



Stradivari

The Man and The Instruments

The Man

Italian instrument maker, Antonio Stradivari, has long been regarded as one of the finest instrument makers of all time. Many instruments he made with his own hands over 350 years ago are still in use today. His instruments command the highest prices at auctions--\$15.9 million for a violin in 2011—and have been owned and played by some of the world's top musicians.

Very little is known about the early life of Stradivari. It is surmised that he was born in 1644 in Cremona, Italy, a city that had been known for its master violin makers for nearly 100 years. The theory is that Stradivari actually started out as a woodcarver and inlayer employed by violin maker Nicolo Amati. It was around 1680, he began to develop his own style and model for the violin family of instruments.

Although Stradivari is most famous for his violins, he also crafted cellos, violas,

harps, guitars, and even mandolins. It is estimated that he made over 1,100 instruments in his life. About 650 instruments still survive, including 450 violins.

Antonio Stradivari created a standard to which many—and even most— instruments are compared to, even 300 years later. His legacy to the violin family of instruments includes lending to the inspiration of countless instrumentalists and instrument makers to create the most beautiful sounds possible from their instruments—a life that transcends wood, varnish, and time.

The Violins

The Stradivarius violin is renowned as the perfect musical instrument. Playing one is a dream come true for any musician, and only the best in the world have had the wonderful opportunity to get close to one of the 450 that still exist.

Listen to Anne-Sophie Mutter, owner of 2 Stradivari violins, playing Vivaldi's "Winter" from The Four Seasons by [clicking here](#).



To make his instruments, Stradivari used European spruce for the top and maple for the back, neck and other parts. According to legend, Stradivari rolled tree trunks on the ground to hear the sound they made, and dedicated his work to the goal of creating an object with the same acoustic quality of the human voice.

One of the enduring mysteries of Stradivarius violins is the varnish. Stradivari's legendary varnish has puzzled and fascinated violinmakers, historians, musicians, and even chemists since the beginning of the 19th century. The qualities of his varnish have turned out to be an elusive "secret" and one of the mysteries surrounding the instruments of Stradivari.

Every Stradivarius instrument has been given a name. Some bear the name of a previous owner or famous player of the instrument (for example, the "Leonardo da Vinci" owned by the Da Vinci family); some the name of composers (the "Wieniawski"); and some have more romantic names like the "Sleeping Beauty."



Yo Yo Ma owns probably the most famous Stradivarius cello in existence, the “Davidov.” Enjoy Yo Yo Ma playing “The Swan” on his Stradivari cello by [clicking here](#).

Where to See Stradivari Instruments

There are many museums around the world that own and display Stradivari instruments—violins, cellos, and guitars— including the Museo del Violino in Cremona, Italy, Antonio Stradivari’s hometown. The most expensive violin in the world is on display in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, England. Named the Messiah Stradivarius, it is valued at over \$20 million.



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