

The Girolamo Amati Viola
in the Galleria Estense
Ed. Andrea Zanrè

This is surely the most comprehensive technical account ever published about a historical stringed instrument. It is, as might have once been said, 'all singing, all dancing'. We have text, precise measurements, magnificent photography, dendrochronology, CT scanning and varnish examination – even a DVD with 3D imagery and crisp sound recordings. Every modern analytical tool [...] has been brought to bear on this magnificent Amati viola, a subject well deserving the attention. All the mass of data is presented beautifully, with great clarity, sensitivity and appreciation of the subject. Every page is filled with stunning visual imagery. To me, and I would hope to anybody interested in our profession, this book is as exciting and glamorous as a cross between Indiana Jones and CSI: an archeological quest through the strata of the instrument and a forensic investigation that is excitingly vivid. It is a revelation. [...]

The contributors to the project are the leading authorities in their fields. The introduction on the instrument collection at the Galleria Estense in Modena, where the viola is housed, is written by its director Davide Gasparotto. Carlo Chiesa, well known to the readers of *The Strad*, provides historical context for the Amati family and their work, while Andrea Zanrè investigates the history of violas in 16th and 17th – century Italy. Alberto Giordano, also an expert contributor to this magazine, gives a finely detailed description of the instrument, and Brigitte Brandmair provides priceless analysis of the varnish. Rudolf Hopfner, curator at the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum instrument collection, presents and interprets the CT scan information, which provides precise arching patterns among other fascinating information, and dendrochronological work is the responsibility of Peter Ratcliff. Jan Röhrmann's photography is excellent throughout, and every word from these experts deserves our fullest attention.

The detail views of varnish, arching and modelling are superb, and of course the viola itself is one of the jewels of the classical Cremonese era of violin making: a rare, uncut, almost perfectly preserved Amati contralto.

It will take me a long while to absorb all the information here; I will be thumbing through the pages for some time. Owning this volume is probably as close as you will get to the sensation of handling the instrument itself, and for me it represents a high-water mark in publishing.

John Dilworth, The Strad Magazine, July 2015