

Pricing of String Instruments

Quality of Workmanship

Another important aspect that goes with construction is whether a skilled artisan builds the instrument. As you will see, the best handmade violins are ones that take much longer to produce than those that are mass-produced.

String instruments can be separated roughly into three groups. I must say though that this is in broad terms and there is some overlapping of the groups. With the increased presence of Oriental and eastern European violins in the market, the distinctions between various classes of violins are blurring, providing the opportunity to get much better performance per dollar than used to be the case.

Student Made:

The first thing you will notice about these instruments is the varnish. Most will be of a high gloss that chips easily. The accessories will generally be of the lower end stained hardwood. The wood is not always carefully selected or matched, in fact there is no consideration of the grain of the wood. Parts do not always fit as they should and symmetry is often lacking. As you look inside the instruments care is not given to graduation and parts may actually be missing. Wood will not be seasoned and may already be warping. Many of these instruments are now coming from China.



Step-Up Instruments:

Next is a series of step-ups. Varnish will start to be either spirit with some actually being applied with oil. All the inner parts will be intact such as real blocks in all four corners with linings in tops and bottoms. As you progress to all real blocks you usually find a separate glued in bass bar. As you progress with the interior construction the improvements show up in the craftsmanship, the graduation, the age and quality of wood. The wood ranges from plain maple with no curl up through that which has a beautiful figured maple back, sides and scroll. Tops will be in both one and two pieces of wide grained to fine and close-grained spruce. Many productions lined instruments here are carefully made; good wood is used and competent artisans do many of the finish details by hand.



Master Made:

This is the top of the master's works. Violins in this grade will be completely hand made and may take months to make. The maker will choose the best woods attainable and will spend a lot of time selecting each piece used in construction, as each will play an important part in the complex tonal structure of the instrument. All construction will be of the highest quality from the purflings to the sting to the graduations. Luthiers tap the tops and backs and listen to make sure the tone is right all over and they still do in high-end violins. That doesn't happen in an assembly line factory. The maker will also apply the finest varnish. And will display the maker's knowledge and skill used in the art of acoustics.

Check back next month as we delve into the seller's second most important category in pricing:

Country of Origin