

IN FOCUS

Breaking the mould

This 1797 violin by Caspar Strnad, with its flatter arching and longer corners, illustrates his departure from Stainer's model. By **Jan Špidlen**

By the end of the 18th century the illustrious Czech kingdom had long since passed and the nation lived under Habsburg rule until the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. Its violin making craft, along with many other aspects of Bohemian life, was imported from Germany after a long line of German immigrants, the first native Czech makers to appear were Thomas Andreas Hülsmayr (1731-88) and Caspar Strnad (1752-1823).

These German influences were echoed in the character of the workmanship. Instruments were constructed according to Stainer's model, with high-arched plates, a deep channel and a fine, narrow edge. The ribs were constructed on an inside mould, as in the Tyrol.



with corner-blocks shaped short towards the middle bouts and long towards the upper and lower bouts. The linings were set into the blocks with pointed ends. This style gradually changed in the second half of the 18th century, as the violin making community in Prague was influenced by the flat-arched instruments of the Italian makers; and here Strnad was the noteworthy innovator.

A pupil of Hülsmayr, Strnad was a talented chamber musician who played the violin and viola. The standard of his work is impressive and shows his painstaking and methodical approach. This 1797 violin is a fine example of the Italian influence on the Prague school. Strnad has lowered the arching, giving the instruments a full, barrel-type form, and enlarged the fine, rounded f-holes, bringing them closer to the Stradivari model. The edges are narrow and rounded, and the corners are longer than Stainer's, bearing more resemblance to those of Amati. The squarish head, however, does not differ much from Stainer's model – the pegbox retains its typical Z-shape and the small scroll above the broad throat is furled into a little eye.

The varnish is typical of Prague. A dark ruby colour, it is cracked in its thicker layers and almost black in less exposed areas, where it has absorbed dirt and dust. As is the case with classic Italian varnish, it chips and easily wipes off the oily base coat, indicating a similarity between the two varnishing processes. The Prague varnish corrodes with water, so it evidently contains some kind of water-soluble gum or glue. According to later documentation, the ground was traditionally made with linseed oil, confirmed here by the reddened wood in the most worn areas, underneath the player's chin and left hand.

UPR Pa. Hülsmayr/Prague violin, with its turn-outdated barrel ground, still in near-creaky in the arch Strnad violin built 1797



DIMENSIONS	
Body length	326mm
Body width	166mm
Upper bouts	166mm
Lower bouts	112mm
Lower bouts	201mm

Katalog z výstavy Slavné evropské housle Obecní dům v Praze, 2009

KAŠPAR STRNAD
*6. 1. 1752 PRAHA
†12. 11. 1823 PRAHA

Žák Tomáše Ondřeje Hülsmayra (1731-1788). Kolena i 1797 se uvedl svou první dílnou na Malé Straně. V. 1. 1811-1823 byl starostou společnosti houslařů a hotoventů dechových nástrojů v Praze. Dříve působil na housle a na viola, působil i ve smyčcové kněževně. Vychovával vynikající houslaře - jeho žáky byli E. A. Honečka (1796-1849) a K. V. Šembera (1781-1821). Jeho pomocníky byli J. F. Wölfler (1781-1868) a M. Weber (1787-1846).

Strnad byl skvělý houslař, jeho housle, violy celá řada byly jsou opatřeny masivní dýhou. Housle stavěl společně podle T. O. Hülsmayra, měli podobné klenuté oblí sklenky, ve stylu nástrojů J. Stainera a J. G. Barchetta (1699-1788). Prvními se přiblížil k modelům A. Stradivariho a v Praze samostatně propracoval. Dnes se mu říká hlavně „Amati“ Stradivari. Přiblížil housle Kašpara Strnada z r. 1797, na nich je vidět obě - používání více obloučité dýhy a sklenky italský charakter - , patří ke klenutím pražského houslaře. Kašpar Strnad dal podobně houslařské škole klenutí vysoké kvality.

KAŠPAR STRNAD
(*6.1.1752 Prague, †12.11.1823 Prague)
Pupil of T. O. Hülsmayr (1731-1788). Around 1797 he opened a workshop in the Lesser Town. In 1811-1823 he was Chairman of the Society of Violin and Brass Instrument Makers in Prague. He could play the violin and viola and performed in a string quartet. He taught excellent successors - his pupils E. A. Honečka (1796-1849) and K. V. Šembera (1781-1821). His assistants were J. F. Wölfler (1781-1868) and M. Weber (1787-1846).

Strnad was an excellent luthier. His violins, violas, violoncellos and guitars are true masterpieces. At first he made violins according to T. O. Hülsmayr's designs and in the style of J. Stainer and J. G. Barchetta (1699-1788). Later he inclined towards a Stradivari model, but was not understood in Prague. Today he is referred to as the "Czech Stradivari". The beautiful violin by K. Strnad from 1797, with features evoking the influence of the German School along with the Italian style, is a gem of Prague violin making. Kašpar Strnad gives the Prague Violin Making School a reputation for high quality.

Housle Kašpara Strnada postavené v Praze roku 1797 jsou nejen materiálově vypracované, ale mají také osobitě krásný tvarový zabarvený zvuk. Úvodní je vidět podobnosti vnitřní i opavovacího cívku z r. 1872 slavného houslaře F. A. V. Honečka, on ale je found inside.

The violin built by Kašpar Strnad in 1797, Prague, is not only masterfully crafted, but is also of a splendid, dark timber sound. Besides the original label, the 1872 inscription tag of the famous violin maker F. A. V. Honečka can also be found inside.

