

TRINITY AMPS:

FINDING THE HARMONIC SWEET SPOTS FOR GUITARISTS

Story by Vic Schukov
Photography by Daniel Vaughan

From early childhood, Stephen Cohrs displayed a mischievous curiosity in performing autopsies on electronic equipment.

"I pulled the car radio out of my grandfather's 1953 Chevy, took it home, opened it up, hooked it to a battery, and made it work. By that time, the car was retired under the oak tree, so Grandpa was okay with it," Steve laughed. "My biggest problem was keeping the battery charged, so I scrounged a spare and a charger, and we then had a radio in our bedroom. I grew up in a family where people built things and played with electronics. I always had mechanical aptitude and loved designing and building things. It was natural to me, things I could touch, things I could see."

Stephen's father Norm built big boats, and the kids helped with everything from woodworking the hull to installing the engine. He also built his own stereo system which Stephen fooled around with as a child: "From him, I also learned how to make speaker cabinets."





When Stephen was three years old, the family moved from Kingston to Ottawa where he lived for 18 years. He returned to his hometown to get a mechanical engineering degree at Queen's University. Upon graduating, Stephen built his first stereo amplifier. "I always wanted the latest and greatest I couldn't afford as a student, so I poured through electronics magazines, reading schematics. I picked up amplifier modules and wired them, turning it into a

finished product from bits and pieces."

His first job was in the heavy steel industry at Stelco in Hamilton. "Predictably, I hung out with the guys in the electrical department where they built controllers. I was fascinated by all the circuitry and relays."

At the same time, he started assembling stereo speakers and amplifiers from scratch which he sold to friends and associates. Electronics fever getting the better of him, Stephen ended up in Northern Telecom in

Kingston as a design engineer. "My objective was to get into the company's digital switching division and eventually I did. That's where they had robots to the max. I was like a kid in a candy shop; I could go for a walk in there with parts flying all over the place. I was a happy camper."

After 17 years at Northern Telecom, he left in 1999 and did some short stints in software start-ups, banking, and health-care industries.

COUNTRYTIME

FURNITURE & HOME DECOR

EST. 1999

RUSTIC | COUNTRY | CLASSIC | CONTEMPORARY
Celebrating our 20th Anniversary of serving
our customers in the Kingston area!



All Furniture
MADE in
CANADA



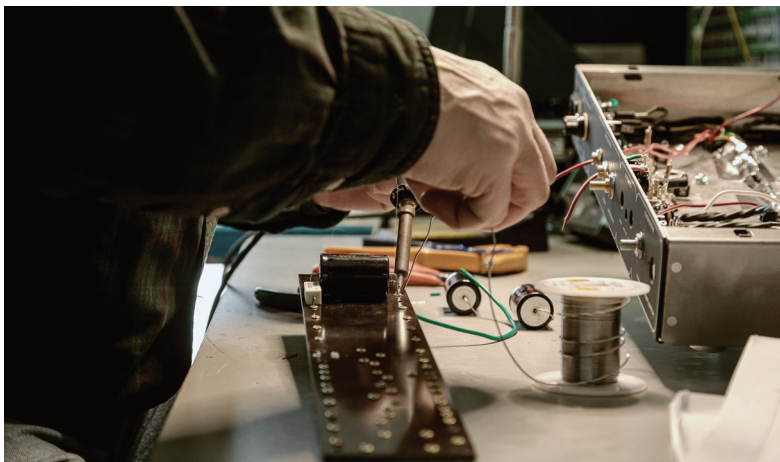
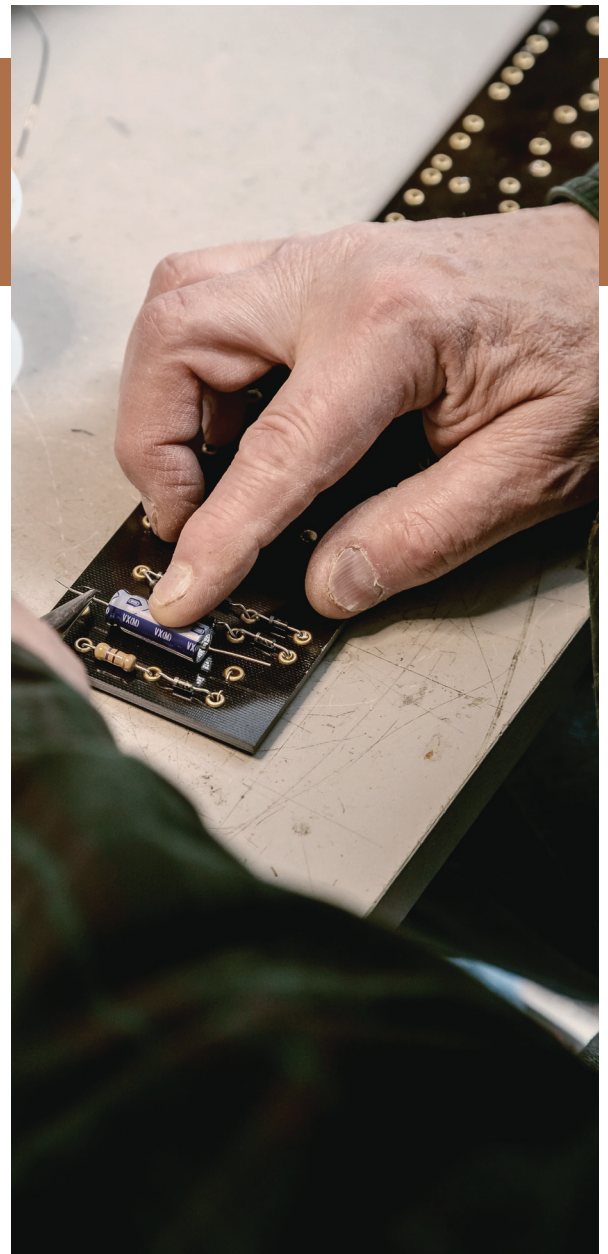
Furniture for every room with everyday fair pricing

Come into Countrytime Furniture where you will find Ontario-made solid wood with your choice of many finishes and textures as well as a large variety of beautiful fabric and top grain leather options. Create pieces to fit your space with customizable sizes and configurations on most pieces such as kitchen islands, bathroom vanities, sideboards or bookcases. We are a family run business with experienced staff who can help you achieve your dream interiors.



ASK US ABOUT OUR MILITARY DISCOUNT!

613-634-1400 | 1245 Midland Ave, Kingston, ON | www.countrytime.ca 



STINKY CANUCK

Quinte's First & Only
Fully Stocked Vape Shop!
Since 2011



Must be 19 to purchase
Military Discounts

3 LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU:

255 Glen Miller Rd. Unit 15 TRENTON | 296 Main St PICTON
111 Milligan Ln NAPANEE | www.stinkycanuck.com

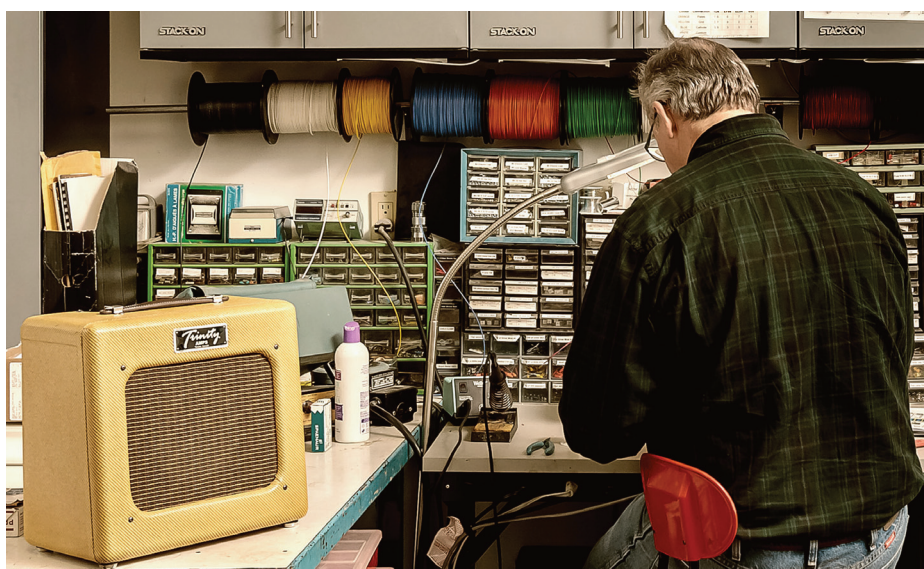
In 2004, while still stoking an innate and bubbling entrepreneurial spirit, Cohrs ventured deeper into his dream vocation by targeting and joining Telus as project manager of new product implementation like phone mapping and global positioning.

Then fate kicked in. "Our 16-year-old son was a guitar player and wanted a killer tube amp. While shopping, we went down into the dungeon of an old shop. My intention was to just find a carcass I could modify. The owner sold us a Marshall 100-watt amp from the early 1970s that could be used in an arena. Andrew needed a bigger speaker cabinet, so instead of one 12-inch speaker, it now had four with enough power to drown us all out. I don't know what I was thinking," he laughed

After Andrew's sonic level threatened to destroy the house, Stephen decided to build him a less destructive 15-watt amp from scratch. For that, he consulted with a tube amp building guru - Glen Wilkins, his father-in-law, a television and radio repairman, and ham radio operator. "I brought a schematic to Glen and asked him if he had the parts. He had it all in old stock and taught me everything about how tubes work. We cobbled it together from the best. It was still plenty loud."

A very pleased Andrew later said, "I was skeptical it wouldn't be like the rock and roll sound I wanted, but when I plugged it in it was overdriven and distorted. We were all blown away by the quality."

Stephen said, "At first, I thought the sound had to be perfect, but my son said musicians wanted the distortion, so I loaned it to a musician I knew at Telus to test. He was



so impressed with it, he wanted one. Then one of my son's friends wanted one, so I decided to make it look professional and incorporated some of my mechanical design skills. I woodworked the cabinets and custom covered them myself. From there, I sold homemade guitar amps, one after another. Guitarists prefer tube over solid state amps because their distortion has a pleasing sound and feel when they are overdriven."

Stephen designed a variety of amps by mixing the flavours of various components like the ingredients in a personal recipe. In effect, he discovered sweet spots on tube operating curves.

In 2004, he started Trinity Amps out of his home. "My son tested them, and my father-in-law coached me on tubes. Trinity, like in the father, the son, and the holy ghost of tubes."

That same year, Stephen received a nebulous email from a gearhead who said he was Billy Gibbons from Texas, same name as the guitarist for ZZ Top. "I didn't actually believe who he was, but he had the money and wanted a certain sound amp with Tone Tubby speakers. I had never heard of them. He arranged to have them sent to me and I installed them in my custom cabinet, after a lot of email conversations with him."

Just as Stephen was ready to ship the amp, he received a phone call from the owner of Tone Tubby, who was checking up on 'Mr. Gibbon's order.' Stephen asked him if this was Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top? "I think he fell out of his chair in laughter. My anxiety level immediately rose knowing it was going to the Rock and Roll Hall-of-Famer."

Gibbons loved the equipment. "I would be in a restaurant and he would call me and say

**Cabinetry
&
Interiors**

WILLIAM DESIGN COMPANY

Design • Build • Renovate • Install

1209 Wilson Road, Hillier, Ontario, K0K 2J0 (613) 399-2344 • williamdesigncompany.com

BECAUSE IT'S CUSTOM, YOUR OPTIONS ARE LIMITLESS



‘Steve, listen to this,’ and I would have to hold the phone away from my ear as he played licks on the other end, like a kid. We have met up several times while he is on tour, and he is a terrific gentleman.”

Other famous clients soon flocked to Trinity Amps, including The Tragically Hip, Donna Grantis, Prince, and April Wine: “A lot of my stuff is one-off. When a musician asks me if I can provide a certain sound, the easy answer is always yes. I then examine my schematic library and tweak and blend them to suit, based on experimentation. Clients find me on the Internet. I call it *word of web*.”

Stephen and his wife Joan moved to Brighton’s countryside nine years ago to escape the stress and congestion of Toronto. In his home workshop, the master craftsman builds upholstered cabinets and amplifiers. He even has a music sampling room. “You can come and pick which sound you like and personalize the cabinet. I encourage clients to take amps home and try them and tell me what they think. I like fussy players because they give me the best feedback.”

“I made one for multi-award-winning harmonica playing blues man Harpdog Brown from the West Coast. I built one based on modifying a 1940s design and loaned it to him for a year while he was on tour. He came back and wanted one of his own. It’s a new design used by harp players who like to mic the flat-out sound of a low power amp, and roots musicians like Lynne Hanson, Canada’s own queen of Americana, who tours extensively with her Triton.”

Stephen even has a startling one-watt design that fits in a knapsack, and by comparison a



«The County’s
Largest Showroom»



124 Main Street, Picton, Ontario

613 476.9259

countyfireplace.ca | stuvamerica.com

75-pound 60-watt bass amp combo. His currency is watts. Like a deaf Beethoven, he goes by magic box schematics, seeing the parts on paper, and hearing the sound in his mind.

What sets Trinity apart from corporate brands is Stephen's willingness - or maybe delight - to work with musicians to find exactly what they really want. "In a store, a sales guy tells you what you should buy. I take your particulars and modify my design to suit your desires and playing style, something you normally don't get when you buy a piece of equipment. We've chosen to cover a lot more sonic ground. People want to know their needs are being considered. I incorporate set tones like a recipe. The ingredients are the components, and if you don't use good quality components, don't expect good quality sound and long life out of it."

Stephen uses old-school manufacturing techniques, based on a lifetime of opening well-made radios and amplifiers. "From examinations, I learned what works and what doesn't, so Trinity is about personalized service, quality components, handmade for the musician. With custom covered cabinets, the sky is the limit because I do it all myself. It becomes a personal item. What we have here is a legacy product, something you can hand down to your grandchildren."

The remainder of Stephen's time is spent providing amp kits. "Musicians are smart people who know their mathematical chords and progressions. It hinges only on the assembler's attention to detail and soldering, reading the manuals, and following instructions diligently."



Nearing retirement, Stephen is philosophical. "I gave myself 20 years in this business, and that's longer than I spent in any other company. Soon, I would like to find someone equally passionate to take it over on my 20th anniversary."

Trinity Amps makes about 20 amps a year with an active waiting list and ships 100 build-it-yourself kits annually with 2,000 customers in 40 countries.

Visit: www.trinityamps.com

COL



**Home is Where
The Heart Is**
Let's make it memorable!

Here's How.

- Custom Kitchens, Bathrooms, Cabinetry
- Hardwood, Carpet, Laminate Flooring
- Hunter Douglas Blinds • Full Design Service!

Visit our Design Gallery for all your home improvement needs.

Picton

Home
hardware
building centre

info@pictonhomehardware.com
13544 Loyalist Parkway, Picton | 613-476-7497