

## The Making of the 2010 ABANA Conference Commemorative ABGT Guitar

by Joe Gentile



This year started off with the formation of the Artist Blacksmiths Group of Tidewater (ABGT). Vince Nakovics, the founder of ABGT, had asked if I would be interested in going to the ABANA conference this year. I wanted to attend a conference and jumped at the chance. We had talked about making something for the conference so Vince and I kicked around some ideas. Since the conference was in Memphis, TN there a musical theme that couldn't be overlooked, so it was decided to draft up guitar.

I drew up a sketch and after some fine tuning we agreed on how it should look. The guitar would be assembled using traditional joinery made primarily out of found material and scrap with no electrical welding. This would be a full size guitar modeled after a Martin guitar with the following changes; Hammerhead Key Head; Tongs to hold the Frets; there would be the ABGT Anvil Logo on the body; ABANA around the Sound release hole and Memphis, TN tamped on the Pick Guard and some Copper Flames! We knew that we wanted to heat color most of it at this point, but put those decisions off to later in the construction. All the parts would be made and then put together and then taken apart and colored and finished as decided upon.

I started with the hammer end that holds the keys. Using a scrap piece of aluminum I cut out the shape for the hammer head. I drilled three holes through the hammer head then cleaned out the excess metal for the neck to fit through. I then use an aluminum wedge to secure the head and peened over the neck top.



Using a plasma cutter Vince cut the body and the side for the neck. The tongs were forged from 3/8 round stock and flattened so they wouldn't stick up too high and interfere with the guitar strings being strung.

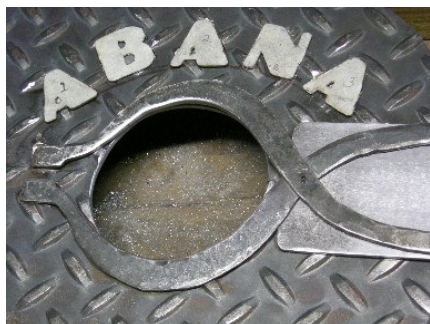


When it came to forging the keys I was trying to think of six simple symbols. I thought of a deck of cards: spade, club, heart and diamond, but needed two more keys. A leaf and a flower seemed to work well.

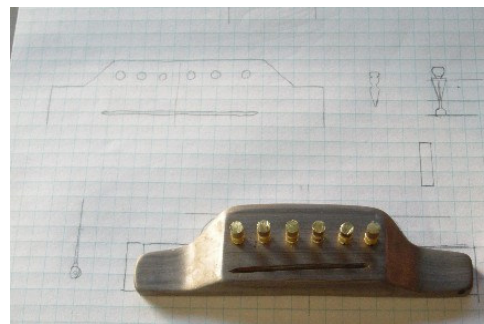
Making and holding the small frets running between the tong reins on the neck was a challenge. In addition securing the frets I had to figure out how the tongs would be held together. At first I was going to use small rivets but it would be hard to connect the back side of the neck. I decided on some small counter sunk screws that allowed me to secure the tongs and hold on the back side. I cut grooves in the reins to hold each fret and of course each fret is a different size so each one has to be placed in its proper order.

When it came to cutting out the ABANA letters Vince suggested using galvanized sheet metal because of the way light would reflect off the facets. I made tabs on the side of the letters to be folded over after passing through the body. In order to hold the letters down properly the diamonds on the body needed to be shaven smooth.

The bridge is made from real wrought iron. I forged it into the bridge using Steve LaPaugh's air hammer. Vince and I forged a rough shape then cut and sanded it smooth. Once I was happy with the look I acid etched the bridge in Muriatic acid. This brings out the grain of the metal that looks similar to Damascus.



I figured out how I was going to attach the strings and started work on the brass bridge pins. The pins were made from cutting some brass rod and using the drill to turn the rod as I contoured it with a hack saw and angle grinder. Holding



those small pins was a challenge especially when I was grooving and polishing them.

The sides of the guitar are made from square channel cut in two. I wanted to have the taps on both sides to allow me to attach it the body and back of the guitar. After lots of grinding and clean up it came time to engine turn the sides. I had some difficulty engine turning the side but after two attempts I was satisfied with the results. I then painted the borders black.



Copper roof flashing was used for the flames but I didn't want to shave all those diamonds off the body. We thought it look good if the flame incorporated the diamond pattern. I cut the flames then pressed it into the body diamonds in a large vice with wood on the copper side to allow the diamonds to press



into the copper.

Using the theme from the ABANA conference flier, which shows a hammer striking the anvil with musical notes, I put the ABGT logo in the center and made the anvil from rusted sheet metal and a polish the hammer head.



This was a slight change from the original ABGT Logo, but we all agreed it would add to the look of the guitar. I was able to secure opposite sides of the sides with screws and then used clamps to bring them in to the waist of the guitar. Once they were in place I secured them with nuts & bolts and was then able to cut and fit the back.

The last stage before final assembly was to pre-fit all the parts together and check for alignment. I cleaned the scale off the guitar body by soaking it in Muriatic acid, then sanded and buffed it to bring out the highlights of the diamonds. From there the guitar body was cooked in the oven at 450

degrees for 50 minutes to give it that bluish/brown/purple color. The neck was also cooked but to a brown/gold finish. The body and neck were then clear coated



Final assembly started by attaching the tongs to the neck then fitting the hammer head on the neck with a wedge.



The ABANA letters were attached by bending over the tabs on the back side, of course the diamond plate was smoothed out under those letters to allow them to lie flat. The ABGT anvil and musical notes were then riveted in place.

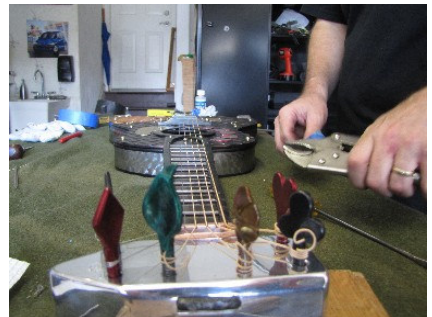
The flames were colored by heating with a torch from behind to give a bluish/red color, but once sprayed with clear coat most of the bright blue color was lost. The flame was then riveted onto the body sans much of its original heat coloring. The pick guard riveted in place after it was stamped with Memphis, TN, polished and clear coated. The side of the guitar was attached using brass rivets.



Attaching the strings presented its own problems. A string was broken and some sharp edges inside the bridge string holes were the cause and needed some detail filing. We were satisfied with the filing and restrung the guitar.



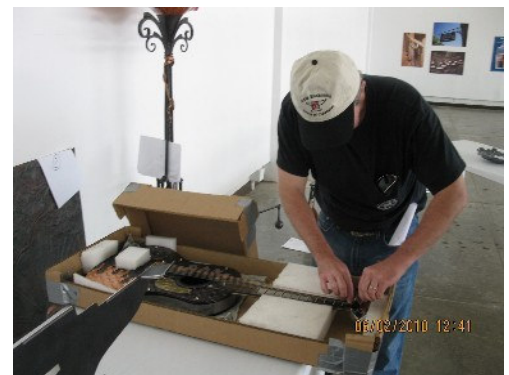
Once the guitar was strung it came time to work on the Guitar's anvil holder. The anvil holder was made from 1/8 inch stainless steel plate. It was bent so the bottom legs could support the weight of the guitar. It was then sanded and polished, painted black with the exception of the edges and my JGANVIL touch mark.



Originally it was going to be stamped with everyone's Touchmark, but it was decided that since the majority of the work was done by Me, I would have the honor of having just my Touchmark on the guitar. I in turn insisted that we should all sign the back as ABGT members and that is what we did. There is one other person that helped out and that is my son Nick, we really appreciated his enthusiasm and input.



Now that the guitar was finished and I am worried about transporting it! I made a special box to carry it and we were off the conference. We delivered the guitar to the Agricenter in Memphis where they were setting up the ABANA gallery.





I was surprised and glad at all the positive comments we received when setting up the guitar in the gallery. During the Auction I was nervous knowing all the hard work that went into the guitar and hoped that it would bring high price for ABANA's benefit.

It made it to Memphis safe and sound!



Going once, going twice, SOLD TO PAUL GARRETT  
How Much!!! We thank you and ABANA thanks you!



I was very pleased to see that Paul Garret resident Blacksmith of John C. Campbell Folk School made the winning bid. I know that we all hope he is as happy with it as I and the other ABGT members were in making it.



**Editor's Note:** We extend a special thanks to Gitte Gentile for putting up with all of us and feeding us on occasion. Gitte also provided us with some special photos that just wouldn't have been available without her. We all thank you so very much. Paul this is the kind of abuse that the guitar was put through before the auction. Vince

If I had a guitar I'd play it in my house, I'd play it in the garden...  
I'd play it all the way to Memphis



Paul does this mean that you bought a used guitar?



What's our next project?