

A Bow Re-hairing Demonstration by Jon Li

by Pete Showman

One of the events at our busy March jam was a demonstration of fiddle bow re-hairing given by Jon Li of Kamimoto String Instruments in San Jose. Jon has been known for years as an expert bow-maker and bow repair person, so I was interested to see how he does it.

As it happened, I'd talked to Jon about re-hairing my bow since it was starting to "slip-n-slide," so he suggested that he use my bow for the demonstration. I agreed.

When Jon was ready to begin, he picked up my bow and a pair of scissors – then looked at me. Even though I knew I

was done with the old hair I blanched a little, then nodded to Jon. Snip, snip! The old hair was off (right).



The hair is held in a "box" at each end of the bow under a wooden wedge. Jon used an awl to remove the wedge at the tip, releasing that stub-end of the old hair.



He did the same at the frog, slipping the metal ferrule off the thumb-rest, then removing the wedge and discarding the final bit of old hair. Now the bow was "bald" (see upper right picture).

I was impressed that Jon custom-made a new wedge for the tip end, apparently having decided the old wedge either was damaged or didn't quite fit right. Jon used a chisel to pare the new wedge until it would just slip snugly into the box, testing it several times:



All photos: Pete Showman

Jon Li prepares to add new hair to the "bald" bow

The next step was to tie the tip-end hairs together a little way from the end, using regular button thread – and considerable manual dexterity!

He then heated just the tip of the tied bundle of hair over an alcohol lamp and melted a bit of rosin into the warm hair to form a lump.



He explained that the rosin lump helps keep the hair from slipping out from under the wedge.

The hair goes into the box at the tip: with the end of the hair bundle aiming towards the middle of the bow, the wedge is pressed over it, and the hair is then folded back over the wedge and towards the frog. The picture below shows Jon pressing the wedge into the tip-end box to secure the new hair, using a blunt-tipped awl.



For the final steps, Jon secured the bow in his re-hairing jig: This holds the tip-end wedge and hair securely in place during the rest of the process.



Next Jon straightened the new hair along the length of the bow and thoroughly combed it, making sure it lay flat and had no tangles (below).



Once it was combed out, Jon repeated the process of tying, heating and rosinning the frog end of the hair. The trick here is to know how long to make the hair so it will not be too tight or too slack, as heat and humidity change. To me this seemed the part requiring the most experience.

One other important step along here, as Jon combed the hair: he slipped the metal ferrule, removed earlier from the frog, onto the new hair, and up to the tip-end, out of the way. If you forget that, the frog-end hair and wedge will need to come apart again.

The rosined hair is tucked into the frog-end box and the wedge put in place. Then the metal ferrule (which Jon had slipped onto the hair earlier) pushed over the the end of the frog to hold the hair in place.

To finish, Jon separated the hair with a comb and checked for hairs crossing others, or the wrong length,



and cut those out. He noted in passing that the often-seen practice of yanking the end of a broken hair from the bow-tip risks dislodging the tip-end wedge – so he recommends cutting (or biting!) the hair off, instead.

The final step in re-hairing is to rosin the new hair thoroughly. (Talk about slippery – try rosin-free hair sometime!) I did that – and now the bow is working properly again.

I was impressed by Jon's skill, and found it a very interesting demonstration. Thanks, Jon!

Pete is an SCVFA Trustee, Membership Secretary, occasional webmaster and newsletter editor, and past President. He's been fiddling for a third of a century.



Pete Showman photo

March KidFiddle students Catrina Riordan and Yuki Torrey perform on stage, with instructor Sarah Kirton



Pete Showman photo

SCVFA member #5 Jack Sadler (left) and Sam Morocco discuss the finer points of – something, at the March jam.