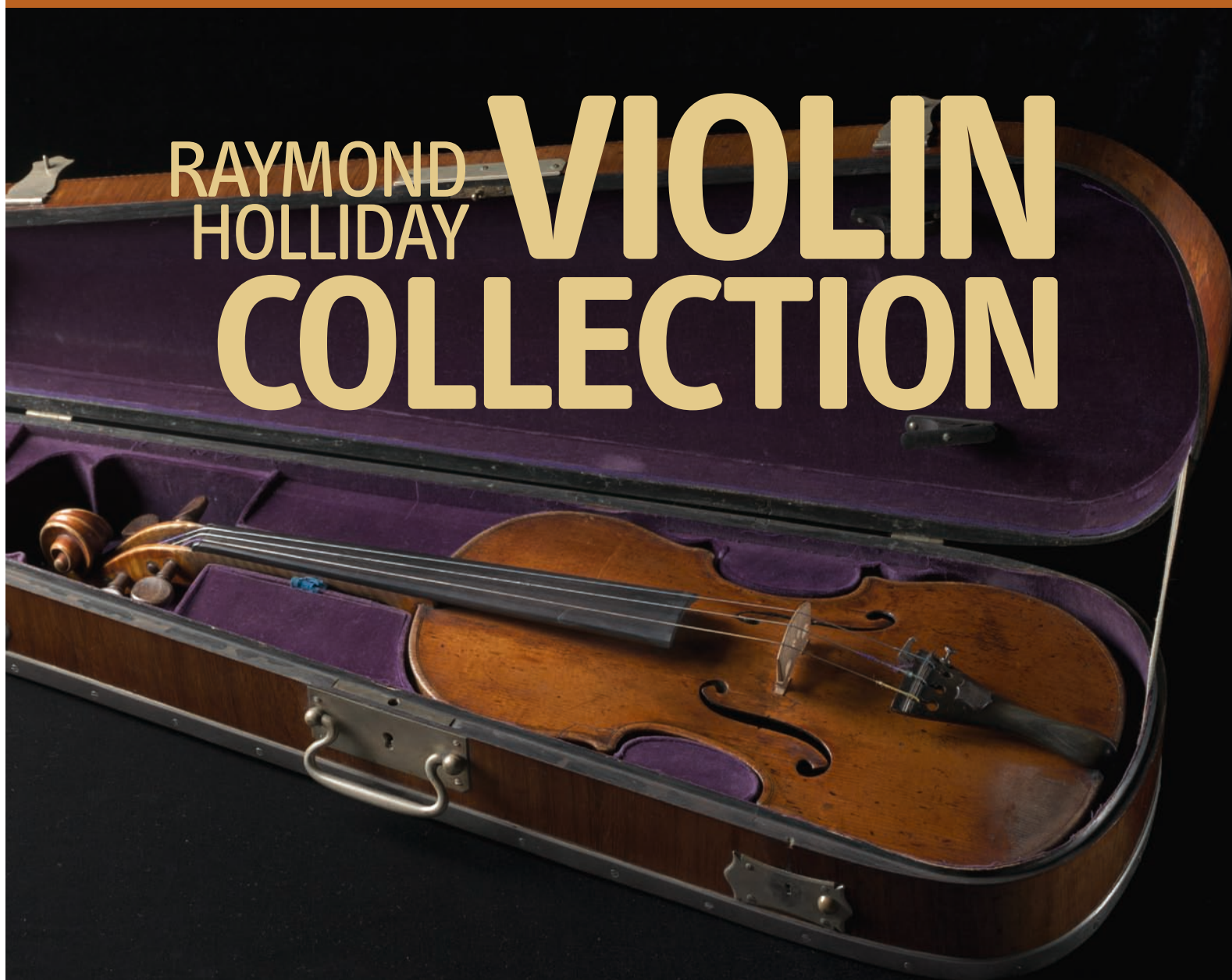




RAYMOND  
HOLLIDAY

# VIOLIN COLLECTION



## AT A GLANCE

- An extensive collection of instruments made by Australian luthiers
- Represents important developments and innovations in the Australian violin-making tradition
- Insight into the other lives of Australian instrument makers

## A MUSICAL PASSION

This violin collection was compiled by Raymond Arthur Holliday (1917–2003) who, after a 40-year career as an industrial chemist, became a highly prominent flute maker with national and international clients. He was devoted to music throughout his life and the violin was his particular passion – as a performer in his earlier years and later as a collector and advocate. As one observer noted, ‘his emphasis changed, through the years, from playing the instrument to being fiercely proud of Australian violins, made by Australians from Australian timbers’. The collection comprises 64 violins, two viola, four violin bows and 23 music cases. It also includes significant documentation detailing information about Australian violin makers, and a selection of material representing Raymond Holliday’s flute-making business, along with a display case demonstrating flute head-making.

Raymond Holliday devoted his life to collecting violins by Australian makers and was planning to publish a book about Australian violin makers. His family has provided a copy of ‘Australian Makers of Violins, Violas, Cellos and Bows’ compiled by Raymond Holliday (1998). While this document includes some provenance information about selected violins in his collection, its primary value is the compilation of original research detailing Australia’s violin makers. Through his collecting activities Raymond Holliday was asking: who are the people making violins and experimenting with Australian timbers? Are they professionals or hobbyists? Why are they making and how do they learn?

## FROM CAMPFIRE FIDDLES TO VIRTUOSI

Music had long been a staple entertainment for Australia’s colonial settlers, beginning with the fife and drum of the soldiers to the campfire fiddles and bagpipes. The lure of gold brought many immigrants to Australia in the 1850s: the rapid rise in prosperity also attracted people with skills other than mining, who could provide services and luxury goods for the flourishing new society. The demand for instruments proved to be a lucrative market for instrument makers and repairers.

Australia’s musical instrument makers have included internationally renowned luthiers, devoted hobbyists with an eye for invention, and ordinary people who love to tinker, play and listen. One of the unique aspects of the Australian tradition is the impact of the fusion between the natural environment (and raw materials) with imported traditions. John Devereux (1810–1883) is considered by many to be Australia’s first and most significant violin maker of the second half of the 19th century. His work has a distinctive oversized style, giving his instruments ‘a deeper and more sonorous tone’, and he is noted for (sometimes) experimenting with Australian timbers. Arthur Edward Smith (1880–1978) is widely regarded as the ‘father’ of Australian violin-making, even though his work is preceded by several key makers including John Devereux. Although he favoured traditional European timbers

and methods, Smith created a training ground for many Australian violin makers, several of whom are represented in the Raymond Holliday collection, such as Charles Clarke, Lloyd Adams and Herbert Sampson, along with examples by Devereux and Smith himself.

## UNLIKELY MUSICAL LIVES

Some instruments in the collection are windows into the broader lives of Australians and their participation in social and historical events. The Mervyn Vaisey 1943 violin is undoubtedly unique in its ability to tell the story of the life of a soldier during the Second World War. He made his violin while stationed in New Guinea, from furniture off a sunken cargo ship. Self-taught maker William Auchterlonie’s main desire was to better educate his children, and as a music-lover, he made his first violin for his children so they could commence music lessons. Although he continued working as a coalminer, he went on to make 53 violins and several bows.

Vaisey and Auchterlonie are also examples of another interesting aspect of the collection, that is, the unorthodox beginnings of fine instrument making in Australia. Some unlikely examples include Carl Alsaker, born in Norway. He worked as a seaman and, after jumping ship in Sydney, worked as a master of colliers plying the coast of Australia while making violins as a hobby. Other professions include a

university science lecturer, a grazier and racehorse breeder, an accountant, an architect and a farmer. Examples of a more obvious link with instrument making are Henry Lykke (b.1882), Gerard W Paszek (b.1888, Poland) and Gordon T Triffett (1895 Glasgow–1983 Tasmania), who all worked as fine furniture makers and/or finishers. As a timber getter at Turramalong, NSW, Ezekiel J Waters (1860–1936) was also inspired to take up violin-making using local timbers. In this regard, the collection reflects the value of music in everyday life and the determination to innovate, experiment and create.

The Raymond Holliday violin collection is a significant addition to the Museum’s other instrument collections, particularly the EV Llewellyn collection which includes a quartet of instruments by AE Smith. The collection also complements the Powerhouse Museum’s collecting program. This tends to focus on the well-known makers demonstrating technical excellence, whereas the Raymond Holliday collection has been made from a social history perspective. Together they create an important distributed historical research collection documenting a variety of makers, and record important developments and innovations in the Australian violin-making tradition.

I would like to acknowledge the research by Amanda J Reynolds in regard to this collection, and her unpublished paper ‘The Music Makers: A creative vision for the National Museum of Australia’.

## Sharon Goddard Australian Society and Culture

Photos: Lannon Harley, National Museum of Australia

From top left: Violin made by John Devereux, Violin made by Mervyn Vaisey, 1943, Viola made by William Holliday, 1963, Violin made by William Auchterlonie, 1939, Violin made by John Devereux - inside its case.