



“The other schools have their courses and styles,” Johannessen explains, “but what makes us unique is that we offer individualized training: every student has their own programme. No other school does that; it sets us apart from any other school in the world.”

I am certainly one who would need that one-to-one tutoring. No kidding! As previously emphatically revealed when presenting readers of *The Beacon* (July 2008) with the incredible carving skills of Coombs artist Jeremy Lee Humpherville, I have always

been somewhat ham-fisted in most attempts at putting my mitts to creative use. So the thought of building a beautiful guitar from scratch, crafting those curves

from fine woods, is as alien to me as the truth is to most politicians. But I have to take heart from how the Summit School’s website encouragingly boasts that ‘No prerequisites are required’ - so could even this klutz succeed under their expert tuition? Johannessen believes so.

“Our only criterion is that you have to have an interest - and be 16 years of age or older,” she says. “If you came to the school hopeless with woodworking and with your hands - you also don’t have to be a musician - what would happen is that we’d start with the basic steps and move you gradually forward. Very rarely we’ll get a student that just doesn’t get it. In fact, in the twenty years we’ve only had two students that failed.”

If you would care to witness some of the many, many successes of their two decades of luthiery, as surely you should, the Summit School of Guitar Building & Repair, Inc. and the Islands Luthiers Guild are holding an exhibition of hand-built guitars at Qualicum’s Civic Centre on November 1st. Running 11:00am - 5:00pm, a concert will follow from 7:00 - 9:00pm, the musicians all playing gorgeous hand-built instruments. For ticket prices and other information relating to the event, as well as details of the Summit School’s range of courses, please visit www.luthiers-international.com or telephone (250) 757-9903. ~

Desperately Seeking Luthiers?

BY DAVID MORRISON

Considering I’ve spent almost three decades of my working life immersed in the music industry, it’s incredible to me that not until a few weeks ago had I ever encountered the word ‘luthier.’ My dictionary explains a luthier as “one that makes or repairs stringed instruments,” the noun deriving from ‘luth,’ as in French for ‘lute’ - the round-backed stringed instrument popularized during the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Not only did I not know this, I was therefore as a consequence also ignorant of the fact that some of the world’s most talented luthiers and one of the very best schools to learn the craft are right here on Vancouver Island. In this instance I’m referring specifically to the artisans of the Summit School of Guitar Building & Repair, Inc. in Qualicum. Despite operating in a narrow field, steady demand for their wares since the day they opened for business sees this globally respected establishment celebrating twenty years of high-end luthiery in 2009.

“The reason we started in the first place is that a lot of people were repairing instruments, but had no clue what they were doing - they’d not had any kind of formal training,” says Summit School co-founder,

Deborah Johannessen. “(Instrument) repair shops and manufacturers were hesitant to take in unskilled people as employees, so we decided to try to do something about it.”

“When we started in Nanoose in 1989, we were one of only eight schools in the world,” she continues, amazing me with that fact. “So, not a lot of people were being trained out there! We started with the basic idea of teaching people repairs, with a bit of building. Then in 1995 my husband, Sigmund, joined the school, and he brought along the building aspect. Then we started developing longer courses because of demand: with one month of building and one month of repair, people were only getting a taste of what they needed to learn to make a living. So over a few years we continued developing the courses until we ended up with the Master Programme, which is our most popular course.”

Today, the range of courses available at the Summit School is impressive, starting with two-week skill honing (or repair-specific) courses right through to the year long Masters. There is also an intensive course in live sound available, but all of the courses are specifically tailored to suit the student, applying a one-to-one educational philosophy that the school holds dear. It also differs greatly from their contemporaries.