

Know Your Bow: Tips for Owners and Users of Pernambuco Bows

PREPARED BY: American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada, Association of British Orchestras, The Independent Society of Musicians (ISM), International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Endangered Species, International Federation of Musicians (FIM), League of American Orchestras, Musicians' Union (MU), National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), Pearle* Live Performance Europe

How well do you know your Pernambuco bow? Pernambuco wood is used in most advanced student and professional bows. The Pernambuco (*Paubrasilia echinata*) tree is native to the Atlantic forests in Brazil and its populations are threatened. Bow owners and users can take essential actions to: (1) document basic facts about the wood used in their bows, (2) be informed consumers and comply with new rules regarding international sales and purchases, (3) support sustainable plantations of Pernambuco and conservation efforts.

Do I need special permits to buy, sell, or travel with my finished Pernambuco bow internationally? On March 5, 2026, new rules went into effect, requiring CITES permits for all international sales of existing and new Pernambuco bows, which require proof that the wood was harvested before the species went under international protection on September 13, 2007. Bows will continue to move free of permit requirements when crossing international borders for performances, repairs, and other specific activities that do not result in a change of ownership.

What is CITES? The [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) is a treaty that regulates international trade in animal and plant species. It provides a framework for cooperation and collaboration among its member Parties (most countries globally) to ensure that international trade in specimens of animal and plant species is legal and does not threaten their survival in the wild. Species are listed in three [CITES Appendices](#), each providing a different level of controls over trade. As a musician, orchestra, or music ensemble, you might be aware that material used in musical instruments such as ivory, lizard skin, and Brazilian rosewood is already under CITES controls.

CITES Parties meet every two to three years at the Conference of Parties (CoP) to re-evaluate controls species-by-species. Groups representing music stakeholders participate in these policy discussions and the latest one concluded in December 2025 in Uzbekistan (CoP20).

How does CITES protect Pernambuco? Since September 13, 2007, the Pernambuco wood used in bows has been included under CITES Appendix II, with rules that require any wood material exported from Brazil (up to the unfinished "bow blank" stage) to be legally and sustainably harvested and accompanied by CITES permits when traded internationally. As of February 23, 2023, CITES permits were also required for *all* Pernambuco wood the first time it leaves Brazil – including finished bows as they leave Brazil. The newest rules that went into effect on March 5, 2026 require CITES permits for all international sales of Pernambuco material worldwide, while exempting most travel from permit requirements. The specific rules and additional actions CITES Parties will take are outlined in a [detailed CITES policy statement](#). CITES Parties adopted these measures at CoP20 in an effort to halt trafficking of Pernambuco wood and bows and to protect wild populations of Pernambuco.

If I own a Pernambuco bow what actions do I need to take? Now that CITES is regulating bows as finished products for all future international sales, it is wise to proactively identify the material in your bow and document that the wood was harvested from the wild prior to September 13, 2007.

Know Your Bow: Tips for Owners and Users of Pernambuco Bows

Documentation of these facts is a helpful way to establish that your bow could qualify for a CITES permit if it is ever resold across international borders.

How do I know if my bow is made with Pernambuco? Seek out a bowmaker or luthier to evaluate the material and confirm the wood in the bow. You can ask for a written declaration from a bowmaker or expert evaluator describing the material in the bow. Many older bows do not have identifying marks from their maker. Make the best effort to collect the following:

- Dated third-party instrument evaluation, noting maker, approximate year made, and material
- Take identifying photographs, including any markings or distinguishing characteristics of the bow

How can I demonstrate that my bow was made from wood harvested from the wild prior to September 13, 2007 and is CITES compliant? Bows made and located outside of Brazil prior to September 13, 2007 (when Pernambuco was first included under CITES Appendix II) are considered “pre-Convention” under CITES, which means that no historic CITES paperwork (e.g., permits) connected with the wood used to make the bow was required. For bows made after Sept. 13, 2007 outside of Brazil, confirmation that the wood was exported from Brazil prior to Sept. 13, 2007 or was traded internationally with a CITES permit or pre-Convention certificate can help establish its legal origin. Finished bows exported from Brazil on or after February 23, 2023 *must have been* accompanied by a valid CITES export permit issued in Brazil. In case you decide to re-sell your bow in the future, your buyer will probably ask you to provide the documents outlined above as evidence of its legal origin.

Make a best effort to document your bow’s birthdate, purchase date, and location. While the documentation requirements for permits will vary from country to country, the following documentation can help establish legality of existing bows:

- Dated receipts of sale
- Dated insurance policy
- A signed affidavit attesting to the date (or approximate date) the bow came into your ownership outside of Brazil
- A signed statement from the maker, verifying the bow was legally crafted

Establishing ownership of your bow prior to September 13, 2007 can be a simple way of proving that the wood was legally harvested from the wild. If your bow was made and sold after September 13, 2007 you may need to contact the maker or seller and ask for documentation.

What do I need to know if I am purchasing a Pernambuco bow in my home country or internationally?

In most cases, rules for purchasing a bow domestically, in your home country, have not changed. However, it is essential to ask for paperwork for any bow purchase. Most bow makers are now well-informed about the new legal environment and are aware that customers are seeking documentation. If you are purchasing a new bow from outside your home country, you must ensure that CITES permits have been obtained and that the bow is transported to you through locations where officials can thoroughly stamp the permits. These fully stamped permits should be kept as proof that the bow was legally acquired. These same requirements are in place whether a bow is shipped to you, or you travel to purchase it and hand carry it home. For further information, contact your [national CITES authority](#).

Know Your Bow: Tips for Owners and Users of Pernambuco Bows

What should I keep in mind when traveling with my bow? Remember: a CITES permit is not required when traveling with a finished bow unless it contains other material covered under CITES controls, such as sea turtle or elephant ivory. The new rules for Pernambuco state that travel is exempt from permit requirements for “finished musical instruments, finished musical instrument accessories and finished musical instrument parts for non-commercial trade only for the purpose of paid and unpaid performance, personal use, display, loan, competition, teaching, appraisal, or repair, provided that this does not change the ownership and that such transport is not for sale, transfer or disposal of the specimen outside of the owner’s usual State of residence.” If you plan to travel, it is advisable to have on hand some form of documentation that confirms that you are traveling for one of the exempt purposes, and present that documentation only if asked by border officials.

How can I take action to support conservation? We all have a vitally important role to play in ensuring the conservation of the Pernambuco species in Brazil and the future health of the threatened forest ecosystem in which it grows. Fully complying with the new rules and being an informed consumer are essential first steps. Learn more about how you can [support the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative](#) and its work to sustain the species and find more information here: [IPCI Germany](#), [IPCI Canada](#), [IPCI USA](#), [International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Protected Species](#), [Information in French](#).

Updated 3/13/2026