

Stradivari's *Chant du Cygne* violin: from Bertuzzi to Wurlitzer – and beyond

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The following text is a 2024 revision of that which was published in *The Galpin Society Journal*, Vol. LXX, March 2017, pp. 81-96. The opportunity has been taken to clarify some less-than-satisfactory expressions in the original text, to correct some minor mistakes, and to present the complex narrative in a user-friendly manner.

Part 1

Violins made by Antonio Stradivari during the final years of his life sometimes have an uncertain identity: labels are not always reliable; the practical contribution of Antonio's two sons, Francesco and Omobono, is thought likely but, ultimately, unprovable; the history of these violins as they pass from owner to owner, dealer to dealer, country to country, can be rendered opaque by inconsistent or non-existent documentation. The present investigation addresses these interrelated issues in the context of what may have been the last violin made by Antonio Stradivari – the *Chant du Cygne* violin – which contains a label dated 1737.¹

It is usually suggested that during the last year of his life Antonio Stradivari made no more than a handful of violins. The Hill brothers identify only one such violin, this instrument belonging to 'M. White'.² The Hills subsequently elaborate this brief identification with the following information:

[...] a violin dated 1737, "d'anni 93". This last is probably the instrument mentioned by Count Cozio as belonging in 1822 to Professor Bertuzzi, of Milan. Later the property of M. de St. Senoch, of Paris, it is now owned by a distinguished Brazilian violinist, M. White.³

With respect to 'Professor Bertuzzi, of Milan', his name appears within multiple documents written by Il Conte Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue:⁴

1a. In late 1774 or early 1775, Count Cozio wrote an inventory of five violins which he had bought (almost certainly from Paolo Stradivari, Antonio's youngest son by his second marriage): *Violini Stradivari da Registrarsi* ('Stradivari violins to be registered').⁵ The Count's descriptive text for one of the five violins is presented overleaf (**Figure 1**):

¹ Antonio Stradivari died on 18 December 1737.

² Hill, W H, A F, and A E, *Antonio Stradivari: His Life and Work (1644-1737)*, (1902), p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 92. The Hills' 'M. White' was the Cuban violinist and composer José Silvestre de los Dolores White y Lafitte (31 December 1835 – 12 March 1918). He studied the violin at the Paris Conservatoire and, in 1856, was awarded a *Premier Prix* for performance on the violin. White composed much music for the violin, including a violin concerto. He toured America and spent many years teaching and performing in Brazil.

⁴ Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue (1755-1840) was an Italian aristocrat who devoted a good part of his wealth (and his life) to collecting valuable string instruments. Within hundreds of documents (Biblioteca Statale di Cremona) the Count wrote extensively about these possessions. Many, but by no means all, of the Count's documents were transcribed by Renzo Bacchetta to form the *Carteggio*, published in 1950 by Antonio Cordani (Milan).

⁵ Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, Libreria Civico [BSCr, LC], ms. Cozio 40.

Bigto stampato e Bollato Antonius Stradivarius⁶ Cremonensis
faciebat anno 1731

manuscritto d'ANNI 93

Fondo intiero Bosco marmorregiato, il Covino di med^e grandezza di più semicerchio, rizzo bello: contornato di nero: intatto: le SS grandi, e belle, e mancante un poco ne profili: di molta tromba il p. f [più forte?]: le fasse gionta al poretto, e la vernice più chiara degli altri.

Printed label with seal Antonio Stradivari [of] Cremona
made in the year 1731

hand-written of years 93

One-piece back plate, the wood [has a] marbled [appearance], the neck button is of medium size, more than a semicircle; beautiful scroll, outlined in black; undamaged; the *f*-holes are large and beautiful, sloping a little towards the purflings; very powerful sonority, the strongest [in tone]: the [lower] rib is jointed at the tail-piece end pin and the varnish is more transparent than the others [i.e. the other four violins, all label-dated 1730].

Adjacent to this descriptive text Count Cozio subsequently added two undated annotations in the left margin:

- 1b.** *Questo lo vendei per mezzo dell' ab^e [?] Cesare Rovida al Bignami ora presso il C^e P.B*
This [violin] I sold through the abbot [?] Cesare Rovida to Bignami, now with [Cavalière Pietro Bertuzzi?]
- 1c.** *indi passò al Bertuzzi suonat[ore] che lo ruppe a Parigi nel 1803 in più pezzi e fù male agiustato.*
transferred to the musician Bertuzzi who broke it in Paris in 1803, in many pieces, and it was badly restored.⁷

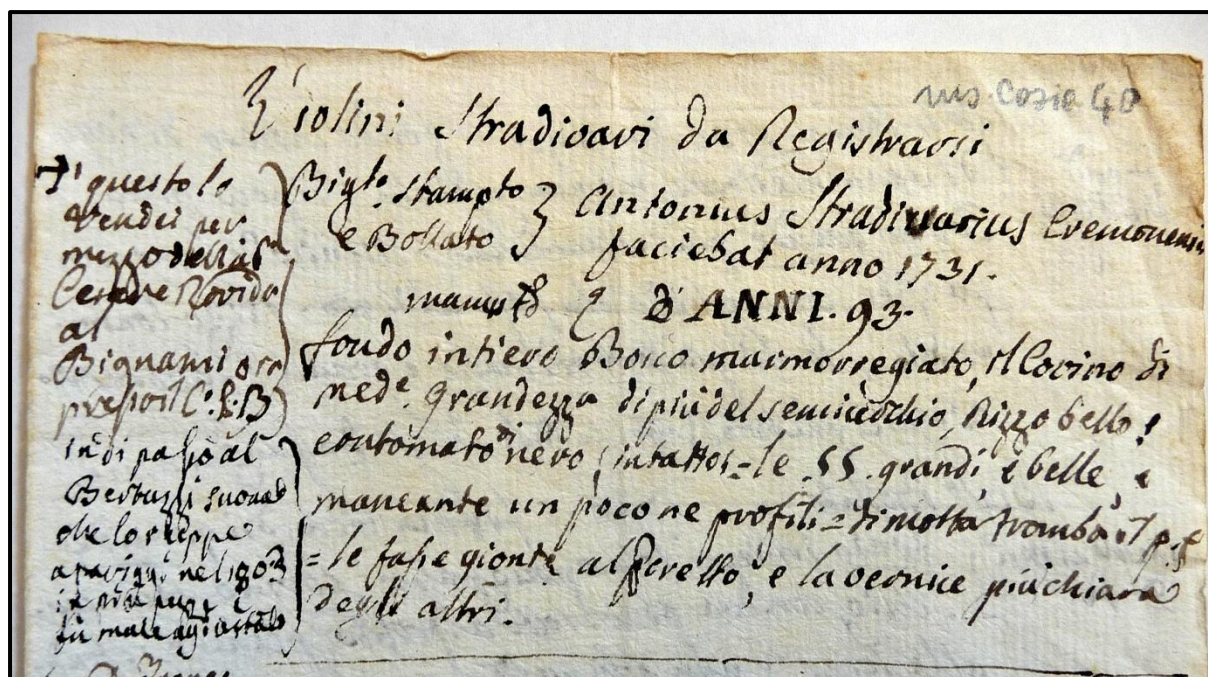


Figure 1: BScr, LC, ms. Cozio 40

⁶ Count Cozio initially writes the letter 'u' (i.e. *Stradiarius*) but then overwrites the 'u' with a 'v'.

⁷ Count Cozio initially wrote 1705, then altered the 7 to 8, and the 5 to 3.

2a. Shortly afterwards (but probably in 1775) Count Cozio wrote out a new inventory,⁸ simply titled *Stradivari*, in which the violin described above was described for a second time (**Figure 2**):

Forma grande, fondo intiero bosco marmoreggiato, il covino di mediocre grandezza che passa il semicircolo, rizzo bello, e contornato nero, tutto intatto, le effe grandi, e belle, e mancante un poco ne profili, di molta tromba, ed il più forte di tutti, le fassa gionta al poretto e la vernice poco più chiara degli altri, con il seguente biglietto, bolato, e tutti arrangiati da Guadagnini

Antonius Stradivarius⁹ Cremonensis

faciebat Anno 1731¹⁰

D'anni 93:

[Built around a] large mould; one-piece back plate, the wood is marbled; the neck button is of medium size that exceeds a semicircle; beautiful scroll, and outlined in black; entirely undamaged; the *f*-holes are large and beautiful, sloping a little towards the purflings; of very powerful sonority, and the strongest of all; the [lower] rib is jointed at the tail-piece end pin and the varnish is a little more transparent than the others; with the following label, stamped; everything 'set up' by [Giovanni Battista] Guadagnini [luthier, 1711-1786].

Antonio Stradivari of Cremona

made in the year 1731

Of years 93.

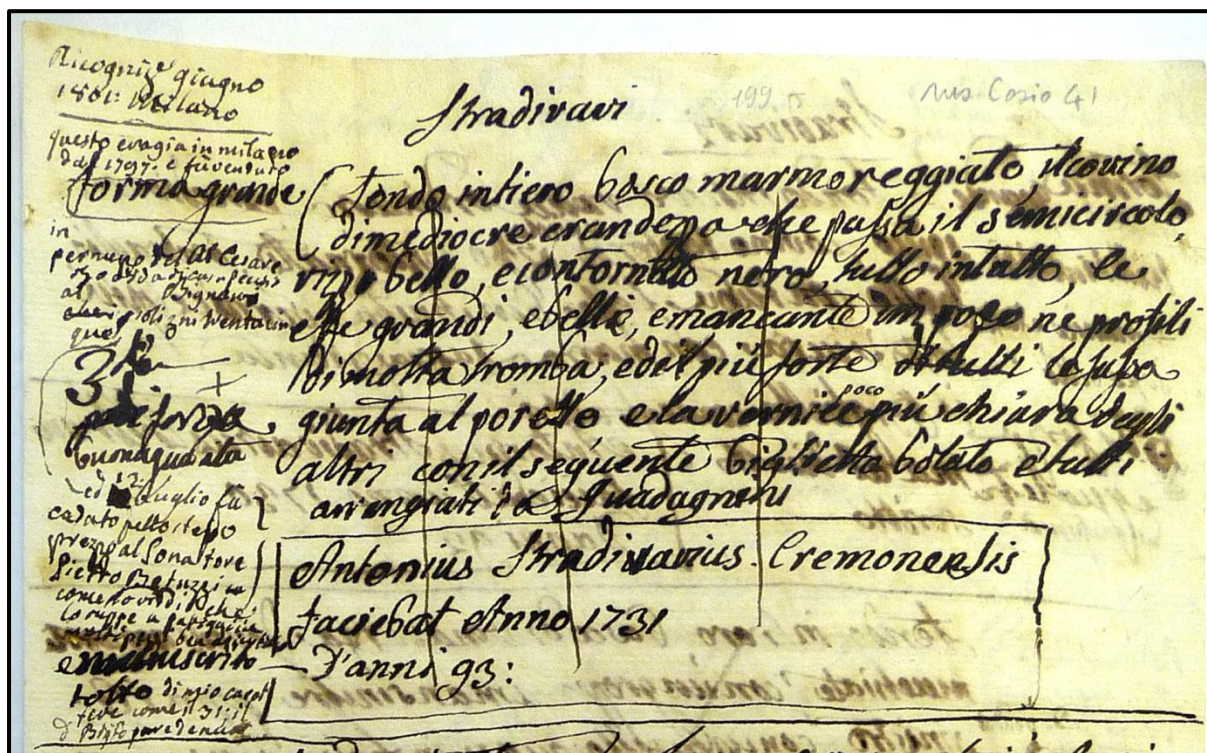


Figure 2: BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 41

⁸ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 41.

⁹ Again, Count Cozio has overwritten the first 'u' with a 'v'.

¹⁰ Count Cozio does not indicate which numerals are printed, which hand-written.

Approximately twenty-five years later Count Cozio returned to this descriptive text and added annotations to the left margin:

2b. *Ricognizione giugno 1801: Milano*

questo era già in Milano dal 1797 e fù venduto in [blank space] per mezzo del Ab[ate?] Cesare Rovida di casa Pecchi al Bignami soli zⁿⁱ [zecchini] trenta cinque ed 12 Luglio fù ceduto per lo stesso prezzo al Sonatore Pietro Bertuzzi come lo vidi che lo ruppe a Parigi in molti pezzi ben aggiustati.

Verified June 1801: Milan

This [violin] was previously in Milan, from 1797, and was sold on [blank space; see **3b.** overleaf] through the abbot[?] Cesare Rovida of the house of Pecchi, to Bignami for only thirty-five *zecchini*, and on 12 July [1801?] it was transferred for the same price to the musician Pietro Bertuzzi; as I have seen, [the violin] was broken into many pieces in Paris; well restored.

2c. *e manuscritto sotto ----- D'anni 93:*

di mio carattere, come il 31: il d^[etto] biglietto pure de nuovo

and hand-written underneath [is the inscription *D'anni 93:*] ¹¹

in my lettering, as is the 31 [of 1731]: this label also new.

This **2c.** annotation shows Count Cozio's clear admission of responsibility for inserting a fake label – printed with blank spaces to be filled in by hand – inside Bertuzzi's violin and writing *D'anni 93* and *31* on that 'new' label. The Count's hand-written *31* numerals confirm the falsity of the label since from 1700 onwards Antonio Stradivari used labels with only the first numeral – **I** – printed (in Roman form); the three subsequent numerals were all hand-written, 'and from this rule he never again deviated [...].'¹² Evidently the Count was unaware of Stradivari's change of policy, post-1700, with regard to his instrument labels.

3a. In April 1801 (i.e. contemporaneously with the **2b.** margin annotation) Count Cozio began compiling a notebook-inventory of his instruments, these instruments having been made by members of the Stradivari, Amati, Bergonzi, Ruger, and Guarneri families, together with further instruments by Cappa, Guidantus, Sneider, Guadagnini, Stayner [*sic*], and Decher:

1801 8 Ap^{le} [Aprile] Milano e seguenti

Inventario de Violini, Viole, e Violoncelli

On page 4 of this notebook¹³ Count Cozio writes a substantial description of a Stradivari violin which (as before) contained a label dated 1731 (see **Figure 3**):

Violini di Stradivario Antonio da molti anni accomperati dal suo nipote a Cremona

Violins of Antonio Stradivari, of various years, obtained from his grandson¹⁴ in Cremona

Oltre li due di d[etto] autore di vernice rossa scura (parte dei dodeci di forma grande ed uno d'essi di f^a [forma] poco più piccola)

Uno di f^a più tosto grande, fondo intiero, tutto marmoreggiato, il covino di med^e grandezza a ²/₃ di circolo: Riccio bello contornato di nero: le SS grandi, belle incavate, mancante un poco ne profili. Le fascie gionte al poretto: vernice ad olio rossa e non tanto carica: Sano in tutte le parti con voce b^{na} [buona] e forte.

¹¹ Count Cozio has deliberately inked a horizontal line to join *manuscritto sotto* to *D'anni 93:*, and, by deliberately leaving a gap in the left-side vertical of the box which surrounds the details of the violin's label, has drawn attention to the importance of the 'connecting' line.

¹² Hill (1902), p. 218.

¹³ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 42.

¹⁴ Antonio (II) Stradivari, the son of Paolo.

Big[liet]^o Antonius Stradivarius Cremonen [sic]
faciebat anno 1731¹⁵

e bolato

d'anni 92 (d[ett]^o 31: e 92: e di mio carattere

[The first] of the two [violins] of this author which have dark red varnish (part of the [group of] twelve of large form, and one of these being of slightly smaller form).

One [built around a] rather large form, one-piece back plate, entirely marbled; the neck-button is of medium size, two-thirds of a circle. Beautiful scroll outlined in black; the *f*-holes are large, [the wings] nicely hollowed, sloping a little towards the purflings. The [lower] rib is jointed at the tail-piece end pin. With red oil varnish and not so intense a colour.¹⁶ In good condition, in all parts; with a voice [sonority] which is good and strong.

Label: Antonio Stradivari of Cremona

made in the year 1731

stamped [with a monogram]

of years 92 (the aforementioned 31 and the 92 are in my lettering).

3b. In the left margin of this notebook-page Count Cozio adds:

Stato venduto per mezzo del ab^e Rovida a 3 Gen^o [Gennaio] 1801 al Neg^{te} [negoziante] Bignami da esso ceduto al Prof^e Bertuzzi sonatore in Milano (allo stesso prezzo di zechini 35 a me pagati ne vale 70 a buono per la bonta e forza

[This violin] was sold through the abbot Rovida, on 3 January 1801, to the dealer Bignami, then transferred to Professor Bertuzzi, musician in Milan (at the same price – 35 *zecchini* – paid to me; worth not less than 70 [*zecchini*] for its quality and strength [of voice].

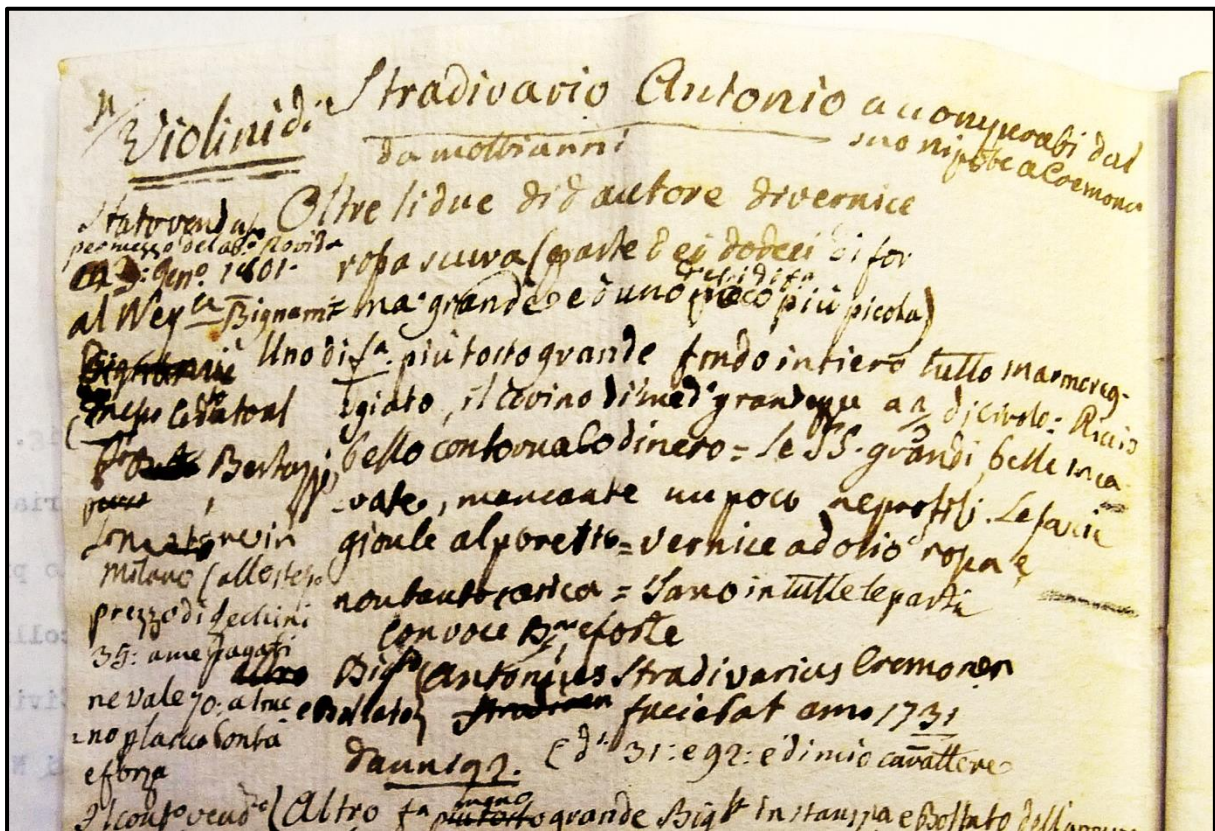


Figure 3: BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 42

¹⁵ Count Cozio's underscoring of the last two numerals was his method of indicating their being hand-written.

¹⁶ 'not so intense a colour' as on the other dark-red violin, label-dated 1715.

Notwithstanding the occasional inconsistencies within these documents – was the violin repaired badly or well after being damaged in Paris? – did Count Cozio write *d'anni 93* or *d'anni 92* on the label? – many aspects of this thrice-described violin remain constant:

1. one-piece back plate which is marbled rather than having reflective bands ('flames')
2. medium-sized neck button, more than a semicircle
3. a beautiful scroll with the edges outlined in black
4. the *f*-holes slope outwards, towards the purflings
5. the lower rib is jointed at the tail-piece end pin
6. the third and fourth date-numerals on the label – *31* – were written by Count Cozio
7. the *d'anni 93* (or *d'anni 92*) inscription on the label was also written by Count Cozio.

In addition, it is all-but certain that Count Cozio was responsible for removing the original label and inserting the new.

4. During these early years of the nineteenth century Count Cozio had also been compiling a notebook-inventory based on the labels he had seen within the instruments which he owned:

Vol. 2^{do} 1800 in 1805 Milano e 1800 in 1809

*Specifica de primari autori de stromenti del tempo che hanno lavorato, estratto da biglietti originali veduti da me I A Cozio ne stessi istromenti, registrati nelle mie memorie Vol Primo e 3^o indi 1816.*¹⁷

Volume 2: 1800 to 1805, Milan, and 1800 to 1809

Details of the prime makers of instruments, of the historical period in which they worked, [this information] based on original labels seen by me I A Cozio in these instruments, registered in my notebooks Volume One and Three, 1816 onwards.

It is unclear whether the Count's notebook is a listing of the labels which he had removed from instruments, or a listing of labels inspected *in situ* and not disturbed. Within the un-numbered and undated pages of this notebook Count Cozio writes one-line details of his Stradivari instruments; these include:

Altro venduto al Bignami ora il Bertuzzi 93 1737

Another [violin] sold to Bignami; currently with Bertuzzi 93 1737

On the facing page, directly opposite this notation, Count Cozio writes:

Nota d'Anto Stradivario è morto in Cremona nel 1738 d'[...?] d'anni 94

Note: Antonio Stradivari died in Cremona in 1738 [...?] of years 94

If Count Cozio believed that Stradivari died in 1738, aged 94,¹⁸ he perhaps realised that the numerals – *31* – with which he had completed the label-date of Bertuzzi's violin should have been *37* (i.e. *D'anni 93/1737*). Given that the Count's main residence was in Milan (the Castello di Salabue, 20 miles south-west of Casale Monferrato, was his summer residence) it would have been a simple matter for Count Cozio and Pietro Bertuzzi to meet in Milan,¹⁹ for the Count to borrow Bertuzzi's violin for a few hours, and for one of the Mantegazza brothers in Milan to remove the violin's back plate and change *1731* to *1737*, especially since the fourth numeral was hand-written, not printed.

¹⁷ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 83 (not transcribed by Renzo Bacchetta).

¹⁸ Antonio Stradivari was probably 88 or 89 years of age when he died in 1737.

¹⁹ See, overleaf, the information linked to footnote 24.

5. Some years later, in 1816, Count Cozio began writing a long account of the history of north-Italian *lutherie*.²⁰

[These] commentaries are offered [by Count Cozio] to aid the understanding and appreciation of string instruments of the various Italian schools (especially the most celebrated authors of the Cremonese school), which may be of some use to those who wish to form a collection [of instruments] of these people, as well as guiding those who wish to learn about the theory of an art which for too long has been in great decline, even more in its substance. [These commentaries] are an initial contribution to such an understanding.

This extensive document was seemingly intended for public distribution,²¹ unlike Count Cozio's inventories and descriptions of instruments which were personal papers, never to be seen outside his private rooms. Within his historical account, in the section devoted to Antonio Stradivari, Count Cozio writes (with his own strike-through corrections):

*Continuò, esso indefesso autore a lavorare sino all'età d'anni novanta tre come annotò ~~nel suo altro violino~~ di proprio suo carattere nel biglietto entrosante nel violino dell'anno 1737, violino ~~che sebbene da~~ ritenuto ora dal sig. professore qui in Milano Bertuzzi, proveniente dal medesimo sig. Cavaliere che con altri dodici acquistò nel 1773 e 1774 dall'or fu sig. mercante da panni Paolo Stradivari, figlio di esso Antonio e fratello di Francesco [...].*²²

Continuing: this tireless author [Antonio Stradivari] worked until he was aged ninety-three, as is annotated ~~in his other violin~~ in his own handwriting on the label within a violin of the year 1737, this violin ~~that although~~ held today by Signor Professor Bertuzzi, of Milan, [the violin] originating from this nobleman [i.e. Count Cozio] who acquired it, together with another twelve [violins], in 1773 and 1774 from the late Signor Paolo Stradivari, a cloth merchant, son of this Antonio and brother of Francesco.

This documentary evidence supports the proposition that the fake 1731 label inside Bertuzzi's violin subsequently had its date changed to 1737.

It has not been possible to locate definitive birth and death dates for Pietro Bertuzzi, but Count Cozio's reference to Bertuzzi's violin being badly damaged in Paris c.1801 suggests that Bertuzzi may have been born around 1770. An internet source²³ indicates that a violinist and composer named Pietro Bertuzzi was active in Italy between the years 1790 and 1826, and that between 1790 and 1799 he was employed at the La Scala opera house in Milan, subsequently at the Teatro di Varese, then at the Società Palchettisti of Como, and, from 1809, at the Teatro Imperiale in Parma. This information is supported by Count Cozio compiling a brief list of names of musical contacts residing in various European cities; for the city of Milan the Count writes *Bertuzzi Pietro primo de' secondi violini* ('Pietro Bertuzzi; leader of the second violins').²⁴

Ernest Doring states, without citing any supportive evidence, that Pietro Bertuzzi died in 1840, and that his violin (which Doring identifies as today's *Chant du Cygne*) was then acquired by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume. Doring adds (again without citing any evidence): 'Vuillaume did sell the violin – that is known; but he left no record indicating the purchaser.' If Vuillaume bought the *D'anni 93(92)/1731(1737)* Stradivari violin which had belonged to Pietro Bertuzzi then he bought, and subsequently sold, a violin with a one-piece back plate.

²⁰ BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 1.

²¹ (through the biography of north-Italian violin makers which was then being compiled by the historian Vincenzo Lancetti; the biography, however, was neither completed nor published)

²² BSCr, LC, ms. Cozio 2.

²³ <http://composers-classical-music.com/b/BertuzziPietroI.htm> (accessed 10 March 2015).

²⁴ Cozio/Bacchetta, *Carteggio*, p. 333.

Doring identifies three 1737 Stradivari violins: the *Lord Norton*, the *D'Armaillé*, and the *Chant du Cygne*.²⁵ The 'Cozio Archive' of the Tarisio.com website (Tarisio Fine Instruments and Bows; accessed March 2015) identifies the same three violins:

Lord Norton (ID 41574): the back plate is in one piece but all known photographs of this violin show that the plate has widely-spaced flames which descend from left to right; the back plate is not 'marbled'.

Comte d'Armaillé (ID 41575): the back plate is shown to be in two distinctively different pieces of wood and the lower-left quadrant of the plate exhibits a sizeable transverse knot.

Chant du Cygne (ID 40540): photographs on the Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive website, in Doring,²⁶ and in the Wurlitzer catalogue (Part 1) of 1931,²⁷ all show this violin's back plate to be in two pieces.

The Stradivari violin which Count Cozio associates with Pietro Bertuzzi – a violin which is described on three occasions as having a one-piece back plate – cannot be connected with the present-day *Chant du Cygne* violin with its two-piece back plate. The post-Cozio history of Bertuzzi's violin is unknown; today's *Chant du Cygne* violin has no documented existence prior to 1870 (see below).

Part 2

On page 29 of his *Catalogue des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius*²⁸ Charles-Nicolas-Eugène Gand describes a Stradivari violin which, initially, had been label-dated 1737:

*(année 1870) Monsieur Nagornoff*²⁹

Violon Stradivarius, 13 pouces 3 lignes, année 1737 a l'âge de 93 ans

(le chiffre de l'étiquette surchargé porte 1707)

Fond de 2 pièces ondes assez larges, mais pas très vives, table de 2 pièces coin gauche du haut ayant été arraché et recollé, petite cassure entre le coin du bas et l'ouïe de l'f, cassure partant du filet du même coin et allant au bas de la table. Tête bien conservée. Vernis rouge brun un peu louche.

1870: Monsieur Nagornoff

Stradivari violin, 13 pouces 3 lignes [358.7mm],³⁰ 1737, at the age of 93 years
(the [third] figure of the label overwritten to show as 1707)³¹

²⁵ Ernest Doring, *How many Strads?* (1945), pp. 340-341, 341-342, and 342-348.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

²⁷ *Rare Violins, Violas, Violoncellos of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries of the Wurlitzer Collection.*

²⁸ Published in 1994 as a photographic facsimile by Les Amis de la Musique, Spa, Belgium. Gand's *Catalogue* is often dated 1870 since that is the date penned by Gand on the front page. However, the *Catalogue* contains descriptive entries which are dated up to and including 1891. Gand died in 1892.

²⁹ Ippolit Mikhajlovich Nagornoff (1847-1900). The year when Gand's description was written – 1870 – is the same year in which 'de Nagornoff' was awarded a *Second Prix* at the Paris Conservatoire. I M Nagornoff is mentioned in the memoirs of Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya (wife of Leo Tolstoy). Nagornoff visited the Tolstoy family in 1876, and 'when he played the violin everyone was thrown into ecstasy' (Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya, *My Life*, ed. Andrew Donskov; University of Ottawa Press, 2010, p. 224.

³⁰ Gand used the 'Foot of Paris' system for measuring his instruments (the same system as had previously been used by Count Cozio di Salabue). In this system one *ligne* is equivalent to 2.26mm, twelve *lignes* equal one *pouce* (27.07mm) and twelve *pouces* equal one *Pied du Roi* (324.84mm). The close agreement between many of the body-length measurements specified by Gand and present-day calliper-derived measurements of the same instruments indicate that he used callipers to measure.

³¹ For someone to alter '1737' to '1707' but leave untouched a second, smaller, label – *if such was present in 1870* – showing the annotation *d'anni 93* would simply draw attention to an impossible conjunction. Gand's 'at the age of 93 years' could be nothing more than his admiring acknowledgement of Stradivari's age in 1737 based on the commonly accepted date of his birth being 1644, this date having been stated in the Fétis/Vuillaume booklet *Antoine Stradivari, luthier célèbre*, pub. 1856.

The back plate is made from two pieces, the flames quite wide but not very bright. The front plate is made from two pieces, the left [C-bout] upper corner having been broken off and re-attached. There is a small split between the [C-bout] lower corner³² and the 'ear' of the *f*-hole, and a split from the purfling of the same corner to the bottom of the front plate [see fn.84]. The head is well conserved. The varnish is red-brown, a little cloudy [opaque?].

Underneath this descriptive text Gand subsequently added, **in red ink**:

18³³ *Monsieur de Saint-Senoche 17500*
1887 *Monsieur [José Silvestre] White 20,000 f*

To repeat: Gand does not identify a second, smaller, label attached to the first (see **Figures 5** and **7** for illustrative examples).

The Musée de la Musique, in Paris, has placed online more than 40 free-to-access digital files, the files containing images of each and every page from the business ledgers which were used by the personnel at the Gand/Bernardel/Caressa & Français violin dealership in Paris during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.³⁴ The ledgers are paired together:

- 1) a Directory (*Répertoire*) showing customers' names in alphabetical order, each name usually being followed by an address; adjacent to the address are numbers which refer to pages in
- 2) a parallel General Ledger (*Grand Livre*) which usually covers the same chronological period as the Directory. Code numbers for all these digitised files follow a consistent format: E.981.8.xx.

Within these ledgers the first appearance of the name 'Nagornoff' is in the Directory for 1866-1875³⁵ with a page reference of 632. Page 632 of the parallel General Ledger³⁶ shows the name 'Nagornoff' and an entry dated 6 July 1870: *réparation complète d'un Stradivarius, 50 francs*. The date of this entry fits precisely with the year-date of 1870 specified by Gand in his *Catalogue descriptif* (see p. 8 of this account). It is thus all-but certain that Nagornoff, prior to 1870, acquired a 1737/1707 Stradivari violin (from J-B Vuillaume according to Gand³⁷), that he took it to Gand in July 1870 for repairs, and Gand wrote his *Catalogue* description while the violin was in his workshop.³⁸

The Directory for 1875-1884³⁹ also shows Nagornoff's name, this time linked to page 1431 in the parallel General Ledger.⁴⁰ On 22 July 1881 the following entry was penned: *Réparation d'un violon 147-1881, 100 francs* (i.e. repair no.147 of 1881). The anonymity of this violin suggests that it was not the Stradivari violin mentioned above, which, if the information from David Laurie is accurate (see overleaf), had been left by Nagornoff, c.1872, as collateral with the violin dealer Claude-Augustin Miremont.

³² The bass side (left side) is assumed.

³³ The third and fourth numerals are not specified.

³⁴ <http://archivesmusee.citedelamusique.fr/en/gand/archives.html>.

³⁵ E.981.8.19

³⁶ E.981.8.14

³⁷ See p. 14 of this account.

³⁸ Why did Nagornoff not use Vuillaume to repair his violin?

³⁹ E.981.8.5

⁴⁰ E.981.8.6

One of the British violin dealers with whom Gand frequently did business was David Laurie (1833-1897). In his *The Reminiscences of a Fiddle Dealer*⁴¹ Laurie relates how he acquired what he implies was a Stradivari violin label-dated 1737: a 'Russian', apparently residing at the Grand Hotel in Paris, had borrowed £200 (5,000 francs) from a Paris violin-dealer on the security of the former's violin.⁴² Nothing more was subsequently heard from the Russian so the dealer enquired at the Grand Hotel only to be told that there was no record of any such person 'answering to the dealer's description' having stayed there. According to Laurie the dealer did not even know the gentleman's name (despite loaning him 5,000 francs!): 'He had nothing as a clue to his identity [...].'⁴³

Ten years after these events the Parisian dealer showed the violin to Laurie:⁴⁴

[...] here was the missing link, for this violin proved once [and] for all that Stradivarius not only lived until his 93rd year, but made at least one violin during that year.⁴⁵ This [violin] had the same letters on the ticket and was written by the same hand, as that which wrote them on the four violins of the year 1736, but instead of D.A. 92 this one had D.A. 93.⁴⁶

If the 'D.A. 93' label was dated '1737', and if the third date-numeral was an un-altered '3', then Laurie's label was not that which was seen by Gand in 1870 – *le chiffre de l'étiquette surchargé porte 1707* (see p.8 of this account) – and Miremont's violin was not that which had belonged to I M Nagornoff.

Laurie describes his 'D.A. 93' violin: 'It was one of the largest of the few which [Stradivari] made of extra size during his best period and had the same noble outline.' Laurie appears to be saying that his 'D.A. 93' violin, despite it apparently being made during Stradivari's final year, could be placed alongside the few of 'extra size' which Antonio Stradivari had made during his 'best period' (presumably his 'Golden Period' of c.1700-1720) and, within that company, his 'D.A. 93' violin was one of the largest.

If Gand's calliper-defined measurement of the back-length of Nagornoff's violin (358.7mm) is accurate – and there is no reason to suppose that it is not – then the violin was certainly slightly longer than the more usual 356-357mm. Whether the additional two millimetres of length would have prompted Laurie's repeated references to the unusual size of his 'D.A. 93' violin – the 'large grand body' and 'such a large body as this violin had' – is questionable.

Laurie also states: 'The wood of the back and rims [ribs] had splendidly marked curls, broad and very distinct' and the front plate had 'rather wide grain running from end to end'. The violin's varnish 'was a decided brown above a grounding of light yellow that gave it a rich antique and picturesque appearance difficult to describe.' Laurie states, admiringly, that the violin 'had been carefully used [...]

⁴¹ Published by T. Werner Laurie Ltd., London; no date but c.1924.

⁴² Laurie (*Reminiscences*, pp. 166-167) does not name the dealer, identifying him only as 'one of the best class of makers and dealers in Paris'. According to Ernest Doring (*How many Strads?*, p. 345) the dealer was Claude-Augustin Miremont (1827-1887). Doring's identification of C-A Miremont appears to flow from the text of a December 1929 letter sent by Alfred Hill to Jay C Freeman (of Wurlitzer, New York); see later in this account. Miremont worked in Paris, subsequently in New York between 1852 and 1861, and then returned to Paris.

⁴³ *Reminiscences*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ See *Reminiscences* p. 168. There is no indication in Laurie's text when the events which he relates took place, other than 1) the 'Russian' had borrowed money from the violin dealer 'ten years' prior to Laurie seeing the 'D.A. 93' violin for the first time; 2) it was 'three years' after that first viewing that the dealer agreed to sell the violin to Laurie; 3) Laurie kept the violin for only 'a short time' before selling it to 'a rich Parisian'; this chronology suggests that the 'Russian' met with Miremont c.1870. Alfred Hill identifies 1872 as the date (see p.11 of this account).

⁴⁵ Laurie, like almost everyone in the latter part of the nineteenth century, believed that Antonio Stradivari was born in 1644.

⁴⁶ It is assumed that Laurie's 'D.A. 93' is an abbreviation of 'D'Anni 93'.

it had literally no flaw worth mentioning. Both inside and out it was quite clear of the smallest addition [...].⁴⁷

Conversely, C N E Gand describes the two-piece back plate of Nagornoff's 1737/1707 violin as 'the flames very wide but not very distinct.' Gand says nothing about the appearance of the ribs, and nothing about the width of the front-plate growth rings, but he does describe the significant damage done to the upper-left C-bout corner of Nagornoff's violin, identifies the front-plate splits, and concludes by stating that the varnish was of a 'red-brown' colour. These elements of Gand's description do not match with those of Laurie's description. The evidence points away from the Nagornoff/Gand violin being the Miremont/Laurie violin.

Laurie continues:

The maker's great age was clearly shewn in the workmanship of [the violin]; the cutting of the ff [f-holes] was wider [than normal] and the space at their turn was double indeed nearly treble his ordinary make, and their edges shaky in their cuttings'.⁴⁸

From the limited photographic evidence currently available for the *Chant du Cygne* violin, it can be seen that the longitudinal 'mouth' of each f-hole is slightly wider than is usually seen on Antonio Stradivari violins. The 'space' which Laurie refers to is the distance between the apex of the f-hole wings (both upper and lower) and the curving edge of the f-hole directly opposite the tip of the wing; these upper and lower gaps are certainly large on the *Chant du Cygne* violin. However, the spaces on the f-holes of the 1736 *Muntz* violin are equally sizeable, as they are on the *Duke of Alcantara* violin, the *Habeneck* violin, and the *Scottish University* violin. Laurie's 'spaces' are not unique to the *Chant du Cygne* violin.

Laurie states that he paid Miremont £600 (approximately 15,000 francs) for the 'D.A. 93' violin. He adds: 'I only kept it a short time and then sold it to a rich Parisian who baptized it "Chant du Cygne" with reference to the well-known legend.'⁴⁹ Laurie does not indicate the date of this sale, nor does he identify his 'rich Parisian'.

Ernest Doring, seemingly using as his source the text of a letter sent in December 1929 by Alfred Hill to Jay C Freeman,⁵⁰ relays the following alternative information:

Miremont [...] sold the [*Chant du Cygne*] violin to a Russian violinist named Nagornoff who was the winner of the Grand Prix of 1870 at the Paris Conservatoire.⁵¹ He [Nagornoff] is supposed to have agreed, in 1872, to pay 4,500 francs for it but that the instrument reverted to Miremont, presumably because he [Nagornoff] could not fulfil the contract.⁵²

The information given by Laurie in his *Reminiscences* – that an unidentified Russian who owned a 'D.A. 93/1737' violin borrowed 5,000 francs from an unidentified Paris violin dealer on the security of the former's violin – fails to match with Alfred Hill's account of Miremont's entirely normal (albeit inconclusive) involvement with Nagornoff in 1872, an account which itself fails to match with the evidence found in Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* entry from 1870 and Gand's letter to José White dated 22 March 1887 (see pp. 14-15 of this account).

⁴⁷ *Reminiscences*, pp. 168-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁰ Perhaps Jay Freeman, on behalf of the firm of Wurlitzer (which, in 1929, acquired the *Chant du Cygne* violin as part of the Wanamaker collection) had sought advice and information about the violin from Alfred Hill.

⁵¹ cf. footnote 29.

⁵² Doring, p. 348. As already shown (see p.8 of this account) by 1870 Nagornoff was already the owner of a 1737/1707 Stradivari violin.

According to Ernest Doring, Laurie paid '12,000 francs, about £480' (GBP) for the Miremont violin,⁵³ brought the violin back to England, and tried to sell it to the Hills. Doring again quotes from Alfred Hill's letter:

[Laurie] tried in vain to induce my Father [William Ebsworth Hill] to buy it, and, failing to find a purchaser in this country, he took the instrument back to Paris and there sold it to a French Senator of the name of St. Senoch, who was then forming a Quartet of 'Stradivaris'.⁵⁴

The fact that W E Hill refused to buy what was, if genuine, one of the last violins (perhaps the very last violin) made in the Stradivari workshop while Antonio was still alive suggests, perhaps, either a shortage of financial resources or doubts as to the authenticity of Laurie's violin. It is noticeable that Alfred Hill underscores his father's refusal to buy Laurie's violin by adding that Laurie '[failed] to find a purchaser in this country'. It is not known whether the Hills sought from their contacts in Paris corroboration of Laurie's (presumably oral) account of his violin's history.⁵⁵

If, despite the discrepancies, the Gand/Nagornoff/Saint-Senoch violin is understood to be the same as the Miremont/Laurie/Saint-Senoch violin then it suggests that Nagornoff was the Russian who, c. 1872, left his Stradivari violin as collateral with C-A Miremont (but why not with Gand? – or with Vuillaume?), that Laurie subsequently bought the violin from Miremont, and, having been refused by W E Hill, sold the violin to M. de Saint-Senoch. Objections to this narrative would focus on the clear differences between Gand's description of Nagornoff's violin and Laurie's description of Miremont's violin.

Following the death of Edouard-Marie Hainque de Saint-Senoch on 3 November 1885, his quartet of Stradivari instruments was auctioned at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris in May 1886; the event was subsequently reported in the pages of the Parisian news-fortnightly, *le Ménestrel*:⁵⁶

It was last Saturday [15 May] that there took place, at the Hôtel Drouot, the auction of the superb quartet of Stradivari [instruments], the property of the heirs of M. de Saint-Senoch. This auction attracted a considerable crowd, not just music-lovers but also the 'curious', and it was difficult to approach the table on which the instruments were displayed. The bidding was very lively, and it was with quite some excitement that one heard, at each adjudication, the auctioneer's hammer-blow on the table. The auction was organised under the auspices of *Messieurs Gand & Bernardel frères*.

The violin of 1704, for which was asked 10,000 francs, received an immediate bid of 5,000 and was sold for 7,000 francs to a music-lover from Neuilly, M. Bachelez. The admirable violin dated 1737 and known as *le Chant du Cygne*, made by Stradivarius at the age of 93, was priced at 15,000 francs; 10,000 francs was quickly offered, and the price climbed to 15,100 francs, becoming the property of M. Edgar de Saint-Senoch [1839-1904], brother of the previous owner of the collection. [M. Edgar] had been vigorously challenged by M. le duc de Camposelice who pursued the violin until the price of 15,000 francs was reached. The viola (1728), for which was asked 15,000 francs, started at 8,000 francs and reached 12,900, at which price it was bought back by the widow of M. de Saint-

⁵³ Doring, p. 345.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* In the aforementioned G&B business ledgers the name *Saint-Senoch* appears only in the Directory for the period 1875-1884 (E.981.8.5), with a page reference of 406. In the parallel General Ledger (E.981.8.6) the small-scale transactions listed on p. 406 are dated between June 1876 and April 1880; there is no mention of any Stradivari instruments being purchased. Both the Directory and the General Ledger specify Saint-Senoch's address – *19 rue Demours*. In 1858 Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume retired to his mansion at *3 rue Demours*; it is surely the case that Saint-Senoch bought his instruments from his famous neighbour rather than from Gand & Bernardel in the centre of Paris (but was obliged to patronise G&B after Vuillaume's death in 1875).

⁵⁵ At the least, an enquiry could have been made of C-A Miremont (d. 1887).

⁵⁶ 23 May 1886, pp. 202-203.

Senoch. Finally, the superb cello of 1696, for which was asked 15,000 francs, found a bidder at 8,000 and was sold for 10,200 francs to M. Dammien [from the town of Aytré (La Rochelle)].

It is noticeable that the four instruments, despite their splendid state, were each sold for less than M. de Saint-Senoch had paid for them. He had paid 12,750 francs for the [1704] violin which was auctioned for 7,000; 17,500 for the violin [*Chant du Cygne*] auctioned for 15,100; 19,000 for the viola auctioned for 12,900; 17,500 for the cello auctioned for 10,200.

The auction produced a total of 45,200 francs for these four instruments; their previous owner had paid 66,750 francs to obtain them.

Ernest Doring states that, following the May 1886 auction, the 1737 *Chant du Cygne* violin (now owned by Edgar de Saint-Senoch) was placed with the firm of *Gand & Bernardel* (the successors to *Gand & Bernardel frères*) to be sold for no less than 20,000 francs,⁵⁷ and Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* text (see earlier, p.9) clearly indicates, in red ink, that the Nagornov/Saint-Senoch violin was bought by José White in 1887 for 20,000 francs.

José Silvestre White had been the music teacher, on both violin and piano, to Princess Isabel, daughter of the Emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro II. According to Ernest Doring, after Dom Pedro was deposed in November 1889, and expelled from Brazil, he and his family 'took up residence [in exile] at Paris whither White also returned. [White's] acquisition of the "Swan" was by gift from his former Emperor.'⁵⁸

Factually, when Dom Pedro was deposed and forced to leave Brazil he did so without any immediate financial support (or, indeed, any future financial support). The new republican government in Brazil offered him a very substantial grant but Dom Pedro refused to accept. As the ailing (diabetic) ex-Emperor, with his family and entourage, journeyed from Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon, and then from Lisbon to Cannes (France), always residing in expensive hotels, their expenditure far outstripped their financial resources. Dom Pedro's associates were obliged to seek much-needed loans from anyone who would countenance such financial commitments. In May 1891 Dom Pedro moved from Cannes to a hotel in Versailles, and from there, in October 1891, to the Hotel Bedford in Paris where he died on 5th December 1891.⁵⁹ Within this straitened environment the purchase of an expensive violin – to be a gift – would surely have been out of the question.

In 1913 Albert Caressa and Henri Français (the firm of *Caressa & Français* being the successors to *Gand & Bernardel*) published a small booklet devoted to the *Chant du Cygne* violin. The booklet contains a brief description of the violin together with reproductions of –

1. two letters sent by Charles Gand (in Paris) to José White (in Rio de Janeiro); these letters are dated 22 March 1887 and 19 April 1887
2. a receipt, dated 6 June 1887, written out by Edgar de Saint-Senoch
3. a letter, dated 14 February 1913, sent by White to Caressa & Français.

The first, long, letter (22 March 1887) from Gand to White begins by acknowledging receipt of a bill of exchange for the sum of 20,000 francs (payable on 6 June 1887) this being the purchase price for the

⁵⁷ See Doring, p. 346.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵⁹ Information sourced from Roderick J. Barman, *Citizen Emperor, Pedro II and the making of Brazil, 1825-91* (Stanford University Press, 1999), especially Chapter 12.

Chant du Cygne violin.⁶⁰ The bill was received by G&B on or just before 10 March 1887, as shown in the aforementioned business ledgers where the name of *White, violoniste, Rio de Janeiro* appears in the Directory for 1881-1887,⁶¹ with the specified page number – 216 – being found in the parallel General Ledger.⁶² At that location and against the title *M^r White à Rio de Janeiro* Gand writes:

*1887 Mars 10: Avoir 1 lettre de change payable le 6 Juin
chez Mallet frères [a Paris banking house] 20,000 francs.*

The overall chronology is likely to have been as follows:

1. During late-1886 José White secures funding from Brazilian associates which will enable him to buy a top-quality violin.
2. In early 1887 White corresponds with Charles Gand in Paris. Gand informs White about the Saint-Senoch auction of May 1886, the *Chant du Cygne* violin, and the manner in which the instrument was 'bought in' by Edgar de Saint-Senoch. Gand also informs White that Edgar is placing the violin on sale with Gand, and Gand's selling price for the violin will be 20,000 francs.
3. White, in Rio de Janeiro, telegraphs(?) Gand a bill of exchange for 20,000 francs (which arrives on or just before 10 March 1887 – see above). Edgar de Saint-Senoch sells his *Chant du Cygne* violin to G&B on 11 March for 17,500 francs.⁶³

White asks that the *Chant du Cygne* violin be inspected and evaluated by a trusted colleague – 'Lebanc'. The violin is also evaluated by Camille Sivori and by Pablo Sarasate, as Gand explains in his letter to White of 22 March 1887:

[Monsieur] Lebanc whom you commissioned to come and inspect it, saw it and had it played and he must have sung its praises to you, he was amazed. [Camille] Sivori, who is familiar with the violin and often played it when it was with the previous owner [Saint-Senoch] wishes he could own it but is not rich enough to afford such an extravagance. [Pablo] Sarasate has just given three concerts at the Salle Erard and when, [afterwards], he brought me his Stradivari violin for overhaul (as he usually does) I made him try yours; although he is spoiled by his own instrument he recognised that yours is a first-class instrument.

In his letter Gand provides White with a short history of the *Chant du Cygne*, stating that the violin was bought by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume 'at the death of Luigi Tarisio':

[?Prior to 1870] Vuillaume sold it to Nagornoff, a Russian, who was at the Conservatoire, in Massart's class,⁶⁴ where he won the Premier Prix⁶⁵ – you must have known him – when he left Paris he travelled with Madame Corneau and Antoine de Kontaki and made for himself a reputation in Russia, where he married. He [Nagornoff] parted from his violin at this time, abandoned his musical career, and the violin went to England; subsequently it was brought back by an English *luthier* (this person, by the way, is the owner of the Stradivari *Alard* violin)⁶⁶ and it was sold to Monsieur de Saint-Senoch. It was at this point that the violin was baptised 'Le Chant du Cygne' and became

⁶⁰ Note that the price of 20,000 francs applied only to the violin; the cost of making of a new violin case, building a protective shipping container, and shipping the container and contents to Rio de Janeiro (fully insured) would be an extra 850 francs. White sent a payment of 900 francs to Gand on 19 July 1887, the surplus 50 francs being spent in November 1887 on more strings. Gand's letter indicates that White also wanted to buy a Tourte bow, mounted in gold and tortoiseshell, but Gand did not have any to sell – 'very few exist and they are very expensive.'

⁶¹ E.981.8.39

⁶² E.981.8.4

⁶³ See Edgar's receipt, p. 15 of this account.

⁶⁴ Lambert Massart, Belgian violinist, 1811-1892.

⁶⁵ Nagornoff was awarded a *Second Prix*.

⁶⁶ The person to whom Gand is referring is David Laurie.

known to all collectors. We [Gand & Bernardel] obtained it from the heirs of the last-named, following his death last year.⁶⁷ Sadly, the violin was not in hands that were worthy of it; in your hands it will begin its career anew, and will once again be spoken about.

Gand says nothing about Claude-Augustin Miremont.

4. On receipt of Gand's 22 March letter (at the beginning of April?) White agrees (by telegram?) to buy the violin. Gand informs Edgar de Saint-Senoch that he has a purchaser for the *Chant du Cygne*. It is not known whether Edgar was aware of the inflated price – 20,000 francs – at which Gand was selling the violin to José White.

5. White's bill of exchange is scheduled for payment on 6 June which allows time for the *Cygne* violin to be carefully prepared in the G&B workshop, and time for the violin case and the protective box to be made; all this is completed by 16 April. Another entry is added to the aforementioned G&B General Ledger, directly beneath the 10 March 1887 entry which itemised receipt of White's 'holding' payment:

*1887 Avril 16: Un violon Antonius Stradivarius année 1737, N° 1379, 20,000 francs
I étui acajou flambé à grandes poignées, plaque gravée, ferrures dorées, garni en velours de soie vert, coussin soie, enveloppe en peau de veau, emballage bois et fer blanc.*

1887 April 16: An Antonio Stradivari violin, year 1737, no. 1379, 20,000 francs
One [violin] case, flamed mahogany with large handles, engraved nameplate, gilded metal fittings, trimmed in green silk velvet, silk cushion, [the case] wrapped in calfskin, the shipping container made of wood and tin.

6. In his letter of 19 April 1887 Gand informs White that he has delivered the violin to the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* for shipping to Brazil the very next day, 'insured against every eventuality', and Gand hopes that it will arrive in perfect condition:

I hope that you will be completely satisfied with your acquisition since it is truly an artist's instrument. Joachim, who was in Paris a fortnight ago, saw it, played many times on it, and loved it.

7. The violin arrives at Rio de Janeiro – one week later? – and presumably is inspected, played, and evaluated by White during the month of May. Evidently satisfied, White instructs Banque Mallet Frères et Cie to release his funds, as planned, on 6 June. This being done, Gand – on the same day – pays the agreed 17,500 francs to Edgar de Saint-Senoch who writes the following receipt:

I acknowledge having received from Messrs. Gand et Bernardel the sum of seventeen thousand five hundred francs, being the price of the Stradivari *Le Chant du Cygne* [violin] which I sold to them on 11 March last.

Paris 6 June 1887

Edg. H. de St. Senoch

The third document reproduced in the *Caressa & Français* booklet is a letter from White, dated 14 February 1913 (present writer's translation):

*Messieurs Caressa et Français
4, rue Saulnier
Paris, 14 Février 1913*

Gentlemen and dear friends,

You can come and take my Stradivari violin tomorrow morning; I will expect you between 9 and 10 o'clock so that I can return to you the *Chant du Cygne*.

It is with sorrow (as you must surely understand) that I part from my glorious companion with whom I have had lived on such good terms for 26 years! What joys [I have had] with him!

⁶⁷ Gand's text suggests M. de Saint-Senoch died in 1886; the correct date was November 1885.

In the end it is finished; I must resign myself [to this reality] since we have concluded our transaction.⁶⁸

The only small consolation that I have is to see [the violin] returned to the successors of the [*Gand & Bernardel*] dealership which sold it to me in 1887; a greater consolation will be if you inform me [in due course] that you have sold it to an artiste. [The violin] deserves to pass into hands which appreciate its value.

And now, with the 'will' for my violin written here: until tomorrow.

Believe me [to be] your constant, faithful, and old friend.

Joseph White

The aforementioned booklet contains a few paragraphs written by Albert Caressa and Henri Français. They state that the *Chant du Cygne* violin contains its original label, dated 1737,⁶⁹ and that there is another, smaller, label, glued on top of the first, 'in the lower middle'.⁷⁰ Caressa and Français provide a reproduction of the entire label (**Figure 4**) *où se trouve manuscrite la mention "D'anni 93", comme on pourra le voir dans la reproduction exacte ci-dessous* ('where is found the hand-written annotation "D'anni 93" as can be seen in the exact reproduction given below.')

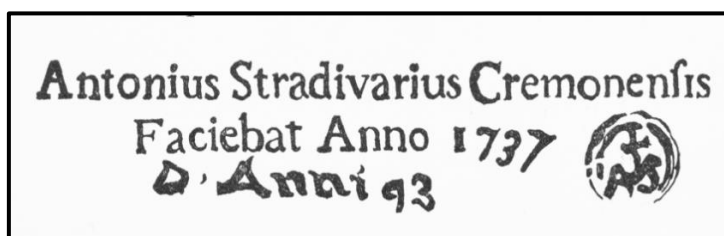


Figure 4: Caressa & Français booklet (c.1913-14), *Le Chant du Cygne*, label illustration.

It is unclear whether this reproduction of the violin's label is derived from a photograph or a tracing, or, perhaps, is a free-hand drawing; the presentation of the label's text-content is almost, but not quite, identical with that of the fourth-last label illustration in the Hills' 1902 *Antonio Stradivari* monograph, opp. p. 217 (see **Figure 5**, overleaf).⁷¹

Albert Caressa and Henri Français continue:

The violin has a back plate [made from] two pieces of maple, with beautiful veins [flames], wide and straight, quite distinctive; nothing has been damaged – not the corners [cf. Gand!] nor the neck-foot (which is original); the ribs, made of similar maple as used for the back plate, are intact; the front plate, in two pieces, is made with regular spruce,⁷² well chosen for resonance; without any internal patches – all is intact; the head, very beautiful, boldly carved, is fractionally 'heavier' when compared to those from an earlier period; the edges of the scroll are not at all worn; the [two] peg-holes for the *chanterelle* [the E-string] have been bushed; the varnish is a beautiful warm red, slightly dark, [but] very transparent, [applied] on top of a golden 'undercoat' which does not obscure the wood which it covers.⁷³

[The violin] was part of the collection of Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, bought in Italy at the death of [Luigi] Tarisio. Vuillaume sold it to Monsieur Nagornoff, a student of the violin who was in Massart's class at the Paris Conservatoire. Nagornoff, having ceased playing, sold the violin in London to a *luthier* called [David] Laurie, who [then] sold it in 1881, in Paris, to Monsieur de Saint-

⁶⁸ C&F paid White 40,100 francs for the *Chant du Cygne* violin and two bows – one by Tourte, the other by Vuillaume.

⁶⁹ They make no mention, as had Gand (see earlier, p.8), of any alteration to the third date-numeral.

⁷⁰ A second, smaller, label was not identified by Gand.

⁷¹ See overleaf for a possible explanation for how the Hills were able to publish an image of the *Chant du Cygne* label more than ten years before the illustration published by Caressa & Français.

⁷² i.e. with consistent-width growth rings.

⁷³ cf. Laurie's description of Miremont's violin, and Gand's description of Nagornoff's violin.

Senoch, celebrated Parisian collector, who already possessed a quartet of Stradivari instruments.⁷⁴ The heirs of M. de Saint-Senoch sold the collection, at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris, on 15 May 1886. The family 'bought in' the *Chant du Cygne*, and sold it, on 11 March 1887, to *Gand & Bernardel*, from whom it passed, on 16 April of the same year, to Monsieur Joseph White, the celebrated Cuban violinist and composer, at that time the personal violinist to the Emperor of Brazil, Don Pedro. The instrument was sent to Rio de Janeiro. After the events which brought about the overthrow of the Empire of Brazil and the departure of Don Pedro, M. White returned to Paris where he had studied, and where, in 1856, he obtained first prize at the Conservatoire, in [Delphin] Alard's class. The *Chant du Cygne* has returned to the long-established firm from which it departed in 1887; it is currently in our possession.

Caressa & Français
Luthiers du Conservatoire National de Musique
4 Rue Saulnier, Paris

One of the last, complete, labels illustrated by the Hills in their 1902 *Antonio Stradivari* monograph is dated 1737:

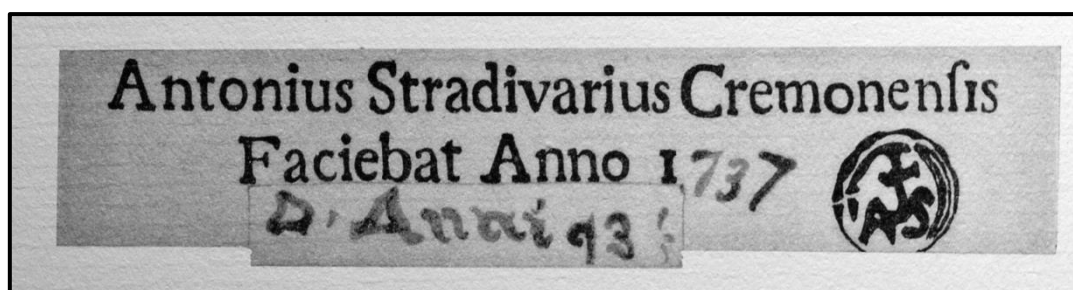


Figure 5: Hill (1902), opp. p. 217.

Within this label's year-date only the first numeral is printed (in Roman form); the subsequent 737 numerals are hand-written. An additional small oblong piece of paper has been glued to the bottom of the main label, evidently positioned with care so that its (long) upper edge exactly abuts the lower edge of the letters comprising 'Faciebat Anno I'; this additional label carries the hand-written annotation *D'Anni 93* }.

The Hills also state that 'several other instruments have been seen by us on the labels of which Stradivari recorded his age. [...] fourth, a violin dated 1737, "d'anni 93".'⁷⁵ The Hills imply that their 'facsimile Plate' (i.e. **Figure 5**) is an illustration of the label from their fourth violin, of 1737;⁷⁶ Ernest Doring states that the Hills' illustration *is* of the label from the *Chant du Cygne* violin:

The label which the violin bears is, like others we have shown, reproduced in the Hill book.⁷⁷

The Hills' illustration shows no sign of any alteration to the year-date numeral '3'. Since it is inconceivable that Gand would have written that the 1737 label inside Nagornoff's violin had an overwritten numeral if it did not (see p.8 of this account) the conclusion can only be that the label described by Gand in 1870 is not the same label as illustrated by the Hills in 1902 and by Caressa & Français in 1913-14. In their 1902 monograph the Hills give no indication of the date when they saw the '1737/d'anni 93' violin but it is most likely to have been when David Laurie was attempting, but apparently failing, to sell the 'Russian'/Miremont violin to them. If Laurie left his violin with the Hills

⁷⁴ The statement that M. de Saint-Senoch 'already possessed a quartet of Stradivari instruments' contradicts the information in Alfred Hill's letter to Jay C Freeman (see earlier) and sits against the evidence from the Hôtel Drouot auction.

⁷⁵ See the first quotation within the present account (on p.1) for the continuation of this commentary.

⁷⁶ See Hill (1902), p. 219 and p. 92.

⁷⁷ Doring, p. 346.

for a few days perhaps they made a copy of the internal label and used that copy in their subsequent 1902 monograph.

In 1901 the firm of *Gand & Bernardel* was bought by Albert Caressa and Henri Français. At an unknown date thereafter an unidentified person at the new firm – *Caressa & Français, Luthiers du Conservatoire National de Musique* – copied into a ledger the entire text (and layout) of C-N-E Gand's *Catalogue descriptif des Instruments de Stradivarius et J. Guarnerius*. This Caressa & Français ledger was subsequently enhanced by annotations which provide further details about the described instruments, and their ever-changing owners, during the first decades of the twentieth century (and additional descriptive entries for yet more instruments were added at the end of the ledger).

Subsequently, another copy of Gand's *Catalogue descriptif* was written out in a second ledger. This second ledger is identified by the following inscription on the first page:

Emile Français, 5 Rue de Copenhague, Paris, 8^{ème}

Emile's son, Jacques, emigrated to New York in 1948. It seems likely that Jacques took with him the first ledger (for reference purposes), the second ledger probably being sent to Jacques after Emile ceased trading, in Paris, in 1981. After the death of Jacques, in 2004, all his documents and records were donated to the Smithsonian Institute; the donation included the two ledgers.⁷⁸

In both ledgers, the descriptive text for the violin belonging to 'Monsieur Nagornoff' is identical to that which was written by Gand in 1870. Underneath the descriptive texts are annotations itemising subsequent sales of the violin (i.e. subsequent to José White selling the *Chant du Cygne* violin back to Caressa & Français in 1913). These annotations indicate that the violin was sold in 1913 to a 'Colonel Maître' for 100,000 francs and then re-sold in 1919 to 'J L Courvoisier' for 175,000 francs.⁷⁹ Caressa & Français re-purchased the violin from M. Courvoisier for 35,000 US dollars and then sold it, in 1925, to 'John Vanamacker' for 45,000 dollars. The firm of Rudolph Wurlitzer acquired the violin in 1929 as part of their purchase of the Wanamaker instrument collection, and the *Chant du Cygne* violin was then sold to the millionaire Miles Franklin Yount (1880-1933) for the use of his daughter, Mildred (b. 1920). Following the death of M F Yount the *Chant du Cygne* violin was sold in 1934 to the Croatian violinist Zlatko Balokovic (1895-1965); in 1959 the violin was 're-sold by E. Herrmann' to an un-named purchaser in Germany; in 1972 the violin was sold yet again. The current (2015) owner of the *Chant du Cygne* has declined to respond to the present author's enquiries about the violin.

Ernest Doring states that the label within the *Chant du Cygne* violin was 'reproduced in the large catalogue of the Wurlitzer Collection, published in 1931. [...] The frontispiece [of the catalogue] presents an exceptionally fine color portrait of the famous violin, the label shown beneath'. See **Figures 6a** and **6b**, and **7**:

⁷⁸ The Jacques Français Rare Violins Inc. Photographic Archive and Business Records are held at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, USA; the Caressa & Français ledgers are located in Box 55, Folders 2 and 4. See www.themessiahviolin.uk for a link to a complete transcription and translation of these ledgers.

⁷⁹ During this period the value of the French Franc collapsed.



Figures 6a and 6b: From the frontispiece of *Rare Violins, Violas, Violoncellos of the seventeenth eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Wurlitzer Collection, Part I* (1931)

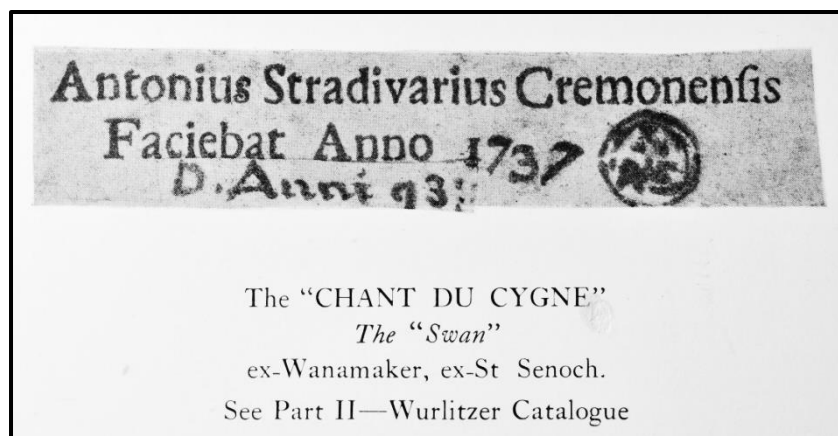


Figure 7: From the frontispiece of *Rare Violins, Violas, Violoncellos of the seventeenth eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the Wurlitzer Collection, Part I* (1931)

Doring continues:

To reproduce it, the label had to be removed from the instrument in the process of doing which the small ticket on which the [additional] inscription was written became separated. Replaced in its approximately original position on the label, a very slight deviation from that indicated in the Hill work will be noticeable [...].⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Doring, p. 347.

Comparison between **Figures 5** and **7** will show that not only is the position of the additional *D'Anni 93* piece of paper significantly changed but the vertical and horizontal relationships between the printed words are also entirely different. In addition, the monograms have different orientations, the letter-shapes are not the same (compare the 's' of 'Antonius'), and the 737 numerals are not the same; even the hand-written *D'Anni 93* annotations differ, and the width of the small label, which, in the Hills' illustration (**Figure 5**), extends from the 'F' of 'Faciebat' to just beyond the 'I' of '1737', is noticeably reduced in width in the 1931 Wurlitzer illustration (**Figure 7**). The graphical evidence indicates that the label as illustrated in the 1931 Wurlitzer catalogue is not the label as illustrated by the Hills in 1902 and by Caressa & Français in 1913-14.

If, in 1931, Wurlitzer found it impossible to photograph the label of the *Chant du Cygne* through the bass-side *f*-hole it would have been necessary to detach the front plate (or back plate) from the body of the violin. Once this had been done the label could have been photographed *in situ* – still glued in its place on the internal surface of the back plate; there would have been no need for the label to be removed by (presumably) painstakingly dissolving the glue with warm water (taking great care that the water did not make the ink bleed). Doring's commentary regarding the removal of the entire label is deeply disturbing.

Doring appears to be more than a little uncomfortable with Wurlitzer's label-illustration since he draws attention to 'some seeming[?] variations due to retouching necessitated in the process of making the plates required for multi-color printing.'⁸¹

As previously indicated, the *Chant du Cygne* violin was sold to the violinist Zlatko Balokovic in 1934. The Jacques Français archives at the Smithsonian Institution include an undated certificate for the *Chant du Cygne* violin, issued by Emil Herrmann⁸² to Balokovic, which states:

Back plate: ⁸³	immaculately preserved; lots of varnish
Front plate: ⁸⁴	immaculately preserved; no half edging; sound-post patch
Ribs:	very nice; immaculate; lots of varnish
Scroll:	undoubtedly from [an] earlier period
Varnish:	reddish-brown; lots; and all original
Label:	genuine; 1737; inscription [no mention of any altered date-numerals]
Specimen:	first class! Splendid
Guarantees:	Hill & Sons; Caressa; Wurlitzer.

Herrmann also provides (tape?) measurements of the *Chant du Cygne* violin:

Upper bout maximum width:	168mm
Centre bout minimum width:	113mm
Lower bout maximum width:	207mm
Body length:	359mm

⁸¹ Doring, p. 347.

⁸² The certificate shows two addresses: Bayreuther Strasse 30, Berlin W 30, and 161 West 57th Street, New York; Emil Herrmann's subsequent (and final) business location in New York was at 130 West 57th Street. In 1951 Herrmann closed this shop and retired. Herrmann's records of certificates and photographs were then acquired by Jacques Français. It is likely that Herrmann's certificate dates from 1934.

⁸³ On the certificate Herrmann has drawn an inked line down the centre of a pre-printed outline of a back plate, in order to show the centre-joint and thereby the two-piece construction.

⁸⁴ Herrmann has drawn, in ink, on the pre-printed outline of a front plate, a small circle to indicate the position of the sound-post patch; he has also drawn a vertical line from beneath the bass-side C-bout lower corner down to the bottom edge to show the position of a crack (thus confirming that the violin certified by Herrmann was the same as that described by Gand in 1870; see Gand's text quoted earlier, at the top of p.9).

F-hole width between upper eyes: 43mm
Rib height at neck: 29mm
Rib height at tail-pin: 30mm

Approximate calliper-defined equivalents of Herrmann's measurements would be:

Upper bout: 166.8mm
Centre bout: 110mm
Lower bout: 205.8mm
Length: 357.5mm

These measurements point towards the *Chant du Cygne* violin being of normal length in the body but slightly narrow in its widths; the measurements do not suggest an agreement with the comments made by David Laurie regarding the 'large grand body' of the violin which he states to have obtained from Claude-Augustin Miremont.

Without present-day access to the *Chant du Cygne* violin a conclusive resolution of the various issues surrounding the instrument's physical condition cannot be reported. Perhaps, if the violin eventually appears in public, the opportunity will be seized to closely inspect it in light of the uncertainty surrounding its identity – an uncertainty which has persisted, and become evermore tortuous, since 1870 when Charles Gand penned his description of the 1737/1707 violin belonging to Monsieur Nagornoff.

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