

Steven Walter is one of a few individuals in the world to be widely known as both a classical guitar builder and performing artist. These are not friendly realms of coexistence when you consider that the demands of both lie with the hands and the building part can get a little rough! However, the most important part is The Journey and when viewed in that context we must conclude the player/builder equation is the best combination of all! - good listener, knows how it should feel, and knows how to fix it. Right?

Of course, another view to take is he simply worked his way through school by fixing guitars. But it's not that simple.

Briefly, Dr. Walter received music degrees from the Boston Conservatory and Florida State University as a player. His skills were so great he was invited to perform recitals and concerts, and was also finalist in one of the world's great guitar competitions. The exceptionally high standard of playing on his recording testifies to a flourishing virtuoso technique and acute musical insight. But these artistic gifts fly in the face of wood shavings, the fret wire and glue that frame a daily scene in his workshop. Is it really possible to excel at both?

Walter's guitar building and playing careers began at the same time in the suburbs of Chicago. Early musical training in drums and electric guitar (with the associated stints in a few rock and roll bands) led him to an interest in a higher form of music. At just that moment, legendary classical guitarist Andres Segovia came to play at Orchestra Hall in downtown Chicago, and Walter was in the audience. "It was a pivotal moment for me," states Walter, "to be in the presence of someone who could make 3,000 people dead silent so they could hear one guitar without amplification. It was completely antithetical to the rock and roll experience." Walter's parents encouraged him to make his own classical guitar, and with the help of a good friend and band-mate whose father was an accomplished amateur cabinetmaker, a new career was born.

In the late 1970's information about guitar building was limited to a few books on the subject. Most professional builders guarded their own work methods, and the market was still dominated by the Ramirez family in Spain. Apprenticeships for a high school teen whose parents insisted on a college education were impossible to find. Consequently Walter's first guitars were rudimentary, at best. "I didn't know what a great classical guitar was supposed to sound like, or feel like, so it is no surprise that my early guitars were not very good."

Walter entered Augustana College in 1980 to study classical guitar performance and finished his degree playing on instruments of his own make, building them during the summers in his parent's basement. In 1984, he began the Master of Music degree program at the Boston Conservatory, starting the degree on his own guitar, but finishing on an instrument made by the great guitar maker Robert Ruck. Walter remembers, "Once I had the Ruck I just stopped building guitars. The sound, playability and workmanship were so superior to what I had been doing that there was just no need to go on. I had a great guitar to play."

After spending a number of years in Boston, honing his skills as a concert musician, Walter decided to pursue a doctorate in music with Bruce Holzman at Florida State University. "I regard my years at Florida State to be the most important in my life for both of my careers," Walter states. "For the first time, I had access to 20-30 great guitars in any given year, and I really came to understand what makes them great. I felt I needed to try building again using all of this new information." Part of that new information was an increased level of classical guitar performance. In 1991 Walter was a major prizewinner at the prestigious Guitar Foundation of America International Solo Guitar Competition, a competition that has launched the careers of many of the world's finest guitarists. Finally, he felt that he knew what he wanted from a instrument, and had a good idea of how to build it.

In 1996 Walter moved to the mountains of western North Carolina and began teaching at [Furman](#)

[University](#) in Greenville, South Carolina. In 2001 he recorded his first solo CD *Steven Walter, Guitar* on the Sonari record label, and has been performing as an orchestral soloist, solo recitalist, and chamber musician in the southeast and abroad. Since 2001 he has been playing his own guitars in concerts and recitals exclusively for the first time since 1986. "I finally achieved a level of guitar making that was equal to, and in some ways surpassing the instruments I had been playing in the years since I bought my first guitar."

In 2015, after 19 years of full time teaching at Furman University, Walter moved back to the suburbs of Chicago with his wife Kristen, and sons Tom and Sam, and is building guitars full time with private teaching and concertizing as side careers. "After years of juggling several careers I felt that it was time to focus primarily on making guitars. Coming back to the Chicago area seems like coming full circle to where it began for me as a guitar maker."

To date Steven Walter has made over 300 classical guitars in addition to a clavichord, two lutes, a steel string guitar and an electric guitar. Most of these instruments have been sold to professional guitarists, students, and collectors.