

# Traveling with Stringed Instruments

It's summertime, and my thoughts go to all the folks traveling around the country and beyond with their stringed instruments.

In my 13 years at Hammond Ashley Violins, I have seen just about everything that can happen. I can say that, in my opinion, MUSICAL INSTRUMENT INSURANCE is a critical piece of the equation. No accident can be fully prevented, and having coverage means you can get your asset repaired or replaced if you do have an unfortunate accident. You can often schedule your instruments as a separate rider to homeowner or renter's insurance. Ask about the coverage and exclusions. Or, there are several professional musical instrument insurance options. You may email us at the shop for some recommendations.

## **Violins and Violas:**

If you fly with your instrument, you must be aware that your case is longer than most airlines will allow to carry onto the airplane. Many times they will allow this, but you must be prepared for them to ask you to check through special handling. I have found that you get much further in life with sugar, and being calm and polite is a much better tact for gaining exceptions from the airline attendants. Still, it may be impossible for you to carry your fiddle ont the airline. So, I recommend the following for preparing your violin:

Have a very strong, hard shell case with suspension inside. Place foam or a soft cloth on either side of the bridge to protect it and the violin in the event the bridge is knocked over. Slightly detune the violin, a whole tone or tone and a half, to relax the tension without dropping the soundpost. Then, identify the violin shops that will be at your destination. You may find some trouble, like the post has fallen, and you will need to know who can help you at your destination. Finally, if you are going to a drier climate than you have left, you should put a humidifier in the case. This can be as simple as a damp sponge, as long as it is not in contact with the instrument. Keep checking this daily and rewet as necessary. Leave the instrument in the case closed when you are not playing to keep up on the humidity. Oh, and the bow should not be too tight before you leave, especially if you are going to a dryer place. The hair will shrink and tighten the bow, sometimes a great deal that could damage the bow.

## **Cello:**

Cellos are too large to carry on as luggage. Some airlines will allow you to purchase a seat for the instrument, but you must check with the airline as you are booking the flight. If you check the luggage or ask for special handling, you must know that a typical hard cello case is insufficient to protect the cello. I have seen countless times when the cello

is damaged in the cargo hold in a strong hard case. To help, you should purchase or rent a flight cover for your case. Or, you should put it inside a box and provide padding around the case like bubble wrap. Please know that TSA must inspect the luggage, so you should pack in such a way that they can open and reclose the package easily. Kind instructions may help them repack properly, if they are willing. Or, you can ask to watch them, but they may not comply. Then, read the previous paragraph about violins and apply similar method to prepare the bridge and be ready for changes in humidity. And, Get Insurance Before your Flight outside the airlines! Cellos are the most susceptible to damage, so please get the instrument covered adequately for any event that could occur.

### **Double Bass:**

Basses are the most difficult to travel with. You may be able to rent a shipping case and check it as oversize baggage. However, many airlines are not accepting basses at all. Even more frustrating; the rules are so unclear that you may be allowed to check your bass on the telephone, only to find that upon arrival, they refuse your instrument! If you get permission on the telephone, make sure they input this into the database and give you a confirmation number so you can point this out to the airline attendants. In general, you must be extremely polite in dealing with the attendants and TSA. They are not required to take your bass, so if you are pushy, it is likely to hurt your chances of getting your way. There's a good website about this at [http://www.isbworldoffice.com/resources/flying\\_with\\_your\\_bass.html](http://www.isbworldoffice.com/resources/flying_with_your_bass.html)

Follow the instructions about flying with Cello to get some pointers, and about violins related to humidity. You may also email Hammond Ashley Violins to rent a case, or get advise. Also, many bass players have taken to renting a bass at their destination. This is touchy, because of availability and quality of instrument that you may encounter. Very few shops know how to set up a bass to be playable. There is a website with advise and referrals at <http://www.rentabass.com/>

### **Shipping:**

You may find that all this talk of flying and the risks involved turns your stomach. I know it does for me, and as a bass player I can say that I have never flown with a bass, even though I have helped hundreds of bass players do so successfully over the years. So, shipping is usually a good option for cost and security, but it does add time and handling on either side of the journey.

Violin through Cello can be shipped UPS or FedEx. They should be in a good, suspension hard case. Prepare them as advised in the section about flying with the violin related to preparing the bridge, tuning down, and humidity. Then, get a box that is at least 2 inches larger on all sides of the case. Place the instrument in the box and pad thoroughly with bubble wrap or packing foam. Leave absolutely no space in the box. Cellos are tough, because the box can only be slightly larger than the hard case for the shipper to accept. You can usually get a box at your local violin shop, as they import

instruments regularly. This may take some planning, because they often recycle the cardboard to keep the shop tidy. Also, they may have an account with a shipper and be able to ship the box for you on their account.

Basses should be in a shipping container and must be shipped by truck freight. This can get very expensive. You will most likely have to contact a shop that deals in basses, as they will have the resources to help you ship a bass. For a list of shops, visit <http://www.isbworldoffice.com/>

I hope you find this information useful. I am more than happy to help advise your journey if you email to the shop at [www.hammondashley.com](http://www.hammondashley.com)