

# Open letter regarding the conservation of pernambuco wood and musical culture.

During the next Conference of the Parties of CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) which will take place in Panama from 14 to 25 November this year (Cop 19), a vote will be taken on Brazil's proposal to ban the trade in pernambuco wood and, consequently, in bows made from pernambuco. This vote is of huge importance for the world of classical music because it concerns all string players. The proposal made by Brazil could drastically restrict travel and all commercial exchange of bows for violin, viola, cello and double bass.

The adoption of this proposal would also lead to the disappearance of the very specialised profession of bow making, by removing any possibility of the supply of pernambuco wood (*Paubrasilia Echinata*).

We are well aware of the major environmental issues which our society has to face. We are also convinced that culture, in the broad sense, is something absolutely essential to us. And so, let's not fetter the dissemination of culture in general, and music in particular under false pretences, and let us not make the musical world a scapegoat for deforestation.

The volumes of wood, European and exotic, used by instrument makers are extremely modest compared to the volumes used by the paper, building or furniture industries around the world. Moreover, the instrument making sector has been particularly vigilant on the issue of conservation for several decades. For example, luthiers, bow makers and musicians have funded various conservation projects including the extensive replanting of pernambuco (International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative) and ebony (Eben!Holz e.V.: Association for the Protection of Endangered Wood for Musical Instrument Making), both of which are used for the manufacture of bows.

We string musicians use pernambuco bows because it is the one material that almost miraculously combines all the qualities required for the expression of our art. Of course, there are bows made with other types of wood or other materials such as carbon fibre. These alternatives may be of interest in some circumstances or for the interpretation of certain works. However, in terms of musical culture and the sensitivity of performers, pernambuco bows in their very wide diversity, are those that allow us to best convey our intentions. This is something that is deeply intrinsic to our culture and heritage.

All of us musicians collaborate with our bow makers, in order to always get the best out of our equipment. Our bows are objects, as violins are, that have a very long lifespan, (frequently many centuries); in contrast to the many objects of very short lifespan in everyday consumption.

The bow is an integral part of the trio formed with the musician and the instrument itself, and is essential to that trio's expression. It is irreplaceable because it is very personal. Despite its apparent simplicity, the bow is the tool that allows each of us to fully express ourselves; we can't exchange one bow for another without it having a significant impact on our playing. The bow is anything but an interchangeable accessory, it is literally an extension of our arm, translating our musical intentions into reality on the instrument.

We see the prospect of having to deal with increasingly intrusive administrative formalities and restrictions as a great hindrance to our professions. It is very likely that we will no longer be able to take the risk of routinely travelling with our pernambuco bows if we have to undergo checks and inspections during our travels, with sometimes unfortunate consequences. Musicians travel widely from country to country, from continent to continent, for the cultural enrichment of all people throughout the world.

How would restricting the free movement of bows facilitate the conservation of Paubrasilia, when even Brazil itself recognizes that this would not have any positive consequence for the preservation of the species?

Furthermore, hampering the manufacture of new bows by definitively preventing bow makers from renewing their stocks (already frozen since 2007) would condemn us to no longer being able to develop artistic creation. Over the last centuries bow making has evolved in parallel with the repertoire written for bowed string instruments, and preventing the creation of new bows will impact the creation and performance of new works.

The quality and diversity of bows produced by craftspeople active today has never been of such a high level since the emergence of the profession in the eighteenth century. We musicians have never had so many options to equip ourselves with bows of excellent craftsmanship meeting our needs precisely, whatever the repertoire we are interpreting. We must be able to maintain our new and heritage instruments, and for this we must be able to count on the support of trained and highly competent bow makers, with the means to fully master their craft; and this extends to the possibility to create new bows.

Today we call on all the ministries in charge of culture, the environment, art, craft, and international relations to work together with CITES and the various partners committed to this issue in order to find best solutions to enable both the conservation and responsible use of pernambuco, without creating obstacles to the expression of our art. It's a question of the preservation and continued creation of an intangible cultural heritage essential to all the world.