

George Wakim

“I’m in the business of making an instrument that will actually serve the musician and will emanate and give the best sound that it can.”

George Wakim came from Lebanon to the United States in 1984 to study civil engineering at the University of Kentucky. Since earning his Master’s degree, he has been working as an engineer for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. His interest in music goes back to the first time he saw a violin player on his uncle’s television when he was twelve. He convinced his parents to get him a violin, learned to play by ear, and joined a band that played in local restaurants. In Kentucky, he connected with other Lebanese musicians to play weddings and festivals. He was not satisfied with the tonality of his violin and frustrated by the fact that it was made for someone who was right-handed, while he was left-handed. In trying to find someone to rebuild the violin, he met J.B. Miller, a celebrity in the world of instrument makers. Wakim was fascinated by Miller’s skill, and Miller helped Wakim learn to make his own instruments, violins that were not only suitable for left-handed playing, but also of a quality to create responsive tones. Wakim built five violins before his interest turned to the oud. The Arab community in Louisville invited Wakim to open for Simon Shaheen, a Palestinian-American virtuoso on the oud and violin. Wakim was entranced by Shaheen’s oud. After the show, they talked, and Shaheen introduced Wakim to his brother, who makes ouds in New York. Wakim began communicating with oud makers in the United States and Lebanon, searching out the secrets of the craft and developing his skills as he built ouds for himself and others. Wakim is now highly respected in both Lebanon and Kentucky for his skillful construction of ouds with the responsive tonality prized by musicians.