



MAKER'S BENCH

Not loud enough? Problem Solved!

by John Waddle

I have been seeing more and more interest in my customers wanting to play amplified. Up until recently, I have been reluctant to get into the electric market, but I had a visit recently from one of my sales representatives, who showed me the new Realist Sound Clip pickup for violin and viola. This is a product developed by David Gage and Ned Steinberger. The two of them have been involved in developing pickups and electric instruments for several years. I think this product might be a game changer.



Realist Sound Clip for Violin / Viola

The most common complaint I hear from musicians is that their instrument is not loud enough, or doesn't project enough. This seems to come from them trying to be heard in situations where they are having to compete with too many other instruments, or other instruments that are louder than they are.

The Sound Clip pickup easily attaches to the edge of the violin or viola top next to the bass side f-hole near the bridge and the bass bar. This location on the top is important acoustically—being an area of a lot of movement. It has cork pads that contact the instrument, so if maintained properly, and installed correctly, it won't damage the varnish. It has a wire that attaches to a small jack that clamps onto the edge of the violin or viola. It connects to an amp or PA using a standard ¼" instrument cord. You can put one on in a couple of minutes and be ready to play. If you want to take it off, you can do it easily yourself. You don't need to visit a violin shop to use it.

Some of my customers have electric instruments, but most are using some kind of pickup on their acoustic instruments. Some pickups are built into the bridge, so you either have to use that bridge all the time, or swap out bridges depending on what you want to play. Some have a Piezo that goes under the foot of the bridge, which raises up the string heights and can leave marks on the top of the instrument, or are inserted into part of the bridge, which may not fit well, and are not that effective. There are small microphones that you can get that are attached near the bridge, but the microphone also picks up any sounds near it, (like you breathing). All of these approaches have problems that the Realist Sound Clip doesn't have.

I have also not been impressed with the electric instruments I have seen. They seem heavy and poorly designed. With the sound clip, you can use the instrument you already have. You don't have to buy an electric violin or viola or cello.

I like the Sound Clip because it seems well designed and well made. We tested it in my shop and the sound seemed full and clear.

Anything that you do to your instrument will affect the sound, and the sound clip certainly does, but once you plug it into an amp, you have options for sounding the way you want. We did try the Sound Clip on a couple of different instruments, and we could tell that the instrument made a difference, so if you like the sound and feel of your instrument acoustically, you are more likely to like the sound of it amplified than if you have to play a different instrument.

Having tested the Realist Sound Clip for violin and viola, we were curious about the Realist Sound Clip for cello, so we got one in and tested it as well. It attaches to the ankle of the bridge on the bass side. It is much heavier than the sound clip for violin and viola, but again looks well made and designed. It is very easy to put on and only takes a couple of minutes and can be taken off just as easily. Again, you can do it yourself. No need for a visit to the shop. Once it is attached to the cello, I didn't notice the weight. It works great as a pickup, but can also serve as a wolf suppressor for cellos with bad wolf notes. There are extra weights that attach to the Sound Clip that can be adjusted for different sound affects, or they can be taken off if the musician chooses not to use them. It also has a volume knob built in, so you can adjust the volume as you play.



Realist Sound Clip for Cello

Of course the amp or PA system you are using will have an affect on the sound. We only tried a couple of amps and one PA system, so I can't comment much about that technology. That would be another article.

As music teachers, you may want to prepare your students for entering today's world knowing that there are options for playing amplified that don't necessarily involve buying an electric instrument.

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shop in St. Paul since 1986. John is a member of both The American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers, and the Violin Society of America. ‡