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How does one choose the right stringed instrument outfit?

One cannot afford the cheap route when it is at the expense of your child's success. That is not to say that going to a discount music dealer is always the least expensive route. Often, a specialist will offer better instruments and service at a comparable price. In addition, one stands a much greater chance of getting an instrument outfit that will hold its value for resale or trade-in.

One of the most important elements of a student's success is the ease with which he or she can produce a good tone. An inexpensive instrument can often fit the criteria of the younger student's private teacher, presuming it is set up properly to facilitate ease of playing and response (the operative term being "set-up". Unfortunately, violin family instruments typically do not come ready to play from their respective makers in the opinion of most teachers. This is not just true for production instruments, as I've seen fine Italian instruments set up so poorly a professional would be unable to perform on the instrument! These instruments need work after they have been made to play and sound their best.

For violin family instruments, a proper set up is labor intensive and takes a professional with years of experience to do it effectively. The set-up should include elements such as; making a new bridge for the violin, hand shaping the fingerboard, installing a new sound post inside the instrument, fitting new pegs, and installing quality strings. Also important is adjusting the nut and string heights to make the strings easier to press down, and facilitate clear string crossing.

Another major factor is climate. Even if the instrument has been set-up well, if it was done in a dry environment and sent to a humid environment, the wood can change dramatically. Often, the set-up has to be completely redone because the wood has changed so much with the climate change

Because of the specialized nature of setting up violin instruments, it would be exceptional if a general music store or catalog wholesaler would have the expertise to provide a set up acceptable to your child's teacher. On the other hand, a violin family specialist should provide a good set up on all their instruments before they are rented or sold. You should be able to rent or purchase a better quality instrument from a violin dealer for a comparable price to the factory set up instrument you can get from a general music source. And, most dealers will provide generous credit and trade-in allowances when it is time for your child to upgrade to a better outfit.

Remember that a quality instrument is an investment in your child's future.

