

GUARNERIUS DEL GESU 1733

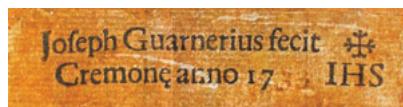
DESCRIPTION AND MEASUREMENTS: ROGER HARGRAVE



This violin must be regarded as one of del Gesu's finest surviving examples and it reaches us in 1984 in an almost perfect state of preservation. The remaining orange red varnish, though not present in large amounts, has thankfully not been marred by the extensive retouchings that unfortunately tend to accompany repair work. With the exception of three tiny drying cracks, two on the belly and one on the back and a small amount of half edging work by the end block on the belly, the instrument is sound.

We have a tendency today to regard del Gesu as a crude and eccentric worker. This image has been more than exaggerated by the train load of copyiers who, while fancying they could copy the freehand style of del Gesu's later period, would never have dreamed of coming to grips with the kind of work represented here. This instrument displays complete coordination of hand and eye. It does so without sacrificing any spontaneity of flow.

Much of this spontaneity comes from the pressure of time which obviously hung over the Cremonese masters and which increased as the 18th century progressed. This can be seen quite clearly from the block and rib photographs. This urgency of work is demonstrated by missing splinters of wood, roughly split blocks, tooth plane marks on the ribs and knife cuts in the ribs where the knife tip has run off the lining during the cutting back process.



The linings and blocks are however structurally sound and, as can be seen from the photograph, the C linings are let into the corner blocks in the manner of Stradivari as described by Simone Sacconi in his *Secrets of Stradivari* (Cremona, 1979). The shape of the blocks indicates that this particular instrument was also constructed on a mould similar to the type used by Stradivari (Cremona Museum collection).

In comparison to the back and belly of this del Gesu, the rib thickness appears to be a little haphazard, ranging from 1.35 mm in places to very thin C ribs of less than 0.9 mm at the block areas. The linings range from 1.5 mm in thickness at the blocks to 2 mm in the bouts and are from 7 to 8 mm deep.

The head of the instrument bears the characteristic tool marks of del Gesu on both the horizontal and vertical planes of the scroll. They are less profuse than his later works and contribute more to the cutting of an accurately flowing scroll, rather than, as later, towards a freehand flow at the expense of accuracy. Like most of del Gesu's work the fluting at the back of the pegbox is shallow.



Tool marks are less visible on the rest of the instrument where the finish is exceptional. Again, unlike his later period there are, for example, almost no tool marks to be seen in the purfling channel of the C's and corners and no scraper marks anywhere on the outside, although a trace or two of the scraper can be seen on the insides of the back and belly.

The sound holes are finely cut yet bold. The right hole is slightly lower set and longer than the left. The stop itself is a little short (192 mm to the nicks on the right, 189 mm to the nicks on the left). The instrument bears an inscription on the back which reappeared while the instrument was being cleaned. It reads as follows: through the good attentions of Leon Sepret/bought from Madame Subosq de Bordeaux/thanks to Madame Emile Germain/the year of our Lord 1890 19 December/by Amedee Soil de Tournai.

We are willing to supply where possible any further details but please allow time. Write to Roger Hargrave, Geigenbau Machold, Ausser der Schleifmühle 46, D 28 Bremen 1, W. Germany.

THE STRAD is grateful to Geigenbau Machold and Tibor Varga for giving permission for the violin to be illustrated.

HISTORY

The Ex Soil Joseph Guarnerius del Gesu, 1733, is now owned by Tibor Varga who has played the violin or more than twenty years (all his recordings since

the 1960s have been made using this iolin). The fullest account of the instrument's history before Varga's ownership may be found in a letter from Alfred Hill to F Frank Otwell, the previous owner, dated 17 August 1927:

Dear Mr Otwell,

The history of your Guarneri del Gesu violin dated 1733 is, as far as same is known to us, as follows.

I became acquainted with the instrument in 1884 when on a visit to Bordeaux and there met the well known wine merchant, M. Dubosq Lettré, one of the best amateurs of his day. He had a small Collection of instruments and this "Guarneri" was by far and away the best violin amongst them. I gathered that he has bought it some 20 30 years previously) from one of the Paris luthiers, either Charles Mauotel, or J. B. Vuillaume: I am inclined to think, from the former, and would add that, at the time, the violin was valued at Fcs.10,000 (£400). About 1890, M. Dubosq decided to sell the fiddle and it passed through the intermediary of E. Germain of Paris to the Belgian amateur, M. Amedee Soil of Tournai, the price paid being Fcs.25,000 (£1000).



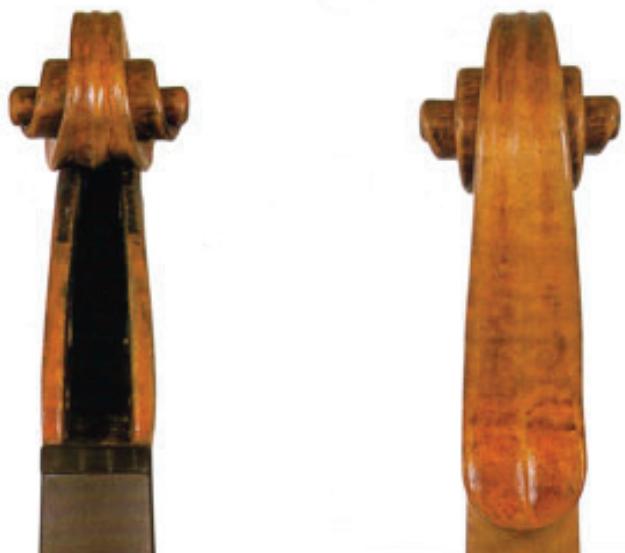
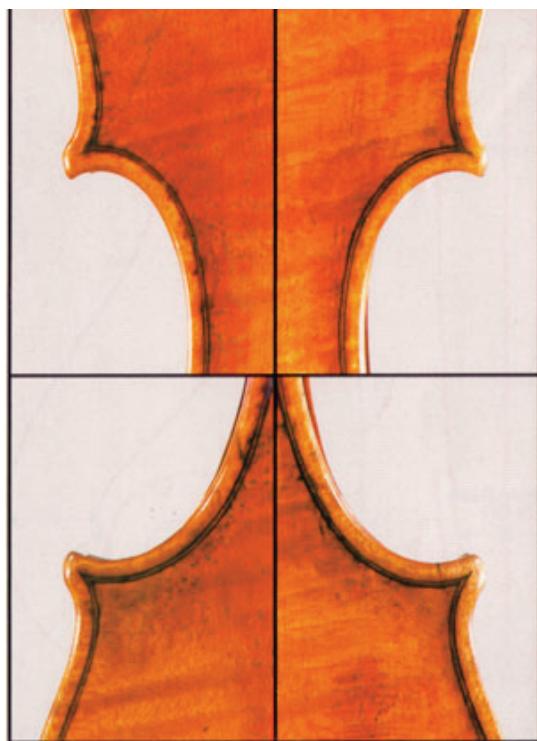
M. Soil was advised to make this purchase by one of his intimate friends, M. Deprets; both these gentlemen had passed several years together in Moscow, the former as Belgian Consul, the latter as a wine merchant, & both took a prominent part in the musical life of that City, the former as violinist, the latter as a cellist. In due course, M. Soil retired to Tournai, his native town. M. Deprets to Paris. M. Soil retained possession of this violin and two fine Stradivari violins until 1911, when, on account of his advancing years, he decided to part with them and the three instruments passed into the hands of the Paris firm of Caressa & Fraples, from whom we subsequently acquired your "Guarneri" and, some years later, one of the above mentioned "Stradivaris". We then sold the former to Mr Henri Verbrugghen, the well known violinist then living in Glasgow, who later occupied a prominent position in the musical world

of Sydney, Australia, migrating thence to Minneapolis in the United States where he is now living. The subsequent history of the violin is well known to you as to ourselves!

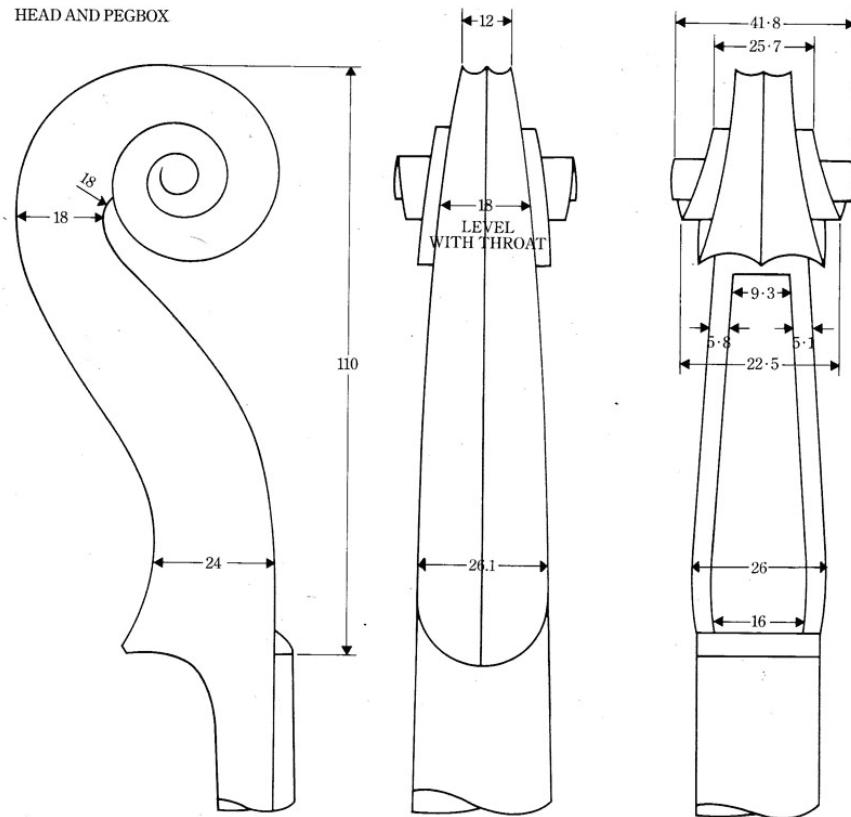
Yours faithfully

Alfred Hill

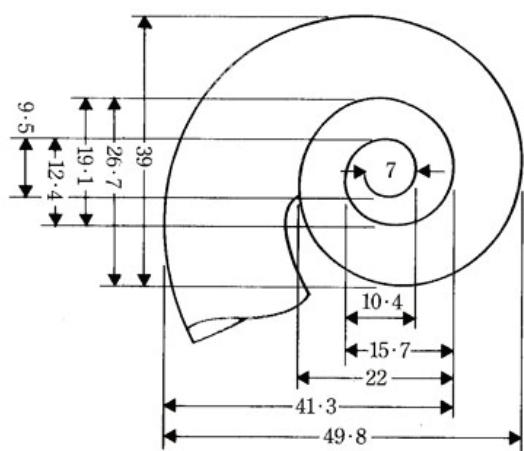
The violin had been certified by, among others, W. E. Hill & Sons, Emil Herrmann and Rembert Wurlitzcr.



HEAD AND PEGBOX



LEFT SIDE



RIGHT SIDE

