



Simon interviews : Philippe Dubreuille – Guitar maker and repairer "un luthier français"

Simon: So I'm here in the wonderful workshop of Philippe Dubreuille, a luthier, who has recently returned to Brittany. Brittany's your original home?

Philippe: No, no, no. I was born in Paris, a long time ago.

Simon: Okay.

Philippe: The place was Bois Colombes

Simon: But returned to France after a very lengthy stay in...

Philippe: 20 years yeah, I stay 20 years in London. I come originally from Haute-Savoie around Switzerland and all that.

Simon: So you're a guitar maker and repairer and all things guitars?

Philippe: Guitars and all strings er instrument.

Simon: Okay.

Philippe: Yeah, I done sitars, er bass. So, not just guitar. Every single can have a string, I can manage to do something you know

Simon: So tell me, er you spent 20 years in England. Tell me, tell me where you were and and why why did you go?

Philippe: Why I went there? Because at one point, I was around Switzerland and the things they were not going fast as I want, as I wanted. And probably I've done all the turn, you can do around there. It was not enough speed for me. And er I think I had much more things to to say, you know. At one point when I went out of France, I went to Portugal and I direct a factory of a classical guitar. That's for 7 er 9 months I think I stayed there. But it was not my um. It was really interesting because I learn a lot of things and also I was directing 30 people at the time.

Simon: Okay

Philippe: And then more say say to the guy, everybody knows how to do a little bit of job but not complete a guitar complete, complete, you know. Okay, you do you do that job, you do that job. And and then at the end, it was a kind, a big production, you know?

Simon: OK

Philippe: Maybe I don't know maybe 200 guitars a month or

Simon: Like a production line.

Philippe: Production, yeah yeah.

Simon: Rather than individual artisan

Philippe: Yeah, yeah. And was a factory that now doesn't exist, because *Comment s'appel je raquis* the place was Guitarras Cigana, and the guy was, er he was a distributor. And he took the market of the Spanish guys from Alhambra I imagine, and doing the guitar half price with the same quality you know, then the Spanish they they they they kill him. You know.

Simon: Not literally

Philippe: No, not literally. He went now he live in Brazil somewhere and probably continue to do guitars or whatever. OK.

Simon: So and then you moved to London?

Philippe: Yeah after a friend of mine. Because I went it was probably in the start of the 90s I went to London at one point, you know. Why you don't come to London, there is some work for you here. Neil he needs somebody now is in Denmark Street, he got a shop in Denmark Street. He's got so much work to do. And er they cannot finish it. You know. In my work. I work really fast, you know, I'm really fast. Used to have some other guy they they work in there, take their time to take the tea, they read the newspaper and all of that. Very laid back. They good technician but they're not.

Simon: They're slow

Philippe: Yeah. They miss a bit of fire, you know. And work also with Brian Robertson, you know, is the guy who you know, he was the guy who was playing the the guitar with er Thin Lizzy and used to have another little shop, you're familiar place to do some repair and all of that. I was doing some fixing the guitar for him another place over to continue business. After the boss, because he was not his shop, he was a kind of er guy er, Mafia maybe you know. Er, used to have the shop and invest in different kind of things. He was no more interesting to do that. Then he has to move and move to Denmark Street.

Simon: Right. So just for our listeners er who may not know but Denmark Street, is the Tin Pan Alley of London. It used to be er the music capital of of London. It has or it had er dozens of music publishers there which would have grown up in the 20s and 30s and 40s I guess, and became I guess during the 60s and 70s it became a sort of guitar capital as well.

Philippe: Yeah. Yeah.



- Simon: So there were lots, there were lots of guitar shops there and I I remember going there for guitar repairs at Andy's, Andy's workshop and you worked at a place next door? Or?
- Philippe: No. I didn't work for Andy. Used to have a workshop special for the repairs it was Neil. The guy was in Croydon. Moved there and *bon* I found myself in the middle of the centre of the music business. The first year they were really cool. But bit by bit really changed you know. The rent they went up and all of that. The greedy people and all that. And now *bon*, then Denmark Street
- Simon: It's just a front now. Isn't it. They pulled down everything behind it, they kept all the frontages, but it's all new buildings behind.
- Philippe: Yeah, the 12 Bar is gone and we used to have some other little club, every night er two, three bars, I was fun, you know.
- Simon: So you were in Denmark Street really in the funky times when there were loads of guitar shops and people coming to get their guitars repaired people getting guitars built, you must have run into some fairly famous celebrity guitar players down there where there's some ...
- Philippe: All the famous celebrity, I probably worked for them, you know.
- Simon: Okay. So I guess we'll have a good story. Is there a celebrity who was terrible to work for or was there somebody who was great to work for?
- Philippe: Um. It's money also you know, terrible or not terrible. I want to, I need to make my my living you know. Er some of the guys they were really famous also the prestige, or to to do something, I got some guys like er Edwyn Collins who er repair some guitar for him. And er the the big one er Oasis, VDI(?) after, more or less all the people they're really famous in London now.
- Simon: They came to London to get guitars done.
- Philippe: Yes
- Simon: So what made you decide to leave London and come back to France.
- Philippe: Ah, *bon*. Denmark Street are really closing. And er there is er those guys, ?? belonged more or less to one or two people you know. And more, they're just interested by money, they make people believe, okay, we love the music, we're going to keep the things running. Is nice to have that that kind of vibe, but they really don't care. They're gonna do some er McDonald or whatever, who pay more money and some hotel, deluxe or whatever. If you want to have the Viper to, to, to feel like a rockstar, you go to that hotel, and you pay er five grand. And er all those guys, they were doing some little job, and and and really putting the real life on it, they all

gone. The shop, they shrink, also you know, on the back, if you go to er that shop, where the Rolling Stones and all of that er now shrink in half, you know.

Simon: Yeah, of course, we should say also, I mentioned earlier that the publishers had their offices there and during the 70s I know and 80s in fact there were recording studios too, weren't there, in Denmark Street, so the publishers would have studios for people to record demos in and many many bands, many famous bands made their first recordings in Denmark Street.

Philippe: Black Sabbath, they record in Regent Sound, the Stones, er Tin Panel Alley Studio, The Pretenders, er but the Sex Pistols you know they they were squatting in front of the of the road you know and now the shop, the name is NoTom. Really have a story David Bowie was, his favourite café was on the corner and er Jimi Hendrix ok, you can see Jimi Hendrix coming in a shop and looking for some guitars and other things. But now all that is gone. Is is la façade you know?

Simon: Yeah. So, so you're back to France and what are your plans here? What are you doing here?

Philippe: *Bon*, All my career, career is done. I um, I don't think I'm going to find some people more famous than I did you know in the past and all of that. Because I want to make guitar for Iggy Pop, for The Cure, for Aerosmith, for ZZ Top, for for nearly every everybody, you know, of of my generation, you know, the music was the vibe of that time.

Simon: Yeah

Philippe: Probably met them all you know, and do work for them or, or make a guitar or whatever. You know.

Simon: Okay, so you're back here France, you've set up this lovely workshop here. You make some pretty interesting guitars.

Philippe: Yeah, yeah, I'm a kind of a – I don't like repeating stuff. You know, I'm a creative guy. You know. I just love to do some unusual instruments if the guy's got the idea and all of that. I know there is a lot of interest now because the people they look for some guitars, vintage all of that.

Simon: Relic'd.

Philippe: Relic'd. I do that you know, also pretty well you know

Simon: I'll just explain to our listeners who might not know, that relic'ing a guitar is taking a new guitar and making it look as if it's been played by some old blues band for 60 years. You knock all the varnish off and scratch it and make it look well played.



And it's a bit like buying a pair of Levi's that have been stone washed and got holes in them, isn't it?

Philippe: Yes, yes. Is is that. But there is a technique. It could be really done well or really bad you know. Some people try to do that. It's a question of also of varnish, how to do the varnish and all of that. Like that. It is like an alchemy, you know. It's not just it's not just scratch it and banging the guitar everywhere you know.

Simon: Okay, Philippe. Thank you very much for talking to me today. It's been really interesting and here's to more great guitars.

Philippe: Yeah? Cool!