

Craftsman interested in wood, rocks

Bryan artist makes, perfects violins

By Jamie Russell
Reporter

What do rocks and wood have in common?

Bradley Bowman. Bowman, 37, has been making and perfecting violins for 22 years and studying archaeology as a hobby for seven years.

Bowman, who left Colorado seven years ago, lives and works out of a wood-floor home in Bryan. He chose the house instead of a more visible store because most of his business comes through referral.

"If someone needs my services they will find me," he says. "Anyone else doesn't need to know I'm here."

Bowman rummaged through the clutter of a dimly lighted work table, commenting that he has no desire to be neat because he is more comfortable with the clutter.

In what was once the dining area of this four-room house, Bowman concentrates on a diminishing art. Few violin makers are left in the world and most of those remaining do restoration work, he says.

"I'm unique in that respect," he says. "I spend more time making violins than restoring them."

Restoring violins tends to be more profitable, Bowman says, but there is greater satisfaction in building new ones.

Bowman's pet dove, Bird, maintains a watchful eye over his work from a cluttered cage. Bowman says he would like to clean the cage, but the bird broke his legs one weekend and has been neurotic ever since.

"He's a spaz," Bowman says. "I think he thinks that if I take him out of his cage he's going to go to the vet to get casts again. He's content in watching me make my violins."

Some 400 hours of work and patience go into each violin Bowman makes.

"It takes six months from start to finish and I work on two violins in that time," he says. "I make four or five violins a year."

"Of course, I do a lot of experimentation. I make all my own varnishes and I'm really involved with electronic acoustical experiments."

In high school, Bowman played in the orchestra's string program. He wasn't interested in pursuing it as a career but was fascinated by the way instruments work.

"I became real interested in the instruments and I decided I wanted to build them," he says. "I started to build one in my garage but I had no idea what I was doing."

Bowman needed help and found it in a man he refers to as V. Hughs.

"I found this guy that made some instruments and learned from him," he says. "I camped on his doorsteps for a while until he decided to let me hang around and do some work."

Bowman's pursuit of and dedication to violin making has been all-important to him, even to the point of disregard for his own comfort. For two years he lived in the back of his truck, despite freezing temperatures, because he was making very little money in his new profession.

"It's not a viable occupation," he says. "You're not going to make any money. You work real hard and nobody cares. If you want to do it for you, then it's worth doing."

That's Bowman's attitude. If people buy his violins, which they do, then fine. If they don't, then that's fine, too.

"You can get a violin from a factory that sounds OK," he says. "But it is not a piece of art, it's a clone. I'm an artist."

Bowman's violins sell for about \$4,000 each, a relatively inexpensive price when compared to other violins, which sell for \$10,000 or more.

Some violin makers will ask outrageous prices for their violins, he added, but they don't always get the price they ask. Even at his relatively low prices, Bowman's violins don't sell fast enough, and for this reason, he does other things.

"It's my prostitution," he says, pointing to some used instruments. "I'll peddle a few used saxophones or violins, rentals, or whatever it takes that is consistent income because light bills work on a 30-day net."

"Violin making is a very slow, long, drawn-out process and I don't necessarily get paid on 30-day intervals," he says. "It's easier to retail than it is to spend all my time on repairs."

Many people lose the art of violin making by getting sucked into the profitability of repair work.

But because Bowman only does repair work for close friends and good-standing customers, his art is maintained.

"The trouble with violins is they don't wear out — the older the better," Bowman says. "No player wants a new violin. As the violin gets older, all the different pieces of wood begin to vibrate together."



Brad Bowman displays one of the violins he's made.

Bowman is serious about his instruments — his expertise and craftsmanship rate with the best in the field.

In his well-worn apron and wire-framed spectacles, he resembles the stereotypical graduate student. On his sabbaticals to Duddley's Draw, he must look like every other patron, but inside he is a true craftsman.

"Craftsmanship-wise, there are very few people as good as me," he says. "I'm very good. I'm not as good as I'm going to be. Violin making takes your whole life, or maybe two,

if you can figure out a way to do that."

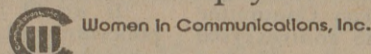
Even one who loves his work much as Bowman needs a hobby. This is where his interest in archaeology emerges.

Proudly but modestly, he pointed out a book that included a published paper he wrote on a historic cemetery he unearthed. The venture that established him as a serious archaeologist.

"I do archaeology on an annual level, but in a professional manner," he says. "I'm serious about it. I can't have two full-time careers. I do archaeology on the weekends."

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House endorses proposal giving tax decision to voters

AUSTIN (AP) — The Texas House endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment Tuesday that would prohibit personal or corporate state income taxes unless voters give their permission.

Rejecting arguments that lawmakers would be ducking their duty by leaving such a decision to the public, the House voted 106-35 to send the plan to the Senate.

"This would allow the voters to decide," said Rep. Stan Schlueter, D-Killeen, sponsor of the measure.

Schlueter said that under the proposal, any income tax plan placed before voters first would have to pass both the House and Senate. That means voters would know precisely what kind of tax they would be paying, what the rates would be and what deductions would be allowed if they approved it, he said.

"This allows the people to find out what is going to be in an income tax before the Legislature passes it in the dark of night — which is the only way (without the constitutional amendment) it would pass if it could pass," Schlueter said.

The proposed constitutional change also would require the Legislature to return to voters if lawmakers wanted to raise the rates after an income tax was approved.

Opponents argued that the Legislature now has the power to enact an income tax if needed, and they said putting the question before voters would be passing the buck.

"I was elected to come up here and make decisions, not pass the ball

"This allows the people to find out what is going to be in an income tax before the Legislature passes it in the dark of night..."

— Rep. Stan Schlueter, D-Killeen, sponsor of the measure

off to the public every time we face a difficult choice," said Rep. Juan Hinojosa, D-McAllen. "It's our job and our responsibility to vote for or against a state income tax."

Hinojosa said it is unlikely voters would decide to tax themselves, adding, "They elected us to make those decisions. If they don't like the decisions we make, they can vote us out in the next election."

But Rep. Bill Ceverha, R-Dallas, said the Legislature often gives voters the final say on major state issues. Last fall, lawmakers chose to allow voters to decide whether Texas should legalize gambling on horse racing with an election to be held this November, he noted.

"We have, on selected items, gone to the people and said, 'How do you feel about this issue?' All it would take is a majority vote and a referendum of the people, just like we did on pari-mutuel gambling," Ceverha said.

Rep. Doyle Willis, D-Fort Worth, noted that before enactment of the state sales tax in 1961, some people urged lawmakers to pass a constitutional ban on that levy.

But the sales tax today is the state's major source of income, and without it state services would suffer, he said, urging lawmakers to defeat the proposed income tax limits and allow a future Legislature to decide if one is needed.

"Let's leave this out of the Constitution, where it certainly doesn't belong," he said.

If the Senate would pass the House proposal, the proposed constitutional limitation on income taxes would go before the voters in November.

Jail plan may stop crowding

DALLAS (AP) — A method for admitting inmates to the state's crowded prisons should end the open-and-shut case that has nagged the Texas Department of Corrections for months, an aide to Gov. Mark Clements said.

Sheriffs have been assigned specific days for bringing prisoners to the Department of Corrections Diagnostic Unit in Huntsville under the plan, Ruler said.

Under the new plan, each day's intake will be limited to 150 prisoners, and admissions will spread evenly throughout the week, Scott said.

Last week, the prison remained below its required capacity by adding the net of each day's admissions and releases to the existing prison population.

On Monday, the system opened for its sixth consecutive weekday, admitting 55 new inmates and releasing 179, prison officials said.

The system has been operating close 10 times this year after hitting its court-order-mandated capacity.

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