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CENTERFOLD

Steven Reilly, Editor

Giovanni Battista Gabrielli 1769

Our featured bass for this issue is the fine bass owned by and performed on by Edgar Meyer.

The early history we have of the instrument is a document from the firm of Ernest & Paul Voigt in London certifying the instrument as authentic made by Joannes Battista Gabrielli in Florence 1769. The certificate was written to a Mr. R. Peters of London and dated 1954. William Lewis & Son purchased the instrument from Mr. Peters and sold it to Sam Hollingsworth, the former principal bassist of the Pittsburgh Symphony, in November of 1958 when Sam was performing in Nashville, Tennessee. Sam told me when he made the deal on the Gabrielli, he left the shop to do some errands around Chicago and upon his return the great Ray Brown was playing his bass, so Sam grabbed another bass and began jamming with Ray.

In 1962, Sam was invited to audition for the Philadelphia Orchestra. At the conclusion of the audition the assistant conductor came back stage and told Sam his solo playing was amazing but his orchestral playing needed improvement. Anyone who knows Sam knows how competitive he is, so he made a tape recording of his playing and sent it to Fred Zimmerman. Fred listened to the tape and called Sam to tell him that his playing was some of the finest he had ever heard. He invited Sam to come to New York and present a Town Hall recital, which Fred paid for.

In a *New York Times* review on October 12, 1964, Howard Klein wrote: "The contrabass, that solid citizen of the orchestra, is occasionally transplanted from its orchestral context to the solo platform. The late Serge Koussevitsky, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, was a virtuoso on the stringed instrument, and Gary Karr, a young virtuoso has given recitals on it here. Saturday afternoon, Samuel Hollingsworth, as bassist from Alabama who plays with the Chattanooga Symphony, brought a program, mainly of transcriptions, to Town Hall. And he showed that he also was a member of that select group of virtuosos of the double bass."

Alden Whitman interviewed Fred Zimmermann for an article that appeared in the *New York Times* on July 25, 1965. "Who

are the outstanding bassists of the day?" Whitman asked. "Certainly Gary Karr," Mr. Z. said. "He's the Babe Ruth. Then there's Sam Hollingsworth, our Stan Musial." What about Mr. Z. himself? "I guess I'm the Casey Stengel," he replied, "a sort of older mentor."

In 1965 Sam sold the bass to George Hofer of Savannah, Georgia, to purchase larger orchestral instruments. George was playing with Sam in Nashville at that time and really loved the bass. He performed on the instrument for nearly twenty years in the orchestras of Charleston, Savannah, Nashville, Jacksonville and Hilton Head, as well as teaching at Peabody Conservatory. George knew Edger Meyer's father for many years in Nashville and sold the instrument to him in 1985. After all the years in between, it seems fitting that a wonderful solo bass is now in the hands of one of the finest solo bassists in the world.

The instrument was made in Florence, Italy in 1769, and has a hand written label of *G.B. Gabrielli*. Gabrielli is considered the finest maker of the Florentine School, which is an especially interesting blend of the Italian style, and the German - Jacobus Stainer School. The arching tends to be more full and rounded than one would find in Cremona. The scrolls tend toward a rounder, slightly egg-shaped spinning out of the volute. The f-holes are a more rounded "S" shape without any or only little relief in the lower wings - all reminiscent of the German school. The interior work of the linings and corner blocks, the measurements, purfling, flow of line of the outline, and the varnish all are examples of the great Italian school of making.

The top is made from three pieces of spruce with a medium wide grain in the center moving to medium width grain at the glue joints. The outer pieces are of similar spruce. The back is made from two pieces of plain maple cut on the slab. To enhance the plain look of the wood, a small rounded plane was used to make cuts across the grain that were scraped and sanded so when the varnish was applied it appears as though the maple has a medium width flame throughout the back. The ribs are of similar maple cut on the slab and the scroll is made of European walnut, which is a much

lighter color than American walnut. The varnish is a deep golden yellow color.

Gabrielli made two distinctly different sizes of double basses: a large 7/8 size featured in the *Bass World* Centerfold in v. 20, no. 3) and the smaller model represented here. The smaller size has a carved back while the larger size is a flat back model. The two models have an interesting connection; the f-holes are nearly the same size on both models, which begs the question, which model came first? My opinion is that the smaller model came first, as the artistry and proportion fits nicely with the overall look of the bass. The larger model makes the f-holes look very short as though the smaller f-hole could be enlarged slightly and made more open without having to design a totally new f-hole pattern. If Gabrielli only made a few double basses in his career, it makes sense to me that he would only alter one pattern to fit the next. At this point in time I know of only two large models and two small models that exist by Gabrielli and the small size f-holes appear more dramatic and proportional.

Measurements:

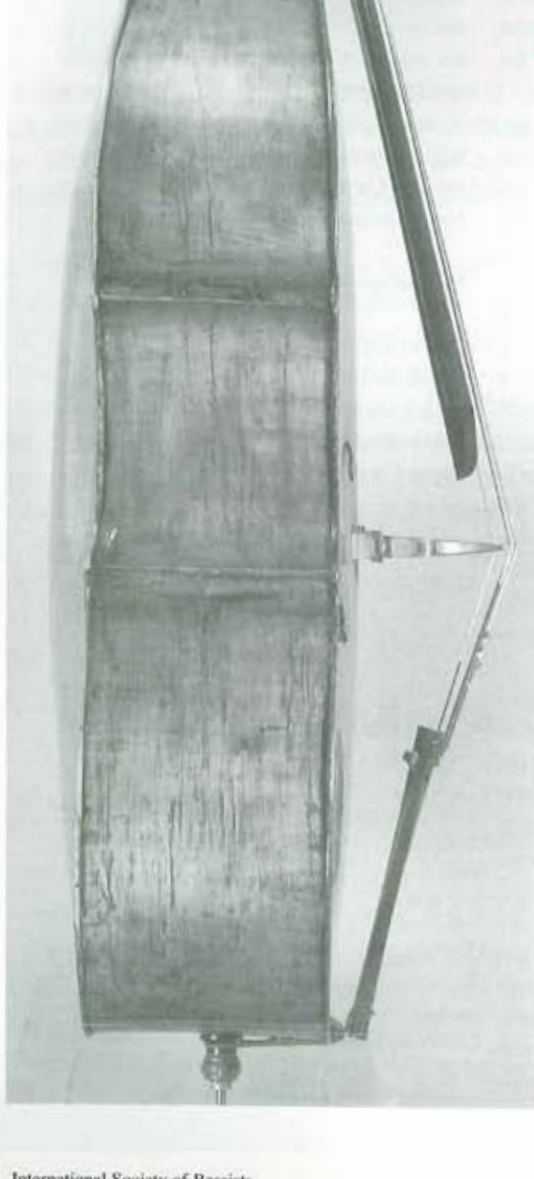
Body Length:	40 1/16"
Upper Bout:	19 1/4"
Center Bout:	13 7/8"
Lower Bout:	23 7/8"
String Length:	41"

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The handwritten label appears to read "Joannes Battista de Gabrielli Florentinus fecit 1769."



The f-hole shape is a blend of German and Italian styles.

Notice how deep the back arching is compared to the top.

International Society of Bassists

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The Edgar Meyer G.B. Gabrielli



The back is of plain maple with imitation flames lightly carved into the wood. Also notice how low the bevel appears on the upper back.

Photos courtesy of Justin Robertson

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BASS CLUBS

Jennifer Sharp, Editor

March 2006 was a busy month for bass clubs. The Western New England Double Bass Society held its first Bass Workshop Day. The Robert Black workshop ran the whole day beginning with warm up exercises that covered the whole fingerboard. With an age span from 8 - 60 among the participants, Robert was able to address the needs of all. He discussed bow holds on both bow styles along with speed and bow weight. Three participants played pieces in a Master Class that Robert critiqued, and this was followed by an hour of "Shop Talk" in which he pulled out numerous method books and accompaniment CDs. The Society invited local luthier Mark Leue in to address more technical instrument problems. Even Robert got some tips on humidifying. Mark grabbed his bridge and got to work shaping someone's bridge during the lunch break. Next, Mr. Black performed a brilliant recital. Lynn Lovell commented that the young ones were spellbound hearing sounds that were totally new in this rural area. For the last two hours of the day, they played several bass quartets that he brought along. With a good workable group, everybody had a challenging part to play. Based on the success of this event, WNEBDS will be producing more of these one-day workshops bringing in the expertise of many wonderful bassists.

Meanwhile in Butler University, Indianapolis, bass professor David Murray hosted the Butler/Midwest Bass Day on March 11. About 100 bassists plus friends and families flocked to Butler University to hear presenters and performers who included Petya Bagovska, Virginia Dixon, Diana Gannett, Daxun Zhang, Bill Koehler, Robert Goodlett, Greg Dugan, Ju Fang Liu, Michael Cameron, Mark Morton and the Bad Boys Bass Quartet (David Murray, Volkan Orhon, Paul Sharpe and Anthony Stoops). The day began with a recital by various college students, followed by masterclasses and presentations, and was topped off with a recital featuring many of the aforementioned presenters. Dustin Williams and Indianapolis Violins exhibited basses, bows and accessories, and there was a

table selling many CDs, videos, DVDs, t-shirts, and books by various presenters. David extends his thanks to Butler University and Lemur Music for their sponsorship.

Also in March, but across the seas in Germany there was the 25th International Double Bass Week in Kloster Michaelstein. Their first event was in 1982! Bass players from 19 countries around the world attended this great event. For further details about the next one, contact Klaus Trumpf.

There is still time to catch two upcoming events later this year. At the Escola Superior de Musica Polytechnique Institute in Porto, Portugal, double bass Studio Professor Florian Pertzborn is organizing a Masterclass from the 16th to the 18th of June, 2006. The Invited Guest Professor will be Bartosz Sikorski of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Solo Repertoire, Orchestra Excerpts and Chamber Music will be featured along

with Recitals and Performances. For all enquiries please contact florian.pertzborn@esmae-ipp.pt.

August 12-19, 2006, the Polish Double Bass Society will organize the second edition of the World Bass Festival in Wroclaw, Poland. This follows their first successful WBF, which was held in Wroclaw in August 2004. Irena Olkiewicz is preparing all the details now, and you can contact her for further information. It sounds like the place to be in August. See you there?

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