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The Ames Stradivarius violin was placed for viewing during a news conference in New York on Thursday.

By Matt Rocheleau

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Stradivarius violins have cachet among discerning musicians - The Boston Globe

GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 06, 2015

Many in the music world believe there are no finer-made, sweeter-sounding violins than the ones Italian craftsman Antonio Stradivari made before his death in 1737.

Case in point: A celebration was held Thursday to mark <u>the resurfacing of a Stradivarius violin</u> that went missing 35 years ago after renowned musician Roman Totenberg tucked it away in his office at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge. The instrument's estimated worth is \$5 million.

Enthusiasts marvel over the look and feel of Stradivarius violins as much as they do over their sound. And because so few exist — only several hundred instruments remain today — they have become highly valuable and coveted among the world's top musicians.

So, why are a bunch of 300-year-old instruments considered the best the world has ever seen?

It turns out, there's <u>no single agreed-upon answer to that</u> <u>question</u>. Over the years numerous explanations have been offered, including that Stradirvari used unique types of wood and other materials or that he simply had a yet-unmatched ability to



carve and assemble the instruments. Not to mention the belief that all violins get better the more they are played.

However, not everyone believes that Stradivarius violins are the best.

Some believe the ones made by his contemporary countrymate, Giuseppe Guarneri, who died in 1744, are equal to or better than Stradivari's, while others contend that modern violins are just as good if not a step above their predecessors.

In fact, several studies in recent years have challenged the long-held belief that old Italian violins are superior.

Just last year, researchers conducted <u>an experiment</u> that found that "first-rate soloists tend to prefer new instruments and are unable to distinguish old from new at better than chance levels."

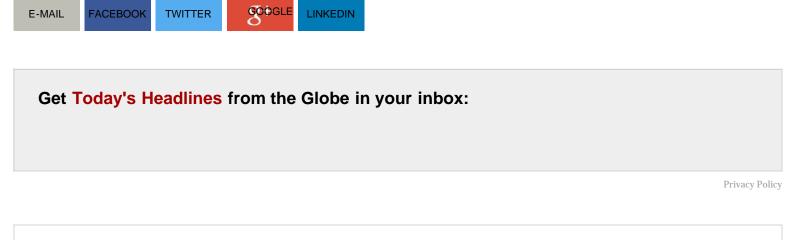
"On average, soloists rated their favorite new violins more highly than their favorite old for playability, articulation, and projection, and at least equal to old in terms of timbre," the researchers wrote. "Soloists failed to distinguish new from old at better than chance levels. These results confirm and extend those of the earlier study and present a striking challenge to near-canonical beliefs about old Italian violins."

Still, many Stradivarian disciples remain unswayed.

Frank Almond, concertmaster of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and a Stradivarius violin player, told The <u>New York Times</u> last year in response to the study's findings that the experiment did not account for the months it typically takes for a violinist to get used to playing a certain violin.

While longtime Juilliard String Quartet member Earl Carlyss told the Times: "I don't know any great soloist who has a Strad or Guarneri who is trading it in for a new instrument."

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