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Robert E. Seletsky

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## New light on the old bow—1

### Context

David Boyden opens his landmark *History of violin playing from its origins to 1761*<sup>1</sup> with a quotation from Michael Praetorius: ‘Since everyone knows about the violin family, it is unnecessary to indicate or write anything further about it.’<sup>2</sup> Boyden is quick to note the irony of the statement, given the scant information on the early violin at the time of his research; and if details about the violin were considered too obvious to be discussed at one time, there is even less written about the violin bow until major changes were wrought in its design during the 18th century.

The late 20th-century period-instrument movement has codified its perceptions about various bow types into an extremely under-informed methodology that now determines the appropriate bows for given musical repertoires. David Boyden himself wrote a considerable amount about the bow,<sup>3</sup> but seems not to have had access to good sources; his version of the bow’s history is full of speculation which has been accepted as fact by the early-music and, to a large degree, musicological, communities in the absence of serious work by others. Nevertheless, Boyden’s basic thesis is sound: the denigration of pre-Tourte bows by 19th-century writers as crude was irrational in light of the unmatched beauty and refinement of great 17th- and 18th-century string instruments that required bows similarly responsive and subtle. There *is*, however, a body of genuine information in the form of extant objects, monographs, and iconography, that presents a believable time-line for the stages of the bow’s development starting in the 17th century.

### Short bows

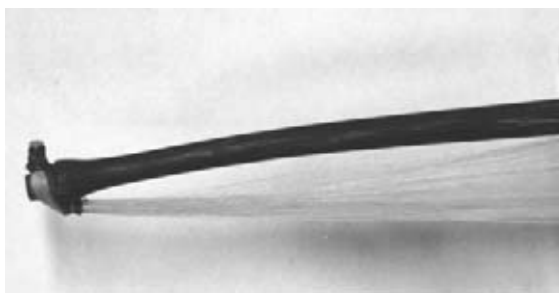
By about 1625, owing to rapidly developing technique, players of string instruments began to require, more sophisticated, better balanced bows for clearer articulation, increased volume and a more complex sound. Iconographic sources indicate that, until then, the hair was attached at the point, as it still is in traditional non-Western cultures: slipped through a hole or a slit, then knotted and wrapped. See, for example, Guido Reni’s painting *Santa Cecilia che suona il violino* (1606) (illus.1). Three extant early bows suggest an experiment in solving the problem of balance, and involve affixing an ornamental cap of ivory or bone to a cylindrical tip extension over which the hair is looped: two of these bows are in the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, their caps missing (illus.2);<sup>4</sup> the other is intact in Copenhagen’s Claudius Museum. (Sadly, it has been the incomplete, and hence, badly unbalanced, versions of this bow in Vienna that have been copied by contemporary makers.) This simple form of hair attachment may not have been uncommon, appearing in 17th-century and even some 18th-century iconography, and was probably retained in unrefined folk bows for a very long time (making the dating of such bows problematic), as shown in Judith Leyster’s painting *La joyeuse compagnie* (1630) (illus.3). The solution customarily adopted in bows intended for art music, probably appearing c.1625, was a point thickened into a ‘pike head’, the hair knotted and curled inside a rectangular (or later, trapezoidal) mortise cut in the head, secured by looping over a snugly fitted wooden plug (illus.4).

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1 17th-century pre-pike-head bow; hair knotted through stick and wrapped: Guido Reni (1575–1642), *Santa Cecilia che suona il violino* (1606) (Pasadena, CA, The Norton Simon Foundation)

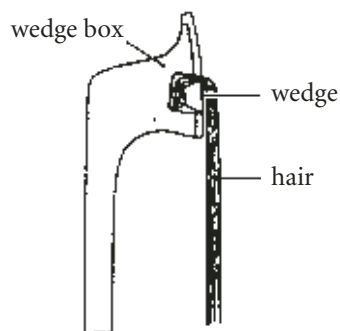


2 Hair looped over cylindrical tip extension, ivory cap missing (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum)

The hair was similarly secured into another mortise at the shank of the stick, a removable frog (nut), separating stick from hair, fitted to a reserve carved in the stick and held in place by hair tension; bows of this design are generally called ‘clip-in’ (illus.5). Although it precluded fine adjustments of hair tension, the clip-in frog was nevertheless perfectly adequate; enough adjustment could be made by



3 Short bow of the type in illus.2, but including ivory cap, in folk setting: Judith Leyster (c.1600–1660), *La joyeuse compagnie* (1630) (Paris, Louvre RF 2131; © photo RMN)

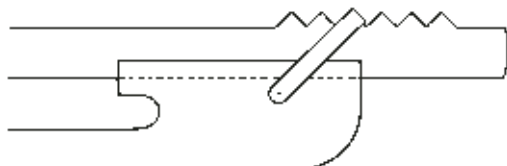


4 Head mortise and plug, as shown on a modern bow

placing or removing slips of leather or other material between hair and frog.<sup>5</sup> Late 17th-century experiments with tension regulation devices like the dented *crémaillère*, where a movable frog is attached with a metal loop to a small ratchet affixed along the top of the stick, seem not to have generated much interest (illus.6).<sup>6</sup> In the few surviving 17th-century bows that retain their original frogs, hair channels



5 Clip-in frog attachment



6 'Crémaillère' frog attachment

are often wider than has previously been considered, measuring as much as 8 mm.

Doubtless in part because of trade routes and colonization, bows had begun to be constructed of tropical hardwoods; in the *Traité des instruments de musique* (c.1631) Pierre Trichet suggests that bows of 'brazilwood, ebony ... and other solid wood, are the best ...'<sup>7</sup> The name 'brazilwood' probably meant something different to Trichet that it does to us today, as the few extant 17th-century violin bows, almost without exception, are made of snakewood (specklewood, letterwood; Lat.: *Piratinera guianensis*), a remarkably dense, strong, and beautiful material; 'brazilwood' is perhaps a generalized reference to the South American origin of the preferred material. Ebony, obtained from Asia and Africa, while a dense material, is often lacking in strength, its extreme elasticity necessitating bows with graduations of exaggerated thickness and weight, as demonstrated in extant 18th-century examples.<sup>8</sup> The various species of ironwood employed, like *Swarzia bannia*, often have properties similar to ebony, and, like ebony, were probably reserved for the naturally heavier bows intended for use on larger instruments.

Seventeenth-century iconography suggests an aesthetic preference for matching the lengths of bows with their instruments: while 17th-century violin bows are shorter than their later counterparts, bows for violone, violoncello and bass viol are seen in iconography to have been substantially longer, though a literal matching of instrument and bow length is limited by practicality in the case of larger instruments. *Braccio* instruments and the lengths of their bows, however, were easily co-ordinated, as shown in the paintings Sir Peter Lely, *Young man playing the violin* (c.1640) (illus.7a) and Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas* (illus.7b); or later, Antonio Domenico Gabbiani's painting of the string band at the court of Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici (c.1685)

(illus.7c). The violin bow in illus.8a, a rare late 17th-century specimen, is 58.4 cm in total length, probably of English or French provenance,<sup>9</sup> with a highly figured snakewood stick and pernambuco clip-in frog; another short bow, probably of early to mid-18th-century English origin, in the Powerhouse Museum of Sydney, Australia, is under 64 cm,



7 Matching lengths of 17th-century violins and pike-head clip-in bows: (a, above) Sir Peter Lely, *A young man playing a violin* (c.1640) (© 1991 photo Scala, Florence; courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Atti Culturali); (b, opposite above) Pieter Claesz (c.1597–1640), *Vanitas* (Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum); (c, opposite below) Antonio Domenico Gabbiani, *The string band of the Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici* (c.1685)



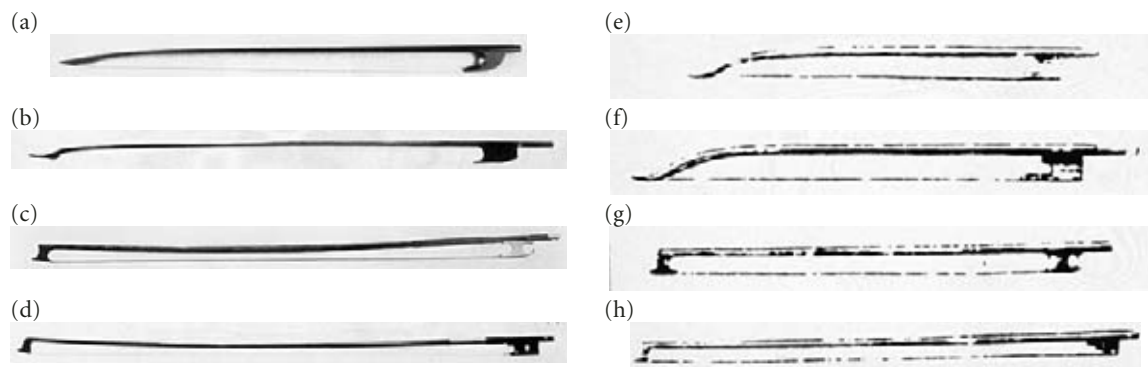


roughly the outer limit for this type of violin bow. The approximate two-foot measurement (about 61 cm) evidenced by iconographic sources and extant objects conforms to the description of the standard violin bow in 'James Talbot's Manuscript', c.1685–1701.<sup>10</sup> Though it is impossible to generalize about the weights of short violin bows, the few extant examples weigh between 36 and 44 grams.

To circumvent any perceived lack of responsiveness toward the tip of a pike-head bow caused by the minimal hair-to-stick distance, the stick was heated and bent—or perhaps carved—slightly outward in its uppermost few centimetres. The resulting increase in height from hair to stick made the bow very flexible and responsive throughout its length, even in its upper third, hence the advice given by Bartolomeo Bismantova (*fl.* 1675–1694) in his manuscript treatise *Compendio musicale* (1677) that 'One may play *passaggi* [divisions] at the tip of the bow with short strokes.'<sup>11</sup> This slight convexity near the head may be observed on the bow in *illus.8a* in addition to a hint of concavity in its lower third that ensures vertical stability given the original frog's 22

mm height; this marginal concavity can be perceived with some effort when the frog is removed; with the convex 'hump' toward the head, the bow can be seen to have a slight 'S' shape when loose. With the frog 'clipped' in place under playing tension, 17th-century bows appear somewhat convex.

While a mathematically applied inward curve—*cambre*—did not play an organic part in the design of the early bow, the bending of wood with heat was a well-known process in furniture-and instrument-making. In general, snakewood is so strong and elastic that the systematic addition of curve to increase resistance and strength was not considered applicable; however, some extant 17th- and early 18th-century bows do have small amounts of inward bend. A logical working hypothesis might be that such curve was applied by makers in modest, localized amounts to correct anomalies in the stick that compromised its optimal functioning. Iconography and extant objects seem to bear out these observations; moreover, the deliberate addition of overall *cambre* in new bows is discussed in the late 18th century with a sense of novelty. However, one must consider that



8 The violin bow's evolution:

- (a) short pike-head bow, snakewood stick, original pernambuco clip-in frog; English or French, c.1685, length 58.4 cm (private collection);
- (b) long swan-bill-head bow, snakewood stick with reeded grip area, original plumwood clip-in frog stamped 'LS' on both sides; English, c.1725, length 71.7 cm (private collection);
- (c) transitional battle-axe head bow, pernambuco stick, ivory open-channel screw-frog and button; probably French, c.1775, length 71.1 cm (including button) (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, Hill Collection no.25);
- (d) modern hatchet-head bow, pernambuco stick, closed-channel ebony screw-frog with ferrule, mother-of pearl slide, silver heel-plate and button, by François Tourte, Paris, c.1790, length 74.5 cm (including button);
- (e–h) the bow's evolution as shown in Woldemar, *Grande méthode* drawings, c.1798: (e) 'Corelli', (f) long 'Tartini', (g) 'Cramer', (h) 'Viotti'

*cambre* can be added or subtracted at any time, and that in bows under tension it may relax somewhat over time.

### Short bows and long bows

Performers were evidently satisfied with the short violin bow well into the 18th century. However, the experiments of luthiers in the first quarter of the century—or slightly earlier—resulted in a substantially longer violin bow, between 66 and 72 cm in total length, generally weighing between 45 and 55 grams. In the middle of the 18th century a number of writers credited Giuseppe Tartini (1692–1770) with suggesting the lengthening of the bow; however, these attributions, some copied from each other and further embroidered over time, seem to have little substance, especially as the earliest appear in the 1740s.<sup>12</sup> References to longer bows are found well before any association with Tartini, though with some variation in the perception of length. In 1702 François Raguenet notes of the Italians that ‘their bows are longer’.<sup>13</sup> Roger North (1651–1734) writes, at roughly the same period as Raguenet, about the ‘very long bow’ used by Italian virtuoso violinist Nicola Matteis (*d* 1714?) who had emigrated to England in the 1670s, but elsewhere refers to it as ‘bipedalian’—roughly 61 cm, or the length of a short bow, unless he is simply estimating.<sup>14</sup> In ‘James Talbot’s Manuscript’, exactly contemporaneous with North, the author observes that the two-foot bow—about 61 cm—was the most common, but goes on to say that bows for ‘Solo’s or Sonata’s’ can be two or three inches—about 5 to 7.5 cm—longer, yielding total lengths of approximately 66 cm and 68 cm respectively, perhaps the earliest specific reference to genuinely longer bows.<sup>15</sup> North might have been accustomed to bows that were somewhat shorter; indeed the bow in *illus.8a* is only 58.4 cm long, but a difference of under 3 cm hardly seems enough for North to view Matteis’s bow as ‘very long’. It does, therefore, seem that North’s perception is inexact, the length of Matteis’s bow more likely conforming to the ‘solo’ bow described by Talbot. Hawkins, in 1776, seems to conflate information from North and Talbot while adding a specious secondary deduction when he wrote, confusingly, that ‘In the year 1720, a bow of twenty-four inches [*c.*61 cm] was, on account

of its length, called a Sonata [solo] bow; the common bow was shorter; and ... the French bow must have been shorter still.’<sup>16</sup> Unsubstantiated assumptions of this kind cloud the issue of the bow’s characteristics throughout its history, such errors repeated and compounded to this day.

The above early examples of longer ‘solo’ bows may have been exceptional, as written and iconographic evidence does indicate that the short bow of about 61–3 cm was the standard for as many as five decades beyond 1700. The great Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713), perhaps the most revered of all composers through much of the 18th century, came to be emblematic of short-bow use, even though during his own lifetime there was scarcely a choice between short and long bows; indeed, in the late 18th century, when bow types were named for noted exponents, the short bow was called a ‘Corelli bow’. Robert Bremner (1713–89), a pupil of Corelli disciple Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762) and thus probably privy to information about Corelli, wrote in 1777:

I have been informed that *Corelli* judged no performer fit to play in his band, who could not, with one stroke of his bow, give a steady and powerful sound, like that of an organ, from two strings at once, and continue it for ten seconds; and yet, it is said, the length of their bows at that time did not exceed twenty inches.<sup>17</sup>

‘Twenty inches’—under 51 cm—is certainly too short an estimate. Talbot’s dimensions of customary bows contemporary with Corelli is more believable, but Bremner’s remarks certainly identify Corelli with the short bow.

An interesting reference comes from a letter written on 2 January 1731 by the Prince of Monaco, who had sent a talented young violinist named Peillon to Paris in order to study with Jean-Féry Rebel (1666–1747)—one of Lully’s successors at the Académie Royale de Musique—and François Francœur (1698–1787). Upon Peillon’s return, the prince writes that

Peillon acquired taste, but I am certainly not accustomed to the long bow that he is using, and I find his sounds less pleasing than they were when he had only a short bow, with which he articulated [*détachoit*] more and absolutely did not fall into the position of hitting extra strings [*vieler*: ‘hardy-gurdyng’], which is nearly impossible to avoid with the other one [long bow].<sup>18</sup>



The prince subsequently sent him to Turin to study with G. B. Somis (1686–1763), a follower of Corelli—hence, an advocate of the short bow. It should be noted that, although these events occurred after 1730, (1) Tartini's name is never mentioned in connection with the long bow; (2) its use was learned in Paris, despite perceptions of French conservatism in the matter; and (3) Peillon's new *Italian* teacher was specifically chosen because he was of the short-bow school.

Besides added length, the mild convexity in the uppermost few centimetres came to be replaced more regularly, though by no means invariably, by a slightly more elevated head that served the same function, frequently resulting in a distinct 'swan bill' profile; the stick was completely straight when loose, though still slightly convex in playing condition. Decades after the fact, Tartini received credit for adding head height as well. The new bows were identified during the period simply as 'long bows', and much later as 'Tartini bows'. In point of fact, Tartini's long bow, preserved at the Conservatorio di Musica 'G. Tartini' in Trieste, has a small, low pike head rather than a swan bill. In addition, the swan-bill head appears far earlier than the long bow itself, and is seen on the short bows in the Gabbiani painting, c.1685, albeit on a proportionally smaller scale (see illus.7c). Not infrequently, the round grip area of the stick was reeded—that is, carved with shallow, narrow flutes, either for a more secure hold, or for decoration. The reeding may also have been intended to serve as a conduit for the player's perspiration, preventing the round stick from slipping in the hand when damp. The long bow in illus.8b is probably of English provenance, c.1725, with a snake-wood stick, 71.7 cm in length, weighing 54 grams with its original plumwood clip-in frog of 21.5 mm height and hair width of 8.2 mm. The grip area is elegantly reeded with 22 lines terminating in dentated ornamental head banding, the reeding reflected in the stick's lowest 1.5 cm, appearing to modern eyes as a screw-button. There are at least three very similar extant bows: Hill Collection no.19 in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, a bow in the Brussels Conservatoire, and one in a private British collection. It is possible that all four bows are the work of the same person. The bow illustrated, also privately owned, is

the only one to retain its original clip-in frog (the clip-in frog in Hill Collection no.19 is a restoration), and was evidently part of a set: the Roman numeral 'VI' is carved on both the underside of the frog and its seating area on the stick, clearly so the maker could match them accurately. As is the case with short bows, the frogs on many extant long bows have wider hair channels than was once assumed; despite a lack of standardization, over 8 mm was not unusual. While the four similar bows discussed could very well have the same provenance, they are of quite variable lengths, between 67 and 71.7 cm. Given the early, more isolated examples of longer bows and the apparent degree of experimentation with the bow, some probably resulting from specific orders placed by players, the period of c.1690–1735 may be seen as 'transitional', a term usually reserved for the type of bows that begin to appear almost 30 years later.

### Long bows and short bows

Long bows did not supplant short bows for half the 18th century. G. B. Somis continued to use a short bow, as has been indicated; and Pietro Locatelli (1695–1764), arguably the most brilliant virtuoso of the 18th century, was adamant in his preference for the short bow, perhaps occasioned by a quicker response that better complemented his reportedly fiery performance style. Writing on 11 April 1741, Benjamin Tate communicated Locatelli's declaration that 'No fiddler can play anything with a long bow that he can't play with a short one.'<sup>19</sup> The long bow's slight sagging, or cushioning, on initial string contact optimized it for the prevailing 18th-century Italianate *cantabile* style; for easy, noiseless triple-stopping (think of Leclair's sonatas or J. S. Bach's unaccompanied violin works); and for continuous on-string passage work, but less so for hard accents. The equalization of down- and up-strokes, inherent in the long bow, was of paramount importance to players and makers alike; it is certainly the reason behind Tartini's advice for 14-year-old *virtuosa* Maddalena Laura Lombardini—later Sirmen—(1745–1818) to practise Corelli's Allegros, beginning both down- and up-bow, as well as every type of dynamic gradation in all parts of the bow,<sup>20</sup> the latter also systematically advised by Leopold Mozart



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(1719–87),<sup>21</sup> and was described by Hubert Le Blanc in his *Défense de la basse de viole* (1740) as the Italian violinists' 'endless stream of seamless bow changes'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, although modern period-players are very intent on clean articulation, and generally have anachronistically stiff 'reproduction' long bows that give the impression of speed, not a word about crispness is mentioned by period writers; their interest lay in the bow's ability to produce complex colours, long phrases and subtle dynamic shading. Hence, genuine period long bows are extremely flexible, often to the surprise of today's performers.

Short bows continued in use until at least 1750, although 18th-century short bows, now in competition with long bows, may more often have been of a stronger variety, more similar to the exmple in the Powerhouse Museum of Sydney, Australia, than the bow in illus.8a. They appear in the inventories of mid-century French luthiers as 'archets communs'—common bows,<sup>23</sup> and a great deal of 18th-century iconography shows them in use: e.g. Charles André van Loo's *The Grand Turk giving a concert to his mistress* (illus.9a) and William Hogarth's famous c.1741 engraving *The Enrag'd Musician* (illus.9b), whose subject has been identified as either virtuoso violinist Pietro Castrucci (1679–1752), the leader of Handel's opera orchestra, or Michael Christian Festing (1705–52), Castrucci's successor in that post.<sup>24</sup> Still, the long bow finally did replace the short bow, at least for most soloists. The aesthetic of matching instrument and bow lengths was abandoned: bows for violoncello and the moribund viola da gamba now became shorter than those for the violin. Francesco Maria Veracini (1690–1760) used a long bow,<sup>25</sup> as illustrated in the well-known engraving on the frontispiece of his 1744 *Sonate accademiche* (illus.10). Jean-Marie Leclair (1697–1764) used one as well; but note that Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, who had seen Leclair perform, needed to correct Johann Friedrich Agricola's assumption in 1749 that Leclair used a short bow. Agricola may have based his inaccurate idea either on an unfounded view of French conservatism, or perhaps because he knew that Leclair was a disciple of G. B. Somis, a pupil of Corelli and a short-bow exponent. The latter hypothesis is more interesting because it turns a modern assumption on its head: the French may

actually have been more experimental and the Italians more conservative than hitherto believed; it should again be recalled that it was when the Prince of Monaco sent the gifted Peillon to *Paris* in 1730—almost two decades earlier—that the young violinist was introduced to the long bow which so displeased the prince that Peillon was sent to study in *Italy*—where they used short bows. It is not known when Leclair, also a student of Somis, began using a long bow; the Marpurg–Agricola dialogue occurred 18 years after the Peillon reference. Despite some isolated early references to Italian long bows, experimentation in instrument technology was always more a French interest than an Italian one.<sup>26</sup>

The long-lived devotion to the short bow among Italian virtuosos and the simultaneous interest shown in the long bow by French players invalidates



9 The short bow in the 18th century: (a, above) Charles André van Loo (1705–65), *The Grand Turk giving a concert for his mistress* (detail) (Château de Montresor, France, Giraudon / Bridgeman Art Library); (b, opposite) William Hogarth (1697–1764), *The Enrag'd Musician* (1741) (London, Tate Gallery)

an old supposition, often accepted uncritically even now, that the French invariably preferred the short bow because of their interest in dance music. Although the speed and ease of the short bow's response make it a fine tool for dance music, the 20th-century idea of a specialized 'dance bow' is only relevant when discussing the diminutive bows for *pochettes* and kits used by dancing masters throughout Europe.<sup>27</sup> The history of the bow seems to have proceeded with little relation to specific national styles; preferences were based upon the musical perceptions of different schools, Corelli's followers remaining faithful to the short bow, others more interested in the newer long form. To some extent, compositional styles may have played a role, Corelli's more polyphonic music eliciting a conservative response about bow choice, Tartini's and

Leclair's more *galant* preferences perhaps guiding them and their disciples to the more modern long bow. But even here, no rule can be invoked: Locatelli, also a *galant* stylist, was a passionate short-bow advocate.

### Structural matters

In an effort to reduce their mass without a compromise in strength, the sticks of many long bows were fluted in their upper two-thirds. There is a substantial cross-section of extant fluted bows showing little wear, their preservation thus possibly owing to their craftsmanship or costly materials rather than desirable playing characteristics; such a hypothesis may explain why fluted bows are virtually absent from period iconography. The anonymous makers of the few extant short bows seem to have solved the







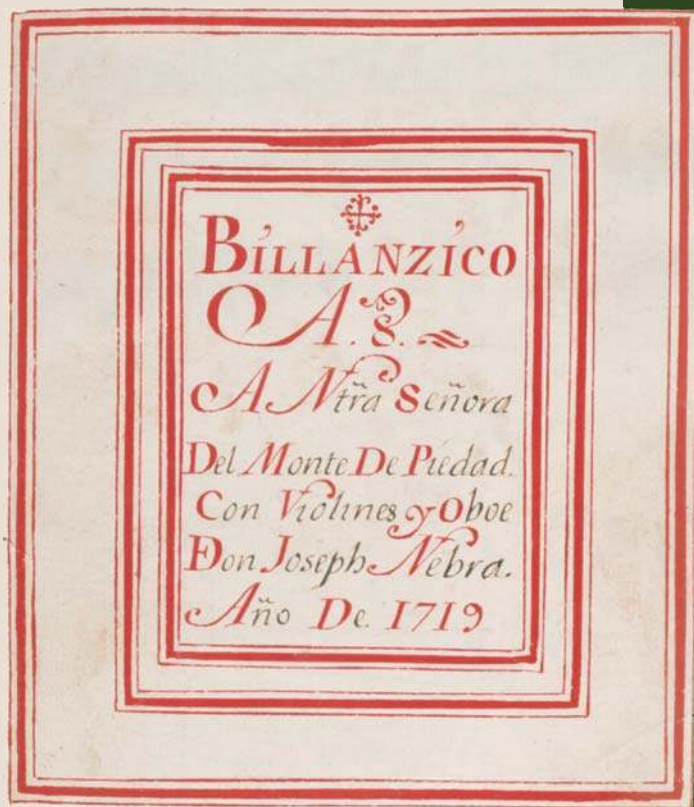
10 Veracini and the long bow: frontispiece for his *Sonate accademiche* (1744)

strength-versus-weight problem by making the sticks slightly oval—higher than they are wide, a logical solution, as strength is required principally in the vertical dimension. Most fluting is applied to octagonal sticks—the state of bows before they are rounded, though fluting is occasionally seen on bows with round, more heavily graduated sticks. The lower section of the bow had to be rounded, retaining sufficient surface area to accommodate the reserve for the clip-in frog. These round lower sections sometimes contain reeding that dovetails elegantly with the fluting of the sticks' octagonal upper two-thirds. The same constructional and decorative procedure is also seen on early screw-frog bows, but with longer plain sections on which the movable frog could ride.<sup>28</sup>

While the clip-in frog was considered adequate, some players after 1750—perhaps more itinerant ones—may have felt that the long bow's increased hair-span made it too sensitive to changes in humidity, and required a means of implementing easy hair-tension adjustments.<sup>29</sup> The ivory buttons that appear on some earlier 18th-century bows and in 17th-century iconography are ornamental attachments to sticks with clip-in frogs. The button/screw-adjustable frog and eyelet—the hair inserted into a mortise cut directly in the frog's hair channel rather than the stick itself—probably did not make its appearance until the middle of the 18th century. Most long bows, and even transitional/classical types, were still built with clip-in frogs for over a decade beyond that: e.g. both of Tartini's bows preserved in Trieste—one early long bow and one with vestigial transitional characteristics that may date from c.1760—seem to have been constructed so they could share the same extant clip-in frog. Instantaneous adjustments of hair tension were apparently not deemed critical enough for most mid-18th-century players to consider the added expense of a screw-frog. Moreover, if one can judge from surviving examples, early eyelets were not reliable, their few threads stripping after modest use. An early reference appears in the first advertisement placed by the great English violin maker Benjamin Banks in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* for 28 March 1757, where guitars, bass violins, and 'the best Screw Bows' are offered; the wording certainly suggests that this type of bow was not a new idea.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, from their writings, such mid-century violin pedagogues as Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762) and Michel Corrette (1709–95), as well as Tartini and Leopold Mozart seemed unaware of the screw-frog.

*To be concluded in the August issue.*





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# ENCONTROS DE MÚSICA DA CASA DE MATEUS 2004



## XXVI INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COURSES

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**Jean Paul Fouchecourt** - singing  
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**Wilbert Hazelzet** - traverso  
**Marc Destrubé** - violin  
**Paul O'Dette** - lute

**Roel Dieltens** - cello  
**Paolo Pandolfo** - viola da gamba  
**Jacques Ogg** - harpsichord  
**Ana Yepes** - dance  
**Rui Vieira Nery** - lectures

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**Brigitte Buxtorf** - flute  
**Dabogerto Linhares** - guitar

### PIANO

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**Jorg Demus**

### VOICE TECHNIQUE SINGING INTERPRETATION

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### MUSIC FESTIVAL – 1 July - 27 August

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Paolo Pandolfo • Jacques Ogg • Ana Yepes • Ensemble Explorations • Orchestre Musica Antiqua • Jorg Demus  
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This paper is expanded from my article 'Bow c.1625–1800' published in *New Grove II* (2000), originally researched between 1995 and 1997. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Professor Neal Zaslaw of Cornell University, whose unpublished materials referring to the 'Tartini bow', assembled during the 1970s, were key in the genesis of my own researches. I tender my gratitude as well to luthier and organologist Ian Watchorn of Melbourne, Australia, for calling my attention to many period bows in European and Australian collections; to the fine period bow-maker and violinist Stephen A. Marvin of Toronto, Canada, for his encouragement and generous exchange of ideas and information; and to David L. Hawthorne of Cambridge, Massachusetts, a great bow-maker, for helpful citations and gratifying collaborations.

1 D. D. Boyden, *The history of violin playing from its origins to 1761* (London, 1965).

2 Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum* (Wolfenbüttel, 2/1619), ii, part II, chap.xxii, quoted in Boyden, *The history of violin playing*, p.1.

3 E.g. D. D. Boyden, 'The violin bow in the 18th century', *Early music*, viii (1980), pp.199–212.

4 R. Hopfner, *Streichbogen-Katalog Sammlung alter musikinstrumenten und sammlungen der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien* (Tützing, 1998), p.48–9 (bow no.81); pp.50–51 (bow no.84).

5 Indeed, given modern period-players' constant travel to locations with radically different climatic conditions—or if they happen to live in the North American northeast, with its dramatic seasonal differences in humidity, the only option for bow-makers in dealing with clip-in bows (originals or reproductions) is to hair/rehair them unplayably long and for the musician to have one to three small rectangular strips of leather or chamois of varying thickness at hand, which can be inserted between hair and frog; by pulling them back or pushing them forward, hair tension can be

adjusted as needed. Especially during a performance, as the room becomes more or less humid, this procedure is essential. Hairing clip-in bows at playing tension for a particular day is impractical: should the humidity subsequently drop even slightly, the hair shrinks, making the bow too tight to play and creating a danger to the stick of breakage or warping. This reality must have been very clear until at least 1750, when clip-in frogs were the only option. One never actually sees these shims in period iconography showing clip-in bows, perhaps because they would not have been appealing in such works. Note, however, that European musicians were usually attached to local ecclesiastical or courtly institutions and travelled little; moreover, European climates are less prone to wide humidity changes than north-eastern North America, so hair tension adjustments were probably less critically required. The benefit of a clip-in frog—with the above hair-length precaution—is that frog placement and height remain constant; with the later screw-adjustable type, moving the frog to adjust hair tension also alters the balance, usable hair length, and the effective relationship of frog height to tip height, making the bow permanently unstable as a musical tool.

6 The screw-and-eyelet type frog bearing the engraved 'date' 1694 on a well-known bow formerly in the London Hill collection is clearly the result of a later modification or is altogether spurious. David Boyden was unable to judge the authenticity of such objects, and it appears, unquestioned, in *The history of violin playing* as plate 38a; the frog and button are shown in close-up as plate 28d.

7 See F. Lesure, 'Le traité des instruments de musique de Pierre Trichet', *Annales musicales*, iii–iv (Paris, 1955, 1956).

8 The entry 'Bow' in S. Marcuse, *Musical instruments* (New York, 1964; rev. 1975), pp.64–5, mentions a mid-17th-century Austrian source, not much later than Trichet, that refers to bows of 'indianische' wood, and that the Verona Academia Filarmonica in 1562 owned two bows of 'cana d'India',

intriguing references perhaps to various species of ebony that are indeed obtained from India (e.g. Ceylon) even today. If the 1562 Italian reference is accurate, it is the earliest indication I know of bows made from wood other than native European deciduous hardwoods, the timing consistent with international trade destinations during that period.

9 Generally, in known, usually English, clip-in bows, the front of the frog is 'snow plough' shape: that is, triangulated and pointed, the reserve in the stick carved to meet it, providing a very secure fit. Indeed, this frog design continued in use on 18th-century English screw-mechanism bows with, of course, no reserve in the stick, even after c.1775 in bows with the new three-faceted frog attachment. The bow in *illus.8a* has an entirely different fit: the front of the frog is hollowed into a semicircle; the front of the reserve in the stick is the 'positive' of this 'negative' frog shape. It is the reverse of what one sees in virtually all English bows. All known French bows of the 18th century seem to be late enough to have screw frogs, but never with the 'snow-plough' frog front. The provenance of the bow in *illus.8a* was originally thought to be English because the head has a 'T-mortise', a hallmark of 18th-century English bow-making. But, without the 'snow-plough' frog shape, one could theorize that it may actually be French—as other details about the frog have suggested as well, and that the 'T-mortise' was not specific to English makers until some time in the 18th century. Frog attachment details of those two bows are shown clearly in H. Saint-George, *The bow, its history, manufacture and use* (London, 1889; 2/1909), p.29, fig.28: the bow on the right is my *illus.8a*, and in the middle is my *illus.8b*.

10 R. Donington, 'James Talbot's manuscript, II: bowed strings', *The Galpin Society journal*, iii (1950), pp.27–45.

11 Bartolomeo Bismantova, *Compendio musicale* (Ferrara 1677; R/1978), p.115 (original unpaginated; facsimile reprint adds page numbers for convenience). In the section 'Regole per



accordare, e suonare il Violino', the original text reads: '... nel far alle volte de passaggi; si suona in punta d'arco, con l'arcada corta'.

12 Tartini seldom left Padua after 1728, and certainly did not spend time either in centres of bow-making like London and Paris, nor even in Italian locations important to string instrument building; e.g. Cremona, Milan, Florence, Naples etc.—though he did make rare trips to Venice; it is therefore virtually impossible that he had any influence on bow design except for the choice of an unusual and not entirely successful wood for his own personal bows, as discussed in the second instalment of this study. He was more likely the beneficiary of various innovations, and his position as a famous violinist-composer and influential pedagogue in his Padua 'School of Nations' probably caused people to assume that the bows he used were somehow created with his participation. Moreover, on 10 March 1712 Tartini was supposedly so awed by the playing of Francesco Maria Veracini, his direct contemporary, that he retired from public performing to Ancona for two years so he could rethink his bowing; see J. W. Hill, *The life and works of Francesco Maria Veracini* (PhD diss., Harvard U. 1972), pp.12–14. It is therefore not implausible that Veracini already had a newer form of bow and the facility with which to use it before Tartini had ever seen one. The suspiciously late kudos to Tartini seem to begin with Giovanni-Rinaldo conte Carli's letter to his Paduan mentor Tartini, dated 21 August 1743, 'Osservazioni sulla musica antica, e moderna', in which the writer congratulates Tartini for lengthening the bow. It is not known whether Tartini accepted or corrected Carli's assumption; evidence points to his silent acceptance and a subsequent 265 years of inaccurate attributions. Friedrich Wilhelm Marburg, in a 1749 polemic with Johann Friedrich Agricola, reports that, contrary to Agricola's assumption, Leclair used a 'so-called Tartini bow'—a long bow—rather than a short bow. References after Tartini's death in 1770, like Benevenuto, conte di San Raffaele's *Lettere due sopra l'arte del suono* ... (1778) and Stefano Arteaga's *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale ital-*

*iano* (Bologna, 1783), credit Tartini with further changes to the bow (Carli, Agricola, San Raffaele and Arteaga cited in Neal Zaslaw's unpublished notes). By the time of François-Joseph Fétis's (1784–1871) monumentally biased, inaccurate writings about the bow in *Antoine Stradivari, luthier célèbre* (Paris, 1856), Tartini was seen as responsible for nearly every change undergone by the bow throughout—and even *after*—his lifetime: greater length, higher head, shorter tip, straight stick, lighter wood, reeded grip area, the screw-mechanism frog and even the three-faceted frog attachment.

13 François Ragueneau, *Parallèle des Italiens et des Français* (Paris, 1702, 2/1752), p.29.

14 Roger North on music, ed. J. Wilson (London, 1959), pp.168, 309.

15 Donington, 'James Talbot's manuscript'.

16 Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of Music*, 5 vols. (London, 1776; r/1875), ii, p.782, note.

17 Robert Bremner, 'Some Thoughts on the Performance of Concert Music', the preface to his edition of Schetky, *Six Quartettos ... opus VI* (London, 1777), p.vii, note.

18 My translation. The original reads: 'Peillon acquis du goût, mais je ne m'accoutume point à l'archet long, dont il se sert, et je trouve ses sons moins nets qu'ils ne l'étoient quand il n'avoit qu'un archet court, avec lequel il détachoit davantage, et ne tomboit point dans le cas de viéler, qu'il est presque impossible d'éviter avec l'autre.' In G. Favre, 'Un prince mélomane au XVIIIe siècle: la vie musicale à la cour d'Antoine I<sup>er</sup>, Prince de Monaco (1661–1731)', *Revue de musicologie*, lvii/2 (1971), pp.134–49, at pp.143–4.

19 *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Twelfth Report, appendix, part IX, pp.179–226; in A. Dunning and A. Krole, 'Pietro Antonio Locatelli: Nieuwe bijdragen tot de kennis van zijn leven en werken', *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziek-geschiedis*, xx (1962), pp.52–96 at p.57;

cited in Neal Zaslaw's unpublished notes.

20 Giuseppe Tartini, 'Lettera del Defonto Signor Giuseppe Tartini alla Signora Maddalena Lombardini, Inserviente ad una importante Lezione per I Suonatori di Violino' (Padua, 5 March 1760); trans. Dr. Charles Burney (London, 1771); reprinted in Giuseppe Tartini, *Traité des agréments de la musique* (Paris, 1771), ed. E. R. Jacobi (Celle, 1961), pp.133–5. Until the last decade, anecdotal information surrounding Maddalena Lombardini placed her birth ten years earlier as an orphan, but archival documents are quite clear that she was born on 9 December 1745 to middle-class parents. See the preface to Maddalena Laura Lombardini Sirmen, *Three violin concertos*, ed. J. L. Berdes, Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era, xxxviii (Ann Arbor, 1991), p.vii.

21 Leopold Mozart, *Violinschule* (Augsburg, 1756); trans. E. Knocker (London, 1948), pp.96–9.

22 Hubert le Blanc, *Défense de la basse de viol contre les entrées du violon et les prétensions du violoncel* (Amsterdam, 1740); reprinted in *Le revue musicale* (Paris: 11/12 1927, 1–3, 6/1928). Cited in J. Hsu, 'The use of the bow in French solo viol playing of the 17th and 18th centuries', *Early music*, vi (1978), p.526.

23 This information from S. Milliot, *Documents inédits sur les luthiers Parisiens du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1970), p.120, and chart facing p.126.

24 People generally take Burney's detailed word that 'The Enrag'd Musician' is Castrucci: Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, iv (London, 1789; r/ in 2 vols. New York, 1957), ii, pp.698, 1004. However, others are more convinced that it is Michael Christian Festing: e.g. G. Hart, *The violin and its music* (London, 1881); on pp.221–2 the author writes rather emphatically that 'Castrucci was long thought to be the original of Hogarth's "Enraged Musician", but the idea has no foundation in fact, since the portrait is traced to Michael Festing, the immortal friend of British indigent musicians.' Incidentally, Burney writes



that in about 1737 Festing replaced Castrucci as the leader of Handel's Italian opera orchestra, and thereafter 'Castrucci had such an antipathy to the very name of Festing, that in his most lucid intervals, he instantly lost his temper, if not his reason, on hearing it pronounced' (Burney, *General History*, ii, p.1004, note (f)).

25 See n.12 above.

26 In the 17th century it was the French who thinned and angled back the necks of viols, making wedge-shaped fingerboards unnecessary, and added a seventh string—the latter innovation attributed to Sainte-Colombe, according to Titon du Tillet. Sainte-Colombe is also credited with inventing the metal-wound gut string; and though its introduction can be traced to Bologna c.1660, it was apparently invented in France concurrently and independently as well, even if the attribution to Sainte-Colombe is incorrect. In addition, it was the French who experimented with longer string and body lengths, flatter arching, varying neck attachments for violins early in

the 18th century, and the modernization of violins in the 19th century. In terms of constructional innovation, the Italian violin makers continued setting upbowed string instruments in much the same way from the 16th through the mid-19th centuries.

27 Unfortunately, the specious idea of a specifically designed 'dance bow' was so enthusiastically embraced by David Boyden that he never understood it was a fiction, and that short bows were intended for universal use. Boyden repeatedly exhibited the short bow in illus.8a as a 'dance bow'—even in his 1980 *Early music* article ('The violin bow in the 18th century', p.205). This particular bow—dense, flexible and weighty, is precisely the kind used by all European violinists as their regular bows for over a century. Of course, any attempt to use this magnificent musical tool (currently in my collection) on a small dancing master's fiddle, would be absurd. Examples of typical tiny—41 cm long—*pochette* bows are Catalogue nos. E. 0823 and 182 (4) in the *Paris Musée Instrumental du C.N.S.M.*

28 An example of a clip-in bow with fluting on its octagonal upper two-thirds and reeding in the lower third is Hill Collection no.21, a bass viol or violoncello bow by Peter Walmsley, probably from the second third of the 18th century. Hill Collection no.22 is a similarly constructed screw-frog viola bow of c.1760 attributed to Thomas Smith; note its frog with snow-plough front, despite being a screw-frog (see n.9 above).

29 But see n.5 above.

30 A. W. Cooper, *Benjamin Banks, the Salisbury violin maker* (Surrey, 1989), p.28.

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