

Music Wood

Used in the construction of high-end soundboards, Sitka spruce sourced from southeast Alaska's Tongass National Forest has long been considered the crème-de-la-crème ingredient in campfire-rocking acoustic instruments such as guitars and mandolins. Now, with over-harvesting threatening to extinguish supplies of the celebrated tonewood, guitar makers have teamed up with conservationists and logging companies in an attempt to ensure the music will go on for generations to come.

"It's been exciting seeing how these corporations can work together as activists," says Maxine Trump over the phone in a smilingly polite British accent. Trump is the director of the upcoming documentary *Musicwood*, which chronicles the challenges facing modern-day luthiers as natural resources historically used to make acoustic instruments dwindle. "Having Greenpeace, a logging corporation and Gibson all sitting together in a room talking about a forest is just delightful," adds Trump. "It gives you hope for other causes, for people in other industries to come together in the same way."

Quality instruments are made from quality wood, and from old-growth timber to the solitary grower trees that require entire areas of woodland to be cleared in order to access them, the instrument manufacturing industry has not been shy about producing what its customers want. Overall, instrument makers leave a relatively small dent in forests, but with heavy timber demands from other industries, species such as the Sitka spruce are being wiped out. Today, 70 of the 200 species used in the manufacture of instruments are now threatened.

"Our beloved Brazilian rosewood was taken from us more than 25 years ago," Bob Taylor of Taylor Guitars told *E/The Environmental Magazine*. "Adirondack spruce was logged out. Today we see the signs of our current woods being diminished to a point of unavailability."

Not wanting to see the choice woods used in their instruments disappear has led manufacturers like Gibson, Martin, Taylor, Fender and Yamaha to become strange bedfellows. Aligning themselves with Greenpeace under the banner "Music Wood Coalition," from which Trump's film takes its name, the companies are pushing suppliers to follow sustainable Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logging practices.

Already, Martin has produced the D Mahogany, a dreadnought guitar made entirely of FSC-certified wood, and Gibson has pledged to use sustainable wood in 80 percent of its guitars by 2012. But it will be consumers who dictate the future of tonewoods like Sitka spruce.

"I think if musicians get behind this, they can tell the story in another very unique way," says Trump. "Whatever language you speak, wherever you're from and you hear music, everybody understands what you're talking about. You don't have to say anything. It just connects people in a way nothing else can."

For more information, visit musicwoodthefilm.com.

