LUIS AND CLARK Carbon Fibre Cello

Submitted by Josephine van Lier

For quite some time, I wanted to purchase a cello that I could safely use for teaching; my 1870 Mirecourt cello suffered quite seriously from being picked up and put down a thousand times a day, not to mention being dropped against the stand, I confess. However, I could never find an instrument for a reasonable price (i.e. under $10,000) that I liked well enough to play all day. Every time I tried a new instrument, I desperately missed my own cello after a few days.

Last November, one of my students inquired about buying a carbon fibre instrument. For those who have never seen one, look no further than the Edmonton Symphony cello section, where Derek Gomez's distinctive black carbon fibre cello (one of the first produced by the Boston-based firm of Luis and Clark) has been turning heads for some time now. Derek was kind enough to satisfy my curiosity by lending me the instrument to try. I already knew that these instruments cost much less than any cello I ever considered to use for teaching, but I was not prepared for the sound and ease of playing! I could hardly believe my ears.

I decided to order one, as did eight of my students who were shopping for a cello in the budget price range. The much-anticipated shipment of nine Luis and Clark cellos arrived just before Christmas, as did my second surprise; impressive as Derek's cello had been, I was doubtful that a synthetic material would leave any room for individual character amongst the different instruments. When I had unpacked them all and played them for a few days, I found that they were as distinct from one another as any series of wooden instruments from the same maker. Some were brighter, some were mellower. All were amazing.

I stayed faithful to my old Mirecourt for all my professional work, using the Luis and Clark for teaching, until fate and the Alberta climate intervened in the form a heavy March snowstorm. Our readers hardly need reminding that inclement weather and wooden instruments do not mix, particularly when one is stuck in a snowbank, but I was due at a rehearsal with the Strathcona String Quartet and time was ticking. I took the Luis and Clark, reasoning that if carbon fibre could stand up to the abuse taken by golf clubs, tennis rackets and jet fighters, it might just survive an Edmonton blizzard. But I was very nervous at the rehearsal. Had I been fooling myself about this miracle cello? Would my colleagues laugh me out of the room? Ten minutes in, I had my answer: three astonished musicians who could only say, "Ohh… we *really* like this!" They suggested I use it more often.

Since then, the carbon fibre cello has become my constant companion in rehearsals and on

stage, as well as in the teaching studio. It never gets cranky from one day to the next, meaning I can produce a certain sound or colour with much more consistency. It has a deep, warm, rich sound, with a clarity that has led my quartet companions to marvel at the amount of detail they can now hear in my parts. It has ample power to balance piano and wind instruments. And above all, it is just so unbelievably easy to play.

In my earlier, skeptical phase, Derek pointed out to me that the character of a player's sound depends on the individual,

not the instrument. I had lived with my Mirecourt for so long that I was convinced my musical personality was inextricably bound to it; I simply could not conceive of expressing myself the same way through any other cello, especially one whose components had been pressed and moulded together like an economy car. But the Luis and Clark has enabled me to express myself with an ease and control that my wooden cello never allowed.

I have always loved my old Mirecourt and forgiven its little failings—slightly too-large measurement, a wolf tone, an oversensitivity to changes in temperature and barometric pressure—after all, that's what love is all about. That devotion is still there, although I have to admit it has mostly meant opening the case once in a while to check the humidity.