

Brilliant and world-renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman, for instance, has examined and played violins from the collection. In addition, the museum recently loaned its 1709 Stradivari to violin virtuoso and Sphinx Laureate Gareth Johnson for concert play.

Instrument makers were also an important part of the team that organized and conducted the scanning at Henry Ford Medical Center — actually acting as the impetus for the project. (Read Adrian Bagale’s story on Page 31.)

At the center of these studies within the music world is a storied discussion about which of the famed instrument makers — Stradivari or Guarneri, both part of Italian instrument-making families in the 17th and 18th centuries — crafted better instruments.

For decades, instrument makers have tried to copy the Italian models to achieve the same sweet sound, a quest that often brings them to Henry Ford Museum.

One of the theories on the books claims that Stradivari and Guarneri applied chemicals or varnish that repelled insects from eating the wood, giving “it a richer sound because the chemicals penetrated into the wood,” explained Fahey.

Another: the wood used to make the violins — from trees that likely grew in Europe during the mini Ice Age — was more dense, with less space between the rings on the tree trunks.

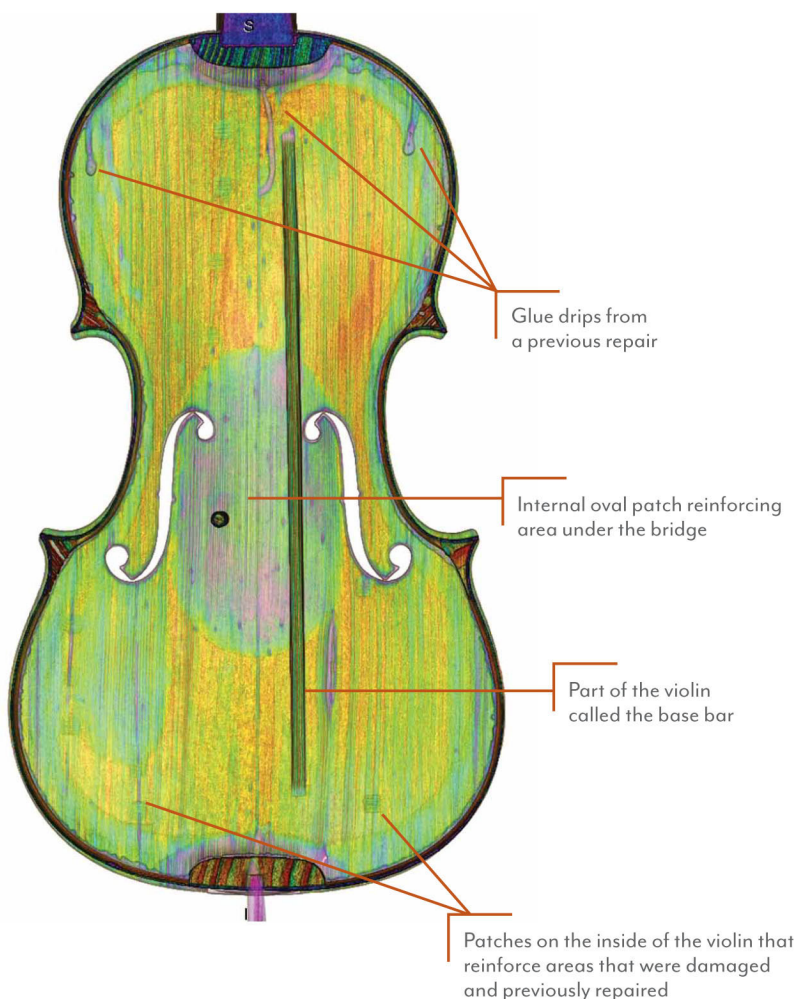
The latest is speculation about the interior volume of the violins and the amount of movement air gets as it travels in and out.

While technology has allowed the museum better insight into the collection Ford held so close to his heart (the discussion continues about what makes these violins superior), it’s playing the instruments and putting them out in front of the public that gives a true read on their condition and, more important, their societal importance, Fahey said.

A tradition that will continue and achieve new meaning as the violins, in storage for the past decade and a half, will return to exhibit in Henry Ford Museum in honor of the 150th anniversary of Henry Ford’s birth on July 30, 2013. ●

A LOOK INSIDE A STRADIVARIUS

Among other findings, the CT scans revealed areas of old insect damage previously unseen by the naked eye. In addition, delicate repairs to the Strad’s interior were discovered.



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