

ARTISANS

OF MUSIC

Outside of the spotlight, these New England makers are perfecting the art of creating exquisite musical instruments.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY PAUL MOZELL

When it comes to musical performances, New England is graced by everything from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to the raucous HONK! street band festival. Less heralded, however, is the region's thriving community of musical instrument makers. From stringed instruments, to brass and woodwinds, to huge pipe organs, they handcraft the tools that bring music to the masses — and to living rooms. Many of these makers say they have seen an increase in business from musicians hunkering down during the pandemic. But before any music is made, these local artisans are hard at work, virtuosos in their own right.



Bill Tippin builds a guitar at his workshop in Marblehead.

TIPPIN GUITARS

GUITAR MAKER BILL TIPPIN knows musicians, like many others, have had more time on their hands during the pandemic. He's more than happy to put a guitar into those hands, but anyone interested in his handcrafted instruments will have to wait: With a recent spike in business, his waiting list is a year-and-a-half long.

Located on Marblehead's waterfront, Tipping Guitars (tippingguitars.com, 781-631-5749) has been building custom acoustic, flat-top guitars since 1995. With a focus on high-quality wood and custom-built instruments, Tippin says he has built his clientele without any advertising.

"All my business comes from word of mouth, and that has given me a trail of customers all these years," he says.



Carl Klein, an organ-maker at C.B. Fisk, checks the tone of an organ pipe.

C. B. FISK INC.

C. B. FISK OF GLOUCESTER makes only a few pipe organs each year, and it's easy to understand why.

The company (cbfisk.com, 978-283-1909) is known worldwide for its intricate organs, each of which is one of a kind and tailor-made for its new home. Artisans use techniques originating from the 15th to the 20th centuries to craft the organs, from casting their own pipe metal from alloys of lead and tin to hand-cutting cow bone to make the surface of the keys. After each organ is built, it then takes several months to perfect the tone of

the pipes, a process known as voicing.

"We never build the same instrument twice," says Dana Sigall, a builder with the company, adding that the organs operate by mechanical key action and involve little, if any, electronics.

The company was founded by Charles B. Fisk, a physicist who pursued organ-making after joining the Manhattan Project. It has crafted instruments for clients worldwide, including Harvard's Memorial Church and the Lausanne Cathedral in Switzerland.

BENOÎT ROLLAND

A MASTER OF BOW-MAKING, Benoît Rolland's résumé includes a MacArthur "genius grant" and training in the French town of Mirecourt, one of the world's instrument-making capitals. Equally impressive, however, are the people he's made bows for—a who's who of legends including violinist Yehudi Menuhin and cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Mstislav Rostropovich.

Rolland sees his craft as a lifelong quest. "I am tirelessly questioning how the bow can be improved, how to ease the interaction between the musician and the bow," he says. "The instrument makes the sound, the bow makes the music."

The magic happens at his Watertown workshop (benoitrolland.com, 617-744-0678), bathed in light from the windows. Each bow—for violin, viola, or cello—is made of dense, heavy Brazilian Pernambuco wood, valued for how it transmits vibrations from the instrument to the player, and the hair from a horse's tail. It takes about two to three weeks to make a bow, and Rolland's wait list is around four years long. Given his mastery, it is worth the wait.



Above: Benoît Rolland chisels a piece of ebony that will become the "frog" of a bow.
Below: He points to an embedded diamond and 14-carat gold ornament.



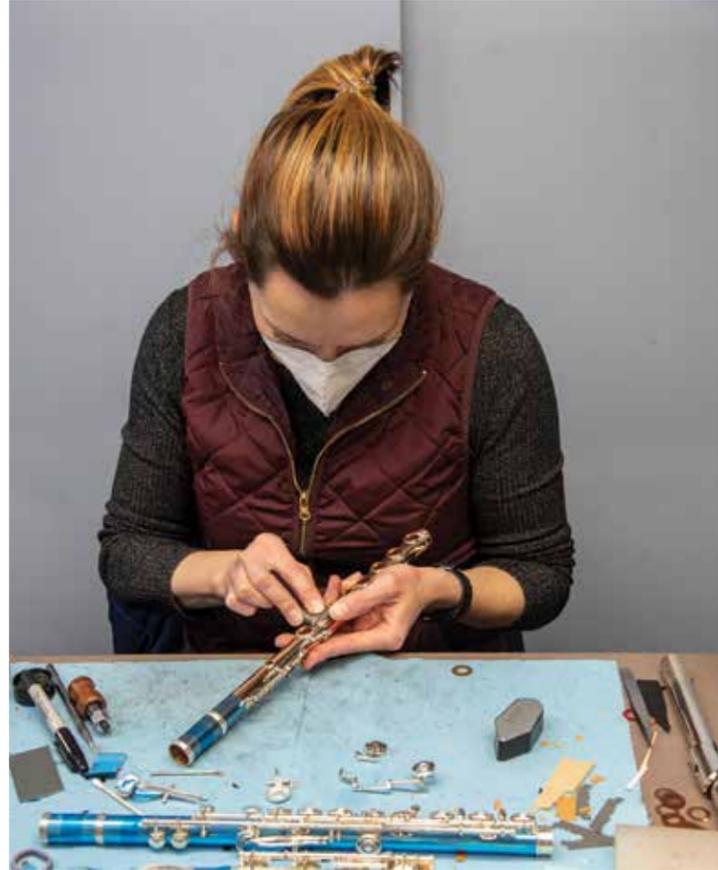
SEEDERS INSTRUMENTS

ONE HALF OF THE FOLK DUO Carling & Will, William Seeders Mosheim knows a thing or two about making music. When it comes to his livelihood of building instruments, he's learned that the more parts one makes by hand, the better.

At Seeders Instruments (seedersinstruments.com, 802-768-1215)—nestled on a wooded hillside in Dorset, Vermont—he shares a bright workshop with his father, a maker of fine furniture, and his metalworker brother. There, he makes banjos with painstaking care, crafting almost all of the parts himself. "I don't have to rely on any other makers to supply my rims, supply my inlays, to supply my hardware," Mosheim says. "I can really fine-tune all the bits and pieces that go into my instruments."

He adds, "There is nothing better than to see the instruments I create go on to make beautiful music in the hands of other artists."

Vermont-based banjo luthier William Seeders Mosheim builds custom instruments with a focus on handmade parts.



WILLIAM S. HAYNES CO.

Left: Joy Roberts, who has been making flutes for years, works on an instrument.
Right: Flutes by the William S. Haynes Co.

THE WILLIAM S. HAYNES CO., now located in Acton, has many “firsts” to its name. So, it’s no wonder it has been a leader in its field of flute-making.

The company (wmshaynes.com, 978-268-0600) was established in 1888, after the principal flutist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra commissioned brothers William and George Haynes to craft him an instrument. It is credited with producing the first American-made 18K gold flute in 1896; according to the company, George Haynes later invented the standard method for making holes in silver flutes.

Today, the company remains one of the premier makers of flutes, crafting silver, platinum, and gold instruments for principal flutists in orchestras around the world. During the pandemic, many adults who used to play flute are looking to pick up the instrument again, fueling a spike in sales, says sales manager Korinne Smith. “In 2022, we are having a record year.”



Christopher White shows a recently completed violin, ready to be shipped to a customer.

CHRISTOPHER WHITE VIOLINS

CHRIS WHITE has long known he was destined to be a luthier — and one who constantly looks to the past for inspiration. “I couldn’t see myself doing anything else,” he says.

Trained at the North Bennet Street School in Boston — where he had worked as a substitute teacher until three years ago — White has been a fixture in the area, making custom violins, violas, and cellos from his home in West Roxbury (christopherwhiteviolins.com, 617-323-8831). He says it’s been a lifelong obsession to emulate Italian masters; his violins are inspired by the work of famed luthiers such as Antonio Stradivari and Joseph Guarneri. ■

Paul Mozell (mozellstudios.com) photographs nature and landscapes; environmental, engineering, and architectural projects; and lifestyles. He is based in the Boston area. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.