



Tarasio

FINE INSTRUMENTS & BOWS

Italian Cello Making

Origins to 1750

A survey by Jason Price

in collaboration with

An Illustrated History of the Cello

Exhibition curated by Jan Strick





To celebrate the inaugural Queen Elisabeth Cello Competition 2017, violin maker and expert Jan Strick has curated an exhibition of fine instruments illustrating the history of the cello since the 17th century. To accompany the exhibition, Jason Price surveys the origins of Italian cello making and its developments to 1750.

“As a violin maker I often have the chance to work on cellos made by the great luthiers of the past. The further back in time we go, the more changes you see in the shape and size of each instrument, and the finest examples can give us an idea of how its form has evolved. In this exhibition we aim to show that evolution by bringing together examples which help trace the history of the cello.

Jan Strick, Violin Maker, Expert

MAISON BERNARD

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A Survey of Italian Cello Making, Origins to 1750

Jason Price

The violin has had the good fortune of remaining more or less unchanged in model, aspect and dimensions for nearly 500 years. The viola and cello on the other hand weren't so lucky. Their dimensions, tuning, and intended role in the ensemble remained unsettled for another few hundred years. In the case of the cello, even its name was up for grabs: in Italy alone in the 17th century archival sources call instruments of the bass register by a multitude of names, including *bassetto*, *basso da braccio*, *violone*, *vio-*

lonzono, *violoncino*, *viola granda*, *violonzino*, *violonzello*, *violone doppio* and *contrabasso*. Such varied terminology suggests both a great variety of instruments and extensive ongoing experimentation. It was only in around 1665 that the first music was written to use the specific term 'violoncello'. For the sake of convenience we will refer to all instruments in this survey as cellos, although it is unlikely that either the makers of the earliest of these instruments would have called them by that name. ■



'Harrell, du Pré,
Guttman'
Stradivari of 1673



'Soyer' Andrea Guarneri
of 1669. Played by David
Soyer (left) and Thomas
Demenga, sold by Tarisio

Cremona

The earliest surviving identifiable cello was made by Andrea Amati (c. 1505–1577) in Cremona around 1550–70 as part of the collection of decorated instruments made for King Charles IX of France. Given that there are only two other Andrea Amati cellos, which have survived in varying states of alteration, there is much that is unknown about the function and format of these cellos although we can accept that for Amati in the mid-16th century the cello was already an essential member of the violin consort.

The sons of Andrea, Girolamo and Antonio, took over their father's workshop. Again the exact original dimensions of their cellos are unknown beyond the fact that most of them were very large. There are fewer than 20 surviving cellos by the Brothers together with remnants of several bass viols and at least one smaller-sized five-string cello.

The later cellos of the Brothers Amati show the collaboration of Girolamo's son Nicolò (1596–1684). Only

a few dozen known Nicolò Amati cellos survive. For whatever reason the main supply of cellos in mid-to-late 17th-century Cremona appears to have come from two other workshops in Cremona: the Guarneri and the Rugeri.

Andrea Guarneri (1623–1698) established the first important non-Amati workshop in Cremona. His early cellos are of the same grand dimensions as those of Nicolò Amati but in workmanship they are significantly less refined. Andrea's son Giuseppe 'filius' (1666–1740) made cellos that initially follow the general parameters of his father, but after around 1700 he introduced a slightly smaller model with narrow f-holes and lower arching.



The earliest surviving
identifiable cello, the
'King' Andrea Amati
cello from c. 1550–1570



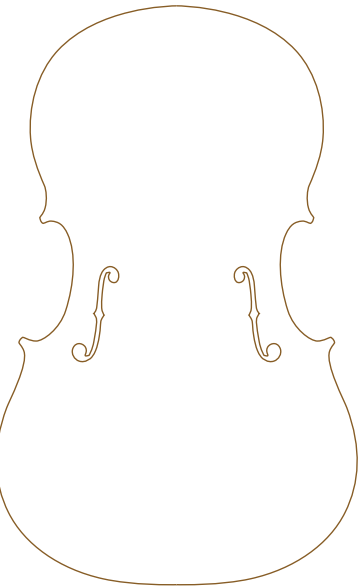
Giuseppe
'filius Andreae'
Guarneri of 1712,
sold by Tarisio



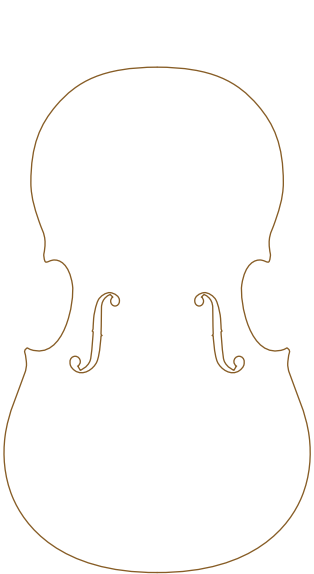
Antonio &
Girolamo
Amati of 1616

The most prolific cello-making dynasty of 17th-century Cremona, however, was that of the Rugeris. Francesco Rugeri (c. 1628–1698) produced cellos often featuring less costly materials such as willow and poplar. His cellos were also the first Cremonese cellos to be routinely built on a smaller pattern: examples with a back length of 75–76 cm exist early as the 1670s. This is significant in that with the exception of Maggini it appears that the Rugeris were the first to adopt the smaller cello that would soon become dominant in Italy.

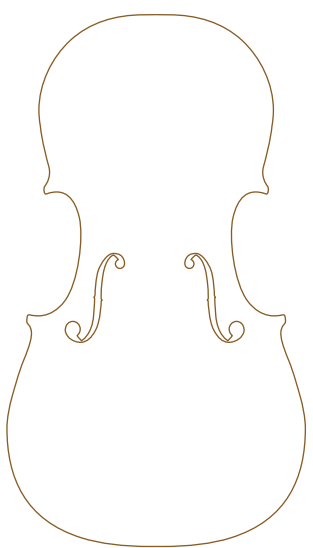
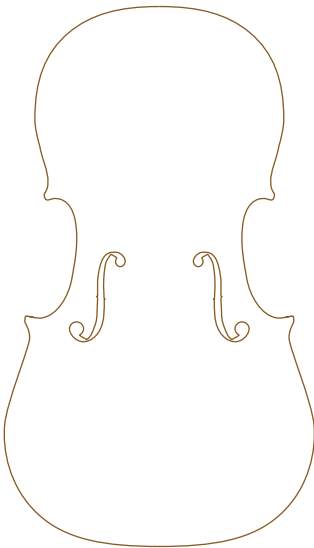
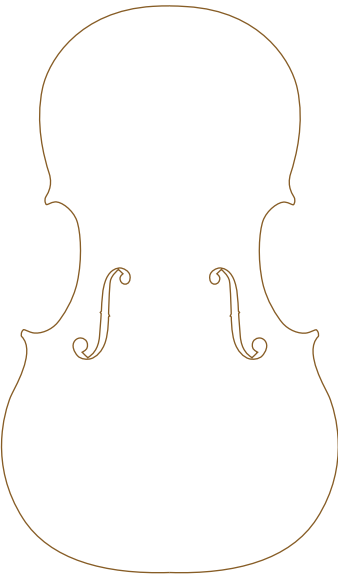
The reasons why the cello was so large in the 17th century and why a shorter pattern become dominant in the 18th century are complex but can be summarized by two simultaneous developments. First, the advent of wire-wound strings allowed instrument makers to build cellos with a shorter string-length. Secondly, music being written for bass instruments began to demand a more manageable and manoeuvrable instrument.



A reconstruction of the earliest surviving identifiable cello, the 'King' Andrea Amati from c. 1550–1570



Cellos by the Brothers Amati have almost all been reduced in size. This 70.7 cm five-string cello was likely originally intended as a violoncello



Left to right: outlines of the 'Medici' (1690), 'Davidoff' (1712) and 'Pawle' (c. 1730) Stradivari cellos

The earliest cellos by Antonio Stradivari (c. 1644–1737) are bassetos, their long body and stop lengths following the standards set by the Amati workshop. But in or just before 1707 Stradivari hit upon his greatest cello innovation, the 75.5 cm 'forma B'. His wasn't the first small-model cello but it was effectively the model which was most fit for purpose and consequently became the most highly revered and most widely copied form. There are approximately 20 surviving cellos of the forma B pattern, including the 1711 'Duport', the 1712 'Davidoff', 1714 'Batta' and the 1720 'Piatti'.

Stradivari cellos from the mid-1720s onwards become even more compact in form and are thought to be predominantly the work of Francesco Stradivari and the young Carlo Bergonzi. It is unknown why Bergonzi didn't continue making cellos on his own after the death of Antonio in 1737 but for whatever reason both he and the other last classical Cremonese master, Giuseppe Guarneri 'del Gesù', steered clear of making cellos almost completely.



'Batta' Stradivari of 1714 (top and left), played by Gregor Piatigorsky



Mstislav Rostropovich played the 'Duport' Stradivari of 1711



'Servais' Stradivari of 1701



Jacqueline du Pré played two Stradivari cellos; the 'Harrell, du Pré, Gutmann' of 1673 pictured overleaf, and the 'Davidoff' of 1712 pictured right, now played by Yo-Yo Ma



Brescia

The first notable Brescian maker of violin family instruments was Gasparo Bertolotti ‘da Salo’ (1540–1609). The Gaspar instruments that are currently set up as cellos were probably originally conceived as viols or violones and later converted. They are rather rustic compared with the refined Cremonese cellos from this period. The arching is full and rises directly from the edges and the outline is broad but highly variable from one instrument to another. The corners are short and the sound-holes are long and variable and undercut into the plane of the table.

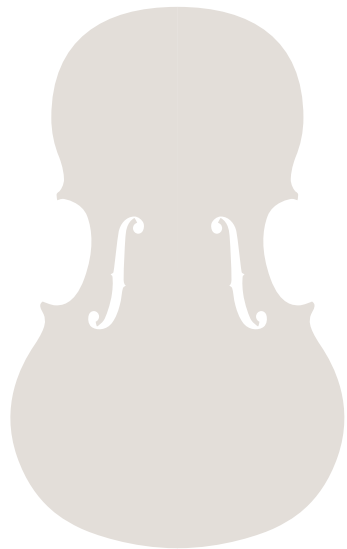
Gaspar was assisted by Giovanni Paolo Maggini (1580–1632). Cellos by Maggini are extremely rare, and their dimensions are very similar to those of



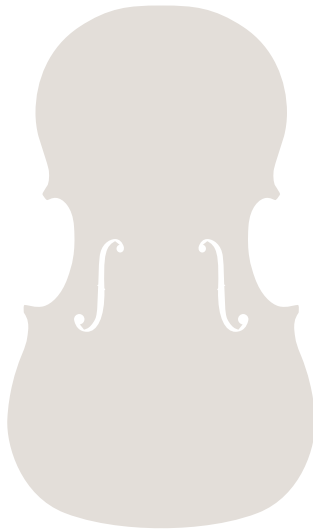
Giovanni Battista Rogeri of 1699

Stradivari’s forma B, indicating that Maggini was very likely the first maker to arrive at these proportions. The death of Maggini meant an irreparable break in the tradition of Brescian instrument making until 1662, when Giovanni Battista Rogeri (c. 1642–c. 1705) arrived in Brescia, fresh from his training in the shop of Nicolò Amati. While the violins of Rogeri are close cousins of Nicolò Amati’s, the model he used for cellos is markedly different. With a back length of roughly 71 cm, sloping shoulders, closed C-bouts, hooked corners and narrowly set sound-holes, Rogeri’s cellos presented a forward-thinking divergence from the Amati tradition. Without a doubt this was the direction of the cello at the end of the 17th century: a smaller body with shorter string and stop lengths, all leading towards a more manageable instrument for virtuoso playing.

Brescia

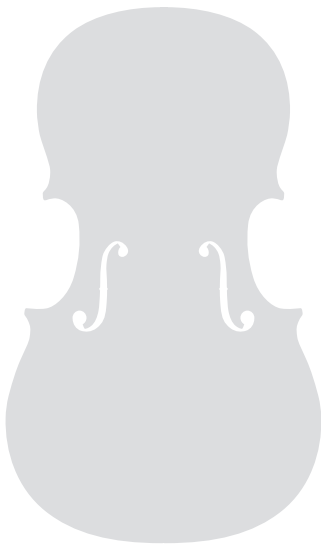


Maggini c. 1630–31
The few surviving Maggini cellos are the earliest known instruments of a 75.5 cm size



Giovanni Battista Rogeri 1706
This was the direction of the cello at the end of the 17th century – a smaller body with shorter string and stop lengths

Venice



Matteo Goffriller c. 1730
The outlines of Goffriller cellos are highly variable which gives each instrument a unique appearance



Domenico Montagnana 1733
Montagnana cellos are shorter in body-length than Goffrillers but are considerably broader in the bouts



Pietro Guarneri of Venice c. 1739
Pietro Guarneri of Venice provided the first important intersection between Cremona and Venice

Venice

The first of the great Venetian cello makers was Matteo Goffriller (c. 1659–1742), who came from the Tyrol. His cellos range from 70 cm small-sized instruments to larger 77 and 78 cm ones, most of which have since been reduced. The outlines of his cellos are highly variable, which together with variations in the shape and setting of the soundholes gives each instrument a unique appearance.

Goffriller was the presumed teacher of the other great Venetian cello maker, Domenico Montagnana (1687–1750). Montagnana cellos are shorter in body-length than Goffrillers but are considerably broader in the bouts and in the waist, making for a compact, manoeuvrable instrument with a highly resonant, full-bodied tone. The archings are rounded but modest and never exaggerated. The sound-holes are modelled on an Amati pattern and precisely executed.



‘Starker’ Matteo Goffriller of 1705

The Cremonese and Venetian violin making traditions had their first intersection when Pietro Guarneri (1695–1762) came to Venice in around 1717. Pietro was a maker of exceptional cellos that perfectly fuse the best parts of the Venetian and Cremonese traditions. The model is reminiscent of that of his father, ‘filius Andreae’, but distinctly recognisable with its wide set sound-holes, attenuated stems and high-waisted C-bouts.

Santo Serafin (1699–1776) arrived in Venice from Udine also in the year 1717. There are fewer than a dozen surviving cellos by Serafin and each is of exceptional quality and craftsmanship. His model shows the inspiration of Stainer in the outline and the head and Amati in the sound-holes, although the back length is a manageable 73–75 cm. The shallow C-bouts and short, pert corners create an effect of compact refinement and graceful elegance.



Matteo Goffriller, c. 1700–1710



Beatrice Harrison played a Pietro Guarneri cello (right) c. 1739



This Domenico Montagnana of 1742 was formerly played by Frans Helmerson



Bologna

Bologna was arguably of greater importance even than Venice for the development of music featuring the cello as a solo instrument. Composers Giuseppe Maria Jacchini, Giovanni Battista degli Antonii, and Domenico Gabrielli all worked in Bologna and wrote some of the earliest highly ornamented virtuosic music in the cello repertoire.

Bologna was also an important location for the production of strings for bass instruments and is thought to be the first city to produce wire-wound gut strings. These strings first appear around 1660 in Bologna around the same time that the term ‘violoncello’ was first used explicitly in printed music, also in Bologna. These are perhaps secondary factors but they help to explain why the production of smaller-sized cellos flourished in Venice and Bologna at the end of the 17th century.

The Tononi family provides an important bridge between Venice and Bologna. The work of Giovanni Tononi (c. 1640–1713) is an interesting mélange of different northern Italian traditions. His cellos are built to an Amati model but with strong Venetian influences. He often used beech and ash for his cellos with rather modest pine for the tables. The heads of his cellos are most similar to Goffriller with a small volute and a tapering pegbox. Giovanni’s son Carlo Annibale (1675–1730) succeeded him in 1713 but left for Venice in 1717.

Giovanni Tononi,
c. 1680,
sold by Tarisio



The best strings of this kinde are double knots ioyned together, and are made at Bologna in Lumbardie, and from thence are sent to Venice: from which place they are transported to the Martes, and therefore commonly called Venice Catlines.

The best strings came from Bologna, wrote the English composer Robert Dowland in 1610



Rome

The great 18th-century Roman tradition of cello making finds its roots in the workshop of Alberto Platner, whose assistants probably included David Tecchler (c. 1665–c. 1747). Originally from Füssen, Tecchler is best known for his cellos, which were built on a large and broad pattern with a rounded high arch and an overall very powerful appearance. Most have since been reduced but some extraordinary uncut examples survive. Tecchler sound-holes are a distinctive blend of Stainer and Amati influences with large and often rounded notches, elegant curved stems and tapered wings. They are set wide apart and low in the belly, giving them a unique appearance. The scrolls are also very distinctive with a very narrow width between the ears, a deep and finely carved volute and a chunky eye.

Alongside Tecchler, Michele Platner is revered for his excellent and attractive cellos. Somewhat more Germanic in styling than Tecchler with slightly rougher workmanship, Platner cellos are found in a large and also a smaller pattern. Platner’s assistant and successor Giulio Cesare Gigli (c. 1724–1794) made cellos in the style of Platner’s smaller model.

And so by the end of the 18th century, smaller-pattern cellos were being made almost universally throughout Italy. The great makers of the late 18th and 19th centuries would make their own experiments, but by 1730–1750 the cello had reached an accepted form and function that has continued more or less unchanged to the present day.

David Soyer played a David Tecchler cello of 1713



Bernhard Romberg owned a David Tecchler cello of 1703



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We hold six fine instrument auctions per year in London and New York of carefully selected fine instruments and bows.

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Tarisio is set up specifically for the needs of musicians. We have extensive viewing periods in the run up to auctions to give you time to trial instruments.

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We provide accurate attributions, detailed condition reports and our cataloguing is the most reliable in the industry.



*Jean-Baptiste
Vuillaume,
Paris, c. 1850,
sold by Tarisio*



*Giovanni Battista
Grancino,
Milan, c. 1701,
sold by Tarisio*



*Jean-Baptiste
Vuillaume,
Paris, c. 1858,
sold by Tarisio*



*Stefano
Scarpella,
Mantua, 1910,
sold by Tarisio*



*Antonio &
Girolamo Amati,
Cremona, c. 1625,
sold by Tarisio*



*Giulio Cesare Gigli,
Rome, c. 1789,
sold by Tarisio*



*'ex-Havemeyer'
Giovanni Battista
Guadagnini,
Turin, c. 1743,
sold by Tarisio*



*'ex-David Soyer'
Andrea Guarneri,
Cremona, c. 1669,
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Wishing participants of the inaugural
Queen Elisabeth Cello Competition 2017
great success!

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today's great players find outstanding instruments

