Recalling the celebrated session men that have used his guitars, Tony came up with such names as Bert Weedon, Ivor Mairants and Ike Isaacs.



"My first guitar is now in the hands of Jo-Ann Kelly. It all started with one small advert but other than that it got round by word of mouth, and I've always had too much work since then. I've lost count of the number of guitars I've made, apart from which half of them were given away to start with.

"I never realised it would get to this stage. In fact I packed it all in at one period, but then someone came over from America especially so I was forced to start making them again; it's all a bit frightening sometimes.



"I used to have a shop in Chelsea but I got smaller and started to specialise so I've been working at home since then".

From the artists using Zemaitis guitars comes nothing but praise. But Tony is disturbed about the nature of one criticism levelled at him — that his guitars are not suitable as backing instruments because they are too strident and thus

# GUITAR MAKER, BY ACCIDENT



● TONY ZEMAITIS

only suitable as a lead instrument. "It's just not true", claims Tony.

"There's always something different about my guitars — in fact I never repeat a particular guitar. That's why when dealers ask for mass produced guitars I don't want to know. The only other person stocking my guitars is a chap called Howard Conder in Kingston, but I'm also trying to fix something up for distribution in America".

Tony was reluctant to talk in detail about his guitars, largely through modesty but also because some of the techniques he would obviously sooner keep to himself.

But Simon Prager, the blues and ragtime guitarist who works with Bob Hall and Steve Rye was adamant about the brilliance of Zemaitis's guitars. In giving his vote of confidence in the model he now possesses, he sold several hundred pounds

worth of Gibson guitar — the big J200 model which most people would give their right arm to possess.

"The Zemaitis guitars generally have a cleaner sound, they are much louder and they ring out. Most guitars respond to a particular key or frequency of one string, but these have got better spreads than any of them," says Simon.

Visually the guitars are easily recognisable by their meticulous embellishments, 'D' sound hole and the neatly carved tail of the fret board.

"The secret of the success is the lightness and simplicity of the guitar, I keep the inside simple and the outside neat, and I suppose the biggest secret is the quality of the front, which must be properly lacquered," says Tony.

"Sometime I inlay as much as 20,000 multicoloured woods on a single guitar, but the most characteristic thing is certainly the sound hole. I chose this because I was very keen on making jazz cutaway guitars, also the "D" fits in nicely.

"Most musicians know exactly what they want when they come to me, and I'm pleased about this because I don't like too much leeway. However, I do usually put more on the guitar than the customer expects.

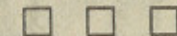
"I think people like having a guitar made for them because they can come along and visit and see how it's getting on".

Tony has had some strange specifications to follow at times, including, in one case, a Mickey Mouse bass — a task

which Tony Zemaitis declined to undertake.

"I get particularly pleased when people phone me up after a period of time to say that they now like their guitar better than ever; that pleases me. But at the same time there's no glamour attached to it, it's all just hard work — a job which I enjoy. We do end up with a heck of a load of friends though".

Tony and his wife are well used to having musicians drop round socially, and the walls of their home are lined with guitars in various stages of production.



"In actual working hours a guitar takes about a month to complete. I could knock up a very cheap one in a fortnight but that would still take two months to deliver".

The acoustic guitars made by Tony Zemaitis are easily recognisable, but how about the electric guitars? "There's not much I can say other than that I make sure the frets are acoustically spot on, never mind theoretically".

His latest order is for a guitar with pie crust carvings, featuring various motifs and inlaid with mother of pearl.

And if you're considering a made-to-measure guitar, the prices go from £150 upwards.

BY JERRY GILBERT

## SHOPTALK

THE GUITAR is still the top sell- who virtually disappeared from the "Les Paul" and if inst-