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## My Road to Low A

**A recent 7-string devotee describes her conversion.**

by Diane Hubka

When not playing and singing solo, my favorite performance format is to sing in a group with at least two guitars; interesting, fun arrangements generally result. On tour, I try to arrange performances with my favorite guitar duos in various cities, for example: LA- Barry Zweig & Jim Fox; TX- Terry Hankins & Joe Lee; DC- Paul Wingo & Steve Abshire, SC- Howard Paul & Jerry Sims. We usually have a bassist too, although with 7-string guitarists we don't really need a bass player.

I myself have played the 7-string archtop guitar since September 2002. My own conversion to the 7-string is kind of a funny story:

It was last September, while singing in Hilton Head, SC with two great 7-string players - Howard Paul and Jerry Sims. I actually owe it all to GOLF as Hilton Head is a big golf resort. We were scheduled to perform that weekend at the Jazz Corner, a very nice jazz club there. I was excited at the prospect of singing with Howard and Jerry, and the Jazz Corner provided me with a nice condo near the beach to stay in. Howard and Jerry picked me up at the Savannah airport the night before, and drove me to the condo, where we had a rehearsal. Then, as they were leaving, they asked if it was ok to leave their guitars with me, as they wanted to play golf the next day before the gig.

Of course I LOVED the idea! First of all, Howard plays a beautiful blonde Benedetto and Jerry had a gorgeous BLUE Comins! It was amazing. It was like being back at the Smithsonian's *Blue Guitars* exhibit all over again, seeing that exquisite craftsmanship! (Bill Comins had made one of the original Blue Guitars, and Jerry asked him to use the same color on his 7-string!) I'd become very caught up in the excitement of the Long Island and Philly Guitar Shows, and was VERY inspired by the Chinery collection, so it was quite a moment for me.



Even though I'd never played a seven before, it was fun to try to play them. On our gig I listened to and watched the guys intently; afterwards they gave me a lesson, and I was completely hooked! I was so blown away by the low-A bass string. The difference between the 6 and 7-string is not only that you can grasp lower notes simultaneously with higher notes, but also the wonderful harmonic spread the 7-string gives a chord. Imagine playing a closed-voiced chord in the middle of the piano, and then dropping one of those notes down an octave. It's the open space between the notes in the chord that makes it easier to hear, and much nicer to sing to.



I immediately knew I had to switch to 7-string and Jerry Sims was very positive; he said it's really not that difficult to play 7-string. First of all, the low A string is simply an octave below the 5th string - same notes of course. And the other six strings are all tuned normally. Jerry lamented, "All 6-string players say the same thing: 'I have enough to handle with six strings; I can't handle seven!'" Of course, that is what I used to say! Jerry said it would only take a few weeks to play everything I knew on the 6-string on the 7.

Armed with that encouragement, I sold my Schaefer 6-string (which I had just bought and really loved) and there was no turning back. I bought a 7-string laminated "American Dream" from Dale Unger, and three weeks later I played my first solo gig! I am studying with Howard Alden, and have also had a couple of lessons with Bucky Pizzarelli. I'm thrilled to say that Dale invited me to play on stage at the Philadelphia Guitar Show in June 2003, representing American Archtop guitars. I sang and played a few tunes solo and then Walt Bibinger, another great American Archtop guitarist, joined me.



I have also asked Ed Schaefer to build me a 7-string, which he's doing now. In May 2003 I went down to Fort Worth, TX to sing in a Schaefer Guitars-sponsored clinic and concert with three great faculty members from UNT (Joe Lee and Terry Hankins, guitar and Lynn Seaton, bass). I hand picked out my wood and even got to help design the headstock, since it's the start of a new line for Schaefer Guitars! While in Fort Worth I met Ed's friend & fellow luthier, Bo Walker, and I asked him to build me a classical 7 too! - because you can never have too many guitars!

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