

The Sounds of Artistry

The Jacobs Gallery hosts Eugene's finest instrument makers.

Imagine a fine art that combines the visual and tactile qualities of sculpture, the design and construction of engineering and architecture, the rigor of mathematics and physics; that requires the know-how of tool-making, the science of acoustics, historical research and musicianship.

All these characteristics are part of *The Fine Art of the Instrument Maker*, a remarkable exhibit at the Jacobs Gallery which chronicles local contributions to the general renaissance in handmade fine instrument-making.

Some of Oregon's instrument-makers belong to the elite of their profession. Their instruments and expertise are sought by renowned musicians and collectors from around the world, as is the case with the show's curator, violin-maker **David Gusset**.

Gusset is one of the 100 or so members of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers, which has strict membership requirements. He also belongs to the even more exclusive international *Entente Internationale des Maîtres Luthiers et Archetiers d'Art*. He is the only American ever to have won the prestigious Gold Medal at the Antonio Stradivari International Triennial Violin Making Competition in Cremona, Italy.

From his luthier's workshop, located behind the 1870 Gothic Revival house he restored, Gusset creates entirely handmade violins, violas and cellos, "adhering to the ideals and working methods of the early Italian masters," such as Amati, Stradivari and Guarneri (the so-called Cremonese School), whose extant works he closely analyzes and documents — sometimes on commission from such institutions as the Smithsonian and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

The other makers of mostly classical and some baroque instruments in this exhibit also subscribe to Gusset's highest standards of craftsmanship, and they too follow a traditional approach.

For instance, of the two trumpet makers in Oregon with international reputations, **David Monette** and **Joseph Marcinkiewicz**, the latter is featured because he makes every component of his brass wind instruments by hand, starting with raw metal sheeting to create superior traditional one-piece bells. At the same

time, he doesn't shy away from contemporary improvements, using computers to make pistons and valves accurate to 1/10,000th of an inch.

This is a rich exhibition, ranging from the technical to the aesthetic. Just glancing around won't do it justice. Each artist has an area in which to display instruments and samples from each stage of the building process.

Gusset's display includes copies of historical instruments; geometric analyses that recall old charts of the planetary system; explanatory drawings; written information on materials and techniques; and scanning electron microscope photographs of varnish layers. Jars contain various varnish ingredients: resins with exotic names like Dragon's Blood, gums, colophony and organic pigments from plants like madder root and insects like cochineal. Rabbit skin glue appears in various forms. Gusset details his construction process with tools and samples of every stage.

There is nothing simple to a professional-quality bow, as **Ken Altman's** display attests. The endangered pernambuco tree from the Brazilian rainforest is the only wood suitable for fine bows. "My task," says Altman, "is to take into account the characteristics of each particular stick: its grain, density and flexibility, its taper, curve and weight. Every bow has a different resonant quality and draws a distinct tonal range from a given instrument." He generally makes frogs, a part of the bow, of ebony, with fittings of Sterling silver or gold, and he uses mother-of-pearl for the slide and eyes.

Jars contain various varnish ingredients: resins with exotic names like **Dragon's Blood** and organic pigments from plants like madder root and insects like cochineal.

The classical guitar designed according to the Torres/Hauser tradition is the other string instrument represented here, through maker **Jeffrey Elliott** and his former student **Anders Sterner** of Eugene. Elliott maintains a 15-year waiting list for his splendid instruments.



Opus 1, pipe organ by David Petty (above)
Trumpet-making display by Joseph Marcinkiewicz (right)



Visitors will admire his and Sterner's rosette inlays with their hundreds of minute laminated pieces expertly arranged.

Marsha Taylor is an oboist with the Eugene Symphony; she uses plans from museums as models for her handmade baroque oboes. Her display shows the different steps involved in making a reed and turning the French boxwood squares that will become the different joints and bells making up an oboe.

The works of **David Petty** and **Byron Will** show keyboard construction. Petty left the world of engineering and large corporations to pursue his lifelong passion for organs and apprenticed to the internationally acclaimed master organ-builder John Brombaugh. Petty's organs are entirely hand-built. He too strives for authenticity. Ironically, he explains, making lead pipes the way they were built in the baroque age requires using C-grade lead and adding impurities of the kind that couldn't be taken out of the "pure" lead used 300 years ago.

His *Opus 1*, a portable mechanical-action organ, features wooden pipes with their distinctive, delicate sound. Petty's instruments are modeled after the tradition of the highly influential North German Baroque organ-builder Arp Schnitger.

Will's exquisitely ornate harpsichords are based on a wide range of historical models: Italian after both Grimaldi and Giusti, Flemish after the 1616 J. Ruckers, French after Henri Hemsch, who represented the height of 18th-century Parisian harpsichord-making, and German after the late 17th to early 18th-century Michael Mietke.

ARTIST WEBPAGES

www.gussetviolins.com/newhome.htm
www.open.org/kalt/
www.byronwillharpsichords.com/
www.elliottguitars.com/index.html
www.marcinkiewicz.com/main.htm
www.davidpettyorgans.com/

Will also makes German clavichords after Christian G. Hubert and J.C.G. Schiedmayer (18th century). The instrument displayed is indeed a clavichord, a soft-sounding ancestor to the pianoforte, popular from the late 14th to the early 18th century.

All these fine instrument makers are themselves musicians, moved by a similar passion: "We want to build by hand because we all take the same special joy in it," Petty says. "Compare a hand-built instrument to one factory-made and you'll see why. Each hand-built instrument is unique. They sound far better and professional musicians know the difference."

The Fine Art of the Instrument Maker runs through July 22 at the Jacobs Gallery, with an opening beginning at 5:30 pm during First Friday ARTWalk July 7. **ew**

NEW SERIES

OREGON SUCCESS STORIES

Weekday Mornings at 7:34 & 8:34

SUCCESS 94.9

SUCCESS 94.9 is locally owned and operated by Diamond Peak Media.

Silvan Ridge
HINMAN VINEYARDS

SUMMER DINNER SERIES

Once a month enjoy delicious
food prepared by a different
local restaurant.

FRIDAY JULY 21ST
EL VAQUERO

For ticket info call 345-1945

27012 Briggs Hill Rd, Eugene
www.silvanridge.com
 541-345-1945
 OPEN DAILY NOON-5 PM