

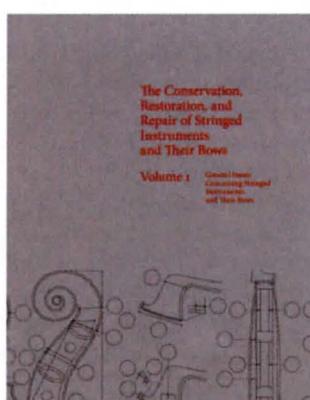
## THE CONSERVATION, RESTORATION, AND REPAIR OF STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR BOWS

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Imagine that a call goes out to 5,000 violin shops, schools, other institutions, repairers, and instrument and bow makers, soliciting articles from those who have established reputations in the fields of conservation, restoration and expertise in the stringed instrument trade. Imagine further, that these articles are then peer-reviewed, culled and published in a book.

I had been hearing about such a project for years, and now the result is an amazing collection of knowledge – a landmark three-volume set of books that I expect to be a worthwhile investment for a broad cross-section of people, from amateur instrument enthusiasts to those at the highest levels of our trade.

There are several main differences between this publication and other technically orientated landmark books from the past, such as those by Weisshaar and Sacconi. It's peer-reviewed, and its scope is not limited to the methods and philosophy of one shop or person. It also addresses – extensively – many of the latest concepts, philosophies and methods that were either absent in those earlier books, or that have

evolved significantly since they were published. Each article in this new publication is accompanied by a bibliography that cites sources, and a large part of the set is devoted to bows. Finally, profits from the books go towards the conservation and sustainable use of pernambuco, the increasingly rare wood used for making fine bows.

Far from the publication being just a technical manual, however, a lengthy portion near the beginning discusses the history of violins and of repair and preservation, and the challenging role of the responsible repairer today. A number of writers allude to repairers fulfilling a dual role: while trying to preserve the originality and study value of these irreplaceable art objects, they must also realise that most of these instruments are still tools of musical performance, and will inevitably suffer damage and wear as a consequence. Given these competing interests, they try to devise a strategy that will inflict the least harm. For example, at one time it was not unusual for a repairer to protect an instrument by covering it with a non-original varnish layer, which it was almost impossible to remove. After repeated applications of such a varnish, we have arrived today at the common smooth and shiny look, no doubt worthy of a place alongside Liberace's piano, but vastly different from the way these instruments originally appeared. Charles Beare places special emphasis on the harmful consequences of this practice in his article on restoration.

In part, this set of books is an appeal to us to do better in the future, and it includes suggestions on different surface protection treatments, including waxes and varnishes that can be easily removed. It suggests alternatives to replacing damaged sections of wood. It documents and encourages progress that is being made towards preserving these instruments with

minimal alteration, and work that even reverses some less judicious past interventions when possible and prudent.

Part of this progress has come as a result of assistance from, and greater interaction with, preservation and documentation specialists in the museum trade, and articles from these sources are also included. The books thereby provide an overview of new knowledge, materials and techniques that did not exist 50 years ago. Greater emphasis on documentation is reflected by the inclusion of more than a hundred pages of forms in the first volume, which can be used for recording measurements, instrument condition, past repairs and ongoing interventions. A CD-rom of these forms is included in the package, meaning that they

manual of specific repair procedures, supplemented with more than a thousand pictures and drawings. However, it does not attempt to be a complete instruction book that is suitable for a maker attempting to learn the trade without professional training and coaching. Many common procedures are not covered. Others are described more than once, by different authors who sometimes recommend contrasting methods. And I have to say that I, and others, will unavoidably take issue with some of the procedures described. All this can be confusing to a beginner. But to someone seasoned in the trade, it has special value. With sufficient peripheral knowledge, all these different concepts can serve as a springboard for new ideas,

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can be conveniently printed for home use. The disc also has the forms in an electronic format, so they can be accessed, annotated and stored on a computer without the need for printing or storing paper files.

To give just a small sample of the articles of a less technical nature, one by René Morel covers the dangers of attempting to learn restoration solely from books – a valuable warning in a book of this nature, which will surely fall into the hands of the home handyman. Benjamin Hebbert talks about the many forces that influence the prices of Stradivari violins. Roger Hargrave provides a fascinating article, entitled 'Some Things You Should Know Before Purchasing a Cremonese Violin'. For those who may not be privy to the dark side of the violin trade, this is highly recommended reading.

This set of books also constitutes an extensive

or they can be combined in interesting and useful ways.

Given the quantity and breadth of information contained in the books, it is fortunate that there is a thorough index. I found myself returning to this repeatedly when I needed to refresh my memory on an interesting point I had previously read, but whose author or the location in the three volumes I had forgotten.

My final reaction after reading the books? This is one of the greatest and most comprehensive single sources of information for anyone who is a fiddle aficionado. It's not perfect (for example, one person in the museum trade has made some shaky assertions about the original varnishing process used on antique instruments), but I am left humbled by this reminder of the vast knowledge and the creative minds in our trade.

DAVID BURGESS