

ANTONIO STRADIVARI

WRITTEN BY JOHN DILWORTH

The ‘Bonamy Dobree, Suggia’ Stradivari cello was brought to England in about 1840 by an amateur player named Bligh, who obtained it from J.B. Vuillaume. From 1875 to 1887 it was owned by Bonamy Dobree, a member of a distinguished Channel Islands banking family whose name is still attached to the instrument in most published sources. In 1922 it was bought from W.E. Hill & Sons in Bond Street by Edward Hudson, the founder of *Country Life* magazine, for his then partner, the Portuguese cellist Guilhermina Suggia. He also bought her a Montagnana in 1919, and when Suggia left Hudson for a Portuguese doctor in 1924, she kept both instruments for herself.

Suggia died in 1950 and left the Stradivari to the Royal Academy of Music in London, so that it might be sold to fund a scholarship: the Suggia Gift, which has since been awarded to Jaqueline de Pré, Steven Isserlis and Raphael Wallfisch among others. It was bought by the cellist and Bach specialist Edmund Kurtz in 1951, but by 1966 it had been acquired by the Habisreutinger Foundation in St Gallen, Switzerland, which has made it available to the Swiss cellist Maja Weber. She now plays it in the Stradivari Quartet, alongside three other Stradivaris from the foundation: the 1715 ‘Aurea’ and 1710 ‘King George’ violins, and the 1734 ‘Gibson’ viola.

●	MAKER
	ANTONIO STRADIVARI
●	NATIONALITY
	ITALIAN
●	BORN
	1644
●	DIED
	1737
●	INSTRUMENT
	CELLO
●	DATE
	1717

MATERIALS

The back is unusual in being made of two matched pieces of slab-cut maple, with an irregular figure and a noticeable knot either side of the centre joint in the middle bouts. Other Stradivari cellos of this period, including the 1714 ‘Batta’ and 1719 ‘Becker’, are notable for their luxuriously figured quarter-sawn backs. The scroll is also slab-cut, but the ribs are made up from the handsome quarter-sawn stock similar to that seen in those other examples. The front is of beautifully even straight-grained spruce.

FORM AND CONSTRUCTION

The cello is a fine example of the great B-form cello design introduced by Stradivari in about 1710, replacing his earlier large-form instruments and virtually setting the standard for all modern cellos. The f-holes are striking in their breadth of cut and their upright position on the front. The crisp preservation of the edge and fluting is remarkable.

VARNISH

The instrument is still lavishly covered with the deep port-wine red of Stradivari’s best ‘golden period’ examples, recalling the magnificent ‘Batta’. The naturally textured surface and relatively unpolished state is clear from the analysis of the instrument published by Brigitte Brandmair and Stefan-Peter Greiner in their 2010 book *Stradivari Varnish*.

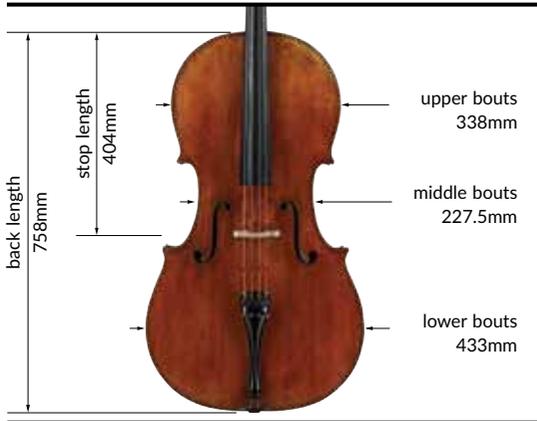
LABEL

The label is authentic and original, with the date 1717 clearly legible, and the familiar ‘AS’ stamp.

SOUND

Maja Weber, who has now played on the cello for almost 20 years, says: ‘The main thing about playing the “Bonamy Dobree, Suggia” is that the possibilities are so unlimited. One really can do anything with it: get the full range of timbres and express whatever you want – as long as you know how! It also has a unique balance from top to bottom. ▶





All measurements taken with callipers



