



FRANCO MARINO: INSTRUMENTAL WORKS OF ART

BY LINDSAY MAHER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAZZ MARTIN



It began with sailboats. Using his hands to fix them in his hometown of Messina, Italy, self-taught luthier Franco Marino became fascinated by the act of creation. The passion swelled for years, and it was when his son enrolled at a music conservatory in Messina that Franco's curiosity for guitar building was piqued. He devoured books on the subject, learning first from the masters of the classical traditions, then educating himself on modern techniques. While constructing his first guitar, Franco fell in love with the process and continues to be head-over-heels for the art.

Franco is the first person to have built a guitar using wood from *morus nigra*, or the mulberry tree. Historically cultivated, its berries sold and leaves used for silkmaking, the *morus nigra* is embedded into the soul of Messina and its wood creates what Franco calls a "sweeter sound," said with excitement in his eyes.

His inspiration? The wood. It gives him sensations of sound and tone that allow him to envision the finished piece, to continue to create art. Every guitar takes about 180–200 hours to complete, and Franco has built 120 guitars to date. The rewards of relief and joy afterwards are insurmountable and always present in his workplace in Marblehead, Massachusetts, where he relocated to from Italy in 2015.

The tonal quality and cadence are smooth, lyrical and pure magic from the initial pluck of a string. Franco's guitars boast a sound born out of love and tireless work, the final product moving to the point of tears. Then the process begins again.

Franco has shared his trade with a number of prominent artists, including Grammy-nominated composer Peter Jansen. Jansen has experimented with a number of sounds before returning to classical guitar and being encouraged by a fellow guitarist to try a Franco Marino guitar. He was enamored from the first play, and in a testimonial, gushes over the quality.

"Franco's guitar arrived at the perfect time for me as an artist. It has the presence, the color and tone, balance, and response that I need for my new compositions. My new recording, 'Places In Time' was released in April 2017, and the producer, the engineer, and myself were very pleased with the guitar's sound and performance. It is an extremely responsive instrument; it gives a lot to the player and responds beautifully to nuances. The Indian Rosewood back and sides and the Italian Spruce top, give the guitar a very rich, deep voice... evocative and revealing."