



Visiting luthier Raymond Schryer (centre) takes a class at the Querétaro School of Lutherie

ON THE CREST OF A MEXICAN WAVE

Mexico's national lutherie school offers students a rigorous all-round education and overseas opportunities. CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE finds out how the programme has developed in 25 years

WE DON'T WANT TO TRAIN MERE artisans,' states Luis Gilberto Lavalle Guillén, director of Mexico's national violin making school. It won't do for prospective students just to show ability in working with wood. They're also expected to excel in music and solfège, and play a stringed instrument themselves.' Celebrating its 25th anniversary in October, the Querétaro School of Lutherie has an exacting entrance procedure that also encompasses mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry. 'Students should understand all the phenomena related to vibrating wood,' Lavalle explains. 'Our syllabus also includes draughtsmanship, painting and languages, plus art and music history.' Of around thirty applicants each year, a maximum of eight are accepted on to the five-year course.

'At present we have eighteen students – we wouldn't want any more, and the existing infrastructure wouldn't allow it anyway.'

Although Mexico's lutherie tradition effectively began soon after the Spanish arrived, its first national school of violin making was only established in 1954. Italian luthier Luigi Lanaro founded the school in Mexico City and ran it until 1970, but unfortunately the institution closed after his retirement. It was another ten years before French luthier Luthfi Becker visited Mexico to give lectures on violin making, which led to fresh plans to establish a school. Now under the auspices of the National Institute of Fine Arts, the new school opened for business in 1987 with Becker as its first director. It too was based in Mexico City for its first five years, until in 1992 it was moved out of the capital as part of a plan to decentralise Mexico's cultural institutions.

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