

Purchasing an Instrument

Purchasing an instrument is an exciting and big decision. This will be a gift your student may have and use for the rest of their life or it may be a beginning instrument that will lead to higher quality purchases in the future. Whether you decide to invest a little or quite a bit more in your student's instrument, please consider the following important information below.

Although there are inexpensive string instruments available, many of them are of poor quality; require many expensive repairs, and may not be returnable. Poor quality instruments make it very challenging to produce a decent tone or sound. It can also be very hard for students to play in tune on poor quality instruments. The orchestra directors, or your child's private teacher, can help you find quality instruments available through various area stores and online shops.

Here are two online music stores that carry decent and fairly inexpensive starter instruments: www.sharmusic.com www.swstrings.com

Here is a list of some reputable string instrument shops in the area:

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| Austin's Violin Shop | www.austinsviolinshop.com |
| Michael Becker Fine Violins (higher price ranges) | www.beckerviolins.com |
| Sapp Violins Shop | www.sappviolins.com |
| Kenneth Stein Violins | www.steinvilins.com |
| Quinlan and Fabish Music Company | www.qandf.com |
| Kagan and Gaines Music Company | www.kaganandgaines.com |

Tips to Buying a Better Instrument from a String Instrument Shop

1. Set aside time - Determine a price range

Discuss with your child's teacher what level of instrument they would like to see your child playing. The teacher knows what progress your child is making and how the present instrument may be holding him or her back. They also can gauge future needs. The teacher may also be aware of price vs. value and be able to give guidance as to what price range of instrument you should be considering for purchase.

Visit several reputable string instrument dealers (violin shops, music stores, etc.). It is wise to visit more than one shop during this process.

2. Plan ahead - Make an appointment to go in and play several instruments.

Have a price range in mind when you call to make an appointment to see instruments. This will allow the shop you are dealing with to pull instruments in that range ready for you to consider. If you don't want to spend more than a certain dollar amount make sure to tell this to the seller. For the education of your ear or for your curiosity, you may want to ask to hear instruments in the next range up or down. Please have your student play on different instruments and narrow it down to their favorite two or three choices.

3. Determine the shop's policies for trying instruments - take your top two or three choices home for a week.

Most instrument shops will let you have two or three instruments at a time for you to take home and play before making a final purchase decision. Before purchasing an instrument please have your child's private teacher or orchestra teacher play the instrument (or instruments that you are choosing between) to evaluate the quality and condition. The quality

of the instrument greatly affects the sound that your student will be able to produce and also the ease of playing the instrument. Ask the shop if they have a "trial policy", i.e. if you really like an instrument, can you take it out of the shop for a set length of time to show it to your teacher, play it in orchestra or a concert hall?

4. Trade-in policy

Ask about the trade-in policy of the shop. If in the future your child needs a better quality instrument or a larger size, what value will your present purchase be given in a trade situation? Also try to determine what selection the shop has available in the range or size that might be the next step-up if trading is important to you.

Buying an instrument is not like buying a pair of shoes. You don't make your purchase, use it until it wears out and then get a new one. Fine stringed instruments are designed to last hundreds of years and, in a sense, you are just a custodian of that instrument for a number of years. It is in your best interest if the seller offers 100% trade in value. In that way the seller will have an interest in the upkeep of your instrument and will keep you advised of whatever is necessary to maintain its value.

5. Purchase good value

Buy an instrument from a reputable string shop who has something at stake in being honest and providing good value. Value of fine instruments is based on four things: origin, quality of craftsmanship, condition and sound. Unfortunately, there is no Blue Book or Consumer's Report for instrument values.

6. Include your teacher in the process

Your teacher wants your child to do his or her best, not only technically - in learning the instrument - but also in being able to musically express him or herself. Having the right tools, i.e. instrument and bow, is crucial to this process. The wrong instrument may result in frustration and lack of motivation. Most teachers will give guidance in this process of choosing an instrument, as having an appropriate instrument and bow plays an important part in their success.

7. The bow

A bow makes a big difference in the way a stringed instrument sounds and responds. Once you've decided on an instrument, play through bows to find the one that sounds the best on the instrument and responds the best for the player. Carbon Fiber bows might be a better option for students at this age level compared to wooden bows. Wooden bows are more fragile, easily damaged and prone to warping of the stick.

**** Instruments purchased at a fine string instrument shop will be sold separately from the bow and the case. Since the instrument, bow, and case are separate considerations price-wise, they should be dealt with in that manner, to obtain the best package.**

Things to avoid when purchasing a string instrument:

Please avoid buying a low price instrument off of the internet unless you have the option to return it after your teacher has had a chance to play the instrument and check its quality. The internet is loaded with low cost, low quality instruments that are hard or even impossible for teachers to play, let alone a beginning string student.

DON'T buy the cheapest instrument you can find. With string instruments, you often get what you pay for.

DON'T buy an instrument without having your child play on it.

A Few Words about Purchasing from Non - Music (non-string websites) and Buyer's Club Instruments

During the back to school season and Christmas season string instruments amongst other instruments begin to appear on many non instrument websites, at discount stores and buyer's clubs. They are nicely displayed and most come in retail boxes with pictures on the boxes that make the instruments look great. They are not. These are the lowest grade of string instruments one can find and are sold as commodities. These should be avoided regardless of how much of a bargain they appear to be. When you purchase one of these you are getting an unplayable instrument as the bridges are not properly fitted, the fingerboard is usually not properly shaped, the pegs usually are not fitted correctly so the instrument will not stay in tune, in addition to the strings being of a very low quality and having a twangy sound rather than a pleasing mellow singing tone and the list can go on and on.. They are sprayed with a very thick coating of lacquer which makes them very glossy but highly non-resonant so good tone production is not possible even if set up properly. You can purchase one of these instruments from about \$80 to \$100 (violin.) The cost to make it playable would certainly exceed that. An instrument of this type is more of a discouragement than one which will allow a young student to advance.