

Double Acts

Inside views on relationships in the string world

The Scottish luthiers have a working relationship based on sharing – from ideas and knowledge to their tastes in drinks

COLIN ADAMSON

I'VE ONLY KNOWN COLIN since 2005. We met in Glasgow at one of the European String Teachers Association's string days, where I was exhibiting as part of the Violin Makers Scotland group. He just turned up with a viola that absolutely knocked me out. We hit it off, and since then we've exhibited together several times, in London, Manchester and Glasgow.

WE HAVE PLENTY OF FUN but we also talk a lot – about the violin trade, ideas and methods. Colin's very open and so am I – we exchange many ideas. Purfling comes up quite a lot. I had a little problem with purfling over the top button on a violin, and Colin explained his method to me, which helped me solve the problem. I make quite faithful copies of instruments and Colin has been picking my brains about how I go about darkening their insides.

BECAUSE HE COMES FROM ORKNEY, Colin travels a lot and often needs to go down south. He started to use my place near Stirling as somewhere he could stop over. He's a whisky man and I'm a wine man, so when he comes to stay we have to decide whether it's going to be a whisky night or a wine night. He's keen on Orcadian malt whisky, and I like Rioja wines, so we've educated each other in our favourite drinks. But we don't go too far!

MOST OF MY CLIENTS are classical musicians but Colin is heavily into the folk scene. That's becoming really strong, and I think it's going to get even stronger in the future. Colin exhibits at the Orkney Folk Festival, and you realise that for a small place, there's an awful lot going on up there. I occasionally work on the instruments he makes for folk players, if he can't manage to do it himself. That has opened up a new world of clients for me.

COLIN'S GOT A GOOD BUSINESS BRAIN and he's very communicative with people. We're quite similar in that way. When we exhibit together, we seem to be able to get people to come to us, because we're both quite approachable, and I think we feed off that. Because both our names are Colin, people say we do a 'good Col–bad Col' double act, like a good cop–bad cop. And they ask which of us is going to be good and which is going to be bad.

NEIL JESSOP

COLIN TULLOCH

I'D HEARD OF COLIN a long time ago, when I was working in Edinburgh, but it was only years later that I met him at an exhibition in Glasgow. I found pretty quickly that he and I were on the same wavelength when it comes to marketing our work. Colin is similar to me in that we can both communicate well with people, which is essential when you're at an exhibition with instruments on the table. With the two of us together, it seems to work really well. We usually sneak in a bottle of malt whisky, and we have some fun with people who come to see us.

WHEN WE WERE IN MANCHESTER, a very good, well-known player started speaking to Colin and me at our table, and before

we knew it he had all the instruments out and was playing them all. It creates a buzz, of course, when you have someone good playing your instruments. He played for about an hour and a half. I could see that other people were aware that something special was happening.

WE ONCE DECIDED to drive all the way down to London. We ended up going right into the centre of town, navigating using an iPhone. We knew we were really close to where we needed to go, but we couldn't find the venue. So we ended up flagging down a black cab, and asking the driver to take

us there with us following him. It was a real case of 'follow that cab!' We got there just in time for the show to start.

WE'VE DEFINITELY INFLUENCED EACH OTHER in terms of our making methods. Both of us make antiqued copies, and since Colin has done so much work in restoration, he's more aware of the wood and varnish than I am, and he's given me several pointers in those areas. He's also had a lot of experience in touching up instruments. Even with a new violin you might get a dent or a scratch, and he's shared some of the things he's learnt about dealing with that. Touching up is a subject that I haven't explored in much depth, but it's something I'm happy to do now.

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENCES between our making styles. For example, we use quite different varnishing techniques, and different forms. There are areas where we're interested in what the other is doing, but we don't necessarily want to copy each other.

INTERVIEWS BY DAVID KETTLE



'We can both communicate well with people, which is essential when you're at an exhibition'

COLIN TULLOCH (RIGHT)