

Godin **in the press**

Robert Godin



Honoring the Innovators

BY DIANE GERSHUNY



Interview with

Robert Godin

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TOOLS OF THE TRADE • HONORING THE INNOVATORS • ROBERT GODIN

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Godin Guitars began in a wooden window factory in a small Canadian village. Not the image one conjures when envisioning the roots of one of the largest guitar companies in North America—and a company that's staked its reputation on building guitars boasting cutting-edge technology, innovative design and high-quality production.

NEXT YEAR Godin celebrates its 35th anniversary, and with that comes the satisfaction of carving out a leading role within the highly competitive world of acoustic and electric guitar makers. We spoke with founder Robert Godin about the company's beginnings, its products—and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

What's your background? Are you a musician?

There is quite a large musical culture in the province of Quebec, and I was exposed to it at a young age. Family and music was a big thing. I started playing guitar when I was 7 and ended up working for my aunt's music store in Montreal when I was 15. At the time it was more out of necessity, as my father was

sick and my family needed the extra income. That's where I really developed my curiosity and love of the guitar. Sadly the health of my aunt declined and she passed away, leaving the future of her store up in the air. I decided at that young age to take it over but had to have my other aunt sign the papers, because I was too young to actually own the place. Eventually I offered guitar lessons, repair services and started customizing guitars. The shop was becoming quite well known, and musicians would come from all over to have work done. I was quite proud of our little shop—and my aunt would have been, too.

When did you branch into guitar manufacturing?

Well, it was actually on a trip to the

country back in 1971, where I met an older gentleman who made wooden doors and window frames in his small factory in Eastern Quebec. We started talking, and I found out that in his spare time he made an acoustic guitar. I wanted to study it, so I took it back to my shop. I worked out how it could be improved and sent him a list of changes. We ended up building 10 guitars, which I sold within two weeks! We made 24 more, and they sold just as quick. We kept working at making better guitars and at refining the process. In 1972 I created our first guitar factory. This was the beginnings of the Norman line of acoustics—named after Norman Boucher, the woodmaker who I started building guitars with.

How were you able to expand the company?

I didn't have enough financing to commercialize my own guitars at the time, so we built replacement necks and bodies for leading electric guitar companies in North America. In 1982 we created Seagull guitars and brought them to the U.S. I was looking for smaller guitar shops to distribute to in New England, traveling and selling the guitars out of an old Econoline van. We built the business through word of mouth and a network of successful dealers that liked what they were seeing and hearing. It's taken a lot of hard work, trial and error and most of my life to develop this company—nothing has happened overnight.

Just how big is your company now?

We make about 200,000 guitars a year, all made in North America. In addition to our headquarters in Montreal, we run five facilities. We're building our sixth factory in Richmond, Quebec, that will be completed by the end of the year. It's 160,000 square feet and will allow us to expand our capabilities by manufacturing our more popular models, such as the Multiac series and A series basses. Our new TRIC cases will also be made there. It's another step toward the future that I'm very excited about. It's like watching your children grow up in front of your eyes and releasing them into the world.

What was the first product that put Godin on the map?

The Godin Acousticaster back in 1988. It was a real benchmark in the world of acoustic/electric guitars and a model we are still recognized for today. In 1993 we came out with the Multiac—the first real nylon-stringed electric with MIDI capabilities. It opened so many doors for us with musicians and kept us on the cutting edge of new guitar technologies.

How has Godin evolved?

Today we have six brands. The Godin electric line features some of the more innovative concepts in the industry and has set a standard for many. Seagull, our best-known acoustic brand, started with the award-winning S6 Original. Simon & Patrick—named after my two sons—is more traditional and features the high-end Showcase models. Art & Lutherie, which is growing in popularity for its great sound and incredible value. The Norman acoustic line, which started it all. We also have the LaPatrie line of nylon-stringed classical guitars and our own line of revolutionary acoustic cases called TRIC (Thermally Regulated Instrument Case). So yes, we've evolved quite a bit in the past 34 years.

What sets Godin guitars apart from the others?

Godin is an innovative company. We always try to come up with new ideas and concepts to suit the player's needs. And I believe we're known for that in the industry. We're compelled by the endless musical possibilities in guitar design and are always exploring new voicings on acoustics, better electronics on the electrics. Our R&D team is made up of 12 experts and we pride ourselves in our quality and invest in research more than anything. Being a Montreal-based company also sets us apart. It feels great to be a Canadian company and being able to manufacture our guitars in North America.

This is a fact that I'm very proud of.

Is Godin an artist-friendly company?

I believe we are. It all comes down to the quality, craftsmanship and the people behind our guitars. We've never paid anyone to play or endorse our guitars. It's quite simple: Artists and players choose Godin not because they're paid to play them, but because these guitars fill their needs for great tone and craftsmanship. At the end of the day it's about the relationships we develop and being there to help out in any way we can. ■

For more information on the Godin Guitar lines, check out godinguitars.com.