Italy's Primacy in Musical History

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By

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FOREWORD

In 2008, when I got a copy of Mr. Graybill's new book, BRAVO!, in New England, I was pleasantly surprised to find my name within. I was similarly impressed with the entire book. Just as Alice declared, "What is the use of a book without pictures… ?" I found myself declaring, "How great is a book without air-headed celebrities!" Such is BRAVO!

Then, another fine surprise: Mr. Graybill asked me to write the Foreword to a new edition of his book. This edition is being published by Sunbury Press, Inc. of Mechanicsburg, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It has a new format and a new cover design; but it carries the same insightful account of the unmatched Italian contribution to the world's music.

The author discusses music's historical development in Italy, with illuminating looks at musical scoring, terminology, orchestration and vocalization. He also tells the charming story of the violin's misty origins, the creation of the piano, the first operas and the startling number of opera scores that are forever lost! His chapters (which he calls "Acts") are replete with mini-biographies of the countless musical geniuses from Palestrina and Paganini to the modern giants, Verdi and Rossini. Among those Italian musical icons who were admired by many still-living music lovers, were Caruso, Tetrazzini, Pavarotti and Toscanini. Here the reader finally gets a fair comparison of Mozart and Salieri, whose rivalry was distorted by a popular movie. And here the reader sees the grand rush to send young musicians to Italy for study or who created one of the world's first 'brain drains' by shamelessly recruiting Italian musical geniuses to come to St. Petersburg, Vienna, Paris and London.

BRAVO!'s great closing chapter, "In Columbo's Wake" is a delightful account of the success of Italian and Italian-American singers, composers and musicians in Canada and the United States. Many of these names will be very familiar to music lovers worldwide.

While Mr. Graybill uses fourteen superlatives to conclude his study, the following can suffice to give the reader a hint of the book's value:

1. The Italians gave the world the continuing glory of opera.
2. The Italians gave the world the grand treasury of Cremona-crafted violins.
3. The Italians taught the world written music.
4. The Italians gave the world a small army (over 750 strong) of competent composers.
5. The rest of the world slavishly copied the Italian lead in most things musical.

Just as Mr. Graybill did not need to be of Italian lineage to realize the richness of the Italian and Italian-American musical heritage, one need not be Italian to appreciate that story, as found in these fascinating pages. I'm pleased to recommend BRAVO! to all students and lovers of music.

—Frank Tenaglia

PRELUDE

This is not a technical work. It is an historical survey, written as an ***appreciative tribute*** *to the overwhelming,* ***and unrivaled,*** *contributions which the Italian people have made to music. This survey will reveal the proof that Italians not only gave us some of the world's finest music; but that they also gave us a preponderance of musical forms, musical terms, musical instruments and musical performers. Even more startling, the Italians gave the world far more of the finest musical compositions than any other group. This book's title states our premise: The Italians are the world's musical masters!*

Having stated the premise, let's provide the evidence.

ACT I

GUIDO'S GUIDANCE

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak."

The Mourning Bride (1697)

Act I, Scene 1.

William Congreve

How ludicrous! Savage breasts aren't soothed by music. Quite the contrary. Savages create their own noises to match their savagery. Congreve's thought is unconvincing. If music could truly 'soothe' savage breasts, there would be an astounding reduction of human bickering, battering and warfare.

THE MUSICAL WORLD BEFORE GUIDO

The first real revolution in the development of musical composition transpired in 11th century Italy; but what had developed before that? There has been music in the world since some prehistoric man or woman discovered that one could add a bit of rhythm to a mean existence by tapping the fingers, thumping a log or a skull, or uttering some little collection of guttural notes. Nature provided the early 'instruments' that fell into any one of the three types still in use today: percussion, stringed and wind (which is now divided into two groups, the brass and the woodwinds. Nature also provided the human vocal chords, which could match the sounds created by all primitive 'instruments'. The vocal chords let humans surpass even the birds in the variety and range of sounds that we could create. For perspective, let's consider the people of the Minoan civilization on the Mediterranean island of Crete, which preceded even ancient Greek civilization. The Minoans were

found to have used rattles (percussion), seashells and flutes (wind), and lyres (string). To all this, they added their voices, to render songs unwritten.

MUSIC AND MATH

The first efforts to analyze music were done by the Greeks, including the great thinker, Pythagoras (c. 582-c.507 BC), a long-time resident of the Greek colony in southern Italy. Pythagoras applied mathematics to music. He experimented with two strings of equal thickness and tension, plucking them and discovering that if one string was double the length of the other, the resulting sound was an octave's distance from the first. Through further experimentation, he recognized musical sounds as being measurable, with identifiable octaves and parts thereof. Rather than building on the solid foundations of Pythagoras, to advance the study of music and musical composition, the Greeks decided, without rationale, to apply their new mathematical theories to the study of the heavens, assuming that the movement of heavenly bodies created some sort of mystical 'music of the spheres'. This nonsense gave astrology–the great anti-science–a boost that has carried the silly system into our own day [Please see the explanatory note at the end of this chapter.]. For centuries thereafter, the Italian musicians harked back to the work of Pythagoras and a Greek musical tradition.

Eventually, after the passage of a full millennium, a Roman writer got the Italians into the theoretical study of music. Anicius Manlius Severinus **Boethius** (c. 480-c. 524) was a renaissance-type figure a thousand years before the Renaissance. After spending more than a decade studying in Greece, Boethius became a successful Roman consul and rose to a position equivalent to that of prime minister. He was, however, caught in the political intrigue of the day and was improperly charged with treason. He was imprisoned and, eventually, viciously killed. The emperor was said to have cried over the injustice he had done to Boethius. Despite this early and unjust execution, Boethius, an early Christian philosopher, left a substantial written legacy. He left writings on astronomy, theology, philosophy, logic,

geometry, arithmetic... and music. His work, *De institutione musica*, was the main book on music for the next several centuries.

THE PLAINSONG PREVAILS

Throughout the period of time that the Europeans identified as "The Middle Ages" (about 500 to 1500 A.D.), the main objective of music was as a way to respond to religious inspiration. The main religious musical form was the **'plainsong'** or **'chant'**, a simple, nearly tuneless song used to accompany hymns, psalms and prayers where the words are not metrically expressed (or not written to fit even moderately complex tunes). The one-note singing was rarely embellished. Two forms of plainsong developed. In the one (antiphonal) a choir sings a portion of the words to be answered by a second choir. In the other (sponsorial) a single voice sings and is then answered by a choir. The beauty of the plainsong is that it requires no harmony and it allows the singer and/or listener to focus on the message in the words, rather than being distracted by the beauty of the music.

One Italian, Saint Gregory I (540-604), aspired to be a simple monk; but became a reluctant pope. He became one of the most famous and influential popes in both European and church history and is known, today, as **Pope Gregory the Great**. It is believed that it was Gregory, as pontiff, who gave many of the chants their final form. Earlier forms of the chants (Ambrosian and others) were replaced by those of Pope Gregory. That is why the 3,000 or so plainsongs or chants in use today are tied to his name and identified as **Gregorian chants.**

GUIDO OF AREZZO (GUIDO ARETINUS)

As the end of the first millennium of the Christian era drew near, many Europeans displayed a growing anxiety about what would happen at the end of a thousand years of Christian growth. Countless numbers feared that the world would have run its course and would end in a cataclysm of blazing sulphur! Debts were paid and vows were made,

while the hopeless and the hopeful awaited the end of the world. All this reminds us of man's preternatural fear of the unknown. This preternatural fear was again revealed in the growing anxiety at the closing of our more recent millennium, when there were thousands who feared the worst: our computers would crash!

As the first millennium calmly passed, a young boy, not yet in his teens, was maturing in the Italian town of Arezzo. This youth, **Guido of Arezzo** (c. 991-c.1050) was destined to revolutionize the world of music and to become the first of many Italians who would play major roles in bringing the beauty of music to the dreary world of Medieval Europe.

His name indicates that Guido was a native of Arezzo, a Tuscan town that was also the native village of the humanist poet, Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304-74). Guido became a Benedictine monk, spending the early years of his monastic life in the monastery at Pomposa, between Venice and Ravenna on the Adriatic coast, about 160 kilometers northeast of Arezzo. At the monastery of Pomposa, Guido noted the problem that monks had in remembering their Gregorian chants. He quickly devised a system for helping them learn the chants in something less than 1/20th of the time normally required. However, Guido went far beyond any simple formula for accelerating the learning process of his monastic colleagues. He showed himself to be a teacher and musical theorist; a gifted thinker who gave substance to the study of music. Almost single-handedly, this 11th century Italian monk revolutionized the studying and writing of music.

Despite the knowledge of music that the Greeks established through mathematical analysis, they recognized no way to transfer music to any written form. This likely added to the conviction of St. Isadore of Seville (during the 600s A. D.) that music **had** to be transmitted orally since, he declared, **there was no way to transfer it to any written form.**

Christian monks, however, did stumble upon a very simplified way of committing music to parchment. Some cloistered cleric drew a yellow line to indicate the position of the note, *C*. One additional line–this one red–was drawn beneath the first and identified the lower musical note, *F*.

That is where written music hung until the entire study of music came under the scrutiny of Guido of Arezzo, the 11th century Italian monk who also happened to be a musical genius.

The hexachord was a medieval musical instrument of six strings. Guido is believed to be the inventor of the hexachord's system or six-note scale, based on the six notes delivered by playing the hexachord. He then named each of the six notes by applying the first syllable from each line of an old hymn (*Ut queant lexis*) devoted to St. John the Baptist. Thus, the six notes of his scale became *ut*, *re*, *mi*, *fa*, *sol* and *la* (later musicians changed the initial *ut* to the more pleasant sounding *do* and added the seventh note, which is now designated as *ti*). This scale now carries his name as the *Aretinian* (from Arezzo) *scale*.

Guido of Arezzo is also credited with adding a pair of lines to the musical staff, so that it had four lines, with spaces between for the intervening notes (A critical fifth line was added much later.). He also drew the diagram of a hand, with labels matching his system of musical notation. Today this instructive tool is still known as the Guidonian Hand. How revolutionary was all this work of Guido? Music could now be read, as well as memorized. Music could also be written for the harmonizing of several voices (Now the sextet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* was only a matter of time!). At last, music could be easily composed and stored for posterity.

Guido of Arezzo also wrote an *antiphonary*, a book that offered readers a collection of antiphons, or samples of music which are sung by one choir in response to the singing of another choir. He also wrote two other known treatises, or formal papers on music, one being a 20 chapter work on musical theory(the *Micrologus)*, a writing that was the first to analyze both the plainchant and polyphonic music and which was used throughout the Middle Ages in the monasteries and, eventually, in the universities.

Encountering envy in the monastery, Guido relocated to Arezzo. From that town he was invited to Rome where Pope John XIV became one of his pupils. Later, he returned to the Pomposa monastery. Still later, he appears to be teaching in a French monastery, San Maur des Fosses.

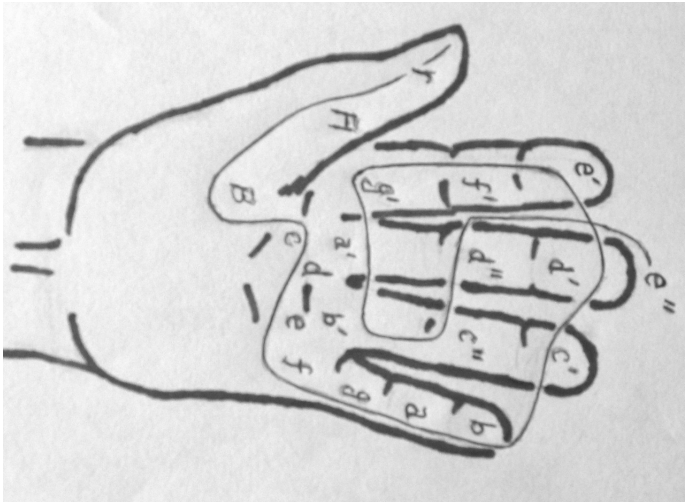
Sadly, Guido of Arezzo then slips from the pages of history. He seems to have spent his closing days in the solitude of a Camaldolese (a religious order founded at Camaldoli in the 11th century) monastery in the vicinity of Arezzo, since a number of Camaldolese musical manuscripts are the oldest known to show the Guidonian system of musical notation. His death went unrecorded, as did the location of his death and his place of burial. Still, his statue now stands in the city of Arezzo and his portrait can be found in the refectory of the monastery of Avellana. The portrait carries this inscription: *Beatus Guido, inventor musicae*. Based on his lasting influence on the world's music, it is unsurprising to read that Guido of Arezzo has been labeled, *the father of music*. His work paved the way for the explosion of musical expression in Italy during the centuries that followed his passing.

A CRITICAL AFTERTHOUGHT

As an aside for which we ask the reader's indulgence, we suggest that astrologers defeat their own claims by imagining the heavens to be a one-dimensional plate. Thus, from Earth's limited base of observation, astrologers would view the heavens without having to factor in the depth of space, a critical flaw. Since the distance of these stars from Earth is measured in 'light years', let's think about those distances. While considering the light years' distance of these stars, keep in mind that light travels through space at about 186,000 miles every second! That means that a single light year is roughly six trillion miles distance! It may sound hackneyed; but, do the math. For example: We can view three great stars, Betelgeuse, Rigel and Sirius and imagine them to be in some sort of celestial proximity, since all three are related to the constellation, Orion ("the hunter"). Yet, if we could grab an endless measuring tape, and stretch it from Earth to these three stars, we'd find that Sirius (Canis Majoris or 'The Dog Star' that follows at the hunter's heels) is less than 9 light years away (somewhat more than 50 trillion miles!), while Betelgeuse (in the constellation, Orion) is 427 light years away (many quintillions of miles farther!). Lastly, the star Rigel (also in the constellation, Orion) is 773 light

years away (many, many quintillions of miles farther then Betelgeuse!). Now, add one other celestial body for consideration: the central glow from Orion's dagger. It is no star; but a nebula, a brightly glittering gaseous cluster that is about 1,600 light years from earth, roughly double the distance of Rigel! The astrologers' one-dimensional view of space is just one reason why we should think of astrology–as a means for predicting the future–as being about as reliable as the ancient systems of studying burned bones or spilled chicken guts!

A scene at Rome, home of the Conservatory of St. Cecilia. (Courtesy, Sara Corbin)



The Guidonian Hand - a 1,000-year-old music-teaching device. (Author's archives)

Scene in Venice, home of Italy's National Conservatory of Music. (Courtesy, Sara Corbin)

ACT II

"BRAVO!"

Concert-goers from many nations, who may not know another word of the Italian language, know that the Italian term, "Bravo!," means "Well done!" or "Excellent performance!" What we should know, as well, is that **well over half of the terms used in the world of classical music are of Latin/Italian origin.**

These are the terms that have allowed composers to reveal the exact meanings sought with each note written and with each 'rest' inserted onto the page of the musical manuscript. These are the terms on which each musician relies when rehearsing and performing. These are the terms that allow each conductor to interpret the composer's creativity into a finished musical work that will captivate audiences who may know nothing about the processes that brought these wondrous compositions to their ears.

To how many terms has the musical world been heir? We consulted just one musical dictionary, that of Louis C. Elson, published in 1909 (see the bibliography). We identified, by national origin as nearly as we could determine it, 1,915 terms. Of the nearly 2,000 terms tallied, 1,095 are of Latin/Italian origin. That's an impressive 57%. Musical terms that came from the German/Austrian tongue amounted to just 25%, and the French contributed about 14%. That leaves a smattering of national groups contributing tiny percentages that, when tallied, cover the remaining three or four percent! The national groups that contributed the few remaining terms included the British, Spanish, Greek, Hebrew, Welsh, Hungarian, Dutch and Bohemian.

Consider just one musical category: *tempo*. The speed of execution of a composition is essential to its conveying the exact feeling of the composer. These words perfectly cover the topic of tempo: largo (at a very slow pace), larghetto (not

quite as slow as largo), andante (at a walking pace), andantino (a couple of meanings are used), allegro (at a lively pace), allegretto (not quite so fast as allegro), vivace (at a very brisk pace), vivacissimo (an accelerated vivace pace), presto (at a very rapid pace) and prestissimo (at the fastest pace). All of the preceding terms are, of course, of Italian origin.

This Italian contribution, musical terminology, is far more critical to the writing, performing and appreciation of music than our tiny chapter suggests. It is one of the cornerstones of modern music, so we give it its own chapter before traveling to Cremona.

Formal shot of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Courtesy, the Pittsburgh Symphony, image by Jason Cohn)

The interior view of La Scala Opera House, Milan, Italy. (Courtesy, La Scala © Marco Brescia)

ACT III

CREMONA AND BEYOND: THE LEGENDARY LUTHIERS OF LOMBARDY

Hundreds of different musical instruments are extant today, from the accordion and the alpenhorn to the zither and the zurna. Let us, however, focus on just two highly revered instruments, the violin and the piano.

Who discovered that a box, with an opening or two over which taut strings could be attached, would produce music? Even more unlikely, who would have thought that even finer music could be pulled from a box if a bow was dragged across the strings? This is lost knowledge. Also lost is the name of whomever first observed that the smaller the box, the higher the pitch to be emitted? Again, we'll never know. Within the sphere of music, as in many other fields, many innovators are unknown and their debts must go forever unrecognized. Also, as musical instruments evolved, there were variations upon variations, with many versions and perversions. We are not inclined to tire ourselves, or our readers, with such musical minutiae. Here, we're offering a simpler account.

The earliest instruments were likely derived from natural objects that lay close at hand, such as the conch; an item that could be easily transformed into a horn. The ram's horn, or **shofar**, for example, became a staple of the ancient Hebrews, who sounded it in battle as well as during other important occasions and who still use it today to add to the solemnity to the celebration of Rash Hashana and Yom Kippur. The Biblical book of First Chronicles repeats lists of instruments that included lyres, harps, cymbals, rams' horns and trumpets. Such lists include all three of the basic musical instruments, percussion, stringed, and wind (which was later divided once more to give us the several versions of

woodwinds and the brass horns). The oldest of percussion instruments was likely the drum, which seems to have been present in every society and to have been in use for at least four thousand years.

The Week magazine (1-20-2006) tells us of something known as the didgeridoo, which *The Week* identifies as "the oldest instrument known to man". It is a horn made from the termite-hollowed trunk of a tree and adapted for woodwind use by the Australian Aborigines thousands of years ago! Clearly, primitive instruments were extant long before anyone knew how to write music.

Perhaps the earliest of the bowed string instruments, and one for which no specimen exists today, was the rebec, with its two or three strings stretched across a low bridge and a few sound holes that opened into a pear-shaped box. The rebec was used over several centuries during the early Middle Ages before there were notable offspring. Then came the viol, a stringed instrument of the 1400's; now long obsolete. Today, there are four principal bowed string instruments of sound that might pose for a family portrait and–standing side by side, tallest to the shortest–would present as follows: double bass, violoncello, viola and violin. A noticeable difference between these and the earlier viol was the presence of the 'c' sound hole in the viol and the change to the 'f' sound hole in the later instruments. Still, when the latter are compared to the old viol, all bear a strong family resemblance.

The star of the family had long been the viola, until the violin (violino) arrived, with its sharper tone and exquisitely higher notes. Today, of all the bowed string instruments, the violin stands alone as the principal instrument of the orchestra, and–along with the piano–the greatest of solo instruments.

One of music's deep mysteries: In the early 1500s, people in Poland, Italy, Germany and France were making violins. However, the origin of the violin is lost. Its early development is lost. There are no existing prototypes. The violin seems to have sprung, full-blown, across the European landscape, as a direct descendant of the viola. The 20th century musical genius, Yehudi Menuhin wrote (see Schwarz, p. 16) that, "In Italy these rustic homemade fiddles gradually evolved in the

hands of the master craftsmen, the earliest of whom were Maggini and Gaspar da Salò and on into the glorious Amatis, Guarnaris and Stradivari we now cherish. The music of the villages became the sonatas of Corelli, the concertos of Vivaldi, and all the great works which are still the basic heritage of the cultivated violinist." **No one knows who made the first violins... although everyone knows who made the best!**

There is a region in northern Italy, just south of the Italian Alps that is known as Lombardy. The region's name tells us that it was the principal area of settlement for the 6th century invaders known as the "Long Beards" or Lombards. The region's name also suggests that it was the ancestral home of two very prominent Americans, Guy Lombardo (1902-77), a popular Canadian-born orchestra leader and speedboat racer (see Act XI) and Vince Lombardi (1913-70), a stellar professional football coach. Significant cities of Lombardy would include Milan, Como, Lodi, Bergamo, Brescia and Cremona. Brescia was home to one of the great Italian **luthiers** (LOOT ee yers) or **makers of stringed instruments,** Gasparo da Salò**.** Da Salò (1542-1609) was among the earliest and best of the violin makers. He was a native of a village on the eastern shore of Lake Garda but started a luthier's shop in the city of Brescia, on the western side of the lake. Catering to the market of the day, Gasparo mostly fashioned double basses and viols; but he had some buyers for his violins and he was shipping some of the latter to France in the late 1500s. The limited number of violins produced in his shop is now nearly priceless. The celebrated 19th century Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, owned a pair of Gasparo fiddles, and proclaimed (Schwarz, p. 227) one of them to be "full of joy," carrying its virtuoso "like an Arab steed." Gasparo Da Salò had one apprentice, Giovanni Paolo Maggini (1580-c.1630), whose several dozen superb violins rivaled those of his master. Gasparo and Maggini brought renown to Brescia.

Milan, the most populous city in Italy today, was an early luthier center. Eighteenth century Milan was known for the quality of its violas, violins and cellos. Among its highly respected craftsmen were Paolo Antonio Testores and several of his family, along with such associates as Carlo Ferdinando

Landolfi, Pietro Antonio Landolfi (Carlo's son), and Pietro Giovanni Mantegassa.

One must acknowledge that several other Italian cities–Piacenza, Venice and Mantua among them–had their luthier shops. However, the city demanding our attention here lies about 50 miles (75 kilometers) southeast of Milan. This is **Cremona**, a town somewhat smaller than Brescia; but destined to become the most talked-about town in the world when violin-making is discussed. Cremona sits along the northern bank of the Po, Italy's longest (about 400 miles) river and the collector of the waters of most of northern Italy for deposit into the ageless Adriatic.

While there is no musical dynasty to challenge that of Germany's Bach family, Italy has given the world an impressive, if different, sort of musical dynasty, that of the Cremona crowd. The 'founder' of the dynasty was Andrea Amati. Our version, listing the most notable, follows:

The Cremona Luthiers' Dynasty
(The exceptional members are highlighted by upper case)

Andrea Amati (c. 1520 - c. 1578) founded the instrument-making school in Cremona where he made violins and other stringed instruments. Andrea is recognized as the man who fashioned the violin with the essential shape, etc., that we have today. His two sons, **Antonio** (1540-1607) and **Geronimo** (1561-1630) were also skilled luthiers; but it was his grandson, **Nicolo Amati**, (1596-1684) who is credited with raising the violin-making craft to even greater heights. Yet, even Nicolo's instruments were to be surpassed in the work of two of his successors, Antonio Stradivari and Giuseppe Guarneri.

The Stradivari family of violin makers begins with a young **Antonio Stradivari** (c. 1644-1737), who worked as an apprentice in the Cremona shop of Nicolo Amati. The first label bearing his name dates to 1666. Sometime during the 1670's he opened his own shop, where he spent a couple of decades trying to improve the Amati design. Finally, he developed a purely Stradivarian model, distinctive for its lengthened neck, changed fingerboard and final form. These became the gems of the musical world, rarely, if ever, matched in tone and beauty. Before his death, in Cremona at the age of 93, more than a thousand violins were crafted by his talented hands. Slightly more than half, about 600, still exist, with about half of that number being in the United States. Few of his other instruments–mandolins, guitars, lutes and harps–have survived. Antonio's two sons, **Francisco** and **Omobono**, were also skilled luthiers, only slightly less capable than their talented father.

The **Guarneri** clan, beginning with Andrea, Nicolo Amati's other famed apprentice, was the family that rivaled the Stradivaris in craftsmanship. Five Guarneri members are noted here for their luthier's skills. Unlike the Stradivari family, the Guarneri family worked both within and beyond Cremona, with shops in Mantua and Venice as well.

Today, only one of the old Cremona violin makers is compared favorably with Antonio Stradivari. That is Giuseppe Guarneri (1698-1744). When Giuseppe began adding his own logo to the violins that he made, people recognized the logo as being a cross and the initials IHS. The initials, of course, are a contraction of the Greek word for Jesus. This is why Giuseppe Guarneri became known as

Giuseppe "del Gesu." Today, the "del Gesu" violins are the only ones considered to be **equal to** (and to the ears of a few, **superior to**) an Antonio Stradivari instrument.

RECENTLY UNFOLDING DEVELOPMENTS

There have been several recent developments regarding Italian violins and violinists. An example: In 1998 a beautiful film was made in Canada. That film, *The Red Violin*, showed a series of adventure stories in which its main character, a fictional Cremona violin of 1681 vintage, reappeared over several centuries and several continents before arriving to become the main piece at a New York City auction.

In 2001 the Violin Society of America, an organization of violin makers, asked three American college professors to try to establish the authenticity of what the Society believes is a genuine Stradivarius violin that was crafted in 1716; but was never sold by its maker. It is known as "The Messiah" and has an estimated value approaching $20 million. While their intense examination couldn't positively prove that it **was** an authentic Stradivarius, they proved that it **could be** the genuine article.

In 2006, a lengthy report (*The New York Times*, 11-28-06, page D1) told of ongoing, computer-based studies that are being made to try to understand the way violins produce their sound and what materials would be needed to duplicate or surpass the sound of the instruments of the Italian masters. Also, the report tells us that the members of the Violin Society of America are among the many people who are sort of 'fiddling' with the traditional design and materials of the violin. They appear to be far from finding any modern methods or materials with which to surpass the quality of the products of old Cremona.

An American literary reference to Cremona's superior violins came from the author/physician Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), who once wrote that "A good and true woman is said to resemble a Cremona fiddle: age but increases its worth and sweetens its tone."

The ancient Greek thinkers foolishly felt that the planets produced musical sounds, which were imagined to be "music of the spheres." Of course they were deluding themselves.

Divine sounds come not from the macrocosm; but from the microscosm. The music of the spheres still emanates, today; but it emanates from the quivering strings and the rippling wood fibers of the fiddles of Lombardy. It's thrilling to contemplate. One expects some modern company to mass-produce computer-generated models of fiberglass violins to be offered at discounted prices at some tacky chain of "Strads-R-Us" outlets. Amazingly, the greatest violinists still seek the greatest instruments, which happen to be the ones that were first crafted in a handful of shops in the Lombardy region of northern Italy from three to four and one-half centuries ago!

When the French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, referred to China as a "sleeping lion," he was doubtless referring to its potential military-political-industrial threat. Today, China is all of these, but it is also a luthier power. A 2007 report (*THE WEEK*, 1-27-07, p.20, referencing the *Los Angeles Times*) informs us that the Chinese are the world's main producers of violins, with just one city, Xiqiao, hosting 40 violin-making companies. A private conversation with an individual who travels in the world of violins suggests to me that, while the Chinese produce a few world-class violins, they also sell unfinished models that may be lacquered in other countries for sale as native-made products.

Other countries are also home to serious violin makers. This includes the United States and it includes Italy. In fact, large numbers of violins are still being made in Cremona. Some of the Cremona luthiers are members of a violin-making consortium, although there are also independent craftsmen. The 21st century fiddles are still being made using centuries-old methods and materials. A buyer who is willing to pay the higher price can go directly to Cremona to choose the wood, the lacquer, and even the historic design of one of the truly-famous old models. There is keen satisfaction in knowing that, each year, hundreds of real violins are being made by real craftsmen in the shops of picturesque Cremona. Several American vendors offer 21st century Cremona fiddles. In early 2007, modern Cremona fiddles carried a price tag of up to 12,000 Euros or about $15,000 in U.S. currency. If one wants a violin of custom design, the asking price might soar to $30,000.