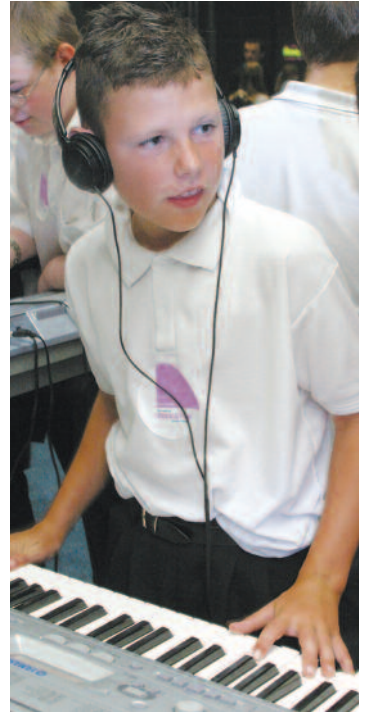


# A GUIDE TO BUYING QUALITY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



HELPFUL ADVICE FOR THE MUSICAL STUDENT





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# Welcome to the amazing world of playing a musical instrument

Music is a wonderful and engaging pursuit for any child and there is substantive evidence of the positive effects on children of music making. This is over and above the sheer fun and enjoyment of playing an instrument. Making music also:

- Builds greater social and team skills
- Improves reasoning capacity and problem solving skills
- Improves maths and language performance
- Improves memory, concentration, creativity, self esteem and self discipline

Music is an essential part of the fabric of our lives. It is an extremely powerful means of communication, playing a role in many of our social institutions and religious rituals. Making music can break down cultural barriers and strengthen social unity.

This booklet has been produced by the Music Industries Association (MIA), which is the UK trade body for the musical instrument industry. Many of the best known instrument manufacturers and shops have helped us to collate the publication and we are very grateful for their support. We have, however, deliberately kept the book "brand free" in order to leave all the information

as impartial as possible and to allow you to make informed choices about what you wish to purchase. The Federation of Music Services and National Association of Music Educators have also extensively helped us with this guide. We have also included some content from other publications, such as the ABRSM's *"Raising an Amazing Musician"*.

The MIA also represents hundreds of musical instrument shops throughout the UK and you can find your nearest one by going to our website [www.mia.org.uk](http://www.mia.org.uk) and clicking on the "find a music shop". We also have a "find a music teacher" link on the homepage, which may be of use.

# Some truths about making music

**TRUTH 1:** Everyone is musical and nearly all of us have the ability to sing and to play an instrument. Of course some of us have more aptitude than others. That's natural in exactly the same way that some people are more gifted than others in sport, or maths, or any other area of learning.

**TRUTH 2:** Because everyone is musical everyone can develop their musical skills to the point that they are able to. Very few of us will become professional musicians but most of us can have a life of enjoyment and achievement through making music.

**TRUTH 3:** There is no one way to learn to play an instrument. Over the years various methods and approaches have been developed. Each approach will suit one person but not necessarily another. Individuals need to find a style and approach that best suits them.

**TRUTH 4:** Music is often best enjoyed when it is shared with others. That 'other' can be a teacher or a member of the family. They can be friends, or a class of other players, a band or a whole orchestra. The important thing about making music is that you make your music with other people as soon and as often as you can.

**TRUTH 5:** All music is made up of the same core elements such as melody, rhythm, harmony and tone. These precepts of music are evident in all styles from classical to rock. There is no best music through which to learn nor is there any right order as to which style should come first. Success and enjoyment are more dependent on the learning approach and the student's motivation and goals than whether you are playing Blur, Bhangra or Bach.

**TRUTH 6:** There are two major aspects to music, playing an instrument and understanding and being musical (some people call it music theory). These two elements are not separate subjects and should be integrated in the process of learning and developing as a musician.

## Getting the best out of this guide

This publication exists to give you a brief overview of the main instrument categories, followed by a short guide of "what to look for" when purchasing a quality musical instrument. The information has been collated with children, parents and teachers in mind and we hope it is useful to all!

### SOME GENERAL THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BUY

There are many things to think about when choosing a suitable instrument including:

- the age of the student
- the character of the student
- the kind of music they want to play
- the cost
- the practicalities (such as size and portability of the instrument)

### STUDENT OR BEGINNER INSTRUMENTS

On the surface it is easy to think that a student or beginner instrument is just a cheaper version of what the professionals play. While student instruments are cheaper they are not what 'cheaper' normally implies less well designed or manufactured. In fact a good student instrument offers special attributes that assist the learner to progress and enjoy their music making.

This includes things like less resistance (resistance refers to how much pressure or effort is required to make the sound) being built into a student woodwind or brass instrument making the instrument easier to blow for the inexperienced player through the careful design of mouthpieces and bodies. A lower action on a guitar (action refers to the distance between the fret board and the strings) makes playing easier and more fluent for young or inexperienced hands.

## **ALREADY A PLAYER?**

If you are already a player then the best advice anyone can give you is to go out and play all the instruments you can until you find the one that suits you and your budget best. There is simply no substitute for trying and selecting the instrument you will make your own.

## **BUY, RENT OR BORROW?**

You may not wish to buy an instrument immediately in case it turns out not to suit you or your child. Some music services (organisations contracted by the Local Authority to provide music tuition in state schools and at music centres) and schools offer instruments on loan to beginners; many others (including some retailers) operate rental systems that, for a modest fee, provide for an experimental trial period. This is invaluable for the more expensive instruments as it allows your child to get a feel for what is involved in learning, playing and maintaining the instrument before actually buying one.

The instrument must be appropriate for your child, however you intend to obtain it. Learning on a sub-standard instrument is extremely demoralising and will prevent your child progressing. You do not have to buy the most expensive instrument, but it must be fit for purpose and properly set up to suit your child – try to consult a teacher or music shop. If you are offered the loan of an instrument by a friend or family member, or are considering the purchase of a second-hand instrument, a teacher should check it for suitability before it is used. However good an instrument is, it may not necessarily be appropriate for your child. Most young string players, for example, begin learning on specially-made smaller instruments and will find it very uncomfortable (if not impossible) to play an instrument that is too large.

## **CONCLUSION**

The best advice is to talk to other musicians, music teachers and music stores to advise on the brands and models to look out for. These are the people with the experience to direct you to the kinds of products that they trust to do the job for them. There is no shortage of great products and brands so you will usually be spoilt for choice.

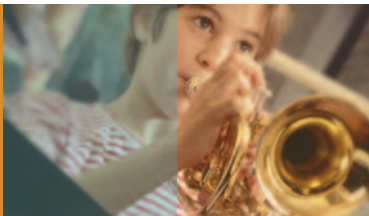




# Some general things to ask when buying a musical instrument



- Does your music teacher recommend any brands/models for you to learn on?
- The safe option is always to go with the established brands – they are usually established brands for a good reason.
- Can you have an instrument on approval from the shop?
- Is there a rental scheme for instruments with the option to buy the instrument at a later date?
- Does the shop operate the A.I.P.S. VAT - free instrument purchase scheme for school children?
- Is the "Take it Away" Arts Council England interest - free purchase scheme available in the shop?
- Is there a practice/demonstration room in the shop?
- Do the instruments get checked over (set up) before they are sold?
- Check with the local retailer whether spare parts are readily available for the brand you choose.



- Does the shop offer a free checkover after 6 months? Is it written down on the receipt?
- Does the shop have a repairer on site (or nearby) in the event that something goes wrong?
- What is their repair turnaround time? Can the shop loan an instrument while yours is repaired?
- Ensure there are no potential instrument health and safety issues e.g. sharp edges, poisonous substances. Check that instruments conform to appropriate EU legislation e.g. rules concerning nickel and nickel plating.
- What sort of guarantee does the shop/manufacturer offer on the instrument?
- Get the manufacturer's/distributor's guarantee card stamped.
- If there isn't a guarantee, get that fact written on the receipt.
- Make sure that the full details of the instrument, including serial number, are on the receipt.
- If buying on the internet make sure that the guarantees/repairs/return policies are all fully explained. Check that you are familiar with the distance selling regulations should you need to return the instrument for a full refund.
- Insure your instrument. This may need a specialist music insurer (your home policy may not cover instruments).



# Acoustic Guitar Overview

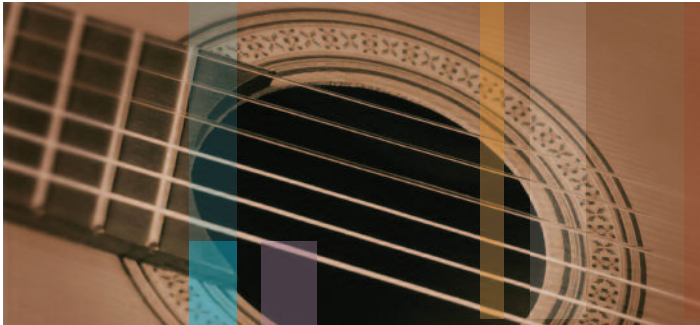
The acoustic guitar is a highly popular starter instrument.

It's affordable, easy to transport, quiet enough not to disturb others during practice, relatively easy to get a nice sound, and doesn't need any additional equipment like amplification.

It can also be seen as a more 'serious' instrument to learn on first if a child ultimately wants to play electric guitar, as the skills and techniques can be transferred.

There are two types of acoustic guitar; classical (or 'nylon strung') and 'steel strung' which is what is most often meant when someone refers to an acoustic guitar.

The classical guitar is considered to be best for beginners as it uses nylon strings, which are much easier to play than steel - the lighter string tension makes it much easier to press the string down onto the fretboard to sound a note.



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Guitars come in a variety of sizes and a full size one is generally suitable for ages 10 - 12 and upwards. Smaller sizes are available for younger students.
2. If you are a beginner ask the advice of your tutor and don't buy the cheapest, spend a little more and get a quality one with a solid top if possible.
3. Take a guitarist with you when you go to buy it, someone who will be able to tell a if it's a good one or not.
4. You should buy the guitar that plays, sounds and looks the best for you. The expertise of the maker and the degree to which an instrument is hand made are of major significance for the development of tonal quality.
5. Visit several music shops before you buy and find the salespeople who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Ask to talk to someone in the shop who plays guitar.
6. Take your time, don't rush out and buy the first one you see, you have to live with it for years so make sure it is the right one.
7. Buy guitar magazines that have reviews or get catalogues on the models you are interested in to research thoroughly
8. If there is a music trade show or convention in your area visit it, as there will be a variety of products to see and there will be people there with a wealth of knowledge you can talk to.



# Clarinet Overview

The clarinet is a very versatile reed instrument, used in both chamber and orchestral music. It was Mozart's favourite, and like the saxophone produced many great jazz players such as Sidney Bechet and Benny Goodman.

There are many different types of clarinet, but the Bflat soprano clarinet is by far the most common.

Cheaper clarinets are made from man made materials and are generally the best choice for beginners – more expensive models are made from hardwoods like ebony, and are suitable for more serious playing.

As a beginner's instrument it is both quieter and less costly than the saxophone, and although the fingering is a little more complex, it is easier to produce a basic sound with. It is also lighter and more portable as the instrument separates into five smaller sections to pack away.

As with the saxophone, there are special reeds for the clarinet, and the same advice is applicable to this instrument. You will also need cork grease to connect the joints of the clarinet together..



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. The cheaper models are made of plastic or ABS resin which doesn't crack, requires less maintenance and is lighter which makes them more suitable for children.
2. Wooden models normally sound richer, darker and warmer.
3. The key mechanism should be nice and smooth, it should not rattle and should make a good seal with the toneholes.
4. When trying out different clarinets it is advisable to use the same mouthpiece and reed, otherwise the different sounds may just be due to the different mouthpieces.
5. For smaller children, there are straps available that will help reduce the weight of the instrument and can reduce any chance of repetitive strain injury.
6. When purchasing the instrument, you need to purchase appropriate cleaning materials. Some clarinet keys have pads to seal the holes, these need to be looked after. A cleaning swab should be used to dry out the instrument and prolong pad life.
7. Quality clarinets have undercut toneholes.

# Drums Overview

Drums are the standard backing instrument in many genres of music including rock, soul, jazz and latin, and together with the bass guitar makes up the 'rhythm section'.

A typical drum kit comprises 5 drums: bass drum, snare drum and 3 toms; hi-hat, crash & ride cymbals and stands and pedals.

Playing cymbals wears out sticks quickly, so it's a good idea to buy several pairs (5A is a good weight to start with), and if you plan to move your kit around, you will need a set of cases.

The drum kit can be loud although the sound can be damped considerably by using practice pads that are placed on the drumheads and the cymbals in a matter of seconds. They are not expensive.

An alternative is the electronic drum kit, which can be used with headphones and has been growing in popularity over recent years.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Value for money – check carefully whether the deal includes all stands and pedals (usual) and cymbals (usually only in basic starter kits).
2. Whether the kit comes boxed for self-assembly, or already built and tuned by the dealer (some good dealers will offer this service – tuning a drum kit is a skill which comes with experience).
3. Whether or not a height adjustable stool is included.
4. What the cymbals are made of (basic ones are brass, bronze is better).
5. How many drums are in the set (five is standard, and most tuition books are scored for five drums).
6. Quality of stands, pedals and drumheads, all of which can get considerable wear and tear.



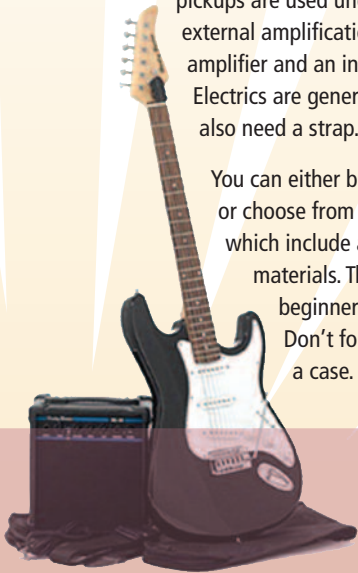
# Electric Guitar Overview

The electric guitar is extremely popular, and has recently undergone a major resurgence of interest due to the prevalence of guitar-based bands. In the past, guitar teachers felt that it was important to get good technique on an acoustic before playing an electric, but attitudes have changed, and as long as the correct tuition is given an electric is just as good a starter instrument.

Like the classical guitar's nylon strings, the electric's strings are much thinner, lighter and closer to the fretboard than an acoustic (steel strung) guitar's, and so are less likely to discourage the sore-fingered beginner.

As electric guitars do not have a hollow body to amplify the sound, magnetic pickups are used underneath the strings which need external amplification, so you will also need a guitar amplifier and an instrument cable to connect it with. Electrics are generally played with a plectrum and you'll also need a strap.

You can either buy all the components separately, or choose from the range of guitar packs now available which include amplifier, cable, strap and often tuition materials. These packages are ideal and tailored for beginners and take the stress out of buying. Don't forget to protect your investment with a case.



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. If you are a beginner, ask your teacher's advice and don't buy the cheapest model - spending a little more will buy a guitar that looks, sounds, feels and lasts better.
2. Electric guitars (especially starter packages) are sometimes available in smaller sizes suitable for younger students.
3. Visit several music shops before you buy and talk to someone who plays guitar for the best advice.
4. Look for a guitar made from solid wood, not plywood.
5. You will also have to purchase an amplifier to go with the guitar so be prepared for the extra cost. Choose one with a headphone socket.
6. Most shops will offer a complete package to get you started that includes all you will need, check these out.
7. Take your time, don't rush out and buy the first one you see, you have to live with it for years so make sure it is the right one. A good guitar will make you want to play it.
8. Buy guitar magazines that have reviews on the latest products and accessories or get catalogues on the models you are interested in and do some research.

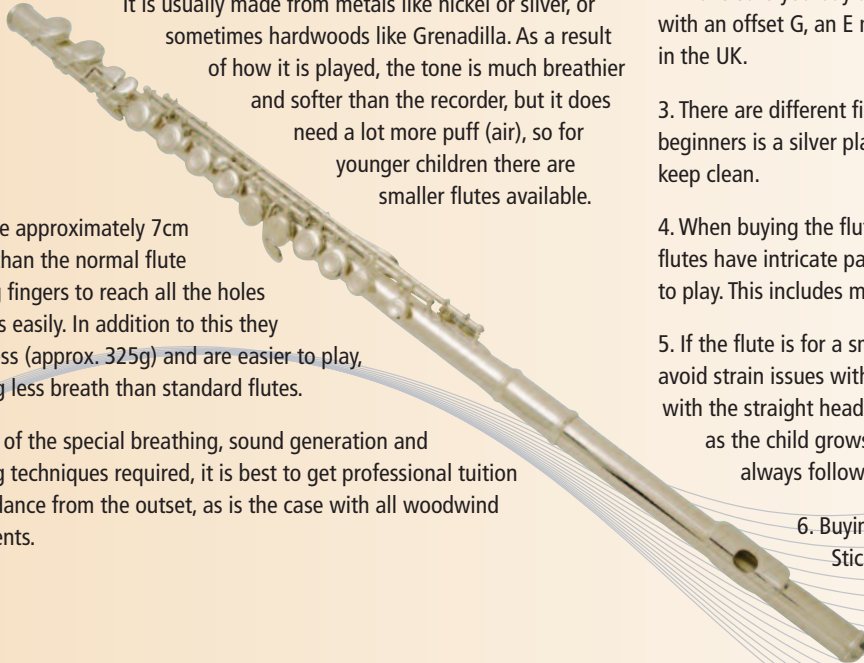
# Flute Overview

The flute is one of the mostly frequently played woodwind instruments, and the transverse flute is the standard orchestral design, so-named because it is held horizontally and air is blown across the mouthpiece rather than into it.

It is usually made from metals like nickel or silver, or sometimes hardwoods like Grenadilla. As a result of how it is played, the tone is much breathier and softer than the recorder, but it does need a lot more puff (air), so for younger children there are smaller flutes available.

These are approximately 7cm shorter than the normal flute allowing fingers to reach all the holes and pads easily. In addition to this they weigh less (approx. 325g) and are easier to play, requiring less breath than standard flutes.

Because of the special breathing, sound generation and fingering techniques required, it is best to get professional tuition and guidance from the outset, as is the case with all woodwind instruments.



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Get the teacher's advice before shopping, as they will have to teach the child and will want to be sure you are buying a good quality instrument.
2. Make sure you buy a flute of the correct specification. Closed hole keys with an offset G, an E mechanism and a C footjoint is the most common in the UK.
3. There are different finishes of flute available. The most popular for beginners is a silver plated finish, comfortable to hold and easier to keep clean.
4. When buying the flute, ensure it has been checked and tested properly, as flutes have intricate parts which, if not set up correctly, can make it difficult to play. This includes making sure the joints are not too loose or too tight.
5. If the flute is for a small child, a curved head flute may be required to avoid strain issues with the player. Some curved flutes are also supplied with the straight head joint making the transition to a standard flute easy as the child grows. Check with the teacher if this is necessary and always follow their advice.
6. Buying flutes on the internet can end in disappointment. Stick with a popular brand and make sure it is the correct pitch for the UK. Buying from another country can also affect your rights in the event of a guarantee issue.



## Ocarina Overview

The ocarina is a simple instrument that offers quick success. Musical skills can be developed to an advanced level on the ocarina; these skills transfer easily when moving on to play other woodwind, brass or string instruments.

Ocarinas are round-shaped flutes with a pure sweet tone. English 4-hole and 6-hole ocarinas are easier to play than

the recorder or tin whistle and, because of this, are used in many primary school classrooms for whole-class music.

The English 4-hole finger-system produces fourteen musical notes. The 6-hole ocarina has the addition of two thumb-holes that add two extra notes. These notes are useful, but are not essential for beginners. Plastic ocarinas are made in many colours and in one 'alto' size. They measure approximately 60 mm wide and 80 mm from mouthpiece to string-end, and are worn round the neck as pendants.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Make sure the ocarina is tuned to concert-pitch. Plastic ocarinas marked 'Alto D' are ideal, as they are tuned to play in groups, with other instruments, and with ocarina music books and CDs.
2. Choose the 4-hole ocarina for young children and for whole-class music. Select the 6-hole ocarina for those likely to play beyond the first 50 tunes and arrangements in the books.
3. Well-tuned ocarinas should be offered with ocarina music books that have charts under the musical stave. These charts guide the fingers and help beginners of all ages to play proper tunes from the word 'go'. A plastic ocarina with first book usually costs around £10.
4. Ceramic ocarinas are made in various sizes from Mini to Great Bass, and tuned to 'D' or 'G'. Choose 'D' ocarinas for group playing, unless you specifically need a different pitch. Ceramic ocarinas cost between £20 and £80, depending on size. Those under £15 are usually poorly made and are not recommended.
5. Ocarinas in the shape of animals or decorated with bright patterns are fun but are not necessarily tuned for musical performance or for use in school.
6. Check that your supplier knows about ocarinas, or is a specialist in the field of ocarinas and education.

# Piano Overview

The piano is a wonderful instrument that encompasses harmony, melody and rhythm. It enables you to learn general musicianship skills that are applicable to all kinds of music. Also, music available for the piano covers a wide repertoire from classical and jazz right through to pop music that makes it appeal to people of all ages.

There are two main types of piano, the 'traditional' acoustic piano and the digital piano, and both have their pros and cons. The acoustic piano has a mechanical 'action' where pressing the key moves a hammer which hits the strings to produce the sound. It's the best instrument for serious piano performance, as training and strengthening the fingers are essential if you want to progress to a higher level at college.

The digital piano is a clear alternative to the acoustic. As always, you get what you pay for, the better the model, the more realistic the 'action' will become. The big advantage of the digital piano is that the volume level is totally controllable. They may also come with a range of other instrument sounds, and on some models can be used with music software on a computer. It should be pointed out that certain (more expensive) acoustic pianos are now available with a "quiet piano" system, which allows silent practice through headphones.



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. It is always best to see, hear and try before you buy. Take your time to visit a few piano shops where the staff will be able to offer you expert advice.
2. Make sure you sit down and play the piano in a shop. It should be light and responsive to play and produce a tone which most importantly, you like. Be sure to play notes at the extremes of the instrument (the very top and the very bottom) to give you a good indication of the overall tonal quality.
3. The two major factors that affect the tone are the soundboard area and the length of the strings. As a general rule, the bigger the piano, the better it is. It is worth considering the largest piano to suit your home and budget.
4. When looking to buy a traditional upright piano, bear in mind the size of the instrument and where it will go in your home, especially if you live in a 10th floor flat!
5. Don't disregard buying a brand new piano. Many of the leading brands now offer affordable options, and purchasing a new piano means you can rely on the quality and it will also come with a manufacturer's guarantee.
6. Acoustic pianos are made from natural materials that are susceptible to changes in temperature and need to be tuned professionally on a regular basis. Keep in touch with your piano shop, they will be able to advise on maintaining your piano.



# Portable Keyboards Overview

The electronic keyboard is a very practical and low cost way to start playing a keyboard. Many will come with basic keyboard skills instructions.

Whereas a digital piano will usually have a fairly standard and basic feature set, portable or 'home' keyboards come in a variety of different keyboard lengths and sizes, and generally include a host of digital sounds and accompaniment features. They usually have built-in speakers, and battery operation is common with smaller models.

These keyboards take full advantage of digital technology, providing auto-accompaniment features which quickly allow beginners to play pieces of music. Drum, bass and chord parts can be triggered, shaped and stored in memory using the left hand, whilst the right hand plays the melody. Schools often choose portable keyboards to provide entry-level instruction for young beginners, as immediate results can be mixed with basic teaching and act as an introduction to the piano when it is felt that the child has reached a sufficient standard. Look for 2 headphone sockets so that a tutor can listen in as well!



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. 5 octave (61 black and white full size keys) keyboard. This length of keyboard allows full piano repertoire to be played and is ideal for the beginner. Don't forget a height adjustable stand for the keyboard.
2. Full size keys. This means the keys are the same size as an acoustic piano.
3. Touch sensitive (also known as touch responsive) keys. This means that, like an acoustic piano, the volume of the notes is louder when the keys are struck harder. Also known as semi-weighted or fully weighted piano-action keys.
4. Sustain pedal input. This allows connection of a sustain pedal, which enhances the expressiveness of the performance.
5. USB or MIDI connections to PC. With 'sequencing' software installed within a PC, these connections allow players to record, store and arrange music within a PC environment.
6. Digital effects, such as reverb, chorus and delay enhance the overall sound of the instrument.
7. On-board song recording (or sequencer). This allows players to record their own performances and store within the keyboard. Many instruments offer 'multi-track' recording.
8. 'Hybrid' keyboards. These are keyboards that offer an extended range of keys (76 or 88 notes) which combine the functions of a keyboard with more piano like performance potential.

# The Recorder Overview



The recorder often provides the first tuned musical instrument playing experience for children.

The first school recorder is usually made from ABS resin, although many professional players prefer wooden recorders. Wooden recorders are harder to play consistently as tuning varies with different atmospheric conditions and they take more looking after. As such wooden recorders are not suitable for beginners groups.

The descant recorder is easy to play and is the most popular model used in schools. Internationally it is sometimes referred to as the soprano model. There are various sizes of recorder - the treble (internationally referred to as the alto) is the next popular model and for ensemble playing the sopranino, tenor and bass recorders are also used.

The descant and tenor recorders are in the key of "C" whilst the sopranino, treble and bass are in the key of "F".

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Get the teacher's advice before shopping; they will often want the whole class to have the same brand of recorder.
2. A recorder can be of one, two or three piece construction. Check which version the teacher would like the children to play.
3. Normally the three piece construction is the preferred descant choice as there is flexibility with individual tuning and finger positioning for small hands. However some teachers prefer the single piece model as there is less to fiddle with!
4. On a three piece recorder the top part is the head joint and you blow into the beak of the head joint. The middle part is the body joint and the bottom is the foot joint.
5. Good recorders are supplied with a cleaning rod, pot of joint grease and a fingering chart.
6. There are toy recorders on the market. The best way to ensure you get a properly tuned instrument is to buy it from a musical instrument retailer.
7. The recorder is a finely engineered musical instrument and should be supplied in a protective bag; its joints should be regularly greased and should fit together snugly. To separate the instrument twist the joints - do not pull apart.
8. There are German fingering models on the market, these recorders are different and should not be purchased for normal use in the U.K.
9. For anyone with finger or hand difficulties there are some specially adapted recorders available.

# Percussion (world) Overview

World Percussion covers a vast range of instruments, both ancient and modern, that are either played with the hands or struck with a beater. Percussion is important in music education as it develops rhythm and has links with mathematics, history and culture.

Using world percussion is an excellent way of adding intriguing and unusual sounds into your music and many of today's top artists actively employ many percussion sounds. Probably the most recognised percussion instruments today come from Africa (drumming), South America (Latin percussion) and the Caribbean (steel pans).

African percussion mainly uses hand drums called Djembe to build complex rhythms that are supported by foil metal attachments played in a similar way to cymbals. These are known as Kessing-Kessing after the sound they make. Also common are basket shakers called Caxixi and Gourd Shekeres.

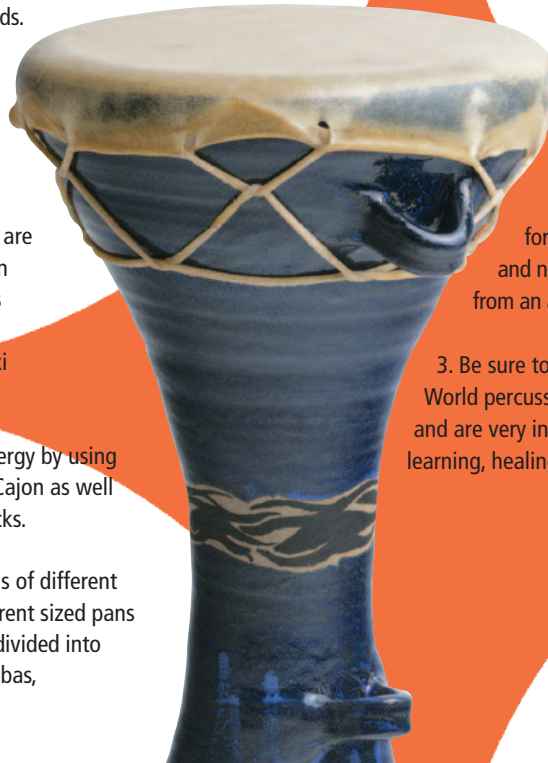
Latin percussion also invokes passion and energy by using hand drums, known as Congas, Bongos and Cajon as well as lighter rhythms from Maracas and Rainsticks.

Caribbean steel pans are made from oil drums of different sizes tuned with different notes and the different sized pans make up steel pan bands. Percussion can be divided into tuned percussion – such as steel pans, marimbas,

glockenspiels, xylophones, where individual notes are struck; and non-tuned percussion where the instrument is not tuned to different notes but relies on different tones emanating from the instrument depending on which part of the surface of the instrument is played.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Be sure you get the best quality by buying from a recognised importer purchasing authentic instruments from the correct country of origin.
2. Percussion instruments can be made of traditional materials or a modern-day equivalent, for example fibre-glass, which may be more durable and need less tuning which can compensate for what is lost from an authentic look.
3. Be sure to experiment and above all have fun!  
World percussion groups and events have an amazing energy and are very inspiring. Many people use world percussion as a learning, healing and social experience.



# Saxophone Overview

The saxophone was invented by the Belgian Adolphe Sax. Its sound is produced using a reed, and so even though it's made of metal it's also part of the woodwind family. Although it was adopted by some composers as part of the orchestra, it gained more popularity in military bands due to its big sound, and was later made famous by great jazz musicians such as Charlie Parker and John Coltrane.



The saxophone family consists of seven instruments, but the most popular beginner's instruments are the alto and tenor saxophones. Due to the size and fingering, the minimum age to start learning is around 8 years for the alto and 12 years for the tenor.

As saxophone reeds are made of cane, they will wear and split with use, so it's a good idea to buy a few replacement reeds as they are relatively inexpensive, and can be bought either individually or in boxes of 10.

If you're a beginner, then start with softer reeds marked from '1½' to '2½', which make it easier to produce a more even tone and pitch ('4' is the hardest type available).

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Ask your tutor which brand or model they recommend you should buy, plus which type i.e. Alto, Tenor etc, as they are all different sizes. Also try it sitting down. Check to see if you can use the side and palm keys, so you can tell if you need a smaller one.
2. When you go to buy always take someone with you who knows instruments or plays them as they will be able to hear and see what the beginner does not. You will also be able to hear what it sounds like from a distance if they play it.
3. Remember that in addition to the Saxophone itself you will have to buy reeds and have the instrument maintained.
4. Ask the salesperson if you can have the instrument on approval or indeed if you can rent it with a view to purchasing it, or something similar, down the line.
5. When you have decided on the instrument you want, make sure you get that one and not one from the stock room, as all instruments have their own sound.
6. You must also make sure to purchase appropriate cleaning materials. Like the flute, saxophone keys have pads to seal the holes. These need to be looked after. A cleaning swab should be used to dry out the instrument after playing to prolong pad life.
7. Make sure that you purchase a good quality neck strap which will help correctly support the weight of the instrument.

# Trumpet Overview

The modern 3 valve trumpet was first developed by Bluhmel and Staelzel and is popular in school orchestras, jazz and brass bands.

The Bflat trumpet is the most common and so is the most sensible choice for the student or beginner. As with the flute, it requires good breath control.

Important accessories for the trumpet are valve oil and a cleaning kit to keep the instrument in good working order.

There are products available that can adjust volume levels of trumpets, such as mutes. There are even "quiet" brass instruments specifically designed for this.

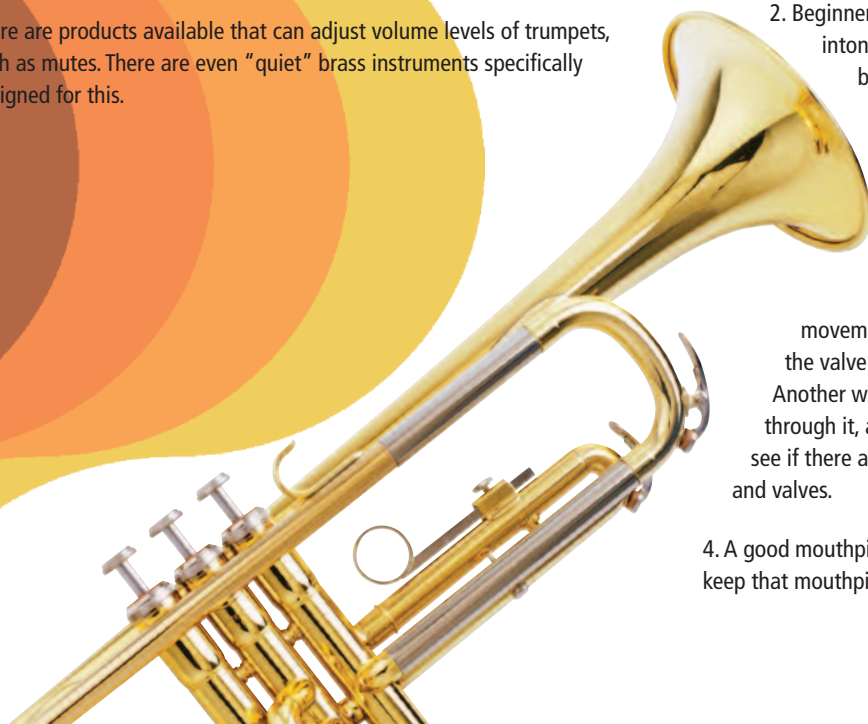
## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. The most common finish for student models is clear or gold lacquer. The lacquer protects the instrument and is easy to keep clean. Unlacquered trumpets will look 'dull' and have a matte finish. They are harder to keep clean. Some players prefer a silver plated finish. These have a smooth rounder sound and a more regular response throughout their range. They tend to be more expensive and heavier. Plain brass and also nickel finishes are not recommended for health/legal reasons.

2. Beginner trumpets should be easy to blow and have accurate intonation. The trumpet's bore size affects how resistant it is to blow. Most student trumpets have a medium-large bore.

3. The valve body is the heart of the instrument. Best quality valves are normally of monel. If buying a second hand instrument the way to check valve wear is to unscrew a valve top and let the valve come out about a couple of inches (5cm) and then try to move the valve sideways in the valve casing. If there is lateral movement (in other words if the valve 'rocks' from side to side), the valve could be worn and therefore would not be airtight. Another way to check if the instrument is airtight is to put water through it, and once there is enough water inside, hold it still and see if there are any drips. Possible leak points are joints, water keys and valves.

4. A good mouthpiece is very important. If you get the right one you can keep that mouthpiece with you as you progress up the grades.



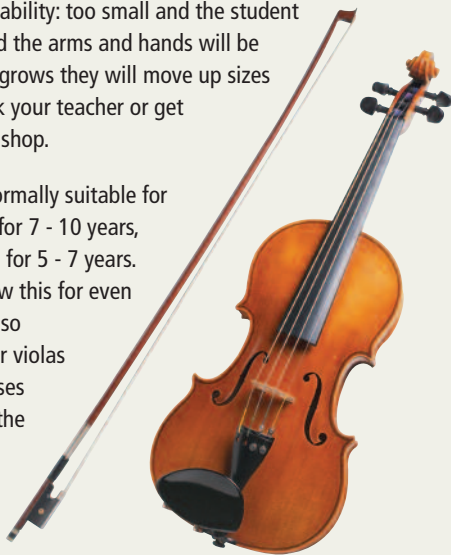
# Violin and Bowed Overview

The violin is both a solo and ensemble instrument, and makes an ideal choice for a child who wants to join their school orchestra and play with other musicians.

Practising and performing in groups assists in learning an instrument more quickly, as more advanced students will help you. Although there are notable players in jazz and folk music, most music written for the violin is from the classical repertoire, and this should be taken into account when encouraging a child to take up their first instrument, as they will generally practise harder when they enjoy the music they're playing!

The size of the violin is very important. Unsuitably sized instruments will affect the student's playing ability: too small and the student will be cramped, too big and the arms and hands will be over-stretched. As the child grows they will move up sizes until they reach full size. Ask your teacher or get "fitted" at your local music shop.

As a guide, a 4/4 violin is normally suitable for 9 years and upwards, a 3/4 for 7 - 10 years, a 1/2 for 6 - 8 years and 1/4 for 5 - 7 years. There are smaller sizes below this for even younger children. There is also a range of sizes available for violas and double basses. In all cases expert advice is needed on the correct size for a child.



## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

**1. Condition of the Instrument:** Violins are made of wood and it is important to examine the body of any violin, both new and old. New instruments made from un-seasoned wood may have bulging ribs, heavily warped fingerboards, and possible shrinkage cracks. Tell-tale signs are in the neck and bottom rib (especially on 'cellos).

**2. Alignment:** Check to make sure that the neck of the violin is set straight. Make sure the bridge is centered between the f-holes, then sight up the fingerboard to see if it aligns with the bridge. If the bridge has to be off-set to one side to line up, then the neck is out of line (see bridge). If the neck is skewed, playing becomes very difficult as the strings will want to fall off the side of the fingerboard.

**3. Fingerboard:** The best wood for wear and fingering is ebony although other hardwoods are used. The nut which divides the strings at the top of the fingerboard must have equal string spacing and the grooves correctly cut for the type of string used. If changing from metal core to synthetic core strings, the nut grooves will need adjusting or broken strings will result. The fingerboard should be slightly convex down the length to prevent buzzing.

**4. Pegs:** Usually made from ebony, rosewood or boxwood. On in-expensive violins an "ebonized" (usually a fruitwood) peg can be used. Whatever the material used the peg needs to turn smoothly and stay in place. A jerky turn will break strings, while slipping pegs obviously don't hold pitch. Basses have machine heads because of the huge tensions involved. Are they well fitted and do they turn smoothly?



**5. Bridge:** This should be tailored to each individual instrument. Some important things to look for are:

- Wood quality: A poor soft piece of wood will not offer enough sound resistance and will wear out quickly
- Is the bridge the right way round? (easy mistake to make). The E string should be lower than the G, and the front of the bridge curves back (the back of the bridge is straight).
- Is it in the right place? As a rule of thumb the bridge should be positioned in between the nick in the f-holes in the centre of the instrument.
- Do the feet fit? (there should be no gaps under the bridge).
- Is the bridge bending forward? The continuous tuning of strings can warp the bridge. If it bends too far forward it will want to fall over and may snap.
- Is the height of the bridge right? This, and the height of the strings over the fingerboard are vital. Too high and the strings are very difficult to press down, too low and there is a chance the strings will buzz.
- Profile or curve of the bridge: The profile should match the profile of the fingerboard. Too steep a curve and bowing becomes difficult; too flat and "double stopping" (playing two strings at once) can happen.

**6. Soundpost:** A small and IMPORTANT length of wood that sits vertically in the violin under the treble (E string) side of the instrument. Some instruments are delivered without the soundpost in (if so do not throw away) or if the soundpost falls down it needs to be in place before the instrument is played. Bringing the strings to pitch without a soundpost can severely harm the instrument. Its fitting and position are very important and the tone can be adjusted by moving/re-fitting the soundpost (trained repairer needed).

**7. Tailpiece:** The tailpiece wood usually matches the pegs and chinrest. Some violins have a metal tailpiece with integral adjusters (do the small screws turn smoothly?) The choice of material will be influenced by the type of strings used. Most cellists now use a metal tailpiece or one with built in adjusters as standard. Basses do not need adjusters as pitch can be achieved by the machine heads.

**8. Strings:** There is a vast range of strings available. Most beginner instruments come with metal factory strings fitted. These are fine, but the quality of tone is limited. Upgrading to better quality metal strings helps both the tone and tuning. Other strings are made with a synthetic core or natural gut core, all usually wound with metal. Seek advice on the brand, tension and tonal qualities of your strings.

**9. Bow:** Bows come in sizes to match the instrument. Usually made from wood (or fibre-glass/carbon fibre). Choosing the right bow is important. Check when you look down the length of the bow, is it straight? When you look side-on, does it have a camber? Does the bow feel right in the hand (if it's too heavy it will be difficult to control, too light and it may jump about). Does it tighten up smoothly? (Too stiff and little hands will find it difficult). For advice ask both your teacher and the shop.

**10. Left-Handed Violins:** Nearly all violins are right handed. Occasionally a left-handed violin is made if the student cannot hold the instrument or bow conventionally. Beware of so-called left handed violins as these are invariably right handed ones with the strings and bridge turned round).

Hopefully you have found this guide to be of use, and helpful in your decision of purchasing a quality instrument. We hope your instrument will provide years of enjoyment!

#### OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS:

##### **Federation of Music Services**

7 Courthouse Street, Otley, Leeds LS21 3AN  
Tel. 01943 463311 [www.federationmusic.org.uk](http://www.federationmusic.org.uk)

##### **National Association of Music Educators**

Gordon Lodge, Snitterton Rd, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3LZ  
Tel. 01629 760791 [www.name.org.uk](http://www.name.org.uk)

##### **Take it Away**

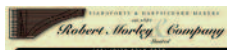
Arts Council England, 14 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 3NQ  
Tel. 020 7973 6452 [www.artscouncil.org.uk/takeitaway](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/takeitaway)

[www.musicmanifesto.org.uk](http://www.musicmanifesto.org.uk)

[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)



We would like to thank the following companies for all their help in collating this brochure:

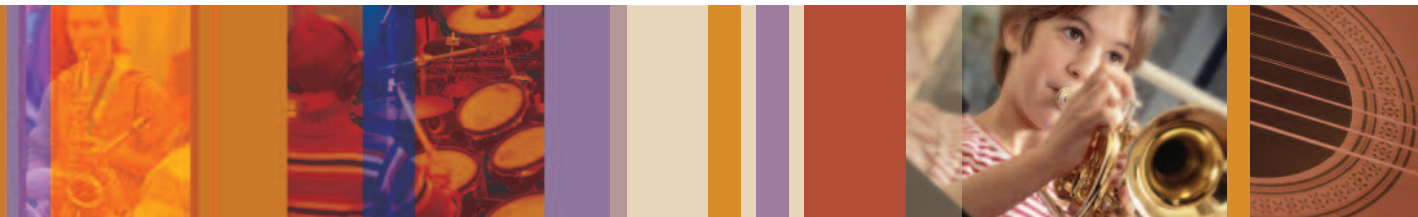


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If you have any further queries that we can help with, please contact:

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Eastwick Road, Great Bookham, KT23 4BA

Tel: 01372 750600 Email: [clare@mia.org.uk](mailto:clare@mia.org.uk)

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