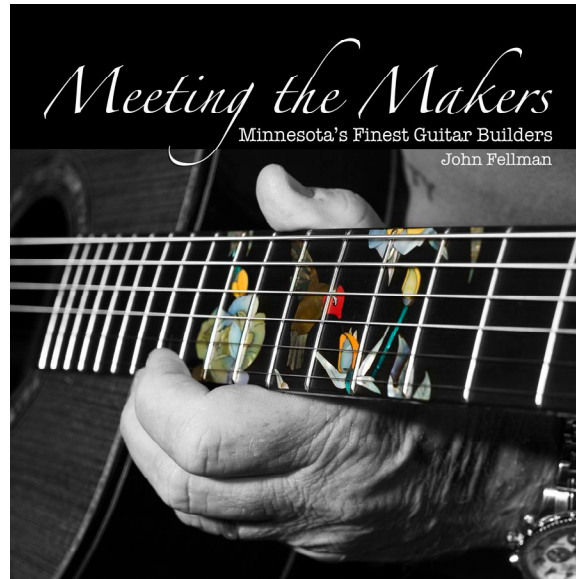


New Book Celebrates Minnesota's Finest Guitar Makers

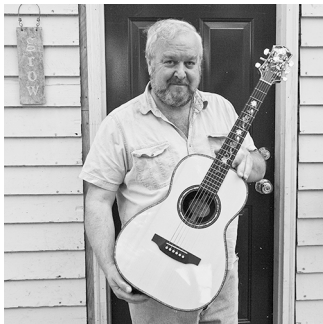
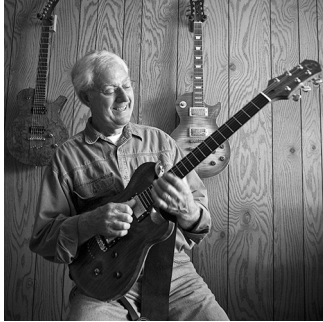


Meeting the Makers: Minnesota's Finest Guitar Builders

Get an inside look at Minnesota's finest guitar builders through the lens of acclaimed photographer, John Fellman. This fine art book contains over 250 beautiful photographs, introducing you to the shops, processes and personalities of **Jim Olson, Charlie Hoffman, Mike Keller, Brian Applegate, Lloyd LaPlant** and more!

260 Pages, Paperback, \$34.95. Available online at <http://mtm.johnfellman.com>
Available locally at Hoffman Guitars in Minneapolis. Watch for it at other fine guitar retailers soon!

Also Watch for the forthcoming articles on the book and these world-class builders in *The Fretboard Journal* and *Guitarmaker*.



Meeting the Makers: Minnesota's Finest Guitar Builders represents the culmination and compilation of months of researching, interviewing, photographing and working in tandem with Minnesota's finest luthiers to create this volume, celebrating their contribution to the history and art of the acoustic guitar. Intended to be an fine-art piece for builders, players and collectors to share, this book captures the spirit of guitar making in Minnesota—while also capturing the individual flavor of each builder, from Jim Olson's state of the art workflow to Lloyd LaPlant's expert, old fashioned handiwork to everything in-between.



About the Author

John Fellman is an accomplished photographer from Robbinsdale, MN. He has a degree in music from a small liberal arts college in St. Paul with an emphasis in guitar. He has been taking pictures since his grandmother gave him a Yashica Electro 35 rangefinder camera when he was ten years old. His portfolio covers travel, photojournalism, architecture, musical instruments and more—though he came into photography as a product photographer at a catalog plumbing supply in Minneapolis. John has a great passion

for music and for photography. This project represents the fusion of the two. Watch for more titles at <http://www.johnfellman.com>.

Minnesota's premiere guitar builders featured in new book



Photographer John Fellman of Robbinsdale (holding a copy of his book) is pictured with guitar-builders from Charles Hoffman's shop in Minneapolis. From left are Ron Tracy, Brooklyn Park; Kevin Schwab, Minneapolis; and Charlie Hoffman, Minneapolis. (Photo by John Fellman)

By Sue Webber - Sun Newspapers

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A dual love of photography and guitars has helped a Robbinsdale man create a project that pays tribute to both.

John Fellman, 26, has done the writing and photography for "Meeting the Makers: Minnesota's Finest Guitar Builders," a 264-page book on the top guitar builders in Minnesota.

"It took about six months to put together; it was a very natural fit," Fellman said. "We have some of the best guitar builders in the world right in our backyard here."

Fellman, who grew up in Winona and has played the guitar since he was 17, majored in guitar performance at Northwestern College in St. Paul. His intent then was to get a job in music ministry.

Well-known guitar players and builders in Minnesota, Fellman said, "are the kind of guys [students] talk about and idolize."

But photography has been a long-time interest, as well.

"My grandma gave me a range finder when I was 10 years old," Fellman said.

He took some photo classes in high school and college, but most of his photographic talent is self-taught, he said.

"Resources are so readily available and they're mostly free," Fellman said. "They're all over the Internet. It's easy to teach yourself if you have the passion for it."

While he was a part-time cashier at Park Supply of America, Fellman learned the company was seeking a photographer for some advertising, and he filled the bill.

Since then, he has created John Fellman Photography.

When Fellman got the idea for the book, he said, his first call went to Jim Olson in Circle Pines, "one of the premiere acoustic guitar builders."

"If he said no, I knew I couldn't do the book," Fellman said. "If Jim said yes, I knew everyone else would do it."

Indeed, the rest agreed. They range in age from 40 to 80, including (in addition to Jim Olson) Charlie Hoffman, Minneapolis; Mike Keller, Rochester; Lloyd, Mike, Don and Billy LaPlant, Grand Rapids; Brian Applegate, Chanhasen; Ron Tracy, Brooklyn Park; and Kevin Schwab, Minneapolis.

"The biggest difficulty was deciding where to cut it off," Fellman said. "There are dozens more I could have found. I went to the most notable."

Fellman said he spent a day or two at each builder's shop, watching them work, listening to their stories, and taking a variety of pictures.

"Jim has the top machinery in the world; it's an incredible set-up," Fellman said. "He measures to 1,000th of an inch. He builds 30 to 40 guitars a year."

In contrast to Olson, 80-year-old Lloyd LaPlant of Grand Rapids avoids machines and does all his guitar-building by hand, Fellman said. LaPlant builds no more than 10 guitars a year.

Charles Hoffman, who has sold 560 guitars since he opened his Minneapolis store in 1971, took a slight detour to go to law school in 1983. He kept the guitar shop during his career as a lawyer, and when he retired from the law firm in 2002, he came back to the shop full-time.

"We have one of the larger repair shops in the country," said Hoffman.

Being a musician isn't a necessary part of building and repairing guitars, Hoffman said, but, he adds, "You have to know the music of a guitar and have your own personal sense of what a good guitar is. You have to be able to talk to customers and tailor your work to what they want. It helps to have listened to a lot of guitar music."

Electric guitars at Hoffman's shop start at \$1,800 and go up from there. Acoustic guitars are priced at \$4,600 and up.

Ron Tracy, a Robbinsdale High School graduate who lives in Brooklyn Park, has worked in Hoffman's shop since 1980. He coaches gymnastics and also plays guitar professionally with "The Two Guys."

Tracy went to University of Wisconsin-Stout to be an art teacher, he said, but wound up at the Vo-Tech school in Red Wing learning restoration and repair of guitars.

Kevin Schwab of Minneapolis also has worked with Hoffman since 1980. He started building mandolins and then got into repair.

A Minnetonka native, Schwab has been playing the guitar since he was 13. He plays in "The Two Guys"

with Tracy.

For the photographs in his book, Fellman used mostly natural light photography, rather than flash, he said.

"Many of the photos are black and white," he said. "There were a lot of long exposures on the tripod."

Just three years out of college, Fellman has produced a couple of travel books with photos, and his work has taken him abroad on several occasions. He also takes photographs at most of the major events occurring in Robbinsdale.

"It's a very busy life; I don't take life slowly," Fellman said.

He and his wife, Abby, a part-time move-in coordinator at Cooperfield Hills in Robbinsdale, have three children: Zeke, 2, Lilah, 1; and Isaac, 10 weeks old.

"Meeting the Makers," to be published this month at Osterhus Printing in Robbinsdale, is priced at \$34.95. Pre-orders are being taken at Fellman's website: <http://www.johnfellman.com>.

NEW BOOK / JOHN FELLMAN

Photographer focuses on guitar builders

Rochester man among 'Minnesota's Finest'

By Christina Killion Valdez
ckillion@postbulletin.com

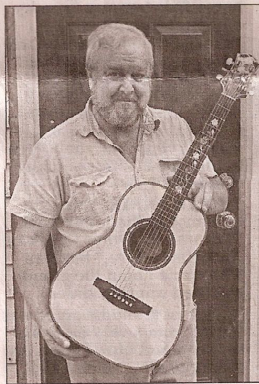
Although the guitars may end up in the hands of the greatest musicians around the country, it's the hands that build them that caught the eye of a classically-trained guitarist turned professional photographer.

For his latest book, "Meeting the Makers, Minnesota's Finest Guitar Builders," John Fellman, a Twin Cities-based photographer, focused on five of the best guitar makers in the state, one of which is Michael Keller of Rochester.

And although Keller, Jim Olson, Brian Applegate, Charlie Hoffman and Lloyd Laplant may be the best known in their field, the photo-driven book, which Fellman expects will be available in early February, provides a behind-the-scenes look inside their shops.

"It's about what makes them unique as a builder, not how to build a guitar," Fellman said.

The different approach is what Keller said interested



Submitted photo

A new book features Minnesota guitar builders, including Michael Keller of Rochester.

him.

"When he contacted me six months ago, he said he wanted to show the builders as human beings, no discussion of building philosophies," Keller said.

Convincing Olson to participate, however, was Fellman's first priority.

"As guitar builders in Minnesota go, he's the top dog," Fellman said. "He builds for Sting and Paul McCartney.

I believe James Taylor plays Jim Olson exclusively. The list goes on and on. If Jim had said no, I could really not do the project."

Fortunately for guitarists and guitar builders

who'd like to see inside these shops, Olson said yes.

From there, Fellman said he knew he also wanted Hoffman, Applegate, who was Olson's protégé, and Keller. It was the luthiers who insisted that Fellman also include Laplant, a self-styled builder who does everything by hand, he said.

"I had the greatest difficulty of where to cut it off," Fellman said. "I chose the most notable, but there were a couple more I could have added."

Although there are pockets of high-end guitar builders found around the country, the work being done in Minnesota stands out especially because there isn't a huge music industry here and the availability of materials isn't any better or cheaper, Fellman said. Because of that, the guitar builders here tend to sell their instruments in other parts of the country and world, he said.

That's especially true for Keller guitars.

"Of all the builders, he did the most experimentation I found," Fellman said of Keller.

Inside his simple Rochester workshop, Keller creates some of the more avant-guard shapes and designs, which come from his obsession with sound quality, Fellman said.

For more on John Fellman, go to Postbulletin.com/weblinks.



New book by Robbinsdale author celebrates guitar builders

The following is a transcript of a news story on Brooklyn Park's Channel 12. For video, go to: <http://nwtv12.web.entriq.net/article/view/6568/?tf=nwtv12newplayer.tpl&v=123>

It's not a job that tolerates guessing. Repairing and building guitars requires skill, patience and a penchant for exactness.

"The average person doesn't know how specific we are. We measure to the thousandths of an inch," said Ron Tracy, a guitar repairman from Brooklyn Park. "A customer will come in here later today and will feel one thousandth of an inch difference in playability."

Tracy has 30 years of experience repairing guitars, mostly at Hoffman Guitars in southeast Minneapolis. He went to technical school to learn the trade, but he started tinkering with guitars as a kid.

"I always had a love for instruments and played when I was a kid in junior high," said Tracy. "Junior high kids break stuff, so I got a handle on starting to be able to fix my stuff back then."

Tracy is not the main feature, but one of the mentions in a new book that celebrates the science and craft of guitar building. John Fellman who lives in Robbinsdale, traveled the state of Minnesota to capture the best guitar builders on camera. His work will be self-published in mid-February in the book, "Meeting the Makers: Minnesota's Finest Guitar Builders."

"There's kind of this aura around them...of mystery," said Fellman. "I knew about most of them and I was curious about what they did. As a photographer, I just thought it would be a cool photographism piece, and saving their place in the history of guitar in our state."

Fellman spent time with each of the guitar builders, often learning about their life and their collections. Often, he would get a chance to play guitar with them.

"It was really great to meet these guys, get more insight into guitars, and get to play some really great guitars along the way," said Fellman. "Mostly, it's the connections I've made along the way and the photographs I have, very proud of them."

Fellman profiled Jim Olson of Circle Pines, Mike Keller of Rochester, the LaPlants in Grand Rapids, Brian Applegate of Chanhassen, Kevin Schwab of Minneapolis, Charles Hoffman of Minneapolis and Ron Tracy of Brooklyn Park.

"There's so much creativity that goes into how you build guitars and how you can change the way they sound, the look of them, how you can fit that to an artist and how you can fit that to the taste of your customer," said Fellman.

To find out more or to order the book, check out Fellman's website www.johnfellman.com

Shannon Slatton, reporting sslatton@twelve.tv

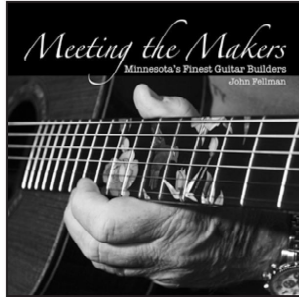
Friday, February 05, 2010

Interview from the Spring 2010 issue of *Guitarist*, the Minnesota Guitar Society's Quarterly Newsletter.

John Fellman and *Meeting the Makers*

—by Paul Hintz

It happened because of craigslist. I was checking the listings for classical guitars, and someone was selling a Devenport 7-string. An email query to the seller yielded his name, John Fellman. A websearch on his name revealed that he was publishing a fine art book about five of the top guitar builders in Minnesota: Jim Olson, Charlie Hoffman, Brian Applegate, Mike Keller, and Lloyd LaPlant. The book came out in February. To learn more about Fellman, and the book, we conducted the following e-interview.



Interview

Q: What came first, the guitar or the camera?

A: Camera. My grandmother gave me a Yashica Electro 35 GSN Rangefinder when I was 10 years old. I didn't pick up the guitar until I was 16. I decided to pursue studying the guitar because I didn't figure photography would be a viable career for me. Cruel irony I guess.

Q: Where and with whom have you studied guitar?

A: I was self taught until entering college at Northwestern College in St. Paul. I majored in guitar performance, studying under Glen Larson.

Q: Are you active as a performer? Where? What style(s)?

A: I am not currently performing on a regular basis. I occasionally play for worship at various churches. That's what I originally wanted to do with my music, but I haven't found a worthwhile position in the field.

Q: How did you get serious about photography?

A: The camera my grandmother gave me was way too nice to give to a 10 year old, but grandma didn't really know what she had. My dad was also into photography (he got into it through boredom while riding the rails, working for the railroad in the '70s), so he was a natural resource and source of encouragement—and equipment—as I got more into it over the years. I did take photography classes in high school and college, but I learned a lot more useful information just reading my camera manuals cover to cover.

Q: How did you come to make your living from it?

A: My education was very specific, as well as expensive. When that education couldn't pay for itself, I took the first job I could get. It happened to be a cashier position at a plumbing supply in Minneapolis. That company decided to revamp their whole advertising strategy soon after. I had gotten to know the ad director, and when they needed images of 25,000 parts for their catalogs, (knowing my background photography) she asked me to move to her department. I grew my own business from there, starting with their suppliers and establishing a foothold in my own community of Robbinsdale.

Q: What got you started on this book project?

A: Honestly, I don't remember. I know that I had the idea for a couple of years, but didn't have time and other resources to get it done. I thought it was a great idea. These were all builders I had wanted to meet since I started playing guitar. The concept had fully developed in my head, so I finally called Jim Olson to see if he would be interested. He was initially reluctant because of the time he was afraid it would take on his part, but agreed when I promised that his commitment would be minimal. I called the others one by one after that. I also got some ideas from Todd Lunneborg's article on the same builders in *Fretboard Journal*, as well as from the Art of the Guitar showcase at the Plains Art Museum in Fargo.

Q: Olson and Hoffman are well-known names in the guitar community, all across North America. How did you find the other builders you feature?

A: I already knew of Brian Applegate and Michael Keller through other players and builders, but I had not heard of Lloyd LaPlant. He came highly recommended by Jim and Charlie both, as of course did Brian and Mike as well.

Q: Had you been involved in book projects before?

A: I've done a couple of short travel books on my own—of which my mother bought two copies each. Otherwise, no. Just catalogs.

Q: Plans for another book after this one?

A: I have talked to a gentleman who restores turn-of-the-century, steam-powered automobiles about possibly doing a title for collectors and enthusiasts in that area. I have also considered doing an educational title on guitar construction because a number of people have asked what they might learn in that way from this

book. The answer to that is: very little. *Meeting the Makers* is really not an educational piece. It's an artistic look at these builders, their shops and their processes. It's a nice coffee-table piece.

Q: How can readers learn more about you, and how can they order the book?

A: The book can be previewed and ordered from my website <www.johnfellman.com>. More about the process of making it can be found on the Facebook page for it (web search "Meeting the Makers"). There is more information about me and my photography on my website, as well as on the Facebook page for my business (search "John Fellman Photography"). [Ed. note: You can also email him about that Devenport 7-string classical. It looks great in the pics, and is still available.]