

The X Note



There is a note that all viola players are taught to avoid. It's called the X Note. It isn't the highest note in the instrument's repertoire, though it is nearby. Violins and altered ocarinas can play the note with no ill effect, but not the viola. Composers who write X Notes into their works are chastised by violists who know what will happen if it's played. Musicologists call it "harmonic disintegration," and shudder when they say it. Officer Dinklaker here points to the tragic result of a novice violist who played the note. "He'd been warned," Dinklaker says, "but he went ahead and played it anyway."