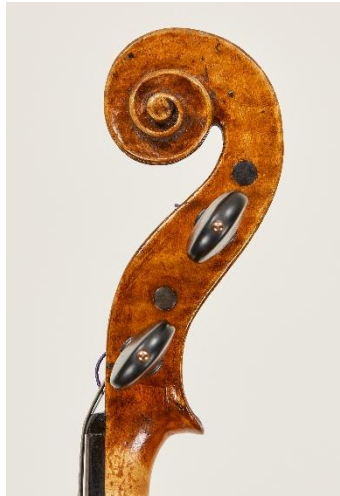




**Tommaso Balestrieri
labelled viola**

Early life and background of Tommaso Balestrieri (born 16 November 1713 in Giustino, near Piacenza; died in Mantua in 1796) was a leading 18th-century Italian luthier associated with the Mantuan school of violinmaking. Although his labels proclaim him “Cremonese”, no documentary evidence confirms he worked in Cremona; all known instruments were made in Mantua.

This present instrument though labelled Balestrieri is likely a superb copy by John Betts. (born in Stamford, Lincolnshire around 1752–55; died 1823 in London) was a seminal English luthier, dealer and connoisseur whose influence helped elevate the London violin-making trade into a major European center. Apprenticed in 1765 to Richard Duke in London, he later took over Duke’s business and by 1781 had established his own shop (moving soon after to the prestigious Royal Exchange location).

Betts’ workshop became particularly renowned for **high-quality copies** of historic Italian models—especially in the latter part of his career and in the hands of his successors. These instruments were crafted to satisfy collectors and performers who sought that “Cremonese tone” but at more accessible prices his dual roles as maker and dealer, Betts played a pivotal role in shifting English violin-making focus away from generic Stainer-style copies and toward more sophisticated Amati- and Stradivari-derived forms; his legacy is as much about shaping taste and trade as about the instruments themselves.



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