

## GET THE BEST FROM YOUR INSTRUMENT!

*Some top tips for players of all ages that may also save you money.*

**DO** clean any powdery rosin of both your instrument, the strings, and bow stick with a soft dry cloth every time after playing. Rosin left to cake on and harden on an instrument or bow can be difficult to remove later and may require specialist cleaning and require the bow to be re-polished – an unnecessary cost! Rosin build up on the strings will cause them to vibrate incorrectly and lose their tone quicker, and therefore need replacing sooner.

**DO** keep your violin bridge upright – do not allow it to start leaning forward. Always check it after tuning. As a general guide, the back of the bridge (facing the tailpiece) should appear roughly at right angles to the belly of the instrument. If a bridge is allowed to lean forward, it will take on a permanent bend in the middle, lowering the string action, and will eventually snap. Cutting a new bridge is costly and can easily be prevented in many cases.

**DO** check that the tailgut is not stretching. The end of the tailpiece should be close to the saddle. A stretched tailgut alters the tension of the strings and may be an indication that the tailgut is about to break.

**DO** replace your strings regularly. They will become dull and lose their tone long before they break! Cello and Double Bass players are usually particularly guilty of keeping strings on for too long!

**DO** have your bow re-haired at regular intervals. How frequently will depend on your usage, but a professional player may re-hair every 4-6 months. An amateur orchestral player may perhaps only need a re-hair every year. The hair has microscopic 'teeth' which wear off, and the bow loses its 'bite' long before the hair falls out, and despite how much rosin is applied.

**DO** have your instrument set-up by a professional repairer and regularly checked. A badly set up instrument will have a poor sound, can make it harder to play, and may cause damage to the instrument.

**DON'T** applaud the conductor by tapping your bow on the music stand – you risk snapping the head off the bow (and inflating the conductor's ego!).

**DON'T** leave a bow or violin on a chair – the next person along (or you!) will probably sit on it!

**DON'T** use chalk on pegs to make them grip. Although its often used traditionally in the past, it causes a jerky operation of the pegs and can jam them up. Use a proper peg composition paste which will help give smooth operation and grip. With peg paste, 'less is more' – apply and wipe most of it off. Using lots of peg paste on pegs that don't fit properly to begin with will not help! If you are in doubt, get your pegs looked at by a professional repairer.

**DON'T** leave your instrument in conditions of excessive heat or cold (or fluctuations between hot and cold!), or excessive dryness or humidity. This can cause cracks to

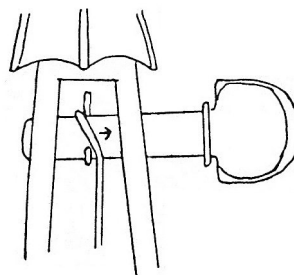
open up, glue joints to come unstuck, fingerboards to warp, and varnish to blister. Chief culprits are leaving in hot cars in summer and cold cars in winter, and a centrally heated lounge which may be kept too dry and warm for an instrument. It goes without saying, never to leave an instrument near a radiator or central heating pipes even if the heating does not appear to be on – it may be timed to switch on later!! Never leave your instrument in a place where it may receive strong sunlight through a window at certain points in the day. Ideally, try to keep your instrument in a moderately, evenly, heated and ventilated room, non-sunny room.

**DON'T** leave an instrument (particularly cellos and basses) leaning against a wall or a chair where they can slide across the wall or be knocked. If leaving upright, it is always best to lean it into the corner of a room (but beware central heating pipes!). If leaving for any length of time, put it back in its case – it's safer there. Don't leave an instrument on the floor if it is likely to be knocked over in a crowded classroom or rehearsal.

**DON'T** leave your bow tensioned up in the case. A bow kept tensioned will start to lose its 'spring' and if jarred in transit might cause the head to snap off.

**DON'T** over-rosin your bow! Routinely applying a heavy dose of rosin every time you use it can clog the hair with rosin, clogging the natural microscopic 'teeth' that give the bow 'bite', and will usually result in the bow needing re-hairing sooner rather than later. A little rosin applied strictly as and when needed to give grip, is a better rule.

**DON'T** force a slipping peg into the pegbox to make it grip – you may crack the pegbox. Use peg composition, or if still slipping, get it looked at by a professional repairer to ensure it is fitted correctly. Correctly winding the string onto the peg will help naturally 'draw' the peg into the pegbox and also prevent string breakage (see diagram).



The correct method of winding on a new string.

The string is now wound progressively towards the head of the peg.

**DON'T** leave small repairs until they become major ones – they just cost more to put right!

**DON'T** try to repair an instrument or bow yourself. You may cause more damage, or by using the wrong glue or materials, may make a professional repair longer, more expensive, or even completely impossible. Don't do it yourself – get help!