

Precious violin adds another string to the bow of national heritage

London, 2 September 2005 – One of the world's most important violins, the 'Viotti ex-Bruce' Stradivari, has been saved for the nation through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's (MLA) Acceptance in Lieu scheme. Last year art and heritage items to the tune of £13 million were acquired in lieu of inheritance tax through the scheme.

The instrument has been allocated to the Royal Academy of Music. The acceptance of this Stradivari could have settled more tax than was payable by the offerors. To make good this difference, impassioned pleas for the instrument were featured on BBC2's The Culture Show and in the press, kick-started with a donation from the National Art Collections Fund (Art Fund). Additional funding was provided by the National Heritage Memorial Fund and many other donors. The offering estate generously waived its claim for a substantial part of the required funds, thereby effectively making a gift to the Academy's appeal.

The instrument, which is in a remarkably well-preserved condition, has been in England for over 80 years during which time it was only very rarely, and many years ago, played in public. Following its acceptance in lieu of tax the instrument will be on permanent public display at the Royal Academy of Music and will be played occasionally under controlled conditions, ensuring that both the present and future generations have the opportunity of hearing this legendary instrument.

The violin is the crucial link between Antonio Stradivari who, more than 260 years after his death remains the unchallenged master of violin-making, and Giovanni Battista Viotti, the father of modern violin-playing. Rarely played in the last two centuries, this violin is one of the best-preserved Stradivaris in the world. The concerts Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824) gave in Paris and London in the 1780s and 1790s first alerted listeners to the power of Stradivari's model. The instrument astonished audiences with a tone and expressiveness that was completely new at the time and led to the recognition of the supremacy of the Stradivari violin.

Mark Wood, MLA Chairman, commented: "In the two and half years that negotiations have been taking place on the acquisition of this instrument, MLA has worked with the offerors and their agents, Christie's, the Royal Academy of Music and the various funding bodies to ensure that this superb violin remains accessible to the British public. When the instrument was sold in Paris in 1860, the French violin maker, Vuillaume, noted that this instrument had always been considered one of the most perfect of Stradivari and also one of the most beautiful. It is appropriate that it should now find its permanent home in London, one of the greatest centres of classical music in the world and at the Royal Academy of Music, where so many fine musicians and composers have trained."

The Principal of the Royal Academy of Music Professor Curtis Price KBE, said: "We are delighted to have helped secure this very great violin for the nation. It joins what is already one of the largest collections of Strads in the world, and our specialized facilities will provide the Viotti with a secure, permanent home where everyone will be able to see and hear it. Even with the help of the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, this was a huge fundraising effort – surely the most money ever raised by a public institution to purchase a musical instrument – and the Academy is extremely grateful to the National Art Collections Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, J&A Beare Limited, Ian Stoutzker, Albert Frost and all the other many donors who are the true heroes of the hour."

David Barrie, Director, National Art Collections Fund, said: "This is an exquisite instrument of extraordinary quality, and its acquisition comes after an exceptional effort by the Royal Academy of Music in which the Art Fund has played a key role. We are delighted to have helped the Academy acquire such a magnificent object for their collection, and to have been on hand to plug the last-minute funding gap."

Stephen Johnson, Head of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said: "Helping to save this very special instrument is a great way to continue the Silver Jubilee celebrations for the NHMF. The Viotti Violin now joins over 1,200 iconic pieces of our heritage that have been rescued for the nation in the past 25 years."

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Further additional funding was provided by J&A Beare, The Belmont Trust, Nigel Brown, members of the Bruce family, Mrs Elizabeth Insall, Mr Albert Frost CBE, Mr Ian Stoutzker CBE, Old Possum's Practical Trust, and many anonymous donors. The instrument will be displayed in the strings gallery of the York Gate Collections, the Royal Academy of Music's free 'living museum' and research centre, which is open seven days a week. For further details, please see www.ram.ac.uk/museum.

The Acceptance in Lieu AIL scheme has been operating since 1947. It enables taxpayers to transfer important works of art and other important heritage objects into public ownership while paying Inheritance Tax, or one of its earlier forms. The taxpayer is given the full open market value of the item and the item becomes the property of the public museum, archive or library at no cost to itself.

The range of objects accepted under the scheme in recent years is wide, from an ancient Egyptian bronze, roman Antique statues, medieval manuscripts and ivory carvings, Chinese porcelain, Baroque sculptures (Giambologna), paintings by artist from Cimabue (late 13th century), through Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, Carracci, Murillo, Van Dyck, Jan Steen, Cuyp, van Mieris, Canaletto, Guardi, Bellotto to many works of art created in the 20th century - Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Stanley Spencer, William Rothenstein, William Scott, Edward Baird, Henry Lamb and Nancy Sharp.

Further information about AIL is available at: <http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/cp/00ail.asp>. The scheme is managed by Gerry McQuillan, Head of Acquisitions, Export & Loans Unit at MLA.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) celebrates its Silver Jubilee this year. It was established in 1980 as a memorial to those who gave their lives for this country and it continues to operate as a fund of 'last resort', focusing on saving heritage which is under threat, whether from sale overseas, the break-up of collections, or, in the case of land, from unsympathetic development. The Fund's current budget is £5million per annum which comes from government grant-in-aid. Outstanding treasures that have been saved for the nation include The Flying Scotsman, the Becket Chasse, The Macclesfield Psalter, Three Graces, the Mappa Mundi, the Sherborne Missal and the National Trust's Victorian country house in Bristol, Tyntesfield.

Although a violin made by this Italian instrument maker is commonly referred to as "a Stradivarius" his name was 'Antonio Stradivari' and for consistency the instruments are referred to in this press release as a 'Stradivari' violin. 'Stradivarius' is the latinised form of his name and is occasionally found on the labels of his violins as follows: Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis Faciebat Anno [date], meaning, "Antonio Stradivari of Cremona made this in the year..."

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