

GIOVANNI BAPTISTA GUADAGNINI

1776

DESCRIPTION AND MEASUREMENTS:

ROGER HARGRAVE. PHOTOGRAPHS:

MICHAEL TOLLMANN

Back Belly

In his classic work *The Guadagnini Family of Makers*, Ernest Doring tells us the following about J. B. Guadagnini's Lachmann Schwechter violin: '... a violin, in condition virtually as it left the maker's hands, with the original neck and inside blocks; the upper or neck block still intact with its three original hand forged nails ... is in the possession of Erich Lachmann. This specimen has thickly laid on varnish of a vivid orange red colour'



Although the violin still retains its original neck, it has been reshaped, blocked up at the root and tilted back in the modern fashion. Unfortunately, the neck block and nails were removed fairly recently by 'person or persons unknown'. Nevertheless, the condition of this instrument allows us to observe the work of the master's Turin period without the usual difficulty of sorting out what is original from what has been replaced or altered. The violin has clearly benefited from being a part of many collections rather than having had a working life with one demanding player after the other. Available data indicates that the violin passed from the collection of Emil Herrmann via a Roger Chittolini to Erich Lachmann, the owner of a famous collection of early musical instruments. The next owner was a Chicago dealer, Mr. Schwechter who later sold the instrument to a German collection. After exchanging hands in Germany several times it entered the collection of Geigenbau Machold in Bremen, West Germany.

Giovanni Baptista Guadagnini is regarded by many as the next most illustrious maker of concert violins after Giuseppe Guarneri 'del Gesù' and Antonio Stradivari, and not without reason. Guadagnini's large, flat but not

necessarily low arched violins, often modelled after Stradivari, have a power and quality which can equal the best Cremonese work. This particular example was made during the period of Count Cozio di Salabue's patronage, and the influence of Stradivari is clearly to be seen, both inside and out. Guadagnini would probably have been given the opportunity to examine the materials of Stradivari's workshop, collected by Count Cozio and which now make up the greater part of the Cremona Museum collection.

The outline of the Lachmann Schwechter is bold with strong corners, not unlike the character of Stradivari's late golden period (see the 'von Beck-erath Stradivarius shown in Walter Hamma's *Meister Italienischer Geigenbaukunst*). The edgework is extremely flat, with almost no hollowing in the purfling channel – the purfling itself is artistically well finished in spite of the uneven character of the individual strips of wood which vary in thickness and the knife cuts which can be seen at two or three points running out of the channel. It is interesting to notice the break in the purfling beneath the button. This is a feature of Guadagnini's Turin period, so often destroyed by well meaning restorers throughout the years. It should not be assumed that Guadagnini was simply too lazy to bridge the gap; on the contrary he probably observed a weakness at this point where the button often breaks away along the purfling channel. This theory is reinforced by the fact that Guadagnini's edgework increases in thickness suddenly as it approaches the button. On this particular instrument the button is over 5.5 mm thick.

The quality of maple wood used by Guadagnini varies considerably from the finest to the plainest. This variation in the quality of materials and the accompanying changes in varnish and working methods caused earlier researchers to conclude that G. B. Guadagnini was two or even three different makers. For those who wish to pursue the development and final outcome of this argument, Doring provides the ideal battlefield. His conclusions are reached by taking the available evidence and balancing it against the most reasonable and logical possibilities. As a result Doring's work is the foundation for what has now become the universally accepted fact – that J. B. Guadagnini was a well travelled, single individual.

The wood used for the back and ribs of the Lachmann Schwechter is of middling quality. It possesses a beautiful velvety flame of medium width but the cut runs from quarter sawn on the right side to slab cut on the left bouts. This has led to a slight distortion of the back arching; this probably became settled quite early in the life of the instrument. The wood is of quick growth with wide annual rings and is more likely to have come from a lowland local Italian tree rather than the mountain timber normally preferred by the classical Cremonese makers. The ribs were almost certainly cut from the back and clearly show the marks of a toothed plane underneath the varnish all round the instrument.

In common with most classical works the top rib is

in one piece, and, in this case, the bottom rib as well. In contrast to the back and ribs the head and neck are of fine growth with shallow figure. The head, again after Stradivari, is elegant and light in execution.

The belly wood used by Guadagnini for his violins is almost always of good quality and this instrument is no exception. The central band of this two piece belly is of extremely fine growth, becoming only a little wider towards the flanks. Once again the belly displays much of the influence of Stradivari. The arching has that fullness over the outside top curve of the f holes, a feature generally exaggerated by later copyists of Stradivari, especially the inferior French productions. Stradivari's influence is also present in the f holes themselves, particularly in their setting, and overall size and shape. They do, however, retain the strong personal stamp of Guadagnini, the nicks, for example, being positioned below halfway. This was also a feature of Guadagnini's Parma period. The top and bottom holes have been clearly drilled out at right angles to the surface of the arching; in particular, the bottom holes are round, not oval or pear shaped as is usual in Guadagnini's work. The wings of the f holes are fluted, but they run out to the edge without scooping into the purfling channel which is almost non-existent even at this point. A few small but clearly defined scraper marks can be seen on the belly here and there, but otherwise the work is extremely neat and tidy.

On the head the volutes are cleanly finished until the last one and a half turns where the gouge marks become more obvious. Tool marks are also visible on the vertical surface of the turns. The eye of the scroll is encircled by the prick marks (the remains of the marking-out process) which are so often a feature of Guadagnini's work. A further glance at Hamma's *Meister Italienischer Geigenbaukunst* will confirm these pin pricks as a feature of the Guadagnini family in general.

The fluting of the scroll and pegbox is quite deep, with a roundish channel, rather than the flat bottomed curve of Stradivari's fluting. Long scraper marks lightly trace along the back of the pegbox, but otherwise the fluting is very clean. The chin of the scroll is slightly square, and what remains of the black lining can be seen on the chamfer, accentuating the lines of the head in the style of Stradivari.

The influence of Stradivari and his contemporaries appears inside the instrument as well. As the photograph of the block shows, the linings and blocks are

of a white wood not unlike that used by Stradivari (see 7 Segreti' di Stradivari by Sacconi). The instrument was also quite obviously built around a mould using blocks of similar proportions to Stradivari. The linings are let into the blocks from the centre bouts only, and are simply wedged into place at the top and bottom bouts. Interestingly, the top linings of the upper bouts taper towards the top block coinciding with the taper of the ribs (see measurements). This seems to indicate that the ribs were tapered on the belly only and that the taper began at the top corner blocks. In general, and in common with other fine Italian makers, the work inside is efficient and solid, without being fussy.

For Giovanni Baptista Guadagnini's use of the stepped label it is perhaps worth quoting again from Ernest Doring's *The Guadagnini Family of Violin Makers*: 'we find the type set in a manner which permitted the ticket to be cut in graduated steps. The form originated in Guadagnini's last years at Parma. A similar form was first used at Turin; reference to Cremona continues, but the initial 'P' under

the monogram is replaced with 'T'. Having asserted a Cremonese connection, the maker found it expedient to renounce allegiance to Piacenza, therefore the substitution of the 'T' for 'P' obviously proclaimed Turin as the city of his residence'.

Finally we come to the varnish. It is a fiery orange red, over a golden ground. From the photographs it can be seen that it is present in both quantity and quality, but its luminescence and intensity need to be seen on the violin itself to be believed fully. It is unusual and at the same time a little untypical of Guadagnini that it is almost tempting to imagine another hand at work. Perhaps to do so would be to fall into the same trap as those who believed that the immense variations in the style of Guadagnini's work were the result of two, three, or even more people working under the same name.

The Lachmann Schwechter violin is pictured and described in the following publications:

Walter Hamma: *Meister Italienischer Geigenbaukunst* (Herrsching am Ammersee, 1965)

Loan Exhibition of Stringed Instruments and ows (New York, 1966)

Ernest N. Doring: *The Guadagnini Family of Violin Makers* (Chicago, 1949)

Certificates include those from Emil Herrmann, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Erich Lachmann

Other references may be made to:

Simone F. Sacconi: *7 Segreti' di Stradivari* (Cremona, 1972)

W. L. von Lütgendorff: *Die Geigen und Lautenmacher* (Frankfurt am Main, 1922)

THE STRAD thanks Geigenbau Machold for giving permission for the violin to be illustrated.

**GIOVANNI BAPTISTA GUADAGNINI 1776
DESCRIPTION AND MEASUREMENTS:
ROGER HARGRAVE. PHOTOGRAPHS:
MICHAEL TOLLMANN**

	<i>Back</i>	<i>Belly</i>
Length (over arch)	352	
Upper bouts	164	166.5 mm
Middle bouts	109	113 mm
Lower bouts	119.5	202.5 mm

Stop length taken from left side of neck: 196 mm

Approximate thicknesses of the edges, taken from the back only:

Corners 3.5 mm

Centre bouts 4 mm

Upper and lower bouts 3.5 to 3.7 mm

Button 5.5 mm

Overhang of the edge from the rib outline: approximately 3.5 mm at centre bouts and 2.75 mm around the top and bottom bouts

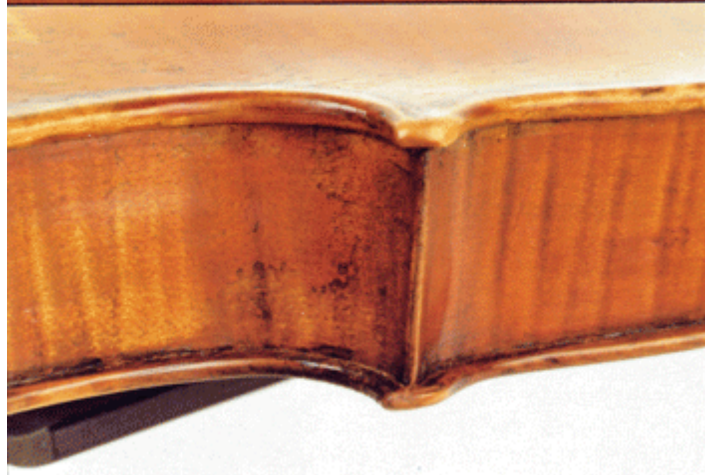
<i>Rib heights</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>
Neck root	29	29 mm
Upper corner	31.5	31.5 mm
Lower corner	32	31.5 mm
Endpin	31.5	31.5 mm

Purfling: the distance from the edge is 4.5 mm and the total width is 1 to 1.5 mm. The width of the whites is 0.6 to 0.75 mm.

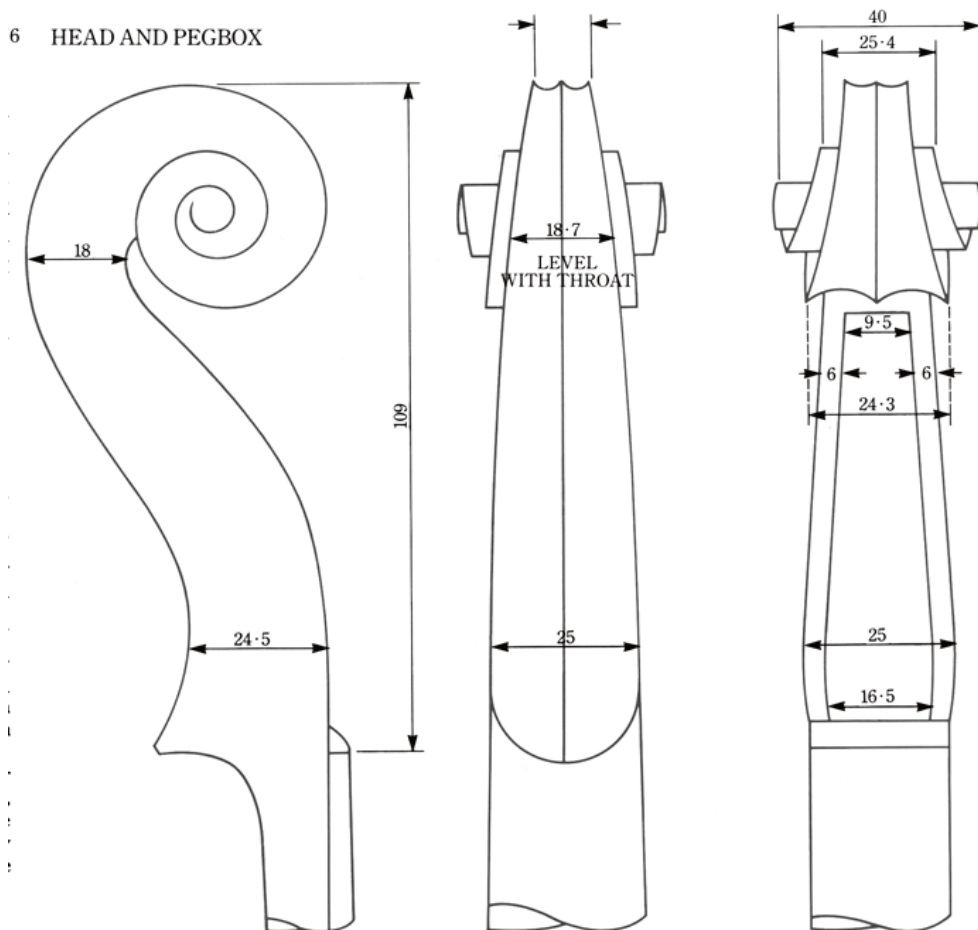
The outline is accurate to within 1 mm over the length. The thicknessing measurements, in mm, are viewed from the inside of the plates. The head and f-hole drawings are only facsimiles on which to mount the measurements.



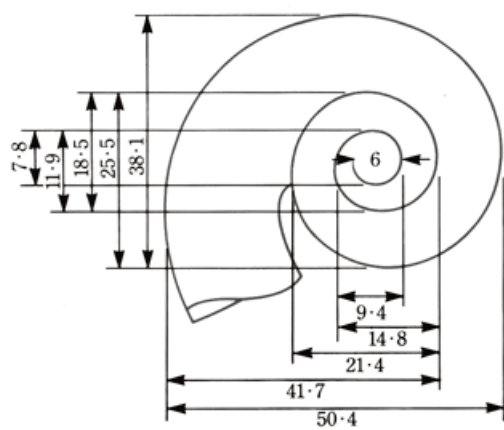




6 HEAD AND PEGBOX



LEFT SIDE



RIGHT SIDE

