



# Adam Whone

Violin dealer, restorer and consultant

# NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2001

Incorporating



Vn bow by A. Lamy

A warm welcome to all readers of Newsletter.

Since our last publication, much has happened, not only in the world of violins but in the world at large. As we are going to print, the sad news of Isaac Stern's death (albeit at the grand age of 81) on 22nd September has just been announced. Following not so long after that of Sir Yehudi Menuhin in 1999, it seems to confirm that we really are departing from a past era and entering a new one.

Thinking further afield, and in particular of the most recent events in New York and Washington, many people (unfortunately not enough!) believe that the growing importance of music and the arts in today's world cannot be overestimated. Yehudi Menuhin once said, "Music is one of the very few fields in which there is no feuding or quarrels. Of course, there may be antagonism or competition between individual artists. But the audience is united as one with the musician. Music binds and harmonises the

performers and the members of the audience." †

In a message to the 1967 Geneva Peace Conference, "Pacem in Terris" (Peace on Earth), at which his peace oratorio *El Pessebre* was being performed, the great Pablo Casals wrote

"Dear friends, my only weapons for justice and against war have been my cello and my conductor's baton ... may your deliberations hasten the end of war and the beginning of a joyous future for all mankind." ††



Sir Yehudi Menuhin

Snowdon/EMI Classics. Courtesy of The Strad



Violin by Michael Platner, Rome, 1728

Music has a very important role not only locally but worldwide in contributing something of value to a society based on culture, education and peace. I for one hope that it will continue to break down barriers and open up many new ways ahead.

Regarding our services, as usual we have an interesting and wide selection of fine instruments and bows for sale, including the exceptional Michael Platner illustrated here, a fine Gragnani, a marvellous Jacobs of Amsterdam, and many others (see back page for details). I am always happy to receive enquiries on any matter regarding sales, purchases, repairs, opinions, etc., and look forward to being of assistance in the near future.

## Notes from the Workshop Fabulous Ferdinand

It is not every day that one receives a package from Australia containing a stringed instrument for sale of undoubted pedigree but in an entirely unknown state of repair. But this happened to me last year. A violin originally certificated by W.E.Hill and Sons in 1919 and with a long history of distinguished owners (mostly orchestral leaders both here and abroad) had, through a friend's introduction, finally ended up on my workbench for restoration and sale.

A decidedly mouldy smell emanated from the case when I opened it, and when I saw the state of the instrument lying within, I began to seriously doubt what I had taken on. The unforgiving years of a climate not unhostile to delicate instruments and, latterly, storage in a possibly damp vault, together with a lack of professional maintenance, had taken their toll. From photographs taken in the 1970s, what had seemed a near perfect example of the work of the famous Neapolitan maker Ferdinand Gagliano was now the instrument I was gazing upon. The violin had been lovingly cared for by

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Scroll before repair



Scroll after repair

† Dialogue between Sir Yehudi Menuhin and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Tokyo, 5th April 1992.

†† *Joys and Sorrows* – Pablo Casals by Albert E.Kahn (Eel Pie, London, 1981)

one owner over a period of around 50 years (thirty of them in Australia), but this hadn't included regular servicing by a good restorer.

Although basically sound, older repairs from around the turn of the century were in serious need of attention and the varnish had accumulated a sticky film that disguised whatever lay beneath.

My original hope for minimal work and a reasonably swift sale for the owners was not to be. After a few days of initial shock I rallied. This violin deserved every effort possible to give it a new lease of life for future generations! After lengthy discussions with the owners, eventually the go-ahead was given to carry out the restoration. Work schedules were reorganised, tools were sharpened (or at least lined up in readiness), three tons of tea bags were ordered, and the work began. It was going to be a long haul.



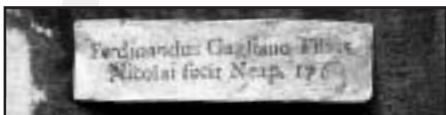
*Ferdinand Gagliano repairs in progress*

The first step in any important restoration is to take the instrument apart and lay out the pieces for inspection. In the case of this instrument, more or less every major joint and old repair required painstaking and time-consuming cleaning out and regluing. Years of polishing oils had penetrated into bare wood and old cracks, and needed to be slowly drawn out to restore the wood and to provide a safe gluing surface again. Table corners and edges were worn thin from general wear and tear – some scroll repairs were necessary and the old neck graft had to be replaced. In short, in order to restore this once fine violin to its former glory, it needed a “rebuild”.

Miraculously, most of the wonderful original varnish was intact under the dark layer of accumulated dirt and oil, though the job of removing this layer proved to be almost as time-consuming as some of the more complicated structural repairs. It would be over-zealous of me to describe in detail every stage of the repair, but, suffice to say, a year later the job was done and sounds emanated from the violin again with renewed vigour.



*Label and back interior before restoration*



*Label following restoration*



*Detail of table following repairs*

One of the most rewarding jobs for a restorer is to work on an instrument such as this one. All the important elements were there: an excellent example of the maker's work; a good overall condition of the table, back, ribs and scroll (albeit in need of a major facelift), and the original varnish mostly preserved.

A restorer has an image of how the final job will be once completed and it is this knowledge that keeps him or her pressing on despite the challenges. No two repairs will ever be the same and the way it was done last time may not be appropriate this time. Sometimes a repair goes so smoothly you wonder why you worried. Not infrequently, you finish a job and you seriously wonder how you ever did it at all!

In the case of the Gagliano, every minute of restoration was justified: the owner was happy that her violin had been restored, and she was able to sell it more profitably; and the instrument found a willing buyer in the first person who clapped serious eyes on its restored state. Apologies to those who didn't - fabulous Ferdinands like this don't come around that often!

AW

**This is** the third excerpt from the book *Mud from a Scrapper* by Jeremy White with cartoons by Herbert Whone. The book, originally intended for publication in 1951, didn't make it onto the shelves owing to the untimely death of the head of the publishing company. Both Jeremy White and Herbert Whone were members of Covent Garden Royal Opera House orchestra when it was written. It is a tongue-in-cheek account of the profession they were in at the time...

## Mud from a Scrapper

(or Give me Excess of it)

Chapter 6 – Protective Coloration

*“Nitedur chorda qui semper oberrat eadem.”* – Horace

**Even** the very best orchestral players know days on which their fingers seem to be thumbs, or when, for some glandular reason, they are simply off form. There are, moreover, chinks in every musician's technical armour which show at one time or another. On these occasions, the same system of bluff, by means of which inadequate players give the impression of efficiency, may be used.

There are three ways in which wrong notes and bad intonation can be satisfactorily disguised. These are:

- 1) Playing inaudibly.
- 2) Not playing what is written.
- 3) Not playing.

Playing inaudibly consists simply of obeying all the marks in the music except those of dynamics. Everything is played *pianissimo*, but the player by appearing to press hard on his bow, by generally looking busy, and by seeming to be exhausted after a strenuous passage, is thought to be pulling his weight. In using this system, however, he must take good care not to seem to be playing better than usual, or suspicions will immediately be aroused.

The most drastic way of playing inaudibly is to use a bow that is innocent of resin. The only sound produced with such a bow is a faint wheezing, similar to the surface noise of a badly worn gramophone record. This method, of course, ensures that no sound is made by its user during an entire concert, and is thus inclined to be too effective, for if discovered he may be considered redundant or regarded as an undesirable practical joker.

The other two classes of disguise are for use in technically demanding or exposed passages. “Not playing what is written” is the more generally applicable, especially in loud passages where notes are conveniently covered by a blanket of brass instruments: any player in this circumstance looking efficient and moving his bow as violently as everyone else is deemed to be doing his job, especially by those not conversant with the score. Those who conscientiously endeavour to play every note are wasting effort, as each note of any arpeggio is bound to be played by some member of a section.

It has been known, in a similar way, for an efficient player to bow any open string whose note happens to be near the prevailing harmony, and to exercise the fingers of the left hand up and down the fingerboard of any other string. Though the sound produced is a monotone, the authorities are usually satisfied. It is also possible to play only alternate notes in a rapid section or to repeat the first note of an arpeggio until a longer and safer note is reached.

A similar system is used by any musician who has lost his place. He chooses a bar some way ahead of the place where he has become lost and plays either the tonic or dominant of the apparent key until his neighbours arrive at the bar he is watching. This is foolproof, providing he does not play through a silent bar. When a real emergency arises, there are many justifiable ways of using the third alternative – “Not playing” – to draw upon. It is inviting comment, to say the least, to sit still and do nothing, but there are other perfectly legitimate activities such as tying shoelaces, or suppressing an attack of hiccoughs.



“... the experienced player ... knows how to pass the blame elsewhere”

The most popular substitute for playing is marking bowing. Everyone uses this ploy at some time, and conductors are now realising that bowings are rarely marked except by players trying to avoid some other activity. It is therefore becoming increasingly necessary to learn new tricks. Some players are content to retune their instruments whenever they need to stop, and some test their bridges, seeming to be trying to improve their tone. Front desk players faced with a particularly tricky passage simply stop and listen to their section. But the general need for a ready excuse for not playing is being filled by the recently developed “mute play”.

Many symphonic works require the use of mutes, and it is permissible for a player to look for his mute at any time before it is actually needed. When it is expedient to stop playing, a musician searches all his pockets, wearing an expression of bewilderment, until the danger is passed. He will then discover the mute behind his ear. This can only be done once during any concert or rehearsal; but there are other devices that may be used effectively. The mute can slip down the performer’s neck for a while, or can even be inserted surreptitiously through one of the f-holes of his instrument – in which case it must immediately be removed. These gambits work with any kind of mute except the sort that fits behind the bridge when not in use. But even this can be exploited, as it may be suspected of rattling and demand prompt attention.

The most fortunate occurrence is for a string to break whilst playing. This is never deliberately engineered, as it would be too expensive. But a player to whom it happens accidentally is given the opportunity of a protracted rest in which to fit a new string, and moreover, when he has done so, he is forgiven any lapses of intonation. Should he have no new strings with him and be obliged to continue playing on the remaining three, he will be praised by all for his *esprit de corps*.

Again, an inside player can, with the co-operation of his partner, turn over a page so clumsily that they both miss at least two lines of music. In extreme need he can pretend to turn quickly and knock the music onto the floor. Also, coughing fits and sneezes can be counterfeited at any time, and have saved many reputations; players have even feigned sickness and had to go home early. In such cases, however, they will not be expected to work for a few days, and will incur financial loss.

Another kind of error, that of narrowly missing making the wrong entry, is always covered by tuning the instrument. It deceives nobody, but is an accepted face-saver. Should, however, a wrong entry be made, the experienced player knows by the simplest of gestures how to pass the blame elsewhere.

All these devices mentioned, along with other discreet camouflages, are used by the true professional from time to time, though he may pretend to be above them.

## Interview with Suzanne Stanzeleit: Taking the high road

**I first met** Suzanne Stanzeleit and her violin at the Withers shop in Wardour Street. People and their instruments leave different impressions – sometimes one can remember the people but not their instruments and sometimes the instruments are more memorable than the people! But more often than not they seem inextricably linked, and this was the case with Suzanne and her Guaragnini violin, which she has owned for most of her professional life. For her young age she has achieved a great deal with it.

It is not surprising that with the wide variety of influences on Suzanne Stanzeleit’s formative years as a violinist, the result would be extraordinary. A student of Leonid Kogan, Nathan Milstein, Sandor Vegh and Yfrah Neaman, Suzanne Stanzeleit came to live in the UK from Germany 12 years ago to expand her musical career. Since that time she has been leader of major orchestras, concert soloist, wide-ranging chamber musician, lecturer and most recently leader of the Edinburgh String Quartet.

In Suzanne’s early years, Kogan was very important to her, especially with her basic technique. But the person who influenced her the most was a less widely known teacher called Vesselin Paraschkevov.



Suzanne Stanzeleit

Paraschkevov was influenced by Oistrach, and after a career as a leader of orchestras including the Vienna Philharmonic and the Cologne Radio, he turned his attention to teaching. He is still an extremely active and dedicated teacher to this day.

Suzanne remembers the lessons well. The Russian tradition was to work very hard and much was expected of young children. Later, Paraschkevov confided to her (no doubt somewhat proudly) “I

always knew you would make it because you were the only one who never cried in the lessons!” Suzanne says, “The idea is that you are pushed really really hard, and if you can withstand that, then you’re cut out to be a soloist. That’s the Russian approach. The English approach is sometimes too nice, I think. It would be good to have some kind of healthy medium.”

(continued from page 3)

At the age of 11, Suzanne received her first violin capable of playing against an orchestra – a 7/8 size Collin-Mezin. Following that, she graduated to her first full-size instrument, a Klotz; then, when she was 17, a Lorenzo Ventapane and finally, at only 20, a fine Guadagnini, the violin on which she now plays.

“I was doing auditions when I first had the Guadagnini, and I met the Greek violinist Leonis Kavacos. He’s very interested in instruments and said how wonderful it was. A year later we were doing a festival together and he played on it again; he said it had changed completely – he couldn’t believe it, it was so extraordinary. Since I had started playing the instrument the tone had become much rounder, subtler and full of character.”

Looking back at her career so far, Suzanne has found great enjoyment in the variety of musical roles she has been able to develop here in the UK. “I came to this country 12 years ago because in Germany you tend to get pigeonholed – for instance as a leader or a soloist or a teacher. It was through Prussia Cove that I got into this country and started doing chamber music and it all led from there.” In the UK, she has been able to develop her many talents concurrently. Aside from her membership of the popular Edinburgh String Quartet (who are also committed to playing and commissioning new works), Suzanne is co-leader of Sinfonia 21 and sought after as guest leader for many other prominent chamber orchestras throughout the UK and Europe.

Her plans for the future? For now, she is firmly rooted somewhere between Scotland and London, where she is also very busy. What interests her most is her work with the quartet, touring and working in Edinburgh which she loves. On a romantic note, this was how she met her Scottish husband, who is also in the music industry, to whom she was married only a month ago in the tiny village of Udney, near Aberdeen, attended by a host of musicians and practically all the locals! What more reason to continue delighting audiences from the highlands of Scotland to the lowlands of suburbia?

AW

**CDs featuring Suzanne Stanzeleit:**

- \*Premier recordings of Scottish quartets and composers (Meridian CDE84445)
- \*Quartet recitals – Haydn, Bartok and Beethoven (Meridian CDE84449)
- \*Bartok – The complete works in 3 CDs (ASV)
- \*English Violin Sonatas (Cala/United)

**For future release:**

- \*Dvorak’s complete works for violin and piano (Meridian)
- \*String quartets by the adopted Scottish composer Kenneth Layton (Meridian)

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Violin by G. Piattellini, Florence, circa 1760



Violin by H. Jacobs, Amsterdam, 1702