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# MUSIC BUSINESS

MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

INDUSTRY PROFILE

## SWEETWATER Sound

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Buyer's Guide to Los Angeles

Interview: NARAS' Michael Greene

# **E.M.M.C. Lands Joint Venture with Romanian Violin Maker**



**Views of the  
Vivarius  
Impex  
facilities  
in Reghin,  
Romania.**



**O**ffering dealers quality hand-crafted European stringed instruments is one thing, but to do so on a consistent basis is really what sets a supplier apart. This statement sums up the philosophy of Mark Saltzman, president of Entertainment Music Marketing Corp. (E.M.M.C.).

“Consistency is one of the first things a dealer should look at in a potential supplier,” said Saltzman. “As a dealer, you want to feel confident that the instruments you receive today are as good as the ones you received last month -- or last year. The consistency of your violin suppliers is critically important, because many U.S. distributors buy the same violin model from different sources. In effect, you can’t count on the same quality level even though you’re buying the same violin model.”

E.M.M.C. has long been known as a reliable source of quality European stringed instruments. In 1999, the company took a big step toward building on this good reputation when Saltzman formed a joint venture to manufacture stringed instruments in Romania. Along with Romanian partners, he invested in Vivarius Impex SRL, a new start-up factory to manu-

facture laminated cellos and basses.

Demand for the factory's cellos and basses grew quickly, and its owners decided to take the business to the next level with the purchase of an existing factory that makes student violins, violas, cellos, and basses, as well as a line of pine furniture. Acquired in August, 1999, the new factory will be merged into Vivarius.

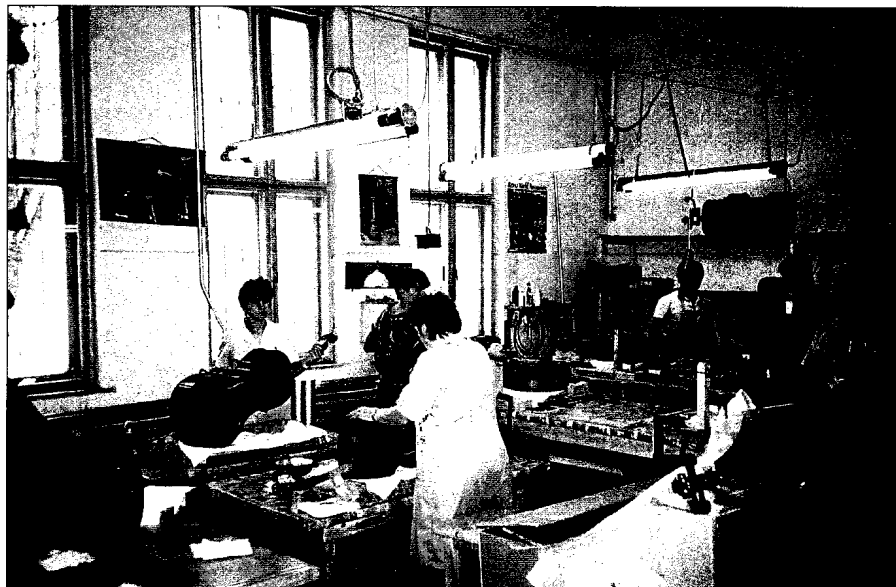
The newly acquired factory is located in Reghin, Romania, one of Europe's leading stringed instrument-making centers. The factory will manufacture a full line of student and step-up violins, violas, cellos, and double basses to be distributed under the Mathias Thoma and Leon Aubert brand names throughout the world. "Having our own production facility in Europe will give us tighter control over the pricing and availability of our products," said Saltzman. "Now we'll be able to ensure that E.M.M.C. dealers have ready access to high-quality stringed instruments that are hand-crafted in Europe."

The joint venture in Romania is the latest in a series of recent growth ventures undertaken by E.M.M.C. In 1998, the distributor established its first facility outside the East Coast, opening a Midwest Service Center in Elkhart. This move allowed E.M.M.C. to increase the speed of its service, and fill customer orders in less time.

According to Saltzman, the addition of the Romanian factory and the Midwest Service Center were undertaken with a common goal: to put E.M.M.C. in a better position to fill dealers' needs for band and orchestra instruments of consistently excellent quality at a value price. "All the pieces are being fit together," he said. "We are building E.M.M.C. into a larger corporate entity that is vertically integrated, with its own stringed instrument supply source and full in-house service capabilities."

## Skilled Builders Abound

The Vivarius factory is located in a region of the world that has an sizable population of skilled woodworking artisans with a centuries-old tradition of hand-crafting violins. "It would be difficult to find another region that has a



**Vivarius employs a skilled workforce of approximately 200 to produce a full line of student and step-up violins, violas, cellos, and double basses.**

larger number of talented violin craftspeople, who take such great pride in their work," said Saltzman. "This is a key reason why we jumped at the chance to set up a joint venture in Romania. We believe strongly in the country, its talented workforce and woodworking artisans, and the world-class instruments they produce."

The Reghin factory has been making violins for over 40 years. It employs a workforce of roughly 200 and includes a fully-equipped on-site machine shop. "The factory does all its own tool-making in-house, which guarantees that the machinery used to manufacture the instruments is built to exact specifications," elaborated Saltzman. "Having such precise machinery, in turn, ensures that the violins themselves will meet exact quality and consistency standards."

Another factor that contributes to the instruments' quality are the raw materials used to manufacture them. Along with the factory and machinery, E.M.M.C. acquired the Romanian company's inventory of seasoned tone wood. Owning a large stockpile of top-grade European wood insures that Vivarius will have a consistent supply of seasoned wood for its products for years to come. The factory is located in an area that is known for its quality maple and spruce that are valued for their tonal qualities.

## Consumers Demand Quality

Quality is something that is becoming more important in the student stringed instrument market today, believes Saltzman. "Throughout the '90s, we've seen a lot of growth in school orchestral programs, and one of the developments resulting from this trend is that students and parents have become more sophisticated about what they're looking for in a stringed instrument," he said. "We've seen a growing demand for higher-quality student violins, as well as more upgrading to step-up models," continued Saltzman. "People have realized that investing in a better violin is a smart move because it will make learning easier and the student will be able to keep the instrument longer. The violins, violas, and cellos produced at our Romanian factory are right on target with today's demand for better quality student models.

"High-quality European instruments are very much in demand as rental products," continued Saltzman. "Their structural integrity allows them to stay in the rental pool longer. Also, the tonal quality and performance features of these instruments ensures that they will be readily accepted by educators."

Driven by the strong string instrument market worldwide, the Romanian factory was running at full capacity at the time E.M.M.C.

acquired it. However, Saltzman believes the plant's production output can be increased even further by introducing modern manufacturing efficiencies and Western-style management techniques. These are steps that the new owners plan to implement in the near future.

"But we will definitely maintain the time-honored Old World methods of crafting violins," he added. "We envision the factory as combining the best of both worlds. By modernizing it to some extent, we will be able to manufacture instruments more efficiently, increase production, and hold down costs per unit. This, in turn, will translate into very favorable prices for our dealer-customers. At the same time, dealers will be getting a stringed instrument that reflects the pride and skill of some of Europe's finest craftsmen."

The violins, violas and cellos produced at the Romanian plant will cover a complete spectrum of full and fractional sizes, and will include both student and step-up models. In addition to instruments currently being made, Saltzman said that new models will be introduced in the future.

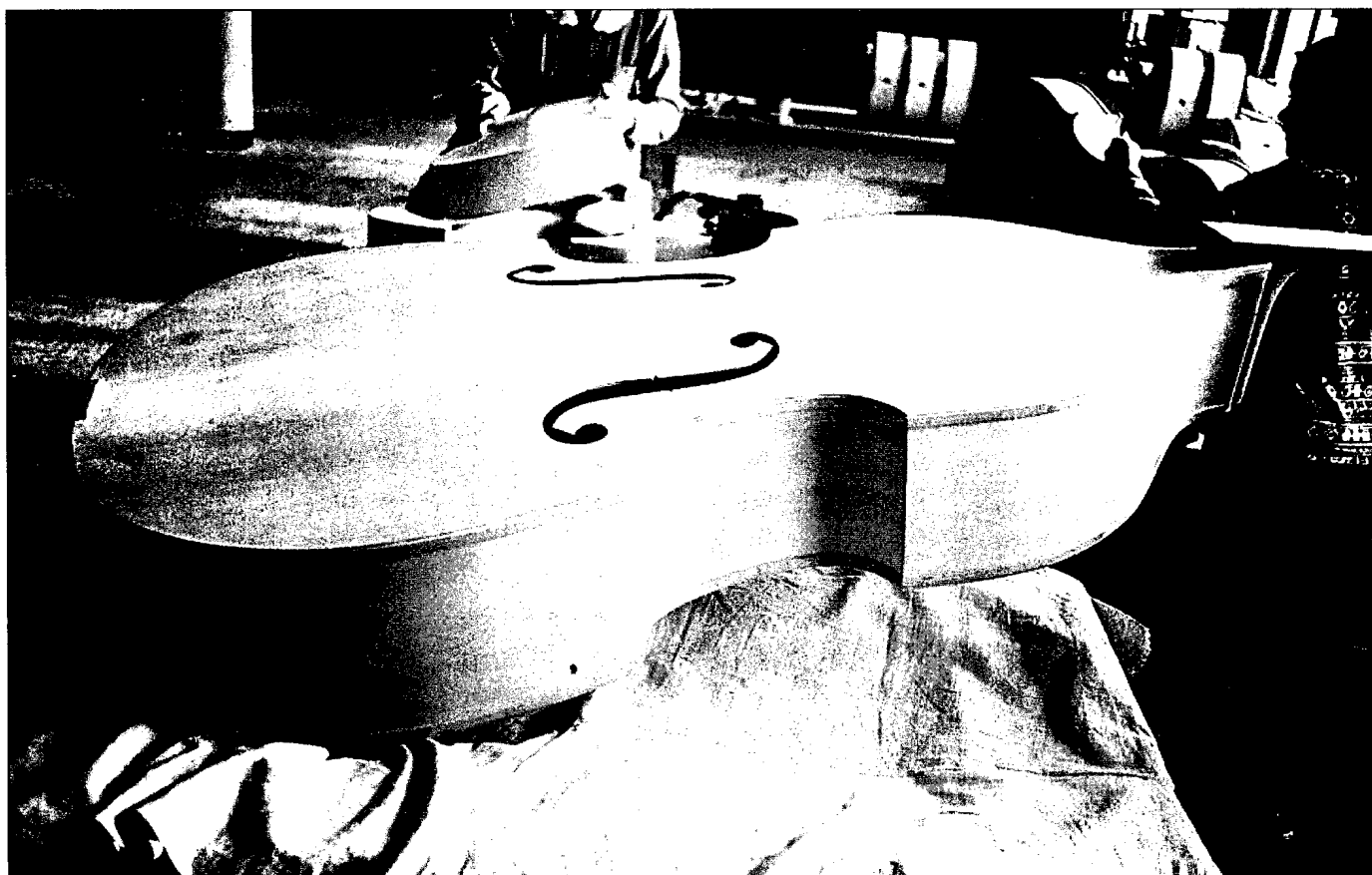


**E.M.M.C. president Mark Saltzman (left) checks out the company's inventory of seasoned tone woods.**

"One of the advantages of having our own manufacturing facility is that we will be able to bring out new instrument models to meet demands in the marketplace as they develop," he pointed out. "Having this capability will make E.M.M.C. more responsive to the needs of our dealers and their customers."

Thanks to E.M.M.C.'s two recent expansion ventures -- the Roman-

ian factory and Midwest Service Center -- dealers will be able to stand behind their stringed instruments with greater confidence than ever before, Saltzman concluded. "The dealer can be assured that every string instrument they buy from us will be spec-ed, manufactured, and serviced properly before it reaches their hands. This is what we mean by consistency," he stated.



## VIOLINS FROM ROMANIA

smaller tools like saws and buffers, to a state-of-the-art computer-controlled pressing machine for making laminated instruments. Additionally, the heating and electrical systems have been upgraded, and a new dust elimination system has been installed to remove sawdust from the environment, improving both product quality and working conditions. To improve production efficiency, E.M.M.C. has reallocated space in the factory to better utilize square footage and has revamped the production line. All of these upgrades have resulted in what Saltzman terms “the best of both worlds.”

“We are still employing the time-honored violin-crafting techniques that have been used in this area for centuries,” he says. “But at the same time, by modernizing the operation we have been able to increase production efficiency and minimize costs, enabling us to bring dealers and consumers an amazing value in a European-made instrument.”

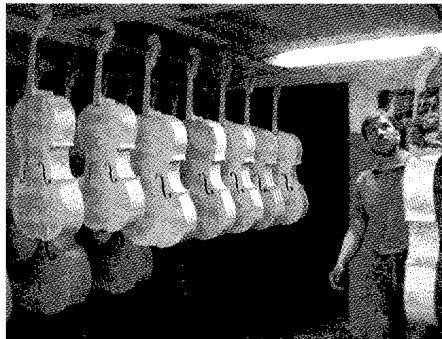
One example of such an “amazing value,” according to Saltzman, is E.M.M.C.’s new Leon Aubert D902 Student Violin Outfit. An entry-level violin available in a complete range of full and fractional sizes, the D902 offers many quality features, such as carved maple back and sides, spruce top, maple bridge, and chrome strings, as well as ebony pegs, fingerboard, nut, saddle, and endpin. The violin comes as a complete outfit for a list price of just \$399.95, which includes an American case and Glasser bow.

“The D902 is the most affordable European student violin outfit that we have ever offered,” says Saltzman. “For a price that’s competitive with Asian products, dealers can offer their customer a finely crafted European instrument with many desirable features not typically found on entry-level student models. The reason we can provide such an outstanding value is that we are able to hold costs down and keep quality high by doing our own manufacturing, with our own supply of aged wood.”

The Romanian factory isn’t limited to making entry-level products. As part of the renovation project, a special luthier shop was created for the crafting of more premium-grade handmade instruments. The first products to come out of this new department are the Mathias Thoma

Maestro 250 and 358 violins, two step-up models that are hand-graduated and feature an extremely beautiful hand-rubbed oil finish. Each instrument is hand-tuned to achieve a rich, warm tone.

“The Mathias Thoma 250 and 358 are handcrafted by skilled violin makers, and look as good as they sound,” says



**LOCATED IN REGHIN, EMMC’s** new factory employs 250, in a region with a violin making tradition that dates back hundreds of years.

Saltzman. “They, too, are priced to offer an exceptional value for their superior quality. By having our own factory, we’ve been able to bring increased efficiencies to the production of upscale handmade instruments in addition to entry-level models.”

Yet another new product to come out of E.M.M.C.’s Romanian factory are wooden multi-instrument storage racks. Drawing on the facility’s excellent woodworking capabilities and raw material supply, the company has introduced a Mathias Thoma Bass Rack and Cello Rack. Constructed of top-grade solid 1-1/2-inch Romanian pine, the racks offer great strength and durability, protecting instruments against the rigors of classroom and auditorium use. At the same time, they are easily transportable, featuring four large swivel casters.

“The new Mathias Thoma racks offer a combination of quality, functionality and affordability that make them ideal for school use,” remarked Saltzman. “They also serve as a very attractive display unit for retail stores. We saw a need in the market for a sturdy, mobile, economical storage rack, and felt this was something we could produce cost-efficiently at our factory. In the future, we plan to introduce Mathias Thoma racks for additional instruments.”

Having its own factory will allow E.M.M.C. to be more responsive to

dealers’ needs, Saltzman points out. When a demand for a product arises—whether for an accessory like a wooden instrument rack, or a violin with certain features at a specific price point—E.M.M.C. is now in a position to fill it quickly.

“We have an advantage over other suppliers when it comes to quick response to market demands. It’s quite different when I go in, as owner of the factory, and say, ‘I want this with these features,’” observes Saltzman, who visits the Romanian facility six times a year. “It’s a very strong position to be in. Basically, it’s enabled E.M.M.C. to offer the products the North American market is seeking. It puts us ahead of the curve in product development.”

Some examples of new market-driven products from E.M.M.C.’s Romanian factory that will be introduced at Winter NAMM include: a solid carved-top bass and cello with laminated back and sides; and a jazz electric bass. The carved-top, laminated-body bass and cello will be offered at a “very, very economical” price point, according to Saltzman. “Our bass will wholesale for about \$1,000, while comparable European models may wholesale for \$1,800. It’s the same with our cello, which will wholesale for about \$500, versus \$1,200 for comparable models,” he says.

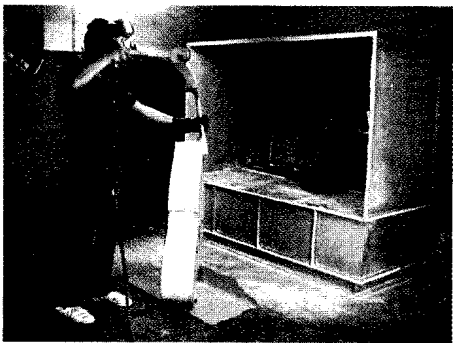
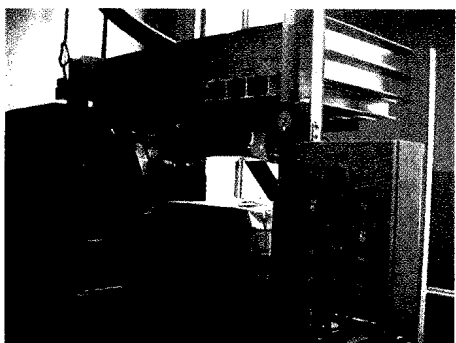
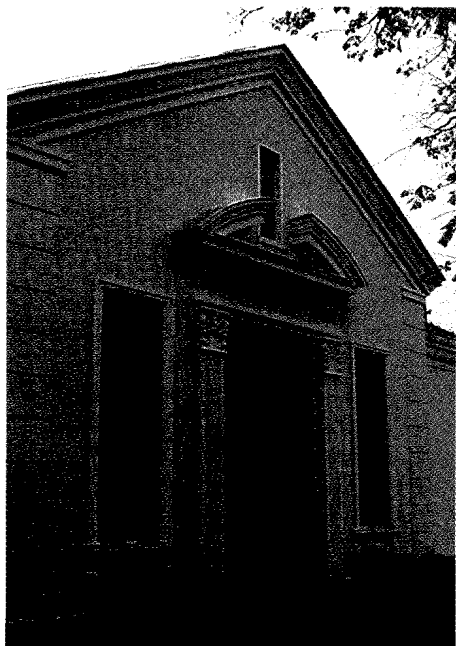
E.M.M.C.’s new jazz electric bass will be offered in both four- and five-string models. It will feature American-made electronics and a choice of two different pickup systems.

Not only has the acquisition of the Romanian factory allowed E.M.M.C. to broaden its product line, it has also helped the company expand its market internationally. Since entering into the venture, the company has opened new distributors in Spain, Italy, Germany, England, and France.

“The Romanian factory has had a very good year and has increased its business substantially,” the E.M.M.C. president commented. “We look for this growth to continue. This venture has required a lot of time and effort on our part. But we firmly believe that the future of our business—and the violin business—is in Romania. Judging from what we’ve accomplished during this first year in servicing our dealers, this has proven to be an accurate assessment.”

# E.M.M.C. HEADS EAST FOR HIGH-VALUE STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

**New Factories In Romania Offer European Quality At Prices Associated With Asian Mass Production**



**SCENES FROM ROMANIA.** The Vivarius and Impex stringed instrument factories combine modern machinery and skilled craftsmanship to deliver high value.

Throughout its history, Entertainment Music Marketing Corporation (E.M.M.C.) has built its stringed instrument business on the basis of offering quality handmade European violins at extremely competitive price points. Although this may sound like a simple mission, E.M.M.C., like many stringed instrument suppliers, has often found it a challenge to obtain a steady supply of consistently high-quality European products—especially ones that can compete in price with today’s mass-produced Asian imports.

Responding to this challenge, E.M.M.C. embarked on a joint venture with a European partner to start manufacturing its own instruments in Romania during 1998-99. The Deer Park, NY-based importer/distributor acquired an interest in two Romanian stringed instrument-making factories, which it has merged and now operates under the name S.C. Vivarius Impex S.R.L.

Today, just over a year after acquiring the second and largest of the Romanian factories, the investment is paying off handsomely. E.M.M.C. President Mark Saltzman reports that the factory has undergone substantial upgrades to improve its production efficiency. It is now manufacturing violins, violas, cellos, and basses in both student and step-up models and has introduced several major new products under the Leon Aubert and Mathias Thoma names. What’s more, E.M.M.C. will be unveiling additional Romanian-produced items at Winter 2001 NAMM.

“We’re very happy with what we’ve accomplished with the factory in just over a year,” says Saltzman. “We went into this venture so that we could main-

tain control over the quality of our products and production costs. We felt that by doing our own manufacturing, and not being forced to rely on outside suppliers, we would be able to offer dealers consistently high-quality European stringed instruments at an unbeatable price. So far, everything has proceeded according to plan.”

According to Saltzman, an important part of E.M.M.C.’s plan was to bring Western-style production efficiencies to the factory, while maintaining the Old World craftsmanship techniques of its highly skilled workforce. The factory, which employs 250, is located in the city of Reghin, an area with a stringed instrument-making tradition that dates back hundreds of years.

“Because the factory is located in one of Europe’s leading violin-making centers, there are many talented craftspeople in the area whose families have been making stringed instruments for generations and who are very skilled in this fine art,” says Saltzman. This is one of the factory’s main advantages.”

Another advantage that the factory offered was an abundant supply of top-quality raw materials. Along with the facility itself, E.M.M.C. purchased its large inventory of aged European spruce and maple woods, which are valued for their tonal properties. Having these superior woods to work with is another factor that will ensure the instruments’ quality consistency, Saltzman points out.

To get the most from S.C. Vivarius Impex’s excellent staff and raw materials, E.M.M.C. has upgraded the factory’s tooling and production processes. The facility has been overhauled with new, more modern equipment—from