
NEWS FOR CELLISTS JANUARY 2013

Review of New Cello Strings

Four years have passed since our last review of cello strings and since then, the research and development departments of the major string companies across the world have been hard at work. Our main article reviews new cello strings by makers including Larsen (Magnacore G and C) Jargar (A and D Special and A and D Superior) and Warchal (Brilliant set, along with their new Prototype A.)



String trial

We are always grateful to receive feedback about strings, so please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to pass on your experiences. We will be delighted to publish your thoughts in a special feedback section in our web version of the article. If you could email sarah@aitchisoncellos.com, briefly describing your cello, the strings you were using before and your opinion of the new strings you have tested, this would be really helpful.

Fine cellos

Over the last two months, beautiful cellos by Simon Andrew Forster, Thomas Kennedy and Joseph Hill have arrived for sale through the Cello Exchange. They have all given many decades of pleasure to their owners and are now ready to meet their future musical partners. For full details and photographs of these and other cellos, see www.aitchisoncellos.com; brief details are also listed on the back page.

Humidify!

The mild weather over Christmas lulled us into thinking that winter was over, but now that the cold weather has returned, it's time to think again about humidity levels. Cellos don't mind the cold, but they really hate the dry conditions inside centrally heated homes when the air outside is very cold and holds very little moisture.

The simplest solution is to use a Dampit or equivalent; dampen the 'green snake' under a tap, squeeze out all excess water so it cannot drip inside your cello and dry it very carefully with a cloth before placing it in an f-hole, then keep your cello closed inside its case when not in use. A more advanced alternative is to buy a hygrometer to keep in your cello case or music room, so that you can monitor the humidity levels reliably. If the cello is kept at home, you can humidify your music room using radiator humidifiers (we bought ours from www.aircomfortcentre.com). If you are always on the move with your cello, you could buy a case humidifier. For an article on humidity, see www.aitchisoncellos.com/articlehumidity.htm

Prize-winning Bow Makers

We are proud to announce the success of three of the talented young bow makers who took part for the first time in *Take a Bow 2011*.

At the Violin Society of America Violin and Bow Making Competition (VSA) in November 2012 Emmanuel Bégin (Canada) was awarded a gold medal for his cello bow and certificates of merit for his violin and viola bows; Emmanuel Carlier (France) achieved an amazing 'hors concours' with three gold medals at the same VSA competition. Gary Leahy (Ireland) was awarded two gold medals for violin and viola bows and one certificate of merit for his cello bow at the VSA competition.

We look forward to showing their bows whenever they are able to send us examples of their work.

REVIEW OF NEW CELLO STRINGS

21st century string manufacture is a competitive and innovative field, which is excellent news for cellists who benefit from the fruits of the labours of string companies' research and development departments. However, some established strings have proved extremely hard to beat. For many years, tungsten wound Spirocore strings have been the most widely used bottom strings for professional players. Spirocores are not universally loved, but they always do their job in their own distinctive way. We would go so far as to describe the Spirocore sound as iconic: they are powerful and responsive, with a cavernous, resonant sound quality and a 'gravelly' edge which projects very well. The downside of Spirocores is that they take a long time to play in and the G strings can be rather variable in quality and can sound painfully metallic when new, making the process of playing in an act of faith on the part of the user. Despite these drawbacks, Spirocores have been the most powerful and popular bottom strings for many years.

Various attempts have been made to improve on the Spirocore achievement, perhaps the most successful being Evah Pirazzi Soloist G and C strings by Pirastro which some cellists use in preference to Spirocores, as well as Larsen's Wirecore G and C.

Two months ago, Larsen launched an exciting new offering: **Larsen Magnacore G and C** (available in medium and strong tensions). These strings have an innovative core construction of two concentric 'Slinky-style' springs of stranded steel, with tungsten (wolfram) windings. We tested these strings on Robin's Guadagnini copy cello (string length 682mm) which had previously been fitted with fresh Spirocore G and C strings and standard Larsen A and D strings. We have also had some very helpful feedback from professional players.

We found the medium **Magnacore G** less flexible under the left hand than a Spirocore; it also tuned up more quickly on the peg. It was easier for us to play and was smoother and less harsh sounding than our new Spirocore G. It was also a good match for a standard Larsen D string in tone, texture and response. It was quite quick under the bow and the tone was very balanced, with more richness than a new Spirocore G. It worked very well on Robin's cello alongside a new Spirocore C. Nicholas Jones kindly tested Magnacore medium strings for us (he had previously been using Evah Pirazzi Soloist bottom strings on his Strad model cello). His Magnacore G medium took three days to play in, but he found it quick speaking, with good depth and a strong, masculine tone.

The **Magnacore C** medium matches very well with the Magnacore G: it has a rich, warm satisfying sound with a slightly smoother texture than a Spirocore C. Our first impression was that the Magnacore C was slightly less powerful and a little slower to speak than the Magnacore G, but it must be noted that we were testing a newly fitted string and we would expect it to speak more readily once it is played in. The open Magnacore C string had a slight winding buzz on our cello, but again this is probably a playing-in issue.

Nicholas Jones's Magnacore C medium took eight days to play in. Initially, he also felt that the Magnacore C was less powerful than the G but he found that it improved with playing and that, like the G, it spoke quickly and had a deep, masculine tone. He decided that the Magnacore strings also improved the top end of his cello and that the whole cello spoke more quickly after they were fitted. Nick observed that the Magnacores were more rigid under his left hand than Evah Pirazzi Soloists, particularly when playing in half position.

Gabrielle Kaufmann came for a string trial in November and decided to use Magnacore Medium G and C on her contemporary instrument. She found that both strings were slow to play in and the rough edge to the sound lasted some time, although she thought they sounded good from day one. She describes their sound as 'round, deep, dark, big, with an edge, and a lot of personality.' She feels that they have improved the overall sound of her cello, giving it a darker and unusually "old" sound for metal strings which has given more depth and richness to the tone of her cello.

Eduardo Palao tried Magnacore G and C mediums on his Wolfgang Schnabl cello. He had previously been using standard Evah Pirazzi medium G and C and Passione medium A and D strings. He told us that the Magnacore strings were much more responsive and had a little more 'edge' to their sound than the Evah Pirazzis and articulation was clearer and faster, with plenty of volume. They also seemed to be stable right from the start. However, Eduardo found their sound rather 'narrower and less rich in overtones' than Evah Pirazzis and they also made his Passione strings sound tighter and thinner. When he replaced the Magnacores with new Evah Pirazzis, he felt that his cello sounded rounder and freer again, with less tension under the fingers, and gave him a wider variety of colours.

Magnacore strings are available in both medium and heavy tension. According to Larsen, the heavy tension strings have more focus, edge and volume than Magnacore medium strings.

Jargar innovations. Since their launch in 1956, Jargar strings have been enduringly popular, useful, moderately priced strings. We understand that Jargar have been experimenting with string design for many years, but only recently have they launched a new family of cello strings: first, Jargar A and D Special, followed in 2011 by Jargar A Superior and in 2012 by Jargar D Superior, all of which are available in three tensions. We tested the Special and Superior strings on Robin's Guadagnini copy which had previously been fitted with standard Larsen A and D strings.

On Robin's cello, the **Jargar A Special** (medium) was a bright, brilliant, resonant string with quite a narrow, focussed sound. We missed the warmth of the Larsen Standard A. We felt that **Jargar D Special** had a warmer sound than the A, and on Robin's cello the string was not at all out of place between a Larsen A and a Spirocore G. We did find that the response of the D string was more affected in the wolf note area in first position than we expected.

We then tested the **Jargar A Superior** (medium) which had a powerful, expansive tone (brighter and more powerful than Larsen A) with an honest, direct response and good projection. Altogether, the Superior A is a much more exciting string than a standard Jargar A. Jargar A Superior was favoured last October by an important young soloist whose cello we adjust. Four months later, he still finds the string much more resonant and successful than the standard Jargar A which he had used previously and he is still enjoying the string, although it slightly overpowers his Evah Pirazzi D, G and C strings.

We found the **Jargar D Superior** much more smooth and mellow than the A Superior. We experimented with various combinations of different tension A and D Superior strings in an attempt to find a good match, but without success; in each case, the A was significantly brighter and more textured than the D. Unexpectedly, we achieved a satisfactory result by fitting a Superior medium A with a Special medium D. It may be that the Superior A and D would work well for a cello that needs lots of extra texture and power on the A string.

Nicholas Jones also tried the Jargar A and D Superior (medium) on his cello and said that the strings were very comfortable to play for both hands and that their tone had more colour and warmth than a normal Jargar A and D. However, he felt that the Jargar D Superior string had less lustre than a Larsen string and had fewer upper partials than an Evah Pirazzi Soloist. Nick also felt that they slowed the response of his Magnacore G and C strings.

Warchal are an innovative Slovakian company producing a range of violin, viola and cello strings.

Warchal Brilliant cello strings have an advanced synthetic core, and so have joined the family of synthetic core strings which includes Dominant, Aricore and Synoxa. We tested a full set of Warchal Brilliant cello strings on Robin's Guadagnini model cello and have also received feedback from cellists.

The **Warchal Brilliant A** had a very quick response, a nice gut-style sound and was very comfortable under the left hand. **Warchal Brilliant D** was also very comfortable under the left hand and responded very readily under the bow. Both A and D had a warm, expressive, clear core sound with a distinct texture (the D string had more texture than a Spirocore G). We believe that Warchal Brilliant A and D have a more modern sound than Dominant A and D, with greater power, clarity and resonance and slightly less texture. They also blend surprisingly well with steel bottom strings. For players who want to work with very flexible, pliable top strings, Warchals are an interesting option.

In our brief test of the Warchal Brilliant G and C strings we found them a little disappointing in terms of power and clarity, compared to the top strings in the set. This may well be a playing-in issue; Warchal recommends



allowing 3 - 4 days for Brilliant strings to play in. Ben Magwood uses a full set of Warchal Brilliances on his cello and loves them. 'They have a bright, rich ringing sound with lots of overtones and a very fast response. They do take a bit of getting used to as they are more 'stretchy' than other strings I've used, almost gut-like, so you have to be aware of where your bow is in relation to the bridge and you often end up tuning using the pegs, as the strings are so stretchy that the fine adjusters don't make much impact when tuning.'

Warchal have recently launched a new metal-core A string, called the **Warchal Prototype A**. We fitted this to Robin's cello and we found it powerful, but a bit difficult to control on the open string. It has a similar timbre and feeling under the bow to a D'Addario Kaplan Solutions medium although it has a slightly harsher, more textured edge to the sound. Kaplan Solutions is a little more subtle in tone than the Warchal Prototype A and is a little easier to control on the open string.

For a table of string tensions for the medium tension strings reviewed here, visit www.aitchisoncellos.com

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

SIMON ANDREW FORSTER CELLO 1836

L.O.B: 29" (735mm) String length: 26 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (682mm)

Price: £60,000

This magnificent cello was made for the Bishop of Oxford in 1836. It is in extremely good condition, with a very rich, colourful and powerful tone. Labelled and inscribed internally and also inscribed at the endpin: 'S. A. Forster, London, No. 14'.

JOSEPH HILL CELLO 1770

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (740mm) String Length 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (677mm)

Price: £55,000

A particularly beautiful example of the work of Joseph Hill in excellent condition, made from very fine materials with a intensely flamed slab-cut one-piece maple back. Hill Certificate.

THOMAS KENNEDY CELLO c.1820

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (740mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (680mm)

Price to be confirmed

A fine cello by Thomas Kennedy in very good condition with an expressive tone, powerful response and beautiful transparent varnish.

THOMAS SMITH CELLO 1765

L.O.B: 29" (735mm) String length: 26 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (675mm)

Price: £30,000

This attractive instrument has just arrived. More details and photographs will be published online.

BENJAMIN RUTH CELLO 1999

L.O.B: 30" (761mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (692mm)

Price: £23,000

A fine instrument by a prizewinning American maker with antiqued orange brown varnish.

THOMAS SMITH CELLO 1762 (Baroque)

L.O.B: 29" (737mm) String length: 26 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (676mm)

Price: £22,500

This elegant 18th century baroque cello has a tone of considerable clarity, depth and beauty.

GEORGES ADOLPHE CHANOT 1895

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (755mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (700mm)

Price: £22,000

A handsome Guarneri model cello by the famous Manchester maker in very good condition with fine orange brown varnish and a rich, powerful tone.

ROBIN AITCHISON CELLO 2012

L.O.B: 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (732mm) String length: 27" (685mm)

For trial only. New commissions: £22,000

A close copy of a Milan period GB Guadagnini cello circa 1755 with a complex, colourful tone.

LONDON SCHOOL CELLO c.1820

L.O.B: 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (766mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (689mm)

Price: £20,000

A handsome English cello with a deep, complex tone and excellent projection. The attractive orange-brown varnish is of very high quality.

MICHAEL KEARNS CELLO 1998

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (698mm)

Price: £16,000

A responsive, lively and attractive cello by a respected maker in very good condition.

HUNGARIAN CELLO c.1910

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (751mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (693mm)

Price: £10,000

MITTENWALD CELLO c.1890

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (760mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (698mm)

Price: £8,000

GERMAN CELLO C.1910

L.O.B: 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (767mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (694mm)

Price: £7,000

GERMAN CELLO C.1910

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (680mm)

Price: £6,000

For full details: www.aitchisoncellos.com

Selected Cello Bows

Eugene Sartory	79.0	S	£tbc
Silvestre Maucotel	80.4	S	£tbc
Jean-Pascal Nehr	82.0	G	£4,580
William Salchow	81.9	S	£4,500
John Stagg	82.8	G	£4,500
Paul Sadka	81.8	S	£4,000
Steve Salchow	82.8	S	£3,750
Carl Nürnberger	77.4	S	£3,500
Tino Lucke	76.5	S	£3,500
Pierre Guillaume	82.8	S	£3,330
Martin Beilke	81.9	S	£3,130
Christian Wanka	82.8	G	£3,000
John Aniano	81.0	S	£2,850
Bernd Etzler	81.4	S	£2,750
A R Bultitude	88.2	S	£2,000
Richard Wilson	82.2	S	£2,000
German bow c.1920	78.0	S	£2,000
Thomas Grünke	80.7	S	£2,000
Klaus Grünke	79.4	S	£2,000
J S Rameau	76.7	S	£1,500
Herman A Hoyer	76.0	G	£1,500
German c.1930	76.7	S	£1,125
Lothar Seifert	76.0	S	£600

Weight = in grammes; S = Silver; G = Gold