YOU HAVE

Ira Landgarten

Ira Landgarten

H*ow did you get into luthiery?*
That question should be broken down into two areas. How did I get into it as a matter of interest, and how did I get into it professionally. My Dad used to play mandolin and harmonica. I remember being put to bed as an infant with a lullaby on the mandolin. Perhaps an infinitesimal amount of that stuck with me through the years. When I was about ten, I used to spend a lot of time in the basement fooling around with anything from model kits to trains. I had no interest in the mandolin at that time, but we had a guitar around the house. I took it down into the basement and accidentally smashed it into a Lally column. Suddenly I saw all these things inside the guitar that you couldn't see from the outside. There were lots of little pieces of wood that were put in there for some special purpose. I guess I left it at that, but the idea stuck with me that there was something on the inside of the instrument that helps it do what it is supposed to.

A couple of years later I was into Santo & Johnny. I was intrigued by the steel guitar. One day I saw an article in *Popular Mechanics* about how to make a triple neck steel guitar. I must have been about twelve when I started to build it. That was the first instrument of any kind that I ever started to make. I lost interest somewhere along the way. I liked rock music, but I liked all kinds of music. I had been studying piano for a few years by that time. I was learning classical piano, which I kept on right into college. I was always being sidetracked by one kind of music or another. When I was thirteen it was folk music. I wanted a dreadnought in the worst way. A D-28 would have done nicely, but I couldn't afford it. I was talking to my dad about this. We used to go into the city every week. On one of our runs we stopped at H.L. Wilds. We discovered that they sold woods exclusively for instruments. They weren't kits, but we picked out a package of wood that would be able to produce a guitar. I knew it was possible to build a guitar. It had to be! There were just pieces of wood that were cut by human beings and fashioned into an instrument. I figured it couldn't be all that difficult. I'm going to try it. I bought a set of mahogany. That body is my first guitar (points to a dreadnought body). I have to make a neck for it. The mold, the shape of the outline, my father helped me with originally. He's a pattern maker among many other talents. I grew up around those kinds of tools, so it was not beyond my way of thinking to be able to put this kind of an instrument together. I used to hang out in music stores looking at guitars until I wore

Master Luthier - JOHN

TO TAKE A CHANCE

By Bruce Morrison

out my welcome. I decided I'd better put this one together. That's what got me started. It was going to be a hobby, but I built another, then another, and yet another. I wanted to be a music teacher. I got my degree in applied music.

The business part of it came about in 1972 when I met the Mandolin Brothers. There was a Gibson mandolin for sale in town. It was an A-0. I wanted to know more about it. By chance I was listening to the radio that evening. The Mandolin Brothers were the guests. They said they had started a business. If anyone was interested in these instruments, to give them a call. I told them about the mandolin. One thing led to the next. They were looking for someone to do their repairs. I said I'd built several instruments, perhaps you'd like to see them? I brought them in. They offered me a job. One of my first repairs was on a 000-45. The next thing was to make a neck for a Bella Voce. Then there were pearl top Martins, all kinds of Mastertones and Gibson mandolins. It was about that time, after I'd been working with the mandolins for a while that I started to get the idea to build mandolins. I carved my first mandolin in 1974. I carved the top and back using the only gouge I had. It was an effort that took me from one afternoon into the next morning. I swore I'd never make another mandolin, but of course I did. It was from my experience carving mandolin tops that I became interested in the arch top guitar.

Tell about your learning experience with Jimmy D'Aquisto.

I met Jimmy about ten years ago. I was becoming interested in the arch top guitar. I hadn't had much experience with them before, except to repair them. I'd worked on some D'Angelicos and was really getting the urge to build one. I started to build my first arch top in 1976 or '77. I'd just met Jimmy around that time. I wanted to know more about John D'Angelico. I was sorry not to have had the interest earlier, as it was possible that I could have met him before he died. But in any event, Jimmy was very helpful. He saw that I had a talent to build the arch top guitar. Once in a while we'll go out and buy materials together. I have a lot of respect for Jimmy. He's a talented builder who specializes in a unique instrument. He's a custom builder rather than a production builder.

He's taken over the legacy of D'Angelico. That has pros and cons. I say that because when you take up after someone's legacy, that can mean that you can be saddled with having to produce certain expectations. People expect you to build the same kind of instrument. The problem is that it doesn't allow for growth. For an individual builder, having freedom is a great advantage because you have an independence which helps you to change. Contrary to that, any company that is trying to build instruments can't adapt that way. They're locked in to what they're making. A company is primarly concerned with selling units. They're moving merchandise. The approach of a builder is different. He still has to make a living, but his cognizance is sharper. So is his conscience.

If you want to talk about the advantages of building an instrument in a small shop by one man as apposed to a company, there are many reasons why one has the advantage over the other. I work alone. I have for most of the time. I find it beneficial to see the instrument through from its very beginning, doing all phases of construction myself. In a factory condition where part A meets part B somewhere down the bench, then part C meets A and B later on, generally these parts are not specifically selected to allow that instrument the ultimate in terms of the combination of parts that's going to work. Whereas in a small shop you're not going to have the noise condition which doesn't allow you to hear your materials as well as you should. It's very important to be able to 'listen' to what you're doing. I'm always tapping and listening, scraping and shaving a little bit here, tapping a little more so I can hear what's going on as I'm shaping.

Are there any other builders that you correspond with?

Sure. Dana Bourgeois is one. Gila Eban is another builder for whom I have a lot of respect. I might be leaving some out, but there are quite a few builders that I communicate with.

There's Mario Maccaferri. We've had the privilege of working together, or rather, I've had the privilege of working with him, I should say. He's very generous. He has a keen interest in the classical guitar. I learned a good deal from him. He has a great talent for being able to expedite an idea. Through my friendship with Mario, I got to restore one of Django Reinhardt's guitars. It was a Selmar model that had been sitting in Mario's office for a long time. It was in bad shape. Mario told me it had belonged to Les Paul. After talking with Les, we decided that I should try to restore it. It came out great. So now I have the ability to build Maccaferri-style guitars.

How many guitars have you built?

I would have to look it up, but I would say it's somewhere around thirty.

Have you built more flattops or arch tops?

I would say it's about even now.

You have a gift for carving arch tops. Where did you learn?

It's like all the other skills which I've developed on my own. Sometimes

MONTELEONE

you can be your own best teacher. Some people have the ability to draft the right information for themselves using what exists as their tools. In other words the instruments were my textbooks. From my experiences with them, I was able to determine which instruments worked and which didn't. Then I had to figure out why they did or didn't work. It's equally important to know why an instrument is bad as it is good. In working with the D'Angelicos, as well as the Gibsons, Epiphones, and Strombergs, all of the information was available for me to decipher, and draft which ideas I felt were right. There is a point where you have to decide how to make it better. My arch top design is something that I have developed myself.

I've always felt that shape, form, and function are highly interrelated. It's not a good idea to make an instrument with certain contours just because it looks good. If you look at a fine violin, it's a beautiful thing to look at, but what makes it fine is not its beauty alone. It has a certain sonority and toneality and other musical attributes that make it the thing that it is. It's quite amazing how the form and the sound blend together so harmoniously.

Today there are many people building copies or replicas of well known instruments, such as the F-5 mandolin, the dreadnought guitar, and perhaps the L-5 guitar. If a student painter goes to a museum and copys a painting stroke for stroke, he gets many things out of that. He learns what the artist did to convey an idea as an image on a canvas. He learns about light, texture, and all the things that go into making the painting. That's fine up to a point. If this student has the talent and ability to carry out those ideas, there's a point where he either sticks to it for whatever reason, or he departs and goes on to create, using his own acquired skills to make a personal statement rather than a copy of an image. In the instrument world, the same thing applies. I made copies of F-5s. I think I made them for the same reason that everyone likes them. It's an established design. It's attractive, and has a very good sound. There are positive things to the instrument, but it wasn't enough for me.

I understand that as a repairman you've had the chance to examine many Lloyd Loar F-5s. How do your F-5s differ structurally from the Loars?

There were a couple of items I wanted to change right away. One was the neckblock. I felt it was too massive in the scroll area. I think I began making them a little more hollow right from the start. By the time I was drafting ideas for the Grand Artist that started to enter into my way of thinking. The other thing was the truss rod. The truss rods in the Gibsons were the reverse of what they are today. That is, the direction in which they curved inside the neck is the reverse of what it is now.

Meaning that they were . . . ?

Higher in the middle. When I put the truss rods in my first mandolins, I was using the design that Gibson used. The rod was high in the middle and low on the ends. It was easier to do, but I didn't relize that there was a problem until later. I found that the rods would either work or they wouldn't. I had to redo some of my earlier mandolins as a result. One day I made an experimental neck with a reverse carved truss rod, high on the ends and low in the middle. I tightened it up and watched which way it curved. I've set up my machine to carve this reverse truss rod. I've never had a problem since.

I noticed that your F-5's headstock is a little slimmer than the Gibson's.

I took it upon myself to make it more graceful, but if you compare some Loars to others you'll find some deviations in the headstock outline. You wouldn't notice them unless you were to lay a template on them. If you've paid attention to the evolution of Gibson headstocks you can see that there were almost yearly changes!

In working with the Gibson F-5s, I found that there were so many changes going on, that by the time the popularity of the instrument was waning, the instrument had probably just started to reach its peak, but didn't have the chance to mature. I thought that from the time of 1923 on, there should have been improvements made to the instrument, primarily due to the musician. The musician today plays music that is somewhat different than it was in the time of the first F-5s. I thought there were certain details of the instrument that could have been improved.

Such as . . . ?

These are my own opinions. These are the ideas that led me to create the Grand Artist Design. I wanted to develop a mandolin that had a broader balance, a faster response, and a very easy action. I started going after these details including the shortened pickguard and changing the design of the F holes, which altered the smoothness of the instrument. I wanted an instrument that was a little more mellow, and not so shrill. I wanted a very clear, transparent, responsive sound that was not too metallic at the top end. At the same time I was going after the alterations of the outside of the instrument such as the scroll and the headstock. Once I got started on the design, it just took off.

Was it a process of evolution?

Yes. Designing the Grand Artist took me through a period of over two years, but the inspiration was right there. I was always thinking about it. I was making the new tools, forms, and templates for it while I was building the F-5s. It took a considerable amount of time to lay out everything for the Grand Artist.

I felt that today's musician needed an alternative mandolin. That's what I was saying about painters. You have to take a chance. You have to step out from the norm. I was taking a chance because everyone was so aligned to the F-5 design. To offer a new design was risky because I didn't know whether or not people would accept it. People have accepted it on it's own merits. That's purely what I'd hoped to do, otherwise I'd still be building F-5s. From time to time I will still build an F-5, but not very often.

How many F-5s have you built?

Thirty-eight.

How many banjos . . . ?

Banjos . . . somewhere around seven or eight. I made a lot of banjo necks. I don't think I numbered those. I did make a fair number of Mastertone banjo necks. As for mandolins, I'm up to about 130 now.

The first announcement of your F-5 was in a Mandolin Brothers ad in the October, 1976 issue of Pickin' magazine. One of the advertised features was a varnish finish. How many of the Monteleone F-5s have a varnish finish?

Four. Instruments number 2 through 5. I started using the varnish to see what kind of results I'd get. The kind of varnish we use on mandolins is not the same that's used on

violins . . . on good violins. First of all when you start talking about varnish on violins, you're talking about a fantastic difference between one varnish and the next. There are so many recipes for varnish that it's mindboggling. There is so much speculation as to what is great and what is not. You'll find that each violin maker has his own thing going.

Anyway, I have an opinion as to what works better with a mandolin. I feel that lacquer works better with a plectrum instrument. Lacquer is a little bit harder than varnish. It's not rock hard, but it is harder than common varnish. I feel that it helps the instrument sound a little brighter. If I were to use a varnish, I feel that it would inhibit the brilliance of the instrument somewhat. The violin is a bowed instrument. Being such, the energy that's put into it by the bow is going to give a different result than if you were to just pluck the strings. If the violin were a plectrum instrument, it would be a lousy one. You have two distinctly different principles in action here. In that Gibson used varnish on their instruments, I can assume that they were trying to lend the mandolin family some of the more positive aspects of violin making. I think they were trying to exude the merits of varnish.

They [Gibson] advertised that the tops of their Master Model mandolins had "Stradivarius Arching."

I just assume that they were trying to bring the refined elements of violin making to the art of building mandolins.

So, I would not use a varnish finish on a mandolin or a guitar. Nor would I use a French polish finish on an instrument. That's extremely hard. It's too much of a jacket. If I were to use a varnish finish on a mandolin, it would take six months to get that mandolin out the door. I found that when using varnish, I had to allow for a very long drying time. It takes a long time for the finish to cure.

The first Grand Artist was number 12?

Yes. That was the first prototype. David Grisman owns it now, but number 25 is the one he uses most often.

Did David have any input for the Grand Artist design?

The only thing that came out of that was that he came to me one time complaining that his hands hurt on the conventional flat fretboard, so I got the idea to start arching the fretboards."

So that was the first arched fretboard. It was number . . . ?

25. There were still a few instruments that were built with flat fretboards, but by the time I got into the upper 20s most of my instruments had the arched fretboard.

How do the Grand Artist's tone bars differ from the F-5s tone bars?

Slightly.

In what way?

Their layout is a little different.

Do you mean their position on the top?

Yes. They're positioned a little bit differently than the F-5's tone bars. Because of their different position, they are carved a little bit differently, but if the average person were to look at them, he wouldn't see too much of a difference.

What are the differences between the F holes of the F-5 and the more S shaped soundholes of the Grand Artist?

I felt that the F-5s soundholes were a little too wide open for me. It was too large an aperture. I also found that I wanted to change the aperture itself.

Size and shape . . . ?

Yes. Size and shape effect the way that an instrument projects. The apertures will alter many things if you want them to. The F holes can be placed in different positions to accomodate different kinds of tone. You can move the F holes in toward the bridge or move them out toward the sides. You can make them longer, wider, or thinner. All of these things will effect the response somehow. I wanted to come up with a design that would lend itself to the style of the instrument. I did some experimenting with larger and narrower holes. I've arrived at a shape that I like the results of. The more elliptical the hole, the further it tends to push the sound out.

Such as this guitar's soundhole? (Points to a Monteleone Hexaphone guitar. It is a flattop guitar with an oval soundhole.)

Right. This guitar is a good example of having a very pronounced oval soundhole. It's actually an ellipse. The concept was to be able to pass sound through an opening as you would pass water through an opening. If you take the opening of a garden hose and flatten it while moving the same volume of water through it, the water will come out further. It was my hope to do the same thing with sound. Certainly by changing the shape of the holes, you can have an effect on how far you project the sound. So if you want, you can say that that's inclining itself toward a single F hole.

I've noticed that some guitar makers bend a flat back slightly and glue it to arched bracing so that the back remains under tension. How does that effect the sound?

The back is one of the more overlooked aspects of any instrument. The shape and mass of the material are very important. The spacing from the top is also very important. By prestressing the back, or even the top sometimes, you can build it into a more rigid structure. Instead of having a loose back like a trampoline, you now have a tight back like a drumhead. The frequency reflection from a higher tension piece of wood is going to give you a brighter reflection.

How does that differ from a carved back?

A carved back functions on a different principle. The carved back has more mass and graduation. It is under a different kind of tension and stress. So is the top. A carved top is receiving a downward force in the middle. The bridge is being pushed down, whereas with a flattop the bridge is being torqued. The transmission of sound from the top to the back is going to hit and effect the back a little differently. Its influence is going to be somewhat more pronounced with the arch top. Now if you make an arch top guitar with a flat back, you would have an instrument that is not going to have as much clarity and note separation. The notes will not be as pronounced. It will tend to sound more like a flattop. Now if the back is arched on that guitar as well as the top, it will enhance what the top is doing. That's primarily due to the shape it is carved into, as well as its graduations. So short of getting into an in depth conversation of how the whole thing is made . . . you can't explain how the guitar is made without actually getting in there and doing it.

When you are selecting wood for tops, backs, necks, and sides, what characteristics do you look for? Let's start with the wood for a top.

I try to think of the instrument in its totality, not just one part of it. In general if I'm building an instrument for someone who is not giving me specific details, or custom building it to their sound, I'll build the instrument as I see it. I'll usually do that anyway, but if people say that they need a brighter treble, or a little more volume, or want a mellower instrument, given those details ahead of time, I can pick out woods that will specifically line up to those conditions, then carve them suitably. By and large I will select the back and top that are going to work well together. It is very possible to get a mismatch of top and back, specifically in terms of weight and stiffness.

For example would you match a heavy, stiff top with a heavy, stiff back?

Sometimes yes. It depends on the vibration characteristics of those pieces of wood.

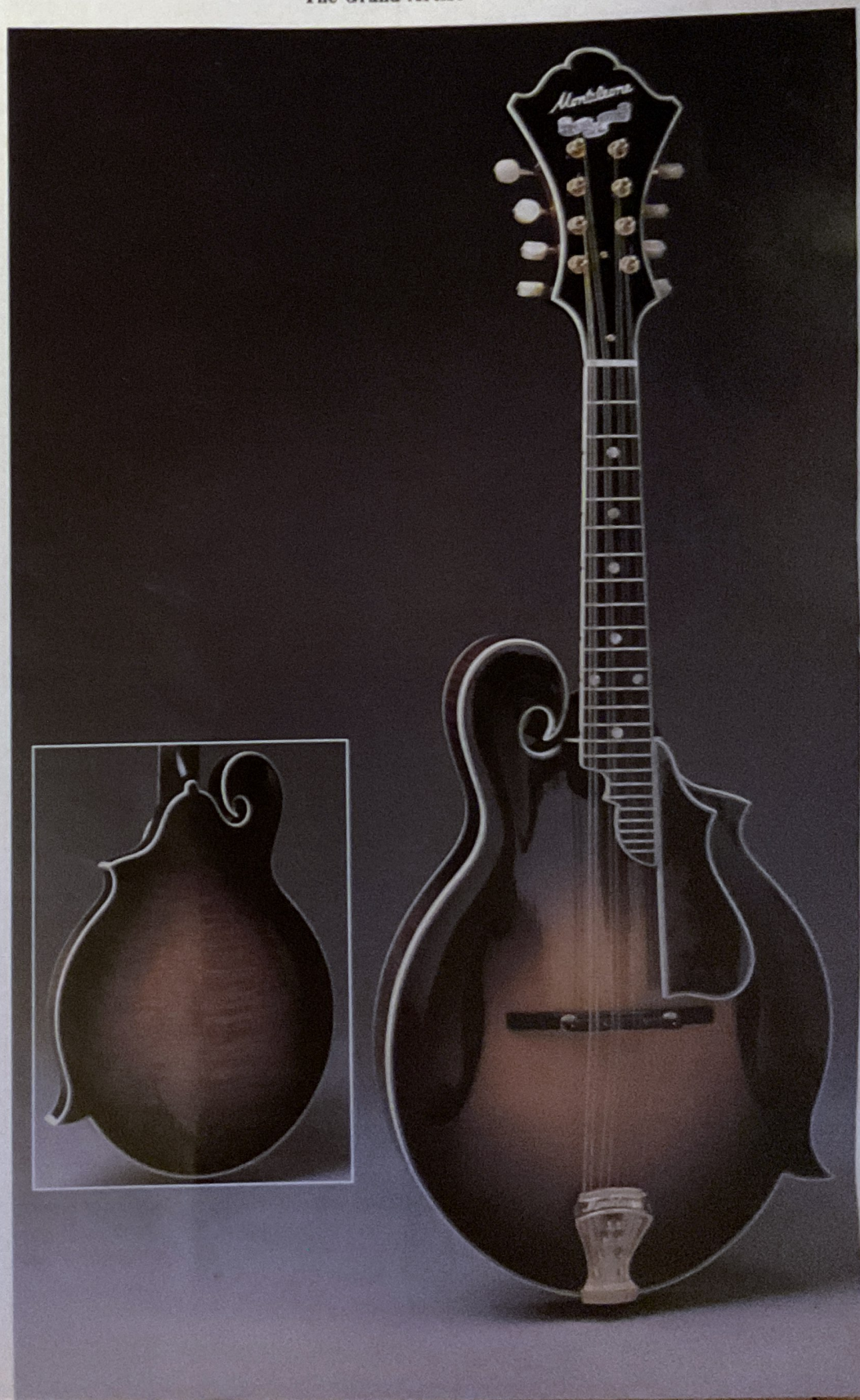
The 'tap' tone . . . ?

Yes. I listen to the wood often. I tap it before it goes together, and while it's going together. It can tell you many things. There are so many things that can go on between two pieces of wood that look exactly alike. One may have a better ability to sustain, or the other might have a brighter ring.

So you don't judge a piece of wood as much by its appearance as you do by it's tap tone.

Right. I'm overruled to an extent because people expect to see fancy wood, but fancy wood doesn't make the instrument. I could use a piece of plain maple and get the same results. It doesn't matter if it's curly or straight. The straight woods, in my opinion, have perhaps an advantage over the fancier woods in terms of their stability as well as their grain structure. An extremely curly piece of wood would not be my first choice, primarily because the grain structure is too erratic. It will hold together and have the ability to amplify or sustain, but the grain structure will tend to run out much more erratically than in a straight piece.

The Grand Artist



So you're saying that the reason for fancy wood is a matter of appearance?

Yes. Aesthetics. There's a great deal of variation from one piece of wood to the next. You have to always bear that in mind. If you look at some of the finest violins, made by some of the finest makers, you'll see that at some point in their lives they probably couldn't afford the real fancy woods and used either plain maple or plain willow with the same results. The key ingredient was the top. After you've chosen the wood, there comes the part of how to bring it to its utmost in terms of dimension, shape and contour. That's why I prefer to take an oversized piece of wood and carve it to the shape I want. The outline is going to be the same pretty much all the time. For the most part the archings are fairly consistent, but there may be slight changes.

For instance . . . ?

That is going to contribute to what makes each instrument unique. Just as all snowflakes resemble each other yet there are no two exactly alike, that's the way it is with instruments too.

When did you begin to build mandolas?

Somewhere in late 1979. The first mandola was number 40.

Did you have an order for it, or just decide to build it?

One day I had an H-5 Loar come for repair. I liked it very much, but instead of making an H-5 duplicate, I made a Grand Artist version for David Grisman. That was the prototype . . . number 40. Later on I made him another one. Number 48 was the second mandola. I think mandolas are beautiful sounding instruments. It's unfortunate that most mandola players are first and foremost mandolin players. If they put their money into an instrument they'll put it into a mandolin first. That's too bad, because there are a bunch of decent mandolas out there.

At the time, I was experimenting with the ten-string mandolin. I wanted to provide a mandolin that had the depth and range of a mandola. It went down to a low C, but the scale was mandolin. The purpose was to allow the mandolin player to have the comfort of that scale. The mandola scale is longer, therefore the reaches are longer.

How does the ten-string mandolin differ from Loar's mando-viola?

His mando-viola had a mandola scale. It had a longer scale with a larger tear drop mandola size body.

I see that the mandocello you are building has an oval sound hole and x-bracing. How were the Gibson K-2s and K-4s braced?

They were braced horizontally in the same manner as the A model mandolins. For me, that wasn't doing enough to move the sound out on the top from the bridge, so I used the X-brace to increase the energy flow from the bridge to the soundboard.

Is it a simple X, or are there other struts and tone bars?

It's just a simple X, with one transverse bar between the soundhole and the neckblock.

Did any of Mike Marshall's influence come to bear on your mandocello design?

Mike was looking for a mandocello that was richer, deeper, and more vibrant sounding than his Gibson. I'd always had the bug to build a mandocello purely because it is an exquisite instrument. Here again as with the mandola, a mandocello is an extravagance that most mandolin players aren't going to pop for. They are going to buy a mandolin with their money. In any event, I love to take a challange once in a while. I couldn't wait to build a mandocello. The results were very satisfying because the instrument was highly responsive and very easy to play. One of the problems in the past with mandocellos, is that many of them were built without truss rods. You'll find that the shape and dimensions of the necks are not conducive to putting in a lot of playing time. I used the arched fretboard on Mike's instrument, too.

Do you have any plans for an F hole Grand Artist mandocello?

Not unless somebody wants one.

Do you plan to build an oval hole, X-braced mandola?

It's not built yet, but I've started to lay it out. It's going to be a fascinating project. When you have an instrument with an oval or round soundhole, there's a problem with using a straight braced kind of system. You can't use the H-brace or parallel

bar system. A transverse bar would give an open, hollow sound, but it would give a sound that was too hollow. The reason I use the X-brace is because I feel that it has a lot of power while retaining the mellowness, warmth, and immediacy of that kind of sound. Here again, we're not talking about an F hole design. F holes are different. The F hole design will give you a lot of power and projection. It's a design that will cut through other instruments. I feel that when you get into the larger bodied instruments, sometimes with the mandola, but especially with the mandocello, the round or oval soundholes suit themselves to the instruments a little better than the F holes. If it's a guitar, that's another story. Here again, the application of the instrument is very important in determining which way to go. With the mandocello, the round or oval holes work better for that kind of sound.

What led you to create your Baby Grand mandolin?

The Baby Grand . . . the name is inspired by my fascination with the piano. I wanted to utilize the materials that weren't quite large enough to make the scroll for the Grand Artist. The Baby Grand has a 2-point body. It uses very nice woods. The same workmanship goes into it that goes into the Grand Artist. The smaller body makes it available at a lower price.

How did the Kentucky KM-Dawg mandolin come about?

In talking with Richard Keldson of Saga, I learned that he was interested in making a Grisman model mandolin in Japan. I think that originally they were going to do some sort of an F-5 design. By this time David was playing the Grand Artist. When we got together to discuss it, David decided that he wanted a version of the Grand Artist as his signature model. I agreed and designed an instrument based on number 25, which is the first Grand Artist that I made for David.

I notice that the KM-Dawg headstock is different from the current Grand Artist headstock.

David was used to the old headstock, so we decided to go with that. I wanted to leave some outward appearance of the difference so that it would be a specific design for them.

When did this take place?

1982. By 1983 they were getting ready to build it. They put a prototype together. I went to Japan to straighten out any problems that might have arisen. It was an interesting trip.

Is it a production instrument?

Yes, but on a very small scale.

How many different people build the instrument?

I believe there are five people. They are building the KM-1000 and the KM-1500 there too. After that, they wanted a mandola and a mandocello design as well. So now they have the KH-Dawg mandola and the KK-Dawg mandocello.

Why did you get into the string business?

Strings came about because I was not happy with the existing gauges. When I was ordering strings for the shop, I would order specific gauges. Then I got the idea to put these strings into sets. I wanted to specify the metallic compound along with the gauges I felt that they would be more capable of suiting all types of mandolins and mandolin players.

As I understand it, Gibson introduced the F-5 to try to preserve the mandolin orchestra by offering "the" mandolin for the times. Bill Monroe discovered another purpose for the F-5 in a style of music that didn't exist at the time of the F-5's introduction. I have seen the evolution of Monteleone mandolins from your early F-5s to the Grand Artist. Noting that many players of new acoustic music are using your mandolins, was it your intention for the Grand Artist to be the mandolin for new acoustic music?

Not as I knew it at the time. I figured I was building an alternative mandolin that would offer some of the musicians who were experimenting with their music the opportunity to have an instrument that was a little broader in response. That is, a mandolin that was not so much locked into one characteristic sound. I wanted an instrument that could cover bluegrass as well as it could cover other types of music. Some people have said that my mandolin has become associated more with new acoustic music. Perhaps that has come about from exponents of the music getting exposure with the instrument. On the other hand an equal number of people have been utilizing the Grand Artist for bluegrass as well. I feel that it's an instrument that can cover a lot of ground rather than just part of it. I didn't want an instrument that would be confined to one area alone.

What are your thoughts about the evolution and future of the mandolin?

A lot of that depends on the mandolin players out there. It's usually a supply and demand situation. If the music grows, so does the demand for supply. I find that the mandolin has grown enormously in the past ten years.

Do you attribute that to the popularity of bluegrass?

Yes . . . to bluegrass and its related musics as well as to some of the more prominent musicians who have been able to establish their own forms of music. So we're talking about the mandolin which has been able to grow within bluegrass, as well as to establish itself to other audiences. The mandolin has been taken into other types of music such as jazz, swing, pop, rock, country, newgrass, and new acoustic music. Whether it continues to grow is dependent upon how much new blood it brings into the music. If that increases, so does the audience. I'm glad to see that bluegrass has been allowing itself to grow. I believe that the musicians are more willing to experiment with their music these days. That fact alone is extremely important in allowing the future of the mandolin to develop. I wish there were a few other aspects that could be looked into as well, such as the arch top guitar . . . of course it doesn't have much of a place in bluegrass music, but it's an instrument that offers an alternative medium of expression. I would say that the average musician hasn't come in contact with a really fine arch top, and therefore doesn't have a good idea what it's all about.

Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

We haven't talked about any mandolin recipes yet . . .(laughter). . . take one piece of curly maple and . . .