

All-State: Stradivari's House

presented by Andrew Dipper — reported by Elizabeth Ericksen

Andrew Dipper is a violinmaker, restorer, and repairer at Claire Givens Violins. He studied in London, England and then went to Cremona, Italy, for further training. While he was there, he became interested in the history of the violinmakers who lived and worked there. Drew gave us a scintillating presentation about looking for information about the house where Stradivari lived and worked, showing many pictures of buildings and artwork from that time.

Stradivari, Guarnari, and Amati all had their shops on the same block in Cremona; these shops were able to communicate through a common back alley. In addition, Ruggieri's shop was situated across the street from this block. Cremona was on an important trade route between Rome and Northern Europe. Priests traveling north from Rome would typically pass through Cremona because taxes were cheaper than other cities. They would take violins north to sell and return with the payment. Drew mentioned that there was a pharmacist on the corner who probably sold the same varnish to all the violinmakers.

Since Stradivari's house was torn down in 1890, Drew needed to use blueprints, descriptions, and 19th century photos of the building to reconstruct what it looked like. Drew has created a model of the house based on his research. The building

had front and back sections. Because the workshop on the first floor was made with a higher ceiling to accommodate organ pipes, the front section of the house had three floors, while the back section had four. The house was in the shape of an L with a courtyard in the back (the toilet took up much of the courtyard.) On top of the house was a secador, an open air building with a simple terra cotta tile roof and tile on the floor. Stradivari did his fine work there in the daylight to take advantage of the light and also hung up instruments to dry the varnish.

Drew showed us many photos of artwork such as Stradivari might have had in his home or from that time period. Among others, there is a painting of an artist's rendition of his workshop based on descriptions of people who had seen it. There was also a painting that may have Stradivari

as one of the subjects. In addition, Drew had 19th century photos of buildings that were in the area of the house including the Church of San Dominico and the tailor's shop that took over Stradivari's Violin Shop.

The model of Stradivari's house is on display at Claire Givens Violins, 1004 Marquette Ave., Suite 205, Minneapolis. Drew wrote a short article on this subject that appeared in *The Strad* magazine and he will be presenting a full lecture this fall at Yale University for the Hill House Museum.

Elizabeth Ericksen is a Lecturer in Music at Carleton College and teaches violin and viola at MacPhail Center. She coaches string quartets in the Augsburg College Suzuki Talent Education program and directs the Sartory String Quartet Institute, a 2-week camp sponsored by MacPhail Center. †