

Care of your Cello

Keeping Your Instrument Clean

Clean rosin dust from your instrument with a soft duster after each time you have played it, also wipe strings free of excess rosin. If this is not done, a sticky layer of rosin will accumulate which will be difficult to remove. It can damage the varnish and effect the tone. About once every two months, clean your instrument with a good violin/cello polish to remove fingerprints, etc. and to preserve the varnish. Use only good quality cello polish. To clean strings, use a little methylated spirit, but avoid contact with the varnish.

Care of the Bridge

The bridge is one of the most commonly neglected parts of the cello. It must be kept upright; as the instrument is tuned, the strings tend to pull the top of the bridge towards the fingerboard, making it lean over. If this is allowed to go unchecked it will eventually collapse or break. Check your bridge often. Most bridges today are fitted to lean slightly towards the tailpiece, this is correct and if your bridge is fitted this way, keep it to this angle. A good bridge properly cared for can last for many years; a neglected one may only last a month or two. The upper strings, on account of their tension and thinness, tend to cut into the bridge: therefore, most strings have little tubes or protectors which should be used. If these wear out, cut a small squares of thin leather and fit them under the strings.

Fitting a new bridge is a skilled job and it can take several hours work, so they are worth looking after.

Pegs

A well-fitted set of pegs should give little trouble. If they become a little stiff, take them out one at the time, wipe them with a rag and apply a little good quality peg composition. If your pegs are old and troublesome, there is only one real remedy – a new set properly fitted.

The Bow

Always loosen the bow hair after use. Wipe rosin dust from the stick with a non-greasy rag. Do not over rosin your bow. Clouds of rosin everywhere means you are using too much, this will give you a gritty tone. After a time, horse hair of the bow does lose its ability to hold rosin. When this does happen applying more and more rosin will not help. The bow must be re-haired.

The Importance of Correct Setup

This cannot be too emphasised. The bridge, soundpost and pegs must be expertly fitted to your individual instrument if it is to sound its best. Poor fittings can result in poor tone, difficulty in playing and permanent damage your instrument.

Choice of Strings

There are three main types of strings in use today - gut, synthetic and steel, all of which have a metal tape winding and are made in various qualities. Choice of strings is a matter of personal preference. Here are a few tips that might help:

- Metal strings must be used with fine tuning adjusters
- Gut strings must be used without fine tuning adjusters

- Synthetic core strings can be used with or without fine tuning adjusters
- Metal strings usually improve the sound of inexpensive instruments and make tuning easier for the inexperienced player, but synthetic strings maybe a better option as they are not so tough.
- Synthetic core strings work well on most instruments and are easy to use.
- Never use steel strings on an old frail instrument.
- When changing strings, change one at the time and check your bridge for straightness afterwards.
- Always wind the strings neatly on the pegs and wind towards the head of the peg.

Common Problems

If the sound post falls down, loosen all the strings immediately and bring the instrument to the workshop to have it re-set.

Check your instrument peridically for any joints (mostly around the ribs) or cracks that may open and require re-gluing. If you find any, bring it to the shop as correct glue must be used. If your instrument sustains any damage, loosen all the strings and bring it to the shop as soon as possible. Do not touch or move any open cracks and on no account try to glue them yourself.

The Case

Select a case of good quality with plenty of room and padding. Keep the instrument covered with a blanket made for the job or at least a duster to prevent bows and case fittings marking the varnish. A good blanket can be made from a piece of thin foam with velvet on top and satin underneath (satin will not stick to the strings). Do not cram your case full with tuning forks, shoulder rests, dirty socks etc. which can easily damage your instrument.

Temperature and Humidity

Avoid keeping your instrument in a hot room or where the temperature fluctuates a great deal. Avoid dampness and above all over-dry conditions (which cause shrinkage cracks) particularly in the winter when central heating is used. An underfloor heating is a disaster waiting to happen - store your instrument well above the floor level. There are many simple humidifiers on the market today, which will help to stop your instrument drying out too much.