

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A CELLO?

How long does it take to make a cello? – it's one of those "piece of string" questions; there's no definitive answer, however one man, a master, working with great care, intent on finishing the cello "in the white" to a super-precise standard may take around two and a half months. The term "in the white" incidentally, is a maker's term for an instrument on which the woodwork is complete but which has not yet been varnished.

So, two and a half months, if he's being very careful. The same master, throwing off the yoke of perfection and working freely may have the cello finished in six to eight weeks. This is usually much more interesting work. Of course, vitally important details demand his full care but sculptural details may be treated more lightly and the whole work takes on a sense of spontaneity. With that, a certain 'character' emerges that can sometimes define the maker.

Should the above master throw caution to the wind, he could finish the cello in a touch under six weeks. Again, vital details would demand careful attention but the sculptural details would be hurried, raw tool marks may be left in the wood and the overall appearance may become somewhat agricultural but, again, the speed and spontaneity of the work would most likely produce an instrument of character.

A dear friend once viewed a Van Gogh exhibition in London and, pointing to a particular painting said to the curator "It's interesting that this can be worth \$20 million and yet it was painted in one afternoon" to which the curator replied "Yes, sir, but it took him thirty years to learn how to paint it in one afternoon"!

The master therefore has spent many years at his craft, learning how to give himself options.

In the Adelaide International Cello Festival "Cello Challenge", seven masters from the Australasian region, led by Frank Ravatin from France, have chosen the unusual option of combining forces to construct a cello in the white, not in ten weeks, but in ten days!

OK, so if it takes one man ten weeks to make a cello, eight men can do it in? In reality, it's not that simple. At the start all hands will be fully occupied, but as the cello slowly comes together, fewer and fewer makers can handle the instrument until, towards the end, as the neck is being fitted, only one maker can be involved.

To achieve the end result in the time given, therefore, requires much careful planning and a genuine team effort from all of the makers on site. Success is by no means guaranteed – it would take but one serious miscalculation or an inability to meet daily work schedules by two or three percent for the project to fail. The makers will be working every day from early morning until late into the night and they need your full support.

The cello making venue is at the Migration Museum Chapel, 82 Kintore Avenue and everyone is welcome to come and spend some time with the makers, watching them in action and witnessing the construction of what is bound to be a tremendously interesting instrument.