

EGB Symposium & Holy Grail Guitar Show 2016

Impressions by EGB support member and guitar aficionado Heinz Henry Rebellius

For 2016 I finally was able to take off two days from my work to attend the EGB Symposium, and not only the HGGG like the years before. And this definitely was a good decision, although I am not a guitar maker, but just a guitar journalist, author and player. I am tempted to say „unfortunately I am not a guitar maker“, because the camaraderie, which I saw among many luthiers, is just great. And desirable to be a part of it.

I did not hear all the lectures, but some. E.g. I found it very interesting to understand what a CNC can do in the hands of someone like Ulli Teuffel. The CNC machines, usually the scepter of industrial guitar making, indeed can be an artist's tool as well and serve as a well for inspiration and creativity. Then I liked the lecture of this French journalist colleague (I always forget his name, but never his wonderful French accent...), which was about using all these Internet channels at best. This definitely was not new stuff for myself, but I could learn a little, e.g. about Snapchat. And leave Pinterest alone.

I could see that many of the luthiers, who were following this lecture, needed these profound informations, knowing too well that these are important ways to promote the business. Some of them stayed skeptical though, and kept asking if these Internet actions do not steal away too much time. I think this is a legitimate question, and the answer is: discipline. Not saying that this is easy...

While hanging around in these lectures I experienced that many luthiers have the same problems: How to make enough money, how to scale down the hours in the workshop, how to stay healthy and how to keep up a family life. And how to get all these aims under one belt. I was impressed by the story of Jason Kostal, who had worked an unbelievable amount of hours per week (was it up to 120?), until a bad car accident told him to scale down his work now to four days a week, with two or three months of vacations per year. Even some of the younger guitar makers were talking about burn-out experiences, and I guess especially for them it was very good to see that some of their colleagues suffer the same. And some overcame it. To me, this danger of going beyond your boundaries also shows the real passion of many of these luthiers.

Then there were some panel discussions. Although they were interesting, there was one thing, which I did not like. On the board of these panels were only more or less successful guys. Guys, who found their way, who — simply said — made it. I would have liked to see one or the other not (yet) successful luthier, shop owner etc. Just to hear about how this guy deals with his life and fate. But maybe such guys avoid the spotlight, maybe such guys don't go to such events? I don't know. At the end of the day, I just found the discrepancy between the panel members and the audience (many young and not yet successful luthiers) just too big. It was a bit like a concert — the stars of the scene were on the stage, the fans were in front of the stage.

Then there was the Holy Grail Guitar Show, which meant for me nothing but work. And no free time to hang around with luthiers or visitors. What kept stuck in my mind were a good handful of very talented young German makers, of which I haven't heard of before this HGGG. It's cool to see that so many good and different guitars were born into this world.

My personal emotional highlight came with Sunday morning. Maybe because we were writing until late Saturday night, to get the HGGs report on our Internet site, I was a little more sensitive than usual. But when I came to the Show and saw all the instruments set up, which belonged to the Local Wood Challenge, I was deeply moved. This little friendly looking army of about 30 brave instruments self-confidently showed us and the whole world how the future of guitar building could be, and the future in general. This was just something very special for me and touched my heart deeply. I was looking around, 'cause I needed some emotional rescue — and found Emma Elftorp standing just beside me. And I guess, she also was moved by the aura of these instruments, so I just urged her into a bear hug. I think she understood me, at least she did not punish me with an earful. I was in a real good mood after this experience, as you might guess.

My final impressions were that the luthier scene is going strong and is very lively. And yes, the HGGs is a great show, maybe the best show worldwide for these kind of guitars. Good ideas don't come easy, but every HGGs and EGB Symposium bring out some real great ideas. Like the Local Wood Challenge, like the Guitar Lounge (where you could rest and listen to some music), like the Historical spotlight, which this year was on Stauffer guitars. Etc etc. Did I miss something in concrete? To be honest, I must say: No. Maybe some more time to watch some of the demo concerts and listen to more lectures... I'll work on this for 2018.