

PLAYING OUR PART

By Liveryman
John Sinclair Willis

IT WAS A LOVELY DAY TODAY. An Australian couple dropped in on their way through Europe. We formed an impromptu band, played *Waltzing Matilda* in a minor key, and offered a large box of Kleenex to our guests to mop up their crocodile tears.

There were no tears, however, just an excited Australian couple enthusiastically being shown around Springwood Music Workshops.

They looked at an early French Harmonium in the process of restoration; they played a violin that was made here; admired a mechanical organ that is destined to spend the rest of its life on the back of a lorry being transported around steam rallies and charity fêtes.

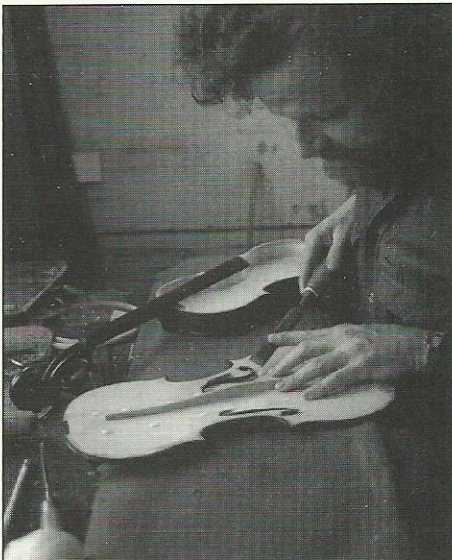
We had coffee and looked at some pianos – new, restored, and in pieces. Against his will we watched a cabinet maker fit a pane of bevelled glass into a music cabinet. We played a new classical guitar that had been made upstairs then tried a Canadian Reed Organ that is restored and waiting to be transported back to the Channel Islands.

The Rebec came out, along with the single stringed violin. Then a bowed psaltery appeared followed by a button-key accordion.

Three rows of melody keys had us all foxed, so a piano key accordion was produced. A musical journey, from Australia to England, then followed. This journey took us through Europe with French folk tunes, Italian melodies and Hungarian dances – all played with a violin accompaniment, and with gusto.

That is Springwood Music Workshops. Less than two years after the idea was mooted we have managed to make the dream come true.

I say the dream, but I really mean the dreams. Springwood Music Workshops has managed to make several dreams



Violin restoration and repair.

come true, but this is only the start.

Up and down the country there are colleges that train people to make and restore musical instruments. We have many talented young makers leaving college each year – but what does the future hold for most of them?

There is a certain amount of doom and gloom for most professionals, and unfortunately in the real world there is no escape for musical instrument makers.

After completing their training they may be lucky enough to be allowed to take over the spare bedroom to convert into a workshop.

There, with Radio 4 in the background, they produce their first, second and third instrument. Each is more refined, better made and more accomplished than the last. Now is the time to start making a living!

But who is going to buy one of these fine instruments? Who even knows that these fledgling masterpieces of the musical instrument makers' art exist?

Advertising would help, of course. A full page in a well-known music magazine would be ideal – but there is one small problem – the small matter of the £1,200 plus artwork plus V.A.T. it costs.

If advertising is too expensive, then another way to get your product known is by marketing. This need not be expensive, but it involves putting your product in front of your target market as often as possible to demonstrate just how good it is. This is not easy working from a spare room at home. In fact the only advantage you have is that the commuting time is cut to the bare minimum. Everything else works against the musical instrument maker in a new business.

This is why Springwood Music Workshops was formed. Located in the centre of Huddersfield, the attractive university town described by the Rt. Hon. Stephen Dorrell, M.P. when Secretary of State for National Heritage as "The Paris of the North", we provide workshops at affordable rents. At present we offer some subsidised workshops and have one rent-free place for an exceptional case.

So far we have hosted new music-related businesses all of which have worked alongside the established firms who also share the building.

The advantages Springwood Music Workshops offer over solitude and obscurity in the spare room are many. We have a passing trade; people who call in to see one musical instrument maker are naturally interested in musical instruments and naturally visit the others. They tell their friends, who, in turn are likely to visit. Word of mouth brings a violin repair from a piano client, or a piano tuning from a classical guitar client.

It has also brought as many as forty



John Sinclair Willis.

Photo: Katie Sinclair Willis (aged 10).

nine visitors on one day – not bad for workshops that do not yet have the facilities for more than a handful of visitors!

The people who work here have a lot in common with each other. Most of them play an instrument or two; they tend to manufacture in similar materials using similar techniques. They find themselves discussing the virtues of one timber over another for a particular job. There is a constant exchange of information on suppliers, adhesives, seasoning, tonal qualities, acoustics, tuning methods, business matters, tools and every other subject known to man. There is a healthy interaction that brightens the spirit, postpones insanity, and encourages excellence.

Opportunities for meeting the right people occur all the time, facilities (such as the Gallery) can be shared, as can the cost of advertising and exhibition space.

We can keep overheads to a minimum by providing office services such as computer and fax facilities at cost. We can prepare and print camera-ready copy, letterheads, and promotional leaflets in-house; we can give full access to the Internet; and we can answer many business questions from "How much does it cost to send a letter to Switzerland?" to "What must a sales invoice to Holland show so that V.A.T. need not be charged in this country?"

With the sponsorship of Peter Conacher & Company, the organ restorers and conservators, Springwood Music Workshops, has managed to reach this stage in its development with no external financial help. Apart from the support of our Patrons – all of whom have given encouragement to the musical instrument makers who have set up their businesses here – the only other support we have had has been from our clients.