

Pernambuco Update: Time to Take Action!

by Lynn Hannings



Musicians and their equipment

Stringed instrument musicians rely on natural resources. When choosing a new bow or instrument, performers are trained to consider the musical qualities of tone, projection, and control. Musicians often have little experience or knowledge of the woods we use, and our environmental impact. In November 2022, CITES changed that paradigm; new international environmental laws require a seismic shift in thinking for the entire music industry.

The same environmental forces that compel us to consider electric vehicles and elephant populations (ivory tip plates) now extend to our bow, fingerboard, and soon the maple and spruce of which our instruments are made. Roughly 90% of the Atlantic Rainforest in Brazil—the only place on the planet where Pernambuco grows—has disappeared. One of the top Bio Hot Spots in the world, a long list of endangered species—plants and animals—in this area of Brazil includes jaguar, sloth, golden lion tamarin, and *Pernambuco*. Despite Brazilian environmental laws dating back decades, illegal cutting of century-old, protected Pernambuco trees is a tragic reality. String instrument bows are the primary use of this illegally cut wood. Current international investigations focus on illegal

activity in the bow trade and have imposed extensive fines and confiscations. Like drugs, environmental and federal officials make it clear that the market—musicians and bow makers—drive the illegal harvests.

In November 2022, representatives from 184 countries met for the 19th Conference of the Parties of the *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES). Brazil proposed a vote at the November meeting to move the already listed and endangered Pernambuco to the highest level of CITES protection due to continued illegal logging of a species at risk of disappearing in its natural habitat. Representatives of musicians, bow makers, government environmental officials, scientists, and government customs officials came together to discuss and negotiate.

The following CITES decisions agreed upon by the parties on November 25, 2022, took effect as of February 23, 2023:

- **Export from Brazil**-Export of wood and **finished bows** from Brazil will need CITES documentation to verify legality for export from Brazil. At this time, there is no export of Pernambuco bows from Brazil.

- **International travel**-International travel by musicians with finished bows will not require CITES documentation for the next 3 years
- **Recommendations were included**-The decision was strengthened by added recommendations to be worked on during the next 3 years. They will be reviewed at that time to evaluate needed expansion of conservation efforts or if a CITES Appendix I listing, with all its challenges, will be recommended at that time.
- **Specific recommendations**-These recommendations include:
 1. Creating a system for documenting the legal origins of all bows, existing and new
 2. Supporting capacity-building for enforcement and conservation efforts (**specifying musicians**) within Brazil and among importing countries
 3. Researching and identifying potential sources of plantation grown Pernambuco mature enough to be suitable for sustainable use and working for a legal structure for this wood to be used in the bow making trade.

These recommendations outline actions for the next 3 years. Given three years, provides time for education, discussion, and movement towards more effective protection measures. Three years provides time to plant more Pernambuco outside the nature preserves for sustainable bow making.

Three years provides musicians time to demonstrate to the international CITES community that they support the protection of Pernambuco and its natural habitat, not its destruction. A year has passed since the CITES vote, leaving us only 2 years to make substantive progress.

The Use of Pernambuco in Bow Making

1. Professional level bows

For centuries, Pernambuco has been the wood of choice for professional music performance because of its superior tone and control. There are many bows still being used by musicians, or in collections, that are decades or even centuries old.

Artisanal bowmakers of today are making limited numbers of fine bows using traditional methods and are working with existing stocks of Pernambuco to service the highest level of advanced student and professional musicians.

Makers should gather and provide to customers whatever proof is available to establish that all the bows they make are in compliance with CITES regulations. This might include a Declaration of Bow Materials, a dated receipt of sale or identifying photographs showing markings or distinguishing characteristics of each bow.

Makers using alternative species should research sources, laws, and purchase wood that is sustainably sourced.

The use of any species must include actions to support a management plan for the survival of the species. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a good resource.

2. Student level bows (bows under \$1000)

Teachers very often recommend to students or their parents that they buy a Pernambuco bow. That is what my teacher recommended when I was a student years ago. Music stores and Amazon have an abundant supply of inexpensive bows to choose from. This would imply that Pernambuco is abundant, that there are no environmental concerns, no legal issues. The opposite is true!

Historical Overview

1992- Pernambuco listed on Brazil's endangered species list

2001-International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (4 international IPCI organizations) were established by bow makers in response to the growing concern for the conservation of Pernambuco and the future of musical traditions

2007- CITES Appendix II which required CITES documentation on raw wood but allowed the export of finished bows across all international borders including from Brazil.

2022- CITES Appendix II listing with CITES documentation on raw wood but as of 2/23, CITES documentation required on all finished bows exported from Brazil, finished bows re-exported (meaning crossing international borders outside of Brazil) allowed to travel internationally without CITES controls for the next 3 years. One item to be reviewed at that time is whether there has been a significantly increased investment in conservation by all stakeholders, especially musicians.

I estimate that 80-90% of all bows manufactured worldwide each year are for the student bow market. Many of these bows are made of Pernambuco and other tropical hardwoods. Others are made of non-wood materials such as fiberglass or carbon-fiber.

To support efforts to protect Pernambuco and its habitat, I recommend we transition to non-Pernambuco, non-wood alternatives or restored existing bows exclusively for bows under \$1000. This would include all student bows; fractional and full-size bows for school depts, rental programs and beginners of all ages.

Things to avoid when buying a student bow:

- There is a growing and troubling trend of the import of massive numbers of very cheap “disposable” bows, primarily from China. These bows are so inexpensive and poorly made that they are not rehairable. These bows are frequently thrown away and replaced. These throwaway bows waste natural resources. Their value to players is limited as they often break, warp and handicap young musicians with their poor quality.
- “Brazilwood” bows do not help environmentally or help to preserve Pernambuco. The word “Brazilwood” is used either to refer to the outer and less dense sapwood of the Pernambuco tree or possibly any hardwood from Brazil. If you are buying or recommending that your student buy a brazilwood bow, buy from a source that can tell you exactly what species it is and try to buy a non- Pernambuco bow.

Laws are changing, so if you are purchasing a Pernambuco bow made in Brazil after February 23, 2023

- Dealers or distributors must have CITES documentation for each bow
- Shops should ask to see and receive copies of this information to share with buyer
- Buyers should ask for information on legality
- **My recommendation: No document number on the invoice, no sale**
- **Buyers should maintain all records for future reference**

Organizations working for Pernambuco

International non-profit organizations working for Pernambuco have greatly benefited musicians.

Musicians, it's your turn to join in! Your support and

participation in Pernambuco conservation efforts will be critically important in the next round of CITES negotiations.

The International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (IPCI-USA, IPCI-France-Europe and IPCI- Germany have partnered with Brazilian scientists, government officials and farmers for 20 years on research and reforestation projects.

The International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Endangered Species (ALLIANCE) is an organization working internationally to raise conservation awareness and financial support for Pernambuco and other species used in instrument and bow making. Top priorities include:

- Ending illegal trafficking of Pernambuco shipped internationally as wood or finished bows,
- Working cooperatively with CITES management authorities for greater understanding and,
- Expanding IPCI projects in Brazil with increased membership of musicians, dealers, distributors.

What can you do to help?

- Protect your present bow(s) with proper maintenance and responsible care
- Reduce the demand for Pernambuco by buying student bows of non-wood, non-Pernambuco alternatives such as carbon fiber
- Don't buy disposable wooden bows that can't be rehaired
- Support makers and shops that inventory and notarize their wood and bows
- Consider doing what you do best by performing, helping to raise awareness and making a contribution by playing a Concert for Conservation.¹
- Donate what you can: alliance-international.org/ipci-usa.org
- Research your bows whether old or new. You will want to have some proof that you owned your bows before February 23, 2023 or have CITES documentation for any bows exported from Brazil after February 23, 2023. This documentation might include dated receipt of sale, dated third-party bow evaluation, dated insurance policy, or identifying photographs. This is important information for you to keep in your records to protect your investment and for future CITES permitting.

Forests are called “the lungs of the world” and provide us with so much more than raw materials. We need forests for our very survival. Music is called “the universal language” feeding our hearts and souls and bringing cultures together in our troubled world. Valuable causes, indeed! We all have a vitally important role to play in ensuring the conservation of the Pernambuco species in Brazil and the future health of the threatened forest ecosystem in which it grows.



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1968-1972: New England Conservatory-Gary Karr,
William Rhein

1969-2020: Bassist, Portland Symphony Orchestra

1970-1990: Bow studies-William Salchow NY, Bernard
Millant, Paris, France

1970-present: Bowmaker, restorer, owner LAH Bows,
Freeport, Maine

1980-present: Instructor-bow rehair, repair, bow making
UNH Violin Craftsmanship Institute

1984-present: American Federation of Violin and Bow
Makers, Degree of Journeyman, Membership

1989-1990: Recipient Fulbright Scholarship and Annette
Kade Fellowship, advanced bow study, France

2000-present: Member International Society of Violin
and Bow Makers (EILA)

2011: ISB Recognition Award, Lutherie

2022: Women in Lutherie, Woman of the Year Award,
Conservation

Memberships: Alliance-International, IPCI-USA

Footnotes:

¹ Concert for Conservation link: <https://d.docs.live.net/86e7e3a2f5988faf/Documents/JAVS/JAVS%20Spring%202024/ALLIANCE%20ONGOING%20PROJECTS/ALLIANCE%20EDUCATION%20OUTREACH/Concerts%20for%20Conservation%20Flier.pdf>.