



"WE MIGHT START PLAYING ON SATURDAY [AT] NOON AND CONTINUE WITHOUT ABATEMENT 'TIL THREE IN THE MORNING."

FIDDLING AROUND

Words by: Jordan Gass-Poore' Photos: Ashley Haguewood

Former Robert Earl Keen band member flourishes with his own violin shop.

The bow screeched across the violin's strings as a young Bryan Duckworth drew it back and forth. Duckworth had taken his childhood friend's violin and repeatedly played the instrument until his friend wanted it back – but that didn't stop him from playing. Decades later, Duckworth's still armed with a violin, and he's not afraid to use it.

Through trial-and-error, the Seguin-based Duckworth learned to play the violin, the instrument used to play fiddle-style music. The terms violin and fiddle are used interchangeably among players and dealers.



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"There are, at times, some minor differences in the way in which the instrument is set up, but there [are] no definitive structural differences," he said.

Violins hang from the ceilings and line the walls of Duckworth Violin Shop in downtown New Braunfels. The shop sells new, used and vintage violins, violas, cellos and mandolins, as well as offering repairs and accessories. Violins, violas and cellos are also available to rent.

To save the eardrums of future generations, Duckworth offers violin and fiddle lessons on a limited basis to adults and youth.

Duckworth's own youthful memories, including a mix of formal and informal fiddle lessons, seem plucked from the plot of a Larry McMurtry novel.

At 18 years old, he began seriously playing the fiddle, a hobby-turned-passion that grew from his interest in Western Swing and Bluegrass music.

Duckworth took his fiddle with him to Texas A&M University and "almost immediately" found others who shared his interest, including country musician Robert Earl Keen, his "musical partner-in-crime" and a friend since 3rd grade.

The remnants of the sixties and early seventies' coffeehouse scene still lingered in the air in College Station. This environment encouraged singer-songwriters and folk music enthusiasts, drifting down Church Street to the house Duckworth

shared with Keen.

Duckworth's fondest college memories are centered on this house, which became a meeting place for musicians and singers of all stripes. "We might start playing on Saturday [at] noon and continue... 'til three in the morning," Duckworth said.

His first fiddle gig was entertaining the Texas A&M Future Farmers of America in an on-campus classroom.

After graduating from A&M in 1978 with an agriculture degree Duckworth moved to Houston to play fiddle full-time. There he learned that he wasn't very good. So, he found a teacher willing to work with him if he agreed to relearn the instrument.

He hung around Winters Violin Shop and distracted the employees to the point where he was given a bench to work on instruments.

Since then, Duckworth has released his own music and played fiddle on numerous Keen albums.

When Duckworth left Keen's band in 2000, he didn't have a plan, just some experience working in a violin shop and a now-or-never attitude.

Duckworth turned that experience into Duckworth Violin Shop, where he's been repairing and teaching violin for more than a decade now.

Duckworth Violin Shop

830-627-1778

9 am through 5 pm Tuesday through Friday

8 am through 3 pm Saturday

duckworthviolinshop.com

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