

BOOK REVIEWS

P. L. Marston

Physics Department, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 99164

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American Luthier, Carleen Hutchins—The Art & Science of the Violin

Quincy Whitney

University Press of New England, Lebanon, New Hampshire, 2016, 290 pp. Price: \$35.00 (hardcover) ISBN: 978-1-61168-592-3

American Luthier, Carleen Hutchins—The Art & Science of the Violin, written by Quincy Whitney (primary arts writer for the *Boston Sunday Globe NH Weekly*), provides a biographical account of the violin-maker and scientist, Carleen Hutchins. In 1997 Carleen asked Ms. Whitney to write her biography and provided her with valuable diaries and other material that has made this book such a true-to-life work. It gives an extensive chronicle of Carleen's life while providing snippets of fascinating stories related to the art and science of musical instruments, and, in particular, the role of women. For almost anyone involved in musical acoustics, Carleen Hutchins was a household name as well as an inspiration to scientists with an interest in violins. Ms. Whitney says it so well on p. 136, "Carleen Hutchins had a gift for perceiving other people's gifts, igniting their passions, finding common ground, and then providing the energy of enthusiasm that she powered like the wind." She was awarded the Honorary Fellowship in the Acoustical Society of America in 1998 "for her unique role in combining the art of violin making with the science of acoustics." This reviewer was one of those fortunate scientists to have known her and was most impressed by her selfless dedication to promoting violin acoustics. This relationship started with my Ph.D. work under Eugen Skudrzyk who presented me with several violin plates made by Carleen to study during my dissertation, having received them from Carleen in the promotion of her love in life, violin acoustics. Her recognition was ubiquitous. Quincy Whitney describes the world class musicians that visited Carleen's basement acoustics laboratory at her residence at 112 Essex in Montclair—a tribute to the reach of her fame and influence.

What is wonderful about this book is that Ms. Whitney captures the essence of Carleen as a scientist and as a person. Having met and worked with Carleen, my personal experiences resonated in unison with Ms. Whitney's accurate accounts. Furthermore, the author adds fascinating "Intermezzos" or short sections throughout the book that entertain the reader with fascinating stories: histories of instruments and instrumentalists, harps from 2500 BC to organs in the Dark Ages, women as performers in the Renaissance, polyphony and the science of sound, waves and vibrations, early days of Cremona, Leonardo Da Vinci's inventions of musical instruments, Michele Todini's "cabinet of curiosities"—the Golden Harpsichord, enthralling stories of the great virtuosos and makers of the 18th and 19th centuries, and finally the most famous violin in the world that no one has ever heard—the Messiah.

As a promoter of violin acoustics as well as a violist with a passion for string quartets, we find out about Carleen's incredible circle of scientists, not surprisingly also musicians, cellists John Schelleng and Robert Fryxell and violinist Frederick Saunders. Schelleng jokingly called this "intense foursome" the "catgut acoustical society" leading to the founding of the society with this name in 1963. Under Carleen's leadership the CAS has promoted scientific research and publication in violin acoustics ever since its first newsletter in May 1964.

As a luthier we remarkably hear about a visit to Carleen from the "celebrated, internationally known instrument dealer" Rembert Wurlitzer of NYC that ended in an opportunity for Carleen to work with his master luthier Simone Sacconi from 1959 to 1963. Sacconi was a renowned expert on violin restoration and author of *The Secrets of Stradivari*. It is not surprising that 9 years later she founded the summer Violin Craftmanship Institute at the University of New Hampshire which continues to instruct luthiers today.

A great deal of the book discusses the trials and tribulations of Carleen's Violin Octet. With the Octet she attempted to bridge the gap between the violin, viola, cello, and bass with a set of eight instruments graduated from a small violin to a very large bass. Promoting this Octet became an overriding passion for Carleen who travelled over the world in the effort. Ms. Whitney describes the many tribulations from funding musicians to perform to convincing conductors like Leopold Stokowski to inject them into the orchestra. This reviewer was fortunate to perform with the Sixteen Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia on the so called "tenor," a small cello tuned a fifth higher. It was a joy to play, and played with ease. However, a colleague who played the much larger baritone cello groaned at the difficulty of playing it. It is perhaps in this last comment that the fate of Carleen's Octet rested—it turned out that classically trained musicians that spend so many hours in the practice room would mostly remain unwilling to struggle with a new set of difficulties presented by the Octet. The author captures this so well in her writing of the history of the Violin Octet, leaving the reader a bit sad in the end. However, and moreover, one cannot forget that Carleen's greatest contribution was to the field of violin acoustics.

This reviewer highly recommends this book. It is an engaging, entertaining, accurate, and informative work, especially to those with an interest in music and acoustics. Having researched extensively Carleen's life, Quincy Whitney has done a phenomenal job.

EARL G. WILLIAMS

*Senior Scientist for Structural Acoustics,
Acoustics Division, Naval Research Laboratory,
Code 7106, 4555 Overlook Avenue, Washington,
DC 20375*

Carleen Hutchins's violin octet: a family of eight violins spanning the tonal range of a piano. Courtesy of the Hutchins estate. Hutchins testing a plate in her basement lab on October 25, 1963. Credit: H. Grossman. The first trial of the Hutchins violin octet, on May 24, 1964. Courtesy of the Hutchins estate. *Apologies classical music fans! During our broadcast, Science Friday described a string quartet as "violin, viola, cello, and bass." IRA FLATOW: All right, we're talking to Quincy Whitney telling the story of The American Luthier: The Art and Science of the Violin "great new book" on Science Friday from PRI, Public Radio International. But you couldn't really "is there any place to actually put an order in for one? Or could a group get started if they wanted to with a group of them? Request PDF | On Oct 1, 2016, Earl G. Williams published American Luthier, Carleen Hutchins "The Art & Science of the Violin | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate." Special attention was given to the problem of reducing the numbers of predictors without greatly decreasing the effectiveness of prediction, and to a comparison of the predictive values of the College Entrance Examination [Show full abstract] Board Scholastic Aptitude Test and the American Council on Education Psychological Examination (ACPE). Data for this study were provided by Mr. Charles R. Dalton, Director of Admissions at the College of Arts and Science of the University of Rochester. Read more. Article. The violin is an iconic instrument. The designs of the entire violin family, including cellos, violas, and basses, have hardly changed since they were first invented, and today's luthiers are in no rush to modify them. Instead, they are focused on re-creating that special something that made the instruments of Antonio Stradivari and his Italian contemporaries so great. Carleen Hutchins: Rogue Luthier. Eschewing tradition, some instrument makers are redefining what a violin, viola, or cello is. By Jacob Roberts | March 9, 2018. Der Geigenspieler (The Violin Player), artist unknown, ca. 1900. Dorotheum/Wikimedia Commons. The violin is an iconic instrument. In the 1950s Carleen Maley Hutchins was a grade school science teacher, amateur trumpet player, and New Jersey housewife. When musical friends asked her to trade a trumpet for a \$75 viola, she decided to try making one, thus setting in motion a surprising career. From the time of Stradivari, the mysterious craft of violinmaking has been a closely guarded, lucrative, and entirely masculine preserve. In the 1950s Carleen Maley Hutchins was a grade school science teacher, amateur trumpet player, and New Jersey housewife. When musical friends asked her to trade a trumpet for a \$75 viola, she decided to try making one, thus... American Luthier is the biography of Carleen Hutchins, and the subtitle is The Art and Science of the Violin. In the 1950s Carleen Maley Hutchins was a grade school science teacher, amateur trumpet player, and New Jersey housewife. When musical friends asked her to trade a trumpet for a \$75 viola, she decided to try making one, thus setting in motion a surprising career. American Luthier chronicles the life of this unsung woman who altered everything in a world that had changed little in three centuries. About the Author: Quincy Whitney, primary arts writer for the Boston Sunday Globe NH Weekly for fourteen years, was a Eugene O'Neill Critic Fellow, Salzburg Seminar Fellow, Metropolitan Museum of Art Research Fellow, and Hosking Houses Trust (UK) Fellow. She is the author of Hidden History of New Hampshire and lives in New Hampshire.