

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | LONDON | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 6 JUNE 2022

Antonio Stradivari's Finest Inlaid Violin:

THE 'HELLIER' STRADIVARIUS VIOLIN

Displaying

New proportions that became the 'blueprint' of future violin models
Enriching the tone and having a profound effect on future centuries of music
and generations of violin makers

Leads

The Exceptional Sale

In London on 7 July 2022

During

CLASSIC WEEK



London – The 'Hellier' Stradivarius, 1679, is the finest inlaid violin ever made by the world renowned genius-craftsman Antonio Stradivari and one of the finest Stradivarius instruments in existence (estimate: £6,000,000-9,000,000). An extremely rare and important example of Stradivari's work, this masterpiece is the top lot of *The Exceptional Sale* on 7 July and a highlight within *Classic Week*, London. The 'Hellier' exhibits new proportions that became the 'blueprint' of future violin models; enriching the tone and having a profound effect on future centuries of music and future generations

of violin makers. It will be on view at Christie's London in *The Art of Literature: Auction Highlights Exhibition*, which will run from 6 to 15 June, ahead of being part of the pre-sale exhibition for *The Exceptional Sale*, from 2 to 7 July.

Amjad Rauf, Head of The Exceptional Sale, International Head of Masterpiece and Private Sales, Christie's Decorative Arts commented: *"Christie's is honoured to be offering the 'Hellier' violin, a rare masterpiece executed circa 1679 by the genius craftsman Antonio Stradivari, which is without doubt his finest inlaid violin. Previously in the greatest collections of musical instruments, and latterly on loan to the Smithsonian Museum, this remarkable lot presents the market with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that exemplifies the best-of-the-best works that are synonymous with The Exceptional Sale."*

Florian Leonhard, Christie's Consultant, London commented: *"Having handled countless Stradivaris, including some of the finest examples, this is without a doubt one of the most exciting, beautiful and impressive instruments in existence. The warmth and personality that an instrument of this caliber exudes, inspires a sense of youthful excitement in anyone fortunate enough to hold it in one's hands. This violin epitomises, more than most, the vision of Stradivari's ability to develop things forward; a reason why he deserves his place in the zenith as the unsurpassed violin maker of all time."*

PRIZED SINCE CREATION TO THE PRESENT DAY

Stradivari was thought to have refused to sell the instrument for 55 years until 1734 in a sale for £40 to Sir Samuel Hellier of Wombourne, England, as recorded in the 1880s, although it is now believed that it may have entered the Hellier family sometime earlier; the 1719 will of John Hellier of Westminster bequeathed 'two Cremona violins' to his nephew, Samuel Hellier, father of Sir Samuel Hellier. The violin remained in the Hellier family for almost two centuries. This hesitancy to part with the violin has been seen from all subsequent distinguished owners, from Henry E. Morris the newspaper tycoon and director of the Shanghai Daily News, to American collector Mr Henry Hottinger, a founder and member of a firm of Investment bankers, who amassed one of the best-known collections of rare violins of the mid-20th century. The instrument has been housed in both the Smithsonian Institution and the Museo Civico in Cremona.

ANTONIO STRADIVARI (1644-1737)

Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737) is the most famous and revered Italian violin maker, whose approximately 500 surviving violins are widely regarded as the finest and most valuable ever made. Stradivari's supreme level of craftsmanship coupled with his inexhaustible artistic creativity resulted in instruments to which all subsequent makers have aspired, and which have been sought after by the leading musicians of each generation.

NEW PROPORTIONS THAT BECAME THE 'BLUEPRINT' OF FUTURE VIOLIN MODELS

Made toward the beginning of Stradivari's career, the 1679 'Hellier' Stradivarius was the first of his violins to evolve significantly from the strict proportions of the Amatisé period (1660-1690), scaled up in a fashion that would form the 'blueprint' for future violin models. Proportions that were not subsequently surpassed, it was an evolution that enriched the tone, and would have a profound effect on several centuries of music and future generations of violin makers.

INGENIOUS IN CONCEPTION, AND METICULOUS IN EXECUTION

From the superior choice of wood, to the exquisite ivory inlays, the 'Hellier' is ingenious in conception, and meticulous in execution. Stradivari's 1679 'Hellier' is an interesting violin for a huge variety of reasons. Aside from the incredible inlay work – which the surviving drawings made in Antonio's hand suggest he did himself – the varnish technique he employs shows his first real attempt to improve on the method great Cremonese maker Nicolò Amati had developed. The incredibly fine work on the scroll, the increased volume of the violin, and the beautiful f-holes all attest to Stradivari advancing existing practices. Nicolò Amati's influence can be seen in the head's perfectly symmetrical proportions, the sweeping gracefulness of the pegbox, and the scroll's small and deeply turned volutions. However, there is an overall bolder momentum to the outline of this violin, and the position and design of the f holes surpass any instrument that came before. The rich, intensely orange-yellow varnish atop a thin almost transparent golden ground layer also demonstrate some deviation from Stradivari's 'Amatisé' style.

Between the two rows of purfling, the 'Hellier' features a procession of nearly 500 precious gems. Beginning at the corners, carefully sculpted ivory circles chassé alternately with delicately engraved ivory diamonds, displaying Stradivari's extraordinary skill in free-hand inlaying. This is complimented by the ornately florid silhouettes of flowers and vines etched into the wood and filled in with an ebony mastic, which creep their way around the ribs of the violin and the pegbox. The art of decorating instruments in such a way may have its roots in plucked string instruments such as lutes. The designs were first drawn on paper before being transposed to the wood, and Stradivari's original drawings and tools can be seen at the Museo del Violino in Cremona. Of the roughly 1,100 instruments Stradivari made over the course of his career, only around a dozen are embellished with decoration, and this specimen is regarded by the Smithsonian curators as the best-preserved extant example.

ROYAL AND ARISTOCRATIC COLLECTIONS

So renowned was Stradivari, and so desired are his instruments that his instruments, particularly the very rare decorated examples, have been precious family heirlooms to the major courts, Earls, Dukes and Royal households of Europe. Arguably most notable of the Italian families is the Medici family of Florence whose dedication to fine art led them to commission instruments from Stradivari, but in particular a complete quartet, which exist today in an almost untouched state of preservation. Not only noble families, but indeed many royal families of Europe have been in possession of Stradivari instruments with the 1708 'Empress Caterina of Russia', which was owned by Catherine the Great, Tsarina of Russia during the late 1700s. Other examples of note include the Early of Plymouth, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Marlborough, Royal Palace of Madrid and King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

FAVOURED BY SOLOISTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Most of the great soloists in history favoured Stradivari, and so many of the great names used Stradivari. Niccolò Paganini, one of the greatest violinists of all time, owned and played on a selection of the finest violins ever made. Amongst these, Niccolò had a number of Stradivari violins that ranged the whole creative output of Stradivari. These include the Paganini-Desaint 1680, Le Brun 1712, Hubay 1726 and the Paganini, Comte Cozio di Salabue 1727. The Soil 1714 Stradivari is widely considered one of the finest Golden Period violins and was acquired by Yehudi Menuhin in

1950, which was subsequently sold to Itzhak Perlman in 1986. André Rieu famously purchased his 1667 Stradivarius the 'Captain Saville', which he purchased and performs almost exclusively on.

Other famous musicians include those such as Joseph Joachim, Jascha Heifetz, David Oistrakh, Jacqueline du Pré, etc. Of the living soloists that use them are Anne-Sophie Mutter, Leonidas Kavakos, Maxim Vengerov, Joshua Bell, Steven Isserlis, Yo Yo Ma.

PRESS CONTACTS:

Hannah Schweiger | +44 (0) 207 389 2964 | hschweiger@christies.com

Notes to Editors

The 'Hellier' violin is registered as being 'exempt' in the UK in accordance with the UK Ivory Act.

About Christie's

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