



Early Music in Northern Italy

Museums and private collections in northern Italy, with recitals

19–23 November 2026 (MM 238)

4 days

Lecturer: Professor Robert Adelson

Some of Italy's finest collections of historic musical instruments, some in private properties and viewed only by special arrangement.

Based in Milan and Bologna, with some free time to explore these historic cities, and excursions to Briosco and Cremona.

Recitals on period instruments and the opportunity to meet the collectors.

An instrument is the sole and precious witness to music that was performed in the past. Many years after the musicians and the sounds they produced have disappeared, a few rare instruments remain, in museums and private collections. Thanks to their preservation, we can today hear appropriate music played with more colourful timbres and more authentic performance styles, and better understand the stylistic choices made by composers.

This tour brings musical history to life by visiting some of the most influential centres of instrument making. No city can surpass Cremona for its tradition of bowed strings, dating to the early 16th century when the mellifluous tone of the Amati family's instruments transformed the violin from a folk instrument to one capable of expressing the noblest musical sentiments. Nicolò Amati probably taught both Antonio Stradivari and Andrea Guarneri, whose instruments have become legendary and whose tradition is continued today among Cremonese luthiers.

Milan was the centre of the violin family's early development, but both Milan and Bologna were also famous for their lutes. And Bologna was renowned for the quality of its wind instruments as early as the 13th century; the ensemble of cornets and sackbuts at the church of San Petronio was admired throughout Italy.

Northern Italy is home to some of Europe's most important collections of historic instruments, many of which are in playable condition, making it possible to explore the evolution of the principal instrumental families – keyboards (harpsichords, clavichords, organs and pianos), bowed and plucked strings, woodwind and brass.



Mid-18th-century copper engraving.

Itinerary

Day 1: Milan. Fly at c. 10.15am (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Milan Linate. In the evening, visit a collection in a private *palazzo* where there is a harpsichord recital and dinner. First of two nights in Milan.

Day 2: Milan, Briosco. Drive to Briosco to visit Villa Medici-Giulini, a 17th-century stately residence which houses one of the most important private collections of European keyboard instruments and harps, many of which have been restored to playable condition. There are demonstrations and performances on the instruments, followed by lunch in the villa. In the afternoon, return to Milan and visit the Musical Instruments Museum at the Castello Sforzesco, which has a vast collection of over 800 instruments, including a rare double virginal by Ruckers (Antwerp c. 1600), numerous examples from the Lombard lute and viol tradition and many African and Asian instruments..

Day 3: Cremona. This glorious town in the Po Valley was home to the Stradivari, Amati and other families of luthiers whose stringed instruments have been the world's best for more than 300 years. Learn about the violin *in situ* at the Museo del Violino (with a performance on a historic violin), and visit a violin-maker's workshop. Continue by coach to Bologna, where the following two nights are spent.

Day 4: Bologna. One of the oldest stringed instruments in the world, the *violeta* of St Catherine de' Vigri, is held in the church of Corpus Domini, while the Museo della Musica houses a rich collection of scores, portraits and instruments. The private collection of the late-Bolognese scholar Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, long-admired by specialists, has recently been made available to the public. It is housed in one of Bologna's oldest churches and traces the history of keyboard instruments from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Day 5: Bologna. Begin with an organ recital in the vast Gothic basilica of San Petronio, before some free time in Bologna. Fly from Bologna to London Heathrow, arriving c. 7.45pm.

Early Music in Northern Italy continued

Lecturer

Professor Robert Adelson. Professor of Music History and Organology at the Conservatoire de Nice. Between 2005 and 2016 he was curator of France's second-largest collection of historical musical instruments, housed in the Musée du Palais Lascaris in Nice. He has published widely on the history of instruments, opera and the sociology of music. His latest book, *Erard: A Passion for the Piano*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2021, was awarded the American Musical Instrument Society's 2023 Nicholas Bessaraboff Prize, awarded annually for the most distinguished book in English on musical instruments.

Practicalities

Included: travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 3 dinners with wine, water and coffee; all admissions; all tips for restaurant staff and drivers; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Sina De La Ville, Milan (delavillemilano.com): a 4-star Belle Epoque-style hotel well located 50 metres from the Duomo. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

Art Hotel Commercianti, Bologna (en.art-hotel-commercianti.com): A traditional hotel housed within a medieval palazzo, located right next to Piazza Maggiore. Rooms vary in size and décor and all are classically furnished and comfortable. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is inevitably quite a lot of walking and standing in museums on this tour. Some of the walking is uphill or over cobbles. The coach cannot be used within the town centres. Average distance by coach per day: 53 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Details for combining this tour with Monteverdi in Venice, 12–17 November 2026, will be available shortly.