Evaluating Violin Quality: How Consistent are Skilled Players?

Charalampos Saitis¹, Gary Scavone¹, Claudia Fritz², Bruno L. Giordano³

¹Computational Acoust. Modeling Lab., Ctr. for Interdisciplinary Res. in Music Media and Technol., Schulich School of Music, McGill Univ., 555 Sherbrooke St. West, Montreal, PQ H3A 1E3, Canada, harry@music.mcgill.ca.

²Université Pierre et Marie Curie, Institut Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, UMR CNRS 7190, 75005 Paris, France,

³McGill Univ., Montreal, PQ H3A 1E3, Canada

A perceptual experiment was designed to investigate how consistent violinists are at evaluating violin quality. The objective was to examine both intra- and inter-subject consistency across a certain range of violins. Skilled classical violinists were asked to play a set of different violins, evaluate their quality, and order them by preference. Violins of different periods were used, varying from student to performance level. Low light conditions and dark sunglasses were used to hide the identity of the instruments as much as possible. Considering the bow as an extension of the player, violinists carried out the task using their own bow. Upon completing the task, participants had to comment on the ranking process and provide rationale for their choices. Preliminary results from a pilot study indicate that both intra- and inter-subject consistency are high when violinists are presented a small group of instruments that are fairly distinct from one another. Results of a more in-depth study (with more instruments, some very similar to one another) will be presented at the conference.