

A Visit to Kai Mayberger and White Raven Drumworks in Vermont

by Ami Sarasvati

I learned about Kai Mayberger's flutes from two students in the beginner Native American flute course I teach in Concord NH. Coincidentally, on the same evening, two students brought in flutes they had purchased from Kai. The flutes were clearly by the same flute maker. His unmistakable graphic signature was etched on the back of both flutes. One of the flutes was 18 years old and the wood needed a little care.

After contacting Kai through email, we set up a time for me to visit his gallery in Vermont. I brought my student's flute up so Kai could look at it and make a recommendation on re-conditioning the wood. A trip through vintage Vermont to White Raven Drumworks is not your average visit to a musical instrument gallery. Kai Mayberger, owner and master craftsman, has created a world of unexpected treasures and sounds. Kai makes flutes, drums, and didgeridoos.

He offers a fascinating selection of indigenous flutes. In his shop was a variety of 5 and 6-hole Native American-style flutes of 7/8" and 1" bores. The beautiful flutes are made of various woods including butternut, also walnut, cherry, maple, American holly, red cedar, toog wood (Kai grows in Florida), wenge, and mahogany. Drone flutes are also available. If he does not have what you are looking for in the shop, Kai will customize your order.

Another kind of flute Kai makes is tuned to a Hijaz scale. When you hear the Hijaz flute you will think of middle eastern music. We decided we would experiment by playing two Hijaz flutes simultaneously to see if, when played together, they had a pleasing harmonies as do two Native American-style flutes of the same key. We each played G minor Hijaz flutes. It was one of those moments you never want to end. These two amazing flutes danced harmonically and their sounds were enhanced by the pleasing acoustics created by the high ceiling in his gallery. All the instruments in the room seemed to suddenly be energetic witnesses in this moment of swirling tones and serpentine soundscapes.

This 7-hole Hijaz flute was so intriguing, I went ahead and ordered one for myself in G. What a treat! Ordering a flute that day meant getting to work directly with Kai to customize my Hijaz! He had me hold a "blank" (one that did not yet have holes) as he marked, remarked, adjusted, and zoned in on my hands and my reach of my fingers to create a well-fitting flute. How thankful I felt in moment, as this seasoned and gifted artisan worked his craft. It is rare to have such devotion, these days to a craft. How fortunate that such a precious art is not lost in our world of technology and automation.

Kai's also makes other instruments:

His Ashikos and JunJun drums are African inspired drums appropriate for African and Caribbean rhythms. These drums come in a large variety of sizes and woods. All are custom designed for an individual's needs. African or domestic heads. Kai works all heads by hand.



Kai's graphic signature



Kai's gallery sign in Vermont



Welcome to White Raven!

A Visit to Kai Mayberger and White Raven Drumworks in Vermont (cont.)

Kai also makes didgeridoos using stave constructed from 12 pieces of hard wood. He still had a couple made of 16 staves at the time of my visit. The sound of these instruments is competitive with those made traditionally in Australia. All are tuned. Custom sizes and woods available. Special orders of length (up to 8' currently), note, and or wood are welcomed.

The day also presented an opportunity to see Kai work this craft in another light. I presented Kai with the 18 year old flute that belonged to my student. It must have been heart-warming to him to see one of this earliest works. His smile confirmed it. Kai examined it and told of some woodworking advancements he's made over the years. We took the flute and walked upstairs to his shop which consisted on the entire second floor of his office building. In a very large, open concept space, were all the tools of his trade. This was the space in which he did his best work. I wondered how many thousands of hours Kai had spent up in this space. Inspired, learning, carving, tuning, perfecting his trade. How many notes have been played with his flutes? How many beats had been beaten with his drums? How many circular breaths have been taken by those who have the great fortune of being the keeper and owner of one of his amazing didgeridoos.

Under his hand, he has created instruments that by now were around the globe. With a hand as steady as a surgeon, Kai skillfully made micro adjustments to the flute. He recommends using bees wax like Burt's Bees to condition the wood when needed. He had a special cloth which he massaged the flute with. All free of charge, just excellent customer service! This lovely 18 year old flute was ready to return to its owner, to offer its voice to those who breathed into it.

We took some pictures and videos. There are two excellent videos on youtube for you to get a better sense of Kai. See "Kai Making Prayer Flutes" (<http://youtu.be/fiDNKqoQxfM>) and "How Kai Started Making his Instruments" (<http://youtu.be/IAz7P-0SxHE>)

A bit more from Kai's website:

Kai Mayberger continues the family tradition of creating art. After studying antique furniture repair and finish carpentry with his uncle, he attended Goddard College and studied a combination of ecology, shamanism, sculpture, and woodworking. The result of his Senior Study at Goddard was the birth of White Raven Drumworks. Kai displays his work at the White Raven Gallery on Route 4 and 100A in Bridgewater Corners, Vermont, between Woodstock, Vermont and Killington Ski Resort. Be sure to call (802) 672-3055 to ensure Kai will be there when you visit. A trip to White Raven Gallery is well worth it.

I couldn't help but also purchase one of this 1" bore 6-hole Butternut flutes and a handsome flute carrier that his wife made before I left. This flute has quickly joined the ranks with my daily "working" flutes.

I'm pleased to be a part of the family of his customers who have enjoyed your creations over the years, Kai. Thank you for all you do.

Visit his website at www.whiteravendrums.com for more information.

