

M A D E I N CUMBERLAND COUNTY: The Chimneys Violin Shop

BOILING SPRINGS, PA

For the past forty years, the theory and practice and the art and science of violin making have been passed on to students from across America and from across the world by Edward C. Campbell at his classic violin workshop and school in rural Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania. Since 1955, when he graduated from Penn State with a degree in Engineering, Ed Campbell has devoted his life to making violins, violas, and cellos that produce beautiful music in the hands of talented musicians. For half a century, the shop Ed Campbell and his wife Mary created in their expansive red brick home on Lerew Road south of Boiling Springs has been a home, a workshop, a studio, a retail store, a school, and a place filled with music and wonder; where some of the finest stringed instruments in the world have been created.

According to Nelson Steffy, now the principal instructor at Ed Campbell's violin making school, "There are just four acclaimed schools in the United States that teach the art and science of violin making." Three of those schools are located in large American cities – Boston, Salt Lake City, and Chicago. Those three schools teach the German method of constructing violins. Ed Campbell's school – the Chimneys Apprenticeship Program – instructs its apprentice violin makers in the Italian tradition, the method of Stradivarius.

The school's apprentices, who come to Boiling Springs from many parts of the globe, commit to a rigid four year (minimum) program under the tutelage of Ed Campbell and Nelson Steffy. As they would with a college degree program, apprentices move to Cumberland County, pay tuition, and spend thirty-five hours per week in the Chimneys classroom/workshop, learning science, art, workmanship, and craftsmanship from master violin makers.

At the end of their rigorous four-year apprenticeship, graduates receive a certificate in violin making, which attests to their ability to create world-class stringed instruments. To graduate, every successful apprentice must design and create sixteen violins, one viola, and one cello.

According to Ed Campbell, who, along with his wife Mary founded this apprenticeship program in 1970, "A successful apprentice needs fortitude, patience, and a willingness to learn and to be taught."

At any given time, there are eight students in various stages of the formal apprentice program laboring and learning on the second and third floors of Ed and Mary Campbell's large brick home. These students spend their days learning



Ed and Mary Campbell, proprietors



Nelson Steffy, principal instructor

the art and science of how to create an extraordinary violin out of hand-selected pieces of maple, spruce, and ebony from Nelson Steffy, who himself learned from Ed Campbell; but Ed Campbell is also in the shop and teaching everyday. Steffy, who started a second career at the age of fifty by starting and completing Ed Campbell's apprentice program, and also received a master's certificate from Campbell, has been the chief instructor for five years.

In addition to teaching their eight apprentices the art and science of violin making, Steffy and Campbell produce and repair violins, violas, and cellos. They are also the authors of four internationally respected instructional books that teach various techniques, tips, skills, secrets, and the magic of violin making. These four Little Red Books, which teach the various techniques and secrets of acquiring outstanding acoustics in hand-made instruments, are purchased, via the internet, by violin makers from around the world.

The instruments created by Campbell, Steffy and their numerous apprentices all carry a special label inside the instrument that proudly reads: Made at the Chimneys Violin Shop, Boiling Springs, Pennsylvania. Every label carries the name of the individual who made the instrument, its number in order of manufacture by that maker,

and in the case of the apprentices, a note that identifies the maker as a disciple of Edward C. Campbell.

In addition to its acclaimed apprentice program, The Chimneys Violin Shop sells and repairs violins, violas, and cellos. The instruments created by its apprentices are sold to help defray the tuition costs of the four-year program; these violins are often purchased by students who want an affordable instrument with outstanding acoustics. The shop also sells the extraordinary instruments created over his lifetime by Edward Campbell, and the recent creations of Nelson Steffy. The shop also purchases violins from other makers for resale to its ever-increasing list of violin playing customers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, New York, and New Jersey.

In recognition of his exceptional skills as a craftsman of extraordinary talent, Ed Campbell has been recognized by the Violin Society of America with its highest honor – the Hors Concours (which translates into English as Standout). This honor, bestowed on a select group of American violin makers, recognizes the competitive achievements of its recipients.