

j
p
b

music

www.jpbmusic.com

AUTUMN 2008 NEWSLETTER

FROM THE U.K.'s LARGEST SUPPLIER OF VIOLIN FAMILY PRODUCTS

Summer I suppose is past history, although I don't remember too many sunny days. If this is what 'Global Warming' is all about, I guess we had all better get some good waterproofs!

Anyway, we had a spectacular Olympics, and have at long last some better news for homebuyers, so we need to start being positive, and whilst acknowledging that we are in a recession, whatever the Government says, we look forward to it being a short dip, in an otherwise positive market.

If you are a new visitor to our website, or a new customer, welcome. We look forward to being of assistance, we are only at the end of a telephone.

Whilst we usually reissue our Mail Order catalogue bi-annually, due to the volatility of prices and currencies, we have decided to hold off for a while, and hope that things stabilise sooner rather than later. In the meantime the website will show current prices, for those with Internet access. Fortunately whilst there are only a few new items, which of course are on the website, there are certainly not as many as in some years. Price rises are the main problem area, but of course that is why we are holding off the catalogue update anyway!

The schools are now back, and many of the players who possibly haven't been practising regularly will find that their instrument may perhaps have got the odd broken string to replace. Of course, recognising that likelihood, we are ready to ship out that replacement string immediately. Stocks as always are high, and of course at this time we ready ourselves for the onslaught.

For those avid readers of our Newsletter, you may notice some repetition. This is of course for new readers, who will have missed what we have had to say previously. I hope that you will forgive us.

Stocks of new Instruments and bows are now at an all time high, and for those players looking forward to up grading, now is a very good time. As we place orders for new instruments some months ahead of deliveries in many cases, the instruments in stock will in most circumstances be at pre-increase prices. However, as the stocks are replaced, there will be the inevitable price hikes. The volatility of the pound is causing chaos with prices, and the higher oil prices are severely affecting shipping costs, and with most instruments coming from China, yes even many of the instruments with European labels, these factors are having effect.

We are sometimes asked why the price for a particular instrument is higher than that shown in the price list, and this probably needs some explanation. When an instrument arrives, before it can be made available for sale it has to be

**JPB Music, The Coach House,
66a Clifton Road, Weston-Super-Mare,
N. Somerset, BS23 1BW**
[email: paul@jpbmusic.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:paul@jpbmusic.wanadoo.co.uk)

TEL: 01934 628600

FAX: 01934 613939

set-up. Depending on the value of the instrument, this takes several forms. In the ideal case, with say a Student Violin (eg up to say £150) all we would need our luthier to do is to put up the bridge in the right position, and check that the string height and position are correct, that the fit of the bridge to the top of the instrument is good, that the soundpost is in the correct position, and upright, that the operation and fit of the pegs is satisfactory, and that the strings do not buzz on the fingerboard. *Phew that sentence went on for ever!!!* We also now have to check the operation of the tailon (that little black plastic cord that holds the tailpiece in position), as the Chinese have decided to redesign the screw operation to improve it, and in some cases this does not work, and causes the threads to slip. In these instances, a new tailon will be fitted, of the original design which has proved the test of time! If these checks all prove satisfactory, the instrument will be deemed fit to sell. Fine, the price would be as the price list, no problem. However that is the ideal case, unfortunately there is a tremendous variation in what we would consider would make an instrument ready to sell and what the manufacturer may consider O.K. So if any of the setting up checks fail, we ask our luthier to undertake the necessary rectifications. Because whatever is undertaken will improve the instrument beyond the manufacturer's specification, this cost has to be added to the basic instrument price. It is an unfortunate fact that our high standards will not allow us to sell any instrument that is below a good playing standard, commensurate of course with its basic price; I have to say that we think we are correct, we hope that you agree. Higher quality instruments of course take a different route, and whilst some of them are sold to us as being Luthier setup by the supplier/manufacturer, these will still all be fully vetted. Generally we find that whilst the quality supplier setups are not bad, the peg fit and bridges tend to be an area not really good enough, so they will need addressing. Therefore additional labour costs unfortunately have to be factored into the price.

With a quality instrument, these tend to be purchased by us completely un-setup. In these cases, we have a fair idea how long this will take, and this is factored into the basic price, therefore the prices vary little from the list price. You can see therefore that our price list really is a guide to the basic price, but some variation may unfortunately occur. We also sometimes stock a few instruments of each type with better strings fitted, to demonstrate how better strings can improve/change the sound produced. These instruments will have the cost of those strings added to the list price. Of course add to that the volatility of the pound, and we have another variable to factor in.

The above paragraph attempts to explain our price structure, however where we list an instrument as 'Fully Improved', this is the highest standard, and all costs are already factored in, so the list price is the selling price!

We are being approached more and more by the Chinese Instrument manufacturers to buy instruments direct from them, missing out the U.K. importer. This would show a considerable cost saving, meaning that we could sell at a much lower price than normal. About 4 years ago we decided to purchase instruments direct, and sell them under our own label, we actually still do of course with the 'JPB Fitness' bass, which is incredibly inexpensive for what it is. However as regards Violins, violas and cellos, what we found was that quality of supply was very variable, changing from excellent on the early deliveries, to mediocre then to downright awful. This exercise really made us decide not, for the time being, to go this route. Whilst we will not close the door completely on this approach, we are rightly wary. If we could afford to go to China and select instruments ourselves, then have them shipped, fine, but that is not an option. The safer route, which nearly all violin shops adopt, is to purchase from an importer. Therefore, if we receive any poor instruments, we can send them back for replacement in the normal way. This safe option comes of course at a cost to you the customer.

A good compromise however is that more Chinese makers are coming over to the U.K., and showing their instruments for purchase there and then. Of course, based on the fact that they are not going to bring over poor instruments, as that would be a waste of their time & money, these instruments are well worth considering. We are therefore able to select each instrument on its merit, and therefore offer a superb instrument at what would be generally considered well below its normal price. However supply of these instruments is mostly not repeatable, so they are generally 'one-offs' What it does do however is give you the customer much more choice!

String price increases are still hot news, with many manufacturers either having increased or about to increase prices. We are still holding off passing this on where possible, but I guess not for much longer. Our Pirastro string prices have only increased about 13%, against an accumulative price rise of about 45%!

Whilst I have mentioned our Help leaflets in previous Newsletters, more & more are asking us whether we have one to cover a particular problem they are experiencing, and we are pleased to be able to say that they really are quite comprehensive. Whilst we have 'copyrighted' them (is that a word?), we don't mean that you can't photocopy them for your friends/pupils, we just don't want other shops pinching our ideas. Whilst there will never be a substitute for a trained Luthiers experience in instrument adjustment/set-up, there are some areas where a help leaflet can get you over an immediate problem, and maybe save you money. All of our leaflets are written in simple terms, which hopefully will enable a player, with care and precision to undertake many tasks, but of course, as always, we have to say that we cannot be held responsible if something goes wrong!

Labour shortages in China are in some cases still affecting deliveries, with many of the skilled operatives having left to go into the better paid construction industry, leaving the Instrument manufacturers with the unenviable task of recruiting and training new staff. This could of course be a possible problem area, with the next shipments of violins being of maybe indifferent quality. Until they arrive, we won't know of course, but we are being very wary and are operating a much stricter instrument quality procedure. We hope that we are not alone in adopting this approach, however I dare say that the General music shops, web based operations and Instrument wholesale dealers to schools, who traditionally don't have the expertise to undertake anything more than a cursory check of an instrument, will neither be aware, or really care. As we always stress, if the shop etc. you are considering buying from has anything other than the Violin family of instruments on display we suggest that you walk away, and find a dedicated Violin shop --- "Buyer Beware"!

Ebay as always is not a place to be buying an instrument. There are currently a lot of instruments being 'dumped' by manufacturers & importers, because Violin Shops world wide were not prepared to buy them, due to quality problems. For an Importer, it is hardly worth sending a defective instrument back to China, when someone will pay, often over the odds for it in an 'On Line' Auction. There is an old adage, which sadly is true, "If it looks too cheap, it probably is!" One wholesaler is also selling instruments, below most violin shops standards, via High Street Chain's. Whilst these outlets perform a valuable service to buy your food, or a new Lawn mower, do not expect to get anything more than the most basic instrument, possibly sub standard, which incidentally you will be expected to set-up!

Our August delivery of BAM cases is still a No Show, will they ever sort themselves out!

We have extended our **SPECIAL OFFER** of bulk purchases of Lina Rectangular Violin cases as the Schools have only just gone back, but when they are gone, that is it! These budget cases are amazing value for money, (see website) and even have a hygrometer. Whilst I know this doesn't affect individual players, this superb budget case which we normally retail at £30 (R.R.P. £38), can while current stocks last, be purchased in quantities of 6 or more for £20 each, + £10 carriage for the whole shipment to anywhere in mainland UK. This is a real bargain, especially for maybe a school with rather tired violin cases with their stock of rental violins.

As always our Bow stocks are really high, and the Website has a representative list, or alternatively we can send you a copy. We are not stocking the Top end Bows (eg £2000 plus), however we are always happy to recommend a reputable source. We are, of course, happy to send you a selection of bows to try, within your price range (regrettably not student bows). There is **NO CHARGE** for this service, we even pay the out going postage by Special Delivery, you just promise to look after them whilst in your charge, and pay the return postage, again by Special Delivery.

Instrument sales are still very good, maybe tailing off a bit over the Summer, but we always expect that. Now that the new Term has started, we are confident that sales will again be good. If we can match last years record of 1000 Instruments, we will be delighted, and may we say also amazed. As always we have you to thank for the great support and encouragement that you give us.

As advised previously, we are very fortunate to have taken delivery of a large shipment of the fantastic Hidersine Giovanni Violin outfits in $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ & $\frac{4}{4}$ Sizes. By purchasing in bulk, we have been able to negotiate the price down to the 2007 prices. These instruments at **only £75**, set-up ready to tune & play are amazing value for money. They are manufactured of the correct tonewoods, with ebony fittings, a Brazilwood bow, and a lovely rectangular case, with blanket & padded ruckstraps. Realistically they would benefit from, say, a set of Dominants at the special low price of £25, to allow them to give of their best. Therefore for £100 you would be purchasing an instrument that realistically 10 years ago we would have been asking at least £150 for. How good is that! At this price, when they are gone they are gone!

The Hidersine Piacenza, available as a Full Size Violin, 16" Viola and a Full size cello is still proving very popular, and is exceptional value for money. Mostly we have upgraded the Violas and Cellos beyond the initial specifications, as the strings supplied in particular, are not good enough. Therefore please ask for a price on these. The Piacenza is a superb instrument, but it does need playing in, maybe more than some instruments. However once played in, say after a month or so, it really does shine against the competition. The Violin & Viola come with a rectangular case, with ruck straps, and the cello with a padded cover. All come with a superior brazilwood bow, with ebony frog and parisienne eye.

We are also stocking the brand new Hidersine Veracini Outfit, see website, at a price much lower than others have indicated they are going to charge for this lovely antiqued instrument. We are only selling this as a fully set-up

instrument, so at the price of £390 you are really getting a bargain, in some cases more than £200 less than the competition. The case and bow that accompany this violin, are of a good quality, as befits this superb package. As we have said before, we welcome enquiries from, and sales to Local Authorities. We can often negotiate very attractive prices, often less than the wholesalers they generally use, and that is for instruments supplied ready to tune & play, not supplied 'un setup'! We are still unfortunately seeing Authorities purchasing instruments from wholesalers, on the basis that they are a few coppers cheaper. This is a false economy, and to those in authority, we recommend extreme care in such purchases.

If you are unsure as to whether to buy or rent, please ask us for a quotation, as often we are cheaper than your Local Education Authority, and we will at least have ensured that the instrument we are sending out has been checked over and setup. The danger with some L.E.A. loan instruments is that many of them will have seen better days. They are loaned out from year to year, returned to store, then resent out on hire whenever required, mostly with no more than a cursory check that it still has four strings fitted, not even that they are the right strings! So if what the student is playing wouldn't produce a good sound even when played by a professional, they are on to a hiding to nothing, and of course being a new player, they naturally think it is their fault & give up. Moreover some LEA's, and by no means all, will run out of the required size instrument, and just send out the nearest size that they do have, and that is awful. So please consider us when renting, and don't forget, if you do decide to rent from an LEA and the instrument is of poor quality, you should demand a replacement immediately.

For those purchasing instruments from us our 'Up-Grade' policy to individual players remains as always, that we guarantee to purchase back any instrument/outfit purchased from us at the price that you paid us (less the V.A.T. which the Government had anyway), when you upgrade to a better instrument/outfit, providing the instrument you return is in a good re-sellable condition. (This price does not cover any upgrades like different strings, as we would automatically replace the strings on return anyway).

On the subject of better strings, may we respectfully suggest that when purchasing an instrument/outfit, that unless it is fitted with good strings as part of its specification, you maybe consider asking us to upgrade it with a set of good strings? This can lift even the most basic of instruments to a different level and produce a much more mellow tone than the factory supplied strings. We don't charge for the fitment, just the cost of the strings and we even let you have the factory strings as a spare set! I can tell you that it makes the playing experience much better, and especially for the parent, the listening experience more tolerable!

Electric Instruments are still popular, and are now fortunately also more accepted by teachers and schools. It has taken a long time, but we have long felt that anything you can do to encourage a player is good. Peer pressure has long left the violin family out in the cold, but the new groups around now, with an electric violinist etc. are encouraging a more 'street cred' attitude. Any youngster who aspires to be in a group really wants 2 things: an instrument that he/she plays well, and an amplifier to carry to group practice in a well meaning parents' garage! The electric violin in particular covers these criteria well. It is compact, and only needs a smallish amplifier to make a big noise. You are however unlikely to get into the school orchestra, or to that matter any orchestra currently, with anything other than a traditional acoustic instrument, but that may not be your aim anyway. Therefore an electric instrument is most realistically to be considered a second instrument option. The Electric instrument offers the parent another distinct advantage; headphones. Almost silent practising is possible, what a boon when the player is struggling over a particularly difficult phrase in some exam. piece! We hold in stock several different makes of electric violin over different price ranges, qualities and features. The 'funkiest' of these is of course the Vivo², which is made of transparent Perspex, has not only fully electronic controls, but also a sound to light facility so the whole instrument flashes as you play it, how cool is that! The Bridge range of Electric Violins are also really attractive, and with a quality of playability and sound that is hard to beat. As a major Bridge supplier, we are able to discount these, generally to below the prices from Bridge direct. Whilst there are some cheap electric instruments around, unless they are playable by a player who is already fairly advanced, they are a waste of money. You will not find us stocking such instruments. As regards the Viola, Cello & Bass, the options are regrettably considerably less. This is a problem we are trying to resolve, but unless manufacturers are prepared to make them, it makes it difficult. Bridge manufacture instruments to cover the whole range, and these are superb, however whilst we stock the 4 string violin, the 5 string violin, octave violin, viola, cello and bass we only supply to order due to the low turnover of these instruments. It generally takes us around a week to obtain one, and don't forget our prices are difficult to beat! Yamaha do of course make electric instruments to cover this area, however other than the Silent Violin, we only supply to order, again due to the low turnover of these instruments. We do not sell the Yamaha Stick bass as we don't like it. Having no bouts, it is difficult for a traditional bass player to hold conventionally, and also whilst when it is packed up it is considerably smaller than an acoustic bass, it is very heavy, much heavier for instance than our JPB Fitness Bass. The sound reproduced is in our opinion, and that of the many players we know who have tried them, nothing like an acoustic bass, but more like a fretless bass guitar, it depends what you want!

If however you are unable to consider an electric second instrument, but still want to be able to play your violin, viola, cello or bass in a group, please consider the range of pickups, which with a suitable amplifier, also of course available from us, covers that need. They are a fine alternative, and give good response, without in most cases detracting from the basic acoustic 'look' of the instrument. Please enquire for details.

Our Website as always is exceeding our expectations as regards 'hits', but we do not have, or propose having a shopping basket. We had always felt that it would be unlikely, although the facility was designed in from the outset. Our reason is quite simple, we obviously want to be able to supply your needs accurately, therefore we would require from you the exact item you need, and whilst that might seem simple, let me give you an example: Violin Dominant E Strings are supplied in the following variants:

Soft, Medium & Hard; Aluminium wound or Plain steel; Loop or Ball end. 24 different permutations! I know that this is the exception, but we do prefer to get your order right first time. Anyway personal contact is much better, you know we are real people, here to assist, rather than some faceless Internet Outfit. Please note that when you click the 'About Us' section of our website, you get an address and full contact details, try that on some of the Internet only sites! We can of course accept orders by Fax or Email, but please let us have a phone number where we can contact you during the working day, so that if necessary, we can speak to you concerning any queries with your order.

Please enquire for any special offers. No goods offered will be seconds, or in anyway imperfect, but sometimes end of lines, or cases we have purchased as an extra to obtain some additional discount that may be offered with their purchase.

Whilst we have always offered a fantastic range of cases for your instrument, we have been made aware that there are some who feel that a budget case, like say the JTL cases for violin & viola should last quote 'forever'. We have to say that whilst they are amazing value for money, and much better generally than you would expect for the price, they do have a lifespan. Of course it depends how much use and how they are taken care of. For example we have many teachers using the aforementioned cases to take their teaching violin around in, and they are therefore being used on a daily basis. We know that many of these cases are still alive & well after four years, so it proves that with care a long life is possible. We have had others who after a year are complaining that they are failing, and when you ask to see them, the music pocket is stretched with the amount of music that has been carried, the fabric is torn, 'D' rings pulled off and the handle detached. This fortunately is exceptional, but it goes to show that your case needs to be treated within its design limitations. Just to show it is not only related to inexpensive cases, whilst we were working for Hamilton Caswell, we had a Professional player, who had purchased a Gordge Violin case 3 months previously, and violin players will know that they were the best, and was complaining of water getting into the case. When we looked at the case, we could see why, inside the music pocket was 26 pounds (11Kg) of music!!!! The catch was unable to hold that kind of weight, and was failing to completely close the case. We of course phoned Mick Gordge to ask his advice, after we had picked him up from the floor laughing, he said that what did the customer expect if he overloaded the case. Well Mick as a gesture of good will did repair the case, with the strict instruction that no more than 5 pounds of music was carried in the case. As we heard no more, hopefully that case is still surviving. Instrument cases are unfortunately perceived to last forever, however how long do we expect our suitcases to last if we are flying. I (Paul) used to do a lot of commuting to USA, and as it was for business purchased Samsonite cases, supposedly amongst the best. If those cases lasted four return trips, I thought that I was doing well, and that seemed about average. Whilst of course we don't chuck instrument cases around like the baggage handlers do our suitcases, it shows that case life is very dependant on care taken, and that exceeding the expected design parameters will cause premature failure. Please therefore consider that when purchasing a case you buy the right one for the job. It is fair to say that the more expensive cases are designed to be stronger in all aspects, and more able to withstand overloading and heavy handling. If that weren't true, we would never be able to sell the more expensive cases. The less expensive cases are more akin to the 'Ikea' concept, when they are worn out you throw them away, and for many that is what they want. At least it only cost say £21 (or £40 for the rectangular violin case). Imagine if you had paid £130 for a case with an identical specification to the JTL case, as some of our competitors charge! Now that is a different ball game.

In summary, if you have a £10,000 violin, we won't suggest a £40 case is recommended to house such a prestigious instrument. Not that it isn't capable of housing it, but its strength and protective capabilities were not designed to be really strong enough to provide a safe environment. Please therefore consider well what you are expecting from your instrument case. If is going to get regular hard use, spend that bit more, and get one designed for harder wear. If you want one as a short term case, maybe because you like to change colours frequently, then by all means spend less, and enjoy the bright colours of some of the less expensive cases.

On the subject of cases, many are now being fitted with handles where a long screw is used to hold the handle to its fitting brackets. A word to the wise, the movement of the handle can have a tendency to loosen the screw, so we suggest periodic checks are made, and if necessary, just retighten the screw with a cross headed screwdriver. We have tried sourcing spare screws, and have found it impossible, in the end we have had a few turned in a local engineering shop, regrettably the plethora of different length screws & thread types makes it impractical to cover all eventualities. Anyway enough of that, I think that kills that topic.

As always we are happy to welcome you to our shop, in particular to select an instrument or bow from our magnificent selection. Due to space limitations we do ask that you make an appointment prior to visiting. This will also ensure that we can devote our time to you and assist you in your selection. Any instrument or bow(s) selected can then be either purchased at the time or taken on approval for a short period. Bows can be returned by post, but not instruments, which must be returned by hand. While we don't open Saturday's, as a matter of course, we can often open by appointment. If a Saturday is the only day you can make, we will try to accommodate you.

Postal and transport costs are as always a problem for all companies offering a mail order service, and with postal charges in particular, seeming to be on the increase it seems every few months, this does present us all with cost increases. As always we try to keep our costs to a minimum, but primarily we do prefer to offer a next day delivery (subject to the carrier not letting us down), so unless you specifically ask for a second class service, we will always use a 1st Class post, or Next day Courier option. Fuel surcharges are already in place from the couriers that we are currently absorbing; however how long this situation will prevail depends on the price of oil I guess. Our suppliers are not being so forgiving, and are passing on all and every increase which impacts on us, and this we are, as they say, 'keeping under advisement'.

We have been asked on the odd occasion to take PayPal. We can see no reason why, when we offer secure Credit & Debit card facilities. Both customer and supplier have a good protection system in place from the card companies and banks. The same does not apply to PayPal, which in any case was only set up by EBay to assist in their operation. Regrettably, 'suppliers' only offering PayPal facilities will invariably be individuals not companies, as recognised companies will always be offered Credit/Debit card facilities by the Banks. As you will all be aware, if you are purchasing from individuals there are several areas of concern. Firstly they are unlikely to be VAT registered, and secondly the Sale of Goods act does not apply, so you are left in an area where no guarantees exist. We have seen some very flashy websites, but that is not a guarantee that there is a bona-fide company backing it up, so please take care. Regarding those customers wanting to use PayPal, as they will only give anyone a PayPal account with either a bank account or credit/debit card registered to it, as you already have those facilities, there can be no logical reason that we can see, why you should want us to offer a PayPal service direct rather than through the banks secure system. We do of course have a discretionary BACS transfer service for those regular customers with internet banking.

Anyway I hope that you have enjoyed this Newsletter, which contains our perspective of the Violin industry. The opinions expressed are ours, based upon our many years experience in this especial sector of the Music Industry. No part of this can be copied or reproduced without the authors expressed consent, except as stated earlier. Well that is the legal bit over!!!

Not quite of course we have to end with Errors & Omissions Excepted, however maybe some errors are deliberately there to stimulate you to contact us and give some feedback!

Paul Corder
Partner

TEL: 01934 628600

FAX: 01934 613939

© Copyright JPB Music

Partners: Joan Corder, Paul Corder & Barry Robinson Mallett
VAT REGISTRATION No. 840 4859 17