

The Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1822 and is where many of today's leading musicians learned their trade. Our international students represent more than 50 countries.

The Royal Academy of Music's 'living museum' and research centre is open every weekday (11:30am–5:30pm), and weekends (12:00–4:00pm). The galleries include instruments, manuscripts, images and other artefacts. An integral part of Academy life, the galleries regularly host lecture-recitals, seminars, workshops and other events. These events include performances and draw on items from the Academy's collections. Items from the Academy's collections can be viewed on APOLLO (Academy Pictures Online), www.ram.ac.uk/apollo.

Admission to the museum and all events which take place there is free.

The galleries are fully accessible for wheelchair users.

www.ram.ac.uk/museum

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Arts & Humanities
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**Viotti's impact
on performance,
composition,
teaching, choice
of instrument
and bow**

Temporary
exhibition
*from September
2008*

Revolutionary Violin



'Viotti ex-Bruce'
violin by Stradivari,
Cremona, 1709

The 'Viotti ex-Bruce'



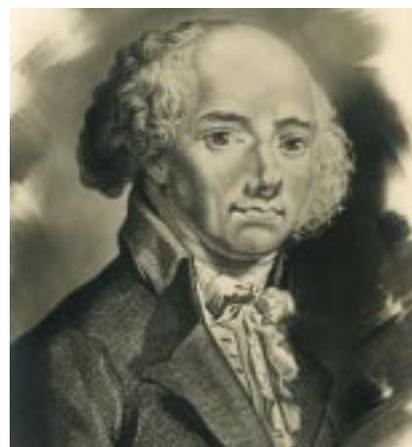
The 'Viotti ex-Bruce' violin, made by Stradivari in 1709, was saved for the nation through the Government's 'gift in lieu of tax' scheme. After a long period of deliberation and consultation this instrument was allocated to the museum of the Royal Academy of Music. The museum, which was formally opened to the public in February 2002, is constituted as a university museum and represents the Academy's

commitment to the concept of a 'living museum'. As the violin went on public display in the autumn of 2005, the museum research team promised to develop an exhibition which would explore its significance. The team is able to call on outstanding collections of instruments, artefacts, manuscripts, documents, printed music and images, while the Academy's community of performers and researchers contributes unique possibilities for exploring musical and historical background always within a context of performance.

The violin is named after one of its owners, the violinist Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755–1824). Although he actually taught very few pupils, the most outstanding players of the succeeding generation revered his playing and loved the man himself — those players were the founders of the school of violin playing which developed in the early years of the Paris Conservatoire and their influence was such that all of today's violinists can trace their pedagogical heritage back to Viotti. He was the first player to promote the use of the modified Stradivari violins and he was also an advocate for the bows designed by Tourte.

Image: Royal Academy of Music, 2005.1803

Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755–1824)



Viotti started playing under the system of patronage; his first Stradivari was given to him by Catherine the Great and for many years his playing was heard only by Marie Antoinette and her immediate circle. In spite of this close association with royalty, Viotti's own philosophy was that of the Enlightenment and he is known to have respected the philosopher JJ Rousseau. As a disciple of Rousseau, he believed

in the importance of education for all and particularly for children — indeed his only pupils were all taught when they were children. He was active in the plans to establish an academy of music for London, drawing on some of the innovations of the Paris Conservatoire and although a rival group to Viotti's actually set up the Royal Academy of Music in 1822 it is significant that its earliest students were admitted at the age of twelve, whereas the students at the Paris Conservatoire were in their late teens.

Image: Royal Academy of Music, McCann Collection, 2004.1252

'Viotti ex-Bruce' violin by Stradivari, Cremona 1709



The 'Viotti ex-Bruce' violin is a fine example of Stradivari's so-called 'golden period' workmanship in an outstanding state of preservation. The instrument shows few signs of wear and may not have been used extensively at any point during its history.

The one-piece maple back is unusual and distinctive and it preserves much of its Stradivari varnish with the original finish intact. The violin has been modernized to suit the needs of players: the neck has been angled backwards and the fingerboard extended; this operation will have entailed replacing the original bass bar with a larger and more robust one.

Viotti owned many violins during the course of his career, including the 'twin' of this instrument which was later played by Marie Hall and is now in a collection in Taiwan. Viotti exploited the even response of the Stradivari violins and as a result of his performances they became the soloist's instrument of choice.

Image: Royal Academy of Music, 2005.1803

The development of the Tourte bow



Image above: Italian Cramer model bow

Image below: mature Tourte model bow, J&A Beare

Pierre Baillot described Viotti's playing in the following words: 'the violin has never been greater or more beautiful than under the bow of Viotti...'. He had taken to heart the dictum of Tartini (1692–1770) *per ben suonare, bisogna ben cantare* [in order to play well, learn to sing well] and based his technique on long, sustained phrases. He examined the ability of a violinist simply by checking that the player could sustain one note for fifteen seconds without any unevenness or imperfections.



François Xavier Tourte (1747–1835) was working on the development of the bow while Viotti was active as a player. His reforms included features which aimed at ensuring that the bow-hairs lay in a flat ribbon throughout their length; that the player could exercise total control over the whole length of the bow; that extra pressure on the hair pulled it tighter — unlike earlier designs.

Viotti and music



Although Viotti was regarded as the outstanding solo violinist of his generation, he seems not to have enjoyed playing in public. He made several attempts to retire from the concert platform, including a period when he worked as a wine merchant in London because, in his own words, 'I find that the English prefer Wine to Music'.

He was at his happiest playing in intimate and appreciative gatherings. In 1790 he commented 'I will play, but only on condition that the audience shall come up to us — we have long enough descended to their level.' Contemporary writers describe him making music with the children of his friends and happily playing dance tunes after a convivial dinner.

Image: Private collection

Viotti and violin teaching



Baillot (1771–1842), Rode (1774–1830) and Kreutzer (1766–1831) formed the important triumvirate of violin teachers in the early years of the Paris Conservatoire and wrote the original 'Méthode de Violon' which was published in 1803. Rode travelled with Viotti when he was exiled from England in 1798 and can be included among his pupils; the other two were admirers and disciples of Viotti.

Images: Private collection



François-Antoine Habeneck (1781–1849), the most influential of all violinists to emerge from the first body of students at the Paris Conservatoire, established the first well-rehearsed and thoroughly disciplined modern orchestra as director of the exercises.

Image: Private collection



Prosper Sainton (1813–1890) studied under Habeneck at the Paris Conservatoire and was Head of Strings at the Academy for more than forty years. He was involved in setting up the collection of violins.

Image: Royal Academy of Music, 2003.1093