

## **Care of the Bow**

**Look after your bow and protect your investment with a few simple maintenance tips.**

Players often spend a great deal of time and money in their search for a bow that will not only suit their playing needs, but will also bring out the best in their instrument. Taking care of this investment is not a complicated procedure – however there are a few basic considerations that you should keep in mind.

### **Tension**

The camber in a wooden bow stick has been placed there artificially using heat and some pressure. The natural tendency of tightened hair is to work against this camber – this provides the necessary spring in the bow. Always release the tension in the bow hair as soon as you have finished playing to preserve the camber in the bow stick. Also be aware that horse hair is sensitive to changes in humidity, so that the tension may change with the weather. In other words, when the humidity drops a loose bow can become tight, and an already tight bow can snap the head off.

### **The Tip**

The tip of the bow should have a covering made of bone, metal or plastic over the face which extends to cover the very end point of the bow. This provides important protection to this delicate area. If the bow tip is cracked or broken it should be replaced as soon as possible.

### **The Screw**

It is good to occasionally remove the screw from its housing in the butt of the bow and check that it is running smoothly and is properly adjusted so that the frog sits flush on the bed on the underside of the stick. You can lubricate a sticky screw with pencil lead and a small amount of bees wax. Do not use oils of any kind as they can be corrosive on hardwoods and penetrate the grain, making any future repair of cracks very difficult or impossible.

Also, be aware that the most common damage done to a screw is over tightening when hair stretches to such an extent that the eyelet in the underside of the frog locks against the back end of the mortise in the stick. The symptom is the hair will not tighten sufficiently and the screw becomes very hard to turn. Once this happens it is important to immediately have the hair shortened. If you keep twisting the screw, you will damage or destroy the button or strip the thread in the eyelet. Unfortunately bow makers did not standardize their thread sizes so finding a suitable replacement is not always possible.

### **The Hair**

The bow hair is the part that is constantly in contact with the string. Bowing is a controlled form of repetitive plucking of the string which creates the illusion of constant sound. It is achieved by applying rosin to the surface of the hair, thereby

making it repeatedly grip and release the string. Your bow will need to be rehired when it feels like it is not grabbing the strings, or when you have lost enough of the bow hairs to be noticeable, or when the hair is dirty. You can extend the life of bow hair by never touching it with anything but rosin – in particular, do not touch it with your hands.

## **Lappings**

Most bows have a section on the stick just in front of the frog which consists of a wound lapping (usually silver, plastic or whale bone) with a short, fatter section of leather. These have two important functions – they provide the necessary balance to the weighting of the bow and they prevent your fingers from wearing away the stick. Since any damage to the stick will devalue a bow it is well worth keeping the lapping in good order. Some players with very expensive bows even have another leather covering put over the end of the stick to protect the makers name stamped in the wood.

## **Rosin**

The periodic application of rosin to the bow hair is necessary to produce a sound when the bow is passed over the strings. However do not over rosin the bow, so that it clogs the hair and the strings. A few swipes before you play should be sufficient. Of course you will need to work more rosin into a bow that is new or just been rehired. Also make sure you wipe any excess rosin off the bow stick (and instrument) when you have finished playing.

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