PROFILES

TRUSTEE IN FIDDLEDALE—II

ALMOST any intelligent person with a reasonable amount of discernment and taste can become a connoisseur of old furniture, paintings, or china by study, but no one can become an expert on the subject of fine old violins simply by reading books about them. An expert on violins must have not only an extensive academic knowledge of them but an eye and an instinct for them. At the present time, there are not more than a dozen individuals in the world who can pass judgment on the authenticity and merits of old violins and make their judgments stick. Perhaps half of these individuals are dealers of such perception and unquestioned integrity that their word is usually accepted as gospel. One of the best-known of these dealers is Emil Herrmann, a sixty-five-year-old German-born American, who opened the first musical-instrument shop on West Fifty-seventh Street in 1923, and now conducts his business on his estate, called Fiddledale, in Easton, Connecticut.

The showcases at Tiffany's contain many glittering treasures, but one can always be sure that in the company's safes rest many others of even greater value. The same is true at Fiddledale, where Herrmann's vault and his combination office and study, both of them bombproof (his fear of atomic-bomb raids was one of the things that led him to leave New York), occupy part of the basement of the main house. The vault, of course, holds the instruments of greatest value—there are always close to two hundred of them, each in a velvet-lined compartment—but so many rare ones are assembled in the well-furnished study that it rather resembles a comfortable museum. One wall of the room is taken up by three open showcases made of Renaissance wood. In one of them is what is regarded as the world's finest collection of miniature violins—from an eighth to three-quarters normal size—made by such artisans as G. B. Guadagnini and G. B. Ruggieri. The center case contains a collection of *pochettes*, the small fiddles once used by dancing masters, who carried them in a pocket of their jackets, suspended by a cord; two violas d'amore, by Bernardo Calcagni and Fernando Gagliano; a quinton (a five-string viol), by Giovanni Grancino; an old viola da gamba, by Niggell; a tenor viol, by Fernando Gagliano; and several other instruments of venerable age and ancestry. The third showcase contains three fine cellos, a number of violins and violas with painted backpieces, and other curiosities. Across the room is a glass chest in which three magnificent cellos, one of them made by Stradivari, are displayed. On the walls are autographed pictures of great violinists, among them Joachim, Ysaye, Sarasate, and Kreisler—who were all, at one time or another, customers of Herrmann or of his father, who was a renowned dealer in Berlin in the early part of the century. And there are several pictures of Nicolò Paganini, the most famous fiddler of all time, who lived too early to be a Herrmann customer—much to Herrmann's regret. Herrmann has a fine collection of Paganini's concert programs. One for Friday, August 17, 1832, at London's Covent Garden, lists among Paganini's "favorite pieces":

> Grand Sonata Militaire, in which will be introduced Mozart's Aria, "Non piu andrai," followed by a Tema, with brilliant Variations (to conclude with "GOD SAVE THE KING!"), composed and to be performed on ONE STRING ONLY (the Fourth String) by SIGNOR PAGANINI.

A massive steel door opens into the vault. There, resting on their sides in the small compartments, are the great violins. To the left of the entrance are rows of violins by Stradivari, Guarnieri, the Amatis (Andrea, Girolamo, Antonio, and Nicolò), Bergonzi, Montagnana, and Ruggieri, and also what Herrmann thinks is the oldest American violin. It was made in 1775 by Peter Young, of Philadelphia, whose work shows the influence of Jakob Steiner, a distinguished German violinmaker. To the right are the less consequential violins, but they are often crowded by an overflow of Guadagninis, Gaglianos, and Gofrillers from the left. The hundred and eighty compartments built into the vault are not enough to house all Herrmann's stock these days, and dozens of violins are stored on shelves above and below the big show. Not surprisingly, the climate in the vault has to be carefully controlled; during the summer an electric dehumidifier is put to work, and in the winter a trayful of water stands in the vault to moisten the air. Also in the vault is Herrmann's register of most of the important violins that are known to exist. It lists the exact measurements of each; provides a set of photographs showing its front, back, sides, scroll, and f-holes; describes its wood and the color of its varnish; gives its history; and concludes with a statement on its ownership and whereabouts at present. "With the help of this register, anybody who has the necessary training and an instinct for violins should be able to identify and appraise all the great instruments in the world," Herrmann says.

Emil Herrmann

Upstairs is an enormous, barn-style living room furnished generously with couches and easy chairs. On the walls hang paintings of musical subjects. One, by the early-seventeenth-century Dutch artist Jan Molenaer, is called "Le Violoniste." The violin shown in it is an Andrea Amati, and Herrmann cites the painting as additional proof of his contention that Andrea Amati was the creator of the modern violin. Of all the great Italian violinmakers, the Amatis are Herrmann's personal favorites—a preference I learned about some years ago when an unexpected windfall enabled me to go to him with the idea of buying a fine violin. Herrmann has a knowing and persuasive way with customers, and I came away at length with one made by the brothers Antonio and Girolamo Amati.

HERRMANN's business being as informal as it is, prospective customers are often invited to come to Easton for a few days and try out vio-

"I'd know. That's who would know!"

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lins. Past customers are also invited to come and try out better violins; many a possessor of a relatively humble Guadagnini or Gagliano has in time graduated into the circle of persons who own a sublime Guarnieri del Gesù or a Stradivari. Once a man has bought one of Herrmann's violins, he is automatically accepted as a member of the multitudinous Herrmann household, which, in addition to Herrmann and his wife, consists of an adopted daughter (they have a daughter of their own, but she is married and lives abroad) and a great many uncles, aunts, and in-laws. Over this unwieldy ménage presides Mrs. Herrmann, who is the daughter of an old-school Russian colonel; Herrmann met and married her while he was a prisoner of war in Siberia during the First World War. A slim, graceful, tranquil woman, Mrs. Herrmann shares her husband's fondness for violins in general and for Amatis in particular, and is able to identify some of the world's leading violinists on the basis of the sounds that emanate from her husband's study. Sitting in her living room while downstairs an appassionato passage is being played on a Guarnieri del Gesù, she will suddenly say, "Ah, there is Sascha. I must ask him to come up for a glass of tea." Or it may be Toscha, or Jascha, or Mischa, or Grischa. Mrs. Herrmann remains unruffled when her husband brings half a dozen excited fiddlers up from the basement just in time for lunch or dinner. Most of them are hungry, having gone through the emotional experience of playing fine violins that they are pretty sure they will never be able to buy. To cope with such emergencies, Mrs. Herrmann has taken up the American system of pre-cooking and deep-freezing; the things she preserves, though, are not chicken pies and lamb stew but the Russian dishes of her youth in Sevastopol. Hers is probably the only home freezer on either side of the Iron Curtain that is filled with *piroshky*, *kotlety Posharski*, *bitotchky*, *zrazy à la Nelson*, *kulybiaka*, and *kulitch*. The Russian atmosphere at Fiddledale is enhanced by an icon in the easternmost corner of each room, a basement bar painted to look like the "good room" in a Russian farmhouse, and liberal supplies of vodka (Smirnoff's, made in Hartford).

Herrmann speaks good Russian and is fond of caviar, vodka—which he serves Russian-style, with a few drops of lemon juice—and Russian dishes, but at times he feels that he is losing his identity among his wife's relatives, and he is often likely to exclaim, "*Ich bin schon ganz russifiziert!*" ("I'm completely Russified!") In any case, he has become pretty well adjusted to the wild vicissitudes of the Russian temperament. The head of his workshop at Easton, which is in a small building near the main house, is his brother-in-law Michael, or Mischa, Yurkevich, who is an expert at repairing violins. Every afternoon, Herrmann stops in at the shop to see how things are going. While Mischa and Herrmann respect each other's talents, their divergencies in temperament occasionally lead them into arguments about the fine points of violinmaking and repair. One afternoon recently, I accompanied Herrmann on his visit to the workshop, a cheerful, white-walled room with large windows that look out on beautifully landscaped grounds. Mischa was standing at a workbench near one of the windows, where he had an assortment of knives, chisels, saws, calipers, planes, sandpaper, and bits of wood within easy reach; also near at hand was a small iron pot of glue simmering on an electric plate. The place was permeated with the odors of glue and oil. Violins in various stages of repair hung from a rack along one wall. Mischa, wearing a pharmacist's white coat, was inspecting a 1683 Stradivari he had opened by removing the top. Herrmann explained to me that there was a tiny crack in the rib of the instrument, between the tailpiece and the chin rest, which had probably been caused by heat. "We hate to open a fine fiddle," he said. "A little of the wood and varnish always gets lost. But we had to do it."

"Might put in a new bass-bar,"

Mischa said. "This one's pretty far gone." The bass-bar is inside the violin, attached to the belly. It supports the left foot of the bridge and helps to maintain a balance between the vibration of the belly and the vibration of the G string. The right foot of the bridge is supported by the sound post, a slender, cylindrical rod that transmits the vibrations of the belly to the back. There is more to a violin than meets the eye.

Herrmann pushed his glasses up on his forehead, turned the belly of the violin over, and held it up to the light. "Yes," he said. "The bass-bar is sloping. A new one wouldn't hurt."

"It would brighten up the sound of the G string," Mischa said.

"It could stand a little brightening up," Herrmann said. "You got the right wood?"

"Yes. About thirty years old," Mischa said.

The decision to install a new bass-bar was a momentous one, I knew, since it might change the acoustic qualities of the instrument. Violins are like human beings; it often takes a patient a long time to get used to a surgical change. I asked Mischa whether he wasn't worried about how the operation might affect the violin. He smiled confidently and said, "It'll sound better than before."

"How can you be sure?" I asked.

"I know," he replied.

"That's what he always says," Herrmann said, with a touch of irritation in his voice.

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" Mischa demanded. "I've fixed violins that were in a hundred pieces. They're as good as ever now. As long as the original wood and varnish haven't been lost, everything can be fixed."

I asked Mischa what sort of varnish he used to supplement the old. He smiled and didn't answer.

"They all think they have the secret!" Herrmann said gruffly. "Every child knows what varnish is—oils, gums, alcohol."

"Yes," Mischa said, "but how much of each? And what about the mixture? Cold or boiled? If you'd get me some real dragon's blood, I could come up with a fine varnish." Dragon's blood—a dark-red, gummy substance derived from the fruit of a Malayan palm tree—is said to have been used by Stradivari in his varnish. Mischa opened a drawer and showed me a blob of stuff that looked like rosin. "This is synthetic dragon's blood—factory-made," he said. "Stradivari's supplies came from Venice, where Marco Polo had brought them

from China. Nothing was synthetic then. No wonder Stradivari could produce those wonderful red shades."

"In Berlin, we once got real dragon's blood from China," Herrmann said. "And the varnish wasn't like Stradivari's."

Mischa retorted, with some asperity, that Herrmann should have hired Stradivari to run his workshop, and there followed a trilingual argument, the two men switching from English to German to Russian and back. Finally, Mischa exclaimed in English, "Synthetic! Everything is synthetic these days!" He picked up the Stradivari and turned his back to us. We left.

HERRMANN's workday begins with the arrival of the morning mail, which often puts him in a gloomy frame of mind. Hardly a week passes that someone doesn't offer to sell him a "genuine" Stradivari, and every time the newspapers come out with a story about the discovery of an allegedly old violin, he is deluged with telegrams and long-distance calls from people who think that they, too, own a master instrument. Their optimism is understandable: An old violin case has been cluttering up the attic for a long time; upon reading of somebody's find, they open the case, and inside is a violin bearing the label "*Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis Faciebat Anno 17——*;" they now recall that their parents once said Grandpa had brought a violin with him from Europe in the eighteen-fifties; and they are convinced they own a fifty-thousand-dollar instrument. (Fifty thousand dollars—that's what it said in the paper.) The unfortunate truth is that their violin is probably worth between twenty and thirty dollars, at the most. In the past hundred years, tens of thousands of cheap "factory fiddles" have been made, in assembly-line style, in the towns of Markneukirchen, Saxony; Graslitz, Bohemia; Mittenwald, Bavaria; and Mirecourt, France. Practically the entire population of these communities works at turning out inexpensive musical instruments. The men cut bellies and backpieces and make the sides, scrolls, and f-holes; the youngsters apply the varnish and chisel bridges and pegs; the women make finger boards and cases, and print beautiful labels bearing the name Stradivarius. These people get little money for their labor; the profits go to the exporters. It is certainly no coincidence that Markneukirchen—at least prior to the Second World War—had more millionaires than any other German town of com-

parable size. In addition to these factory fiddles, custom-built violins have for years been manufactured in several large German cities. Called *Grosstadtgeigen* (big-city violins), these often bear the marks of good craftsmanship. They range in price from a hundred to a thousand dollars.

Herrmann is, of course, as eager as anybody else to unearth a genuine old fiddle, but he knows that the chances of doing so are infinitesimal. It is true that many precious violins disappeared during the Napoleonic invasions of Italy, Spain, and Austria, during the Franco-Prussian War, and during both World Wars, but the experts are convinced that they were destroyed and that the history and whereabouts of practically all the remaining great violins are known. The careers of the majority of these can be traced back for forty or fifty years; in the case of some instruments, the entire history is known, from the time it left the workshop of its maker. Herrmann concedes that a few masterpieces may be hidden somewhere, but he thinks it most unlikely that the somewhere is the attic of an American house. "Certain violins that were spoken of in old journals and letters and diaries have disappeared," he says. "They may well be in the possession of wealthy or aristocratic families in Italy, France, or England—families who are aware of what they own but say nothing about it. In this country, people have searched their belongings too often to make many more discoveries probable. But I wish we knew something about Russia." Herrmann feels sure that during the Russian Revolution, a lot of fine fiddles must have found their way from glass cases in noblemen's houses to the vaults of the state. It is known that the state owns many important instruments and lends them out to "reliable" artists; the finest Stradivari in Russia is thought to be the one played by the Kremlin's favorite violinist, David Oïstrakh. Herrmann estimates that a dozen Stradivari instruments and from fifty to a hundred other fine old violins, violas, and cellos are now in the Soviet Union. He would be glad to go there and give the Russians the true picture of what they've got. "Some of their so-called authentic instruments would undoubtedly turn out to be fakes," he says, "but there are probably also some genuine ones that haven't been identified." While waiting for a call from Moscow, Herrmann makes regular trips to Italy, where most fine fiddles came from originally and where only very few still are. This is attributable chiefly

to the activities of several Italian dealers during the past century, the most assiduous of whom was Luigi Tarisio, who between 1800 and 1845 bought up fine violins by the score and sold them in France. Present-day Italians long for good violins, and Herrmann is moved by their longing. Four years ago, when he was suffering from rheumatism, he visited the town of Abano Terme, near Padua, where there are therapeutic baths. While he was there, word got around that the man from America had a Stradivari and a Guarnieri del Gesù in his room, and he was besieged by residents of the community who wanted to look at his fiddles. "You walk through an Italian town with a violin case under your arm and people come after you to ask what you have in it," he says.

Herrmann tries to discourage the Americans who beg him to let them bring in a violin that they have found among the family heirlooms and that they are sure is "genuine." He tells them not to waste the time and money, and if they keep pestering him, he tells them just to send him a photograph of the instrument in question. Even so, hopeful owners of violins keep journeying to Fiddledale from all over the country. Almost all of them leave disappointed and some of them leave angry. "They try to persuade me that their forty-year-old factory fiddle has been in their family for more than two hundred years," Herrmann says. "They think I'm lying when I tell them the truth, and they threaten to go to another dealer—who, of course, tells them the same thing. They go home and put the violin back up in the attic, and thirty years from now their children will find it there and think *they've* got a treasure. No one ever throws a violin away, no matter how bad it is. It's a vicious circle."

Only once in his career has Herrmann discovered a previously unknown masterpiece. That was in 1911, in Posen, Germany, where he had gone, as a representative of his father, to deliver an instrument to a customer. He was told that an old postal clerk in the

town owned several violins, among them a Stradivari. Youthful though he was, Herrmann was skeptical, but he went to the clerk's house, just on a chance. His skepticism deepened when he was ushered into a living room that looked like a second-rate antique shop. The clerk showed him thirty or forty violins, all of them factory-made, and Herrmann was about to leave when the clerk brought out a battered old case and opened it. "I couldn't have been more amazed," Herrmann recalls. "It was a Stradivari—no doubt about it—a small one, made in 1684, with a one-piece back and a light-brown varnish. It was in a bad state of repair, with several cracks, but it was definitely genuine. I offered to buy it, along with eight of the other violins, but the postal clerk didn't want to sell. I paid him several hundred marks for some horrible china and bric-a-brac, in the hope of establishing good will, and said I'd be back. Two weeks later, I returned with four thousand marks in gold—nine hundred and fifty dollars in those days. The clerk still didn't want to sell. We argued all afternoon and well into the evening. Finally, around ten o'clock, I took out the money and put the whole four thousand marks, in twenty-mark gold pieces, on the table—four long rows of fifty coins each. It was a tempting, gleaming sight, and the clerk couldn't resist."

Many people bring violins of unquestioned value to Herrmann and ask him to authenticate or appraise them. Herrmann can recognize any good violin he has ever seen before, and even if his previous encounter with the instrument was thirty years back, he can remember precisely the circumstances under which it took place. He keeps himself in practice for such exercises of recognition by going daily into his vault and, alone and in silence, surveying his rows of violins, identifying each instrument simply by one aspect or another of its superficial appearance. It is a routine that he calls "playing a few scales."

When Herrmann looks at a beautiful old violin for the first time, he is something to look at himself. He holds it up in front of him, getting the feel of it and noting its shape. If he can't identify a reputedly good violin within a minute, the chances are that something is amiss. In doubtful cases, his extensive scrutiny begins with the back, where he examines the texture of the wood and quality of the varnish. Then he studies the front, with its f-holes, and the scroll, the sides, and the ornamental purfling along the edges. Every prominent violinmaker had certain peculiarities of de-

sign, and they are as obvious to the eye of the expert as the characteristics of a man's signature are to a bank teller; the cutting of the scroll and f-holes is particularly revealing. Even aberrations sometimes provide a key; Stradivari's eyes grew weak in his last years, with the result that the curves and f-holes of the violins he made then lack the dynamic sweep of his earlier ones. Some violins display the touch of more than one maker. A number of the last instruments made by Nicolò Amati show the hand of Stradivari, who started out as an apprentice in Amati's workshop. In his book "Antonio Stradivari, His Life and Work," the late Alfred E. Hill, a violin dealer in London and one of the great violin authorities of all time, mentioned an authentic Stradivari with a label reading, "*Alumnus Nicholai Amati, Faciebat Anno 1666;*" this would mean that Stradivari was then in his early twenties, which is entirely plausible, for the great violinmakers started early. Andrea Guarnieri made one of his outstanding violins when he was fifteen. In some of Stradivari's last violins, the coöperation of his sons Francesco and Omobono is evident. Experts often argue about certain violins that were made around 1720, when Andrea Guarnieri's son Giuseppe Guarnieri had his young cousin Giuseppe Guarnieri del Gesù, Carlo Bergonzi, and Lorenzo Guadagnini all working side by side in his workshop. Some years ago, Herrmann identified an alleged Giuseppe Guarnieri del Gesù as the work of Giuseppe Guarnieri; on the other hand, del Gesù used his own labels only after 1726, and some of his independently made earlier violins bear his cousin's label. In Herrmann's vault is a violin labelled "Nicolò Amati, 1646," which is known to have actually been made by his less famous son, Girolamo. It was the favorite violin of Benito Mussolini, who always thought he had a genuine Nicolò Amati; apparently, no one dared disillusion him. The collection started by Rudolph Wurlitzer, of the musical-instrument company, used to contain a violin with belly and label by Stradivari and back, ribs, and scroll by Alessandro Gagliano. Hill once bought a fine Stradivari of 1710 with a scroll by del Gesù, and soon thereafter came into possession of a fine del Gesù with a Stradivari scroll; an anonymous violinmaker is believed to have had both violins in his shop for repair and accidentally changed the scrolls. Every once in a while, Herrmann, too, gets a violin that he knows was not made by the man who made

its scroll. When this happens, he puts it in his vault and waits, perhaps ten or twenty years, until he comes across a proper scroll—which, if it turns up at all, is likely to appear on a relatively undistinguished instrument that has been reconditioned by an unknowledgeable repairman. Herrmann has also had occasion to match up violins with their proper labels. He has been assembling a collection of labels since 1908; as a nucleus he acquired the famous collection of the Italian maker Giuseppe Fiorini, and he has kept picking up others in Europe. Labels often tell a story. On the labels of G. B. Guadagnini, for instance, one can follow the maker's wanderings from Piacenza to Milan to Cremona to Parma to Turin; a meticulous man, Guadagnini always changed his labels with his place of residence. Stradivari changed the type face of his labels but never their wording, though after 1729 he changed the Latin "u" in "Stradiuarius" to the Roman "v."

Stradivari's violins vary considerably in value. Although his genius is evident in everything he did, there is a difference in quality, and price, between the instruments of his early, Amati period—they are called Amatise—and those of his "golden" period, from 1700 to 1720, and those of his "late" period, after 1727. Of the approximately five hundred and forty violins (and eleven violas and fifty cellos) that have survived Stradivari, there are a dozen that are generally regarded as supreme. At the head of the list is the "Messiah," which was made in 1716, when Stradivari was seventy-two, and which is now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. (Almost all great violins have honorific names commemorating early owners or attesting to their noble characteristics.) The "Messiah" was once owned by Count Cozio di Salabue, an enthusiastic collector of the late eighteenth century, who acquired several of the finest Stradivari violins directly from the heirs of the master; Cozio's notes have been invaluable in authenticating a number of Stradivaris. Other distinguished Stradivari violins are the "Alard," of 1715; the "Cessole," of 1716; the "Parke-Kreisler," of 1711; the "Dolphin," of 1714, now owned by Heifetz; the "Soil," of 1714, now owned by Menuhin (M. Soil was a nineteenth-century Belgian collector); and the "King Maximilian," of 1709, which Herrmann sold in 1931 to Frau R. Loeb, the wife of a Berlin banker, for three hundred thousand marks, which was then seventy-one thousand dollars and is the

highest price he ever got for an instrument. He has written a monograph, in both English and German, on this violin and one of Menuhin's Stradivaris, the "Prince Khevenhüller," and illustrated it with scrupulously accurate colored plates. For the past ten years, he has been at work on a book in which he hopes to synthesize all that he has learned through research and experience on the subject of the Cremonese masters and their work. He expects that it will reverse many popular assumptions about violins and their makers, and he complacently admits that it will no doubt stir up endless controversies among the experts.

From time to time, Herrmann has to inform the owner of a rare old violin who has brought it in for appraisal that in his estimation the instrument is not worth as much as its possessor would like to believe. Today, the prices of Stradivaris range all the way from around ten thousand dollars to around sixty thousand. Buying violins at a price that will permit him to sell them profitably is, of course, the dealer's most difficult commercial problem. Herrmann is always on the lookout for instruments. Like all dealers, he keeps himself well informed on such events as deaths, divorces, and economic crises involving the owners of rare violins, for they mean a possible seller. Sometimes there is a spirited race among dealers to get there first with the most. The violin market, though not as topsy-turvy as the art market, has had violent ups and downs. There have been times when a fine violin offered at a ridiculously low price has gone begging, and there have been others when a fine violin could not be had at any price within reason. Henry Ford, who never played the violin but

was a zealous collector, once offered a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the "Alard" Stradivari and didn't get it.

Herrmann had dealings with Ford in 1924, when he was invited out to Dearborn to show the automobile manufacturer a few instruments. He took along eight violins, including two Stradivaris and a Guarnieri del Gesù. Ford asked Herrmann to play a certain polka, and when Herrmann said he didn't know it, Ford dispatched a messenger to the Dearborn Public Library for a photostatic copy of the score. After Herrmann had played it on all eight instruments, Ford showed interest in one of the Stradivaris and said he would think it over and make an offer the next day. Would Mr. Herrmann meanwhile leave the instruments with him? Herrmann agreed to do so, and set out for his hotel, full of dreams of making Ford's collection the greatest on earth. Upon entering the lobby, he saw a poster announcing that his friend Jascha Heifetz was to give a concert in nearby Detroit the following evening. Here, he thought, was a most felicitous break; he would get Heifetz to play the violins for Ford—not even the most hard-headed businessman could resist the magic pull of Heifetz' portamento. "I went to see Jascha the next morning," Herrmann recalls. "At first, he didn't want to go to Ford's at all. I kept pleading with him, and in the afternoon he changed his mind and said he would go along, provided I wouldn't ask him to play the violins. He said he couldn't—not with only a few hours before his concert—but I was pretty sure he would break down once we were in Ford's office. When we got there, Ford told Heifetz he was quite a fellow, and Heifetz, who was twenty-three at the time, replied, 'You're a great man, too, Mr. Ford.' Ford asked Heifetz how he liked the violins. Heifetz said he liked them fine. Silence. Then Ford asked, 'Would you care to play any of them?' Heifetz said he never touched a strange violin before a concert. And he didn't. I begged him and Ford begged him, but Jascha never so much as touched one of the violins. Ford was rather nice about it—he showed us through some parts of his factory, and went to Heifetz's concert that night—but he didn't buy any of my violins."

Herrmann has had greater success with other wealthy people. He feels that the high point of his career came in 1946, when he managed to sell the quartet of Stradivari stringed instruments—two violins, a viola, and a

Where to buy Macintosh

NEW YORK. . ABERCROMBIE & FITCH
Albany . . . . . W. E. Walsh & Sons
Athens, Ga. . . . . Gunn's
Atlanta . . . . . John Jarrell, Inc.
Baltimore . . . . . Wm. H. Lohmeyer
Berkeley, Calif. . . . . George J. Good
Beverly, Mass. . . . . Johnny Appleseed's
Birmingham, Ala. . . . . Henry Porter, Inc.
Boston . . . . . Jordan Marsh
Boston . . . . . Arthur L. Johnson Co.
Burlingame, Calif. . . . . Robert W. Gates
Cambridge, Mass. . . . . Sills & Company
Carmel, Calif. . . . . Robert Kirk, Ltd.
Carmel, Calif. . . . . Mahar's
Chicago . . . . . Von Lengerke & Antoine
Cleveland . . . . . The Halle Bros. Co.
Colorado Springs, Colo. . . MacNeil & Moore
Denver . . . . . The Gano-Downs Co.
Grand Haven, Mich. . . . . Reichardt
Hopkinsville, Ky. . . . Frank Cayce Company
Indianapolis . . . . . I. Strauss & Co., Inc.
Kansas City, Mo. . . . . Jack Henry
La Jolla, Calif. . . . Dutch Smith Men's Shop
Los Angeles . . . . . J. W. Robinson Co.
Los Angeles . . . . . Phelps-Terkel
Los Angeles . . . . . Boshard & Doughty
Louisville, Ky. . . . . Roche & Roche, Inc.
Madison, Wis. . . . . MacNeil & Moore
Martinez, Calif. . . . . Jameson's
Miami, Florida . . . . . Eddie Stephens
Milwaukee . . . . . MacNeil & Moore
Minneapolis . . . . . Nicolas, Inc.
Monterey, Calif. . . . . Ed Williams
New Haven . . . . . Gentree, Ltd.
New Orleans . . . . . Godchaux's
Newport, R. I. . . . . Thompson-Forbes, Inc.
New York . . . . . Abercrombie & Fitch
Oakland, Calif. . . . . Larry Cunningham
Pasadena, Calif. . . . . William Taylor
Philadelphia . . . . . Jackson & Moyer
Philadelphia . Sports & Specialties Shop, Inc.
Pittsburgh . . . . . Larrimor's
Portland, Oregon . . . . . Mathis
Portland, Oregon . . . . . M. & H. H. Sichel
Portland, Oregon . . . . . Ray Bolger
Providence, R. I. . . Elsbree-Valleau Co., Inc.
Richmond, Va. . . . . Berry-Burk & Co.
Sacramento, Calif. . . . . Mayhood's
St. Louis . . . . . Boyd's
San Diego, Calif. . . . . Lion Clothing Co.
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cello—that was once owned by Paganini. Assembling a matched quartet of rare instruments has always been one of Herrmann's special delights. It is not an easy thing to do; for example, as his father pointed out, in a 1912 monograph called "Das Ideal Streichquartett," only eleven Stradivari string quartets can be formed, because only eleven Stradivari violas exist. Herrmann assembled one Stradivari quartet in 1937, which was used by the Musical Art Quartet (the Quartet later disbanded, and the instruments are scattered), and there are three other Stradivari quartets in this country, owned by the Herbert N. Straus family, the estate of Felix M. Warburg, and the Whittall Foundation in Washington. But no one had ever been able to bring together the four Paganini instruments—the "Desaint" and "Salabue" violins, of 1680 and 1727; the "Paganini" viola, of 1731; and the "Ladenburg" cello, of 1736. Herrmann's father had tried for years, and so had other dealers, but the best anyone could do was to get control of two of the instruments at one time. Herrmann got hold of the viola and the cello in 1935, and picked up the "Desaint" violin in 1944, when a collector in Boston died. In 1945, he acquired the "Salabue," from a New York investment banker and collector. This is one of the instruments whose entire pedigree is known, right from the day they left the workshop of their makers. It was bought from the Stradivari estate by Count Cozio di Salabue, who sold it in 1817 to Paganini for a hundred louis d'or—approximately four hundred dollars. Subsequent owners were Paganini's son, Baron Achille Paganini; the dealer J. B. Vuillaume; the Comte de Vireille; the dealers Gand & Bernardel; the Italian collector Ernest Nicolini; the dealers Hart & Son; the British collector Frederick Smith; the dealers W. E. Hill & Sons; and the American collector Felix Kahn, who brought it to this country in 1914. He later sold it to Herrmann, who sold it to the investment banker, who sold it back to Herrmann to complete the Paganini set. During this tortuous career, the price of the "Salabue" went up a hundredfold—to forty thousand dollars.

Herrmann offered his Stradivari quartet to several affluent collectors without success. He was thinking of breaking it up and disposing of the instruments one by one when he met the Belgian violoncellist Robert Maas, who had been a member of the celebrated Pro Arte Quartet in Europe. Maas

had come to America in 1944 and was trying to start a similar ensemble here, but neither he nor the three other players he had interested in the project had adequate instruments. Herrmann showed Maas the Paganini quartet, and Maas went to see Mrs. Anna E. Clark, a wealthy New York woman, whose niece he had met in Europe and who was well known for her lifelong devotion to chamber music. Mrs. Clark thought well of the quartet of instruments, and two weeks later sent Herrmann a hundred-and-fifty-five-thousand-dollar check for them. She turned them over to Maas's quartet, which accommodatingly named itself the Paganini Quartet.

In 1946, Herrmann assembled a quartet of Nicolò Amati instruments, which Mrs. Clark also bought. She lent the instruments to the Loewenguth Quartet. Herrmann has since put together a Matteo Gofriller quartet and a G. B. Guadagnini quartet, and hopes to put together a Guarnieri quartet. Because Giuseppe Guarnieri del Gesù, the best of the Guarnieris, made no violas or cellos, Herrmann's idea is to match two fine del Gesù violins with a cello made by Cousin Giuseppe and a viola made by Uncle Andrea. It will be a big day for Herrmann when he achieves the Guarnieri family reunion.

ONE morning not long ago, Herrmann called me up and invited me to come to Fiddledale and play a few string quartets that evening with him and two friends of his. He apologized for giving me such short notice, but I assured him I would be delighted to come. There is almost nothing that would keep me from an evening of chamber music; almost every string player feels the same way, since it was written for the enjoyment of amateurs rather than for the display purposes of professionals. Beethoven wrote his magnificent quartets to be played in the houses of his aristocratic patrons. Chamber music, and particularly string-quartet music, is the pure essence of music; composers of far more ambitious works have turned to it from time to time as a means of distilling beauty from musical instruments that compositions for big orchestras, with their brasses, woodwinds, and percussion, cannot duplicate. From the player's point of view, chamber music is wonderfully satisfying, for, unlike orchestral works or solos, it is usually played in congenial surroundings where, no matter how inadequate the performer may be, his ego is not likely to be injured. For the

most part, chamber music is played not by people trying to prove something to themselves or to others but by people whose enthusiasm outstrips their ability. It's music for the sake of music, the perfect blending of music and companionship, and when I drove out to Fiddledale, through the lovely Connecticut countryside, I felt happy and supremely at peace with the world.

As I entered Herrmann's house, I heard the sounds of instruments being tuned up in the living room. The Herrmann dogs, Butch and Mursik, came barking at me in the hallway, but soon withdrew in amiable indifference. In the dining room, Mrs. Herrmann and her adopted daughter Natascha were setting the table for a late supper. In the living room, where Herrmann had set up four stands, I shook hands with my fellow-players. They were Leopold Godowsky, Jr., an amateur musician, a professional inventor, and the son of a well-known pianist. He was going to play his Amati viola. The cello player was Aldo Parisot, a reserved young Brazilian concert artist, who smokes a pipe even while playing a difficult passage; he owns a Montagnana. Herrmann and I would play the violins.

Herrmann went down to the basement and came back with several instruments. As he was putting them down on a table, he gave Parisot's cello a sharp, clinical glance. "What happened to your Montagnana, Aldo?" he asked, pointing to a tiny spot where the varnish had come off.

"My boy banged his spoon against it," said Parisot, with a young father's proud smile. "He's nine months old. Has no respect for Montagnana."

I took my Amati out of its case, but Herrmann said, "Wait! Let's play the first quartet on Gofrillers. Here, take this one." He handed me a violin, gave a handsome dark-red viola to Godowsky, and told Parisot to go down to the vault and fetch the Gofriller cello. Godowsky played a few notes on the viola; they were sonorous and mellow. "What a beautiful, big tone!" he said. "But it's a terribly large instrument, particularly after my Amati."

"That's why it has that big tone," Herrmann told him.

We played Mozart's "Hunting" Quartet, and I was soon swept up to the rarefied heights of string-quartet harmony, where for me there is some of that exaltation I imagine mountain climbers must experience on silent peaks above the clouds. After the first movement, there was the vigorous tuning and practicing that amateurs go in for at such

times, together with talk of missed rests, of that fourth bar after C, of the repetition of the main theme, and so on. Godowsky told Herrmann how much he admired the varnish of the Gofriller viola. "Until a few years ago, that viola was considered a genuine Bergonzi with a false Bergonzi label," Herrmann said. "But when I first saw it, I was sure it was a Matteo Gofriller. A lot of people thought I was wrong, pointing out that the varnish is soft and thick, with all the earmarks of a fine Cremonese finish. Gofriller, of course, lived in Venice, where the varnish never approached that of the Cremonese. Well, perhaps Gofriller did spend some time in Cremona. At any rate, that's where someone—probably Luigi Tarisio—found that viola. He took it to France, and I guess he thought he'd get more money for it under the Italian name of Bergonzi than under the German-sounding name of Gofriller—who wasn't well known in Paris, anyway. He's probably the one who put the Bergonzi label in it. But it's now recognized as an authentic Gofriller, all right."

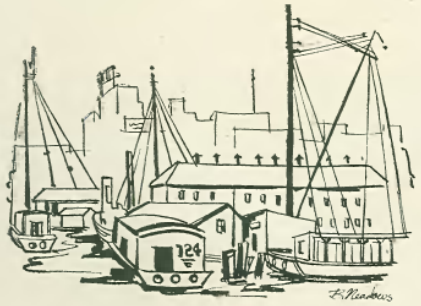
Next, we played one of the early Beethovens—Opus 18, No. 4—and then got ready for Dvořák's "American" Quartet, Opus 96. Herrmann suggested that we change instruments for the Dvořák, and asked us what we'd like. Everybody was in favor of Stradivaris; after all, there are not many private homes in Connecticut—or anywhere else, for that matter—where one has an opportunity to play quartets on Stradivaris.

"All right," Herrmann said. "Go down and help yourself. You know where they are." As the three of us started for the basement, he called after me, "Bring one for me."

"Which one?" I asked.

"Any one. They're all good," he said.

In the vault, the Stradivaris were lying in their velvet compartments, side by side. For myself, I took a violin that was made in 1709 and once belonged to the great virtuoso Tivadar Nachez; I knew it had a wonderful tone, for



I had played it before. Then I picked out the "Monasterio" for Herrmann. Godowsky and Parisot weren't confronted by the necessity of making a choice; among Herrmann's collection of Stradivari instruments there was only one viola and one cello at that moment.

In the Dvořák my Stradivari sang like a human voice; it responded to the slightest pressure of the bow. Like all the greatest violins, its tone was penetrating and soft, sweet and strong at the same time—a perfect combination of beauty and volume. It felt unbelievably good to be playing the melancholy theme—a theme that always makes me think of the sad Czech folk songs of my youth—on such a violin. We finished the Dvořák and were about to go on to something else when Mrs. Herrmann came in and said that the food was not getting better for waiting. Suddenly we all discovered that we were very hungry. We went into the dining room, where we found all the Russian in-laws. Natascha served the food—*bitotchky*, *bœuf Stroganoff*, American ham, and German-style sausages—and Herrmann brought in several bottles of wine. Mischa said he'd liked the Dvořák, but why hadn't I used the 1683 Strad he'd just repaired? "The new bass-bar gives the G string more brilliance," he added. There was talk about fiddles and fiddlers—about Kreisler's avuncular manner as he came onstage, about Menuhin's way of swinging his violin like a baseball bat, about Heifetz, an elegant bundle of discipline, and about another great violinist, who during his performances used to make mental note of who had come to his recital and who hadn't. Then the conversation turned—as it so often does at Fiddledale—to Herrmann's most cherished aim in life: the establishment of a museum of fine stringed instruments. It is a subject on which he is highly articulate and extremely persuasive. "Artists and art lovers have plenty of opportunity to study the works of the great masters," he said, "but what can a violinmaker or a violinist do? There just isn't any place in the world where the great Italian instruments can be studied. I've always thought that anyone who has a great instrument in his possession—including dealers like me—is really just a trustee for future generations of artisans and musicians. But that's not enough. The trustees should get together and pool their treasures—or at least some of them. The violins, violas, and cellos in this museum needn't be the most famous in their fields; they should be typical,

rather than outstanding, specimens. And the museum should be a *living* museum, loaning out its assets to gifted young artists. Well, maybe it will come true someday, if I live long enough. Now, who would like another glass of wine?" Presently we went back to the living room and played more quartets on still other instruments. I tried the Stradivari that Mischa had repaired; it sounded excellent. So did a Ruggieri. And after that I played my Amati.

Much later, after Godowsky and Parisot had gone home, Herrmann and I went down to his study, carrying our wineglasses, and inspected the most recent addition to his collection—a Pietro Guarnieri, of 1742. We sat there talking for a while, and when we returned to the living room, the lights had been turned out and moonlight was the only illumination. From the dining room came the muted sound of voices and a faint tinkle of glasses. My empty violin case was lying on a chair by a window. I looked for a light switch in order to find my Amati, which I'd left on a large table with seven or eight other violins. Before I could find a switch, Herrmann went to the table and ran the tips of his fingers over the sides of one violin after another, as a blind man would read Braille. "Here's your Amati," he said after a moment, and handed me a violin. It was.

—Joseph Wechsberg

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

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"*Ma'am est servie,*" says the headwaiter of The Colony with courtly ceremony. With these three little French words he announces that a royal lady's dinner is starting.—*From "Gone with the Windsors," by Iles Brody.*

No swank like the old swank.

•

Johnny Johnston plans to settle in Hollywood now that he's expecting his fourth baby. Too bad he couldn't have done this when he was married to Kathryn Grayson—if he had, he would still be married to her.—*Sheilah Graham in Silver Screen.*

How many children would they have?

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RAISED EYEBROWS DEPARTMENT
(JUSTICE DIVISION)
[*From the Morristown (N. J.) Daily Record*]

George Lewis of Route 6, Budd Lake, was found guilty of assault and battery yesterday afternoon, after a jury of eight men and four women celebrated for almost two hours.