AITCHISON MNATZAGANIAN

CELLO MAKERS RESTORERS & DEALERS

NEWS FOR CELLISTS AUTUMN 2015

London Cello Day on Sunday 1 November

You are warmly invited to a cello day at the Bartlett School of Architecture, Room 206, 140 Hampstead Road, London NW1 2BX on Sunday 1 November where we will be showing a selection of the cellos and violas listed on the back page of this newsletter. We also hope to have a Marquis de Corberon Stradivari cello copy by Robin available to try for anyone interested in this model. If you would like to try any of the instruments listed in this newsletter or on our website, please call 01353 668559 or email aitchmnatz7@ntlworld.com as soon as possible to book your one-hour appointment. Appointments are available from 10am to 6pm and full venue details will be posted at aitchisoncellos.com/antique.htm/

Two violas by Robin Aitchison

Robin made several violas and violins before he decided to specialise in cello making; we now have two of his violas for sale as their owners have recently retired from playing. Further details can be found on the back page and photographs of both violas can be found on the 'Cellos for sale' section of the website.

The very latest in cello endpins...

Cello Endpins

Do cello endpins influence an instrument's sound? Thirty years ago, endpins were regarded merely as a metal 'spike' to support a cello on the floor. After the introduction of carbon fibre endpins in the 1990's the playing community discovered the tonal impact of using a lighter endpin and the last ten years have seen a massive expansion in the range of carbon fibre endpins available. This has coincided with a strong counter-revolution in the production of high-mass metal endpins such as the Manson Super Spike and the Mitsuke range from Japan. On pages 2-3 we report on a series of tests we carried out on a selection of 10mm diameter endpins. Our tests demonstrated that the weight, materials and design of endpins do have a considerable effect on a cello's sound and playability.

It is important to point out here that our tests were entirely subjective: they were carried out on a small number of cellos with a small number of players and the results for each endpin varied significantly depending on the design of the cello used, the taste and playing style of each cellist and the space in which the endpin was tested. Our tests took place in our music room in Ely and while we are accustomed to observing the aspects of sound in this space which we associate with good projection, this is not an infallible indicator of the actual result in a larger space.

So please don't regard our feedback as an objective judgement on any endpin; we simply pass on the subjective impressions noted down during our sessions. The only way to discover the best endpin for you and your cello is to try a variety of endpins on your instrument. The exciting reality is that modern endpins offer yet another way for cellists to explore and evolve the sound of their instruments.

Cello courses and groups

Please keep us posted with details of any cello course or group you are running. Just email us up to 250 words and we will publish the details on our website: http://www.aitchisoncellos.com/events-and-links/cello-courses.htm/ There is no charge for this service.

TESTING CELLO ENDPINS

Metal versus carbon fibre. During our tests we observed that the relative weight of an endpin has a distinct effect on the tone and projection of a cello. When you reduce the overall mass of a vibratory system such as a cello by using a light carbon fibre endpin rather than a metal alternative, you create more freedom for vibration in the cello as a whole. The general observation of players using carbon fibre endpins is an increased awareness of resonance in the cello. This resonance is experienced under the player's ear but, depending on the cello used, is not always projected out to an audience. Solid, strong cellos which have a very centred sound are most likely to benefit from a carbon fibre endpin; if you are seeking an intimate sound for your cello, carbon fibre is also likely to be a good choice. Conversely, it is clear that a solid anchor beneath a cello in the form of a heavy metal endpin enables some cellos to project more effectively (just in the way that high quality loud speakers are designed with very heavy boxes or bases, so that the energy put into the speaker ends up moving the air, not the speaker.) Strong players wishing to project their sound powerfully may well benefit from the strength, rigidity and solidity of a heavy metal endpin.

Metal types The types of metal used in an endpin also have an effect on the way the endpin vibrates during use and therefore on the resulting tone and response of the cello, due to the varied density and stiffness of each metal used. This phenomenon has been imaginatively explored by Junichi Mitsuke in his range of six metal endpins which use different combinations of brass, iron, tungsten, titanium and carbon (see table online). Klaus Bender has also explored ways to influence sound through the design of his Berlin endpin which can be rotated to make the endpin vibrate in different directions. For details of materials and metal densities, please see the tables published in the online version of this article.

Endpin length When testing endpins it is worth experimenting with the length of the endpin protruding from the cello; if comparing several endpins it's also worth measuring the length of endpin you normally use and ensuring that you use the same length with each endpin tested in order to achieve a more accurate comparison.

If you wish to experiment with the widest possible range of new endpins, you will need a fitting which takes a 10mm diameter endpin. You will also need a well engineered fitting in order not to damage a carbon fibre end pin. The best design is the Bois d'Harmonie endpin fitting; the Bender fitting is also well designed but can become clogged with carbon fibre dust over time. Any endpin fitting which has a screw which presses directly onto the pin should only be used with a metal pin as the screw tip will eventually damage the carbon fibre shaft.

Endpins tested. This summer we tested the range of six metal endpins produced by Junichi Mitsuke in Japan, the Manson Superspike, the Klaus Bender range (Berlin, Aluminium and carbon fibre) the New Harmony carbon fibre endpins (both hollow and solid) and the Bois d'Harmonie carbon fibre endpin. The lengths and weights of the endpins we tested are shown in the table opposite.

We know several players who use the Mitsuke Triple Brillante endpin so we used this as a control while testing endpins on a Montagnana model cello by Robin. We also tested selected endpins on a Banks, a Betts school and another contemporary cello.

Mitsuke Triple Brillante (TB) gave the Montagnana added power, core resonance, projection and what the player described as 'fizz' - an exciting edge to the sound. Clarity was also improved: individual notes in chords could be heard clearly, as could notes high up on the C string. Banks player 1 found the TB rather heavy on the C string, not allowing the notes to 'breathe'. Banks player 2 said that TB gave 'good upper partials and projected well and was fairly malleable but lacked depth' and was a bit smooth for their taste. On the Betts School (a strongly built cello previously fitted with a tubular Titanium endpin) the TB added 'strength, brightness, "fizz" and a rich resonance' and also gave the player added cushion under the bow. On another contemporary cello (previously fitted with a carbon fibre endpin) the TB added real clarity, making the cello quicker to respond in all registers. It sounded brighter on the A and more precise, rich and colourful on the C. We also tested the TB on a newly completed Guadagnini cello and the player said that the cello sounded richer and brighter and more played in, as if the endpin had a ripening effect on the cello.

Mitsuke Brass and Carbon (BC) sounded softer and smoother than TB on the Montagnana copy and lacked the heavy core given by TB. On the A string it was clear, strong and brilliant but was less distinct in the lower register on this cello. Banks player 1 said BC sounded bright and powerful on the A string but was less clear on the C string. Banks player 2 found BC creamier and warmer in the bass than TB but thought the treble a bit nasal and closed. On the Betts School, BC gave the C string more focus but the A string was a little veiled and deadened by comparison.

Mitsuke Brass and Tungsten (BTu) was more malleable under the bow on the Montagnana than TB but thinner in the upper register and overall offered less support than TB; it felt as if the cello's sound could be suppressed if the player leaned in too hard. It offered a warmer, richer and softer sound than TB in the lower registers and required less muscular effort but didn't project as well as TB. The player thought it might be successful in a chamber music context. On another contemporary cello the player felt there was a loss in clarity and resonance compared to TB, particularly on the C string but the sound had a 'soulful, sweet' quality. On the Banks BTu sounded rather 'narrow, blatant and prescriptive and not particularly clear; a bit coarse in the bass.'

Mitsuke Quartet (Q) felt similar on the Montagnana to BTu but had extra edge and texture and an almost nasal tone. The player found it more flexible to play than TB and that it also gave more support under the A string than TB. He liked the effect on the C string and the overall impression was 'warm and friendly, flexible but with some edge and excitement'. On another contemporary cello Q sounded 'warm but a bit muddy and rather narrow in the upper register'. On the Banks, Q felt 'warm, gentle, rich, full, broad, spacious; a weighty velvety sound, good upper partials, malleable'.

Mitsuke Brass and Iron (BI) had considerable brightness and depth on the Montagnana but was slower to respond than TB. The player felt it had a 'more baroque, flowing response' than TB, responding well to softer gestures rather than to an attack from the bow, with a nice sense of bow cushion. Tonally it lent 'a rich, deep, pure clarity' to the C string and felt more 'intimate and noble' than the Manson Superspike. Banks player 1 said BI was good all round; it gave added resonance and more colour, edge and body to the sound. Banks player 2 found BI 'rich, warmer than TB, with good upper partials, a noble, dignified sound with a fresher edge than Q.' In his view, it offered the most interesting tonal palette of all the endpins he tried, with a clean response and sunny sound. On the Betts School BI created a rich, creamy bass but sounded rather thin on the A; overall BI created too much darkness in the Betts cello. On another contemporary cello BI had a hard, quite grainy sound and the player found it difficult to reach the core of the sound with his bow but he found the response good, with a clear edge and good clarity.

Mitsuke Brass and Titanium (BTi) had a similar effect to BC on the Montagnana; the overall effect was attractive but on quite a small scale, giving an intimate, approachable quality to the sound. On another contemporary cello the BTi was very resonant, with a spacious, flexible response, particularly on the C string. On the Banks BTi gave a nice balance but sounded more metallic than BTu, with a 'slower response, restricted under the bow, a bit two-dimensional in sound.'

Manson Superspike (MS) sounded very bright and powerful on the Montagnana but had a colder tone with fewer dimensions and less depth and colour than TB. The player also felt it didn't sustain the sound very successfully. Banks player 1 said MS sounded very bright and gave power to the A string but was less clear on the C string than TB. Banks player 2 found MS 'big and beefy, more metallic than Bender Berlin but a bit dark/muted in treble register. You can sculpt the sound but it has fewer colours than BI.' On the Betts the MS was powerful but a bit deadening; although clear, the sound lacked uplift and didn't 'take off'.

Klaus Bender Berlin (KBB) is designed to be used in different orientations. When fitted to vibrate at 90 degrees to the plane of the Montagnana, the KBB gave a bright sound with excess texture and the player struggled to reach a consistent tone. When fitted in its second orientation (vibrating perpendicular to the plane of the cello) KBB was much more consistent in tone and allowed greater vibration but the player felt it was rather dimensionless in tone. On the Banks cello (fitted at 90 degrees to the plane of the cello) the player found KBB rather uninteresting, offering little freedom, with a hard cushion under the bow. However, when fitted perpendicular to the plane of the cello, the Banks cellist found the endpin more enjoyable and balanced, with a clean result on the A string, and a nice cushion but he found it less tonally interesting than other endpins.

Klaus Bender Aluminium (KBA) gave a warm, free, soft-grained tone to the Montagnana which was similarly attractive and enjoyable to play to Mitsuke BC. On the Banks the player found KBA 'hollow, diffuse, and soft' and felt that the endpin narrowed the cello's possibilities, restricting the C string and giving few overtones.

New Harmony Carbon Fibre Hollow (NHCFH) sounded 'clear, bright, broad and open' on the Montagnana, 'if a bit dimensionless and with delayed response in the bass.' The listeners, by contrast, thought the endpin cloaked the sound and that it allowed less resonance to project into the room. On another contemporary cello the NHCFH gave an open, broad response on the A string and had a lot of texture but the overall response was quite difficult for the player. On the Banks, NHCFH sounded free and resonant but not particularly clear; the cello felt slow to respond on the C string; the player also found the cushion too soft.

New Harmony Carbon Fibre Solid (NHCFS) sounded better on the Banks than NHCFH. The player felt it had reasonable depth and colour, a clear treble response but was a little rough in the bass. The player felt it also gave excess resistance and a slow response on the C string.

Bois D'Harmonie Carbon Fibre (BHCF) was powerful on the Montagnana A string and rather grainy on the C but was more responsive and focussed than NHCFH. There was a better response on the C string than the other carbon fibre endpins but overall the player felt he was struggling to get on top of the sound - the cello didn't support his bow so well and he felt as if the sound was escaping in all directions rather than staying under the bow. Banks player 1 found BHCF was clearer and more treble in response than NHCFH but lacked a sense of solidity and reliability on the C string. Banks player 2 found the BHCF a good all-round endpin: calmer, smaller than TB but more centred and with more overtones than NHCFS. 'A bit nasal in upper register but good projection, quick to respond, malleable. Harder to handle than BI and Q.'

Klaus Bender Carbon Fibre (KBCF) felt 'brittle' to the Montagnana player; he felt this endpin failed to give any support or sustain and that the sound stayed in a narrow band of upper partials. On the Banks the KBCF produced a rough, unclear C and sounded over-resonant and uncomfortable on the A, giving a harsh sound quality overall.

MITSUKE ENDPINS	Abbrev.	Weight	Length
Triple Brillante	TB	393	55
Brass & Carbon	BC	249	55
Brass & Tungsten	BTu	430	55
Brass & Titanium	BTi	293	55
Brass & Iron	BI	348	55
Quartet	Q	301	55
OTHER METAL ENDPINS			
Manson Superspike	MSS	439	72
Klaus Bender Aluminium	KBA	106	62
Klaus Bender Berlin	KBB	138	53
CARBON FIBRE ENDPINS			
Klaus Bender carbon fibre	KBCF	57	63
Bois d'H carbon fibre (c/f)	BHCF	82	60
New Harmony c/f hollow	NHCFH	45	51
New Harmony c/f solid	NHCFS	80	61

Weights are shown in grammes; lengths in centimetres

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

BENJAMIN BANKS CELLO c.1780

L.O.B: 29⅛" (740mm) String length: 27" (686mm)
Price: £78,000

A magnificent Banks cello in very good condition, with beautiful red brown varnish and a deep, complex and powerful tone. Hill certificate.

HENRY LOCKEY HILL CELLO 1827

L.O.B.: 29¼" (742mm) String length: 26½" (674mm)
Price: £70,000

A beautiful example of this famous maker's work in very good condition with a colourful, expressive tone and excellent projection.

JOSEPH HILL CELLO 1770

L.O.B: 29⅛" (740mm) String Length 26¾" (677mm)
Price: £47,500

An exquisite cello in exceptionally good condition with a one-piece maple back and beautiful varnish. The tone is clear, expressive and powerful. Hill certificate.

CIRCLE OF ARTHUR BETTS CELLO c.1840

L.O.B.: 29" (738mm) String length: 27⅛" (690mm)
Price: £45,000

A strong and handsome example of this school of making in excellent condition with a rich, deep and powerful tone and dark red varnish.

GEORGES ADOLPHE CHANOT 1895

L.O.B: 29¾" (755mm) String length: 27½" (698mm)
Price: £35,000

A handsome, powerful and expressive instrument in excellent condition with fine golden brown varnish. Labelled internally and inscribed at the endpin.

WAMSLEY SCHOOL CELLO c.1750

L.O.B: 28" (712mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £33,000

This elegant small cello is a very nice example of the Wamsley School and is in good condition. The tone is dark and colourful. Hill receipt.

COLIN IRVING CELLO 2005

L.O.B: 29½" (750mm) String length: 27⅜" (696mm)
Price: £24,000

A strong cello with a powerful, deep tone and good response, in excellent condition. The varnish is a rich red-brown.

KENNEDY SCHOOL CELLO

L.O.B: 29" (737mm) String length: 27" (685mm)
Price: £14,000

NEUNER & HORNSTEINER CELLO

L.O.B: 29½" (748mm) String length: 27¼" (694mm)
Price: £7,500

*** TWO ROBIN AITCHISON VIOLAS ***

'KIEVMAN' GASPARO DA SALO VIOLA c.1580 COPY BY ROBIN AITCHISON 2002

L.O.B: 15⅝" (397mm) String length: 14¼" (362mm)
Price: £9,000

A close copy of an unusually small Gasparo viola with a full, dark tone and very easy response, with double purfling and decorative inlay on the back. The condition is immaculate.

'ARCHINTO' STRADIVARI VIOLA 1696 COPY BY ROBIN AITCHISON 1996

L.O.B: 16⅜" (416mm) String length: 14⅞" (376mm)
Price: £9,000

A careful copy of the Archinto Stradivari viola made by Robin in 1996. This instrument has a beautiful, clear voice which projects very well. The condition is excellent.

Selected Cello Bows

C N Bazin	74.0	S	**£5,500**
W E Hill & Sons	76.5	S/T	**£5,000**
John Clutterbuck	81.9	G/T	**£4,750**
Charles Ervin	80.0	G	**£4,500**
Malcolm Taylor	76.0	G	**£4,500**
Garner Wilson	81.2	G/T	**£3,950**
Albert Nürnberger	76.4	S	**£3,750**
Christian Wanka	82.5	G	**£3,680**
John Aniano	81.4	S	**£3,170**
Mark Drehmann	81.0	S	**£3,000**
Roger Zabinski	83.3	S	**£2,980**
Martin Beilke	81.9	S	**£2,750**
Richard Grünke	82.9	S	**£2,750**
Klaus Grünke	82.7	S	**£2,750**
Bernd Etzler	81.0	S	**£2,750**
Emmanuel Begin	79.5	S	**£2,730**
Robert Pierce	81.8	S	**£2,650**
Heinz Dölling	91.0	S	**£2,500**
Gunther A Paulus	81.5	S	**£2,500**
Andrew McGill	80.0	S	**£2,400**
Stephen Bristow	83.3	G/T	**£2,400**
Eric Gagné	81.7	S	**£2,270**
Howard Green	81.5	S	**£2,200**
David Tempest	83.4	S	**£2,200**
Richard Wilson	82.2	S	**£2,000**
Juliano Oliveira	82.6	S	**£960**
Luan Ruy	79.7	S	**£960**
Siqueira	80.0	N	**£780**