

Newsletter

of the British Violin Making Association

Editor: Shem Mackey

Contents

"400" Years Exhibition

John Dilworth says "USE YOUR VOTE".....Page 2

At the Bench

Judith Blackwell interviews John Topham.....Page 3

Conscience

Florian Leonhard discusses re-thicknessing.....Page 9

Status of Violins in Public Collections

Andy Lamb on the Violin and the Museum.....Page 12

The Brăcsă of Transylvania

Claire Doyle describes Romanian "Viola".....Page 13

Springing of the Bass Bar

J.E. McLennan on the science of Bass Bars.....Page 17

Dartington Violin Conference 1996

Shem Mackey reports on Dartington.....Page 25

Letters

Bow Wood, Violin selection.....Page 30

Selection of Contemporary Makers for the BVMA Exhibition "4 Centuries of Violin Making in the British Isles" *John Dilworth*

The selection of contemporary makers for this exhibition is a fairly delicate problem, and much thought has been given to it by the committee, and several suggestions have been received from the membership. Obviously display space is limited and we are just discussing the first drafts for the design of the exhibition layout itself, so we don't know yet exactly how many new instruments will be shown. We are aiming to make this exhibition a highly prestigious event., so there will be considerable kudos for the chosen makers. Our hope, though, is that by choosing those who will show current work to exhibition visitors in the best possible light, the whole community of violin makers in the country will benefit from an increased interest in British work in general. It would be quite unjust to allow one individual to make the selection, and even the election of a selection panel would be complicated. By far the simplest and fairest solution is the one first suggested by Marc Soubeyran, that there be a ballot of the membership itself.

What the exhibition committee have decided is to ask every BVMA member to nominate ten makers whose work they feel best represents the "state of the art" of violin and bow making in these islands today; those

makers who the membership itself will feel happiest representing them. The ballot will be anonymous, so there is nothing to prevent anyone voting for themselves, but should anyone feel the need to do so, they can only do it once, and the best safeguard against "rigging" or a biased selection of any kind, is for as many of the membership as possible to cast their vote.

We ask you to nominate up to ten makers of violin family instruments or makers of bows, in any proportion. You can make your judgement on any criteria you feel appropriate; visual qualities, tonal quality, craftsmanship, originality, authenticity - whatever. If you don't know the work of ten makers well enough, or do not consider that there are ten makers in the country who are good enough, just list as many as you like. The important thing is to cast your vote. The committee feels that a return from less than 20% of the membership will not provide a broad enough base for a fair selection and should that happen, they would have to undertake the choice themselves. None of us wants to set themselves up in that particular firing line unless it is absolutely unavoidable, so please.....

USE YOUR VOTE!

(Zygmuntowicz's) making techniques, Carlo Chiesa on the history of the Milanese makers, Friedrich Meyer on old violin varnishes and Peter Trevelyn on the Baker Quartet. Price £12 BVMA members. £15 non-members.

Please make cheques payable to "The British Violin Making Association" and send to the editor. (Address on back page)

BVMA Newsletter Back Issues

Back issues of this newsletter are available from the editor (address on back page) at a price of £1 per issue.

Dartington Transcripts 1995

Transcripts of the Dartington Conference 1995 are now available.

They include talks given by Charles Beare - broadly dealing with ethics in restoration, Sam Zygmuntowicz on Guarneri and his

BVMA

AT THE BENCH

John Topham is this issue's subject for scrutiny under Judith Blackwell's all-seeing eye. Judith braves the unknown territory of London's southern hinterland to bring some insights to a man who is widely regarded as one of the finest restorers around and who also finds time to fulfil his duties as secretary of the BVMA

South London is a place I rarely visit, and whilst driving down to John Tophams workshop I remember why. The traffic jams and pollution are soon left behind though, as country lanes lead me to the Topham residence.

The workshop is in the gods, the eaves of the house, and incredibly tidy. On the bench John has an old group photograph taken while studying in Mittenwald, where the students have extraordinary hairstyles and clothes!

"When were you there John?"

"From 1967-1971, the full course of three and a half years and then an exam at the end. I actually have the certificate here. I'm now qualified to work with a master."

"Could you speak German when you arrived?"

"A pretty awful effort actually having done a night class for one year. When you get there you easily get into the workshop German. It's the theoretical side, history and music that I was pretty useless at. The worst I got was 'ausreichend', that's 'sufficient', for music history. I did well with the making and workshop report book. At first I drew everything in it and later wrote in German, gradually more descriptively."

"Any real help from staff or other pupils?"

"Karl Roy, the first main teacher where we made four or five violins. He was German, maybe Bavarian as he used to go around in lederhasen. He spoke to me a lot in English, he thought England was okay as he had a friend whom he used to visit in North London. He had a picture in his workshop where he's shaking hands with the Queen. Yes, he was very helpful.

"So after a year and a half what then?"

"Herr Furst, who died recently, ran the varnish workshop. He taught us to spirit varnish our violins. When they were made we'd put a coat of linseed oil on. After a few months when they are judged to be brown enough you can varnish them. While we were doing this we would be in the repair workshop with Edbauer. Then the set-up, six months under Mathius Klotz (claiming he was the ninth generation). He used to make a violin and use no templates for the f holes, just cut them from a scribbled on line, the Tyrolean style, a bit of an eye opener."

"How did you find out about the course?"

"My father saw an article in the Times educational supplement in 1966, all about this marvellous place in Mittenwald where you could learn to make violins."

"Was there nowhere in this country?"

BVMA

"There was an apprenticeship at Hills where you had to work for five years but then couldn't work within a thirty mile radius of Hills if you wanted to leave, so I believe."

"So at the tender age of sixteen you find yourself in South Germany, it must have been daunting, were you very homesick?"

"Yes I was definitely very very homesick and one of the first things I did was set up a radio which had a special aerial that could tune in to evening transmissions of radio 4, Home Service then. I was certainly out of touch with sixties England at that time."

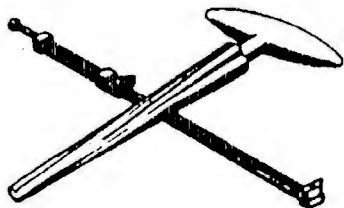
When John returned to London he worked for a chap called Ronald Prentice, the London friend of his first

college lecturer. He made viols rather too quickly for Johns liking and didn't pay quite enough attention to detail. A year on and John filled a vacancy left by Peter Benedek, at Withers.

"What type of work did you do at first?"

"The first two years I made viols. Kessler knew a lot about old English instruments and I learnt how to make viols in the way they should be made. Sometimes his style is over clean, a good discipline in fact, although a lot of English viols are made with abandon. Some of the details that Kessler styled his work on were from Richard Meares of about 1680, good tone and very very good workmanship."

"Did you restore there too?"



*Hand made specialist tools including
The original, double swivel jaw brass crack clamps
and Spiral fluted reamers.*

MARK JACKSON

Wold Cottage, Wold Close, Hunsley Road, Walkington
East Yorkshire, HU17 8SZ
Telephone 01482 887867

BVMA

"I made about sixteen viols in the first two years, then small repairs leading up to restoration work. Kessler was hugely experienced and who I am today is because of him. He taught me the discipline of making instruments in a commercial way, and one thing that Kessler is always promoting is to look for the angle to make things work without having to stick to certain forms, basically to improvise."

"So what made you leave?"

"I didn't want to stay in London beyond my 30th birthday; the claustrophobia was getting me down. After seven years Kessler offered me a directorship but by that time I wanted to do other things. I was fairly confident I could make it on my own. People were saying as soon as you go self employed your standards drop, so I was very conscious that should not happen. I carried on trying to be as disciplined as possible."

An Open University course in Stirling followed, where John was to meet his future wife. While deciding to set up home together, John acquired a workshop above Peter Biddulph at 11 St. George Street, who was in partnership with Peter and Wendy Moes at the time. Work was almost exclusively coming through them, and very naively John had told anyone offering him work to go through Biddulph. In 1982 the partnership dissolved amicably, and John stayed on. Out of the blue Biddulph acquired a consultancy and with very little warning

announced he had no more work for John.

"I had an order for instruments to be made and got on with that while looking for work. J&A Beare, or more accurately Robert Graham at that time, were happy to offer me work, and have done so ever since, for which I am very grateful."

"I've heard you're the best viol restorer in the country...."

"I just happen to be one of the few who've done it. Kessler has handed on to me some of his collection to repair, I've done a good half dozen, so in that sense I've had that experience. In fact I'm working on a Claude Pieray, 1709, Paris, the latest acquisition from Mr. Kessler."

John places the viol front on the bench and I'm amazed what little damage there is.

"I'm doing the whole thing. No serious cracks on the back, but the back centre joint was in a very bad state. The nick, where the back bends, was badly broken and I had to reglue it. The soundpost bar had to be taken off, it was cracked so I reglued it. It was also buckled so it had to be cleaned, steam flattened and refitted .

"A friend told me while he was at Newark you were known as the man who discovered the invisible crack...."

"I don't believe that! I learnt from people like Kessler who told me to make sure they were as clean as possible. The crack filling varnish we use now, a cellulose derivative, adheres to the original surface well, much better than shellac used to." "Over the crack

BVMA

5

repairs how would you reproduce the crackle effect on this viol?"

"The large crackling on this particular instrument I'd try to reproduce with a scratching effect, when slightly soft. With fine crackling you can use a stain. First of all when an instrument is finished put a very thin layer of varnish on and leave for an hour or so. Then put on a.... I've got a nutwood stain, which when you let it dry will shrink the surface, causing the top layer of varnish to shrink with it, cracking but not affecting the varnish underneath."

"When restoring an instrument like this are you inclined to remove everything that isn't original, or do you consider old repairs should be preserved?"

"I think anything outside the makers ideas should go. The front of this instrument had a piece on the side that was put on some time after the instrument was made. The outline was very different from the one I've done. You see the piece was not symmetrical."

"But it hasn't been made badly, why so out of character?"

"It maybe that they had to go with the rib. If the ribs and back were still intact and the rib bulged out he could only reproduce what the rib was doing. I'm able to take the whole thing apart and manipulate the ribs. The nature of the top bouts suggests the symmetry of the instrument. The back too, with a nicely rounded shape rather than the English viols which happen to be a squarer shape."

"Something else you are getting into now, dendrochronology; have you had this instrument under the microscope?" "I have, and I can't date this one, it's possible the wood came from the Eastern Alps which doesn't correlate as well. Although one can't be definite, the French seem to be fitting together; Paris makers may have had a common source of wood. More research is needed to find the 'French connection' - nothing to do with drugs!"

John showed me the first dendrochronology measuring device he'd made and explained how it worked. The violin is held in a cradle and is moved very carefully on a travelling stage with a dial. Having a microscope or lens system stationary it is possible to read off how far it has travelled.

"Not knowing much about it, it was interesting to note that two sides of a fiddle had the same pattern, so the same piece of wood. I corresponded with Klein a bit and read a few books. Sheffield University have helped although everyone is very restrictive about data."

"And owners seem happy to lend you their instruments to correlate?"

"Well, I've been very grateful that Charles Beare has let me look at a lot of his English instruments. I've been getting some spectacular results with them, instruments like Forsters, Betts', Tobin and Dodd. They all seem to have got their wood from a similar area in the Alpine region. Fascinating that these makers were importing wood at this time."

"Are you going to publish this for us?"

"Derek McCormick and myself are trying to produce a formal scientific paper which will hopefully go in a general scientific journal, but we are also in the process of writing an article for the Strad. My feeling is that I'd prefer to get the scientific article out because in a sense people would be able to look at it objectively. I want to have scientific credibility."

"So, earning a living at the bench and your dendrochronology work must take up a huge amount of time, what else do you manage to fit in?"

"I've got a family, Chrisy and three boys, nine, twelve and fourteen. I'm also a Parish councillor, in fact we were involved in a vigorous campaign two years ago to oppose a small airport that was to be built next-door to our village. About fifteen of us got together. I was involved in the pollution side of it which meant building a mathematical model to work out where gases were disposed and how concentrated they would be. I learned a lot about aircraft technology and pollution. Then I was involved in opposing a waste incinerator proposed a couple of miles away, to be the biggest in the south, causing traffic and pollution problems. Instead of making a mathematical model this time, the Americans had already made one, so it was just a matter of getting them to down load this programme. I appeared at an enquiry for the parish council, along with many other people, using this pollution model and we won."

"You also spend a considerable amount of time as secretary on

B.V.M.A. work, I know this because your computer disks are showing times like 3.00a.m....."

"I've asked for help to do the minutes, if I'm re-elected I'm happy staying with the membership."

"John, is there anything in life you haven't had a go at and would love to?"

"Chrisy says before she dies she wants to attend a football match but she'll have to take one of the kids, I don't want to do that. I don't know! I'm happiest when I'm involved in a project. I mean, with instruments the projects are part of me, whereas projects like dendrochronology are separate from me and I like to pursue them on my own. When I was at school I made a small Hovercraft that was going round in the playground at one of the school open events, then came radios and electronics. When I was working in London I made an animal called EMMA, Electronic Mimic Mobile Animal. It was two wheels with a platform, two light sensors and individual motors to go back, forward, sideways. It would follow you if you shone a torch at it and bump off things it hit. Something that stretches the imagination, that you can do with conventional bits of machinery. I'm interested in electronics and more complicated things like neural networks that stimulate the way the brain works, you can make a programme on the computer that behaves the same as that. From the normal you get extraordinary outcomes....."



Edward Withers
C. 1865



Edward Withers

Ltd

230 Years of Violin Craft in Soho

Adam Whone

A unique and fascinating account, chronicling the history of the oldest surviving violin shop in London, incorporating much previously un-published material and information on many of the famous makers associated with Withers such as the celebrated John Lott II and Charles Boullangier. Over 70 Black and White Illustrations and 16 Colour Plates.

Price per book: £30, plus postage & packaging of: UK £3.50; Europe £5, Others £10
***Promotional price of £25 plus postage & packaging as above until end of February 1997**

The book will be available from mid-November 1996

**To make an early order, please fill in the following form and return to: E Withers Ltd,
2 Windmill Street, London, W1P 1HF, U.K. or telephone 0171 916 7840**

"EDWARD WITHERS LTD - 230 Years of Violin Craft in Soho"

Name No. of Copies

Address

Postcode 

I enclose a cheque payable to E. Withers Ltd. for £.....

Or, Please charge my Visa/Mastercard:

Card No: _____ Exp/Date: ___/___/___

_____/_____/____/____

Signature Date



Oil painting C. 1830 believed to be of John Frederick Lott II

Conscience

Florian Leonhard rethinks re-thicknessing and comes up with some surprising alternatives to the obvious answers

This is a subject of some delicacy and no matter how diplomatically one approaches it there is a risk, even a certainty, of upsetting someone or another. Few subjects elicit such a wide range of opinions with equally valid and convincing arguments.

In an ideal world rethicknessing of plates would never be done but changing fashions in what is required from instruments has made many people attempt to exact the maximum from each one. Sometimes makers or restorers don't have a solution for why a particular instrument doesn't sound but too often the approach to remedying the situation is founded on a knowledge of modern construction technique and without taking a historical perspective. A violin is primarily an object of cultural significance and as such deserves to be treated with a certain respect whether we are talking about restorations, tonal adjustments, repairs or simply cleaning!

Semi-modern Italian Violins, which are in rapidly growing demand, have to sound as good as their rapidly growing asking-price. These instrument are presently the target for rethicknessing. Instruments by makers such as Antoniazzi, Bisiach and Candi till De Zorzi are all too frequently found under the surgeons knife. Quite often they seem rather thick in the wood (a possible cause for a dull, unresponsive or sharp sound), but consider why the maker left it thick! Often the instruments were constructed in a different way to our understanding?

These men knew very well what they were doing but yet sometimes worked with wood which wasn't ideal, or was just downright bad! Why they used such wood will remain a mystery, perhaps they or their client

couldn't afford the first quality and opted instead for second, third or even lower quality. Lower quality wood is sometimes weak or soft and in such cases it doesn't help to rethickness a plate (which I see being done all too frequently).

The plate was made thicker in the first place because the choice of wood did not allow for making it thinner.

So if thinning out the plate is not the answer, what is?

In such a case it can be of greater benefit to strengthen the weak area with small bars made from medium/fine-grained pinewood fitted carefully across the grain. These bars are fitted only after careful assessment of the plate and the violin as a whole in order to determine the optimum layout and position. Often one or two bars can be enough! They are fitted as thick bars, without tension, and are only afterwards cut down to the correct size and shape. (See figs. 1 and 2) Removal is a simple process and leaves the instrument undamaged and as before.

A bassbar of increased width and height can contribute to strengthening weak wood in the bassbar area.(An added cross bar in a different weak area then might be enough to strengthen the plate without adding too much weight to the plate.) The increased width of the bassbar covers more grain and with some adjustment to its design, e.g. a wider bassbar needs to be more slenderly shaped, excessive stiffness can be avoided.

Thicker plates, if too hard can create a lighter sound, which may not be desirable. In this case a deeper sounding bassbar can solve the problem. This is achieved by choosing a softer wood for the bassbar. Thicker wood does not necessarily

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

create a dull sound, with the right bassbar. Also softer wood for the soundpost helps to compensate for thickness in the plates.

Rarely is a good Violin, Viola or 'cello too thick in the centre, even if it contradicts what we have learned at Violin-making school. But if, after all experimental avenues have been explored, there is no improvement why not consult a colleague who can possibly provide a new angle or come up with a fresh idea.

Don't get stuck on your own!

If in doubt, it is better to close the instrument and make a different bridge or choose a softer wood for the bassbar before closing it.

The worst aspect of regratuating, which is often seen, is when the centre area of the plate has been regratuated. In most cases where it has been done in the past, the magic did not last very long. There is a long

legacy of bell shaped centre-patches to evidence the folly of these regratuations.

Today in northern Europe makers tend to make the plates of 'Cello's thinner than they used to be made in Italy in the past. The stronger Italian ones still sound very strong today, when properly set-up. Why should we correct these great makers? We simply need to recognise them as such but by the time we do, it's often too late and someone has already altered their instruments from the original condition. It is heartening to see unaltered instruments with thicknesses of 5mm. and over in a Violin back and over 10mm. in a 'Cello back. It is especially heartening to hear how well and strong they sound!

The basic message is, if we take our time with decisions, assess the instrument from all angles starting with its history and

ending with the physics of the fiddle, we can find the correct solution for each individual violin and thus avoid rethickening. On a general note we have a responsibility towards the violin and to the preservation of its idiosyncrasies however unaccommodating

they may be. The integrity of our trade depends on a certain respect for the work of past violin makers and we should weigh our decisions carefully, with this very firmly in mind.

fig.1. Violin Table

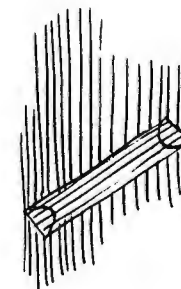
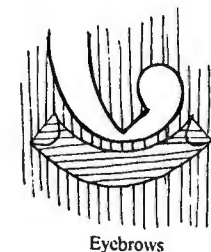
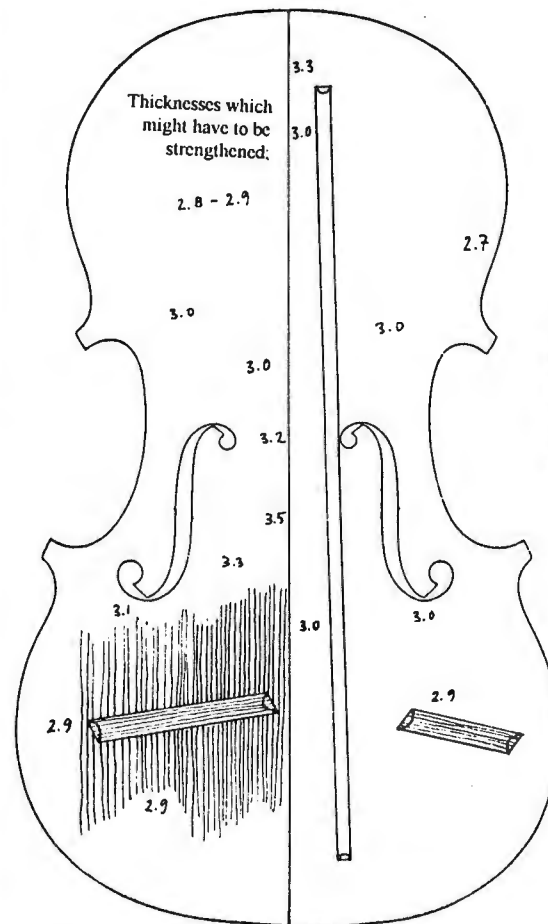
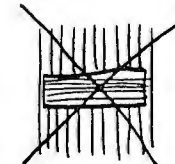
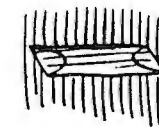


fig 2



Never like this, it will create cracks next to the bar.

Like this;



The Status of Historic Violins in Public Collections

Andy Lamb, Musical Instrument Conservator RCA/V&A

It is always difficult for the museum profession to explain the treatments that have been applied to historical instruments. This is particularly so with instruments like Violins which have such a widespread base of popular appeal. Sometimes it seems that instrument care is excessively neglectful while in other cases some mad and inappropriate treatment has been applied.

It is probably wrong to suggest that, historically, museums have always had the best interests of the instruments at the forefront of their collections strategy. The curators certainly had their own agenda and in the past tended to live in a splendid, academic isolation. Seemingly lunatic treatments may have seemed entirely reasonable when applied in these conditions. Nowadays of course, everything has changed. Hasn't it?

To an extent, everything has indeed changed. 1988 was the watershed year. This was the year that the National Audit Office started a series of random checks on our public collections. It soon became clear that, apart from the star items, the average curator hadn't the vaguest idea about what constituted the bulk of the collection. Wild claims were made concerning the scope and scale of these groups of objects while collection staff were unable to locate individual objects. The Audit Commission concluded that this demonstrated ineffective stewardship and that a strategy should be developed to rectify the situation.

Since that time there has been a mighty shift of emphasis in collections management. In these post-audit days the needs of the entire collection has taken precedence over that of individual instruments. The poor little violin now has to take it's chances along with all

those flutes, drums, trumpets, gamalans, lurs and tap dancing shoes that comprise the national collection of musical instruments as it is spread across several hundred separate institutions.

This sounds like a massive disaster for the needs of the violins. It has been acknowledged by the world press that this is of detriment to an international cultural resource. Although, personally, I would dispute claims that museum storage causes violins to lose their soul and that they become impossible to tune. Yet this is a prevailing view among parts of the world violin constituency. Instead one could suggest that this is a minor disaster for the few yet a huge opportunity for the many as great swathes of collections come to receive a bare minimum of attention.

Yet, despite the needs and pressures of the wider museum world, wild treatments are still being promulgated. I recently had cause to witness the loss of the original fabric of an noted instrument in Canada following a series of speculative and specious restorations that left the poor thing as unplayable as if it had not been touched. One could easily describe this as unforgivable and yet I feel myself unable to dispute the right of the restorer to explore his heritage through the manipulation of this material artefact.

It may be that this is the crux of the matter. It may be that the violin resides within the stewardship of a particular institution but it should be acknowledged that it belongs, in a wider sense, to the great audience of violin users. An audience that includes musicians, musicologists, lutenists, restorers, conservators, curators and most especially, those who occupy the auditorium. If the great instruments in our public collections are to receive their fair share of attention then these interests should be recognised. Although, realistically, there will never be extra resourcing to meet the greater demand.

The Brácsá of Transylvania by Claire Doyle

Claire Doyle has recently returned from a three month visit, her fourth, to Transylvania. She is a musician and musicologist with a particular interest in the music and instruments of this mountainous region where the traditions have remained unchanged for centuries

She plays the brácsá in the London-based group Ördögösök

Traditional village life in Transylvania has largely unchanged for centuries, despite slow westernisation following the communist era. Most women weave and sew, many men have traditional woodcarving skills and of course, music is an integral part of the fabric of village life. It is within this background that we find that many village musicians, frequently Gypsies, will make their own instruments- with varying degrees of workmanship. Although not always the case nowadays - the violin, brácsá and double bass - all can be made at

home.

The brácsá of today is more usually, however, a modern viola which has undergone some transformations: it has only three strings tuned to G, up a fifth to D and down a fourth (re-entrant) to A. The curve of the bridge is flattened which allows for the playing of continuous triple-stopping: the action of the instrument tends to be quite low to facilitate this. The soundpost is placed just under the right foot of the bridge. (It is surprising how many links there appear to be with the lira da braccio of 16th.



After more or less continuously being under Hungarian rule for 1000 years, Transylvania was transferred to Romania after World War I. Six million Romanians live here with two million Hungarians, a large Gypsy minority (dating from 15th. Century) and a dwindling saxon community.



Century Italy, which also had a nearly-flat bridge, was tuned in fifths with re-entrant tuning and used for chordal accompaniment.)

From the photograph, you can see that the instrument is held on its side: the end-button of the instrument is held against the chest with the upper bout resting on the wrist. This allows one hand to position the fingers for chords, the other to bow the strings vertically. The brácsá is always played sideways although there are several sideways playing positions - being comfortable with a variety of positions is useful to relieve stiffness and tension during those long Hungarian Transylvanian weddings, where the musicians will have to play for three days. (Incidentally, this instrument is known as the brácsá or kontra to Hungarians, as the braci or contra to Romanians.)

This particular photograph is of a Romanian left-handed brácsá player at Stoiceni, Maramures in July 1996 - the usual playing position is reversed. Note the "baroque" shape of his bridge but, equally, the sellotaped soundboard. It is not unusual for musicians to be playing totally dilapidated instruments in this part of the world.

Home-made brácsá's can be extremely heavy, and may have a slab-sawn soundboard, f-holes that look "wonky" and the scroll extremely unorthodox. These instruments, however, have a charm all of their own and sound perfect for the job.

The traditional Transylvanian ensemble (both Romanian and Hungarian) is typically, violin(s), brácsá(s) and a 3-gut stringed double bass. The very characteristic Transylvanian sound is largely due to the brácsá, the sound of which is not unlike that of a record being played backwards. It is generally viewed as the most important instrument in the group, particularly by dancers, for whom the brácsá sets the tempo and rhythm, along with the double bass. The bass is tuned variously; the required sound is loud and throbbing and very rough in comparison to classical playing, often being "out of tune" (sometimes the result of a violin player playing the double bass). Some double bass players will play only on one string for all the tunes (the other strings are there "because it looks better", according to the bass player from Palatca); and again, other players will use the full range of the instrument including a style of double stopping. Traditional music rarely involves a plucked bass here.

The brácsá bow is also home-made and is a longer thinner version of the double bass bow. It is often a rough stick with a hank of hair glued and tied to it - no need for delicate adjusters! - the heaviness of the bow and the thickness of the hair is

essential to acquiring the right sound. As regards strings, the brácsá may sometimes have gut strings (village made) but more often today, Romanian strings come from the factory at Reghin.

Musicians often complain about the quality of strings in Romania and, in fact, watching the gypsy musicians from the village of Palatca (2 violins, 2 brácsá's, double bass) play for 30 minutes recently, both brácsá's broke a string each and one violin broke two strings during the performance. Naturally, with these musicians, the performance carries on uninterrupted.

The brácsá is played in many ways, usually emphasising the off-beat. The most frequently used style involves two beats to a long bow stroke with a stop, or near stop, in the middle of the bow. It is surprising how many different styles and nuances can be obtained with the brácsá, using different bow pressures and suchlike. Variations of style can indicate the village where the music (or the musicians) originated and are essential to obtaining the correct timbre of the music.

Copyright Claire Doyle 1996

Additional research by Alexander Hopkins

Recordings

"Romania: Music for strings from Transylvania" (1992), Paris, le Chant du Monde LDX 274 937, (Collection Musée de l'Homme)

"Magyarpalatka: Hungarian folk music from the Transylvanian Heath" (1995), Budapest, Hungaroton Classic MK 18216-17

Although the continual interplay of the various musical styles in Transylvania make the discrimination between Romanian and Hungarian music rather difficult to make, it is possible to note that the Romanians may play more complex irregular rhythms than the Hungarians and employ fewer chord changes. Either way, musicians use a lot of improvisation during a musical performance. In the Transylvanian heath, the brácsá plays only major chords and - as far as I have worked out - there are just eight. A musician can demonstrate extraordinary skills of harmonisation and rhythm within this limitation. However further to the west towards the Hungarian border, the music features all chords and their variations, including minor, which is a new development of the tradition of the last 20 years.

This instrument is also found in other parts of central and eastern Europe - Moravia, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Gyimes (another area of Romania) - and is played within a variety of musical contexts.

Ördögösök

Hungarian village music from Transylvania

0171 732 2257

0171 652 3196

Bee Propolis as a ground coat for oil varnish

A no-nonsense recipe for propolis users from Carass Topham

Mrs. Beatons recipe for Jugged Hare says "First catch your hare". My recipe says "First catch your Beekeeper". Contact with the local Beekeeper's Association might be made through the Rural District Council or the Ministry of Agriculture advisory Dept. You might go to Association meetings but I have a warning! "Bee fever" is catching, and is usually incurable!

What you need is the scrapings from the insides of beehives. The bees coat and waterproof every surface with their varnish; they fill up cracks and stick together all the parts of the hive. The beekeeper is constantly cleaning this off, usually by scraping. I believe that there is a market for it, but how many beekeepers bother I do not know.

You need enough scrapings, small lumps, dust and chips of wood to fill a small Yoghurt pot. Put them in a screw top jar, put in methylated spirit or industrial spirit to about twice the volume of the bits, screw down the top, shake well and put on the shelf for a month, shaking when passing. The solution can be decanted and strained through muslin. Colour will depend on source varying from yellow to golden brown. Try out on some scrap wood with a soft brush. It is easy to apply.

Take your finished instrument, which you have set-up in the white for you, if a player, or your friends to try out; remove fittings and hang up in light and air, preferably for a month (I must admit I never managed so long). Give it a good sponge over to remove grease and grime. This will raise the grain; give a light rub down with very fine garnet paper or wet and dry. Apply one coat Propolis and allow a week in light and air to dry before applying the second coat.

Allow at least a week before the first coat of varnish. You will see that my process is not for the impatient.

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 Michetschlager & Jonathan Sherlock

Springing the Bass Bar

J.F. McLennan has spent his working life as a research scientist and lecturer in metallurgy. Since retiring he has become involved in acoustical research and violin making. He is a member of the Australian Association of Musical Instrument Makers and has served in the past as chairman and editor

The bassbar has not had the attention given to it as the soundpost has. It is understood to have been absent in early instruments (1) and after being introduced, gradually increased in size to its present form. The bassbar is tapered at each end to increase its flexibility. It is placed beneath the bass foot of the bridge on the inner surface of the top plate and aligned along the violin a distance from the centerline proportional to the respective width of the upper and lower bouts. The bassbar does not admit of much variation; it has been placed on the centerline of experimental instruments [2] and varied in shape.

It is supposedly installed to support the downbearing of the bridge due to the string tension. It is also thought to maximize the area of the top plate that moves in phase at the lower end of the range of the violin. Where the "breathing action" predominates and monopole radiation is important for maximum output. The bassbar has another function, one that would be difficult without it. When the plates are tuned by whatever method, it allows the detuning that occurs when the ff holes are cut to be reversed. When ff-holes were used instead of a "rose", to increase the flexibility of the top, the plate tuning was lowered. It could be restored by raising the stiffness lost and allowing some adjustment. This may have been the more important function of the bassbar. An example using figures for free top plate mode 5 is plate tuned, 377 Hz; ff-holes cut, 311 Hz; bassbar added and tuned, 376 Hz. The bassbar in another

sense is a form of "strutting" as used in the guitar. Only one attempt [3] is known where it has been used in this way. There is a controversy attached to the fitting of a bassbar. This concerns whether it should be sprung when gluing it in place. The logic behind this idea is that "prestressing" will counter the force applied through the bass foot of the bridge and thus prevent depression in the top often found in old violins

There are two uncertainties associated with this. One is whether the pre-stress introduced will be permanent. Wood is visco-elastic and will undergo permanent deformation under stress. Deformation of the violin body is not unknown. The other uncertainty is what is the force to be supported and how big is the force introduced and by the springing operation. Rule of thumb method can be used.

From an overall look at the violin and the forces that are sustained by the structure, it is clear that the forces resisting the string tension must be well below those needed to deform the structure. The tensile strength of spruce in the longitudinal direction of the grain is about 100 MPa (maple is similar) and the limit of proportionality about 75 MPa. The working stresses are about one tenth of this with associated strains of 0.05%. Wood being visco-elastic will slowly deform under a constantly applied load. From the general state of violins over 250 years old that show little deformation suggest the stresses are indeed low. The strength in compression is about one third

that in tension; the wood structure deforms by buckling. There is therefore something to be gained by tensioning the back to lower the compressive forces in the top. Gadd [4] carried out some relaxation tests on Sitka spruce with bending stresses 2 and 4 times the expected working stresses. He found 60% relaxation at room temperature after 5 years. However the test was a constant strain test. As the structure relaxed the level of stress decreased. This is not the situation in the violin where the stresses are maintained.

The problem is indeterminate. approximate numbers can be obtained by applying simple beam theory and assuming a simple geometry and force conditions. To a first approximation, the arching of the top can be neglected and the bassbar treated as a simple rectangular beam. In the figures stress varies between tension (T) and compression (c). No magnitudes are implied although the difference across the glue line is thought to be maintained,

Case 0

Clearly the case when the bassbar is shaped

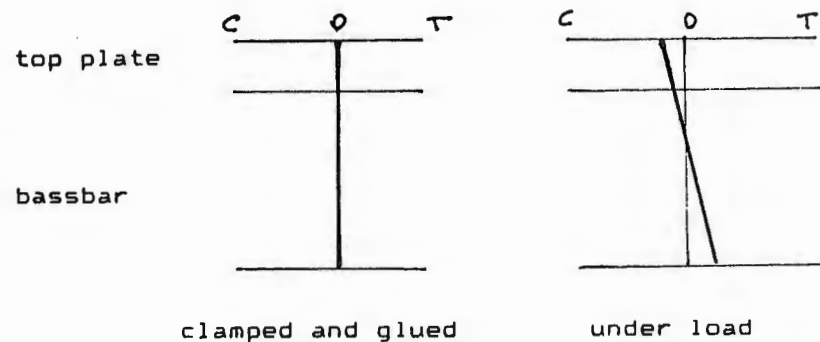


Figure 0. Stress distribution for case 0.

and glued in without springing would be expected to be simple. There would be no built in stresses and under load the bassbar and the region of the top plate in its vicinity might behave as a simple beam to a first approximation. If this is the case the stress distribution under load in the unstressed case would be superimposed on the other cases with built in stress patterns to obtain the final situation under load.

Case 1

As an example, a beam 0.270 m long with a cross section of $17 \times 10^{-3} \text{m}$ by $6 \times 10^{-3} \text{m}$ assumed to be simply supported at the ends with a central load. (In fact the support and the load would be distributed over the glued length of the bassbar.) For a maximum deflection of $0.75 \times 10^{-3} \text{m}$ the load for spruce ($EI = 10 \times 10^{-6} \text{Pa}$) is about 45 Kg. This deflection might be that expected after springing 1.5 mm at each end allowing relaxation after gluing to the top. The load equivalent to this net deflection is about 10 times the estimated load at the bass foot of the bridge. The technique of springing the bassbar by shaping the bar so that the ends are forced against the inside of the top for gluing, causes a mutual

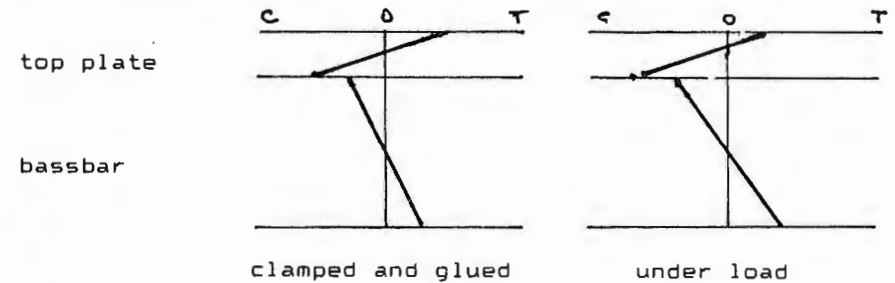


Figure 1. Possible stress distribution for case 1.

deformation of both the top and bassbar during clamping, the relative amount depending on the respective stiffness of the two parts. Thus the two surfaces glued together are in compression while the outer surfaces of the top and bassbar are in tension. The stress difference across the glue line is assumed to be maintained during any subsequent working and loading. The relative stress levels will be governed by the stiffness of the two members. If the stiffness is similar for the two members, in this case the top at 3 mm thick and the bassbar, taken at 10 mm by 6 mm and springing the ends by 1.5 mm followed by a final deflection of 0.75 mm, the maximum fibre stress in the bassbar would be about $4 \times 10^6 \text{pa}$ and in the top about 1.25×10^6

pa giving a difference across the glue line of $2.75 \times 10^6 \text{pa}$ and will be compressive. Loading from the bridge foot would reduce the tension in the top and increase the tension in the free surface of the bassbar.

Case 2. If the shaped bassbar (approximate at this point to allow tuning) is forced to conform with the top held to the carved arching during gluing, on release, the top will be placed in tension as the bassbar tries to recover. If we assume the same geometry as above and a spring of 1.5 mm at each end of the bassbar, the maximum fibre stress in the surface of the bassbar glued to the plate would be about $8.0 \times 10^6 \text{pa}$. If it relaxes to half, the top locally will be in tension to something less than this.

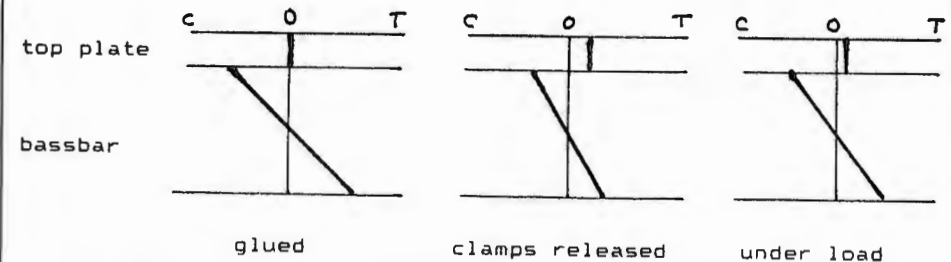


Figure 2. Possible stress distribution for case 2.

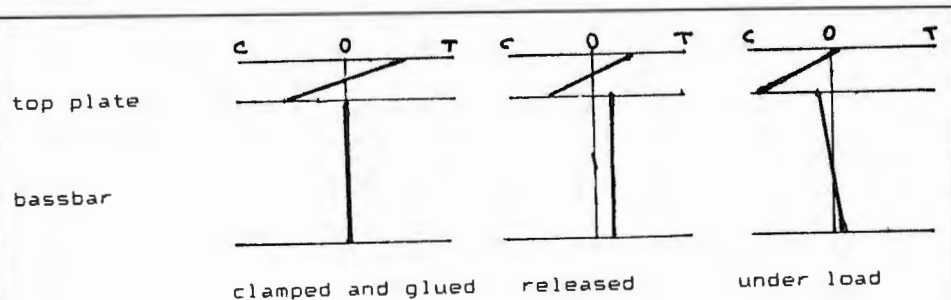


Figure 3. Possible stress distribution for case 3.

Case 3. An alternative would be to shape the bassbar blank to the spring required and when gluing, to deform the plate to conform with the bassbar blank. This assumes the blank is rigid enough not to bend. On release the bassbar would relax slightly. Carving the ends of the bassbar blank would allow further relaxation in the top as the ends of the bar are pulled up. Tension in the bassbar would increase as the top returned further towards its carved shape. Using the above numbers, the stress in the top would be about 2.5×10^6 pa relaxing to about half this.

Case 4. The method proposed by Saunders [5] to pre-stress the bassbar blank by gluing a strip to the convex edge of the bent blank and then shaping the free edge of the blank to fit the top plate curve, gluing it in place and then planing off the "tensioning strip" has the effect of not deforming the top while fitting a stressed bassbar. Removing the clamps after the initial stressing allows some recovery; a thicker "stressing member" would reduce the amount of recovery. Shaping the bassbar would allow more stress relaxation and following gluing to the top and removal of tensioning strip the final stress state intuitively is the top in tension and the bassbar in tension at the free

surface. In this method there would be a varying stress difference across the glue line between the bassbar and the top.

Using Saunders' dimensions and the simple model described above an approximate estimate of the stresses induced can be made. For a curvature similar to the one illustrated in reference [4] with spruce for both members, the maximum fibre stress in the bassbar would be about 14×10^6 pa and in the "tensioning strip" 6×10^6 pa. This would give a stress difference of about 20×10^6 Pa across the glue line. On removal of the clamps, a "tensioning strip" of the dimensions given is unlikely to hold the bassbar in the clamped shape. Some relaxation will take place but the stress difference at the glue line is assumed to remain unchanged. It is possible that the "tensioning strip" would be placed more in compression with a reduction in the residual stress in the bassbar blank. To estimate the possible residual stress level after the clamps have been removed, we might relate the change to the respective depths of the two bars glued together, a tension strip equal in depth to the bassbar blank is assumed to result in no relaxation while no tension strip would result in complete relaxation. In the present example, the amount of relaxation would be $(17-7)/17$ of, says the largest single stress, keeping in mind that the stress difference across the

glueline is preserved, This leads to a compressive stress of about 11.75×10^6 pa in the "tensioning strip" and a tensile stress of 9.25×10^6 pa on the other side of the glue line in the bassbar blank. The stress profiles might be similar to that shown in figure 4. It would be interesting to know what the shear resistance of animal glue is, although for a properly glued joint it is the shear resistance of the wood that is important. The edge of the bassbar blank when shaped to fit the top plate will be in residual compression of about 8.25×10^6 pa and after gluing and removal of the so called "tensioning strip" the readjustment of stresses would most likely lower this compressive stress in the bassbar and put the top plate in local tension. On further shaping the bassbar these stresses will be further reduced. The level of stress induced in the blank will be proportional to the depth of the "tensioning strip". If no relaxation occurred, a maximum fibre stress of about 1.6×10^6 pa would be needed in a bassbar, when sprung, to support a load of 5 Kg. If the intuitive reasoning above is correct, cases one and three give rise to compressive stresses in the top plate. in the region of the bassbar, while cases two and

four induce tensile stresses. Case two would be difficult to achieve easily.

After the violin has been assembled the combined string tension of about 23 kgf puts the top plate in compression and a downbearing at each bridge foot of about 5 kgf. If one makes an over simplified assumption that the string force is borne by the top over the section between the upper eyes of the f holes measuring about 42 mm x 3 mm, the compressive stress in this region would be about 2×10^6 pa. Any stress of this kind will Modify the stress distributions as described above.

The uncertainties associated with springing the bassbar have led to a mixed reaction to the idea and probably most makers do not spring the bassbar. It would be interesting to know if, when bassbars are removed by means that would preserve the internal stresses remaining in the wood, whether there is any evidence of "Springing", either in older violins or, more specifically, in violins that are known to have had the bassbar "sprung" at some earlier date. The thoughts expressed above are offered in the hope that they may stimulate further discussion.

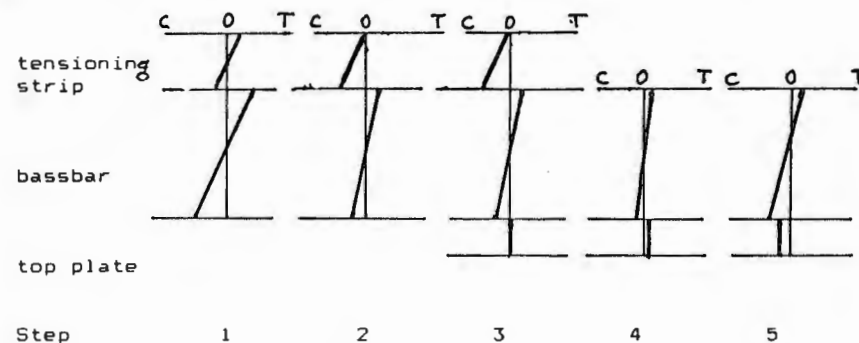


Figure 4. Possible stress distribution for case 4.

1. Tension strip/Bassbar bent and glued
2. Clamps removed.
3. Bassbar shaped and glued to top
4. Tension strip removed
5. Under load.

References

1. Sol Babitz; "Identifying the Renaissance, Baroque and Transition Violins" The Strad, 9 (1964)
2. Edward Heron Allen; Violin Making as it was and is, Ward Lock, London 1885.
3. Itokawa H. And Kumagai C.; "On the Study of the Violin and its Making" in Musical Acoustics Pt.1, Ed. C.M. Hutchins, 55 (1975) Benchmark papers in Acoustics, v5, Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross Inc. Stroudsburg, Pa.
4. Gadd C.; "Stress relaxation of wood", CAS NL #41, 17 (1984)
5. Saunders W. "Prestressed Bassbar", BVMA Newsletter, 1,11 (1995)

Michael T. Sowden

(Master Dresser)

Finest Quality Bow Hair

Master Dresser & Supplier To The World's Finest

Bow Makers & Pro-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 01132.853456

Committee Report No. 4 *(John Topham (Secretary))*

The management committee met on the 8th October at the Royal Academy of Music in London mainly as a debrief after the Dartington Conference. Florian, our

treasurer, reported that we had £5202 in our current account and £1500 in our building society account. He mentioned that there were a few bills to pay but those were

substantially the current totals. I reported that we had 218 paid up members (at the time of writing we had 232 paid members). We were pleased that not many previous members have dropped out.

On the success of the Dartington Violin Conference this year (see Dartington Report in this issue) we have drawn a short list of people who we would like to come and talk at the next Conference to be held on the weekend 19th -21st September 1997. They are Paul Childs (bow expert), Karl Moens (Museum curator), Malcolm Siddal (Violin Maker and repairer, ex-teacher at Welsh School), Dr Jim Woodhouse (Department of Engineering at Cambridge University) and Mr Despiau (Chevalets Despiau, expert on bridges). We have also asked Dietrich Kessler to bring along some of his instruments for a small exhibition. Plans

are not definite yet but this is the line up we intend to have. The transcripts for this year's conference are well in hand. Some of them have already been completed. Hopefully we can publish well before next year's conference.

At the time of writing the AGM was due. A full agenda has been planned and a full response was hoped for. Matters such as the Exhibition of English Makers (a meeting about which took place on the 12th November, more about that elsewhere in this issue) and an archive will hopefully be fully discussed. Whatever decisions are made will either be aired in the next issue or if more urgent response is needed, a mailing will be forthcoming demanding your attention.

All the best to you all and good making!

More on "400 years" Exhibition

Patrons to the Exhibition now include Norbert Brainin, Lord Menuhin, Curtis Price, Simon Standage, John White, Peter Biddulph, Charles Beare, Janet Ritterman and Stephen Isserlis.

A meeting was held in June this year, between the Exhibition Committee and Dr. Price (Principal of the Royal Academy of Music). A subsequent offer to use the Duke's Hall at the Academy to host the Exhibition (free of the normal charges) was made and has been gladly accepted.

The dates have been set as 30 March - 11 April 1998. An accompanying Exhibition catalogue is planned and a one day seminar with guest speakers to be held in the Theatre at the Academy.

It is expected that around 100 makers will be represented, which will include 10 contemporary makers. John Dilworth and

TOUCHSTONE TONEWOODS

Musical Instrument Makers' & Repairers' Supplies

**Tonewoods
Tools
Parts
Bowhair
Pernambuco
Accessories**

Select yourself from our large stocks or order with confidence from our Mail Order Catalogue

Touchstone Tonewoods Ltd.

44 Albert Road North, Reigate, Surrey RH12 9EZ U.K.
Tel: +44 (0)1737 221064 Fax: +44 (0)1737 242748

Andrew Fairfax are presently compiling a short-list. The membership of the BVMA, as explained, will vote for the representatives of contemporary making.

A provisional estimate for display cabinets and lighting has been received from the firm of Melville Exhibitions and Museums, but two further estimates will be sought. The estimate received brings home to us the astronomical costs in mounting such an exhibition and Committee members John Milnes and David Thomas are at present engaged in sorting out possible sponsorship. Finally as we are of an extremely varied

membership, it may be that someone out there has had experience in one or other of the above i.e. Fund-raising/Sponsorship, Exhibition organisation or Exhibition suppliers - then we can use your help.

Also if there are any non-contemporary makers that you feel should be represented and who may be overlooked, then let the Exhibition secretary know.

By the way, Robin Aitchison has replaced John Topham as Exhibition Secretary and all communication regarding the Exhibition should be directed to him - his address is as follows; 30A Barton Rd. Ely, Cambs. CB7 4HZ. Tel. 01353 668559.

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

Musicora 1997 - Paris 24-28 April

The Musicora International Classical Music and Jazz Exhibition will take place over five days from 24 - 28 April 1997. The venue - Grande Halle de la Villette. This years major themes will include a grand violin celebration orchestrated by Patrice Fontanarosa including concerts, masterclasses and conferences on both modern and early violin. The International Symposium on the Art of Stringed Instrument Making will again bring together more than 400 luthiers from all over the world to treat a theme at the highest level specific to stringed instrument making. A variety of concerts will be held throughout the exhibition and as usual there will be in excess of 450 trade stands representing 16 nationalities.

Further details on concerts or availability of stands from; Secession. 62 rue de Miromesnil. 75008 Paris France. Tel. (0033)1 49532720 - Fax. (0033)1 49532704.

Dartington Violin Conference 1996

A report by Shem Mackey

The second Dartington Violin Conference got off to a pretty miserable start with driving rain for most of Friday but those attending cared little as they sat with drink in hand while Peter Oxley and his jazz quartet entertained late into the night in the White Hart bar.

The conference opened on Friday evening, an after dinner welcome and introduction from Helen Challoner of the Dartington Hall Programme (Co-organisers with the BVMA) was followed by a few words from Marc Soubeyran (Chairman BVMA).

The first speaker of the weekend, Duane Rosengard, revealed the fruits of much painstaking research in his tracings of the history of the "Guadagnini" family or "Guagnini" as the spelling in the earliest records suggest.

Lorenzo Guagnini first appears in the local records of Bilenio, a small town near Parma, in 1685 as a share-cropping farmer. Giovanni Battista, was born there on 23 June 1711 and when he was fourteen, the family moved with his four siblings to Piacenza where the records show that Lorenzo took a lease on a butcher and bakers shop. (Lorenzo's mother had died in Bilenio in 1716 and on her death certificate the name "Guadagnini" with the more familiar spelling first appeared.) Giovanni Battista spent his childhood in Piacenza and the next we hear of him is on the occasion of his first marriage on

12 April 1739. His first two wives both died early in marriage and he wasted no time on each occasion in finding a replacement, the first time within two weeks! On the second occasion the gap was two months when he married Anna Vitala in April 1747. (His case in finding a wife must somehow have reflected his standing within the community at the time?) Anna Vitala was to become the mother of the future violin makers Gaetano, Phillippo and Carlo.

Two years later, in 1749, the family (including 3 children and his two sisters) moved to Milan, a move probably prompted by the cellist Carlo Ferrari who had already moved there to take up an orchestral position. (G.B. obviously had some connection with Ferrari and it is thought that the small model cello may have been invented specifically for Ferrari, as he was crippled) Lorenzo died in 1750 in Piacenza.

The family moved again between 1755-59, this time to Parma and again probably connected with Ferrari's taking a position at the Ducal chapel. In Parma. G.B. came under ducal patronage and in 1766 the label C.S.R. first appears attesting to the fact that he was under royal care. His pension at the time, 1200L per year. In November 1768 C.P.A. Guadagnini was born and from this point onwards an unbroken line of violinmakers can be traced until

the death of Alexandra after the Second World War.

Three years later G.B. left the Ducal service and packed his bags for Turin where Gactano was born on 3 November 1771. It was here that G.B. met with Count Cozio. At that time, 1773, Cozio had begun his negotiations with Paulo Stradivari for the sale of the remaining workshop effects of Antonio Stradivari. G.B. entered into a contract with Cozio regarding the making of violins but was also contracted to act as intermediary in the Stradivari deal. (G.B. had many contacts in Cremona during his lifetime, with the Amati's in particular. Carlo Bergonzi died in the Stradivari household in 1757 and it is possible that G.B. may have gone there briefly on Paulo's invitation to help clear up the loose ends in the workshop, hence his usefulness to Cozio as intermediary for the sale.)

This arrangement was short-lived. Letters which passed between them indicate that in 1776 there was a major falling-out over a question of late payment on Cozio's part, while Cozio suspected G.B. of double-dealing! In one letter to Cozio G.B. states that "I am not a boy" and later in his memoirs Cozio was to describe G.B. as "stupid and hot tempered".

From about 1783 his three sons Carlo, Phillippo and Gactano begin to take over the violin work and three years later in 1786 G.B. died. The workshop inventory, undertaken by Anna Vitala, included evidence of extensive guitar production, violin pieces and violins in

the white. Only two violin forms are mentioned.

Professor Peter Klein exceeded his brief to include painted panels, in particular oak panels in introducing his talk on dendrochronological dating of musical instruments. He described how dendrochronological dating of wooden panels has, in some cases, led to a change in attribution. For example, a painted oak panel originally thought to have been painted by Van Eyck, was examined and dendrochronologically dated by Klein. He found that the tree from which the panel was cut had been felled in the same year as Van Eyck's long and protracted death!

He dealt with the regional variation in wood growth and the need for a separate reference chronology for each area and briefly, referred to the movement of wood, commercially, through Europe from 15th.-17th. centuries.

Only the fronts of violins are used in the dating process, maple being almost impossible to analyse due to the extreme variations in growth - 1 metre difference in altitude can result in the absence of a growth ring! From his researches he discovered that different makers employed vastly differing seasoning times for violin wood. In Germany alone the maximum time encountered was 60 years (Widhelm used wood from the same tree as his teacher Schelle but with a gap of 60 years) while in another case the wood was used within the same year that the tree was felled! Generally, in German workshops, violin wood was

used within 1- 25 years of felling. Interestingly spruce from different alpine areas (north Alps/south Alps) is indistinguishable, the factor most effecting a difference being the altitude at which the tree grows. This is not, however, the case with fir.

Stephen Barber asked if Prof. Klein had encountered the particular figure known as "Hazelfichte" in spruce and if he had any theory on how it came about. He replied that he was familiar with it but did not know what caused it except that it only occurred at certain altitudes. Finally he was heavily questioned on the application of Dendrochronology in the attribution of musical instruments and in reply to a question from Ute Weggerhof stated that "Statistical values given high statistical probability linked with familiarity with the system gives good results". A Professorial but fair answer!!

Professor Sir James Beamont's new book "The Violin Explained" formed the basis of his talk entitled "How we hear sound" and provided the most controversial topic of the weekend. His very clear presentation and deliberate delivery quickly dismantled all our preconceptions as to what constituted a good violin. "The listener is physically incapable of differentiating between one violin and another because the human ear is not equipped to separate out harmonics higher than the first six or seven. Beyond that we simply hear noise!" With the aid of a very thorough slide presentation he described the relevant physiology, showing the positions of the receptor areas in the

inner ear and where the overlapping of harmonics occurs.

A "good" sounding instrument is an "easier" instrument to play or simply "suits" the player. He suggested that it is more important to ask ourselves "how does it play - not how does it sound".

Naturally there were a few sceptics in the audience and questions came thick and fast. Many people were adamant that thickness, arching and overall good workmanship had to play a part in the resulting sound. Prof. Beamont replied that thickness was not a critical factor and that variations of 2.3 - 3.5 in front thickness were not uncommon in quality instruments. More important, in his estimation, (and this met with some approving nodding of heads) was the scooping of the edges; deeply scooped - sweeter sound and weaker upper harmonics, unscooped - upper harmonics good.

He spoke against the use of electronic equipment in the making of violins and against the standardisation so prevalent today. He pleaded for the continuance of variability and character which occurs in the hand-built violin.

After dinner the "Cat quartet" gave a spirited performance of works by Purcell, Shostakovich and Dvorak. There followed a session during which the members of the quartet played and commented on the instruments brought along by the conference participants. The instruments were displayed in the great hall throughout the weekend and there was quite a good showing with in excess of 30 violins, violas and one cello.

Following breakfast on Sunday the Paris-based Bowmaker, Peter Oxley (looking remarkably fresh) delighted the attendance with a witty, informed talk on Bowmaking. The emphasis was on the practical hands-on aspects of Bowmaking but he started by outlining his influences and in so doing described the main differences between the French and English schools. Using Tourte and Tubbs as examples he pointed out the aesthetic and more fundamental differences which separate the two traditions. His work embraces both traditions, working the wood in a curious but effective combination of English workmanship aiming for a French aesthetic.

Using a slide presentation he took us step by step through the making of a bow, from wood selection to the final fitting-up. When asked about the weight of his bows he replied that he tends to make the stick a standard weight and achieves any necessary adjustment by varying the weight in the fittings.

He aims for a final weight of 60-61 grms.

Jan Strick's talk on "the Old Flemish School of Violinmaking in the 17th. and 18th. Centuries" began with a historical background against which to view the work of such great makers as Gaspar Bourbon., relying heavily on a detailed slide presentation to illustrate his words. He described the boundary changes brought about by the religious wars of the 1570's and the effect on the then very rich Flanders and the strong commercial, trade and artistic connection with Italy.

In construction the Flemish instruments diverge greatly from the norm, the ribs held in a rebate cut into the plates with an integral neck/top-block fixed in a slipper-heel type arrangement. This type of construction suggests that these instruments were built without a mould and shows many similarities to the methods employed by the Bohemian/Saxon makers. Between 1705-40 the Flemish makers adopted the Italian method of construction.

One instrument, a large 'cello by Gaspar Bourbon was shown to have a front of locally grown wood, a necessity brought about by the 10 year siege of Antwerp by the French army. Strick's talk shone some light on an otherwise neglected aspect of violinmaking in northern Europe and no doubt his forthcoming book will go a lot further towards enlarging our knowledge of this subject.

During the weekend there was a trade exhibition with a small number of invited suppliers showing their wares at two locations in the east and west wings. Participants were free to browse and buy at their leisure with ample opportunity to discuss individual requirements.

Before the final talk there was a raffle of tools, wood, books and bow-hair which were donated by the six trade exhibitors. The various winners were drawn from the hat and selected prizes from the pool of goodies.

The final speaker, Stephen Barber, a lutemaker who has also spent many years in researching and documenting not only lutes but many of the finest

viols. He has produced a great number of detailed drawings both for museums and private collectors and for the first time during the weekend, daylight flooded into studio 2, to illuminate many of his drawings which were displayed about the room.

What he had to say was also illuminating. He was concerned with the general lack of professionalism in the recording and documentation of musical instruments and was reservedly critical of the violin world in particular. He cited the need for some standardisation in the process of measurement and in the recording of data and the ultimate need, necessity, to disseminate such data.

Using many purpose-built tools, he explained his methods for obtaining complex outlines and details of 3-dimensional shapes. How, using

relatively simple photographic techniques, he can extract information otherwise difficult to obtain. Using a 55mm. lens, which enables close-up work, 200asa Kodak Gold film and a cold fluorescent lamp he uses a system of "bracketing" (i.e. set aperture but adjust shutter speed for three separate frames per shot) to achieve the ideal exposure. There was general agreement with the need for more work in this area and indeed since the conference Stephen Barber has expressed the desire to develop a more standardised system for general use.

The conference closed with a brief feedback session and work has begun on the next conference (1997) with a short list of speakers already announced. From the obvious success of this years conference it would seem prudent to book early to avoid disappointment!

1st. International Violin Making Festival "Venceslav Metelka" 1807 - 1867

This competition, the first of its kind, will be held in the Art Nouveau Theatre and Hotel Beranek in Nachod, Czech Republic between 1 - 5 May 1997. Nachod is situated 140km. Northeast of Prague, where the founder of Czech Krkonose Violin Making school, Venceslav Metelka (1807 - 1867), started his apprenticeship in 1829. Competitors are required to attend the competition which is divided into two sections (a) submission of a complete new instrument - violin (Model Antonio Stradivari) and (b) competition in workmanship - carving a scroll and pegbox at the competition venue! This section is obligatory for all participants.

The competition is open to all professionally active violin makers and apprentices, irrespective of nationality, sex and age. Further information is available from the national secretary - (02) 9772 4415.

Bow Wood - another alternative ?

I was very interested to read the paper on "Alternative woods for Violin Bows" by Messrs Wegst and Ashby in the recent BVMA newsletter. In the light of the ever increasing scarcity of pernambuco, research of this kind is most appropriate. Much has been written with regard to the measurable physical characteristics of bows and their playing qualities but, to my knowledge, little attention, if any at all, has been paid to the very material from which bows are traditionally made.

Perhaps the deeply conservative attitude of so many musicians has conditioned their thinking into a blind acceptance of pernambuco as virtually the "one and only".

Pernambuco has, of course, proved its value over the years but it is not without its deficiencies. In many senses it is far from ideal with its tendency towards knots, cracks, twists, checks, worm holes and inconsistencies with respect to the often varying elasticity of two bow sticks cut from the same part of the log.

However, I notice that in the list of alternative woods for bows included for trial many are themselves becoming scarce. They are, too, all from slow growing, exogenous trees. May I suggest that Tonkin cane, a fast growing and abundant material might be considered in future research. Perhaps I might be forgiven if at this point I mention the late Lawrence

Cocker's split cane bows which have already proved themselves to be a most successful alternative. I and the rest of my family and many friends and colleagues have been

using Lawrence's bows for many years with great satisfaction. Indeed, the eminent cellist Tibor de Machula owned at least six of these bows.

He preferred these bows - made on the same principle as the split cane fishing rod - for their "very strong vibratory quality especially in the middle of the bow".

Lawrence's bows are made up of six equilateral triangles of split cane, staggered so that three have two nodes and three have one node - to give extra strength. The strips of cane are cut off to length, split with a knife and put in an oven for an hour and a half on "Regulo three". (Lawrence believed that this 'put life' into the material). The strips were then pre-formed and resin bonded over an appropriate former to the required shape. The tip and frog end of the bow (usually made from small pieces of Rio rosewood or other suitable hardwood) were accurately and beautifully spliced into the cane.

Lawrence did many physical tests on his bows. One of his conclusions was that the cane bow is at least 33% stronger and stiffer, weight for weight, than one

of pernambuco, so that the bowing characteristics can be adjusted according to a player's needs. Being pre-formed, these bows also retain their shape extremely well. Apart from the obvious functional attributes, I think

most people would agree that Lawrence's bows are surely aesthetically pleasing, too.

Ieuan Owen
Osbaston
Monmouth

Instrument selection- Let the players decide!

I'm sorry that I was unable to attend the final session at Dartington, and I hope that I'm not too late to express an opinion on the matter of selecting ten makers to represent contemporary British violin making.

As you know the sale of musical instruments in this country is very competitive, and you can forgive violin makers for seeking to gain personal advantage from the list of ten makers submitted, even down to a tit-for-tat arrangement with other makers.

The people best placed to select the ten representative makers are the PLAYERS rather than the violin makers themselves!

In my view, and taking into consideration that you want to dispel the feeling that the association is getting a little 'cliquey', I would strongly recommend that the fairest way would be by competition in which craft and tone would be the main factors and who could object to that? Incidentally, I would feel the same about any instrument selected for the Benslow Trust, and remain ready to support any initiative by the BVMA in this direction. Many thanks for the BVMA contribution to the events at Dartington, the help given was much appreciated.

Anthony Perry
Deganwy
N.Wales

Mittenwald 3rd. International Violin Making Competition.

The "Verein der Freunde der Geigenbauschule" and the community of Mittenwald Upper Bavaria will again hold this competition from 16-24th. May 1997. There will follow an exhibition of the instruments and bows from 24-31st. May. All violin, viola, cello and bow makers are invited to participate. For more information please contact; Kurverwaltung Mittenwald, Dammkarstr.3, D-82481 Mittenwald. Germany. Tel; (08823) 33981 Fax; (08823) 2701.

Baryton Congress Eisenstadt September 18th-21st 1997 advance notification

The International Baryton Society has been invited to organise a Baryton Congress as part of the prestigious International Haydn Festival in 1997. This will be the largest and most important event of its kind ever held. Distinguished musicologists and performers from Europe and America will be taking part in a rich and varied programme of events illustrating four hundred years of the instruments history.

There should be plenty to interest both the dedicated baryton enthusiast and the music lover. Highlights include a recital by Jose Vasquez, first performances of Haydn rarities, and exhibition of original instruments, a coach tour to Eszterhaza, and a full programme of lectures and lecture recitals. In addition the opportunity to attend events in the main Haydn Festival.

Haydn held the position of Kapellmeister at Eisenstadt for over 40 years. It was from here that his music

was disseminated throughout Europe, establishing him as the most widely performed composer of his time. The Haydn Festival brings together famous artists from all over the world, attracted by the opportunity to perform at the splendid Esterhazy Castle in the outstanding Haydn Concert Hall. Festival events to be held during the Baryton Congress include chamber and orchestral concerts, and performances of the Haydn opera *IL Mondo Della Luna*.

The society hopes to arrange transport and accommodation through a tour operator. However, it should be noted that accommodation during the Festival is always at a premium, and numbers will be strictly limited. If you would like to receive further details as they become available, please contact Jeremy Brooker, Baryton Congress Organiser, 3 The Vale, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 1RB, England.

Editor's Note; The deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is February 19th. 1997.

This Newsletter is printed and published by the British Violin Making Association. Correspondence and articles to go to the Editor, Shem Mackey, 15 Weaver House, Podley Street, London E1 5ES. Tel No. 0171 375 0273
Contributors to this Newsletter express their own opinion and are not necessarily those of the BVMA.
Advertising Manager, Paul Collins, The Cottage, Millhill Farmhouse, East Hannigfield Road, Sandon, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 7TF

Officers of the BVMA:

Marc Soubeyran, Chairman, 12 Atlas Mews, Ramsgate Street, London E8 2NA. Tel No. 0171 241 1064.
Florian Leonhard, Treasurer, 64 Goldhurst Terrace, London NW6 3HT. Tel No. 0171 624 0400.
John Topham, Secretary, 114 Mid Street, South Nutfield, Redhill, Surrey, RH11 4JH, Tel No. 01737 822341.