



MIM

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM



# STRADIVARIUS

ORIGINS AND LEGACY OF  
THE GREATEST VIOLIN MAKER





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
ORIGINS AND LEGACY OF  
THE GREATEST VIOLIN MAKER



*In partnership with:*



Museo del Violino

*friends of*  STRADIVARI

*Sponsored by:*



We are in the hillside forest of the Fiemme Valley in Italy, in *Il Bosco che Suona* (“The Musical Woods”). It was from this forest that the early masters—including Andrea Amati and Antonio Stradivari—sourced the materials for their craft.

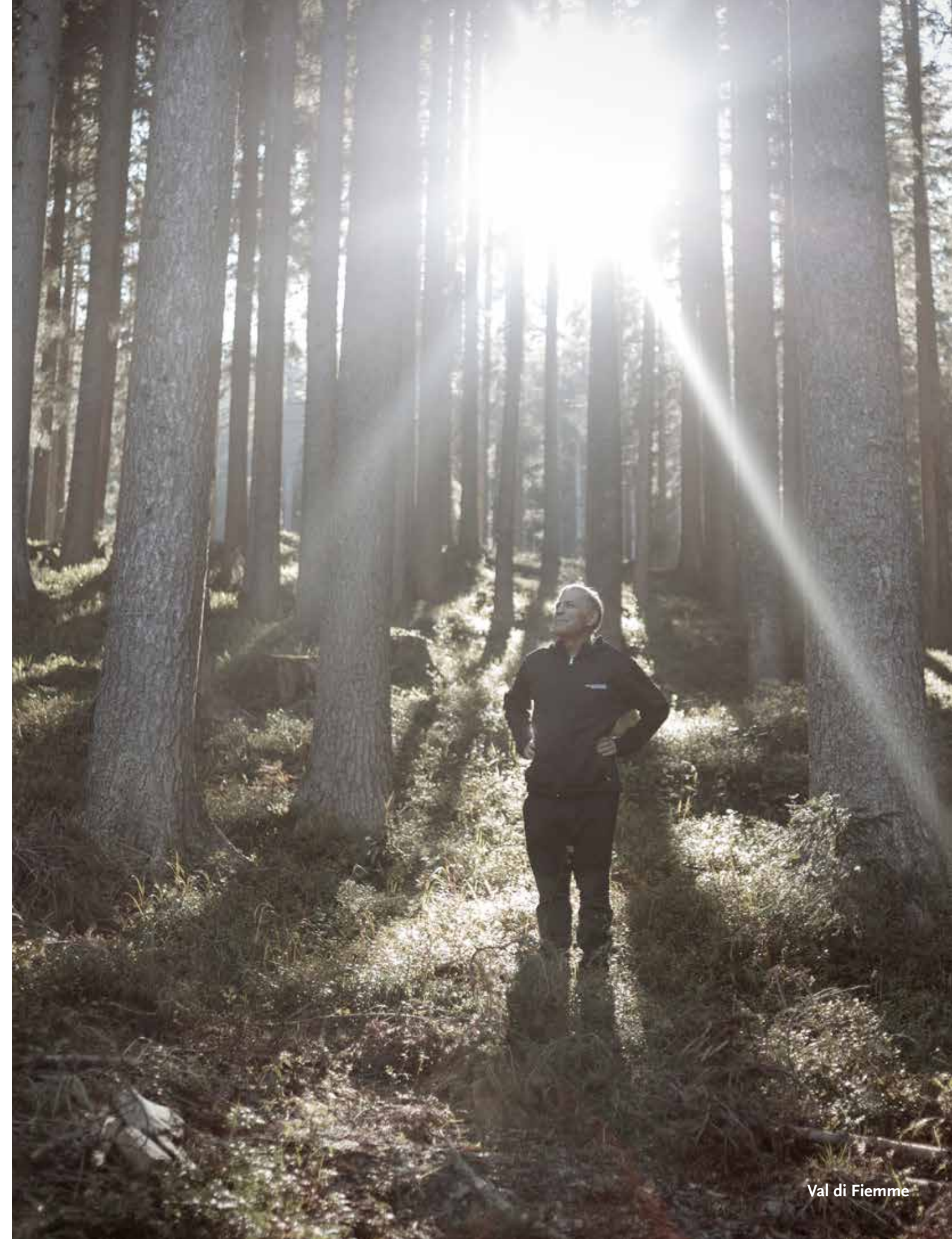
A hand knocks on the side of a tree.

The sound resounds.

The tree is strong, yet flexible enough  
to live a second life in music.

The wood from these trees is transported down the river and ends its journey at the small Italian walled city of Cremona, the so-called city of the violin. There, in a woodworker’s workshop, the master luthier taps a hand against a block of wood.

To hear its ringing sound is to hear the start of our story...





Autem quae volupta tiuntia atis vollia

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# About Our Partners



## Museo del Violino

For five centuries, Cremona, Italy, has been the world’s capital of violin making. The city’s Museo del Violino celebrates this heritage and welcomes visitors to its exhibition halls, research laboratory, cultural and study centers, and world-class auditorium.

The Museo del Violino presents some of the greatest works by luthiers from the Cremonese workshops of the Amati, Guarneri, and Stradivari families. Other highlights include original molds and tools used by Antonio Stradivari in his workshop, loaned masterpieces from all over the world, and winning instruments of the International Triennial Competition of Violin Making “Antonio Stradivari” (called “Triennale”). Multimedia installations allow visitors—from novices to experts, from children to adults—to enjoy an enthralling visit in which history, instruments, fragrances, sounds, and images converge.



Launched in 2009, the Friends of Stradivari is an international community of people who share a passion for violin making and who collect, play, and safeguard instruments made by the great masters of the Cremonese school.

The “Friends” facilitate a permanent exhibition housed in Cremona’s Museo del Violino. Their growing collection includes important instruments made by the venerable Cremonese masters owned by private and public collectors worldwide. Visit [friendsofstradivari.it](http://friendsofstradivari.it) to join and become part of this special community.

# Partner’s Statement



Violin making in Cremona is absolutely unique in world history. This Italian legacy was formally acknowledged in 2012 when UNESCO declared the traditional violin craftsmanship in Cremona an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The mission of Cremona’s Museo del Violino is to cherish and preserve this tradition for future generations and to disseminate this knowledge throughout the world. For this reason, it is a pleasure and an honor for us to share a small but significant part of our collection with such a prestigious institution as the Musical Instrument Museum, a renowned cultural institution that attracts visitors from across the United States and the globe.

**The mission of Cremona’s Museo del Violino is to cherish and preserve this tradition for future generations and to disseminate this knowledge throughout the world.**

The special exhibition *Stradivarius: Origins and Legacy of the Greatest Violin Maker* was conceived as a way to give museum guests a taste of the five centuries of our city’s tradition, starting from Andrea Amati up to contemporary violin makers. In this story, Antonio Stradivari is a natural focal point.

We hope this exhibition will inspire you to visit Cremona, a city that holds many artistic treasures to be discovered. Working with colleagues at MIM has been a genuine pleasure and we hope to continue our mutual cooperation in the future.

**Paolo Bodini**  
President, Friends of Stradivari

**Virginia Villa**  
Director General, Museo del Violino

## Director's Statement

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Since its inception, MIM has collaborated with prestigious national and international institutions that share a similar vision, including Musée de la musique in Paris, France; the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium; and the Smithsonian Institution. Now, for the first time, MIM has the great privilege to partner with *Museo del Violino* and the Friends of Stradivari. Together, we are pleased to present *Stradivarius: Origins and Legacy of the Greatest Violin Maker*.

MIM was founded in the belief that music is a unique gift that unites the world. By our very nature, we have a need to make music, craft instruments that create particular sounds, and, in some cases, endeavor unrelentingly to pursue perfection.

**It is an honor for MIM to showcase these beloved instruments and share their rich history through compelling narratives and an immersive audiovisual experience with visitors from around the world.**

The gifted work of Antonio Stradivari symbolizes the pinnacle of superior craftsmanship; the name itself remains a superlative of enduring excellence. Originating more than three centuries ago in the Italian city of Cremona, with and among masterpieces of other violin makers, Stradivari's works set such a high standard that even today, they remain unmatched for their beauty and sound. It is an honor for MIM to showcase these beloved instruments and share their rich history through compelling narratives and an immersive audiovisual experience with visitors from around the world.

This never-before-seen exhibition has special significance to MIM and we are truly inspired by the opportunity to tell the story of Stradivari and his legacy through music—the language of the soul.

**April A. Salomon**  
Executive Director, Musical Instrument Museum

## Preface

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On August 6, 2015, the news story broke that a stolen Stradivari violin had been located. The 1734 “Ames” Stradivarius had disappeared in 1980 from the conservatory office in Massachusetts of its owner, violinist and educator Roman Totenburg. When news of the instrument's recovery went public, it was picked up by every major media network in the United States and spread like wildfire across the country. Social media was abuzz with the news: the story was “liked” and “shared” thousands of times on Facebook, and the message flew through Twitter. The maker of this instrument, to our knowledge, had rarely left the rural Italian walled city in which he lived and worked. By contrast, the geographical and virtual space covered by the news story was more expansive.

**What is the power of violins that keeps us looking back through the centuries to try to understand them and to possess them?**

The widespread celebration that accompanied this story of recovery prompts several questions about the legacy of Antonio Stradivari in the popular imagination. What is the power of violins that keeps us looking back through the centuries to try to understand them and to possess them? What is it about Stradivari's work—and the mythology surrounding it—that keeps him in the news nearly three centuries after his death? Other instruments are frequently stolen and recovered but are not considered newsworthy. Why do violins so pique the curiosity and attention of the media and the public? What does the spread of this news story tell us about human desire? What inflates the values of these instruments to the point where some people will steal or do harm to obtain them?

The Stradivari phenomenon goes beyond interest in news stories; it has even entered the language we speak. To share a personal experience: I recently overheard a salesperson in a sporting goods store tell a customer that a certain tennis racket was “the Stradivarius of tennis rackets.” As the Latin cognate of the name Stradivari, the term “Stradivarius” is used to refer to the musical instruments created by Italian master luthier Antonio Stradivari (1644–1737). When divorced from that usage, the term implies greatness in one's field and is synonymous with “perfection,” “the best,” or “unmatched.” Aside from bringing a smile to my face, this statement likening a tennis racket to a musical instrument demonstrates the only instance in which an instrument maker's name has entered into popular usage to imply something other than the instrument itself.

# Preface Continued

Beyond this word’s popular usage are stories that have yet to be widely shared and that cast a very human light onto the subject. Outside of the circles of classical musicians, experts, and aficionados, many people have never been exposed to the stories of Stradivari’s predecessors and contemporaries, nor to the ongoing legacy of violin making in the magnificent Italian city of Cremona.

The exhibition *Stradivarius: Origins and Legacy of the Greatest Violin Maker* serves as an opportunity to engage visitors in the stories of the creators and preservers of Cremonese instruments, as well as those who make music on them. It allows visitors to admire the instruments as works of craftsmanship and to better understand the people who bring violins to life. It illustrates the many stages of a Cremonese violin’s pilgrimage through history, from the makers’ workshop to royal courts, auction houses, concert stages, science laboratories, and museums.

Museums are not solely repositories for treasures; they actively shape how people understand and appreciate these treasures. MIM explores musical instruments through the lens of human behavior. What do we learn about people’s social and cultural identities by examining the musical sounds they make and enjoy, the musical instruments they create, and the acts of music making they engage in? In trying to respond to these questions, I draw on perspectives from my training in ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicologists are interested in the social life of music, and our methodology often requires observing, participating, and talking to people to gain a deeper understanding of how and why they make music. We explore the values, hopes, and everyday challenges and pleasures that are expressed and affirmed in music making. From this perspective, the mythology surrounding violins and their high status exist because of human will and action. Violins are created by people. They are cared for and played by people. The narratives and myths surrounding Stradivarius—often framed in terms of mystery, secrecy, and fixation on value—are defined and perpetuated by people.

**From this perspective, the mythology surrounding violins and their high status exist because of human will and action.**

The historical and ongoing legacy of Cremonese luthiery offers something meaningful for everybody. It is a story that belongs to the world. Yet, often it is not represented in venues and modes that are accessible, understandable, and meaningful to nonspecialists and non-aficionados. MIM’s exhibition aims to bring out this legacy in ways that will appeal to nonspecialists—the vast majority of the public! The content naturally lends itself to people of all interests: art lovers, design fanatics, scientifically inquisitive types, people who enjoy handiwork and craftsmanship, those with interests in natural resources, and—the broadest category of all—music lovers. This exhibition follows a legacy of exhibitions about fine violins that display a range of work by one maker or a group of violins as art objects. Some pursue different narratives from ours, for example, the history and importance of the bow, the strings, or the contributions of makers in Germany, France, and England. Our exhibition exposes only the tip of the iceberg of the many possible accounts that could be told on this topic. And yet, I am immensely proud of the way we have represented the narratives we selected and the novel concepts we pursued in order to accomplish our goal. We reflect the story of the

violin as belonging to people of all ages and genders, from many places of origin and varied life experiences. Instead of the museum or curator acting as authority, we allow the makers to speak on their own behalf. And, we use sight and sound to bring the story to life in compelling ways. In this exhibition, the story of Stradivarius is neither cloistered by myths and secrets nor is it the sole domain of the experts; it belongs to everyday people.

My own recognition of these masterworks as the ultimate human interest story was formed over several visits to our partner institution, the Museo del Violino in Cremona. That museum presents stories of the instruments and their makers in inspiring and unforgettable ways. My deepest hope is that what visitors see at MIM will inspire them to visit Cremona and the Museo del Violino.

**Kathleen R. Wiens, PhD**  
**Curator, Musical Instrument Museum**



## Why Cremona?

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In the sixteenth century, Cremona was a flourishing commercial town with a strategic location near the Po River. Along this key trade route flowed the wood used in violin making, including resonant spruce from the Fiemme Valley. As an important center of the Duchy of Milan, prosperous, populous Cremona experienced a period of intense artistic creativity.

Painters, sculptors, and architects as well as skilled masters in wood carving and inlaying all converged to work in Cremona. Among them were Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1532–1625), one of the first women painters in Europe, and Giulio Campi (1502–1572), both renowned artists associated with northern Italian painting styles that emerged in the late sixteenth century.

Cremona's cathedral, churches, and academies hosted intense musical activity. Generations of violinists from Cremona worked at both the English and French courts. Composer Marc'Antonio Ingegneri (c. 1535–1592) and his pupil Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), a pioneer of early opera, led the musical scene.

A plague epidemic swept the Po Valley in 1630–1631, annihilating many master luthiers in Cremona and the neighboring town of Brescia, home to other early violin makers. Andrea Amati's grandson, Nicolò Amati, was the only Cremonese violin maker known to survive the outbreak. His instruments and methods inspired the next generation of masters: Francesco Rugeri, Antonio Stradivari, and Andrea Guarneri.



## Royal Beginnings

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Patronage has always been an important part of the violin's story.



“Patrons” are supporters who commission or purchase instruments for themselves or others to play. The political and cultural influence of Florence’s Medici family directly contributed to the violin’s swift rise to fame. As the Medici strategically married into the most powerful European royal families, they brought with them their legacy of artistic patronage. Catherine de’ Medici (1519–1589) married King Henry II of France. She supported poets, artists, and dancers, and her patronage of instrument makers and musicians brought Italian influence into the performing arts of the French court. Although it is unknown if she herself directly commissioned Andrea Amati, decorated Amati instruments were made for or gifted to her children, including several for her son Carlo IX.



Autem quae volupta tiuntia atis vollia



Autem quae volupta tiuntia atis vollia

# The “Carlo IX” Violin c. 1566 by Andrea Amati (1505–1574)

Private Collection  
Courtesy of the  
Friends of Stradivari



The earliest recorded workshop in Cremona belonged to Andrea Amati. Often called a founding father of the violin, he developed the proportions and shape of the instrument that is now familiar to our eyes and ears. He is also credited with evolving the Cremonese construction method, in which the sides of the violin are shaped around an internal form. The form ensured efficiency during construction and uniformity of product. This method was used by all the Cremonese masters who followed.

Northern Italian artists decorated Amati instruments in honor of noble recipients using gold leaf, silver leaf, and natural pigments. This instrument was created for King Charles IX of France. It features crown designs, fleur-de-lis (a symbol of the French royal court), and the seal of the Order of Saint Michael located on the lowest portion of the golden cord. The letters T-A-T are visible on one side, and gold-leaf patterns appear on both sides.

About twenty instruments by Andrea Amati exist today. They are located in private collections and museums, such as the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, and the Museo del Violino in Cremona, Italy.

# Violin c. 1680 by Francesco Rugeri (1628-1698)

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Private Collection  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari



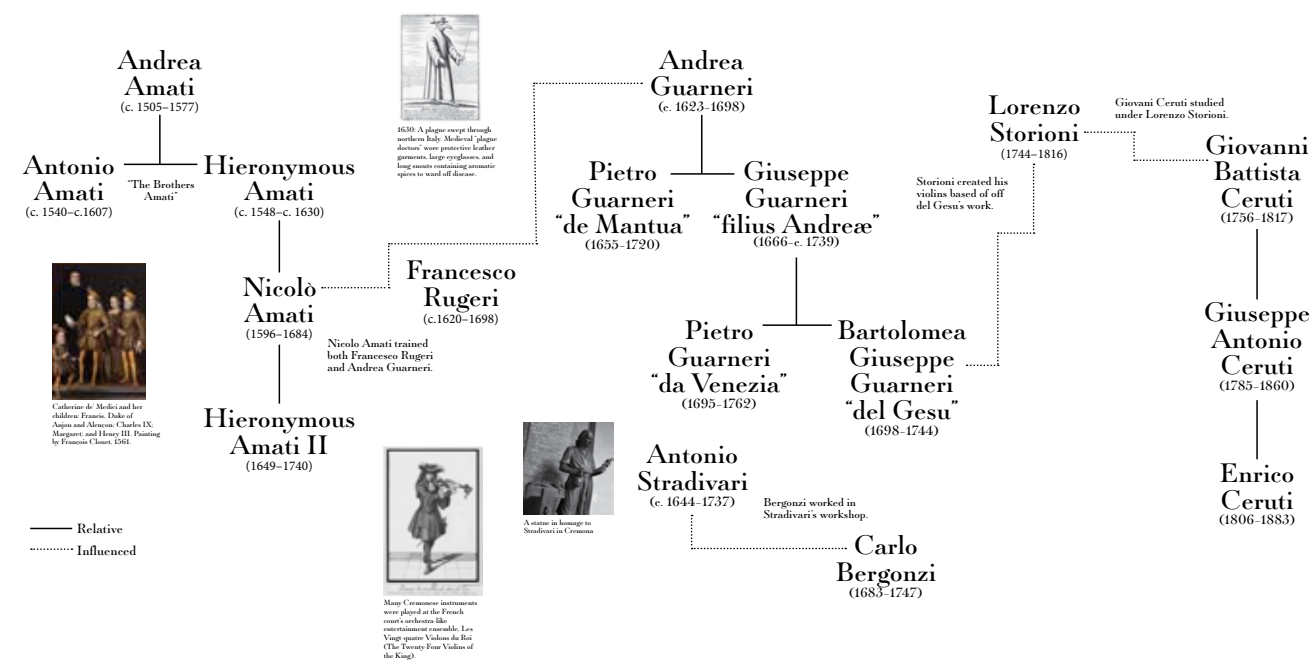
Often hidden by the long shadow of Antonio Stradivari, Francesco Rugeri remains one of Cremona's "best-kept secrets." The beautiful tone produced by his instruments, especially his cellos, make them highly prized by players the world over. It is thought that Rugeri was a student of Nicolò Amati or, at the very least, was heavily influenced by him. In true Cremonese fashion, several of Rugeri's sons assisted him in his workshop.

Rugeri was the first maker to create cellos smaller than the large-sized ones popular until his time. Our standard-sized modern cellos are in part thanks to his design modifications. The smaller sizes were both easier to handle and had a delicate, refined sound. Large Amati and Stradivari cellos were often cut down in size to accommodate easier handling.

This violin has an interesting story. Although the internal label identifies it as the work of Nicolò Amati, the instrument is in fact the work of the master Francesco Rugeri. Very likely, the original Rugeri label was "upgraded" to the more valuable name of Amati in the nineteenth century.

# Dynasties of Craftsmanship

As with many trades, violin making is learned through apprenticeship: a student watches, learns, and then imitates a teacher. In Cremona, family workshops functioned as centers for apprenticing luthiers. Sons, grandsons, nephews, and visiting apprentices from across Europe spent years learning their craft under the watchful eyes of their elders. Members of each family also established connections via financial arrangements and relationships through marriage or as godparents. While there is no evidence to indicate whether wives and daughters worked in the workshops, there is no proof that they did not. That history is simply not a written one.



# The “Artôt-Alard” Violin c. 1728 by Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737)

Endre Balogh  
Courtesy of the  
Friends of Stradivari



As the most widely imitated maker of stringed instruments, Stradivari created violins whose design is familiar to our eye. If you look closely, you may note visual differences between this violin and other instruments in the exhibition in their height and width, the slope of their front and back arches, and the shape and position of sound holes (the *f*-shaped carvings). These proportions contribute to the sound of a “Strad” and are key to the sweet tone it produces. Strads are responsive instruments; musicians can make them sing with the slightest touch.

It is perhaps paradoxical that although Stradivari set a standard, each Strad has its own “personality” and is different in tone, proportion, and color. During all seventy years of his working life, Stradivari tried new lengths and widths, new shapes and sizes of the sound holes through which the vibrating air sings out to the listener, and differing thicknesses and sloping angles of the face and back plates. It was this experimentation and quest for perfection that led to his status as arguably the greatest violin maker.



Autem quae volupta tiuntia atis vollia

### The “Artôt-Alard” Violin Continued

Often put on a pedestal in musical instrument history, the work of Antonio Stradivari is anything but mysterious or secretive. His was a very “human genius.” He dedicated his entire working life and every working moment to experimentation and refinement. His craft was fueled by enormous energy and driven by insatiable curiosity and a controlling, perfectionist personality. He pushed the limits of knowledge in his time and set the standard in his field for generations to come.

Antonio Stradivari was around eighty-four years old when he made this instrument. Note the exceptional wood he selected for both the front and back plates. The spruce front shows grain lines that are close together and almost perfectly straight, and the maple back has a tight horizontal “flame” pattern. This violin, like almost all Strads, has been refitted with a modern bridge, fingerboard, and neck.

## What’s in a Name?

**Sobriquet so·bri·quet** (‘sō-bri-ˌkā, -ˌket/) – a nickname, sometimes assumed, but often given by another

The custom of attaching a name to fine bowed string instruments is more common for violins than for any other European classical instrument type. These names provide a mark of distinction, venerate a past owner, or serve as a reminder of an instrument’s history. They also indicate people who helped ensure the continuity of the violin’s story through history.

Rachel Barton Pine plays the “Ex-Bazzini, Ex-Soldat” del Gesù. The double name is a reminder that the violin once belonged to the great Italian violinist Antonio Bazzini (1818–1897) and was later given by composer Johannes Brahms (1883–1897) to the young virtuosa Marie Soldat (1863–1955).

The “Prince Doria,” also by Guarneri del Gesù, was once owned by the affluent Doria family of Toulouse, France, in the 1860s.

The 1728 “Artôt-Alard” in this exhibition indicates that the instrument likely passed through the hands of Belgian violinist Alexandre Artôt (1815–1845) and French composer, teacher, and violinist Jean-Delphin Alard (1815–1888). Son-in-law of the famous luthier Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume (1798–1875), Alard was involved in playing, buying, and selling Cremonese masterworks. Vuillaume made some of the finest instruments of his time, many of which demonstrate his close study of Stradivari’s craftsmanship. Vuillaume also designed the original *octobasse* on which MIM’s octobass was modeled (displayed in the museum’s Orientation Gallery).



Marie  
Soldat-Roege



Alexandre Joseph  
Artot



Jean-Delphin  
Alard



Jean-Baptiste  
Vuillaume



# An Interview with Musician Rachel Barton Pine

Concert violinist Rachel Barton Pine shares her thoughts on the special relationship between musicians and their instruments.

KW: Kathleen R. Wiens, PhD  
RP: Rachel Barton Pine

**KW** There is an ongoing friendly rivalry between musicians who prefer playing an instrument made by Stradivari and those who prefer Guarneri del Gesù. What is the basis of these differing opinions?

**RP** Whether one generally prefers a Stradivari sound versus a Guarneri sound is really a matter of taste, and I've always been a Guarneri girl myself. I just love the fact that a del Gesù can be sweet like a Strad, but it can also be deep and powerful. There are no limits to how far you can go with the del Gesù. I'd played a number of instruments in my life before I encountered this particular one, but as soon as I met the "Ex-Bazzini, Ex-Soldat," I just knew that this was the fiddle for me, and I hope it feels the same way. It's amazing; it can do anything that I can possibly imagine, and even beyond. Its voice is continually inspiring me; it's an ongoing relationship that is evolving every day. I feel like we make wonderful life partners.

**KW** The great violinist Paganini was the first player to champion the violins of Guarneri del Gesù. What makes the sound of a del Gesù suitable for his fiery, virtuosic repertoire?

**RP** The violin that I play was made in the year 1742 by the great Guarneri del Gesù, so it's actually the same year and the same maker as Paganini's violin. Its voice shares many of the same characteristics that Paganini's violin is known for. It's very full and deep and rich and powerful. It has all the subtleties and nuances that you could possibly want, but you can also dig in and there are no limits. It's perfect for playing Paganini's music.

**I feel like we make wonderful life partners.**

**KW** What difference can a fine violin make in an artist's career?

**RP** For artists to be able to express themselves, they need to have their palette of colors. On a lesser instrument, the colors might be beautiful, but there are simply fewer of them. It's like your Crayola box of twelve. And to have every possible Pantone color just enables you to bring the music to life in a way you otherwise would never be able to do, despite hard work and talent. And so, it's really necessary these days with instruments being priced for the collectors' market, for the generosity of patrons to come in and make that difference, purchasing the instruments and owning them, and then loaning them to students and performers. And I've been the grateful recipient of many fine instruments throughout my life, including my current beloved 1742 Guarneri del Gesù. The best way that I can give back is through my own foundation, and I've had the privilege of supporting more than sixty young artists at this point, with everything from fine, contemporary instruments all the way to valuable antiques, so that those young artists can grow and launch their careers with the help of these wonderful musical partners that they otherwise wouldn't have access to.

**For artists to be able to express themselves, they need to have their palette of colors.**

The “Prince Doria” Violin  
c. 1734  
by Bartolomeo Giuseppi  
Guarneri “del Gesù”  
(1698–1744)

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Private Collection  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari



For Guarneri del Gesù, sound was king.

He is called “del Gesù” in reference to the cross symbol and the monogram “IHS” (an acronym of Jesus’s name in Greek) on some of his labels. His violin making was influenced by the Amati and Stradivari workshops, both located near the Guarneri family workshop. Guarneri del Gesù filled his short life experimenting with sound. He distinguished himself by pushing beyond the shape and proportions used by the masters who preceded him. If Stradivari was likened to Michelangelo in terms of his attention to melding function, form, and beauty, Guarneri del Gesù could be considered a Picasso, throwing out conventions of visual beauty in favor of raw, intuitive technique. Instruments by Guarneri del Gesù elicited attention when the consummate virtuoso Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840) publicly championed his 1743 “*Il Cannone*” [The Canon] violin.

This instrument was restored by Simone Fernando Sacconi, whose “Baroque Violin” is in this exhibition. The scroll on this violin was likely made by Guarneri del Gesù’s father, Giuseppe “filius Andreæ” Guarneri.

*Violino Piccolo*  
c. 1802  
by Giovanni Battista Ceruti  
(1756-1817)

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Museo del Violino  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari



Since methods of construction were passed from person to person, when teachers died without apprentices their knowledge died with them. Cremona's two hundred-year dominance in violin making waned after the untimely death of Guarneri del Gesù in 1744. Violin makers in Italy, Germany, and France soon rose to surpass those of Cremona. Even so, several "late period" Cremonese works by Carlo Bergonzi, Lorenzo Storioni, and the Ceruti dynasty are still admired both for their construction and sound quality.

The *Violino Piccolo* is pitched higher than a standard violin. It is called for in only a few compositions, such as the Brandenburg Concerto no. 1 by Johann Sebastian Bach.

This violin was restored by the American luthier Bruce Carlson in Cremona.

The “*Violino Barocco*”  
Inlaid Violin  
c. 1941  
by Simone Fernando Sacconi  
(1895-1973)

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Museo del Violino  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari



One day, when Sacconi was a small child in Rome, he noticed a flaw in his father's violin. His parents returned from an outing to find that young Fernando had pried the violin open. Rather than getting angry, his father took him to a local violin maker. Thus began Sacconi's career in violin making and repair.

Italian-born Sacconi was the first person to carefully reexamine and study the construction methods of the early masters. He used the tools preserved from Stradivari's workshop as a starting point. Sacconi is considered one of the finest luthiers of the modern age. He emigrated from Italy to the United States at the start of World War II and worked as a restoration expert in the workshop of Rembert Wurlitzer in New York. He restored the “Prince Doria” by Guarneri del Gesù.

This instrument is referred to as the “Baroque Violin” because it has a short neck and baroque-style fingerboard. It was made in New York and is modeled after Stradivari's 1679 “Hellier” violin from the Axelrod Collection of the Smithsonian Institution, now on long-term loan to the Museo del Violino through the Friends of Stradivari network.

# Cremona Today

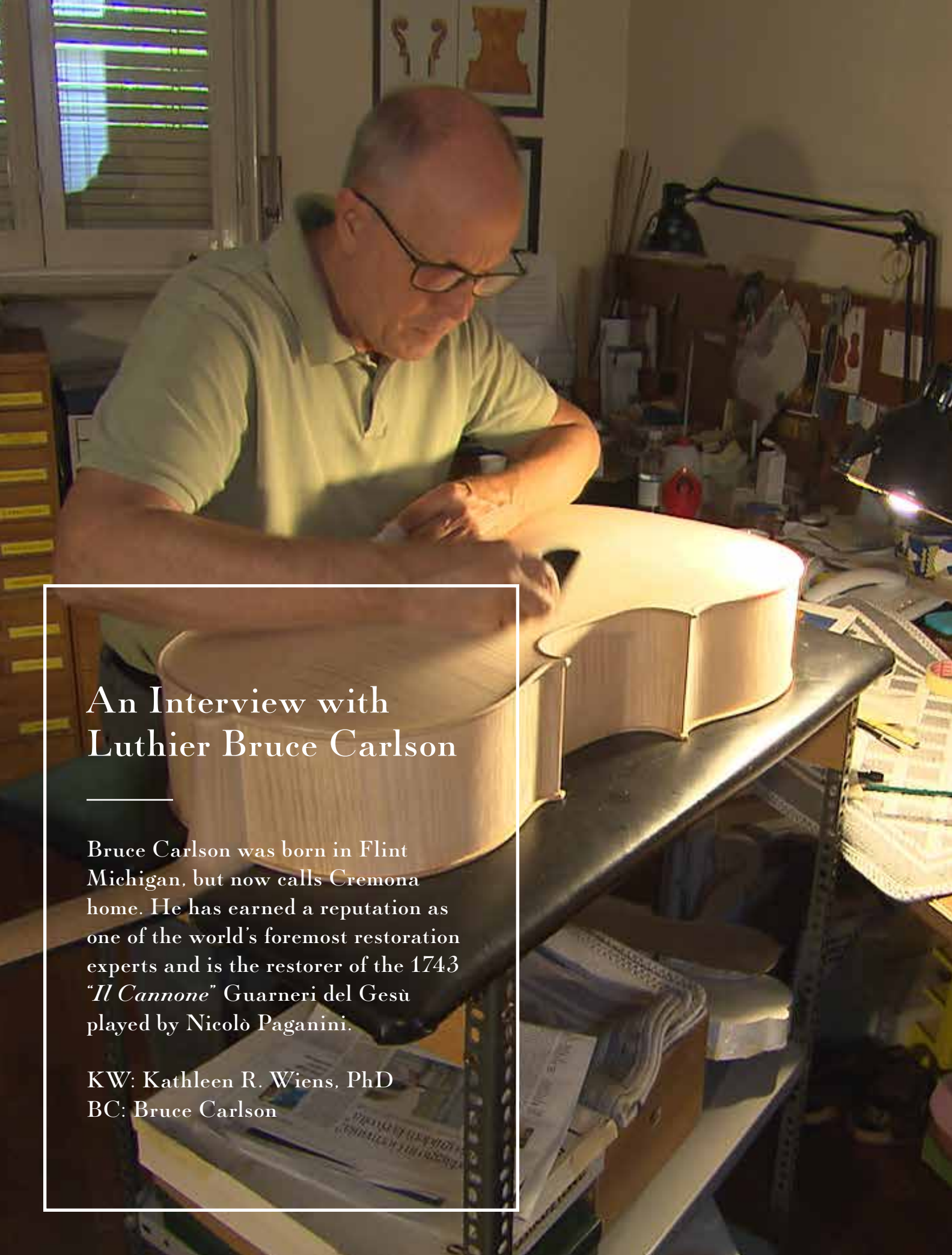
Today, Cremona remains “the city of the violin.” Over ninety luthiers from around the world now call Cremona home. These luthiers must ascribe to the time-tested Cremonese construction methods for their instruments to warrant the label “Cremonese.” These methods are monitored and protected by the Consorzio Liutai “Antonio Stradivari” Cremona (Consortium of Violin Makers “Antonio Stradivari” Cremona) and taught at the International School of Violin Making (Italian acronym, IPIALL), a mecca for aspiring luthiers from around the world.

## Today, Cremona remains “the city of the violin.”

One can see the finest work at the International Triennial Competition of Violin Making “Antonio Stradivari,” which every three years recognizes a selection of newly made superb instruments in the Cremonese style. For luthiers, winning the Triennale is like winning an Olympic medal.

The history and ongoing legacy of Cremona’s masterworks are celebrated at the impressive Museo del Violino. The museum brings these instruments and their makers to life for the visiting public. Visitors can hear a masterpiece played live in the concert hall, marvel at “visiting” masterpieces that are usually housed in other parts of the world, or admire the collection of “homegrown” masterworks.





# An Interview with Luthier Bruce Carlson

Bruce Carlson was born in Flint Michigan, but now calls Cremona home. He has earned a reputation as one of the world’s foremost restoration experts and is the restorer of the 1743 “*Il Cannone*” Guarneri del Gesù played by Nicolò Paganini.

KW: Kathleen R. Wiens, PhD  
BC: Bruce Carlson

- KW** If people would have told Bruce Carlson as a youngster in Michigan that one day he would make a living with stringed instruments and live in the cradle of violin making just blocks away from where the greatest violin makers had lived, how do you think he would react?
- BC** I would probably have said they were crazy. When I was eight, I didn’t even know exactly where Italy was. In a sense, it is funny that I ended up here, rather than any place else.
- I enjoy walking through the town. I have a sense of history about this place and can feel it. Great things happened here a long time ago, and I think it’s inspiring.
- KW** What is special about restoring old violins?
- BC** Not all old instruments are better than new instruments and vice versa. There are some really fine new makers now, who are making really spectacular instruments that will continue to be appreciated in the future.

I have a sense of history about Cremona and can feel it. Great things happened here a long time ago, and I think it’s inspiring.

- KW** What was it like to restore Paganini’s “*Il Cannone*”?
- BC** Not all old instruments are better than all new instruments and vice versa. There’s some really fine new makers now, who are making really spectacular instruments that will continue to be appreciated in the future. But there is something different about old instruments that have been played and used.
- KW** What was it like to restore “il Cannone”?
- BC** It’s an incredible instrument. It is fantastic, very inspiring! I’m very privileged to be able to work with it.
- When Paganini died, he willed the instrument to the city of Genoa. The instrument has remained there since he died in 1840. It was very little played, and so the condition of the instrument is more what we would expect to see of a Cremonese instrument in the 1850s. It’s in a very pure state, it hasn’t been over-polished, it hasn’t been overly restored, and it hasn’t been overly used. Many violin makers and many, many connoisseurs consider it to be one of the finest Guarneris in existence, if not the finest, considering the historic content.
- You might think this is funny, but you have to approach this a little bit more like a surgeon approaches an operation. I can’t be nervous. Most of the things I end up doing with a valuable instrument are things that I’ve done a thousand times over on student-grade instruments and on other types of instruments. And so it becomes a very routine thing to a certain extent. Obviously, I realize what I have in front of me, but at the same time I don’t think you can allow yourself to get carried away emotionally over the thing. You have to just do your work; you do it as best you can.

From America to Italy

Violin  
c. 1973  
by Bruce Carlson  
(1947-)

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Private Collection



My uncle dropped off his huge classical music collection at our house when I was about eleven. I started listening, and I couldn't get enough of it. Later, I was in the US Navy for four years. I went to meteorology school and they sent me to Guam, out in the middle of the Pacific. There was not too much to do on the island; I swam and read in my spare time. During my reading, I discovered a book by the Hill brothers on Antonio Stradivari. I'd always enjoyed building things with my hands, so I actually tried to make a violin while I was there. In 1970, I found a violin maker in Flint, Michigan, and he got me started. I entered the International School of Violin Making in Cremona in 1972. I now call Cremona home.

**Bruce Carlson**

Made in Cremona

Cello  
c. 1985  
by Primo Pistoni  
(1957-)

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Museo del Violino  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari

First Prize at the 4<sup>th</sup> Triennale



I was born in Cremona. At a young age, I became interested in the construction of stringed instruments. I enrolled in the International School of Violin Making in Cremona at age fourteen and I obtained a diploma as luthier. I am a member of the Luthier Consortium of Cremona and still live and work in the city.

I built this cello on a 1711 model by the “Supreme Teacher,” Antonio Stradivari. I began construction early in the year 1985, and I finished in the spring of that year.

One of the greatest moments of my life was on the 250th anniversary of the death of Stradivari, which was celebrated in Cremona in 1987 with forty-seven instruments. This led to the unexpected visit to my workshop of luthiers from around the world. My heart was a thousand times bigger; I’ll never forget that occasion.

**Primo Pistoni**

## A Modern-Day Dynasty

Violin  
c. 2003  
by Jan Špidlen  
(1967-)

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Museo del Violino  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari

First Prize at the 10<sup>th</sup> Triennale

Jan Špidlen represents the current generation of Prague's Špidlen violin-making family dynasty. A violin by his grandfather František is featured in MIM's Czech Republic display.



Cremona and Italian violin making are important topics for every violin maker. Our idols Amati, Stradivari, and Guarneri set the standards for us who work in modern times. With this violin, I used a handsome old slab of wood. I had no experience with slab-cut (one piece) backs. I also used a certain method for the edging for the first time, and I still use that method now.

To be a maker in a family dynasty is both an advantage and also a responsibility. High-quality work is expected, and if I could not keep it up everybody would notice. Before the Triennale victory, customers came first to my father and accepted my work if his was not available. Since Cremona, clients come to me directly.

**Jan Špidlen**

Inspired by the Amatis

Viola  
c. 2012  
by Ulrike Dederer  
(1969–)

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Museo del Violino  
Courtesy of the Friends of Stradivari

First Prize at the 13<sup>th</sup> Triennale



I was born in Germany and live in Switzerland. I studied at the International School of Violin Making in Cremona. Having seen many vintage instruments of the highest quality during my years of restoration work, I gained more and more respect for the process of making new instruments.

I designed this viola model for the first time to make this Triennale viola. I used the proportions of a 1615 Antonio and Hieronymus Amati viola. I am fascinated by “Brothers Amati” instruments for their equilibrated proportions, arching, sound-hole design, and scroll cut. Their instruments are extremely elegant and were made on the highest level of workmanship—many decades before Stradivari.

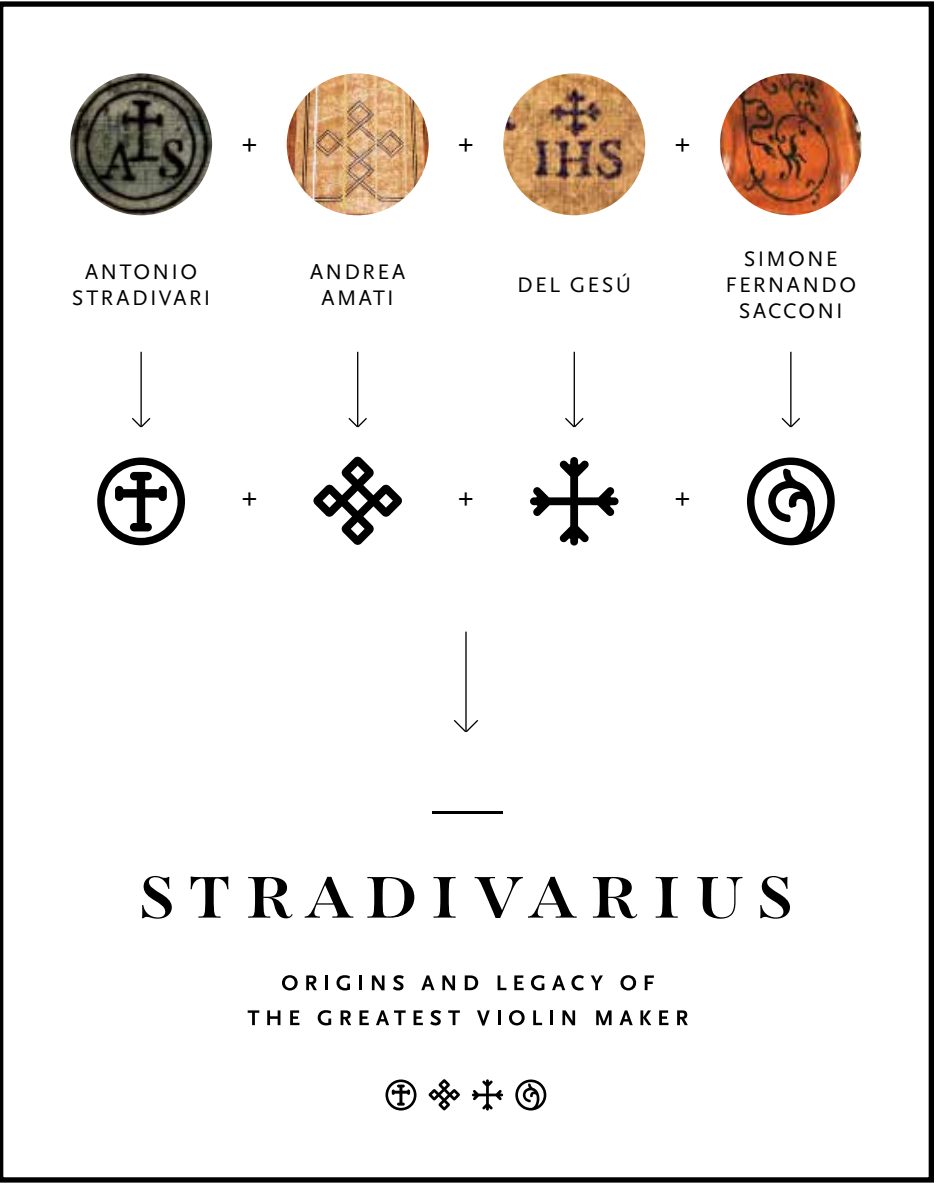
**Ulrike Dederer**

# Saluting the Masters, Making an Exhibition

To carve the path of our story and find our visual inspiration, we looked to many sources: the forest of the Fiemme Valley, the rich visual arts from Renaissance European royal courts, and the natural pigments found in the paint on Andrea Amati violins, including shades of cinnabar, malachite, and azurite.

The sounds that inspired us included the sound of a luthier’s hands knocking on wood slabs, the uplifting strains of a busking violinist in Cremona’s main square, and the infectious energy of Rachel Barton Pine, both in conversation and on stage. Her recording of Brahms’s Violin Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is a “must-hear.”

Visual attributes of the violins inspired our interpretative logo symbols. These included elements noted on the labels of Antonio Stradivari and Guarneri del Gesù, the ornate detailing of Simone Fernando Sacconi, and the purfling designs modeled after early Brescian and Cremonese masters that decorate the modern fingerboard on our Amati.



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# MIM

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