

Glance

DELIGHT | DESIGN | ACTION | THOUGHT

Photography by Matthew Tolzmann



{ CHICAGO }

Do You Like Good Music?

A superb musical instrument, such as you see here, will ideally have many lifetimes. This one, the so-called **Vieuxtemps violin**, is Cremonese, the work of the legendary **Guarneri del Gesù**, and is already nearing three centuries of life. Will it surprise you to learn that it is also an investment vehicle? And that the passion drawn from it by 23-year-old Elena Urioste not only increases its sweetness but also its value? **AS**

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Violin Philanthropy

You could call this philanthropy's sweet song, with musicians and instruments and investors involved.

By Claire Wrathall



THE YOUNG AMERICAN VIOLINIST ELENA URIOSTE MADE her debut last April with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in an acclaimed performance of Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*. Critics commented on her poise, her passion and the "hypnotic delicacy" of her playing. Several also commented on her instrument, the *Chicago Tribune* noting that "the sweet yet refined sound she drew from it was every violinist's dream come true." And no wonder, for the violin in question was the "Vieuxtemps," made by Guarneri del Gesù in Cremona, Northern Italy, in 1741 and valued at US\$18 million.

"That instrument, I don't even think it's a violin," Urioste told me excitedly after the experience. "I really think that thing is alive. It breathes; it resonates; it's like an animal. You can't possibly believe it's just made of wood. It's like nothing else in the world, as far as I'm concerned."

So how did a then-23-year-old, immensely talented certainly, but far from a household name, come to be playing such a violin?

The answer is philanthropy, specifically the generosity of Dr Charles E. King, a collector of rare instruments, and the Stradivari Society, a Chicago-based foundation chaired by Geoffrey Fushi of the musical instrument dealers Bein & Fushi

(which is handling the sale of the Vieuxtemps, hence the reason it was made available to Urioste) that brokers such arrangements by "identifying the world's most promising young artists and uniting them with the superb Italian instruments they need to help launch and sustain their professional careers."

Urioste is not alone in such good fortune. British violinist Nicola Benedetti, 23, plays the "Earl Spencer" Stradivarius, which belongs to Jonathan Moulds, Bank of America Merrill Lynch's president for Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia; while Sayaka Shoji has use of the "Récamiér" Strad, on loan from the Japanese chemicals magnate Ryuzo Ueno.

In a more complex arrangement, the U.S. violinist Robert McDuffie plays the del Gesù "Ladenburg," which was once played by Paganini and is now owned by a consortium of 16 people, including McDuffie. Each share cost \$100,000 (the violin was valued at \$3.5 million in 1999), and at the end of the 25-year lease, the instrument will be sold on the open market and is expected to return a tidy profit for each shareholder. Until then, McDuffie gets to play it and is otherwise only obliged to insure and maintain it.

Strings Attached

Young artists such as violinist Elena Urioste have been matched "with the superb Italian instruments they need."

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