

THE PANORMO GUITAR AND ITS MAKERS
by GARY SOUTHWELL
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A STUDY OF THE PANORMO GUITAR AND ITS MAKERS.
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INTRODUCTION

My interest in the Panormo guitar and its family of makers started when I decided to make a copy of a guitar by Louis Panormo. Not being content just to copy the guitar as I saw it, I sought to find out more about it and Louis Panormo himself. I found surprisingly little in the standard texts on the history of the guitar about Panormo and what I did find was vague and confusing. Many generalizations and wild assumptions were made, a good example is in connection with the famous guitarist Fernando Sor; in his article on Louis Panormo, published in 'Guitar Magazine' June 1975, Mr. Sensier says

“Why did Louis an Italian, born in Paris and working in London, make guitars which differed so much from the standard of his time? The answer may be found in his friendship with Sor, whom he may have met in Paris or London, and whose Spanish built guitars he was able to examine”

There is no information to suggest Louis ever met Sor, let alone was a friend of his and examined his guitars in Paris or London, I shall elaborate on this later. However, this sort of comment is typical of many authors all of which are very readable but lacking in hard facts on this particular subject. So I decided to do some research on the matter for myself.

The first step was to try and see as many Panormo guitars as possible. My first encounter was in doing a working drawing of the Panormo at the Victoria & Albert Museum, although attributed to Louis Panormo this seems very doubtful to me now.

Its lack of label or other identification and shoddy workmanship suggests the work of Edward Panormo rather than Louis. This was followed up by trying to see as many examples in private collections as possible; this met with various degrees of success and is still an on-going process. While starting to get a good knowledge of the guitars themselves this brought me no nearer to the man behind the making of them. So I collected as much written material on Louis Panormo from secondary sources (and later the whole Panormo family) as I could find and set about sorting out the fact from fiction.

The most effective research started, however, when I started looking into primary sources; this was a new experience for me as the brief account which follow describes. It started with a trip to the Guildhall library to delve into the London trade directories and hopefully find out where Louis Panormo, and the rest of his family, had worked and lived. The Librarian was very helpful as I piled through various trade directories from 1815 to 1878, a trip to Bishopsgate Library was also called for to fill in a few missing links after which I ended up with all the possible listing for the Panormo family. It was an exciting thought and now I was hooked, my next assignment took me to the Public Records Office to go through the census reports for 1841 (the first year in which they were done), 1851 and 1861. This proved to be more of a headache, it took me half a day to work out their catalogue system and many reels of microfilm later I actually started to find some useful information.

Another thing I wanted to do was confirm dates relating to births and deaths, also to authenticate the story that Louis Panormo had emigrated to New Zealand in 1854. This I managed to do at Alexandra House and St. Catherine's House, and via New Zealand House. Information from players and collectors and notes from sources such as Sor's "Method for the Spanish guitar" have all contributed to this piece of work and although the copy of the Panormo guitar is finished now the research that started it could go on for much longer.



GUITAR BY LOUIS PANORMO

19th century in England the
and unknown instrument,
"English guitar" a steel string,
and by the 1830's it was enjoying
patronage from the wealthy
London.

famous Spanish guitarist and
was resident in London between
any people and gave astounding
which developed into a flourish
"the Harmonicon" a music journal
1833, p.42.

lighted and surprised the
don by his performance
is now living in Paris
the Parisian amateurs
, save our French
from its appearance, have
it, but judging by its
in a complete orchestra."

"the Harmonicon" reported again in

used musical instrument,
acted, and coming into
guitar..... Its power
at his are certainly
the modern Jubal, cannot
in of time to render it
a small room."

and if it was confined largely
to the parlours rooms of the wealthy.

THE GUITAR IN LONDON DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

At the turn of the nineteenth century in England the guitar was a much neglected and unknown instrument, everyone was playing the “English guitar- a steel strung, cittern like instrument. Yet by the 1830’s it was enjoying considerable popularity and patronage from the wealthy society world of Victorian London.

Much of this was due to the famous Spanish guitarist and composer Fernando Sor, who was resident in London between 1815 and 1823. He taught many people and gave astounding concerts during this time, which developed into a flourishing interest in the guitar. “The Harmonicon” a music journal of the time wrote in March 1823, p.42

M. Sor who so long delighted and surprised the lovers of music in London by his performance on the Spanish guitar, is now living in Parishe charmed all the Parisian amateurs by an instrument which, says our French correspondent, might from its appearance, have been taken for a guitar, but judging by its harmony, must have been a complete orchestra.”

Later in 1824, p.48 “The Harmonicon” reported again in connection with Sor

“Amongst the once favoured musical instrument, now for sometime neglected, and coming into practice again, is the guitar Its power in almost every hand but his are certainly limited and even he, the modern Jubal, cannot give it strength enough of tune to render it useful anywhere but in a small room.”

So the craze had started, even if it was confined largely to the parlour rooms of the wealthy.

Most of the renowned guitarist of the day came to London for sometime to perform and teach; including a few home grown ones, the most famous of which was Catherine Petzer. Although born in Germany she came to London at an early age in 1830, where as a child genius she was “the talk of society” as Mr. Harrison tells us in his book “The Reminiscences of Madame Sydney Pratten” . She later became Madame Sydney Pratten by marriage to Sydney Pratten, who died only fourteen years after their marriage. She became a very fashionable teacher, her pupils including the Princess Louise and Princess Beatrice.

The guitar was so in fashion that a magazine devoted entirely to the guitar was published for a few years in the 1830's, it was dedicated to the guitarist Giuliani and entitled "The Giulianiad". Although I have found no extant copies here is a section published in Brian Jeffrey's book "Fernando Sor composer and guitarist" p. 71, where it praises the guitar's popularity.

"The Giulianiad" 1833

"The successful introduction of the guitar in England has been comparatively of recent date. Till the peace of 1815 it may be assumed that few persons in this country were acquainted with its full powers. From that time, however, to the present moment, no instrument can be brought in comparison with its rapid advancement in public estimation."

It is also possible to trace the guitar's popularity through the makers of London during this Period. In the 1820's the Panormo brothers were the only known makers in London and even then they advertised as violin makers in the trade directories.

In 1830 (some seven years since Sor had left London) Louis Panormo started trading as a guitar manufacturer, the only competition at this time was from Mark Myers of 37, Princes Street, Soho and Thomas Poole of Shepherdess Walk, City Road. By the 1840's the number had swelled considerably. Most of the large violin, woodwind and piano makers were now advertising as guitar makers as well. In the Post Office London Trade Directory for 1844 apart from the numerous large companies professing to make guitars there were more makers who were purely guitar makers, or making one other instrument, than ever before.

Chas Barke	Regent Street
Heiy Boneli	Gt. Tikchfield Street
Alf Brunyan	Tavistock Street
Dominic and Arnold Roudhloff	31, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy St.
Edward Panormo	2, Richmond Street, Leicester Sq.
Louis Panormo	46, High Street, St. Giles.

Jordon Wainwright

27, Greenhills Mts.

Most of the guitar makers listed in the trade directories only survived for a few years and made no impression, exceptions to this are the Panormo family who were prominent throughout this era and remain the most famous guitar makers of nineteenth century London. The Roudhloffs also achieved some notoriety and lasted longer than most of the London makers; they were Russian immigrants who interestingly enough worked in the same street that Sor had lived in while in London, though some years later.

By the turn of the 1850's, however, the guitar's popularity seemed to be in decline again in London and many of the makers disappeared. By 1868 only four guitar makers remained in London.

Chas Boullangier

Soho

John Hant

Soho

George Lewis Panormo

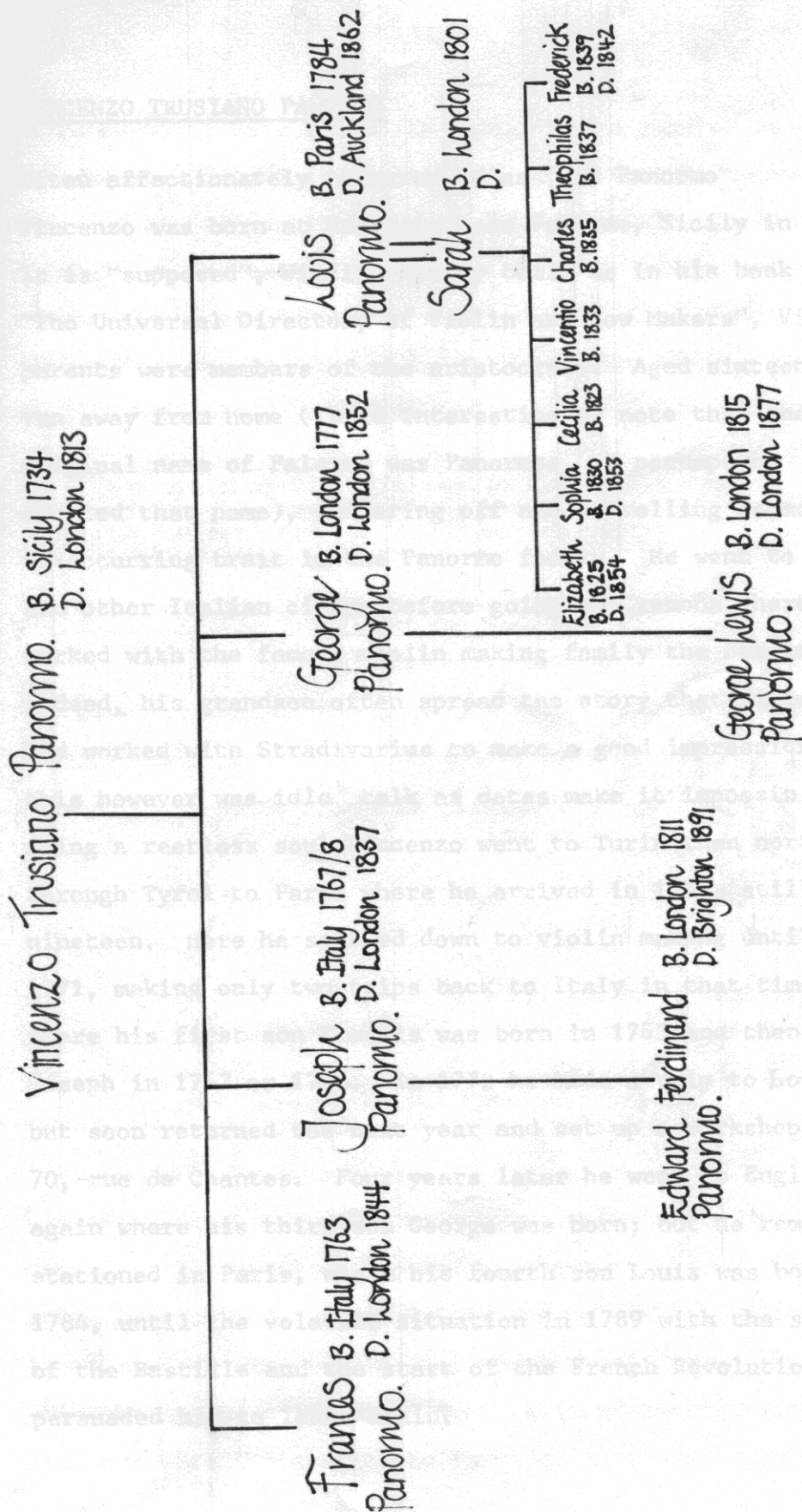
Whitefield Street

Thomas Prouse

Hanway Street.

Now the guitar's popularity in London was all but over, in 1877 George Lewis Panormo died and with him a fine tradition of guitar making in London. The emphasis on the guitar's development had turned to Spain where Tarrega and Torres were changing its character irrevocably.

The Panormo Family Tree



VINCENZO TRUSIANO PANORMO

Often affectionately referred to as “Old Panormo” Vincenzo was born at Monreale near Palermo, Sicily in 1734. It is “supposed” William Henley tells us in his book “The Universal Directory of Violin and Bow Makers”, Vincenzo’s parents were members of the aristocracy. Aged sixteen he ran away from home (It is interesting to note that the original name of Palermo was Panormos, so perhaps he adopted that name), wandering off and traveling seems a re-occurring trait in the Panormo family. He went to Naples and other Italian cities before going to Cremona, here he worked with the famous violin making family the Bergonzis. Indeed, his grandson often spread the story that Vincenzo had worked with Stradivarius to make a good impression, this however was idle talk as dates make it impossible. Being a restless soul Vincenzo went to Turin then north through Tyrol to Paris where he arrived in 1753, still only nineteen. Here he settled down to violin making until 1771, making only two trips back to Italy in that time where his first son Francis was born in 1763 and then Joseph in 1767 or 1768. In 1772 he made a trip to London, but soon returned the next year and set up a workshop at 70, rue de Chantes. Four years later he went to England again where his third son George was born; but he remained stationed in Paris, where This fourth son Louis was born in 1784, until the volatile situation in 1789 with the storming of the Bastille and the start of the French Revolution persuaded him to leave again.

He is known to have worked in Dublin for a year or so where he used wood from a large billiard table for the backs and sides of his violins. Vincenzo finally settled in London, a label from an extant instrument reading “Vincenzo Panormo London 1791” which shows he was in London from this time, although the exact address is still unknown to me. Vincenzo died in 1813 while living in London.

“The dream of his life was to faithfully copy the Stradivarian models to the minutest particulars” and he “lived on the poetry of violin making”

“The Universal Directory of
Violin and Bow Makers”
William Henley.

The finest examples of Vincenzo’s work are amongst the best replicas ever made of the

Stradivarian violins. He used splendid wood with tricks to prematurely age it and fine varnishes, even here the corners were broken down to give a worn look. Yet he still had an individuality to his instruments, particularly his grandiose scrolls. Perhaps the greatest honour is given to Vincenzo by William Henley again, when he tells us

“Six well known soloists (personal friends of the author) frequently for publicity purposes state they play Strads, but are actually Panormos”

Vincenzo was also highly regarded for his double basses. However, “Old Panorno” has not been given the high reputation he richly deserves, mainly due to the fact that he had lived much of the time in semi-poverty and due to his hardships he had to spend most of his life producing cheap and mediocre work for dealers to survive.

JOSEPH PANORMO

Joseph was the second son of Vincenzo, the first son Francis became a flautist and fashionable music teacher. Joseph was born sometime in 1767 or 1768 in Naples, on one of Vincenzo's trips back to Italy. He grew up and learnt his trade in Paris, this would have given Joseph an interesting mixture of influences. From his father he would have learnt many Italian ways of doing things as well as a strong French influence, not only from the makers around him but also again from his father who worked most of his life in Paris. He settled in London in his early twenties with his father and younger brothers although the address is unknown at the moment. It seems after their father's death in 1813 the brothers stayed together as "Panormo and Company" Joseph being the eldest aged 45 to 46 and his younger brothers, George aged 36 and Louis aged 29; all of them having lived in London some twelve years. However, the first recorded address I have found was at 26 High Street, Bloomsbury (in the parish of St. Giles) in 1817. This information comes from a label of an extant guitar, although the actual maker is unknown, as it only says "Panormo", but what is particularly interesting about this early Panormo guitar is that it is very French in style and quite unlike the guitars usually associated with the Panormo family. In "Johnstone's Complete London Trade Directory" which was only published for 1817 and 1818 it shows someone else occupying the same address (the directory lists all the traders street by street), as the information for the 1817 issue must have been taken the previous year or early 1817 we can assume the Panormo family moved in some time in 1817. The 1818 issue was basically a reprint of the previous year and most changes of address would have gone unaltered. The first time they were recorded in a London trade Directory was in "Pigot's" in 1822 as "Panormo and Co." the address still 26 High Street, Bloomsbury. The following year in 1823 Joseph was listed in "Pigot's" at 39, King Street, Soho (not far from the other shop at the High Street) with his son. The most likely idea is that Joseph and his son set up one workshop while George and Louis maintained the other. Joseph and his son Edward remained working in King Street until 1830 when they moved to 4, New Compton Street, this was a little road off the High Street where his brothers were still working. The last entry for Joseph was at the same address in 1835, he died later in 1837 in extreme poverty.

He had a chequered career much like his father, sometimes prosperous yet often on the verge of starvation. His standard of work went through phases too, he made some fine violins and excellent cellos but he will be best remembered as the original maker of the Panormo guitar, which stemmed from work he did with the great guitarist of the time Fernando Sor. How Joseph became involved with Sor remains a mystery, however in Sor's "Method for the Spanish Guitar" he says

Mr. J. Panormo made some guitars under my direction"

Here we find a link with Spanish guitars, for undoubtedly Joseph would have studied Sor's guitars from the Cadiz School, notably Pages. Hence some similarities in shape and construction between the Spanish school and Panormo guitars. However, Joseph never seemed to capitalise on this guitar design and very few known examples of his guitars survive today.

GEORGE PANORMO

George was born in London in 1777, the third son of Vincenzo, yet would have lived in Paris as a child, being about twelve when they left. So he would have picked up Italian and French influences from his father and Joseph. It is strange that while a fine maker he never owned his own workshop and always worked with his brothers. George was never entered in the trade directories under his own name except for the last four years of his life between 1840 and 1852 when the entry read

“Panormo Geo and Louis. Music Sellers and
Musical Instrument Makers.
31, High Street, St. Giles.

He specialised as a guitar maker along with Louis after Joseph's work with Sor had inspired them to make their Panormo guitars. However, George (like the other brothers) started off as a violin maker and again like his father copied the Strad model in particular the Amate model outline, so good was he that some pass as original Strads. He is also highly regarded as a Cello and Bow maker. In fact Henley in his “Universal Directory of Violin and Bow Makers” says in regard to George

Patronage and honours from Royalty was often given to
individuals whose claim cannot be named in the same breath
with those of Panormo but no such luck ever came his way'

Another problem faced when looking at George is that he seldom labelled his work, apart from his bows which always had his name stamped on them.

I think that he had always spent most of his time working at the shop in the High Street along with Louis and their sons, and it seems likely that guitars with the “Louis Panormo” label owe as much to George in some cases as they do to Louis, indeed it seems that the fine workmanship of George's violins and guitars has been somewhat neglected. His life seems to be obscure as well, and all that I could find out for sure is that he had worked at the High Street, St. Giles where he died in 1845.



GUITAR BY LOUIS
PANORMO 1830'S

GUITAR BY LOUIS
PANORMO 1843



LOUIS PANORMO

Born in Paris in 1784 Louis is perhaps the most prestigious member of the Panormo family. Like his brothers Joseph and George he had started by working with his father. When they left Paris Louis would have only been about five years old so apart from the influences he received from his father and elder brothers (those of Italian and French craftsmanship) he perhaps would have picked up more English influences than the others, as that is where he developed. In fact Louis became a British subject and seen in the 1851 census report on him. Louis, along with his brothers, set up shop at 23, High Street, Bloomsbury sometime in 1817, what had happened between their father's death in 1813 and this date remains unknown at this time. By 1822 they are first entered in "Pigot's" London Trade Directory, a year later Joseph had left for his own shop in nearby Soho. In 1826 it ceased to be listed as "Panormo and Co." but under Louis' own name, here he was listed still as only a violin maker, as had all the family. In 1829 Louis moved to 46, High Street, St. Giles (Bloomsbury) just a few doors along, now however he became known as a "guitar manufacturer" in the London Trade Directories. Business obviously developed nicely for Louis he received patronage from the rich society world and his prices became extravagantly high. In 1837 Louis resurrected Panormo and Company and set up a music selling and publishing business at 6, Greek Street Soho; while still keeping the guitar going at the High Street.

This high spot in his business career lasted four years, but in 1841 the premises at Greek Street had to go leaving Louis guitar making and music selling at 43 High Street. Perhaps the overheads of two places were too much for him after a while, or the business went through a slump. This situation lasted until 1847 when he added another workshop, the "Post Office" Trade Directory reads:

"Panormo Louis Guitar Maker and Music Seller
43, High Street, St. Giles.

Panormo Louis Guitar Manufacturer
22, Compton Street, Brunswick Square'

This was short lived (hence the variety of guitars from Compton Street) and by the next year he had moved into the one place at 31, High Street, St. Giles. Here Louis remained until

1854, when he emigrated to New Zealand.

Louis had a large family to maintain, there was his wife Sarah, a Bloomsbury girl born in 1801, at least three daughters, Elizabeth, Sophia and Cecilia, and four sons Vincentio, Charles, Theophilas and Frederick. There may have been more but these are the only ones found in the 1851 census report, but as Louis was already 57 years old at the first census in 1841 some children may have already left home by then. Frederick died as a baby (aged only three) the other sons would have helped in the workshop when old enough as it was very much a family concern. Unfortunately though, none of Louis's sons went on to make instruments like their father and fall into obscurity.

Bone in his book "The Guitar and Mandolin" tells us a story about another of Louis's daughters, Angiolina, who, he tells us, married the celebrated guitarist Huerta. Also that Huerta's favourite guitar was made by Louis and that Louis had published some music Huerta had dedicated to Angiolina. This story has yet to be authenticated, although I have seen a piece of music arranged for guitar by Madame Huerta. Sophia and Elizabeth did not marry however and both died in their twenties, it was after Elizabeth died in September 1854 that Louis emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand with whatever was left of his family. Why at the age of seventy Louis should want to make such a move remains a mystery, perhaps he wanted to give the remainder of his children a fresh start in a prosperous new land. His profession on his death certificate reads "Musical Instrument Maker" and as he lived out there for eight years some examples of his work must survive over in New Zealand somewhere. Louis Panormo died aged seventy eight on the 11 August 1862 in Awitu Block, Auckland, New Zealand, cause of death "Old Age".

Louis was an outstanding guitar maker, amongst the finest in the history of the guitar and his output was tremendous as today many of his guitars can still be found. His guitars sold from two to fifteen guineas, as it says on his label, many of these were expensive guitars for the society world to which he gave much adornment, particularly in his elaborate use of Mother

of Pearl. Also many serious Players and professional performers used his guitars and still do today, which is the greatest tribute anyone can give to Louis Panormo.



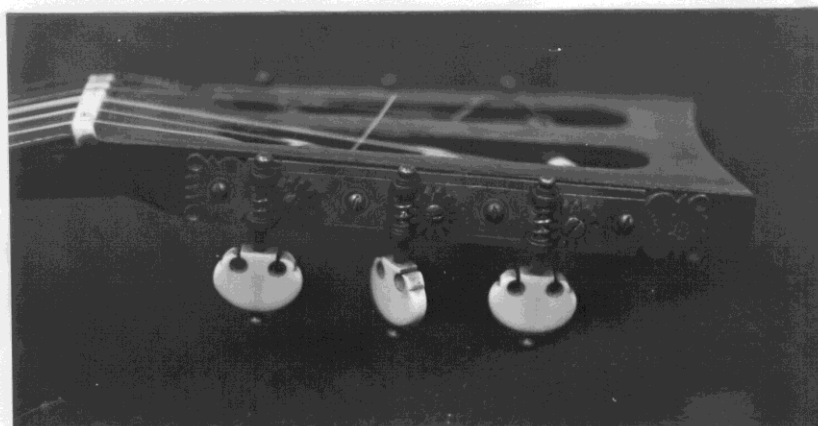
PANORMO GUITAR
FROM THE V&A
COLLECTION.

POSSIBLY THE
WORK OF
EDWARD PANORMO



DETAIL OF ROSSETTE

"BAKER"
MACHINE HEADS



EDWARD FERDINAND PANORMO

Sometimes referred to as Edmund, Edward was the son of Joseph and was born in London in 1811. He started work with his father and Uncle Louis but from the age of twelve would have been mainly with his father at the workshop in King Street. Edward was the only one of the Panormo makers who was also a good musician as well. In 1835, aged twenty seven, his father Joseph retired and he had to run, on his own, the shop in 4 New Compton Street. Around this time he married a local girl Susannah. In 1840 he moved to 37, Frith Street, Soho, from here he moved again in 1843 to 2, Richmond Street, a place he shared with a carpenter called Richard Ellis. Edward was obviously very poor and doing badly at this time. Two years later he moved down the road to his own place at 12, Richmond Street, his fortune seemed to rapidly change as did his address. In 1856 was at 91, Wardour Street Soho, then in 1859 at 6 Marylebone Street, Golden Square. Three years later in 1862 things had got really bad and like his grandfather "Old Panormo" he took to wandering for a couple of years.

Restless, he traveled to various towns, he also spent a few months in Ireland. In 1864 Edward returned to London and set up at 11, Ridinghouse Street, but he could make no headway and a year later he moved down to Brighton. Here he opened a music shop, he also repaired instruments, did some cabinet making, gave guitar and violin lessons and played viola in the Brighton Theatre Band.

However, want of business success together with his variable temperament kept him more or less in semi-poverty. Ultimately he found himself in the workhouse for a time, after which he and his wife were maintained by public subscription. He died in 1891 and was buried at the Parochial Grounds, Brighton, the expenses were paid by the Parish.

He was never a very distinguished maker. Henley in his "Universal Directory of Violin and Bow Makers" says he was out to

"Make money easily and quickly".

He wrote and published a guitar tutor and other music and is also said to have made the first Banjo in England by Henley, but his temperamental nature and lack of great talent kept him in poverty and he never attained the greatness of his forefathers.

GEORGE LEWIS PANORMO

George was born in London in 1815 the son of George Panormo. He worked with his father and Uncle Louis in the High Street, he was a good craftsman whose speciality was always guitars. Little is known about him at the moment however, after his father had died and Louis had left for New Zealand in 1854 George left the High Street, Bloomsbury and moved to 87, John Street, Fitzroy Square. He stayed there until 1868 when he moved to 37 Whitfield Street, Fitzroy Square. Here he remained working until his death in 1877. He will be remembered as the last of the Panormo guitar makers and the last in a great family tradition.

RECORDED ADDRESSES FOR JOSEPH PANORMO (1767/8 - 1837)

1817	Panormo	25 High Street Bloomsbury.
This comes from the label of an extant guitar and is his earliest known address. The following addresses come from Pigot's London Trade Directory. There was no entry for the name Panormo in the trade directories until 1822.		
1822	Pigot	Panormo & Co. 26 High Street, Bloomsbury
1823	Pigot	Panormo, Jos & Son. Violin Makers 39, King Street, Soho.
1824	Pigot	“
1825	“	“
1826	“	“
1827	“	“
1828	“	“
1829	“	“
1830	Robson	Panormo, Jos & Son. Violin Makers 4, New Compton Street.
1831	“	“
1832	“	“
1833	“	“
1834	“	“
1835	“	“

RECORDED ADDRESSES FOR GEORGE PANORMO (1777 - 1852)

1817	Panormo	26 High Street, Bloomsbury.
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This comes from the label of an extant guitar and is his earliest known address. The following addresses come from Pigot's London Trade Directory. There was no entry for the name Panormo in the trade directories until 1822.

1822 Panormo & Co. 26 High Street, Bloomsbury.

1823 “ “

1824 “ “

1825 “ “

The next entry possibly relating to George is in Robson's London Trade Directory.

1837 Panormo & Co. Music Sellers & Publishers
6, Greek Street, Soho.

1838 “ “

1839 “ “

1840 “ ”

The next entries relating to George is in the Post Office's London Trade Directory.

1848 Panormo, Geo. Louis. Guitar Manf. 31, High St. St. Giles

1849 Panormo, Geo & Louis. Music Sellers & Musical Inst.
Makers. 31, High St. St. Giles

1851 “ “

1852 “ “

RECORDED ADDRESSES FOR LOUIS PANORMO (1784 - 1862)

1817 Panormo 26, High Street, Bloomsbury

1820 Louis Panormo 26, High Street, Bloomsbury

These come from the labels of extant guitars and show his earliest known address. The following addresses come from Pigot's London Trade Directory, Robson's London Trade Directory and the Post Office's London Trade Directory. There was no entry for the name Panormo in the trade directories until 1822.

1822 Pigot Panormo & Co. 26, High Street, Bloomsbury

1823 " "

1824 " "

1825 " "

1826 " Panormo Louis Violin Maker "

1827 " "

1828 " "

1829 " "

1830 Robson Panormo Louis Guitar Manf.
46, High Street, St. Giles *

1831 " "

1832 Pigot "

1833 " "

1834 " "

1835 Robson "

1836 " "

1837 " "

Panormo & Co. Music Sellers & Publishers
6, Greek Street

1838 " Entries as for 1837

1839 " Entries as for 1837

1840 " Entries as for 1837

1841 P. O. Panormo, Louis Guitar Maker & Music Seller
46 High Street, St. Giles

1842 " " "

1843 " " "

1844 " " "

1845 " " "

1846 " " "

1847	“	Panormo, Louis Guitar Makers & Music Seller 46 High Street, St. Giles
		Panormo, Louis Guitar Manf. 22 Compton Street, Brunswick Square
1848	“	Panormo, Louis Guitar Maker & Music Seller 31 High Street, St. Giles
	“	Panormo, Geo. Louis. Guitar Manf. 31 High Street, St. Giles
1849	“	Panormo, Geo. & Louis. Music Sellers & Musical Inst. Makers 31 High Street, St. Giles
1850	“	“ “
1851	“	Panormo, Geo. & Louis. Musical Inst. Makers 31 High Street, St. Giles
1852	“	“ “
1853	“	“ “
1854	“	“ “

* In 1830 the High St. Bloomsbury became entered as High St. St. Giles, although this is the same place.

RECORDED ADDRESSES FOR EDWARD PANORMO (1811 - 1891)

The following addresses came from Pigot's London Trade Directory, Robson's London Trade Directory and the Post Office's London Trade Directory.

1823	Pigot	Panormo, Jos & Son	Violin Makers 39, King St, Soho.
1824	"	"	"
1825	"	"	"
1826	"	"	"
1827	"	"	"
1828	"	"	"
1829	"	"	"
1830	Robson	Panormo, Jos & Son	Violin Makers 4, New Compton Street
1831	"	"	"
1832	"	Panormo, Edward	Guitar Maker 4, New Compton Street
1833	"	"	"
1834	"	"	"
1835	"	"	"
1836	"	Panormo, Edward	4, New Compton Street
1837	"	"	"
1838	"	"	"
1839	"	"	"
1840	"	Panormo, Edward	Musical Inst. Maker 37, Frith Street, Soho
1841	P. O.	Panormo, Edward	Violin & Guitar Maker 37, Frith Street, Soho
1842	"	"	"
1843	"	Panormo, Edward	Violin & Guitar Maker 2, Richmond St. Leics. Sq.
1844	"	"	"
1845	"	Panormo, Edward	Violin & Guitar Maker 12, Richmond St. Leics. Sq.
1846	P. O.	"	"
1847	"	"	"
1848	"	"	"

1849	“	“	“
1850	“	“	“
1851	“	“	“
1852	“	“	“
1853	“	“	“
1854	“	“	“
1855	“	“	“
1856	“	Panormo Ed.	Guitar Maker 91, Wardour Street, Soho
1857	“	“	“
1858	“	“	“
1859	“	Panormo Ed.	Guitar Maker 6, Marylebone St. Golden Sq.
1860	“	“	“
1861	“	“	“
1862	“	no entry	
1863	“	no entry	
1864	“	Panormo Edward	Guitar Maker 11, Ridinghouse St.
1865	“	“	“

RECORDED ADDRESSES FOR GEORGE LEWIS PANORMO (1815 – 1877),

The following addresses came from Post Office s London Trade Directory.

1853	Panormo, Geo & Louis	Musical Inst makers 31, High Street, St. Giles
1854	“	“
1855	“	Guitar Maker 87, John St. Fitzroy Sq.
1856	“	“
1857	“	“
1858	“	“
1859	“	“
1860	“	“
1861	“	“
1862	“	“
1863	“	“
1864	“	“
1865	“	“
1866	“	“
1867	“	“
1868	“	“
1869	Panormo, Geo Louis	Guitar Maker 37, Whitfield St. Fitzroy Sq.
1870	“	“
1871	“	“
1872	“	“
1873	“	“
1874	“	“
1875	“	“
1876	“	“
1877	“	“

THE PANORMO GUITAR

The earliest Panormo guitar I have seen is dated 1817 and when I saw it I was surprised how different it was to what is usually recognised as a "Panormo guitar". It had a small brown label inside with the words

"Panormo Facit
London 1817"

Simply printed in black type on it, and hand written in blue ink was the address 25, Wilt Street, Bloomsbury, London.

Unlike the later guitars this was very French in style and showed less understanding of guitar making.

Most noticeably in that it only had fifteen frets and

the neck was joined to the body at the eleventh fret!

The fingerboard was flush with the soundboard and the

rest of the neck was by

GUITAR BY LOUIS

PANORMO 1825

style, with a brass plate

reminiscent of later

in the middle ring

looked very shabby

the back and sides

the whole guitar was

1826, only three years

shows how the design

instrument to show

Spanish style, and

influence of Panormo

upon the Panormo guitar



THE PANORMO GUITAR

The earliest Panormo guitar I know of is dated 1817 and when I saw it I was surprised how very different it was to what is usually recognised as a “Panormo guitar”. It had a small brown label inside with the words

“Panormo Fecit
London 1817”

Simply printed in black type on it, and hand written in blue ink was the address 26, High Street, Bloomsbury, London. Unlike the later guitars this was very French in style and showed less understanding of guitar making. Most noticeably in that it only had fifteen frets and the neck was joined to the body at the eleventh fret! The fingerboard was flush with the soundboard and the rest of the neck was lacquered black. The head was joined to the neck with a V joint but was flat with six wooden tuning pegs in it. The bridge was in the “Lacote” style, with a brass saddle and while the rosette was reminiscent of later Panormos the mother of pearl diamonds in the middle ring were roughly cut into black mastic and looked very shoddy indeed. The soundboard was spruce and the back and sides were of beautifully figured maple and the whole guitar was very light and well balanced. By 1820, only three years on, a guitar made by Louis Panormo shows how the design had changed from a French styled instrument to the familiar Panormo guitar based on the Spanish style. This change was probably due to the influence Fernando Sor, the celebrated guitarist, had upon the Panormo family.

When reading any of the standard texts on guitar history Louis Panormo is usually acknowledged, or hinted, as being the originator of the Panormo guitar, often in connection with some work he was alleged to have done with Fernando Sor.

“Sor brought the guitar into the musical mainstream of his day and through his work with Panormo took a close interest in the problems of guitar construction”,

G. Wade. Traditions of the Classical Guitar p. 116

Although Sor did do some work with “Panormo” while he was living in London between 1815 and 1823 it seems unlikely that it was with the most famous guitar maker Louis Panormo but his older brother Joseph. For Sor himself says this in his book “Method for the Spanish Guitar” where in Part 1 p.7, he talks about the instrument itself.

“In order that the belly or soundboard may be set in vibration sufficiently by the impulse communicated by the vibrating string, it should be made of thin and very light wood But being as thin as necessary for the prolongation of the sound, the strong and continual tension of the bridge would compel it

to give way in a little while, and it would. be pressed inwards. To prevent this giving way, the manufacturers have contrived ribs or bars inside. If these ribs are strong enough to support the force of the bridge (equal to the united tension of all the strings, plus the impulse received from the fingers of the right hand) they must necessarily hinder a great part of the vibrations of the sounding board; and if they are weak enough to enter into vibration themselves they will not prevent the sounding board from giving way eventually. I think I can show that a bridge form represented by fig 1, constructed of a single piece, and an inside bracket, made as seen in profile by perpendicular section in fig. 2, would answer the object desired. Experiment has proved it in London where Mr. J. Panormo made some guitars under my direction, as well as Mr. Schroeder at Petersburg”

It is not clear why Sor should have gone to Joseph Panormo to try out his ideas, because although he may have made some guitars he was only known as a violin maker. It was probably because no guitar makers worked in London and so Sor went to the most respected violin makers around, which would have been the Panormo family, and to the elder brother Joseph. This work went on sometime between 1817 and 1820 and it is possible that while Sor mentions Joseph Panormo that George and Louis came into contact with Sor, they were certainly influenced by him and the ideas he shared with Joseph. One last mystery concerning the connection between Panormo and Sor is brought to light in page 9 of Sor’s “Method for the Spanish Guitar”

“...if I wanted an instrument, I would procure it from M. Joseph Martinez of Malaga, or from M. Lacote, a French maker

The guitars to which I have always given the preference are those of Alonzo of Madrid, Pages and Bernediz of Cadiz, Joseph and Manuel Martinez of Malaga or Rada, successor and scholar of the latter, and those of M. Lacote of Paris. I do not say that others do not exist; but never having tried them, I cannot decide on that of which I have no knowledge”

Here Sor makes no mention of Panormo, so obviously did not recommend them.

Perhaps he had only played one or two of Joseph’s early guitars and was unimpressed or perhaps he never played any of his instruments and had just left Joseph with some ideas. Whatever the case we can see that by 1830 (the year Sor’s method was published) the Panormo had not yet established an international reputation that was to equal that of any of the makers Sor mentioned. The influences Sor left on the Panormo brothers are obvious to see throughout the history of their guitars. Although examples of Joseph’s guitars are very rare, many examples of Louis’s guitars exist and some of George Lewis’s and Edward’s guitars, all of them have the same basic design features and style.

The Panormo guitar varied slightly from model to model over the years, often the later the date the bigger the guitar. Due to this any descriptions of their instruments can only be generalisations, here is a rough guideline to the dimensions of the Panormo guitar,

Overall length	94cm
String length	62.9cm
Body length	44.8cm
Body width	upper bout 22.9cm to 23.2cm
	waist 17.cm to 17.5cm
	lower bout 28.7cm to 29.2cm
Body depth	8.2cm to 9.4cm up to 8.9cm to 10.5cm

It is usually the body width and depth that varies from guitar to guitar more than anything else. The head design is one of the most striking features of the Panormo guitar. It is usually made of maple (some examples have mahogany) and was finely carved to give the lightest head possible, this was largely done to compensate for the weight of the machine heads, superbly made by E. Baker. It is possible that this was Ezekiel Baker of 24, Whitechapel Road, a gun maker to His Royal Highness Prince Regent, which would account for the Royal crest on some Baker machine heads. He was a fine craftsman, as his guns will show and even today his machine heads are in better working condition than most modern examples.

This fine maple head is attached to a mahogany neck by means of a superb V joint, another distinct feature (particularly of Louis's work), where the rich mahogany against the light maple set the joint off beautifully, however, sometimes the neck and head was finished with a black lacquer to give an ebonised effect, like in many French guitars. The neck is attached to the body in the Spanish style of a "slipper heel" the sides of the guitar run into slots on each side of the heel and the back and soundboard are glued onto the bottom and top of the heel. The fingerboard is usually made of ebony or rosewood and is slightly curved across its width, an unusual feature for the time but one that makes it very comfortable to play.



GUITAR BY LOUIS PANORMO COMPARED WITH
A GUITAR BY PAGES OF CADIZ

This fingerboard usually extends to the soundhole, although on some of the very decorative

guitars with elaborate rosettes, it stops at the rosettes. They normally have eighteen rectangular frets made from brass or nickel and sometimes mother of pearl marker dots were placed in the fingerboard, or ebony dots in the neck to mark the fifth, seventh and ninth frets.

The body Shape, although varying in dimensions, is always similar to look at. It obviously owes something to the Spanish guitars of the Cadiz School as can be seen when you compare a Panormo to a Pages guitar, perhaps another of Sor's influences. The sides have a straight taper and occasionally were made from two pieces, with a purfling in the middle laminated together. The backs were made up from anything from one to four pieces. Sometimes the back is made of spruce, veneered in rosewood on the outside and painted in black or dark maroon on the inside, usually however, the back and sides were made from solid rosewood or maple of very fine quality. The purflings, mentioned earlier, were also distinctly Panormo. It is made up of rosewood (or mahogany) and boxwood veneers and goes rosewood, boxwood., rosewood, boxwood, rosewood.

As far as the soundboard and strutting goes the vast majority of Panormos were well up with the new ideas of their time.

Again, probably through that early connection with Sor, they used the Spanish method that Sor mentions in his book, a thin soundboard made of spruce with small bars reinforcing it, which we have come to know as "fan strutting". An example of Joseph Panormo's strutting pattern comes from Mr. Wades "Traditions of the Classical Guitar" p. 136 and can be seen along side a diagram of Louis Panormo's strutting pattern, taken from an extant instrument. Both are similar although Louis's is more developed and both show that careful thought had been given to them, unlike many guitar makers of that era.

The bridge on the Panormo guitar also varied, I have seen three different types of original bridges, one similar to the one Sor said he had experimented on with Joseph Panormo. However, I have never seen a Panormo guitar with all the Sor additions, perhaps they felt later (as I did on reading Sor's method) that Sor's theories on this matter were somewhat suspect. All of the bridges are made of either ebony or rosewood, the saddle being formed from the front edge of the bridge (rather than being fixed in a slot like on the modern guitar) as is not replaceable, although they have lasted remarkably well. The strings are held by means of bridge pins.

The rosette decoration around the soundhole varied according to the price and amount of decoration on the instrument.

The basic rosette consists of purfling rings around the soundhole; this is added to by mother of pearl dots or lozenges in the middle of the inner ring. More outer rings were then added and again the number varies, on really elaborate examples lots of mother of pearl and purfling rings were used as in the example from the Victoria & Albert Museum.

While it is easy to distinguish Panormo guitars from these examples it is often difficult to tell which Panormo made it. The work of the elder brother Joseph is rare but there is an abundance of guitars from the mid 1820's to the 1850's most of which are of the highest quality and craftsmanship. These would have been made mainly by Louis and George and have the Louis Panormo label.

“Louis Panormo
The only maker of Guitars in the Spanish style.
46, High Street, Bloomsbury
(Serial No) London (Date)
Guitars of any description from 2 to 15 guineas.”

As Louis had such a good reputation he could command a high price, it is possible that Louis had little to do with some of the guitars to come out of the High Street workshop. Many Panormos from this time have a ‘P’ carved into the strut just below the soundhole, one collector put forward the theory that these were guitars made by Louis alone, a nice story but how true it is impossible to say. ‘Whoever made them though, the guitars from this era were beautifully made.

The later guitars of George Lewis, while still good lack the certain finess of Louis's time, the guitars of Edward Panormo are unfortunately often of a poor standard.

We know the range of prices of the guitars from the label of Louis Panormo's guitars ‘which say “from 2 to 15 guineas”’. From the many surviving instruments it is possible to roughly guess how they were priced. For around 2 guineas you probably got a basic guitar, cheap wood, no back purflings, simple bridge and rosette. Moving up in price you would pay extra for purflings, then mother of pearl decoration in the rosette and the Sor type bridge. We do know that at 10 guineas you could buy an enharmonic guitar, this was invented by Thomas Perronet Thomson and the idea was to achieve equal temperament by making every fret at

every string fully adjustable. To achieve this frets were made like croquet hoops and could be pegged into little holes in the fingerboard. In 1829 Goulding and D'Almande published Thompson's book "Instructions to my daughter for playing on the enharmonic guitar, being an attempt to effect the exaction of correct harmony on principles analogous to those of the ancient enharmonic" he starts by stating

"The following pages had their aim in a desire to abate the untunableness of the common guitar"

he follows on

".....a diagram to scale of a guitar as made and sold by Louis Panormo, musical instrument maker. 46, High St, Bloomsbury. Price in common wood 10 guineas"

An illustration is given in the book of the enharmonic fingerboard to serve as a model for construction however the complexity of using the guitar was very off putting and only one example is known to survive and that is in the Karl Marx Museum, Leipzig. The very expensive guitars 10 to 15 guineas were elaborate affairs for their wealthy society enthusiasts, they were heavily decorated and covered with mother of pearl. They lacked the subtle beauty of the standard concert guitars and in comparison it is difficult to take them seriously as musical instruments.

It is amazing that there are still many Panormo guitars around often still in playing condition, they can be bought quite easily from auctions or dealers for a variety of prices depending on the condition of the instrument. Some originals can still be heard being played in the concert halls by enthusiasts of the early guitar. Soundwise they are much quieter and delicate than a modern guitar but possess a warm bass with sweetly singing trebles and even today are a delight to play.



COPY OF A PANORMO GUITAR BY THE AUTHOR

CONCLUSION

I have tried where possible to present only the facts (as known at this time), which can be proved correct as this was the purpose of the research, however, inevitably some assumptions have been made and when they have I hope I have made it clear that they are only theories. Information concerning Vincenzo comes from secondary sources and has been assumed correct by me, the rest has all been checked through primary sources. It has been difficult to discover all the facts about the Panormo family, indeed the whole study seems to have brought up as many questions as it has answered. I see this piece of work not as the complete story but just the start and I believe it will be many years, if ever, before all the facts are known.

However, this study does present facts hitherto unknown, for example the confirmation of Louis's emigration to New Zealand and his death dates, Joseph's connection with Sor, and the most complete address list for the Panormo family. It seems odd that only ten years ago the name Panormo was virtually unknown in the guitar world. Today they are remembered as fine makers, Louis is particularly regarded amongst the greatest guitar makers of all time. But perhaps the greatest tribute is that even today, some one hundred and sixty years on, players are still performing on Panormo guitars, while others are kept as highly treasured possessions.

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