

ADAM WHONE

NEWSLETTER November 1998

LIFE AFTER WITHERS.....?!

IT is now about a year and a half since the sad day when we reluctantly closed Withers' doors to its many precious customers and brought an end to an era which may never be quite the same.

This newsletter was one of the things we had begun not long before Withers' closure. It seemed a good idea, not only to widen the awareness of the firm's activities, but also to act as an informal, informative and interesting angle on the violin scene which would also welcome reader's suggestions and private adverts. The feedback I received was that people enjoyed the letter. Therefore, in a spirit of continuity I recently decided to fire it up again. I would be very keen to hear what readers think about its content and, to that end, any comments/suggestions will be gratefully received.

The changing times

DURING the last century and a half, since Withers' appearance on the violin scene, the face of the world of bowed musical instruments has been through many changes. Restorers, makers and dealers have come and gone in succession, some leaving more of a mark than others, and the routine circulation of instruments has continued on. Probably the biggest thing to change is the actual condition of the instruments themselves (the less said about the restorers the better!) which, speaking of the 18th century variety, one hundred years ago would have been a delight to behold. Sadly, instrument viewers today are

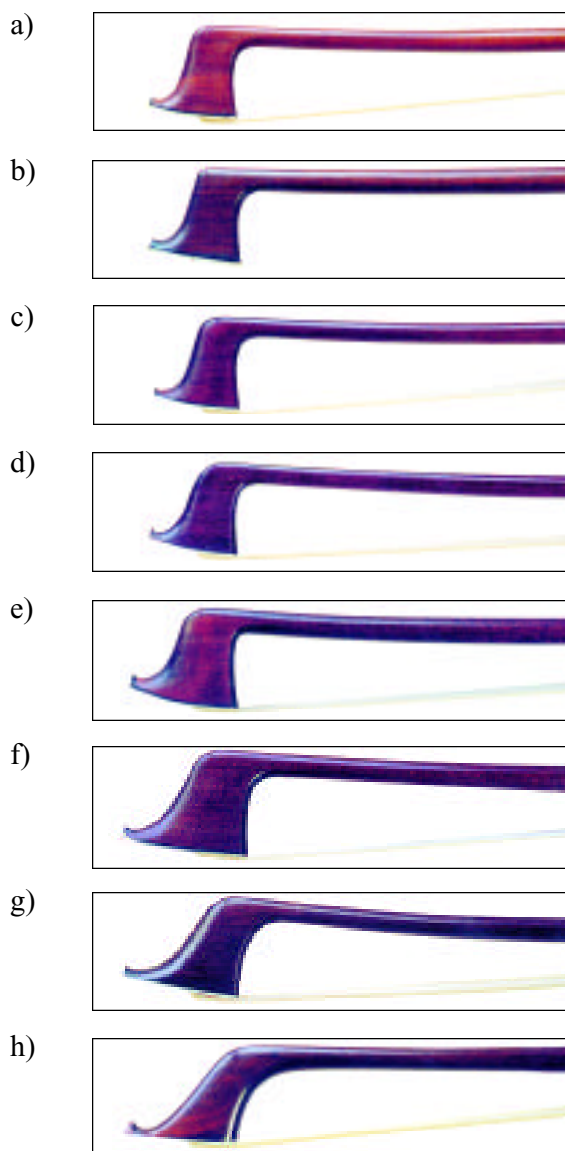
partially robbed of the glorious effect of a 17th or 18th century instrument in pristine condition.

Withers still survives

THE important and colourful history which was fully revealed to me as I researched and wrote the Withers book made the closure of our shop in Windmill Street all the more sorrowful to me personally at the time quite apart, of course, from the loss felt by our customers. (contd. on page 2)

Bow-quiz

(All bows shown are currently for sale)



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[Answers at bottom of back page!]

Nevertheless, I am delighted to say that I am able to carry on the authenticity and tradition of Withers (albeit under my own name for the moment) and at the present time from my own home the only limitation of which is space when compared to the Windmill Street shop. Plans for expansion, however, are already underway and before long I hope to be able to regain "lost ground".

Restoration and dealing in instruments and bows is as healthy as ever before, and the records of all Withers insurance valuations are alive and well, as are all other records and historical items of the shop, etc. Whether the name is Withers or Whone - and it could be either (or both!) - the service and tradition will always be the same. The only thing we currently lack is a postal service for strings & accessories. However, I am glad to say that, perhaps surprisingly, I now hold more stock ready for sale than we did at Windmill Street including a number of very fine bows. New instruments are never far from the mind either and a large stock of wood sits expectantly in the store-room, but all in good time!

Adam Whone

“INTERVIEW”

with JULIAN LLOYD WEBBER

“My Sound”

JULIAN Lloyd Webber began playing the cello when he was just four years old - his reason being to avoid playing the piano! Piano lessons at a very early age were the norm in the Lloyd Webber household and Julian hated the piano at the time. A visit to the Royal Festival Hall with his mother decided his musical future - Julian saw and heard the cellos in the orchestra for the first time and decided that this was for him, especially if it meant he could give up the piano.

Julian's initial enthusiasm for this new instrument was a little dampened, however, when the cello arrived - it was only 1/8th size and he really wanted a big one like those he had seen. Nevertheless, over the years he did manage to progress from an eighth size to a half to a three quarter size to a seven eighth until, when he was fourteen, he was given his first full size instrument. This cello by Paul Bailly, a pupil of Vuillaume, cost £300 and served him through his years at college, for his Wigmore Hall debut and for his performance of the Bliss Concerto at the Queen



Elizabeth Hall which marked his debut there in September 1972.

The prospect of more solo work forced Julian to search for a better instrument and in 1974 he paid £7,000 for a cello allegedly by Grancino. "I say allegedly because I don't think it was a Grancino," Julian says. "It was not a good instrument. The stop was too big and it had no bass, but of course this was a crucial time for me. I was beginning to make recordings and I was desperate to find something better. Now I cannot listen to the recordings I made then - I detest the sound." It took Julian six years to find what he was looking for and in 1980 he purchased a cello by Joseph Guaragnini from a player in the RPO. "It was a good cello - the first one I had that I really liked," he says. "Adam will no doubt remember the instrument fondly because despite its fine sound it also had the odd wolf note which needed attention at the time."

Just after this, Julian spotted a Stradivarius cello at auction and tried it out. "I just knew it was better than anything I had ever played on, but, having said that, it had been stored in a bank vault for 50 years and needed a lot of playing." It is known as the "Barjanski" Strad and is the instrument that he still plays on. "It is a wonderful cello. I am not looking for another instrument. I love playing it - this is my sound - the sound I want to make. I suppose I should have another instrument as a back-up, but I don't - it would always be second best and I wouldn't want people to hear that."

Today, Julian travels the world with his precious Strad. He has recently returned from a major tour of

South Africa and has played the instrument in places as far apart as Tokyo, Sydney and New York. Future plans include more chamber music and pursuing his support for music education in schools.

“The cello is not a natural choice for many children to learn at school - it is unlike the ‘instant’ things that everyone wants these days. To learn the cello you have to spend years before it sounds good - but the rewards are tremendous. I am delighted that, in spite of all the difficulties, there are so many good young cellists around.”

B.M.

A new CD by **Julian Lloyd Webber** :

FAVOURITE CELLO CONCERT OS
on **Philips 462 505-2** (two discs for the price of one)

Featuring Julian's acclaimed recordings of the concertos of Elgar, Dvorak and Saint-Saens and Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations, with other works for cello and orchestra.

VANISHED VARNISH

(Notes from the Workshop)

FINE varnish is to violins perhaps what expression is to music - it simply is not the same without it, as if an important part of the personality had been taken away. Were you to remove the varnish of a fine old instrument (I'm not seriously suggesting it!), the result might be like looking at a fine oil painting without any colour or, worse, without any paint! Of course it is not quite the same, but the beautiful colour coat on a good instrument *should* be treated as if it were an old master painting. It displays the character of the maker to such an extent that without it even an expert may meet with some difficulty in identifying the work. As any good restorer will tell you, one of the golden rules of restoration is always to preserve original varnish *and patina*.

Sadly, one of the worst consequences of daily wear and tear on an old instrument is the effect on the varnish. The protecting layer of varnish is the first thing to go before the wood beneath starts to wear away. This is probably one of the most common causes of decline in wooden musical instruments - perhaps akin to a roof being stripped off to allow access to the rain. Those who have the good fortune to own a lovely old instrument also inherit a sort of obligation to keep it in good shape for future generations. After all, prevention is better than cure, and the instruments will live far longer than all of us. It has to be said, however (and I hope I will be forgiven for mentioning it), that some repairers can cause more damage to instruments than can centuries

of wear and tear. The other day I witnessed the result of a minor repair on a fine old Gagliano fiddle. The instrument had only required some basic crack repairs but had ended up with a thick layer of shellac varnish coating both front and back, obliterating the delicate and beautiful original underneath. This is unforgivable, and murder to put right (sometimes near impossible), very expensive, and in most cases the original surface will never be the same again after centuries of care and protection against such acts of brutality. At the other extreme, I recollect one of the world's leading experts expressing his anguish and disbelief when a fine old violin he had known some decades previously, which had the most marvellous original varnish, came back into the shop having been vigorously cleaned over the years by another repairer. The beautiful original patina was long gone, as was most of the varnish. They had both been polished to oblivion. Thankfully there are not too many repairers like this, but probably still more than there should be.



Other than the above examples of professional incompetence, there are probably two main causes of damage to varnish. The first is simply the general wear and tear an instrument inevitably receives from day to day usage. There are measures which can be taken to alleviate this problem, which occurs mainly in the hand area around the top shoulder and upper table (in violins, violas and cellos) and around the chin area on violins and violas. Some wear attributable to the unique way a particular player handles his or her instrument may also start being noticeable. Luckily for restorers, they can at least avoid blame for this kind of wear. The second cause is over-enthusiastic cleaning of the instrument. This damage often occurs completely un-noticed and over a relatively long period of time (say ten years or more) and can be just as easily inflicted by both the musician and the restorer - partners in crime, as it were...!
(to be continued)



Adam Whone

Violin maker, restorer
and consultant



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A Selection of instruments and bows currently on offer

£50 - £100,000

Nicolo Gagliano (violin) Naples, 1769
Camillus Camilli (violin) Mantua, 1739

£20 - £50,000

Riccardo Antoniazzi (violin) Milan, c.1880
Leandro Bisiach (violin) Milan, c.1890
Giuseppe Tarasconi (violin) Milan, 1889
Henry Lock ey Hill (viola) London, c.1800 (40.2cm)
John Betts (cello) London, c.1790
Thomas Kenned y (cello) London, 1818

£10 - 20,000

Richard Duk e (violin) London, c.1770
Benjamin Banks (violin) Salisbury, 1779
Emile Germain (violin) Paris, 1906
Francois Rem y (viola) Paris, c.1820 (40.5cm)
George Crask e (cello) mid-19th C.

Under £10,000

Violins by **J.B.Collin Mezin**, **J.Grandjon**,
P.Wamsley, **J.Carter**, **B.Szepessy**, etc.

Also a selection under £5,000 and a number of
good classical instruments in original condition.

Bows

See front cover. Many more including:
 A.Lamy, A.Vigneron, Chs.Peccatte,
 B.Ouchard, Bazin, etc.



Fine violin by Riccardo Antoniazzi
 Milan, circa 1880

NOTICEBOARD

Please use this space to place small ads for musical
 or musically related items.

All contributions can be sent to me by mail,
 fax or Email. The deadline for the Spring issue will
 be the end of February 1999 for publication in
 March.

If you change your address or do not wish to
 receive this newsletter, please let us know.

Quiz answers: a)Vctr.Fetique b)D.Peccatte c)Cl.Thomassin d)Js.Tubbs
 e)Js.Tubbs Va f)Js.Tubbs Ce g)E.Sartory Ce h)J.Dodd Ce (br. Forster)