

# Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

*Editor: Shem Mackey*

## Contents

### **At the Bench**

Judith Blackwell interviews Marc Soubeyran.....Page 3

### **Dendrochronology and Violins**

Dr Peter Klein writes about tree ring analysis..... Page 12

### **Milan's School of Violin Making**

Dr John Basford writes of his recent visit ..... Page 26

### **Cleaning and Gluing Cracks**

Christoph Götting tackles crack repair (part 1)..... Page 28

### **The Manchester International 'Cello Festival**

Kai-Thomas Roth describes the scene ..... Page 30

### **Letters**

Loan Scheme, Violins for Africa and more..... Page 33

## Editorial

### 400 Years Exhibition

As you well know, we are organising an exhibition of '400 years of violin making within the British Isles'. As part of the exhibition there will be a section on living makers. In order to give everybody a voice for that section, the committee has decided to ask all members to submit a list of up to ten living violin or bow makers whom you consider to be representative of contemporary British making. We will then work out a list from all the answers received. In order to allow members to see more instruments and bows by contemporary makers, we would like to remind everybody that you can take the opportunity at the Dartington Conference, (to which you are encouraged to bring your instruments) to view each others work.

Of course you are most welcome to nominate yourself as well as non BVMA members, as we are trying to be as representative as possible. We think you will find this way of selection both open and fair. Please send your selection to John Topham, 114 Mid Street, South Nutfield, Redhill, Surrey RH1 4JH before 31st. October 1996.

*Exhibition Committee.*

### Recontre Internationales de Musique Ancienne. Paris - Carrousel du Louvre 1er, 2 et 3 Novembre 1996

The fourth International Early Music Exhibition will take place on November 1, 2 and 3rd. At the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris. The Carrousel du Louvre, opened in 1994, is situated in the heart of Paris and has become one of the capital's busiest cultural centres, especially since the inauguration of the Grand Louvre.

### Barn Dance cancelled

The BVMA barn dance, which was to take place on Saturday June 15th, was cancelled. It was necessary to have at least 70 people attending to break even and not having reached that number it was thought prudent to cancel. To those people who had intended to travel, we extend our apologies.

**Renewals.** BVMA memberships are now due for renewal.

### Next Issue

The September issue of the newsletter will have an informative article from Dennis Plowright on the manufacture of animal glues, a subject of some interest in these BSE times. He has worked for many years in the glue-manufacturing trade and provides a very comprehensive description of the production processes - also included will be a research report on "Alternative woods for Bow making" from Cambridge University's materials research group.

There will be more from Roy Collins, this time on Bow lappings and the remainder of Christoph Gotting's article on crack repair. The deadline for the September issue is August 16th.

The Exhibition will take place in the Salles Gabriel and Delorme, with 2500 sq.m of exhibition space.

Details and registration pack from; Philippe Suzanne, C.O.D.A. 106 Bd. Richard Lenoir - 75011 Paris

Tel: (01) 43 55 47 09 Fax: (01) 43 55 35 17  
e-mail: 100532.653 @compuserve.com

## AT THE BENCH

*The first in a series of interviews, where Judith Blackwell attempts to get under the skin of different makers and restorers to find out why and how they do what they do! Who better for her debut article than our chairman Marc Soubeyran.*

Visiting Marc Soubeyran's workshop brings me to Dalston, Hackney. There seems very little charm in this deprived borough until I drive into the pretty mews where Marc lives. Tucked out of sight from the real world, the cobbled streets are a relic from the past, the perfect setting for a true artisan.

My initial impression of the workshop is shock, our chairman is not the tidiest of men, and yet on closer inspection, there is order in this chaos.

'So first of all Marc can we start with your background, your initial training and what inspired you to choose this vocation?'

'What inspired me? I haven't a clue. Gradually in my teens the idea came but that's all I can say, no big click.'

'Any family tradition in woodwork or music?'

'None whatsoever. We listened to a lot of classical music and when I was still at school I started working, one afternoon a week, with a hurdy-gurdy maker, in Lyon, and then after school I worked part-time for him, every morning. Then I heard about the school in Switzerland and as I have French and Swiss nationality I knew that I could go. So, I applied. Its quite interesting, a small school with only 8 students in all, that's 2 per year. They have a very strict entrance exam which lasts 2 days.'

'What does that involve?'

'All sorts of things. Music, musical tests, drawing, some woodwork, some writing, but the idea of the test is not the result, but how you approach it. I think it

was very important to do the screening before the training.'

'So how did you approach your first employer, having left college?'

'What happened actually is, its all about who you know! I was in my fourth year and Dietrich Kessler was on holiday in Switzerland. He was staying with the director. Dietrich Kessler mentioned that one of his employees had just left. The next day the director mentioned it to me. I actually got on my bike and went to see him. It was July at that time, but I told him I was finishing next May and was there any chance I could have the job? He said he'd prefer to have someone straight away, so I suggested I take my 3 months work practice, which the college allows. It worked well, and I was able to return after completing my college course.'

'So how did your relationship develop with Kessler, did you become friends?'

'Well, he was definitely the boss, and rather intimidating at that. Don't get me wrong, he is probably the one who has the most bench experience in the country. He's always been a hard worker, always very fast, and easily. When he cut a bridge he would cut it in an hour and a half whereas everyone else would take two to two and a half, so he was demanding a tremendous amount from us. Because of this we produced some fantastic stuff. It was a brilliant training.'

'So was he appreciative of the work?'

'Looking back you realize he was, but the push was always there. I do treasure the time I had at Withers, but after six and a half years, towards the end I was ready to go. But now I can say we're really good friends, although I still look up to him.'

'So what was the force behind the decision to leave?'

'I think I was ready to leave probably nine months before I did, but at that time Dietrich Kessler told us he was selling the business to Adam Whone, so I thought I may as well stay on and help with the change over. There were a lot of things to do. Also towards the end I was working in the shop a lot, which basically helped me to run my own business eventually. So I finished there on the last day of September 1987 and started in Atlas Mews on 1st October 1987, and I had a customer in almost straight away!

The workshop is on the ground floor, with bars on the windows and not much natural light. But the room has a good working atmosphere, the mess makes you feel the benches are constantly in use. On a bench in the middle of the room a cello front is having its belly reshaped with a sandbag.

'What's being worked on at the main bench?'

'I'm actually making a baroque violin

using a Stainer model. Its something I've had in mind to do for quite sometime. Its not an order. In 1988 there was a Sothebys sale of the Bloomfield collection. There was a fantastic violin, in mint condition, an extraordinary instrument; to my mind, probably one of the nicest I've ever seen. I always thought it would be quite nice to do something like that. Luckily Shem [our editor] made a drawing of it.'

'So you don't actually have access to it at the moment.'

'The instrument was bought by the 'Shrine to music', in the States, but I've got quite a few photos from various books and the auction catalogue and also the plans Shem drew, so I've got enough measurements. There seems to be some evidence that Stainers were fetching a lot of money in his time and probably up to about the end of the 18th century, more money than Strads then. The natural conclusion to draw from that is they sounded best. Obviously one has to be very careful with this conclusion. My



## J Thibouville-lamy & Co Ltd

Wholesale Importers of Violin Family  
Instrument Accessories

Gilbert House, 406 Roding Lane South (off Woodford Ave)  
Woodford Green, Essex, IG8 8EY  
Tel 0181 551 1282, Fax 0181 550 8377

suspensions seem to be supported by the fact that there are an awful lot of baroque musicians using re-baroqued Stainers.'

'So you are assuming that a baroque Stainer would have produced the best tone of any violin at that time.'

'A very important time is the transition period, when baroque instruments were changed to modern. Nowadays you don't find Stainer instruments with modern set-ups that sound fantastic. They might sound good but not outstanding. I think that Stainer actually pushed the limits, almost to the extreme, so that they sounded more like the baroque players wanted. With this you have a more powerful sound, with more clarity and articulation, maybe not quite as powerful as a modern instrument.'

'So although this instrument isn't a commission do you usually make to order?'

'Yes, on the whole. When I first set up on my own I set out to offer a service to musicians, be it repairing, servicing, and bow rehairing but also to make for musicians. I would say 90% of commission instruments I've made were for musicians who I'd already done work for.'

'Do you have a free hand in this process or do they ask you for a specific model?'

'Its different every time, its part of the discussion of what they want, like and require. Sometimes I have designed my own model, particularly with violas. I've changed some models or made models the musician has chosen. When making for the musician I love that relationship, they always have the knack of asking the right questions, which makes me progress.'

'You obviously follow traditional aesthetics 100%, don't you feel limited by that?'

'Ultimately I'm aiming to design my own model within the classical framework. Obviously the size of a corner to a layman is nothing but to us its everything. Also, how

you handle the edge work and purfling. Its really all about making an instrument sound. As a maker there are two sides to it. 1, the vanity of making it look good. 2, the archings, thicknessing and set-up have got to be right. You must combine the two. I'm not saying I'm there yet, but I'm working on it!'

'How far would you take the customising? I know that you've recently finished a 'cello that had a fish painted on the back.'

'Yes, but when a musician orders an instrument I always say at the end of the day when its finished, if they like it they're most welcome to buy it, if they don't like it they won't buy it, I take the risk. Some people don't work like this, I do. But, when an instrument has something more special about it, like that fish, then it would make it more difficult to sell, therefore the musician would be more obliged to buy it. Also, the production of sound must not be impaired by the customising. I won't do that.'

'You obviously feel extremely comfortable with the making, what about repairs? I can see a 'cello front being worked on...'

'Yes, a soundpost crack in the front which I've had to correct the arching on. The front plates have been thinned at some point, they're less than 4mm, a bit on the thin side for a 'cello and the crack had been left for a long time. Basically, if I feel I can handle a repair successfully I will take it on. Obviously one has to know ones ability and limitations. I have said "no" to some work but I've always known someone who can do it, so I'll always put them in touch with someone else.'

'Have you ever had any complaints about your work?' [long pause]

'I haven't actually, but, you can laugh, on the other hand there are some people I haven't seen for years. So why have they not

come back? Are they not happy with my work? I don't know. There's always people moaning and complaining a bit, but on the whole, no.'

'How often do you review your price list?'

'Officially cartels are not allowed but you talk to others, basically. We'll work it out between quite a few people.'

'Do you have a London costing, because I know people, living out of London, who say "Oh, you lot, you have your London pricing, way way above ours!" I think the other way. I look at what kind of car the musicians come in, and very often they come in a brand new car. I can't afford a brand new car....you draw your own conclusions. Its as simple as that.'

'So, back to the bench. The Stainer copy is in the white, ready to be glued together, and then? Do you use a light box?'

'Yes, I use a U.V. light to dry the varnish, to accelerate the process. First I may use saffron straight on to white wood, sometimes a little tea. With this fiddle as its not an order I will probably put it in the U.V. box for a month to see what happens, just to get a bit of colour really. With primers I'm still not certain, although instinct tells me its a mistake to use hard primers, after all the instrument has to breathe. I think this subject needs to be discussed more.'

'So do you use just oil varnish?'

'No, up to about a year ago I'd been using a spirit varnish. I decided to change firstly because spirit varnish is a pig to varnish, I'm not a great varnisher anyway but I was having tremendous difficulty and the varnish wasn't drying. And then last May or April I went to the Venetian exhibition in Paris, and in the catalogue there was an interesting discussion about the varnish and I think it was Charles Beare who said it was definitely a cooked varnish,

and also Rene Morel said something about how it was like sugar, if you put sugar on a hotplate it first goes brown and then just before it actually burns to black it goes this incredible deep red colour. So I thought I'll try it. I've cooked my resins, a very simple mix, quite hot and for quite along time and you get this really deep colour.'

'So would you be happy to divulge one of your recipes?'

'Sure, but I think a lot of people use the same ingredients just different quantities. Basically half sandarac, half colophony with a bit of zinc oxide, used as a drier. Cook that for about three quarters of an hour maybe an hour, very very hot until it gets quite dark, then put some linseed oil in it, cook that again, it gets darker, then I thin it down with lavender oil and turps.'

'So there are no extra colour pigments?'

'Yes, I actually use orange madder which I grind into the varnish, after cooking. Its very simple and I do believe its got to be because those guys, in those days, didn't have time to hang around. Obviously some people have worked for years on their varnish and have achieved fantastic stuff and would like to keep it to themselves, I personally believe in talking to each other, hence the BVMA. If we shared, we would raise the standards, but also give the same varnish recipe to ten different people and you have ten different results.'

My attention wandered and I set eyes on Marc's wonderful wood store.

'Where does it all come from?'

'All sorts of different places. I do have one very good contact in Switzerland for split pine.'

'So where does the maple come from?'

'I've bought from Dietrich Kessler, also two or three trees with Norman Myall, from a guy in the West Country. I also found some maple on a little island off the Isle of Sky.

'All this fantastic wood Marc, and so much effort to turn it into a violin, so, do you cheat?'

'I've got a bandsaw, that's all. I think right from the start its important to feel the wood, and get to know it. I don't feel happy about using routers or formers. Its not my thing. I've also got a lathe which I mainly use with sanding disks and I've also got a sanding drum to sand my ribs down.

'Do you use any unusual hand tools?'

'No, most of the planes, chisels and knives I use you'd find on any bench. I've got a little hand plane, based on an old Norris plane, a great size for planing 'cello fingerboards, an incredibly fine set-up and small mouth, so you can take the bare minimum. I also prefer old tools, I think, on the whole the steels better.'

Away from the bench now and I'm keen to ask one or two personal questions to conclude.

'Do you think you've gained any personal benefit from being voted Chairman of the BVMA?'

'That's a very leading and political question isn't it. Yes I have, and that is simply that I have got to know a lot of people in the trade, which is wonderful.

As Chairman you're leading the pack, where would you like to take us? I hope the newsletter will carry on improving, and reach a standard where people will keep it as a library item. We must aim for high standards long term, listen to what the members want and exchange information to help everybody progress in their violin making.'

'How do you rate your success, you've come a long way since your college days?'

'Its not for me to say.'

'There must be a feeling of personal satisfaction.'

'There is. I do work for some of London's leading musicians and I'm

delighted but I'll still fit a bridge on a little Chinese instrument if someone brings one to me.

'Do you have any icons?'

'Dietrich Kessler without a doubt. I have a lot of respect for him. There are two others, makers. I don't particularly agree with their work but I respect them completely, that's Wilf [Saunders] and Roland Ross. Simply because they do very exciting work and stand by it.'

'So apart from work, how do you spend your time? I know cricket is one love!'

'When I arrived here in '81/'82, the great Botham years, we were listening to radio 3, medium wave. Not knowing what it was all about, a complete foreigner, I just needed to know. Now I play for a club and just love it. Its great fun, but also a complete break from everything.'

'Is there a lot of music in your life?'

'I especially like jazz or early music. I like to hear my customers playing and go as often as I can to classical concerts. In chamber music I find myself analysing the sound of the instruments, in French we say "deformation professionnelle"! I do have Bass-viol lessons on an instrument I made, but only occasionally. I scratch the fiddle! and don't claim to be a musician.'

'So, playing a traditional English game, a way of life for the British people, being of French and Swiss nationality and living in a country quite alien to the French way of life.....'

'Yes, its quite alien, you very quickly pick up on things. Within 6 months you know what its all about. British life - its a former umpire.....er, empire!

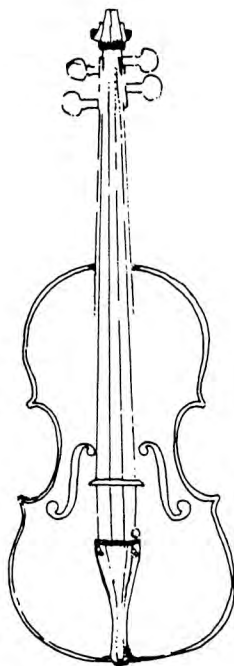
'So do you feel at home here?'

'Oh yes, absolutely.'

'And we've made you welcome?'

'Some.....'

FOR SOUND ADVICE, COME TO SOTHEBY'S



Sotheby's holds three sales each year devoted to instruments of the violin family. The instruments we sell range from Duke and Derazey to Guarneri and Guadagnini.

Our expert advice is free and without obligation. We are happy to discuss all aspects of buying and selling at auction, as well as advising on condition and restoration.

**SOTHEBY'S**

To find out more, please contact: Graham Wells on (0171) 408 5342 or fax (0171) 408 5942. Sotheby's, 34-35 New Bond Street, London W1A 2AA

## Committee Report

*John Topham (Secretary)*

In the past three months there have been two meetings, one held by the management committee and one by the exhibition committee (*plus another, see Stop Press*).

The management committee hurriedly met on the 2nd April to mainly discuss our participation in the Strad's 'Guide to British Lutherie'. Some months ago we heard that the Strad magazine was preparing to publish a 'Guide' and they were going to invite people to submit their names for a nominal charge. We understood that for a 'small' additional charge anyone could add a picture of one of their instruments to their entry. With this idea in mind we had agreed to provide a brief description of the Association effectively supporting the guide. We also had agreed to distribute amongst members copies of the brief questionnaire they had prepared. Complying with the Data Protection Act, we were unable to give the Strad members names and addresses, so we decided as a courtesy to give members an opportunity to enrol if they wished.

This was the position as understood by the committee up to the middle of March. However, it appeared in the meantime that the Strad had changed their ideas. They decided to add an extra section to the guide involving what they termed as the top 24 makers in the country. Concern was immediately expressed as to how these 24 makers were chosen. On inquiry Mr Marcus Netherwood of the Strad who was organising the guide did not wish to divulge the names of the people who had drawn up lists from which these 24 makers were chosen. He also did not wish to say how they were finally chosen. Although he conceded to various changes in the course of our inquiries we felt at the meeting that the

format was still so contrary to the aims of the Association that we decided to withdraw our support, which effectively meant we did not provide any copy. This feeling was also based on various comments we had received from members. By now all of you should have received a copy of the letter we wrote to the Strad. To date we have not received a reply.

The committee wish to express their regret about the situation and would like offer any help in the future should another guide be considered. Our only wish is that it should be done in an open and fair way which will gain the support of most people within and outside the craft.

Marc informed us that he was interviewed by the World Service at the BBC's Bush House in his capacity as Chairman of the BVMA. The programme called 'Outlook' was concerned with the environmental problems of cutting down of too many trees in tropical areas. His involvement stemmed from our contacts with FFI who came and gave a talk at one of our meetings some months ago. The programme was transmitted at the end of April.

The Exhibition committee met on the 7th May to discuss further plans for an exhibition of English makers, old and new, hopefully to be held October '97 or Spring '98. They invited two people who they thought could help them in that respect. They were Diana Hirst, co-organiser of a festival soon to be set up called the 'Red Violin', and Lisa Gee who has had a lot of experience in organising events such as exhibitions.

They asked Diana Hirst if the main festival organiser, Madeleine Mitchell

would favour teaming up with us to a certain degree in order to simplify things such as publicity. Ms Hirst outlined the ideas behind the festival and said it will go ahead in the Autumn of 1997. The festival was to include an exhibition of violins. Ms Hirst said they were quite prepared to let us do that and was willing to let us organise it in our own way. The feeling of the meeting was that it would be a great idea provided we were able to set it up exactly the way we wanted it. There was much discussion about the venue and short list was drawn up.

### Dartington Update:

Prof. Sir James Beament's short biography was incorrect. His entry should be as follows: 'PROFESSOR SIR JAMES BEAMENT FRS is a physiologist and composer, and a fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge. He will speak about the way in which we hear sound, which is central to his forthcoming book 'The Violin Explained', to be published by Oxford University Press.'

We will now have music on the Friday night, (something we were uncertain about before) provided by Peter Oxley and friends, who will play their particular brand of jazz. Unfortunately, Anne Houssay will not be able to attend. The Musee de la

Lisa Gee gave the committee a detailed and stark outline of the requirements needed for an exhibition. She offered to write a brief report for a small charge giving greater detail of what was needed. The committee agreed and asked her to proceed.

Marc has included a letter in this issue, asking all of you to submit names of 10 people who you reckon should be included in the exhibition. If there is a good response, there should be a good representation of the best of British work. Good luck to you all and good making.

Musique in Paris where she works will not be open in time and she said she will not be able to speak about its instruments before then. However, Stephen Barber, expert lutemaker and all round good egg will give a talk about the art of drawing musical instruments. He promises to bring a few drawings along which by personal experience are a sight to behold!

Helen Chaloner of Dartington Hall applied to the Crafts Council for a grant to help subsidise the cost of overseas speaker travel and to our joy they said that they will give £1000.

## London International Early Music Exhibition

*Royal college of Music London 6,7 and 8th. September 1996*

The London International Early Music Exhibition, normally a bi-annual event, will be held again this year. Following last years successful return to the R.C.M. venue it has been decided to make the event an annual one.

Anyone requiring details should contact; The Early Music Shop, 38 Manningham Lane, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD1 3EA Tel; (01274) 393753 Fax; (01274) 393516.

**!! STOP PRESS !!**

## '400 Years of Violin Making in British Isles' Exhibition

For a few weeks the Exhibition Committee had been discussing which venue would be best for the event. On 18th June members of the Committee met with Dr Curtis Price, Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. After a long discussion where many ideas we put forward, Dr Price offered the Academy as a venue for the exhibition at a minimal cost. He said it will be available for two weeks before Easter 1998. This length of time is exactly what the committee was hoping for. The Academy is a large several storey building. There is one main hall called the Duke's Hall, ideal for the main exhibition space. There is a lecture theatre cum small concert hall, ideal for a symposium that is planned. After being shown around, all agreed it was an excellent site for the exhibition. Dr Price was especially keen to hold the Exhibition at the Academy since he planned to organise a music festival at roughly the same time. The combination of the two events would attract a wide range of people.

We now have eight patrons who have

agreed to lend their names to the event. They are: Lord Menuhin, Prof. Dr. Norbert Brainin OBE, Steven Isserlis, Simon Standage MA, Dr Curtis Price, John White FRAM, Peter Biddulph and J. & A. Beare Ltd.

John Dilworth has had an excellent response from people owning a wide range of instruments. There will be more than enough instruments to show! Please remember your list for new makers!

The committee will now concentrate on working out the mechanics of organising the event and also on raising enough funds to pay for it and a detailed catalogue.

The Committee would like to ask members if they can offer any services toward this project. In the next few weeks a detailed plan of what is needed will be worked out, jobs will be designated and volunteers sought. If any of you are interested in getting involved please contact the secretary, John Topham (01737 822341).

### *Wood, tools & accessories for violinmakers*

- Extensive stock of tone wood.
  - Carefully selected maple and spruce ● Range of exclusive tools.
- Available by mail-order and to callers by appointment**

Free catalogue from:

**LIGNUM**

The Ferrers Centre, Staunton Harold,  
Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire. LE65 1RU  
tel & fax 01332 865076  
Helen Michetschläger & Jonathan Sherlock

# Dendrochronology and Violins

*Dendrochronological and wood biological investigations on string instruments by Peter Klein, Universität Hamburg*

The dendrochronological dating of spruce wood of ancient string instruments could give answers as to their temporal and technological construction. In order to date the growth ring series of an individual instrument it was necessary to collect wood from growth regions known for their quality of sound wood and to establish master chronologies. Using spruce trees from some German centres of string instrument production and wood from different instruments and panel paintings master chronologies could be built up, dating back to 1292. In addition to the dating the utilisation of sapwood could also be identified. Furthermore, comparison of the exact construction year of instruments and the dendrochronologically determined date of the youngest growth ring gives some knowledge about the period for seasoning before using the wood for making instruments.

## Introduction

History documents wood as being a highly appreciated material for secular and religious sculptures and monuments but also for musical instruments such as flutes, clavicords, or string instruments. Many scientific analyses have been carried out concerning the resonance and acoustic properties for string instruments. However, an exact temporal attribution could not be made by these analyses. This was mainly achieved by stylistic and music historical criteria, while the documented papers in the violins are often without significance.

The main aim of our investigations was to date the spruce wood of the bellies of string instruments by dendrochronological

analyses. Our analyses began 1983 and should also contribute new aspects to the preparation of wood for building instruments, particularly as to whether the sapwood was cut off or the wood quality of the entire diameter of the tree had been accepted. In this connection the seasoning time of wood is interesting, because the literature gives values between 5 and 50 years. Furthermore more knowledge of the origin of wood is important because no exact information exists whether the violin makers used wood only from mountain regions of special growth. Therefore an attempt was made to localise the provenance of the wood in order to trace the trade with sounding wood in former centuries.

## Materials and methods

Firstly master chronologies for spruce wood (*Picea abies*) were established for the string instrument centres in Mittenwald/Alpes, Nürnberg/Bavaria, and the region Bayerischer Wald/Erzgebirge. For these chronologies different recent spruce trees were used. In addition raw boards prepared for instruments by the School of Violin Making Mittenwald were included. From another 120 spruce trees from 8 different sites within Germany the growth rings were compared in order to ascertain within which geographical distance the growth is similar.

For the differentiation of sapwood and heartwood microscopic cross sections of spruce wood from planks and instruments were stained with safranin-astrablue. The measurements of the growth rings were as a rule performed directly on the instruments.

## Results and discussion

### Characteristics of growth rings in wood with sound quality

A raw board of a spruce tree selected for sounding wood in a known alpine region near Mittenwald documents the high quality of the wood taken for a belly of a string instrument. This raw material (fig. 1) contains 249 narrow rings with an average width of 1,15 mm and only a small variation in the annual growth increment. The comparison of different radii of this tree reveals a high similarity in the growth habit, while on other optionally selected spruce trees of lower regions the growth rings along radii can differ greatly within a single tree. Dendroclimatological analysis of the growth of trees in alpine regions shows that the increment depends predominantly on the climatic factors summer temperature and precipitation.

However, wood investigation indicates that some Italian violin makers like Stradivari and Guarneri did not always build the instruments of wood with very uniform and small rings. Therefore the general opinion that wood for string instruments has to contain only narrow rings cannot in every case be confirmed.

### Establishment of master chronologies for spruce wood

The spruce trees from the alpine region around Mittenwald and the wood from various string instruments were the basis for establishing a master chronology from the present back to 1292 valid for alpine regions. This master curve has been confirmed by a spruce chronology for an alpine site in Austria and also by a fir chronology for Southern Germany and it was also possible to obtain a match with spruce chronologies for alpine sites in Switzerland. The build-up of a corresponding master chronology for the

string instrument centre Nürnberg was not successful. The growth ring pattern of these trees did not fit with the growth rings of the instrument wood used in that centre over centuries. However, most of the growth ring series of the instruments made in Nürnberg did fit to the master chronology representative of the alpine region (fig. 2). This finding indicates that the string instrument makers of Nürnberg traditionally obtained their wood from alpine sources.

To confirm this result an attempt was made to compare the similarity of growth habits of another eight sites of different elevation and geographical location. These comparisons revealed a good similarity of the growth between widely separated low elevation spruce sites. On the other hand the individual growth ring pattern of the alpine origin in Mittenwald does not fit with that of trees at the plain close to Mittenwald.

Up to now an allocation of wood to the exact geographical region could not be made. But by means of these different chronologies the origin of the wood for bellies can be differentiated into alpine regions and sites at lower elevations as Bayerischer Wald and/or Erzgebirge.

### Use of sapwood for string instruments

In literature it is often reported that no sapwood has been utilised for the bellies of violins and other string instruments. If this was generally practised by instrument makers a dating of the heartwood would not contribute much to age determination of an instrument. In contrast to oak, the number of sapwood rings for spruce wood differ markedly between trees of different sites even if the same age class is compared. The trees contain some times more than 60 sapwood rings. According to this it was unlikely that this valuable part of the wood would be cut off. On account of the dating of the wood of several instruments for which an exact date of construction is

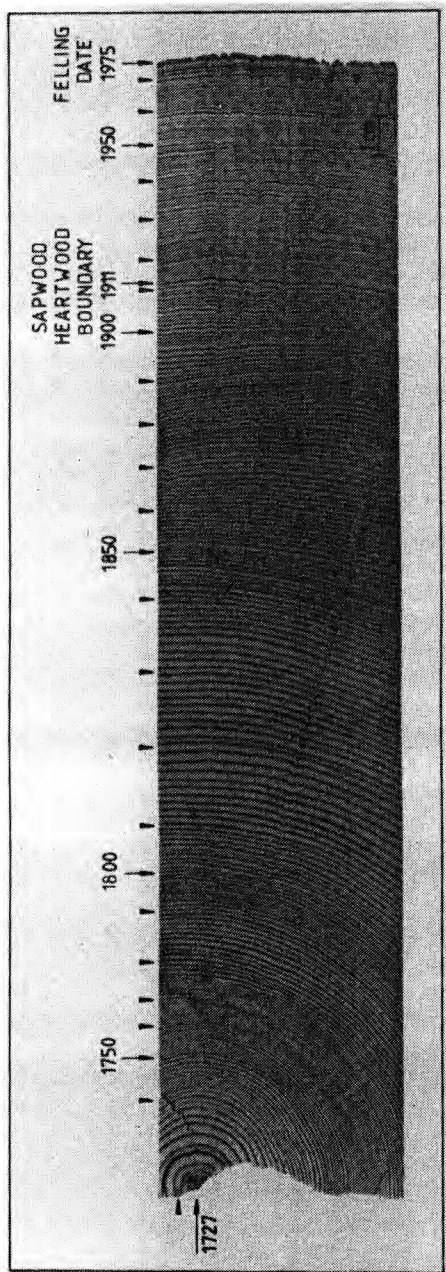


fig. 1: A raw board of a spruce tree from an Alpine region near Mittenwald (more than 1100 m above sea level) with 249 growth rings.

known it was possible to prove that the interval between the date of the youngest growth ring and the date given for the instrument is smaller than the sapwood would comprise.

For some instruments it was possible in addition to attempt a direct determination of the sapwood. Tiny wood specimens of 10 to 20 µm thickness of the instruments could be stained with safranin-astrablue and the sapwood character identified microscopically by means of the blue stain in membranes of the bordered pits in sapwood, while the membranes in heartwood contain aromatic accessory components, which absorb safranin.

For some instruments with a span of more than 50 years between the dendrochronological date and the building date of the instrument it cannot be excluded, however, that the entire sapwood has been removed. Therefore it will be

necessary to analyse different schools of violin makers before a general statement on the use of sapwood for instruments can be made.

#### The seasoning time of sounding wood

The analyses of the wood selected for instruments in the School of Violin Making in Mittenwald with known felling dates demonstrate that a different number of growth rings were cut off during manufacturing of an instrument. For example: from 10 boards from the same tree (fig. 3) felled in 1970 in order to make violins up to 29 growth rings were removed. These results are important in evaluating the seasoning time of spruce wood of old instruments. Regarding the belly of an instrument it is not possible to say whether the interval between the felling date of the tree and the creation of the instrument indicates the seasoning time of the wood. It

*Michael T. Sowden*

*(Master Dresser)*

*Finest Quality Bow Hair*

*Master Dresser & Supplier To The World's Finest*

*Bow Makers & Re-Hairers*

*All Bow Hair Is Dressed Or Re-Dressed In Our Own*

*Workshop To The Highest Of English Traditional Standards*

*Quality Assured*

Best Quality Available In All The

Usual Colours & Sizes

Bulk Bundles & Hanks

Price Lists & Samples Available On Request

Michael T. Sowden

70 Moor Top, Drighlington, Nr. Bradford

W. Yorkshire BD11 1BX, England

Tel: 01132853140. Fax: 01132853456



is rather the rule that a certain number of growth rings which were cut off in the process of manufacturing have to be considered. Under the assumption that two or three millimetres of wood are lost, the number of growth rings removed can be evaluated. Using this reliable assumption for about 100 instruments a seasoning time of between 1 and 20 years could be concluded.

#### Dendrochronological dating for string instruments

The dendrochronological dating was attempted on altogether about 350 string instruments from the 16th to the 20th century from different instrument making centres.

With the next diagrams several dating examples are listed in more detail with the order of their historical data. The belly of the bass viola (H. Vogel, fig. 4) which represents one of the oldest instruments dated 1563 consists as an exception of four boards with the youngest rings 1546, 1534, 1536, and 1526. In most cases, however, the bellies consist of two parts. Only few instruments, i. e. a viola da gamba and a viola (P. Hiltz, Nürnberg), a violino d'amore (L. Maussiell, Nürnberg), and a violin (Ventura Linarol(?), Wien) contain one-piece bellies. It is also evident that sometimes before joining the bass and treble side the width of the board used was reduced by different number of growth rings. For example a viola of Klotz (Mittenwald) contains a bass side with 148 and a treble side with 205 growth rings originating from the same tree. Furthermore the results demonstrate that the violin makers used wood with different wood structure. Leonhard Maussiell, Nürnberg, used a plank with 215 rings for one violin and with only 70 rings for another. Normally the bass and treble sides were joined together with the youngest rings in

the center of the belly. But sometimes we found the eldest rings in the joint, too.

By comparison of tree ring curves often it has to be concluded that the wood of different instruments is originating from the same tree. Furthermore, the bellies of an violoncello of S. Schelle, Nürnberg 1735, and a violoncello of M. L. Widhalm, 1780 or 1789, are made from the same tree. M. L. Widhalm worked in the same workshop as Schelle and used wood which must have been seasoned for at least 45 years.

The dendrochronological analysis allows a dating of the youngest growth ring present on the instrument to the exact year. Already on account of this time point, without consideration of seasoning and removed growth rings, some historical attribution must be corrected. The top of the violin (fig. 4) of Ventura Linarol (dated 1581) shows the youngest ring for the year 1640. That means a wrong historical attribution or an old instrument with a renewed top. On the other side the historical attribution "1511" of a lyra of G. d'Andrea da Verona could be confirmed by the dendrochronological date.

The analysis of some instruments of M. Harton, Padua (fig. 5) shows that in three cases the dendrochronological analysis confirms the historical attribution. Only the attribution of a theorbe has to be changed. Besides string instruments a dendrochronological analysis can be performed also on soundboards. For example the different boards of a soundboard of a claviorganum of J. A. Stein (fig. 6) could be dated.

Above all a dendrochronological dating is necessary for the many violins copied after famous violin makers like Stradivarius or Stainer with or without a documented paper in the corpus. It can be proved that the wood for the real Stradivari and Stainer instruments is originating from the Alps and the dendrochronological dating is con-

# Leonard Labram

## Special Violin Makers Tools

Thickness Markers, F hole Eye Cutters,  
Purfling Markers,  
Brass Thumb Planes, etc

*Brochure & Price list on Request*

6 GADSBY ST, NUNEATON, WARWICKSHIRE, CV11 4NY  
01203 348375

gruent to the historical attribution or some years earlier (fig. 7 and 8). The copies have their origin frequently in the end of the 19th century. The wood used for these instruments is originating from the Erzgebirge or Bayerischer Wald (fig. 9 and 10).

#### Conclusions

From the present dendrochronological investigation it becomes evident that a "terminus post quem" for the creation of string instruments can be determined. An exact dating to the year of creation, however, is not possible, because this method is restricted to the youngest growth ring present on the instrument. From the absolute dating of many instruments, however, it can be concluded that the entire wood of the tree radius was more or less utilized for making the instruments. It is obvious that the seasoning of the wood varies considerably and in addition a different number of tree rings were often cut

off. The difference between the youngest measured ring on the tree and the historical attribution of the instruments shows the possibilities and the limitations of dendrochronology. These statements refer only to some instrument maker schools. Therefore it is necessary to analyse more schools of instrument making in different countries. The establishment of extended master chronologies for spruce from different geographical regions will allow a more accurate attribution of wood used for bellies to its origin.

#### Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the Musikinstrumentenmuseum, Berlin, Musée Instrumental, Brüssel, Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag, Händelhaus, Halle, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Geigenbau-schule, Mittenwald, Deutsches Museum, München, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Kunst-historisches Museum, Wien, and many private owners.

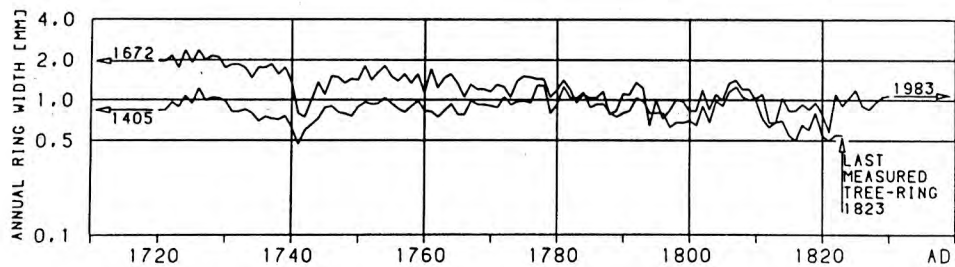


Fig. 2: Comparison of a growth ring series of an instrument with the master chronology of the Alps.

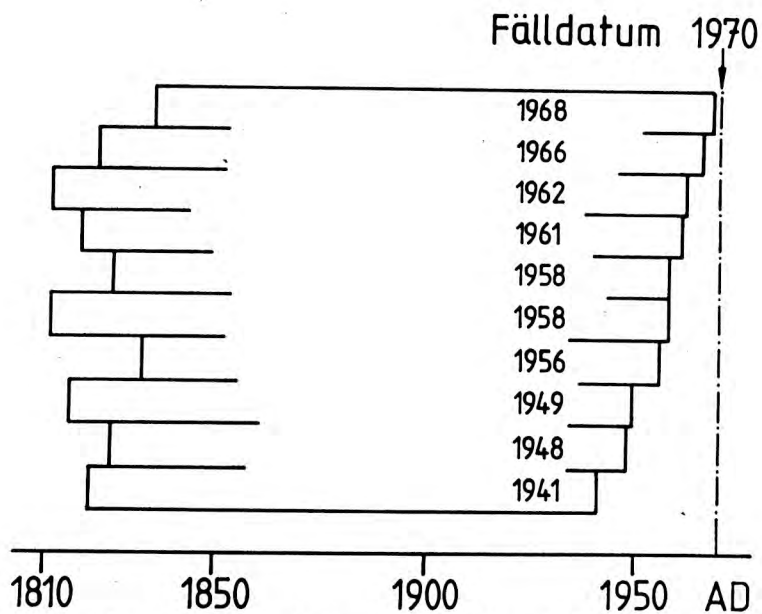


fig.3 : Dendrochronological attribution of ten raw boards of the same spruce tree.

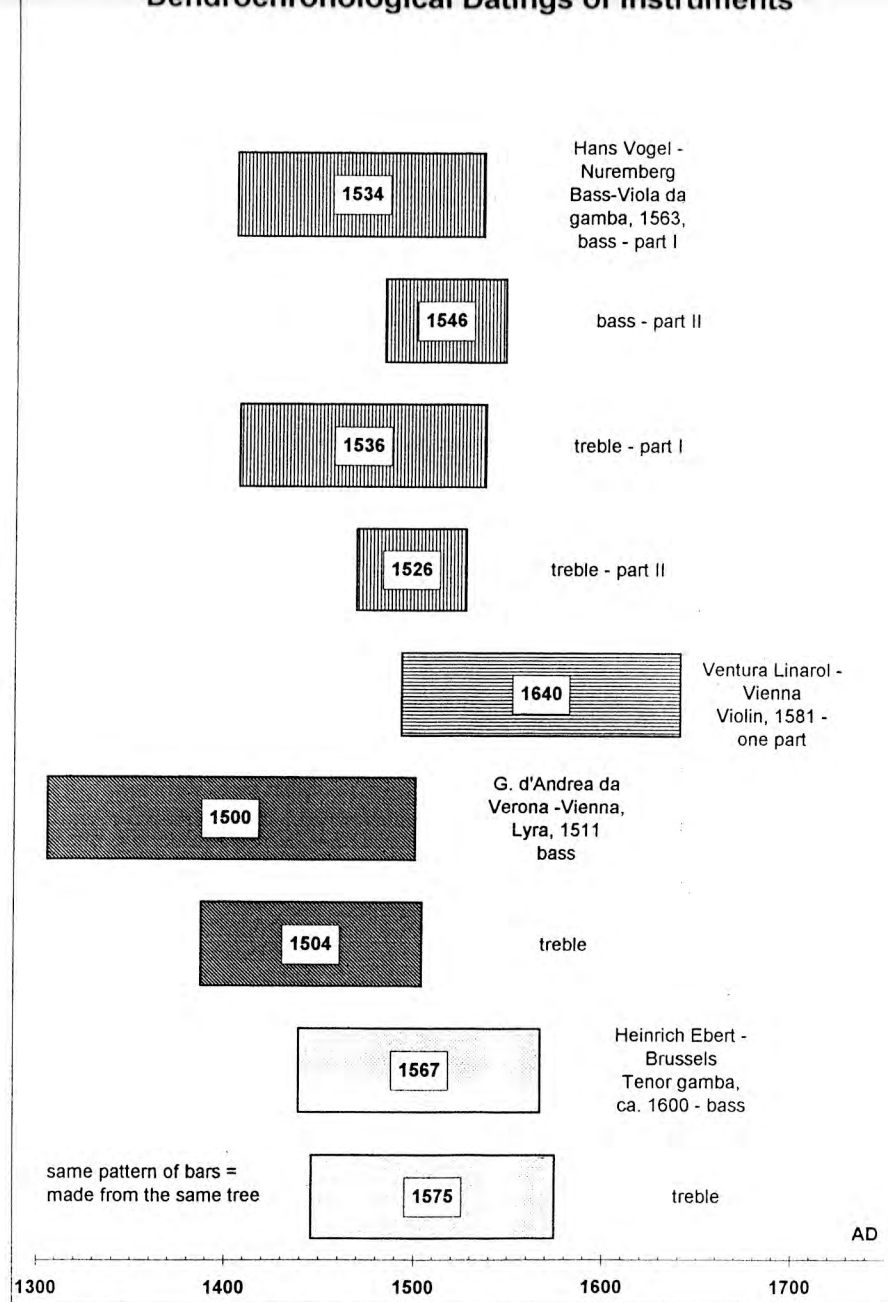


fig. 4: Dendrochronological determination of some instruments.

## Michielle Harton, Padua

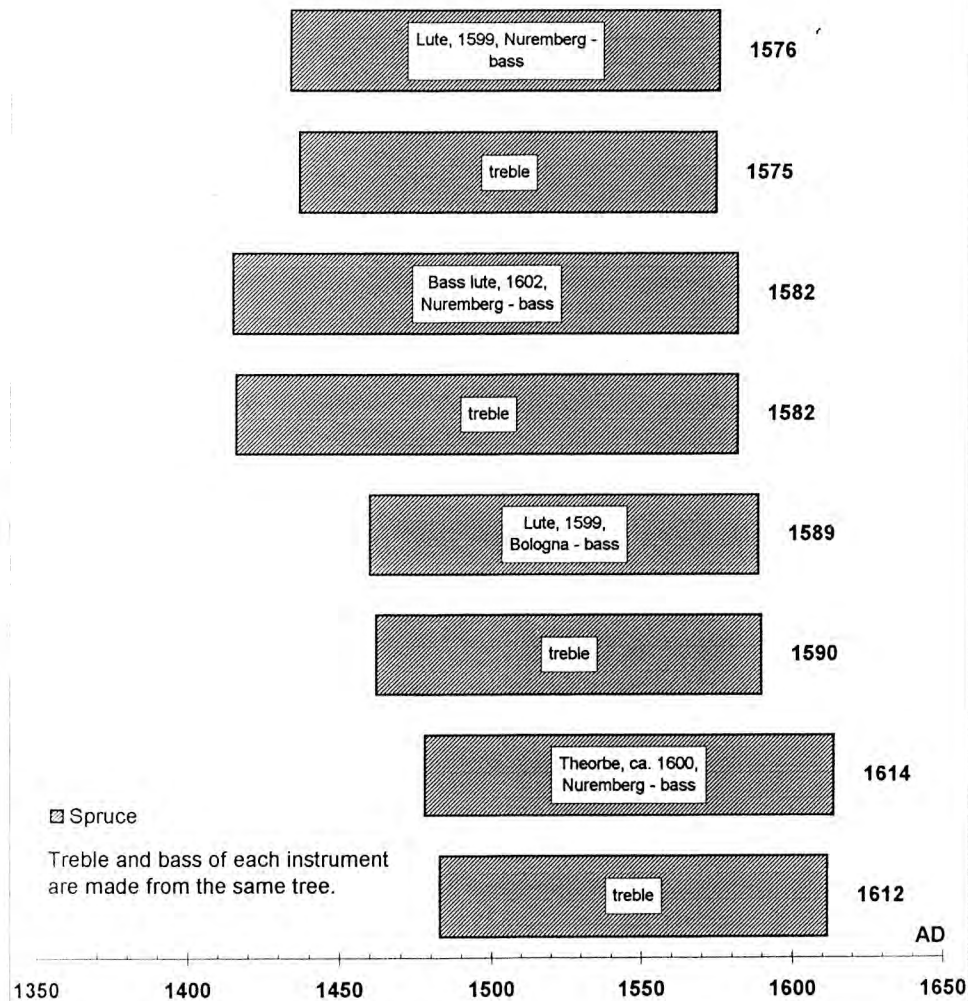


fig. 5: Dendrochronological determination of some Harton violins

## Johann Andreas Stein

Claviorganum, 1781, Den Haag

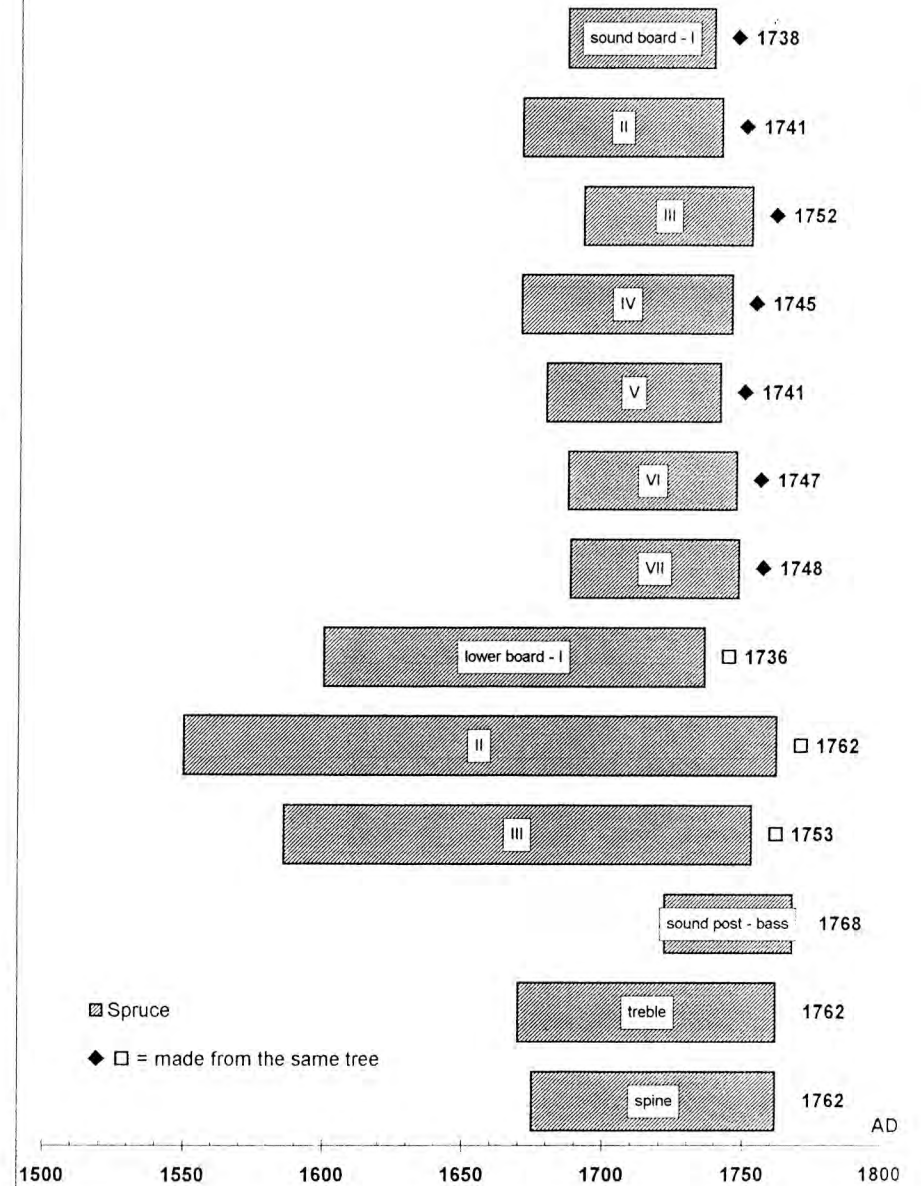


fig. 6: Dendrochronological determination of a claviorganum of Stein..

### Antonio Stradivari (1640/45 - 1737)

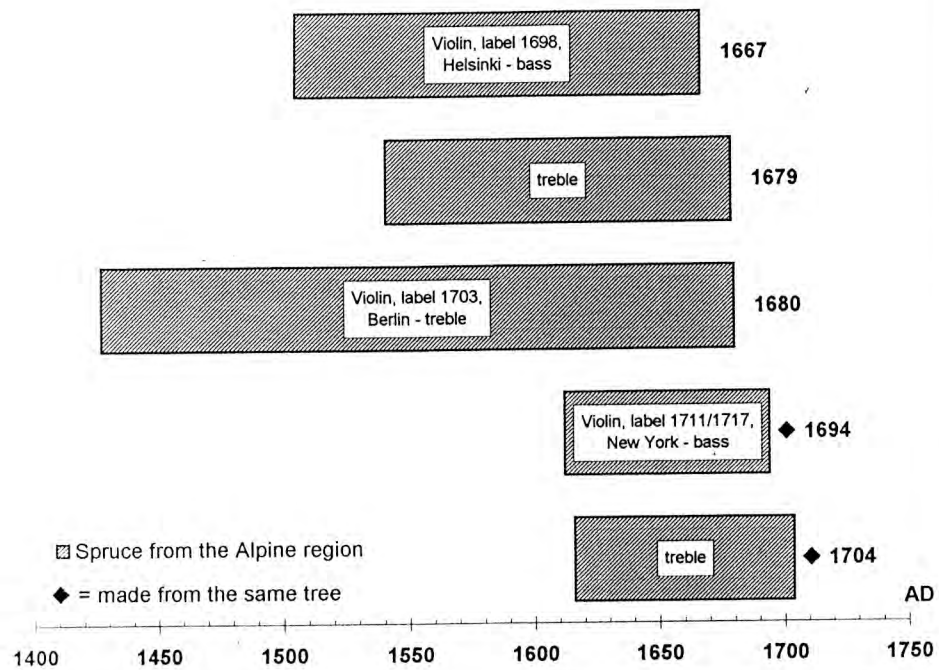


fig. 7: Dendrochronological determination of some Stradivari violins.

### Antonio Stradivari (1640/45 - 1737) - Copies

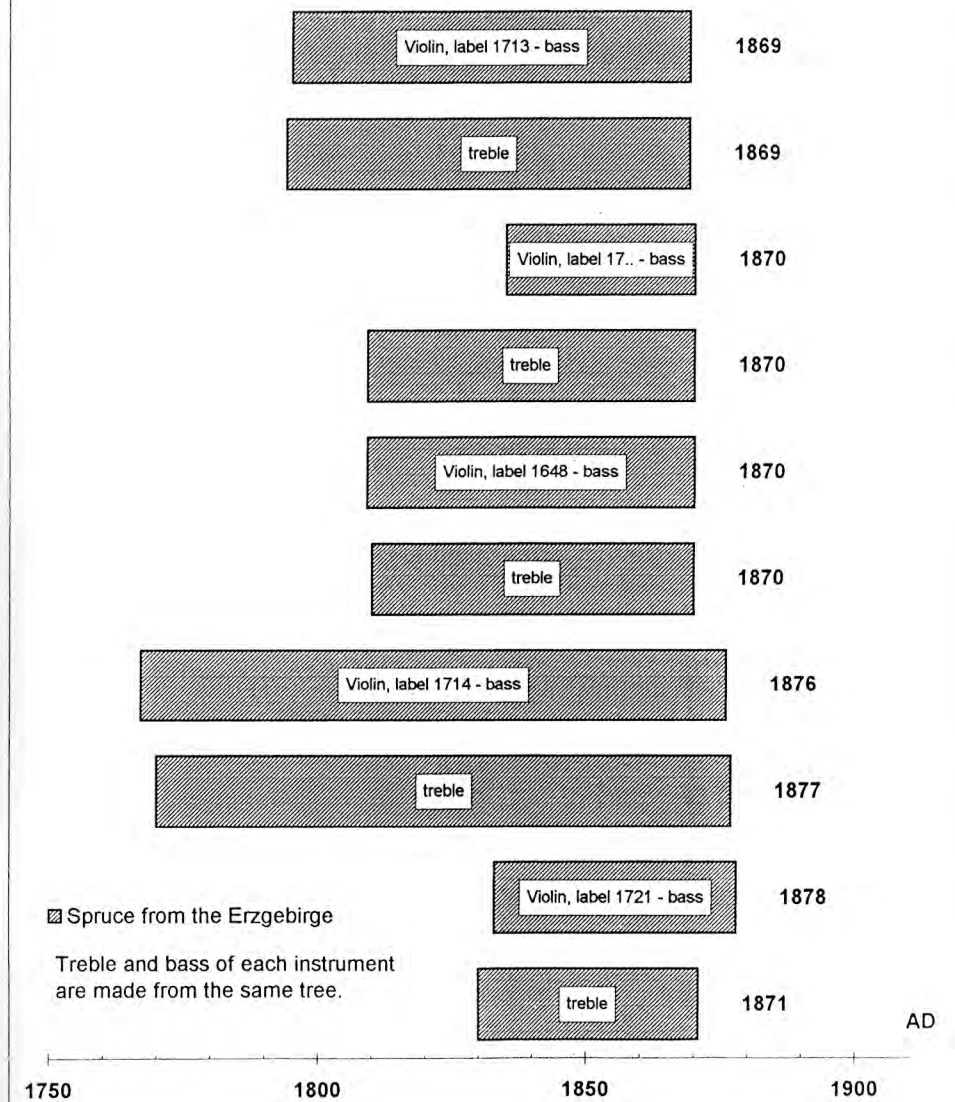


fig. 8: Dendrochronological determination of some Stradivari copies.

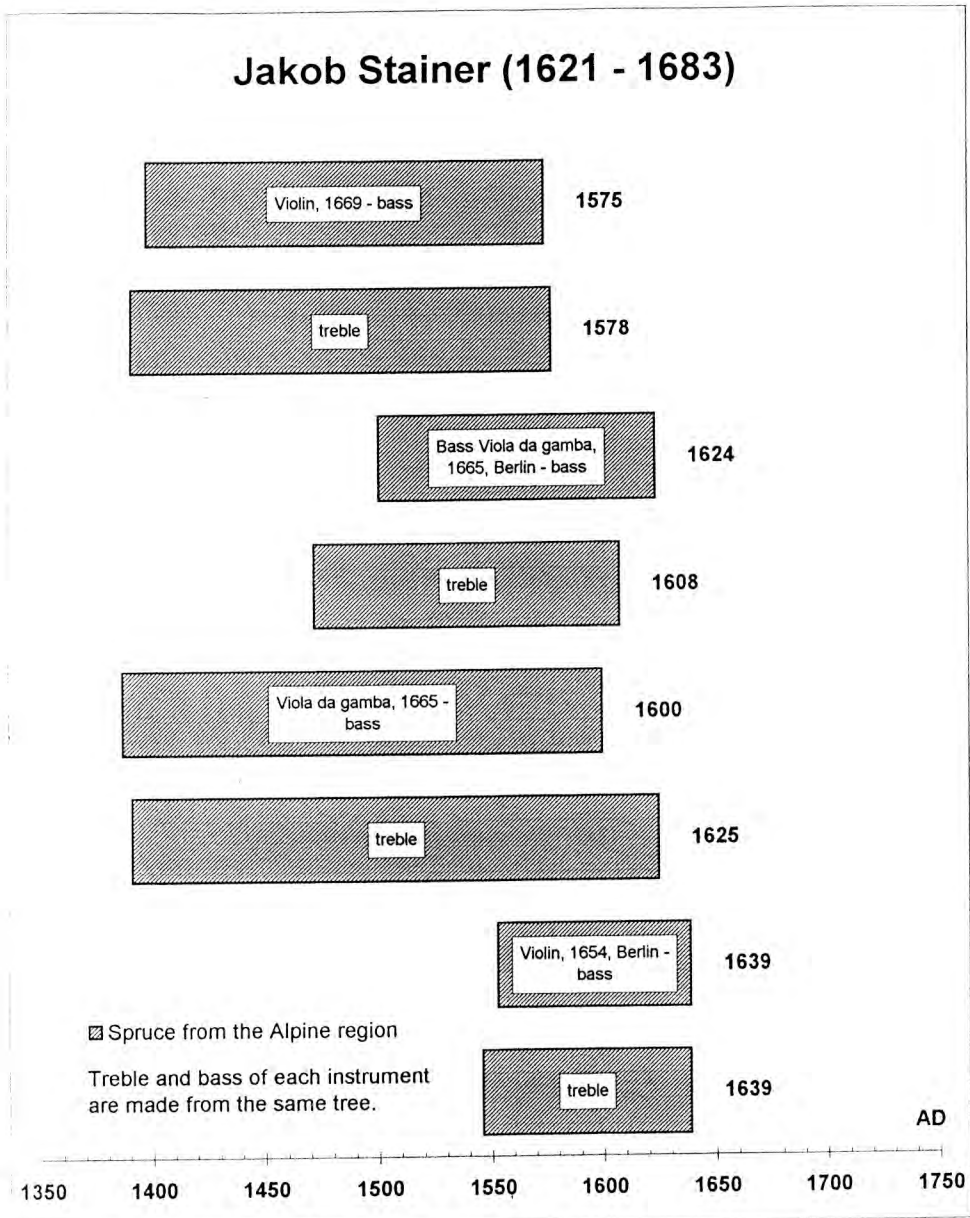


fig. 9: Dendrochronological determination of some Stainer violins.

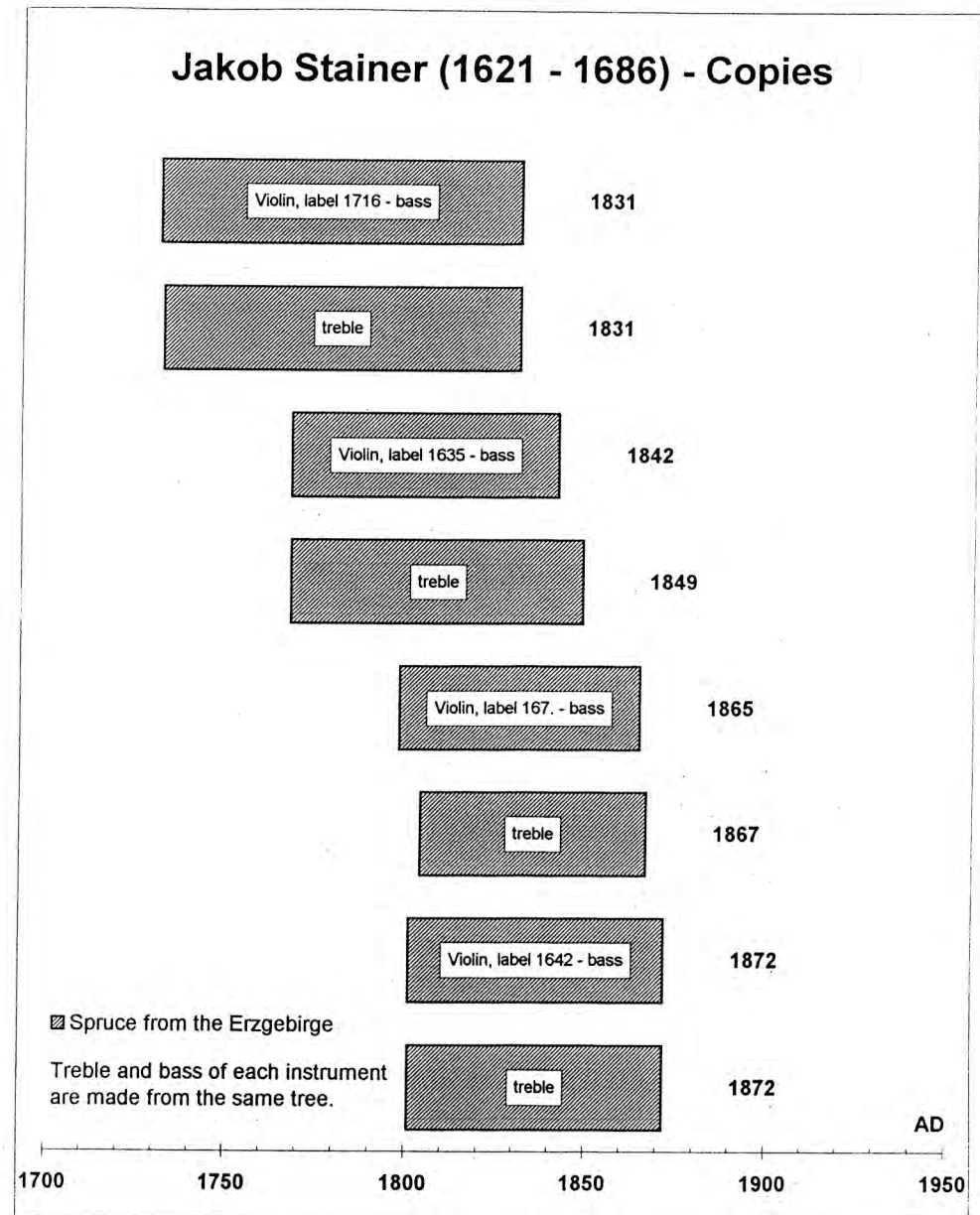


fig. 10: Dendrochronological determination of some Stainer copies.

## Milan's "Civica Scuola di Liuteria"

*John Basford recently visited the Milan school and here recounts his impressions*

The violin-making schools of Mittenwald, Cremona and Newark are all well known in this country but the "Civica Scuola di Liuteria" in Milan had received less attention until very recently, when the burgeoning international reputations of two former pupils; Luca Sbernini and Luca Primon, brought it greater recognition.

Last March I spent two days at the school with Luca Primon observing his teaching methods and looking at the current students' work, and also had the opportunity to discuss the structure of the course with its director Virginia Villa. As the school is open to any nationality I thought a brief description of its workings and a summary of its history might be of more than passing interest to members of the BVMA.

The school runs two sections; one dealing primarily with modern making, the other with historical reconstruction's of mainly renaissance and baroque instruments - there is also a one year course in guitar making. My two days were spent in the workshop of the modern course, other information comes from Virginia Villa, Paola Vecchio, Luca Primon and his students, and the school's library.

The course is made up of two two-year units. The first two years involve two days a week in the workshop (09.00-13.00 and 14.00-18.00 each day) and one and a half days spent on theory, design, physics, chemistry, performance and the history of instruments. This amounts to two thousand one hundred hours over the first two years-thirty hours a week over seventy weeks.

The next two year section totals one

thousand six hundred hours at approximately twenty seven hours a week, over fewer weeks. Again two days are spent in the workshop and parts of two other days are spent in studying restoration techniques, organology, documentation, performance and research. There are examinations at the end of the second and fourth years. There is a balance of Italian and non-Italian students, the latter are, I imagine, self financing. The youngest age of admission is sixteen.

The school was founded in 1978, its first organisational director was Marco Tiella and its first violin-making tutor was Renato Scrollavezza (who continues to run a very fine school at Parma). Since then its violin-making tutors have included; Luca Sbernini, Luca Primon (current), Nadia Mantovani, Paola Vecchio, Primo Pistoni (very briefly) and Renzo Mandelli (current). Gabriele Negri and Claudio Canevari are the two current tutors of the non violin-making side of the modern course.

Approximately twenty five people have graduated from the school so far, an average of less than two per year. Pupil/ teacher ratios in the workshop are at the highest in the history of the school, seven pupils to one tutor! There have been times when it has been as low as two or three to one. It is funded by Milan City Council and it is a measure of the council's and the staff's commitment to excellence that these levels are being operated in spite of the difficult fiscal situation prevailing in Italy.

The intensity of application of the best students is very impressive. They carry a sense of importance into their making and

it is manifest in some beautifully made instruments. The feeling that what they do matters is carefully and strictly inculcated by Primon who maintains an easy atmosphere coupled with absolute discipline with regard to the work, a badly sharpened tool can meet with a frosty silence followed by a painstaking demonstration of not only how to sharpen but why this precision in sharpening is necessary to produce the results required. Technical excellence is assumed as the first step, then real violin-making can begin. Aesthetic considerations are evident even from year one- an uncertain line or injudicious chamfer are just as likely to be

criticised as poor technique- equally acoustics, and playability are dealt with from the outset.

All instruments made by the students at the school are kept and exhibitions of work are occasionally staged. Browsing through the hundreds of instruments in the school's museum and in various cabinets around the building one is struck by the consistently high standards that have been maintained even as numbers have risen.

The legacy of the Bisiachs, Ornati and Garimberti is of particular importance for the school - the best of the new Milanese school may well create equally luminous reputations!

## BRIAN HART

FINE HAND MADE LUTHIERS TOOLS

TOOLS AND FIXTURES FOR THE RESTORER AND MAKER  
MADE TO ORDER

(as used by J. & A. Beare Ltd.)

24 ANN STREET, GADLYS, ABERDARE, MID-GLAMORGAN,  
SOUTH WALES, CF44 8DU. GREAT BRITAIN. TEL. 01685 886004

*Price list and catalogue available on request*

# Crack cleaning and reglueing

*In this, the first of a two-part article on restoration techniques, Christoph Gotting gets to grips with crack repair*

Some of you, who went to last years Dartington conference may remember the talk Charles Beare gave on the ethics of restoring and cleaning instruments. I would like to give a few more practical hints on this subject. Most of this will be common knowledge but if I can give a few of you some new ideas this will be worthwhile.

In particular I want to mention techniques of retouching, but since most of the retouching we have to do is that of reglued cracks, perhaps a few words on how to do successful cleaning and reglueing of these should be said first.

## Cleaning

Most cracks on a decent instrument will have been glued with good old hide glue, the first task is therefore easy enough. Any little studs need to be cut down carefully and the remainder soaked off. A thinly twisted string of cotton wool should then be wetted and placed on the inside and another laid on the outside of the table directly over the crack. This string does not need to be thicker than one or two millimetres in diameter, and depending on how well the crack is glued, it might need to be dampened with cold water a few times. After between ten and twenty minutes the crack should firstly be bent open here. Once fully separated it must be washed clean. To do this I use the following method; I fold up a piece of white (or better still recycled grey) toilet paper into a strip of about 10-15mm width and lay this along the inside of the crack. Because I wash with 20% vol. Hydrogen Peroxide I use thin plastic gloves (the ones petrol stations give away for Diesel users work well enough).

Alternatively a piece of plastic from one of those very thin rustling food bags can be placed on top of the paper. For washing with Peroxide it is advisable to use a Nylon type brush, because a natural bristle brush will soon get as brittle as the hair of a Peroxide-blonde, in fact it will soon drop out. I use an 8mm wide brush that is cut to a length of about 6mm. This way the brush is still soft but has a little resistance to it.

The procedure then is as follows: Whilst moving the crack gently, wash along it with Peroxide from the top. Before taking more Peroxide rinse the brush in a glass of clean water and dab it dry on some loopaper. If this is repeated often enough all soluble dirt seeps through and into the paper underneath. If there is much dirt, the paper needs to be turned over or changed. Once the paper stays clean all soluble dirt has been removed. Hydrogen Peroxide is an ideal cleaning agent because it does not leave a residue like soaps, detergents or heaven forbid, Oxalic Acid. On wood it has only a mild bleaching action, I have never managed to "over bleach" anything. After leaving the wood to dry thoroughly the crack can then be reglued.

Should there be old retouching present or other dirt that cannot be removed with Peroxide many people take to the scraper or knifetip. Using such physical action can too easily damage the wood itself. I find that an ordinary paint stripper, if used with the greatest care on a small brush, is of much less danger. I have also found that on occasions when cracks were glued with a water insoluble glue like casein, paint stripper can be of great help.

## Reglueing

For the reglueing one needs to apply enough cross pressure to close the crack but at the same time it is of paramount importance to keep the crack level.

This I used to do by eye and touch, but often enough the result was less than perfect. Therefore a slight pressure applied from the top and from below is of great help. I am still waiting for the person who will manufacture a lightweight clamp especially designed for this task. Such a set of clamps would not need to be very high but some should be deep enough to reach the centre joint from the widest part of the instrument (not so easy to do for the 'Cello because of structural reasons). Both contact points of the clamp must have swivel-feet.

Failing such perfect tools we must make do with the G-clamps we already own and these will work satisfactorily in most cases. What we must make ourselves though are

counterparts for the cracks to be glued. On the inside I use a strip of maple (or any other hardwood) about 10mm wide and 1.5mm thick, that has been covered with a 1mm (approx.) thick piece of cork. These counterparts can have varying lengths (depending on the cracks) and the cork should be rounded off slightly towards the sides. On the outside of the table it is important to have a very hard counterpart to get the crack totally level. I use a strip of clear acrylic or perspex that is 1mm. Thick and otherwise of the same dimensions as the inside counterpart. Its edges must be well rounded not to make impressions on the arching. In order that the counterparts will not glue onto wood or varnish I found that a strip if the very thin (rustling) food bag plastic mentioned earlier works incredibly well.

The actual gluing procedure should not be attempted in a cold room since the glue

## Materials for Violin Varnish

- Glues - Pearl Glue, Rabbit Skin Glue, Skin Glue, Fish Glue, Isinglass, Franklin Hide Glue
- Resins - Dammar, Mastic, Sandarac, Colophony, Brown Black Colophony, Burgundy Resin, Amber, Congo Copal, Manila Copal, Shellacs, Shellac Polish, Sticklac, Seedlac
- Balsams - Larch (*Venice*) Turpentine, Venetian Turpentine, Strasbourg ("*Silver-Fir*") Turpentine
- Vegetable Colours - Madder Root, Madder Lakes, Genuine Orange Madder, Logwood, Alkanet, Lac Dye, Cochineal, Redwood, Brazilwood, Sandalwood, Fustic, Dragon's Blood, Gamboge
- Wood Preparation - Lycopodium, Glimmer (*natural quartz powder*), Tannin
- Dry Pigments - Over 200 colours : Transparent Iron Oxides, Burnt Siennas, Ochres, Earths, Synthetic Organic pigments, Coloured Glass, Powdered Dyes,
- Oils - Refined & Cold Pressed Linseed Oils, Stand Oil, Poppy Oil, Lavender Oil, Tung Oil
- Varnishes / Mediums - Copal Varnish, Mastic Varnish, Dammar Varnish, Amber Varnish, Violin Rosin-Oil, Beech Tar, Asphaltuum, Eburit, Half-Oil "*Halbol*", Siccativ, Solvents - Double Rectified Turpentine, Shellsol T (*low odour*), Ethylacetate, White Spirit

## AP Fitzpatrick

Fine Art & Restoration Materials  
Studio 1, 10-22 Barnabas Road  
London E9 5SB

Tel : 0181 985 7865 / 985 7669 Fax : 0181 985 7659

will gel too quickly. The glue must be fresh and all tools should be laid out ready for use. Once enough glue has been applied to the crack it is pushed together as well as possible by hand and now strips of the thin plastic are laid on the inside and the outside. One stretch-clamp can be put over the top with little tension and the acrylic strip slid underneath it. Next the inside counterpart is put into position and both are secured with one G-clamp. The swivel foot of the clamp (if it only has one) must be placed on the concave side of the arching.

Depending on the difficulty of the crack more clamps are now applied and gently tightened. If the crack was difficult to level, as many G-clamps as will fit between the stretcher clamps can be applied. Because of the weight of these clamps it is important to support the arching well during drying time. Care must be taken not to get impressions of the counterparts on the varnish, this is especially important and difficult on concave curves near the f-holes.

Because of the plastic covering of the crack on both sides a little extra drying time should be allowed. After two hours it is usually safe to undo the clamps and remove the counterparts. The plastic can then be carefully peeled off and any glue can be washed off with wet cotton wool. Should there be a section of the crack that is not quite level it is often sufficient to clamp it once more against the acrylic after some time soaking. To check that the crack is perfectly level, the end of a steel ruler is put across it and held against a light. This method shows up the slightest step. Once one is satisfied that it is dry any residual glue is carefully removed. Along the crack itself I use my nylon brush to wash. After repeated drying the process of retouching can begin.

*(The second part of this article, which will deal with retouching techniques, will appear in the September issue of the newsletter)*

## The 1996 Manchester International Cello Festival - A maker's view!

*Kai-Thomas Roth went to Manchester this year for the 'Cello Fest and came back with a very positive impression!*

For the fifth time Ralph Kirschbaum and his brilliant administrative team at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester managed to organise an international 'Cello Festival that one will have to search long and hard to find any parallel with in the world.

As we have almost come to expect by now an army of internationally renowned cellists came together to be part of this event. Some gave masterclasses, some held

workshops or gave talks but nearly all of them participated in one way or other in a series of unforgettable concerts. It must be mentioned that this time in particular the festival championed new composition in a big way. There were commissions by the festival itself of two new pieces, written by Sally Beamish (U.K.) and Simon Parkin (U.K.), one BBC commission from Alexander Goehr (U.K.) and two more premieres of pieces by Dmitri Smirnov

(Russia) and Elliot Carter (U.S.A.).

As a violin maker I am not going to assume the position of music critic and it will suffice to say that my wife and I took the opportunity to see many concerts, classes and other events and were thoroughly impressed with it all. Certainly five days took their toll as there was so much to take in and enjoy.

### Strad 'Cello Competition

In this its fourth year, the festival again hosted the Strad Cello and Bow making competitions. Entries were accepted from twenty countries with instruments judged on craftsmanship (50% of total points) and sound/playability (50%). Under the co-ordination of Charles Beare (U.K.), the instrument judges were Rene Morel (U.S.A.), Roger Hargrave (Germany) and Patrick Robin (France, gold medallist in 1994). The bow making judges were Bernard Millant (France), Klaus Grunke (Germany) and Bill Watson (U.K.) The playing judges were Patrick Demenga (Switzerland) and Tim Hugh (U.K.)

There were 65 'Cellos entered in the competition, and all of them were put through the judging process, truly a remarkable feat. The jury devised a somewhat faster first round to eliminate all but the last 23 (a number that, according to Charles Beare, was arrived at as there had occurred a large gap between nos. 23 and 24).

These were then looked at again in more detail and twelve instruments were chosen as semi-finalists. The semi-final was open to the public and held on the opera stage of the R.N.C.M.. The remaining instruments were again played and judged to decide for gold, silver and bronze.

The results were as follows;

Gold Medal: Frank Ravatin (France)

with a very competently distressed instrument that exhibited high skill and unerring taste.

Silver Medal: Andrew Finnigan (U.K.) with a 'Cello based on the work of Montagnana, the most immaculate work imaginable.

Bronze Medal: Frederic R. Chaudiere (France) with an undistressed 'Cello of very high standard.

There was a special award for the best sound which went to J.L. Prochasson (France), and a special award by the Group des Luthiers et Archetiers d'Art de France for Bertrand-Yves Delisle (Italy).

### Bow Making Competition

There were seven prizes awarded for bow making, these were as follows;

Gold Medal: Eric Grandchamp (France)

Silver Medal: Edwin Clement (France) and Kunitaka Ohse (Japan)

Bronze Medal: Noel Burke (Italy), this prize was donated by the Groupe des Luthiers et des Archetiers d'Art de France.

Two commendations for high quality craftsmanship:

Peter Oxley (France)

Gregor Walbrodt (France)

Commendation for high playing quality:

Robert Pierce (Belgium)

In his summary Charles Beare was pleased to say that the standards had again been encouragingly high with a great deal of very professional work even among the runners-up.

It is probably not an exaggeration to assume that this competition is one of the fairest of its kind, as fair as a competition can ever be.

### Workshops

There were two extra events of interest to the maker. Charles Beare and Roger Hargrave hosted a workshop on modern



instruments in which they talked about the major and minor points of fitting-up that a competition would be interested in. They made it clear that quite apart from being well worth knowing for this kind of event, these hints represented good professional practice.

In his workshop on tonal adjustment, Rene Morel demonstrated the merits of sound post adjustment and how important it was to get this just right for the individual player.

## Q & A

Can someone within the BVMA please tell me if there is an easy way to remove the pearl slide from a violin bow. There are times when it seems to be almost glued in place and nothing seems to shift it. Could you have more articles on bowmaking etc.? Michael Norris.

(In reply to the above query Roy Collins will explain the method of removal without damage)

### Removing the Mother of Pearl Slide

Judging by the number of bows I see with the slide damaged by what can only be somebody trying to remove the slide with a screwdriver it is obvious that people have difficulty in removing the pearl slide.

Here are some thoughts that may help the removal of slides with minimal damage. I'm cautious about suggesting that all slides can be removed with no damage because in some cases the slide is worn so thin that it is impossible to remove it without damaging it.

1. Cut the hair away about 25cm from the ferrule.

2. Remove the frog from the bow, and then remove the ferrule. If the ferrule can not be removed by gripping the ferrule between the thumb and forefinger then hold

Some of the participants in the competition also used the chance given to eighteen parties to exhibit their wares on trade stands in the main concourse of the college. This afforded ample opportunity for exchange between maker and musician and also between maker and maker!

A festival like this must certainly remain one of the bi-annual highlights of the calendar for maker and musician alike.

the ferrule gently in a vice with leather faced jaws and rock the frog carefully from side to side.

3. Remove the spreader wedge from the tongue of the frog by slipping a thin knife between the wedge and the frog. If anything cut the wedge rather than the frog as the wedge is disposable and the tongue of the frog can be cleaned up afterwards.

4. Remove the pearl slide by holding the frog with the forefinger under the tongue and applying the fleshy side of the thumb to the slide.

The grip of the thumb may be improved by applying some powdered rosin to it.

If the slide is obstinate a small piece of masking tape can be stuck to the slide and coated with rosin. Most slides will have moved by this stage.

If the slide still refuses to budge an elastic band, 6mm wide, can be positioned round the frog so that it lays along the slide. The thumb of the left hand can be used to hold the elastic band against the back of the frog. Place the other thumb on the elastic band over the slide and apply pressure to remove the slide.

It is always a good maxim when rehairing a bow to think that you may be asked to rehair that bow again so I suggest

that the slide is cleaned and the edges rubbed with a bit of wax so that the slide does not stick again.

(There will be an article in the next issue, on the Q&A page, on Bow lappings - the

various types and their application. Please address any questions of a technical nature to the editor, and they will be answered here, the address is given on the back page.)

## LETTERS

### Profit and Loss - Insure to be sure ?

*There is a first time for a problem to surface that requires a new solution. Recently I had the dubious privilege of one of those to happen to me.*

*Early in November last year I was showing two instruments, a 'cello and a violin, to prospective customers in London. While visiting friends in a violin shop in Waterloo I left the instruments covered in the rear of the car. On my return twenty minutes later, both instruments were gone! Neither the insurance company, leading in it's field in this country, nor I were aware that we were approaching uncharted waters. After all, there are not very many makers who have their instruments stolen before they are sold!*

*The value of instruments for insurance purposes certainly gives scope for debate.*

*The policy states clearly that instruments can only be covered at cost. This is a good enough definition for the musician who is no doubt as to what has been paid for the instrument. My personal policy covered any single item for some 30% more value than the highest standard price we would charge for a 'cello. I therefore had no worries about being fully covered.*

*The insurers point of view, however, was that understandably they did not want to cover for loss of profit which I was likely to make on an instrument. This raised the question of which part of the instrument price could actually be defined as profit!! In our opinion there is not much profit to be found once we have paid ourselves a decent wage for the time spent in making our product.*

*The discussion about these particular definitions went on for some time. Each side trying to make their points as clearly as possible. I am happy to say that eventually the case was settled to my full satisfaction.*

*The lesson to be learned for any maker of new instruments is to supply their insurer with a written statement of their current "average cost price" of each of their types of instruments and to get this acknowledged in writing. The situation is then clear for either side beyond debate.*

*p.s. Although I contacted all the major shops and auction houses in the country with a detailed description and colour photographs of the stolen instruments, I have not yet heard a thing.....and the guessing goes on?*

*Kai-Thomas Roth*

### Benslow Musical Instrument Loan Scheme.

*For some years now, Cyril Heels has been acting as advisor to the scheme with regard to instrument maintenance and repairs. The tasks he has undertaken include: inspecting every instrument coming into the scheme or returned from a borrower, recommending*

*appropriate maintenance and repair work; delivering and collecting instruments to and from repairers, and discussing the work with them; doing minor repairs and adjustments; matching potential borrowers to instruments, and visiting potential lenders/donors. Cyril*

has been reimbursed for these tasks on an ad hoc basis.

Cyril feels that the time has come to relinquish his work for the scheme, and so we are faced with finding someone else - or perhaps several people - to fill the gap. Is there anyone within the membership of the

## Violins for Africa

A year ago I accompanied Yehudi Menuhin to South Africa - his first visit there in 40 years to celebrate the ending of apartheid. We met many music teachers of all races, who joined in master classes and workshops with their young students. The work they do under difficult conditions in the townships and other underprivileged areas is enormously encouraging; far from classical music being in a state of decline because it is considered 'Eurocentric' in some quarters, there is great interest in it. When we asked what might be done to help, the response was overwhelming: "send us violins," they said, "and most especially half-size and three-quarter size violins, since we have long waiting-lists of children wanting to learn to play.

With the help of the South African Music Education Trust we have set up a scheme called 'Violins for Africa', which will acquire as many instruments as possible, and lend them out to music teachers for their students. A central register is being maintained, so that all instruments are documented, and their whereabouts known. By giving them on loan, it means that instruments can be made available to new generations of youngsters.

The greatest problem that the new South Africa is facing is criminality. It is Lord Menuhin's firm belief - backed up by statistics - that young musicians have neither the time nor the inclination for crime. We feel that 'Violins for Africa' is a practical contribution.

Will you help? I am writing to luthiers around the world today in the hopes that you have an instrument you might be able to donate - particularly a small size violin. I am

BVMA who might be interested in - and have the time for - such work?

Please contact, Jenny Dann (Loan scheme secretary) Benslow Musical Instrument Loan Scheme, Little Benslow Hills, Off Benslow lane, Hitchin Herts. SG4 9RB. Tel: 01462 420748 Fax: 01462 440171

not looking for Stradivari! If you have an instrument in your atelier, no matter in what condition, that doesn't have a home, would you consider giving it to 'Violins for Africa'?

Perhaps you have a bow you could spare as well? I have a sponsor who will pay all shipping and insurance charges. In November this year Lord Menuhin will return to South Africa for an 80th. Birthday concert, and will present the first instruments to President Nelson Mandela for the South African Music Education Trust.

SAMET is doing sterling work in South Africa. For example, with the help of Mercedes Benz they run a music literacy and outreach program with the Transvaal Philharmonic, bringing 160 children from the townships outside Pretoria to music lessons each Saturday morning at the State Theatre, hoping thereby to develop future audiences and establish a pool of musicians, music teachers and choir leaders, and to stimulate and foster interest in the arts. There is a genuine thirst for knowledge of music and the arts in all South African communities.

Please call, fax or write to me if you can help. I should be very happy to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

Eleanor Hope.

9 Southwood Hall

Wood Lane

London N6 5UF

Tel: +44 181 883 1896

Fax: +44 181 883 6495

## Passionate French Maker

Assistant violin maker, wants to practice his trade. I have a passion for musical instruments. I made a training as a woodcarver and musical instrument maker (violin, viola, cello). I am determined to succeed in the trade and would like to meet other musicians and makers interested in exchanging ideas, advice and mutual support.

## History - A millstone?

In the last issue of the newsletter there was an article by Carlo Chiesa on the need to have a good knowledge of history when working as a violin maker or restorer. While I am generally in agreement with what he said I feel that we as a body of craftsmen are still too eager to deify our forebears and, in doing so, place their achievements forever beyond our reach. There is no argument in that Stradivari and Guarneri were masters of their craft and as such deserve our respect but there has to come a point when we cut free from this historical millstone and become makers in our own right without the need to constantly explain ourselves in the terms of men who died two and a half centuries ago.

I recall a statement made by Roland Ross in a profile in the Strad some years ago when he said, "I refuse to be intimidated by Stradivari" or words to that effect. This, to me, is the core of what is wrong with modern violin making - too many of us are intimidated by Stradivari and are therefore afraid to express ourselves fully through our work, to allow the idiosyncrasies that make us individuals permeate our work and create a little something that is not of the 18th. century but definitely of the 20th.

We are not helped in any way by the world-wide violin making competitions which present the "ideal" instrument as a bland, characterless but "technically perfect" or, on the other hand (as we are beginning to see), convincingly distressed object which provides little if any insight into the style or inspiration of the maker - constricted talent being pushed through a Stradivari-shaped hole!

I am looking for any designs or documents concerning violin, viola or cello making, old or new. Please write with information or if these ideas interest you

Contact; Didier Gramard 3, Rue du Pouzin, 07000 Privas. France. Tel: 75 64 13 73

I do not know how much of this conservatism is competition-led or whether the fault lies with the teaching institutions. Maybe its simply a fact of life in the 20th. Century, as intimated by William Castle in an article two issues ago, but it is the overwhelming impression one gets in the trade today. Maybe its always been like this but if so, then Stradivari and his contemporaries certainly were not intimidated by the likes of Andrea Amati and Maggini when they began to push back the horizons.

A return to some form of apprenticeship scheme is vital if the next generation of makers are to take up from where we leave off - the present system returns each generation to the same starting point - 1st. year at college and we make a rather poor imitation of a 1716 Strad, we need a training process where we can build on the many lifetimes of knowledge and experience acquired at the bench. Could the BVMA organise some form of apprenticeship scheme, there must be lottery money available?

Carlo's words still apply, we need to appreciate the social history of the great makers, if only to see that they had feet of clay and lived ordinary lives and were separated from their peers by that which might be called "genius" but which was probably a confidence in their own ability and a refusal to be overwhelmed by the achievements of their ancestors. Surely with our knowledge and appreciation of the past we can also make that leap into the future and create a new golden era in violinmaking.

John Moore

# THE BACK PAGE

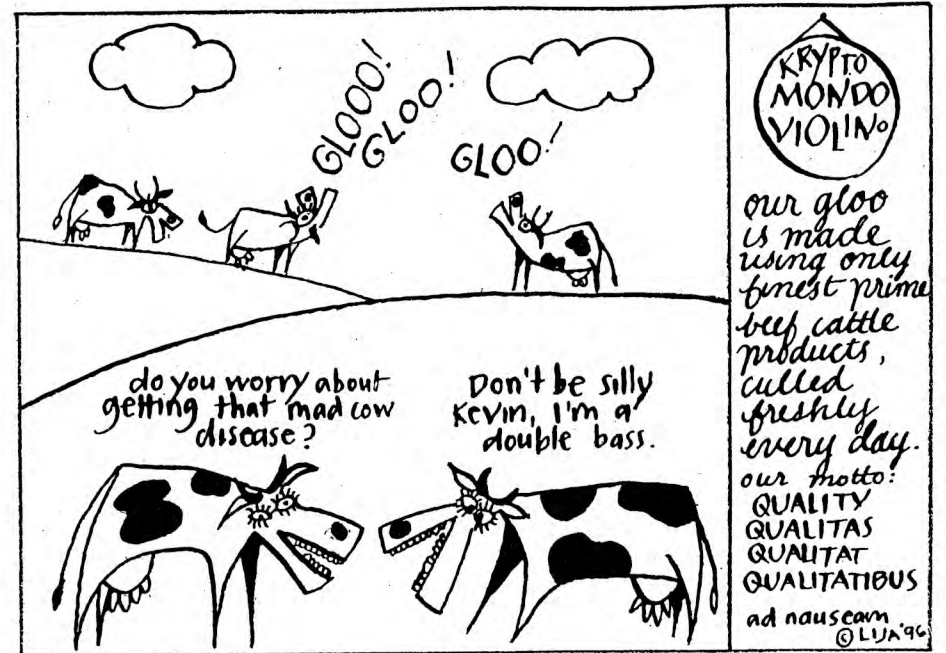
## Tom Jenkins Award

A new award for Violin making has been recently set up in memory of Tom Jenkins, who was an immensely popular performer as violinist and Orchestra leader during the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

He led BBC Radio's Palm Court Orchestra in "Grand Hotel" which attracted a weekly audience in excess of ten million listeners. Throughout his career he played on a 1667 Stradivarius. His widow, Michelle, has now kindly made available funds to set up a trust fund which will provide an annual £500 award for the best bowed stringed instrument produced in the Musical Instrument Department of the

London Guildhall University. This will include violin and viola da gamba, construction of which has been taught at the University for over 20 years.

The first presentation was made this year during the L.G.U. summer show on 26 June to joint winners Jean-Pierre Dondelinger (Violin) and Daniel Kowaleski (Viola da Gamba) after which there was a recital on the winning instruments. The instruments were judged by an external panel which included David Hill of Hill & Sons, Graham Wells of Sothebys and Gary Bridgewood of Bridgewood and Nietzert. Overall the standard of the work was very high.



This Newsletter is printed and published by the British Violin Making Association. Correspondence and articles to go to the Editor, Shem Mackey, Winchester Wharf, Clink Street, London SE1 9DG. Contributors to this Newsletter express their own opinion and are not necessarily those of the BVMA.