

Review Highlights

“Monumental ... its value as an important, new standard reference work is unquestionable”

“An essential primer in important concepts regarding the nature of musical instruments as objects: on the competing roles of violins as primary documents of their time, as working tools, and as works of art or stores of wealth”

“Wide applicability to other sorts of musical instruments”

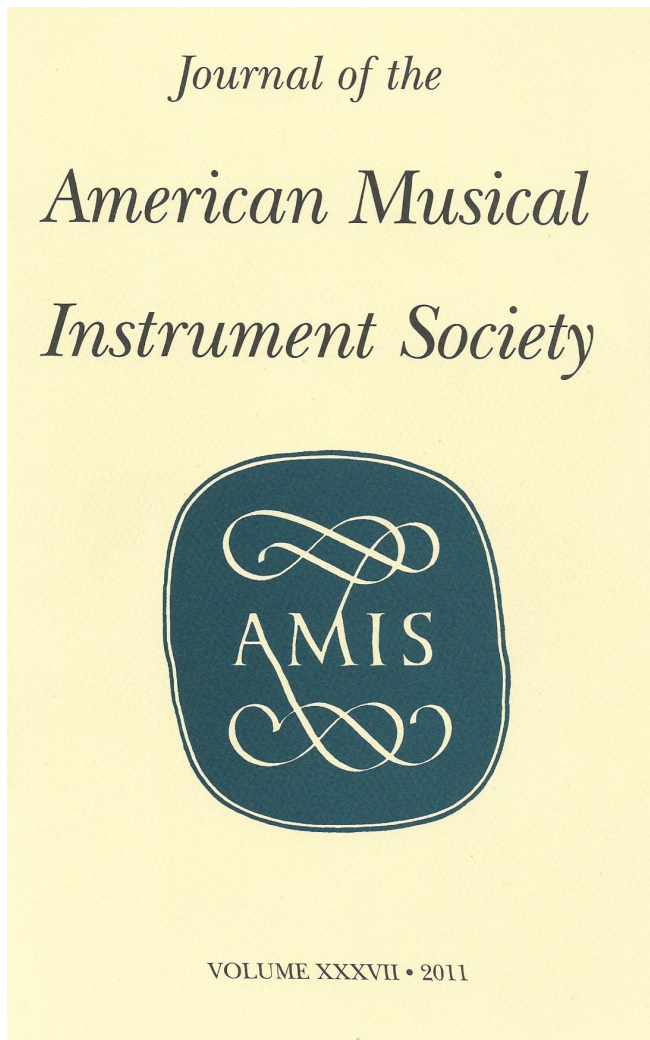
“A fascinating look at recent research on historical bows, the history of the violin market and the origins of instrument collecting, and issues of authenticity and expertise ... these essays are particularly good examples of close studies of physical and historical characteristics”

“Thought-provoking, important, and even controversial points about the epistemology of historical musical instruments, not limited to violins and their bows”

“The value of the diagrams naming each part of the violin and bow in marvelous detail, along with an index of terms in English, French, Italian, and German, cannot be overstated, as nothing exists in prior literature that even approaches the thoroughness presented here”

“An admirable achievement and a work of remarkable generosity”

– Arian Sheets, National Music Museum



amples of scholars who deny the very existence of Stradivari (pp. 41 and 97n1). Both scholars have declared this statement absurd. A section on pages 41–45 is dedicated to refuting the data collected by Herbert Heyde, suggesting that Stradivari must have led a large workshop. Pollens's conclusion that, on the contrary, Stradivari was assisted only by his son Francesco (p. 46) is based on even weaker evidence and contradicts all we know about the Italian production system of these years. Further work on this point is clearly needed. Definitely not the author's fault is the poor quality of the photos, whose clarity and crispness could be much improved in a second edition.

These criticisms, somehow unavoidable in a review, should not undermine interest in the book's contents, and in the quantity and quality of the subjects discussed and the conclusions drawn. The book is a new type of study on Stradivari that will hopefully open a new interest among organologists in historical violin making, drawing on the systematic application of scientific principles—an approach that had emerged already in Pollens's 1999 article "The Messiah." The new volume will be useful to the informed readers who are not specialists in the field, and also to the Stradivari experts, who will find here both new ideas and a critical synopsis of most of the existing literature.

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Tom Wilder, editor. *The Conservation, Restoration, and Repair of Stringed Instruments and Their Bows.* London and Montreal: Archetype Publications and IPCI-Canada, 2010. Volume I, 774 pp.; volume II, 366 pp.; volume III, 338 pp.: 1,000 photographs, 300 technical drawings, CD-ROM. ISBN: 978-1-904982-41-8. \$1,395.00 (cloth).

This compendium of essays represents a monumental effort to present a variety of leading opinions concerning how we care for, handle, and interpret violin-family instruments and their bows. The work is divided into three volumes, totaling 1,478 pages. The first volume, entitled *General Issues Concerning Stringed Instruments and Their Bows*, contains fifty-two essays divided into seven parts: Pernambuco and Its Conservation; Conservation, Restoration, and Repair; History, Collections, and Connoisseurship; Documentation; Materials; Infestations; and Surfaces. A CD-ROM presents the standard documentation forms described in this volume, for easy use by those inclined to follow this

proposed standard. The second volume, entitled *Stringed Instruments and Techniques for Their Conservative Restoration and Repair*, contains fifty-three essays in five parts: Basic Maintenance, Setup, and Preventive Procedures; Counterforms, Moulds, and Casts; Surface Interventions; The Body; and The Scroll and Neck. The final volume, *Bows and Techniques for Their Conservative Restoration and Repair*, contains thirty-seven essays in three parts: Basic Maintenance and Preventive Procedures; The Stick; and The Frog. There are 122 contributors.

The project was initiated with the founding of IPCI-Canada, an affiliate of the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative. Tom Wilder, the Toronto-based luthier who is president of IPCI-Canada, coordinated, funded, and edited the work, the proceeds of which will go to support the conservation of pernambuco. Contributions to the compendium were solicited via a call-for-papers initiated in 2002, and submissions were evaluated by a panel of violin and bow makers, restorers, dealers, and a few professional conservators and scholars. In spite of its nature as a compendium of viewpoints, the work bears all the hallmarks of an extremely thoughtfully prepared and carefully packaged reference source. It is quite clear that it is not intended to replace standard reference works such as violin dictionaries and the classic on violin repair, *Violin Restoration: A Manual for Violin Makers* (Los Angeles: Weisshaar-Shipman, 1988) by Hans Weisshaar and Margaret Shipman. Neither is it a textbook from which a novice could learn standard procedures for common repairs. It is, however, an essential supplement for any comprehensive library dealing with musical instruments, and a particularly fine documentation of the current thoughts of some of the leading violin restorers, conservators, and scholars worldwide—in essence, a dialogue between experts from a variety of professional and geographic backgrounds.

For makers, restorers, and conservators, it will best serve those with an advanced knowledge of their profession, for whom many of the ideas contained within may be directly applied to their existing skills; the techniques described may spur further innovation. However, even for those beginning a formal course of study, a careful reading will prove instructional and thought-provoking, though one should avoid the temptation to delve into advanced techniques without a secure knowledge of the basics, which this work does not provide. For those with general or historical interests in musical instruments, with no intention of ever working on a string instrument, this set will provide an

essential primer in important concepts regarding the nature of musical instruments as objects: on the competing roles of violins as primary documents of their time, as working tools, and as works of art or stores of individual wealth.

The first volume contains the essays most likely to be of general use to those with interests in instruments besides the violin, and to the museum profession. A section is devoted to pernambuco, the wood whose endangerment has inspired a call to action among conscientious violin and bow makers worldwide. Likewise, throughout the volume, there are essays focusing on various materials used in violin and bow making, including their origins, sourcing, working characteristics, chemical composition, and, where applicable, substitutes. Sections on animal glues, ivory, horn, bone, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, metal alloys, synthetic adhesives, pigments, oils, solvents, and varnishes have wide applicability to other sorts of musical instruments.

A section bearing the same title as the entire work highlights the care with which physical intervention is treated. Increased awareness of the concepts of restoration, repair, and conservation is critical to the survival of the original features and the character of historical musical instruments, especially those still in working use. Essays in this section explore how attitudes toward modifications to instruments have changed over time. Essays by Charles Beare and Andrew Dipper draw on concrete examples of former and current techniques, while Robert Barclay and Marco Tiella present more theoretical approaches. This section could have been significantly expanded, as a thorough grounding in these concepts profoundly affects one's approach to the physicality of these objects. While the philosophy of mindfulness has increasingly played a role in the repair of working instruments, such professional standards can never be enough emphasized, and it is important that choices are made deliberately rather than haphazardly, particularly when an instrument holds value as a primary historical document, not merely as a performing instrument or *objet d'art*.

An essay that might have been especially apropos would have focused on historical setup, including fittings, stringing, geometry of bridge, nuts, and saddles, and internal components in different times and places, including the twentieth century. Too often, such features of an instrument, revealing the original tonal and aesthetic choices of the maker, are obliterated when an instrument is "cleaned up" for sale or playing. When an instrument is understood in its own context, it may

be possible to achieve the required performance results with the least intrusive actions. A more-detailed history of repair techniques might have included discussion of when modifications might be preserved as part of the significant history of the instrument, and when they might detract from its aesthetics or functionality. These are very tricky issues that warrant more discussion.

The section on History, Collections, and Connoisseurship provides a fascinating look at some recent research on historical bows, the history of the violin market and the origins of instrument collecting, and issues of authenticity and expertise. While not everyone will be interested in the details of the Dodd family of bow makers, covered by Philip Kass, or the styles of French bow tips, described by Matthew Wehling, these essays are particularly good examples of close studies of the physical and historical characteristics of bows, a subject that can be particularly disorienting to non-specialists. Friedemann Hellwig, Laurence Libin, and Roger Hargrave each make thought-provoking, important, and even controversial points about the epistemology of historical musical instruments, not limited to violins and their bows. Above all, their essays reinforce the idea that interpreting musical instruments is extraordinarily difficult even from a purely academic perspective. Various scientific tools are at our disposal, but attribution can often come down to opinion, and, as Hargrave warns, large sums of money increase the stakes to a terrifying degree for any potential buyer of a valuable musical instrument.

Documentation is a critical first step for organizing and comparing the data that we can gather from musical instruments, and is the essential building block for understanding their construction and history. A section of this volume describes some documentation techniques and proposes a consistent standard for documentation of violins and bows, forms for which are provided in the book and on a supplementary CD-ROM. The standards are similar to those already used in certain types of museum cataloguing and in technical drawings, but the idea here is to instruct others as to their general applicability and ensure consistent recording of information. This will certainly be of value to any professional restorer who wishes to keep files for personal reference and development, as well as to curators wishing to increase their own knowledge and raise institutional standards of documentation. This section, though large, cannot possibly be comprehensive, but it is a good start-

ing point for those who may not have systematically recorded such information in the past, such as those in the general instrument trade.

The final sections in the first volume, concerning materials, insect damage, and varnishes, should prove especially valuable to restorers and conservators, though a general knowledge of such issues is also essential for curators and collectors, who are responsible for the care of musical instruments. The second and third volumes are more specific to the restorer's and repairer's arts, but notable in each are diagrams naming each part of the violin and bow in marvelous detail, along with an index of terms in English, French, Italian, and German. The value of these features cannot be overstated, as nothing exists in prior literature that even approaches the thoroughness presented here.

Overall, *The Conservation, Restoration, and Repair of Stringed Instruments and Their Bows* is an admirable achievement and a work of remarkable generosity on the part of the editor, Tom Wilder, of Wilder & Davis Luthiers, who will devote fifty percent of the receipts from the first five hundred sales to IPCI, then increase the contribution to one hundred percent once production costs are recovered. While the cost of the set is substantial, its position as an important, new standard reference work is unquestionable, and its charitable mission speaks to the passion with which the organizers and writers for the project approached their topic and gave their time.

ARIAN SHEETS
NATIONAL MUSIC MUSEUM