

WILLIAMS GENGAKKI VIOLINS

I N C O R P O R A T E D



3104 East Shadowlawn Avenue • Atlanta, Georgia 30305

Phone 404-233-2811 • Fax 404-233-2818 • Toll-free 800-326-2811

www.williamsgengakkiviolin.com • wgv@williamsgengakkiviolin.com

Policy of Assurance

Thank you for your interest in Williams Gengakki Violins. We take great pride in offering only instruments in fine condition, professionally set up in our own workshop. Please find below our policies concerning the trade-in and resale of instruments and bows purchased from our shop. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call or e-mail us.

Resale of instrument or bow: If you should wish to resell your instrument or bow for any reason, we will do this for you. You will receive the *original purchase price less the service charge* once the instrument or bow is sold.

Trade-in of instrument or bow: You will receive the original purchase price less the service charge towards the purchase of a new instrument or bow. Should you decide to trade in an instrument or bow for one of lesser value, we will refund the difference less the service charge once the traded-in instrument or bow is sold.

Service Charges: A service charge will be assessed for all traded-in and resold instruments and bows to partially compensate for our costs of preparing them for resale (\$50 for all bows, \$50 for violins and violas, \$125 for cellos). Bows must be rehaird, cleaned, and have leather grips replaced. Instruments must be restrung, cleaned, polished, and adjusted. Naturally, this policy is contingent upon the merchandise's returning to us in an excellent state of preservation.

Warranty: For 12 months, we will cover any necessary repairs and adjustments, with the exception of those due to damage incurred subsequent to purchase. Bow rehairings and replacement strings are not covered by this warranty.

Directions to the Shop

I-75 South: Take exit #255 for West Paces Ferry Road and turn left at the light on West Paces Ferry Road. Go straight about 3 miles. Go through the large intersection at Peachtree Road and continue on East Paces Ferry Road. Turn left on the third street on the left, East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the sixth building on the left.

I-75 North: Take exit #251 North for I-85 North and follow directions below.

I-85 South: Take exit #88 for Cheshire Bridge Road/Lenox Road. Turn right at the light on Cheshire Bridge Road. Immediately get in the left turn lanes, and turn left on Buford Highway. At the next light, turn right on Sidney Marcus Boulevard. Turn right on Piedmont Road (Sidney Marcus dead ends here). Turn left on East Paces Ferry Road (Corner Cafe on corner). Turn right on the second street on the right, East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the sixth building on the left.

I-85 North: Take exit #86 for Buford Highway/Piedmont Road. You will then be on Buford Highway. Take the exit for Piedmont Road North (Hwy. 237 North), and turn right on Piedmont Road. Turn left on East Paces Ferry Road (Corner Cafe on corner). Turn right on the second street on the right, East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the sixth building on the left.

Ga. 400 South: Take exit #2 for Lenox Road. Turn right at the exit light on Lenox Road. Turn left on Piedmont Road. Turn right on Peachtree Road. Turn left at the second traffic light on East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the ninth building on the right.

Roswell Road (heading south): Turn left on Piedmont Road. Turn right on Peachtree Road. Turn left at the second traffic light on East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the ninth building on the right.

I-20 East or West: Take exit for I-75/85 North. Take exit #251 North for I-85 North. Take exit #86 for Buford Highway/Piedmont Road. You will then be on Buford Highway. Take the exit for Piedmont Road North (Hwy. 237 North), and turn right on Piedmont Road. Turn left on East Paces Ferry Road (Corner Cafe on corner). Turn right on the second street on the right, East Shadowlawn Avenue. The shop is the sixth building on the left.

Bow Selection

Could the selection of a violin bow really be as important as the selection of an instrument? In a word, yes. For many people it is also far more of a mystery and therefore more confusing. In this article I will address the importance of a proper bow and discuss condition, playability, sound production, and physical beauty and their relevance as selection criteria. In summary, I will address these factors and how they contribute to the bow's value.

The bow, because it is very much an extension of the bow arm, is critical to the development of many techniques. It is like the golf club to a golfer, the bat to a baseball player, or the hammer to a skilled carpenter. A bad bow must be overcome, many times by the development of the *wrong* muscles or the wrong technique in order to make up for its shortcomings. It is for this reason, especially, that the selection of the right bow is especially important to students. A bow does not have to be expensive to be very playable but should nonetheless be well balanced and both strong and supple, and all its parts should fit well and function smoothly. In discussing the various criteria for selection, it is perhaps best to begin with condition.

Condition. Without question, the condition of a bow is critical and must be addressed foremost. When purchasing a bow, before all else one must confirm that the bow has never been broken. Student bows and most lower-cost professional bows lose virtually all of their commercial value once broken, though they may be repaired and used. In general, student bows in any less than excellent condition should be avoided since there are always plenty available in good condition. In studying the condition of a bow, there are many details to consider. See the article titled "Physical Condition of Bow" on page 3 for more information on this topic.

Once satisfied as to condition, the playability and sound production of a bow must be considered separately, and it is this two-part process that is often most confusing.

Playability. The playability of a bow is a function of how easy it is to use. It may be considered the tool, and the violin the instrument upon which work is to be performed. Here we must test its balance. Hold the bow in a natural bowhold and see how it feels when moving it through the air. Does it feel comfortable in the hand compared to other bows? Place it on the strings and draw a tone slowly, from frog to tip. Is it easy to control? Does it feel steady and stable, or does it seem to wobble? I recommend starting with just two or three bows in your price range at one time and checking just this much. During this same test, check also for strength. Strength is not a function of how hard or stiff the bow is, but rather how well it holds up as pressure is applied and tone drawn from the instrument. If one bow is less comfortable or harder to control or just *feels* worse, eliminate it, at least for the moment. Then try one or two more using only this

much to eliminate one or two more, keeping only the best feeling ones. Having narrowed your selection to only those which are comfortable and easy to control, you may now consider further criteria.

Sound quality. At this point, you may wish to go back and compare the remaining bows for sound quality. Here, you are matching the bow to your instrument. A perfectly good bow that sounds good on another violin may not sound as pleasing on yours, so it is important to use your violin for this test. Some bows will produce a softer, sweeter sound, some a smoother sound, others a grittier or edgier sound. Some will produce a focused, brilliant sound, others a darker sound with more breadth. The finer the bow and instrument, the more pronounced the distinctions will be. Here, too, playing slowly, even just a scale with vibrato, will be sufficient to get a good idea of the sound qualities of the bows you are considering. Eliminate those you don't like.

Finally, you should go back and check another aspect of playability: response. At this point you will be primarily matching the tool to your technique, although, to a certain extent, here, too, there is a match with the instrument. This is where you will want to try any technique such as *stacatto*, flying *spicatto*, *martelé*, string crossings, and other such quick-moving techniques which you may wish to employ. It is especially at this stage that you must find the bow which works for you.

In summary, then, I like to use the analogy of trying on shoes. First, the bow must be comfortable to hold and easy to use, much as shoes must be comfortable and wear well. Then, the bow must suit your instrument, bringing out the best in its sound, much like the right pair of shoes may complement the clothes you have already selected to wear. Finally, the bow should be well made and in good condition. Once these conditions have been met, you have found your bow.

Beauty. While the above listed criteria are the only ones that need be considered with respect to function, you may well find two or more bows suited to your needs and within your budget. At this point, you may wish to select the most beautiful of those that remain. Look at the wood under a good light. Examine the workmanship of all the parts. Select the one which appeals most, but only after all of your other criteria have been met.

Price. Much as with most other things in life, the challenge is to accomplish this within your budget. Here, a few guidelines may be helpful. I recommend that one restrict the search to bows made of pernambuco wood whenever possible, with perhaps the exception of bows for small children just getting started. For the purposes of this article, I will limit my discussion to bows priced up to \$2,000 and assume that we are talking always of bows in excellent condition. Since the cost of repairing damage to a bow can easily exceed the value of the bow itself, it is essential that the bow's condition be thoroughly examined before making a decision to purchase. This is especially true with student bows, since there are plenty available,

and even a few seemingly minor repairs can easily add up to \$150 or more. In general, damage to the head or stick of the bow should be avoided at all costs; a break to the stick on any other than a truly rare bow (otherwise worth many thousands of dollars) will reduce the commercial value of a bow to virtually nothing.

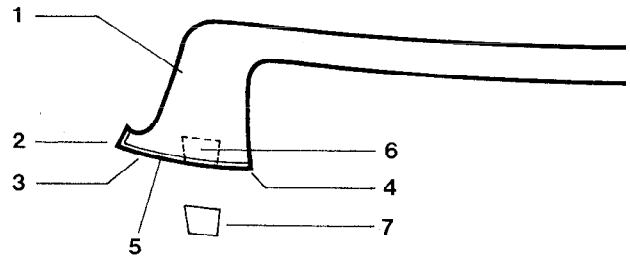
Bows in excellent condition priced between \$300 and \$1,800 can be generally assumed to be commercial bows (not produced entirely by hand by one individual artist). With these bows, especially, it is best to keep in mind that precious materials used in the frog and adjuster, such as gold, ivory, and tortoiseshell, will usually raise the price significantly and are seldom associated with an accompanying significant improvement in playing qualities. If you are partial to these materials, at the very least you should consider comparing several bows *not* mounted in these materials (but rather in the more typical ebony and silver) that are selling at a similar price before deciding to purchase.

When searching for bows priced between \$300 and \$1,000 (a good price range for beginning and intermediate students), it is probably best to ignore everything but the condition, the wood, and the playability of the bow. Even the names found branded on these bows are of little use as a reference, other than with new bows, since commercial bow companies are forever having bows produced by different groups of people under the same trade name, many times even shifting production from one country to another. Nonetheless, a careful search can uncover some surprisingly nice bows at very reasonable prices. Due to the fact that large numbers of bows are being produced in both China and Brazil and then stamped with various names by commercial concerns there and elsewhere, names are often, though not always, next to meaningless when considering bows in this price range.

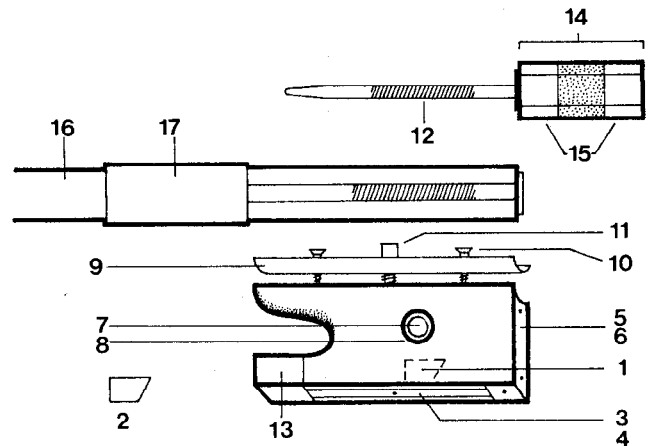
One can expect to find more sophisticated playing qualities in bows priced between \$1,000 and \$2,000. The most frequently encountered bows that represent a good value here were produced in Germany 50 to 100 years ago as commercial bows; it seems that more care was taken in the production, and especially nice wood seems to have been more readily available than is today. I can suggest some names that may be more reliably expected to lead us to some special bows. These brandings include but are not limited to Pfretzschner, Nürnberger, Hermann, Schuster, Hoyer, Rau, Prager, Prell, Knopf, and Bausch. Each of these names represents a well-respected maker, the best of whose work individual work, when available, can be expected to cost upwards of \$2,000. However, in each of these cases, the bowmaker has also been responsible for a number of commercial bows of varying quality. The best of these commercial bows are often very fine bows also and can usually be found at prices between \$1,000 and \$2,000.

Parts of the Bow

Head: 1) ridge, 2) peak or point, 3) face, 4) headplate, 5) tip liner, 6) mortise, 7) plug



Frog: 1) mortise, 2) plug, 3) slide, 4) slide liner, 5) heel, 6) heelplate, 7) eye, 8) ring, 9) underslide, 10) underslide screws or pins, 11) eyelet, 12) screw, 13) ferrule, 14) button, 15) rings, 16) wrapping, 17) thumb grip



Instrument Selection

For many parents, buying an instrument for a child can be an intimidating process, and unless one is armed with the proper information, costly mistakes can be made. We trust that the information provided here may be of value in taking some of the mystery and risk out of that experience.

If properly selected, a child's first and subsequent instruments should give great pleasure while continuing to hold their value. In selecting an instrument, sound, condition, playability, workmanship, and appearance should all be carefully considered. Furthermore, the resale policies and repair capabilities of the shop from which you purchase should also be carefully considered.

Condition, condition, condition. The first criteria in selection should be condition. In real estate the rule is location, location, and location. No matter how much you like the house, don't buy if the neighborhood isn't good! In stringed instruments, no matter how much you like the sound, don't buy if the condition isn't right. Professional repairs that can be guaranteed to hold up can be extremely costly. Furthermore, instruments that have obvious repairs can be very difficult to resell, even at significantly reduced prices. Avoid instruments with cracks, especially in the sound post and bass bar areas, or on the back and ribs of the instrument. Unsightly blemishes are not nearly as serious as cracks. Unless everything else is right about the instrument, they are usually best avoided, however. Meanwhile, there are many aspects of condition that can only be judged by a professional. If you are not buying from a professional, be sure to have it checked over by one. (Would you buy a used car without having it checked over by a mechanic?)

Appearance. While instruments are meant to be played, some children may be strongly turned on or off by the appearance of an instrument. Most parents and teachers would probably agree that trying to force a child to play on an instrument that doesn't appeal is most likely to be counterproductive. That said, we still feel that the condition, playability, and sound of the instrument are ultimately more important than the appearance.

Playability. Playability is something you may have difficulty judging. Your teacher may be able to be of assistance here, as can a caring professional. For the musician, this means ease of tuning, ease of fingering, and comfort when holding the instrument. These factors are greatly affected by the quality of the "set-up" as we refer to it in the trade. Pegs must fit properly and be properly lubricated. The angle of the neck coming into the instrument must be exactly right, and the bridge must be cut properly to match. The fingerboard needs to be calibrated exactly and planed properly. Otherwise, certain notes will buzz or always sound out of tune. The chinrest should fit and feel comfortable. The outcome of buying an instrument and asking a child to learn on it without having these things attended to may well be compared to

that of trying to teach a beginning rider to ride a bicycle with a chain, brakes, and pedal assembly that aren't properly adjusted. The child may just give up in frustration believing he or she, not the instrument, is the problem.

How much do we pay for good sound? There is healthy sound, just as there is healthy food. Trained musicians and trained stringed instrument professionals usually agree on this matter. A healthy sound is one that is balanced and even from string to string. It is a sound that flows smoothly under both light and heavy bow pressure, and generally one that responds easily, allowing the player to readily produce both soft and loud tones at will while maintaining an appealing quality. These things can be judged more or less objectively by any teacher and by many students, even beginners in some cases. If you are not comfortable deciding whether the sound of an instrument is healthy, you should not hesitate to ask for your teacher's advice.

Ultimately, your goal should be to select an instrument that is pleasing for you to listen to and easy to play. To select the right instrument, a number of different instruments in the same price range should be compared in a quiet place that is comfortable for you. Most professional string shops understand that it may be necessary for you to take an instrument out on trial and to get your teacher's opinion before you can buy with confidence. You should not feel it inappropriate to inquire as to the possibility of taking an instrument home for a few days to try it out before purchasing.

Nobody can dictate to you what good sound is any more than they can dictate what good flavor in food or good taste in art is. The work of a local artist may appeal to you more than a Salvador Dalí painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but if you pay more for the local artist's work, you will no doubt regret it later. You may like hamburgers better than French food, but you shouldn't have to pay more for the hamburger. Just as with art and food, there should be a trend towards better and better sound as instruments get more expensive. But your taste will not always agree with the market, and since there is no right and wrong in taste, you may benefit from taste which doesn't agree with the market.

The Sound of Magic

Why does the sound of a great violin played by a gifted artist have so much influence over the human soul? My mother often explained that the sound of the violin is more similar to the human voice than is the sound of any other instrument. For variety alone it would seem that this comparison must hold true; what other instrument is capable of producing such a variety of sounds and of expressing through music the full range of human emotions? The sound of a violin has been known literally to draw tears, to inspire awe, to enthrall, to express fiery emotions, to whisper, to soothe...to express that which words cannot.

Yet what is this nebulous thing, sound? Many musicians seem to struggle to describe just what kind of sound they are looking for. What, then, distinguishes good sound from great sound from magic sound?

The following ideas are entirely my own and are not based on any research, empirical or otherwise. I hope this descriptive material will prove helpful to two groups of people: the uninitiated who are just beginning to learn about the differences in the sound of violins, and the experienced who nonetheless would like to find a more effective or informative vocabulary for describing and comparing the sound of different violins.

When I mentioned to a few people that I was planning to try to discuss the sound of the instruments of the violin family in this edition of the newsletter, the reactions ranged from “good luck” to “impossible” to “if you’re prepared to write a book” to “nobody agrees....” The comment which I found most apropos was “there is no language poetic enough.” While there is truth in all these comments, it is also true that many people have described to me enough aspects of the sound they were looking for that I have been able in turn to help them find an instrument with that sound. It is also true that while there is a great deal of disagreement about the sound of many violins, there tends to be a great deal of agreement about the greatest instruments. Who ever has been heard to comment that the instruments played on by Oistrakh, Heifitz, Primrose, or Jacqueline Du Pré didn’t sound good?

My premise, then, is that it is the lesser instruments upon which there is the greater disagreement. The potential limitations of lesser instruments prevent the artist from fully expressing, in one parameter or another, some aspect of the music in question. Therefore, the dispute may often be about which of the shortcomings should be given precedence over the others. Rather than presume to pass judgment on any of this, I will attempt briefly to describe the ten parameters I consider when evaluating an instrument’s sound.

Volume is the loudness of sound produced by the instrument.

Projection is the distance over which sound can be heard. Bear in mind that some soft sounds can be heard

for a long distance, and some loud sounds may die out before reaching far away.

Response is the quickness with which an instrument responds after the bow is touched to the strings.

Balance is the evenness of tone production from the open note on the bottom string to the highest note on the highest string. Here, the ideal would be equally good volume, texture, clarity, and projection with the same degree of bow pressure at all pitches and on all strings.

I believe these first four to be empirically measurable. I believe also that there will tend to be a relatively high level of agreement among musicians as to what aspects of each is good and what is bad. Qualitative judgements on the remaining parameters tend to be far more subjective, however. Here the fun begins.

Texture. Some sounds seem to be like satin, others like velvet, others gritty like sandpaper. Some are creamy and others are buttery. Please remember, some very fine music may call for the ability to produce textures that may seem bad when described alone but are good when heard in context.

Focus is closely related to texture but different. Imagine the sound emanating from the violin as if it were light from a flashlight—the beam of light can be concentrated into a small spot or diffused over a larger area. Some violins have a naturally tightly focused sound while others have a broader focus. The choice of bow, as well as usage of both left and right hands, seems greatly to affect or moderate the natural focus of the instrument. If you haven’t noticed this, try your instrument with several different bows and listen closely.

Color. Some might also use the word *flavor*. Since we neither see nor taste sound in any literal sense, it is here that the most imagination may be required. Yet there is an aspect of sound which seems best to lend itself to a choice of vocabulary including words such as silvery or golden, nutlike, or just plain delicious. A sound may be said to possess one particularly appealing or rich color or flavor or a combination of a great many.

Brightness. Dark and brooding or bright and cheerful, and all that lies in between.

Clarity. Some sounds seem pure and clear as a spring-fed stream, others muddy, others simply “covered.” Pure and clear sounds would seem to be the ideal, although sounds that are cloudy, covered, or thick may be called for at times (just as with variations in texture). Are the best instruments capable of both? In the hands of the greatest artists, it would seem so.

Place of emanation. It is difficult to explain, but the sound of different violins seems to come from different locations on the instrument. The sound of some instruments may seem to be delivered right from the top or table, while with others the sound seems to come from a spot dead-center and inside, between the top and back, right under the bridge. With others still the sound may

seem to come from the back of the instrument, or another place.

I believe that distinctions between student-quality violins, professional-quality violins, and those truly world-class instruments heretofore described as “magic” are readily apparent, at least to the musician, if not to the audience, as well. Here I would like to explore briefly some of the differences by drawing upon some of the aforementioned imaginative vocabulary.

Simply put, even an inexpensive student instrument (\$800–\$1,200) can sound quite good if it is professionally set-up and adjusted and played well. Inevitably, however, these instruments are extremely limited in several, if not most, of the parameters of sound. Such instruments usually sound good in only one range of volume and rarely, if ever, are capable of the volume needed to be heard over an orchestra; they rarely produce a beautiful sound (as compared to much better instruments) when played at extremely low volume levels, yet many sound quite nice at medium levels. They seldom possess the projection required to be appreciated in a large hall, although in a small room they may sound very nice indeed. They usually produce only one tone quality or color rather than a palette of tone colors, and thus they are limited or much less versatile than better or more professional instruments. Therefore, as a student advances and is capable of doing more, he or she requires an instrument with increasing possibilities.

Let us try to imagine now an ice cream sundae or some other delicious food with many layers of increasingly rich and perfectly blended flavors. The deeper one reaches with the spoon, and the harder one works, the richer the flavor of the next layer and the more perfect the blend. Assume the spoon is a flavored, edible spoon that becomes a part of the perfect gourmet recipe, and the analogy is complete. Such a spoon would be like the bow, which is indeed a critical part of the violin’s tonal production. A dessert composed of one layer of ice cream would be akin to the student violin, and so on.

But I have digressed. The student-quality violin may respond well and easily to the player in the lower positions but rarely responds easily and resonates freely when played at the highest position. The student instrument may have a soft or mellow texture, or a harder, more aggressive one, but rarely will it be capable of achieving both. And the story goes on.

Obviously I have used three distinct categories for the sake of simplicity, whereas in actuality there exists a continuum of sorts from the simplest of instruments to the rarest and finest. While beautiful sounds can be made on even the simplest violins, it is the vast range of possibilities available to the musician on only the finest instruments that makes these so sought after.

Care of Your Instrument and Bow

1. *Wipe the top of the instrument, strings, and fingerboard clean with a soft, dry cloth after each use to ensure that no rosin remains anywhere.*

You are in possession of a very fine instrument, the varnish of which is a key component in producing the sound that you have selected. Rosin left on the instrument can react with the varnish and cause it to break down. We do not recommend the use of polishes, since improper use and the chemicals in some polishes may harm the varnish; cleaning and polishing is best left to a professional violin maker.

2. *NEVER leave the instrument unattended in a vehicle at any time.*

Excess heat and humidity can cause varnish to “melt,” even in the winter. Extremely cold temperatures can cause wood to shrink, and the accompanying dryness may possibly cause cracks to develop.

3. *Put the instrument away in its case at all times when not in use.*

The case helps protect the instrument from physical damage, and it also serves as a very effective barrier to sudden changes in temperature and humidity.

4. *Loosen the bow hair to the point that it is slightly relaxed, or not taut, after each use.*

Hair may shrink as much as 1/2" in dry weather; thus a bow left even slightly taut after use may become much tighter in the case, putting unnecessary stress on the stick and even causing breakage in extreme cases.