

NEWS FOR CELLISTS AUTUMN 2007

London Day

Sunday 30th September

London cellists may like to come and see us at our next London Day in Hampstead on Sunday 30th September. You are welcome to book a string trial, a sound adjustment, a general consultation or to try a selection of cellos and bows.

We will be resident in rooms 1 and 2 at the Belsize Music Rooms, Belsize Lane, NW3 5AX from 11am to 4pm. If you would like to try any particular cellos and bows during your visit, please let us know and we will do our best to bring them with us. One or two-hour sessions can be booked in advance and are available on a first come, first served basis; please telephone or email as soon as possible to reserve your time: 01353 668559 or sarah@aitchisoncellos.com. If you would like more information about the venue, see: www.belsize-music-rooms.co.uk

Left Hand Comfort

For cellists who are recovering from injuries or warding off strain, the ideal set up can be quite different to the standard set up. We explore some of the delicate compromises which can make all the difference to the left hand.



Cello Exchange

Since its foundation in 2004 the Cello Exchange has found new homes for 46 cellos and bows by makers including Thomas Dodd, George Craske, William Forster Senior, William Forster Junior, Henry Furber, John Furber, Joseph Hill, Henry Lockey Hill, Henry Jay, Thomas Kennedy, David Rubio and Peter Wamsley.

The Exchange aims to help both the buyer and the seller by operating with a minimal commission of 10%. The buyer pays the seller direct, giving the Exchange complete financial transparency. A significant proportion of cellists use the Exchange both to find a new cello and to sell their previous instrument.

As each cello arrives, we assess its potential for players on our waiting list and contact them immediately. As we go to press there are five people currently looking for an instrument between £20,000 and £50,000. All instruments in the Exchange are publicised on our website which attracts buyers from across Europe. For further information please visit www.aitchisoncellos.com/celloexchange.htm

Website Update

We have recently updated our website in order to make it a little easier to use by the thousands of cellists who regularly visit the site. On page three of this newsletter we give a brief introduction to the most frequently visited pages on the site. All *News for Cellists* newsletters can now be viewed online.

LEFT HAND COMFORT

We're all fond of quoting that puritanical proverb: 'It's a bad workman who blames his tools,' but if you experience discomfort in your left hand during or after playing, it would be wise to consider whether some aspect of your cello's set up is responsible.

Some makes of strings are easier for the left hand than others. This is both a function of the tension of the string and its elasticity or pliability. Choosing a pliable string is a pragmatic way to ease the strain on the left hand and does not require any modification to an instrument's set up. The most pliable cello strings available are those with a gut or Perlon core (eg. Eudoxa and Dominant). The most rigid strings are metal strings with a solid wire core (eg. Jargar and Larsen). Some metal core strings use a woven core and lie somewhere between the two extremes (eg. Helicore, Spirocore, Flexicore and Evah Pirazzi).

However, players sometimes find that they cannot get the tonal effect that they desire from the string which is most comfortable to play. At this point it is worth reviewing all aspects of the set up which influence the height of the strings above the fingerboard.

Excessive string height above the fingerboard is one of the major causes of left hand strain. Strings need sufficient clearance to ensure that they do not clatter on the fingerboard when they are played. As a general rule, the stronger the player and more pliable the string, the more string height is required. However, if your strings never clatter on the board and they are uncomfortably difficult to push down, your strings may be set unnecessarily high and it may be possible to adjust your set up for lower string clearances.

The standard measurements for string clearance are made at the bridge end of the fingerboard, measuring the perpendicular distance from the surface of the fingerboard to the centre of the string. In this system the standard height for the C string is 8.5mm and for the A string is 6.0mm. However, these measurements could be altered by as much as

2mm either way, depending on the flexibility of the strings used and the strength of the individual player. Most players struggling with over-high strings ask to have their bridge height reduced. This can help, as long as there is enough wood in the bridge to work with without compromising its acoustic design.

String clearances can change in response to atmospheric conditions. When there is a lot of moisture in the air, string clearances increase and they decrease when the air is very dry. In some countries cellists have different bridges and sound posts for different seasons. Most cellists in the UK manage with one bridge - in which case it is important to find a compromise which works across a range of atmospheric conditions. If string clearances have increased it may also indicate that some part of the cello has lost its structural integrity (most commonly when the fingerboard has become unglued from the neck).

String height problems are sometimes caused by a mismatch between the bridge curve and the curve of the fingerboard. For example, if the fingerboard was originally made for a bridge with a flatter playing curve than the current bridge, the D and G strings will have excessive clearance in high positions, causing discomfort and creating a bow clearance problem in high positions.

If playing in first position is tiring, you should check your string heights at the nut. It should be just possible to slip a business card beneath the A and D strings at the nut; if the gap is any greater, the nut should be lowered.

Strain experienced around 4th, 5th and 6th positions is usually associated with two possible causes: fingerboard scoop and neck shaping at the root. 5th position is about half way down the length of the fingerboard and the degree of scoop planed into the board influences how far the string must be pressed down to make contact with the fingerboard. The amount of scoop in the board can be viewed by gently pressing the string down at each end of the fingerboard until the string

just touches the surface of the fingerboard at each end. The air space remaining under the string in 5th position should be between 1mm to 1.5mm. If this space is much more than 1.5mm it could make life difficult in 4th, 5th or 6th positions. Some players like to have even less scoop than this, particularly for a rigid high tension metal A string (e.g. Jargar or Larsen).

Good neck shaping is very important for playing comfort and the critical point is at the bottom of the neck where the precise height and shape of the neck root determine how far the thumb must be stretched away from the other fingers in 5th and 6th position - too much stretching can induce a lot of tension in the palm of the left hand. Re-shaping a cello neck is a fairly expensive process so it's important to check the neck shaping very carefully when choosing an instrument.

Another major cause of left hand strain is excessive stop length (ie. the playing length of the open string). Some cellists have such flexible, strong fingers that they can manage a long stop, even though their hands are not large, but cellists with smaller hands tend to find a moderate stop more manageable.

Luthiers can make reductions to the stop length of up to 10mm by repositioning the bridge slightly higher up the instrument and by fitting a special nut. Shortening the stop length from both ends leaves the feeling of the neck at 4th position unchanged, but the best solution of all is to find a cello with a comfortable stop for your hand.

In the next issue we will be exploring right hand comfort.

CELLOS

Cellos for sale
Bows for sale
Cellos by Robin Aitchison
Set-up

CELLO EXCHANGE

Cello exchange

STRING TRIALS

String Trials

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www.aitchisoncellos.com is becoming increasingly popular with cellists all over the world as a source of specialist information for cellists. The most popular areas of the site are the *Cello Care Guide*, followed by the *Cellos for Sale* and *Bows for Sale* pages which contain fully up-to-date details of all cellos and bows currently available. Most surfing cellists also make a bee-line for the *Cello Exchange*, *String Trials* and *Set up* pages detailing some of our specialist services. Cellists planning a visit to Ely regularly consult *Travelling to Ely* which has maps and directions to our studio.

Many visitors browse extensively through the *Articles* section which has just been updated with its own address bar to ease navigation between articles. This section now includes all articles previously published in *News for Cellists* as well as other articles on cello set up, string design, contemporary bow making and bow testing techniques which were first written for the *Strad Magazine* and the European String Teachers' Association newsletter, *News & Views*.

Our links page has a growing number of links to specialist cello sites. If you would like us to add a link to your web site, please let us know and we will be delighted to include your details. Do let us know if you have any thoughts or requests for the website – we always value your feedback.

SELECTED CELLOS AND BOWS

LOCKEY HILL CELLO c.1780

L.O.B: 29" (737mm) String length: 26 $\frac{1}{3}$ " (669mm)
Price: £28,000

ROGER HANSELL CELLO 1994

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

FORSTER SCHOOL CELLO c.1790

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (740mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (680mm)
Price: £17,500

FLEMISH CELLO C.1800

L.O.B: 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (720mm) String length: 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (674mm)
Price: to be confirmed

JOHN CARTER CELLO c.1790

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (737mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (682mm)
Price: £16,000

ROBIN AITCHISON CELLO 2007

L.O.B: 30" (758mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (695mm)
Price: £14,000

KENNEDY SCHOOL CELLO C. 1840

L.O.B: 29" (737mm) String length: 27" (685 mm)
Price: £12,000

ROBIN AITCHISON CELLO 2002

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (739mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (693mm)
Price: £11,500

CHARLES BUTHOD CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (760mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (690mm)
Price: £10,000

DAVID RUBIO BAROQUE CELLO 1978

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (670mm)
Price: £9,500

MITTENWALD CELLO c.1840

L.O.B: 29" (736mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)
Price: £9,000

GERMAN CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (768mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)
Price: £8,000

$\frac{3}{4}$ SALOMON SCHOOL CELLO c.1770

L.O.B: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (700mm) String length: 25 $\frac{1}{3}$ " (643mm)
Price: £6,000

GERMAN CELLO c.1900

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (738mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (699mm)
Price: £5,000

LÉON MOUGENOT CELLO 1908

L.O.B: 30 $\frac{1}{3}$ " (770mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (690mm)
Price: £4,000

PRESTON SCHOOL CELLO C. 1800

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (746mm) String length: 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (674mm)
Price: £3,000

SELECTED CELLO BOWS

Fine Dodd bow	84.5g	£tbc
Fine Hill bow	82.5g	£5,000
E.F. Ouchard	82.5g	£4,000
Vidoudez	82.3g	£3,500
Stephen Salchow	84.5g	£2,350
Roger Zabinski	78.9g	£2,350
Pierre Nehr	81.7g	£2,200
Paul Sadka	81.8g	£2,100
Stephen Bristow (gold)	84g	£2,000
Robert Pierce	83.4g	£1,950
Josef Gabriel	81.3g	£1,400
Pierce & Co	82.5g	£1,050
20 th century French bow	77.5g	£1,000
Good Hill bow	72g	£1,000

PERIOD CELLO BOWS

Andrew Dipper	French Baroque	£1,220
Andreas Grütter	1780 - 1820 Dodd	£1,200
J S Finkel	Classical bow	£900
Gerhard Landwehr	Baroque c.1700	£890
Philip Davis	French Baroque	£800

For detailed descriptions of all cellos and bows see:

www.aitchisoncellos.com