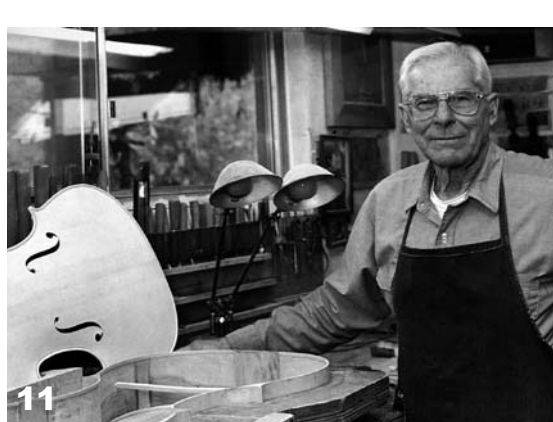


VIOLIN

FROM PAGE 1



Photos by Barbara Holiday

1. The beginning: Michael at ten with his violin in San Diego.

2. Janice Klein restores fine bows for professional musicians using silver wire, horsehair, leather and lizard skin.

3. Michael demonstrates his handmade grinding wheel, an integral part of making violins.

4. Hannah Blausner, a young student of Michael's, is restoring an antique French violin.

5. Dentist Jeffery Kaze, another student, is intent on making violins for a living.

6. Applegate denizen Jill Brenkman plays harp and flute in addition to making violins.

7. Here, in this handmade log cabin classroom, is where Michael passes the baton to his violin-making students.

8. Hannah Blausner's violin in progress.

9. From titanium factory work to his sixth and final violin, student Forrest Vorce will graduate soon from Michael's school.

10. Jill Brenkman's second violin dries in the sun.

11. This photo of Michael's mentor, Vittore E. Giardinieri, hangs prominently in his classroom.

Michael created by hand. Just as he creates his musical instruments. First encountered is the Klein's two-story Tudor-like residence built above Michael's workshop. Daisy May, a 10-year-old golden lab, appears to be the official greeter. Farther down the driveway is the log-cabin classroom where, on a recent Sunday, four diverse students were working on violins in various stages. From the cabin, one can spot the bunkhouse across the field and up the hill where visiting students can stay three to four at a time.

Step back a moment in time, though, for the genesis of Michael's interest in musical instruments and behold the photo of Michael in his native San Diego when he was just ten years old—holding his violin. Michael's mother swore that he could sing before he could talk and encouraged his musical talent by providing the young boy with piano and violin lessons. (Michael's piano teacher "fired" him, however, because Michael played by ear, which was unthinkable to his teacher!) Michael was fortunate enough to be able to serve an apprenticeship with a Master violin maker, Vittore E. Giardinieri, and work with him until Vittore was 86 years old. Vittore finished his last instrument, a cello, in Michael's workshop. He was 96 when he died a few years ago. Michael named his school after Vittore, to which Vittore had donated hand tools.

It was Vittore who also taught Michael that the Pacific Northwest provides all the wood needed in the making of musical instruments—except ebony, which comes from Africa and Malaysia. "I love the forest and I believe in using it," says Michael. So from various locations in Oregon, he harvests only the most select Engleman spruce, western bigleaf maple, mountain mahogany, brown willow and pear wood, each used for different parts of an instrument. The top of a violin, for example, is made from Engleman spruce; the back, ribs and neck are of western bigleaf maple. He may look at 200 to 300 trees before he finds the right wood, which "has to ring." The nicest tree he ever found was a maple in Yoncalla.

After cutting the wood himself, Michael seals the ends of the wood pieces in wax, air-dries the wood outside for two years, then inside for two more years. The wood is then stored in his shop where it's drier and air circulation is optimal. The total drying process can take from six to eight years for maple; from four to five years for spruce.

"To be able to help Grants Pass High School and the Youth Symphony of Southern Oregon financially is good heart medicine. And it's tremendously rewarding to teach students who really want to learn. They are invested, competitive, eager, all get along great, have fun—and learn a lot," said Michael.

Attesting to this, the four students in the log classroom that Sunday afternoon were all laughing and enjoying themselves while hard at work.

Hannah Blausner, who plays and teaches both piano and violin, has made two violins under Michael's tutelage; one is still in process. At present she is restoring an old French violin; it may be 100 years old. She was just 16 years old when she met Michael when she played in the Grants Pass High School orchestra (she graduated three years ago). She knew his name and came to him to buy a violin, also thinking she would like to learn to carve wood.

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