

# A master of many trades

A prominent authority on rare and old violins and South Africa's leading international violin dealer lives right here on our doorstep. We caught up with Ballito-based violin dealer Johan Grobbelaar and found out about his passion for violins, diving and photography.

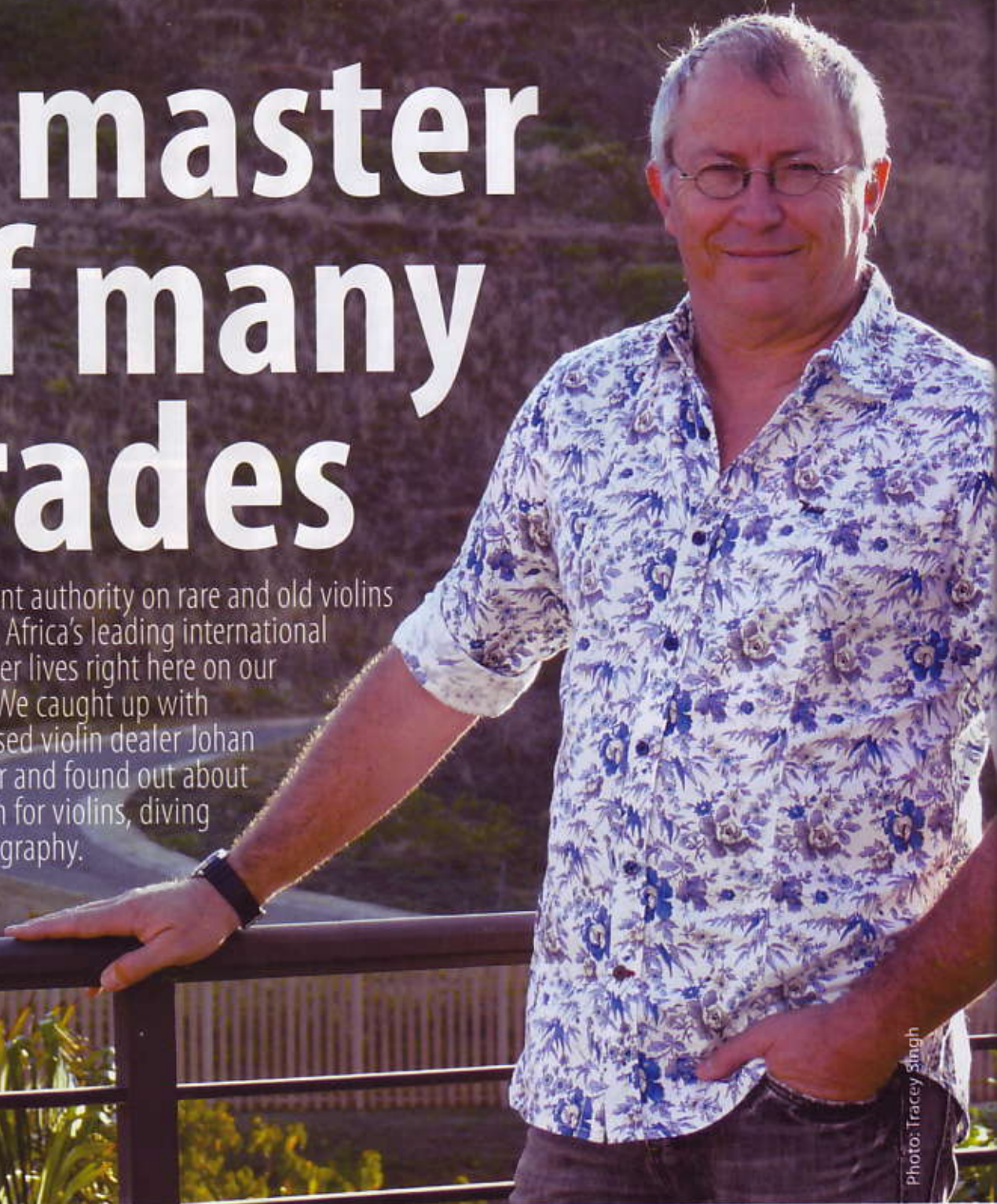


Photo: Tracey Singh

**H**e's worked as a producer for the SABC, lived as a professional photographer in Paris and his underwater film work has been featured on the National Geographic Channel and on PBS in the United States. Nowadays, though, Johan Grobbelaar is one of the leading authorities on top end violins and violin trading - some of which are valued at more than R400 000. And he does this from the comfort of his own home in

Ballito. Johan started playing the violin at the age of nine years. After school he studied at the University of Pretoria where he achieved an honours degree majoring in composition and violin.

Following his love for music, Johan got a job at SABC Radio after university where he worked as a music producer for five years. Needing a change, he broke away from radio and music and moved instead to current affairs television productions. "I produced a

programme for SABC TV called Midweek for two years. This was real hard work! At the time I was the youngest TV producer in the SABC, but I got to travel the world, working on documentaries and even received a National Checkers award for consumer journalism while I was there. I also launched Special Edition, which was sort of the SABC's version of 60 Minutes. I really enjoyed my time working in current affairs."

It was around the age of 30 that Johan found his way back to music and took up a producer's position in the SABCTV's music department. Here, for three years, he worked with some very famous international musicians. But, with massive productions and constant deadlines, it looked like Johan was heading for total burn out.

"I needed a change of scenery, so I resigned and moved to Paris, which would be home for the next 10 years. I studied French and started doing my Doctorate in Communication Sciences, which I eventually found too difficult to complete in French."

While in Paris, Johan followed one of his other passions - photography. He worked as professional photographer in Paris for about six years. "I shot stuff for magazines mostly, like health and beauty, architecture and airline magazines. But my back took a lot of strain and eventually I gravitated back to television, as a writer."

In 1993, while working as a freelance researcher and writer for a French government production department, Johan was sent to South Africa to

solitude, not to mention having a 'fixed' salary."

After that, John went on to play for the KZN Philharmonic Orchestra for a few months, eventually being made the acting manager of the orchestra.

Being involved in the 'violin world' once again, Johan realized there was no effective infrastructure for violin dealing in top-end instruments, and he decided to start his website: [www.violins.co.za](http://www.violins.co.za). That was 10 years ago and Johan has never looked back!

According to Johan, the website is one of the top five sites for string instruments in the world. It has become a reference site for dealers and a place where people can buy and sell fine instruments. "The site has been a huge success. I use it to showcase top end instruments made for professional musicians. I serve as a facilitator between buyers and sellers but I also do assessments and evaluate instruments from estates etc."

Through his work Johan has become the leading authority on violins in SA and an expert in old and valuable instruments.

When he's not playing, buying, selling or valuating violins, Johan spends time on his other activity - scuba diving - a hobby that he says has gotten completely out of hand!

"I started scuba diving about 12 years ago. I took to it quickly, but after about my first 100 dives I became bored and frustrated. There is so much beauty down there, and I wanted to show it to others."

Johan got himself a good video camera and befriended underwater photographer, Dennis King. He started filming and involving himself with fish identification projects.

"I have dived the Red Sea extensively several times. I have a list of 950 species

I want to get video of, and so far I have already filmed 500 of them. I love documenting the lesser-known species."

Johan has sold some of his footage to the Discovery and the National Geographic channels and recently some rare footage he shot in the Gulf of Aqaba was featured in the Nat Geo Wild series, 'Caught in the Act'. His television work is done under the name John du Plessis, which he assumed when he became a French citizen.

Through his diving Johan has also returned to lecturing. He wrote and teaches a curriculum for a new special module on marine videography as part of the fourth-year course in Theory of Television Production at the Durban University of Technology.

A master, it would seem, of many trades, one wonders why Johan chooses to spend his days in a little coastal town like Ballito?

"Although most of my work is done in the big centers and abroad - mostly in Paris and London - I've always been a beach boy. I spent my childhood on this coastline and I will never live away from the sea again."

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"It was around the same time that my mom passed away and I needed to settle her estate. I got a job as a senior French lecturer at the University of Zululand, and ended up staying in SA for good. I lived in Mtunzini and absolutely loved it! Having come from 10 years of hustle and bustle in Paris, I was surrounded by stretches of open beach. It was bliss. I loved the space and



Photo: IBA Adianos



Photo: Dennis King

