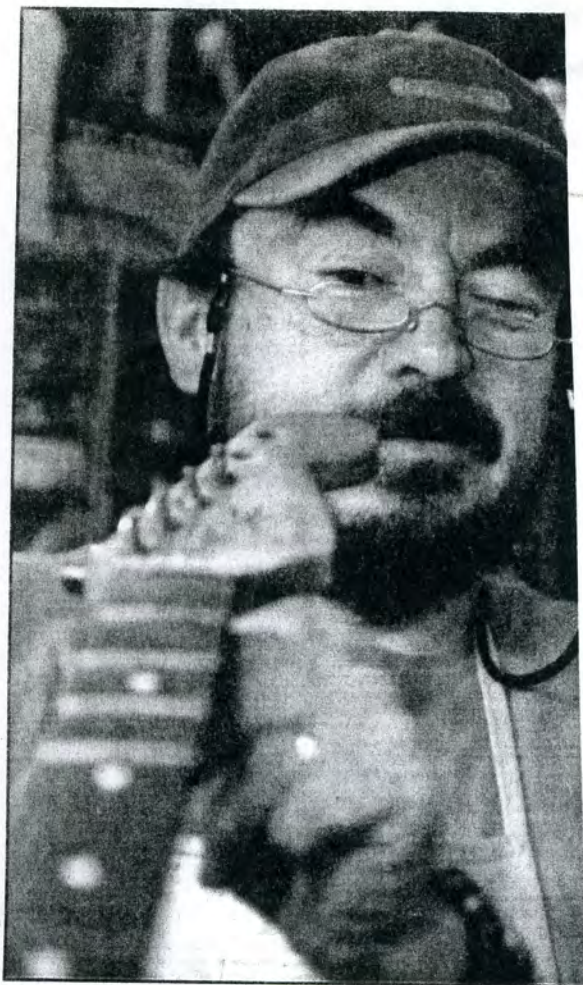




PHOTOS BY NANCY SIDELINGER/SPECIAL SECTIONS PHOTOGRAPHER

Above: John Tatum of John's Guitar Shop in Winston-Salem has experience teaching guitar, banjo and mandolin at Forsyth Tech and UNCG and is now a full-time music teacher. Top right and below: Tom Henry of Tom's Guitar Service in the process of a partial refret of a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar. Henry is trained in classical instrument repair but began repairing guitars in the early 1980s while working in Boston as a musician.



Jobs that ROCK

Three men prove
you don't have to
starve to be an
artist in the local
music business



BY SHALINI CHATTERJEE
Special to the News & Record

Like many performance-centric careers that appear effortless and glamorous, working in the music business is harder than it looks. But there are many niches and opportunities for regular work.

These days, it's easy to get confused about what the music business is. It is not about a person on a television show, singing to canned tracks with no musicians or equipment in sight. That's all about television and the exploding realm of contests and non-scripted, inexpensive programming. Careers in the real-life music business involve self-starting attitudes, constant work and perseverance. People who work in the music business and peripheral businesses go to work every day with their tools, which could be a lesson plan, a Ventures record, a guitar or a soldering iron.

The Triad is a hub for many of these work-

ing individuals. They seem to live an almost underground existence below the overwhelming surface of cultural conventionality, but their self-perpetuated work lives are real, vivid and stable.

Repairing instruments, teaching music

Located in a scenic spot on Brookstown Road in Winston-Salem, Brookstown Stringed Instruments houses two self-run businesses run by lively individuals whose jaunty personalities infuse the place with an air of old gas-station authenticity. Stringed instrument/guitar repairer Tom Henry and guitar teacher John Tatum maintain an old-time level of high-quality workmanship and camaraderie while staying busy.

Henry didn't expect to repair guitars for a living. It just ended up that way. Nor did he expect to wind up in the South. That just sort of happened, too. After attending school in Boston, he decided to visit family in Winston-

Salem in 1990 and ended up staying.

After a dozen years running the service department at the local Music Loft, he opened his first independent repair shop, Nothin Shocking, a tube and equipment supplier. He has now been repairing instruments independently for 15 years.

In Boston, Henry played music every day from 1981 to '89 with heavy-metal band Terra Firma, and jazz guitar on weekends. Musicians usually hold down odd jobs in order to play music and bring in enough money to scrape by.

Henry branched out by getting into repair work.

"I was a broke musician, and over 30 years it's developed into full-time work," he says.

So why was there suddenly so much repair work in the early '80s? The answer: heavy metal.

"The 1981 metal phase got me into repair.

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In '81 you didn't have a mish-mash of instruments. There were heavy metal guitars with double-locking systems. I said, 'I can repair those!' I (secretly) didn't know a thing about them. So I spent two years doing that," he says.

Henry's clients run the gamut from owners of vintage instruments to N.C. School of the Arts students, whose stringed instruments need repair. He points out that while he is trained in clarinet repair, and other classical instruments, he is not trained in guitar repair, which is only really learned by practice. "They (NCSA students) bring in violins, etc.; things I was trained in repairing," he says.

"It's a hard business to get into," Henry continues. "Cosmetics are complicated."

The best way for anyone to get into the guitar repair business, he adds, is to jump right in and start, like he did. He advocates self-employment to gain the most hands-on experience with a variety of guitars.

"In the repair biz, those people trying to break in now work for warranty departments. Most people who are experienced are working on their own."

On the music instruction side, John Tatum has experience teaching guitar, banjo and mandolin at Forsyth Tech and UNCG, and is now a full-time music teacher at Brookstown Stringed Instruments.

Tatum and Henry met 12 to 15 years ago (neither can remember exactly when) through the center of Winston-Salem's music scene — the late, venerable Sam Moss.

"Some retirees want to learn how to play banjo. They say, 'I've been waiting all my life to learn how to do this.' You're never too old."

— John Tatum, music teacher and owner of John's Guitar Shop in Winston-Salem

Tatum currently teaches about 20 students "at \$15 per half hour, and that adds up," he says.

The work is pretty steady, though it revolves around the school year. "Summer's quieter with the students gone, but after Christmas it's really good. Everyone gets guitars," Tatum says.

Tatum's students range from seven to 60 years old, with the older ones often fulfilling lifelong dreams they had put off.

"Some retirees want to learn how to play banjo. They say, 'I've been waiting all my life to learn how to do this.' You're never too old."

Tatum cites several advantages he enjoys in his job: his hours are flexible, although he normally must be available from 3:30 to 8 p.m. on weekdays after school lets out. In addition, most music teachers pay the storeowner a percentage of the lesson fee, but by being his own boss, "I get to keep all the money," Tatum says.

The bar gig

Much like Henry and Tatum, Clay Howard established himself as a

singer by just doing it. After years of singing in Triad-area bands, Howard is now a regular live entertainment attraction at Brewballs in Burlington. He plays from 10:30 p.m. to 2 a.m., a gig that started out as a mix of originals and covers that quickly became popular covers.

"I had no idea that the 20-somethings of today considered Guns N' Roses classic rock, until it was requested for the hundredth time," says Howard, a 30-something father of four in Kernersville.

Howard landed his gig, which was originally on Thursday nights, purely from his reputation as a lead singer in bands such as Diggin' Taters and Barely White, "a kind of R&B/funk band. I had played there (Brewballs) in bands going back to 1997, so when I decided to try to earn some extra cash, I called and asked to play an acoustic gig, and that quickly turned into an offer to play weekly, and here we are three years later."

The move to Friday nights made more sense in terms of revenue.

"Moving to a weekend night made it more lucrative, being that more bodies came in the door simply because of the day of the week. More bodies



NANCY SIDELINGER/SPECIAL SECTIONS PHOTOGRAPHER

Tom Henry (left) and John Tatum met more than a decade ago through the late Sam Moss, a local musician. Located in a scenic spot on Brookstown Road in Winston-Salem, Brookstown Stringed Instruments houses Henry's instrument repair business and Tatum's music instruction business.

equals more tips," he said.

When Howard approached the club, he estimated a fee amount based on his experience as a bar band singer.

"I just threw out a number and adjusted that accordingly when it turned into a regular gig. There is a guarantee, and the people at the venue are very good about tipping," he says.

Generous patrons are important, as Howard makes much of his money from tips.

Because Howard plays in other working bands, mainly area rock band Stratocruiser, he has to juggle his schedule, musician-style.

"Now that my Brewballs gig is on

Friday nights, it's not a hassle at all, as far as my day job goes. When the gig was a standing Thursday night gig, Fridays were very long days at the day job that I had at that time. The Thursday nights ended about the same time that job did. I have played several two-in-a-night gigs where my (other) band will play an opening slot in Durham or Chapel Hill and then I drive to Burlington and play the three-and-a-half hour acoustic set.

"I have also turned down several band gigs, since the Burlington gig has a guarantee, and this has become part of my household budgeted income."