

As someone who was pretty close to the birth of the bouzouki in Ireland, I feel I know a little about its history.

If Johnny Moynihan had taken our advice that evening in Galway, so long ago, the instrument would have died in childbirth. Fortunately, he was not the kind of man to take that sort of advice!

As Graham will tell you, by quirks of fate and hostages to fortune, Johnny discarded his original Greek bouzouki having found a flat backed one. The story as I remember it, was that a man called Bailey had made it for someone who never came to collect it and Johnny duly bought it. How would the course of Irish music have run, we have always wondered, if that man - was it John Pearse - had collected his instrument before Johnny got wind of it.....

I was shortly to be in a band with Johnny, called Sweeney's Men and got to play his bouzouki when he was playing tin whistle, or not looking. I didn't get on with it too well, initially, preferring to play the Gibson A3 mandolin that the same Johnny had swapped with me for a fiddle. It took a couple of years before it finally became my main instrument but I have explored its possibilities with fascination since about 1968.

One thing is for certain though, I know absolutely nothing about how to make one!

Graham McDonald has been building bouzoukis/citterns/octave mandolins for over twenty years and should know a bit about it! He uses lovely native Australian woods and his instruments are much sought after. In this book, he tells would-be builders all the tricks of his trade.

So get your band saws and planes out, your fret wire and inlay and make your own bouzouki!

(Just don't call it a bouzouki when Greeks are about though....)

Andy Irvine
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photo by Shigeru Suzuki