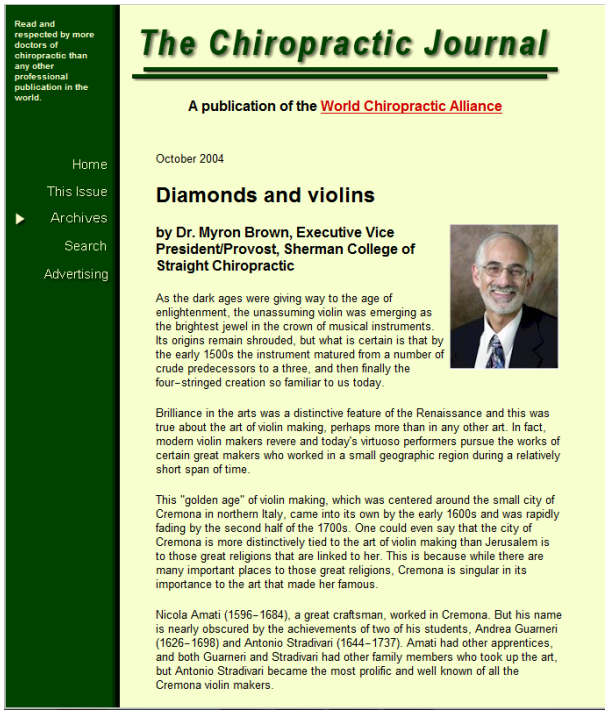
Diamonds and Violins

by Myron D. Brown, DC, ACP, FCSC (Hon.)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Home
This Issue
Archives
Search
Advertising

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Diamonds and violins

by Dr. Myron Brown, Executive Vice President/Provost, Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic

As the dark ages were giving way to the age of enlightenment, the unassuming violin was emerging as the brightest jewel in the crown of musical instruments. Its origins remain shrouded, but what is certain is that by the early 1500s the instrument matured from a number of crude predecessors to a three, and then finally the four-stringed creation so familiar to us today.

Brilliance in the arts was a distinctive feature of the Renaissance and this was true about the art of violin making, perhaps more than in any other art. In fact, modern violin makers revere and today's virtuoso performers pursue the works of certain great makers who worked in a small geographic region during a relatively short span of time.

This "golden age" of violin making, which was centered around the small city of Cremona in northern Italy, came into its own by the early 1600s and was rapidly fading by the second half of the 1700s. One could even say that the city of Cremona is more distinctively tied to the art of violin making than Jerusalem is to those great religions that are linked to her. This is because while there are many important places to those great religions, Cremona is singular in its importance to the art that made her famous.

Nicola Amati (1596–1684), a great craftsman, worked in Cremona. But his name is nearly obscured by the achievements of two of his students, Andrea Guarneri (1626–1698) and Antonio Stradivari (1644–1737). Amati had other apprentices, and both Guarneri and Stradivari had other family members who took up the art, but Antonio Stradivari became the most prolific and well known of all the Cremona violin makers.

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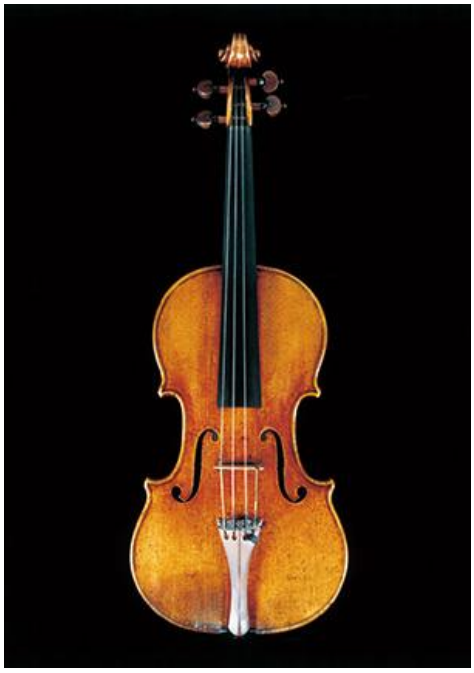

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(Photo left) This Stradivarius violin called, "Dolphin" for its color and appearance, was made in 1714. Considered one of his finest works, it was owned and played by the world famous virtuoso Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987).

By now the reader should be wondering, *"what does all this have to do with chiropractic"*? We're coming to that…

Around the beginning of the 1800's a curious observation began to dawn upon the world of violinists and violinmakers. They were gradually becoming aware that violins of Cremona outperformed all of the newest and best violins. Especially peculiar was the fact that this was only true of the Cremona instruments that were more than 50 years old! Had they learned that older violins somehow aged like a fine wine into something better? No, it was something much more than that. In fact, when the old violins of Cremona, Italy were compared with the best old German or French violins, there was just no comparison. Old violins of Venice and Florence similarly failed to measure up. The Cremona instruments had qualities that far surpassed all of the others. Even those instruments made in Cremona by craftsmen possessing less superb woodworking skills outperformed the best of the rest. These differences hold true today, too.

Since it took more than 50 years before the experts to begin to notice, when instrument makers started to explore the differences between their art and that of the old Cremona masters, there was no one still living who knew what used to be done differently. With that observation the connoisseurs began to grasp the depth of irony to this most elusive secret. To unravel the mystery, latter day violinmakers meticulously copied the work of the old masters. The most expert of these nineteenth century craftsmen produced some beautiful instruments. But when compared to the work of the Cremona masters, the results were disappointing, at best. The differences were obvious in a number of ways. Artists playing on a Cremona violin filled a concert hall with sound in a way that just penetrated it. The sound was not louder, but featured a depth that ignored distance and permeated to the listener's ear. The Cremona instruments had a beautiful translucent varnish that possessed certain qualities. The Cremona varnish seemed to somehow fill and preserve the wood in a way that not only halted the process of decay, but unlike so many other kinds of varnishes, it did not deaden the resonance of the instrument. Rather, it gave the wood a magnificent ability to resonate. Qualities like sonorous, sweet, and resounding voice are amongst the many descriptors of what a Cremona violin could accomplish.

So, "*when are we going to talk about chiropractic"*? Watch this…

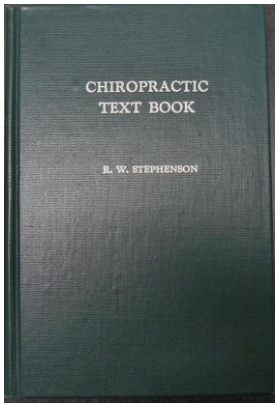
It gradually became apparent that the secret to the greatness of the Cremona masters was twofold. First they *were* great masters at working with wood. They created precision calipers and other tools of the trade without machinery and long before the industrial revolution. Then, they worked their masterpieces by hand. Secondly, they used a varnish that master craftsmen north of the Alps and south of Cremona simply did not have. The mystery was in the great Cremona varnish.

Investigators began to study the lost secret of the Cremona varnish, and two hundred and fifty years later they are still trying to unravel it's secrets. Many priceless instruments have been severely damaged by alchemists taking apart the violins and chipping off pieces of the varnish as they try to analyze the Cremona varnish. Nevertheless, *how* it all took place is actually not mysterious. Historic documentation reveals that craftsmen like Stradivari and Guarneri would varnish their instruments in multiple coats and the drying time for the sub varnish, or first layers could be quite prolonged. Stradivari would hang violins in his attic for months at a time to get them to dry properly. Then one fateful day, around 1750, the French developed a fast-drying varnish. Soon the quick, easy way, which brought results overnight, replaced the old fashioned methods. The violinmaker no longer had to wait months for a violin to dry properly. Anyone using the old, slow methods would surely have seemed foolish and out of step with the times, not to mention the economic pressures for faster production. The old masters gradually died off, and with them so did the knowledge of the Cremona varnish.

The irony in it is that the persons who learned the art of creating handcrafted instruments from history's best masters did not recognize what they possessed. They were like the characters in Russell Conwell's famous story, "Acres of Diamonds". Conwell's character blindly abandoned the world's richest source of diamonds in order to go out and find diamonds. Another Conwell character sold the property that sparked the California gold rush…so that he could free himself to go out to look for gold.

Now *"where's the chiropractic relevance in all this*"? Actually there are multiple parallels and an important message…

In Stephenson's philosophy textbook we learned in our study of principle number 6 that there is no process that does not require time. What did violinmakers discover about the outcome of a hurried-up drying process?



Another parallel can be found if we consider that amongst these principles is the one that speaks to the character of universal forces. Principle number 11 observes how the "forces of universal intelligence are manifested by physical laws; are unswerving and unadapted, and have no solicitude for the structures in which they work". The lesson there is that when life is no longer present in a tree the wood will deteriorate due to the effects of universal forces. For a period of time we may use that wood to build houses or fine musical instruments. But with continued exposure to universal forces, soon the wood will break down. We can slow the process with paints and other preservatives. In the case of the violins of Cremona, the particular varnish used had a far superior ability to protect the wood from these forces.

The whole story of music, the violin (and especially the diamond of all violins, the Cremona) and the performing artist punctuates the philosophical construct we refer to

as the triune of life. Principle number 4 states that life is a triunity having three necessary *united* factors, namely, intelligence, force and matter. The intelligence of the artist is expressed when it is united with matter, by force – in this case the physical act of bringing bow to string. Remember, the function of intelligence is to create force (principle number 8); the function of matter is to express force (principle number 13); and the function of force is to unite intelligence and matter (principle number 10). In the case of these rare Cremona violins, the higher quality of the matter allows for better expression of intelligence than could be possible with a violin of lower quality.

These observations are not meant to urge students of the philosophy of chiropractic to memorize the principles and their corresponding numbers, but rather to observe how the constructs we use to understand the basis for chiropractic thinking apply well in other areas of inquiry. The concept of interference is important to consider here. The idea that interference with the transmission of force distorts the intended result is not only obvious, but also is a critical chiropractic concept. Imagine a child pulling on the right arm of a violinist while the artist is trying to draw the bow across the strings. A dissonant, disorganized noise would be the predictable outcome. This illustrates the effect of interference with the transmission of force. Similarly, would a violinist with a vertebral subluxation not become better able to express his or her art if the vertebral subluxation were corrected? Deductively we affirm this by following our philosophic model. Once the vertebral subluxation is corrected, its interference no longer distorts the conduction of innate forces through or over the nervous system. Thus, the innate forces more freely reach the matter in which creative essence (intelligence) is to be expressed. Both of these illustrations demonstrate the effect of interference with the force that unites intelligence and (its expression) matter.

Perhaps the greatest parallel this story offers is the simplest one. The violinmakers of Cremona had within their grasp the ability to create superb instruments capable of expressing brilliance superior to anything the world has seen since. When mankind found a quick, easy, more acceptable way to fabricate instruments, no one stopped to ask what might be lost in forsaking the difficult way of the master. Taking the comfortable route is not always bad, but one ought to always ask where that direction will lead. B.J. Palmer once said that, "*taking the path of least resistance is what makes rivers and men (or women) crooked".* Sherman College of Straight Chiropractic chose the difficult route more than 30 years ago and the entire profession, indeed mankind is benefiting because of that decision today. Let us remain mindful of that heritage.

<u>Food for philosophical thought</u>

Find the hidden principles:

Philosophical principles number 4, 6, 8, 10,11, and 13 are all directly cited in the above article. If one were to review principles number 2, 17 and 32, similar relationships could be found to them as well. See if you can find principles 2, 17, and 32 at work in the article.