

PERFORMA

NEW MEXICO'S MAGAZINE
OF THE PERFORMING ARTS



Peaseblossom A Midsummer Night's Dream

Ballet • Chamber Music • Soundbites • Fiction
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and Much More.



PAGE 1



Photo by Allan Green

PERFORMA VISITS

The Matchmaker of Music

By J. Buerkle

If it were possible, some human beings should be able to return and do another life, acquiring more time in order to express all their ideas. That is, if they want to.

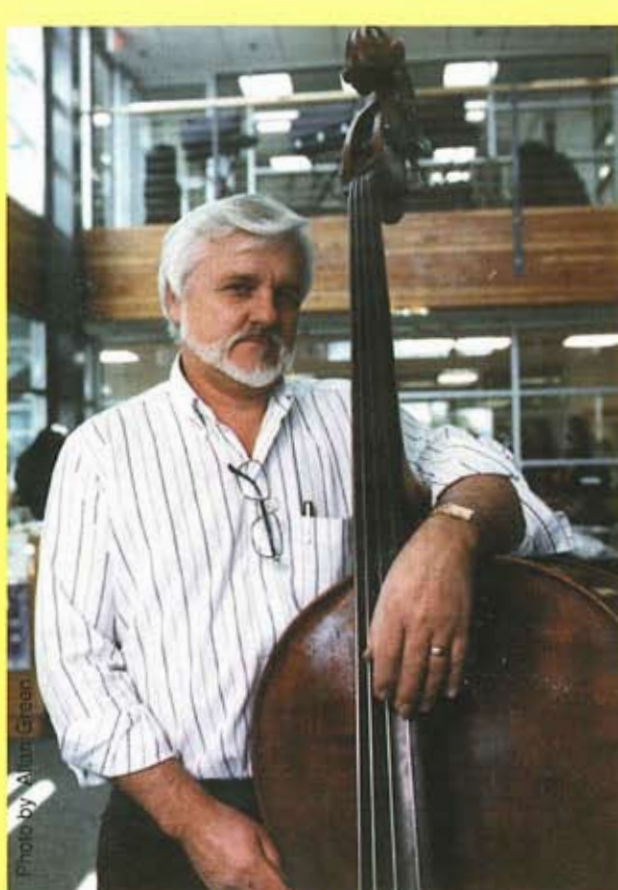
Don Robertson wants to, and he has a quantity of ideas to express which could easily grant him a couple more lifetimes. Such is the path of so many talented persons, in that they are reactive to aspects of their immediate task and all its relatives and simply need time – lots more time! As I spoke with Don, I realized the tide comes in and goes out with

8

him every day. There is a charge of energy in his new shop which brings with it many gifts.....the gift of people with their musical needs and ideas, instruments from all over the world including a Stradivarius from England, phones calls about many concerns, classical music, his wife, Marie with his sons. Accordingly, Robertson and Son's Violin Shop is about the sound of music and it's making.

Don metamorphosed himself from a cellist-teacher to a musician-technician of stringed instruments. At the age of 10 in Amarillo, Texas where Don was a student, a teacher from the string program came by and played the cello and "that was it for me." His musical sense was awakened – the love for the sound of the instrument was instantaneous. Don told his parents he wanted to play the cello and their reply was "What's the cello?" Although Don's parents were not

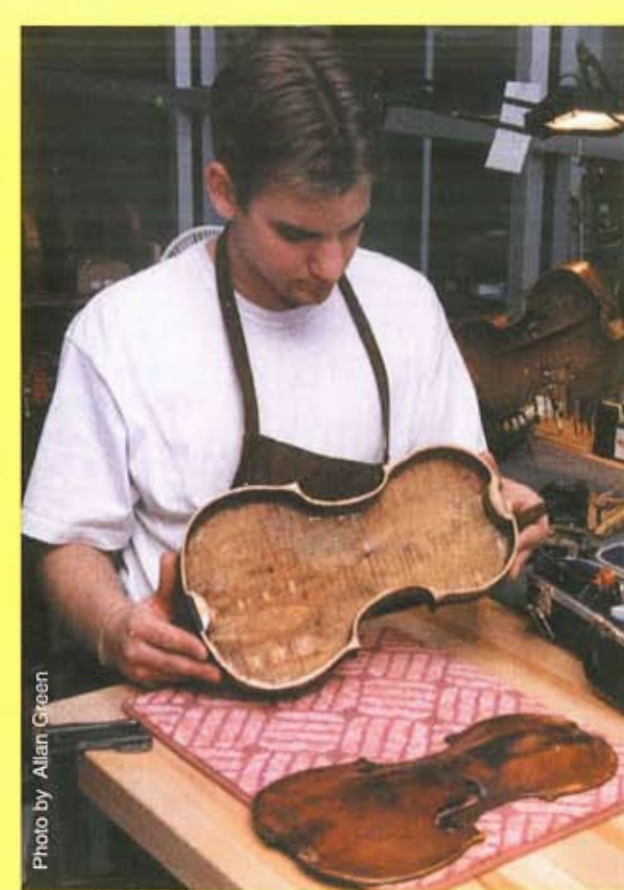
PAGE 2



Don Robertson, Owner

musicians, his mother rented a cello for Don and directed his musical education (and four siblings). This good fortune, coinciding with his knack for woodworking skills he acquired as a boy led him to a university scholarship, a teaching position at UNM in Portales, a teaching certificate, a chair with the New Mexico Symphony, and a teaching position in the public schools. And now – his own instrument repair business competing with others like it in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Paris and London.

Somewhere in the make-up of the Robertson family a resonance with stringed instruments prevailed. Don even uttered categorically that All cellos, are good! Don's three sons play the cello, bass, or viola. How does one decide which instrument/s meets their *a priori* needs? This indeed is a poser. In Don's words, "Music is bigger than life." Is he



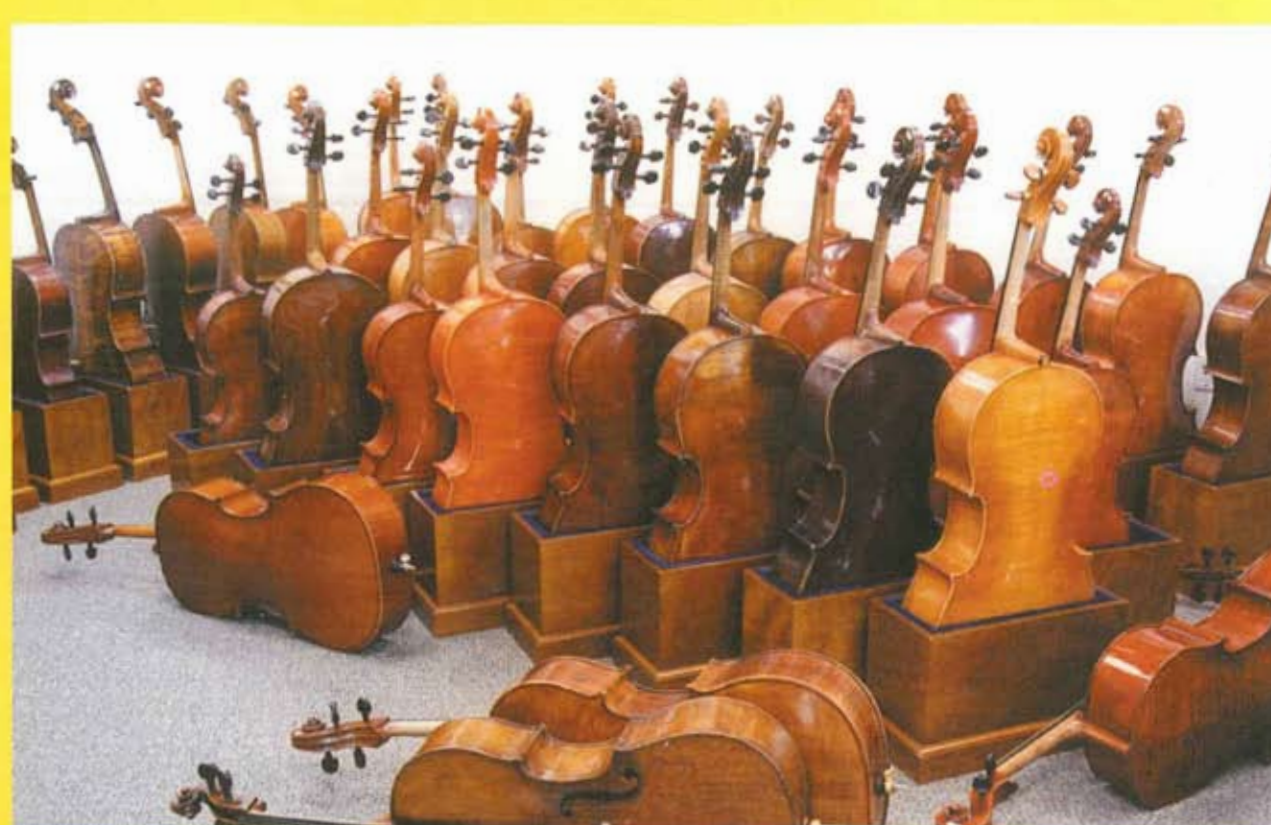
Justin Robertson inspects a vintage instrument

suggesting that music came before life – that the archetype of music is firmly established long before man existed? For many musicians, the gravitation to an instrument is immediate knowledge, yet unexplainable. Even Don's son Aaron insisted on playing the bass, overruling Don's concerns about the size of the bass versus the size of his son.

The physical characteristics of the individual and the physical requirements of the instrument play an important role in deciding what instrument to play and determine success or failure. Put a small child on the bass who has thin fingers and she will have trouble pressing the strings down. A boy playing the tuba with very small lips will have trouble as this instrument requires large lip muscles. In order to get just the first sound from a stringed instrument you have to hold it fairly close to correct position, hold the bow accu-

Continued on Page 12 9

PAGE 3



ately, pull the bow at the right speed, pressure, and correct distance from the bridge. And yet the desire to play a particular instrument persists, in spite of the maneuverings one must incur.

An intriguing aspect to stringed instruments is that so many adjustments can be performed on the instrument which immediately change the sound and ease the playing. Many other instruments are not so accessible to adjustment, i.e. piano. Herein may be the breath of Don's natural interest in the universe - adjustments toward perfection with so many possibilities!

For Don, the luckiest people in the world are those who can get out and do something they truly enjoy – and he knows he is one of those. At the moment, Don has a couple of pots in the fire which he wasn't prepared to disclose, but next year at this time these ideas will have come to fruition.

In the meantime, Don has plenty to do in his new 13,500 square foot building located on Carlisle north of Candelaria in Albuquerque. Herein lies the largest violin repair shop in the world. The architecture of the shop is in of itself a spectacle. As one looks up through the three story building, hundreds of window panels allow access to a clear and realistic view of the sky. This is surely unusual architecture in Albuquerque, but after all, that's partly what the Southwest is about. The open staircase winds around the outside of the interior building to all levels where instruments are serenely displayed in various glass rooms. On the first floor is a performance hall with beautiful wood floors and acoustic panels. Marie and Don Robertson have contributed so gloriously to the city of Albuquerque. And to think.....it was a dream – and now, it is alive and real! As Shakespeare says in *Antony and Cleopatra*, "If there be, or ever were, one such, It's past the size of dreaming."