

Passports for 'endangered' musical instruments

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The keys of a Bechstein piano at their store in Berlin on June 9, 2010. From pianos with ivory keys to violin bows crafted with tortoise shell, musical instruments made from protected species will soon be able to roam the globe more easily—with their own passports.

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The 178-member Convention on [International Trade](#) in [Endangered Species](#) (CITES) agreed on Wednesday to create a system of certificates for such instruments, which currently need a new permit each time they travel.

"This is monumental because it facilitates movement of musicians, particularly orchestras. Think about all the paperwork that is going to be saved," said Bryan Arroyo, head of the US delegation, which proposed the move.

"It is a great victory," he told AFP.

The multi-entry passports will be valid for three years for non-commercial movements.

In the case of species whose international trade is completely banned, they will only be available for instruments made before the protection took effect.

Kazuko Shiomi, president of Japan's Nippon Music Foundation, said the move would end a major headache for international musicians who borrow its priceless [Stradivarius](#) for their performances.

"They travel extensively for concerts throughout the world very frequently with a very tight schedule," she said.

The time-consuming paperwork and risk of seizure linked to moving such instruments around the world has in the past prompted drastic measures, such as removing ivory keys from pianos, according to one British removal expert specialising in antique pianos.

"No one wants to harm [elephants](#) but it seems a little ridiculous to have to apply for a CITES (permit) for a 120-year old piano," he told AFP,

asking not to be named.

The US National Association of Music Merchants has welcomed the passport scheme as "a good first step" towards making it easier for [musical instruments](#) to cross borders.

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