First violins imitated human voices: study

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Music historians have long suspected that the inventors of the violin wanted to imitate the human voice, and a study shows how 16th to 18th century luthiers in Italy did it.

Researchers at National Taiwan University asked a professional violinist to play 15 antique instruments, including one from 1570 by Andrea Amati.

First, researchers recorded scales on the 15 antique instruments played by a violinist. Then, they recorded the voices of eight men and eight women, ranging in age from 16 to 30 years, who sang common English vowels. Performing a thorough acoustic analysis, they found that an Amati violin and a Gasparo da Salo violin mimicked the basses and baritones of male singers, “raising the possibility that violin makers from this period may have designed violins to emulate male voices,” said the report.