

MAKER'S BENCH

A Tribute to Bob Jamieson

by John Waddle

On February 13th, 2018, the Twin Cities lost a great cellist. Robert Jamieson. “Bob” died at the age of 94. A few months later, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra gained a great cello.

Bob was born in Santa Monica, California, and started playing the cello at the age of 7. By high school, he was performing professionally with the Brodetsky Ensemble. He served in the 370th Army Air Force Band and Armed Forces Radio Service during WWII. In 1946, he won the LA Philharmonic young artist's competition. At the age of 23, Bob joined the LA Philharmonic as assistant principal cellist. He also played for many motion picture soundtracks in Hollywood. He moved to New York in 1948 and joined the New York City Opera and Ballet, toured with the NBC symphony under Arturo Toscanini, and studied and performed at Tanglewood, where he knew Gregor Piatagorsky.

Bob became principal cellist with the Minneapolis Symphony (now the Minnesota Orchestra) in 1951 and retired from the orchestra in 1991. Bob was also an avid chamber musician, performing with several groups. He taught hundreds of cello students in his private studio and as an adjunct member of the faculties of the University of Minnesota, University of St. Thomas, University of St. Catherine and Macalester College. After retirement, Bob continued to play the cello, as well as gamba and recorder.

When I first met Bob, in about 1984, his main cello was a beautiful Joseph Filius Andrea Guarneri.

I started my shop in 1986, and was working at my bench one day when the phone rang. It was my friend and former classmate at the Violin Making School of America, Brian Skarstad. Brian had moved to New York and established a shop of his own. He had a customer in Japan looking

for a great cello and money was not an object. They were looking for an investment.

I told Brian that the best cello I knew of was Bob's Guarneri, but that Bob was playing it every day, and I didn't think he would sell it. Brian asked if Bob might be interested in a Montagnana cello. Brian also knew of a Montagnana that had a repaired crack in the back, and the customer in Japan wasn't interested in it.

I called Bob and he was interested, so he flew out to New York to try the Montagnana. He only needed to play it, in the owner's apartment, for less than an hour, to know that he wanted it. Bob had had the experience of playing a different

Montagnana cello in New York when he lived there previously, but at the time could never afford to buy one. He had not forgotten the previous experience.

Brian took the Guarneri to Japan, and eventually a deal was done.

I went to New York and got the Montagnana and brought it back. Bob and I looked it over and agreed that it was a great cello, but needed some work. The sound-post crack in the back had been well repaired, and didn't need any attention, but the pegs were worn, as was the fingerboard. The neck angle was low, and it needed a new bridge and sound-post. I bushed the peg holes, fit new pegs, glued a thin shim on the neck to get the neck angle up, made a new fingerboard, nut and bridge, fitted a new sound post, and adjusted it, put new strings on it, cleaned and polished it, and it was good to go. Bob played the Montagnana in the orchestra until he retired.

The Montagnana was made in 1730, in Venice, Italy. The first

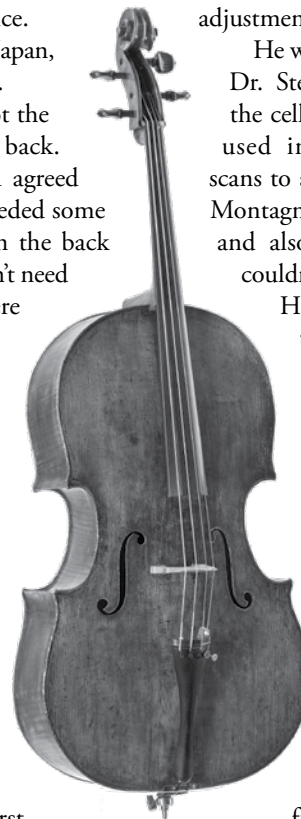
recorded owner was Johann Maria Farina, who founded Eau de Cologne, a perfumery, which is still in operation today, run by the same family. The cello was sold by W.E. Hill, and Sons in 1900 to W. B. Paterson, of London. Paterson was a cellist and art dealer. The story goes that Paterson went to a concert of cellist May Mukle, and was apparently so moved that he told her that she could go to the Hill shop and pick out whatever cello she wanted and he would buy it for her. She played the Montagnana all over Europe, Africa, the U.S. and Canada, until 1969. The cello was then sold by Jacques Francais, in New York, in 1969, to Bernardo Altmann, an Argentinian, who played it in the New York Philharmonic. Altmann owned the cello until Bob acquired it in 1988.

Over the years that Bob owned the cello, I became very familiar with it. Whenever it needed gluing, or new strings, or a summer or winter bridge, Bob would bring it back to me. He took excellent care of it, and he wasn't a fussy musician when it came to adjustments. He believed in practicing.

He was also generous. He allowed Dr. Steve Sirr and I to CT scan the cello, and Bill Scott and I later used information from the CT scans to aid in making a copy of the Montagnana, which Bob also bought and also used until he eventually couldn't play either cello any more.

He liked playing the copy, and used it extensively for practicing and outdoor concerts and sometimes because he said it was easier to play.

Bob never wanted to part with his cellos, but after his passing, I was asked by his family to find a new home for both the Montagnana and the copy. Montagnana cellos tend to be wider than most other models of cellos. They are known for having a deep, full, enveloping sound, as



opposed to a laser like direct sound that Stradivari cellos are known for. Ilya Finkelshteyn, an immigrant to the U.S., from Russia, had worked his way up to the position of principal cellist in the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and with the backing of his music director, and a generous foundation that was willing to support a cello purchase, had been looking for a suitable cello for several years. They were close to buying a Stradivari, but he heard about Bob's Montagnana and flew to Minneapolis and came to my shop. He played the cello for several hours in the shop and decided he needed to compare it to the Stradivari cello back in Cincinnati, so we flew the cello to Cincinnati. Apparently it didn't take long, playing the two cellos side by side for them to decide that the Montagnana was

the one they had been searching for, and the deal was done.

So now, sad as it is that Bob is no longer with us, and sad as it is that the cello did not stay here in the Twin Cities, at least I feel good knowing that it is being played again, and by a fine cellist. I think Bob would approve.

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