American Violins for America’s Library

A COLLECTION 50 YEARS IN THE MAKING

A Library of Congress Campaign to Acquire the David Bromberg American Violin Collection

“I can’t think of a more democratic instrument than the violin.”
- David Schoenbaum, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Iowa
Celebrating American History through American Violins and Their Makers

The Library of Congress, the nation’s first-established federal cultural institution and the world’s preeminent reservoir of knowledge, is embarking on a campaign to raise $1.7 million to acquire and make accessible the David Bromberg American Violin Collection. The Collection’s 263 American violins, crafted between 1848 and 1950 and carefully collected over 50 years by David Bromberg, will enhance the Library’s ability to illustrate American music and history through performances, historical documentation and interactive programming.

Acquiring the Bromberg Collection will allow the Library to establish a living collection - a resource that will inspire innovative projects in the performing arts, assist researchers, promote educational programming, and enable recording. Building on successful outreach projects, the Library proposes to establish a national instrument loan program that will enable some of the collection to be played by American violinists in symphony halls, music venues, music and conservatories across the country.

The American violins will enhance the Library’s world-renowned musical resources which include printed and manuscript scores, more than 1,800 flutes, six Stradivari...
“The Library of Congress has a clear commitment and vision to develop, shape and support a new center for the study of the violin, focusing on the mastery of the luthier’s art form within the American landscape.”

- Ken Burns

instruments, the papers of important classical and popular composers and musicians, vast holdings of sound and film recordings, images and photographs, and the world’s largest archive of ethnographic recordings and traditional culture documentation in its American Folklife Center. With the acquisition of the American violins, the Library will have unprecedented opportunities to make the instruments accessible to musicians, luthiers, students, scholars and music lovers across the nation and around the world.

When the instruments are not being played, they will be available to luthiers and scholars for research in the Library’s new state-of-the-art vault, which will house the violins at an ideal temperature and humidity in a secure environment. The Library will also display and make available selected violins in its Performing Arts Reading Room and make them available for performances in its renowned Coolidge Auditorium.

With the acquisition of the David Bromberg American Violin Collection, the multifaceted stories of American music, culture and people can be told and heard through this vibrant living collection.

The Library will use this opportunity to seek new, innovative partnerships and collaborations for programming, performance, research and outreach.
“Throughout my musical life I was always trying to capture the essence of the music of America. That my musical adventure has a home at the library of the American people is both humbling and a high honor.”

- David Bromberg

The David Bromberg American Violin Collection

Over the course of 50 years, iconic American musician David Bromberg has amassed a comprehensive collection of American violins. At 263 instruments, it is the world's largest and most important collection of American violins and represents the significant role of American luthiers in the broader story of international violin-making. The Collection reflects the history of the American violin’s European roots while documenting how American makers incorporated their individual and regional styles into the construction and tone of violins.

The Bromberg American Violin Collection includes sophisticated examples of instruments that show the influence of European luthiers and the standardizing of construction techniques. The instruments also reflect how American violin-making evolved to embrace emergent, homegrown regional musical styles such as Louisiana Cajun, New Orleans Dixieland, Mississippi blues, Chicago jazz, New York klezmer, Southwest Hispanic and New England dance music.

The violin has been ingrained in American musical culture since before the founding of the nation. Thomas Jefferson was an aficionado and devoted thousands of hours to the study of the violin. Today, the violin, or “fiddle,” is integral to many of America’s most important music genres and artistic traditions. Acquiring the Bromberg American Violin Collection will strengthen the Library's folk, popular, jazz, ethnic and classical music capabilities and complement the Library’s priceless 17th and 18th-century Cremona instruments by legendary luthiers Amati, Guarneri and Stradivari.
David Bromberg in his shop in Wilmington, Delaware

Photo Credit: The News Journal, Suchat Pederson
A Gifted Multi-instrumentalist

A gifted multi-instrumentalist with an intuitive understanding of American roots and music styles, along with a sly sense of humor, David Bromberg has earned a following for his many solo recordings and has served as a sideman and collaborator with some of the most respected artists in his field. Bromberg was born in Philadelphia on September 19, 1945, and spent most of his childhood in Tarrytown, New York. As a teenager, he was hooked on rock & roll and began exploring the blues, folk and country artists who informed early rock. When he was 13, Bromberg began learning the guitar and later, while studying musicology at Columbia University, he began playing in Greenwich Village folk clubs. He was soon lending his talents on guitar, dobro, mandolin and fiddle to albums by Bob Dylan, Carly Simon, the Eagles, Ringo Starr, Willie Nelson, Gordon Lightfoot, Bonnie Raitt, Doug Sahm and many others.

In 2015 David Bromberg donated papers pertaining to his 60 year musical career to the Library of Congress American Folklife Center. The collection, dating from his early stage days playing with such folk luminaries as Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger and Doc Watson, includes notes, letters, photographs, ephemera from shows (including posters and programs) and audio and video recordings documenting public and private performances.
50 Years in the Making

For 50 years, as David Bromberg traveled across America on tour, and with a discerning knowledge and eye, he visited violin shops in all corners of the continent looking for beautiful examples of the trade.

In the 1970s, band member Jay Ungar, whom David Bromberg called a “fiddle genius”, inspired him to buy his first — an American-made violin: 1920 Stephen Perry from Lowell Massachusetts. The purchase turned into a collection and today the Bromberg Collection has 263 violins.

Sparked by the purchase, Bromberg embarked on a new adventure. In 1980 Bromberg, taking a sabbatical from performing on the road, and his wife, sculptor Nancy Josephson, moved from California to Chicago to study at the Kenneth Warren School of Violin Making in Chicago. In the following years, Bromberg established a successful business building and repairing violins as well as dealing in quality instruments, and in 2002 he opened a shop in Wilmington, Delaware, simply called David Bromberg Fine Violins.

With both his performing and violin-making careers underway, Bromberg meanwhile was building a collection of fiddles, one at a time. His demands for excellence and his ongoing love of learning about the elemental aspects of a violin’s sound and structure fueled the burgeoning collection which now includes 263 violins made in America between 1848 and 1950.

“I decided, with no proof, that there were good American makers and I started collecting their instruments, and the collection proved itself. I was lucky that I happened, accidentally, to be right.”

- David Bromberg
The acquisition of the Bromberg American Violin Collection will form the basis of a “living collection” that will be used to engage, educate and inspire the next generation of musicians and entertain public audiences throughout the United States. The Library has a longstanding tradition of carefully monitored loan programs that make instruments available to talented musicians, and selected classical, popular and traditional music venues, as well as partnerships with outside research institutions.

Making selected violins accessible to individuals and venues will enrich communities and invigorate our musical heritage. For example, selected instruments could return to their “hometowns” to form the basis of special performances and homegrown programming.

At the Library, instrument makers and students will be able to convene to design and build new stringed instruments.

The Library even has the tools to build stringed instruments of the future. Thanks to the generosity of Philip Kass, the Library recently acquired the vintage tools, workbench and other mid-20th-century artifacts of the influential Boston violin maker Frank C. Ball, who was himself a student of the legendary 19th-century Massachusetts luthier O.H. Bryant.

The Library looks forward to presenting public programs that will allow the violins to be heard in performances and recordings. There will be opportunities for new works to be commissioned for the instruments and for the violins to be played at venues, including in the Library’s legendary Coolidge Auditorium where free world-class programs featuring chamber music, jazz, American musical theater, pop, country and folk music are regularly presented and recorded.

The new sounds and new stories enabled by this important collection will become part of one of the largest assemblages of musical Americana in the world.
263 violins made in America

24 STATES
104 CITIES
246 MAKERS
SPANNING 102 YEARS

LEGEND
Location
YEAR Maker
The Opportunity

Support America’s Musical Story

Your gift will secure a home at the Library of Congress for this irreplaceable collection of violins and preserve American history through the voices of the violins and their makers.

1943 image of Frank C. Bell standing by this workbench

INSPIRE

Inspire music lovers of all ages through discovery and exploration of the instruments in this one-of-a-kind collection.

Your gift gives future generations of young audiences and student artists access to world class instruments.
CELEBRATE

Celebrate the music and artistry of the American violin.

Preserve the history of violin-making in America.

Your gift ensures the ability to engage experts like luthier John Montgomery, pictured here as he inspects the Library's 1697 "Castelbarco" cello made by Cremonese master Antonio Stradivari.

Your gift will bring instrument players and makers together to further the study of American-made instruments and music. Pictured here are participants in a 2006 event with the public and experts in dialogue about the vital role of the violin in American cultural life.
We Need Your Support

The Library of Congress is seeking a visionary philanthropist and champion of America’s music to acquire the David Bromberg American Violin Collection and to create access to this unique resource. A gift to this endeavor will resonate for decades to come in the lives of musicians, luthiers, students, scholars and music lovers across the nation and throughout the world.

$1,700,000

$1.5 million
Funding to acquire the 263 American violins
Naming Opportunity

$200,000
American Violin Maintenance & Program Fund.
Naming opportunity

The Library also seeks partnerships to fund tailored opportunities that will allow the instruments to continue to define and enrich the American musical landscape.

ARTISTIC INSTRUMENT LOAN The Library intends to offer instruments from the Bromberg Collection to musicians and ensembles for performances and recording sessions the world over.

MASTER CLASSES As part of the artistic programming included in the support of the Bromberg Collection, the Library will present violin masters to up and coming musicians and instrument makers with invaluable master class experiences only available at the Library.

COMMISSIONS Continuing the Library’s more than 90 year tradition of commissioning new music from ground-breaking composers, the Bromberg Collection will serve as inspiration for music specifically written to be premiered at the Library on the instruments.

SEMINARS AND SYMPOSIA On topics ranging from violin performance to the influence of violin construction on American musical genres and regional styles, collection support includes the production of study seminars and symposia to continue and preserve the art of violin-making in America.

Recognition and Naming Opportunities
Contact

For further information or to discuss opportunities, please contact

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Music Collections

A 31 million-item Living Collection

The Library’s music collections include music and sound recordings, books, manuscripts, librettos, copyright deposits and musical instruments that, combined, constitute an unmatched resource for musical scholarship. The music collections encompass virtually all genres – classical, jazz, pop, theater, folk, gospel, blues, rock, country, Latin, world, dance and hip-hop. Original manuscripts of European masters such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms sit on the shelves next to those of American masters such as Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein. The Library is home to the largest sheet music collection in the world, dating from the earliest publishers in Europe and America to the present day.

Studies of popular music are bolstered by the vast collections of traditional music in the Library’s American Folklife Center, which is the world’s largest archive of ethnographic materials from the United States and around the world. The archive features millions of items of ethnographic and historical documentation from the 19th century to the present, including iconic recordings of legendary figures such as Muddy Waters, Woody Guthrie, The Seeger Family, and Zora Neal Hurston, as well as tens of thousands of hours of field recordings of diverse American folk and regional music traditions collected by hundreds of researchers including renowned fieldworkers Alan Lomax, Charles Seeger and Jean Ritchie.
Performing Arts at the Library

Live Performances Using the Collection as a Guide: Since 1925

The Library of Congress is unique among national libraries in that it seeks new and innovative ways to acquire, preserve and present the performing arts. The first music materials acquired by the Library include 13 volumes on music literature and theory from Thomas Jefferson’s personal library.

Holdings include Francis Scott Key’s handwritten text for “The Star-Spangled Banner,” the manuscript of John Philip Sousa’s “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” copyright deposits of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith and Woody Guthrie and the collections of violinists Fritz Kreisler, Jascha Heifetz, Roman Totenberg, Isaac Stern, Maud Powell and the Budapest String Quartet—who played the Library’s famed collection of Stradivari instruments.

The collections are enlivened by the Library’s musical instruments, including stringed instruments by the Cremonese masters Amati, Guarneri and Stradivari, harpsichords by Pleyel, instruments given by the King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand and the world’s largest collection of flutes. These materials attract scholars and performers from around the world and are heard on stage and in recordings.

The Library presents materials in the performing arts which are international in scope and which are at once the record of the past, the experience of the present, and the precursor of the future. Through a tradition of private philanthropy, the Library has presented a distinguished chamber music series for 90 years and it also commissions new works of music and dance to reach an even wider audience of artists, scholars and music lovers. In addition, the American Folklife Center’s popular Homegrown series regularly presents free concerts featuring the best of American folk, ethnic and regional musical traditions.
“Fiddling remains, in one form or another, one of the most vital folk music traditions in America today.”

- Alan Jabbour, Former Director, Library of Congress, American Folklife Center