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Fine Instruments & Bows



The 'Primrose'
Guarneri viola of 1697

5 JULY 2012 LONDON

A private auction

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“There are only three other Guarneri violas and the one you are purchasing is by far the finest... There are many dealers and string players also, who declare it to be the finest viola extant, and I am disposed to believe them.”

William Primrose



The 'Primrose'

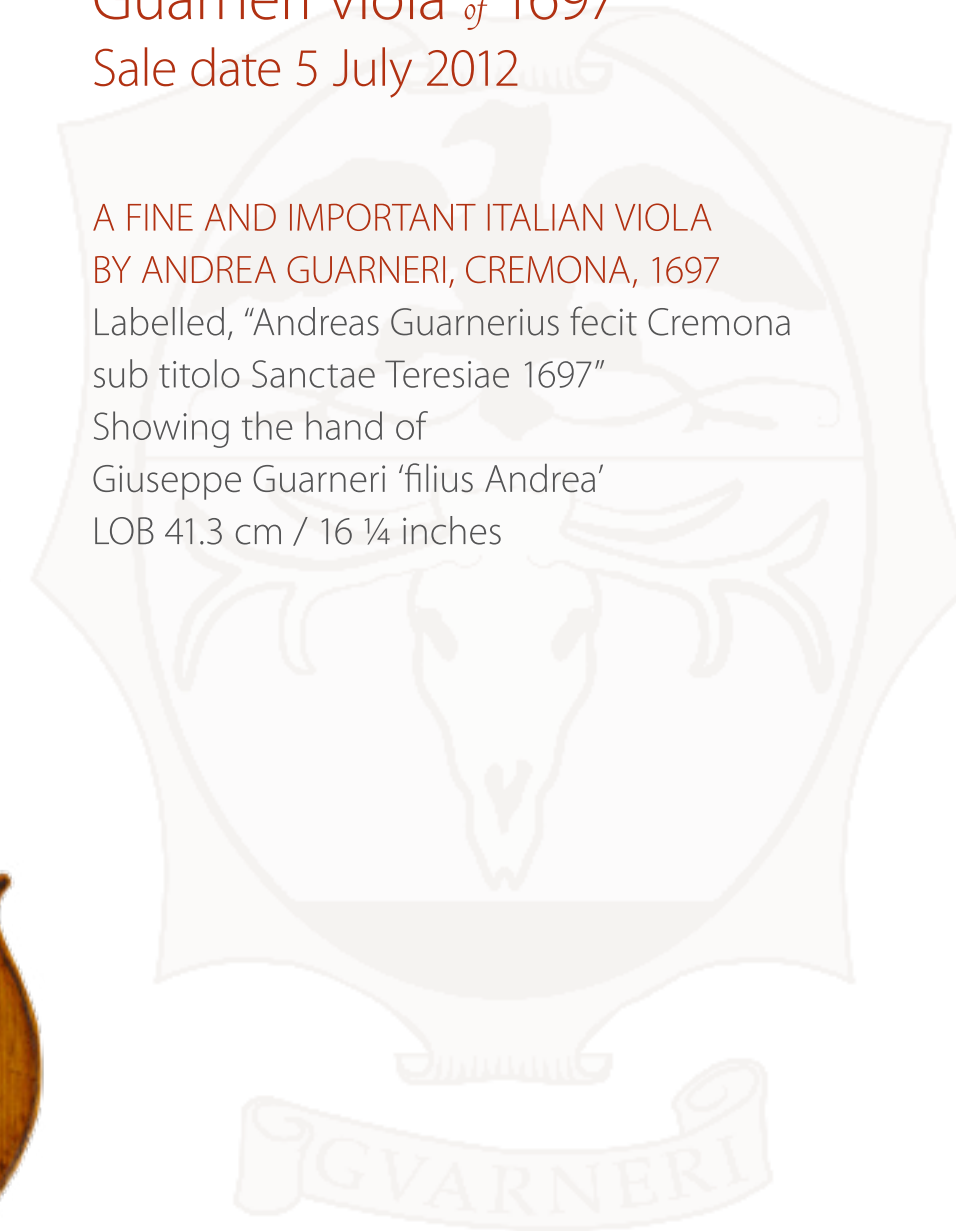
Guarneri viola of 1697

Sale date 5 July 2012

A FINE AND IMPORTANT ITALIAN VIOLA
BY ANDREA GUARNERI, CREMONA, 1697

Labelled, "Andreas Guarnerius fecit Cremona
sub titulo Sanctae Teresiae 1697"

Showing the hand of
Giuseppe Guarneri 'filius Andrea'
LOB 41.3 cm / 16 ¼ inches



Provenance & Documents

Provenance

1978 – Present	Ulrich Fritze <i>Bein & Fushi, Inc.</i>
1974 – 1978	Gary Vanosdale <i>Benjamin Koodlach</i>
1954 – 1974	William Primrose <i>Rembert Wurlitzer, Inc.</i>
1925 – c. 1954	Antonio Antoncich <i>W. E. Hill & Sons</i>
1872 – c. 1920	Charles Windham Stanhope, Earl of Harrington <i>Christie's</i>
? – 1872	Joseph Gillott

Certificates

- Photocopy transcription of certificate from Bein & Fushi, Chicago (8 April 1994)
- Photocopy transcription of certificate from W. E. Hill & Sons, London (16 October 1958)
- Photocopy transcription of certificate from Rembert Wurlitzer, New York (13 April 1955)
- Photocopy transcription of certificate from W. E. Hill & Sons, London (6 March 1925)

Correspondence

- Photocopy letter from Bein & Fushi, Chicago (9 June 1978)
- Photocopy letter from William Primrose to Benjamin Koodlach, Mangerton, Australia (19 November 1974)
- Photocopy letter from W. E. Hill & Sons to Antoncich, London (6 March 1925)

Bibliography

- The Primrose*, by Robert Bein & Geoffrey Fushi, Bein & Fushi, Inc., Chicago, 1983
- The History of the Viola, Volume I*, by Maurice W. Riley, Braun-Brumfield, Ann Arbor, 1980
- The Violin Makers of the Guarneri Family*, by W. Henry, Arthur F. & Alfred E. Hill, William E. Hill & Sons, London, 1931
- The Violin: Its Famous Makers and their Imitators*, by George Hart, Dulau & Co., London, 1885

Andreas Guarnerius fecit Cremonæ sub
titulo Sanctæ Teresiae 16

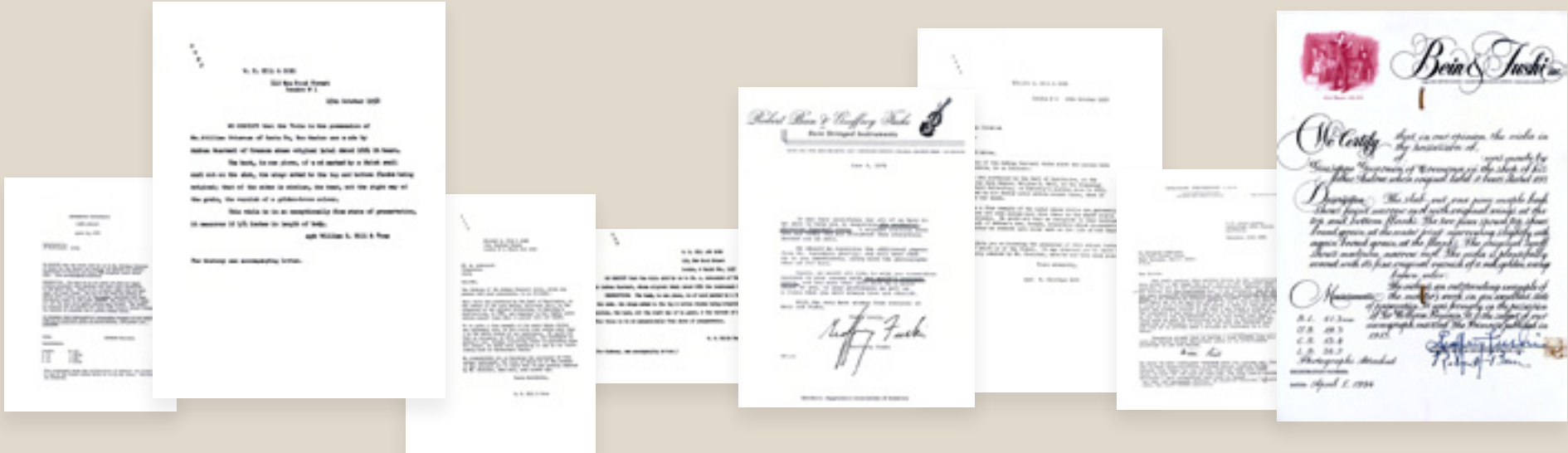


The arching is rounded in the centre and slightly hollowed just inside the corners

The volute reduces to a fine and almost diminutive eye



The edgework is careful but not fussy



“The Guarneri ‘contralto’ model has been a favourite of players and makers for over three centuries”

The ‘PRIMROSE’

There are roughly half a dozen surviving Guarneri violas and the ‘Primrose’, dated 1697, the year before Andrea died, is the last. Although the original label is of Andrea, the workmanship in its details and its broader concepts is the work of his son, Giuseppe Guarneri ‘filius Andrea’. It is made on the smaller ‘contralto’ model, which was ultimately to replace the larger, more unwieldy ‘tenore’ violas favoured by makers such as Andrea Amati, Gasparo Bertolotti ‘da Salò’ and Giovanni Maggini.

During the 17th century, the music that was being written to include the viola had begun to require instruments that could cope with a more technically demanding role. And as the viola part received more notes to play in higher positions over the fingerboard, comfort and size became critical factors and musicians needed smaller instruments that would allow them to play with greater ease in the higher registers. The ‘contralto’ model was the perfect solution: its tuning was the same as the ‘tenore’, but the string length and body length were shorter, the ribs shallower, the bouts narrower, and the resulting instrument was far easier to play.

The ‘contralto’ model had existed even in the days of the Brothers Amati and Maggini, but it is Andrea Guarneri who is often credited with perfecting its design. With



GUARNERI VIOLA

its shorter back length (41.3 cm compared to the giant 47 cm of some ‘tenores’), the Guarneri ‘contralto’ model has been a favourite of players and makers for over three centuries.

The back of this great viola is made from a rather humble tree: one piece of slab-cut maple with wings in all four bouts and a small cluster of knots in the upper centre bout. The top is in two matched pieces of spruce with rather wide grain at the bouts. The edgework of the top and back is careful but not fussy and lies somewhere between what one expects of Andrea – longer corners, a finer edge – and what one sees in more mature violins by Giuseppe ‘filius Andrea’ – shorter corners, broader edges and less depth in the channelling. The arching of both back and top is rounded in the centre and slightly hollowed just inside the corners. On the top the hollowing above the sound holes is exaggerated and slightly ‘pinched’ as one sees in later ‘filius Andrea’ violins.

Two large maple locating pins are set just inside the purfling of the back. The internal centre pin appears to be of the same stock. The sound holes show the unmistakable hand of Giuseppe ‘filius Andrea’: they are upright, narrow and straight without being stiff. The upper and lower holes are round and the wings are slightly pinched.

The head is superbly carved and sculpturally elegant. The pegbox is robust and sturdy almost to the point of being massive, yet the volute reduces elegantly to

a fine and almost diminutive eye. Compass points are visible along the central ridge of the back and at the heel of the pegbox. As with most Cremonese violas, the ‘Primrose’ has a stepped pegbox at the transition from the neck to allow a wider interior to the pegbox and to give more reinforcement and proportional symmetry to the longer and larger head. The step has been reduced in the ‘Primrose’ by way of a clever neck-graft to allow more comfort to the player in the first positions.

The label of the ‘Primrose’ is original and in excellent condition apart from the last digit of the date, which has faded with time. This has made the precise dating of the viola the subject of some debate. The Hills and Wurlitzer refer to the date of the viola in their correspondence and certificates as 1694, but the Hill Guarneri book (published after the Hills’ initial correspondence regarding this viola) dates it as 1697. Robert Bein agreed, and gave the date as 1697 in his monograph on the viola published in 1983. Under ultraviolet light the last two digits of the label do indeed appear to be 9-7, which makes sense given the obvious hand of Giuseppe and the fact that Andrea died a year later, in 1698.

The varnish of this viola is rich in both colour and texture and covers the instrument generously on top, back, ribs and head. ■

Jason Price





Tully Potter examines how William Primrose pushed the boundaries of viola playing to produce some astonishing tone qualities from his instruments

Until William Primrose emerged in the 1930s, Britain was not famed for producing string players, and three decades passed before another British player of similar star quality, Jacqueline du Pré, astonished the world. Primrose's rise, which saw him co-operate on equal terms with Jascha Heifetz, Emanuel Feuermann and Gregor Piatigorsky, was all the more extraordinary because it represented a career change. Until 1930 Primrose, born in Glasgow in 1904, was an excellent but not especially startling violinist. Once he had joined the London String Quartet as its violist, he took on a new lease of life and was soon a leading soloist.

A KALEIDOSCOPE of COLOUR



Top: Primrose as a boy. His first teacher was the Sevcík pupil Camillo Ritter

Middle: Performing with regular chamber partners Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky

Bottom: A concert poster from one of Primrose's frequent visits to Japan. His wife, Hiroko, was a respected Suzuki teacher

After a spell in Toscanini's NBC Symphony in New York, he had the courage to go completely solo; and because much of his career was made in America, he achieved a level of fame unknown to other viola pioneers such as Lionel Tertis in England, Maurice Vieux in France and Vadim Borisovsky in Russia. He also played much better than his main international rival in the 1930s, Paul Hindemith.

The somewhat cocky, even pugnacious, Scot was given a good start in Glasgow by the Sevcík pupil Camillo Ritter. Once he moved to London he learnt much from hearing such musicians as Kreisler, Casals and Heifetz. Summers spent with Eugène Ysaÿe – who heard something in his tone suggesting an aptitude for the viola – lent both his bow arm and his left hand a touch of Franco–Belgian flexibility, and playing Mozart's Sinfonia concertante with Tertis in Paris in 1928 gave him an idea of the viola's capabilities. But the two always diverged in their approach: Tertis found Primrose's viola playing too violinistic and his vibrato too fast; Primrose found Tertis's C string bias too heavy.

From the start of his recording career as a violist in 1935, Primrose challenged perceived ideas of how a viola should behave, playing Paganini's Caprices and other virtuoso works. Above all, he released a kaleidoscope of colours from the viola, especially from the middle two strings, the most evocative and haunting register of the instrument. He was helped by the fact that his father John – an orchestral violinist and violist and later Sir Thomas Beecham's LPO librarian – was a keen instrument collector. Primrose began his viola career on his father's Brothers Amati, which was a cut-down model and was quite small, but had a wonderful contralto depth of tone. By 1944 he was flirting with instruments such as the 'Macdonald' Stradivari, on which he recorded *Harold in Italy* with Koussevitzky. In 1950 he acquired a new viola by William Moennig and the following year he sold the Amati to Ferenc Molnar. The Moennig – strung with metal, like his other modern viola by Pierre Vidoudez – was used for *Harold in Italy* with Beecham.


In 1954 Primrose bought the 1697 'Lord Harrington' Guarneri, from which, despite its greater body length (41.3 cm as opposed to 39.8 cm on the Amati) he drew a more mezzo-

soprano tone than he had from the Amati. Was this a function of the new instrument, or of Primrose's revised attitude to viola tone? Even with the Amati, he had often produced a lighter sound in his post-war recordings, perhaps under the influence of Heifetz. We can compare the 1941 and 1956 versions of Mozart's Sinfonia concertante, where the contrast between the darker Amati and lighter Guarneri is startling. But with both instruments, Primrose created astonishing colours. In a 1956 recording of Beethoven's E flat major Piano Quartet with the Festival Quartet, his plangent tone in the Andante cantabile is memorable. The viola solo in the Adagio non troppo of the 1960 Fauré G minor Piano Quartet with this ensemble should also be heard, likewise the Andante of the 1959 Mozart C major Quintet with the Griller Quartet, where Primrose plays first viola.

With the Guarneri, Primrose soon changed to using gut for two strings – he found that fitting a gut A enriched the other extreme of the range and made the C string sound better. He then had recordings scheduled with Heifetz and, knowing that the violinist used gut A and D strings, he changed his D to gut as well. Those interested in the evolution of the Heifetz–Primrose partnership can compare the string trio recordings with Feuermann with those with Piatigorsky.

Live recordings and anecdotal evidence indicate that with all his violas, Primrose produced an excellent quality and volume of tone, but in some ways his playing was better balanced on the Guarneri than it had been previously. It was perhaps this equality of sound on all four strings that led him to state in his memoirs, *A Walk on the North Side*, that he preferred 'the mezzo quality of the Stradivari or Guarneri as opposed to the contralto sound of the Gaspar da Salò and kindred instruments'. ■

“Primrose drew a more mezzo-soprano tone from the Guarneri than he had from the Amati, despite its greater body length”



‘After two hours, I bought it’

Ulrich Fritze, former principal violist
of the Berlin Philharmonic, reminisces
about finding the ‘Primrose’ viola and
the years of happiness it brought him

Right: Ulrich Fritze (left) and
Henryk Szeryng display their
Guarneri instruments


Far right: Fritze performing
on the ‘Primrose’ Guarneri.
‘Its sound touches you
deep in the soul,’ he says



When I was 15 I played both violin and viola, and during that time I listened very often to the chamber music album from the Jascha Heifetz Collection, which had William Primrose as violist. From that time I became a great admirer of Primrose – he was my favourite solo violist. He already had the Guarneri viola by the time of this recording and its tone became my ideal of viola sound. He bought it in 1954, when it was known as the ‘Lord Harrington’, at the Rembert Wurlitzer shop in New York. He played it there and was so delighted by its quality that he took it that evening to play in his recital as a test. During just those two hours of the concert, he decided to buy the viola.

The story of how I found the viola is parallel to that of Primrose. I had followed all his concerts and recordings and I admired his wonderful viola very much. I did a lot of research and

“We had many wonderful instruments in the Berlin Philharmonic,
but the Guarneri helped to give my whole section a richer sound”



found the owner, Gary Vanosdale, who was a former student of Primrose. In May 1978 we met in Bein and Fushi’s shop in Chicago. It was there that for the first time in my life I held the Guarneri viola in my hands. Finally the fantastic sound I loved so much came to life. I tried it out in the shop and in a concert hall and after two hours of playing I signed the contract. I had tried many instruments before this but I was always a little bit unhappy with the sound. I always had in mind my perfect sound and with the ‘Primrose’ Guarneri I finally got it. It was like when I met my wife – when you find the right one it is easy to make a big decision quickly.

Then I took the ‘Primrose’ for the first time to a rehearsal of the Berlin Philharmonic under Maestro Herbert von Karajan,

where I was the principal violist for that concert. We were rehearsing Richard Strauss’s *Metamorphosen*, which starts with several big viola soli. When this introduction was finished, Maestro von Karajan stopped conducting and said in front of the whole Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra to me: ‘The soli sound wonderful Mr Fritze. Congratulations on buying the Guarneri viola.’ He was an outstanding man, not just a conductor. He knew every member of the orchestra and was always curious to know what kind of instrument and bow you played. He was very sensitive to the different sound of string players.

We had many wonderful instruments in the orchestra, but the Guarneri helped to give my whole section a richer sound. My orchestra colleagues were excited by the viola and my friends would come to me and ask if they could play on it.

For two years I was the assistant of the great violinist Henryk Szeryng for his masterclasses in Geneva and I had the honour to play with him in concert very often. He played a ‘del Gesù’ violin and those two Guarneri instruments sounded terrific together. He loved my viola very much. This was the same all over the world; I was always made very welcome and respected because of this outstanding and fascinating instrument.

To me, it is the number one viola in the world. You cannot forget its wonderful sound, which goes into your heart and your memory and touches you deep in the soul. It gives the player and listener a strong mental power. You feel very sure of yourself, because you can express your feelings, your mood through it. It makes you happy.

It is not easy to say goodbye to such an outstanding and beautiful instrument. I owned it for 34 years and it became a part of myself. In a sense it became something like a family member for me and my wife and daughters. I will love and cherish its memory and sound for the rest of my life. ■

interview by Naomi Sadler

Viewing & Bidding

5 July 2012 London • A private auction

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Prospective bidders only, please.

Bidding

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Phone bidding is encouraged. Registration to bid is required at least 24 hours in advance. Bidding ends on 5 July 2012.

To register to bid please call +1 800 841 4188 (New York) or +44 (0)20 7354 5763 (London).

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In 2011 Tarisio auctioned the 'Lady Blunt' Stradivari violin for a world record price of \$15.9 million.

Additional content

Further information about the viola is available at tarisio.com/primrose, including high resolution photographs and certificates. Please contact us to request a login and password to access this content.

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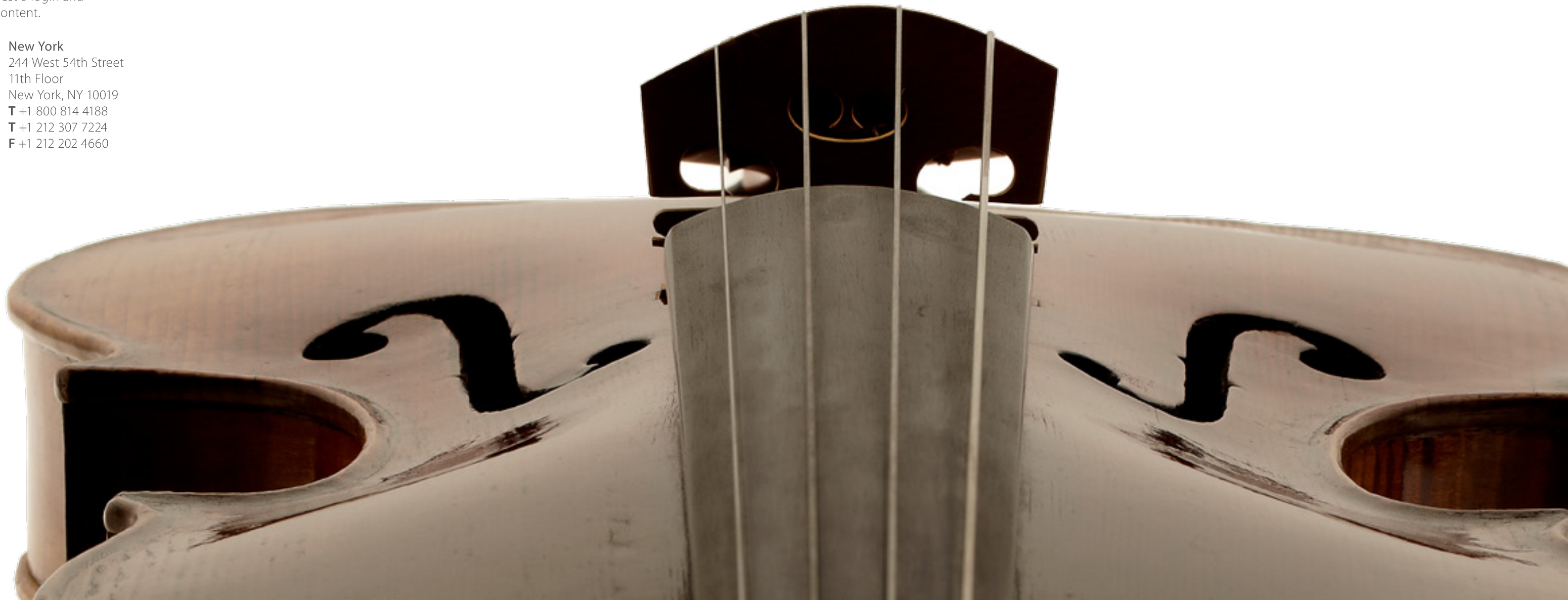
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