

All-State: Instrumental Issues

presented by Heather Hoff and Frank Davis from Claire Givens Violin Shop
reported by Mary Ann Bashaw and Betsy Neil

Heather Hoff and Frank Davis gave a 2-part presentation. Heather discussed the student and parent education needed when they are searching for a new or step-up instrument. Frank addressed general maintenance and adjustment issues.

Instrument selection and purchase

Many factors need to be considered when purchasing an instrument, such as sound, condition, quality of materials, artistry and craftsmanship, and origin of instrument. Heather Hoff included a checklist that students could use for rating instruments and suggested a list for parents to use when purchasing a new instrument:

1. Set aside time of about 1 to 2 hours at a time for the search. Discover how a better instrument can enable you to develop a better sound. Decide what it is that you want in a new instrument to satisfy your needs. Develop a vocabulary so that professionals can determine what it is that you want in an instrument and what sounds you might like to get from your instrument. Often changes can be made in any instrument depending on what it is that you want.
2. Determine the appropriate quality or price range of the instrument that you want. Involve your teacher in the decision so that he or she may help you determine the quality of instrument that will what is best for your present and future progress.
3. Plan ahead and have a price range in mind when you call to make an appointment to see instruments.
4. Determine the shop's "trial policy" for trying out instrument. Again, it is important to involve your teacher in the selection by taking an instrument out to a lesson.
5. What is the Trade-in policy? In the future, will you be able to trade to a better quality instrument and what type of value will you be able to reap?
6. Build a long-term relationship with the seller so that you feel comfortable in dealing with them. Also determine the quality of workmanship from the repairman.
7. Purchase a good value instrument from someone who has something invested in your community and with whom you can develop a personal relationship. They must be able to back up their instruments and their reputation.
8. Include your teacher in the process because he or she will have your best interest in mind. You will need to depend on their expertise in evaluating the instruments knowing what your student's needs are at present and to also predict what she or he will need in the future.
9. Keep in mind how you will pay for a fine instrument. Check to see if the shop has financing or if you will need to deal

with a bank. Be prepared to tell the shop how you will pay for the instrument!

10. The bow also makes a big difference in the way a stringed instrument sounds and responds. This is a very personal decision as to whether you like a light or heavy bow and how it responds to you. Be sure to know what materials a bow is made of before you purchase. The bow should cost 20% of the value of the instrument bought. Octagonal bows tend to be a bit stiffer. Response can be adjusted in a bow. Sixty grams is the ideal weight for a violin bow, 70 grams for a viola bow, and 80 grams for a cello bow.

Instrument Maintenance

Frank Davis reminded us to teach students about instrument maintenance. We need to talk about humidity and temperature control; pegs and the use of peg compound; fingerboard, bridge and soundpost adjustment; polish; strings; and the importance of having a reputable repairman check over an instrument at least once a year. General checks ups are important to check for open seams, cracks, and proper alignment of the bridge and post. Students may not realize that if the instrument is not in good adjustment that it can make playing very difficult.

Frank gave some practical suggestions for home or school maintenance:

- When a bridge becomes warped, it can be straightened by soaking in water and microwaving for 20–25 seconds
- When you manually straighten bridges for students, don't worry if the feet are subsequently forced to not touch the surface of the violin; the feet often will relax and resume their position of sitting on the surface of the instrument.
- When the bridge is straight, it looks like it is slightly tilted back toward the tailpiece. In most cases, the bridge should line up with the inside notch of the f holes.
- When searching for buzzes in an instrument, don't overlook the tail gut. By shoving a toothpick in you can take care of the buzz.
- It is good to lubricate the bridge on the string contact point with pencil lead.
- Hill Peg Compound is the best for keeping pegs moving.
- A humidifier in the room is much more effective than humidifiers in the instrument or case. †