Emil Herrmann

PROFILES

TRUSTEE IN FIDDLEDALE—I

LIKE a good many other people who play the violin, as well as a few who don't, I have always wanted to own a rare old Italian fiddle, and the fact that I own one now is the result of a fortunate combination of circumstances a few years back—a sudden burst of affluence and a visit I paid to a dealer named Emil Herrmann. I had never met Herrmann, but I knew that he had sold Jascha Heifetz and Yehudi Menuhin, among many other distinguished musicians, their violins, and I figured that what was good enough for them was certainly more than good enough for me. His office at the time was at 130 West Fifty-seventh Street, and when I walked in and told him of my interest, his response was at once courteous and lukewarm—characteristically, I have since learned, for he has had much experience with wistful violin lovers whose desire to gaze at and handle the prizes he keeps on hand far exceeds their ability to pay for them. Persuaded at last that I was a full-fledged customer, Herrmann, who can play a violin as well as sell one, questioned me closely about my tastes and musical experience, and presently recommended a violin made by the brothers Antonio and Girolamo Amati, in Cremona, in 1608. Then followed several weeks of excitement and indecision for me—weeks during which I spent many hours in Herrmann's office trying out fiddles. Sometimes I would take friends along and ask their advice about this violin or that one, or have them play various violins for me; sometimes I would take a violin home and ask my wife what she thought of it. When I finally settled on an instrument, it was the one Herrmann had recommended to me in the first place. It is one of the oldest violins in existence. With it came one of Herrmann's certificates of authenticity, which reliable violin dealers everywhere accept implicitly. My certificate includes full-size photographic reproductions of the violin's f-holes and scroll, and reduced photographs of its front, back, and sides, and reads, in part, "The back is of handsome curly maple, the sides to match, the scroll plain. The top is of choice spruce of medium grain. The varnish is of a golden orange brownish color. A fine and characteristic specimen of the maker's work in a high state of preservation, and of excellent tonal qualities."

Nowadays, a person wanting to call on Herrmann in his office has to journey to Easton, Connecticut, some fifty-five miles from Manhattan, where, on a hundred-and-twenty-acre estate called Fiddledale, he lives and conducts his business. In 1938, Herrmann and his wife, Kira, bought for sixty-five hundred dollars an old farmhouse and a few acres of swampland in Easton, as a place to spend weekends. As the years went by, they added acreage to the grounds and wings to the farmhouse until by 1951, when they decided to make it their year-round home, they had a hundred-and-twenty-five-thousand-dollar property, which included a large workshop, a pavilion for outdoor chamber-music concerts, a swimming pool, several natural lakes, a cocktail terrace, a barbecue terrace, parking space for twenty cars, and a bombproof vault for Herrmann's violins with a combined office and study adjoining it. The Herrmanns have a daughter, Tatjana, who is married to Sergei Sikorsky, a son of Igor Sikorsky, and lives in Cologne, where her husband is a representative of United Aircraft, but her parents are far from lonely without her. Herrmann was born in Germany and his wife in Russia, and conditions being what they are in those two countries, they have plenty of relatives over here to keep them company. Living with them at Easton are their adopted daughter, Natascha, whose parents, distantly related to Mrs. Herrmann, died during the Battle of Berlin and who graduated from high school in Bridgeport in June; two brothers of Mrs. Herrmann's, Michael and Vladimir Yurkevich, and Vladimir's wife; and Mrs. Herrmann's sister Gala Turchanovich and her husband. Also present much of the time are Mrs. Herrmann's aunt, Mrs. Helena Memnonoff, and Herrmann's secretary, Mrs. Margaret Popoff, who has been working for him for nearly a quarter of a century. In fact, as an opera-loving friend of Herrmann's remarked recently, the roster of the Fiddledale household sounds like the dramatis personae of Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin."

Another of Herrmann's friends, who is nonmusical himself but spends a good deal of time in musical company, is fond of expatiating on a theory he holds about musicians—that they vary temperamentally according to the type of instrument they play. He maintains that violinists are sensitive and intense, bull-fiddlers placid, oboists nervous, bass-tuba players relaxed and fond of beer, and so on. Herrmann he unhesitatingly puts down as the violinist type. Whatever the truth of this may be, Herrmann, at sixty-five, is a spry man of medium size, energetic and given to quick gestures, with a preference for bow ties, of which he owns close to a hundred. His thick gray hair falls down over his forehead, and his roughly angular face and twinkling gray eyes behind heavy glasses are suggestive of a Bavarian woodcut. His voice is soft and his laughter youthful, but in business matters he has a shrewd and realistic outlook, born of his fifty years at his trade. Since 1925, when he really began to hit his stride, he has sold over five million dollars' worth of rare musical instruments, eighty per cent of them violins and the rest violas and violoncellos (except for one double bass, made by Francesco Ruggieri). The total number of important Italian stringed instruments in the world today has been estimated at from five to six thousand, and Herrmann not only is familiar with almost all the great ones but can recognize them no less surely than most people recognize their friends. On the other hand, he cannot place the faces of men and women he knows, and he frequently embarrasses his wife by asking her to introduce him to someone he has only recently met.

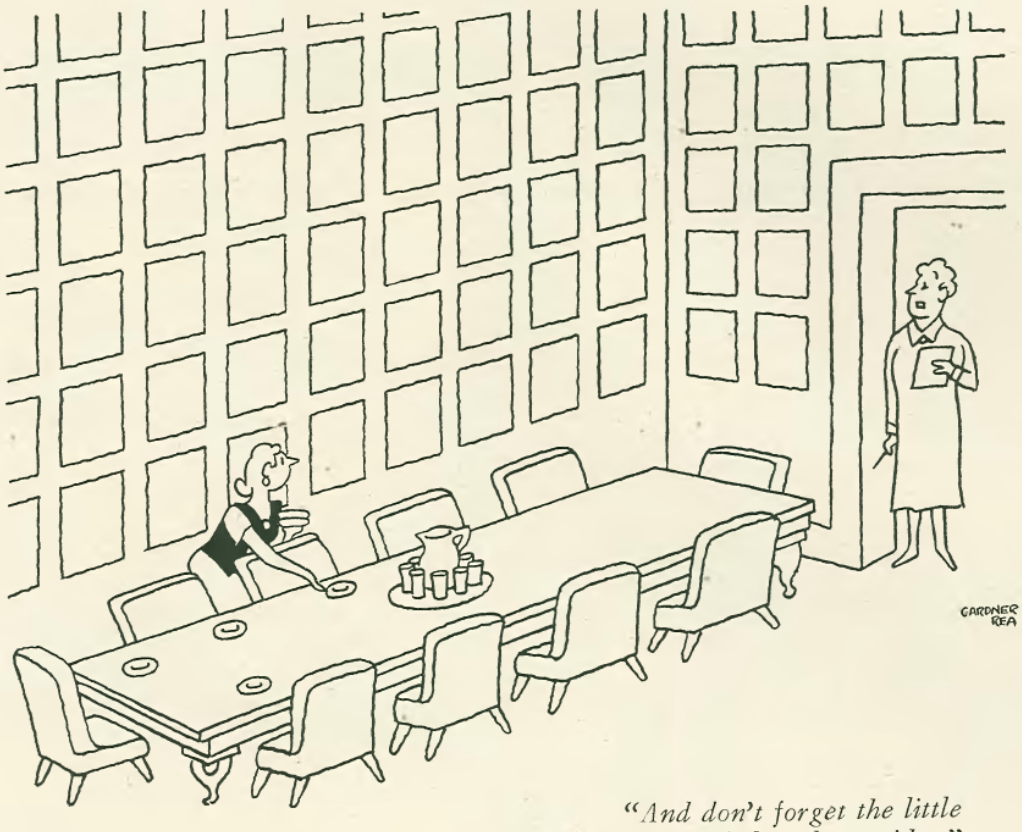
Herrmann has spent a great many hours of his life, both here and in Europe, listening to people play violins as

they try to make up their minds which one to buy. This experimental process can become rather cacophonous, for even the world's great violinists don't always sound as brilliant when they are shopping around as they do on the concert stage. Few players are able to make all violins sound right, even all good ones. Herrmann has found that his customers have an almost universal weakness for bringing several friends and fellow-fiddlers along to his office when they are in a buying mood, and the result can be acoustic pandemonium, with two, three, or more people wandering around and playing violins. As Herrmann continues to bring violins out of his vault, the air becomes as filled with discordant opinions as with dissonant sounds. One of the visitors may prefer the sweet, nightingale tones of an Amati; another, the robust, clarinet tones of a Guarnieri del Gesù; and a third the rich, oboe sound of a Stradivari. Despite Herrmann's skill at sizing up a customer and correctly deciding which violin is the right one for him, his advice is often not appreciated. As I have reason to know, his customers and their friends usually insist on trying out other violins and soliciting opinions from everybody within earshot. Often Herrmann's study, a museumlike place lined with showcases containing rare instruments, is filled with men and women milling about with fiddles under their chin, trying frantically to outplay one another. In no time, they get so confused that no one knows who is playing what violin.

Frequently, the situation is further complicated by the economic facts of life. In most cases, the prospective buyer has only a limited amount of money to spend. Decades of witnessing the struggle between desire and the pocketbook have taught Herrmann how to deal with the problem. "I always ask a customer how much he wants to spend," he says. "There is no sense in showing a person a thirty-thousand-dollar Stradivari when he has only three thousand dollars. After playing the better fiddle, he won't like the cheaper one, and consequently he buys none at all and you've lost a customer. As for experimenting with different violins, I try to persuade people to do it for no more than a quarter of an hour at a time. After fifteen minutes, even musicians with an expert ear lose their ability to discriminate. As a rule, the last violin they play always sounds best. A man who wants to buy a violin should never let someone else play it for him; you just can't judge one when it's played by someone else. You have to play it yourself and get the feel of it. Violin players disagree about violins as much as men disagree about women."

Herrmann tries to dissuade his customers from taking violins home to test them, although he concedes that a man who is thinking of putting thousands, or tens of thousands, of dollars into an instrument should be permitted to try it out in any reasonable way he sees fit. Sometimes when a customer takes home a fiddle he likes and plays it for his relatives and friends, they find fault with it. Many a sale has been lost in this way, and there are many dealers who refuse to sanction the practice at all. When a customer who has taken a violin home returns to Herrmann with a list of objections raised by kibitzers, Herrmann, provided he is convinced that the violin is the right one for the prospect, patiently tries to answer the criticisms, one by one. He usually succeeds in bringing the customer around to his point of view, since he generally knows more about the subject than the customer and all his relatives and friends put together. Herrmann is far from being a high-pressure salesman, however. He thinks a good dealer's most important job is not to sell an instrument—any instrument—but to help the customer find the one that is best suited to him, and to his means.

"A man testing violins gives himself away without knowing it," Herrmann says. "He takes one in his hands, puts it under his chin, plays it, puts it down, and tries another, and so on. Soon it becomes apparent that there's one violin he instinctively likes best—whether he's aware of it or not. In nine cases out of ten, that's the violin for him. Sometimes young boys come to my office with their teachers. Often the pupil has an instinctive preference for a cer-



"And don't forget the little pads, in case one of them has an idea."

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tain instrument, but the teacher—being the teacher, of course—knows best, and I have to convince him tactfully that his pupil may be right. After all, it's the boy, and not the teacher, who's got to live with the violin. Another problem is the customer who buys an expensive instrument and after a while begins to think he's made a mistake. He's paid thirty-five thousand dollars, perhaps, and suddenly, for no particular reason, he starts complaining that the violin doesn't sound the way it should. I ask him to bring it to my office and try it out in comparison with some equally good instruments, and just as suddenly it sounds all right to him again."

People act in a variety of ways when they pick up a valuable violin. Some are so afraid of dropping it that they can hardly put a bow to it. Some are awed by the thought that the small piece of varnished wood in their hands is worth more than, say, a town house in Manhattan. Some get an acquisitive gleam in their eyes of the sort familiar to croupiers at Monte Carlo, to bookies, and to salesmen at Cartier. Like every other violin dealer, Herrmann has had some painful experiences with people who get that gleam. In 1938, a man took a violin at random from Herrmann's vault and walked out with it under his jacket. There were plenty of Stradivaris and Guarnieris del Gesù in the vault that day, but the untutored thief happened to grab the least expensive violin of the lot—a Giuseppe Gagliano, worth fifteen hundred dollars. It was soon recovered; the thief sold it to an instrument dealer for sixty-five dollars, and the police discovered it while making a check of music shops. Last year, a fine G. B. Guadagnini viola belonging to Herrmann was stolen on Sixty-seventh Street from a locked car owned by Walter Trampler, a member of the New Music String Quartet, who had borrowed it from Herrmann. It has not been found, and because the ownership and whereabouts of every really important instrument are well known in the violin dealers' fraternity, it can never be sold for anything like its real value; it can only be passed off as a cheap factory fiddle. Most of the best violins have long had names, which has helped to preserve their identities. Some are named for former owners of prominence (there are Stradivaris called "Paganini," "Auer," "Récamier," "Morgan," "Joachim," and "King Maximilian"); other names refer to the violin's physical or tonal characteristics ("Titian," "Apollo," "Red Diamond," and "Nightingale"), or to a place or event connected with the instrument ("Irish," "Siberian," "Rochester," "Berliner," and "Swan Song," which is the name of Stradivari's last known violin, made in 1737). Sometimes the names have almost no significance; there is a violin called "Lord Nelson," for instance, simply because it was found in an officer's stateroom on Lord Nelson's flagship after the Battle of Trafalgar. Lord Nelson never played a violin and never owned one. Dealers are not above giving a violin an arresting name in the hope of enhancing its value; Herrmann once christened a Stradivari of 1727 "Venus" as a tribute to its beautiful shape and varnish. One of the most famous violin thefts took place at the Maryinski Theatre, in St. Petersburg, one night in 1908; the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaye's "Hercules" Stradivari, made in 1732, was stolen from the artist's dressing room while he was onstage playing his Guarnieri del Gesù. It has never been seen since. In 1919, Bronislaw Huberman's celebrated "Gibson" Stradivari, of 1713, was taken from his hotel room in Vienna. Within a few hours, it was offered to a dealer. The dealer notified a detective agency, and the thief was caught. Then in February, 1936, the same violin disappeared from Huberman's dressing room in Carnegie Hall; no trace of it has ever been found, and Huberman collected thirty thousand dollars' insurance on it. Herrmann believes that Huberman's Stradivari is hidden somewhere in this country, watched over by a fanatic who has no intention of putting it on the market.

NO one has ever dropped in at Herrmann's place to buy a Stradivari as a weekend present for a host, but once, when Herrmann was still in New York, a young lady, the daughter of a wealthy New York banker, bought a violin from him almost as impetuously as that. She appeared in the front room of his shop—where strings and other trifling paraphernalia were sold—and told the clerk

To a heartbreaker

Every salesman has some prospects who seem the most logical for his proposition, but whom he cannot seem to budge, no matter what he does, nor how hard he tries. We have a few prospective advertisers like this. About a baker's dozen. We call them "heartbreakers."

Each of our salesmen has at least a pair of these "heartbreakers." The general idea is he must either get them into the magazine as paying customers, or have some solid reasons why he should cut them out of his life completely.

Well, we're happy to announce we wooed and won two "heartbreakers" recently, one in the west, one in the east. One makes industrial buildings, the other makes textiles. So, you see, they had little in common other than the gold in these NB hills, and an initial reticence to grab their picks and shovels and get to digging. But they're in the book at last with good healthy schedules, busy making customers and friends . . . and they're happy, and we're happy, and our 800,000 readers are happy, too, with at least two more interesting ads to read and do something about each month.

Meanwhile, we've got a stubborn railroad, a temporarily shortsighted bank, a slightly too unaggressive airline, and a few other "heartbreakers" to go after. If you're one of them, don't say we didn't warn you. Nation's Business, *a magazine for businessmen*, Washington 6, D. C.

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on duty that she wanted to learn to play the violin, and would like to have a Stradivari for her lessons. The clerk refused to take her seriously, but the girl persisted, and finally made her way into Herrmann's inner office, where she gazed in rapture at one of the beautiful instruments lying around there. Herrmann, with his air of polite indifference, told her that it was not for her; it was the "Bavarian" Stradivari, of 1720, a violin that had been in the possession of Bavarian royalty for many years. But if she cared to see a less expensive fiddle . . . "Ah, Bavaria!" said the young lady. "What a lovely country! I had the best time of my life there. I want to buy that violin." She wrote out a check for thirty-two thousand dollars for it on the spot. Two years later, she abandoned her studies, but she still has the violin.

If all violin buyers were as cavalier as that, Herrmann's life would be easy, though perhaps rather dizzying. Usually, however, he has to wait months, and sometimes years, for a customer to make up his mind. Some of his biggest sales have been made after ten or fifteen years of waiting. In the majority of cases, people approach the purchase of a violin with as much thought as the average man devotes to buying a house. As a rule, the kind of violin prospective customers are interested in depends upon their position in the musical world. Orchestra players generally want an instrument with a strong, powerful tone that will enable them to make themselves heard over the din raised by their fellow-players. For them, Herrmann may select a Guadagnini or a Gagliano—instruments that are distinguished by their power rather than by their delicacy. Amateurs and chamber-music players prefer beauty of tone; for them there will be a sweet Amati or a mellow Ruggieri in Herrmann's vault. (His own favorites are the Amatis; if he had to choose one violin from all the treasures he has ever handled, he would pick a grand-pattern Nicolò Amati, made in 1656, with double purfling and tiny rubies and emeralds inlaid in the wood. When, being first of all a businessman, he sold it a few years ago, he felt as if he had lost a dear friend.) Collectors are likely to be more interested in the appearance and condition of an instrument than in its tonal qualities; Herrmann recommends to them a violin that hasn't been played much—one with a tone that may even be still a little "hard." And, finally, soloists and great concert virtuosos need instruments that respond easily and combine beauty of tone with carrying power. The choice

for them is a Stradivari or a Guarnieri del Gesù.

Unfortunately, good violinists cannot always afford the instruments they ought to have. In other days, the ratio between a concert artist's earnings and the price of fine violins was more in the artist's favor. For instance, when Nicolò Paganini gave a series of fourteen concerts in London's Covent Garden in the summer of 1832, he collected eight thousand pounds in ten weeks—almost three thousand dollars a concert. Yet Paganini paid the equivalent of only a thousand dollars for his famous viola, made by Stradivari in 1731—the viola that led Hector Berlioz to compose "Harold in Italy." Describing how this came about, Berlioz later wrote, "Paganini came to me and said, 'I have a marvellous viola, an admirable Stradivari, and I wish to play it in public but I have no music *ad hoc*. Will you write a solo piece for me? You are the only one I can trust for such a work.'" To be sure, after Berlioz had completed "Harold in Italy," Paganini was displeased with it, because "it contained too many rests for the viola." Today the "Paganini" viola is worth close to sixty thousand dollars. It is now owned by Mrs. Anna E. Clark, of New York.

Gifted but impecunious young violinists occasionally ask Herrmann to lend them an instrument. If his estimate of their abilities is as high as their own, he is likely to acquiesce, and not entirely for altruistic reasons; there is always a chance that the young artist may find a benefactor who will lend him the money to buy the violin or even pay for it outright. In 1929, when Yehudi Menuhin was thirteen years old, Herrmann decided that the "Prince Khevenhüller" Stradivari, of 1733, was the ideal instrument for the boy. It is a famous violin. Its label bears the notation, in Stradivari's own hand, "*d'anni 90*" ("at the age of ninety"); the old man took a justifiable pride in producing such a masterpiece at that age. Herrmann lent Menuhin the violin for a concert at Carnegie Hall. In the audience was the late Henry Goldman, the blind New York banker and art collector. He was enchanted by Menuhin and the violin, and thought it would be a fine thing to bring them together permanently. He asked Adolf Busch and Fritz Kreisler about Herrmann, and on being assured that the dealer's judgment could be trusted, he bought the "Prince Khevenhüller" for Menuhin. In 1939, Menuhin bought a Guarnieri del Gesù, of 1742, from Herrmann, and later wrote to him, "You can well imagine how happy

I am with the Guarnieri. It is useless to describe to *you* the glory of this instrument. It is fitting that I should again find another lifelong friend through you. . . . I know that now, with two of your adopted children in my possession, an even greater attachment will ensue between us." The attachment increased last year when Menuhin bought a third violin from Herrmann—the "Soil" Stradivari, of 1714. (M. Soil was a nineteenth-century Belgian collector.) Most concert artists swear by either Stradivari or Guarnieri del Gesù, but Menuhin swears by both. Sometimes he plays two violins at the same concert, using his Guarnieri for unaccompanied Bach and one of his Stradivaris for everything else on the program—a feat of adaptability few other violinists of today would attempt.

In 1914, Herrmann chose for Jascha Heifetz a Carlo Tononi, of 1735, on which Heifetz, then thirteen, made a great success. Seven years later, when Herrmann was offered the magnificent Guarnieri del Gesù of 1742—called "Ferdinand David," after the concert-master of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, who once owned it—he decided that this was the violin Heifetz really ought to have. Heifetz was on tour at the time, so Herrmann got in touch with the violinist's father, who came to see him and bought the violin solely on the dealer's recommendation; Jascha Heifetz had never even seen it. Later he wrote Herrmann, "I have wanted to tell you how much joy my 'David' Guarnieri is giving me. It is a most wonderful violin under any kind of playing conditions and I am continually delighted with it. . . . I feel warmly toward you for bringing 'us' together." Among other concert artists who have bought their instruments from Herrmann are, or were, Richard Burgin, Willy Burmester, Adolf Busch, John Corigliano, Benar Heifetz, Louis Krasner, William Kroll, Edith Lorand, Frances Magnes, Nathan Milstein, Mischa Mischakoff, Jeanne Mitchell, Charles Münch, Ricardo Odnoposoff, Louis Persinger, Gregor Piatigorsky, Ossi Renardi, Joseph Rabushka, Ruggiero Ricci, Josef Roismann, Alexander Schneider, Toscha Seidel, Oscar Shumsky, Miriam Solovieff, and Helen Teschner-Tass.

Among Herrmann's most rewarding customers are wealthy collectors, but the species is dying out fast. In Europe, they have declined steadily since the First World War. Today the only nation where an appreciation of fine instruments is backed up by adequate cash is

the United States. When Herrmann first came here, in 1923, there were about fifteen Stradivaris in America; now there are over two hundred and fifty. At present, about half the world's important instruments are in this country, where they change hands much faster than they used to in Europe. The first important collector in the United States was Royal De Forest Hawley, of Hartford, a dealer in hardware and agricultural supplies; at the time of his death, in 1893, he had twelve excellent violins, among them two Stradivaris. Other early collectors in this country were D. J. Partello, a State Department official who started his career under President Cleveland; and J. W. Coggeshall, of Providence, a textile manufacturer. Herrmann's prize customer today is a partner in a downtown investment firm who played the violin as a young man but never owned a really fine instrument until he met Herrmann. Under Herrmann's guidance, he has built up what is believed to be the foremost private collection of violins in the world. He currently owns six outstanding Stradivaris, covering the Master's finest period—the "Harrison," of 1693; the "Rubino," of 1708; the "Parke-Kreisler," of 1711; the "Cessole," of 1716, which is one of the greatest of all; the "De Chaponay," of 1722; and the Herrmann-christened "Venus," of 1727. He also owns two exceptional Guarnieris del Gesù (the "Soil," of 1733, and the "Joachim," of 1737); a Nicolò Amati, a Carlo Bergonzi, and an Alessandro Gagliano; and the Andrea Amati of 1566, which is probably the oldest violin in this country. Herrmann sold him all but one of them.

There are musicians who bitterly object to collectors, maintaining that they buy up fine violins and put them away where they do no one any good. Herrmann, as might be expected, strongly dissents, and he has forceful arguments for backing up his position. In his opinion, the world is indebted to collectors for the preservation of many fine instruments that would otherwise have deteriorated. If all the fine instruments had always been in the hands of professionals, he says, there would be fewer of them today. Some great artists—notably Heifetz, Menuhin, Milstein, Kreisler, and Francescatti—keep theirs in perfect condition; they always clean them carefully and "put them to bed" after using them. But quite a few musicians take shocking care of their instruments—exposing them unnecessarily to the rigors of climate, getting them scratched, and neglecting to remove rosin dust, which

eats into the varnish. (A drop of olive oil will safely remove the dust, but some people use alcohol, which destroys the varnish altogether.) It is true that a violin becomes less responsive in its vibration and tonal qualities if it is seldom played over a period of ten or twenty years, but after a few months of expert playing it sounds as good as before, and sometimes better. Herrmann has an especially low estimate of anyone who feels that it is his privilege to mistreat a violin simply because "I paid for it." "People who have fine violins in their possession are merely trustees for future generations," he says. "Their ownership is temporary. They have the duty of preserving their instruments for posterity." He was also pained by the conduct of one prominent violinist who, thinking something was wrong with his Stradivari, had it taken apart so many times that it lost much of its quality. "Any time a man thinks something is wrong with his Stradivari, he ought to start wondering whether something isn't wrong with himself," Herrmann says.

HERRMANN became associated with violins at an early age. His father, August Herrmann, started out in life, during the eighteen-seventies, as a music teacher in Tauberbischofsheim, Germany, and worked on the side as an apprentice to Carl Adam Hörlein, a violinmaker in nearby Würzburg. Gradually he gave up teaching and began to deal in violins and pianos in Tauberbischofsheim. In 1890, he moved to Frankfurt am Main, where he set himself up as both a dealer in and a manufacturer of violins, with a workshop presided over by Theodor Schrage, a well-known violinmaker. Before long, the senior Herrmann had eight violinmakers on his payroll, all busily turning out instruments that were called Herrmann's Neue Solo Violinen. However, being basically an old-violin man, he closed down his Solo Violinen plant in 1902 and established himself in Berlin as a dealer in rare stringed instruments.

August Herrmann had three children—August, Jr.; Emil; and Bianca. Emil was born in Tauberbischofsheim, on February 2, 1888. (It has since been pointed out to him more than once that February 2nd is also the birthday of Fritz Kreisler and Jascha Heifetz.) Father Herrmann made each of his sons take up the violin at the age of six. Emil liked the violin all right, but he hated to practice. Nevertheless, he ground away at his studies, for his father was not well disposed toward disobedience, and today he is glad that he did, if only because it is

all but impossible to sell violins without knowing how to play one. As he grew up, he went on studying, but he continued to be a far from ardent pupil.

Life in the Herrmann family revolved around violins. The father had a repair shop, where his instruments were put in order, and the boys spent much of their time there, watching the craftsmen at work and getting the feel of violins, but they didn't become apprentices; their father wanted them to be dealers and experts rather than makers. When Emil was eight, his father began explaining the intricacies of violins to him and his brother. For a year, the boys were shown a different, undistinguished German violin every day and ordered to write a one-page analysis of it. The second year, their father gave them better French violins to study and report on, and finally they advanced to the unequalled Italian violins. At the dinner table, violins were discussed much as wine is discussed at the tables of French *viticulteurs*. Every time an old violin was brought into the shop, Father Herrmann would ask his sons to describe its characteristics in writing and try to deduce the country it came from and its maker. It was hard, unexciting work, but it paid off. By 1906, when Emil was eighteen, his father had enough confidence in his judgment to send him out on the road as a buyer and seller. In Wiesbaden, Emil sold a fine Nicolò Amati for twenty-one thousand marks—which was then five thousand dollars and a high price. His father was delighted. Emil spent the greater part of the next few years buying and selling violins in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Holland, and Belgium.

Nowadays, Herrmann looks back fondly at those times. In Budapest, he met Jenö Hubay, who was the head of the Music Academy there, and his pupils, three of whom were Franz von Veczey, Joseph Szigeti, and Steffi Geyer; in Brussels, the great violinists Eugène Ysaye and César Thomson; in Prague and Vienna, respectively, Otokar Sevčík and Arnold Rosé, who conducted classes for aspiring violinists from all over the world. There was much demand for the young salesman's rare Italian wares, particularly in Vienna, where a number of wealthy men, among them Theodor Hämmerle, Wilhelm Kux, Oskar Bondy, the Rothschilds, and the Barons Gutmann and Wittgenstein, were notable collectors. During the slack warm-weather months, Emil continued to study the violin, part of the time at a summer school that the great Sevčík conducted

in the small Czech town of Písek. Ševčík's fame had just been enhanced by the success of his star pupil, Jan Kubelik. "Ševčík would tell you how to break up the most difficult violin concerto into workable scales and passages," Herrmann recalls. "After a while, even the Brahms and Tchaikovsky concertos ceased to frighten you." Herrmann spent one summer in Loschwitz, near Dresden, at a camp run by Leopold Auer, of St. Petersburg, who was perhaps the most successful teacher of the day. Among Auer's pupils were Heifetz, Efrem Zimbalist, Mischa Elman, Kathleen Parlow, David Hochstein, and Cecilia Hansen. Herrmann's summers proved to be a good investment, for in the course of them he made friends with many young violinists who have since become great soloists, noted orchestra players, or prominent teachers in various parts of the world, and many of them are now loyal customers of his.

While on the road during the winter, Herrmann did business in an old-fashioned way, putting on cutaway and top hat and paying formal visits to eminent teachers and collectors to invite them to inspect his stock. "It's hard to realize now that such a life did exist—and only forty years ago," he says wistfully. In the evening, he would attend a concert, and afterward there might be a party that would last through the night. Herrmann remembers one such blowout in the fall of 1911, when he and his brother, who also spent much time on the road, were showing a collection in Vienna. Among their visitors were Eugène Ysaye, who was giving a concert in town, and his son Gabriel. Ysaye invited everybody to a party after the concert. Emil got back to the hotel at dawn, but his brother didn't return until the following afternoon, and Gabriel Ysaye wasn't heard from until two weeks later, when he turned up in Berlin, just in time for one of his father's concerts.

One of Herrmann's best friends in those days was Albert Benois, the son of the famous Russian water-colorist and an artist himself. After a wild career in the Czarist Army, Albert had abruptly decided to become a violin virtuoso. A tall, handsome man of the grand-seigneur school, much given to eating, drinking, and talking, he was contemptuous of anyone who practiced on the violin. As far as he was concerned, he boasted, he would attain his goal through sheer genius. One summer when he and Herrmann were studying under Ysaye in Godinne, Belgium, he told Herrmann about the high life in

St. Petersburg and invited him to come to Russia, where he would be sure to meet a lot of good customers. Benois returned to Russia in the spring of 1914, and Herrmann promised to get in touch with him later. He kept his promise, but with no violins to sell and with no prospect whatever of sampling St. Petersburg high life, for the First World War intervened between the promise and the fulfillment. Herrmann was drafted into the German Army in 1915. After eight weeks of training, he was sent to the Belgian front, and then switched to the Russian front. His company, consisting of inexperienced draftees like himself and led by green reserve officers, was daily diminished by Russian bullets. Before long, he was taken prisoner when, ignoring orders, he advanced instead of retreating and found himself surrounded by hordes of Russians. After a long ride east in a cattle car, Herrmann was interned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Dauria, close to Manchuria, in the vicinity of the Gobi Desert.

All things considered, life in Dauria was not bad. The prisoners were allowed to organize string quartets and orchestras, and Herrmann was much in demand as a violinist. Toward the end of the war, all but the most basic restrictions were lifted, and he was often invited to play in the homes of Russian officers. One night, Herrmann was invited to the home of Colonel Vassily Yurkevich, a retired regimental commander who was chairman of a local building commission. The Yurkevich house was popular with the prisoners of war, because of the excellent food, the damask tablecloths on which it was served, and the Colonel's three pretty daughters. Herrmann especially liked the *bœuf Stroganoff* and Kira, the Colonel's second daughter. For her benefit, he outdid himself in putting on a concert in the Yurkevich music room, winding up with a dazzling performance of a mazurka by Wieniawski. Eventually, Herrmann proposed to Kira and was accepted. There were mutterings among the local Russian social arbiters about a misalliance, but Colonel Yurkevich was pleased. Actually, the engagement turned out to be

a lucky thing for all concerned, for when the Revolution erupted in 1917 and the Red Russians took out after the gentry and the Czarist officers, Herrmann arranged to conceal the Yurkevich family in the prisoner-of-war camp. The family returned the favor a few months later, when the White Russians temporarily regained control and put Herrmann in jail as a German spy. It was Colonel Yurkevich who liberated him.

Herrmann and Kira were married in November, 1919, in Chita, a town in the Transbaikalia region of Siberia. To support his bride and himself, Herrmann played the violin in a Chita cinema, sitting behind the screen and barging into "Ave Maria" when the heroine was in distress or the "William Tell" Overture when the villain took to his heels. A competitor for the job was Alexander Hilsberg, who later became the concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra and is now conductor of the New Orleans Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra. After a few months of this, the Herrmanns left Chita and headed east. Herrmann was eager to return to Germany, and about the best route at that time was via Shanghai, Singapore, and Suez. On the way, in Harbin, Herrmann was able to keep his prewar date with his friend Albert Benois, who had not become a violin virtuoso through sheer genius but was aide-de-camp to the Russian military governor of Manchuria, and thus a person of considerable influence. Benois invited the Herrmanns to the governor's mansion and then gave them a pass on the Manchurian State Railroad to Dairen, where Herrmann gave two concerts and made enough money to get to Tsingtao. After spending six pleasant weeks with members of the German colony in that city, and raising more money, he and his wife got aboard a steamer bound for Europe and arrived in Hamburg in May, 1920. A few months later, their daughter Tatjana was born in Berlin.

IT was not a happy homecoming. Herrmann's brother had been killed in the war, and his father, depressed by the loss of one son, showed little pleasure at learning that his other son had married what he continued to regard as an enemy alien. In 1922, Herrmann left his father's business and started his own violin firm in Berlin. His initial stock was small—a G. B. Guadagnini and sixty minor instruments. After a few weeks, he was commissioned to sell a fine Guarnieri del Gesù and a Stradivari.

He went to London, where he sold the Stradivari for nine hundred pounds, or forty-five hundred dollars, and then to Amsterdam, where he made an excellent deal on the Guarnieri. The possibilities for a violin dealer in the United States were said to be enormous—plenty of money and few good instruments—and in January, 1923, he made his first trip here. Visiting New York, Rochester, and Chicago, Herrmann sold a Nicolò Amati cello, a Stradivari, and several other violins. He went home two months later with fifteen thousand American dollars in cash, which was a fortune in inflation-ridden Germany. He became Germany's most generous employer by paying the men in his workshop five dollars a week. They would spend one dollar and save the rest.

In Germany, the violin business was at a standstill. No one there wanted to sell violins, since the price brought by a Stradivari might not even pay for a streetcar ride a week later. In October, 1923, Herrmann returned to New York, bringing with him his wife and another collection of violins. After staying for a while at the Hotel Wellington, which was the headquarters of Fritz Kreisler and other musicians, Herrmann went into partnership with Oswald Schilbach, a German violin-maker who was working in a tiny room on Madison Avenue. The two men rented office space at 148 West Fifty-seventh Street, as close to Carnegie Hall as they could get. They painted a picture of a violin on the window, which they kept lighted during the evening, and were in business. Theirs was the first music shop on Fifty-seventh Street. It wasn't much of a place—just a salesroom and office in front, containing a desk, a vault, and three cello cases; a middle room that Schilbach used as a workshop; and a back room, where the Herrmanns ate, slept, and frequently entertained. Business was good, and three years later Herrmann left Schilbach and moved into larger quarters across the street. He called his one-man enterprise "Emil Herrmann, Rare Violins," and that is still its name.

During the next ten years, Herrmann divided his time between Germany and the United States, crossing the ocean with a specially constructed trunk lined with compartments for twelve violins; on many occasions, the instruments it contained were worth half a million dollars. He was an enthusiastic air traveller until one day in October, 1926, when, with four Stradivaris, he boarded a small Junkers monoplane bound from Helsinki to Berlin. Over the North Sea,

the lone engine started to cough and the plane settled on the sea. The four Stradivaris (and the pilot and the plane's two passengers) were picked up and landed on a tiny Finnish island. The experience made Herrmann slightly leery of flying, particularly when he is travelling in the company of several Stradivaris.

In the late twenties, Herrmann decided to expand his business in this country, and in the spring of 1929, he opened branch offices in Chicago and San Francisco. A few months later, when the crash came, the demand for violins, rare and otherwise, subsided abruptly. Herrmann was stuck with four offices (including one in Berlin), a payroll that took in office managers with long-term contracts, and practically no business. At this point, it would have been easy to buy up violins at bargain prices, but Herrmann had put most of his surplus cash into expanding his business; in fact, the firm's financial situation became so precarious that he was reduced to pawning the family silver. The Herrmanns managed to scrape along until 1933, when Hitler came to power and Germany's armament drive got under way. Then things got better for a while, as Herrmann, reversing his usual procedure, imported instruments into Germany from the United States. Not for long, however; the Nazis soon decreed that no valuable instruments could be taken out of the country, and people didn't want to buy in the face of such restrictions. Moreover, the mark began to fall.

Early in 1937, Herrmann moved his New York headquarters into a cathedral-like duplex office at 130 West Fifty-seventh Street, where the acoustics were superb and where he installed three vaults big enough to store a hundred and ten instruments. After the war, what with his large number of relatives and violins—both irreplaceable—he grew increasingly apprehensive over the constant talk of New York's vulnerability to an atomic-bomb attack. (His Berlin office had been bombed out in 1942.) Besides, his Fifty-seventh Street setup was extremely costly, and the noise of the city was getting him down. Finally, he moved everybody and everything to Easton, where he is prepared to withstand a long siege by either man or nature. There, in addition to his subterranean study and vault, he has put in three furnaces, in case two should break down; an emergency generator, to provide electric current; a filling-station pump, to provide the gasoline to keep the generator going; and a couple of wells. Mrs. Herr-

mann keeps a deep freeze bountifully stocked with Russian delicacies, and Herrmann's wine cellar is well provisioned. He believes that fine food and fine wines go well with fine fiddles, and points out that Brillat-Savarin once owned the beautiful reddish-brown Stradivari, of 1721, later called the "Macmillen" Strad, after the American violinist Francis Macmillen, of Marietta, Ohio. Last year, Mr. and Mrs. Herrmann became American citizens.

ONE afternoon not long ago, Herrmann and I drove out to Easton from the city. Upon arriving, we went down to his bombproof study, where we found the young American concert violinist Jeanne Mitchell examining a violin with the ecstatic expression of a Moslem pilgrim gazing for the first time on the minarets of Mecca. Miss Mitchell bought a Guarnieri del Gesù, of 1729, from Herrmann last year, after she had borrowed it for two years, and, like all good customers, she has the run of the place. Herrmann complimented her on her performance of the Bruch Concerto with the Connecticut Symphony Orchestra at a concert he had attended the night before in Bridgeport. Miss Mitchell smiled modestly and said it wasn't she, it was Herrmann's wonderful Guarnieri that deserved the praise. Herrmann shook his head. "You played it, Jeanne. And your tone was big and beautiful."

"I love my violin," she said. "During the time you lent it to me, I'd sometimes get up at night and turn on the light to see whether it was still there. The very thought of having to part with it made me so nervous that my hands would start to tremble."

"Well, you've got it now, so relax," Herrmann said. "What's this I hear about your bow?"

"Yes, my bow," Miss Mitchell said. "That's why I came. I'm afraid it's had it. Look."

Herrmann pushed up his glasses and inspected the bow she held toward him. "Do you always play it so tight?" he asked.

"I'm used to it that way," she said. "It's bad, I know."

"Kreisler would have tightened it even more, and he did fine," Herrmann said. "But you're right, it's almost finished." He went to a glass-covered cabinet, took out another bow, and asked her to try it. "Here, take one of these," he added, pointing at several violins lying on a table.

Miss Mitchell picked up the violin that she'd been looking at when we

came in and drew the bow across it. It had a sweet, strong sound.

"Gosh!" she said.

"It's the bow you're trying, Jeanne, not the fiddle," Herrmann said dryly.

"Sure, sure," said Miss Mitchell. "But what fiddle is it, just the same?"

"The 'Monasterio' Stradivari, of 1719," Herrmann told her, and explained that it was named for Jesús Monasterio, a famous nineteenth-century Spanish violinist.

"Oh dear!" Miss Mitchell said, and sighed. She drew a few more notes. "It has that ventriloquist quality. It throws its tone. What shall I play? I never know what to play on one of your violins. They make me nervous."

"Play some scales," Herrmann said.

Miss Mitchell put down the violin and laughed. "You sound like Heifetz," she said. "I remember once, three years ago, when I played for him, he listened through a sonata and a whole concerto without saying anything, and then when I finished, he said, 'And now play some scales.' What a letdown it was!"

"Well, play the Bruch," Herrmann said.

Miss Mitchell played the beginning of the Bruch Concerto, but soon switched to some staccato and spiccato passages to test the bow. "This is a wonderful bow," she said. "Look, you didn't give me a Tourte, did you? I can't afford one." François Tourte, who lived in Paris between 1750 and 1835, is the Stradivari of bowmakers. Originally a watchmaker, he brought a jeweller's precision to the making of bows, improving many of their details. A good Tourte bow sells for from one thousand dollars to several times that. Herrmann assured Miss Mitchell that the bow wasn't a Tourte. "I've always wondered why not a single Cremonese bow has been preserved," he said to me while she was playing a Paganini "Caprice." "I've never seen a Stradivari bow, and yet we know he made them—along with bridges and pegs and cases and everything else."

Miss Mitchell put the violin down. "It's a great instrument," she said, and added, a bit defiantly, "But I wouldn't trade my Guarnieri for it."

"That's the way you ought to feel," Herrmann told her. He went into the vault and came out with a violin in each hand and two more under his arms. He put them on the table and handed one to Miss Mitchell. "Here, try this one," he said.

The violin produced a dark, velvety tone. "Stradivari?" Miss Mitchell asked.

"No," Herrmann replied. "It's per-

haps the finest Pietro Guarnieri of Venice."

Miss Mitchell started to play some of the Beethoven Concerto, and I asked Herrmann whether he didn't think the importance of an instrument, any instrument, is sometimes overrated, since, after all, it's the artist who produces the tone. He nodded. "A bad violinist sounds bad even when he's playing the finest Stradivari," he said. "And a great violinist will sound good even on a mediocre violin. But there's no doubt that a good artist is helped by a good instrument." He reminded me of a well-known violinist whose musicianship is famous but whose tone isn't. "He plays a second-rate violin," Herrmann said. "People don't know it, of course, but they do know instinctively that an element of tonal beauty is missing. I had the proof one night when he borrowed a fine Stradivari from me for a Carnegie Hall concert. Several critics noted that his tone was better than usual."

Miss Mitchell put down the Guarnieri and tried another of the violins on the table. I found myself attracted to one of the others—a beautiful Stradivari, of 1702, with a handsome one-piece back and a full red varnish. Taking a bow from the table, I began to play, too. Herrmann smiled and, after a while, handed me a violin that was varnished in a lovely golden orange. "Nicolò Amati," he said, and tried the Stradivari himself. For some time, the three of us strolled about the study, playing and testing, each trying to listen to the sound of his own fiddle. Mrs. Popoff, the secretary, came in carrying a batch of letters, put them on Herrmann's desk, and, apparently not noticing the noise, walked out again. Presently, we stopped, and Herrmann showed us still another violin, played a few notes on it, and asked us to guess what it was. Miss Mitchell thought it was a Guarnieri. It sounded to me like an Amati.

"You're both wrong," Herrmann said. "It's one of the finest Francesco Ruggieris."

"Oh!" Miss Mitchell said dreamily. "All these wonderful, wonderful violins! This is what heaven must be like."

—JOSEPH WECHSBERG

(This is the first of two articles on Mr. Herrmann.)

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Sam Saba, sales manager for Variety Sportswear, recently became the father of a baby boy. He and Mrs. Saba have named the new arrival Normal Steve.—*Women's Wear Daily.*

Optimists!