

Weather Protection

Humidity and Temperature

Low humidity is very dangerous for theorbos, being the prime cause of soundboard cracks. Humidity levels of around 50-55% are ideal; if the humidity levels are lower than this your instrument is at risk of cracking. To measure humidity you need a hygrometer. Top-end music shops, especially violin dealers, usually sell high quality ones, but you can also buy basic but functional hygrometers from garden centres for a fraction of the price. Humidity levels in the home can be boosted by various types of humidifier, ranging from electric gadgets which steam gently, to simple water reservoirs hung on radiators, the contents of which gradually evaporate into the atmosphere. Wet towels hung on radiators will do the same job, though less elegantly. In emergencies, a wet flannel placed in an open plastic bag, inside the theorbo's case (but NOT touching the instrument) will humidify the instrument fairly effectively. Commercial humidifiers intended to be placed inside an instrument are inherently unsuitable for lute-family instruments because there is no access hole comparable to the guitar's soundhole or the cello's f holes. I have recently started using Oasis case humidifiers, and have found them effective, even for large instruments. They clip into my Kingham cases without a problem.

High humidity is more of a nuisance (because of its adverse effects on tuning) than a danger to the instrument. There is also very little one can do about it except keep the instrument in its case with the lid closed whenever possible. If you live in a very humid climate, installing dehumidifying equipment is an option, though an expensive one.

Extremes of temperature are chiefly dangerous because they are inextricably linked to humidity. Warm air can hold more moisture than cold air, so the driest time of year in many climates is also the coldest. Otherwise your theorbo is unlikely to be damaged by cold, and a little commonsense will protect it from the worst effects of direct heat. Don't leave your theorbo exposed to direct sun (and remember that sunny and shady areas change in the course of the day). If you are driving long distances with your theorbo on a sunny day, putting the case soundboard-side down in the car and covering the whole case with a light-coloured cloth can effectively shield it from the worst effects of the sun. A light-coloured case will also keep the instrument much cooler than the standard black case, which can absorb a tremendous amount of heat on a sunny day.

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