

## North America focus

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Photographs Tucker Densley

# GABRIEL MARC FRANÇOIS

**Maker** Gabriel Marc François was the central figure in a group of violin makers that worked in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the early part of the 20th century. François was born into a family of luthiers in Mirecourt in 1873. He was apprenticed to Jacquet in Mirecourt and later worked for Paul Bailly in Paris and London.

At the age of 22, François emigrated to the US. He arrived in Boston in 1895, and

by 1898 had settled in Pittsburgh, which, because of its coal and steel industries, had become one of the most prosperous cities in America. François quickly gained a reputation as one of the leading makers of his day.

In a letter written in 1917, Johann Blose, a maker from Atlantic City, New Jersey, extolled the qualities of François's varnish, saying: 'The question of varnishing is a serious one. There are two men whom I know that can varnish a violin – François in Pittsburgh and Gemunder in New York. I would trust either of them with the varnishing of the finest product.'

François maintained his business of making and dealing in violins until his death in 1938. On 16 March of the following year, François's business manager, Philip Parker, was

involved in a car accident while transporting the firm's collection of violins to market in New York. Parker's car, which contained two cellos and eight violins, including a Stradivari, plunged over a 40-foot embankment and caught fire. Parker survived the crash with first-degree burns, but the instrument collection was destroyed.

**History** This instrument, made in 1919, was based upon a 1753 Guadagnini Milan-period violin, which belonged to Margaret Horne, a prominent Pittsburgh violinist. François's copy was sold to Cleveland Orchestra member Carl F. Ludwig, who was also the owner of Ludwig Music Publishing in Cleveland, Ohio. Records also indicate that the instrument may have been owned by Thaddeus Rich, concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1906 to 1926.

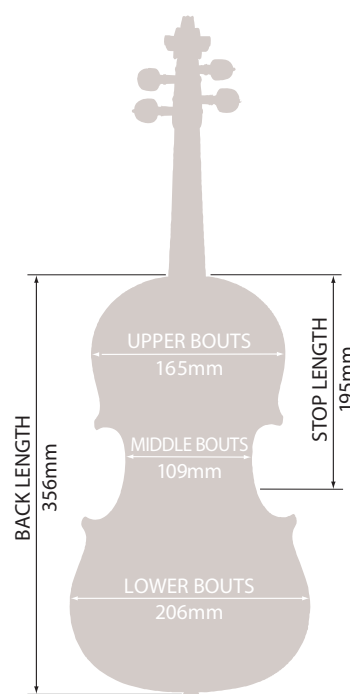
**Form** The outline and model are an accurate representation of the form used by Guadagnini during his Milan period, although some of the measurements and proportions of the François instrument are slightly larger than those of the original.

**Arching** Like many Guadagnini instruments from the Milan period, the François violin has a relatively low, flat arching on both top and back plates. However, the arching retains a fullness that extends into the purfling channel.

**Scroll** The characteristic outline, bold volute and pear-shaped pegbox back are notable features. There is, however, no evidence of the characteristic locating pin marks that are found on most Guadagnini instruments.

**Soundholes** The f-holes of the François violin exhibit the typical oval hole shape that characterises most Guadagnini. However, the more slender, elongated shape of the stems and the upright angle of the holes display François's own character.

**Varnish** The varnish of this violin, although not as heavily pigmented as a Milan-period Guadagnini, shows a lively colour and transparency. Much of the colour lies close to the wood. In addition, the varnish exhibits a natural texture that has not been polished over. ■



MAKER **GABRIEL MARC FRANÇOIS**  
NATIONALITY **AMERICAN**  
BORN **MIRECOURT, 1873**  
DIED **PITTSBURGH, 1938**  
INSTRUMENT **VIOLIN**  
DATE **1919**