

George Wakim

“I’m in the business of making an instrument that will actually serve the musician and will emanate and give the best sound that it can.”

George Wakim came from Lebanon to the United States in 1984 to study at the University of Kentucky. He earned his Master’s degree and began working as an engineer for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. His interest in music began when he was twelve. He saw a violin player on his uncle’s television. He talked his parents into getting him a violin. He learned to play by ear and joined a band that played in local restaurants.

In Kentucky, he met other Lebanese musicians. They played music at weddings and festivals. He did not like the way his violin sounded. It was also awkward. It was made for someone who was right-handed, but he is left-handed. He tried to find someone to rebuild the violin. He met J.B. Miller, a celebrity in the world of instrument makers. Wakim was fascinated by Miller’s skill. Miller helped Wakim learn to make violins that were for left-handed playing and had a good sound.

Wakim built five violins. Then his interest turned to the oud. The Arab community in Louisville invited Wakim to open for Simon Shaheen. Shaheen is a famous Palestinian-American oud and violin player. Wakim was amazed by Shaheen’s oud. After the show, they talked. Shaheen introduced Wakim to his brother, who makes ouds in New York. Wakim began communicating with oud makers in the United States and Lebanon. He wanted to learn the secrets of the craft and develop his skills. He built ouds for himself and others. Wakim is now highly respected in both Lebanon and Kentucky for his skillful building of ouds. His ouds have the responsive tonality prized by musicians.



How do instrument makers connect the world of craftsmen with the world of musicians?

