

## 'Red Strad' makes record £902,000 at Christie's

By Godfrey Barker

A STRADIVARIUS fetched a new record of £902,000 at Christie's yesterday, the highest price for a Strad at auction since the Cholmondeley fetched £682,000 at Sotheby's in June 1988.

This violin was the Mendelssohn of 1720, an instrument once known from its gorgeous varnish as the Red Strad.

Its buyer was anonymous, acting "for a professional musician".

What this Strad will sound like was made wonderfully clear on Tuesday when a Japanese violinist demonstrated its deep-throated and sonorous voice. Surprisingly, it also proved to have a big concert sound.

In its years in the Mendelssohn family, it has been little played except by amateurs, and its tone might have been expected to incline to the raw and stiff rather than the mellow.

Its price was helped by its date of 1720 (the height of Stradivari's Golden Age, when his finest concert instruments were made) and by its superb appearance.

"It was fresh on the market, never before in the saleroom," noted Frances Gillham, Christie's music expert. "Its price was helped upwards by the estimate we put on it, by the way it works and by the way it looks".

● Up the road, at Sotheby's, the remarkable sum of £880,000 was given for the autographed score by Mozart of one of his most Beethovenish pieces of music—the Piano Sonata in C Minor, K 457.

It was a manuscript which had been "lost" for 200 years but which came to light in 1989 in the safe of the Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia.

The buyer was the London dealer Otto Haas, acting for a continental dealer.

Also sold, with its 14 dense pages in brown ink, was the violently amended autograph of the K475 Fantasia in C



Christie's Frances Gillham with the Mendelssohn

Minor which, following Mozart's example in Leipzig in 1789, has usually been played as an introduction to K457.

Far from Mozart's most popular piano pieces, these are nonetheless among his most emotional works. The price equals that given for the Schumann A Minor Piano Concerto in 1989 and has been surpassed only by the £2.53 million paid in 1987 for a bound book containing nine of Mozart's symphonies.

Mendelssohn as a watercolourist was also featured. An individual and well-observed Cliffs at Amalfi went on target for £13,200.

● Ava Gardner's furniture from her South Kensington flat sold for £346,065 at Sotheby's. Her Martin Carlin bureau plat circa 1785 fetched three times estimate at £37,500.

The real excess of the day, however, was given by fans and souvenir hunters for her costumes and shoes. Her matador cape with a medallion of the Virgin Mary made £2,420 and her Chanel necklace £1,100. Both were 10 times estimate.

● Bonhams sold English watercolours for £157,751, with Albert Goodwin's The Night Ferry making £7,040, double the estimate.