

Autobiographical notes

“Since I was a child (six –seven years old) I had a great desire to study the violin, this was brought on by a man who in that period was on holiday in my village and who often came to my house, with my brother Antonio (at that time an organist and an excellent pianist) and they enjoyed themselves playing easy pieces for violin and piano. From that moment, my thoughts were always focused on the violin and so at a Christmas party in that period I expressed my wishes to buy a violin. This was the cause of pandemonium. The result was a hard slap and an admonition:“it would be better if you learned to work.”

When I was around 17 years old, while I was working in Mandello, as I could not buy a violin, I began studying the flute and soon I joined the small orchestra in my village. The desire to play the violin returned several years later in Mandello when I met a child prodigy, Gilberto Todeschini, who gave me my first lessons. I rented a factory violin, and I secretly began studying and saving. My desire was so great that I practiced even at night. In a short time I passed from Ferrara’s first method book to the second, and having changed jobs (Lecco) I changed my teacher as well: Prof. Galeazzi Annibale, a student of Maestro Virgilio Ranzato, who had a degree from the Conservatory of Parma. New methods, new teachers and in short, a lot a progress. After trying out my teacher’s violin, my own factory violin was something of a disappointment. I wanted a good hand made violin.

This was the period of the last war in Africa, and through a colleague I had the chance to meet the violin maker Ferdinando Garimberti in Milan. I met him in his workshop. After trying out several violins, I finally found one that I liked. When the maestro told me his special price for “friends” I was disheartened and I realized that I would never be able to have a nice hand made violin (I had 300 lire in my pocket, the fruit of many years of savings, and the violin cost 3,000 lire).

At that moment some important Swiss clients entered the shop and the maestro went into another room and left me for almost an hour in his workshop. I looked around at the forms, the blocks, the purfling, the tools and suddenly I had the idea to make the violin myself.

When I got home I purchased some basic tools, a book published by Hoepli on violin construction and I began to work, continually examining the Pedrazzini kindly loaned to me by my violin teacher, Prof. Galeazzi.

Making a violin was very different from the jobs I was used to: forging iron, embossing, designing in general, weaving machines, and at the beginning I had to try and try again to learn how to glue, to sharpen my tools, etc...but so great was my desire and my curiosity to carry out this experiment that in the end my first instrument was a great success (better than the “little wooden box” I played on).

Now I had to find a nice varnish and even in this area I was completely incompetent! In any case, satisfied with the result of my violin in the white, I was encouraged to make other violins and this “disease” for violin making took possession of me.

In the meantime, I had the chance to meet the widow of Genovesi, the famous violin maker from Piedmont, who lived in Lecco and who kindly gave me a varnish recipe of her husband. I tried using it but the results were disappointing as the varnish was glassy.

One day I heard this announcement on the radio: “Italian violin makers, for any sort of information contact the School of Violin Making in Cremona.” I didn’t lose any time in writing and an appointment was arranged with the head maestro Mr. Péter Tàtar. I showed him the white violin I had constructed. After examining my violin, Mr. Tatar, a Hungarian of few words, said that if I could make such a violin I would also know how to varnish. Thus I did not hesitate to show him the notes of my varnish trials based on Genovesi’s recipe and told him that I was not at all satisfied because the varnish was too vitreous. He suggested some modifications to the recipe. I returned home with my violin, intentioned to varnish it

with the new recipe. To tell the truth, there were certainly some improvements, but I was still not satisfied.

By now it was 1944-45, a period in which I had to remain hidden in order not to be captured by the Nazi troops as I was dodging the draft of the Republic of Salò and I had just escaped from Sicily where I had been help prisoner by the Germans etc... but the war story would be too long to explain now.

I continued my experiments and my research...

One day when I was talking to an inspector of the post office, where my wife worked, I discovered that a certain Dr. Ravaioli, collector of instruments had been evacuated and currently resided in Erba (Como). I wasted no time in contacting him and I had the honour of being received by him; I showed him my white violin and he was surprised by my great precision. I had the chance to visit him on several occasions at his home and to examine several hand made violins in his collection including the one I liked the most by Maestro Ornati of Milan, and Mr. Ravaioli allowed me to copy as much as possible of this violin. But he also said that to get advice I had to become a member of ANLAI (National Association of Artistic Italian Lutherie).

I quickly wrote a letter to the association, and through the instructions and designs I received by correspondence from Prof. Dr. Pasqualini, president of the association of which I joined in 1954, I made good progress.

In the same year, in 1954, I participated for the first time in the 2nd Santa Cecilia National Competition and had the satisfaction of being admitted. Urged on by curiosity, I went to Rome to see the other instruments and to meet other violin makers. On that occasion I had the fortune of meeting the brothers Giacomo and Leandro Bisiach of Milan at the opening ceremony, in the foyer of Teatro Argentina. We entered the exhibition hall together and they pointed out several defects in my violin, yet at the same time they recognized my abilities. "The potential's there," they said. "Come to our shop in Milan and we'll give you a nice model and lots of tips". And thus I became their student.

Thanks to their teachings and my stubbornness I made enormous progress and gained self-confidence. I continued to strive for perfection from every point of view and I developed my own personal style.

I must also say that the only valid help I received in violin making came from the Bisiach brothers, who I collaborated with till the end.

I worked in continuation, and began to emerge in the competitions I took part in; this is mentioned in the letters, diplomas, books. I hope that these sacrifices I have made will be considered by those who have the chance to play on my violins."