

WAYNE

Made in USA



Wanye Charvel



Interview by Trent Salter

MH: Tell us about your early musical influences.

My early musical influences were without a doubt Dick Dale and the Dell Tones, the Ventures of course, Dwaine Eddie, and Lynn Ellsworth. Lynn and I would go down to the Rondaveau Ballroom on the weekends and listen to Dick Dale and everyone did the Surfers Stomp, it was great music and great times. Lynn and I later started a company called Boogie Body Guitars.

MH: When did you first start playing guitar and can you recall what your first guitar was?

I started playing guitar approximately when I was five years old, it was an old beat up Stella guitar that my dad gave me. I only played it for about a year and gave it up until 1959, when I went down and bought my first 1959 Fender Stratocaster Non-Trem guitar and a Fender Tweed Tremolux amp. I recall both of them. I made payments on them, they were around \$495 for both of them including the case. It was a really great little guitar I wish I still had it.

MH: When and why did you first show an interest in building guitars?

I played in nightclubs for around 13 years and the whole time I was playing, I was repairing guitars for myself and a lot of friends. Once I got the idea of taking them apart and repairing them I thought, gee I could build one of these. Probably around 1961 or 1962 I built my first guitar, I still have the neck to that by the way. I will send you a picture, it was pretty bad but I used to show that neck to some of my students, I taught guitar building too, just to show them you've got to start somewhere, don't give up.

MH: Do you recall the first guitar that you ever modified?

That's a good question. The first one I ever did, which I'm going to send you a picture of the neck, I built that one. Then I made my first guitar pickup

around that same time period with a barbecue motor. I took a gear out of it to make it go faster, and I made a guitar pick by hand. The first guitar that I ever modified was for a guy named Jeff Ross who played a Telecaster really well. We're still friends to this day. He played guitar for the Belemy Brothers for quite a while and what I did to his guitar was I made a brass plate about 3"x3" en routed out the bottom right under his bridge of his guitar because he wanted he wanted more sustain. We sunk that brass into the guitar and we put the bridge back on it and he played it for a couple of weeks, brought it back and said it was to good, it sustained too much, so we changed it and made a thinner plate for it.

MH: Do you recall the first guitar you built?

Some of the first guitars we did were the ones that Lynn Ellsworth and myself did in

Boogie Bodies, I think that was probably in the mid 70's. I was first doing guitar parts and then I were selling bodies and necks and then I hooked up with Dave Schechter from Schechter Guitars, and shortly after that we started making our own guitars.

MH: Tell us about the early days when you

started building literally out of your garage?

I started doing repairs around '71 or '72 in my garage. Like I said, I did a lot of repair with Lynn Ellsworth and Dave Schechter. We would assemble a few and sell them to friends of ours, then I got a call from Fender because I was doing a lot of guitar refinishing too in those days. They needed someone to do their out-of-warranty guitar refinishing, they didn't have time to do it. It would stop their production line if they had to pull someone off the production line to take guitars apart and try to refinish them, so they gave me all that work. I worked for Fender for about 3 years and

they asked me if I could also recover amplifiers and Fender Rhodes pianos in the black tolex. Shortly after that we had some tweed material that we had made up in Mexico and we also made the Specialties Case Co, which we sold the old Vintage Tweed Cases. I would cover a lot of the old Fender Tweed Cases because we were the only ones that had the tweed, and we would put lacquer on them. The original ones had a finish called Proxoleen, which was really close to lacquer. We didn't have Proxoleen so we used an acrylic lacquer over those and we would get that nice finish that the original ones had.

MH: Did you have a special mentor that was influential in getting your start in building?

Yes, I would say that I was building guitars along with a really close friend of mine, Bernie Rico from BC Rich Guitars. I had him put a fret board on a 335 for me years and years ago. I would see Bernie at the BC Rich booth in the early days at the NAMM Show. I was there of course with my guitars and Bernie and I became really good friends. He is a great guy and I really miss him. I'm sorry that he is gone. He eventually hired me to do some work for him at the BC Rich Factory.

MH: When did you feel the lights were starting to turn green for your guitars?

The first guy that I had of any fame was Richie Blackmore. He had a group called Deep Purple. A guy named Bockman who used to come over to the shop, I believe he was the engineer for Deep Purple, Fender had sent him to me in the early days. Fender didn't have a custom shop and they didn't do anything but stock repairs on their guitars. In other words, they wouldn't put a humbucking pickup in like we were doing. You could bring a

guitar to our shop and a stock fender and we would mill out for humbucking in the bridge or one in the neck position. We would rewire it, shave the necks down, and put on fancy metal flake finishes. I was the first guy, to the best of my knowledge, doing hotrod flames on guitars. We got our start there and also with guys like ZZ Top's, Billy Gibbons who would come by and we'd build guitars for him. It was a great time!

MH: Obviously Eddie Van Halen was a huge breakthrough when he introduced the Custom Shop Charvel stripe guitar on the first Van Halen record. Give us a little history of how the two of you hooked up?

Brad Becknal a good friend of mine who worked for me at the time and also played in the band with Michael Anthony, brought Eddie up to the shop one day. We hit it off really well and I started doing guitar work for Eddie. He used to come sit on the floor of the shop and noodle around while I worked on his guitars. I was one of the first guys potting pickups in those days, which means you dip the pickup in hot wax and it keeps it from squealing. I took one of Eddie's DiMarzio's and we put it in hot wax and left it in to long, he was helping me do it. It got to hot and shriveled up, he really liked the looks of that. It did stop the squealing however, and Eddie and I have remained friends all these years. I talked to him recently and he's doing really well and still playing his guitar, things looking good for him.



MH: At that time (circa 1980), how did this affect the awareness of Charvel Guitars?

Eddie Van Halen, of course, when they came out with their first album gave me album credits. Once the albums came out they became quite popular, obviously the dealers were calling me up and asking me, what is this Eddie Van Halen guitar, with all these stripes and everything? I told them it was a guitar that we made for Eddie Van Halen, they said well we want some, so I said ok. Some of the ones we did they didn't put any clear on the guitars, so I said well we'll do them for you but we are going to put some clear on them so that we can block sand the clear down so they are nice and smooth. So we started selling a lot of those guitars that were styled after Eddie's guitar

MH: Leo Fender is recognized as the Father of the solid body guitar, it's also stated that Wayne Charvel is generally recognized as the "Customizer" of the solid body guitar. How do you feel about that?

I feel very flattered about that! Leo Fender was a personal friend of mine, he was a really nice man, I would see him at the trade shows. One time he even came up and remarked on how nice our finish was on our guitars. He asked me about the process we used and I told him. He was always asking questions, he was a very humble man. He always carried a little slide ruler around with him and would measure everything all the time. He was very influential in my profession, I loved Fender Guitars and still love Fender Guitars. I'm very flattered that people would think that I am recognized as the customizer of the solid body guitar! I would like to say, God Bless Leo Fender and Bernie Rico.

MH: In the mid 80's, Charvel sold it's interest to Grover Jackson, give us a brief history of that merger.

Grover Jackson came to me from Anvil Case Co, he was I believe working in the administration part of Anvil Case. I hired him to do the business end of my company. At that time he didn't know or do anything with the guitars. After a while when I decided to sell because of the stress and the money problems we were having, Grover decided he wanted to buy it and I sold it to him.

MH: I understand that about 200 guitars were built by Gibson with WC on the headstock. Can you tell us a little bit of history on that?

After I worked with Bernie Rico, Gibson made me an offer I couldn't

refuse or so I thought. Henry Juszkiewicz and Paul Jernigan approached me and wanted to know if I wanted to team up with them. I was kind of semi-retired at the time and thought this might be something cool. They originally told me we were going to do around 1,500 guitars a month and I would get a royalty on those guitars. That never came about, they kind of dropped the ball on the guitar. The first guitar to go to the trade

worked for Bernie, approximately 9-10 months a year something like that. My job was to go in and buy the machines we needed. We bought a Bridgeport type mill, and an Overhel pen router. I made all the templates for the bodies and necks and got those guys going so they could really speed up production on their guitars. Bernie and I had a great time together, we would go to lunch together almost every day with Bernie's son, Bernie Jr and his son Joey who were working

made it look like a month. We thought, Wow that's cool, we like the shape of that and since we knew that Eddie was going to be a star we named it after him and called it the Star Guitar. Michael took the logo and made our logo for the Wayne guitar. We decided we wanted to make a really nice handmade guitar in small numbers and keep the stress down, sell it to the small companies and not sell it to the big companies. Let them make some money and have something the big three couldn't get.



MH: Tell us a little bit about the company and the involvement of your son Michael. Michael handles all of the business and the computer emails. In addition to all of that, Michael does all the painting, all the graphics and all the flames, with the exception of the airbrush work. We don't do that, we send all the airbrush work to a guy named Jim O'Connor who is the original guy at Charvel Jackson. He did all the

graphics for Kiss and Van Halen and all the various groups. We do everything else in-house, all the flames and pen striping. Michael has been painting for years and he's really gotten it down.

MH: How many different models are offered in the "Wayne" Guitar line and briefly describe each?

Basically we offer the Rock Legend, we did offer the Wayne Special which was a guitar with a quarter inch flame maple top and binding, but we've been so busy that we are about a year backed up on guitars right at the moment. That was such a time consuming guitar to do, we decided not to pursue the binding unless we got a lot of orders. We are just filling up some of the back orders on those now. We decided to possibly not keep that line of guitars, so mostly we are doing the heavy metal guitars.

Right now we are building one for Warren DeMartini from Ratt, and we are doing one for Oz Fox, but they are all really high quality. Most of them have maple fingerboards, we use really, really old maple. We have a really good supply of old maple, it's all Birdseye, we have a few chunks of flame maple mostly Birdseye which is really hard to get a hold of right now. We are using really nice aged Birdseye maple with either rosewood or ebony fingerboards, but mostly Birdseye fingerboards. We use the real Floyd Rose tremos and we use Seymour

show, unannounced to me, put Wayne Charvel on it. I would never have agreed to do that because of the lawsuit with Jackson. They had that guitar at the trade show and low and behold Jackson along with Tommy Moore who had merged with Grover, sued Gibson and myself. We later changed it to WC.

MH: You also worked with your old friend, the late Bernie Rico at one time. What was your involvement with BC Rich at that time?

Bernie and I go back a long time, we are the same age. He called me up and asked me what I was doing one day and I said, Oh I'm just making some of the WC Guitars. He said, I really need some help in my factory, we're doing everything by hand, we're routing these bodies with a hand router, we're taking a file and filing the edges of the guitars, and it's just taking us forever! Can you come down and make some templates, get us automated and use some of the machinery that you guys were using in your company? I said yeah. I went down, Bernie and I went to lunch and we struck a deal.

At that time I

there at the time. Bernie Jr still has the BC Rich Company making some really nice guitars. After about a year, I got Bernie set up, then I got tired of that long drive so I told Bernie that it's time for me to get back to doing what I was doing. So we agreed that since he was all set up that I would do that.

MH: "Wayne" Guitars premiered officially in 1999. What was your goal of this new venture?

My son, Michael Charvel, has been doing guitars with me for a long time, he used to hang around the shop when he was a little kid. I remember one day Michael Angelo came in, he was a really hot guitar player. Michael was really influenced by Michael Angelo along with of course Eddie Van Halen. Michael and I had a joint venture on a music store, and one day he said, I'm getting burnt out on this music store scene, why don't we do a new Wayne Guitar? So Michael came up with the logo, The Star Guitar, which by the way is an Eddie Van Halen basic design. Eddie asked me to paint an Ibanez Explorer for him one time. I said, Ed I can do it but it will be about a month before I can get to it. He was kind of disappointed, imagine me turning Eddie Van Halen down, but this was before he was super famous. He came back the next week and he had drilled holes in the rear part in the shape of a star, took a saw and cut the holes in half and

