

Get a fiddle to go from Providence exhibitor

Among the Rhode Island show's offerings was the 20"-long Wiplstix, a scaled-down violin

By James Foye

STAFF WRITER

From expertly made furniture to great keepsakes, the exhibitors' booths at the ninth annual Fine Furnishings Providence Show held a splendid array of work. But of all the artists, there was only one man plucking a banjo.

Bill Whipple's booth was filled with wall-mounted shelves, made of cherry and maple, that seemed to flow along the three walls, while a cherry hall table looked as though it would spring from the floor.

But Whipple was also peddling a Wiplstix: a portable violin/fiddle, that was like nothing else at the show.

An obvious music lover and musician, Whipple designed the instrument so it could be tossed into a backpack, carried and played almost anywhere. "It's a standard four-quarter violin," said Whipple, whose Wipl Fine Wood is in Union, W. Va. "Pretty much other than the weight and size, it's the same fingering. So it's great for traveling."

Twenty inches long, the Wiplstix fits in a PVC tube for transport. The tough, watertight, and painted PVC case comes with an attached strap and holds the 1/8-size bow — smaller than the average bow — needed to play the compact fiddle.

"I had the idea of taking a violin and putting it into a 2" piece of PVC pipe. So I had to find a thin-walled piece of PVC pipe and that's the specifications used to make these. So the PVC pipe came first," Whipple said.

Done on a lathe, the body of the instrument is made of sturdy maple, with the topside consisting of spruce. The Wiplstix's fingerboard is composed of hickory with a walnut tailpiece, and a desert ironwood nut and saddle.

"I don't use any rainforest woods in any of my work," Whipple added.

The tuning pins (modified zither pins) have a groove in the top to accommodate a penny, allowing the fiddle player to tune the instrument. A chin rest, made from bicycle tire inner tubes, is also housed in the PVC "carrying case."

The response to the pithy fiddle has been positive for Whipple; he's made about 300 in the last four years (he sold three in Providence). Whipple feels that people who don't know how to play aren't intimidated by the Wiplstix because it looks so different from a classical violin. Even so, some famous violinists have become customers and fans of the Wiplstix.

"Pamela Frank, who's a world-famous solo violinist, bought one at the Philadelphia Furniture & Furnishings Show. She left grinning ear to ear, tickled to death by it," Whipple said, grinning himself.

The Wiplstix comes in plain maple for \$225, curly maple for \$245 or birds-eye maple for \$265.

Contact: Bill Whipple, Route 1, Box 169B, Union, WV 24983. Tel: 304-772-3625. www.wiplstix.com



Bill Whipple fiddles around with his creation, the Wiplstix, at the ninth annual Fine Furnishings Providence Show.

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