

# THE Scroll

The Newsletter for the  
Cox Violin Community

Fall 2015

[www.coxviolins.com](http://www.coxviolins.com)

Dear Friends,

## Celebrating 30 Years at Sunset Lake Road

This July marked the 30th anniversary of our move to Sunset Lake Road in West Brattleboro. Many good things have come to life in this place over this time, not least the hundreds of instruments now in the hands of players around the world. The studio where I work every day and watch the world flow through the seasons and years was built a few years after our move. I am thankful to have found and settled in a place that has nurtured me in so many ways. Not only is the land beautiful and inspiring, but the community is very supportive of the work I do.

My son Nathaniel, who was born here, joined me in the studio this past year and has brought with him a passion for early music, instruments, and performance practice. As you will see inside, this year has seen an exploration of historically informed instruments, stretching beyond the violin family to viols and lutes. Learning new things does not become easier with age, but these experiences have taught me much.

Alongside the attention to early instruments, my violin work continues to provide me with a welcome routine of tasks and procedures so well known and practiced. As I approach my gooth instrument I am amazed that there is still so much I do not know, that every curve I shape has a new life and direction to be explored and realized.

My work would not be meaningful without the players who bring it to life and without the inspiration and challenge of new players posing new needs and expectations. Thank you again for being part of my violin family.



*House with Studio under construction, 1992*



*House & Studio, 2015*

## On the Inside

From the Bench:  
Time Traveling  
About Antiquing

Copying the 1610 Maggini  
Why Make Copies?

Artist Profiles

From the Desk:  
The Ivory Ban



# From the Bench

## Traveling Back in Time

This past year has seen more new and experimental work than any time since the beginning of my career. Working with my son Nathaniel, I have learned the techniques of lute construction, designed and built a set of lightweight violas da gamba using local cherry, and built a baroque guitar copied from the work of Antonio Stradivari.

In anticipation of exhibiting at the Boston Early Music Festival this past June, and to take advantage of Nathaniel's connections as an early music performer, I built more baroque violins and violas than in recent years. Baroque violins on Maggini and Gaspar models and several violas on diverse models from 15 ¼" to 17 ¼" are now in my inventory and available for trial.

*Violin 864  
1610 Maggini Baroque*

## About Antiquing

My father, like many violin makers, antiques his instruments, intentionally giving them nicks and scratches and staining the wood to make them look old. In large part this is because of the universal esteem for the great Cremonese violin makers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Since the most prized violins today are those made hundreds of years ago, it makes sense that we should associate an instrument that looks old with one that sounds good.

While I have met players who have very different opinions on antiquing, paradoxically, makers and players who specialize in early music typically prefer new-looking instruments. This paradox, in fact, makes perfect sense. The idea of Historical Performance is to play old music as if it were new: to understand the

aesthetics of the period and present the music as it would have been heard at the time. Stradivari's violins didn't look old in the 18th century. So making an antiqued baroque violin could be compared to making a film in black-and-white because it is set in the 1940s: some may do this successfully, others may find it unnecessary or affected.

I believe it is because of this fundamentally different approach to instrument making that lutes are almost always made to look pristine. While I appreciate this aesthetic, I think that in some cases there can be justification for the antiquing of lutes.

The most recent instrument I completed is a copy of an 11-course baroque lute now in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum. The original was made in Bologna c. 1550, and then converted into a baroque lute in France in the middle of the 17th century by replacing the neck and bridge. This is entirely typical, as numerous 17th-century sources praised the value of "the old Bologna lutes," and one Italian source complained that they were no longer to be found, as they had all been bought up by French lutenists. Therefore, I decided to antique the soundboard and body of the lute, as they would have both already been 100 years old when this instrument was "new." The decision of whether to antique an instrument or not can thus be a surprisingly complex one.

I enjoyed the opportunity to try some of my father's antiquing techniques, and I have received numerous compliments from players on the appearance of the lute.

*Nathaniel Cox*



*Nathaniel Cox & 11-Course Lute*

# The 1610 Maggini Project



*Photo © Cox Violins, ca. 1985*

Last summer at the Marlboro Festival, I was introduced to a good friend of one of my clients, a devoted amateur and proud owner of a 1610 Maggini violin.

This rather rare instrument, small for a Maggini, piqued my interest, and we decided to produce a copy to better understand how the violin works, both acoustically and aesthetically. The violin has very low ribs, paired with very high arching of both top and back, and an overall elegance with no sense of fussiness. Given my focus this year on early instruments, I made an additional copy in what might have been its original set up.

## Why Make Copies?

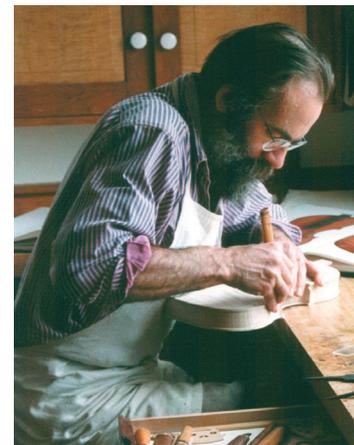
In the world of craftsmanship, the apprentice starts by observing and helping with production of a master's work. A craftsman learns through imitating the motions and tool use of the master, studying how changes in approach lead to changes in the end product. The craftsman learns from doing, from imitating, from the wood through the tool to the hand and to the brain.

The violin is a highly evolved human artifact. Nearly every imaginable variation has been tried, and most have been discarded. It makes sense to me to learn as much as possible from the experiments and experience of others, and to stand on their shoulders as I strive for my own highest achievement.

We know very little of how classic Italian makers worked and thought about their work other than what we can deduce from their extant

instruments. We can learn a great deal from the careful study of their instruments, but to integrate that knowledge into the living present of my own work, I need to absorb that knowledge through the experience of working the wood, and through the success or failure of those ideas in the context of my own abilities and temperament.

Modern technology has given us the ability to measure objects with remarkable precision and to reproduce forms with detailed printouts and with models from 3D printers. The Strad 3D project



*Photo © Julie Abraham, ca. 2000*

demonstrates the application to violin study of CAT scan and other technologies available to the scientific community. But this point-by-point description, as exact as it is, does little to inform us of the working method that produced the violin, or of the understanding and imagination that led to the maker's decisions. As a working maker I try to intuit what a maker 300 years ago might have been thinking and feeling that led to a particular outcome. By putting those intuitions to work with my tools and wood, I may learn something of that long-ago maker, but more importantly, I learn something of myself and my own instruments, and expand my vision and imagination. I base most of my work on existing antique instruments. This is not from lack of imagination or self-assurance, but rather that referring to an existing instrument allows my work to flow in a way that is natural for me.

As I have tried to understand the basics of what makes a great instrument and to explore my own personality, I have also been drawn to makers whose instruments also

# Player Profiles: Quan Yuan & Charles Galante

work well but may not fit standard expectations. Lorenzo Storioni has always intrigued me for his often eccentric wood choice and simplicity of design, and Carlo Bergonzi because of the influence of Stradivari's mentorship on an intelligent personality. J. B. Guadagnini is a complex personality who made successful and beautiful instruments that show the accumulation of much experience and information.

In making a copy, I try to use the basic dimensions, find similar materials, and apply stylistic aesthetics appropriate to the original. I do not generally copy thicknesses, as my materials are different, but I do try to adopt what I know of the originals' acoustic principles and goals.

If I have understood the essence of the antique instrument and captured in my understanding important principles that make it work, I would hope that the experts in the field will recognize the instrument copied. I also do not try to completely sublimate my own methods, values, and vision in the

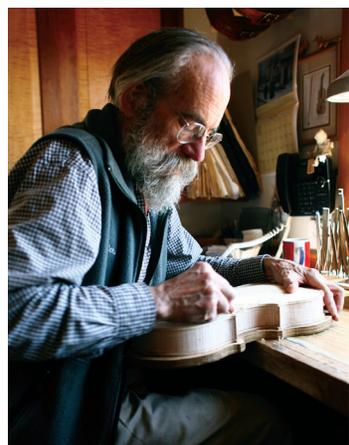


Photo © Len Emery, 2014

process, such that the resulting copy is also recognizably my work. The spontaneity and flair of masterwork is something that cannot be imitated through approximation, but must arise from the authentic flow of a practiced hand and mind. My goal is not to make a museum reproduction of a particular violin, but through the copying process, to make the best instruments of which I am capable, and to improve my own making vision and personality.

Doug Cox



Violinist Quan Yuan, © Liang Dong

Our relationship with violinist **Quan Yuan** began in 2013, when he was a graduate student at New England Conservatory. This year Quan joins the violins of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in New York, playing on Violin Opus 710, a 2010 Storioni 1795 model violin.

Born in Beijing, China in 1984, he began his studies at the age of four and came to the U.S. to study at the Curtis Institute with Joseph Silverstein, moving to NEC to study with Donald Weilerstein in 2008.

His long list of accomplishments include winning the 2006 China International Young Artist Competition, the 2006 Delaware Symphony Orchestra Young Artist Competition, and the 2000 Denmark International Young Artist Competition. As a soloist or chamber musician he has played at the Library of Congress, Carnegie Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, Jordan Hall, Beijing Concert Hall, Merkin Hall, Sanders Theater, Town Hall of New York City, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Concert Hall, Beijing Century Theater, Concert Hall of the National Library of China and Xinzhuang Culture and Arts Center of Taipei. He has given master classes in Taipei and Beijing and has been a judge of the "Golden Beijing" Violin Competition since 2012.

Violist **Charles Galante** began his studies at the age of nine in his hometown of Northport, New York. He continued his studies at the Manhattan School of Music Pre-College Division where he studied with Patinka Kopec and Tali Kravitz. Currently, Charlie studies with Misha Amory at Juilliard. He plays on Viola Opus 640, a 16¼" 2009 Ceruti 1800 model, through a loan from the Virtu Foundation.

An avid chamber musician, Charles has enjoyed being coached by members of the Guarneri, Emerson, Cleveland, Ying, Fine Arts, Dover, Michelangelo and Bryant Park Quartets. Recently he has attended the Sarasota Music Festival, Heifetz Institute, Sejong International Music Festival at the Curtis Institute and the Manhattan in the Mountains.

Charlie loves baseball, has a dog named Max, and says that his grandma makes the best red sauce/pasta on the planet.



Violist Charles Galante, © Zoot Shoot Photography

## From the Desk: The Ivory Ban

I have been following the progress of global and US rules governing trade in ivory, as it has the potential to impact musicians' travel and the value of their instruments. Douglas Cox's instruments do not contain ivory or other endangered species, but a violin or viola is not much good without a bow, and many bows have ivory tips and sometimes other endangered species that are controlled under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) of 1975. While these protections for wildlife have been in place for many years, a 2008 amendment to the Lacey Act - a 1900 conservation law originally focused on helping US states safeguard game species and keeping harmful exotic wildlife out of this country - and President Obama's Executive Order in 2013 have resulted in heightened attention at US ports of entry.

My own bow has a tip of mammoth ivory - *Mammuthus primigenius*. I had the bow appraised with the intention of applying for a travel certificate from the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for international travel; however, since there are no banned materials in my bow, it doesn't qualify for a certificate. I can carry the appraisal along to prove that the bow doesn't violate the Convention, but there is no guarantee that it won't be seized by an overly enthusiastic customs official who cannot tell mammoth ivory from elephant ivory. So my options for international travel are to risk having my bow seized; replace the non-offending ivory tip with something that can't be mistaken for elephant ivory; or travel with a carbon fiber bow with a plastic tip meant to look like ivory, and which I would not be devastated if I lost.

There are amended rules being proposed by FWS on ivory which, if put in place, would make things easier for musicians. The proposed rule would allow the movements of items with less than 200 grams (a little over 7 ounces) of ivory, with ivory parts permanently affixed, as long as the item is not wholly or primarily ivory, the ivory was removed from the wild before 1976 or imported into the US before 1990, and the item was manufactured before the effective date of the rule. If this new rule becomes final, musicians will be able to travel with an ivory bow tip, or other instruments with small amount of ivory, as long as they have the proper paperwork. However, the rule may not solve my own problem of traveling with a mammoth ivory bow tip that can be easily confused with ivory.

I continue to keep an eye on these rules and changes to rules and monitor anecdotes that come my way, learning as much as I can. I'll post updates to our website and blog as I confirm the validity and usefulness of what I learn.

Laurie Indenbaum



African Elephant, *Loxodonta africana*



Not Yet Ripe

## Instrument Showings

### BOSTON, 2015-2016

I will be bringing instruments to monthly Saturday office hours in Boston from September to May. These dates may be subject to change.

From September to December I will be at 84 St. Stephen Street in a private home. Check our website for 2016 locations.

September 19, 2015	January 23, 2016
October 17	February 20
November 7	March 19
December 12	April 23
	May 21

Let us know if you would like to receive our Boston schedule emails, and check our website for date & venue updates.

### 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 at [www.facebook.com/violinmaker](http://www.facebook.com/violinmaker)

Visit our blog: [coxviolins.com/blog/](http://coxviolins.com/blog/)

We produce an email newsletter on no definite schedule. You can opt in via the website, [www.coxviolins.com](http://www.coxviolins.com).

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

We welcome your inquiries and hope you'll tell us how we can be useful to you.

There are a limited number of scholarships for exceptional students who lack the resources to procure fine instruments. If you'd like more information about scholarships, let us know.

[www.coxviolins.com](http://www.coxviolins.com)

(802) 257-1024  
1138 Sunset Lake Road  
Brattleboro, VT 05301

## Douglas Cox

1138 Sunset Lake Road  
Brattleboro, VT 05301

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Presort STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Five Maples

## What People Say

Douglas Cox's violin is amazing to play! When I first picked it up it reminded me of when Harry Potter first rides his Firebolt broomstick in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* - he is amazed how it responds to his every subtle touch. This violin has a beautiful sound and looks beautiful too. Its quality and personality make it a joy to play on.

Katianna Nardone, Violin 652,  
*Andreasson Guadagnini 1779*

I have loved the sound of my violin from the first bow stroke. My violin is my most prized possession, my trusted friend, and my constant companion.

Heather Ensley, Violin 585, *Golden Period Strad*

I am very happy to tell you that my daughter finally bought the Douglas Cox violin. We have been searching and tried more than 50 violins from different shops in our price range this summer. When she played the #616, she immediately knew this is "The One". I want to thank Mr. Cox for the fine instrument.

Parent of Lucinda Chiu, Violin 616, *Gibson Strad*

I was immediately drawn in by [the viola's] personal tone and color — something I have very much been missing. It gives me renewed hope in my search — so many violas I have tried have been, as my friend quipped, 'serviceable but not special'.

Beth Trower, Viola 734, *Red Sycamore*

Finding Opus 778 was like finding a wand in the world of *Harry Potter*. I knew immediately by the feel and beautiful tone that I wanted to continue my studies on this instrument.

Abina Cohen, Violin 778, *Gaspar da Salò*