

THE VIOLIN SHOP

WHO'S BEHIND IT?

Finn Meyer is a Dane by birth, a classical guitarist, and, with patience and the right piece of wood, an artist. For 19 years here at his Linden Hills shop he's been making violins, violas, and bows.



HOW DOES A VIOLIN MAKER STAY IN BUSINESS ALMOST 20 YEARS IN A SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS NEIGHBORHOOD?

By making instruments so well, with such care and craftsmanship, that world class musicians wait and hope for a call telling them Finn's got a new one available. They can wait a long time. Finn says he makes about five violins per year that he judges worthy of making music.

That's because making these instruments is a little like Michelangelo carving a masterpiece out of a marble block: If the material is flawed, you may not see it until you've already put a lot of work into shaping and refining it. A lot of things have to turn out just right for a violin or viola to make it from a few blocks of wood to a finished instrument, and Finn can never be sure he's succeeded until the work is almost complete.

It's the same story with the bows. Finn says can make about ten good bows in a year. And each one can sell for as much as \$5,000.

WHAT MAKES A BOW SELL FOR \$5,000?

To a player, the answer is incredibly obvious. But for the rest of us: It's not just the horsehair touching the strings that makes those strings vibrate. The wooden part of the bow should be alive with vibrations. Watch closely when Finn taps one of his successful bows on the bridge of an instrument, you can see the wood of the bow vibrating like a tuning fork. It's those vibrations, passing from bow to instrument, that truly make stringed instruments sing.

It takes just the right kind of wood—Pernambuco, found only in South America—and many, many hours of paring it down to shape it into that strong but delicate vibrating instrument. A slight imperfection in the wood, or the tiniest misjudgment in the workmanship—perhaps no more than the thickness of a fingernail—and months of work has to be thrown away.

When it all works, Finn can pick up a phone and contact one of his clients to say, "I've got one." Some of those clients are members of the Minnesota Orchestra, but players come here from all over the country in answer those calls. The work is sold almost the moment it's complete. Which is why you'll almost never see a violin—or bow—in Linden Hills' Violin Shop.