



Press-Gazette photo

Louis Ropson of Dyckesville, who died last July, is shown here working on a cello in 1963. Tools, instrument parts and cabinet woods he used in his trade will be sold at auction this weekend. A collection of string instruments he made and his Hammond organ will also be sold this weekend.

Dyckesville man left a rich legacy of sound

There was a special demand for violas after World War II because none were available from European craftsmen. That's when the late Louis Ropson, a Dyckesville farmer, began his career making violas, violins and cellos. Ropson died in July, and his collection of instruments, as well as enough supplies to last him another lifetime, will be auctioned this weekend.

Shop tools, hand tools, instrument parts and cabinet woods will be sold at the Massart-McDermott Finger Road Auction House beginning at noon Saturday. Some of the tools are hand-made. Ropson fashioned his own tools when he could not buy some of the chisels and gouges he needed.

Ropson's string instruments and his Hammond organ will be offered at the Downtowner Motel Sunday afternoon, beginning at 1 p.m. The instrument collection has been appraised at between \$8,000 and \$10,000.

Although Ropson did not play the stringed instruments, he was a musician. Born June 8, 1903, he attended Bayview school but left in the eighth grade to help his widowed mother on the homestead farm. When he was about 10 years old, Louis walked 4½ miles to the Robinsonville Chapel each week for organ lessons. When he was 12, he was playing the organ at church. Four years later he was appointed regular organist at St. Louis Church, Dyckesville, and served as choir director.



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Of the Press-Gazette

Difficulty with the plain and Gregorian chants of church music prompted Louis to study with the Rev. Mathias J. Vanden Elzen at Fairland. This was in 1920, and Louis walked to Fairland, now Namur, for the lessons, which he paid for by playing the Fairland organ. In 1929 Ropson studied advanced counterpoint at Tonet with the Rev. A.L. Dobblessteen.

In 1933 Louis learned of a correspondence study course offered by the University of Wisconsin, and he enrolled in courses of music history and counterpoint with Mrs. Helene Blotz.

Louis was fascinated by stringed instruments and how sound came out of them. He suddenly realized while studying counterpoint that he didn't really understand, so he decided to make the instruments to understand them. He made his first violin in 1942 and said later "It turned out so good I just kept on."

Some of Ropson's instruments have traveled a long way from his Dyckesville farm. Violins were sold to Boston University, and one went to South America with Dr. Sigfreid Prager, a former teacher at the University of Wisconsin. Ropson also sent a violin to a Texas student, and sent a viola to the University of Texas to be used by its symphony orchestra.

Some members of the Green Bay Symphony also played Ropson-crafted instruments.

One of the violas to be sold Sunday made its debut with the University of Wisconsin Symphony orchestra in March 1952. The artist was William de Malignon of Aberdeen, S.D. He wrote to Ropson after the concert to tell him the viola was well made and beautiful sounding.

Ropson's violas were believed to be better than his violins, but some of his first efforts were exceptionally large. Performers began to request smaller, customized instruments.

Although some of the woods were imported, Ropson used Wisconsin maple and spruce for the instruments, which were 15 years in the making. The 15-year period was Ropson's insurance against the wood warping.

One of Ropson's violins will become the property of the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, as will his manuscript.

Mrs. Ropson, who died three years ago, used to help her husband varnish the instruments. Their neat little home was constantly open to visitors. And in the background you could always hear Ropson's "accompaniment," the world's finest symphonies.