

GREAT ACOUSTICS

Ribbecke/Manzer Duet

By Julie Bergman

The Duet archtop was built as a collaboration between two of North America's premier guitar builders. Toronto's Linda Manzer, who has been building innovative flattops and archtops since 1968, and Tom Ribbecke of Healdsburg, California, a guitar builder since 1972 and a noted lutherie instructor, joined forces in the fall of 2000 to create the Duet and document its construction in an instructional DVD.

Building the Duet was "like jumping on a fast-moving train," Manzer says. Though there were months of predesign, Ribbecke and Manzer fabricated the body, voiced the guitar, and strung the instrument up in an intense seven-day session in front of students and the camera of Canadian filmmaker Robert Fresco. The resulting 45-minute video, scheduled to be released this fall (to be followed by a highly detailed DVD next year), captures the dialogue between teachers and students as well as the synchronized, almost musical interaction of the guitar's creators. "We called it the Duet because it was like two soloists performing live together," Manzer explains. "We paid a lot of attention to each other's moves and reacted accordingly. While Tom was soloing, I was comping, and vice versa."

The Duet features an Adirondack spruce top, big leaf maple back and sides, and koa binding. The neck is bird's-eye maple, and all of the fittings and the fingerboard are ebony. It has a scale length of 25 inches, and the fingerboard measures 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches at the nut. Ribbecke's 17-inch Monterey archtop shape and structural methods were used, along with his top design, basic neck structure, and carbon fiber-reinforced truss rod system. Manzer carved the back using the techniques she learned from the late James D'Aquisto and designed the tailpiece, bridge, inlay banner, and engraving. They worked together on the design of the peghead and X-brace, the location of the f-holes, and the "toasted orange" lacquer finish.

The Duet's tone is a remarkable synthesis of Ribbecke and Manzer's signature sounds. "My guitars are known for their complex midrange, and Linda's are known for their responsiveness in all ranges," says Ribbecke. "This guitar combines both."

