



*Meet  
Your  
Maker*

**MODERN  
INSTRUMENTS  
COME  
OF AGE**

by Katherine Millett

BROOKLYN LUTHIER  
SAMUEL ZYGMUNTOWICZ  
TRIMS A SCROLL.

“Makers of modern instruments solve problems of projection, helping performers to fill large halls with sound and to meet the varied timbral demands of contemporary music.”

#### BUYING NEW

A musician suddenly elevated to a new job may find the search for a contemporary instrument urgent and daunting. At the threshold, most dealers who sell fine antiques won't even discuss new makers, according to Eugenia Choi, a violinist who researched the sales history of Stradivari violins for her 2007 doctoral dissertation at The Juilliard School.

“Knowledgeable and respectable violin specialists are so scarce that only a few people control the entire industry,” she wrote. “Therefore, any mention of a maker’s name by someone like Charles Beare would immediately influence the market and pricing. Dealers have a ‘house rule’ not to mention any names.”

Not surprisingly, dealers who specialize in old instruments, and have nothing to gain from sales of new ones, are reluctant to help the market for new instruments develop. Modern makers aren't household names. Samuel Zygmuntowicz (zig-mun-TOH-vich) of Brooklyn, New York, might be, if he had an easier name, but instrument makers tend to be solitary, dedicated individuals who advertise little.

A good starting point for finding a luthier is the online directory of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers, ([www.afvbm.com](http://www.afvbm.com)) or, for European makers, the Entente Internationale des Luthiers et Archetiers, ([www.eila.org](http://www.eila.org)). Violinist.com maintains a forum to discuss instruments and makers, and most younger luthiers have websites.

Electronic means offer only an introduction, however. Finding the right instru-

ment takes time and research—or pure luck. Full-time makers turn out seven to ten instruments a year, fewer if some are cellos. Most are spoken for before they are finished, made for players on a waiting list. Some shops sell new instruments made by luthiers they employ for repair and restoration work. Others sell instruments by outside makers, on consignment. Because shops typically buy wholesale at 50 percent or take commissions of 25 percent for selling consigned instruments, most makers prefer to work directly with players.

Marilyn Wallin adopts an unusual business pattern. She makes all of her instruments in her home workshop but sells them through shops in Boston and Baltimore. A former teacher at the North Bennet Street School in Boston and now based in Concord, she prefers to spend all of her working time making instruments, even if it means earning less money.

“My colleagues spend two to three days a month adjusting instruments and doing insurance appraisals,” she says, “and I don’t want to do that. I prefer to work with an agent.”

But Wallin is atypical. Most makers, unless they have exclusive arrangements with dealers, work directly with players.

So why not start with the local luthier? When Joshua Gindele, cellist of the Miró Quartet, decided to commission a new instrument, he went to Phillip Injeian, a Pittsburgh-based craftsman who had been adjusting Gindele’s old French cello for years. Gindele had tried out dozens of instruments by better-known makers, but he trusted Injeian’s skill and taste; and over time, the two have developed a common understanding of sound.

“I proposed having Phillip build me a new cello modeled on this beautiful Tononi I knew in Canada,” Gindele says. “He liked the idea, but he convinced me to move up the food chain and use a Montagnana model instead. I absolutely struck gold. I love the cello. It’s gigantic but easy to play, free of wolfs. He made the perfect cello for me, and my colleagues still say how lucky I am.”



IRISH FIDDLER LIZ CARROLL BOUGHT HER INSTRUMENT FROM CANADA’S RAYMOND SHRYER.