

THE Scroll 11

The Newsletter for the
Cox Violin Community
FALL 2012

www.coxviolins.com

Dear Friends,

Everyone loves a parade!

I love the parade of people and ideas passing through my studio and life. This edition of the Scroll celebrates two of those people: Eric Rosenblith and David Wells.

Eric Rosenblith, who passed away in 2010, came into my life during my years working in Boston. We became much closer through our mutual involvement with the Yellow Barn Chamber Music Festival. His first stop upon arriving in Putney each summer would be to bring his bows to me for rehairing and for a visit. He was most supportive and encouraging of my work from very early on, and many of my clients were students of his. He tried a number of my instruments before settling on my Opus 152, one of many copies I made of his beloved 1713 Grand Pattern Stradivarius violin. His feedback and criticism taught me much about the violin as a working tool in the hands of a great player.

David Wells, cellist, founder of Yellow Barn, neighbor and friend passed away on August 7, 2012. He was one of the first people I met when I moved to Vermont in 1985. David personified the concept of a life well lived, and was a beloved friend and teacher.

One of my remembrances of David Wells was a long conversation over dinner about the place and nature of democracy in art, and chamber music in particular. He was less interested in the philosophical implications, and more in what it takes to make great music: democracy not as goal but as effective process. The Yellow Barn Festival he founded has been for me an endless parade of great people, inspiring instruments, and transcendent experiences. His life and philosophy can be summed up with his words "more, More, MORE!" when coaching chamber music groups, and a celebratory "You did it!" after a performance.



Brattleboro July 4, 2012 Parade
Aaron Hilbun, oboe; Chris McAvoy, viola;
Michelle Liechti, cello; Doug Cox, bicycle

David left a note addressed to "All My Students Over the Years," which said in part, "I wanted you to know what a central place you occupied in my life. I hope I helped you mature as musicians, but did you know that you in turn were my inspiration? You helped me develop, not only as a musician, but also as a fuller human being. How fortunate I was to know people like you, so full of life."

How fortunate I am to have had Eric Rosenblith and David Wells in my life.

My best wishes to you as we enjoy this parade together.



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Work-Term
Reflections

Douglas Cox



From the Bench

Testore Violas

Last year I wrote about the Testore model violas I was working on, inspired by twin violas I saw last summer that were attributed to Paolo Antonio Testore.

Both violas are set up and have turned out well. One has a birch back, the other cherry with cherry ribs and neck. The use of unusual woods and the lack of inlaid purfling – it is scribed and painted – are as charming as the originals.

Bergonzi Violins

Last year Chris Reuning published a beautiful exhibition catalog on the work of the Bergonzi family,

Viola #752

including photographs and technical information.

At the same time, I was lucky enough to study close up two of the Carlo Bergonzi (1683-1747) instruments featured in the book: the 'Eddy-Brown' and the 'Hozier-Andrews.'

These opportunities inspired four Bergonzi violins, models I have never tried before: 'Eddy-Brown,' 'Meintzhagen,' 'Hozier-Andrews' and 'Vinegra-Wallace.'

Bergonzi worked in Stradivari's shop before it closed at Antonio's death in 1737. Bergonzi's work of the 1730's shows the influence of that experience, his own less fastidious temperament showing itself more as time passed.

This project has given me the chance to step away from familiar forms and explore more deeply the underlying principles of violin making.



Violin #766, 'Eddy-Brown'

Curly Basswood

For several years I have been building violins inspired by the work of Gasparo da Salò. These large models with their dark resonance are not for every player, but they add a unique voice to my portfolio.

When I received a piece of curly basswood (*Tilia americana*) from Northern Vermont, courtesy of David Meyer, a violin maker from Jeffersonville, I thought this lighter, softer wood would work well with this pattern and chose the model to fit the wood, rather than my usual practice, choosing the wood to suit the model.

From the Desk of the Business Manager

Late in 2007, when my previous job was ending, I sent emails to many friends, asking if they knew anyone who was in need of my collection of skills. At the same time, Doug was considering hiring someone to take care of the aspects of his business that he could not find time to do himself. My skills seemed an almost perfect match for those needs, so we agreed to give it a try.

The learning curve for this job was much steeper than I expected, and almost five years later I am still learning new things and new skills to keep the Cox Violins business running smoothly and efficiently.

Among more mundane tasks, I photograph the instruments, oversee production of *The Scroll*, and maintain the website, including the "Spotlight" section, a rogue's gallery of players who play on Cox instruments. I also worked with Charlie Dion of Bear's Den Carving, who created our new bear (see back panel).

In 2010 I went to my high school reunion in Southern California. The best part was being asked what I do, and answering, "I am the business manager for a violin maker in Vermont."

~ Laurie Indenbaum

A Conversation with Eric Rosenblith

In December of 2009 I asked Eric Rosenblith to tell me about his 1713 Grand Pattern Strad violin, about what makes it a great violin, and what makes it work for him.



Eric Rosenblith, 1920-2010
©2003 Carol Rosenblith

ER: There is the element of personal taste and the personality of the player... whether there is a good match between the violin and the player. The player responds to the violin and gets molded by the violin, as the violin gets molded by the player. These are not just objects – these [violins] are living things, in a way.

I think my violin permits me to convey different colors beyond almost any violin I know. In a way I've always been interested in diversity, that for each composer you can make different sounds, for each era you can make different sounds, for each national origin of the music you can make different sounds. I must tell you a funny story...

When I first came to New York, Emil Hermann liked my playing, liked me, and was very generous to me, in lending me instruments from his shop. He kept me in Strads, maybe six or seven Strads, over the years. I could always play concerts on wonderful instruments. But occasionally he would phone me and say, 'Eric, you really must return this violin because I have to sell it.' So I would take it back, and he would pull more out from the enormous wall of cubbyholes in his studio full of violins.

My mother, who was a pianist, would always come along to try violins. Emil would say, 'try this one,' and my mother would hear me tune and she would say,

'don't play that.' Then it turned out, it was only a Guadagnini or something like that, it wasn't a Strad or a Guarnerius. She could tell, just from my tuning, whether it was a totally first-rate instrument, or only a good instrument! That was even beyond what I could hear. She had that sense of quality in violin tone, and I was just tuning, I hadn't played a note yet!

DC: This is something we're trying to develop as makers: what information can we gather from the instrument to understand its quality? We're looking for the fingerprint of each instrument.

ER: I am sure you must already have an extremely acute ability to perceive different qualities.

DC: I would like to have you play a scale on your violin for me to record. I can then analyze the spectral response of this instrument.

ER: Fine, sure, of course. So you are going about it that way to not be so influenced by the player, in a way that has a certain neutrality to it?

DC: Since players vary so much, part of it is to figure out what we can about the instrument itself. Tell me, how did you settle on your violin?

ER: At one time, my father had a thriving business in New York. I thought we were close to buying the so-called 'Apollo' Strad from Emil Hermann in New York, but my father had a very bad heart attack, so we didn't. Then I got concertmaster jobs, and I needed one violin, I couldn't keep borrowing violins. So I bought a Joseph filius Andreas Guarnerius from Hermann, which was quite an honorable violin, and it was good, but I was hoping to do better. And I had made some very influential and wealthy friends in Indianapolis.

So at one time I went up to see Ken Warren, and he said, 'would you try this violin?' and it was the 'Circle' Strad. So I took this violin to try, and I played some concerts with it, but it didn't gel. It was a

finer violin than my Guarnerius, but I wasn't totally enamored of it, so I returned it. And then Ken said, 'Mrs. Wurlitzer has a Strad that really you will like.'

I had some concerts here in New England, so I went to New York, and I picked up this violin. I loved it immediately, and I played several concerts on it. And then I went to return it to Mrs. Wurlitzer and she said, 'no, get better acquainted with it.' So I took it back to Indianapolis to get better acquainted with it, and my friends there said, 'Now that is something!'

DC: They could tell the difference.

ER: These friends bought the violin through their Foundation, The Clowes Foundation, for the concertmaster to use, so I had it for 2 or 3 years. When I quit the orchestra, I asked if I could buy it from them over time, and they were very business-like about it. I bought it on a contract for 20 years and I worked very hard and paid it off in 16 years, and since then, I have this violin.

DC: Does this violin have a name? I call it the 'Rosenblith.'

ER: That's too much honor for me. No, it doesn't have a name.*

DC: What was it about this violin that gave you what you were looking for?

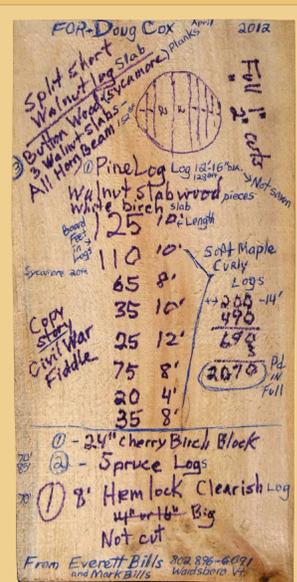
ER: I was enamored of the richness of the G string. I thought it was a wonderful sound. And I also loved the power of the E string. And finally I realized the warmth of the D string. I never felt that I had a violin that I was so much in sympathy with.

Eric played on his Strad for 46 years – from 1964, when the Foundation purchased it from Mrs. Wurlitzer, until the end of his life in 2010.

*On the Hill Certificate issued in 1926, Rodewald is the surname of the buyer for whom the certificate was written, and the violin is referred to as the "Rodewald Stradivarius" in an estate appraisal and in Henry Goodkind's book, "Violin Iconography of Antonio Stradivari," ©1972. Eric believed this was an instrument which had never received a name designation, since it was for so long in the possession and care of loving amateurs – probably since its days with Viotti in the early 1800's.
~ Carol Rosenblith

Eric Rosenblith's Silver Maple – *Acer saccharinum*

This spring Carol Rosenblith called me. She found it necessary to remove a large Silver Maple next to the house. Was I interested in having some of the wood from this tree? In May, on my monthly trip into Boston, I borrowed a neighbor's pickup truck and loaded it with wood from a tree that had been Eric Rosenblith's near neighbor for many years. In 10 years or so, when the wood has seasoned, we'll see if the close proximity of such a wonderful violinist has had any influence on the musicality of this wood.



The Bills Lumber Co. Invoice

Bills Lumber Company

I had another call out of the blue, from Everett Bills in Wardsboro, Vermont. He had several logs of curly soft maple – *Acer rubrum* – from a logging project in Brookline, Vermont, and someone had told him I might be interested. I visited the Bills Lumber Company – a classic New England back-woods sawmill – and purchased the logs along with a sampling of other local woods.



Some of the new wood

The Wood Library Project

When Seamus Carey contacted us last fall about a 7-week internship, we thought it would be a good opportunity to develop my wood library – a compilation of data about the material I have been using over the years. I moved to Southern Vermont in part because of the abundance of wood, maple and spruce mostly, available locally.

As I worked with Seamus to remember and capture the details of my wood choices and inventory, I realized afresh how interesting the stories are behind the wood that finds its way onto my bench and into my instruments.

Wood Library Reflections by Seamus Carey

As a student at Bennington College, I have the opportunity to have a seven-week 'work term' between semesters every year. I contacted Douglas Cox in November, 2011 to discuss the possibility of interning at the shop.

I spent a large part of my internship researching wood, working on Doug's "wood library." Nearly every piece of wood Doug has is marked with an ID such as "87-5" or "N-12" that until recently only had meaning to Doug. We set up a binder with a page for each batch of wood: describing the year and location it was cut, the story of how Doug acquired it, the density, basic appearance, and a small sample. To gather this information, I audio-recorded Doug telling me what he remembered of the origin of the wood. I dug through old records to see what recorded densities I could find, and which wood was used in which instruments. I developed a paper form to record the information, went through all the data I collected and put it all together.

Though I've been playing fiddle for most of my life, I had limited knowledge of the violin making process, and even less of an understanding as to how different woods played into the process.

On the first day of my internship, I watched as Doug shaped a piece of maple into what would be the back plate of a viola, and at the time I saw only the surface of what was happening; a man gouging out a chunk of wood, that somehow ends up a smooth, beautiful part of an instrument. Over the weeks of my work term, Doug showed me nearly every aspect of the violin making process, and explained each in full detail. I had the opportunity to work with the wood myself. I learned that violin making is, in part, feeling the wood and having your hands understand how to manipulate it in order to produce an instrument, an understanding your conscious mind could never describe. Now as I watch Doug work, I see the care he puts into the motion of his hand, the selection of tools, the consideration of thickness, shape, and dimensions, and the indescribable instinct his hands have developed that knows exactly what to do.

My internship was an invaluable experience. I have been so lucky to witness Doug's beautiful craftsmanship first hand, and have had a wonderful time doing so. ~ Seamus Carey



In the Greenhouse



Ursus whetstonensis coxii

Instrument Showings

BOSTON, 2012-2013

I will be bringing instruments to monthly Saturday office hours in Boston, starting in September.

September 22	March 9
October 20	April 13
December 8	May 11
January 19, '13	June 1
February 16	

These dates may be subject to change.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

My work can be seen at dealers of fine instruments in many cities. I travel occasionally and welcome the opportunity to meet people and show my work.

Visitors are always welcome at the studio in the hills of Southern Vermont. Call to be sure I will be available when you want to visit.

ON THE WEB

Visit us on facebook and twitter:
www.facebook.com/violinmaker
www.twitter.com/coxviolins

We produce an email newsletter, published quarterly on no definite schedule. You can opt in via the website, www.coxviolins.com.

The Scroll's purpose is to provide information and enjoyment to people interested in fine new instruments.

I welcome your inquiries and hope you'll tell me how I can be useful to you. There are a limited number of scholarships for exceptional students who cannot procure fine instruments in other ways. If you'd like more information about scholarships, let me know.

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Praise for Douglas Cox's violins & violas

How fortunate I am to have found this fantastic violin! It is my most valued possession.

Daniel Vega-Albela, Violin #345

I absolutely adore my Cox viola. It is perfect in every way. It was 'love at first sound' – I tried it and knew instantly that I had to have it. I have deeply bonded with my viola, and feel honored to own such a marvelous instrument.

Blakeley Woessner, Viola #269

You are a hell of a good violinmaker.

Alan Grishman, Violin #708

I played my Masters recital on the 'new' viola and was overwhelmed with positive reactions from my friends and colleagues. I couldn't be happier.

Anna Griffis, Viola #174

I love my violin. Its clarity and dynamic depth are amazing. The harmonics are wonderful and it resonates with everything around it.

Gwen Pfouts, DVM, Violin #149

Being able to explore and project a huge array of rich sounds, colors, and styles has been a dream come true. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to use such an amazingly mature-sounding young instrument.

Teddy Wiggins, Violin #590

Your violas showed me what a real viola should sound like. Between you and me, your viola was the best in our whole studio. Thank you so much for your help and generosity.

Michael Casimir

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