AITCHISON MNATZAGANIAN

CELLO MAKERS RESTORERS & DEALERS

NEWS FOR CELLISTS FEBRUARY 2019

Cello Bridge Care

One of the most hard-working elements of a cello's set up is the bridge. Day and night, it supports the downward pressure of the strings and also transmits the energy of the bow down into the body of the instrument. Our specialist article this month focuses on how to maintain your bridge in optimal condition.

Seeking Cellos and Bows for Sale

Our Cello Exchange service is a busy market place for instruments and bows. Over the last two years we have sold cellos by William Forster, Henry Lockey Hill, George Chanot, Benjamin Banks, Leon Mougenot and Anton Bachmann, as well as some lovely unnamed English instruments. Bows sold include those by Sartory, Thomassin, Dodd, and Hill as well as many fine contemporary bows by makers such as Yannick Le Canu, Bernd Etzler, Victor Bernard, Robert Pierce, Matt Wehling, Steve Salchow and Richard Grünke.

If you are considering selling a cello or bow, do let us know and we will do some careful pricing research for you. To ensure complete transparency, we publish our prices online and ask buyers to pay owners the full sum direct. The owner stays in complete control of the process and we invoice for our commission only when the funds from the sale have cleared.

We charge 12.5% sales commission for cellos and 15% commission for bows under £8,000 (12.5% for bows over £8,000.) *Please note that we are unable to sell cellos by other living makers.* Cello prices start at £12,000; bows at £1,000.

Newsletter Subscriptions 2019

Thank you very much for confirming your newsletter subscription. If any of your friends or colleagues didn't manage to get back to us in time with their details, please reassure them that they can call or email any time to renew their postal or email subscription.

Bow Rehairs – a call for recommendations

Can you recommend a really good bow rehairer? Cellists often ask us whether we can recommend a good re-hairing service near them. We know some wonderful bow makers but we don't have a birds-eye view of re-hairing services across the UK – so often we're unable to help. We discussed this issue with some cellist friends who suggested that we invite our readers to let us know their favourite bow maker so that we could pass on these recommendations when we receive queries.

If you work with a bowmaker whose re-hairs you love and who would be happy to share their details with the cello community, please send us their name and contact details by email: sarah@aitchisoncellos.com or telephone 01353 668559. Thank you!

A bad re-hair can come undone during a performance…

CELLO BRIDGE CARE

GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR CELLO BRIDGE.
A good bridge can last indefinitely but it does need constant care and attention from the player to stay in optimal condition. There are three main issues to be aware of: **warping** of the bridge head, **splaying** of the legs and **cutting** of the strings into the string grooves.

A GOOD START IN LIFE.
For a bridge to stay in good condition and to transmit the energy of the player to the body of the cello efficiently, it needs to stand up straight. The best luthiers are fanatical about their wood selection for bridges. We look for a combination of fineness and evenness of growth: the tighter the growth lines (rings) and the straighter the medullary rays (vertical structures) in the wood of the bridge blank, the stronger and more stable the bridge will be. Excellent bridge wood also offers the luthier more scope in the design details of the bridge.

We use top-grade maple bridge blanks made to our own design from the best French manufacturer. They source their maple from the same region as the wood we use for the backs, ribs and scrolls of our cellos, but they choose plain maple without any figure or curl.

Good bridge manufacturers always season their wood, but we like to season our bridges for at least a further five years. Like most luthiers, we also heat treat bridges before use, to release any internal stresses in the wood and give the bridge more stability during its lifetime.

BRIDGE CARE GUIDE.

1. Lubricate the string grooves.

Each string groove in the bridge and the ebony top nut should be well lubricated by rubbing a piece of dry soap (see below) across the empty string groove until it is full of soap fragments. The presence of the soap will allow the string to slide much more smoothly over the bridge and nut, with far less friction.

If you want to lubricate your string grooves but are not changing the strings, tune down each string by a major third, briefly lift the string out of the string groove while you rub soap into the groove and then replace the string, tune it up and straighten the bridge. Many cellists like to use graphite (pencil lead) to lubricate their string grooves which is an equally effective method, but we prefer to use dry soap as it's quicker and cleaner.

How to prepare dry soap. The best soap to use is of a basic quality, such as a little tablet of hard and crumbly hotel soap. Nice soaps containing oils which are good for your skin are too soft for our purpose. If you don't have a cake of old hotel soap, cut a 1cm slice off a bar of basic soap and put it in a warm dry place for a few months until the soap is dried out and shrunken. When you scrape the surface, small flakes should come away like snow.

A little piece of soap like this can safely be kept in your cello case and used for your string grooves in the bridge as well as in the nut at the top of the fingerboard – whenever you fit a new string.

2. Straighten your bridge regularly to stop it warping.

Even if you use dry soap to lubricate your string grooves, some friction will still occur between the bridge and string every time a new string is fitted or tuned. This friction will drag the bridge fractionally in the direction of the pegs or the tailpiece, depending on whether you are tuning from the pegs or fine tuners.

It's important to note that fine tuners drag the bridge **six times more powerfully** than pegs, because they are in such close proximity to the bridge. If you use fine tuners regularly, you need to keep a close eye on the bridge and correct its stance away from the tailpiece. It's worth tuning with your pegs whenever practical to counteract the effect of the fine tuners, but every time you fit a new string, you should assume that the bridge has been pulled towards the peg box and will need straightening.

To ensure that the bridge stays upright and in perfect condition through its lifetime, we recommend checking the posture of your bridge at least once a week. If your bridge has already become warped, don't despair: good luthiers can re-flatten moderately warped bridges (there are a variety of techniques.)

A straight bridge sounds better. It's also important to keep your bridge standing upright from a tonal point of view as the posture of the bridge makes a big difference to the sound and response of the cello. For the bridge to function as the luthier intended, both feet should sit flat on the cello front, with even pressure on every part of the feet – so that the bridge is neither rocking back on its 'heels' or forward onto its 'toes'.

Some cellists carry out minor sound adjustments on their instruments by changing the angle of the bridge; other players are less keen to experiment, but we would encourage every cellist to learn how to adjust the angle of the bridge to keep it standing straight upright. Practise straightening your bridge until you are confident!

1,000 years of bridge straightening. This 11th century sculpture in the Portico de la Gloria, Santiago de Compostela is the first record of a player straightening their bridge.

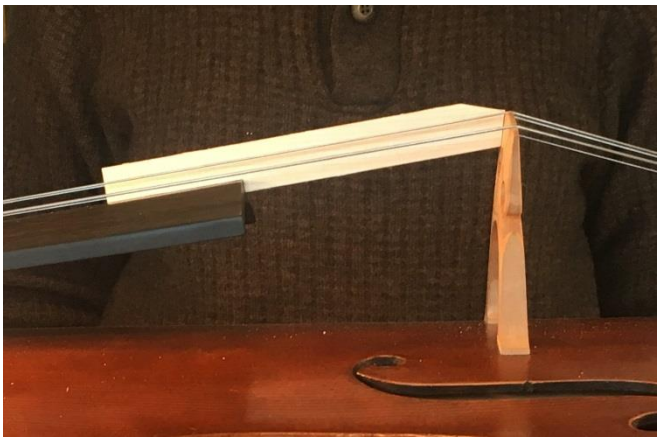
3. Bridge straightening techniques:

(i) Like the Santiago de Compostela player in the photograph above, grip the bridge immediately beneath the strings in order not to break any part of it with the pressure you're applying. Straighten the bridge gently and evenly, balancing the effort of both hands.

(ii) This method is Robin's favourite and works well for players with big hands (see below). Lie the cello across your lap or a table. Wrap your hands around the strings on either side of the bridge and brace the little finger of one hand against the tailpiece and the little finger of the other against the fingerboard. If the string grooves have been lubricated, you will be now able to push the head of the bridge in the desired direction with your thumbs. The thumb which is not pushing can act as a balance or brake to ensure that the bridge doesn't go too far.

Robin's favourite straightening method

4. Use a bridge gauge. If you are unsure how to assess the posture of your bridge, you could ask your luthier to make you a bridge gauge like the one pictured below



which is designed to fit precisely between the top of the bridge and the end of your fingerboard when the bridge is standing perfectly upright. Use this gauge to check the posture of your bridge and correct the bridge angle as required. Make sure the grooves are well lubricated with dry soap before you correct the bridge angle, otherwise the strings will grip the bridge too firmly to allow any movement.

5. Watch out for splayed bridge feet If a cello's front has high or steep arching, there is a tendency for the bridge feet to try to 'do the splits' and become splayed. If a cello accidentally rolls over onto the bridge, this also causes the bridge feet to splay apart. If your bridge legs are splayed this will have a very negative effect on tone. It is possible to squeeze the bridge feet back into place safely with your thumbs and forefingers, but we suggest you watch the new video on our website before attempting it.

6. String groove maintenance: Only 30 - 50% of each string's thickness should sit in the groove. If a groove is too wide for the string, this can cause a buzz; if the groove is too deep, this will cause excessive friction between the string and the bridge, which may warp the bridge and damage the windings of newly fitted strings. We like to fit bridge vellums (small pieces of parchment) over the A, D and often the G string grooves to help prevent the upper strings cutting down into the bridge. Vellums are finer and harder in texture than wood, and therefore withstand the pressure of strings better. The narrow A string can still cut through a bridge vellum over time, so keep an eye out for this. If your string grooves are too deep or over-sized, they can be built up again by a luthier and filed back to the right shape.

7. Keep your old bridges: If your existing bridge is beyond repair or you decide to get a new set up, ask your luthier to return your old bridge to you as it is an important part of the cello's history. It's also an insurance policy: if you are not happy with the new set up, you can return to the old set up or ask a luthier to make a copy of the old bridge that worked well for you.

SELECTED CELLOS & BOWS

CARLO ANTONIO TESTORE c.1730

L.O.B: 29½″ (755mm) String length: 27¼″ (691mm)

£320,000

A very fine example of Testore's work in excellent condition. This versatile cello would make an exceptional chamber instrument, especially within a string quartet, and has an exquisite solo voice. Beare certificate.

FLORENTINE CELLO c.1750

L.O.B: 30″ (760mm) String length: 27¼″ (693mm)

£80,000

A handsome Italian cello labelled Lorenzo Carcassi with a colourful, deep, fine tone and powerful upper register projection. Previously played by an orchestral principal and soloist. In good restored condition. J&A Beare letter.

JAMES W BRIGGS CELLO

L.O.B.: 29¾″ (757mm) String length: 27⅛″ (689mm)

£38,000

This handsome cello by James William Briggs belongs to a principal cellist and is in excellent condition. It is a fine example of his later work and has attractive craqueled varnish. The tone is rich and powerful.

AITCHISON STRADIVARI COPY

L.O.B: 30″ (762mm) String length: 27⅛″ (690mm)

Price: £32,000

A rare chance to acquire a beautiful close copy of the Marquis de Corberon Stradivari cello with a lyrical, powerful tone and crisp response. The cello was made in 2014 and is in immaculate condition.

JOHN YOUNG CELLO c.1730

L.O.B: 29″ (735mm) String length: 26¾″ (681mm)

Sold

A handsome unpurfled early English cello in very good condition, with a clear, powerful tone and quick response. The varnish is a beautiful red-brown colour and the cello bears the original, very detailed label.

FINE GERMAN CELLO c.1820

L.O.B: 29½″ (754mm) String length: 27″ (685mm)

£20,000

A distinctive and beautifully made German cello in good condition with a noble, deep tone, excellent power and projection and a swift response. This cello is in good condition and has fine, dark brown craqueled varnish.

LOCKEY HILL SCHOOL CELLO c.1780

L.O.B: 29″ (735mm) String length: 26½″ (675mm)

£20,000

A beautiful English cello with lush red-brown varnish and a rich, colourful tone with considerable projection. The cello is a very comfortable size for a smaller player.

CHAROTTE-MILLOT CELLO c.1830

L.O.B: 28¾″ (731mm) String length: 27″ (684mm)

£15,000

A handsome, comfortably sized cello by Joseph Charotte-Millot in very good condition, with a. rich, responsive bass and singing treble. The varnish was antiqued by the maker.

GERONIMO BARNABETTI CELLO c.1880

L.O.B: 30¼″ (770mm) String length: 27″ (683mm)

£10,000

Once the second instrument of a fine professional player, this Geronimo Barnabetti cello is in excellent condition with a smooth, deep and resonant tone.

Selected Cello Bows

John Dodd	86.6	S	tbc
Claude Thomassin	76.0	S	£12,000
C N Bazin	75.5	S	£9,000
Samuel Allen	78.8	S	£8,000
W E Hill & Sons (Johnston)	81.0	S	£8,000
W E Hill & Sons (Yeoman)	78.9	S/T	£7,500
Matt Wehling	81.8	G	£6,100
Robert Pierce	83.4	G	£5,500
Roger Zabinski	80.5	S	£5,370
Hill (Albert Leeson)	75.5	S	£5,000
Steve Salchow	81.0	S	£4,880
Richard Grünke	83.3	G	£4,500
Malcolm Taylor	83.6	G	£4,500
Victor Bernard	80.9	G	£4,300
John Aniano	80.5	S	£4,070
Bernd Etzler	81.9	S	£4,000
French bow	73.0	S	£4,000
Robert Pierce	84.6	S	£3,670
Bernd Etzler	81.9	S	£3,500
Richard Grünke	80.8	S	£3,300
Stephen Bristow	83.3	S	£3,200
Christian Wanka	83.2	S	£3,070
Bernd Etzler	80.8	S	£3,000
H R Pfretzschner	83.0	S	£2,750
Gunther A Paulus	79.0	S	£1,700
Alfons Riedl	81.0	S	£1,500
Jackson Fornaciari	81.8	S	£1,100
Alfred Knoll	83.5	S	£1,100
Conrad Gotz	87.5	S/I	£1,000
Siqueira	80.0	N	£880

For a complete list of cellos and bows visit www.aitchisoncellos.com