



Cremona's current oldest luthier, Hungary's Stefano Conia (74) and his son Stefano Jr (47) are pictured with a violin at their workshop in Cremona.—AFP photos



Stefano Conia Jr, 47, carves a violin scroll at the workshop of his father, Cremona's current oldest luthier, Hungary's Stefano Conia in Cremona.



Italian-Colombian Master luthier and president of the Cremona's Antonio Stradivari luthiers consortium, Giorgio Grisales is pictured with a violin at his workshop.



Italian cellist of the Bazzini quartet of Cremona, Fausto Solci plays on a cello made by Italian-Colombian Master luthier Giorgio Grisales.

VIOLIN-MAKERS TUNE IN TO TRADITION OF STRADIVARIUS IN ITALY'S CREMONA

Working in the shadow of the great masters, the violin-makers of Italy's Cremona are valiantly fighting a shrinking market and foreign competition as they seek perfection, one violin at a time. The birthplace of Stradivarius, Cremona is a veritable laboratory for luthiers from all over the world, where violin workshops seem to be everywhere you look. Stefano Conia's studio—just one of the 160 in this northern Italian city of 70,000 inhabitants—has not changed for decades. It's situated at the back of a flower-filled courtyard, and this native Hungarian, one of the doyens of Cremonese violin-makers,

heads there every day, despite retiring nearly 10 years ago.

"If I stopped making violins, life for me would be over. Every day I'm here in the workshop. It's an antidote to old age," said a smiling Conia, 74, whose father crafted violins and whose son is also pursuing the family tradition. Conia's workbench faces that of his son. Both are covered with files, clamps, compasses, brushes and small saws. Wooden planks are laid on the floor.

"Going into violin-making was a natural choice," said Conia's son, Stefano, known as "the youngster" who began handling tools at the age of seven or eight. He spent his childhood in the workshop his father opened in 1972, two months before his birth. "I would play with the wood and the musicians would come and buy their violins and play," said the younger Conia. "It's always been a special atmosphere, which I really liked."

For the Conias, the violins lovingly made from flamed maple or spruce are more than just instruments—they become family. "The instruments are a bit like children. They live thanks to the energy we give them, it is a part of us that will continue to live after our death," said Stefano Conia.



Spanish luthier, Arantzasu Rojo from Bilbao is pictured working on a cello.



Violins are displayed in the shop and workshop of Italian-Colombian Master luthier and president of Cremona's Antonio Stradivari luthiers consortium.