

CRAFT AND TRADE IN THE MODERN WORLD- A VIOLINMAKING STUDY



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Ever since I can remember, the violin has been an important part of my life. I started taking lessons at age five and continued to study both classical music and the fiddle music of my Appalachian heritage. When I was young, I took my lessons in a violin making and repair shop. The meticulous handiwork of the makers planted a seed of interest and passion in me. I have stayed endlessly fascinated by the craft and artistry of the instrument, as well as the wide variety of music that comes from it.

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I began my Burch fellowship summer by traveling to southeastern Germany to visit the Mittenwald School of Violinmaking and experience the astonishing Bavarian mountain landscape. Here, I learned about how violinmaking became Mittenwald's primary trade and was able to meet many students my own age and learn about the school's piecework approach to violinmaking education. Each student makes four instruments at a time, honing their technique on each specific process as they go. Through historical research, I learned that this is not new for Mittenwald. Their violinmaking industry has relied on piecework for over a century. Mittenwald is unique in this way, and most other places that I visited and have researched rely on a model of building one instrument at a time. From Mittenwald, I traveled across Austria and Germany in a musical pilgrimage of sorts and had the opportunity to realize many dreams. I visited Mahler and Beethoven's graves, saw the Hapsburg family instrument collection, and saw an Opera at the Vienna Opera House.

Before continuing my violinmaking in Cremona, I traveled to Genova, Italy to study and practice the Italian language. I lived in a homestay in the medieval 'Caruggi' and went to a small language school where I studied with students from France, the Ukraine, and Germany. We stumbled through class as beginners – with no English allowed. Learning to live my life in a new language was exhilarating and rewarding, and pushed me to grow in self-confidence. Without this knowledge of the Italian language, it would've been impossible for me to navigate my time in Cremona, which

is not exactly a tourist destination.

Next, I traveled to Cremona, the home of the modern violin in the region of Lombardia. In Cremona, the students that I met and interviewed were from different corners of the world such as Japan, Spain, and Switzerland. They graciously invited me into their home studios, gave me tours of the violinmaking school, and talked with me about their experiences. We shared meals and the experience of being foreigners to Cremona, which was often lonely and isolating. Here, I was also able to visit violinmakers and spend time in the newly built museum

of the violin, amongst some of the earliest and most precious instruments in the world. The museum traces the genealogy of the instrument, houses many early Stradivarius instruments, and

has a listening room that mimics the acoustics of the inside of a violin. I was even visited by some UNC friends and got to share this place and this passion with them.

The highlight of my summer was undoubtedly being able to finish the body of my instrument at the Cambridge violinmaker's workshop in England. Like much of the summer and in the shop that I spent time in as a child, I was one of the only women in the violinmaking workshop. Here, I worked daily from 8:45 in the morning to 6:00 in the evening with teachers who were patient, challenging, and sharply humorous. I was immersed in British culture through humor, and also the daily rituals of tea. As a work-study apprentice in



the workshop, I prepared the tea for everyone in the workshop.

Over the weeks, I grew familiar with tools and tasks and developed more independence in the workshop. Many tasks I learned were difficult and tedious, but they helped me to cultivate a lot of patience. I realized slowly that building an instrument was a lot like playing one. Much like music, the instrument had already been there, waiting in the wood – I was just uncovering it.

Over the course of this experience, I learned that "the art" of traveling and the study of violinmaking require a similar patience and appreciation for solitude, as well as a willingness to accept a failure or change in plans. I felt this in the workshop but also during lonely stretches of the trip. Though some things felt impossibly difficult at times, this made the moments of pure discovery and joy all the more exciting. I feel nothing but gratitude for the amazing experiences I came across and the resilience I was able to cultivate while traveling alone. Incredibly, I finished this violin and will be able to play it for the rest of my life. If that's not a gift, I don't know what is. Sono molto grato.

