

FOR PLAYERS OF VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO, BASS, AND FIDDLE

STRINGS

Vadim Gluzman's "Auer" Stradivari Violin Has Been Inspiration for Generations of Great Violinists and Composers

The soul and sounds of the 1690 'Auer' captured Tchaikovsky

By Vadim Gluzman posted March 2013



Player Vadim Gluzman

Instrument The 1690 "Auer" Antonio Stradivari violin, on loan though the Stradivari Society. After a few years of experimenting with many different sets of strings, I found that a combination of Thomastik Dominant stark G, D (silver wound), and A strings, and a Jargar forte E, gives me the biggest variety of color; projection; best and quickest response; a warm, round tone; and good stability.

Condition The Auer exhibits some of the features typical of Stradivari's late Amatisé period and glances into his further development. Incredibly well-proportioned body, copper with gold-colored varnish, and my favorite part—the absolutely stunning slab-cut back.

Bows I use two bows in concerts. One is a truly phenomenal Dominique Peccatte bow, made in the late 1840s. It has a tremendous provenance—at different times it was the concert bow of both, Eugene Ysaÿe and Henryk Szeryng, from whose collection it was passed on to me. My dear friend Daniel Schmidt, a bow

maker in Dresden, made my other stick for me about ten years ago. He comes from a long line of bow and violin makers on both sides of his family and truly is one of the greatest makers of our day.

Is this your primary violin?

The Auer has been my primary concert violin for the last 15 years.

How does it compare to your previous violin (and what was that instrument)?

Prior to becoming a recipient of the Stradivari Society, I used a beautiful 1711 Pietro Guarneri of Mantua violin, lent to me by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. That was a very special instrument in my life, which came to me through the recommendation of Isaac Stern. I won the Henryk Szeryng Career Award playing that violin, which started my career as a concert violinist.

It's unfair to compare these two violins: the Strad is on a completely different level in every aspect, from the power of projection to the variety of colors.

What gift does this violin bring to your playing that cannot be found in any other?

This violin possesses every imaginable—and sometimes unimaginable—shade of color and intensity, from the darkest, deepest, most intense colors to the lightest, most featherlike, ethereal sounds! Having such an enormous palette at your disposal is the most extraordinary gift an artist can receive. It constantly inspires me to look for new angles of expression and interpretation.

A few years ago, I was working on Sofia Gubaidulina's *Offertorium* Violin Concerto. While studying it, I kept hearing the sound of a pan flute in one particular moment in the score, but told myself that I can't find this sound on any violin. Nevertheless, I tried to find that haunting, surreal sound and just as I was about to meet with the composer I suddenly heard it! Gubaidulina was very pleased to hear such a special color and a couple of years later, while working with her of the second violin concerto, *In Tempus Praesens*, she asked me to use it again.

Have you thought about the people who have handled it before you and do they resonate in your performance?

The most famous owner of this Stradivari was Leopold Auer, the great Hungarian violinist and one of the greatest violin teachers of all time. The founder of what we refer to today as the great Russian violin school, he taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory for almost 50 years. His students included Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Nathan Milstein, Oscar Shumsky, Efrem Zimbalist, and Kathleen Parlow. It's hair-raising to think of all these great musicians listening to this very instrument in the most formative years of their life!

I believe strongly that instruments are living, breathing beings with souls, feelings, moods, and opinions. A relationship with an instrument is in many ways similar to a human relationship, and like in any relationship, we influence each other, leaving parts of our souls in each other.

I'm sure that a great personality like Leopold Auer left an undeniable and everlasting mark on this violin.

There's a story of [Pyotr Ilyich] Tchaikovsky initially dedicating his Violin Concerto to Auer, who declined it as unplayable (or unviolinistic). Tchaikovsky was writing it with this very instrument in mind! Playing this very violin, Auer has decided not to perform it.

After all these years of playing this violin, after countless performances of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, I still find it extraordinarily inspiring. Just yesterday (November 18, 2012), I walked onstage at Powell Hall, and as the wonderful St. Louis Symphony was playing the opening bars of the Tchaikovsky, I marveled at this incredible historical circle that I had a privilege to complete that night.

I know that thanks to Auer's Strad, my playing has changed dramatically in the last decade-and-a-half, and I dare say that the violin has opened itself up to me, and subsequently to my audiences in the most amazing ways.

How did you come into possession of this violin?

Mary Galvin and Geoff Fushi, the founders of the Stradivari Society, attended my recital debut at the Ravinia Festival. They must have liked what they heard, because when I returned from a tour a month later, I had a message on my answering machine inviting me to come to Chicago and pick up a violin that had just become available. I went the very next day. As I was handed the violin and started tuning it, I had a distinct feeling of someone staring at me from behind. I turned around and there was an enormous portrait of Leopold Auer looking at me from the wall of the Bein & Fushi shop!

What are your violin's strengths and limitations? Its likes and dislikes?

The only limitations I've found so far are within me. As for the strengths, I should mention its incredible stability. Spending most of my life on the road, with constantly changing climate zones and air pressure, can affect the well-being of any instrument (and human being for that matter!). The Auer is happy to support me in all my journeys and only expresses some displeasure when we visit an extremely humid climate.

If given the ability, what would you say to your instrument if the two of you sat down for tea?

I would just say "thank you" for all these years of making music together, for supporting me, and most importantly for giving me (becoming) my voice to express the most intimate thoughts and feelings that I couldn't have expressed in any language but music. And I would say how much I look forward to more to come! But I think she (in the Russian language violins are female) knows it.