THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE Violin

EDITED BY
ROBIN STOWELL

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Preface

The chapters which make up this volume were commissioned from various friends and colleagues, all experts in their fields. The principal objective has been to provide the reader with a compact, composite survey of the history of the violin from its origins to the present day, focusing in particular on the instrument's structure and development, its fundamental acoustical principles, its chief exponents, its technique and teaching principles and its repertory and pedagogical literature, but embracing also its folk traditions and its role in jazz. If we have been successful in stimulating constructive, penetrating thought about the past, present and future of the art of violin playing and its numerous related aspects, our joint purpose will have been realised.

This book is a 'companion', not a 'compendium'. While comprehensiveness would always be our ideal, we have had to acknowledge that achievement of such a goal would require a volume many times the size of this. My contributors and I have therefore had to be selective in our essays and overall scheme, and in our illustrations, music examples and bibliographical references. There are some conscious omissions (for example, useful discussion of such treacherous areas as specific and improvised ornamentation is impossible in the limited space available, hence their one brief mention in Chapter 7); but if there are significant areas which we have inadvertently overlooked we very much regret our negligence. As editor, I must take full responsibility for the volume's overall proportions and various subdivisions, which were devised to comply with the understandable limitations of length imposed by the publisher.

Inevitably, therefore, the *Cambridge Companion to the Violin* employs the telescope rather than the microscope, revealing principally the central issues of our subject and their broad outlines while occasionally pinpointing the finer detail of particularly significant aspects. Although this finer detail may not always fill out and qualify simplified accounts of complex matters, my sincere hope is that the fifteen chapters have touched upon, if not fully embraced, nearly every aspect of the violin's history from its origins to the present day.

We have written for all who have an interest in the violin – 'amateurs' as well as students and professional musicians. Although some technical knowledge has been assumed of our readers, those unversed in 'musical mechanics' will find help to hand in the explanatory glossary of technical terms, included at the end of the volume on pp. 261–6. There is an appendix listing the principal pedagogical literature of the instrument and a select bibliography, and numerous illustrative plates and musical examples have been included to enhance the text and contribute to a balanced publication, thus avoiding the 'coffee-table book' formula of so many recent volumes on the subject. Dates of birth and death of certain significant figures in the violin's history are sometimes included in the text to clarify historical perspective, but such details are provided in the index as points of reference in respect of most personalities cited.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help given so willingly and by so many in the preparation of this book. I am indebted to my contributors one and all for their co-operative attitude, promptness of response to various problems and queries and for giving readily of their expertise in their various fields. The University of Wales College of Cardiff has also been generous in its help, granting me a short period of study leave in order to bring this volume to completion, and I am indebted to my wife and family and many friends and colleagues who have assisted and encouraged me during the course of this project. Last, but far from least, I must extend my sincere thanks to Penny Souster and her team at Cambridge University Press, and especially Lucy Carolan, for their helpful advice and firm but unobtrusive encouragement in bringing the book to press.

Robin Stowell

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Music examples
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Special thanks are also due to Tony Russell for locating some of the discographical information included in Chapter 15.

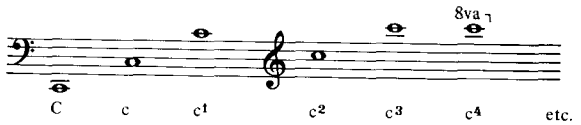
Abbreviations, fingering and notation

amp vn	amplified violin
bc	basso continuo
ch orch	chamber orchestra
fl	flute
hpd	harpsichord
kb	keyboard
orch	orchestra
perc	percussion
pf	pianoforte
rec	recorder
str	strings
va	viola
va da gamba	viola da gamba
vc	violoncello
vn	violin
vn picc	violino piccolo
ww	woodwind

Violin fingerings are indicated in the usual manner:

0	open string
1	the index finger (not the thumb as in keyboard fingering) and so on

Pitch registers are indicated by the following letter scheme:



Under this scheme the notes to which the violin is normally tuned are represented as g, d^1, a^1 and e^2.

Contents

Illustrations

1 The violin and bow – origins and development

JOHN DILWORTH

The violin: introduction and terminology

The violin is an endlessly fascinating instrument, both historically and artistically. A performer's instrument may be four hundred years old, but it will not differ significantly from one made yesterday. That the frail-looking violin has endured shows the perfection of its design, both as an expressive instrument of music and as a beautiful object in itself.

The violin is a mechanically simple but acoustically complex instrument. The four tapered tuning pegs for adjusting the G, D, A and E strings are made usually from rosewood or boxwood for durability, and project laterally from the backward curving pegbox (see Fig. 1). This latter ends in the scroll, a baroque adornment which is a characteristic feature of the violin family. The backward slope of the pegbox tensions the strings across the ebony nut, which is grooved to locate and raise them just above the surface of the ebony fingerboard, against which the strings are stopped by the fingers of the left hand. The fingerboard is glued to the neck, which is carved in one piece with the pegbox and scroll from maple (*acer pseudoplatanus*). It has a curved top in cross-section, and increases in width from the nut end to permit wider string spacing across the bridge, allowing easier movement for the bow. The neck joins the body of the violin at the root, whilst the fingerboard extends further above the body. The framework of the violin body is the rib structure, assembled from six thin maple ribs bent to shape by dry heat, and reinforced at the joints by interior blocks – one in each of the four outward curving corners, one at the lower end of the instrument, and the top-block, into which the neck root is fitted with a tapered mortice (prior to the nineteenth century, the neck was glued to the outside of the ribs, and secured with nails through the top-block). The six ribs correspond to the six main curves in the violin outline, the upper bouts, inward-curving middle or 'C' bouts, and wide lower bouts, on treble and bass sides. To ensure a strong glue-joint between the extremely thin ribs and the table and back of the violin, strips of pine or willow, the linings, are glued

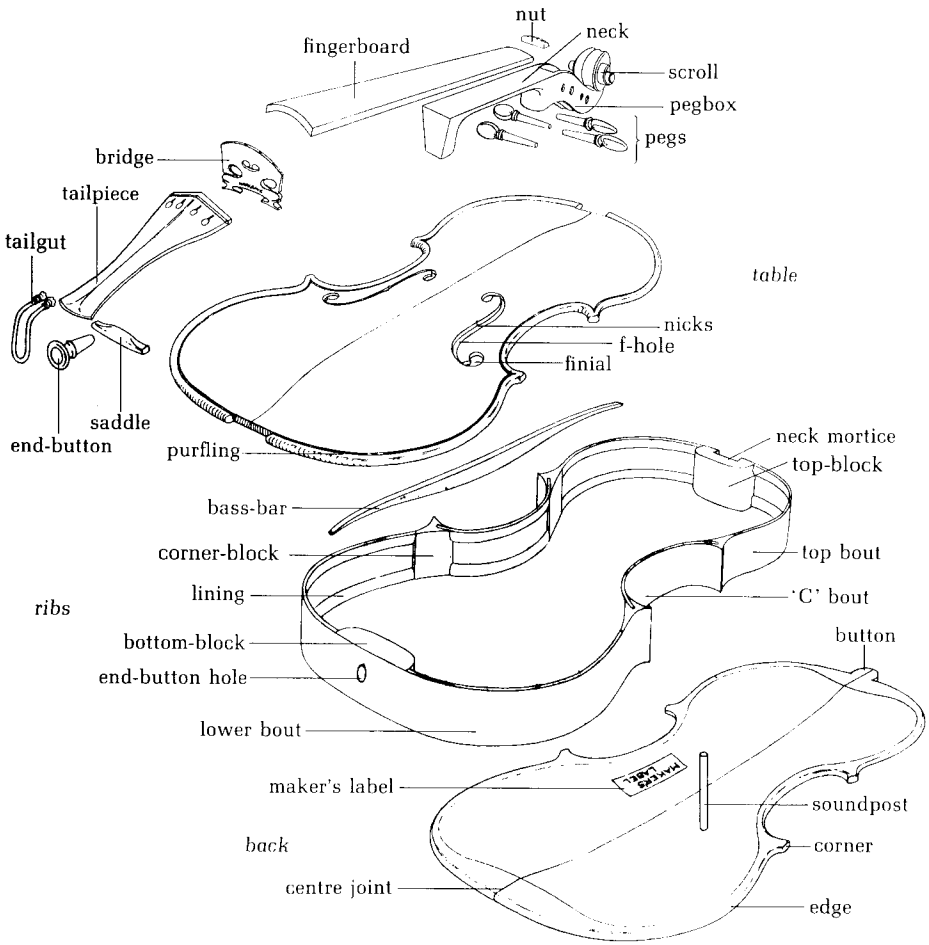


Fig. 1 An 'exploded' view of a violin

along the inside edges of the ribs. The traditional technique is to assemble the rib structure around a shallow hardwood mould.

The back of the violin is made from one or two matched pieces of maple, onto which the outline of the violin is drawn and sawn out (see Fig. 2). the arching, the outward swell, is then carved. The inner surface is also carved out to give a finished thickness in the centre of a violin back of about 5 mm, reduced around the edges to about 2.5 mm. The height and shape of the arching, combined with the finished thickness, are fundamental factors in determining the tonal quality of the instrument. Fig. 3a illustrates a two-piece back cut 'on the quarter'. Note the joint up the centre of the instrument and the horizontal 'figure', matching on both sides. Fig. 3b shows an example of a one-piece back cut 'on the quarter'; there is no centre joint, and the horizontal 'figure' runs continuously across. The horizontal 'figure' is less apparent in Fig. 3c, which shows a one-piece back cut 'on the

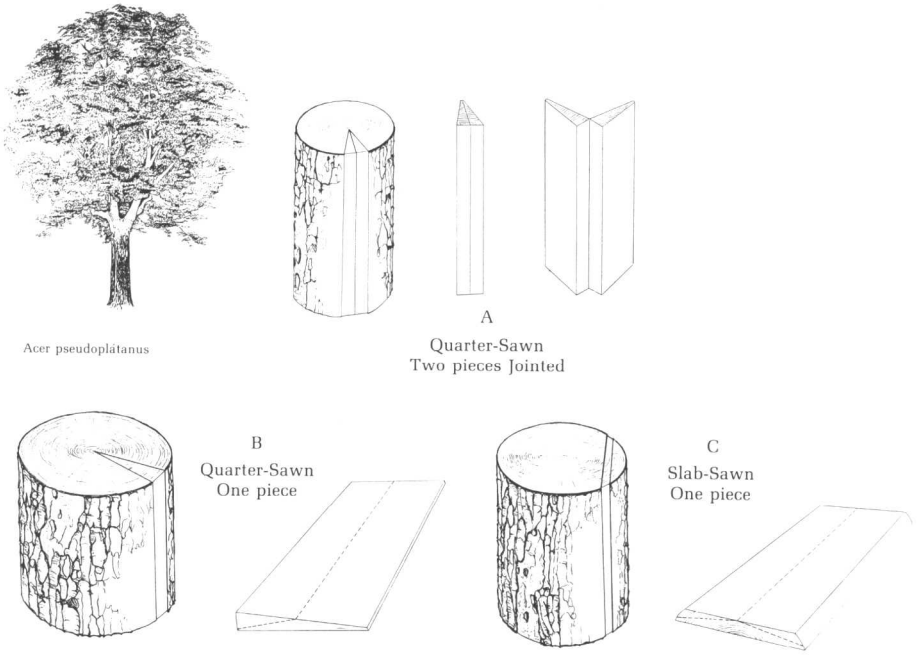


Fig. 2 Cutting the back of the violin: three different methods

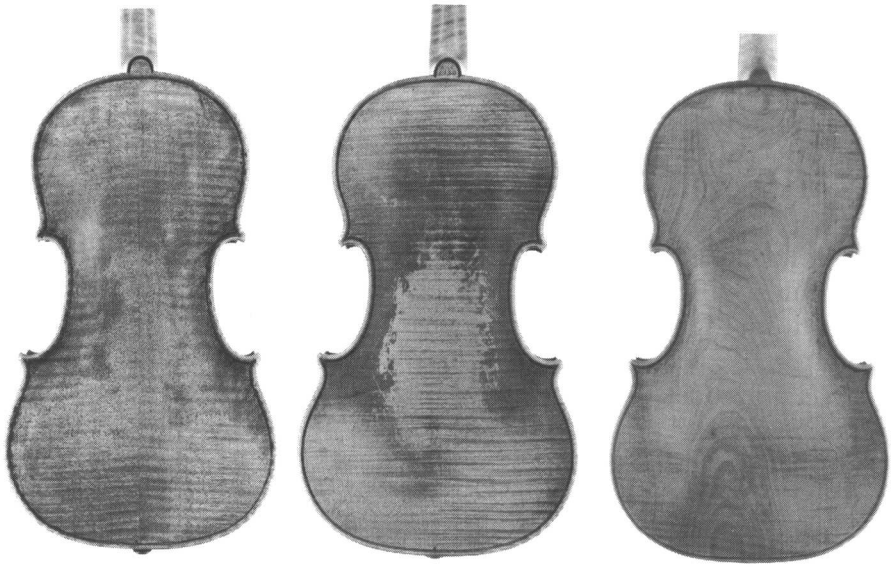


Fig. 3 The backs of three violins: (a) the 'Vieuxtemps' Guarneri (see also Fig. 12); (b) a violin by Antonio Stradivari, Cremona, 1691 ('The Hilton'); and (c) a violin by Nicolo Amati, Cremona, 1656