

Music MAKERS

Bay Area Guitar and Ukulele Builders

LUTHERIE—THE MAKING OF stringed instruments such as are shown here—was virtually nonexistent as an individual pursuit in the USA until the late 1960s. Although a centuries old craft in Europe, by the mid 1800s, fretted instrument building in the US had moved firmly into factories. Although the founders of such famous companies as C.F. Martin and Gibson built guitars with their own hands, guitarmaking increasingly became an assembly line process in order to meet high demand while keeping costs low.

Up until forty years ago, an independent luthier was mostly an anachronism. The few who were practicing the craft were creative and often rather eccentric, not able or willing to work within the mainstream system. These “pioneers” left a lasting legacy of accurate yet low-tech methods and collegial sharing that has allowed a widespread lutherie culture to flourish. Today, it is possible for a skilled luthier to make their full living from the craft. About 100 are doing so in California. Their instruments are of the very highest quality, some would argue much higher than their manufactured counterparts.

Luthiers make guitars for reasons as varied as the makers themselves. Chief among them are the desire to work independently, creatively and to do work that is enjoyable, useful and meaningful. Lutherie can be a total immersion pursuit, one that is more about living a life than about making a living. It can be accurately described as a calling and is, in its purest form, concerned with such things as excellence, living ethically and participating in a tradition which one can pass on to others.

— Ervin Somogyi, Luthier



Exhibition curated by Lewis Santer and Ervin Somogyi