

The Making of the "Texas Rose"

I play traditional folk music with a diatonic accordion on the streets of Austin, Texas, with a friend who plays a piano accordion. We play lots of Breton, French, Scandinavian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Quebec tunes. We are buskers. We don't make a lot of money playing music, but we have a good time and share our love of music with the people of Texas this way. I have several two row eight bass boxes in different keys, but the one key system I did not have was Bb/Eb, and I have a friend in Norway who plays this key system, and I love listening to anything he plays in Bb/Eb, as it sounds very pretty to my ears. Heaven knows I didn't "need" another accordion, but I had been saving up my money from street music for a trip, and I had quite a bit of money in the bank when I first heard about Stormy Hyde and his beautiful boxes.

A friend of mine had come back from visiting Stormy in Australia, and he gave me a t-shirt with a picture of one of Stormy's boxes on it. Then he sent me a picture of an accordion Stormy had just finished making for someone. I had heard that if I were to ask, Stormy would send me a CD of people playing his boxes, and also a CD showing the different accordions he makes along with all the different types of wood that can be used to make an accordion. He also has a website, so I wrote to Stormy and asked him if he would send me these CDs, as I was interested in finding out about his accordions. About a week later these CDs showed up in my mailbox, and I quite excitedly went to my bedroom with a beer and a smile to check them out on my laptop. There were so many different varieties of wood to choose from, and shell for the buttons, and so many different styles of accordions, and I knew that if I did not like any of the styles he had listed, that I could ask him to try something different. There was also a price list enclosed, and Stormy had also sent me a postcard with a picture of one of his accordions and a leaflet telling more about himself.

I emailed Stormy and asked him what a two row 23 button accordion with two reeds and 12 basses would cost. He wrote back and told me the cost in Australian dollars - so I had to find a website to translate that amount to American dollars, and the cost was only a little over half of what the Australian dollar amount showed. Not bad. I already had two Castagnari Tommys, and the price was approximately the same amount. I wanted one reed less on the treble side and no stop, but more buttons on the treble side and more bass buttons. I was astounded that the cost for a handmade custom box would cost me the same as my Castagnaris.

So I started emailing Stormy and telling him I did want him to make a box for me, and at that time I also began asking about the different woods, as I had no idea what kind of box I wanted - what I wanted it to look like! At first I was going for the very light colored woods and I had a lot of questions, which Stormy very happily answered. And I loved the look of the shell on the buttons, and knew I wanted my buttons to have shell. There were so many different ones. Thinking back, I'm sure it took a couple of months for me to decide on what all I wanted. Stormy emailed me pictures of some different wood he had - called Tasmania Myrtle, and I loved it - so decided I wanted my accordion to have that wood as the main wood. He also used two other woods in this box. I explained to him that I wanted an air button that pushed in - rather than a piece of cheap plastic that pushes down like on a hohner accordion. He told me that was how he made his boxes - with a nice air button that pushes in. And I wanted the buttons to be close together like on a Tommy, instead of further apart like on a larger box, so I measured the space between the buttons on my boxes and gave him that information. I also wanted a step up between the rows, and measured that to make sure it would be close to what I was used to and gave him that information also. I explained how I wanted the keyboard to look.

With all of that information he added my box to a batch of others he was making at the same time, as he makes them in small batches. Transferring the money for my box to his bank account was a small problem as the lowly paid people who work at my bank didn't have a clue as to how to do this, but they finally managed it, and my money went from my bank account to Stormy's bank account. I paid it all at once so I wouldn't have to pay another \$35 transfer fee - some

people pay Stormy in installments, but I decided I would save money sending it all at once.

Every time Stormy would make good progress with my accordion, he would send me emails with pictures so that I could see how it was coming along. In the meantime I recorded myself playing on a minidisc recorder and sent the music to Stormy along with some pictures of myself, so he could see what kind of music I play and what I looked like, so he could have thoughts of me and what I look like and play while he was making my accordion for me. It was a very personal experience. It was exciting to me every time I'd get another picture of my accordion.

When asked about which shell to use, I told Stormy to pick what went well with my box, and that I would trust his judgment. In the beginning I had wanted stops on the bass side of my box, and Stormy had thought he could do this, and then when he found out he could not fit them in that small size of a box, he emailed me telling me this, and offered to start over on another box altogether for me - a bit larger box, but by that time I was thinking of that box as "my box" and I told him I would rather just not have the stops as I wanted that box!!!

Then one day I got an email asking me what I wanted on the outside of my box - what personal emblem. He would make it in silver. I thought, and thought, but had trouble coming up with anything - so then I emailed Roger Poitevin who suggested a rose, and even was nice enough to find one for me. I decided that was a very good idea. I wanted my accordion to be very feminine and pretty. So I sent that picture to Stormy, and he made a beautiful rose to put on my box. Then I decided I wanted my initials on the box also, and he did that too.

Stormy didn't have Bb/Eb reeds in stock, and so had to get those from the maker. He only uses handmade reeds and he let me know as soon as he had them. He also gave me a choice of bellows, and I chose red inside - as it would match my box very well.

When he finished my box, he emailed me to tell me it was done and that he was going to have some people play it - and would record it for me and mail it to me so I could hear the tuning, as we had been talking about that. Originally I wanted a very wet tuning, but after much thought I decided I wanted it to be midway between wet and dry. He had a get together at his house and had people play my box, and a lady who stopped by also played the box, and they all talked about it on the two CDs he sent to me. He went through every note - both bass and treble sides and talked about the tuning to me. Then he mailed the CDs off to me.

They got to me the day before Christmas. What a wonderful gift it was too!! I listened to those CDs over and over for days - and emailed Stormy that I didn't want any changes - that it was perfect just as it was. He emailed me back that he would be sending my box in just a few days. He does several tunings on a box to make the sound perfect.

The accordion was shipped out to me, and I waited with much anticipation. It got here very quickly. I was so excited to get my box home from the post office. I found out the day before that it was there, but by the time I found out with a postcard in my mailbox, it was too late to go pick it up, as the post office was closed. I had thoughts of my box in my mind all night and hoped it didn't get hurt in transit.

He had sent both a hard case and a soft case, and had sent the straps separately to me, and they had already been delivered.

I had a big smile on my face when I first saw my box - it was better than bringing home a new baby! It was gorgeous! It played so beautifully I was amazed. It has a much prettier sound than my Castagnaris. It's not as loud, but the sound is lovely. And the action on the buttons is so fast. Stormy makes his reedblocks a special way so that they will play light and fast. I was in awe of this accordion. And I still am. I would sometimes mess up areas on songs that go fast with my other boxes, but with this one, I don't mess them up - I think maybe my fingers were just too fast for those other accordions, but this one responds well to a quick touch. And the weight of it is

less than a Tommy, and it is almost the same size, but with all these extra buttons. I couldn't bear to leave the room and not see it. I didn't want to go anywhere! I wanted to just sit home and play this accordion for a couple of weeks.

Then I took it out to show it off to my friends - they were also in awe. My buddy who plays on the street with me said it fits my personality. He was also amazed with the light quick way it plays.

I am very happy with this accordion, which has been named the "Texas Rose", as it is a new style of accordion that Stormy had never made before. The tuning was even different from anything he had ever done for anyone else.

It was a grand experience to have this beautiful accordion made just for me, and one I hope to repeat again when I get more money saved from my street music!! I have the highest regard and respect for Stormy Hyde and the wonderful gift he has of making beautiful accordions.