



Green

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Bow Makers Unite Behind a Precious Tree

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Living

As the earth's forests and other natural resources face growing peril, humans are affected in many unexpected ways. In recent years, musicians have found themselves organizing to save the pernambuco, a medium-size tropical tree native to Brazil and known for its unique red wood. Discovered by French bow makers 250 years ago, it provides the primary — indeed only — wood for making high-end bows for professional musicians. (The tree is also known as the pau-brasil.)

“No comparable substitute is known to bow makers or musicians,” the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative, a charity created by bow makers around the world to finance replanting initiatives in Brazil, says at its Web site. “The rigidity, flexibility, density, and beauty of this wood, combined with its ability to hold a fixed curve, makes pernambuco a unique material that is essential to the craft of bow making and to the musicians who use these bows.”

But the tree, which grows primarily in Brazil's Atlantic forest, has been so depleted by logging and agricultural and urban development that it is listed there as endangered. So to aid the institute's replanting efforts, bow and violin makers have crossed a once-inviolable line and are giving up some closely held secrets of their specialized artisanry.

Tom Wilder, a violin maker, restorer and historian of stringed instruments from Montreal, has put together a three-volume, 1,600-page set of books called *The Conservation, Restoration, and Repair of Stringed Instruments and Their Bows*, that reveals the best techniques.

Profits from the book, available at a list price of \$1,395, will go to the I.P.C.I.



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