

10 Things To Consider Before Buying A Violin

Getting a good quality instrument that will help you progress in your playing is a big decision for any player. The following is a brief overview of some aspects which, amongst others, you might like to consider before making a decision.



Before you begin...

1. Clarify what you want

- Write down in words the sound you are after (dark, rich, focussed, bright, warm etc).
- Play a few different instruments first (friends, colleagues, teachers) to get used to different instruments.
- Get someone else to play your instrument to you.

2. Be prepared

- Ensure you have a familiar bow to play on all instruments.
- Prepare to play the instruments to a variety of people, in a variety of venues.

What to look for when trying out instruments...

3. Sound

Think about the following things:

- How quick/well does the instrument respond?
- Does the instrument resonate well?
- Can you play loud and soft?
- How interesting is the the sound of the instrument?
- Does the instrument 'speak' from the G string up to the E string?
- Does the instrument project well in a variety of different settings?

4. Appearance

Does the instrument instantly appeal to you in...

- **Varnish** - there are generally three main types of varnish - clean finish, shaded finish, antiqued finish.
- **Model** - some models are slightly smaller than others (eg some Guarneris models) which can be to your advantage if you have shorter arms or smaller hands.
- **Wood** - some wood is plain, some more 'flamed'. Whilst you may like one above the other, the pattern of the wood is not an indication of a better sound. Some people also seem to think that one-piece backs equal a superior sound, but this is not the case.
- **Fittings** - these are generally made from ebony, rosewood or boxwood. Boxwood is nice and light which helps reduce the overall weight. Ebony, when well fitted is a stable choice. Think about which you prefer.

- **Workmanship** - the instrument should look organic and flowing. Nothing should stand out uncomfortably.
- **Age** - new instruments should be in perfect condition, but old instruments may have 'issues', such as cracks or loose fittings that will need to be looked at to ensure the playability is not impaired.

5. General Feel of Instrument

The set-up of an instrument is absolutely crucial to its sound and playability. The following are a few aspects to consider:

Are the pegs easy to adjust?

Is the string spacing good - can you play each individually without touching any others?

Is it comfortable to play at the top nut and at the bridge?

Does the neck feel comfortable - not too thick or thin?

Does the fingerboard feel secure and comfortable to play on?

6. Specifications

Good violins are built and set up to certain measurements. It may be a good idea to take an instrument you are considering buying to a reputable violinmaker/restorer to seek their opinion on the workmanship of the instrument - ideally someone not in direct competition to avoid a conflict of interest and bias.

7. Value of Purchase

Many players think that 'old' always means 'better', but this myth is becoming more and more exposed, and many of today's top players play on good modern instruments. Consequently the value of fine modern instruments is increasing.

8. Service/Adjustment

New instruments benefit from check-ups, especially in the first year, so it is valuable find out whether the violinmaker or shop is able and willing to service the instrument so it sounds at its best.

9. General reputation of the violinmaker

It is a good idea to find out about the violinmaker's training, work, where their instruments have sold in the past and read other clients' testimonials. Many violinmakers will have a website where you can research these things.

10. Seek second opinions

Seek the opinion of teachers and other players.



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