

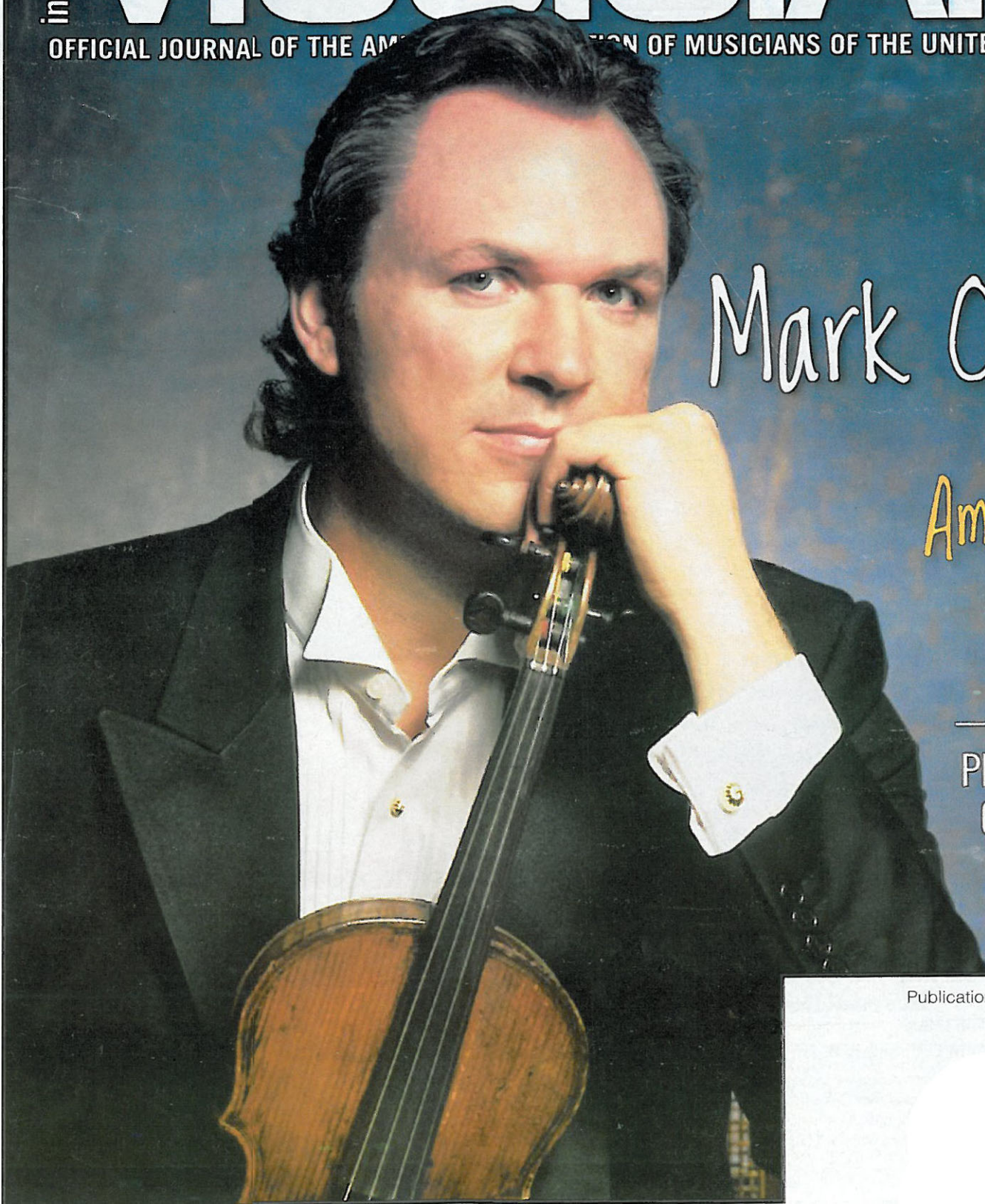
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# Chime Maker Finds Musical Ancestry Blowing in the Wind

Garry Kvistad's career as a wind chime maker began in an Illinois junkyard. At the time, he was a percussion instructor at the University of Northern Illinois who wanted to build his own instruments as a hobby, using old materials to hear even older sounds. Today, the Local 215 (Kingston, NY) member is the owner of Woodstock Chimes, now celebrating its 30th anniversary as one of the country's top wind chime manufacturers.

Kvistad's original inspiration to make a custom instrument came from a book by composer Harry Partch. "It turned me on to these ancient scales that you could only hear if you built instruments because there are notes [in those scales] in between the notes of the piano," Kvistad says.

"In music school, I'd hear these scales played on a piano and wonder, what's the big deal?" he continued. "But when I actually heard them tuned correctly I realized there's something much deeper."

As a staff member, Kvistad was allowed to take a few classes for free at Northern Illinois each semester. He used those credits to study the disciplines he'd need to build quality custom instruments, including acoustics, woodworking, and metallurgy.

Armed with the desire and the technical know-how, all that Kvistad needed to resurrect those ancient scales was the right material. While he was rummaging through that junkyard, he found a treasure-trove: a pile of lawn chairs. The frames were made of hollow aluminum tubes, sturdy, resonant, and well-suited for percussion. Kvistad cut them down to roughly the right lengths, then fine-tuned them using a micro-tonal tuner from Motorola—a rare tool back then.

Soon he had his first wind chime, based on the scale of Olympos, an ancient Greek storyteller, composer, and flautist who traveled Greece and Asia Minor in the 7th century B.C. His flute was tuned to this legendary scale, which supposedly had an enchanting power over listeners.

"I was really intrigued by thinking about this guy," Kvistad says. "He was like a traveling news reporter and entertainer. I really wanted to hear that scale and I was drawn to the story by the human side of it." The Chime of Olympos is one of Woodstock Chimes' best-selling models to this day.

Today, Kvistad builds his wind chimes using sophisticated, computer-guided equipment in a Shokan, New York, factory, which he founded in 1979. The process has changed, but he still designs models with what he calls a "cultural connection" in mind and packages each one with the backstory that inspired it. The Amazing Grace model, for instance, is inspired by the tale of the reformed slave-trader who wrote the lyrics to the classic tune after surviving a major storm at sea.

"A lot of my competitors make wind chimes and tune them very well, but they don't have that cultural connection," Kvistad says. "So no matter what we do, if it's just a melody like 'Amazing Grace,' we want to bring more to it so people are informed and intrigued. It's called 'romancing the product,' in the industry. We do that as much as possible and people are really into it."

In addition to owning and operating Woodstock Chimes, Kvistad has remained active in percussion performance throughout the years, even winning a 1998 Grammy for his part with Local 802 (New York City) member Steve Reich and Musicians' *Music for 18 Musicians*.

The two endeavors "fit together very naturally," according to Kvistad. "We actually make a big deal out of the fact that this wind chime company is founded and run by a professional musician."

Kvistad currently performs with pioneering percussion quintet NEXUS, which he joined in 2002. The group is known for challenging conventional wisdom of how percussion can be used in a classical context. Their repertoire includes works by John Cage and Lou Harrison. Along with Harry Partch, these were some of the composers who turned Kvistad on to the ancient scales and instrument-making in the first place. It's like his career has almost come full circle.



**Garry Kvistad, founder and CEO of Woodstock Chimes and member of Local 215 (Kingston, NY), poses with his company's King David Chime.**

Kvistad says that the AFM played a key role in getting him involved in music. "As a young teenager I auditioned for the musicians' union," he recalls. "I went down to the headquarters in downtown Chicago. I was as nervous as can be. I had to play rudiments on a drum pad, but I became a member. I didn't know what I would use it for right away, but it was a kind of rite of passage."

He used his union connections to perform with the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra in Chicago during the summers when he was home from Oberlin College in Ohio. "I know that the union in Chicago really helped the musicians get good benefits and good salaries," says Kvistad. "Otherwise I think it would've been a real amateur group. It was quite a good summer orchestra. It employed members of other Midwest orchestras that didn't have summer programs at the time, like Indianapolis. And the second players in, say, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra would play in it. The pension program is great, too."

Reflecting on his career so far, he says: "If I could claim any success, then that is to have supported my passion through a related business. We're making musical instruments. It's a nice synergy between my business and the performance part of it."