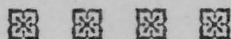


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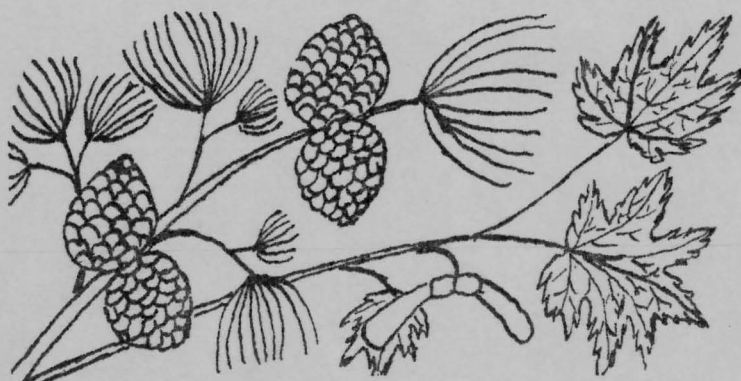
*April
1959*

*Langster
filler + varnish*

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.
Treasurer: Mr. Floyd Holly, 2636 W. 6th Ave.
Secreta Mr. Don White,

ry:

Meetings held the second Saturday of each month

VOL..2...No.6.....EDITOR: DON WHITE.....April, 1959

We are now entering upon our third year as an association.

I, as your new president, will no doubt find it rather difficult to follow in the footsteps of our late president, who so ably steered us through our birth pangs. A great deal of honest praise is due to Mr. Friess for his time and effort in getting us to hold together and keep on an even keel.

Mr. Don White has done an excellent job as our secretary and publisher and editor of our Journal and we should consider ourselves very lucky in having such an ardent worker for our cause.

There are several members who have each month been giving Mr. White some assistance in putting the Journal together. They are, Mr. Huggins, Mr. Holly, Mr. Jones, Mr. Svindsay, Mr. Hyde, Mr. Waters, Mr. Helin and Mr. Hawes.

Then there is the Rev. Wright who along with the late "Doc" Porter were at the very root of our inception.

Thanks is also due to Mr. Holly for his able management of the treasury.

I do feel that it is incumbent on me as your representative to thank them all for what they have done to forward our march along the road to better fiddle making.

Personally I have hopes that at some future date Vancouver will become known as the Cremona of the Pacific. In order to accomplish this we will all have to literally, pull our socks up. In many cases, not as to workmanship, for we have some really wonderful artists along that line, but to really get the polished tone of the old Cremona violins.

We need above all constructive criticism by competent on the line and tell us what is wrong. Our great trouble is, often musicians who play our instruments and tell us they are very good, just to be polite, and thus we and our fiddles are "darned with faint praise," and we get nowhere.

All this is going to take considerable time, however even Cremona made violins for over a hundred years before it produced Stradivari. Therefore, I say let us not despair and start writing epitaphs on our ability to produce what the true artist requires in the qualities of a responsive violin.

H.G. Heyworth



LOCAL NEWS

by HAROLD BRIGGS

I have been asked to assume the task of writing a little column of local news to be published in the Journal each month. If this enterprise is to be successful, it will require the co-operation of each member of our association, for I can't get news worth writing about out of thin air, so each and every one of our membership is being asked to let me know of any events that may be of interest to our organization. I realize that these news items will be mainly of interest to those of our members who were unable to attend our meeting and my main aim will be to make these absentees realize just what they are missing, so they will make a more determined effort to be present next time.

March 14th was our annual meeting and election of officers. Mr. Geo. Friess who has so successfully presided over our association for the first two years of its existence did not wish to continue in office, so Mr. H.G. Heyworth our Vice President was elected President, yours truly was named to take his place as Vice President. Mr. Don White, secretary and Mr. Floyd Holly, treasurer. All officers were elected by acclamation. A word of appreciation is in order for our retiring president. He must be given a large measure of credit for building up our association to its present standing. A very favorable financial statement was presented by our treasurer.

One of the highlights of the evening was a very interesting color film showing how a violin was made. There was some superb violin music accompanying the film and I am sure it was enjoyed by all. A very hearty vote of appreciation was given to Mr. George Wright and his son Wendell, for presenting us with this interesting and instructive entertainment.

Then we had our local orchestra give us much their best performance to date, under the very able baton of Mr. J.C. Collins. I am sure if Arthur Sullivan had been here he could have found the Lost Chord among our strings instead of looking for it in an organ.

We were glad to note that Mr. M. McDonald has recovered from his illness and able to be with us again. We want all our members to know that they are missed when they are absent.

A visitor at our meeting was Mr. Carl Brades of White Rock. Carl made a few fiddles when he was a young man in Poland and I am hoping he will decide to start in again.

Another feature of our meeting - Geo. Friess brought his prize winning cello and two new cellos were brought by Floyd Holly and R.W. Helin. These last two were still unvarnished. The craftsmanship shown in the construction of all these instruments is of a very high order. I do not feel qualified to judge which had the best tone but after listening to the contented sounding grunts coming from their direction, I reached the conclusion that each maker believed his own to be best. There was also on display a viola made by Mr. Walter Luckton of Port Kells. Its quality and quantity of tone received a lot of favorable comments.

Mr. Wright also came up with a dandy looking rib bending tool, shaped like a cross between a space gun and a three tiered wedding cake. It was beautifully turned of brass and looked as tho it would be quite efficient. (note- I bent my first few sets of ribs without
Page 2.

benefit of gas or electricity. I simply heated one end of a car axle to red heat in a blacksmiths forge and then tried to find the spot where the heat was just right. After a preliminary period when the air was blue with something that might have been wood smoke, I got along quite well and have a fiddle to prove it.)

It was suggested at our last meeting that someone write a Biography of each member. This will take a great deal of time and preparation. I think we should get the F.B.I. and the R.C.M.P. to furnish us with details then maybe we could collect enough "hush" money to run the Journal for years.

I recently read of three rules that should be followed by speakers. The last one at least should also apply to writers. The rules are:

1. Stand up
2. Speak up
3. Shut up

.....

NOTICE

Mr. Irwin Hoffman, conductor of The Vancouver Symphony will be the guest speaker at the April 11th meeting of the Association.

Mr. Hoffman will discuss the tone qualities required in a 1st class violin and will branch out into other subjects of this nature. He would like a few good violins to demonstrate on. So don't forget to bring along that pet instrument.

Mr. Hoffman is a very busy man and we appreciate the time he is spending on us. Lets all turn out and show this appreciation.

.....

Bride-to-be to friend: "It was Christmas before I realized that Tom was getting serious. He gave me an electric blanket with dual controls.

.....

MORE ABOUT FIDDLES AND VARNISH by E.H. Gangster

The March issue of the Journal to hand and I find it very interesting, however I feel I must write a short article to put Mr. Carmen White straight on the varnish and some of the statements he made in regard to my varnish. He stated and I quote. "His varnishes cannot be colored except by addition of anilines." Mr. White is mistaken and I do not know how he got the idea for I have told him that I do not use any coloring agent of any kind in making varnish, it is not necessary. With the formula No.11 by Fioravanti 1564 any color ever used by the Old Italians can be made without the addition of any coloring agent of any kind and anyone can make it in less than forty minutes. Why go to the bother to make up a recipe when we have a recipe by an Italian given out and published before violins were made. Gasparo DaSalò was not born until 1542 and was only twenty two years old when Fioravanti published his Formula No.11. Why mix up a lot of lye water and add a tincture of madder or what have you to color the resin when the resin will color itself with strong heat. You folks in B.C. saw my No.64 and 68, No.64 was a beautiful golden brown and 68 was a beautiful dark golden red. Neither one had the least bit of coloring matter in the varnish. I do not believe that the Old Italian violin makers knew anything about Potassium Carbonate, Calcium Chloride, or Aluminum Chloride varnish they used was used on lutes long before violins were made. I have made varnish using formula No.11 with pine resin (lump water white), Resin from the fir trees of Nova Scotia, Venice turpentine which is a product of the larch tree and from Douglas fir resin, which by the way made the reddest varnish of all. I have it before me on violin No.65 and it is

gorgeous. You folks in B.C. have plenty of Douglas Fir, get if you can, some resin from it, soft thick and white (what Alexis in 1550 called "galipot") and make yourselves some beautiful varnish without any coloring agent.

I find the letter from John Lawson, London, Eng. very interesting. I agree with him that playing is a very great factor in making a violin play but playing will not give an English, French or German violin Italian tone. If it would, we would have thousands of violins that have been played with the Italian tone. I have handled a goodly number of German, French and English violins that were old but not one of them had the tone quality of a good Italian. Not long ago I had the Wilhelmy Lupot in the shop and it is a beautiful violin in everyway but when compared with a Franciscus Ruggeri it did not have the beautiful soft pure tone that is so pleasing yet gives the player the feeling of great power.

Now a word about the effect of age on wood. Age does make a great difference in wood especially Spruce if it is exposed to the elements and any of you folks up North where plenty of Spruce grows can prove. When I was a young man in Nova Scotia I had occasion to replace some Spruce boards that had blown off the south end of an old hay barn. When I sawed them across the grain they were far harder and stiffer in everyway than a board that had been inside the barn. So age does make a great difference in wood, especially if it has been exposed to strong light and this brings us right back to that which was written six years before Strad was born. "The violin cannot be brought to perfection without the strong heat of the sun."

It seems odd to me that we in this modern age should try to find out by science what a great number of violin makers with little or no knowledge of science knew and did to perfection over two hundred and fifty years ago. It is my opinion that any maker who will follow the archings of Stradivari and use good European top wood can make a fine violin but if he uses Stradivari's thickness the violin it will not have the quality of tone of a good Italian violin. Why? This comes back to the fact that the Old Italians must have put something on their violins that strengthened the fibre and here is something I wish every violin maker would try at least once. After you have your violin finished in the white as perfect as possible get some pure linseed oil and it must be pure, warm the oil in a water violin with a generous coat. In the winter months hang it up in a warm room in a good light and forget about it. When the weather gets warm hang it out on the clothes line every nice day and let it swing in the breeze for at least three months. At the end of this time take a good look at your violin and feel it, it is alive to the vibration and it will be impossible to tell there had been anything put on it. This in my opinion was the only secret of the Old Italians, but it took time and for this reason was abandoned about 1750. The excellence of Stradivari was due to the fact that he was one, if not the greatest workman the world has ever known and it is my opinion that many of his violins were not varnished until after they were made two or three years or more.

This will be continued later for I have more to say on the subject.

E.H. Sangster, Dallas, Texas

.....

A ninth-grader "floored" telephone folks recently with this portion of an essay entered in a contest. The youngster wrote: "The telephone is very necessary in cases of emergency. For example, if your house is on fire, you can use the telephone to call the insurance company."

.....

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A periodical published monthly on a non-profit basis.

Subscription rate \$3.00 per year. Remittance payable at par Vancouver. Address Don White, Editor 4631 West 14th Avenue Vancouver 8, B. C. Correspondence Invited.

For advertising space apply to the Editor. "The Journal goes right into the Violin Maker's Home."

In your last Journal Mr. Alfred Slotnick of Brooklyn asks for information about the methods of the late Mr. Justin Gilbert. He made his plates thin and weighed them with absolute accuracy. Then, with thick gloves, he got them as hot as possible over an open fire and painted them with his boiling magic solution so long as they would absorb it. Apparently a mixture of resin and linseed oil. He thought tone.

He had a long hall in his house with a stairway at each end, and he used to stand on one stair while I sat on the other and listened. The tone was nice, but boys in the orchestra here who used his instruments say they went downhill right from the start and in two or three years were best for panatellas. He was a nice old chap. God rest his bones. He tried.

Now our Editor and some of our worthy members want to standardize not only tone but the adjectives describing it. I am afraid we are catching up on the old colored preacher in Birmingham who opened his sermon one Sunday by telling his congregation: "Today, brethren and sistern, Ah has a wonderful message fo' you. Ah is goin' to describe the indescribable. Ah is goin' to explain the unexplainable and Ah is goin' to onscrew the onscrutable."

One of your contributors says he has tried several Strads and most of them were no better than modern instruments. These must have been some of the stuff Strad made after he moved over to Markneukirchen and married that German girl. Women play hell with everything, don't they? Of course we can't be sure. It was about that time he quite putting red pepper in his glue. Bound to be some loss of tone.

Mr. Carmen White of Texas in his "Fiddle Fallacies" demolishes some of our most treasured gods of the fiddle world. The following comment is submitted for purposes of further discussion of the points he raises.

1. "Fiddles do not play in. They are good to start with if they are any good." While it is true a good instrument should show some life right from the start, I have found that it takes from a year to two years under string tension for a cello to equalize the strains of construction and get down to business.

2. "Violin does not improve with age and playing." It is true that age and playing will not make a good instrument out of a cluck. But the Hill firm, in the violin business since 1700, say it takes from 30 years for a light instrument, for a heavy job like a Bergonzi to "mature" and produce all the tone it is going to. My 1948 cello, now in Friedlander's hands, did not do much for two years, but now plays very well. It was quite heavy.

3. "Curves and proportions unimportant." I think this is probably true except for viola. Maggini settled that for us.

4. - 5. "Wood not important." While the Testori and quite a few other Milanese makers were not particular about their wood, I have yet to see poor wood in the front side of a Cremonese or Brescian instrument. And let's not forget that on average the Milanese sell for only about 10% to 20% as much. Los Angeles makers are enthusiastic about our "wonderful B.C. wood" and prefer it to Swiss. One of my friends there recently sold a cello he made of it for \$1200.00 and it was worth it. There seems to be no evidence that age is a factor, but certainly wood varies widely from piece to piece, both in weight and sensitivity. All wood grows with very strong internal strains, and this is one reason why vibration and time are needed to mature the instrument. Take two identical flutes made of African Blackwood, with an interchangeable silver head, and it is not unusual to find one has bigger tone, much better response, and requires much less effort to play.

Probably the best one will be the coarse crooked grain one. Anyone familiar with the fierce internal strains in these tropical woods can understand why this might be.

6. "All Italian violins not good." Most certainly. A lot of their stuff, old and new, is junk, just like ours. But some of the new stuff being turned out right now at Florence is being used in sensitive work like quartet and trio by top flight professionals.

7. "Varnish unimportant." I don't know enough about varnish to offer any comment. Use a gum varnish of course.

8. "Workmanship unimportant." I agree. Musicians who amount to anything are not looking for pretty fiddles; they are looking for tone, response, and power, which last is necessary for the large halls of today.

9. - 10. "Weak tone, big tone, carrying power, quality." Here we get to a matter that in my opinion has been very badly handled. Since back in the days of Savart and Vulliamie in the early 1860's people have been getting behind curtains and having listeners pick out the best fiddle. The new instrument played along side a Cremona is usually picked as the best -- it makes more noise.

The human ear just isn't capable of judging tone by itself. Put the instrument into its proper context, a good quartet or trio, where we can hear it, and we very quickly find out a lot about it; whether it has the volume to hold up its end in forte, and having it, will blend, whether the response permits a "live" spiccato, and whether the tone itself is full of musical loveliness or its just another tone. Here we will get an idea of whether the top half of the E string will ever soar in the infinities of Verklarte Nacht, or is only a cousin to a burned out bearing. People with a "pet" fiddle should keep away from this kind of test. It often brings a shock.

When the Quartetto Italiano was here last, there was some discussion following their concert, with a few of my European friends who suggested that, excellent as the concert was, it would have been even better if the first violin had "put more into it."

What they didn't know was that the second was playing a long Strad, and the first a Rocca. Now the Rocca is a semi-modern Italian, probably about 1830, and no doubt sounded stronger to the player than the Strad; but the birdlike clarity of the Strad could find its way through any labyrinth of tone, and the Rocca couldn't.

The predecessors of the Incas in South America had something that would soften rock. The early Egyptians could temper copper. We can't do either now. The violin work done at Cremona and Brescia has never been approached for more than 200 years and never will be. As Sangster says, "they did something to them" and along with some other things this has been lost.

But very few authentic instruments are left, and good modern stuff is badly needed, so let's get on the ball. If they can do it in Florence, why not here?

Walter Jacklin, 5058 Cypress Street
Vancouver, B.C.

.....

The woman was filling out a blank checking account. When she came to the space labeled "age" she hesitated.

The clerk waited patiently, then leaned over and whispered, "The longer you wait, the worse it gets."

.....

I don't know if I have stumbled onto a valuable discovery, or simply carried into the clouds of wishfull imagination, by an experience I had recently.

However, I think I should tell you my findings, -- with a hope that some of the readers may give me some scientific answers. I have done considerable work along the line of trying to find out if the Old Master's secret, was in the varnish. Hence, I have been experimenting with amber.

I have had some ground amber in a chemical solution for 2 years, or more, and have proceeded to shake it up every week or so. But it did not appear to be discolving, so I forgot about it for about 8 months. However, a few days ago, I had occasion to move it, so I once more took a dare look at it, and found a film, or skin, had formed on it. So I proceeded to fish the film out. As soon as my finger touched this film, it snapped around my finger, as if it were something alive. I realized it was pure amber, yet it was flexable and tough. In fact, it was the strongest film I had ever seen, yet it was less than 1/1000" thick.

Also I remembered, about amber being noted for its high conductivity of static electricity. I had learned this in my Electrical Engineering course. It seems there is no substance known, so capable of holding so high a charge of static magnetism as amber.

It was at this point of my experiment, that I got the revolutionary thought. It came in the form of a question. I asked myself, "is amber the secret?" "Does the playing on the strings, set off an excitement in the electrons of the amber that causes this powerful magnetic field over the entire surface of the violin?" If this was so, it would add considerable atomic pressures all over the instrument, besides the known atmospheric pressure. Perhaps that is why we hear players say so frequently, "I have to play my violin half an hour or so, before it begins to sing."

It seems that a goodly number of the writers of books believed that the Old Masters used amber for varnish. I quote one from a book, whose author is concealed, "A Master of the Instrument." On page 31 - "The Cremona varnish was considered by many makers to be composed principally of amber." unquote.

I can easily imagine this added atomic pressure would have the effect of unifying the vibrations in the various parts of the violin, also cause it to have greater carrying power etc..

I wish some one would pass on to me some good ideas about what to mix with the amber. However, Mr. Editor, I would like to know if it is fact or fiction.

Yours for better fiddlin'.

Rev. Geo. R. Wright.

.....

Your Editor told this tall Texas yarn in a letter to me. A Texas man told him it was so hot in Texas this past summer it melted his shadow before it reached the ground." Ha! That Don is going to keep on 'til one of us Texans won't have a comeback. That will be the day!!

Well, it gets darn hot in old Arizona, too, pardner. In the sand hills around Yuma in the summer it gets so hot the Larbe lizards that go from shade to shade carry a short, sharp pointed stick. They will run in the hot sand a little ways and when their feet get so hot they can't go any farther, they stick the stick in the ground and run up it to cool their feet -- then repeat. A lizard with no stick will roll over on his back and fan his feet in the air -- and that's a fact!

Bob Wallace, Sr. Gilbert, Arizona

.....

TONE QUALITY by Bob Wallace Jr.

Every violin maker when he has finished a fiddle, quickly and carefully strings it up, and (sometimes just as quickly) takes a deep breath and draws a bow across the strings. What does he hear? It may be anything from a brilliant Guarnerius to a mellow Strad tone.

We have as many different kinds of tones as we have violins. Just what is the difference in violin tones? Before we go into tone we must know just what sound is.

When a plate is set into vibration it moves back and forth from a central rest position. On one half of the cycle the plate moves out, compressing a layer of air next to it which moves out from the plate much as a disturbance in water will move. On the other half of the cycle the plate moves back in leaving a partial vacuum, which also being a disturbance of the air, moves out. The number of cycles that are sent out in a second is called the frequency of the sound.

If it were a pure tone the plate would move in and out smoothly, describing what is called a sine wave. The movement is actually irregular although it is the same for each cycle. Every violin has a slightly different characteristic motion which accounts for the variation of tone.

Science has discovered that a combination of a sine wave of the fundamental frequency (the note we hear) and other sine waves of multiples of the fundamental frequency (called harmonics or overtones) will produce the same irregular motion. Since the vibration pattern of the sound we hear is the same as that of the plate, we can think of the tone as made up of many notes; the fundamental twice the fundamental which is called the first harmonic, three times or the second harmonic and so forth.

The harmonics decrease generally in volume and in the violin, after about the fifth, are so weak that they have no effect.

Not only can we ignore the original pattern of vibration and think of harmonics, we can actually measure the strength of them. By using an instrument similar to a radio which tunes in on a certain harmonic and rejects the others we can read its strength on a meter.

So it can be said that the difference between one violin and another is its harmonic content.

.....

Here about the Texan who tried to commit suicide by jumping off his wallet?

.....

The President of an Over Eighty Club when called on the carpet for allowing two 78 year old men to become members retorted, "Every club needs young blood."

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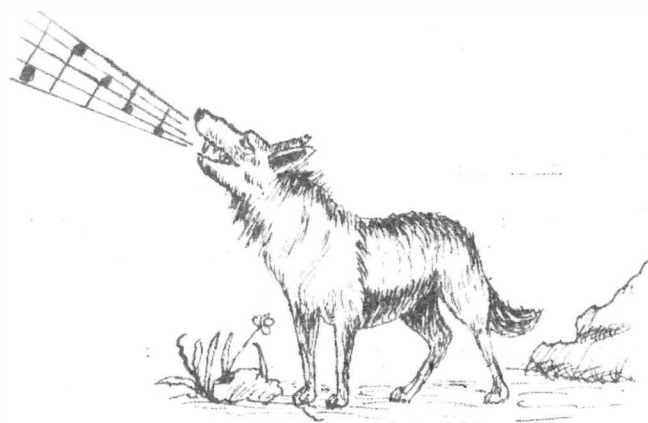
Wife: "I want to play. Make up a game."

Husband: "O.K. lets play store, I'll be the boss and you shut up for the night."

.....

WOOLF NOTES

by The Editor



New Headings

Having established several monthly columns, we thought it might be an improvement to have printed headings. The artist who did the drawings is none other than our new President, Gilson Heyworth.

I believe all will agree that he has made a good job. Gilson also did the design on our new cover. We put Pine and Maple, you might say it should be Spruce and Maple. Someone should clear up this matter. In Europe they call it Pine here we call the same thing Spruce - How Come?

A Novel way to Keep the Audience Quiet:

Milton Katins, oConductor of the Seattle Symphony, tired of audience hacking tried the novel experiment of handing out free cough drops to those entering the theatre. It was a success - not a cough was heard throughout the entire concert.

Letter from Mr. Clifford A. Hoing:

The following is part of a letter just received from this distinguished English Violin Maker. Mr. Hoing won the "Festival of Britain Diploma Award of Merit, 1951, also Diploma of Honour, International Exhibition, The Hague, 1949. (Editor)

137 West Wycombe Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire, England.

Dear Mr. White:

Thank you for sending me a sample copy of your Violin Makers Journal which I must say is very excellent. I should like to subscribe to this and receive it regularly.

I am enclosing a sample strip of Flexible Purfling of my own manufacture which may interest you. This is 6/- per set of 105 inches (enough for a viola). If you have not tried this, you will be surprised how much easier it makes life for a violin maker. I send it half-way around the world, to Australia among other places.

You may be interested to know that Mr. Jack Kessler who plays on your radio and lives in Vancouver, has one of my fiddles. He is a nice chap and a very fine player.

I am of course a full time professional maker and work entirely on my own. Am sending you some leaflets about my work. I have orders to keep me busy until 1960.

Best wishes to all members.

C.A. Hoing

WOOLF NOTES cont..

Note: The flexibility of this purfling is hard to believe. About 3 feet of beautiful purfling was rolled into a coil small enough to enclose in Mr. Hoing's business envelope.
(Editor)

Wood Craftsman's Catalogue:

Most Violin Makers are interested in other forms of woodwork. If you are such a person then send .25¢ to - Craftsman Wood Service Co., Chicago 8, Ill., for their catalogue. Besides every imaginable wood, veneer and otherwise, including violin wood, they carry special tools and hardware for the craftsman.

Watch Out For Yours!

Woodworkers are constantly cutting or sawing off fingers.. Sid Ergen of Dauphin, Manitoba, tells me he pushed his little finger into the power saw. A nasty cut but O.K. now. I use this as an illustration to show how such an accident can put a stop to violin making for many months. Be careful boys!

Erica Morini:

The successful appearance of Erica Morini, a few weeks ago, with the Vancouver Symphony resulted in at least three correspondents mentioning that they consider her the leading violinist of the day. A year ago she was advertised as the finest woman player. Just why any distinction between the sexes was mentioned I wouldn't know, possibly because the men were not good enough so were placed in a class by themselves. Now that barrier is down and Erica stands up at the front!

An interesting incident is told of how Erica Morini was shopping in a music store. A delightful violin concerto was being played on the Hi Fi. Erica went to the salesman and asked to purchase, "that wonderful interpretation of the violin concerto played by - . "I am sorry lady" said the clerk, "that is not playing, it is Erica Morini"!

Letter from Lee McNeese:

Received the February issue of the Journal. It is getting better all the time. I would like to discuss the rebaring of the French repairman a little more.. The top plate ring goes down in pitch faster than the back plate ring, and the only way they had to make the violin sound right was to rebar with a heavier and longer bar thereby raising the top plate ring to the proper relation with the back plate tone. They must not have sounded so good when Farisio took them to France, or he never could have acquired them in Italy for such ridiculous prices. He may have known himself in a vague way what was needed to restore the original tone or an approximation of the original tone, but he also had to find a market for them and that market, at that time was France. Neither he or the French repairman seemed to know what the Italian Luthiera did to get outstanding tone in the first place, or they could have made a new top with short bar to give the proper plate tone, so they raised the plate tone of the top with a heavier longer bar, which worked very well indeed, but it may not have been quite perfect.

One of your subscribers speaks of resistance to the bow. The heavier bar may be the cause of that. I never did have but one Strad in my hands, but I must say I was terribly disappointed in it. It seemed hard to play or something. It was valued at a mere \$3000.00 so it must have been a good one. The man who had it, a very capable concert artist also had a Guadagnini that he played as a child, and in his hands I liked it better than the Strad. Maybe I was scared. I should have been. I quite agree with Mr. Wallace in saying a violin in the white sounds wonderful, but to me it is a very ficle tone. Seems

Letter from Lee McNeese cont..

to vary from week to week or even overnight with every change of humidity and temperature.

Kind regards,

Lee McNeese, 170 So. Lisdale,
Buffalo, Wyoming

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Each noble work is at first impossible.

- Carlyle

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One of my latest Correspondents:

I feel that if a good violin can be made I should be the one to do it. Just think! Many of the world's best Violin Makers are writing, giving their "Secrets to me!" However you have the same opportunity as I just pass them on. That is the wonderful part of this Journal and it gives me fresh hope for humanity - the thought that these makers regard the advancement of Violin Making more important than personal gain. Wm. Driggs is one of this type. Here is a sample of one of his letters. (Editor).

Dear Don:

I have enjoyed reading the article in the present issue by Carmen White. I think this fellow works along the same lines as I have done to a great extent as he speaks of plate weights in particular, using Sangsters method of prime coats of linseed oil and resin (of which I use 2 coats) sunning for quite a time, out here the sun is hot and you have to avoid blistering.

I have never investigated Michelman's Varnish but if as he says it preserves the tone as you have it "in the white" that is something we have desired, to some extent at least.

Alfred Lannini (a pupil of Romeo Artonazzi of Milan and Cremona) from who I had my last instruction did weight his plates and he made them light as he gave me his weights which were figured according to his wood.

One thing I noticed, a fellow (player) picked up one of my fiddles, one that was very live and ringing; he did not like it; too many overtones he said. So some do not like too much vibration and perhaps they are more or less correct.

I shall enjoy having Michelman's book which I shall secure at once. Once I impregnated a top with the hot linseed and resin inside and out at Sangsters suggestion, but I did not think the results showed an improved tone (tho' well sunned) after a year even. I now warm it in water bath and apply to outside only.

I have heard some where that violins impregnated with mastic "play out" after a time. So much for that.

W.H.Driggs, 4002 Rand Drive Court
Sherman Oaks, California

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"Some people are funny," mused the man in the smoking car, "I know a man who hadn't kissed his wife for 10 years. Then he goes and shoots a fellow who did."

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Letter from Carmen White:

I suppose most of us have that cat-like quality of purring if stroked the right way! This letter if it does not succeed in making me purr, at least creates a feeling of satisfaction for my slight efforts. (Editor).

Dear Don:

Thanks for your nice letter received yesterday, and congratulations indeed on your last issue of the Journal. I am flattered that you devoted so much space to the Michelman varnish without having yet tried it yourself, and of course, I am pleased indeed with the treatment you gave the material. You have a good way of presenting all sides of the picture, and all in all, I think you are doing a great job with the Journal -- also, the new appearance is stimulating and better in every way. I am sure all the readers will agree that the editing and articles are stimulating and that they make us think. That is what we need more of! It has never been my idea that we should ever adopt a recipe and say "this is IT" and everybody else is wrong! Sometimes, as you have so well pointed out to me, I am inclined too much to do just that. So I appreciate your pointing it out to me so tactfully as you have done--after all, there are other people who know more than I do, and who have different opinions! Grant me tolerance!

Please let me know the result of your experiments with the methods I offered. I can point out at least 70 to 80 examples to prove the truth of these methods--over 25 years continuous experimenting with them! This is not said in a boasting manner, but to let you know that I am not one to risk ridicule by rushing into print on the basis of one or two experiments--I envy such enthusiasm that makes some of our friends do just that, but what I have said, though not much, yet it is the result of many experiences and I believe it will stand the test of time. To me, it is the most logical and most likely of all methods I have ever found that could have actually been used by the Old Masters of Italy. It requires no special knowledge of chemistry--actually, Michelman's varnish can be made without careful measurements. Michelman himself showed me two violins he had varnished using actual lye-water made from wood ashes, resin, tincture of madder, and common clay (alum). These materials were in abundance in Italy, and the two violins were beautiful red-orange color, and transparent and apparently permanent--however, it must be said that Michelman is a chemist and does not know the technique of varnishing a fiddle as you do. Yet, they are beautiful.

I varnished one myself that way--just to prove it could be done--it turned out fine, but the varnish has darkened so much that I think this method must have been used by Older Italians as Gaspar de Salo. As I have said many times, this method can produce all the variations in the Old Italian Varnish--the soft Cremona, the harder Venetian, and all the older blacks, browns and "in-betweens", even with brush marks--I have seen them all in my own experiments and can account for them!

I was interested in your fine article on Mr. Gilbert. I have one of his violins "P133" made in 1940, which I prize highly, but he failed so miserably with varnish that I have removed his varnish and varnished with Michelman varnish--it is surpassingly beautiful, and tonally, it makes a very eloquent defense of Mr. Gilbert! A friend of mine here has one also, with original varnish, and it is very good, but the opinion of your friend from Comox, B.C. is true--not good enough to make people want to imitate him--yet, I have his book and have had it since 1942--paid \$20 for it, and consider it the finest investment I ever made in violin lore--I cannot agree that he was "unsuccessful" but I bow down to his memory and consider that he made the most significant contribution to modern violin making in print in modern times along with Michelman and his varnish. It was my pet ambition to visit his shop as your friend from Comox did--but he died before I was able to make a trip that far; Mr. Hatfield's opinion is of great interest to me! I did not know before that Mr. Gilbert's violins "petered out" -- mine certainly has not, and I have one violin which

Letter from Carmen White cont..

I treated by his process in 1944--fifteen years ago, and it sounds fine right this morning. I have two others I treated exactly according to his formulas and recommendations, and they are both beautiful in tone but I did not like the warping of the plates and his strong heat, so I have perfected my own methods, based on his ideas--I give him all the credit-- you see I myself have not contributed anything except the technique of using these methods. So, I consider that Mr. Gilbert did fail, as many others have, in the varnish--otherwise, he was a pioneer in a forbidden field--as traditional violin making forbids the treatment of wood for making violins--but traditional violin making has seldom showed us anything tonally worth while since 1780, so I consider that you are within your rights to question it and its methods.

The methods I advocate may well be questioned as to permanence. Let us face that issue squarely. Raw wood violins have been made in abundance--many of which sounded good at first--for a few years; then the universal charge that they "suddenly lost their tone" appeared. Surely you have heard this argument as a reason given for fear to buy a new fiddle, even though it sounded fine-- "What will it be like ten or twenty years from now?" Since raw wood has proved un-permanent--why not try our treated wood? All scientific knowledge, all experiments, and all tonal tests indicate that treated wood is permanent--and that permanent results may be expected by treating our woods to prevent the soaking in of moisture and water vapor, the resulting decay and deadening of sound and vibration! So, until proven wrong, I will take my chances on treated woods and Michelman varnish! I have studied chemistry and science myself, and to me, Michelman makes sense.

Treating our woods permits us to thin the plates more--but not to the extent advocated by Mr. Gilbert--this was his undoing if he had any undoing--hebelieved in too little weight! He could not have been completely wrong however, as I re-barred a Nicholas Gagliano violin which top was full 3/64 thick nearly all over, and weighed only 69 grams with my bass-bar, and gave a G-natural at 80 degrees--if you find one like that, treasure it and do not thin it--you'll have a fine playing fiddle. Most woods we can get will not give us that result--we are more likely to get a 74 to 80 grams weight completewithout varnish, bass-bar glued in--and an F sharp instead of G. You can go down to 6/64 all over if you satisfy above conditions. I made one top 6/64 all over of Alaska spruce, 78 grams, F-sharp, another of Douglas Fir, 8/64 all over, F-sharp--tone fine fromboth.

Carmen White, 1022 Jaddo St.,
San Angelo, Texas

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A mother and her young son were shopping at a supermarket. The young boy, desiring to help his mother, picked up a package of something and brought it over to her.

"Oh no, honey," the mother said, "Put it back. You have to cook that!"

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A guy with a real problem is the glassblower with hiccups.

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The youngster from a rich home turned up his nose at the army stew and complained bitterly to the mess sergeant, "Don't. I have any choice here?"

"Certainly, my boy," replied the sergeant, "Take it or leave it."

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