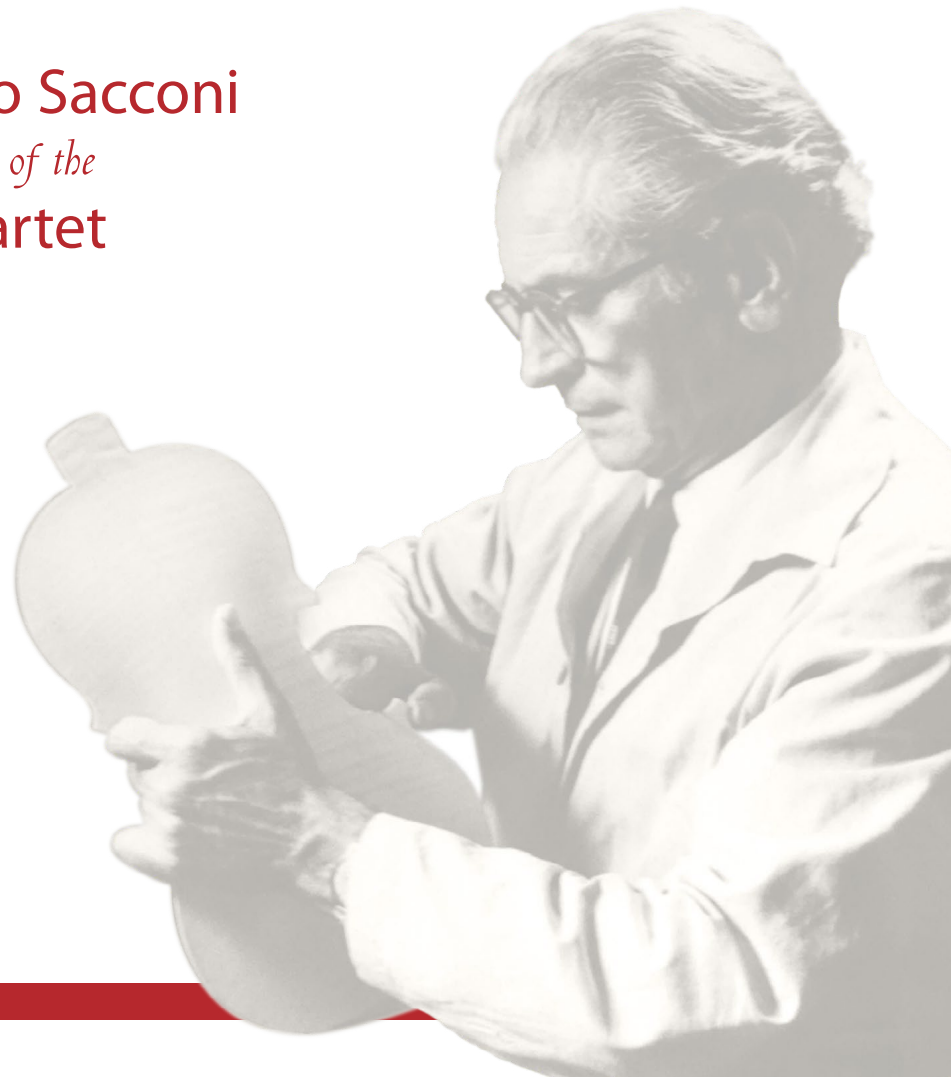


Tarisio

FINE INSTRUMENTS & BOWS

Simone Fernando Sacconi

*& the instruments of the
Sacconi Quartet*



SACCONI QUARTET

At the time that the Sacconi Quartet was founded in 2001, Ben was playing a Sacconi violin that had been lent to him by Charles Beare. A few years later Ben was loaned the 'Archinto' Stradivari and returned the Sacconi. After the Stradivari Ben played several other violins including an English violin by the master copyist of Guarneri 'del Gesù', John Lott.

Ben Hancox (*violin*) • Hannah Dawson (*violin*) • Robin Ashwell (*viola*) • Cara Berridge (*cello*)

Meanwhile in 2004 after a recital in St Thomas's Hospital, a woman came backstage to congratulate the quartet. It turned out that not only was she an active concertgoer and supporter of classical music, but her family owned a viola made by Sacconi in 1934 and she asked if Robin would be interested in trying it. The viola was an instant match, both for Robin and for the quartet. The two Sacconi violins

followed ten years later. Ben found his 1932 violin in 2015; it had lived the past quarter century in Holland. Hannah's 1927 violin followed shortly thereafter and came from America where it likely had lived for the previous 90 years since it was made. Sacconi cellos are particularly rare but perhaps someday Cara will find a Sacconi cello that sounds as good as her fabulous Nicolò Gagliano.



The prodigiously talented Italian luthier Simone Fernando Sacconi was born in Rome in 1895, the son of a tailor and amateur violinist. From the age of 9 to 16 he assisted in the workshop of the Roman violin maker Giuseppe Rossi, where he learned the fundamentals of the trade. From the outset, Sacconi aimed to study and understand the instruments of the great classical makers of the 17th and 18th centuries – Amati, Guarneri and most of all, Stradivari – something that seems obvious but which was not often common to his contemporaries, who

chose instead to concentrate on making new instruments on a personal model and not on copying meticulously the makers of the past.

Sacconi's competition in Rome was thin, as most serious violin making at the beginning of the 20th century was concentrated around the more prosperous northern cities of Milan, Turin and Bologna. In the decades before and after the First World War, Sacconi defined himself as the leading violin maker in Rome and indeed one of the best in Italy.

“Sacconi aimed to study and understand the instruments of the great classical makers of the 17th and 18th centuries

Simone Fernando Sacconi

by Jason Price
Founder, Expert, Director

Tarisio

In 1931 Sacconi was invited to run the workshop of the New York dealer Emil Hermann. Post-war Italy was not an environment in which violin makers thrived and perhaps with this in mind, Sacconi, who was now in his mid-40s with a wife and child, moved to New York. Sacconi continued to make new instruments during his time in New York but his speciality quickly became the restoration and curation of antique instruments, which were arriving in America in large quantities in the early 20th century.



In 1951 Sacconi left Hermann's workshop to join the firm of Rembert Wurlitzer who was fast becoming not only the most active dealer in America, but also the most knowledgeable expert in the world at the time. Sacconi and Wurlitzer made a formidable team. Together they served the world's top artists such as Isaac Stern, Mischa Elman and David Oistrakh, and built a workshop which trained and influenced many of the 20th century's best makers, restorers and experts, including René Morel, Charles Beare and Dario D'Attili.

But perhaps Sacconi's greatest achievement was his analytical and technical study of the working methods of Antonio Stradivari which culminated in his book 'I Segreti di Stradivari'. Published in the last year of his life, 1973, this book is a testament to his research and accumulated knowledge of the working methods of Antonio Stradivari. ■

“Sacconi's greatest achievement was his analytical and technical study of the working methods of Antonio Stradivari



An Analytical Brain

Against the Landscape of a Romantic Tradition

The violin business has always been accompanied – or perhaps dragged down, depending on your point of view – by a certain amount of romantic and magical thinking. In the 19th century there were dozens of biographers and so-called experts who romanticised the life and abilities of the great 17th and 18th century violin makers. They turned Stradivari and Amati into mythical giants who painstakingly applied every coat of varnish to the hundreds if not thousands of instruments that left their workshops and they imagined Guarneri 'del Gesù' as a tortured genius, complete with an entirely fictional tale about him spending his last years in prison. The reality of the lives of these

late Renaissance artisans was undoubtedly much more prosaic and routine.

All this left a large and messy pile of misinformation for scholars and experts to sort out – a task which continues to this day. Sacconi was one of the first violin makers to make a technical study of the works of Antonio Stradivari by carefully analyzing and documenting the instruments themselves, and by studying the forms and drawings and tools which are known to have survived from the Stradivari workshop and are now housed in the Museo del Violino in Cremona.

At the turn of the 20th century when Sacconi started his career, violin making in Italy was very much a provincial

craft where one generation passed its knowledge and techniques on to the next. And this is the reason why Italian regional schools of violin making are so unique and identifiable: a maker's instruments, for the most part, look a lot like his teacher's instruments. What made Sacconi unique is that he broke free of this tradition; by observing and documenting and using his formidable intellect, he reverse-engineered the process of making a Stradivari.

'I Segreti di Stradivari' remains the most insightful and useful book for beginning violin makers. It was my first purchase when I enrolled in the Cremona violin making school and I still refer to it occasionally to this day. ■

Hannah's 1927 Sacconi Violin

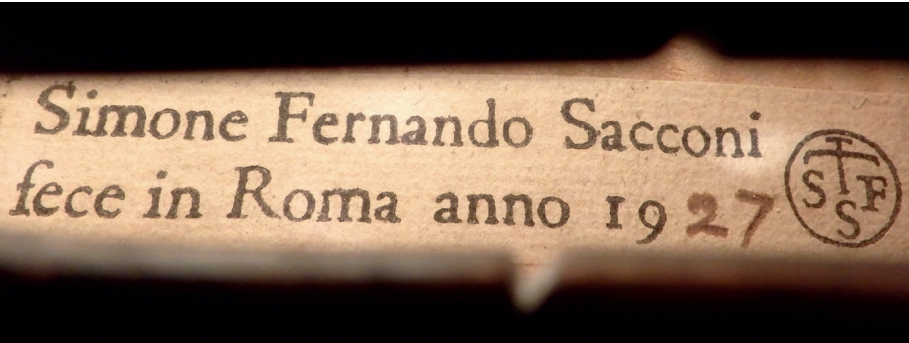
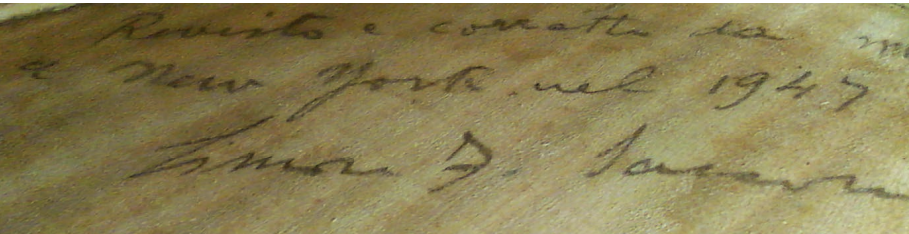
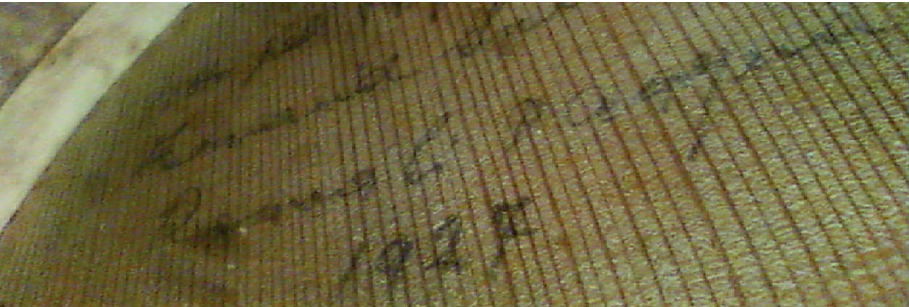
“we find the stylistic influence of Fiorini in the fine beaded edgework, the precise, almost delicate purfling and the narrow sound-hole stems

Hannah's 1927 violin was made when Sacconi was 32 years old and had already established himself as the leading maker and restorer in Rome. He had eclipsed his first mentor and teacher, Giuseppe Rossi, with whom his work shares surprisingly few stylistic similarities. Instead in these years we see the influence of the Bolognese violin maker Giuseppe Fiorini who had arrived in Rome in 1923. Sacconi, who was 34 years his junior, is known to have assisted the already highly accomplished Fiorini in the years 1924–25. The timing couldn't have been more advantageous for Sacconi as Fiorini had recently acquired the historically important collection of tools, models and forms that Count Cozio had acquired from the original Stradivari workshop.

Hannah's 1927 example is a loosely interpreted Stradivari model from the 1707–1712 period but more than Stradivari we find the stylistic influence of Fiorini in the fine beaded edgework, the precise, almost delicate purfling and the narrow sound-hole stems. Sacconi was at the height of his technical powers but his style was still in development and slightly stiff. Interestingly, this violin bears two handwritten inscriptions internally. The first is a semi-legible dedication to a certain professor for whom the violin was made. The second is an inscription dated 20 years later when the violin was repaired by Sacconi in New York, 'revisto e corretto da me a New York nel 1947, Simone F. Sacconi.'



Handwritten inscriptions inside the violin, one from 1927 and the second from 1947 when Sacconi repaired the violin



Tarisio contacted me last January with the news that they had a 1927 Sacconi violin for me to try. I had been playing on my mother's beautiful, unnamed Italian violin for many years, but had always had in my mind that I wanted to give it back to her one day. The Sacconi made a sweet, delicate sound at first. I could tell it had power too, but needed to be played. I tried it for several months and Ben and I were amazed at how easy it was to play the two Sacconi violins together. They have

different qualities, but somehow there is a tangible similarity in sound that makes blending easier than before. Over these few months the violin really did start to blossom and I decided to ask the Royal Society of Musicians for help in acquiring the violin. They very generously agreed, and the violin is currently on loan to me for the foreseeable future. It is incredibly special for us to now have three Sacconi instruments in the quartet!

- Hannah Dawson



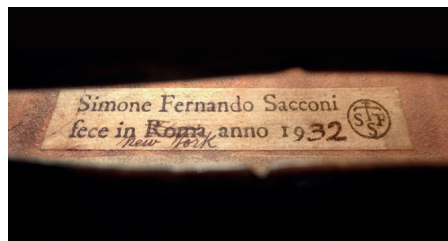
Ben's 1932 Sacconi Violin

Ben's 1932 violin would have been one of the first instruments made by the maestro in New York. With the great migration of European art that came into America in the 1920s and 1930s also came many fine instruments through the ports of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. The New York atelier of Emil Herrmann possibly imported more Stradivari, Guarneri and other great Italian instruments than any other American shop in the 1930s and Sacconi, newly arrived in 1931, must have been a kid in a candy shop.

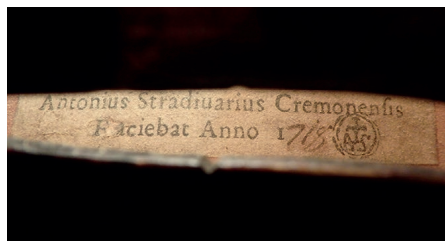
“wide model, broad edgework, large, imposing sound-holes and a thick, deep-red varnish

This 1932 violin is a bold copy of a mid-golden-period Stradivari with a wide model, broad edgework, large, imposing sound-holes and a thick, deep-red varnish. Unlike Hannah's 1927 violin, this 1932 example appears to have been made as a copy of a specific violin – the wear patterns, scratches and blemishes seem as if they were done in imitation of a specific Stradivari, of which Herrmann no doubt had plenty around. The violin bears two labels. The first is Sacconi's own, the same as he used in the 1927 violin but in this case he has scratched out 'Roma' and hand-written 'New York' showing how

truly fresh he was to North America. The second label, positioned directly above the first, is a facsimile Stradivari one dated 1718, which is perhaps the date of the Stradivari that Sacconi was copying.



The violin bears both Sacconi's own label and a facsimile Stradivari label



“the wear patterns, scratches and blemishes seem as if they were done in imitation of a specific Stradivari



Since meeting my Sacconi violin two years ago it has been a voyage of discovery. I had played a Sacconi violin in 2000, which is how we named the quartet, but have since had the pleasure of playing many other instruments before coming back to this maker.

As soon as I picked up this violin, I felt confident and ready to play on stage with it. It has a naturally open

characteristic, which encourages you to play with it and take risks. Along with this openness, it has started to develop new depths and complexities, which draw you into its sound. This is an exciting journey to be on, and I'm grateful for the great help from the Royal Society of Musicians, and of course to Tarisio, for pairing me up with this fantastic instrument.

- Ben Hancox



Robin's 1934 Sacconi Viola

Robin's 1934 viola is inspired by the two great late Stradivari violas that were resident in New York in the 1930s: the 'Paganini, Mendelssohn' of 1731, which was owned by Emil Hermann in the mid-1930s, and the 'Cassavetti' of 1727, which was acquired in 1934 by Gertrude Clarke Whittall. Although not a precise copy of either Stradivari, Robin's 1934 Sacconi is a sophisticated assimilation of the qualities of both. In addition to his own label, which was now a new design with a printed 'New - York', Sacconi inserted a facsimile Stradivari label dated 1730. Violas by Sacconi are comparatively rare with only six authentic examples known to us. Robin's is one of only two known violas that were made in New York.

*Commentary by Jason Price
Founder, Expert, Director*

Tarasio

“violas by Sacconi are comparatively rare with only six authentic examples known to us



Sacconi's 1934 viola was likely inspired by Stradivari's 1727 'Cassavetti' viola (above) and 1731 'Paganini, Mendelssohn' viola (right)



Again Sacconi inserted two labels in this viola, his own printed New York label and a facsimile Stradivari label dated 1730



Playing and getting to know my Sacconi viola has been a wonderful, ongoing experience. The viola's owner, Ellen Solomon, heard the quartet playing at St Thomas's Hospital in 2004. After our concert she told us that she had her father's Sacconi viola at home and was looking for someone to play it. I remember first taking the viola out of its case at Ellen's house and putting bow to string, finding the sound different to what I was used to and fairly closed, yet with a

definite, tantalising hint of depth and flavour. During the next few weeks its sound opened and blossomed so many times over, like peeling an onion and finding ever more layers. Over the years I have experimented with different strings and bows, and had a new wider bridge cut for the viola, all the time looking to increase the width and depth of its sound while preserving its bright, singing qualities. It is one of the most handsome 20th-century instruments I have ever laid eyes on.

- Robin Ashwell

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TARISIO IS A LEADING INTERNATIONAL VENUE FOR FINE INSTRUMENTS AND BOWS, SERVING MUSICIANS, PATRONS, DEALERS AND COLLECTORS. With offices in New York and London, Tarisio holds six fine instrument auctions per year, and Tarisio's Private Sales operates a year-round personalised service. Tarisio also owns and maintains the Cozio Archive, a reference resource for fine instruments and bows containing detailed iconography, provenance, pricing and maker information for over 60,000 instruments. ■

Simone Fernando Sacconi
fece in Roma anno 1932
New York

