

A VIOLIN BY GIUSEPPE GIOVANNI BATTISTA GUARNERI

Roger Hargrave, who has also researched and drawn the enclosed poster, discusses an outstanding example of the work of a member of the Guarneri family known as 'Joseph Guarneri filius Andrea'.

Andrea Guarneri was the first of the Guarneri family of violin makers and an apprentice of Nicola Amati (he was actually registered as living in the house of Nicola Amati in 1641). Andrea's youngest son, whose work is illustrated here, was called Giuseppe. Because several of the Guarneri family bear the same christian names, individuals have traditionally been identified by a suffix attached to their names.

Thus, Giuseppe's brother is known as 'Peter Guarneri of Mantua' to distinguish him from Giuseppe's son, who is known as 'Peter Guarneri of Venice'.

Giuseppe himself is called 'Giuseppe Guarneri filius Andrea' or, more simply, 'Joseph filius' to distinguish him from his other son, the illustrious 'Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesu'.

In case this all seems a little complicated I have included a family tree for guidance.

I normally leave a description of the varnish until last when discussing instruments for THE STRAD, but in this case I will begin with the varnish. It is red over gold, radiant and warm, like glowing coals. This is 'Joseph filius' varnish at its very best. It is a long time since I picked up a violin which looked so 'alive'. The effect is something like that of the Fauvist school of painters at the turn of the last century or the Op Art school of the 1950s and 60s it makes the eyeballs vibrate. I can almost imagine the label on this bottle of varnish in Joseph's workshop, it might have said: 'Colour extremely intense apply thinly'. Although

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many details of instruments by Joseph filius at this period recall the Amati school, this type of varnish, in combination with the freer hand of Joseph, gives the instruments a visual impact never achieved by an Amati or, with the exception of Stradivari, by any other classical maker before this time.

It should be said, however, that the varnish of Joseph filius varies considerably. It is not always of such outstanding quality the same can be said of Joseph's production in general. If I were asked to describe the instruments of a few of the great Cremonese makers in a single word, I would say that Amatis (all of them) are 'refined', Stradivaris are 'stately', del Gesu are 'rebellious' and the instruments of Joseph filius Andrea are 'impulsive'. No two works by Joseph filius are ever the same. At various times he seemed to incorporate the ideas of his father, his brother, the Amatis, and even of his great contemporary, Antonio Stradivari. Further more after about 1715 his work also begins to show the hand of his two sons, Peter of Venice and del Gesu, and probably also that of Carlo Bergonzi.

Although the instrument illted here is Joseph filius Andrea at his best and most unmistakable, because of the many influences on his work there have been some difficulties in the attribution of certain other instruments. In this respect it is interesting toy read what the Hills have to say in their chapter on Joseph filius Andrea in their book, The Violin Makers of the

Guarneri Family.

A good deal of labelling and relabelling was practised during the early half of the nineteenth century, and the 'Guarneri' possibilities were not overlooked. Numbers of Andrea's violins were renamed 'Amati', certain of those of Giuseppe [Joseph filius] also; others of the master's work were transformed into 'Bergonzis'; and even today experts fail to distinguish between the one and the other. Anything at all roguish in the work of either Giuseppe [Joseph filius] or of Peter of Venice was immediately rebaptized 'Giuseppe Del Gesu'.

The head of this instrument is unquestionably Guarneri work. It is very much in the style of Andrea, but is cleaner and more accurately finished. This is, however, no inanimate fossil type scroll, whose beauty lies in mathematical purity and a crystal sharp finish. This scroll is full of energy, like some hand forged steel spring, loaded and ready to unfurl itself in an instant. Its cut and form perfectly matches the vibrant quality of the varnish and the wood.

Viewed from the side there is a full roundness to the outline, whose edge is finished with a broad chamfer. There is a trace of blacking to the chamfer on the top of the pegbox as it enters the throat. The throat itself runs a long way back under the scroll, becoming slightly wider towards the end. This makes the head look as though it is reaching forwards slightly. There is very little sign of the 'squareness' which often characterises the side outlines of Guarneri scrolls.

The volutes are cut to a similar depth as those of a Stradivari of the same period, but the final turn into the eye is closer and tighter than a Stradivari would be. There is no tiny straight cut at the eye, where the volutes end, which is a general feature of the Guarneri school. The few tool marks on the flat sides of the scroll in the final turns of the volutes are no more than we would expect to see on a Stradivari and certainly far less than an Andrea head would sport.

From the back the long slender taper of the pegbox clearly shows the influence of the Amatis. Later heads by Joseph, although much wider behind the pegbox, retain this extra width over the end of the head so that the lines of the taper remain relatively straight. In contrast, a Stradivari head would be wider behind the pegbox, becoming rapidly more tapered as it runs up and over the back of the head.

The flutings are quite shallow, lacking the depth of a Stradivari or an Amati. Neither do they have the flat

bottomed curves of Stradivari's flutings. These shallow flutings are typical of Joseph generally, but his son and pupil 'del Gesu' occasionally took even less wood away.

The central spine between the flutes fades out quickly under the front of the head. This does not happen in the extreme manner of the early Amatis, or Francesco Ruggeri; it is merely the natural result of the everdecreasing depth of the flutes. A few small, round section gouge strokes run at right angles to the central spine under the front of the head at the point where the flutings fade out. Otherwise, in contrast to his father's work and even his own later scrolls, there are very few tool marks to be seen on the flutings. A few thin traces of the scraper run along the back of the pegbox in the flutings, but these, like the fine gouge strokes on the vertical surfaces of the scroll turns, are, almost a Cremonese trademark. There is no visible scribe line or central pin pricks from the marking out compass on the spine between the flutings.

One final point which I think is worth noting, is that because of the shallow nature of the flutings Joseph's heads often appear to be more worn than they actually are. In this case the presence of large amounts of varnish shows that this head is relatively unworn. The wood of this head is of typically very fine growth and is cut on the quarter. The figure matches the back and ribs as well, but as usual it is not pronounced, making it easier to carve.

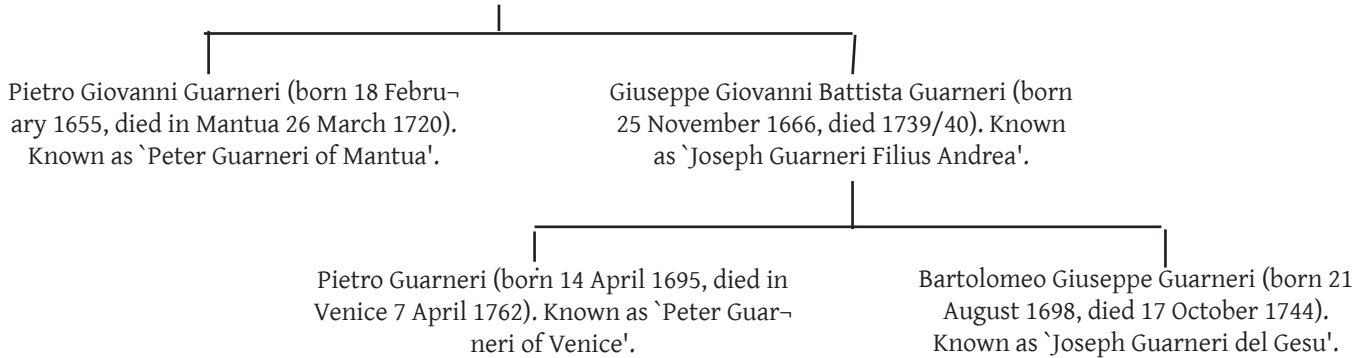
Like his father's later works the body outline of this instrument is very rounded in the top and bottom bouts. There is no prominent flatness across the top and bottom block areas, which was a feature of his father's early works and which in turn was a legacy of the Amati school.

The central bouts, although also well rounded, have a hint of squareness as they run into the top corners. This is the beginning of a prominent Joseph filius feature which was later taken up by Carlo Bergonzi. It is one of the stylistic points which link Bergonzi to the workshop of Giuseppe rather than to Stradivari. The feature was exaggerated almost to the point of caricature by Carlo Bergonzi's sons and grandsons.

The two piece back wood is of fine grown maple, the flame or figure is of medium width and is slightly wild. The ripples of the flame are strongly pronounced and the corrugated effect can be felt with the fingertips.

GUARNERI FAMILY OF VIOLIN MAKERS

Andrea Guarneri (born c.1626, died 7
December 1698). Recorded as living in the
house of Nicola Amati in the census of 1641.



The back arching is very full to the edges in the top and bottom bouts, but it has a slightly pinched look in the centre bouts. This gives the arching a long soft x shape. Several sweeping scraper strokes following this long x shape on both sides of the arch, have left their marks. Although these marks are not deep, they have retained the intense thin red varnish better than the surrounding wood. The resulting stripes of red sweeping across the lines of flame not only accentuate the x form of the arch but also add to the vibrant visual effect which I mentioned earlier.

I do not wish to give the wrong impression with these scraper marks. Their presence would probably never have been noticed had the varnish not been so thin and so intense. The truth is that the work on this instrument is very clean by any Cremonese standards and fitting for a maker who was still relatively young and sitting bang in the middle of the most auspicious period of violin making in history.

The edgework and corners are quite wide, almost on a par with a contemporary Stradivari, but they are not as thick. They do, however, still have the Cremonese contrast in thickness, with the centre bouts being very slightly thicker than the upper and lower bouts, and the corners just a little more again. The overhang, though quite even, is very small, with the rounding of the edge beginning almost directly against the ribs. The usual Cremonese knife cut

chamfer to the underside of the edge was cut at a very shallow angle. It is quite unevenly finished (probably because of the deep flame) and the resulting hollows have held little pools of dark red varnish.

The purfling seems quite wide, because the blacks are relatively thick. The blacks, though dark, have a quicker tendency towards grey where the edges are worn. This greyness in the blacks was to reoccur regularly to a greater or lesser extent throughout Giuseppe's working life and was also a feature of the works of his son, del Gesu. The mitres of the purfling are of medium length, they are cleanly cut and well balanced. They have no sting, either drooping in the style which his father occasionally preferred, or slender and delicate in the style of

**Stradivari's sons
contributed 88 working
years to the workshop
during his lifetime alone.
What were they doing all
that time, brewing tea and
sweeping the floor?**

Stradivari at this time. The edge channel, like the fluting on the head, is quite shallow. Again this gives the impression of greater wear to the edgework than is actually the case.

Finally I think it worth pointing out that I have observed a joint in the purfling of the centre bouts on many Joseph filius violins.

These joints are sometimes only visible with a jeweller's eyeglass (for a possible explanation see THE STRAD April 1985, p.934).

Before leaving the back I should mention the locating pins. They are quite large and placed prominently on the centre line about 2.5mm inside the

purfling. No attempt has been made to hide them under the purfling as Stradivari would have done. In contrast, the mysterious centre pin of the Guarneri family is more difficult to detect, (see THE STRAD May 1988, p.405). In this case the pinpoint exit of the conical hole lies on the centre joint midway between the top and bottom purfling lines. As far as I know the only maker using this pin in classical times who deviated from this central position was Guarneri del Gesu. Del Gesu occasionally set this 'pin' on the 'reverse stop', which Stradivari also used for his thickening centre. On the inside of this violin the central back pin has been covered by a stud, several of which have been set along the centre joint. These studs are not original.

The rib wood is very similar to that of the back and once again the deep ripple of the flame can be felt as well as seen. The colour contrast ranges from the silver gold of the ground where the varnish is missing, through the orange red of the true varnish to the brown/grey reds of the patina which has collected in the deepest hollows. In the tighter curves the ribs have clearly split along the line of the flame. These splits probably happened during the bending process and similar splits can even be seen occasionally in works by Stradivari. In his later works, del Gesu appears to have tried to avoid this risk by thinning the centre bout ribs to about 0.5mm at the corner block and by making the centre curves much more open. At the corners the rib joints have been blackened.

The two piece belly wood is of exceptionally fine growth, widening only slightly in the bouts. This belly has the neatest edge-work I have ever seen on a violin by Giuseppe. There

are almost no tool marks on the belly and the pure state of its preservation is accompanied by a rich covering of original varnish.



Side of the violin by Giuseppe Giovanni Battista Guarneri.

The belly purfling seems to be slightly heavier than that of the back. This is possibly due to the different swelling properties of back and belly wood. I have observed the same phenomenon on some of my own works.

The belly arching, though similar to the back, is fuller across the centre bouts, where the soundholes sit. The x shaped form of the back arching is therefore less apparent on the belly.

Generally speaking, this instrument has much less of the Amati influence than many of Joseph filius's earlier works, but in certain particulars the message still comes through loud and clear. On this instrument the soundholes bear a remarkable stylistic resemblance to the soundholes of a Nicola Amati. In fact they are possibly more directly related to the style and workmanship of Amati than to that of his father, especially his father's later works.

The soundholes are quite short, as they are on many of Joseph's works from this time. They are cut in the normal Cremona way; that is, the top and bottom circles have been drilled and the main body of the soundhole has been cut at right angles to the surface of the arching.

This is 'Joseph filius' varnish at its very best. It is a long time since I picked up a violin which looked so alive if I were asked to describe his instruments in a single word, I would say . 'impulsive'.

The shape of the wings, which taper together towards the ends, is typical of the Amatis. The cut off of these wings, especially the bottom wings, is also much more akin to Amati than to Andrea, his father, whose cut off angle was slightly more vertical. The fluting of the wings is, like Amati, an integral part of the arching. In contrast, Stradivari's flutings are a feature in themselves and break the

natural flow of the arching.

Joseph filius also changed his soundholes dramatically during his working life. Each time he seems to have taken on

some feature which reminds one of someone else, but I don't think he ever hit the specific style of any maker more than he did in the cutting of these soundholes after Amati.

I am not implying that Giuseppe had no style of his own he certainly did. Perhaps it is worth taking a look at the problem of overlapping styles in Cremona generally. I sometimes think that we fail to understand fully the relationship which the classical Cremonese makers had with one another. Not only were they grouped in families, they were also grouped professionally. Furthermore they lived together as neighbours, in most cases on the same street corner. They were active members of the same church. They acted as godfathers for one another's children and they served their apprenticeships in each other's workshops, often alongside other apprentices who in turn would eventually become their neighbours and their professional colleagues. How could they avoid influencing each other?

One of the most beautiful instruments I know is considered by some authorities to be the work of Carlo Bergonzi, while others believe it to be the work of Francesco Stradivari, but no one in the business would be prepared to offer it as a bit of both. I know of any number of instruments where the work of two or more makers is apparent and where all the parts clearly belong together.

When we search for a specific identity for an instrument it is all too often because a clear attribution is required by a customer. We only seem to admit to collaborative work when the junior partner has a higher price to his name tag. This is often the case with Joseph filius Andrea, where the hand of del Gesu is always considered worth mentioning. In the case of a later Strad, however, the bias will usually run in favour of the father alone.

I have heard it voiced by an expert of considerable standing that almost all Stradivari's heads after 1700 were cut by his sons. He added that of course one cannot say such a thing to a customer. Well, why not? If we estimate that Stradivari's sons were capable of making a violin at the age of 18 (in fact, they were probably capable by the age of 14), this would mean that together the brothers contributed 88 working years to the Stradivari workshop during Antonio's

lifetime alone. What were they doing all that time, brewing tea and sweeping the floor?

There is of course a difference between collaboration and influence, but the line which divides them is often ill defined.

Personally I am convinced that the violin illustrated here is as pure an example of Joseph filius's work as one could imagine. The key word here is influence rather than collaboration. Signs of collaboration in Joseph's work came later, but it certainly did not devalue his instruments.

The Hills estimate that Joseph made about 250 violins and possibly one viola, which was made in his father's workshop. He also made perhaps 15 to 20 cellos.

He may never have reached the dizzy heights of his great contemporary Antonio Stradivarius, but he does rank as one of the greatest makers of all time. As I have already pointed out, even by Cremonese standards Joseph's production was occasionally exceptional, as this magnificent instrument proves, and in other ways his contribution may have been just as important as that of Stradivari. We should not forget that he sired and trained Peter Guarneri of Venice and the great del Gesu, and he probably had a hand in the development and training of Carlo Bergonzi. Three cheers for collaboration! If his roll as a teacher had been Giuseppe's only contribution, it would probably have been enough.