

## IN FOCUS

# Flawed perfection

**Benoît Rolland** examines a viola bow by Persoit, who created great art from unpromising materials

Two revolutions had ravaged Paris and a third was around the corner – the government was soon to impose a modern aesthetic on the city's architecture. Jean Pierre Marie Persoit, a quiet and traditional man whose name does not appear much in the records, had discovered the calm of Rue d'Angivillers and bought Lupot's workshop. The year was 1840 and he had just completed a decade of work under Vuillaume.

Persoit's output reveals an introverted and meticulous character, testing the water rather than diving in full-stream – he experimented with new features, but rarely took them any further. This mature viola bow boldly presents an unusually thick silver ring around the pearl. The narrow hair remains faithful to earlier concepts of music and the then fashionable metallic underslides have been ignored. A silver wrapping helps it meet the weight requirements.

Little of Persoit's wood is flawless, but he achieved brilliant effects with the materials he could afford. In this bow, a knot marks the handle and several cross-grains are visible, yet the liveliness is enchanting and the deep colour – originally dark orange – magnifies the veins of the wood.

Confronted with such difficult wood, Persoit kept the emphasis on playability and took particular precautions shaping the stick. He did not bend it over a flame, but cut the camber directly into the wood board. This makes it more durable, but shortens the wood fibres behind the head, as they do not follow the line of the stick. Persoit compensated for this potential fragility with style. He cut the head square, with the camber behind it more pronounced than usual and the throat slightly thickened, all of which delicately builds up wood in the necessary areas. The deep curvature is all the more apparent because of the low frog.

The bow also demonstrates Persoit's attention to detail and proportions – save for 1mm, possibly lost during a tip replacement, the head would be perfectly square. The button complements the stick magnificently – a perfect example of Persoit's art, it is in three parts and elegantly chiselled. The thin, symmetrical frog provides a sober match for the head.

In a violist's hand, the bow is perfectly balanced, with a slight lack of strength in the frog area. It develops a round, open and powerful sound, and martelé bowing is easy. This art was not lost with Persoit who, as Vuillaume's foremost bow maker, trained the young Dominique Bascetta, since



**FROM TOP** the grain direction indicates that the camber behind the head is original; the eye's silver ring is unusually thick; the throat and