
NEWS FOR CELLISTS SPRING 2013

Caring for your cello bow

We regularly hear from cellists who have problems with their bows, for example excessive tightness in the adjuster, loss of alignment, a badly fitting frog or re-hair concerns. In response we thought it might be helpful to publish an article about general bow maintenance, with practical guidance on how to care for your bow and when to seek professional help.

When researching this article we sent a questionnaire to a diverse group of senior bow makers and we have summarized their responses on pages 2-3. A full list of the contributors can be found on the web version of the article along with a short list of recommended UK bow making and restoration workshops.



It's best not to oil your frog

Crown strings by Larsen

Larsen has recently released Crown cello strings, a set of steel core, budget student strings which were redeveloped by Larsen after they acquired the Swedish manufacturer in 2012. The feedback so far is very positive; the strings provide a rich and rewarding response, are comfortable for the left hand and work well as a set; the C string is Tungsten wound. The price for a complete set is £89.99.

Farewell, Caroline

Caroline Bosanquet, cellist, teacher and composer, died in Cambridge this January aged 72. A pupil of Christopher Bunting, she was known internationally for her *Elegy for Cello* written in memory of cellist Joan Dickson, and also for her ground-breaking work on cello harmonics, *The Secret Life of Cello Strings: Harmonics for Cellists*. The combination of an uncompromising desire for musical excellence and a physically comfortable playing technique, delivered with a powerful voice and a relentlessly positive attitude, resulted in a stream of grade 8 distinctions for her pupils and a whole community of able and happy cellists.

She was known and loved throughout Cambridge where she lived and worked for most of her life; during her last few weeks the hospice visitor's book recorded a constant stream of entries from past and present students and their families, fellow musicians and friends, and even her local shopkeeper who had for years insisted on personally delivering her shopping by hand after she developed ankle problems.

Indelible memories of Caroline include her sitting happily in her garden in between lessons, handing out mugs of tea beneath the room-engulfing climbing cheese plant which her students called 'The Triffid' and bursting into loud laughter at the look on my face when she handed me a tennis ball and asked me to use it to play vibrato on my cello, under my left wrist.

littlecellist.com

A fresh new website for very young cellists has been launched recently. It has an excellent listing of concerts, workshops and courses, profiles of famous cellists and a series of games and videos. There's also a gallery space for budding cellists to publish art and poetry. www.littlecellist.com

Illustration by Michael Edwards

CELLO BOW MAINTENANCE

Tightening/loosening bows. If you have trouble tightening or loosening your bow, the most likely cause is a lack of internal lubrication in the tightening mechanism of the bow. To lubricate a bow, Roger Zabinski and Bill Salchow recommend a product called Door-Ease, a white crayon-like stick made from waxes and refined petroleum oil (£4.90 + p&p from <http://graphitetrading.co.uk/>). Rub a little of this onto the screw tip, screw threads and shank, onto the under-slide of the frog and onto the nipple (lubrication points and surfaces are indicated using small arrows on the drawings below this article). You may need to use a tissue to remove excess lubricant from the under-slide and nipple. Steve Salchow prefers to use candle wax (paraffin) for his bows. An alternative lubricant for the under-slide and nipple area is graphite from a soft (6B) pencil. Some bow makers recommend that you take your bow to a good repairer if you have concerns about stiffness, rather than trying to remedy the situation yourself.

If there is still too much friction between the frog and the stick, it is possible to improve the fit of the frog against the stick by loosening or tightening the brass eye. However, it is very easy to damage the frog when turning the brass eye so most makers recommend that you seek professional help.

More rarely, adjuster stiffness can be caused by a misalignment of the screw in the handle mortice (for example, the screw may lie closer to one side of the mortice than the other, causing the brass eye to rub against the edge of the mortice and creating unnecessary friction as a result). To cure this problem the circular holes in the bow handle have to be filled with fresh wood (bushed) by an expert bow restorer and then re-drilled so that the screw sits accurately in the centre of the mortice, allowing the brass eye to travel freely up and down the thread without fouling against the side of the mortice.

Loss of straightness/camber. Bows can easily lose their straightness if they are exposed to high temperatures which release latent tension in the wood. If a bow is unevenly supported in its case, or if many of the bow hairs have been broken on the playing edge of the ribbon, this can also force the stick out of alignment. Newly made bows can also move spontaneously out of alignment, particularly during the first two years after being made. To check straightness, look down the bow from the frog towards the tip. If a cello bow bends towards the left it will collapse towards the strings when played and the bow will have an awkward, unbalanced feel when being used.

If you have a contemporary bow with alignment

problems – or any other significant issue - we would warmly recommend that you return the bow to its maker for correction. Most makers are happy to correct the alignment or camber of their bows free of charge during the first two years of a bow's life. Correcting camber and alignment is a highly skilled job and requires an advanced understanding of bow design, and it is a process which some competent re-hairers may not be able to carry out well.

Wear and tear. Wear and tear on bows takes place each time a bow is played. Sweat and perfume have a corrosive effect on wood, pearl and metal, while contact with skin, nails and rings on exposed areas of the bow stick also causes the wood to wear away through friction. Decorative mother of pearl inlay in the eye and the slide are particularly vulnerable to contact with a moist hand and will gradually wear away unless protected. Some bow makers recommend using an adhesive plastic layer to protect pearl inlay if you perspire easily. Very worn pearl should be replaced before the exposed ebony surrounding the pearl starts to get worn. Replacing worn original pearl on a bow is seen as a necessary process and does not result in loss of value.

Maker's brands are also liable to wear and do eventually become illegible; we have observed that just 5-7 years of continuous use can noticeably wear the brand of a new contemporary bow. Some players have a thin piece of leather stuck over the handle, particularly on old bows. Steve Salchow always recommends using leather to protect the stick, even on contemporary bows. 'There are other options such as tape or clear nail polish, but these don't last as long as leather and must be monitored by the player. None of these options are the least bit damaging to the stick.'

The exposed bow stick in between the leather thumb grip and the frog can easily become worn if the hair on the bow is too long. As Steve Salchow explains: 'Many players don't realize that the hair stretches over time with playing and humidity; the hair then gets too long, resulting in a gap between the front of the frog and the leather thumb grip. The thumb fits naturally into this gap and wears a hole into the bottom of the stick. It can be repaired by filling in the hole, but never fully restored to its original condition. This kind of damage is common and does devalue a bow.' To avoid this, make sure you have a nice short rehair, renew your thumb grip if it is worn and possibly also have a leather flap fitted to bridge the gap between the thumb grip and frog. This part of the bow will also be protected if you happen to use a piece of rubber tubing, baby bottle teat or rubber thimble to increase the size and comfort of the stick and protect your thumb from the sharp edge of the frog.

Re-hairs A good re-hairer will have a stock of good quality bow hair and will take time to discard defective hairs. The hank of selected hairs is then bound together and held into each end of the bow with wedges to form an even ribbon of hair. This is a very skilled job so a good re-hair is not cheap, but the results are worth it. Apart from not playing well, a bad re-hair might damage your bow in about a dozen different ways. Any reputable re-hairer would prefer to re-hair a bow to your satisfaction, so don't hesitate to let them know if you are not happy with a re-hair. A list of a few recommended bow workshops is published in the web version of this article, but the list is not exhaustive and it's worth consulting professional friends to find if they have a re-hairer they are happy to work with.

For cello bows we recommend that you ask for a short re-hair which leaves the hair only just slack when the adjuster is fully unwound. A short re-hair ensures that the frog stays close to the thumb grip when the bow is tightened and also means that the balance point of the stick stays close to your hand. Another advantage of a short re-hair is that it allows for the tendency of hair on a cello bow to stretch in use. Steve Salchow agrees: 'I like to re-hair bows so there's a small amount of tension when they're loosened all the way, i.e. the hair is straight rather than dangling.'

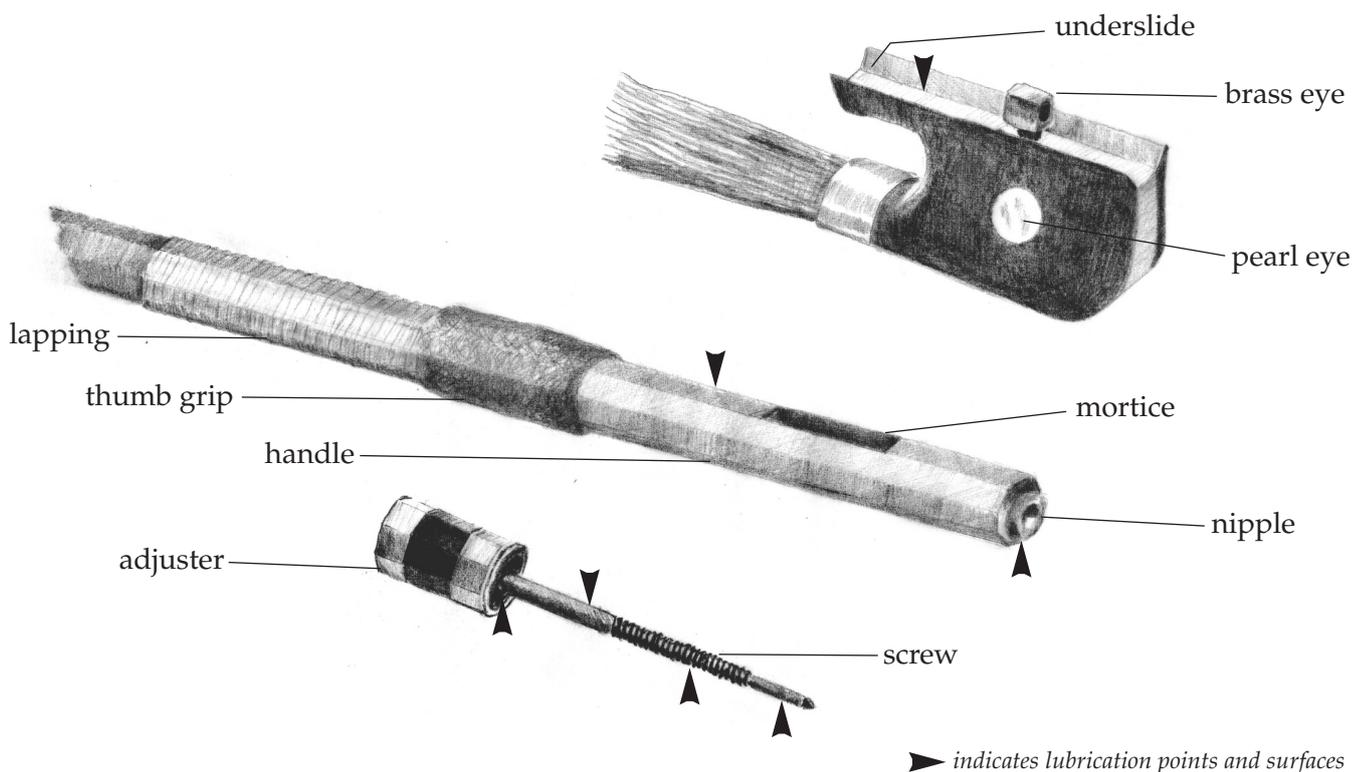
Thumb grips. The leather thumb grip acts both to protect the stick from wear and also provides comfort for the player's thumb. Individual taste dictates how thick or thin, soft or firm the leather needs to be. Worn thumb grips should be replaced promptly to prevent the thumb nail wearing into the bow stick.

Face damage. The face of a bow is a very important part of the structure of the head. It is usually a thin

bone/ivory or occasionally silver layer covering the flat or slightly curved face at the head of the bow where the hair emerges from the head mortice. Its function is to protect and reinforce the pernambuco head from wear when it is pushed into a bow holder and it protects the head from being split open when the head wedge is being fitted during a re-hair; it also protects the very tip of the bow from being snapped off. In an ideal world, all the forces created by a re-hair should be taken by the face, not the brown pernambuco wood itself.

If the very tip of the face is broken off, this exposes the pernambuco tip to wear, which is very difficult to remedy, so a face should be replaced immediately if it loses its tip. The face can also get cracked at its most narrow point next to the mortice. If a crack occurs in this location, the bow shouldn't be re-haired until a new face is fitted as the cracked face is no longer protecting the head as it should. Making a good job of a new face requires a lot of patience and skill, which explains the relatively high cost of this repair. The more valuable your bow, the more important it is to ensure that your face is replaced by a highly skilled and experienced bow maker.

General points A bow should be thoroughly cleaned by the re-hairer each time it is re-haired, so most bow makers just recommend giving your bow a quick wipe with a dry duster or micro fibre cloth after each playing to help keep the bow clean. Try to keep your bow in a stable environment and be sure to avoid exposing it to direct sunlight (which shrinks the hair) and high humidity (which lengthens the hair). Always fully loosen the bow after playing and – as Bernd Etzler advises – never sit on your bow!



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: '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 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 by Thomas Smith has a tone of considerable clarity, depth and beauty and which projects extremely well. The condition is very good.

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 cello has recently benefitted from some excellent restoration work and is in good playing condition.

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.

DAVID RUBIO CELLO 1986

L.O.B: 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (750mm) String length: 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (690mm)

Price: £14,000

This cello was commissioned by its owner as a close copy of a 1729 Montagnana cello and is in immaculate condition.

GERMAN CELLO c.1850

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

Price: £9,000

An appealing instrument with a rich, responsive tone and a one-piece maple back.

GERMAN CELLO c.1910

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

Price: £7,000

A good German cello with an excellent, colourful tone, in good condition.

GERMAN CELLO c.1910

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

Price: £6,000

An attractive cello with a rich tone and a very comfortable string length, in good condition.

Selected Cello Bows

Dominique Peccatte	76.5	S	poa
Eugene Sartory	79.0	S	poa
Eugene Sartory	82.4	S	poa
Silvestre Maucotel	80.4	S	£tbc
William Salchow	81.9	S	£4,770
Jean-Pascal Nehr	82.0	G	£4,740
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
Martin Beilke	81.9	S	£3,310
Robert Pierce	80.2	S	£3,020
John Aniano	81.0	S	£3,020
Bernd Etzler	81.4	S	£2,750
Thomas Grünke	80.7	S	£2,070
Klaus Grünke	79.4	S	£2,070
A R Bultitude	88.2	S	£2,000
Richard Wilson	82.2	S	£2,000
D S Finkel	81.2	S	£1,500
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

poa = price on application

£tbc = price to be confirmed