



## Our Friend, The Folding Chair

"For weeding we have a reversible folding chair, light, and easily carried; attached to the top is a broad parachute, which is opened and closed with a spring, operating with the opening and closing of the chair. When you desire to hoe or weed your garden, you approach the bed and touching a spring with your foot, the chair opens out and the parachute unfolds, and seating yourself you begin the task of plucking weeds, with grateful feeling in your spinal column." — from an ad in *The Star and Sentinel*, Gettysburg PA, May 21, 1875.

What has six legs and twelve strings? Me, sitting in my folding chair, playing my guitar. My music partner Lou and I have been helped by many an inanimate object over our almost fifty years of performing, as you might suspect. We are in debt to the capo, the hat for passing, the hat for wearing, the thumb pick, the water glass holder, the music stand, the duct tape, the podium light, the accordion monopod, the microphone, the tranquilizer, the clamp light, the extension cord, the PA speaker, the guitar tuner, not to mention the shoe, the eyeglass, the accordion, the luggage cart, the airsick bag, the computer, the automobile, and in the beginning, the typewriter, the rubber cement, the ditto machine, the tape recorder, and the gin bottle. But of all these things, except maybe the guitar and accordion, the most consistent helper and has been the lowly folding chair.

Probably 70% of our shows feature audiences perched on folding chairs. In fact, the only situations I can think of at the moment where this isn't the case are some of the nicer cabarets, those churches with fixed, non-folding pews, and those venues that use stackable but not foldable chairs. Oh, and also those coffee houses with funky couches and scrounged kitchen chairs. House concerts often have a mix of folding and fixed seating. But even grand auditoriums almost always have seats that fold

at least partially, making it easier to replace the chewing gum.

Folk festivals are like test campuses for folding chair technology; they're more like *Fold Festivals*. You see vast pastures of canvas or nylon and metal-rod folding chairs with armrests and cup holders, folding aluminum-tube and nylon webbing lawn chairs and chaise lounges popularized in the early 1950s, X-legged folding camp stools, three legged metal and cloth teepee-style stools, X-legged captain's chairs, the similar director's chairs (which as far as I can tell are captain's chairs that say "director" on the backrest) and so on and so forth.

They are made of polyethylene, polypropylene, PVC, flat steel, aluminum, titanium, carbon fiber, canvas, nylon, leather, bamboo, teak, mahogany, oak, etc. They have weight ratings of from 250 to 1000 pounds. You've seen 'em all. They range from like eight bucks apiece to, for example, the set of two Anderson Teak Folding Arm Chairs, now only \$715 ("You save \$184.99") from the *Home and Patio Decor Center*. And I'm sure you can spend way more than this if you shop around.

Lou and I have rented folding chairs, sat on 'em, folded and unfolded 'em, dragged 'em across floors, stacked them in piles or racked them in wheeled racks, hauled them with us for our own comfort to outdoor concerts and festivals. In fact, at home when songwriting and/or playing the guitar, I sit exclusively on an old Samsonite all-steel with padded back and seat model that is holding up better than I am. I have been so taken with the allure and mystique of the humble folding chair that five years ago or so, when I was asked to make an "art chair" for a local benefit auction, I invented a padlocking system to prevent unauthorized unfolding of a wooden folding chair and painted *RESERVED SEATING* on the backrest. I never found out if anyone bid on this grumpy piece of art but had great fun making it.

I'm also in the process of writing a song about folding chairs, which is how I got so sidetracked by the available information that it spilled over into *Whither Zither*. Bet you can't wait.

Uncle Google says the folding chair has been helping people take a load off since at least 4500 BC. The early models were what might be called *camp stools* today, with X-braced legs and a cloth or leather seat. These occasionally developed into something very much like the captain's chair of today, with arm and back rests.

King Tut was buried with two folding chairs, no doubt in the hopes of he and a friend being resurrected into the midst of a folk festival. The Mesopotamians, Scandinavians, and Germans had similar X-braced folding stools and chairs thousands of years BC. This style, almost unchanged, is still sold today (see photos). Also note that, with the minor substitution of a hard top, this is the basic X-design of the TV tray.

Some say this design was introduced to Earthlings by space aliens from Planet X, which, when you think about it, is the only way you can explain why people were making TV trays six thousand years before TVs were invented.



Folding stool frame from Denmark, circa 1,000 BC.



Folding stool from Meijer's, circa 2013 AD.

### Webliography:

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