

# Red Hot Strings

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## Choosing the Right Violin

### *I don't have a violin yet. How do I choose the right one?*

When it comes to finding a violin there is a wide range of choices making the task of picking the right violin difficult. A person should choose a violin that's appropriate for one's size. Most adults will fit a full size violin or if you are small a 7/8 size may be suitable. Children can be fitted for a smaller size violin by a music store professional.

Student violins range in price from approximately \$170 to \$800 depending on the brand, size and quality. Often these violins are machine made and have a hard varnish, which negatively effects the sound quality. Over time the sound of these instruments worsens and they lose value. Conversely, the sound of an instrument that is hand made with a soft varnish will improve over time causing the instrument to appreciate in value. The starting price for a pretty good, full size hand made violin is around \$1000. Smaller sizes will cost less.

Like most things the cost of a violin usually reflects the level of quality. Although it is tempting to purchase the cheapest violin available, such violins are set up with poor components making them less fun to play. For example, cheap violins usually have cheap strings which may be false, meaning they go out of tune very easily if the string is stroked with a great amount of force. Also the overall sound quality of these strings and violins is poor.

The most inexpensive violins are not made with good materials. Often the fingerboards of such violins are made from a wood that is painted black rather than made from real ebony. The paint may wear off. The pegs of such violins may not turn easily or evenly, making them more difficult to tune. Sometimes the pegs are not made from a strong enough wood and they may break when a person attempts to tune them.

Aesthetically, if you look closely at a cheap violin compared to a slightly better quality instrument you will see that a cheap violin is often put together sloppily. You may notice that parts of it are not symmetrical, especially around the scroll and peg box. Sometime the bridge of such violins moves out of place easily. Generally cheap violins are harder to tune and keep in tune.

If you are looking for small instruments for a child, you may find some good quality instruments made in Romania. Also some violins from the Czech Republic and the Japanese Suzuki violins can be decent beginner violins. These children's violins usually start at around \$270 for the smallest sizes. The price increases the larger the size of instrument.

One advantage to buying a decent small violin is that most stores will trade up to the next size instrument for a nominal sum. Remember that the better quality instrument you own in the beginning will reflect whether or not that violin appreciates and/or maintains its value over time.

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Renting a violin for a few months is a good way to familiarize yourself with the violin. After renting for three months you should either purchase the violin or make sure that you have a rent to own policy so that you have something to show for your monthly payments.

## ***Where should I go to rent or buy a violin?***

I recommend going to a store that specializes in stringed instruments rather than going to the large music stores. Usually the quality of the smaller store's products exceeds that of the large chain music stores. You will get better service and information at stores that are specialized in violins. Most stores will put the rental cost towards a purchase made later. There are many reputable violin stores to choose from in the Vancouver area so shop around a little and you will learn more. Here are two Vancouver stores that really know violins:

<b>KCM Luthiery</b> 4274 Fraser St. (at 27 <sup>th</sup> Avenue) Vancouver 604-251-4309 <a href="http://www.kcmluthiery.com">www.kcmluthiery.com</a> <a href="mailto:chris@kcmluthiery.com">chris@kcmluthiery.com</a>	<b>Northwest Music</b> 1991 Main St. (at 4 <sup>th</sup> Avenue) Vancouver 604-877-1991 1-800-663-6797 <a href="mailto:info@northwestmusic.ca">info@northwestmusic.ca</a>
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In case you are tempted to purchase a violin through an online music store, remember you may have to wait a while to get whatever you purchased. Also if the product is crossing the border you should account for the currency difference and you will have to pay sales tax. When you add up all these things the savings are negligible.

## ***What else will you need besides a violin?***

In addition to having a violin, you will need: a case, bow, some rosin and a shoulder pad to support your instrument while holding it. The Kun shoulder rest is popular. You may also try using a sponge held on with elastic bands instead of a shoulder pad. Your teacher can help you out with this. Try other models of shoulder pads at the store to see what is comfortable. Make sure that there is a return policy in case you discover the device is inappropriate for you.

I also recommend getting an extra set of strings in case you break one and a soft cotton cloth to wipe the rosin dust off your violin and bow. Of course, a music stand and metronome are also very handy to have. Some metronomes come with a screen telling what note is being played and if it is in tune. This can be helpful for those who have difficulty analyzing pitch. Good luck finding the right instrument!