

# THE Scroll

50th  
Anniversary  
Edition

The Newsletter for the  
Cox Violin Community

Fall 2017

[www.coxviolins.com](http://www.coxviolins.com)

Dear Friends,



*Photo © Carol Compton, 2017*

One of my joys this year has been seeing the completion of a new education building and performance hall for the Brattleboro Music Center. I've been working for twelve years on this project, most recently as Chair of the Capital Campaign, through many twists and turns, ups and downs. There is joy in seeing the unpredictable ways these new spaces are both shaping music in our community and being shaped by the musicians making use of them. There is joy in feeling all the investment and energy over these years, now come together in this particular piece of architecture. There is also joy in the unfolding of these spaces as they take on a life of their own, and in the anticipation of watching and wondering at this unfolding over the coming years.

It is with similar feelings that I approach this year's Scroll's celebration of 50 years at the bench. As I reflect on my career so far, I celebrate all the energy and caring and experience that has passed to me, and around me, and through me. I relive the vision and dreams, hopes and expectations that have shaped my life and work. And I am thankful for the many who have invested in my work, just as I am thankful to the donors who turned the BMC's dreams into reality.

And just as a space for music takes on a life of its own and a spirit shaped by the sound vibrations that fill it and by the passion and commitment of the musicians making that music, so my instruments have a life of their own. I feel both joy and humility in watching them make their way in the world, interacting with all they meet in all the ways things come together in this world.

The success of fundraising for the new BMC was built on 65 years of investment in "promoting the love and understanding of good music and making it a vital part of the community," as the mission statement tells us. The vital community that has grown here, one that loves and understands good music, is what brought about the dollar investment in these spaces that will inspire and support music for the coming generations.

It is the 50 years of investment in my work that allows me to produce what I do, and, with luck, will serve and inspire the coming generations of string players.



*Photo © Wm Dixon, 2011*

## On the Inside

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# 1967 - 2017: Fifty Years at the Bench

In the Greenhouse, 2017

## In August of 1967 at the age of eighteen, Douglas Cox traveled to the Geigenbauschule Mittenwald to begin his apprenticeship.

As is customary, the first instruments he made belonged to the school. Only Viola Opus 5 remains in his inventory. I was assigned to the workshop of Karl Roy. The course of study in his studio was to do one major step of construction, such as building a rib cage for two violins, followed by single repetitions of that process for two additional violins. When these four were complete in the white (not yet varnished), a viola was to be built in one process. I built my viola in the spring of 1968 on the school's Strad pattern and varnished it the following winter, counting it as my Opus 5.

Given my tendency to work quickly and loosely, the meticulous process and workmanship standards of the Mittenwald School provided a good foundation for me to build on.

## 1971-1981

Doug began working in the Boston shop of J. Bradley Taylor. During that summer, he continued working in the shop part-time while continuing to run the family farm in Plaistow, NH. He spent the next ten years doing restorations and repairs in Taylor's shop, working on some of the finest instruments in the Boston area.

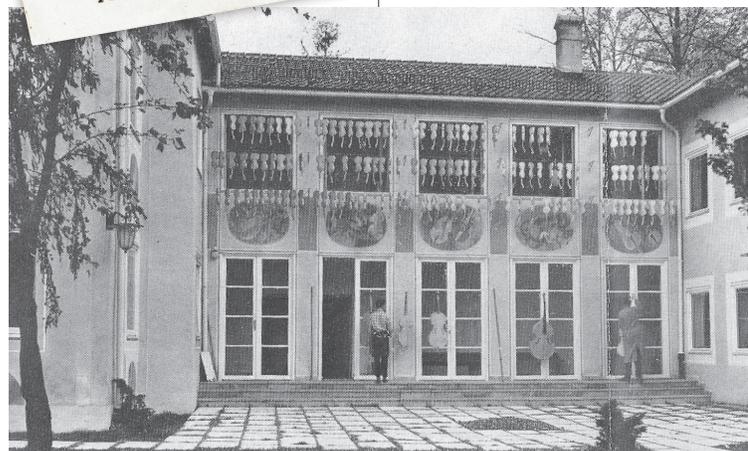
## June 1979

Married Lisa Anderson.

## September 1981 – June 1982

Doug accompanied Lisa as she continued her Classics education at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece.

Seven early instruments are labeled "Douglas C. Cox, Athens 198–." Others were begun in Boston and finished in Athens, or begun in Athens and finished in Boston.



Geigenbauschule Mittenwald (State Professional School for Violinmaking)

*It was about this time that I realized that my instruments did not play as well as they should. I began looking critically at the acoustic assumptions and practices of the Mittenwald School and comparing that to my experience in the Taylor shop. My focus shifted from the "this is how violins should be made" approach to "how can I make instruments that play well."*

*I began the process of experimenting and learning from players. The evolutionary process of trial and error – getting to know my wood, and getting to know myself – led to increased success in making instruments that played well. Robert Koff was very important for me in expanding my thinking.*

## August 1983

Lisa took a position teaching Latin and history at the Putney School. Forty-three instruments are labeled "Douglas C. Cox, 198–, Putney, Vermont." Doug worked in rented space on Main Street in Putney, and later in dormitory space on campus.



Early Music, ca. 1983

## 1984 Jeremy Cox born.

## July 1, 1985

Purchased and moved into the house on Sunset Lake Road in Brattleboro. Instruments made from this date on are labeled "Douglas C. Cox, Brattleboro, Vermont." More than eight hundred instruments are so labeled as of September 2017.

## 1986 Nathaniel Cox born.



## Fall 1988 – Spring 1990

The Cox family relocates to Bard College, where Lisa teaches Classics. Instruments continue to be labeled "Brattleboro." The first year Doug worked in Livingston, NY and the second year in Rhinebeck, NY.

## Summer 1990

Return to Sunset Lake Road. The first few years there, when not away at Bard, Doug worked in the basement of the house. After the return from Bard, work begins on building the shop.

## January 1991

Residency with the Ural Philharmonic in Yekaterinburg, Russia.

## 1991-2008

Work, work, work!

## Summer 2007

Began attending the violin acoustics workshops at Oberlin College. Set up acoustic record-keeping system.

## 2008

Hired a business manager.

## 2009

Developed the making protocol with assistance from intern Isaac Avenia-Tapper.

## 2010

A comprehensive table of woods used - the foundation of Doug's work - was added to database with assistance from intern Seamus Carey.

## 2011

First Wine and Violin Tasting at NextStage in Putney, Vermont. Yum!

## 2013

Exhibit at David Walter Gallery.

## 2014

Guadagnini models exhibited at Stamell Strings, Amherst, Mass.

## 2015

A comprehensive catalog of the forms used is added to the database. Over 60 forms - many still in use today.

## January 2016

Traveled to Santiago de Cuba on a cultural exchange with 20 artists and musicians.

## 2016

Nathaniel Cox joins the business, building lutes and baroque guitars.

## 2016-17

Violinmaker-in-Residence for the VSO. Violin #934 debuts at the May 6, 2017 concert. Mid-2017, Doug speeds past Opus 950 on his way to Opus 1,000.

## From the tree.....

Timeline of the making

**START**  
September 7, 2016.....Autumnal Equinox .....October.....VSO Residency #1.....Happy Halloween.....November

**Prepare top & back plates**

**Glue blocks to form**

**Liners**

**Body Assembly**

**Shaping the edges**

**Residency #1**

**Purfling back**  
Carve channel

**Purfling**

**Ribs**

**Select wood for neck & scroll**

Working with **Brad Taylor** helped to launch my career. He smoothed the way for my study in Mittenwald, and then gave me the opportunity to get to know professional players and fine instruments in all their diversity and complexity. With his guidance and support I undertook work that stretched me beyond my limits, discovering and developing the skills and understanding that have provided the foundation of my making career.

**Marylou Speaker Churchill**, principal 2nd violin with the BSO, had a profound influence on my career. As she did with so many others, she encouraged and challenged me to do my best work. There are hundreds of individuals, not all musicians, who can say the same. Her reach as a teacher, musician and friend was vast, and through those people her teachings and her spirit live on.



**Eric Rosenblith** was a celebrated violin teacher and chair of the string department at New England Conservatory in the 1980s and a prominent part of the Yellow Barn Festival in Putney, Vermont. I saw him regularly and he graciously made his 1713 Grand Pattern Strad available to me to study and copy. The violin had



been his since he was a young prodigy in the orchestral world and fit his character and playing style perfectly. He is one of many who gave me access to inspiring instruments and the understanding of why they are so wonderful.

**Robert Koff**, founding 2nd violin of the Juilliard String Quartet, gave tirelessly of his time and wisdom over the many years he served as my mentor, evaluating and improving my work. He played and commented on most of my instruments for two decades and kept me reaching for the "Dark Chocolate" sound he loved.

**Blanche Moyse** was mentor, inspiration and formidable taskmistress to generations of musicians in Brattleboro and beyond. As conductor and interpreter, she offered rare and profound insights into the music of J. S. Bach. As a passionate advocate for community participation, she pursued her vision with a tenacity that has made our town a Mecca for music.

Blanche generously allowed me to study her 1610 Brothers Amati Violin, and I have made several violins on this pattern. My Opus 730, made entirely of wood harvested locally in Windham County is a tribute to Blanche and her legacy.

**Antonio Stradivarius** lived from 1644 or 1648 to 1737. He was a brilliant thinker and craftsman, and he and his shop produced a very large and well-documented body of work. Coming to violinmaking with 200 years of evolution of the instrument before him, he was able to synthesize the work of his forebears and apply his own genius to systematically experimenting with the form and materials to achieve results many feel have not been surpassed.

I look to Stradivari for inspiration and instruction. In my case the instruction



has not been "do it this way!" but more "here is how to think about the violin and here is how to experiment and evolve". The vast production of his studio – about 600 instruments still exist from a likely output of around 1200 – and their prominent placement in museums and with top players, allows for easy study and comparison.

### On Violinmaking

I view myself primarily as a toolmaker: I make violins to be used by musicians to order sounds in the universe, to express their soul and spirit. As a user of good tools, I know that tools have a beauty that comes from elegance

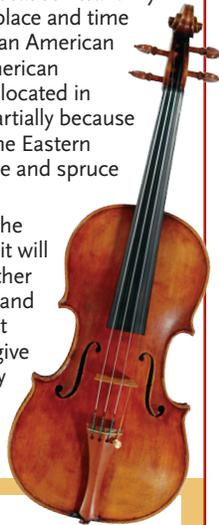
and efficiency of design, comfortably fit to the body, and a relationship to a tradition of use. My work is limited by the nature of wood, the laws of physics, the shape of the human body, and the imagination of my clientele.

Visually my work needs to be inviting to the player. It needs to look like it wants to be played and will respond to the player's wishes. The classical violin world is conservative, and old is usually considered better, so most of my work is designed to look and feel old; most is modeled on specific instruments of the past. I admire and strive for strength of character and personality, and willingly sacrifice fineness of detail to achieve this strength.

Tonally, I strive for ease of response and a full, flexible sound. I work on a wide range of models to try to meet the needs and tastes of a wide range of players. The goal is a rich, complex foundation with enough character and personality on top to provide projection and clarity of articulation.

I use local woods because I want my work to reflect the place and time of its making. I am an American and I like to use American wood. My studio is located in West Brattleboro partially because of its place within the Eastern forest and the maple and spruce with which I work.

Once I have made the violin and set it up, it will be the playing, weather changes, accidents and repairs over the next 200 years that will give the violin its identity and its soul.



ing of Violin #934 for the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. A blog documenting start to finish is at [www.coxviolins.com/blog](http://www.coxviolins.com/blog).

to the Music!



ber.....November.....Thanksgiving.....December.....VSO Residency #2.....Winter Solstice.....Happy New Year.....March.....Vernal Equinox.....April.....Spring comes to Vermont.....May.....VSO Residency #4



# Fifty Years : A Gallery of Work



*Violin #11, Amati Baroque, 1979*

## **The First Hundred: 1967 - 1988**

Shown above is Opus 11, the earliest violin of mine still in my possession. I also have Viola Opus 5, made while I was at Mittenwald. Opus 11 was built at the Taylor Shop on a Nicolo Amati form.

## **Opus 100 - 199: 1988 - 1991**

The first hundred took 21 years, the second hundred only 3. Below is Opus 111, built on my Koff Vuillaume form.



*Violin #111, "Koff" Vuillaume, 1988*

**Opus 200 - 299: 1991 - 1996**  
In the 1980s I purchased a large quantity of local wood in the log from Cersosimo Lumber Company. In the 1990s that wood was seasoned enough to use. Occasionally interesting material will come my way so I have added to the inventory over time. Show below is Violin #246, a Kreisler Guarneri model built using maple from the Cersosimo wood.



*Violin #246, "Kreisler" Guarneri del Gesù, 1994*



*Violin #399, Guadagnini 1779, 1999*

## **Opus 300 - 399: 1996 - 1999**

Bjoern Andreasson, long-time violinist with the New York Philharmonic, made his home in Vermont during retirement. He brought his 1779 Guadagnini violin to the shop for some work and allowed me to study it. See #399 pictured above.

## **Opus 400 - 499: 1999 - 2003**

Below is my Viola #434, a slightly smaller version of the 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ " Gasparo da Salò viola I was lucky enough to study in Brad Taylor's shop in 1981.



*Viola #434, 16 $\frac{7}{8}$ " Gaspar, 2001*

# Fifty Years : A Gallery of Work



Viola #524, Storioni 1789, 2004

## Opus 500 - 599: 2003 - 2007

Shown above is Viola #524, the first made on the Storioni 1789 form inspired by the viola played by Kazuko Matsusaka in the Boston Symphony. This is one of the forms developed from the work of "lesser" makers - Storioni, Testore, and the like - which have added interest to my work.

## Opus 600 - 699: 2007 - 2010

In January of 2008 I hired a business manager to free myself of tasks I enjoy less than making instruments. This resulted in an increase in production (see graph below). My business manager and my family continue trying to find ways to slow down production.

I have had good results making violas inspired by the work of Gasparo da Salò. I thought it would be fun to apply the same principles to violin design, and my Opus 623 was the first of these Gaspar-inspired violins.

Viola #623, Gasparo da Salò, 2008



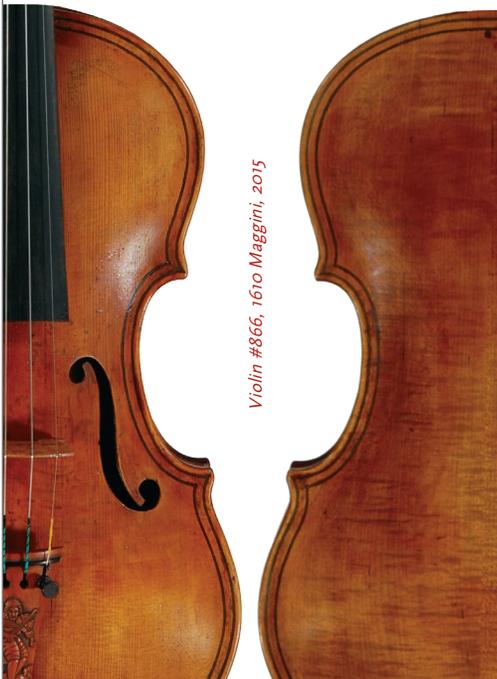
Violin #730, 1610 Amati, 2011

## Opus 700 - 799: 2010 - 2013

Violin #730 was made in 2011 from a unique piece of wood as a tribute to Blanche Moyses. The form, from Blanche's 1610 Brothers Amati, has such dainty proportions that it is perfect for the smaller player who wants the big sound.

## Opus 800 - 899: 2013 - 2015

In mid-2014 the owner of a 1610 Maggini violin asked me to copy it, as he intended to sell the original. I made three violins on the form - one in baroque form and two in modern form. Shown below is #866, the violin that replaced his Maggini.



Violin #866, 1610 Maggini, 2015



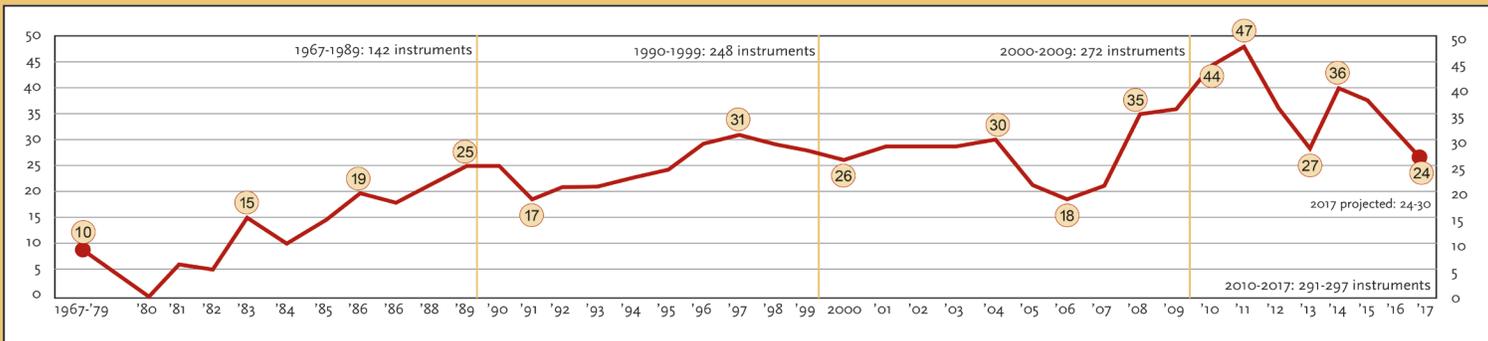
Violin #900, "Stern" Guarneri del Gesù

## Opus 900 and Beyond: 2015 - 2017

I numbered my 900<sup>th</sup> instrument in early November of 2015, a "Stern" model Guarneri del Gesù on the form developed from Roman Totenberg's Guarneri violin.

I numbered Viola 950 in March of 2017, a 16 5/8" made on a 1983 form first used for Viola #32.

Viola #950, 16 5/8", 2017



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## What People Say:

I am still in love with my Cox Violin! It has served me well and so far traveled to teach and perform with me in Europe, Honduras, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, China, and around the US. I am truly grateful to you for providing an instrument with which to find my voice.

**Joel Schut, Violin Opus 392**  
"Rosenblith" 1713 Strad, 1999

I'm in love with my new viola. In Turkish we compliment people who create anything with their hands by saying, "*ellerine saglik*" which translates as "health to your hands," so you continue making more. Thank you so much for making such beautiful violas.

**Gizem Yücel, Viola Opus 897**  
15 5/8" 2015

The first time I heard Doug's violins, I didn't expect to fall in love. Here was an instrument with a multi-faceted sound; rich, dark, throaty and clear at the same time. I love the clarity on the G string, notes resonating as if the instrument had a fifth string, a low C.

**Andrea Larson, Swedish Fiddler**  
Violin Opus 686, Gaspar da Salò 2010

It is such a treat to see a young musician experience playing on a fine instrument for the first time - watching them light up as they discover the beauty of the sound that they are able to produce - finding the personality of the instrument.

**Professor David Rubinstein, about**  
Viola Opus 846, Storioni 1789, 2014

I am so impressed with the power and sweetness of my new violin, as well as the beautiful craftsmanship. I could not ask for a better companion. Many thanks.

**Claire Thaler, Violin Opus 908, 2016**  
"Nachez" Strad 1716

Doug's violins have always impressed me. I have several colleagues who perform regularly on Douglas Cox violins, and I've had the pleasure of performing and recording alongside these violinists. The sheer power and consistency of his instruments are what impress me the most. I've tried out a few myself, and I remember the ease of playing, and how each Douglas Cox violin has its own unique personality.

**Jennifer Choi, Concert Violinist,**  
Soloist, Chamber Musician



## Douglas Cox

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### BOSTON, 2017-18

With the sale of the New England Conservatory building I have used for the past several years, my patterns are changing. I look forward to serving clients in the Boston and New England area going forward. If you would like to see me, please call or email, and I will do my best to accommodate you as quickly and conveniently as possible.



Violin #934, the VSO Gariel-Laredo  
in the Greenhouse, Fall 2016

### WHERE TO SEE MY WORK

My work can be seen at dealers of fine instruments in many cities. I travel occasionally and welcome the opportunity to meet people and show my work.

Visitors are always welcome at the studio in the hills of Southern Vermont. Call or email in advance to be sure I will be available when you want to visit:  
(802) 257-1024 ~ info@coxviolins.com.

### ON THE WEB

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**THE SCROLL'S** purpose is to provide information and enjoyment to people interested in fine new instruments. We welcome your inquiries and hope you'll tell us how we can be useful to you.

### SCHOLARSHIPS

There are a limited number of scholarships for exceptional students who lack the resources to procure fine instruments. If you'd like more information about scholarships, let us know.