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Rare Stradivarius sells for near-record \$15.3 million

A rare Stradivarius violin that belonged to a Russian-American virtuoso and was used in the "Wizard of Oz" soundtrack sold at auction in New York Thursday for \$15.3 million, just below the record for such an instrument, according to auction house Tarisio. The violin, made in 1714 by mas-

Einstein. "This violin has set side by side with the great mathematician scientist as they played quartets in Albert's home in Princeton, New Jersey," said Jason Price, founder of Tarisio, which specializes in stringed instruments. Seidel, who immigrated to the United States in the 1930s, and Einstein, who fled the Nazi regime in Europe, participated in a New York concert in 1933 in support of fleeing German Jewish scientists. Of the thousands of instruments made by Stradivari, there are still around 600 known today.

"Of those, many are in museums, many are in foundations and are in situations where they won't be sold," Price said. "There's a select few which are known as the Golden Period examples, which is approximately between 1710 and 1720," he said. "And these, for the most part, are those which are most desired and most highly valued." The violin had previously belonged to the Munetsugu collection in Japan. Tarisio did not reveal who the buyer was.

The record for a Stradivarius at auction was set in 2011, when a violin baptized "Lady Blunt," said to have belonged to Lady Anne Blunt, granddaughter of the poet Lord Byron, was sold for \$15.9 million. In 2014, another Stradivarius whose auction price was set at a minimum of \$45 million did not sell. — AFP



This photograph courtesy of Tarisio shows the "da Vinci, Ex-Seidel" Stradivarius violin. — AFP

ter craftsman Antonio Stradivari, belonged to virtuoso Toscha Seidel, who not only used it on the score for the 1939 Hollywood classic, but also no doubt while teaching his famous student Albert



In this file photo Canadian singer-songwriter Justin Bieber arrives for the 64th Annual Grammy Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. — AFP photos



In this file photo Canadian singer Justin Bieber arrives for YouTube Originals' "Justin Bieber: Seasons" premiere at the Regency Bruin Theatre in Los Angeles.

Justin Bieber says suffering from facial paralysis

Justin Bieber on Friday told fans in a video posted to Instagram that he's been diagnosed with Ramsay Hunt Syndrome, which is causing him partial facial paralysis. The 28-year-old pop singer recently announced he was pausing his Justice World Tour due to illness, hours before his first slated concert in Toronto.

Ramsay Hunt Syndrome is a complication of shingles that occurs when an outbreak impacts the facial nerve near one ear. In addition to facial paralysis, it can cause hearing loss. "As you can see, this eye is not blinking, I can't smile on this side of my face, this nostril will not move," Bieber explained in a video.

"So, there's full paralysis on this side of my face. So for those who are frustrated by my cancellations of the next shows, I'm just physically, obviously, not capable of doing them. This is pretty serious, as you can see." The "Peaches" singer said he was doing facial exercises and taking time to "rest and relax and get back to 100 percent so I can do what I was born to do." He did not give an estimated timeline for his recovery. It's the third instance Bieber's tour has been postponed, the first two due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Bob Marley brings common cause at Americas summit

Bob Marley famously sang "Africa Unite" but on Friday he was bringing unity to an Americas summit that was marked by disputes. Taking the podium at the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados quoted the late reggae legend as she said, "There is so much trouble in the world." Mottley explained that she was not "an apostle of Bob" but shared his message of action.



Bob Marley

"He reminds us of the day-to-day reality of our people and of our citizens," she said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was chairing the session and is known for his love of music, replied with an impromptu medley of Marley lyrics. "In the words of Bob, no woman, no cry," Blinken said with a smile. "Don't shed no tears. Let's act. We can sing a redemption song together."

Marley sang frequently of political unity and is credited by some with helping quell a low-level civil war in his native Jamaica through his 1978 "One Love Peace" concert. The Summit of the Americas was led by US President Joe Biden who has sought greater economic ties and cooperation on migration. But he also faced open criticism and a boycott from Mexico's president over his refusal to invite the leftist leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela on the grounds that they are authoritarian. — AFP

'Most significant' shipwreck since Mary Rose found off UK coast

A British warship that sank in 1682 while carrying a future king has been located off eastern England, in a find described as the "most significant historic maritime discovery since the raising of the Mary Rose in 1982". The announcement follows 15 years of secret verification work due to the need to protect the wreck.

The Gloucester had lain half-buried on the seabed undetected until brothers Julian and Lincoln Barnwell and friend James Little discovered it in 2007 after a four-year search of the Norfolk coastline. The Royal Navy vessel was carrying the future King of England, James Stuart—then the Duke of York—when it ran aground on a sandbank on May 6, 1682.

It sank following a dispute between the future King James II of England, a former Lord High Admiral, and the pilot for control over the ship's course as it navigated the treacherous Norfolk sandbanks. University of East Anglia maritime history expert Claire Jowitt noted that the age and prestige of the ship, the condition of the wreck, the finds already rescued, and the accident's political con-



text all contributed to the importance of the find. "The discovery promises to fundamentally change understanding of 17th-century social, maritime and political history."

Hundreds of the crew and passengers perished, but Stuart barely survived, having delayed abandoning ship until the last minute. "Because of the cir-

cumstances of its sinking, this can be claimed as the single most significant historic maritime discovery since the raising of the Mary Rose in 1982," Jowitt added.

The Mary Rose, one of Henry VIII's warships which sank in 1545, was salvaged in 1982 in a feat of maritime archaeology that provided a wealth of

detail about life in Tudor times. Following years of painstaking work, it was finally raised 40 years ago in a spectacular operation watched live by millions on television. Around a third of the wooden warship, which was almost completely buried under the sea bed, had survived, the exposed parts having eroded away.

Wooden gun carriages, cooking pots, scalpels, leather book covers, syringes, fiddles, whistles, weapons, navigation devices and furniture were all among the items retrieved from the Mary Rose providing historians with the largest ever collection of genuine Tudor artefacts. "The Gloucester represents an important 'almost' moment in British political history: a royal shipwreck causing the very near-death of the Catholic heir to the Protestant throne at a time of great political and religious tension," the university added. An exhibition is planned for 2023 at Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery which will feature objects found in the wreck, including the bell that helped identify the ship. — AFP

Prosecutor seeks jail terms over Banksy work theft from Paris attack site

French prosecutors on Friday sought prison terms for eight men accused of stealing a Banksy artwork painted on the door of the Bataclan concert venue in Paris to honor 90 people killed in the 2015 terror attacks. The seven French defendants and one Italian are suspected of removing the metal door from the building before dawn in January 2019 and transporting it to Italy. It was decorated in 2018 with the stencil of a mournful young woman by the anonymous British street artist, giving it an estimated value of up to one million euros (\$1.1 million).

Prosecutor Valerie Cadignan told the court Friday that the three men who had confessed to the theft should be given three or four years. She said the suspected mastermind of the heist, Mehdi Meftah, should be sentenced to three years in prison with an additional three-year suspended sentence, and fined 150,000 euros. The prosecutor recom-

mended 18-month prison sentences or more for the others.

"The theft of the door sparked much emotion and great disruption of public order," the prosecutor told the court. She acknowledged that the perpetrators had not sought to debase the memory of the attack victims, but "being aware of the priceless value of the door were looking to make a profit". She said the thieves "acted like vultures, like people who steal objects without any respect for what they might represent".

A white van with concealed numberplates was seen stopping on January 26 in an alleyway running alongside the Bataclan in central Paris. Many concertgoers fled via the same alley when the Bataclan became the focal point of France's worst ever attacks since World War II, as Islamic State group jihadists in November 2015 killed 130 people at a string of sites across the capital. — AFP



In this file photo a policeman stands guard near a piece of art attributed to Banksy, that was stolen at the Bataclan in Paris in 2019, and found in Italy, ahead of a press conference in L'Aquila. — AFP



Slovenia museum cancels exhibition over alleged fakes

An exhibition in Slovenia claiming to feature works by Picasso, Van Gogh and Matisse was abruptly cancelled this week over fears some works were forged, prompting a police probe on Friday. The National Museum in Slovenia planned to officially open the show on Wednesday this week, entitled "Travels" and featuring 160 paintings owned by the little-known Boljkovac family.

But hours before planned opening, museum director Pavel Car said the show was cancelled after several art experts warned that, having seen the exhibition catalogue, they believed the

works were most likely fakes. "These are clear forgeries... you don't need to be an art history expert to notice it," Slovenian art expert Brane Kovic told news website N1.

The show promised works by Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Matisse and Marc Chagall, apparently owned by the Boljkovac family. But Kovic said it was highly unlikely that so many masterpieces were among a private collection in Slovenia. The Boljkovac family has so far not commented. Ljubljana police said Friday they had launched an investigation into the incident, "with the collaboration of pertinent institutions".

Car insisted he personally had seen the paintings' authenticity certificates, but nonetheless resigned Thursday, admitting he had been "naive" about the works. The museum's website removed all references to the cancelled exhibition on Friday. — AFP



A speaking garbage can is seen at the David Hall bridge in Malmö, Sweden. — AFP

Seductive rubbish: Swedish dustbins scream with pleasure

"Aaah that was really good", "come back soon and do it again" and "Mmmm, thank you". It's not what you think. They are audio messages broadcast by rubbish bins in the southern Swedish city of Malmö, where authorities recently changed the voice from a man's to that of a sensual female, hoping it would be more soothing. Previously the voice thanking people for disposing their garbage was a male, barking out no-nonsense messages from the public bins.

But in a bid to make the experience of throwing out garbage more pleasant, the voice is now a husky timbre delivering double entendres. It's part of an awareness campaign in the city to clean up public spaces by discouraging littering. Located near the main shopping street on the David Hall bridge, the dustbins were installed a few years ago in Sweden's third largest city. A detector triggers the messages every time someone opens a dustbin. — AFP