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FINE INSTRUMENTS & BOWS

## *Guarneri del Gesù*

the 'Baltic' of c. 1731

NEW YORK LONDON BERLIN

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# *Giuseppe Guarneri 'del Gesù'*
## the 'Baltic' of c. 1731

At auction March 16, 2023

## Provenance

| | |
|---|---|
| –1935 | Giese family |
| in 1935 | Sold by W. H. Hammig |
| 1935–1940 | Walter Sochaczewski |
| in 1940 | Sold by Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. |
| 1940–1950 | E. Clem Wilson |
| in 1952 | Sold by Rembert Wurlitzer Inc. |
| 1952–1962 | Dorotha Powers Percival |
| in 1962 | Sold by Rembert Wurlitzer Inc. |
| 1962–c. 1971 | Irving Levick |
| in 1971 | Sold by Harry A. Duffy |
| 1971–c. 1975 | George A. Gade |
| c. 1975–1979 | Steven Staryk |
| 1979 | Sold by Harry A. Duffy |
| 1979–1988 | Sau-Wing Lam |
| from 1988 | The Lam family |

## Documents

| | |
|---|---|
| Certificate | Tarisio |
| Dendrochronology report | Peter Ratcliff, London |
| Certificate | Rembert Wurlitzer Inc., New York |
| Letter | Philipp Hammig, Berlin |
| Certificate | W. E. Hill & Sons, London |
| Letter | W. E. Hill & Sons, London |
| Certificate | Philipp Hammig, Berlin |

*Text by Tarisio Founder, Director and Expert, Jason Price*



# *Guarneri del Gesù*
## the 'Baltic' of c. 1731

It has been over thirty years since a Guarneri of this quality has come to auction. Original in all parts, made of exemplary tonewood, in excellent condition and covered in a stunning, deep red-brown varnish—the 'Baltic' is breathtaking.

The year 1731 was significant for Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù. His father, Giuseppe 'filius Andreæ', had recently become incapacitated after an illness; early in 1731 del Gesù moved into the center of town; and, as if finally embracing his new position as one of three master makers in Cremona—alongside Stradivari and Bergonzi—he increased his output and began making better violins than ever before.

Prior to 1730, the model and dimensions of Guarneri's violins were more variable—the back length could be as long as 357 mm and the stop could be up to 200 mm as seen, for example, in the c. 1727 'Dancla'. Starting around 1731, del Gesù tended towards instruments of a shorter (350–353 mm) body length with a stop length of 190–193 mm. His sound-holes also changed: The lower holes became smaller which made the wings broader, and it was around this time that the 'hatchet-shaped' sound-holes we associate so much with the Guarneri style emerged. The 'Baltic' may well have been one of the first of a new series; its model—with exceptions and inevitable variations—endured for the next seven or so years until around 1738. The text to Peter Biddulph's 1994 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York made this point eloquently: "The 'Baltic' model … marks a watershed in del Gesù's development" and represents "the first fruit of new ideas, heralding a new phase in del Gesù's career."[1]

Del Gesù had access to outstanding maple which was, in fact, often notably better than the more humble stock used by the world-famous Stradivari workshop for most of the 1730s. The maple that del Gesù selected for the 'Baltic' is stunning, with wide flames flowing across the width of the instrument. In the lower bouts, the wood is cut precisely on the quarter exposing the short, bright medullary rays that glisten in direct light. The sides are made of similar wood; the lower ribs, originally in one piece, are deeply flamed like the back while the upper ribs are more plain.

A dendrochronology examination performed by Peter Ratcliff dated the youngest rings of the treble and bass sides to 1713 and 1711 respectively. The two halves are unmatched but probably from the

same tree. Guarneri, as many of his contemporaries, frequently joined unmatched halves to make the tops of his instruments instead of 'book-matching' a split billet. Significant correlations, some strongly indicating a same tree match, were found with other Guarneri violins including the 1732 'Posselt' and 'Armingaud', the 1734 'Violon du Diable' and 'Haddock' and the 1745 'Leduc'.

The 'Baltic' has two locating pins bisected by the purfling in the upper and lower bouts of the back. The Amati-school central pin, seen clearly on the inside back, is 182 mm from the lower edge. The thickness of the back is a full 4.5 mm at the location of the pin.

The scroll retains features common with Guarneri's instruments from the late 1720s. The slightly egg-shaped volute of the 'Baltic' is most similar to the c. 1729 'Lady Streeton' but also resembles the 'Stauffer, Zukerman' and the 'Gibson, Huberman' both of c. 1731. By 1733 del Gesù's head model had changed, ironically returning to the style of his father from previous decades.

The other important development that occurred around the time the 'Baltic' was made was the first appearance of del Gesù's new label with its enigmatic and iconic IHS seal. It was modern, bold and broke with tradition. The label currently in the 'Baltic' is a facsimile reproduction that was inserted by W. E. Hill & Sons in 1939. Writing to Rudolph Wurlitzer on June 2 of that year, Alfred Hill remarked, "I note that the label it bears dated 1731—the period is correct—is fictitious. I shall replace it [with] a much better reproduction."[2] The Hills weren't the type to swap labels unnecessarily, but they would have wanted the 'Baltic' to be presented with an accurate and appropriate label. The quality and verisimilitude of the Hill facsimile is exceptional; they even went so far as to imitate the two short vertical pen strokes after the date—a typical but not fully understood feature of del Gesù's labels. It is entirely understandable that this label had previously passed as original.

The 'Baltic' was selected by Peter Biddulph for his 1994 exhibition of twenty-five exceptional Guarneri instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is illustrated in the exhibition catalog as well as the two-volume monograph on the maker that followed. Two decades later, in 2012, it was put on display again at the Metropolitan Museum with the other instruments from the Lam Collection. The 'Baltic' is accompanied by certificates from W. E. Hill & Sons, Rembert Wurlitzer and Tarisio. ■



# Provenance

> “You couldn’t be more German than my father.”
> – *Barbara Sochaczewski Dreyfuss*

The c. 1731 ‘Baltic’ Guarneri takes its name from “an old Baltic family by the name of von Giese, which no longer exists.”[3] As far as historical accuracy goes, this isn’t much to work with. Nevertheless, that’s what the Berlin violin dealer Philipp Hammig wrote to Rudolph Wurlitzer in 1946. The ‘Baltic’ is what the Wurlitzers called the violin, and this became its name.

Hammig’s family firm had sold the ‘Baltic’ eleven years earlier, and the firm’s archives give a slightly different account of its past. According to Wilhelm Hermann Hammig’s notes, the previous owner of the ‘Baltic’ was a member of the Giese family of Rathenow, a small town in Brandenburg, 90 km northwest of Berlin.[4] The Giese family weren’t nobles; they were merchants (the ‘von’ was added by Hammig), and although Rathenow is far inland from the Baltic Sea, several generations of the Giese family were successful shipowners and sea captains who likely traded up and down the Baltic coast.

Hammig sold the violin to Dr. Walter Sochaczewski, a successful pediatrician in Hannover. Sochaczewski had served in the German army as a doctor in the First World War, stationed in Bavaria. In 1919 he married the daughter of a banker from Hannover and in 1922 he opened his practice in a prestigious building in the center of the city. He was particularly interested in *Sozialpädiatrie*, an interdisciplinary approach to developmental pediatrics which was popular in Germany in the early 20th century.[5]

The Sochaczewski family was middle class and cultured. They had a large library and a piano; chamber music was played frequently in the family home.[6] “You couldn’t be more German than my father,” remembered his daughter Barbara in 2010.[7]

In 1933 over 50% of Germany’s pediatricians were Jewish[8] but with the rise of National Socialism, life quickly became dangerous and unsafe for doctors like Sochaczewski. At the beginning of 1935, a prominent Hannover publisher and the head of the anti-Semitic *Stürmer Freunde Hannover*, Heinz Siegmann, included Dr. Sochaczewski in his *Juden in Hannover*, an insidious list of Jewish companies, banks, doctors and other professionals.[9] Patients and their families, previously loyal to Dr. Sochaczewski, were bullied into leaving his practice.

Mindful of the worsening political situation, Dr. Sochaczewski and his wife began to think of leaving Germany and the financial consequences such a decision would entail. We don’t know if Dr. Sochaczewski or his wife Ilse played the violin but that doesn’t seem to be the reason he bought the ‘Baltic’ in November of 1935.[10] If the political situation



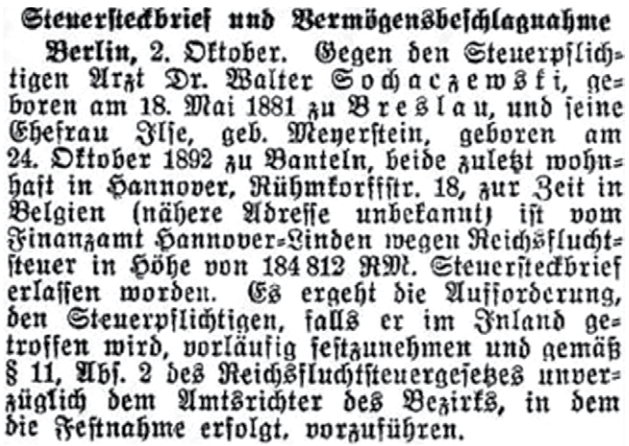
*Sochaczewski, a doctor in the German army, was stationed in Bavaria during the First World War.* (Photo credit: Barbara Sochaczewski Dreyfuss from myheimat.de)

deteriorated further for his family, a precious yet highly-portable and unassuming violin could be an effective way to transfer wealth without attracting attention.

If the political situation deteriorated further for his family, a precious yet highly-portable and unassuming violin could be an effective way to transfer wealth without attracting attention.

A year later, a police officer whose child had been a patient of Dr. Sochaczewski, tipped him off that soon he was to be arrested and deported.[11] On November 25, 1936, Sochaczewski and his family escaped in secret. The doctor crossed into Belgium; his wife and daughters traveled to Switzerland; and the family reunited in Brussels.[12] Less than a month later, the 'Baltic' was in London at the violin dealers, W. E. Hill & Sons. There's no indication whether the 'Baltic' was submitted to the Hills for sale or safekeeping but a certificate was issued for the violin on December 18th in the name of Dr. Sochaczewski of Brussels. The accompanying letter from Alfred Hill noted that the violin was not previously known to their firm, which explains why it wasn't included in their 1931 monograph on the Guarneri family.[13]

On October 2, 1937 an arrest warrant was issued for Dr. Sochaczewski and his wife by the German tax authorities for non-payment of the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. Since 1931 this 'Reich flight tax' had effectively prohibited the emigration of affluent, mostly Jewish



**Steuersteckbrief und Vermögensbeschlagnahme**

**Berlin, 2. Oktober.** Gegen den Steuerpflichtigen Arzt Dr. Walter Sochaczewski, geboren am 18. Mai 1881 zu Breslau, und seine Ehefrau Ilse, geb. Meyerstein, geboren am 24. Oktober 1892 zu Banteln, beide zuletzt wohnhaft in Hannover, Rühmkorffstr. 18, zur Zeit in Belgien (nähere Adresse unbekannt) ist vom Finanzamt Hannover-Linden wegen Reichsfluchtsteuer in Höhe von 184 812 RM. Steuersteckbrief erlassen worden. Es ergeht die Aufforderung, den Steuerpflichtigen, falls er im Inland getroffen wird, vorläufig festzunehmen und gemäß § 11, Abs. 2 des Reichsfluchtsteuergesetzes unverzüglich dem Amtsrichter des Bezirks, in dem die Festnahme erfolgt, vorzuführen.

*An arrest warrant was issued for Dr. Sochaczewski and his wife Ilse for non-payment of the* Reichsfluchtsteuer, *the tax on German citizens fleeing the country after 1931.* (Photo credit: Barbara Sochaczewski Dreyfuss from myheimat.de)

families by levying extortionate tariffs on their assets. If Dr. Sochaczewski's purchase of the 'Baltic' was part of a clever strategy to avoid the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*, the Reich was not going to take it lightly.

While Belgium initially granted refuge to Jewish exiles like Dr. Sochaczewski, there were concerns that the far right would gain power and that leaders like Léon Degrelle and his *Rexiste* party would align the country more closely with its fascist neighbor. Sensing that worse trouble lay ahead, the Sochaczewskis boarded a ship in Antwerp and sailed to São Paolo, Brazil just a year after fleeing Germany. Dr. Sochaczewksi died in Brazil on January 23, 1950 at the age of 68.

The 'Baltic', meanwhile, did not travel with the Sochaczewski family to São Paolo. Correspondence from June of 1939 between Alfred Hill and the New York dealer Rudolph Wurlitzer reveals that the violin was in London in the care of the Hills and was being prepared to be sent to Wurlitzers for sale.[14] The Hills and Wurlitzers were close associates in these years. Sales, consignments and referrals flowed freely between them, but mostly the instruments went westward to America where customers and cash were plentiful. The Hills had arranged for Wurlitzer to get the consignment of the 'Baltic' and in return,

If Dr. Sochaczewski's purchase of the 'Baltic' was part of a clever strategy to avoid the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*, the Reich was not going to take it lightly.



*Mickey Mantle, the young superstar baseball player for the New York Yankees, takes lessons from violinist Dorotha Powers in 1954. The original caption read, "there is no danger of the Yankee Stadium losing Mantle to Carnegie Hall."* (Photo credit: Bettmann via Getty Images)

Wurlizer paid the Hills a referral commission. On August 7, 1939 the 'Baltic' arrived in New York City on the SS Queen Mary.[15]

Six months later, the Los Angeles branch of the Wurlitzer company sold the violin to Elihu Clement Wilson, an eclectic engineer who had made money in the burgeoning oil industry. Together with his two brothers, Wilson held lucrative patents for tools and technology used to mine and refine petroleum. In addition to the 'Baltic', Wilson owned another Guarneri violin, the 1731 'ex-Turrettini' as well as instruments by Stradivari and Bergonzi.

Wilson died in 1950 and two years later, Rembert Wurlitzer, who had succeeded his father at the firm, purchased the 'Baltic' from Wilson's daughter, Elizabeth Wilson Farrar. Shortly thereafter, Wurlitzer sold the violin to the American violinist Dorotha Powers. Powers's husband Arthur W. Percival had been a piano salesman at the Wurlitzer company and in 1947 he and another Wurlitzer employee, Eugene Farny, started Telecoin Corporation, a company that franchised self-service laundromats. The business flourished in the booming post-war American consumer economy and the partners boasted a profit of $550,000 in the first nine months of 1947.[16] Powers owned two Stradivari violins that she purchased from Wurlitzer—the 1711 'Earl of Plymouth, Kreisler' and the 1682 'Hill, Banat'. Interestingly she traded in the latter to finance her purchase of the 'Baltic'. Among other accomplishments, Powers is remembered for leading the Powers String Quartet consisting of four siblings and for giving lessons to Yankee baseball superstar, Mickey Mantle.

In 1962 the violin came back to Wurlitzers on consignment and this time they sold it to the upstate New York collector, Irving Levick. The Wurlitzer certificate noted that the violin was in "an exceptionally good state of preservation."[17] In 1971 Levick sold the violin through the dealer Harry Duffy of Miami to the California collector, George Gade. Several years later, the 'Baltic' was acquired by the Canadian violinist Steven Staryk who concertized extensively on the instrument and made several recordings. In 1979 the 'Baltic' was acquired by Chinese American businessman and music patron, Sau-Wing Lam. ■







# The Origin of 'del Gesù'

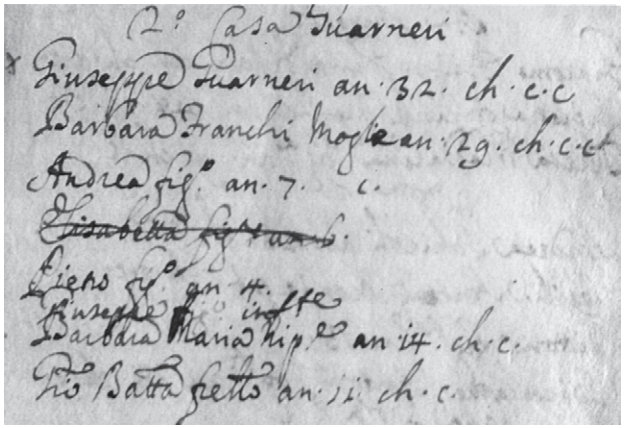
Jason Price and Carlo Chiesa

The period in which Guarneri made the 'Baltic' was significant for the young maker: He moved into a new workshop, succeeded his father and, perhaps most importantly, began using a new label, one that broke with tradition and created a mythology all his own.

For almost as long as his violins have been famous, Bartolomeo Giuseppe Guarneri has been known as del Gesù. It's an enchanting name for an artisan, evoking a heroic, larger-than-life mythology that has, for centuries, inspired romantic visions of a possessed artist and a god-gifted genius. But this talented craftsman wasn't always known as del Gesù. The nickname came much later, long after the golden-age of Cremonese violin making had come to an end. As the late violin expert and Guarneri specialist Robert Bein once said, it's not like his wife yelled upstairs at mealtimes, "Hey del Gesù, dinner's on the table!"

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This nickname first appeared in the late 18th or early 19th century when the first violin experts began to sort out the various makers of the Guarneri family. Confusion arose from the fact that two successive generations were named Giuseppe: the makers we now refer to as Giuseppe 'filius Andreæ' (the son of Andrea) and his youngest son, Giuseppe 'del Gesù'. The latter was christened with the full name of Bartolomeo Giuseppe, but from the beginning he was called simply Giuseppe. Already in the parish census of 1699, recorded just months after he was born, his first Christian name was omitted, and in nearly every subsequent census, record or document in which he is mentioned, including his marriage record, he is referred to as Giuseppe. Bartholomeo was probably given as a formality, so that father and son didn't have the same name. This issue wasn't unique to violin makers and even today in Italy naming a child after a living parent or sibling is strongly discouraged—when flowers arrive for Maria Rossi and there are four Maria Rossis all living at the same address, it's chaos.

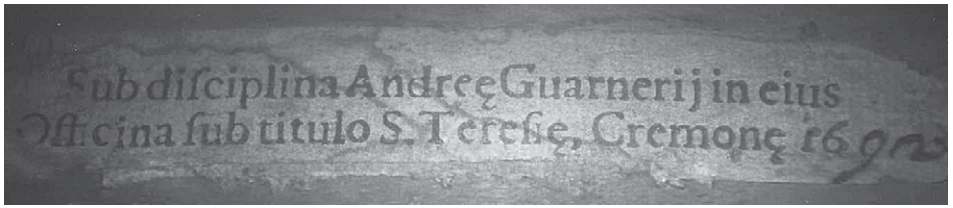


*The parish census of 1699. Just months after Bartolomeo Giuseppe was born he was referred to simply as Giuseppe with no mention of his first Christian name.* (Photo credit: Carlo Chiesa)

The earliest violin experts and enthusiasts understood that there were two makers named Giuseppe Guarneri but had difficulty working out the relationship between them. In a way, del Gesù himself was partly responsible for this confusion: It was he who broke with the Cremonese tradition of naming parentage on his labels. The Cremonese convention, beginning with the Brothers Amati, was to declare a maker's lineage by stating the name of his father. Nicolo Amati's labels went further, telling us that he was both the son of Girolomo and the nephew of Antonio ("Hieronymi Fil. ac Antonij Nepos"). This served to show the relationship of the maker to his master and to underline the importance of familiar traditions. The two sons of Andrea Guarneri did the same by adding "filius Andreæ" (son of Andrea) on their labels, and Pietro of Venice wrote "filius Joseph" (son of Joseph) even long after he left Cremona. At the beginning of his career, "del Gesù" followed this tradition but in an unprecedented way: In his first, pre-1730 label he referred to himself as "Andreæ Nepos" (grandson of Andrea).




*The label of the 1728 'Kubelik, von Vecsey.' According to Count Cozio's notes, in his first instruments, up to 1730, del Gesù referred to himself as "Andreæ Nepos".*




*In one version of Andrea Guarneri's label, used for instruments made under the master's direction, the text specifies "in eius Officina sub titulo S. Teresię" (in his workshop at the sign of Santa Teresa).*

This label helped experts to understand that there were two Giuseppe Guarneris, but created further confusion because of a linguistic ambiguity. In Latin the word *nepos* can mean either grandson or nephew so the phrase "Joseph Guarnerius Andreæ Nepos" could mean either nephew of Andrea or grandson of Andrea, and without context or archival research, early experts had no way to know which was correct. Possibly influenced by Nicolo Amati's *nepos* reference, many early experts falsely concluded that Giuseppe was the nephew of Andrea.

The confusion was compounded by the fact that several other Giuseppe Guarneris were born in Cremona in the late 17th century. In fact, Andrea Guarneri had two grandsons named Giuseppe. As far as we know only the one later known as del Gesù was involved in violin making but that didn't stop researchers and biographers from occasionally muddling the identities of these men. It would have helped if del Gesù had called himself "Joseph filius Joseph," but we agree: that's awkward. *Nepos* was the right choice; it wasn't del Gesù's fault that historians got it wrong.

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Del Gesù's labels broke with another tradition too, one that his father, grandfather and uncle had followed for nearly eighty years. After Andrea Guarneri left the Amati workshop in the mid-1650s, his new independent label included four Latin words, "sub titulo Sanctæ Teresiæ." This short phrase literally translates to "at the sign of Santa Teresa" but its meaning has been interpreted in different ways. We believe that the "sign of Santa Teresa" was a signpost, marker, symbol, statue or possibly an icon of Santa Teresa that was positioned on the façade of the Guarneri workshop to identify its location.

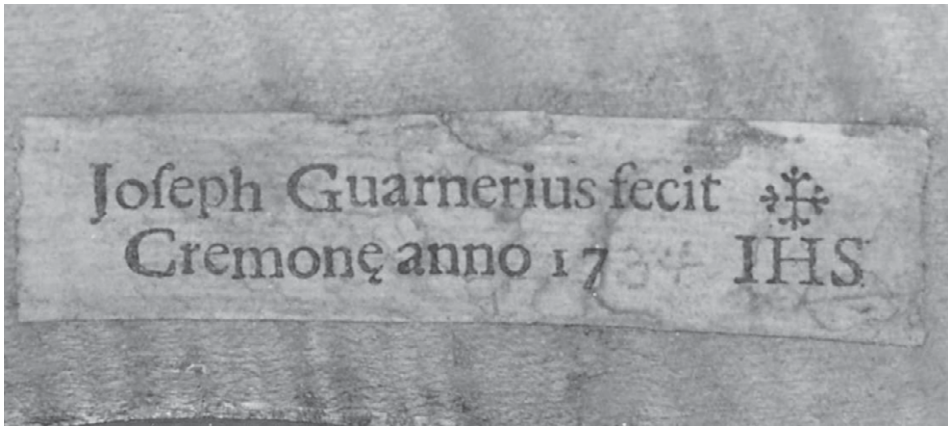
In Italy in the 18th century there wasn't a precise or unified system for recording civic addresses. Few streets had names and houses rarely had numbers. Shops, inns, artisans and merchants commonly identified their location with a landmark that was distinctive and could be used by a traveler to locate the address they were looking for.

There were many examples of this in Milan, where the violin makers were clustered along the Contrada Larga, a wide boulevard in the center of town. Grancino, Testore and Lavazza all had their ateliers on this street and were in competition with each other. We can assume that Grancino didn't want his customers to wander into the Lavazza workshop by mistake. As such, the Grancino family labels indicate "in Contrada Larga di Milano al segno della Corona" (in the Contrada Larga at the sign of the crown) whereas the Testore labels say "… al segno dell' Aquila" (at the sign of the eagle). In the mid-18th century Landolfi suggested on his label that prospective customers come to the Contrada di Santa Margarita "al segno della Sirena" (at the sign of the mermaid), while his former pupil, Mantegazza, worked "al segno dell'Angelo" (at the sign of the Angel). Our favorite is the house where the Pasta and Grancino families lived for a time, which was an inn identified by "il cane che abbaia alla luna" (the dog barking at the moon). Similar locating phrases were used on makers' labels in Venice, Florence, Bologna and elsewhere. The signs they referred to are long gone but would have helped customers locate a maker's shop. Locals of all levels of literacy could direct a traveler to the violin maker at the sign of the eagle.

The first two generations of the Guarneri family worked in the Casa Guarneri in Piazza San Domenico, so it makes sense that Andrea and his sons Giuseppe and Pietro would have all used the "sub titulo" phrase on their labels while working there. After moving to Mantua in the mid-1680s, however, Pietro continued to use the "sub titulo" phrase. This may have been a symbolic way of asserting continuity and confirming that he was of the same clan as the Guarneris of Cremona, but it's also possible that he replicated an actual sign of Santa Teresa outside his new

workshop in Mantua. Pietro of Venice, on the other hand, the elder brother of del Gesù, didn't mention Santa Teresa or any other address on his labels after he left Cremona around 1717. Del Gesù, who was last recorded in the Casa Guarneri in the census of 1722, never referenced Santa Teresa.

In or around 1731, several significant events occurred in del Gesù's life: he moved into the center of Cremona and opened an independent workshop; his production increased considerably; and his father effectively retired from working following an illness. At this same time, del Gesù debuted a new version of his label, the type found in the 'Baltic', which he would use for the remainder of his career.




*The label in the 1734 'Violon du Diable'. The new IHS label format appeared around 1731.*

On this new label there was no 'sub titulo' phrase and there was no son of, grandson of, or nephew of clause. It was simply a bold, modern and confident label. What came to be its most distinguishing mark, however, more distinguishing perhaps than any other label in the history of violin making, were three printed letters at the far right side reading IHS. The initials are a Christogram derived from the first three letters of the Greek spelling of Jesus (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). Since the 7th century, IHS had stood for the Latin motto, Iesus Hominum Salvator ("Jesus Savior of Mankind"), and by the 17th century, it had come to represent the order of Jesuits. These three letters—set under a cross but without punctuation or context—have provoked nearly three centuries of theories and speculation.

A conclusive explanation has yet to materialize but many interesting hypotheses have been suggested. Perhaps it was a symbol of a Jesuit connection. Or evidence of a pious artisan giving thanks to God. Or perhaps it was an imitation of the famous (A†S) monogram on Stradivari's labels. Or, seeing how it first appeared around the time that del Gesù moved his workshop, the IHS seal could have referenced a sign or a landmark that helped customers find their way to his atelier. In the 18th century the IHS symbol was common and in fact the facades of many buildings in Cremona still bear this emblem as a decoration. Was there a conspicuous IHS sign near Guarneri's new workshop? The answer may be simpler than it seems: In 1731 del Gesù no longer had to differentiate himself from his father; he needed to advertise his new address.

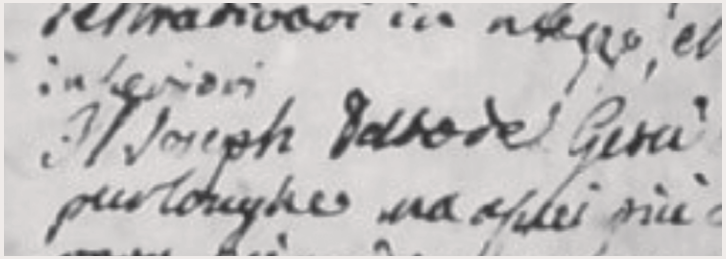
Whatever the explanation to this centuries-old riddle, we can take comfort in knowing that del Gesù's new label was evidence of a new, independent and exciting chapter of the maker's life. ■

# When did Giuseppe Guarneri become del Gesù?

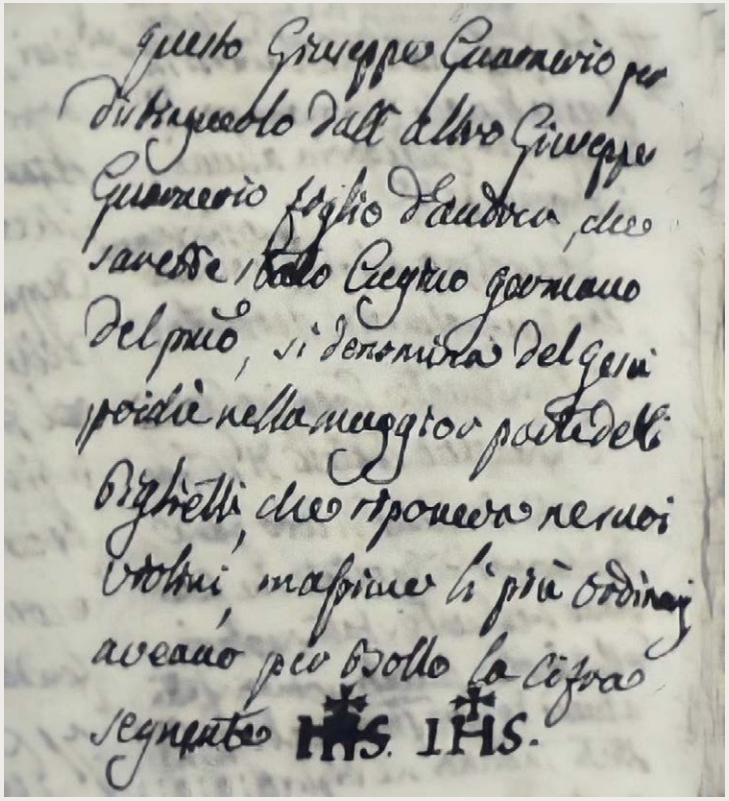
The first written explanation of the IHS symbol is found in the writings of the violin collector Count Ignazio Alessandro Cozio di Salabue. Count Cozio kept detailed notes of the instruments he owned and his notebooks provide important insight into the biographies and circumstances of Italian violin makers in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a collection of notes dating from 1804–1807, Cozio refers to 'il Joseph detto del Gesù (Giuseppe known as del Gesù).

In 1816 he provided a longer explanation: "To distinguish this Giuseppe Guarneri from the other Giuseppe Guarneri, the son of Andrea … we call him 'del Gesù' because most of the labels he inserted in his violins … bear the following seal, IHS" (per distinguerlo dall'altro Giuseppe Guarnerio [sic] figlio d'Andrea … si denomina del Gesù poiché nella maggior parte delli biglietti che riponeva ne suoi violini … aveano per Bollo la cifra seguente IHS).

This note also demonstrates that Cozio had misinterpreted the phrase "Andreæ Nepos" because he refers to del Gesù as the first cousin (cugino germano) of Giuseppe 'filius Andreæ'.



*In perhaps the first ever written record, Count Cozio's notebook from 1804–1807 refers to "Giuseppe known as del Gesù".*




*In Count Cozio's notes from 1816 he explains that del Gesù began to use the IHS seal to distinguish himself from the other Giuseppe Guarneri, the son of Andrea. (MS1 folio 19f)*

*Sau-Wing Lam* (Photo credit: The family of Sau-Wing Lam)



# Sau-Wing Lam and the Lam Collection

In 1979 Sau-Wing Lam acquired the 'Baltic' and added it to his prestigious collection of fine Italian instruments and French bows. It was one of Lam's last acquisitions and probably his most important. If instruments manifest the personalities of their owners then it's no surprise that the 'Baltic' beams with grace, nobility and warmth.

Sau-Wing Lam was born in 1923 to a Cantonese family in Shanghai, China. His father worked in banking, and together his parents instilled in their nine children the importance of education and curiosity. Perhaps this is what Sau-Wing owed his love of classical music to, seeing as it appeared to have emerged out of the ether. Neither parent displayed any remarkable love for music, and none of the Lam children received music lessons. His passion for music seems, as such, almost innate, as central to his personhood as the senses of sight or touch.

In school, Sau-Wing took up the viola, which was the only stringed instrument available for him to learn. He was hooked. By the time he matriculated at St. John's University in Shanghai, he was playing in a theater orchestra. Shanghai in the 1930s was a vibrant, vivacious city, thrumming with energy and excitement, and in playing in the orchestra pit, Sau-Wing found himself in the center of the madness. Regularly, he hurtled through the city on his bicycle (sometimes with the orchestra's French horn player balanced on the handlebars) as he traveled to gigs where audiences awaited enchantment.

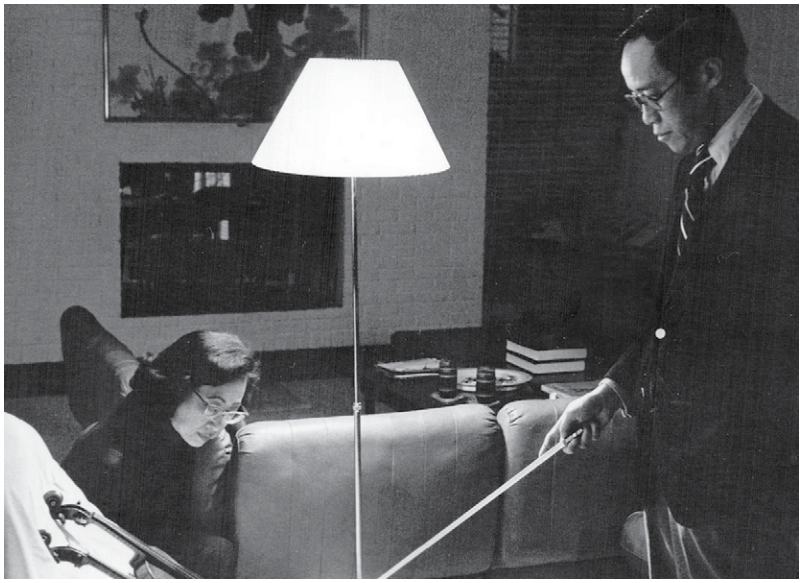
Sau-Wing was the sort of man who found all of life interesting. At university, he studied art and journalism until those departments were closed owing to the war; he in turn focused on economics. After graduating, he moved to Hong Kong where he worked for Hang Seng Bank, until, in 1948, he was sent to New York to establish the Dah Chong Hong Trading Corporation's presence in the United States. Under DCH's umbrella, he went on to open some of the most successful automobile dealerships in the country.

In New York, Sau-Wing met his future wife Jean, an amateur pianist, and together they played chamber music out of their living room. Following the start of the Cultural Revolution, returning to China became unthinkable. Believing that China was heading in the wrong direction, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 with the aim of purging the country of bourgeois infiltrators and revitalizing the spirit of the communist revolution. Sau-Wing and his wife did not go back to visit China for nearly three decades.

Once married, Sau-Wing and Jean lived first in Riverdale, the Bronx, before settling in New Jersey, where they raised four children and assimilated themselves into the local community. Theirs was to be a musical home, though to Sau-Wing's surprise, none of his children took up stringed instruments, preferring instead the piano, flute, drums, and trumpet. Nevertheless, he regularly invited both amateur and professional musicians to play his outstanding collection of stringed instruments, and to play with him. Through an auction he once won a performance by the Juilliard Quartet, and when they arrived at the Lam home, they found Sau-Wing with his viola ready to play. Afterward, the Quartet joined the Lams for a meal Jean had prepared.

Sau-Wing strove to be, first and foremost, a decent person. He was exceedingly generous and thoughtful, embodying the belief that small acts of kindness could go a long way. Throughout his life, he offered patronage and support to musicians of all ages, preferring to be on the side-lines rather than in the spotlight himself. His approach to collecting and to music was similar, and as with life, he tried to learn as much as he could about this art that he so loved. Above all, he sought a great sound, and the instruments he assembled in his home were exquisite. To Sau-Wing, they had everything: beauty, history and most importantly, they made music. ■

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*Sau-Wing and Jean Lam in their home in New Jersey.* (Photo credit: The family of Sau-Wing Lam)

# Notes


1. Peter Biddulph, *The Violin Masterpieces of Guarneri del Gesù* (London: Peter Biddulph, 1998) p. 23, 29.
2. The Business records of the Rudolf Wurlitzer company. Stock card 8971, M272.
3. Letter from Philipp Hammig to the Wurlitzer company, December 14, 1946 (translation copy).
4. Thank you to Michael A. Baumgartner for his discoveries in the Hammig archives.
5. "Familie Walter und Ilse Sochaczewski", Lebensraum-Linden Navigator, http://navigator.lebensraum-linden.de/inhaltsverzeichnis/details/poi-900000088-5201-Familie_Walter_und_Ilse_Sochaczewski.html, accessed on December 29, 2022.
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9. "Familie Walter und Ilse Sochaczewski", Lebensraum-Linden Navigator.
10. Hammig, W. H. Certificate of authenticity. (Translation copy.)
11. "Familie Walter und Ilse Sochaczewski", Lebensraum-Linden Navigator.
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13. W. E. Hill & Sons, Letter to Dr. Sochaczewski, December 17, 1936., reissued November 19, 1971 (accompanying the violin).
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15. IBID.
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17. Rembert Wurlitzer Inc., Certificate of Authenticity, July 26, 1962 (accompanying the violin).





