



The only CBG store in the World!

Located in Lowe Mill A&E

2211 Seminole Dr. SW, Studio 106, Huntsville, AL 35805

TheCigarBoxGuitarStore.com

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## FACT SHEET

### History of the Cigar Box Guitar (CBG)

- Beginning in 1865 the U.S. Government required that cigars be sold in small boxes to aid in tax collection. The discarded boxes would be joined to a broom handle or other wooded stick. A wire, often from a window screen, was stretched across it to create a simple fiddle played with a bow or plucked. CBG was originally the poor man's guitar, created by people who wanted to play an instrument but couldn't afford to buy one.
- Built out of a box and a stick, the CBG was often part of a "jug band," a band made up of washboard bass, a jug and a harmonica, and sometimes things like spoons and a comb or stovepipe. Some of the earliest Blues music was created in jug bands. Lightnin' Hopkins, a Blues guitarist that Rolling Stone placed in its Top 100 Guitarists of All Time, frequently played a CBG.
- Other well-known guitarists that have played CBGs include Bo Diddley, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Jimmy Hendrix, Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, Ed King of Lynyrd Skynrd, Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top and actor Johnny Depp. In Huntsville, local musicians Microwave Dave, John Savage, Travis Bowlin and John Nickel play CBGs.

### About Cigar Box Guitars (CBGs)

- Perhaps the most interesting thing about a CBG is that each one has a unique sound (whereas commercial guitars are built to have consistent sound) because of the different sizes and depths of the guitar body.
- The traditional CBG has three (sometimes four) strings. Three strings are easier to play than the typical six string guitar because they are easier on your fingers and hand flexibility.
- CBGs are traditionally tuned Open G, with the strings G-D-G.
- Open G tuning means that many notes can be played as a bar chord (one finger across the full fret) making it easy to play a tune with just two or three different finger placements.

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## About The Cigar Box Guitar Store

- The Cigar Box Guitar Store was founded by John Nickel and his father Pat Nickel in 2010.
- It is the only brick-and-mortar store in the world that focuses on selling cigar box guitars.
- It was one of the first studios to open at Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment, the largest privately-owned artists' community in the U.S. (as of Summer 2023). It is located in the South building on the first floor. Park by the Water Tower, enter through door 15 and walk straight down the hall. It's a few studios down on the right.
- You can find a selection of about 40 CBGs in the store at any time, plus other handmade instruments, including tambourines, stomp boxes, washboard, cello, bass guitars and cigar box amplifiers.

## About The Owners

- Jeff and Tara (pronounced TAR-RAH) Mello took over the store from the Nickel family in February 2021. Jeff is the juried artist for the store and the vast majority of the guitars for sale in the store are built by him.
- Jeff Mello built his first cigar box guitar in April 2019 after visiting the store with an out-of-town houseguest. A longtime hobby woodworker, he was intrigued by the idea of creating what he viewed as "playable art."
- Jeff's first CBG was completely hand built, including building a wooden box from scratch.
- After he built a handful of CBGs, he decided to launch Mad Sci Innovations and began selling his CBGs in the store in July 2019. Mad Sci Innovations guitars are designed to be "playable art." They look substantially different than traditional CBGs and feature custom sound holes, exotic woods and fancier headstocks. Every guitar has a unique theme and features custom inlaid wood accents. Details such as highly-polished necks, smooth-edge fret wires and top-quality electrical details make them desirable by musicians. The most complex of the Mad Sci Innovations guitars, called the Professional Series, include high-end electronics, a balanced body and an adjustable truss rod.

## About The Cigar Box Guitar Festival

- Jeff and Tara Mello, owners of The Cigar Box Guitar Store, are the organizers of the annual Cigar Box Guitar Festival in Huntsville, Alabama.
- It is the longest-running cigar box guitar festival in the world. The most recent festival, held June 2-4, 2023, marked its 19<sup>th</sup> year. This family-friendly event features a kick-off concert on Friday night, followed by a day of music on Saturday and Jazz Brunch on Sunday. [Watch the highlight video here.](#)
- In 2023, the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Cigar Box Guitar Festival featured eight acts as well as a children's area where kids built five different recycled instruments and then performed on stage with the Cigar Box Serenaders of New Orleans. At least 2,800 people experienced some portion of the three-day event. Over \$4,600 was raised for music in schools, benefiting the Microwave Dave Music Education Foundation and Arts Huntsville's North Alabama Arts Education Collaborative.