



I would like to credit the following quotes to the book shown here.

device for making sound.

Despite their relatively large size, acoustic guitars are not all that loud, and the sound that they do emit must compete in a crowded part of the frequency spectrum. In a bluegrass band, for example, the violin is louder than a guitar. So is the mandolin.

Despite their small size these instruments play in a much higher register, to which the human ear is more sensitive. The Dobro, a guitar played horizontally with a metal slide, is louder because it has a metal resonator. The sound emanates from a mechanically driven loudspeaker—a metal version of what you'd find inside your home stereo—mounted inside an inert body. And the banjo is essentially a drumhead with a neck and strings, and played well or badly, it can drown out even the loudest guitar. This, in particular, has been a source of consternation to guitarists since, well, forever. In the post-PC world, banjo players have joined

And indeed, the story of the guitar has in many ways centered on sound levels. At the Experience Music Project museum in Seattle, there's a compact exhibit on the history of the guitar called, appropriately, the Quest for Volume. Curated by Peter Blecha, with guitar historian Walter Carter, who chose the fifty instruments for their historical value, the exhibit is very well done. For example, you can hear many of them being played by virtuosos like Frisell and his sometime sidekick, slide guitar player Greg Leisz.

If volume was the guitarist's holy grail, the easy answer was technology. Even the loudest acoustic guitar has its limits. That's why early jazz guitarists like Charlie Christian attached primitive pickups to their archtop guitars. This helped some, but the guitar's resonant nature caused howling feedback, so there was a distinct—and very moderate—limit to how loud they could play.



But for Wayne Henderson, who doesn't even own an electric guitar, all of this is the road not taken. Which is not to say that volume is unimportant to him. It is one of the things that makes a Henderson guitar not only different, but better. In the world of bluegrass, a loud guitar is affectionately known as a cannon. It's not the most apt analogy—the *1812 Overture* notwithstanding, no one has ever touted the musical qualities of heavy artillery—but it drives the point home. In the world of the acoustic guitar, volume is an unalloyed good—so long as it's not achieved at the cost of delicacy of tone or structural stability.