The Atlanta Early Music News

Newsletter of the Atlanta Early Music Alliance

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Editorial Notes

Welcome to 1995! Are we sad to see 1994 end?

All the fun and food from the holidays have left us heavy laden, so we thought this was the perfect time for an **Altanta Early Music News: Lite Edition.** Having a six-page version of the **News** also allows us to include **Recitals at Dusk** posters for each member. Please distribute your posters as quickly as possible, in order to get maximum exposure and attendance for this interesting series. If you could use more, call 658-1357.

Time is short, but with a little effort, you, who are our best emissaries to the wider Atlanta potential concert audience, can make a real difference. Please also consider donating some time (or cash!) to some of the many tasks that involved in making such a series happen!

For this issue, Tish Berlin, interviewer extraordinaire, has come up with another interesting musical subject in the person of bowmaker Jon Crumrine.

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BOW-MAKING

Jon Crumrine - Bowmaker

Interviewed by Letitia Berlin

[Jon is a bowmaker at Williams Gengakki Violins in Atlanta. He worked out of his own shop in Michigan making modern and Baroque bows until joining Williams Gengakki Violins in June 1994. Jon is a violist and avid outdoor sportsman. Barbara Blaker, a Baroque cellist now based in Birmingham, AL and Letitia Berlin, recorder player and AEMA editor, hadp several questions for him recently.]

BB: Do you make bows from different periods?

JC: Pretty much any period. So far what I've made are what's called a dagger bow or clip-in bow [Note: See illustrations on p. 2], on which the frog is immovable. The hair is basically a loop that fastens at either end of the stick and the frog just clips in and provides tension in the stick – it's held in place by the pressure of the hair. The length of the stick is much shorter than on the modern bow. It would be used for the music of Biber, Monteverdi, other early Baroque composers. Very simple – the frog doesn't move, all it does is provide the space between the stick and the hair. Very pointy, very lightweight and very fun to play with.

LB: Does an immovable frog mean you can't tighten the hair?

JC: Right.

LB: How do you keep the hair at the tension you need?

JC: It's tough. When the weather changes, and it gets too long or too short, it's really hard when you rehair it, because you have to be just dead on. There's no way to adjust it. The hair wraps around the back of the frog and then goes into the stick right underneath the frog. The frog is shaped on the bottom, pointed on the front and rectangular in the back and it fits into a little notch. Michael Sand wrote a really good article about this type of bow and playing the music of Biber with it. (The article appears in the Fall 1988 issue of *Strings*.) That's the earliest type that I've done, and the next step is where the frog moves, but it's not a screw.

LB: When did that type of bow start coming into use?

JC: That would be just before the time of Corelli.

LB: Do the bows reflect a growing virtuosity in violin playing?

JC: I think so, or because of the growing virtuosity, people needed equipment that worked more effectively and could allow them to do the different types of articulation. In the composer's world, or virtuoso player's world, or both – as people wrote more complicated and technically demanding music, and started to develop strokes beyond just a basic detachee or single note sort of things – it sort of all affected it.

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Jon Crumrine - Bowmaker

Interviewed by Letitia Berlin

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People developed new technical abilities, and they found that their equipment wasn't doing what they wanted it to do. You can't play off the string with a baroque bow. It doesn't bounce. It's a convex bow rather than a concave bow, like a baroque bow. There's a lot more tension on a modern bow and it springs.

LB: Biber is virtuosic, isn't it?

JC: Very virtuosic, but it's all played on the string. The bow– it's all really fast short clipping notes but it's never off the string. That's a big difference between baroque bows and modern bows. Baroque bows are a little softer and the articulation is much different. You get a much crisper sound – each note's defined more – but there's a lot you can't do with it. You can't sustain any notes that are longer than a quarter note, because you have no power at the tip. With the modern bow you have incredible power at the tip. It's a combination of power and strength in the bow and how you're using the speed. In a baroque bow you have all your weight in the frog, and there's no weight in the tip, and the sound dies away.

LB: So you get sort of an ebb and flow in the sound?

JC: Yes. It's very hard to sustain the sound of a baroque bow.

LB: This would make it tie in well with the good beat/bad beat aesthetic of the Baroque.

JC: That's right. It makes perfectly good sense. You have no power at the end of the stroke. That's a big thing as music changed and the concept of sustaining sound changed. Same thing with harpsichords – you've got your attack and then instant decay. Whereas with pianos, etc. you have a step toward sustained sound. Once you have pedals...

LB: Bigger halls, too, needed bigger and more sustained sound.

JC: And that goes with changes of instruments too. More tension, more

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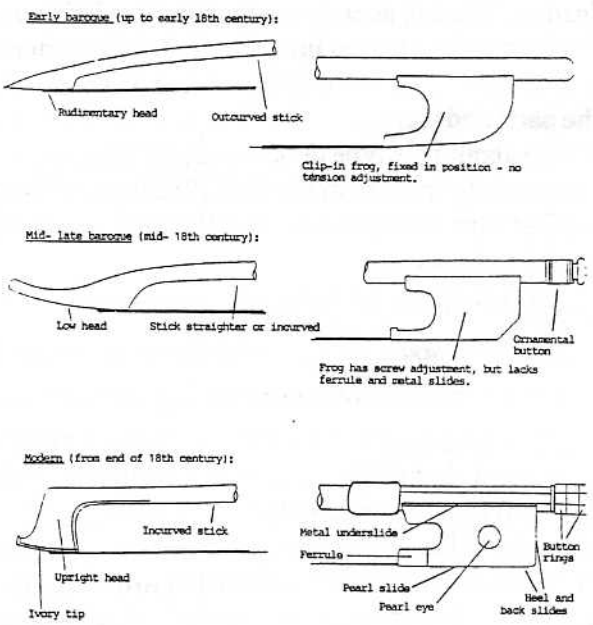
Three Stages of Bow Development



Recitals at Dusk

presents

Thursday, Jan. 19
Episcopal Church of Epiphany
Letitia Berlin

Sunday, Jan. 22
Episcopal Church of Epiphany
Lutes Atlanta

Tuesday, Jan. 24
First Presbyterian Church
Thamyris

Thursday, Jan. 26
First Presbyterian Church
The Merry Band

Tues.day, Jan. 31
First Presbyterian Church
Harmonie Universelle

All concerts are at 6:00 p.m

Editorial Staff

Letitia Berlin
Frances Blaker
Patricia Adams Nordstrom

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All deadlines are firm.

Send material(s) to the **Atlanta Early Music Alliance**, 592-B Linwood Avenue, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30306.

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Patricia Nordstrom

Jon Crumrine - Bowmaker

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volume. Compositionally, numbers of players changed. By Berlioz you had much bigger ensembles than you would have in late Mozart or Haydn. Actually I think Berlioz was way ahead of his time.

BB: What sort of wood do you use in your bows?

JC: Well, so far, because of the way I've been able to purchase wood, I've had to use pernambuco for everything.

LB: That's good, isn't it?

JC: Well no, that's what you use for modern bows. For the baroque period, ideally you use things that are denser, heavier, oiler. Traditionally, snakewood was used, which comes from South America. I actually have some of that, but it's not ready to use. It's got to sit and season.

LB: For how long?

JC: About eight years. It's very hard to find old snakewood that's not really expensive. If you spend $250 for one piece as your raw materials, your cost goes way up. And to buy old nice wood, you pay, you really do. Also there's something called ironwood, which you find all the way up to transitional period bows.

LB: What period is that?

JC: Around 1760-1800 pretty much, both in Paris and England.

LB: What was going in Italy?

JC: I don't know what was going on in Italy. Most of my information is on French and English makers. There was a German violinist named Kramer who was a virtuoso player, and there's a bow called a Kramer-style bow, made by Edward Dodd in England. He was a contemporary of Viotti, a violinist who was in Paris. Kramer worked with either John or Edward Dodd, Viotti worked with Louis Tourte. The Tourte's are *the* makers in the beginning of modern bows. I don't know if they knew each other – two cities, two centers of bow making – but that was a really important time. To go back to materials, traditionally baroque bows are made from snakewood or ironwood, or...

LB: Where does ironwood come from?

JC: I'm not sure, but I think it's again a tropical wood, or African. I haven't been able to find any.

LB: Do you think it's harder to find because of the rainforests being decimated?

JC: I don't know. It may be that there's just no demand for it so people don't harvest it. They may use it for firewood.

LB: Why is a heavier, denser, oilier wood better for a baroque bow?

JC: Well, the bows were much shorter, and to have sufficient weight, you needed a denser wood. When you make a baroque bow out of pernambuco which is less dense it's too lightweight. It may not have enough strength because those bows were a lot more slender as far as the diameter of the stick. They weighed less to begin with, but the wood that we get now for modern bows isn't really sufficient. It's too weak. I've been experimenting with making all ebony bows and sometimes they're a little too heavy. They look really cool. Materials are a big problem, because ivory is the choice, for frogs and for buttons. Of course you really can't export ivory, and personally I don't like the idea of using it.

LB: Would you be able to use old ivory?

JC: Yes. You can go to antique dealers here in Buckhead and buy tusks, but they're a thousand bucks a tusk some places. When you use that material you're spending $150 for the block, rather than $2.00 for ebony – whether you decide to mark that up or just pass the cost along in your work – a lot of it boils down to basic economics. And both are good materials, with similar weight and density. They both have their own unique esthetic as far as appearance.

LB: And they both have an effect on the playing that you don't want to substitute?

JC: That's right. You also see people use walrus tusk or mastodon, which is actually extinct. Mastodons have been dug up, in northern Canada and Russia. It's a little less expensive and it's legal to export. I have heard stories of customs people smashing ivory frogs – confiscating them, taking a pistol and just smashing the frog. People also use rosewood for the frogs, bone, cow horn, and something called mountain mahogany. It's an American hardwood – it looks good and is very dense. There's also a wood called bahnia. I'm not sure where it comes from – tropical. Hard to work with. Because the wood is so heavy and dense on baroque bows, often they would flute the bows. What that means, is on each edge, the length of the stick, they would make a small channel, a groove. It can be done very decoratively. Sometimes they would flute the entire stick, sometimes just a portion. Sometimes it would be done where the bow was held to make it more of a good texture where you grip if your hands perspire, because there's no leather or winding to hold on to.

LB: What's the purpose if the

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