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WINTER 2008 NEWSLETTER

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

This Newsletter is going to be brief, primarily because we have been warning in the last 4 Newsletters of the forthcoming problems, and don't want to bore you with it again. So please if you want to look at the previous issues, please click on the link to them. It will confirm that we have been predicting the situation we now find ourselves in for some time.

We have now been given the Government's answer to resolve the Recession, so we look forward to you all SPEND, SPEND, SPENDING!!!!. Well we know that is highly unlikely, the 2.5% V.A.T. reduction does not cover a fraction of the cost increases this particular sector is experiencing. Thomastik prices for example are going up between 20% & 25% on December 1st, and Pirastro prices have gone up 13% today (27th November). The state of the Pound against other currencies is the main factor, largely because there is almost nothing made for the Violin Family of Instruments in the U.K., we are very exposed to external currency variations.

We have been warned that Stentor's 20% 'across the board' price increase in October is being followed by another in Mid December, and to add to that all of the other rises that have been imposed on the industry, it indicates a very different picture than we are being told by Government and the Media. We have already absorbed many of the cost & price increases during this year, and realistically, we can absorb no more if we wish to remain viable. Therefore over the next few weeks we will be updating prices on the Website, and issuing price update sheets to all customers placing orders. We will be as generous as we can in holding prices on older stock, but our high turnover means that this will only be a temporary measure. We have purchased enough Thomastik strings to cover about 1 normal months requirements, but when they are gone we will have to impose the price rises. I would like to be able to say that if the UK Pound becomes stronger, then we would be able to lower prices accordingly, but unfortunately like Fuel, which goes up immediately the cost of Oil goes up, and doesn't go down when oil goes down, my feeling is the same will happen in this industry. More and more of the 'so called' Budget high street music shops and wholesalers are going into receivership, which highlights the squeezes we have had to endure. I hope that I am wrong, but please don't hold your breath for price reductions if the situation with the UK Pound does improve.

The situation is of course very serious, who would have anticipated Woolworths going into receivership. I can't say the same about MFI, they have gone this route before. Realistically, until the banks get back to some semblance of normality, the situation is unlikely to drastically improve.

Stocks of all products sourced from China are at a premium, especially instruments, and in the short term this is unlikely to improve. This is one reason that we increased our stock level when we realised which direction the wind was blowing last year. The Chinese currency is one of the few worldwide which is increasing in strength, and

**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

Manufacturers are holding on to stocks, to take advantage of the increased price they would then be able to charge. If you are thinking of an upgrade, especially in the medium price range of instruments or bows, **do it now.** We still have a good stock of instruments and bows at 'pre-increase' prices. As regards Student or Starter instruments, this is a bit different. The release of Government funding for Local Education Authorities to purchase instruments has depleted these instruments to a dangerous level. Some LEA's had the foresight to use the money to buy instruments better than they would normally purchase, which has to be good for the potential players. Regrettably some LEA's just buy the cheapest they can, it literally is down to price. The ability of the instrument to even work does not seem to matter to them. Sad, and a complete waste of money, but hey, they have met Government targets. The Chinese factories have been laughing all the way to the bank, they have been able to offload instruments that the responsible side of the industry had already rejected. Their normal purchasers, the Internet 'cowboys' have also picked up a fair quantity of these sub-standard instruments. It is definitely a 'Buyer Beware' situation.

I have previously warned about the quality level of instruments from China dropping off. We are currently rejecting one instrument in every two, and these are from selected suppliers, who have gone to China to select the instruments themselves. Rest assured that once we have chosen them they are fine, and up to the standards we have become used to from China. That regrettably will never be the case from a non specialist music shop, or dare I say it, the Internet, so save yourself the hassle and purchase from a specialist like ourselves. There are many good Violin shops, who pride themselves in the quality of Instruments that they sell, please continue to use them, and in the long term you will save money, and have a more enjoyable experience.

Whilst I am in predicting mode, may I also suggest that the current run of Sales in the High Street will not extend much past Christmas, in particular in terms of products made outside of the U.K, and that is pretty nearly everything. In particular goods emanating from China, and that includes electrical goods & computers, will inevitably be subjected to the same price rises that we are experiencing, and there is really only a finite amount that retailers can squeeze their margins before we see another Woolworths.

If you are a new visitor to our website, or a new customer, welcome. It is sad that you have joined us at such a depressing period, but be assured, our friendly and helpful manner will hopefully cheer you up. 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 probably the next year, 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!

As I have written previously 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. Bear in mind that with our price structure, our bows are around 25 – 30% cheaper than the competition, for the same bows. We also have a strict policy of not adding spurious makers stamps to unstamped bows. We are, of course, pleased 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 carriage, you just promise to look after them whilst in your charge, and pay the return postage, by Special Delivery.

As advised previously, we still have a few of the fantastic Hidersine Giovanni Violin outfits in ½, ¾ & ¾ Sizes left at 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, 15½" & 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 of course also stocking the new Hidersine Veracini Outfit, see website, at a price much lower than others are

charging for this lovely antiques instrument. We are only selling this as a fully set-up instrument, strung with Thomastik Dominants, 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 who are looking for realistically priced instruments. This does not mean that we will try to sell the cheapest of the cheap, that would make us no better than the instrument re-wholesalers, who supply what can really only be described as 'tat', at rock bottom prices. Try us, we can often negotiate very attractive prices, usually less than you think, for instruments supplied ready to tune & play, not supplied 'un setup'!

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!

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.

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. Whilst we don't open on 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.

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