



Dave Begalka plays his creation – a Lapro – in his work space.

# A guitar pro creates Lapro

Mankato guitar maker Dave Begalka has created a model of guitar that puts a new twist on an old tradition – and sounds great.

By Joe Tougas

Photos by Dave McCandless

**W**ith a diverse appreciation for what a guitar can do, Dave Begalka took the next step and created one of his own.

In doing so, he has taken a left turn from tradition, put wood where steel used to go and has begotten an entirely new type of guitar: The Lapro Electric Resonator. A few thousand people saw and heard the axe in action when Steve Kimock (Ratdog, The Other Ones) took it front and center at the 10,000 Lakes Festival this summer.

Begalka, of North Mankato, has long been a champion

guitarist, one of those players who can comfortably play with a jazz combo or punk band. A Dobro player with the acoustic group B-Squad, Begalka also put in time as bassist with the Libido Boyz, a concentrated explosion of passion, power and a deceptive amount of precision.

Years passed. Hair was cut. Love, marriage, family and jobs all followed and Begalka eventually opened his own business, Mankato Woodworks. It was here that he created the Lapro – a six-string guitar that gets its unique tone from the use of a wood resonator rather than a steel one.

Resonators – or cones – are the part of steel guitars that vibrate and give volume. They were used in the days before amplifiers so jazz guitarists could be heard among horns, drums and pianos. The brand was National, and the National

steel eventually became a staple sound in blues.

What Begalka has done is create an electrified resonator guitar that uses a wood cone instead of the steel. The result is an instrument that – like its creator – fits comfortably with any genre. Plus, it has a depth of tone that makes an interesting difference. (To see this thing in action, click on the video at [www.myspace.com/mankatowoodworks](http://www.myspace.com/mankatowoodworks), or catch a B-squad performance).

Begalka has two Lapro designs – one to be played like a standard guitar and the other to be played on the lap like a Dobro. The design of each is compact – two buttons for an array of tones. And these hand-crafted works are now, officially, for sale.

It all began with salad bowls.

Last year, Begalka was at his lathe in the Mankato Woodworks shop ready to make wooden bowls for holiday gifts. He was halfway finished with one and set it down.

“I looked at it later,” he says. “It struck me that the shape and

size is the same as a National-style resonator guitar cone. I thought ‘Why couldn’t I just make one out of wood and see what happens?’ That’s how that started. And I just continued experimenting with bits and pieces of stuff that were lying around the shop until that first pretty nice-looking prototype came about.” Work on the guitar continued, and he sought out advice from some stellar players, including Lance Keltner, a journeyman guitarist from Texas and guitarist for Rod Stewart. It’s Keltner playing on the audio recordings of the Lapro on Begalka’s MySpace site.

“I was impressed by the bowl,” Keltner says. “The bowl provides a very unique tonality. No one is doing anything quite like that.”

Keltner had also advised Begalka to give the instrument a more vintage look through the finishing process.

Begalka was also able to connect with Kimock, who had worked as lead guitarist

for the post-Grateful Dead groups The Other Ones and Ratdog. Kimock used a Lapro when his band, Crazy Engine, performed at the 10,000 Lakes Festival. Begalka found him online and Kimock agreed to help road test and evaluate the guitar.

Comments afterward were helpful – Kimock liked how well the guitar played and its variety of tones, Begalka says. “The critiques were mostly ergonomic...the way the guitar sat on his lap wasn’t as easy as the Fenders he usually plays.”

A New Ulm high school graduate who excelled at basketball and music, Begalka studied guitar making at the Roberto Venn School of Luthiery in Phoenix in 1994 and 1995. He took his repair apprenticeship in Phoenix and worked for Gibson guitars in Bozeman, Montana.

And he is now the founder of Lapro Steel Resonator guitars, the name of which is a hybrid of lap steel and Dobro.




Begalka created two Lapro designs.

“It’s got a unique tone all its own, tones that are just not capable of being made with a regular lap steel guitar,” he says. Aside from the tone, players will appreciate how it’s constructed to be fairly feedback resistant, which is usually not the case with metal resonator cones.

The cone is about one-eighth-inch thick, made of maple and black walnut. Black walnut makes for a mellower tone with less high end and a good amount of sustain.

Begalka says he’s found the balance of materials that makes for a well-behaved sound – technically speaking – on stage.

“The idea as an instrument builder is to try to make it as even as you can throughout the spectrum of frequencies so that it doesn’t freak out at a particular note or have a note that’s noticeably stronger than others.”

To contact Begalka, visit his MySpace site at [laproguitars.com](http://laproguitars.com). 

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