


Photos courtesy of Virginie Nguyen.



A MELODY OF GENEROSITY: A 1707 STRADIVARIUS TO INSPIRE YOUNG VIOLINISTS

FOR DISTINGUISHED MUSICIAN CHARLES CASTLEMAN, THE STRADIVARIUS HE BOUGHT MORE THAN 40 YEARS AGO HAS BEEN A FRIEND AND INSPIRATION. AS SOMEONE DEDICATED TO TEACHING YOUNG MUSICIANS, HE FELT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO PASS THIS REMARKABLE INSTRUMENT ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION. AND HAVING HAD AN EVEN LONGER RELATIONSHIP WITH BELGIUM'S QUEEN ELISABETH MUSIC CHAPEL, KNOWN FOR TRAINING TOP YOUNG MUSICIANS, HE WANTED THE INSTRUMENT TO GO TO THIS INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED EDUCATION INSTITUTION.

In 1963, when Charles Castleman received a Silver Medal in the Queen Elisabeth Competition, a prestigious music contest held in Brussels, it was for a piece he played on a Stradivarius, one of the rare and highly valued violins created by Italian craftsman Antonio Stradivari more than 300 years ago. The competition changed Castleman's life—but so did the violin. "It's the kind of sound that it

produces and the kind of emotion it induces," he explains. "With a Strad, it's educating you as you play it."

Back then, his Strad was a loan. But by the early 1980s, Castleman, who was a child prodigy, had saved enough money from his many stage and TV appearances (where he performed with stars such as Frank Sinatra) to buy his



own—the 1707 “Marquis de Champeaux” Stradivarius. He had also made investments in other high-quality violins and bows, which he was able to trade in to help cover the cost of the Stradivarius.

With the help of Myriad ART, a service through which Myriad USA helps navigate the complexities involved in donating art abroad, this exceptional violin is now on loan to the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel. Based in Waterloo, Belgium, it is a world-renowned training center for outstanding musicians. Castleman hopes the violin will have the same transformative effect on young musicians as it did on him. “Seeing what it did for me, it seems like it could easily do that for someone else,” he says.

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION

The violinist Miclen LaiPang, a former student of Castleman, member of the Paris-based Trio Zadig and Associate Artist at the Music Chapel, will play the “Charles Castleman” Stradivarius until the end of 2027. From 2028 onwards, the Music Chapel will award the Charles Castleman Prize, which will consist of the loan of the Stradivarius to the best artist in residence in preparation for the Queen Elisabeth Competition.

Like his teacher and mentor, LaiPang understands the transformative relationship a musician develops with a Stradivarius. However, he has also come to understand that this relationship takes time to develop. In fact, his first few weeks with the violin were not easy. Soon after receiving it, he was the soloist in a performance of a Beethoven sonata for piano and violin and couldn’t understand why the instrument was not responding in the way he’d hoped.

“AS A VIOLINIST, MY JOB IS TO BRING MUSIC TO PEOPLE. I ALSO WANT TO PASS ON MUSIC TO FUTURE GENERATIONS THROUGH MY STUDENTS.”

CHARLES CASTLEMAN

In the interval, he expressed his frustration to the pianist, who gave him some advice: Sit down with the violin to listen to what it has to say. “I played a few notes, and it felt a little bit kinder to me,” he recalls. “Then I went on stage with the attitude of ‘let’s make music together’ rather than ‘let me force what I want onto it.’ It was an incredible success and the audience went wild.”

LaiPang is now “out-of-this-world happy,” as he puts it, and he and the Strad have become firm friends. The instrument, he explains, shows him how to play in a completely different way. “It’s a beautiful journey,” he says. “And it’s teaching me through every minute of playing it.”

THE MUSICIAN AS TEACHER

While Charles Castleman is known as a virtuoso violinist whose musical talents have led him to perform as a soloist on the world's leading stages, he is equally famous as a music teacher and mentor. He has conducted master classes in London, Vienna, Helsinki, Kyiv, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Tokyo and major cities in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

In 1970, he created the Castleman Quartet Program, an in-depth and intensive summer program during which participants learn and perform one concerto movement, two contrasting Bach movements (or the equivalent), two string quartets and a sonata. Combining solo and chamber music, the program is designed to help a new generation of top-level musicians to take their skills to the next level.

The program played an important role in the musical life of LaiPang, who first took the program at the age of 12. "I went every summer for about three weeks during high school," he says. "At 22, I was teaching on the program as a guest and this year I'm teaching as a full professor for the week."

In addition to his work on the summer program, Castleman spent many years as a professor of violin at University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, a position he took up in 1975. And while he retired from Eastman in 2015, he continues to teach at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami.

Unlike many music teachers, he does not push his students to play like he does. "My goal as a teacher is not the same as everyone else's," he says. "My goal is to have the students use the violin to express their deepest emotions—not mine." LaiPang has experienced at firsthand Castleman's passion for passing on his knowledge and

skills. "Charlie is one of the most generous and kind people I've met," he says. "And he loves to give back by teaching."

STRADIVARIUS AT THE CHAPEL

In April 2024, Grégor Chapelle, the Music Chapel's CEO, received an email from LaiPang saying he had recently had a meeting with Castleman, who had expressed his wish to give his Stradivarius to the institution. For Chapelle, the idea that the Music Chapel would have access to such an instrument was thrilling. "I couldn't believe it," he says.

The Music Chapel was founded in 1939 by Belgium's Queen Elisabeth, herself a violinist, and Eugène Ysaÿe, a leading violinist and composer, as an international training center that would foster the development of emerging classical musicians in the disciplines of piano, violin, cello, viola, chamber music and voice.

**"ANY VIOLINIST WHO PLAYS A STRADIVARIUS
FEELS THEY ARE AMONG MANY GENERATIONS
THAT HAVE PLAYED THE INSTRUMENT. IT'S
THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE CONCENTRATED
IN ONE INSTRUMENT."**
GRÉGOR CHAPELLE

As part of its mission to transfer musical excellence from one generation to the next, the Music Chapel helps prepare its artists in residence for the Queen Elisabeth Competition. All competition finalists are kept in isolation at the Music Chapel during one intensive week before their final round. During that week, they study a compulsory unpublished

work, the score of which is given to them upon their arrival at the Music Chapel. Contact with their teachers and the use of cellphones are strictly forbidden.

For Castleman, it was the week he spent preparing for the final round of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in May 1963 that introduced him to the Music Chapel. The experience was musically fruitful, helping him win his Silver Medal. But it also enabled him to get to know musicians from around the world. "It made for a pretty interesting bunch of friends, many of whom I still have contact with," he says.

That week—a week that transformed his musical career—made the institution a natural choice for the gift of his Strad. And his student and fellow musician LaiPang, whose Zadig Trio musicians are Associate Artists at the Music Chapel, was the first person he and the institution chose to experience the magic of working with a Stradivarius. "We have a very strong connection," says Castleman.

After receiving the email from LaiPang, Chapelle arranged for the three of them to meet in Miami. Chapelle invited Castleman to give a masterclass at the Music Chapel and discussions about the logistical details of the gift followed.

It turned out that the easiest solution would be to give the violin to Myriad USA. "Myriad USA will lend it to the Music Chapel as an institution so we can lend it to one of the artists in residence," explains Chapelle.

FOSTERING STEWARDSHIP

For Chapelle, Castleman's gift represents many things—things that he learned about in their discussions about the gift. "He told us how the Music Chapel changed his life, how he benefited from the loan of a Stradivarius when he was in the Queen Elisabeth Competition and how he

wants his Stradivarius to be used by the next generation of musicians," says Chapelle. "He wants not to give back but to give forward."

In this, the gift aligns with the Music Chapel's mission of passing musical excellence on to tomorrow's artists. Moreover, the Castleman Stradivarius has arrived at an opportune moment, as the Music Chapel is starting to focus on the concept of environmental stewardship and is working to raise awareness among young artists of the need to respect planetary boundaries.

Here, the Stradivarius also has an important role to play. "In a world where everyone wants to possess and consume things, the Stradivarius is the opposite," says Chapelle. "It's an incredible instrument that we are taking care of for future generations. It's a metaphor for how we should treat the planet for our children and grandchildren."

www.musicchapel.org

<https://myriadusa.org/services/myriad-art/>

Myriad USA facilitates thoughtful, effective giving across borders. We provide donors with a simple and efficient platform to support their favorite nonprofit initiatives overseas, anywhere around the world.

To learn more about our Donor advised funds, Legacy funds, and Myriad ART, visit myriadusa.org or contact us at (212) 713-7660 or info@myriadusa.org.