

Stradivarius Fails Sound Test Versus Newbie Violins

Can you tell the difference between modern violins and antiques crafted by Italian masters? Don't feel too bad – expert players can't do it either. In a double-blind test, 21 experienced violinists were unable to tell the difference between rare, old instruments and new ones. The study is in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. [Claudia Fritz et al, [Player preferences among new and old violins](#)]

Researchers provided violinists with six high-quality instruments: three modern and three crafted by the legendary Stradivari or Guarneri in the 18th century – and worth a hundred times as much as the new ones.

To prevent bias, everyone who handled the violins did so without knowing which instrument was which, in a darkened room while wearing vision-modifying goggles. A dab of perfume under the chin-rests even masked the instruments' scents. After playing each violin, the subjects rated them and selected their favorite one.

When it came to instrument quality, the old and new violins earned similar scores, and fewer than half of the participants chose old violins as their favorites. Apparently, a violin by any other craftsman can sound as sweet.

—Sophie Bushwick

[The above text is a transcript of this podcast]

