



Tuning a lute. Photo by Erini Rodis

A flourishing ancient craft

By Sheila Armstrong

In a quiet orderly workshop in the heart of East Finchley, internationally famous Stephen Gottlieb makes his lutes. Using yew or maple, he stretches and glues the wood, taking about six weeks to complete one instrument. He works to commission about a year ahead and restores as well as makes them. He also occasionally makes furniture and jewellery boxes.

Originally trained as an architect but able to play the guitar and always keen on making things as a boy, Stephen decided to become a lute maker in 1972.

That was in the early days of the Early Music revival when lutes were no longer made or even played much. With Crafts Council grants, Stephen visited historic collections of musical instruments around the country to gain information about how they were made. As the last one had been finished in the 1760s no one really knew.

A nobleman's instrument

The lute was fashionable before keyboards were made and the keyboard may be said to have been part of its demise.

It was a nobleman's instrument, its gut-made strings played with the fingers not a plectrum. Its music was written in tablature not the usual musical notation and this also contributed to its decline.

Stephen's superb craftsmanship has been very much part of the revival of lute playing and he probably knows just about all there is to know about the instruments. He is to be honoured for his skill and knowledge by being made the Master of The Art Workers Guild next year.

Japanese lute player Takashi Tsunoda already has two of Stephen's instruments and he is collecting a new baroque lute from him in June. He will also

be playing at the East Finchley Festival with singer Matsumi Hatano when the internationally-acclaimed Early Music duo give a concert on Wednesday 29 June in All Saints Church, Durham Road. (Tickets from the box office at Coral Travel on 020 8444 7268).

Stephen Gottlieb can be contacted on 020 444 5367.

A beacon of hope

By Jonathan Blackstaffe

How do you do justice to a life devoted to helping others in just a few hundred words? A few hundred words just isn't sufficient. Indeed, even a few thousand words might not suffice for Jack Shapiro, 88, of Brim Hill.

The prestigious annual Beacon Prize awarded Mr Shapiro "highly commended... for his philanthropic achievements." Other nominees for a Beacon Prize, an annual awards scheme designed to recognise and showcase individuals who have made exceptional contributions to charitable or social causes, included Bob Geldof and Jamie Oliver.

The Beacon Fellowship says that Mr Shapiro was nominated for his contribution to the work of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and as a founder member of the British Tinnitus Association as well as for the formation of self help groups and their help lines in Northwest London.

According to Mr Shapiro, who describes himself as "profoundly deaf," he had been, "in activities of a communal kind since the end of the [Second World] War," when he helped Holocaust-surviving children relocated in London.

A big noise

Then, one morning in 1970 he awoke to the sound of a "marshalling yard in my garden". Except there was no marshalling yard.

Having been told by the medical community there was nothing they could do for him, Mr Shapiro decided to prove that there was plenty he could do for himself, as well as others in the same

unenviable position. He started by refusing to treat his deafness as a handicap. "It can be a blessing sometimes," he says.

Since then, Mr Shapiro has been making a big noise in promoting the cause of the aurally challenged. And as a result, tinnitus, once an occasional footnote in medical texts, now has a whole library of research dedicated to it.

Thanks to Mr Shapiro's endeavours the lives of the thousands of tinnitus sufferers have improved immeasurably, as the Beacon Fellowship has gratefully acknowledged.

Twinning supper

The Friends of Montclair, the American town twinning society in Barnet, enjoyed a successful 'galloping gourmet' supper.

More than 30 members and guests went to different hosts' houses around the borough to have various courses of the supper, with a final get-together for tea and coffee and a raffle in the home of the chairman.

The next social function will be a tour of a wine museum, with tastings. Anyone interested in becoming a member can ring the membership secretary on 020 8361 8978.

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