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bows should not be considered art objects but “tools of the trade,” subject to wear and tear and thus depreciable, even though a “played out” bow could retain value as a collector’s item.

A worrisome issue is the all too common practice of “secret commissions” between teachers and dealers in sales of instruments to students. As Shapreau explains, concealing a commission may constitute fraud under the common law if the teacher’s relationship with the student gives rise to a duty to disclose this commission. In part to address issues such as this, the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers has outlined a Code of Ethics (listed in Appendix 3) for all its members; violations can result in disciplinary action such as expulsion or suspension.

Although the detailed accounts of specific trials and laws in this book are highly informative, the section of most ready use is Appendix 1, which outlines practical guidelines for members of the trade, dealers, auctioneers, and others, such as collectors and teachers. These concisely and directly-stated points (presented as guidelines for those involved in the British violin trade, but applicable to America as well) summarize the legalities detailed in the previous chapters. The entire book should prove invaluable as a guide to legal and ethical practices in our field.

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Robert L. Barclay, editor. *The Care of Historic Musical Instruments*. Edinburgh: Museums & Galleries Commission and Canadian Conservation Institute [in cooperation with the International Committee of Musical Instrument Museums and Collections of the International Council of Museums, with financial assistance from the John S. Cohen Foundation], 1997. vi, 145 pp.: 18 black-and-white figures. ISBN: 0-660-17116-3. Can\$36.00 (paper).

Every collector should be concerned about the safekeeping of valuable instruments, but professional guidance is not always easy to find; published sources of specific technical information are scarce and sometimes contradictory, and reasoned approaches toward conservation can differ widely. This handbook goes a long way toward addressing the concerns of non-specialists. Its advice especially about handling and cleaning instruments will help private owners and restorers as well as

institutional custodians. The seven contributors—Robert Barclay (Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa), May Cassar (Museums & Galleries Commission, London), Friedemann Hellwig (Fachhochschule Köln), Cary Karp (Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm), Arnold Myers (Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments), Jay Scott Odell (National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, *emeritus*), and Mimi Waitzman (Early Keyboard Workshop, London)—beg the question of what makes any instrument “historic,” hence, presumably, worth preserving; their recommendations apply to modern as well as old instruments regardless of intrinsic quality. According to their specialties, the authors—mostly experienced conservators—discuss general care; storage and transport; properties of different substances; methods of fabrication, diagnosis and conservation; and maintenance. The text is packed with useful facts and strong opinions, not only on treatment and mistreatment of objects but also about professional ethics, environmental and cost controls, and documentation.

Specific problems of functioning organs and automatic and electronic instruments lie beyond the book’s scope; still, much information about their materials and potential hazards can be gleaned here. The book avoids excessive technicality, although a glossary would have been helpful, since words such as “frass” (insect debris and excrement) may not be familiar to all readers. Not all types of instruments receive equal attention: chapter 6, “Basic Maintenance of Playing Instruments” by Waitzman, Barclay, Odell, Karp, and Hellwig, devotes more than a dozen pages to stringed keyboards but less than two to woodwinds and only a few sentences to percussion, focused on drums (a little more about woodwinds and drums appears in chapter 5, “Basic Conservation Treatments”).

Although much useful advice is given, some pronouncements are questionable. Original or old drumheads, the book warns, “should never be sounded” (p. 105), though why this proscription should apply to, say, a drum of Ringo Starr’s is unclear. Even more dubious is the dogmatic assertion that “Playing original early instruments for historic and aesthetic reasons is philosophically unsound” (p. 107). Statements such as “No oil should ever be applied to the bores of historic instruments” (p. 77) or “Under no conditions should mechanical work be done on keywork of wood-bodied instruments” (p. 78) will provoke debate. Owners of glass flutes will be skeptical of the adjuration that woodwinds made of glass “should never be subjected to playing” (p. 101). The state-

ment that carbon dioxide and nitrogen “are becoming the preferred methods” (p. 25) of asphyxiating insects overlooks the increasing use of argon. Careless editing must have been responsible for such nonsensical statements as “A sudden change of relative humidity that may occur between removing an instrument from its case and beginning playing can be irreversibly damaging, and the opposite is true when returning it to storage after use” (p. 99) or “The jack holds the plectrum rigid while it is forced past the string creating a sound, damp the sound afterwards, and position the plectrum for sounding again” (p. 89). Elsewhere (pp. 75 and 97) missing words make sentences incomplete.

Consistent with a belief currently fashionable among some conservators that “Museums exist primarily to preserve the information inherent in objects” (p. 111), these authors’ primary concern is to retain irreplaceable evidence inherent in historic instruments by retiring them from active service. This is a contentious matter, but at least the book recognizes the futility of absolute “hands-off” policies and instead offers guidance for properly maintaining instruments that “must continue to work for their living” (p. v), even as it strongly discourages their use. In a sensible spirit of compromise, Odell and Karp distinguish playability from “soundability,” pointing out that “instruments can often be coaxed into providing useful audible evidence without first being subjected to invasive preparation” (p. 6), in contrast to the warning quoted above against ever sounding drums.

Whether or not playing historic instruments is perceived as a good thing obviously depends on viewpoints and circumstances, but it is clear that many important old instruments remain in regular use for compelling reasons and equally clear that such usage is ultimately harmful. For that matter, subjecting instruments to analytical examination, displaying them, or leaving them untouched also entails risk. Since even the most carefully protected artifacts will not last forever—certainly museums offer no guarantee of permanence—conservation efforts can only seek to prolong their existence, ideally for the benefit of humanity. However, an object’s potential heuristic, not to mention aesthetic, value is unknowable. Balancing future uncertainties against legitimate current interests and institutional needs is a delicate responsibility beyond the purview of most conservators.

The idea that museum pieces should be preserved intact rather than used (up) for the public’s benefit has long been debated. Discussing in 1857 whether London’s National Gallery should remove its paintings to

a less polluted but less accessible location, High Court Justice John Taylor Coleridge, himself no philistine, argued successfully that:

"... if it were demonstrable that the pictures in their present position must absolutely perish ... this would conclude nothing. The existence of the pictures is not the end of the collection, but a means only to give the people an ennobling enjoyment. ... If, while so employed, a great picture 'perished in the using' ... it could not be said that the picture had not fulfilled the best purpose of its purchase, or that it had been lost in its results to the nation."¹

Be this as it may, most owners and custodians today agree that musical instruments deserve respectful treatment, that unnecessary risks should be avoided, and that damage should not be ignored. The basis for any decision about conservation, restoration, or use should be the fullest available knowledge of the object: its significance, its materials and their properties, its design and construction, and the many factors tending toward deterioration—factors that include the effects of different treatments as well as absence of treatment, biological attack, pollution, and other perils. In any event, it is better to do nothing than to make an irreversible mistake. This book effectively conveys the complexity of responsible decision-making and constantly refers the reader to specialists for further guidance. To this end the authors' addresses appear, along with a list of some relevant organizations and a brief bibliography, to which might be added Marjorie Shelley, ed., *The Care and Handling of Art Objects: Practices in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, rev. ed. 1996).

The sparsely illustrated text is slightly marred by production errors, including a few missing lines. But never mind the oversights and polemics; taken with a grain of salt, the book well serves its purpose as a cautionary guide to primary care.

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1. 1857 Report of the National Gallery Site Commission, quoted by Neil MacGregor in *'To the Happier Carpenter': Rembrandt's War-Heroine Margaretha de Geer, the London Public and the Right to Pictures* (Groningen: The Gerson Lectures Foundation, 1995), 29–30.