



LUTHIER
Olivia Pelling
 LOCATION
Ottawa, Canada

MY WORKSHOP'S INSIDE MY house, in the basement. I'm close to downtown Ottawa and about 200m from the Ottawa River. The workshop has its own separate entrance, accessed through the garden. Because it's in the basement, I only have the one window you can see at the back of the picture. It's north facing, and although I do get some light from it, I rely on daylight bulbs.

I make and repair instruments on the back and centre benches and do bow rehairs and paperwork on the right-hand one. I like to read, and you can see my current stack of materials on the edge of the right-hand desk, under a block of wood that will become a viola neck. On the go at the moment I have an article on Brescian making, a book on acoustics and a copy of *The Strad*. I light the gas stove at the back occasionally between December and March to take away the chill of the Canadian winter.

On the centre bench are two small violas I'm making. One is a Maggini model and the other is a Brothers Amati, and they are 15 1/4 inches and 15 3/4 inches respectively. I'm also making some sound adjustments to my own violin, which is on its side. I'm gluing the seams and fixing a crack on the cello at the back of the room. The instrument is owned by a local charity called the Leading Note Foundation. They're based on Venezuela's El Sistema and give music lessons to inner-city children.

I volunteer for them for a few hours a week, taking care of their stringed instruments.

The Celtic harp on the right is the first instrument I made. It took me two years and I keep it in the workshop because it reminds me of how I started. Occasionally, if I get the chance, I play it. I was inspired to make the harp after visiting Scotland, where I played one for the first time. I wanted a harp of my own, but as a student I couldn't afford one. So, my mum and stepfather – both luthiers – encouraged me to make one. It was my first taste of making and I got the bug. As I play the violin and viola, it seemed a natural progression to move on to bowed stringed instruments after that.

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My brother gave me the Lyon & Healy harp case on the left. It still has its original shipping label on the outside – it was

shipped to a harpist in Toronto in 1964 – and was made for a 46-stringed semi-grand pedal harp. I'm using the back of it to display and store instruments, and the front is on my living-room wall as an art piece. The wood leaning against it is local cherry. About three years ago my friend's father told me he was cutting down a large cherry tree and asked if I wanted the wood. I helped him to fell it and now I'm drying the chopped-up pieces. In a couple of years I hope it will be good enough for at least two violas.

INTERVIEW BY VICKY HANCOCK

NEXT MONTH: STEPHAN VON BAEHR, PARIS, FRANCE