

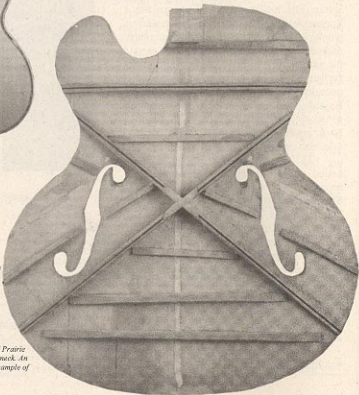
EUPHONON & PRAIRIE STATE

so many of the instruments had variations from the norm. They would build whatever the customer wanted as Les Paul found out when he went to their shop in 1934. He asked Carl to build a cutaway archtop guitar with a maple top $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick with no f-holes. The guitar had a tailpiece and 14 fret-to-the-body neck with a total of twenty frets. The neck had a permanent, non-adjustable truss rod in it. Les was happy with the guitar which was a stepping stone in his evolution of ideas that led to the famous "Log" and, ultimately, the Gibson Les Paul. The log ended up with a Larson fingerboard on an Epiphone neck. A few other cutaways were made in both Euphonon and Prairie State brands including at least one of the gigantic 21" models.

Beginning in the late 1930s, the Larsons built a small number of f-hole guitars in the 17" and 19" sizes. These were unique because the backs and tops were not carved like other makers' instruments. The Larsons used a thin top and back similar to their flattops and bent the back and top over arched braces to get the archtop look. The sound of these guitars, as expected, is somewhere between a flattop and a conventional archtop. At least one of these was made with a cutaway body. Some of these later Euphonons and Prairie States sported rectangular fret markers of pearl or abalone.

The Larsons' creations are quite rare and harder to find as years go by but the quality-minded flatpicker or fingerpicker with a good ear and eye would be an extremely happy picker with one of these beauties. The discriminating collectors already know all about them. ■

From top: This Euphonon dreadnought has been in my family since it was purchased in 1938-39. It is a powerhouse of beauty! This 15" Euphonon c. 1937 demonstrates the usual features but with the square shoulder look. This is a fine rosewood guitar with laminated braces and a 3-piece, laminated neck. This cutaway f-hole top shows the laminated bracing idea which was patented by August in 1904 and used on the high-end guitars throughout the Larsons' career. Left: A 17" Prairie State f-hole guitar c. 1950 with a maple body and laminated maple neck. An internal steel support tube runs the length of the body. This is an example of the thin top and back arched over the laminated braces.



THE LARSON BROTHERS' LEGACY PART II

BY ROBERT HARTMAN

In the preceding article, I talked about the early years of August and Carl Larson's achievements under the Maurer & Co name. Upon buying out Robert Maurer in 1900 to the mid-1930s, the Larsons produced an impressive number of instruments of high quality in an unbelievable array of styles and sizes. They built guitars, harp guitars, mandolins and harp mandolin family of instruments for mandolin and guitar orchestras. This next segment begins with the transition to larger body acoustic instruments.

It was the mid-1930s and the big thing in the music industry was more volume. The big bands started using amplified guitars which were mainly the f-hole jazz models. The regular smaller body instruments previously made could not compete in loudness to the addition of banjos and the other aspects of louder band sounds so a louder flattop guitar was inevitable. The normal large body guitar up to the mid-1930s was 15" wide and had a neck on which the fingerboard met the body at the 12th fret. The Larsons, as well as most other makers, began making guitars with a longer, narrower neck which joined the body at the 14th fret. These larger guitars started with the 15" lower bout and graduated upward to include 16", 17", 19" and 21" bodies in the Larson Brothers' offerings.

The Larsons introduced the Euphonon brand for these larger guitars and mandolins which replaced the previous Maurer brand of the earlier years. The Prairie State brand was retained and was used for the Euphonon style guitars in which the steel support tube was

used, spanning the length of the body. The small rod was eliminated in these larger guitars. These Euphonons and Prairie States were built in varying degrees of fanciness from the quite plain mahogany or oak body Euphonons, which I call student grade, to the very fancy, high-quality guitars built in the aforementioned sizes. These beauties sported engraved fret markers, fancy pearl and abalone peghead ornamentation, pearl and abalone trim around the edges of the tops and an array of pickguard styles which were inset level with the top. The fanciest of these beauties included laminated bracing patterns and laminated necks of from three to five pieces along with the usual laminated pegheads. The back and sides were predominately mahogany, Brazilian rosewood or select maple of one variety or another and the occasional use of oak. The Larsons' practice was to use woods aged twenty years or more, selected from their own stash of tone woods stored in the form of planks or logs. Included were European spruce, Madagascar ebony, select mahogany and the

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different maples and well-aged oak taken from barn timbers of razed buildings. The Euphonon brand of mandolin family instruments had similar purfling and the overall look similar to Euphonon guitars. The scale length was extended from 13" to 14" which allowed the player a longer neck with more room between the frets as well as the larger body with more volume.

The guitar body shapes and styles varied considerably even in what you would consider a normal flattop shape. Most all of them were asymmetrical front-to-back and even slightly side-to-side. The waist on some would be tighter than others, the depths would vary as well as the width of the neck. Many of these differences were due to being hand-made in small quantities and the remainder were attributable to the requests of the customer or the experimentation of the maker. Some guitars had a square shoulder look at the upper bout. These look a bit odd but are some of the best sounding and loudest of the Larson guitars. These varying body sizes and styles produced many different sounds as evidenced in the CD that accompanies my latest book titled, *The Larson's Creations: Guitars and Mandolins* (Centerstream Publishing). Muriel Anderson describes and plays an assortment of Larson-made guitars, mandolins and a Dyer harp guitar. The different guitar sounds lend a feel to the player and conjures a mood which is evidenced by the music that follows. Muriel chose the songs and playing style to beautifully fit the particular instrument. The guitar sizes vary from my parlor 12 1/2" wide and 2 1/4" deep, the 15" body sizes and the larger dreadnaught, Euphonon and Prairie States. The mellowest sound came from a Euphonon guitar that was played countless hours by the late Patsy Montana. Patsy related to me that this guitar had been around the world and been played by many famous performers. Hank Williams, Sr. borrowed it once to do a commercial on the Louisiana Hayride radio show. Patsy was a very generous lady and I consider it an honor to have known her. The CD ends with a selection on the Dyer harp guitar.

The Larsons had a section of their shop sealed off for instrument finishing. This room was August's pride and joy as he was the main man who used it. Starting early on in their career, the brothers would French polish the higher-end instruments and by the 1920s and '30s, they were masters of the art. These instruments, when new, had a mirror-like finish as is still evidenced by some of the instruments found today that have been well cared for. August tried spraying techniques for finishes and sunbursts as well as combining French polish over undercoatings.

By today's standards, the Larsons shop would be considered a Custom Shop because



Top right: A 17" rosewood Prairie State with pearl trim and "BOB" pearl inlays on the peghead. Top left: This Euphonon was played many years by Patsy Montana (Country Music Hall of fame) during her long run on the National Barn dance radio show in Chicago and also on her world tours. It still plays and sounds great. It's definitely broken in! Above: The rosewood back of the 17" Prairie State.