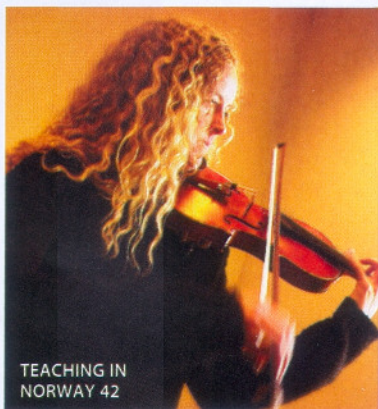




'He is entirely unusual, a sort of savage genius'

OLE BULL 26

DEXTRA MUSICA 37



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COVER SCROLLS (CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM): GUARNERI 'DEL GESÙ' VIOLIN, 1744; GUADAGNINI VIOLA, 1781; GENNARO GAGLIANO CELLO, 1748  
 COVER PHOTOS AND DEXTRA MUSICA PHOTOS: RICHARD VALUHCIN/DEXTRA MUSICA  
 OLE BULL PHOTO: COURTESY HARALD HERRESTHAL  
 TEACHING IN NORWAY PHOTO: KJETIL ALSVÅG/CONCOPHILLIPS

WELCOME TO THE STRAD



Among bygone violinists, I would have most liked to meet Ole Bull, whose 200th anniversary falls this month. I imagine any interview with him would have been all over the place, with Bull enthusing about performing atop the pyramids, touring the world in his wagon, or his latest plan to colonise Pennsylvania, schemes which Harald Herresthal describes on page 26. Bull toured in that wagon for nearly 50 years – a lesson for players who complain about travel. For further encouragement in these winter months, François Denis describes how early violin makers were influenced by the architecture around them (page 46) and on page 30 various makers explain how they think themselves into the mindset of Guarneri 'del Gesù'. And for a truly inspirational story, on page 67 maker Roger Hansell talks about living with multiple sclerosis, and how his slower pace of work even means that his results are better than ever.  
 Ariane Todes, Editor

AMONG THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

**FRANÇOIS DENIS** (violin arching, page 46) is an instrument maker based in Angers, France. He originally studied science and music, and his book *Traité de lutherie*, published in 2006, explores the origins of Stradivari's violin forms

**HARALD HERRESTHAL** (Ole Bull, page 26) is a professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. He has written a four-volume biography of Ole Bull, and has also worked on performing editions of Bull's concertos and fantasies

**TIM INGLES** (In Focus, page 58) is head of the musical instruments department at Sotheby's. He co-wrote the 2006 book *Four Centuries of Violin Making: Fine Instruments from the Sotheby's Archive* with John Dilworth

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## NEWS

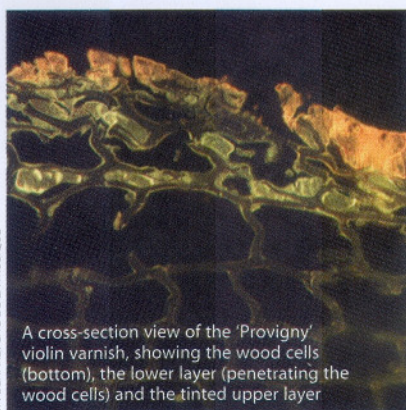
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## Stradivari varnish analysed in Paris

New chemical study finds oil and resin layers and a variety of red pigments, but no secret ingredient

THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC STUDY of Stradivari's varnish has reinforced the consensus that the Cremonese master used common ingredients, but in a very subtle and varied way. A team led by Jean-Philippe Echard at the Musée de la musique in Paris undertook a chemical analysis, using five different techniques, of samples from five instruments in the museum's collection: a long-pattern violin, possibly from around 1692, the 1708 'Davidoff', 1716 'Provigny' and 1724 'Sarasate' violins, and the head of a viola d'amore dated around 1720.

A similar varnish layer structure was found in all five instruments: a siccativ oil layer that partially fills the upper wood cells, then a layer of oil and resin, which in all but the long-pattern violin contains red pigments ranging from iron oxides to vermilion and cochineal lake. The siccativ oil is identified as probably linseed or walnut, and the resin as pine, larch or fir. Such varnish



J.P. ECHARD/OTÉ DE LA MUSIQUE

A cross-section view of the 'Provigny' violin varnish, showing the wood cells (bottom), the lower layer (penetrating the wood cells) and the tinted upper layer

ingredients were in common usage by artists and craftsmen of the time, said Echard. 'An oil combined with conifer resin is the most common mixture cited among the 400 varnish recipes used by easel painters before 1800 that we have catalogued in the museum. We are not saying that Stradivari's varnish is not subtle, but that we have not found any magic ingredient.'

Violin maker Stefan-Peter Greiner, who is due to publish a book with conservator Brigitte Brandmair on Stradivari's varnish this spring, questioned why Echard and his team did not detect proteins in any of their samples. 'In our research we found proteins in every instrument we tested. In practice, you have to protect the wood. If you just apply linseed oil directly to the wood, it goes millimetres down.' Echard said that if there were proteins present in his samples, they were only a very minor constituent. 'As for the oil layer, we know that oil is the major constituent. And there are many ways of adjusting the viscosity of an oil, and of pre-treating the wood, that would prevent the oil from soaking through the wood. These possibilities are ones we want to explore further.'

Jean-Philippe Echard will discuss his research in the April issue of *The Strad*

## Moennig & Son closes after 100 years

**PHILADELPHIA VIOLIN SHOP** William Moennig & Son quietly shut its doors in December after a century in business. Pamela Moennig Taplinger, who was the fourth generation of family owners along with her brother William Moennig IV, said the decision to close was rooted in practicality. There are no family members to take the business on, and with so many smaller shops out there, it doesn't seem practical to keep a big shop going, with all the overheads involved. She added that the fate of the shop's inventory was yet to be decided.

Richard Donovan, who had worked at the firm for 38 years doing restoration and appraisals, said: 'There has been a sea-change in the violin business in general. The big shop may still be a great repository of information and history, but it's about as much a liability as a benefit.' Moennig & Son had downsized its staff since the late 80s and early 90s when a dozen people occupied its workbenches: by late 2009, there were seven employees, two of whom were part-time.



The William Moennig & Son violin shop in 1927

COURTESY WILLIAM MOENNIG & SON