

LA VOCE

OF CLAIRE GIVENS VIOLINS, INC.

La Voce: our voice

SPRING 2003

In the past two years we have noticed increasing interest in learning to play instruments of the violin family. We see tremendous support by families for their young musicians; a remarkable number of adults who walk in and state that they have always wanted to play the violin and it's now or never; and professionals who are increasingly grateful for the role they play in creating beauty and a better understanding across borders. To be part of a business that is growing during these times is a privilege that we take very seriously. We are thankful our customers' musical lives are thriving. -CG

Serving the String Community for a Quarter Century

We have enjoyed doing business in the last 25 years and look back with fond recollections to all the talented musicians that we have been able to help. The company has grown considerably over the years from one employee (Claire) in 1977 to fifteen in 2003.

Our growth has allowed us to better serve our customers and the string community in general. It is also important to us to give back to our community through supporting prizes for various competitions as well as the strings portion of the annual MacPhail Master Class series.

The growth of Givens Violins, both in size and knowledge, has led to many opportunities for staff members. Claire Givens and Andrew Dipper have both written articles for magazines such as *The Strad*, as well as serving as fine instrument appraisers for **The Antiques Road Show** on PBS. Givens Violins also makes a concerted effort to support and promote contemporary makers through the annual Cremona Exhibition and our individual commissions. We are honored to have your continued trust and loyalty.



Three of the bardanger fiddles in Givens Violins current collection (see article back cover)

New Accessories

◆ As all instrumentalists know maintaining the proper level of humidity is a constant battle, especially in the Midwest where fluctuating temperatures and indoor heat exacerbate the problem. The new **Planet Waves Instrument Humidifier** can help prevent serious damage to instruments caused by our dry climate. The humidifier can be placed in the case and moistened when needed. The humidifier does not leak and the humidity can last up to one month before the unit needs to be remoistened. Price: violin/viola \$12.99 Cello \$14.99

◆ Protect your violin or viola from rosin dust and make a statement too with one of our gorgeous handcrafted silk instrument bags. They come in a variety of colors and patterns making them a perfect complement to any instrument or case.



Givens Violins staff and their families and friends at our year-end party (photo by Paul Nixdorf)

News of Note

♦ Claire Givens Violins is dedicated to supporting the efforts of the region's young string players. Every year, Claire Givens Violins sponsors a prize for the **Young People's Symphony Concert Association** Competition. This year's winner of the Given's Prize is **Rolf Haas**, a violin student of Sally O'Reilly.

Claire Givens Violins also donated prizes to the winners of the **MNSOTA** competition. This year's Grand prize winner was **Karin Andreassen**, student of Sally O'Reilly. Senior division winner was **Paige Kearl**, student of Mark Bjork. Junior division co-winners were **Rumi Shimizu**, cello student of Jonas Carlson, and **Rolf Haas**, violin student of Sally O'Reilly. The intermediate division winner was **Anna Savelsberg**, violin student of Sally O'Reilly.

The winner of the **Minnesota Sinfonia** Competition Given's Prize was **Jenny Lang**, violin student of Mary West.

♦ **Violins as Investments:** With today's fluctuating and disappointing stock market, instrument investment is an attractive option for many. We have helped players find instruments and bows as additions to their investment portfolio. We have also worked with investor groups interested in helping players with their careers. Please feel free to contact Claire Givens or Tim Herman for more information.

♦ Watch **The Strad** magazine this summer for Claire and Andrew's article on Hardanger Fiddles. If Hardanger Fiddles and Norwegian folk music and dance are your cup of tea, or rather your bowl of fruit soup, be sure to check out **The Hardanger Fiddle Association of America's** AmeriKappleik this summer at St. Olaf College July 23-27.
<http://www.hfaa.org/amerikappleik/index.shtml>

CREMONA EXHIBIT DRAWS EXCITEMENT AND CROWDS

This past fall was once again busy and exciting for Claire Givens Violins, Inc. due to the Cremona Exhibit. Music and people filled the halls of the Handicraft Building as teachers, students, professional players and instrument enthusiasts stopped in to view and play the 75+ instruments in the **5th Annual Cremona Exhibit** and our own exhibition of fine historical Italian instruments. With instrument prices ranging from \$5,000.00 to \$425,000.00, there were treasures for everyone.

Special events during the exhibition included an opening weekend spread of Cremonese cheeses, mostarda, torrone, and wine. At the end of the exhibition the **Artaria String Quartet** performed a free concert on some of the modern Italian instruments, featuring the works of Haydn, Schumann, and a contemporary work by Chinese composer Zhou Long. After the performance, the downtown restaurant, **Hell's Kitchen**, provided concert goers with a delicious buffet, and Larry Anderson of **Anderson Music Stand** donated his beautiful adjustable wooden stands to the quartet.

We would like to thank everyone who stopped by the exhibition, the Artaria String Quartet, Hell's Kitchen, Anderson Music Stand, and Gwen Freed of the Minneapolis Star Tribune for the wonderful article she wrote about the exhibit. Givens Violins is looking forward to this fall's exhibit and we hope to see you there.

On The Road

With our larger sales team, we have been able to go to our customers instead of them coming to us. Tim Herman, the newest member of the Givens Violins sales department, has been making trips all over southeastern Minnesota. Customers let Tim know the tone qualities, price range and size of the instrument they're looking for and he packs up the appropriate inventory and "hits the road".

We also make bi-annual trips north. One of the sales associates is accompanied by a member of the shop so that repairs, check-ups and maintenance can be provided for customers who have purchased their instruments from us. Customers know that their instruments will be well taken care of, even if they are unable to make the trip to Minneapolis. We are willing to consider making trips anywhere around the upper Mid-West. If you have a group that is interested in this service please feel free to contact us via telephone or e-mail.

Voila, it's a Viola

by Heather Hoff

I have recently been posed with the question, "How are you so successful at finding the right viola for customers?" Initially I thought that it was just coincidence. I never really thought that being a violist would necessarily correlate to helping someone find a viola, but as I have found myself pondering that question, I have realized that there is validity to that argument.

◆ Comfort Factors

When I was looking for a viola a few years back, I was very adamant about the size of instrument I could handle. Like many other violists, I struggled throughout college with injuries related to playing. What I have discovered now, which I didn't know when I was searching for the "perfect" instrument, is that there are many more variables to how a viola fits other than just its length. More significant than the length of the body is the length of the vibrating string. **String length** directly affects the stretch of the hand, which can be the cause of more fatigue than arm length. A standard viola has a string length of 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", so if size and stretch are an issue for comfortable playing conditions, start by finding an instrument with a shorter string length.

◆ Proportions

When playing in the upper positions of the instrument, many violists run into difficulty getting around the bouts. The **width of the upper bout** can be especially troublesome. Some instruments have a larger lower bout with a smaller upper bout, which retains the richness and depth of the instrument while making it manageable in the upper positions.

The **height of the ribs** may also contribute to having the feeling of being too large and unmanageable. As soon as you find yourself "reaching" over the instrument with your neck, you are actually shortening the tendons that allow you to reach up and over the instrument, which causes a lot of unnecessary potential for injury.

◆ Other considerations

Sometimes the instrument itself can feel too large with accessories that are too tall. If a flatter chinrest is

added to many instruments, it can cut down on the strain of getting around the viola. The other component is, of course, the shoulder rest. We stock many shoulder rests that can allow a player to customize the fit of their instrument. Throughout struggling with injuries, I learned that it is most important to retain "normal posture" while playing.

◆ What to listen for

Ultimately, the search for an instrument weighs all of the above criteria for comfort, but adds the component of sound. I have found myself attempting to explain what a viola should sound like in relation to the violin or cello which seem to have "set"

characteristics. Part of the viola's charm is the fact that the instrument has its own sound. It is not a "big violin" or a "little cello", but a viola. Violas can have a myriad of colors and voices, so taking time to get to know an instrument is very important.

◆ Small Violas

In conjunction with the viola becoming increasingly popular, more and more young students are starting their musical studies on the viola rather than a violin strung as a viola. We have recently had a number of calls from parents and teachers looking for small performance quality violas for their students. I have researched many string combinations with our workshop to find the optimal set up for these little violas. We have

successfully found violas as small as 11" to send to our customers around the country. I am consistently getting calls from people who have heard these instruments played. As a violist, I feel it is extremely important to have small instruments actually made as violas in order to optimize the volume and sound that is produced on the C-string.

Finding a great viola is definitely not an easy task. It is like a puzzle that has many little pieces that could be similar, but only a certain set of pieces fit together. My job is wonderful because I get to fit the puzzle pieces together while working with what I love - the viola.

Heather Hoff is a graduate of Concordia University in St. Paul where she majored in Music Education and Viola Performance.



*Heather Hoff-Sales Consultant
and Viola Impresario*

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Celebrating our 25th Year!
Claire Givens Violins, Inc.
provides

- A complete line of instruments, bows and services for intermediate to professional string players.
- Workshops staffed by professionally trained and experienced violin and bow makers, providing repairs and restoration of the highest quality.
- A complete on-hand inventory of accessories.
- Specialized assistance to families and teachers of string instrument players.
- Nationwide and international shipping service.

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LaVoce is the newsletter of Claire Givens Violins, Inc., Dealers, Makers and Restorers of Fine Violins, Violas, Cellos and Bows. It is part of a concerted and continuing commitment to keep our customers informed. LaVoce is edited, written, unless otherwise noted, and designed by Julene Flink and published periodically.

Dipper Restorations
Hardanger Fiddles

There are many variations on the basic model of the violin. One remarkable instrument is the Norwegian violin called the Hardanger Fiddle. One of the most significant differences between it and the violin is the addition of four tunable metal sympathetic strings that pass through the bridge and under the fingerboard, making eight strings total. The tuning of these strings varies with the mode of the tune that is being played. Some Hardangers have a very short neck and string length to allow for a tuning that is higher than the modern violin. The peg box and body of the instrument are nearly always decorated with arabesques of fine ink tracery called "Rosemalling" and the normal violin scroll is replaced by a carving of the heraldic lion of Norway. The purfling is invariably traced by ink lines and the borders of the most expensive instruments are decorated with inlaid pearl chevrons. The fingerboards and tailpieces too are faced with cow horn and inlaid with bone and mother of pearl. Even the strings differ from the modern violin in that they are made of gut and the 'D' string is wound with an open spiral of silver wire. Many aspects of the instrument including its construction are reminiscent of the early violin making traditions of Füssen and the Alleanische school of Germany. -AD