

KRUTZ Strings

**Anton Krutz -
The Journey of a
Passionate Craftsman**
by Denyse Neilson



In 1976, eight-year-old Anton Krutz left St. Petersburg, Russia with his parents to begin a new life in the United States – in Kansas City, Missouri, to be exact. His father, Misha Krutz, had accepted the position of principal bassist with the Kansas City Philharmonic. It was a time of political détente: from 1967 to 1979, the easing of Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union allowed some Soviet citizens, like musicians, to emigrate out of the country. Both of Anton's parents were classically trained musicians and played in different orchestras in St. Petersburg.

The Krutz family settled in and felt at home in Kansas City. By the time Anton was 12 years old, he started apprenticing with a master violin maker in downtown Kansas City. As he remembers, "I would go there every day in the summer and every Saturday during the school year. So, by the time I finished high school, I already had a lot of experience in violin making and repair. Then I went to the Violin Making School of America (VMSA) in Salt Lake City for the four years of violin-making training. After the VMSA I went to work for two years in New York City shops restoring instruments." One of those shops included the violin workshop of Philip Injean, across from Carnegie Hall.

In 1992, Anton returned to Kansas, where he and his father became equal partners in a new business venture and both founded KRUTZ Strings and opened K.C. Strings, the flagship, 4,000-square-foot retail space of KRUTZ.

Since then, the business has flourished. Anton explains their success: "As luthiers concentrating on crafting these professional instruments, the reputation of our brand has become more well-known. This used to be common for shops in Europe but is no longer the case today. We started receiving requests for advanced student, step-up, and beginner instruments. These requests started coming from across the country, and so our business grew as we added more lines to meet that demand."

Today, KRUTZ manufactures student to professional-level vio-

lins, violas, cellos, and basses. Anton continues, "Our K.C. Strings retail store sells the full line of KRUTZ products, of course. We also sell the more popular accessories. Players always love to come in and try out the instruments and bows because that decision is very personal for them."

KRUTZ and K.C. Strings are separate companies – K.C. Strings buys products from KRUTZ Strings, just like all other dealers do. From the business side, they are completely separated. From the customer side, the service and quality are the same. Anton explains that, "the retail staff advises other dealers on how to sell instruments, the restoration techs help other dealers' techs on repairs and possess the knowledge of all things retail with string instruments and share that with dealers who have not had extensive experience with string instruments."

K.C. Strings is located in Merriam, Kansas, between downtown Kansas City and its surrounding suburbs, in a historic business district dating back to the early 1900s. It has become a thriving area to do business in, as Anton explains, "In fact, IKEA liked the area so much, they built a store five blocks away from us just a couple of years ago." The KRUTZ warehouse and workshop are just a couple of miles down the road. Over time, their success has enabled them to expand to seven buildings, totaling around 16,000 square feet of space, in all.

Anton explains the evolution of the business: "Originally I thought we were just going to be a small luthier and instrument restoration shop, but we grew – mainly due to word of mouth. There were vertical student to professional brands in the brass and woodwind market. So now dealers had an authentic brand in the bowed string instrument space. We kept growing due to the brand and, at a certain point, grew into more business complexity than I knew how to handle. So, I got a very strong board together to help guide the strategy and logistics of the growth."

As most business owners know, growth is key, but equally important is adapting to and sustaining that growth. KRUTZ seems to have managed that balance, but how? Anton's response is simple: "Great instruments, social media engagement, and word of mouth from happy customers. We craft a couple hundred of our advanced student to professional instruments every year. The basses take

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five times longer to craft than the violins. We try to keep ahead of the demand by always having different instruments started in the crafting process. That way if we suddenly sell out, we can get those types of instruments finished and ready for sale sooner.”

Having a good system in place keeps production moving like a well-oiled machine, but how is quality maintained within that system? For Krutz, the answer can be summed up, possibly, in one word – “picky.” Could it be that simple? Anton explains that, “being picky is continually spot-checking the work of the craftsmen and repair techs to make sure they adhere to the standards that I have developed over my lifetime.” He adds, “Good systems are when all staff know what their role is within the overall operation and are aware of what the roles are of other staff around them. That way everything functions effectively with minimum friction and miscommunication.”

Within this framework, Anton Krutz has built a work culture within the company that seems to be working, “I work with our staff through shared conclusion, and then I give them responsible autonomy to make the right decisions that will serve the customer. I think any business is only as good as the culture within the business. Cultures can only be built through shared conclusion.”

Depending on the size of the company, there are many ways to do that, but for Anton, it all comes down to person-to-person communication with his staff and leadership teams to ensure there’s an understanding of what is expected. At KRUTZ, the idea is that this system empowers people to have pride in their work and stretch their creativity. Anton says, “You have to hire the right people for this to work. Mistakes happen with new staff under a responsible autonomy system, but then it smooths out, and the operational results and customer service go to a higher level.”

KRUTZ’s carefully-crafted instruments are distributed to violin shop owners and

music store dealers around the U.S. Anton says, “We don’t have any required minimums. So, if a dealer wants a small order, we’re great with that.” This may be a costlier policy for Krutz, but he says, “That is how we set up operations right from the beginning, so it feels normal to me. Also, as retail dealer that is how I would like to be have an instrument wholesale company work with me.”

As for the KRUTZ business model, they have one overarching business philosophy, which is, “Never play the Minimum Advertised Price (MAP) game.” Anton explains, “We only have retail prices online,

and we check to make sure all of our dealers follow that. This way the dealers are not forced to compete or undercut each other online. Then the dealers can do all the in-store sales they want, serve their customers, and still have great margins.” In terms of marketing, Krutz utilizes what he calls, “the big three” – Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The content is geared toward string players. “We try to use those platforms to publish content that players



An instrument is hand-crafted in the KRUTZ workshop



would be interested in," says Anton. "That is what will help our dealers the most. I think this is going to be the future role of all premium brands, in whatever field they are in – to come up with unique and interesting content for their end user."

Anton also writes informational newsletters for KRUTZ dealers about how to better sell to and understand string players and teachers. He says, "String players and teachers have a very different culture from brass and woodwind players, and I try to bring an insight to that. I can do that because I have 30 years of experience working with everyone from beginning strings students to string players of some of the biggest symphonies in the country."


His passion reaches far beyond the physicality and mindfulness needed to be a skilled craftsman. Sharing his insight and knowledge may be the purpose of his newsletter, but maybe it's more than that. "Music is the strongest catalyst for emotion – it's about love, hate, and everything in between. If you think about life without emotion, without music, it really has



no meaning." This passionate statement comes from Anton's "Sound of the Soul" video, which can be viewed on the KRUTZ Strings website (www.krutzstrings.com) or YouTube. His passion for his instruments and music is connected to emotion and the range of emotions we have as human beings.

Anton elaborates, saying, "Intelligence and emotion are two completely different mind components. As humans, we are mainly interacting through our emotions. Pure intelligence is very slow and communicates very little. The emotion that is attached to intelligence is what gives context to that communication. Art and music have the greatest effect on emotion. That's because they are one and the same, just in a different form. Art is frozen music and music is liquid art. The human voice intersects both forms. In turn, the bowed string instruments come closest to reproducing the sound of the human voice than any other instrument. That's why string instruments have such a strong impact on emotion. That's why films, video games, and other commercial soundtracks use strings." How does one apply these emotional, poignant, and heartfelt thoughts to the intellectual pragmatism needed to run a business? Anton answers: "We feel we have the best sounding instruments, and that is why the brand statement of KRUTZ is, Creating the Voice of Strings."

KRUTZ's instruments have been used mainly by classical players. However, changes and expansion may be on the horizon. Their featured artists roster is growing, but not just in the classical market. They've also caught the attention of nonclassical players from a whole host of music genres. Anton welcomes this trend and expects it to continue.

For Anton Krutz, it's been a long – sometimes arduous, but joyous – journey from Russia to Kansas, apprentice to master craftsman, perhaps sustained and supported by his belief that we all have a voice and a range of emotions, and it's through music that we can find it. 

Chedeville[®]

Life Without Limits

Introducing a Full Range of Classical Woodwind Mouthpieces

Chedeville.com

The advertisement features the brand name 'Chedeville' in a large, white, cursive font against a dark blue, starry night sky background. Below the name is the slogan 'Life Without Limits' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, two images of classical woodwind mouthpieces are shown: one on the left and one on the right. The mouthpiece on the right is labeled 'Chedeville Elite'. The background also includes a silhouette of a person standing on a hill under a starry sky.