



Tenor resonator banjo

Date

1926-1935 ca.

Primary Maker

Charles A. Stromberg

Description

The Stromberg family, while best known for their large archtop guitars made between the '30s and the '50s, also produced other musical instruments. Charles A.

Stromberg, who emigrated from Sweden in 1888, was listed in a Charlestown, Boston, directory as a cabinet maker in 1890, living at 58 Corey Street. By 1892, he had moved to 156 Arlington Street in Chelsea. The 1900 census lists Charles as a musical instrument maker, but does not indicate whether he worked on his own or for another employer. In 1902, the Chelsea directory clearly lists Charles as a musical instrument maker, located at 125 Essex Street. By 1918, he had moved his home to Somerville and had a separate business address at 40 Sudbury Street. Various members of Charles Stromberg's family were involved in his cabinet and instrument-

making businesses, at different times. In 1892, Charles had a boarder, John Stromberg (probably his brother or cousin), who was also a cabinet maker. Before the publication of the 1893 Chelsea directory, John Stromberg moved out of Charles' house to Boston, where he was listed as an instrument repairer in the 1920 census, as a musical instrument maker at an instrument factory in 1930 census, and as a musical instrument repairer in the 1947 Boston directory. In 1910, Charles Stromberg's son, Harry, aged 20, is listed in the census as an apprentice banjo maker. Harry was drafted in W.W. I, but, unlike his brother Elmer, did not serve, and was listed in the 1920 census as a manufacturer of musical instruments, while his father was specifically listed as a manufacturer of drums. Harry left by 1930, when he appears in the census as a buffer at a razor factory. Charles' youngest son, Elmer, 25, was listed in 1920 as a "helper" in the manufacture of drums. Elmer remained with his father as a "mechanic" at the "musical store" in 1930. As indicated in the census records and the metal signature plaque of NMM 10874, banjos and drums, which require similar construction techniques, formed an important part of the Stromberg's product line. In 1926, Elmer Stromberg applied for a patent for his novel banjo tone ring, which was comprised of a hollow tube with 42 short tubes perpendicularly soldered to it, to enhance the volume. The patent was awarded in 1928, and the tone ring became a signature feature of Stromberg banjos made during this time. The 1930

census lists Elmer as a "mechanic" at the music store, which suggests that he was responsible for the fabrication of the tone rings and metal parts for the Stromberg banjos. The banjo features the fancy abalone inlay on the fretboard and the carved detail at the neck heel that are traditional on the finest Boston banjos since the nineteenth century. The beautifully constructed metalwork is gold plated and stamped with decorative flowers. While many Stromberg banjos have standard model names, such as Deluxe or Marimba, stamped on the dowel stick, this instrument does not. The presence of the name Rainville inlaid in abalone on the peghead suggests that this was a custom-made instrument. While the identity of the original owner has not been established, Rainville is a common name in Massachusetts among the descendants of French-Canadian immigrants. Neck: rosewood; floral carving over stippled background on neck heel; center strip comprised of five-ply brown-stained hardwood, red-stained hardwood, and light hardwood purfling strips; five-ply dark brown and light hardwood purfling strips inlaid on neck along fingerboard (the dark strips wider) interspersed with rosewood diamonds surrounded on each side with chevrons of light and blue-stained hardwood Peghead: fiddle-head-shaped; ebony veneer; mother-of-pearl inlay comprised of three birds perched on branches; two flying birds, each carrying a clear plastic mounted green rhinestone; two banners, one engraved and inked with "STROMBERG" the other with "RAINVILLE"; sides along top veneer inlaid with five-ply brown-stained hardwood, red-stained hardwood, and light hardwood purfling strips Fingerboard: ebony bound in ivoroid; 19 nickel-silver frets; abalone bird-in-flight inlaid behind 1st fret; two abalone swallows inlaid behind 3rd fret; abalone bird perched on branch inlaid behind 5th fret; two abalone birds perched on branch inlaid behind 7th fret; two abalone birds perched on branch of different design inlaid behind 10th fret; three abalone flowers inlaid behind 12th fret; mother-of-pearl swallows inlaid behind 15th and 17th frets; abalone geometric design inlaid behind 19th fret Heel cap: two ebony inlaid on side with five-ply brown-stained hardwood, red-stained hardwood, and light hardwood purfling strips and further ebony band on inside edge Head: white matte plastic; aluminum flesh hoop Tone ring: arched top; comprised of hollow tube tone ring with 42 larger hollow tubes with holes on inside edges, soldered perpendicularly to tone ring, the whole apparatus soldered to flange with 21 holes, opening into every other hollow tube below; nickel-plated brass Dowel stick: maple inlaid with five-ply dark brown and light hardwood purfling strips inlaid on neck along fingerboard (the dark strips wider) interspersed with rosewood diamonds surrounded on each side with chevrons of light and blue-stained hardwood; gold-plated brass neck angle adjustment hardware. Rim: brown-stained maple Bracket hooks: 26 gold-plated steel Tension hoop: gold-plated brass with 26 notches; stamped between notches with flowers Resonator: mahogany veneered with rosewood on back, brown-stained maple veneered with rosewood on sides; bound on upper and lower edges with ivoroid; bound on inside upper edge (not visible from exterior) in blue celluloid; bindings trimmed on sides with five-ply dark brown and light hardwood purfling strips inlaid on neck along fingerboard (the dark strips wider) interspersed with rosewood diamonds surrounded on each side with chevrons of light and blue-stained hardwood; back of resonator inlaid with center strip comprised of two mosaic inlay strips of slanted light, red, blue and black hardwood strips with light hardwood strips along outside, these mosaic inlays strips surrounded on each side by mosaic five-ply dark brown and light hardwood purfling strips inlaid on neck along fingerboard (the dark strips wider) interspersed with rosewood diamonds surrounded on each side with chevrons of light and blue-stained hardwood; two circular, concentric circles comprised of two strips each of mosaic inlay of slanted light, red, blue and black hardwood strips with light hardwood strips along

outside; gold-plated brass flange with circular openings; stamped between openings with flowers Armrest: none Nut: bone Tuners: gold-plated brass tension pegs with mother-of-pearl heads Tailpiece: gold-plated brass Finish: clear lacquer

Dimensions

Total instrument length: 861 mm (33-7/8") Vibrating string length: 545 mm (21-15/32") Fingerboard length: 395 mm (15-9/16") Fingerboard width at nut: 29 mm (1-1/7") Fingerboard width at body: 38 mm (1-1/2") Head diameter: 281 mm (11-1/16") Vibrating head diameter: 227 mm (8-15/16") Rim diameter: 279 mm (11") Resonator diameter: 352 mm (13-7/8") Combined rim and bracket hoop depth: 69 mm (2-23/32") Combined bracket hoop, rim, and resonator depth: 79 mm (3-1/8")