
NEWS FOR CELLISTS JANUARY 2008

Take a Bow 2008

We are very pleased to announce our next exhibition of international contemporary cello bows which will take place from 1 November to 7 December this year. Fifty world class cello bows by international master makers will be available for cellists to try at our studio in Ely and we will also be taking the exhibition on an educational tour of conservatoires throughout the UK.

For cellists seeking a new bow, *Take a Bow* is a unique opportunity to compare the work of the world's finest contemporary makers, both those already famed for their work and less well-known but talented young makers who have been recommended by their senior colleagues.

One young maker who has won a series of major prizes since we first showed his bows at *Take a Bow 2003* is Yannick Le Canu. Players who bought his work have had the satisfaction of knowing that they spotted his talent early on – and have also made an excellent investment.

Full details of *Take a Bow 2008* will be sent out with our September newsletter, while up to date information about the exhibition will be posted on our website at regular intervals. Bookings for the exhibition will open on 1st September.

This year *Take a Bow* will be supporting the work of the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (IPCI).

Kampala Music School

The Kampala Music School is urgently seeking materials for their music students, including strings, sheet music, classical music CDs, instruments and bows. If you feel you can help in any way, please contact Frances Bower by email: frances@fbower.orangehome.co.uk.

The school also welcomes master class visits from professionals as well as longer teaching placements for gap year students (Grade 8+). www.kampalamusicschool.com/



Right Hand Comfort

In Autumn *News for Cellists 2007* we focussed on ways to reduce stress in the left hand. On pages 2 and 3 we address the main comfort issues for the right hand.

Cello Transport Research

We are currently researching ways to make life easier for cellists travelling by car and train and would like to dedicate an area of our website to cello transport. As well as contacting train companies to clarify their policies regarding cello transport, we are also asking cellists to share the fruits of their travelling experiences (see page 3). All participants will receive a set of postcards in return for their contributions, which will be included in a forthcoming article.

RIGHT HAND COMFORT

Choice of Bow. The most important factor in achieving right hand comfort is using the best possible bow. Of course, choosing a bow is a very personal and sensitive process in which a match needs to be found between the player, the instrument and the bow. However, it's advisable to use a bow which produces sound very efficiently, engaging immediately with the string and producing generous volumes of sound in return for the effort put in by the player, as well as performing off the string strokes willingly. These qualities are central to the performance of the best bows in existence.

The weight and balance of the bow are also crucial to the comfort of your right hand. A heavy bow can be very powerful in romantic legato passages, producing sounds of searing intensity; however, these benefits must be weighed against the extra work required from the player when changing bow direction, using off the string bow strokes and lifting a heavy bow from the strings.

The balance of a bow is most apparent at the very moment you lift it from the string. Two bows of the same weight may feel different in balance, depending on the distribution of that weight along the stick: a bow weighted more towards the tip will feel heavier than one which is weighted more towards the handle. The issue of balance is very sensitive for many players and it's worth bearing in mind that re-hairing and re-lapping can change the balance and weight of a bow.

Bow re-hairs. The amount of hair on a bow can easily change its weight by 1 gram, but the overall length of the hair will change the balance and feel of the bow much more dramatically. A re-hair which is made too long – or has stretched in use – will make a bow feel heavier at the tip and also less strong. The material used for the bow lapping also affects weight and balance. Lighter lappings made from silk, tinsel or leather can be 3 or 4 grammes lighter than a lapping of silver wire. A light lapping reduces the overall weight of a bow and shifts the balance towards the head, while a heavy lapping adds to the overall

weight of the bow and shifts the balance towards the handle. Since recent tastes in bow weight have favoured heavier bows, many old cello bows have been fitted with heavy silver lappings which were never envisaged by the original bow maker. Bow grips used by some players to increase the comfort of the handle also add weight; sometimes lead weights are hidden in the head mortice of a bow to make a bow heavier at the tip.



Bow Grip. In a normal bow hold, the corner of the player's thumb sits in the space between the frog and the leather thumb grip, touching the leather, bow stick and frog. Ideally, the frog should be a comfortable shape where the thumb touches it but unfortunately this is one of the places where bow makers occasionally put beauty before function. For this we must blame Francois Xavier Tourte, the creator of the modern bow, who left his frogs particularly sharp next to the thumb grip. If your bow is not a priceless antique and the frog is uncomfortably sharp, it is quite reasonable for you to ask a craftsman to modify the shape of the frog to a more comfortable shape where the thumb touches it. If an old bow is uncomfortable at the frog due to excessive wear, new wood can be grafted in

by a bow maker. And if your bow is made by a famous French bow maker, the frog is in mint condition and is excruciatingly uncomfortable, you may want to have a comfortable new frog made for everyday use and put the original in a very safe place because it is worth more than the family silver!

The leather thumb grip is a little easier than the frog to adjust for comfort: it can be made thicker or thinner, harder or softer depending on the taste of the player. Most cellists find it more comfortable if there is only a short length of stick between the frog and the thumb grip and this also helps to avoid wear to the stick. To achieve this, it is important to ask for a short re-hair, so that the hair can only just be loosened when the re-hair is new, as the hair on cello bows is played at tensions which always cause it to stretch with time.

As well as making the frog and thumb grip comfortable and correctly positioned, many players like to have extra cushioning for their thumb. Several non-bulky options exist, including rubber thimbles, baby bottle teats, small leather sleeves or a leather flap secured beneath the thumb grip. For a bulkier solution, a length of rubber, latex or silicone tube can be worked onto the bow stick and stretched over the nose of the frog.

Cello set up. There are several aspects of cello set up which can make bowing easier. The first is rather fundamental and relates to the neck

and fingerboard of the cello. The cello neck can be set with the fingerboard exactly level with the front or tilted up at the A string and down at the C string (or vice versa). If the fingerboard is tilted up at the A string and down at the C, the advantage is that the right arm does not have to be raised so high to bow the A string. This configuration also creates more space between the A string and the C bout of the cello and between the A and the D strings, giving the player more freedom of movement. Although the fingerboard is never intentionally tilted down at the A string, the fingerboard can warp over time and misalignments can also lower the A string, placing extra demands on the right arm.

Strings and sound post. Lastly, there are two aspects of cello adjustment which have a major impact on the way a cello is bowed. It is possible to select strings which are quick to speak and do not require heavy bow pressure, although it is of course necessary to find a solution which achieves your tonal objectives as well as ease of playing. Also, adjusting the sound post to induce resistance into the set up also has a significant bearing on how easy or difficult the cello is to play.

*For the previous article on left hand comfort – along with all earlier articles and newsletters:
www.aitchisoncellos.com/articleshome.htm*

Illustrated by Michael Edwards.

Cello Transport Questions

Where is your favourite place to put your cello case in the car?
(passenger seat, boot; upright or lying down)

Do you always anchor your case in the car with a seatbelt?

Is your current cello case easy or difficult to fit into a car? Please give details.

Which make/model of car is most suited to carrying a cello, in your experience?

Which train companies have you found easiest/most difficult to travel with as a cellist?

What is your preferred method of securing your cello in a train carriage (e.g. use empty seat, strap to a secure upright, use luggage racks?)

Do you use a wheeled cello case? If not, which is the most comfortable case to carry?

If you would like to take part in this research, please post your answers to Sarah Mnatzaganian at 7, Cambridge Road, Ely CB7 4HJ or email your ideas to sarah@aitchisoncellos.com.

All contributors will be sent a set of free Cello Care Guide postcards in return. Thank you for your help.

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

HENRY JAY CELLO 1762

L.O.B: 29½" (750mm) String length: 26⅝" (677mm)
Price: £30,000

WILLIAM BOOTH JUNIOR CELLO 1843

L.O.B: 29½" (748mm) String length: 27¼" (687mm)
Price: £27,000

ROGER HANSELL CELLO 1994

L.O.B: 29" (735mm) String length: 27" (685mm)
Price: £25,000

BETTS SCHOOL CELLO c.1830

L.O.B: 29⅜" (745mm) String length: 26⅝" (678mm)
Price: £22,000

SIMON ANDREW FORSTER CELLO

L.O.B: 29⅝" (738mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £18,000

FORSTER SCHOOL CELLO c.1790

L.O.B: 29⅝" (740mm) String length: 26¾" (680mm)
Price: £17,500

PETER WAMSLEY CELLO 1730

L.O.B: 28¾" (730mm) String length: 26⅝" (675mm)
Price: £17,000

JOHN CARTER CELLO c.1790

L.O.B: 29⅝" (737mm) String length: 26¾" (682mm)
Price: £16,000

ROBIN AITCHISON CELLO 2007

L.O.B: 30" (758mm) String length: 27½" (695mm)
Price: £14,000

GERMAN CELLO c.1890

L.O.B: 29½" (749mm) String length: 27½" (693mm)
Price: £12,500

DAVID RUBIO BAROQUE CELLO 1978

L.O.B: 29½" (750mm) String length: 26⅝" (670mm)
Price: £9,500

MITTENWALD CELLO c.1840

L.O.B: 29" (736mm) String length: 27⅝" (690mm)
Price: £9,000

GERMAN CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 30¼" (768mm) String length: 27⅝" (690mm)
Price: £8,000

¾ SALOMON SCHOOL CELLO c.1770

L.O.B: 27½" (700mm) String length: 25⅝" (643mm)
Price: £6,000

GERMAN CELLO c. 1890

L.O.B: 30¼" (767mm) String length: 27⅝" (693mm)
Price: £6,500

GERMAN CELLO c.1900

L.O.B: 29¾" (738mm) String length: 27½" (699mm)
Price: £5,000

SELECTED CELLO BOWS

Fine Dodd	84.5g	£5,000
Vidoudez	82.3g	£3,500
Christian Wanka (gold)	81.1g	£2,450
Stephen Salchow	84.5g	£2,350
Roger Zabinski	81.5g	£2,350
Pierre Nehr	81.7g	£2,200
Paul Sadka	81.8g	£2,100
Stephen Bristow (gold)	84g	£2,000
Michael Duff c/fibre	82.4g	£2,000
H R Pfretzschner	75g	£2,000
Johannes Miething	82.8g	£1,700
Robert Pierce	81.4g	£1,650
Hill	78g	£1,500
Josef Gabriel	81.3g	£1,400
Bazin School	80g	£1,200
Pierce & Co	82.5g	£1,050

PERIOD CELLO BOWS

Andrew Dipper	French Baroque	£1,220
Andreas Grütter	Dodd	£1,200
JS Finkel	Classical	£900
Gerhard Landwehr	Baroque c.1700	£890
Philip Davis	French Baroque	£800
Roger Doe	Baroque	£600

Photographs are available on request. For detailed descriptions of all cellos and bows see:

www.aitchisoncellos.com