



The Sitka Violin Spring 2024



In September 2023, Sitkans Marcel⁽¹⁾ and Connie LaPerriere commissioned Georgetown, Kentucky, luthier and art professor at Georgetown College, Daniel Graham, to make a violin out of wood from Sitka, Alaska, for the Sitka Music Festival.⁽²⁾ LaPerriere's son Zach, known for his woodworking and wood artistry, had a mixture of wood that he gathered over several years from around Sitka. An assortment of wood that gave Graham options and met his specifications was shipped to his studio. As Graham started *acclimatizing* the wood, LaPerriere's friends and fellow supporters of the Sitka Music Festival, Dr. Don Lehmann and his wife, Penny, decided to chip in on the commission.

From these:
Scraps of wood.



To this:
Exquisite violin.



One of Graham's and the LaPerriere's goals was not to hide the beauty of the wood under coats of dark stain. Thus, the violin was finished with a clear finish and then French polished to a high gloss to further highlight the woodgrain's splendor.



The top of the violin is made from 114-year-old Sitka spruce 2X4s salvaged during the renovation of Stevenson Hall, the home of the Sitka Music Festival. The fingerboard and tailpiece are made from ironbark that Zach LaPerriere salvaged from an old piledriver that sunk in the 1980s in Leesoffskaia Bay, a bay close to Sitka. The neck and chin rest were made from mountain ash that grew on Lincoln St. The tailpiece has Sitka rose etched into a piece of Alaska yellow cedar.



The back is made from mountain ash salvaged from a tree that blew down on Whale Island, about three miles from downtown Sitka.



The inlay on the back of the violin is based on the stained-glass window in front of Saint Peter's by the Sea Episcopal Church. The window in the church is an icon of Sitka with a unique history. The story goes in November 1899 with a cold wintery wind blowing into the church; when the wrong window arrived in Sitka, the leaders of the church decided to install the window, saying it was acceptable to keep that window because it harkened to the Old Testament of the Bible. ⁽³⁾

By coincidence, the window resembles the rosette that is carved into the top and under the fingerboard of Sitka Music Festival's Artistic Director Zuill Bailey's Matteo Goffriller Cello, made in 1693.

To make the inlay even more special, Graham used veneers made from seven different species of wood that he has salvaged over the years. Another coincidence: his woodworking mentor was Mr. Sitka. The species of wood used in making string instruments often tell stories on their own. In this case, the Star of David in the middle of the inlay is a piece of Mesquite that Dennis Sitka cut into a star before he gave it to Graham, which makes eight species of wood in the inlay.





The neck of the violin is mountain ash that came from a tree that was cut down near Saint Peter's by the Sea Episcopal Church.



The upper and lower bouts are yellow cedar from a dead tree that grew in Eastern Channel adjacent to the south end of Sitka. The C bouts are crabapple from a tree that grew on Peisar Island about 25 miles south of Sitka.

If the Sitka Violin wasn't special enough, Daniel Graham used his printing skills on the inside of the violin to print a poem by his teenage daughter Olive and a photo of Paul Rosenthal, the founder of the Sitka Music Festival, that can be seen through the F holes, taken by the Daily Sitka Sentinel's photographer, James Poulson. In the photo, you can see the blocks made from a beachcombed western red cedar log and a western hemlock base bar.

The Forest by Olive Graham ⁽⁴⁾

the forest
she whispers
kind words
and her fingers
offer rest
to passing friends

but they are
often too busy
to listen

her heart full
of joy and
unconditional
love

a beauty
surrounds
her
from a
loving
creator

the joyful
sound
made from
her offered
fingers
carries
her beauty and
whispers

then
weaves them into
song



Contacts

- Daniel Graham: Daniel_Graham@georgetowncollege.edu 859-537-9584
- Marcel LaPerriere: sitkaviolin@gmail.com
- Connie LaPerriere: claplake@gmail.com 907-623-0933
- Zach LaPerriere: zachlaperriere@gmail.com 907-738-1328
- Don Lehmann: dplehman@gci.net 907-738-6707
- Alex Serio, Executive Director: director@sitkamusicalfestival.org 907-747-6774

Pertinent Information and Links

1. Marcel LaPerriere has advanced Bulbar ALS. He hasn't been able to talk since the end of 2015 and has been confined to a wheelchair since mid-2018.
2. In June 2024, the Sitka Music Festival will celebrate its 52nd Anniversary:
<https://www.sitkamusicalfestival.org/about>
 - a. A short informational video of the Sitka Music Festival:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdkhQPXVAD0>
 - b. A musical postcard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw5N6pFUJ5A>
3. Saint Peter's by the Sea: <https://stpeters-sitka.org/>
 - a. The story behind the window: <https://www.jewishvoicesnj.org/articles/the-mystery-behind-a-star-of-david-in-an-alaskan-church-window/>
4. Olive Graham reads her poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzBOoMr-fgY>
5. Graham's YouTube Sitka Violin Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WEbYOQVtzw&list=PL-oy0wwDZFUaZHHWOTIq-TQfJz4ubEQvv>
6. The Sitka Violin Debut video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmNegcV-nlq>
7. Sitka Violin on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1388705835333033>

Media Stories

- KCAW Raven Radio News: <https://www.kcaw.org/2024/01/10/salvaged-wood-violin-will-be-audio-portrait-of-the-region/?fbclid=IwAR3k7OXdZrGMq03NqmS4MhgALZM3lsFGcijwfU2-JIaXF4h-kyMD8Akr46q8>
- News-Graphic: https://www.news-graphic.com/arts_and_entertainment/violin-made-from-112--year-old-sitka-wood-to-debut-at-summer-festival/article_792a65f8-e7a3-11ee-bd2c-5f871a5c91a9.html
-