## *Is it Really a Violin? Or Is it Only a VSO?*

*(a "Violin-Shaped Object")*

## A Parents' Check List

We're very excited that your child is considering joining his school string program! And we want to be sure he has the best possible chance to succeed in strings. Unfortunately, we have recently seen young people attempt to learn to play on instruments that are of such inferior quality that the children cannot possibly learn.

Bargain hunters are finding inexpensive instruments on the Internet, in discount stores, and in some catalogs. Sadly, these instruments are ***not*** bargains. While the price may *look* right, the "real" cost of this instrument may be in costly repairs, poor durability, poor tone, or worst of all, a student who is not able to succeed in string class.

We want to help you be able to distinguish a "real" violin from a "VSO," a violin-shaped object that looks like a violin. A violin will give your child many years of fun and enjoyment, while a VSO may only lead to student and teacher frustration, wasted family expense, and worst of all, a student who has lost an opportunity to become a lifelong music maker. Here is a very simple checklist you can use to determine whether the instrument you want to buy is a "real" violin, or a VSO:

**1. The Pegs – provide easy, stable tuning.**

Do the pegs work smoothly? Hold properly? ❒

Look for 360° contact on all pegs at both points of contact with the instrument. ❒

**2. The Nut – provides for proper placement of the strings.**

The nut should be the height of a business card off the fingerboard. ❒

Is there string damage at the nut? ❒

**3. The Neck and Fingerboard – provide a durable playing surface, buzz-free sound.**

Lightly pull up on bottom of fingerboard – is it loose? ❒

Look down the fingerboard: are both sides evenly spaced between the f-holes? ❒

Measure from the nut to the bridge – is it 325 – 327mm?** ❒

The fingerboard should have a scoop, but only a very little; and should not be wavy. ❒

*If you hold a string down just below the nut & at the end it should make noise when tapped.*

***A music dealer who sells string instruments should have what's called a Mensur tool that you can use to measure different parts of a violin.*

**4. The Bridge – provides for proper string height and spacing.**

Is the bridge positioned between the nicks of the f-holes? ❒

Is the back of the bridge perpendicular to the top of the instrument? ❒

*Correctly positioned, the feet of the bridge will be flush with the top.*

Are the grooves in the bridge too deep, so that they cause string damage? ❒

Is there a protector on the e-string at the bridge? ❒

*If someone tunes your violin or changes a string for you, make sure he or she checks the bridge afterwards!*

**5. The <u>Top</u> and <u>Back</u> – provide for soundness of body, proper sound.**

Are there any cracks in the instrument? ❒

Feel under the bottom of strings – is there a "soundpost crack?" ❒

Is there any varnish damage? ❒

Is the top spruce? Is it "solid carved?" Is the purfling inlaid or merely painted on? ❒

***<u>Quality of the wood used</u>*** *is one of the most important aspects of string instrument construction. Spruce has the highest strength-to-weight ratio of any natural material.*

Is the bottom maple? ❒

*While flamed maple is 5 – 10 times more expensive than unflamed, it is more brittle, and <u>not</u> always of better quality. Neither is a one-piece back always better than a two-piece.*

*The top should be about 3.2mm thick at the f-holes, and the "tap-tones" of the top and bottom should match. Ask your dealer to demonstrate the instrument's tap-tones.*

**6. The <u>Soundpost</u> – provides support, transmits sound to the back of the instrument.**

Look in the f-hole -- is the soundpost right behind the foot of the bridge? ❒

*A soundpost should only be re-set by a certified repairman.*

**7. The <u>Adjusters</u> ("fine tuners") – provide tuning ease.**

Are any adjusters loose? Do the screws move easily? ❒

Are any so tight that they touch the instrument? ❒

**8. The <u>Chinrest</u> – provides safe, secure and proper hold for the player.**

Is it loose or broken? ❒

Does the part that cradles the chin touch the instrument or tailpiece? ❒

Is there a cork on the bottom to protect the bottom of the instrument? ❒

**9. The <u>End Button</u> and <u>Endpin</u>**

Is the end button (violin & viola only) centered in the end block? ❒

Is the button made of ebony? ❒

Is the button held firmly in the hole? Are there cracks around the bottom? ❒

Does the endpin (cello & bass only) moves easily? Is it bent? ❒

Does the screw hold adequately (cello & bass only, again)? ❒

**Remember,** each violin is made of between 70 and 76 parts, and each part is an opportunity for the manufacturer to take a short cut! We know you want to give your child the best possible start in strings, and so do we. So, **if you have purchased an "eBayolin" or other VSO, we are willing to exchange it and give you credit towards one of our teacher-approved instruments** (ask us for details).

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