

When it comes to building guitars **Dave Sumner** knows a thing or two; just ask Sir Paul McCartney. But while his craft has led him to work with icons of the music industry, Dave now gives his life to spreading the power of worship through Guitar Aid

Walking through Timisoura Square, Romania, tank tracks fresh on the ground from the country's revolution, Dave Sumner's heart was struck with compassion as the reality of those who had died for their freedom dawned.

In his travel case Dave had six guitars, which he decided to give away in a hope that music and the ability to worship God through song may bring some form of healing.

Thus, Guitar Aid was born, with a vision to release and empower worship leaders by providing instruments to those who are unable to access or afford them.

"It was strange how things worked out in 1990," Dave tells iBelieve.

"In 1989 I was commissioned to make a guitar for Paul McCartney, it was a gold-plated replica of his Hofner violin base and come 1990 all the publicity about that came out.

"I was able to then contact all the guitar companies, and I came back from Romania with this vision to bring the ability to worship, but wondered what I was going to do with it.

"Suddenly in every guitar magazine going there was a story about this guitar made for Paul McCartney – it was front-page of the Daily Mail the day it was presented – and suddenly I could say to all the guitar companies, 'I'm the guy who made that guitar for Paul McCartney.'

"So I would ask them if they would sell me some of their second-grade guitars so I could repair them and that is how all this started. We were buying guitars and repairing them."

Despite the passion laying heavy on Dave's heart, it was not an easy task to complete.

"When it got to a thousand," he recalls, "I remember saying, 'Lord, if I repair an-



Dave Sumner's Guitar Aid will soon give away its 3,000th guitar to help people in poorer countries worship

other guitar I'm going to go crazy.' From there we decided to have our own brand of guitar.

"I have been going on missions regularly four or five times a year and each mission we go on we take guitars into all different parts of the world.

"If you go to places like Asia or Africa, everybody needs an instrument; none of them can afford them.

"Oftentimes we will take guitars to places where no one can even play, but I think if you take a guitar and come back a year later you will more times than not find a musician.

"I remember going to Poland and seeing a guy in his mid-20s playing a bass guitar with Guitar Aid written on it and thought it must have been at least ten years old. He said to me, 'I remember you, when I was a little boy. You

used to come in a Land Rover and give guitars to us.' What we have done each year is a round trip in our Land Rover with a trailer, starting in Poland, then Czech, then Slovakia to Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Croatia and distributed guitars."

The testimonies of how people have been blessed by the ability to worship God through music have overwhelmed Dave.

"Someone in Slovakia told me, 'What you did, you bred a culture of generosity because now in Slovakia when someone upgrades their guitar they don't sell their old ones, they give them away.'

"What we are doing is releasing and empowering people to worship and raising up a new generation of worship leaders in these countries.

"As well as touring Europe each year, I also like to go somewhere further afield, so I have been to India, Africa, Cuba and just recently I have been to Peru, where we met missionaries from Colombia and Panama – each one we sent home with a guitar."

With experience of being in a band and leading worship for several years, Dave understands the impact a guitar can have when placed in somebody's hands.

"I understand what people need," he explains. "We don't just do acoustic or electro-acoustic, we also do bass guitars. The most popular guitar that we give away is the electroacoustic guitar with a built-in tuner – now they would cost around £300

in the shops.

"That is the standard of guitar that we are giving and that is really nice for someone who cannot afford one. We have been able to give guitars in 90 countries >

'A guitar has the ability to change the atmosphere in a church or in a community'



A young Serbian woman practises on a Guitar Aid guitar, left, while a community in Ethiopia is delighted to receive a guitar to help them worship

STRIKING A CHORD

to help the world worship



PHILIPPINES



TANZANIA



CAMBODIA



SLOVAKIA



SERBIA



EGYPT



People in the West African nation of Togo welcome Dave and his team and give thanks for their guitars

and as of 2016 we have given away 2,934 guitars.

"When you give a guitar, it doesn't just influence the guitarist themselves, it also impacts their youth group or community.

"I remember when we went to Bosnia just after the war and people found a healing effect in being able to express themselves through music."

One of the highlights of the year for Dave is his tour of Europe, and Slovakia holds a dear place in his heart.

"I look at Slovakia as one of the prime examples of what we love to do," he says. "We have been going there around 18 years and they have this festival called CampFest; Graham Kendrick and Rend Collective are among some of the many who attend regularly, and most of the bands that play from Slovakia are playing Guitar Aid instruments.

"We have never been anywhere like Slovakia when it comes to unity amongst churches with no divisions at all, everyone's just wanting to serve God."

Worship Central lead singer/songwriter turned vicar of Gas Street Church in Birmingham, Tim Hughes, says, "Guitar Aid is a fantastic way of combining a passion for music with a passion for justice; a great way to make a difference," a comment Dave feels really catches the heartbeat of the organisation.

"What is really nice is I recently saw Tim Hughes at a concert and gave him two guitars that he was delighted with and said he was going to take them to South Africa. He also gave me a signed CD and

wrote, 'Love what you do'. For someone like Tim Hughes to say he loves what you do and write John 10:10, 'I have come that you may have life and life to full,' that is such an encouragement.

"Martin Smith said something similar recently and I feel in a really privileged position as what I have been able to do is build a fantastic relationship with guitar companies and we now have better quality guitars to distribute and God is really prospering what we're doing."

Dave's vision for Guitar Aid is simple, but he feels there is much more impact to be made yet.

"This year we will give away our 3,000th guitar which is really exciting, but I notice in the Bible that David had 4,000 instruments so I have to get past that don't

!" he quips. "I see God is opening new doors for us and Assemblies of God have asked me to be an associate missionary for them, which opens up even more new doors.

"Guitar Aid is non-denominational, but those kind of partnerships will open new doors for us.

"Budget airlines really open up Europe to us and I think there is a shift happening in places like Serbia, where unemployment is high and life is difficult, but we are able to reach those who are persecuted and that really is my heart with this project.

"A guitar can make such a difference. A guitar has the ability to change the atmosphere in a church or in a community, that is what I really believe."



Ugandans celebrate with the guitars that Dave has presented