
NEWS FOR CELLISTS SPRING 2009

Cello Backs

In this issue we explore an often uncomfortable area: the lower back of the cellist. Sitting for long periods and carrying heavy cases can wreak havoc on cellists' backs and we decided to consult experienced specialists to discover ways both to prevent problems and treat existing conditions. If after reading the article you would like to pass on any of your own experiences for the benefit of other cellists, please do email or write to us and we will publish your comments in a follow-up article.



Insurance Alert

During the last 12 months the value of Sterling has dropped by 15% against the Euro and by 25% against the Dollar. As cellos and bows are part of a truly international market, you may now be under-insured if your instrument or bow needs to be replaced after loss or damage. Due to the continuing weakness of Sterling, we suggest that you contact your insurer and ask them to increase your insurance valuations by 15%. If you own a bow or cello by a living maker outside the UK we recommend that you check their current price and then convert it into Sterling using the prevailing exchange rate. Do contact us if you need advice as we would be happy to help.

Wanted – Cellos

The Cello Exchange has been very busy recently, with several fine instruments finding new homes in the last few weeks. We're also being contacted by increasing numbers of cellists from the UK and across Europe who are looking for another instrument, so if you are considering selling a cello, it may be a good time to find a buyer.

We are seeking instruments between £10,000 and £40,000 so if you have a cello for sale and would like us to consider it for inclusion in the Cello Exchange, please do get in touch and we will make an appointment to see you and to assess the instrument.

When a cello is sold through the Exchange, the buyer pays the seller direct and we then invoice the seller for 10% of the selling price as our commission on the sale. For further information: www.aitchisoncellos.com/celloexchange.htm or contact us on 01353 668559.

Case Questionnaire

Enclosed with this issue is a questionnaire about cello cases. We are hoping to gather as much feedback from players as possible in order to identify which cases serve players best; we will publish the results in a future article and will also offer feedback to the relevant case makers, to help them to improve their cases in the future.

If you can spare a couple of minutes to complete and return the questionnaire we'd be most grateful. The form can be sent by post or you might like to download a copy of the form from the website at www.aitchisoncellos.com/casesurvey.htm and send your comments via email to save postage costs. All participants will receive a free set of Cello Care Guide postcards in thanks for their contribution.

CELLO BACKS

A worrying number of cellists struggle with back problems, probably due to long hours seated at the cello combined with the strain of carrying heavy cello cases. Teresa Checchia, a cranial osteopath, Kathy Hooley, professional cellist and McTimoney chiropractor and Ann O'Brien, an Alexander Technique teacher all agreed to offer their advice.

Chair design: All three practitioners stress the importance of using a chair with the right height for your legs. Ideally, the front of the chair should be the same height as your lower leg (below the knee) so that both feet can rest comfortably on the floor; adjustable piano stools are very useful in this respect. It can also be very helpful to have the back of the chair a little higher than the front, as this raises the hips above the height of the knees, allowing the hip sockets to open more freely as you lean forward to play and also helping the lower back to retain its natural shape. A cheap solution is to buy a firm wedge-shaped cushion (with 11-15 degrees of slope) to use on your existing chair but it is also possible to buy special cello chairs which are built with a slightly forward-sloping seat.*

Posture: Every practitioner recommends that we review our posture when we play; here are some of their suggestions: Are your feet resting comfortably on the floor? Are your neck and shoulders relaxed? Does the crown of your head feel as though it is floating upwards towards the ceiling like a helium balloon, lengthening your spine? Is your breathing free and chest open – even when playing difficult passages?

Ann suggests making more use of the body's natural hinge-points, especially the hips, in order to avoid strain on the back: 'When leaning forward, bend from the hips, not with the spine; the hips are designed to bend in the same place repeatedly but the back is not!' Kathy observes that some cellists bear most of their weight down through one side of their bodies when playing: 'This results in a corkscrew effect, twisting the spine as we move forwards with the right shoulder and backwards with the left. Ideally the shoulders and pelvis should be in line with each other when playing.'

Take regular breaks from sitting if at all possible. Sitting for long periods causes the body to stiffen and the hip flexor muscles to tighten, so aim to take a break every 20 minutes if you can; stretch and walk around, drink some water and allow the body to realign itself before getting back to work. If in the middle of a performance, Kathy advises cellists to wriggle in their chairs, arching and flexing the back forwards, backwards and from side to side.

Stop: If you are tired, uncomfortable or feeling stressed, try to stop and re-group, even for a few seconds. Cellist Vivien Mackie first learned this lesson from Pablo Casals, and then again from her Alexander Technique teacher: 'You need to be able to say to yourself, "Stop, and stay where you are," ... this puts you into a completely different place for arranging your next action at the subconscious level.*' Ann encourages her clients to create a feeling of stillness in a nanosecond, just by stopping and detaching the mind.



Try to use a light case with rucksack style straps. Carrying a heavy cello case probably causes the most damage to cellists' backs. 'We humans are symmetrical creatures and carrying something as heavy as a cello case on one side of the body is unlikely to do you any good in the long term, unless you are very robust,' Ann reasons. Compared to the cost of long-term therapy after a back injury, buying a light carbon fibre case with rucksack-style straps could be a worthwhile investment; a carbon fibre case can weigh as little as 3.1kg compared with a traditional fibreglass case weighing 6 or 7kg. If you have wheels on your case, do use them whenever you can.

The moment of picking up a case can be dangerous for the back, particularly if the action is done in a hurry, with a braced, tense body. Teresa and Ann advise cellists to use their bodies in a fluid, elastic way at all times: a tense muscle group is compromised by that tension and is much more liable to injury. Ann suggests that you stop and prepare yourself for a moment, release your neck muscles, think of lengthening your whole back and keep the body elastic as you pick up the case; Kathy warns against jerking or twisting movements. If you don't have rucksack straps on your case and are carrying the cello for a long distance, swap the cello from side to side and take short breaks so you can gently free up the body.

Injury: If you have an injury or chronic condition which is undermining your ability to play or interfering with your life, the first step should always be to consult a doctor. Most back pain is caused by muscular problems but on rare occasions it can be the symptom of an unrelated problem, such as kidney stones. Once the doctor has checked the symptoms they will be able to prescribe suitable pain relief in the short term and, if necessary, refer you for a scan or physiotherapy.

Choosing a practitioner: Those with ongoing back problems may already work with a trusted practitioner, such as a physiotherapist, osteopath, acupuncturist or chiropractor. But it can be very difficult to know whom to consult when you first have an injury. The challenge is to find a practitioner with whom you feel safe, who listens carefully to everything you say and to whom you can express your symptoms, doubts and fears.

I am increasingly drawn to a philosophy of 'less is more' when dealing with health problems. The body is a sensitive and complex system and I believe it is helpful to be treated as gently as possible. Mainstream osteopathy and chiropractic both have a fairly 'macho' image but within both disciplines there are gentler branches of practice. As a McTimoney chiropractor, Kathy works to adjust the bones of the whole body to maintain correct alignment of the spine and to ensure the body's nerve supply works as efficiently as possible; the difference with this approach from other methods of chiropractic is its speed, accuracy and gentleness, checking patients from head to toe.

Teresa specialises in cranial osteopathy, treating the body via gentle stimulation. She finds that musicians respond well to gentle cranial techniques as they are sensitive individuals who require fine tuning, just like musical instruments. As well as treating injuries, osteopathy can radically improve mobility and alignment but once this is achieved Teresa always encourages her patients to work with an Alexander Technique teacher: 'If you want a long playing life, you have to develop the self awareness and training to maintain a fluid, flexible and toned body,' she advises.

Exercise: Taking regular, balanced exercise is one of the best routes to a healthy back but the pressure of work can all too easily distract us from taking care of ourselves. Teresa encourages her patients to walk as much as possible and to do structured exercise such as Pilates, as well as singing to open the chest. Kathy advises bilateral exercise such as swimming or walking to keep the body balanced. A recent study published in the British Medical Journal* shows walking to be particularly good for chronic back pain when combined with a series of Alexander Technique (AT) lessons. A simple and

safe exercise to maintain or improve the health of the lower back is the AT Semi-Supine position*. Another option is to work through a relaxation exercise while lying down; *Simple Relaxation** is the classic approach and is very effective.

Case History: My lower back went into spasm after a dance class two years ago and I was desperate to get moving again. Two male friends had been successfully treated for similar symptoms by a local physiotherapist using a powerful tens machine so I went for a couple of sessions, hoping for a 'quick fix'. Unfortunately the spasm then became so acute that I couldn't get out of bed. My doctor prescribed powerful pain relief and insisted I get up straight away; research shows that the sooner you move around using pain relief, the sooner the spasm abates. He also referred me to a senior NHS physiotherapist. I took pain killers and had regular acupuncture for eight weeks but was still very sore and stiff when I finally saw the physiotherapist three months after the injury. Her main concern was the total absence of movement in my lower back: the muscles were still very tight after the injury but apparently I was also unconsciously guarding the back against any movement. She explained that during and after a muscle spasm the spine is immobilised, which in turn limits blood supply to the injured area and inhibits the efficient delivery of nutrients and clearing of toxins, thus preventing full healing. If you have experienced acute back pain you will know how alarming it is to start moving the back again but my physio explained the secret: to make very gentle, subtle movements which cause no pain. The brain then receives a positive message that movement is not dangerous and will in turn accept more movement in the back. Week by week, I was prescribed larger movements until, several months later, my back was moving normally for the first time in years.

Having a back problem is worrying and painful but it can also provide an opportunity to stop and think about the way we've been using our bodies. Injury can increase physical and emotional self-awareness in a positive way, while a vulnerable back encourages you to stop and think before picking up a heavy cello case or an oppressive work load. Stopping and reflecting for a few moments can prevent further injury and also allow life to flow a little more gently. Working with a good health practitioner and taking more exercise can also help the mind and body to become more elastic in the face of life's many challenges. SM

* For more information, extensive references, contact details and an extended version of this article: www.aitchisoncellos.com/cellobacks.htm If you would like us to post a copy of these details to you, please call Sarah on 01353 668559.

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

JAMES & HENRY BANKS CELLO 1802

L.O.B: 28¾" (730mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £45,000

This fine instrument is in very pure condition with crackled dark brown varnish and a rich, rewarding tonal response.

WOLFGANG SCHNABL CELLO 1999

L.O.B: 30" (760mm) String length: 27⅞" (690mm)
Price: £18,500

An immaculate example of this sought-after maker's work, based on the 'Cristiani' Stradivari model. The tone is deep and smooth and projects well.

SIMON ANDREW FORSTER CELLO c.1840

L.O.B: 29⅞" (738mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £18,000

A fine example of the work of the last generation of the Forster family with characteristically rich red-brown varnish and a rich and satisfying tone.

ROBERT THOMPSON CELLO c.1760

L.O.B: 29¼" (743mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £16,000

A fine instrument with a cavernous sounding bass and a lyrical upper register with good projection. The varnish is pale honey-coloured and the arching is influenced by Stainer.

GEORGE CORSBY CELLO c.1810

L.O.B: 29¼" (742mm) String length: 26¾" (687mm)
Price: £15,000

A beautiful English cello in good condition with a crisp, clear and colourful tone and a quick response. The back and ribs are of very attractively flamed maple with a transparent honey-brown varnish.

TYROLEAN CELLO c.1780

L.O.B: 29¼" (745mm) String length: 27⅞" (690mm)
Price: £12,000

A very appealing instrument with a lively, richly textured and colourful tone and very beautiful, classic 18th century varnish.

IJMKJE VAN DER WERF CELLO 2008

L.O.B: 30" (764mm) String length: 27¼" (691mm)
Price: £8,000

An attractive cello by a talented young graduate of the Newark School of Violin Making, modelled on the Davidoff Stradivari cello.

MIRECOURT CELLO c.1890

L.O.B: 30⅞" (760mm) String length: 27¼" (691mm)
Price: £6,500

PRAGUE SCHOOL CELLO c.1900

L.O.B: 29½" (746mm) String length: 27⅞" (674mm)
Price: £6,500

ADOLFE DURENZY CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 30¼" (762mm) String length 27" (690mm)
Price: £5,500

PRESTON SCHOOL CELLO c.1800

L.O.B: 29½" (746mm) String length 26½" (674mm)
Price: £5,000

MITTENWALD CELLO c.1800

L.O.B: 29½" (750mm) String length: 26½" (674mm)
Price: £4,500

SELECTED CELLO BOWS

Dodd	92g	£tbc
Emile Ouchard père	80.8g	£5,000
William Salchow	80.2g	£4,070
John Dodd	77g	£4,000
E Ouchard (nickel)	77g	£3,500
Fine bow c.1900	81.5g	£3,500
Fine Peccatte copy	81g	£3,500
Stephen Salchow	82.4g	£3,290
Roger Zabinski	77.8g	£3,115
Paul Sadka	78.8g	£3,000
Tino Lucke	82.5g	£2,910
Mike Maurushat	78.9g	£2,760
John Aniano	81.9g	£2,690
W E Hill & Sons	74g	£2,500
Bernd Etzler	82g	£2,500
Josef Gabriel	80g	£2,200
W E Hill & Sons	82.1g	£2,200
Charles Bazin	72g	£2,000
Christian Wanka	80g	£1,950
Walter Mettal	79.2g	£1,200
Penzel	80.5g	£1,000
German c.1920	78g	£900
F R Leblanc	82.3g	£800
R K Neudorfer	70g	£800

Photographs and further details about our instruments and bows are available on request: call 01353 668559 or email sarah@aitchisoncellos.com