

Claudio Giovalè

ANDREA POSTACCHINI

the Stradivari of the Marche



Brief notes on life and work



FONDAZIONE CASSA DI RISPARMIO DI FERMO

On the cover:

Photo-portrait of Andrea Postacchini, from the archives of Mr. L. Cicconi (photo P. Minnoni).

On the back:

Cello bow (detail) by Andrea Postacchini with silver and ebony frame, c. 1840, purchased by the Foundation of the Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo from Sotheby's in 1996.

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Presentation

Deeply linked to the territory in which it operates, the Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo Foundation always actively participates in the development of cultural and artistic initiatives.

As part of its institutional purposes, the Foundation has the ambition to promote the creation and the widest dissemination of studies that are testimony to the history and culture of the Marche and Fermo territory in particular.

We participate in the publication of this work to better document the presence of a luthier from Fermo appreciated by many, but little known by his own fellow citizens.

We thus contribute to discover another piece of our history and of the artistic skills that we have expressed and are appreciated in the different parts of the world where there are string instruments produced by the luthier Postacchini.

We thus want to stimulate further research towards the most complete knowledge of this artist in order to try to retrace his training and his production, to better decode the environment and cultural influences that characterized the social and economic fabric of Fermo and its territory in Andrea Postacchini's period.

Fermo, May 1997

*Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo Foundation
The President
Amedeo Grilli*

The interest that critics and historiography are taking with even more attention towards so-called minor characters of the past seems recently to point persistently towards the figure and the work of the luthier from Fermo Andrea Postacchini.

In this context, the repeated acquisitions of some of his instruments by the Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo Foundation as well as the International Violin Competition¹ that Fermo dedicates yearly to his memory represent without any doubt the rediscovery, far from being archaeological, of a certain protagonist of the art of liutery, appreciated well beyond regional borders.

Not that studies on this artist are lacking; but partly the scarce news of his life, partly the very different instrumental production have induced historians and lutologists to affirm the existence of even two Andrea Postacchini. And in this misunderstanding, which already belonged to Liitgendorff, to Gabrielli, to Jalovec and others, fell also the musician from Fermo Isaia Billè who in his book "*The string instruments and their lovers*" splits Postacchini, with even dated births and deaths, in Andrea I, builder of "excellent instruments, with heavily charged varnish tending to brown"² and in Andrea II whose double basses he described as "smooth, like ancient violas, and those in the shape of a violin tend to small sizes and have a flat bottom without filleting, which is very distinct and well inlaid in the soundboard".³

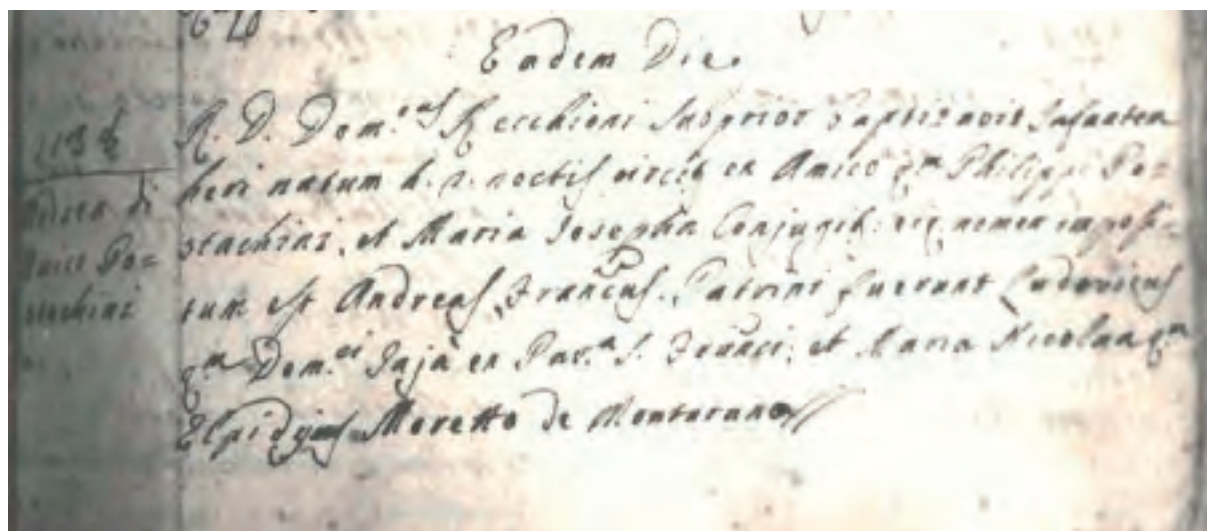
On the other hand, a more correct biography seems to be the one published by Giovanni Cicconi in 1947 in "IL POPOLO DI ROMA" where, being "in touch with the artist's surviving relatives", he was able at least to recompose the split between the two Andrea in the only really existed Postacchini.⁴

He transcribed the names of the members of the Postacchini family with their dates of birth from the book of the *Status Animarum* (Parish family book) of the Curia of S. Maria delle Vergini in the city of Fermo. Andrea di Amico born on 30 December 1786, his wife Maria Mariani (1794) and his six children: Giulia (1822) in a Monastery in Jesi, Raffaele (1823), Adelaide (1826), Caterina (1827), Alessandro (1833), Eugenia (1837).⁵

In the *Book of the Dead* of the same curia, on p. 209, under the year 1862, he tracked also the death certificate of the luthier Andrea which establishes his death on February 3rd. In the article furthermore Cicconi praises the quality of the works sold by the artist from Fermo "particularly in the famous fairs of Senigallia, where he used to bring his merchandise every year, always sought after by passionate lovers of sound."⁶

The scholar Andrea Scorcelletti, who studied many artists of the Fermo area, taking an interest in Postacchini, identified his baptism certificate⁷ which dates back the birth of the luthier in 1781, and not 1786, as instead results in the *Status Animarum* of the Curia of S. Maria delle Vergini from which Cicconi drew.

Scorcelletti mentioned this detail in a correspondence which later merged into the unpublished *Biographical Dictionary of the Marche Musicians* by G. Radiciotti and G. Spadoni. Here he praises the qualities of Andrea Postacchini "who manufactured with precision and perfect finishing" and also provides information on Don Raffaele Postacchini, son of Andrea, who before becoming a priest "knew his father's art very well".⁸



Baptism certificate of Andrea Postacchini.

According to Cicconi and Scorcelletti's notes, confirmed by later lutherie studies, Andrea Postacchini, after his modest beginnings *with flat shapes*, refined so much the production following the models of the great Cremonese craftsmen that "he managed to rank among the Italian classics of the XIX century."⁹ Azzolina in the nineteenth century considers him "on equal footing with Pressenda and Rocca".¹⁰ He acknowledged genius in all his numerous works which, despite the continuous mutability of forms, models and details, attest "the incessant spirit of research of the craftsman".¹¹

Hence the marked diversity of the product between period and period, between instrument and instrument. Also because with a growing notoriety, Postacchini will respond to the requests of an increasingly wealthy client by building refined instruments thanks to the beauty of increasingly pasty and tender paint, the shape of the scroll, the cut of the f-holes, the value of the sound. The choice of wood will be more careful, the thicknesses will be wisely worked.

He was a very prolific creator given that already in 1824 he signed a violin as *Opus 214*.¹² "He also specialized in the difficult construction of *Strings* or bows and was an excellent restorer of violins and cellos of all eras and schools".¹³ In his shop in via delle Vergini n. 3¹⁴ he also made guitars.

It is still Azzolina who tells us the interesting story of a violin bearing the label: *ANDREAS POSTACCHINI Firmanus fecit / sub titulo S. Raphaelis Arcang. 1848* now in the collection of Mr. Luigi Cicconi of Fermo; "[...] it was donated by Postacchini in 1850 to the violinist Vincenzo Boccabianca, soloist of the Pesaro Theater orchestra, on the occasion of the performance of an opera by Giuseppe Verdi, with the presence of Verdi himself. The latter had congratulated Boccabianca for his skillful performance, as concert master, of *a solo* of the opera, adding however: 'It is a pity that a violinist of your worth does not have an adequate instrument'. Upon which Postacchini, also present at the conversation, nodded, adding on his side: 'It's true: I too felt that the violin was not up to the task, and therefore, Maestro Boccabianca, if you allow me, I will give you as a present one of my latest violins which seems to me to be quite successful from an acoustic point of view'.

Postacchini's promise was then kept with the gift of the instrument".¹⁵ The current owner has kindly asked the writer to examine the historical instrument, who has ascertained the elegance of the model: well finished and carefully detailed, it gives a round and powerful sound, especially from the two bass strings.

The master luthier from Ascoli Cesare Castelli - listened to by the author of these notes - ascribes to the early period of Postacchini, up to about 1825, violins with short f-holes and smaller than those of his maturity¹⁶, while finding in every instrument he examined the constant use of a wooden embedding board, *in the shape of a little butterfly*, in order to facilitate the junction of the two boards of the back. The back always in Apennine maple, which is heavier than the Balkan one, has a fairly fine graining with a bright and deep reflection.

The Cremona master luthier Ernesto Vaia, referring to the heterogeneous work of Andrea Postacchini, who he considers the main 19th century luthier in the Marche region and one of the greatest of his century, says: "The construction of



*Guitar with the label: Andreas Postacchini
(A)mici filius / fecit Firmi Anno 1817 / oPus 172.
Property of Prof. Massimiliano Travaglini.*

his first violins leave something to be desired, they are without purfling with an uncertain sculpture” (these first instruments bear the manuscript label).

After this beginning, his manual skills undergo a metamorphosis. In the second phase of his work he follows Stradivarian models.

The analysis of the various Postacchini instruments leads to the conclusion that the acoustic quality is to be found not only in the careful choice of wood and in the skilful processing (the sculpture becomes more sure, the attention to details is remarkable, even inside, the head, the f-holes, the purfling show evident artistic characters), but also and above all in the exceptional quality of the paint that changes from amber yellow by modifying ingredients and losing defects of the one used in the first period, to a pasty, elastic and a beautiful red-brown and remains as such after more than a century since the birth of the instruments.

These details ensure that the voice of almost all the Postacchini is always soft and harmonious, with a prompt response on all positions and therefore highly sought after by soloists.

In addition to a few hundred violins, this luthier built violas and cellos; all instruments of high quality.¹⁷

Over time, however, there was no lack of detractors such as Valdrighi or Forino who considered him "mediocre craftsman [...] Nevertheless, in the Hamma catalog of Stuttgart (1896) a violin was valued at 600 marks.”¹⁸

Immediately the instruments of the Fermo artist reached very high prices and Vannes, who availed himself of the Ascoli violinist and lutologist Gioacchino Pasqualini to write up his famous Dictionary, informs us about Postacchini instruments sold at high prices both in Lyon in 1928 and in Berlin in 1929¹⁹.

The double bass player Isaia Billè played on a Postacchini and in 1928 he estimated that in order to buy a violin by the same author it would take 8,000 lire²⁰.

More recent evaluations are around 25 / 30,000,000 lire²¹.

Latest appreciations related to the instruments of the Fermo artist acknowledge that they "are mostly based on a personal model and are of excellent sound quality".²²

Nicknamed *the Marche's Stradivarius* by the chroniclers, the Fermo luthier is called to revive, together with the supporting actors Rainaldo Ungarini from Fabriano (second half of the 18th century - first half of the 19th century) and Giuseppe Baldantoni from Ancona (1784 - 1873), the peculiar lutherie of the region. The latter, which already boasted previous examples of excellence like the *Pesarino* Antonio Mariani (1600 ca -1680) or *Villan d'Ascoli* (*Farmer from Ascoli*) Giuseppe Odoardi



*Violin with the label: Andreas Postacchini Firmanus
fecit / sub titulo S. Raphaelis Archang. 1835.
Property of Maestro Stefano Corradetti (photo by P.
Sabatini)*

(1746-1786), also found in Postacchini yet another creative self-taught, who, in the absence of a continuous local trend, could not root his lutherie in a stable tradition: his son Raffaele (1823-1892) soon left the laboratory paternal to address the priesthood²³.

As well the uneven Postacchini production objectified the stereotype of the luthier from the Marche who, given the lack of a real regional school, adhered to the model of the most disparate aesthetic canons. Therefore, the regret of Gabrielli is legitimate when he states: "What pains us is that all our lute artists lived and worked alone. Thus, workers were never created, although they had to arise given the value shown by the majority of our luthiers."²⁴

The distant cause of all this dates, rather than from the diffusion of the art of lutherie, as far back as to the appearance of string instruments in the Marche and to the relative historical-musical situation in which it evolved.

If from the hybrid predecessors of the violin, *embraced* by the various musician angels repeatedly represented in the Region by the painters of the fifteenth century²⁵ and perfectly adhering to the forms of musical expression widespread *in loco*²⁶, we pass with the violin dated 1531 by Giandomenico Poli²⁷ from Ascoli to the absolute dawn of lutherie, in the Marche it was definitely promoted only by the Pesaro citizens Carlo Cortesi and Antonio Mariani, one active towards the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, the other in the 17th century. Both immediately looked at the Brescia area, copied from Gasparo da Salò and from Maggini. They personified the artistic symptom of a land that had always been socially parceled in cities such as Pesaro, Urbino, Macerata, even Senigallia and Fano, which lived under the influence of the ferments of the Po Valley centers open to new trends; but in marked antinomy with the remaining territory of the Region devoted to agriculture, with papal nobility which imposed commercial and cultural contacts preferably with Rome and its musical dictation. This meant that instruments of a more conservative nature circulated in the south and the theaters reserved for the few hosted mainly people who certainly were not thrilled by the innovations of the cultural customs.

The excluded commoners and peasants, then, in the squares of their villages, during festivals and celebrations, delighted by music and dances using various musical instruments built by local peasant-artisans during the long winter months.

Even in the eighteenth century, when the violin became the main instrument of popular music and its construction was already widespread throughout the Region, the central-southern Marche luthier was for the most part only a self-taught of peasant extraction. And shortly thereafter, Postacchini too will pay the price of this southern location, from which he will free himself with the general evolution of all his works, only when he will broaden his horizons by going annually to the Senigallia fair, and will observe and compare his goods with the Nordic models, with the perfection of the Cremoneses, when he will challenge himself with the acoustic demands of increasingly professional customers.

Notes to the text

- 1) The "Antiqua Marca Firmana" Cultural Center has been organizing an International Violin Competition for four seasons, the winner of which is awarded a quite valuable violin offered by the Cremona International Professional Institute of Violin Making,
- 2) ISAIA BILLE', *Gli strumenti ad arco e i loro cultori* (String instruments and their lovers), Roma 1928, p. 87.
- 3) Ibidem, p. 87.
- 4) See APPENDIX I.
- 5) *Status Animarum* (Parish family book) of the Curia of S. Maria delle Vergini in the City of Fermo (not as Cicconi wrote: Curia of San Francesco), years 1840 – 1855, now in the Archiepiscopal Historical Archives of Fermo, p.68.
- 6) See APPENDIX I.
- 7) Book VI of the *Baptized* in the Curia of S. Michele Arcangelo in Fermo, years 1765–1805, now in the Archiepiscopal Historical Archives of Fermo, act 1138, p. 119v:
Eadem die (1 December 1781)
R.D. Dom.cus Reccbioni Subprior baptizavit Infantem heri natum h.2 noctis circiter ex Amico q.(uonda)m Philippi Postacchini, et Maria Iosepha Coniugibus ei q.(ue) nomen impositum est Andreas, Franciscus. Patrini fuerunt Ludovicus q.(uonda)m Dom.(ini)ci Iajà ex Par.(oeci) a S. Fran.cis)ci et Maria Nicolai q.(uonda)m Moretto de Monturano.
 From this it is clear that Andrea of Amico Postacchini was born on November 30, 1781. Since Amico dies in 1783 when he was fifty-five years old (*Book of the Dead* of the Curia of S.M. Arcangelo from 1754 to 1830, p. 143v), the content of the Scorcelletti correspondence regarding the birth of luthier comes out validated.
- 8) See APPENDIX I.
- 9) RENE' VANNES, *Dictionnaire Universel des Luthiers* (Universal Dictionary of Luthiers), Bruxelles 1959, s.v. A. Postacchini.
- 10) UMBERTO AZZOLINA, *Liuteria Italiana dell'Ottocento e del Novecento* (Italian Violin Making of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), Milan 1964, p. 53.
- 11) Ibidem, p. 53.
- 12) WILLIBALD LEO LUTGENDORFF, *Die Geigen und Lautenmacher* (Violins and Luthiers), Frankfurt am Main 1922, s. v. Andrea Postacchini

- 13) RICCARDO GABRIELLI, *I Liutai marchigiani* (The Luthiers of the Marche), Rome 1935, p. 35.
- 14) Currently via Giovanni Cicconi 7 in the City of Fermo.
- 15) UMBERTO AZZOLINA, *Op. cit.*, p. 54.
- 16) Perhaps, like those by Francesco Maurizi (Colli del Tronto 1816 - Appignano 1903), the instruments of reduced size were manufactured to be sold at low prices to rustic customers who used them for concerts on the occasion of religious ceremonies and country festivals; cf. RICCARDO GABRIELLI, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.
 It is not coincidentally that the Marche lutherie will acquire professional characteristics only when the violin, which disappeared from musical practice of folkloristic use being supplanted by the *organetto* (diatonic accordion), will be requested by more and more demanding customers.
 Unfortunately, from the second half of the nineteenth century, "unscrupulous merchants and antique dealers mingled with the changing clients and combed the small provinces hoarding thousands and thousands of musical instruments, buying them from farmers or slightly more affluent families for very little money". (Urs Breitenmoser, *La Liuteria nelle Marche* - Work written for the Master Luthier diploma examination), Session October 1994, Bern-Ittigen, p. 23.)
- 17) Autograph letter sent by U. VAIA to the author.
- 18) LUIGI FORINO, *Il violoncello, il violoncellista e i violoncellisti* (The cello, the cellist and the cellists), Milan 1930, s. v. A. Postacchini
- 19) RENE' VANNES, *Op. cit.*, s. v. A. Postacchini.
- 20) ISAIA. BILLE', *Op. cit.*, p. 98.
- 21) GUALTIERO NICOLINI, *Liutai italiani di ieri e di oggi, dal cinquecento all'ottocento* (Italian luthiers of yesterday and of today, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century), Cremona 1983, p. 99.
- 22) Various Authors, *Gli Archi* (Strings), Milan 1995, s. v. A. Postacchini, p. 257.
- 23) See APPENDIX II.
- 24) RICCARDO GABRIELLI, *I Leutari ascolani* (The Luthiers from Ascoli), Ascoli Piceno 1927, p. 25.
- 25) In particular I refer to the *Madonna adoring the Child* by VITTORE CRIVELLI in Falerone, to the *Madonna and Child* by GIROLAMO DI GIOVANNI in Camerino, the *Coronation of the Virgin* by CARLO CRIVELLI currently in Brera.
- 26) Cf. ANNA MARIA CORBO, *San Ginesio e la tradizione musicale maceratese tra la fine del '300 e l'inizio del '500: suonatori e strumenti musicali* (San Ginesio and the musical tradition of Macerata between the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 16th century: players and musical instruments), San Ginesio 1992; and again by the same Author, *Suonatori, Cantarini e Strumenti Musicali nel 500 in San Ginesio e nel Maceratese* (Players, Singers and Musical Instruments in the 16th Century in San Ginesio and in Macerata area), San Ginesio 1993.
- 27) RICCARDO GABRIELLI, *I Leutari ascolani* (The Luthiers from Ascoli), Ascoli Piceno 1927, p. 6.



*The house in Fermo where Andrea Postacchini lived,
now Via Giovanni Cicconi n° 7*

APPENDIX I

The following article appeared in the newspaper IL POPOLO DI ROMA of Thursday 30 October 1941, on p. 3, reserved for the Chronicle of Macerata and Ascoli, and was sent from Fermo by Mgrs. Giovanni Cicconi, Director of the Municipal Library:

For the exact biography of an artist from the Marche

"Among the most talented builders of string musical instruments who lived in the last century, Andrea Postacchini from Fermo holds a very distinguished place.

Many are the writers who have mentioned him. We can cite the German Lutgendorff, Falegatti, Fornino, Valdrighi; and among ours writers Prof. Isaia Billè from Fermo, double bass teacher in the Royal Academy of S. Cecilia in Rome, who honors art and his native city, author of the valuable work "Gli strumenti ad arco e i loro cultori (*String instruments and their lovers*)"; and more recently the distinguished scholar of things and people of Ascoli and its province, Mr. Riccardo Gabrielli, Director of the very rich Civic Art Gallery of the chief town, author of a learned monograph: "I liutai marchigiani (*The luthiers of the Marche*)". Even the author of these lines, who was in contact with the artist's surviving relatives and was able to collect authentic news in person, ventured a modest article on the subject in the city periodical *La Voce delle Marche* (The Voice of the Marche) many years ago.

But unfortunately, the morally and artistically beautiful figure of Postacchini has not come out yet of the biographers' pen whole and exact. For a strange phenomenon, certainly through no one's fault, it has undergone a curious split. Of a single person, as he was in reality, two have been made. We therefore spoke of an Andrea Postacchini I, senior, son of Amico; and of an Andrea Postacchini II, junior, son of Andrea I; both makers of musical instruments.

So consequently the two figures were treated separately "as a solid thing and completed with dates. Andrea I, son of Amico, would have lived from 1766 to 1824. He would have built "numerous string instruments, often of unequal measure due to the little respect he had for classical precepts. However, he deserves credit for finding a bright and solid paint of a deep red tending to brown. His works are valued very differently ... He also built guitars and was an excellent repairer, etc.". About Andrea I the biographers were able to tell us this and more.

Andrea II, his son, would have been born in the year 1810 and would be dead in the year 1857 approximately. The latter, again according to what the aforementioned authors write, was a pupil of his father; worked better than him and surpassed him in the making of string instruments.

* * *

Now to dispel these two stories all of a sudden and reconstruct the personality of Postacchini, it will be enough to recall what we read in the parish books of the Curia of San Francesco, to which his family belonged, according to the certificates issued by that rev. Parish Priest, which we report below.

In the *Status Animarum* (parish family book), section of the city, years 1840 - 1855, we have: "Postacchini family: Andrea of Amico, born on December 30, 1786. Maria Mariani, wife, born on August 15, 1794. Giulia, daughter, in the monastery in Jesi, born on 23 January 1822, Raffaele, son, born on 16 April 1823, Adelaide, daughter, born on 21 December 1826, Caterina, daughter, born on 25 November 1827, Alessandro, son, born on 13 March 1833, Eugenia, daughter, born on 23 [recte (correct) 22] February 1837". Nothing, therefore, of an Andrea II, son. Moreover, in the *Book of the Dead*, of the same Parish (page 209), under the year 1862 at n. 7 there is the following death certificate, signed by the Parish Priest of the time: "*Andrea Postacchini, quondam Amici filius, annorum septuaginta sex, ecclesiae Sacramentis roboratus et in agone adiutus, obdormivit in Domino, die 3. februarii et in Coemeterio sepultus fuit*". That is: "Andrea Postacchini, son of the late Amico, seventy-six years old, fortified by the sacraments of the Church and assisted in the agony, fell asleep in the Lord on February 3 (1862) and was buried in the Cemetery".

After all this, it seems it's inappropriate to talk about the *two Andreas*, isn't it? Unless you want to deny faith in the parish books, which are in Italy before 1860 the first authentic sources for the history of families and their individuals.

* * *

Therefore, there was *only one* Andrea Postacchini!

Of rural origin, he wore the clerical habit for some time, which he left to start a family when he was about 28 years old.

He had six children. The two males were priests: Raffaele, of the secular clergy, died in Fermo on 1 April 1892; Alessandro, a Camaldolese monk with the name of Romualdo, died in Nola at a very old age. Of the four females

mentioned above, the first was a nun; the other three remained unwed, they lived in the paternal home where they had a private school. The last, Eugenia, died on June 14, 1918 and with it the Andrea's family became extinct.

* * *

It is to his great honor to have been self-taught in the noble art that he practiced throughout his life with honesty equal to the value, satisfied only to earn the bare essential for the family, working in the modesty and silence of his house, which was his temple and shop. He was extremely active, because his works are countless: violins, violas, cellos, etc., spread in the Fermo area and outside, particularly sold in the famous fairs of Senigallia where he used to bring his goods every year, always sought after by passionate lovers of sound.

He constantly used to mark his works with a label placed in the back of the instruments, now bearing the wording: "*Andreas Postacchini Amici filius fecit. Firmi anno ...*", now "*Andreas Postacchini fece in Fermo l'anno* ", now and more often: "*Andreas Postacchini Firmanus fecit sub titolo S. Rapbaelís Archang: 18 ...*". The author has some copies of this last wording.

His small home workshop had the written sign: "All'Arcangelo S. Raffaele". You could read in the bridges the machine engraved writing: *Postacchini*. This was the only form of advertisement that he allowed himself in his modesty. Only once, as far as we know, his works were presented by the heirs to an Exhibition: the *Agricultural Industrial Exhibition of Fermo* in 1869. They were awarded with a diploma and medal, which are thoroughly preserved in the small private collection of the author.

It might seem out of place to linger here in particular on its artistic value, after writers such as those mentioned above have dealt with it, and with competence on the subject. However, it will do no harm to note that Postacchini, with some rare exceptions, was considered, as Cav. Gabrielli wrote, "one of the most talented luthiers in the Marche, whose fame as an artist has crossed the borders of his native region".

Already since 1869 the *jury* for awards to the expositors in the aforementioned Fermo exhibition, ruled that "Postacchini's violins were worked in imitation of those of *Antonius Stradivarius*. Postacchini is now commonly greeted with the honorary title of *Stradivari of the Marche*. Therefore, it is not without surprise that we note that in the "Guide of the Province of Ascoli Piceno" compiled by the Ascoli Piceno section of C.A.I. (Italian Alpine Club) in 1889, the writer has omitted Postacchini name in the chapter "Music in the

Marche" among the names of our distinguished artists, , even though he was "so worthy of honor".

We are sure that whoever is in charge of teaching the history and technique of string instruments in music institutes will want from now on to do justice to Postacchini by correcting the inaccuracies that have so damn distorted his figure and his artistic work.

* * *

At this point we can wonder why writers of undisputed value have fallen into the misunderstanding of creating a double personality, writing about this artist. We cannot explain it. It has been written that in the first labels he simply put: *Andreas filius*. We do not know: however, we tend to believe that it is a reading cut off by mistake, to be completed as follows: *Andreas filius Amici Postacchini*. Perhaps someone, apparently the German Lutgendorff, would have drown out the wrong lesson by stopping, as they say, at the first station, and the other authors would have accepted it as it was without checking it striving then to combine the other details of the dates.

It is also likely that in the beginning somebody has spoken of Andrea Postacchini I and Andrea Postacchini II, in order to distinguish the first period or first mode of the artist's work, from the second period or second style. Isn't it in fact common to say in art Virgil first and Raphael second or third?

That is how you later get to the monstrous split with such an abundance of details.

* * *

Anyone who in the future would like to talk about Postacchini, his technique and so on, will do well rather to highlight one feature as clearly as possible: the real help he got from his son Raffaele. Biographers talk about him, but not always precisely. During the years of his youth he had given good evidence to be highly successful in his father's art; but then he embraced the priestly state and, scrupulous as he was, stopped everything for fear of contributing to sin by making instruments that could be used for dancing, attending only to works of mercy and ministry. And perhaps it was Raffaele himself who destroyed for the same reason the recipe for the paint that his father used for his instruments; a professional secret which he took with him to his grave.

His name appears in the printed catalogue of the exhibitors awarded in Fermo in 1869 alongside his father's name.

* * *

Fermo which boasts noble traditions in terms of music can also be proud of the citizen Andrea Postacchini. It is regretful however to note that barely the memory of the artist's countless works remains in his homeland, although they were known and appreciated even outside Italy, paid for from eight thousand to twelve or fifteen thousand lire.

The last violins left to the family as a single inheritance and all the tools of the trade were taken away many years ago by a fence at a very low price. Only one double bass, however badly reduced, which tradition attributes to Postacchini, has been preserved for a few years in the Civic Museum.

The abovementioned Professor Billè from Fermo owns another magnificent double bass and uses it in his concerts.

In order to remember such an excellent artist, the civic administration named a street after his name a few years ago. A little bit and a little late: but this is better than nothing.

Almost at the same time a memorial stone with only Postacchini birth and death information was placed by the undersigned and current owner on the building that was formerly the artist's house and shop in via delle Vergini n. 3.

A kind writer friend of the author, making a flattering nod, noted politely that it would have been possible to add also the name of "Andrea II junior son".

We hope that after our very modest writing he will have to change his mind. The report, with all due respect to everyone, is history that does not fear denial.



Detail of the violin bearing the label: Andreas Postacchini
Firmanus fecit / sub titulo S. Raphaelis Archang. 1835.
Property of Maestro Stefano Corradetti (photo by P.
Sabatini).

APPENDIX II

MACERATA, "Mozzi-Borgetti" Municipal Library: G. RADICIOTTI-G. SPADONI, Biographical Dictionary of Marche Musicians,. unpublished ms. (notably Ms 1017-1030), papers. 3191v-3192r, correspondence Aristide Scorcelletti.

Postacchini Andrea luthier

Born in Fermo from Amico on 30 November 1781, died there on 3 February 1862.

Contrary to what various historians of lutherie printed, starting with the German Latgendorff, then with Billè and others (who all followed the information of the first biographer without checking it at the source) only one of the Postacchini Andrea luthiers from Fermo really lived, the one born as above; therefore no Andrea senior son of Amico, who would have been born around 1766 and died in 1824. Not even another Andrea born in 1788 and son of Andrea I existed.

This is said to correct precisely those who wrote about Postacchini and it was summarized by Riccardo Gabrielli in his publication "I liutai marchigiani (The luthiers from the Marche)".

Our Postacchini was born into a family of wealthy farmers and he was sent in order to pursue an ecclesiastical career to study with a friar nobody knows anything about. It is known, however, that during his leisure hours this friar dedicated himself to making violins with very primitive tools. Postacchini was very talented and followed closely this work which he put later to good use for his subsistence. He then joined the Fermo seminary as a pupil and wore the clerical habit until the age of 28. Due to the sad Napoleonic events he had to pass to the lay state and it was then that he devoted himself completely to the manufacture of string instruments, succeeding very well due to his natural passion and truly self-taught in its further training. His manufacturing systems are completely unidentified, kept completely hidden and only known by his son Don Raffaele who likewise did not have apprentices nor taught his manufacturing systems. Not even the other numerous children, who lived always or for a long time next to their father, were able to know the most obvious methods of manufacturing. It is only recalled that he used, even for violins and violas, the wood obtained from the lids of the mouths of the farmhouse ovens (if not exactly so, we might perhaps think that he placed the wood in front of the mouth of an oven in order to perfectly dry it). He has made the whole series of the string quartet (violins, violas, cellos and double basses) but mainly the series of his violins is numerous and reached today a very

considerable price; his double basses have also been worthy of distinction. He also made excellent guitars. In a print dated 1862, year of his death, Postacchini is said to be "not inferior to the Stradivarius in the construction of violins".

A blurb reported in number 18 (22 July 1815) of the "Giornale del Tronto" thus says: "Mr. Andrea Postacchini of Fermo, skilled manufacturer of string instruments, who reached, after assiduous and not doubtful experiences of a decade, the level of excellence which it is possible to aspire to in the difficult art he professes, being stimulated by the admirers of his valuable works and by his friends, has decided to offer his services to the public.

Therefore anyone, even outside these provinces, yearning for violas, cellos, double basses, guitars, mandolins, etc. will only have to address a letter to the aforementioned Manufacturer, prescribing the quality of the voice he wishes in the instrument, sure of being served with all precision and solicitude".

He produced a lot and sold in Fermo area and in the marche (sic!), especially in the famous Senigaglia fairs; he also shipped abroad. He was also highly sought after abroad for restorations of ancient and very valuable instruments and in this he was unequalled. Speaking of restorations, it is remembered that a renowned musician travelling for the famous music of S. Severino Marche overturned the car and therefore his violin by a famous author was smashed. Observing that all the pieces of the instrument were there, even the most minute or become such, and the violinist complaining strongly about the disaster towards the instrument, some musicians very practical of Fermo area suggested Postacchini, well known also as a very talented restorer. Receiving the violin that had become "a sack of bones", and recognizing that no piece was missing, even if shattered, he took it upon himself to put it back perfectly in place in a fortnight. So it was and the restoration was completely successful, so much that the owner of the violin, grateful and admired, instead of the required 4 ecus for the performed work, gave Postacchini 12 ecus.

Postacchini manufactured with precision and perfect finishing. His bows are of great renown. One of his specialties was the composition of the paint gone with him to the grave. His instruments bore the following label inside "Andreas Postacchini Firmanus fecit sub titulo S. Raphaelis Archangeli ..." then he put the year of manufacture in pen. Or "Andreas Postacchini did in Fermo year ...".

His contemporaries also called him "the angel of the violin".

(I dwelt on Postacchini to highlight a luthier who is little talked about and almost unknown, especially to us from the Marche of today and perhaps even of yesterday).

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The Municipality of Fermo named a street in the neighborhood of S. Caterina after Postacchini. The house where he died on the initiative of Msgr. Cicconi, who now owns it, bears the following epigraph dictated by him: "This house was inhabited by Andrea Postacchini - luthier of national renown - MDCCLXXXVIII - MDCCCLII, [Recte MDCCCIX11] (However the date of birth is wrong, not 1788 but 1781 as shown in the birth certificate found by me in the Parish of S. Angelo and transcribed by me.)

* * *

Postacchini don Raffaele, priest.

Son of the aforementioned, born in Fermo on April 16, 1823 and died there on April 1, 1892, he knew very well the paternal art that he would certainly have surpassed if delicate concerns of conscience had not advised him to stop, as it was a profane art and not suitable, he thought, for the dignity of a priest, serving string instruments and especially violin for even sinful purposes, mainly dancing. And with him we lost an excellent school that could have been followed by some pupil but was not, working jealously he too, like his father. He stopped making violins when he was about 35 years old and starting saying mass.

Don Raffaele was also a very talented restorer. Once Maestro Pisilani needed to have restored a cello badly fixed by a certain friar. He took it to Don Raffaele who first of all wanted to be assured that the instrument was not needed for the theater and above all for dances. Pisilani formally assured him, calling as a witness Maestro Montanari then at the beginning of his career as choirmaster in S. Elpidio a Mare (see) who told me the anecdote. Don Postacchini restored the instrument masterfully and, in this way, "all the mess made by that awful ignorant friar" were repaired as Postacchini called him so to

say, with a certain professional indignation, that he did not understand at all the art of restorer.

Aristide Scorcelletti



1/4 size violin attributed to Andrea Postacchini, G. Pasqualini collection, currently in the Civic Art Gallery of Ascoli Piceno.

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