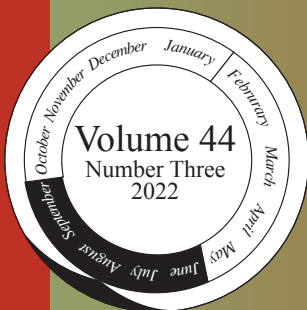


The Magazine of the International Society of Bassists



# BASS WORLD



## The ISB Honors Jeff Bradetich

# Bassists, We Have a Problem!

by Lynn Armour Hannings

Music as we know it is in danger. How far would you go to save it? Please read the letter below from the U.S. Embassy in Brazil concerning ongoing worldwide investigations of the illegal cutting, exporting, and use of pernambuco.

Pernambuco is an endangered species. This is serious business. We must make every effort to get informed and to avoid all purchases of raw wood and bows made from illegally harvested wood. Ignoring these international laws has potentially serious consequences.



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Polícia Federal coordinate joint enforcement actions to combat trafficking of rare and endangered timber from Brazil**

**December 1, 2021:** A press release issued on November 30 by Polícia Federal provides details of a joint U.S./Brazilian timber trafficking investigation and the execution of 20 search warrants in the State of Espírito Santo. The investigation involves the manufacture and export of musical instruments and parts, specifically, stringed instrument bows, derived from illegally sourced, rare and endangered timber from Brazil to the U.S., Europe and Asia.

The wood species from which the bows are derived, Paubrasilia Echinata, known commonly as 'Pau-Brasil' or 'Pernambuco' is a rare species of wood listed as 'Endangered' under Brazil's official list of endangered species of flora, Lista de Espécies da Flora Ameaçadas de Extinção, and the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), to which the U.S. and Brazil are both Signatories (Party). Pau-Brasil is also recognized as the National Tree of Brazil with deep cultural significance to the country. Despite the foregoing protections, pau-brasil remains heavily traded internationally, widely regarded in the manufacture of quality musical instruments.

Today, the species is largely exasperated in Brazil but international demand for the wood has only increased. As quantities of any remaining legal stock in Brazil diminish, the price for Pau-Brasil has increased dramatically over the years, and a series of frauds have surfaced in Brazil designed to mask illegal sourcing of rare and slow-growing pau-brasil, in order to fulfill international market demand, including in the United States. By way of comparison, a custom viola bow made of rare pau-brasil wood weighing approximately sixty (60) grams, can sell for more than \$6,200 USD in the United States, roughly the same price per gram as cocaine.

The U.S. is committed to working with Brazil to combat deforestation, timber trafficking, and related environmental crimes. This investigation highlights cooperation between the United States and Brazil to prevent extinction of endangered species and preserve our natural heritage for future generations.

**Link to the press release of the Federal Police:** <https://www.gov.br/pf/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2021/11/pf-combate-crimes-ambientais-no-norte-capixaba>



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Musicians have so much to be proud of! Musical traditions of creating and sharing music all over the world have been enjoyed for centuries. Musicians have made a lifelong contribution with study, growth, and performance, often beginning as very young children, to reach the highest standards of technique and musicality. Musicians value the very finest instruments and bows as tools of their trade, as their voice.

I found it rewarding to be a member of the Portland Symphony Orchestra. Sitting in the bass section, I was surrounded by talented musicians playing with great sensitivity and passion, giving the very best of themselves for personal satisfaction, for colleagues and audience members alike. I appreciated the enthusiastic response of the audience. Playing well and pleasing donors were critically important. As a former orchestra representative to the PSO board, I knew that their continued financial support was essential. All this was made possible because of the instruments used. These instruments and bows are the essential link between the heart and hands of the musicians and the listening audience. Musicians, how many of us truly know what we hold in our hands?

Sadly, there is a dark side to our musical traditions. Our instruments and bows are made of hardwoods that have been harvested since the days of colonialism when resources were stripped with no regard for the future. The modern-day use of forest resources continues to be a serious problem around the world. Musicians need to gain awareness of the ever-increasing problems of availability and responsibility.

Worldwide environmental issues can no longer be ignored. There is vast destruction of tropical rainforests: down to only 7% of its original size in the case of Brazil's Atlantic Rainforest, the home of pernambuco. Climate change is causing floods and droughts. Unsustainable forest practices are threatening thousands of species of trees and animals worldwide, including woods from which orchestral instruments and bows are made. Forests are being cut down as population centers expand. Land is being cleared for farming and for industrial use. Indiscriminate, often illegal cutting negatively impacts forests and local communities that are impoverished by unhealthy living conditions and economic hardship.

#### **Hard questions to think about:**

- What would happen to classical music if access to instruments and bows was impaired or denied?
- What if WE – musicians, orchestras, managements, students, teachers, supporters of the arts – were the endangered species as we rely on forests that are disappearing?

- What if musicians could no longer travel with their personal equipment?
- Who is educating or guiding the musical community to look realistically at these threats and to find ways to take meaningful action?

The history of instrument and bow making is full of materials, once common, that have become more endangered. The materials with the highest level of regulation include rosewood, whalebone, tortoiseshell, and ivory. Modern makers are experiencing increasing restrictions on the use of certain species of ebony, pearl, lizard, and pernambuco. There is growing concern about maple and spruce. We can either sit back and watch our world continue to shrink, or we can take action.

It is a challenge for the makers and dealers of today to remain informed, abide by the changing regulations, identify new materials that will work as substitutes and importantly, to educate and guide musicians about changing regulations, required documents, or potential travel restrictions. Communications with and guidance from governmental authorities must be made available to assist shops, those in the trade, and musicians in these changing times. **The takeaway is that musicians of the world have a lot to lose right now.**

The International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (IPCI) was started in 1999 by an international group of bowmakers who were committed to the restoration of the preeminent hardwood used for bow making. They created an internationally supported comprehensive program in Brazil that involved research, community outreach, and support of a youth orchestra which resulted in the planting of over 250,000 seedlings in farms, towns, and national forests. This was the first and at that time the only management plan ever developed for pernambuco, and is considered by scientists to be essential for the restoration and conservation of this species.

The IPCI of today has made a significant contribution to the scientific literature in Brazil, including some studies being done for the very first time. With global warming considerations, research projects can determine the best climate and soil conditions for successful planting. The IPCI-planted trees continue to grow and the IPCI, despite the devastating impact of the pandemic in Brazil, has continued to support research on different varieties of pernambuco and other woods used in bow making.

Bowmakers took the first steps to establish this important work, but it was always understood that membership needed to expand to include musicians, orchestras, dealers, suppliers to the trade, teachers, and students all coming together in support of constructive actions.

Musicians have come up with many creative ideas for supporting education and fundraising:

- Benefit concerts, talks, and dinners can inform donors of the challenges facing present and future generations of musicians and music lovers.
- Music shops can become active by collecting a percentage of sales or repairs as a conservation fee.
- Teachers can engage with local musical groups and schools to build awareness among students.



Seedling in the nursery (photos by Jacy Sousa, Horst John Bows)



After 3 years they moved to the forest



20-year-old trees

Musicians around the world continue to use pernambuco and travel with finished bows in part because of the forethought of this conservation organization and its timely and responsible actions. For this to continue, we need to demonstrate our commitment to conservation with greater membership and expanded programs to work to restore the forests. We need to work together to stay involved, to avoid wasting precious resources, and to develop systems and approaches that will enable and encourage shops and customers to make purchases that are informed, ethical, and verifiably legal. We need to bring a halt to illegally poached wood or instruments and bows made of illegal wood. This is the only path towards a future for our music. It's up to us.

Environmental problems in our forests did not happen overnight and cannot be fixed quickly or easily. The music industry is not responsible for all of the problems, but our continuing reliance on these materials makes our participation in responsible actions critically important. As part of the problem, we must also be part of the solution. It will take time and effort. The International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative and the deserve our appreciation and continued support.

In 2005, Jacy Sousa planted for me 200 pernambuco trees in memory of my father who had just died. This seemed a fitting

tribute to my father, who so loved nature and music, and a permanent gift to the Atlantic Rainforest. My thanks to Jacy for making this possible.

#### Musicians, what can you do to take action?

- Care for your bows by keeping them well maintained to preserve precious resources.
- Do not purchase or sell disposable bows that are not worth the cost of repair. This is a horrible waste of resources!
- When purchasing a bow, ask the shop owner to demonstrate that the wood used was legally obtained. They may not know, but the questions can help to prompt action.
- Support shops that donate a percentage of repairs or sales to conservation.
- Support conservation by making a donation, and get informed by joining IPCI-USA ([www.ipci-usa.org](http://www.ipci-usa.org)) and following on Facebook and Instagram.
- Begin discussions with your colleagues. We need fresh thinking and solutions.

Let's work together for a future of verdant forests and beautiful music enjoyed all around the world!

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*Lynn is a bowmaker who studied with William Salchow in New York City, and with Bernard Millant in France as a Fulbright Scholar and Annette Kade Fellow. She is a member of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers, the Entente Internationale des Luthiers et Archetiers and the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative, IPCI-USA.*

