



Restoration of Unknown Maker Folk Guitar

Performed by Ron Cook

1998

Purchased by Ron Cook at Three Amigos Guitar Show, San José, California

Currently owned by Anna Liikala, Santa Cruz, California

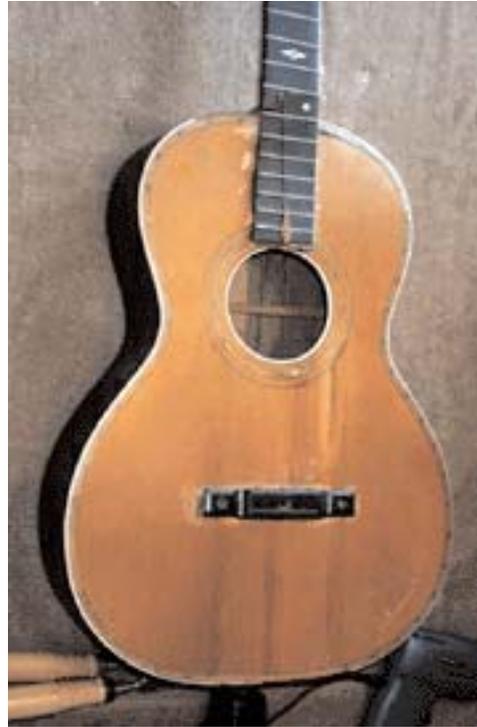
Background

Several years ago, around 1995-96, I found this guitar at the Three Amigos Northern California Guitar Show, which at the time was held at the old San José Conference Center (now the new Tech Museum). One of the vendors had this hidden under a counter probably not expecting it to sell. I happened to glance down at a well-worn chipboard guitar case, bent down, and opened it up. This interesting old guitar was in pieces. I feel it was originally a classical guitar, but it had been obviously strung up with steel strings due to the neck and top problems. The same vendor also had an old Harmony Jumbo Sovereign I wanted, so I made a deal to take both guitars. He let me have them for a very fair price. We were both happy.

Valuation

There is no label and no identifying stamps inside or out. The top might have been replaced at one time, and a shoddy attempt at “fancy” inlay left gaps in the fingerboard. The head inlay was off center. With my purchase deal for this guitar and the Harmony, my initial investment was around \$50 (about the cost of the case). After restoration, or rather repair/conversion, the instrument’s value increased to around \$400. It became a new guitar with old parts.

Assessment & Inventory



As I mentioned, this instrument was in pieces. (For these pictures I set the pieces in place to get a full shot of the guitar.) The neck was completely loose from the body, and the well-worn ebony fingerboard was broken between the 11th and 12th frets. The portion of the fingerboard on the soundbox was still glued on, but had a vertical crack running up from the soundhole.

After a thorough examination, I concluded that the spruce top was not original to the body. The binding did not match that on the sides and back, and the roughed out ladder bracing on the inside was not consistent to the better construction of the sides and back. The neck and tuners may have been replaced too. The neck attached to the body with a very rough cut dovetail in pine, again not consistent to the better construction of the sides and back. The tail block was a better finished hard mahogany, which I feel the original neck block must have been. All the inlay on the neck and head were crude. Most were off center and slightly angled and had gaps between the inlay and ebony. The bridge had at one time been horrendously "repaired." It had been replaced with a cheap metal one that was fastened with flat-head wood screws

Assessment & Inventory 2



The back of the guitar was in great shape. The sides had cracks, but were repairable. The wood was a beautiful, finely grained Brazilian rosewood, but it was a laminate, which put this guitar, originally, in a budget class. However, many "budget" instruments in the 1940's up to the mid-1960's were well crafted and often made with decent woods (usually seconds, or, as in this case, laminates). The back inlay strip and binding were very nice--and were real wood, not celluloid or plastic. Only a small section had pieces missing.

Restoration



From the shape of the guitar and its wide neck, I felt this was originally a classical guitar, so I decided to restore it as that. Because of the condition of the top and fingerboard, I wasn't able to save them. I ended up creating a new top out of my stash of old-growth Douglas fir, and put a classical style fan bracing on the underside.

I repaired the neck, which was broken at the heel, and rejoined it to the body. I made a new ebony fingerboard. I got the soundhole rosette and bridge from Stewart-MacDonald's Guitar Shop Supply along with some new classical tuners. After sanding down the entire instrument, I applied six coats of tung-oil varnish.

As you can see, it turned out very nice. As a classical guitar, the sound was fine, but not great--still a budget, or rather student-style guitar. It is now owned by a young beginning guitarist in Santa Cruz, California.