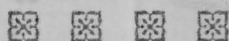


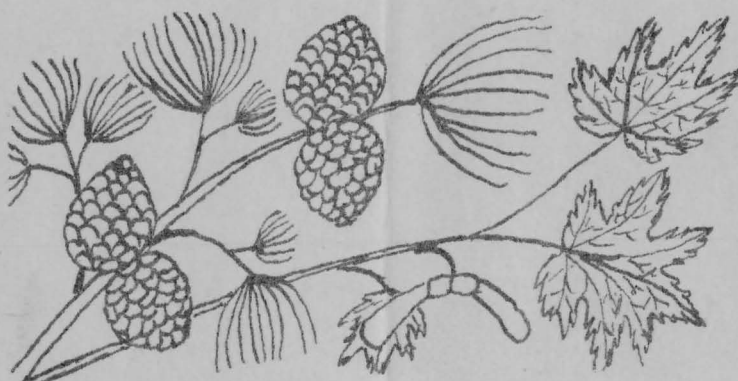
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August 1959

The Violin Makers' Journal



THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE VIOLIN MAKERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Devoted to the development and encouragement of the art of violin making
in Canada.

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THE VIOLIN MAKERS JOURNAL

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE VIOLIN MAKERS ASSOCIATION OF B.C.

Officers of the Association:

President: Mr. Gilson Heyworth, 1683 Renfrew St.
Vice President: Mr. Harold Briggs, 13367 North Bluff Rd. White Rock B.C.
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Secretary: Mr. Don White, 4631 W. 14th Ave.

Meetings held the second Saturday of each month at 4360 Main St.

EDITOR: DON WHITE

EDITORIAL

THE VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Undoubtedly it is the duty of any local editor attached to a magazine of a musical nature to comment on Vancouver's second International Festival.

It would appear to us that if our Festival is to retain world recognition a great deal more care must be exercised in programme selection. We realize that this is a difficult matter. Drawing cards must be arranged that will appeal to all walks of life.

After the outstanding success of the Mozart Opera "Don Giovanni" last year why not follow it up with say "The Marriage of Figaro" instead the little known and not too exciting Gluck's "Orpheus and Eurydice" was produced.

At a song recital one expects "Art" songs to predominate but two and a half hours of the lesser known German Lieder songs, and other works presented for the first time becomes a little toxins to the average listener. Why not insert some of Brahms Schubert or Schumann's beautiful and well known selections, or an instrumentalist to relieve the monotony? Definately poor programming!

Let us hasten to praise the Festival Orchestra and the wise choise of Conductors including our own Irwin Hoffman. All programming and Guest Artists skillfully planned. The Hungarian Quartet whose superb playing drew full houses.

The C.B.C. Chamber Orchestra who really comes to life under Guest Conductors and well chosen programmes. Both the Ballet Espanol and the Takarazuka Dance Theatre showed talent of the first order.

Some of the first concerts showed very poor attendance but the general high standard drew packed houses to succeeding performances.

In all a Festival of very high calibre and worthy of International Recognition.

.....



LOCAL NEWS

by HAROLD BRIGGS

Hello Everybody:

I have been reading about the fellow who was so narrow minded he could look thru a keyhole with both eyes. Nothing like this is likely to happen to a fiddle maker since we specially put two peek holes in a violin top, and they are put in on a slant to accommodate all widths of eyes. Just as a precaution, be sure you don't try to look thru one "F" hole with both eyes at the same time.

Our meeting held on July 11th was mostly given over to hearing and discussing reports from various members of the committee who were appointed at our previous meeting to investigate ways and means of holding some sort of competition and exhibit of our violins and of bringing our work to the notice of the public. Mr. Helin had investigated the possibility of giving concert in the Oakridge auditorium and hiring a top grade string quartet who would use our violins during the concert and our work would be on display during the intermission. The costs of this suggested concert proved to be quite high. The rental fee for the auditorium would be \$50.00 and the musicians charges would be at least \$400.00. Then there would be advertising, printing of tickets and commission on the sale of the tickets. All of which seems to add up to pricing the idea beyond our ability to finance.

One committee member had contacted the T. Eaton Co., who stated that they had discontinued the sale of all small musical instruments but they were of the opinion that a display such as ours would attract considerable interest if some members would be in attendance and actually working at the making of a violin.

The art gallery had been contacted and it was learned that our instruments could be put on display there with no charge from the Art Gallery.

Mr. Friess suggested that we might get some publicity and possibly sales of instruments by giving a few instruments to the Vancouver School board for use in school orchestras etc.. It would be up to each individual member to decide whether or not he wished to donate an instrument for this purpose.

The Community Arts Council had been contacted and it was felt we could expect no assistance from them except for a little publicity.

Our President and Secretary gave us a brief but very interesting resume of the Arts Resources Conference and an outline of the work of the Canada Council.

Our fellow member Mr. Ernie Linberg was still in hospital and would be glad to have visitors.

Hope for more and better news next time.

.....

THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF VARNISH

The Lost Art of Varnish Making:

Why you may ask did the art of making Violin varnish the Italian way become lost? Well I think a little thought and observation will answer that Question, bear in mind that we are dealing with a period of time covering the 16th, 17th & 18th, century's when the Education of the working classes was not what it is today. Many folks could neither read nor write, so how could you expect them to sit down and write long articles about Varnishing Violins for your benefit, it wouldn't put any money in their pockets if they had, and you must remember that money is No.1, item to a poor family. Add to this the fact that there was only 1 here and there capable of readable composition, some had to pay others to print or write their Violin Labels because they could not even write or print their own Names and Addresses.

It is an historical fact that Stradivarius once sent a fairly large consignment of Violins to London to be sold retail for the very modest sum of £6. each and they were all returned as unsaleable.

The new redish played upon, those are the Violins which today fetch sums of money that take your breath away, but the poor man who made them could not get £6, each for them.

There are 2 possible theorys about the Varnish problem, first if they made the Varnish themselves, they taught their sons how to make it, the second idea is that they bought it from a family who earned a living making the varnish in quantity to supply all the musical instrument makers for miles around, and if after a time that family died out leaving no heirs the art would fade out, in any case, there is also one more reason why the recipes for the old oil Varnishes may have died out between 1740 & 1760 great changes in the manufacture of varnishes were introduced. The old soft gums and their menstrua were dis

The reason for this change was that carved furniture was on the way out and plain smooth surface styles of furniture were coming in. What many people fail to realize is that those much praised oil varnishes were not produced for violins only but were used on the furniture made and sold in the same period.

The old soft badly wearing varnishes no longer sufficed for the protection and covering of such surfaces hence the new processes. The hard Copal gums hitherto undissolvable, or only partially so were found to yield entirely on proper heating and fusion and the problem of durability, hardness, and unchangeableness was soon solved; but of course with the laying aside of the old recipes the Italian Wonder Oil Varnish became a lost art.

There has been many guesses as to what this varnish was made of and I suppose your guess is as good as mine, well you will probably say "What is your guess?". Well I'll tell you, there is no doubt that there were several kinds of Oil Varnishes made in those days, now I will ask you to remember what I said a while back, and that is that most of the Violin Makers were not rich people, and if the varnish was made by a separate varnish maker I doubt very much if they were much better off than the Violin Makers, you see it is usually the Merchants and salesmen who make the money and not the craftsmen, it is the same today, I know I am bread and butter, and occasionally a little jam 55 years old. Well I think that the varnish used in the "Cremonese Old Masters" was Real Amber Oil Varnish, I can hear you saying how do you know big head, well I don't, this is only what I believe, and I will tell you why, I have used Amber Oil Varnish and its the tops, I used Harris Oil Varnish as advertised every Month in the Strad Journal. Now you will probably say

"where is the connection?" Well its this way: I have just told you that these chaps had to get along as cheaply as they could, not being rich folk, and you will in reply probably say, "But Amber has always been pretty expensive stuff." This was probably so but what was not generally known was that within a short distance of Cremona important Amber Deposits were worked from time for carving, they would be cast aside and were available to any person probably free who could find a use for them and cared to gather them up and transport them to his premises.

Another pointer is that an English Chemist of great repute name Perkins detected Amber in varnish scraped from a Joseph Guarnerius violin.

Another point is that no other gum will give the fine yellow color and characterisitic sheen, called by Charles Reade "The Hidden Fire" which is the result of the very high refractive power of Amber the highest of any gum substance, and almost equal to Rock Crystal among minerals.

It has always been Amber with which the great experimenters worked when attempting to make varnish.

That the Amber theory was believed in by English Makers, Contemporary with the Italian Makers who were then using it.

That Lupot tried it, and that the Great Vuillaume made many trials with Amber in search of the true varnish.

It seems that the people who poh poh the Amber Theory are the ones who have failed to produce satisfactory varnish if any at all from the Crude Amber, but right here in England the Family of J.E. Harris, who as far back as 1893 were Violin Makers and repairers are making and selling, and have been for many years, real amber oil Varnish of excellent quality.

It is best to use a 1" French Hog Flat Brush.

Good Luck, and Good Fiddling.

Ron Lapwood.

.....

LETTER FROM WALTER A JACKLIN:

Dear Mr. White:

I have just been reading the article by Mr. Joseph Michelman in the last issue of the Journal and think that he, and possibly some of our other members, may be unduly pessimistic about present day instruments.

Mr. Michelman laments and among other things says, "Progress has also been to comprehend the assistance that properly applied scientific research can give them."

I have read all the scientific articles on the violin from M.I.T., Harvard, Cambridge, etc., since 1923, and if they contained anything of value that could be applied by a maker I have missed it, and that I doubt.

The last time I was in the city I was solo in Swan Lake, and during intermission had a chat with the Concertmaster, who was playing a violin by Carl Becker, five years old. When I asked him where his Amati was,

cont..on Page 7

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ON PRIMING OR FILLER COATS FOR VIOLINS

by Clifford A. Hoing

Modern methods of violin making are usually based as nearly as possible on methods used by the finest old Italian makers, when these methods are known.

With regard to the filler or priming coats used by makers in recent years, these have been of many different kinds. To list but a few of them; Olive oil, Linseed oil, white of egg, whole egg, mastic, sealing wax, varnish, shelac, propolis (from bees), turpentine and resin etc.

It has of late been suggested that it is advantageous to expel any moisture from the plates of the violin and treat them with some substance that will prevent absorption of any further moisture.

In order to do this, many makers have resorted to the use of linseed oil, applied hot, cold, boiled, or mixed with a solvent of some kind.

Michelman, in his book, gives much information on this. He has tested absorption, after treatment with linseed oil on the outside of the violin only, and found that the wood then resisted droplets of water applied to the inside of the back. This proved that the oil had penetrated right through the wood.

Now, I agree that to prevent a violin being affected by atmospheric conditions, humidity etc, is a good idea. But the above test does not necessarily mean that a humid atmosphere would be resisted by a fiddle treated with linseed oil.

I submit that there is no evidence to suggest that the old Italian makers used linseed oil!

Here are several reasons why I do not think they did. The inside of the finest Italian violins do not resist water. Another thing is that there is no difficulty in repairing cracks in old Italian violins as there would certainly be if they had been treated with linseed oil!

Further, it is a well known fact that old Italian violins are very temperamental to atmospherical conditions! This proves more than anything, that the inside of the instruments have received no treatment that insulates them from any dampness of the air.

A good many English makers have used linseed oil as a priming or filler coat, leaving the instruments so treated for a number of years before varnishing as suggested by some of your readers, but I have never yet heard what I consider to be a really fine toned instrument, that had been treated with linseed oil. The tone never has that reedy quality (as in such reeded instruments as the oboe) that is possessed by the finest toned instruments.

One English maker who made hundreds of fiddles during his lifetime, used linseed oil because it improved the appearance of the wood under the varnish. But he said that the Italians never used top left edge of the back where the hand rubs the varnish off with wear. The oil treated wood thus exposed, turned black. He said, "you will never find this effect on an old Italian fiddle."

Michelman found that linseed oil never really sets and even after many years it retains its oily characteristics, though it turns into a substance of a different composition. I think this oily treatment tends to muffle the tone. Make the comparisons I

have mentioned above and then remember the most entertaining visit of Mr. Irwin Hoffman to the Associations meeting. There should be something to learn from the tonal comparisons made with the Amati violin. Don't forget that there are better toned fiddles than an Amati too!

And when I find the magic formula for a priming or filler that will give you old Italian tone without bothering about proper construction, I will let you know!!!

I am glad to note that you reprinted the article on Fiddle Faking by H. Werro of Switzerland and I would add to it the following remarks.

Publicity given to the trial of a dishonest violin dealer in Switzerland recently, and his conviction on several charges should bring home the truth to many players on the relative values of old and new violins.

It is obvious that if new or comparatively new violins can be passed off as Old Masters, the tone, workmanship and general appearance must bear a near similarity. If in fact the tone of an old Italian instrument was as superior as is claimed by many dealers, then it would not be possible to mistake a new instrument for one of the Old Masters.

I myself have owned and repaired many Old Italian fiddles and can assure, first-hand, those who rever the Old Master makers, that in most cases the superiority of tone of these instruments rest in the imagination of the credulous enthusiast.

Many times I have allowed clients to test old and new instruments against Old Masters..... to the advantage of the modern instrument, and usually to the disbelief of the player.

In a book called "Scaccomatto Alla Crisi" (Checkmate to the Crisis); by Giovanni Ivigilia, written in Italian but including brief translations in four other languages, there is much information given on the fake violin "racket".

It states that in 1949 the town of Cremona was prevented from organizing an exhibition of antique violins because the most reputable dealers claimed the right for themselves alone to judge which instruments were to be considered genuine.

"In 1937 in Cremona 2000 instruments with pasted in classic labels were handed in, of which only about 40 were proved to be genuine."

"The famous Stradivari "Greffuhle" was confiscated in Switzerland. It has now been returned to the legitimate owning firm with the injunction not to offer it any more for sale as genuine."

Ivigilia was the person responsible for bringing the fraud cases against Messrs. Hug or Zurich and Werro of Bern in respect of fiddle faking.

In the "Time" magazine of December 1958, it was stated that "Werro hastily repurchased five violins and a cello for the total of about \$60,000, before he was brought to trial.

All credit to those who speak, act and publish the truth in these things. Players who are wise will see now the advantage of buying instruments of quality direct from the makers, and choose for the tone and performance of the instrument instead of its supposed age or origin. In most cases the cause of good music will gain by greater beauty of tone and the player will save much money.

If anyone still doubts the ability of modern makers to produce fine toned instruments, let them carefully read the following that was taken from the catalogue of a well-known firm of violin dealers in U.S.A., now closed.

"If the violin be a very old one... it will probably require a complete going over. This, as a rule, includes the following; a new neck grafted in the old head, regratuating of top and back, new bass-bar, regluing of all cracks, fingerboard, bridge, tailpiece, strings, etc. Often corners and edges have to be replaced, soundholes rebuilt and varnish retouched....."

Wherin can the reader see any merit remaining of the Old Master, after the above treatment? I think it more likely that a competent maker could produce better results from scratch. This is not just my fancy either, for many players are using modern violins and violas because the tone is actually superior to most old ones. The chief merit of the antique is in "SNOB VALUE".

.....

Mr. Jacklin's Letter cont..

he said, "That thing's too much money to lug around the country to get smashed or stolen, this Becker suits me fine." Some others: Italiano Quartet, cello 1951. Boccarini Quintet, cello 1953; violin 1954. CM. Vancouver Symphony, Szlepesy-Bella 1880. Violinist in my own trio just recently turned down an Amati (small) preferring her modern French. I could mention others.

So long as we have makers around like those I shall mention below, we have little cause to bewail our progress.

Becker, Chicago. Moennig, Philadelphia. Clifford Hoing, England. Ellerseick, California. Bisiack, Chichioni. Capizinni, Italy. Millant, Paris. -- but why go on? All these people and many others are turning out top grade work, suitable for the hands of first rank professionals.

Walter A. Jacklin.

.....

Letter from Alvin S. Hopping:

Dear Mr. White:

I have found much of interest in your Journal and new tests have been suggested by some of the items I have read, more about that later.

Most authorities agree that the best wood obtainable should be used in violin construction. All other factors being equal the wood having the highest knock tone should be used.

Testing equipment of special design having very high accuracy is about ready which automatically vibrates the specimen under test over the audible spectrum and produces a photographic record of the response of the specimen. This same testing procedure can be used to test the effect of filler and varnish. Investigation of these two important subjects should be of interest to your association.

My work still continues with Dr. Saunders and Mrs. Hutchins but I could find time to do an article on selection of wood if you think that would be helpful. There may be wood on this continent superior to European wood tho much testing may be required to flush it out.

Alvin S. Hopping, Lake Hopatcong, N.J.

.....

COMMENTS by Raymond R. Haake, Whitefish, Montana:

As to violins improving with age and use, it is of course foolish to think that a poor violin can improve thereby. It has to be well made and varnished out of the right material in the first place.

I feel sure that the best old Italian makers treated their wood before varnishing. I have handled and played on so many of the old Italian master violins, and there is no better to have a good healthy new violin than one of the lesser old ones which usually have been much repaired and misused. Most of the old violins are over-rated, the dealers of course trying to hold the prices up. I have not made an entire violin of my own, but I can not hold back any longer. Had done a lot of repair work and adjusting. I was born in Winon, Minn. in 1898. Served in the U.S. Marine Corps in World War I, after which I returned to school to study electrical engineering. Went into sales work in Chicago. Worked for the music house of Lyon & Healy for some time, as salesman. Had charge of the business and of the repair dept. for a time, and learned a bit about violins there. John Dubbs was head of the "Old Violin" Dept. then. I was always a violin nut, and have done a lot of playing. I found that one of my uncles had made violins in Germany. In fact I was told that his violins were sold before they were finished. Wouldn't that be grand for most of us? We could really become enthused then.

.....

Learn to live a day at a time that is tough enough.....

.....

Letter from Carmen White:

Dear Don:

Just received the latest issue of the Journal, and it is terrific! I don't see how you do it, or where you find the time and patience to do such an excellent job of editing. I am really glad to see all these fine articles, and am learning a lot every time I read them. You mentioned a "struggle for supremacy" between several of us contributors--please let me explain again that I do not so regard these matters. As you say, each one has his own separate developed methods, and only time can tell whether any one of us has done anything or not. I am thoroughly convinced that no modern violin maker can hope for any professional acceptance of his work--that is, he will never live to see it--as it is only after a maker has been dead 50 years that the connoisseurs will examine his work with more care and will give him a hearing. The

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only modern makers who get professional hearing in a serious manner are the Italian makers, both in their native countries and in the United States--and I am sure it is so in Canada. I do not say this with any bitterness; it is just a simple statement of fact, and we must accept it, with regret perhaps, but true nevertheless. Believe it or not, I have been told by two professional violinists that if I would change my name and label to an Italian name, that I could readily sell my instruments! Of course, the idea is preposterous, but true, nevertheless.

I am examining these methods carefully, Any time I find one which will please me more than my own, I shall immediately adopt it. So far, I have not found one, but am still experimenting and trying. My method has between 70 and 80 actual examples and tests to prove its worth. It is not new, nor is it original with me. Professional violinists may praise your work, they will not buy it! So, we must work just to satisfy ourselves--not for any financial reward at all.

With sincere personal compliments and thanks for your good work, I am,

Carmen White.

.....

The fellow who boasts about what he's going to do tomorrow usually is quiet about what he did yesterday.

.....

MORE ABOUT AUDIBILITY TESTS by Larry Owen

It was very refreshing to again be challenged, and this time by Mr. Hoing. It points out what I have been trying to say since my first letter. Conditions need to be established that can test in such a way as to allow of no argument, but to offer definite proof. The criticism of the judges with mixed experience was of unquestionable value, and I believe all of the tests by audiences of which I have read have suffered from the same lack of control. There may be argument about which violin has the more beautiful tone, but which "carries" better can be proved.

The point of open field was that it has no special acoustical properties of its own as a hall might. Incidentally I have tested fine violins in auditoriums, with the same results. But again I must admit the conditions are not properly controlled. It is a disputed opinion that good violins carry well! Lots try to use logic or established knowledge to consider the problem. It is established that all things being equal a vibration with greater amplitude (louder) will take longer to diminish in its

amplitude below the audible range than one which had less amplitude. Also it is known that the ear hears certain ranges better than others. Put the two together, loudness and in the best audible range, and the two make the essentials of "carrying power". That property is one of the principal arguments of violin dealers. They speak of the master violins (an many much less) as tho they operated under completely different laws, and they never can explain those laws.

But applying "logic" and calling upon various "authorities" only gives rise to pointless debate. The violin association should become something other than a literary society. Personally I don't trust much that I read in it because I never know if the ideas can be proved in any way. May I suggest that with the Vancouver membership there should be sufficient violins of varying quality that could be used for testing, and with such a membership persons could be tested to find who could consistently pick violins that do carry best in one of several different auditoriums. Using only several judges that can fairly consistently pick one violin's "carrying power" from another, test one violin against another until it is found which class or classes of violins "carry best". Actually almost anyone should be able to test that. They can simply go away from the sound until it can no longer be heard. If one can be heard consistently further away than another, it "carries" best.

Why on earth don't you folks get busy and devise some tests for yourselves, rather than continuing the groundless debate. Admittedly some areas don't lend themselves to proof, but why not tackle the areas that can, and find some Facts.

I would be glad to have anyone interested in the subject write me.

Lary Owen, 535 Oakridge Drive,
Redwood City, California

.....

Letter from Earle Sangster:

Dear Don:

I have just returned from a nice trip to Nova Scotia to see my three bothers there. Left her on June 21st and got back July 3rd. The weather was grand and I had a wonderful time. Stopped in New York and spent three hours with my friend Rembert Werrlitzer--saw some fine violins and bows, "The Circle Strad" and the "Baron Rothschild", a fine "Bergonzie" and many others also a Gaspar DeSalò violin the only one I have ever seen. It seems funny to me but nearly everyone wants a dark varnish, yet all the Strads I have ever seen except one was a light golden red color and must have been very light in color when first varnished.

Your last copy of the Journal is very very interesting and I enjoyed it. Mr. Michelman's answer to my article is interesting but does not prove anything and the analysis of the old varnish may show all the elements he says but some of our modern varnish may do the same. Another point, how does Mr. Michelman know that the old Italians used potassium carbonate, calcium chloride or alum chloride. He doesn't know, I don't know and neither does anyone else. The most interesting thing in Mr. Michelman's book is on page 97. "The behavior of Linseed oil upon Drying." If Mr. Michelman had applied the oil to a good piece of violin top wood and kept it in strong light for eight years he would have learned more. Now a word about seasoning wood with water. It is known to many that this is the quickest way to season wood. It is done at least two years to violin wood before it is worked up. I wish that any violin maker who can will go out in the country and see if he can find a spruceboard on an old fence on the south side of a barn--take a piece home plane it smooth at right angles to the grain and then look at it with a strong magnifying glass and at the same time look at a piece of his best top wood. First he will note that he cannot with his sharpest plane, plane the

exposed wood without a nap on it. The new wood will plane as smooth as glass. In the exposed wood the grain is just like steel and the wood is brown all the way through. The new wood so white and shinny. .

Lastweek I strung up #70 and 71, they are two very fine violins. A lady who is first violinist of the musicals here came in and wanted a slight adjustment made on her Gagliano. I asked her to try #70, she said "Mr. Sangster it is wonderful but is so new sounding." I know exactly what she meant and this is what every violin maker is up against. One who owns a fine old violin and plays for a living will not purchase a new violin no matter how good it is. I could cite many experiences on this. Must

Must go to work Don, keep up the good work and with Best Wishes.

E.H. Sangster.

.....

EXHIBITION BY THE VIOLIN MAKERS' ASSOCIATION OF B.C.

An Exhibit of String instruments made by members of The Violin Maker's Association of B.C. Will be held at the Store of T. Eaton & Co., Vancouver during the first week of October, 1959.

About 60 instruments will be necessary for this display and all members are requested to do their utmost to make the exhibit a success.

All instruments will be for sale for the amount corresponding to an attached price tag.

The exhibit will include a booth in which all the different parts of a violin will be displayed and at least one maker will be present at all times to explain to the public the methods of violin making. One or more instruments will be under construction during the exhibition.

The T. Eaton & Co. are going to a great deal of expense regarding advertising to make this event known to the public and it is to be hoped that all members will also do their best to make a success of such a venture.

It is being planned to hold an Old Time Fiddlers Contest in connection with the Exhibition.

.....

If your troubles are many and your rewards are few.....

Remember the mighty Oak was once a nut like you.....

.....

Old Age is that period when your thoughts turn from
Passion to Pension.....

.....

SCIENTIFIC REFLECTIONS

by John Lawson

The letter I received and your editors kindly comments, following publication in the February 1959 issue of The Journal of my somewhat unorthodox thoughts on violin tone, encourage me to return to the subject. With your indulgence, I offer the following comments in the same spirit of optimistic discovery and with the respectful reminder that barriers are often broken when old ideas are thoroughly shaken up..

Cast a stone into the smooth waters of a quiet pond and watch the ripples spread and undulate evenly away from the point of disturbance. Now throw another stone of different weight and shape and watch the ripples. It is scarcely possible for the human eye to record the minute differences in wave structure, induced by the different stones - but even without scientific proof, it would be reasonable to suppose that such differences do in fact exist. (Individual frames from a cine-camera film, if subjected to microscopic examination, would probably prove this point.)

Although I have no scientific status, I like to apply the mind of a keen amateur; I am one of those persons, also, who can still find pleasure in that childish delight of throwing stones into a pond and watching the ripples. In those moments of abandonment, flashes of great truths have changed the lives of men far greater than me. Isaac Newton once confessed that he was "as a small boy playing on a beach, now and then finding a smoother pebble, while the great ocean of truth stretched before me."

A body of water, unlike a violin plate, is an every-changing and changeable thing. But the two are equally responsive to a disturbance, each conducting shock waves from a nodal point to its outermost bounds. Each, too, sets up a condition known as reverberation - a mixing of the sound or shock waves with those which have bounced back from the edges of the body.

A simple experiment illustrates this. Drop a small object into the centre of a round basin filled with water and with a strong light overhead. You will notice how the ring wave bounces back and forth between centre and sides of the bowl until the wave has "suffocated" itself. Introduce one or two "breakwaters" and see how the shape of the waves alters quite distinctly. The light overhead will cast a shadow of the wave pattern conveniently on the bottom of the bowl. In a controlled experiment it would no doubt be possible to induce precisely the same wave pattern every time.

Apply these remarks to a violin. The wave patterns set up in the top plate will, of course, be considerably more complex, there being at least eight edges to reflect them. These are, as I see them: upper bouts, inner bouts, lower bouts, top and bottom. This complicated mixing of waves in the centres of each bout (the three points along the centre line) is, I believe, a major factor controlling the fiddle's resonance, with the air volume of the box following closely in importance.

Logically, it follows that the basic shape and structure of the top plate, must control wave pattern and, ultimately, the tone quality. Now, if we backtrack a little, we reach another controlling factor - the all-important reflecting edges of the plate. If it were possible to eliminate these edges, or at least to reduce their capacity to reflect, I think we might well improve the tone. We should then no longer have these centres of confusion and conflict where waves are tossed and jostled against one another. Instead, the vibrations would flow smoothly in one direction only, enabling the wood to sing in its true voice, free from the overtones of anguish!

You will think of several ways to damp down the reflection from the edges.

Here are some that occur to me. Set up a sound post in the centre of all three bouts. Having determined the correct height and end-slope, there is no reason I can see why they should not be lightly glued into place on the back, so that they fit snugly against the top when it is placed in position. It is possible that posts in the centres may also prevent some of the waves from spreading through the plate, with loss of power. Then why not try a colonnade of soundposts right around the instrument at intervals of, say, two inches and about an inch away from the walls? This might help to draw off those unwanted reflections. Perhaps even a solid, continuous, "sound wall" might be the answer - a kind of violin within a violin.

I have it in mind to make a violin without the conventional walls - that is to say, top and back carved from deeper blocks so that their edges fall into natural walls, which could be glued together like the two halves of an Easter egg. It would, of course, mean a considerable "softening" of the usual outline, but in this unending pursuit of perfect tone, what matters the shape of the box if the results are justified? And is not the egg nature's most perfect shape? In such a violin, I would confidently expect to eradicate the aforementioned centres of disturbance, since the vibrations or sound waves could then travel right round the instrument without meeting sharp, dead edges. I might even discover a new sound and make my fortune overnight, like some rock'n'roll "artist" who discovers a new way to twist his tonsils and vibrate his nostrils. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

My very best wishes to all those unforgettable friends I made in the Association.

John Lawson, London, England

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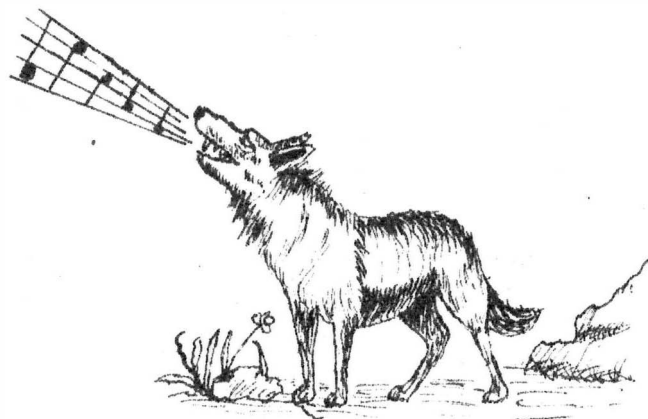
Every new baby is proof

That God has not yet given up on man.....

.....

WOOLF NOTES

by The Editor



CORRESPONDENCE:

Our mail is becoming so heavy that I might be well to warn correspondents that their letters may not always be answered immediately - unless I hire a stenographer - even that might not work unless she were very unattractive! This is not to suggest that you write fewer letters. We must have them, they are the life blood of the Journal. I might suggest that when you write anything that can be used in our pages please do so on a separate sheet. I spend hours wading through letters selecting material. What ever you do don't let the well go dry.

A GOOD BOW:

We know that a violin, however superb it might be, will not respond to its fullest unless the best of strings are used. Also with the violinist, however good the violin or artist, the performance will not be the highest possible unless a good bow is used.

This was one of the points stressed by Mr. Irwin Hoffman at the talk he gave us, some months back. I felt that he displayed his bows to us just as proudly as his Amati.

Mr. Hoffman suggested that there is only one bow for each violin and artists spend their lives searching for the ideal combination.

Speaking of Bows, my good friend Alfred Slotnick of Brooklyn states he has the Book on Bows by Joseph Roda from Wm. Lewis & Son and was so inspired as to make a bow for himself. He says he learned a lot by the experience and is convinced that anyone capable of making a violin is capable of making a fine bow. Our local member Mr. Peder Svindsay has made several splendid examples.

MR. JOHN LAMSON COMMENTS OF CARMEN WHITE'S ARTICLE:

Carmen White, in his Fiddle Fallacies (brilliant title!) said (in paragraph 4): "How can there have been any real differences in the maples and spruce they used and the same woods of today? Has Nature changed her methods of growing wood?" He asks this question in the certain knowledge that the answer will be "How ridiculous even to think that Nature has changed her method of growing wood". But since the time of the Masters we have experienced a phenomenon called atomic radiation and although the scientists (or politicians) assure us that its level has not really upset the balance of Nature, I am sure it has affected the growth patterns of trees. These changes could be fantastically small, but when a piece of wood from such a tree is worked into a violin plate and high-frequency sound waves are made to permeate that plate, then these tiny structural mutations will be magnified appreciably. Unnatural radiation could have (and has been proved to have) a deforming effect on growing bodies. When one

thinks how much extra-natural radiation must be accumulating over the forests of Scandinavia and Canada, so close to Russian experimental explosions, I little doubt that our sources of violin wood is affected.

HOBBY SHOW:

By the time this issue is published the F.N.E Hobby Show will be in full swing. Said to be the largest show of its kind in the world this show has exhibits from many countries. Beautiful wood work and displays of a hundred other Hobbies. Among the violin exhibitions will be Earle Sangsters, I.B. Irwin both of Dallas Texas and Wm. Briggs, Sherman Oaks, California. Need we also mention Bob Wallace with his magnificent inlaid violins. Local makers will also do their part in supplying good competition.

ITALIAN VIOLIN MAKERS ASSOCIATION:

I have a stack of literature six inches high received from the Italian Association. It looks as if I would have to take a course in Italian as there appears to be much useful information now hidden from me. I hope to talk more about the wonderful Italians after I have some of it translated.

ROELOF WEERTMAN'S BOOK:

On the following page we present the third instalment of this book. Now you are getting into the subject, let me know what your reactions are.

.....

NO NIGHTIES

A small girl was taken to church for the first time. When everyone knelt down, she whispered: "what are they going to do?

"They are going to say their prayers," whispered back her mother."

The child looked up in amazement; then, in a loud voice, she exclaimed:

"What, with all their clothers on?"

.....

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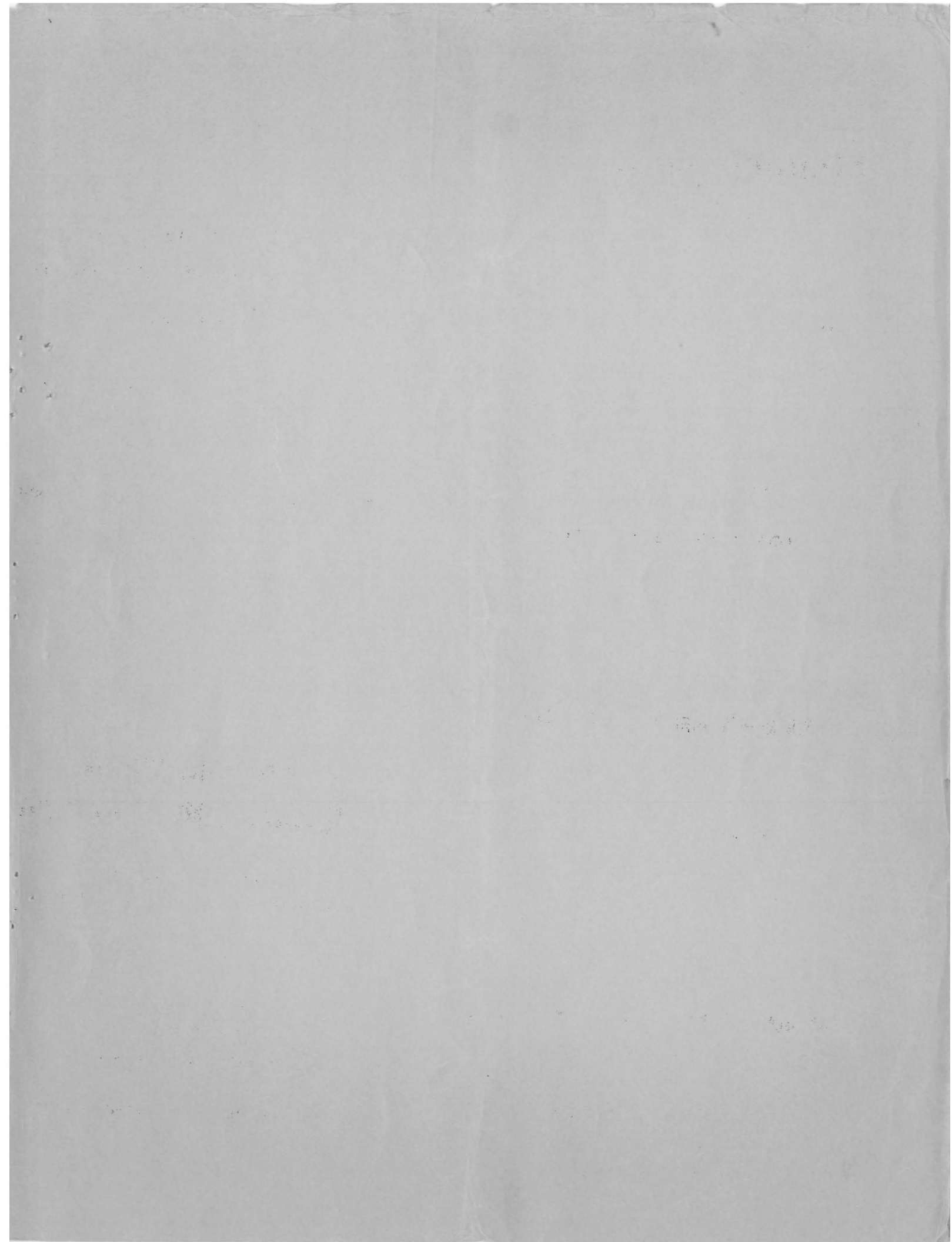
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