

Proper Care of String Instruments and Bows

TEMPERATURE

The temperature of your instrument must be kept as constant as possible. In cold weather, avoid letting your instrument be in any situation where it might become chilled, and in warm weather, avoid letting it become overheated. Indoors, keep it in a place which is neither near a window or other drafty area nor directly by a heating or cooling source. In colder weather, if you must be outside for longer than it takes to dash from a building to a car, be sure to use a “cushy” case cover. If you end up being out in the cold longer than expected, allow the instrument to warm up gradually by waiting to open the case until the outside of the case is no longer cold. Your instrument must never be exposed to direct sunlight, including through a window, either inside or outside of its case.

“Just say no” to any situation where your instrument may potentially be exposed to cold, heat, or sunlight. Borrow a friend’s “outdoors fiddle” or turn down the gig.

HUMIDITY AND RAIN

The humidity of your instrument’s environment should ideally be approximately 50%. It should never fall below 30%. If the pegs become stuck from being in an overly humid environment, let the wood shrink a little in an air-conditioned room rather than trying to force them to turn.

“Just say no” to any situation where your instrument may potentially be exposed to rain. Borrow a friend’s “outdoors fiddle” or turn down the gig.

TRANSPORTATION BY CAR OR TAXI

Your string instrument case should never be placed in the trunk of any vehicle, nor should it be placed on the floor of the back seat. It should only be on the back seat itself or in someone’s lap. When exiting a taxi, if you need to remove multiple bags, your instrument should be part of the first “batch” so that the driver doesn’t accidentally drive off with the instrument still in the vehicle. After removing your instrument, keep it on your shoulder rather than setting it on the curb unattended. Your instrument should never be left unguarded in a parked vehicle.

TRAVELING BY PLANE

When walking through the airport, always keep the case on your shoulder rather than placing it on a luggage cart. When going through security, keep an eye on the case at all times. If an airport employee asks to open the case, politely insist that you be the only one to handle the instrument. If they want to touch it, or if they want to rub any chemical testing swabs on the instrument, do not ever allow this. Ask to see a supervisor. If necessary, exit the airport and change your travel plans. Your string instrument may be placed underneath your seat, in the overhead bin, or in the closet. If the flight attendant insists that it must be checked, do not ever allow this. If necessary, exit the aircraft and change your travel plans. Before boarding, politely ask the desk attendant if you can board early to safely and quickly stow your fragile instrument, and then stay nearby so they don’t forget your request. If your instrument case is stowed in the airplane ahead of where you are seated, be sure to keep a close eye on things while the passengers ahead of you are exiting. Make sure that you get an aisle seat so that you can guard against other passengers throwing their heavy

luggage in the same overhead compartment as your instrument. The air inside the overhead compartments is cold year round, so if you are not using an extra “cushy” case cover, wrap your instrument case in a coat or blanket.

HOTELS

The instrument insurance company does not consider your hotel room to be secure. After all, every hotel employee has a key that can let them into your room when you are away. They still have these keys even if you put up a “Do Not Disturb” sign or hide the instrument case under your bed or in the closet. The hotel’s security room where you can leave your suitcases is not secure either. No public lodging is considered a safe place to leave your instrument, whether it’s a roadside motel or an expensive name-brand hotel. Your instrument must be with you at all times. You may, however, leave the instrument in any locked, private home.

BACKSTAGE

No backstage is secure enough that you can risk locking your instrument in a dressing room and going to a different part of the premises. Leaving it with a security guard is not safe enough either. Even if all of the other musicians are leaving their instruments in the green room, you must not. Your instrument must be with you at all times. At competitions and auditions, your friends and colleagues may be more easily distracted or even tempted towards sabotage, so never let anyone but yourself keep watch over your instrument. Never carry your instrument up or down stairs outside of its case, even in your own home.

RESTAURANTS, THEATERS, MUSEUMS, ETC.

No security room or coat-check room is secure enough for you to leave your instrument. It must be with you at your table as you dine, with you at your seat in a theater, on your shoulder as you walk around a museum, etc. If you are dining alone and need to use the restroom, bring your instrument with you into the stall as you would a purse or wallet.

FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

It is very tempting to pass your beautiful instrument around to your friends to let them play it or to your family members so they can admire it. However, if something were to accidentally happen while the instrument is in any hands but your own, you could be liable for the cost of the damage and repair. The only people besides you who may carry the instrument out of its case, touch it, or play it are your teachers and approved luthiers. Please contact us if you have any questions.

PRACTICE AND REHEARSAL BREAKS

When entering an uncarpeted practice room, be cautious of slipperiness caused by leftover condensation from wind and brass players. Carry your instrument with you to the restroom or vending machine rather than leaving it alone in a practice cubicle or unlocked studio. During breaks, remove the shoulder bar, put your instrument in the case and close the lid. Never leave a violin or viola lying on a chair, even for a moment, or ever hang it by its scroll from a music stand. Before setting a cello down on its side or on a chair, make sure that the endpin is retracted. When resting a cello on a chair, the scroll, not the neck, should be touching the chair. Never set a cello down on its side on a rug or carpeting, and never set a cello bow on top of a cello.

INSTRUMENT CASE

The instrument may only be carried in an approved case. Most “lightweight” cases do not provide proper protection. You must get our approval for any case you wish to use other than the one we

originally provided. Before closing the case, remove the shoulder bar, be sure to carefully secure the instrument's neck strap, and make sure that your bow's restraint is fastened. The case must always be fully zippered before picking it up. Cellists should only put their cello in the case while the case is flat on the ground rather than standing upright. Never leave a cello case standing upright with a cello inside of it, even when closed; always lie it down on its side. A piece of paper with your name, address, and phone number should live in the case's sheet music section and in the case's inside "glove compartment."

CARE OF THE VARNISH

No one but an approved luthier may polish the instrument. The only areas you may touch are the neck and external hardware. Be careful to keep your thumb from rubbing the varnish during pizzicato passages. If your up-bows tend to nick the rib of the instrument, always practice with a rubber rib guard. Gently wipe the rosin off your instrument after each use with a clean, soft cotton cloth or unscented soft tissue. Violinists and violists, make sure that no spot on your shoulder bar's back or feet could scratch the instrument.

MUTES

Exercise extreme caution when using a heavy metal practice mute. Never use a "Menuhin" or "shield" style of mute.

MICROPHONES

No pickups may be taped to the outside of the instrument, nor may any microphones be clipped onto the bridge. A lavalier microphone may be clipped to your collar and you may wear a headphone-style microphone. Please contact us if you have any questions.

BOWS

Be extra careful when lifting your bow off the string in rooms with low ceilings or near a microphone on a stand (a "boom mike"). Be aware that your gestures may become more flamboyant during a performance and you will have less clearance than you thought. The bow hair should be loosened every time you are not playing, including during practice breaks.