AMERICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
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A Message from the President

AMIS recently held its thirty-first annual meeting at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I would like to give my personal thanks to Darcy Kuronen and his team for organizing a splendid meeting. The fall *Newsletter* will contain a more detailed description of the various events.

It is not too early to begin planning for our next meeting in August, 2003, a joint meeting with our friends in the Galpin Society in London, Oxford, and Edinburgh. You will find an announcement of this meeting below, including a call for papers. Be sure to check the AMIS website (**www.amis.org**) for last-minute updates. Coordinating the AMIS side of the meeting is our vice president, Kathryn Shanks Libin.

I want to thank all AMIS members who gave valuable insights about the Society in our recent survey. As the Society moves forward in the 21st century, we want to continue to grow to meet your needs. Communication among our members is an important goal. Our hard-copy membership directory helps to do this in part, but as more of us use electronic means of communication, we are in the process of finding the best and most secure ways

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A Visit to Wurlitzer-Bruck

We are pleased to reprint here the following article about AMIS members Marianne Wurlitzer and Gene Bruck, which appeared under the title "My Manhattan: The Memorabilia of Music" in the Weekend section of The New York Times *for Friday, February 15, 2002. The author is Jeremy Eichler.*

One blustery afternoon a few months ago, I set out to find a former home of Sergei Rachmaninoff. The great pianist and composer once lived at 33 Riverside Drive, but when I arrived I discovered that his townhouse had been razed to make room for a stately apartment building at the same address. A plaque affixed to the facade tells the passer-by nothing about the old Russian master but proudly notes that George and Ira Gershwin lived there three years later. I was intrigued by this coincidence. Like the vertical strata of an archaeological site, New York's musical history seemed to be stacked on top of itself.

If anyone could appreciate this observation, I knew it was a wonderful couple I had recently met only blocks away. There is no plaque on their building, but inside their apartment the layering of the musical past goes far beyond the overlapping addresses of yesterday's New York.

Indeed, to enter their home is to find this very history distilled into the world of artifacts: books, photographs, etchings, paintings, manuscripts, letters, diaries, quotations, concert programs and instruments. These objects line the walls, tower high in the closets and quite literally emerge from the carved woodwork. The only things they have in common are that they are old and music-related and that they have been collected by the remarkable husband-and-wife team of Marianne Wurlitzer and Gene Bruck.

The apartment is a gallery with elements of a museum, an archive and an antiquarian shop, but none of these quite describe the space that this couple has created. It is perhaps better thought of as a variety store of musical history where, for a reasonable sum, you can purchase an actual letter written by Brahms to his publisher, a first edition of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion," an

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In This Issue

AMERICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

William E. Hettrick, Editor

The *Newsletter* is published in spring, summer, and fall for members of the American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS). News items, photos, and short articles are invited, as well as any other information of interest to AMIS members.

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original silhouette of Paganini in concert or an autographed musical quotation from Verdi's "Aida" in the composer's own hand. There are thousands upon thousands of such items within these walls. Given how much it encompasses, the gallery fittingly draws its name from a simple linking of theirs: Wurlitzer-Bruck.

I first heard of this extraordinary place the way most people do, by word of mouth. Although they have been in business for more than 25 years, the two have never advertised or sent out a catalog or even placed a sign on the door. Business is by appointment only, and they say customers who are serious have a way of finding them.

When I arrived at the gallery for the first time, I found it difficult to keep my eyes on any one thing, so intense was the overload of the curious, the strange and the beautiful. Everywhere I looked, centuries of history intermingled and distinct musical traditions competed for scant wall space.

A Bourdelle bust of Beethoven peered out austerely beneath a gorgeous Norwegian Hardanger fiddle with a fingerboard of bone, ebony and mother of pearl. A signed portrait of the jazz drummer Max Roach levitating in the lotus position hung mischievously over a quotation from Wagner's "Tannhäuser." A giant 4-by-3-foot original etching of the Joachim String Quartet adorned a wall next to a blue and white porcelain cello made as a garden ornament, and on and on.

The main room of the gallery was bathed in a soft afternoon light that streamed in through large windows overlooking the Hudson. The striking view, 17 stories up, added to the peculiar enchantment of this place—a secret musical reliquary in the sky.

After a quick tour of the apartment, Mr. Bruck and Ms. Wurlitzer invited me to sit down, and across the two bronze Shan rain drums that they use as a coffee table we began to get acquainted. Mr. Bruck is a gentle and soft-spoken man who has had many jobs in music journalism and publishing. Ms. Wurlitzer comes from an illustrious line of instrument dealers (known primarily for their pianos, organs and jukeboxes), and she speaks with the knowing sharpness one might expect from growing up around a family business, together with the thoughtful wisdom of having reinvented it.

The idea to open a shop selling what they themselves are hard-pressed to describe but generally refer to as "oddball musical things" came to them in 1974. They took their first business trip to Europe to start buying shortly thereafter.

"If we could sell it all when we got back, fine," Mr. Bruck said. "If not, we'd have all that nice stuff, and we'd go and get real jobs."

Almost three decades later, business is still good, and in true mom-and-pop fashion, they have moved their living quarters to a studio apartment one floor above the gallery.

Conversation eventually turned to the shop itself, and the stories began to dovetail one into the next. I quickly realized that for every one of the countless items in this shop, there was a separate tale of the research, the hunt, the acquisition, the provenance and the personalities involved.

The couple clearly relished telling these charming anecdotes, and they would pass the narrative thread between each other in midstory or even midsentence with a practiced ease, like string quartet players handing off a single melody across several instruments.

Accordingly, I learned that much of the business they do is in presents. They once selected a gift to be offered to the emperor of Japan (he was an amateur cellist and was given a facsimile of the original Mozart quartets), and for Woody Allen, who bought a Gershwin-autographed score to "Porgy and Bess" for an occasion he did not specify. They also travel frequently to auctions overseas, including a recent trip to Europe from which they returned empty-handed only to find the librettos of the first two operas in history, printed in Florence around 1600, for sale in the building across the street. (They bought them.)

The couple have performed dozens of appraisals, another subject of many a yarn. Within their first year of business, the New York Public Library asked them to appraise the original manuscript of Mozart's "Haffner" Symphony. They have also appraised the Toscanini estate of more than 26,000 items.

"It was very poignant," Mr. Bruck said. "We got to know him through his collection, through his letters and even through his eyeglasses, which you could see getting progressively stronger."

And finally, there are the tales of their own families and past lives, and here Ms. Wurlitzer takes center stage. Her grandfather, Rudolph Henry Wurlitzer, had a fabled shop in Cincinnati where the great instrumentalists of music's golden age would stop by.

In these stories, legendary performers become lovable family friends. The great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe was a big gourmand, Ms. Wurlitzer explained casually. "He would knock on the window to find out what was for lunch, and if it was something he liked, he'd knock on the main door to be let in. And who wouldn't invite Ysaÿe over for lunch?"

This intimate sense of connection to musical spirits long gone is, of course, present not only in Ms. Wurlitzer's family stories, but in the collection itself. The "graphics room," off the main gallery, is filled with signed letters, autographs and musical quotations. Many of these are tastefully matted and carefully stacked one atop the other on shelves: a message scrawled on Shostakovich's private stationery; a calling card from Mahler with a note inviting a friend to cocktails at a Vienna hotel; a concert ticket signed by Berlioz; a folk rhythm jotted down by Bartók. These were all quotidian moments captured from transcendent lives, and I loved the way they were now piled cozily together, a Gordian tangle of chronology, geography and memory.

And while similar relics might appear in a museum exhibit, sterilized by a glass display case and soporifically explained by a caption, the excitement of this gallery lies in the fact that each object can be held in one's hand. What's more, the items are introduced personally by their owners and layered with the couple's own relationship to the item. One is drawn in by the hushed tones with which Mr. Bruck unveils a youthful portrait of the composer and musical mystic Ferruccio Busoni, or the care with which he opens the cover of his favorite first edition of Bach to marvel at the splendor of its title page.

And yet, as Mr. Bruck and Ms. Wurlitzer are quick to point out, they are not collectors in the traditional sense. Despite all of their appreciation for what they own, they also run a business, and they are willing to sell even the most magical and precious items in their inventory.

That attitude first struck me as odd, even heartless, but I soon came to see it as a sort of wisdom, an idea of property divorced from its illusion of permanence. Everything in their gallery belongs to them, but in a way that acknowledges that these items were never theirs to begin with. Rather than collectors,

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A Message . . .

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to improve exchanges via our website. Please notify our membership office at A-R Editions of any changes in address, phone number, or e-mail address, so that our database can be up to date.

Many members have expressed concern over the increased expense of running the Society. AMIS continues to have a strong financial base, but we can always use more help, especially as operating costs always seem to be on the rise. If any of you are interested in advertising on our website, please contact me.

To keep our dues as low as possible, we do need to increase our individual and institutional membership base. Invite your friends or students to become AMIS members, and if you have any influence over the institutional acquisition of journals, especially to university and museum libraries, please encourage them to become members too. We are most proud of our publications and would like to see them in more libraries throughout the world.

As always, I welcome your suggestions, criticisms, and concerns on any aspect of the Society. You may reach me at:

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—Harrison Powley

Joint GS–AMIS Conference in August, 2003: Call for Papers

The joint meeting of the Galpin Society and the American Musical Instrument Society in the United Kingdom on August 3–9, 2003, will include visits to important collections of musical instruments in Oxford, London, and Edinburgh. The conference will also feature concerts, social events, and scholarly papers presented by members of both societies. The paper sessions are provisionally scheduled to take place in London on Thursday, August 7, and in Edinburgh on Friday, August 8, and Saturday, August 9.

It will be possible to register for the paper sessions of the conference without registering for the whole meeting. The accommodation booked for participants will, however, be allocated preferentially to participants registering for the whole meeting.

Members are invited to offer papers based on original research and discoveries, which may be on any topic concerning the history, design, use, and care of musical instruments. The language of the abstracts and presentations will be English. Papers should be delivered in person at the conference by the named author (or one of them in the case of multiple authorship). It is intended that there will be no parallel sessions.

Abstracts of papers (a maximum of 400 words) and a biography (no more than 75 words), together with a list of audio-visual equipment and time requirements, should be sent to Arnold Myers by e-mail (**A.Myers@ed.ac.uk**) by January 15, 2003. Abstracts may also be submitted by post, in which case they should be received at the address given below by December 15, 2002.

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the two are custodians of these objects, assembling them and providing them a place to reside until they find their future homes.

As the sunlight faded in the apartment that first afternoon, Mr. Bruck and Ms. Wurlitzer showed me stack after stack of pictures, letters and autographs. Over time, I discovered that not all salvaged scraps of the past were equally moving to me. Some items seemed pregnant with a deeper meaning, while others seemed little more than curiosities.

As we waded through Dvorak [*sic*] letters and Puccini quotations, I found myself impatient to encounter my own musical heros. I asked, for example, if they had any photographs of the Soviet violinist David Oistrakh, a musician whose incandescent playing burned through the darkness of his times in a way that has always captured my imagination. (They of course produced several pictures.)

As I spent more time in the gallery, I realized that I was ultimately seeking a particular type of connection with the past. Rather than admiring its wonders from the critical distance of a historian, I was instead looking for a resonance of myself in that past, a connection through time to my own ideas about someone or something I could never really know.

This, I finally understood, was what Proust meant when he wrote about our searching in things for glimmers of our own thoughts or, in his words, the reflection of what our soul has projected onto them. When we find that reflection, the object becomes meaningful to us, perhaps more so than it ever was to its original owner. There was something very beautiful, I thought, in this notion of a physical thing and its moment in history being reimagined and reborn inside each new owner.

Back in the gallery, I was careful to focus on the task at hand, but I suspected that Mr. Bruck and Ms. Wurlitzer had already discovered my secret. Despite my stated journalistic mission, the couple surely realized that while they were showing me the pictures, letters and everything else so that I might write this article, I was quietly imagining myself one day purchasing just a single item from within these walls.

And while I didn't find that object on either my first or my second trip, I am not worried. I know that I'll be returning to this otherworldly place, to visit Mr. Bruck and Ms. Wurlitzer and to continue looking through their stacks—until that moment when I hold in my hand the sliver of history I will one day own, and find in its sepia-toned imagery or in its hastily scribbled sentences the shock of recognition.

A Visit to Boardman & Gray

The following article was published under the title "Boardman & Gray's Dolce Campana Attachment Piano-Fortes" in the 1854 volume of Godey's Lady's Book *(Philadelphia; Mrs. Sarah J. Hale and Louis A. Godey, eds.) in the issues for January (pp. 5–13) and February (pp. 101–107). It is illustrated by a number of fine engravings (several referred to in the text) of areas in and around the Boardman & Gray factory, showing visitors, workers, tools, machines, instruments being constructed (all square models), and a sample of a completed square piano-forte; we hope to reproduce this pictorial material in a future issue of this* Newsletter. *A greatly abridged and slightly garbled version of the article was reprinted, without the engravings, under the title "Pianoforte Making" in the issue of* Musical World *(New York) for February 5, 1855 (pp. 54–55).*

Perhaps we cannot present our readers a more interesting article on manufacturing, than to give an idea of piano-forte making. Piano-fortes, in these days, making an almost indispensable article of furniture in every dwelling; adding so much to the pleasures of home, and being so much of a companion in all home hours: contributing so largely to the enjoyments of society, that some little knowledge of the processes of making, and the materials used, must be not only interesting to all, but valuable to those who may wish to know how good piano-fortes should be made.

With this desire, we have selected as our MODEL the large and flourishing manufactory of Messrs. Boardman & Gray, the eminent piano-forte makers of Albany, N.Y. celebrated as the manufacturers of the Dolce Campana Attachment Piano-Fortes, whose instruments were not only sought after and used by Jenny Lind, Catharine Hayes, and other celebrities, but by the profession generally throughout the United States.

Messrs. Boardman & Gray's manufactory is situated at Albany, N.Y., occupying the end of a block, presenting a front on three streets of upwards of 320 feet, the main building of which, fronting on two streets of 208 feet, is built of brick, four stories high above a high basement-story, devoted exclusively to machinery driven by a forty horse power engine. The completeness of design of these buildings and machinery for the propose used, we believe, has no superior, if any equal, in this country. Every improvement and convenience is attached to make the entire perfect, and in going through the premises one is attracted by the comprehensiveness of the whole concern.

The entrance to the factory of Messrs. Boardman & Gray is by a large gateway through the centre of the building, next to the office, so that the person in charge of the office has full view of all that enter or leave the premises. We pass into the yard, and are surprised at the large amount of lumber of all kinds piled up in the rough state. The yard is full, and also the large two story brick building used as drying sheds for lumber. Here a large circular saw is in full operation, cutting up the wood ready for the sheds or machine-rooms. Messrs. Boardman & Gray have the most of their lumber sawed out from the logs expressly for them in the forests of Alleghany [*sic*], Oneida, Herkimer, and other choice localities in N.Y., and also Canada, and delivered by contract two and three years after being sawed, when well seasoned. The variety and number of different kinds of wood used in the business is quite surprising. Pine, spruce, maple, oak, chestnut, ash, bass-wood, walnut, mahogany, cherry, birch, rosewood, ebony, whiteholly, apple, pear-tree, and several other varities, each

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Submissions will be considered by the Organizing Committee, which includes representatives of both societies. Applicants whose submissions are accepted will be notified by February 15, 2003. Accepted abstracts will be placed on the Galpin Society's website (**http://www.music.ed.ac.uk/euchmi/galpin/**).

It would be helpful to those planning the meeting if members intending to submit abstracts of proposed papers could notify Arnold Myers as soon as possible, preferably by e-mail.

Information about all aspects of the joint conference will be maintained on the Galpin Society website. Further information can be obtained from:

Arnold Myers
Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments
Reid Concert Hall
Bristo Square
Edinburgh EH8 9AG
United Kingdom

Just Rewards for Rosenberg and Schroeder

FLUTES STOLEN FROM ATWILL'S MUSIC SALOON, No. 201 Broadway.—A suitable reward will be given for the recovery of TWO valuable FLUTES, stolen from the subscriber's establishment within the last few weeks. One Flute was of Hamburg manufacture, of ebony, tipt with silver, cork joints, with 11 keys of silver—value $80. The other Flute is of the manufacture of Rosenberg & Schroeder, New York, silver tipt, ivory joint, 11 keys of silver, &c.—

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Just Rewards . . .

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value $80. Pawnbrokers and others are requested to detain the above, if offered for sale.

Joseph F. Atwill,
Proprietor of the Music Saloon,
201 Broadway.

The foregoing notice, published repeatedly in The Transcript *(New York), beginning in January, 1835, provides the only known documentation of the partnership of John C. Rosenberg and Richard Schroeder and the only evidence that they manufactured flutes. Rosenberg is not listed as an instrument maker in New York directories before 1838. Atwill shared his premises with William Geib and John Osborne, but neither is suspected of the theft. A reward will still be given for recovery of the flutes, by*

—Laurence Libin

International Symposium on Spanish Keyboard Music

The Third International Festival of Spanish Keyboard Music (FIMTE) will be held on October 11–14, 2002, at Mojácar in the Province of Almería, Andalusia.

An important part of this conference is the third "Diego Fernandez" International Symposium on Spanish Keyboard Music, scheduled for October 11–12, which will feature presentations drawn from the following areas of scholarly study: organology and iconology; relationship of liturgical chant, vocal polyphony, and keyboard music in

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of which has its peculiar qualities, and its place in the piano depends on the duties it has to perform. The inspecting and selecting of the lumber require the strictest attention, long experience, and matured judgment; for it must be not only of the right kind, and free from all imperfections, such as knots, shakes, sapwood, &c., but it must also be well seasoned. All the lumber used by Messrs. Boardman & Gray, being cut two or three years in advance, is seasoned before they receive it; then it is piled up and dried another year, at least, in their yard, after which it is cut up by the cross-cut circular saw, and piled another season in their sheds, when it is taken down for use, and goes into the machine-shop; and here it is cut into the proper forms and sizes wanted, and then put into the drying-rooms for six months or a year more before it is used in the piano-forte.

These drying-rooms, of which there are three in the establishment, are kept at a temperature of about 100° Fahrenheit, by means of steam from the boiler through pipes. As fast as one year's lot of lumber is taken down for use, another lot is put in its place ready for the next year. In this way, Messrs. Boardman & Gray have a surety that none but the most perfectly seasoned and dry lumber is used in their piano-fortes. Their constant supply of lumber on hand at all times is from two to three hundred feet, and as Albany is the greatest lumber mart in the world, of course they have the opportunity of selecting the choicest lots for their own use, and keeping their supply good at all times.

The selection of the proper kinds of lumber, and its careful preparation, so as to be in the most perfect order, constitute one of the most important points in making piano-fortes that will remain in tune well, and stand any climate.

Here is the motive power, and a beautiful Gothic pattern horizontal engine of *forty horse power*, built at the machine works of the Messrs. Townsend of Albany, from the plans, and under the superintendence of Wm. McCammon, Esq., engineer now in charge of the Chicago (Ill.) Water-works. The engine is, indeed, a beautiful working model, moving with its strong arm the entire machinery used throughout the building, yet so quiet that, without seeing it, you would hardly know it was in motion. In the same room is the boiler, of the locomotive tubular pattern, large enough not only to furnish steam for the engine, but also for heating the entire factory, and furnishing heat for all things requisite in the building. Water for supplying the boiler is contained in a large cistern under the centre of the yard, holding some 26,000 gallons, supplied from the roofs of the buildings. The engine and boiler are in the basement (occupying the basement and first story in one room), at one end of the building, and are so arranged that all the machinery used in the different stories is driven throughout by long lines of shafting put up in the most finished manner, while the entire manufactory is warmed in the most thorough and healthy manner by steam from the boiler, passing through some 8,000 feet of iron pipe, arranged so that each room can be tempered as required. At the same time, ovens heated with steam through pipes are placed in the different rooms to warm the materials for gluing and veneering. The glue is all "made off" and kept hot in the different rooms by means of iron boxes with water in them (in which the glue-pots are placed), kept at the boiling point by steam passing through pipes in the water: thus the boiler furnishes all the heat required in the business.

We pass to the next room, where we find the workmen employed in preparing the massive metallic (iron) plates used inside the pianos, from the rough state, as they come from the furnace. They are first filed smooth and perfect to the pattern, then painted and rubbed even and smooth, and are then

ready for the drilling of the numerous holes for the pins and screws that have to be put into and through the plate in using it. (A view of the drilling-machines and workmen is given with the engine.)

Into each plate for a seven octave piano, there have to be drilled upwards of 450 holes, and about 250 of these have pins riveted into them for the strings, &c.; and these must be exactly in their places by a working pattern, for the least variation might make much trouble in putting on the strings and finishing the piano. Of course, these holes are drilled by machinery, with that perfection and speed that can be done only with the most perfect machines and competent experienced workmen. And these metallic plates, when finished and secured in the instrument correctly, give a firmness and durability to the piano unattainable by any other method.

In the same room with the drilling-machines we find the leg-making machines, for cutting from the rough blocks of lumber the beautifully formed "ogee" and "curved legs," as well as sides, of various patterns, ready for being veneered with rosewood or mahogany. The body of the legs is generally made of chestnut, which is found best adapted to the purpose. The leg-machine is rather curious in its operations, the cutting-knives revolving in a sliding-frame, which follows the pattern, the leg, whilst being formed, remaining stationary.

Our first impression on entering the machine-shop is one of noise and confusion; but, on looking about, we find all is in order, each workman attending his own machine and work. Here are two of "Daniel's Patented Planing-Machines," of the largest size, capable of planing boards or plank of any thickness three feet wide; two circular saws; one upright turning-saw, for sawing fancy scroll-work; a "half-lapping machine," for cutting the bottom framework together; turning-lathes, and several other machines, all in full operation, making much more noise than music.

The lumber, after being cut to the length required by the large cross-cut saw in the yard, and piled in the sheds, is brought into this machine-room and sawed and planed to the different forms and shapes required for use, and is then ready for the drying-rooms.

In this machine-room, which is a very large one, the "bottoms" for the cases are made and finished, ready for the case-maker to build his case upon. If we examine them, we [w]ill find they are constructed so as to be of great strength and durability; and, being composed of such perfectly seasoned materials, the changes of different climates do not injure them, and they will endure any strain produced by the great tension of the strings of the piano in "tuning up to pitch," amounting to several tons.

But we must pass on to the next room. We step on a raised platform about four feet by eight, and, touching a short lever, find ourselves going up to the next floor. Perhaps a lot of lumber is on the platform with us on its way to the drying-rooms. On getting on a level with the floor, we again touch the magic lever, and our steam elevator (or dumb waiter) stops, and, stepping off, find ourselves surrounded with workmen; and this is the "case-making" department. And here we find piano-forte cases in all stages of progress; the materials for some just gathered together, and others finished or finishing; some of the plainest styles, and others of the most elaborate carved work and ornamental designs. Nothing doing but making cases; two rooms adjoining, 115 feet long, with workmen all around as close together as they can work with convenience. Each room is furnished with its steam ovens, glue heaters, &c. The case-maker makes the rims of the case, and veneers them. He fits and secures these to the

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the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; music for keyboard, strings, and ensembles; contributions to keyboard music from dance and popular songs; literature in keyboard music; and interpretation and repertory.

Information on the Festival and the Symposium may be obtained from:

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E-mail: **fimte@wanadoo.es**

Violin Society of America Competition for New Instruments and Bows

The Violin Society of America announces its biennial Competition for New Instruments and Bows and Annual Convention, November 11 to 17, 2002, at the Drawbridge Inn and Convention Center in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Hundreds of violins, violas, cellos, and basses, as well as bows, many made by the world's finest makers, will be entered into this competition. On Friday and Saturday of the competition week (November 15 and 16), the instruments and bows will be on display for all attendees to inspect and play. Gold and silver medals and certificates of merit are scheduled to be presented to the most outstanding instruments on Friday evening.

During the week of the convention, there will be a series of lectures

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and workshops on instrument and bow making, historical instruments and their makers, and other topics concerning instruments of the violin family. The convention will also feature several concerts, displays, and a commercial exhibition.

The Violin Society of America is an international organization of makers of instruments and bows (both amateur and professional), performers, musicologists, collectors, dealers, teachers, and music lovers, as well as conservatories and libraries. The Society reflects the interests and concerns of these members, such as making and restoring instruments of the violin family and their bows, the history of instruments and performers, and the acoustics of stringed instruments. The activities of the Violin Society of America include annual conventions, biennial competitions for new instruments and bows, the publication of the Society's *Journal* and *Newsletter,* scholarships for students of violin making, workshops, and a library collection held jointly with Oberlin College.

Additional information about the 2002 Competition and Convention, as well as registration forms, can be obtained at the Violin Society's website, **www.vsa.to**, or from The Violin Society of America, 48 Academy St., Poughkeepsie, NY 12601.

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bottom. He also makes and veneers the tops. This completes his work, and then we have the skeleton of a piano, the mere shell or box. The rim is securely and firmly fastened to the strong bottoms, bracing and blocking being put in in the strongest and most permanent manner, the joints all fitting as close as if they grew together; and then the case is ready to receive the sounding-board and iron frame. The bottoms are made mostly of pine; the rims of the case are of ash or cherry, or of some hard wood that will hold the rosewood veneers with which they are covered. The tops are made of ash or cherry, sometimes of mahogany, and veneered with rosewood. We will now follow the case to the room where the workmen are employed in putting in the sounding-board and iron frames.

The sounding-board is what, in a great measure, gives tone, and the different qualities of tone to the piano. Messrs. Boardman & Gray use the beautiful white, clear spruce lumber found in the interior counties of New York, which they consider in every way as good as the celebrated "Swiss Fir." It is sawed out in a peculiar manner, expressly for them, for this use, selected with the greatest possible care, and so thoroughly seasoned that there is no possibility of its warping or cracking after being placed in one of their finished instruments. The making of the sounding-board the requisite thinness (some parts require to be much thinner than others) its peculiar bracing, &c., are all matters that require great practical experience, together with numberless experiments by which alone the perfection found in the piano-fortes of Messrs. Boardman & Gray, their full, rich tone giving the most positive evidence of superiority, can be attained.

We will watch the processes of the workmen in this department. One is at work putting in the "long-block" of hard maple, seasoned and prepared until it seems almost as hard as iron, which is requisite, as the "tuning-pins" pass through the plate into it, and are thus firmly held. Another workman is making a sounding-board, another fitting one in its place, &c. &c. All the blocking being in the case, the sounding-board is fitted and fastened in its place, so as to have the greatest possible vibrating power, &c.; and then the iron frame must be fitted over all and cemented and fastened down. The frame is finished, with its hundreds of holes and pins, in the drillers'-room, and the workman here has only to fit it to its place and secure it there; and then the skeleton case is ready to receive its strings, and begins to look like what may make a piano-forte.

Spinning the bass strings, and stringing the case, come next in order. In the foreground of the last plate, we have a curious-looking machine, and a workman busy with it winding the bass strings, a curiosity to all who witness his operations. To get the requisite flexibility and vibration to strings of the size and weight wanted in the bass notes, tempered steel wire is used for the strings, and on this is wound soft annealed iron wire, plated with silver; each string being of a different size, of course various sizes of body and covering wire are used in their manufacture. The string to be covered is placed in the machine, which turns it very rapidly, while the workman holds the covering wire firmly and truly, and it is wound round and covers the centre wire. This work requires peculiar care and attention, and, like all the other different branches in Messrs. Boardman & Gray's factory, the workmen here attend to but one thing; they do nothing else but spin these bass strings, and string pianos year in and year out.

The case, while in this department, receives all its strings, which are of the finest tempered steel wire, finished and polished in the most beautiful manner. But a few years since, the making of steel music wire was a thing unknown in the United States; in fact, there were but two factories of note in the world

which produced it; but now, as with other things, the Americans are ahead, and the "steel music wire" made by Messrs. Washburn & Co., of Worcester, Mass. is far superior in quality and finish to the foreign wire. The peculiar temper of the wire has a great influence on the piano's keeping in tune, strings breaking, &c., and, as the quality cannot always be ascertained but by actual experiment, much is condemned after trial, and the perfect only used.

The preparation of what is termed the "key-board" is one of peculiar nicety, and the selection of the lumber and its preparation require great experience and minute attention, so that the keys will not spring or warp, and thus either not work or throw the hammers out of place, &c. The frame on which the keys rest is usually made of the best of old dry cherry, closely framed together to the form required for the keys and action. The wood of the keys is usually of soft straight-grained white pine, or prepared bass-wood. Both kinds have to go through many ordeals of seasoning, &c., ere they are admitted into one of the fine-working, finished instruments of Messrs. Boardman & Gray. The keys are made as follows: On a piece of lumber the keys are mark[ed] out, and the cross-banding and slipping done to secure the ivory; the ivory is applied and secured, and then the keys are sawed apart and the ivory polished and finished complete. The ebony black keys are then made and put on and polished, and the key-board is complete; the key-maker has finished his part of the piano. The ivory used is of the finest quality, and an article of great expense; its preparation from the elephant's tusks, of sawing, bleaching, &c., is mostly confined to a few large dealers in the United States. The most important concern of the kind is that of Messrs. Pratt, Brothers & Co., of Deep River, Conn., who supply most of the large piano-makers in the union. As the ivory comes from them, it is only in its rough state, sawed out to the requisite sizes for use, after which it has to be seasoned or dried the same as lumber, and then prepared and fastened on the key; then to be planed up, finished, and polished, all of which requires a great amount of labor, much skill, and experience. Besides ivory, Messrs. Boardman & Gray use no small quantity of the beautiful variegated "mother-of-pearl," for keys in their highly ornamental, finished piano-fortes, a material itself very costly, and requiring a large amount of labor to finish and polish them with that peculiar richness for which their instruments are so celebrated. In this, as in the other departments, each workman has his own special kind of work; nothing else to attend to but his key-making; his whole energies are devoted to perfect this part of the instrument.

In this [i.e., action-making] department, we again see the perfection of machine-work. The action is one of the most important things in the piano-forte. On its construction and adjustment depends the whole working part of the instrument; for, however good the piano-forte scale may be, or how complete and perfect all the other parts are formed, if the action is not good, if the principle on which it is constructed is not correct, and the adjustment perfect, if the materials used are not of the right kind, of course the action will not be right, and it will either be dead under the fingers, without life and elasticity, without the power of quick repetition of the blow of the hammer, or soon wear loose, and make more noise and rattling than music. Thus will be seen the importance of not only having that action which is modelled on the best principle, but of having an instrument constructed in the most perfect and thorough manner. All parts of it should be so adjusted as to work together with as much precision as the wheels of a watch.

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Musical Anecdotes from 18th-Century Germany

The following pleasantries are translated from Legende einiger Musikheiligen: Ein Nachtrag zu den musikalischen Allmanachen und Taschenbüchern jetziger Zeit *[Legends of Sundry Musical "Saints": A Supplement to the Musical Almanacs and Handbooks of the Present Day]. This collection of anecdotes and reminiscences was the work of the respected music theorist and critic Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718–1795), who in this case wrote under the pseudonym "Simeon Metaphrastes the Younger." According to the concluding remarks by Wolfgang Reich in the facsimile edition of this work (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1980; p. XII), the book's publication in 1786 took place not in Cologne, as indicated in the original title page, but in Breslau.*

Two violinists were in the habit, when a duet or trio was to be played, of always quarreling over the first part, which each one coveted. The Prince, to whom this dispute over rank seemed ridiculous, undertook one day to make them realize it, and to this purpose he had the two violin parts of a certain trio copied out and identified with the words *Porco I* and *Porco II*, and he had the trio placed in the music cabinet until it was needed. As the two violinists squabbled with each other over the first part of a duet on the next concert day, the Prince ordered the concert servant to bring out the specially copied trio and to set it out before the two musicians. This was done, and the two proud fiddlers, who had quarreled over the first part just a moment before, began from that

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point on to compliment each other over it, since neither wanted to be the *first pig*. [pp. 25–26]

A lady of rank participated in a concert and sang like an angel. Just as she was concluding her cadenza, the voice of a donkey blurted out nearby. A foolish musician, who was eager to express his approval of the lady, approached her and exclaimed with surprise, "Ah, madam, what a difference there is between your fine singing and the voice over there!" "That's odd," replied the lady. "I thought the voice over there was yours." [pp. 143–144]

A keyboard player and a workman lived on the same floor so close to each other that their rooms were separated from each other only by a thin wall. The keyboardist, who had a positive organ in his room, was in the habit of often practicing on it late until midnight, which was not very agreeable to the workman, who had borne the heat and burden of the day, as he was thus disturbed in his rest and had to get up very early the next morning. Therefore, the latter betook himself one morning to his neighbor and beseeched him to have the kindness to cease his playing at night. The musician, not a little surprised at the demand of the other, reproached him with having little taste for music, told him that many fashionable people of the city would listen to him with pleasure all night long when they had the opportunity, and bluntly refused his wish. The workman, who was no blockhead, realized well that he had to approach the matter from another side. He brought a small child's drum and decided to begin his playing directly after the musician had finished his

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Messrs. Boardman & Gray use the principle which is termed the French Grand Action, with many improvements added by themselves. This they have found from long experience to be the best in many ways. It is more powerful than the "Boston or Semi-Grand;" it will repeat with much greater rapidity and precision than any other; it is far more elastic under the manipulation of the fingers; and, to sum up all, it is almost universally preferred by professors and amateurs, and, what is still a very important point, they find, after a trial and use of it for many years, that it wears well. What is technically called the action consists of the parts that are fastened to the key, and work together to make the hammer strike the strings of the piano when the key is pressed down. The parts made of wood, consisting of some eight or ten pieces to each key, are what compose the action-maker's work; and, although they are each of them small, still on their perfection and finish depends much of the value of the instrument in which they are used. Various kinds of close-grained wood are used in their construction, such as white holly, apple or pear-tree, mahogany, hard maple, red cedar, &c., and other kinds as are best adapted to the use put to. They have to be closely fitted; the holes for the centre pins to work in must be clothed with cloth prepared expressly for this work. Buckskin of a particular finish, and cloth of various kinds and qualities, are used to cover these parts where there is much friction or liability to noise, and every part so perfectly finished and fitted that it will not only work smoothly, and without any sticking or clinging, but without noise, and yet be firm and true, so that every time the key is touched the hammer strikes the string in response. The action-maker completes these different parts of the action; and then another workman, who is called the "finisher," fits them to the keys and into the case of the piano; but, before we enter into his room, we will see to the preparation of another important part of the action, namely, the hammer. This is another extremely important thing in piano-forte making; the covering of the hammers is one of the most peculiar branches of the business. It is one that long experience and minute attention can alone perfect. The hammer head is generally made of bass-wood, and then covered with either felt prepared for this purpose, or deer or buckskin dressed expressly for this business. The preparation of buckskin for piano-forte makers is at this time quite an important trade, and the improvements made in its dressing of late years have kept full pace with the other improvements in the piano. The peculiar ordeal they undergo we cannot here explain; but we can only see the beautiful article finished for use. Some of them for the under coatings or layers are firm and yet elastic and soft, while those prepared for the top coating or capping are pliable and soft as silk velvet; and these, when correctly applied, will form a hammer which, if the piano-forte is perfect otherwise, will always give the rich, full organ tone for which the pianos of Messrs. Boardman & Gray are so celebrated. Those employed in covering and preparing hammers do this exclusively, and must perfect their work. They give the greatest number of coats, and the thickest buckskin to the hammers for the bass strings, and then taper up evenly and truely to the treble hammers, which have a less number of coats and of the thinnest kinds; and then, after the hammer is fitted to the string in the piano, and it has been tuned and the action adjusted, it goes into the hands of the hammer finisher, who tries each note, and takes off and puts on different buckskin until every note is good, and the tone of the piano is perfectly true.

to be continued in the next issue

A Resonant Testimonial

The following article appeared under the title "On Stringed Instruments" in the issue of The Musical World and New York Musical Times *(ed. R. Storrs Willis) for June 10, 1854 (p. 63).*

The "harp of a thousand strings"—the human frame—is an instrument, we all know, that hardly improves by age; but shows the wear and tear of years. Unlike this is the harp of four or six strings, the more prosaic *violin* or *guitar,* which improves as it gets older: improves in soundness and improves in tone. This is a well-known fact, but perhaps few persons have investigated its cause. What really *is* the reason, let us enquire, that stringed instruments of this description improve the more they are played upon?

One special cause may be the following. On every violin string, when brought up to concert pitch, there is a strain of perhaps a hundred pounds: that is to say, the same amount of force brought to bear upon that weight would raise it. This is a very great force to apply to a small instrument like a violin or guitar: particularly as the strain draws (partly in the violin and altogether in the guitar) upon the *sound-board*—the very portion of the instrument that must necessarily be thin, to subserve the purposes of vibration, and ought to be free from anything like (what might technically be called) *purchase*. Now, to resist this great strain upon a thin surface, the sound-board must be strengthened by cross-bars below, in the body of the instrument, attached to the under portion of the sound-board. But the cross-bars thicken and stiffen the sound-board, constituting another great obstacle, in addition to the strain of the strings, to the free vibration of the wood.

The more an instrument is played upon, however, the more this soundboard is *eased* of the strain upon it and the stiffness imparted to it by the cross-bars below; the more freely it vibrates, and the more sonorous, round and musical grows the tone. Life, musical life, is infused into the instrument the more it is played upon, banishing rigidity and stiffness and musical torpor. For this reason, in the violin manufactories of France and Germany new violins are placed within the reach of all who come in; and the manufacturers are very glad if strong-armed peasants, or lusty fiddlers of the coarser kind, scrape away vigorously upon their violins in order to arouse them; to breathe life into them—in other words to induce easy and sympathetic vibration of the sound-board and bring it out of that tense, stiff condition, induced by combined strain and pressure.

We see, then, that the *age* of a violin or other similar instrument, which, in the conviction of all musicians improves it so much, is nothing but the time necessary for the instrument to recover from the mechanical (and supposed necessary) disadvantages peculiar to its structure—to resist and overcome the combined impediments of strain and contraction.

Now, an ingenious American mechanician, Mr. W. B. Tilton, has demonstrated, that this strain of the strings upon the sound-board is unnecessary: and consequently, that the appliance of so many cross-bars, &c., to resist this strain, is *also* unnecessary. We have in Tilton's improvement to violins, guitars, &c., the advantages of *age*, for the greater part *anticipated:* anticipated by a simple change of mechanical structure.

The invention of Mr. Tilton seems to us an important one to the Art of music. We *know* that the guitar is vastly improved thereby: for playing it ourselves we can satisfactorily judge of this. We do not play the violin, but the testimony of reliable men in our community who do, corroborates the testimony

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own and had gone to bed. This took place, and the musician complained about the nocturnal drum noise, whereupon the neighbor responded in the very same tone in which his complaints had been answered by the keyboardist. In the course of this, he added that he was ready to give up his practicing on the drum right away if the keyboardist would not play the organ any later than ten o'clock at night. The deal was made, and each one let the other sleep from then on. [pp. 153–154]

An oboist who had not received as many bravos in a concert as the harpsichordist had, said jealously to the latter, "You clattered away splendidly on your instrument today." "Not as much," answered the harpsichordist, "as you cackled away on yours." [p. 175]

A double-bass player was returning home from a wedding celebration in a Hungarian town when he saw that a pair of wolves were threatening to attack him. Lacking any other defensive weapon, he seized his instrument and began working away on the lower strings to such a degree that the two beasts, terrified at the unusual sounds and perhaps also at the shape of the instrument, took flight, and the honorable man was able to continue on his way in peace. [pp. 285–286]

—*Ed.*

A Note from the Editor

The *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society,* issued annually, contains scholarly articles about the history, design, and use of musical instruments representing a variety of cultures and historical periods. The Society's *Newsletter* contains shorter articles, news of public and private collections, announcements of meetings, and other information.

AMIS members are encouraged to submit materials to the *Newsletter,* including reports of their own activities concerning musical instruments. Professional-quality black-and-white or color photos of interesting instruments in their collections are also welcome (especially if sent electronically). Contributors wishing to submit published newspaper articles to the *Newsletter* should include the name and e-mail address of the appropriate official at that newspaper who can give permission for reprinting (most large papers require fees that are beyond the limits of our budget, however).

The *Newsletter* is published in spring, summer, and fall issues (with corresponding submission deadlines of November 15, March 15, and July 15) and is also reproduced in full at the Society's website, **www.amis.org.**

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—William E. Hettrick

Testimonial . . . *continued from p. 11*

of our reason, that whatever essentially aids *vibration, must* improve every musical instrument. The advantage of this improvement is, that it can easily be applied to old instruments, the change of structure being easily effected without any detriment whatever. We understand that Messrs Tilton and Company can hardly respond to all the orders for new instruments of the improved make which they are receiving, or well attend to all the old instruments which are sent in to be re-moddelled [*sic*]. We are glad to find, that they have just erected at a very great expense, a large factory for the manufacture of violins and guitars of this construction, where they are employing a large number of workmen.

As is the case with every new invention, there are some doubters and cavillers. We believe there are a few such in the present instance. But they are confined to foreigners, who cannot believe that anything good can come out of Nazarath, or that anything of importance can be contributed to *Art* in this country. We intend to resist, in this journal, every encroachment upon the universal domain of Art: whether it come from American or German or Italian source. Art is free—it *is* universal: there is no nationality in Art, that the *ipse dixit* of any nation should rule and bear sway. Art is to be judged by itself—not by the nation from which it emanates.

We heard of an instance the other day, however, in which a foreign caviller as to the improvement of Mr. Tilton was condemned by his own deliberate judgment. A large musical house was desirous of having the agency of the improved instrument. A foreigner frequenting the establishment endeavored to dissuade them; speaking lightly of the thing. On calling several days afterward, he was requested to test half a dozen or more violins lying on a table. He unsuspectingly did so, with great care. After long-continued trial, he decided upon two instruments. They were the very "Tilton improved." "But" said the dealer, these are new and less costly violins: are you sure? "Cannot help it" was the reply, "the two have unquestionably the superior tone."

Mr. Tilton, we believe is a native of the old Granite State, who resided some time at the South and there perfected his improvement of the violin and guitar. He has already obtained three Medals, two for the Violin and one for the Guitar from the American Institute, and would have obtained another from the Musical Jury of the World's Fair (of which the editor of this journal was a member), had his improvement been submitted in time to come into competition. Mr. Tilton has associated with him, we understand, a New York capitalist, and active business man, Mr. James E. Smith. But the travelling business agent of the new enterprise is the energetic and trustworthy Mr. Augustus Morand, a member of the New York Board of Education, and one of our most useful and valued citizens. Should this gentleman be fallen in with by any of our friends, far or near, we commend him to their confidence and good services. We have, ourselves, so much faith in the Tilton improvement, that we intend to have a $100 guitar, used in our own family, altered conformably thereto; and we recommend our friends, if they wish to add value to such an instrument in their possession, to do likewise.