

Martin Schleske – Master Violinmaker

(compiled and edited – David Collins)

{video} <http://www.schleske.de/en/master-luthier/movies.html>



This account has been passed on by Baxter Kruger from Paul Young. A friend had translated from German to English, a few pages from a book written by the master violinmaker, Martin Schleske, and given it to Paul. They had been speaking to one another about the tragic accident that had left a young man paralyzed – and Paul's friend was distraught.

The story from the master violinmaker had come to be a powerful allegory that had spoken to them of how God's intimate and creative work in our lives can never be thwarted by the events and circumstances that have left us damaged and flawed.

Whether it be a physical flaw or a scar upon our soul; whether it is the result of our own failure or a thing inflicted by another, or a debilitating set of circumstances – our Lord and Master is at his creative best in making an instrument of our lives of amazing beauty and purpose.

At first, Martin shares about the wood he uses for the violin's body.

Only one sort of tree is chosen from a certain area in the mountains. These trees are formed by rough weather and winds and meager ground, which produces resilient wood that is elastic at the same time. Sometimes I will spend months seeking the right tree by tapping on them with a tuning fork – which is how, in old times, violin builders found their 'singer trunks' at the rivers where all the harvested wood was floated down to the cities. Some trunks made melodic sounds when bouncing into others; these revealed themselves as the 'singers'.

Every hardship the tree experienced made the roots go deeper and the structural fibers stronger, however, all crooked it a little this or that way. If a tree close to the chosen one, the 'singer,' fell, the different angle of light and wind made the whole trunk twist a little, which also shows up in every fiber. Other characteristics emerge in every millimeter of wood and each is absolutely unique.

The wood is then stored for years in the workshop under certain heat and humidity conditions until it is ready for its purpose to become a violin body. Now the violin builder starts cutting the body's bulge, or curvature, out of it – something that is uniquely crucial for giving the violin its unique voice.

Paul writes ... It would be cheap to force one's perception on the wood. The art is in seeing what the fiber requires. Someone fixated on the 'ideal' or 'right' shape only follows his laws. The artist, who also knows about the laws of acoustics, sees something else: he honours what is crooked and what has become in the fibers and knows that these must not be cut in the wrong places. Only then is the evolution a spiritual one where inner wisdom and knowledge of the wood and its needs are uppermost, and not blind determination to a 'form'.

The perfectionist is content with fulfilling the law; the artist fulfills the sound.

Romans 8:28-30 describes a similar process: *"And those who love God know that all things work together for good, for those who are called according to purpose. Those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Those he predestined, he called, those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified."*

It's really quite similar to working on the Violin's bulge (curvature). The wood is carefully chosen (called). A good violin builder respects the texture of the wood and under his fingers he feels the character, the solidity and density. This shows him both the possibilities and the limits of the wood. Each of this wood's quirks and characteristics has an influence on the sound it will bring forth.

Some trees, like people, have suffered staggering hardships and overwhelming winds in their life. The course of our fibers become difficult, one-sided, crooked and scarred. But like the wood, we reveal our true selves during the small and great ordeals of our lives – these knock on our life and thus make our fibers (our inner structure) audible.

If I, as a violin builder, am willing to work with the kind of fiber I get, and start creating with what has already become, and what is difficult and crooked ... how much more God will do so! God's Wisdom knows what is necessary to build a unique sound with our texture, our fiber and our sometimes difficult history. That is what is meant by 'called, justified and glorified' in the text.

(Martin) *"I will only become a master artist-creator if I am willing to work with a 'despite' ... despite this particular flaw, this odd structure, this damage ... I will give this wood its voice! I will make it sing!"*

(Martin) *"While I am working on a curvature (bulge), I sometimes feel the planer take a different approach. This shows me, here I have to leave the idea of the curve I had in mind. It may not be pretty, but necessary. Everything that has happened to the wood requires asymmetry" – that is, embracing and working with the irregularity and lop-sidedness.*

If the fibers were lines definable by Mathematics, one could construct an ideal curve, an ideal form already defined before the work begins. But the fiber course is not perfect, not ideal, and thus the making of a Violin body is no construction site, it is an act of creation.

It's an act of creation because it is not the wood that yields to the Maker, but the Maker yielding to the wood.

The artist has to ask himself what he has on hand: "How did this wood grow? What can it become?" The intent of the process of creation allows for promised possibilities to unfold. This cannot happen through a rigid plan. Everything depends on the esteem and wisdom the Master has for his creation.

(Martin) *"When I feel the fibers through the roughness of my planer it is like a dialogue with the wood. Only while I'm working on it do I get clarity on how the curve should be. The wood has its say in this joint creation."*

A construction is a forcing of a predetermined ideal on the material. Everything has to yield to that ideal. Then we are at the heart of legalism where life is coated in and subdued by unrelenting ideal concepts. Now we have arrived at the curse of religion.

However, the 'justification' of man in the Romans verse, first and foremost means that there is a Wisdom at work that does *justice* to life. The real fibers of our life are respected and given a voice. It is an act of love that embraces the imperfect and sees its worth.

Love sees all the beauty, joy, desire and hope (the possibilities of the soul), but it also sees all the weaknesses, disappointments, sadness and pain (the crooked fibers). Our life is a creation, not a construction; it is not done on a drawing board, it's done by the Lover of our souls – the Master who is intimate with every fiber and twist of grain within us.

Creation means that everything that has already happened "talks" to the Master craftsman and "guides" His hand. This is brilliant! In a construction, everything that is in the making is under the constraint of what is wanted. That is insufficient! That is pathetic!

Scriptures show me that God has the heart of an artist, not a grim construction planner. If the world were the work of a cosmic engineer, he would be in a constant state of discontentedness. We would all suffer from the constant nagging of a dogged designer whose plans just never work out like he intended or expected. Reality could never live up to his spotless (wonderful) construction plans. But a true Creator knows he not only has to shape, but also endorse and allow. Wisdom allows things to grow and unfold.

He doesn't construct an ideal perfect – He creates a unique beauty ... and that's perfect! And that's you!