



UNIVERSAL
DICTIONARY
OF
VIOLIN AND BOW MAKERS

BY
WILLIAM HENLEY

VOLUME III

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VOLUME III

This, the third volume of the UNIVERSAL DICTIONARY OF VIOLIN AND BOW MAKERS by William Henley, begins at GUARNERIUS, JOSEPH (CONTD.), and ends at MAUCOTEL, CHARLES ADOLPHE.

(CONTD.):)

GUARNERIU, JOSEPH.

Poverty and art are often synonymous. The external goods of fortune, and the mental advantages which control the manipulative power of the hands, are both subject to perpetual fluctuation and ultimate decay; and they who strive to ascend the steep hill of ambitious progress, often slide back in their passage, or fall at once from the summit when it is attained. Thus with Joseph del Gesù.

Bergonzi (who knew him intimately) tells us that Guarnerius lived a fast and irregular life; that he was indolent and only worked when caprice seized him; that he was negligent in dress and manners; that he was totally indifferent to what his fellow creatures thought of him and his habits; that he was indulgent with wine, and spent considerable time and money in the many available orgies of pleasure; that his wife, born in the Tyrol, had found nothing but misery with him although she frequently and lovingly helped him in his work and, finally, that he was a rabid partisan of Radical politics which eventually brought him to imprisonment. Whether this is all true or not is now of little importance; but the degenerated productions of his art at this period would be inexplicable if we did not accept some of the traditional rumours that his last years were deplorably impoverished by loss of money and loss of self-respect, which brought in their train the loss of manipulative accuracy and ambition.

This is the period when he wrought the notorious instruments known as the Prison Josephs, the Drunken Josephs, the Impudent Fiddles and a few other similar appellations. Tradition has it that they were made during an enforced imprisonment, and that the jailor's kind-hearted daughter took pity on his misery, ran hither and thither to procure him wood and any cutting implements she could lay her hand to, procured varnish of any colour and any kind from the various fiddle shops, then afterwards hawked the instruments about and sold them for trifling sums of money in order to alleviate his abjectness.

He certainly turned out several instruments during his last two years which bring little credit to his name, but the prison story rests upon no satisfactory evidence and seems to be an inventive tit-bit of fiction set floating about to explain the flooding of the market with a large number of inferior fiddles containing spurious labels. Careful researches in connection with the prison story have falsified the ugly tale. It appears that in 1715, a prisoner named Giacomo Guarneri had died in prison and Bergonzi (born the following year) had, in the course of his life, come to hear of the circumstances and enlarged his imagination by fancifully supplying fictitious details; and there we get the foundation of the tale.

Those violins bearing indelible signs as the work of Guarnerius have all been carefully asserted and picked out and experts have given guarantees as to the authenticity but, of course, the value of this last period instruments is relatively much smaller (except the few very famous specimens later cited) than those of the other periods, for some of them exhibit meanness of wood, stiff scrolls, atrociously ugly, long and slanting sound-holes, scratchy purfling, rough workmanship inside and out, and inferior varnish of various colours, some looking as though he pitched globs of a puce shade here and there without toning them down or making an even surface. If he had taken a bottle of ink and thrown the contents on the wood, then blotted it, the result could not have been much worse. These particular type productions may be recognised by the arching. Many are the worse for wear and often present a battered and cracked appearance—some worm-eaten, too.

Principal copyists of his style were Testore, Landolphi and Storioli.

1743. The "Columbus". Owned by Edith Lorand (well-known concert violinist) of Berlin, 1928.

1743. The "Paganini". Presented to that virtuoso by M. Livron at Leghorn, 1820. Bequeathed to perpetual imprisonment at the Genoa Museum, 1850. One of his grandest patterns, dark red varnish, "wear" of continual playing very marked, low and thin bridge, very strong edges, two-piece back, deep grooves carved round the finely chiselled scroll, ivory string nut at foot of peg box, body length 35½ cm.

1744. Owned by Emile Sauret. In the possession of a Liverpool violinist and collector named Sheridan, 1928. Rich orange brown varnish. Two-piece back. Powerfully brilliant tone. Body length 13¾ inches.

1745. The "Leduc". Owned by Alphonse Leduc (Paris). Acquired by Hart. Subsequently purchased by R. D. Waddell (Glasgow). One of the most "command-

ing" of his creations. High shouldered outline suggestive of magnificent solidity. Body length $13\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Startlingly beautiful and vivid dark red varnish with a remarkable "bloom" upon it. Heavily wooded, very handsome back, belly of well defined reed. Long sound-holes, cleanly and perfectly cut and delightfully characteristic. Particularly weird looking scroll, freakish concept of a genius, unusually narrow when viewed in front, slightly turned up bosses prominently drawn out. Tonal quality of astonishing strength and of "contralto" mellowness.

1746. Owned by Slavik (rival of Paganini), 1820. Later acquired by Princess Leontine von Fürstenberg, subsequently purchased by Alois Heller (virtuoso at Prague). Created much controversy as to its authenticity.

Labels, each bearing *I.H.S.* under a cross.

Joseph Guarnerius
Alumnus Andrea Gisolberti
fecit Cremona. 1706

Joseph Guarnerius fecit
Cremonae, anno 1742

Joseph Guarnerius del Gesu
Fecit Cremona 1735

Joseph Guarnerius Cremonensis
faciebat 1724

Ten or a dozen violas known.

Supposed and recorded (until 1905) by several experts that he had added another notch to his desire for singularity by never constructing a 'cello. Then one was found, made in 1710, by Vincent Cooper of Kew, and certified as genuine by Horace Petherick. Measurements, etc., body length 29-1/16 inches; upper bouts 13-3/16; middle 9-1/16; lower 16 $\frac{1}{2}$; ribs 4 $\frac{1}{2}$; width between upper part of sound-holes 3 $\frac{5}{8}$; distance between outer edges of lower curves of sound-holes 9-5/16; length 5 $\frac{1}{2}$; from top of sound-hole to edge above, right side 12; left side 12-1/16; purfling to outside edge $\frac{1}{4}$. Back of "nutmeggy" sycamore, rather plain, with a small knot above left upper corner. Front material of close thread and delicate growth. Waist curves typically "del Jesu" style. Sound-holes like those of his early period violins, being upright with the lower wings, rather narrow and not hollowed. Deeply gouged scroll, free design, shell of average depth. Varnish of subdued transparent golden orange shade.

Marc Laberte (maker at Mirecourt, 1925) also claims to possess a genuine specimen dated 1715 (which he several times replicated), model of power and elegance combined.

Another, dated 1730, said to be the solo instrument of Jules de Swert, was extensively advertised in 1893.

Occasionally 'cellos have appeared as by Del Jesu, but subsequently found to be the work of Joseph (son of Andrea).

Everybody should read the finely illuminating and very knowledgeable volume de luxe *The Violin Makers of the Guarneri Family* (published by Hill & Sons, London), containing reproductions of various documents and plates illustrating representative instruments. Also *Joseph Guarnerius and his Master* by Horace Petherick (Strad Library).

1735. The "Winternitz". Named after this reputed American soloist (1920). Formerly owned by Ole Bull. Of particularly "telling" tone.

1735. Magnificent example. Originally in the possession of the famous Di Medicis, and was enshrined with the wild tales of the Duke Gian Gastone (the last of the dissolute Di Medicis). The violin travelled from one royal household to another, until it came into the workshops of Caressa and Francais. Bought by Albert Spalding (famous American virtuoso), 1913. Bears all the characteristic traits of the maker's best period. Bold design and unconventional pattern which has gained for him the title of "The golden voiced violin maker of Cremona". Large proportions and richly varnished with a deep red graduating to a pale orange shade. Tone of deep contralto like quality with upper notes of remarkable brilliance. One-piece back and the usual originality in sound-holes.

1735. W. W. Cobbett (wealthy amateur and patron of chamber music), resident in London, 1930, proud possessor of two specimens, one of large proportions with a label that is not original, and a smaller one dated 1735. Sound-holes perhaps the most remarkable feature as they seem to be strongly reminiscent of the early Amati. Body length 14 inches bare, unusual length for a Guarnerius; upper bouts 6 $\frac{5}{8}$; lower 8-3/16. Two-piece back of fairly broad curl sycamore. Dark reddish brown varnish truly Cremonese in quality. The smaller model is the finer instrument of the two. Body length $13\frac{3}{8}$ inches; upper bouts 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ full; middle 4-5/16; lower