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G.B. Guadagnini, Turin c.1775-6  
• Andrea Guarneri, Cremona  
c.1680 • Lorenzo Storioni,  
Cremona 1784 • G.F. Pressenda,  
Turin 1835 • Giuseppe Rocca,  
Turin 1863 • Joseph Gagliano,  
Naples 1781 • Jacob Stainer,  
Absam c.1655 • Carlo Tononi,  
Venice 1735 • J.B. Vuillaume,  
Paris c.1847 • J.B. Vuillaume,  
Paris c.1855 • G.B. Gabrielli,  
Florence 1747 • Lorenzo  
Ventapane, Naples c.1820 •  
Tommaso Eberle, Naples c.1780 •  
Vincenzo Postiglione, Naples 1902  
• Enrico Marchetti, Turin 1902  
Frederic Chaudiere, Montpellier  
1997 • Pierre & Hippolyte  
Silvestre, Lyon 1845 • Gaetano  
Antoniazzi, Milan 1895 • Romeo  
Antoniazzi, Milan c.1910 • Carlo  
Giuseppe Oddone, Turin 1922  
• Michele & Pietro Melegari,  
Turin 1871 • Enrico Marchetti,  
Turin 1923 • Riccardo Genovese,  
Montiglio 1924 • Giuseppe  
Tarasconi, Milan c.1900 • Giorgio  
Gatti, Turin 1929 • Ambrogio  
Sironi, Milan 1935 • Luigi  
Gallimberti, Milan 1924 • Carl  
Becker, Chicago 1930 • Sergio  
Peresson, Haddonfield 1981 •  
Oreste Candi, Genoa 1930 •  
Ermindo Farina, Milan 1909  
• Emile Germain, Paris 1867  
• Fernando Ferroni, Florence  
1932 • Ernesto Pevere, Ferrara  
1927 • W.E. Hill & Sons, London  
2019 • Igino Sderci, Florence  
1950 • Pietro Gallinotti, Solero  
1931 • Nestor Audinot, Paris 1881  
• Richard Duke, London c. 1770  
• Luciano Sderci, Florence 1960  
Riccardo Bergonzi, Cremona 1991  
• Paolo Vettori, Florence 2018  
• Dario Vettori, Florence 2018 •  
Lapo Vettori, Florence 2013  
• Sofia Vettori, Florence 2018  
• Maurizio Tadioli, Cremona 2019  
• Claudio Testoni, Mantua 2007  
• Hristo Todorov, Cremona 2016  
• Vincenzo Cavani, Modena 1940  
• Wojciech Topa, Zakopane 2019  
Benjamin Phillips, Pittsburgh 1947

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# LEARNING FROM THE PAST AND SHAPING THE FUTURE

Violinist Emmanuel Vukovich plays violins both old and new

By Laurence Vittes

I first heard Canadian violinist Emmanuel Vukovich play at the Montréal Chamber Music Festival in 2014. It was after he had completed his undergraduate studies at Juilliard and McGill University, where he concurrently pursued degrees in music performance and environment, and then spent three years co-managing an organic farm. He performed Bach's Violin Sonata in A minor, BWV 1003, from the center aisle of St. George's Anglican Church. Five years and festivals later, on a noontime concert at Montréal's Salle Bourgie, Vukovich seemed to have had a guardian angel on his shoulder in a deep and moving performance of Bach's *Chaconne*.

In these and other far-ranging ventures, such as a recent performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto in New York with the Stony Brook Symphony Orchestra, and the upcoming creation and world premiere of a new violin concerto, inspired by Hindustani music, written for him by Sheila Silver, Vukovich has benefited from the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Musical



PHOTOS BY RODOLPHE BEAULIEU-POULIN

Instrument Bank. Over the past several years he has played on violins crafted by Gennaro Gagliano, Giovanni Tononi, Nicolò Amati, and Giovanni Battista Guaragnini. Vukovich has simultaneously been a strong advocate for contemporary violin making and has owned and performed on several modern instruments, including a violin built by Denis Cormier in Montréal and a "Gruszblatt" violin made by Mira Gruszow & Gideon Baumblatt in Berlin.

I spoke to Vukovich from Montréal, where he is currently preparing his final doctoral recital for Stony Brook University, including Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz. 117, and an original composition titled *Parzival & Fierrefiz* for solo violin, voice, African drum, and chamber orchestra co-created with American composer John

McDowell. Vukovich is also preparing a debut album, which will include Sheila Silver's "To the Spirit Unconquered" and Beethoven's "Archduke" Piano Trio, Op. 97, with the Parcival Piano Trio.

## Tell me more about your violins.

The "Gruszblatt" violin is inspired by a 1744 Michele Angelo Bergonzi violin; it won the Double Gold Medal in the Violin Society of America International Violin Making Competition in 2018. Recently, I have also had the privilege of playing a 1629 Nicolò Amati and currently, a 1753 [Giovanni Battista] Guaragnini.

## What do you know about their histories?

The Gruszblatt was made for me—I remember speaking with Gideon and Mira

about a concept of sound for this violin as it was being created. The Guadagnini was previously part of the Canada Council Musical Instrument Bank collection and is now privately owned.

### How did you come to play them? What first drew you to them and how did you know they were the “right” fit?

As I just mentioned, the Gruszblatt was made for me by Gideon and Mira. They have become close friends. We first met in Montréal through mutual friends in both music and farming.

I have previously been loaned instruments through the Musical Instrument Bank. Through this unique program I have been connected to instruments outside the Bank, and this is how I came to play both the Amati and the Guadagnini.

Many years ago, when I was looking for my first full-size violin, I was told that an instrument “comes to you.” I believe this and can say that it has happened with all of the instruments I have played. It is similar to meeting people we connect with—their appearance, their voice, and the way they make us feel is what attracts us to them.

### What gifts do your instruments bring to your playing?

We grow as violinists through the instruments we play, especially in our concept of sound and our unique musical voice. To play an instrument made by one of the old masters is like working directly with one of the great composers whose artistic vision and legacy we continue today. Their wisdom and teaching are preserved within the works they have created, in their compositions and in their instruments.

To play on a modern instrument that’s made expressly for you is like taking part in the creation of a new musical work that will help shape and change the future. It is to be involved in the creation of a new voice, which has yet to be defined through your playing and the repertoire you play on it.

### What are your instruments’ personalities and temperaments like? Do they remind you of anyone or anything?

In his memoirs Yehudi Menuhin writes, “I could recount my entire life in terms of a dialectical argument between the Stradivarius

and the Guarnerius del Gesù.” He describes this archetypal polarity in the sonority of Stradivari violins as pure gold and the sound of Guarneri del Gesù as “the red of Sainte-Chapelle stained glass.”

Following Menuhin, I can place every violin I have played on this spectrum. Also, more often than not, the physical characteristics of an instrument betray its voice. The Gruszblatt is golden colored, with relatively high arching, and has a very open and clear sound. The Amati is a smaller instrument, with a darker top, and very high arching, and has a warm and rounded tone. The Guadagnini has very bright varnish, relatively flat arching, and is extremely powerful and focused in its projection.

### Does each of them perform better in certain situations? How does each adjust to all the different music you play?

I believe this is always more dependent on the player than the instrument. Playing on both old and modern violins, I have come to believe that projection is not a question of force but of focus; that color and nuance are expressions of infinite subtlety; and that beauty is expressed, above all, through our capacity to be honest. The violins I play have helped me explore and expand my horizon and range of dynamics, color, and timbre. Over time, as I connect with a violin, and learn how to coax a wider and deeper range of nuance out of it, the instrument becomes a friend, and eventually a part of me, as I also become a part of its life.

For me, instruments are like keys to the human soul. Their sounds touch us, can move us, and if played well, can open our hearts and the hearts of those who are listening.

### What are your violins’ greatest strengths?

Gruszblatt: clarity; Amati: warmth; Guadagnini: power.

### What are some of their limitations?

The limitations are always in the player—not the instrument. Always! Menuhin writes, “One must rise to a Stradivarius before it will speak from its craftsman’s soul. It spurns the man who lets his hand exert too much pressure or his finger fall ever so slightly wide of its mark. . . . By contrast, from the rougher hand of ‘del Gesù’, his choice of less good wood and his f-holes ‘obviously gouged by

some rough measure of the eye,’ one could infer a man at once passionate and compassionate, bull and saint, a temperamental nonconformist. . . .”

### What would your instruments suggest as their beverage of choice?

Guadagnini: Definitely whiskey!; Gruszblatt: Riesling; Amati: Burgundy.



## VUKOVICH’S GEAR

### BOW

1890 Charles-Nicolas Bazin  
1995 François Malo–Paris (round)  
2018 François Malo–Montréal  
(octagonal)

### STRINGS

Thomastik-Infeld Dominant, Vision,  
Rondo, and Peter Infeld P1; Jargar E  
forte

### CASE

Bam

### ROSIN

Bernardel, Pirastro Gold

### ADDITIONAL GEAR

Two humidifiers for the case; a fine piece of suede leather in which to wrap the violin; an extra latch and buckle at the top and bottom of the case added by Wilder & Davis to keep the case more tightly sealed in order to help in cold climates and deal with the changes of humidity due to travel