

Two Masters Ply Their Trade

There was a time in this nation when everything was hand-crafted. With the increase in America's population, however, industrialization emerged to produce products at a faster rate to meet sales demands.

Along the way, an important ingredient in production was often lost: the high degree of quality resulting from pride of creation. The majority of today's mass-produced items last only a few years before being tossed into the garbage can or junked beside the road.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to encounter two people who are masters of their crafts. One is responsible for the beautiful, mother-of-pearl inlay work in the handmade guitars played by artists like Hank Snow, Ernest Tubb and Merle Haggard. The other designs and manufactures handmade guitars played by such performers as Neal Diamond, Doc Watson, Grandpa Jones and the sons of Earl Scruggs.

MIKE LONGWORTH, field representative for the C.F. Martin Co. of Nazareth, Pa. and J.W. (John William) Gallagher, founder of the J.W. Gallagher and Son Co. of Wartrace, Tenn., both have their work displayed in museums.

Longworth's is in the Martin Co. Museum in Pennsylvania, and Gallagher's is in the Country Music Hall of Fame building in Nashville. Mention the names of either men to people who know musical instruments, and you will hear instant praise, both in tribute to the work they produce and to themselves as individuals.

Being from competitive companies, Gallagher and Longworth don't like to brag on each other too much. Nevertheless, when you get them separately to talk about each other, the mutual respect is obviously genuine.

"To my knowledge, the Martin and Gallagher companies are the only major guitar companies in America which still hand-make each guitar," Gallagher related with pride.

The Tennessee native spent 35 years making custom furniture before turning his talents in 1965 to producing guitars.

He is now aided by five employees including his sons, Bill and Don. Gallagher estimates since the company was formed, his shop has made 1,075 guitars, with 135 turned out in 1976.

IRONICALLY, Gallagher does not actually play the instrument which is so much a part of his life. "I still get a big thrill, though hearing good music come out of one of my instruments. I feel like I have contributed something to the performance."

Longworth, on the other hand, spent three years as a professional musician before joining the Martin firm. He played five-string banjo, upright bass and also guitar with a New Hampshire group called "Clyde and Willie Mae Joy and the Country Folk." He laughingly recalls the leader of the group was a "Yodeling cowboy with a Boston accent."

Longworth said working for America's oldest guitar company (founded in New York City in 1833; moved to Nazareth, Pa. in 1839) is especially enjoyable "because of the reputation and prestige of the company."

Most music companies, no matter how old, still work to produce better instruments, Longworth reports. He informed me the Steinway Co. is now working to produce a new instrument called the "Henway." When he was asked, "What's a Henway?," Longworth replied, "About 10 pounds."

My hope is Longworth does not forsake his guitar work for the field of comedy.

ALSO NOTED: Dolly Parton is profiled in the current issue of Rolling Stones magazine; another Opry star, Ronnie Milsap, is being played on rock music stations ("It Was Almost Like a Song") and Willie Nelson has become a cult hero among the young crowd.

Years ago, this writer kept saying there was more good music in life than just popular and rock music. Glad ya'll are finally finding that out. **DON RHODES.**