

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Company

What does your company do?

Strings for Tomorrow, LLC is a stringed-instrument retailer, selling primarily violins, violas and cellos. We also have a selection of French, German and Brazilian bows, and an assortment of our favorite rosins and other accessories. Via our Tomorrow Program we help to increase accessibility by donating at least 1 instrument for every 3 instruments that we sell to a deserving school or community organization. We are also very active in starting up new string programs at schools throughout the state.

What is your company philosophy?

Strings for Tomorrow was founded on the single-minded desire to make available great sounding, stringed instruments at reasonable prices to adults and children in Hawaii, including to those who do not have access to an instrument and are unable to afford one.

An important part of our philosophy is quality. And therefore,

- all of our instruments are made out of wood (spruce and maple);
- all of our instruments are properly fitted; and
- all of our instruments are professionally tested.

This we think, is the minimum that anyone can expect.

Another important component of our philosophy is the emphasis placed on offering instruments at a reasonable price. The stringed instrument area is often one with a lot of pricing mystique. We have taken this to heart, and all instruments are priced in a fair and consistent manner.

Finally, accessibility is important to us—we would like to provide access to a stringed instrument to as many individuals as possible. And so, not only are we involved in setting up string programs, but we also create ways to making playing an instrument a reality. An example of this is our rent-to-own program.

Why isn't there a shop?

Strings for Tomorrow minimizes overhead and keeps operating costs to a minimum—the idea is, the less fixed costs we have, the more we can pass on to our clients, and the more we can stick into philanthropy. And so rather than maintaining a shop, we employ a more personalized approach of setting up individual appointments. In this way, we can focus exactly on every individual's need.

What inspired the sell 3, give 1 away idea?

Like we say on our website, it was Bob and his kids (and adults) on Molokai that got us thinking. Joanna was on Molokai playing with the Galliard String Quartet. She came back and mentioned that they were playing without shoulder rests! Getting them shoulder rests was easy. But figuring out how to come up with a longer-term, viable solution that could help out programs like Bob's was a lot harder—we were convinced that this was something that mattered, something that needed a solution now.

You give instruments away, so why aren't you a charitable organization?

We considered that, and from our perspective, we are like a charitable organization except that we pay taxes. We think that by generating profits (rather than asking for donations), we have a more organic and stable source of income that can be used for charitable purposes. Our goal is to be as efficient as any other for-profit organization, and as giving as a charitable one.

Instruments

What kinds of instruments do you offer?

We have violins, violas and cellos. We don't have any basses in inventory at the moment, however we are more than happy to order them for you.

My son is 8 years old, do you have smaller instruments?

We do. We have instruments in sizes ranging from 1/16 to 4/4 size for violin and 1/10 to 4/4 size for cello. We might add, that we pay particular attention to our non-full size instruments. All too often, instruments are not fitted properly, and this will hinder a child's progress. Therefore, we are dedicated to making sure that all non-full size instruments have great projection, a clear upper register, and are easy to play.

How do you ensure the quality of your instruments?

Our pursuit of quality pervades in how we operate. We have strict quality standards and checks/procedures in place. For instance, instrument quality standards range from the underlying materials used, to the selection of the instrument makers that we work with, to the proper instrument setup and ultimately to the testing of instruments.

What things should I consider when buying a stringed instrument?

One of the most common beliefs when buying an instrument is that the more you pay, the better the instrument must be, and therefore the better the tone. This unfortunately is not true. There are a lot of people who find great sounding instruments for a smaller amount of money, and there are some who spend larger sums for poorer sounding instruments.

One of the easiest ways of buying an instrument is to first decide how much money you would like to spend, then go to a reputable dealer, have them play a few instruments, and listen to the instruments objectively. Which has the nicest tone?

Another route of selecting an instrument would be to go through the following list of instrument characteristics that determine price:

- **Who is the maker of the instrument?** The name of the instrument maker is important in determining the price of a stringed instrument. There should be a label inside that tells you who the maker is, and where/when it was made. If the instrument maker is more well-known, you'll get papers or documents from the maker, that he/she indeed made the instruments.
- **What is the country of origin?** Most people think that Italian instruments are the best. After all, the violin was invented in Italy and the earliest music for violin comes from Italy. Also, the Italians have not really commercialized

instrument making like the French and Germans (and Chinese) have. Chances are if the instrument is Italian, it is made by one person or an apprentice supervised by a more well-known maker. That said, there are many good French and German (and even some Chinese) instruments. Ask if the instruments are handmade or factory-made. This does have an effect on sound.

- **What materials were used?** A violin, viola and cello are made of wood. Generally, a maple back with spruce sides and top. The spruce top is the sounding board. Spruce is considered to be the best material for the sounding board of string instruments. It is the sounding board for piano, harpsichord, guitar lute etc. The fingerboard and pegs are generally made out of ebony. Each piece of wood vibrates differently, and it is the combination of vibrations that will produce a nice tone.
- **Does it have a beautiful tone?** Sound is subjective, and everyone has his/her own opinion as to what sounds beautiful.
- **Is it physically beautiful?** A physically beautiful instrument does not mean that it has a better sound. But people will often prefer an instrument that is highly flamed or if it has a one piece back. I guess, it is something like, it's difficult to enjoy a meal which tastes great, but which looks horrible. But taking great pains to make an instrument look like an old, Italian masterpiece will not make an instrument sound better. The choice of wood should be for its acoustical properties and not for its beauty.
- **Has it been properly setup?** Bowed string instruments need people with specialized training and focus who can do proper set-ups, select the best strings for the individual instrument, and generally maximize a stringed instrument's potential. An expensive instrument can sound and behave as badly as a student instrument if it is not properly setup.
- **Is it easy to play?** If the right materials are used, if the instrument has been correctly made and setup, then chances are that it is also easy to play.

Once you have found a set of instruments, they need to be tested. Always use the same bow when testing instruments. Play the same scale on each instrument to get an idea about sound. Which one sounds best? Which one feels the most comfortable in your hand? Then play a few lines of music on each instrument. Try different dynamics and bow techniques to check for responsiveness. Also have someone else play the instruments for you so that you hear its sound.

How do we care for our instrument?

Here are some tips:

1. **Avoid extreme temperatures.** In Hawaii, generally it is heat that we need to be concerned about. Excessive heat can damage the delicate varnish, and can also melt the special glue that is used to hold the instrument together. Extreme cold, as well as dryness or rapid climate change of any kind can cause cracks in the instrument. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself if you'd be comfortable in whatever environment you are planning on leaving your instrument. A big no-no is leaving a stringed instrument in a parked vehicle in the sun.
2. **Proper storage.** It is a good idea to keep your instrument and bow inside a good quality case, when it is not in use. Most damages happen because of neglect.
3. **Cleaning.** Use a soft, clean cloth to remove the rosin dust from your instrument. You will need to carefully clean the top plate, fingerboard, bridge and bow stick. If this is not done, rosin dust can build up over time, and become more difficult to remove.
4. **Never over-tighten the bow hair.** The bow is supposed to have a curve in it at all times. Always loosen the bow hair after playing, and before storage. Avoid handling the hair on the bow with your fingers. Natural oils from your skin will shorten the useful life of the bow hairs. Also avoid applying too much rosin to your bow.
5. **General handling.** Great care should be taken in handling your instrument and bow. Never throw or toss your instrument or bow, and be very careful never to drop it. Chairs and sofas are dangerous places to leave instruments and bows. They can be easily sat upon.

Here is a good link on instrument care (even though it is about cellos):

<http://www.aitchisoncellos.com/CelloCareGuide4.pdf>

We bought an instrument from you and now we want to upgrade, can we trade in our old instrument?

Certainly. A lot will depend on the condition of the instrument. 70% to 80% of the initial purchase price will go to the cost of the upgrade for instruments in good to excellent condition.

My daughter has outgrown her 1/2 size instrument, and is ready for a 3/4 size, what things should we take into account when upgrading?

A good idea is to invest in the best instrument you can afford at the “next level”. A playable, good sounding instrument makes practicing much more pleasurable and will increase your child’s progress. A discerning student at any age will appreciate the difference between a starter instrument and a more advanced one. If the student is committed, the time to upgrade is at the point when the musician can tell the difference.

Do you do repairs?

We do.

If you have issues, just send us an email at contact@stringsfortomorrow.com and we will setup an appointment.

When should I rent instead of buy?

It is a good idea to rent if the person playing is a beginner. This gives you the flexibility of getting rid of the instrument if there ends up being no interest. However, most rental instruments are very basic instruments, which mean they do not have a great sound and may not be as playable as a higher quality instrument. That’s the dilemma. Therefore it is probably best to rent long enough to evaluate whether there is a true interest in learning and playing an instrument.

Do you rent instruments?

We do! Take a look at the rent-to-own section of this FAQ.

Should we insure our instrument?

Yes. Insure your instrument to cover against fire, theft, and/or damage anywhere the instrument goes. Make sure that the policy extends outside your home for school, concerts and travel. Often one can add this coverage to homeowners or renters insurance for a few dollars or maybe even nothing at all. For very expensive instruments, specialist musical instrument insurance may be a better alternative.

How do you find/select instrument makers?

Finding good instrument makers is a long and tricky process. We do a number of things: we look around and ask around, we go down lists of members of instrument-making associations, we attend fairs, and when we find one that we like, we go and visit them, and if they pass that test, then we will test one of their instruments.

We want as partners, makers that produce great sounding instruments, and who will continue to produce great instruments in the future. We constantly monitor the quality of the instruments delivered, and we are very much aware of the power of incentives. We look for makers that have the incentive to continue to produce great instruments. Things that will influence our selection include where the maker is from, their company structure, their dependability, whether they come from a long line of instrument makers, whether there is a son or daughter in the business etc.

How do you price instruments?

We are pretty systematic about how we price all of our products. We understand that we live on an island, where often times, we pay an extra “tax” for living in paradise. And so, we make the extra effort to price instruments in a consistent and fair manner.

We will also subsidize things that we feel are important. So for instance, one way of protecting your instrument is to have a fiberglass (or any good) case. Problem is that cases not only cost a lot, but they are expensive to fly in (like a cello case). And so when someone buys an instrument from us, we are happy to bear some of the burden, knowing that in the long run, having such a case will mean less headaches for all.

Student Model Rent-to-Own Program

At Strings for Tomorrow LLC our philosophy is that customers should be able to rent quality musical instruments at affordable prices, and accumulate as much equity towards the purchase price as possible. Therefore, 100% of all rental payments made are applied to the purchase price of an instrument. There is no interest, finance or hidden charges if timely payments are made. Our objective is simply to offer a very customer-oriented rental program that makes learning to play a stringed instrument even more accessible to all.

How much would it cost if I decided to purchase a student instrument?

Student violins range from \$350 to \$650, student violas are \$450 to \$725, and student cellos range from \$700 to \$1,250.

How much is the rent per month for a student instrument?

\$20/month for violins and violas, \$50/month for cellos.

How long is the rental period?

The rent-to-own contract will run for 12 months. For the first 11 months, a fixed rental payment of \$20 or \$50 + GET (depending on instrument) is due. In month 12, the remaining balance is due. So after 12 months, the instrument is yours!

What if I decide that I want to buy an instrument, but not the one that I am renting?

No problem. All of your rent will be applied to any instrument of equal or greater value.

What if the instrument gets damaged or stolen?

You are responsible for any damages or if the instrument is stolen. We offer an optional coverage for loss of, damage to each violin, viola and cello. The cost is \$10 per month for violins and violas and \$20 per month for cellos.

What if I decide that I do not want to continue renting?

You may return the instrument at any time with no penalties. But please note that in order to meet certain legal conditions, the minimum rental period is 4 months.

What do I need in order to start renting?

All that is needed is a valid ID, a refundable deposit of (\$20 for violin/viola, \$50 for cello), your first month's rent and a Visa or MasterCard on which we can charge your monthly rental payments to.

I want to rent-to-own, how do I set up an appointment?

Go to the [Make an Appointment](#) section of our website, and tell us when you are free.

Bows

What kind of bows do you carry?

At the moment, we carry brazilwood and pernambuco bows from Germany, France, Brazil and China.

How does one select a bow?

Here are a few guidelines. Selecting a bow can be a daunting task. Like your instrument, sound should be the most important consideration.

Here are a few guidelines:

1. **Quality of wood:** Stringed instrument bows come in several varieties of wood, but usually either in brazilwood or pernambuco. Both woods come from the same tree. The brazilwood is the outer layers or the newer growth. The pernambuco is the inner, stronger layers.

Since the late 18th century, pernambuco has been the wood of choice. It is a dense, heavy wood that comes from several areas in Brazil. The wood seems to possess just the right combination of strength, elasticity, and responsiveness. Top bow makers will spend a great deal of time looking for and choosing only the very best pernambuco sticks, i.e. those with higher sound velocity (see next FAQ). But due to environmental degradation, pernambuco is now scarce, and as a result, the government of Brazil has put severe restrictions on the export of this wood—making it rare and expensive.

Many players consider the work of the great 19th-century French makers as the ultimate bows. Why have the later makers not been able to equal their work? Some say that the species of pernambuco used may no longer exist. Others feel that makers like Tourte, Peccatte, Sartory and their contemporaries were simply the best makers. That said, many players prefer modern bows that are stiffer, stronger, and quicker in response.

2. **Weight and balance:** The average weight of a violin bow is about 60 grams (a viola bow is 70 grams; a cello bow, 80 grams). But remember, this is only an average. Many bows by the great makers of the past weigh as little as 54 grams and yet they play beautifully. Proper balance is far more important than weight. If a bow feels right in your hand, it probably *is* right. A bow should feel natural in the hand—well balanced from tip to frog with equal weight throughout.

3. **Round or Octagonal?** It actually makes no difference. The bow maker creates a bow in accordance with that particular piece of wood, taking into account stability, weight, strength and flexibility—all play a role in whether the stick becomes octagonal or round. But note that the great French master bow makers rarely made octagonal bows. Even today, most top makers produce predominantly round bows.

4. **Wood or Carbon Fiber?** While carbon fiber might be a good choice for outdoor performance, the truth is that nothing plays better than wooden bows. Hundreds of years of experimenting have led many back to pernambuco time and time again.

5. **Other Things that Could Influence the Price:**

a) The Bow Maker. The name of the bow maker is important in determining prices as with a stringed instrument.

b) The Country of Origin. The French are as well known for bows as the Italians are for violins. The French actually invented the bow as we know it, and over the years they have produced many fine bow makers. Prices of bows made by modern French makers will tend to be higher than those from countries such as Germany, even though they may play just as well as a French bow.

c) Ornamentation/Color. Decorative effects on bows are typically concentrated on the frog (including rings, pearl eyes, metal inlays, linings etc) and metals used in

their mounting (nickel alloys, silver and gold). Frogs are usually made out of ebony wood. Finally, grip windings may be made of silver, gold or plated metal wires, or even colored threads.

Wooden bows are generally brown with pernambuco exhibiting warmer shades of brown when new, and darker, richer browns when older. Some bow makers color their wood to their own preferences.

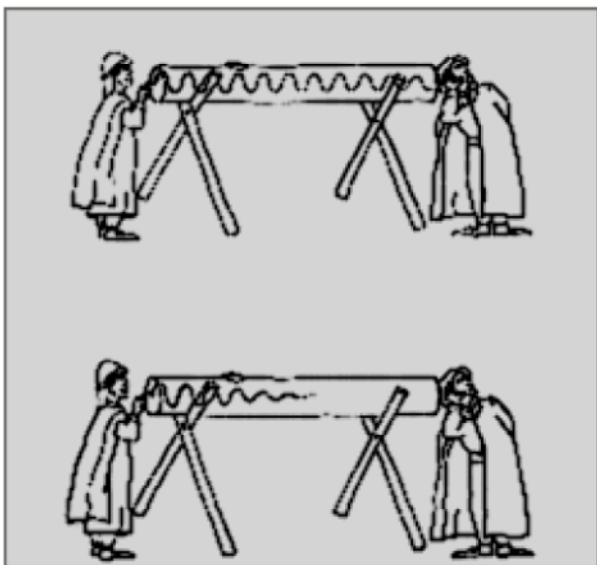
6. How much do you want to spend? The prices of bows range from the inexpensive (\$100) to very expensive. A good rule is to spend between 25% - 35% of the cost of your instrument. You will find that bows are like instruments, they each have their own personality and will bring out different qualities in your instrument and your playing.

7. How to select a bow: When trying out bows, it is important to always use the same instrument. Try two or three bows at a time, playing the same scale on each bow. Which bow makes your instrument sound better? How does the bow feel in your hand? Is it too heavy, too light? Then try various bow techniques, such as spiccato, staccato, martelé. Which bow reacts the best for you? Play long notes, listening to the sound. Play different dynamics. Play several lines of music on each bow. Which one handles slurs, rhythms, bow speeds the best?

What is sound velocity? Why is it important when selecting a bow?

Here is the main idea: the higher the sound velocity, the quicker sound is transmitted, and the narrower and more regular is the stick vibration. This provides better grip of the bow on the string, yielding a clearer and purer sound.

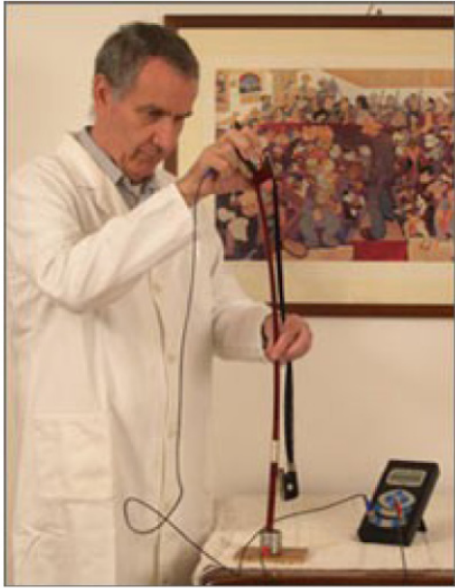
It is said that Stradivarius used a particular method of selecting his woods. He would prop up a trunk like below, and his assistant would beat the trunk with a hammer at one end, while Stradivarius listened to the emitted tone and how long it took for sound to pass through the trunk. Judging from his masterpieces, this empirical test served him well.



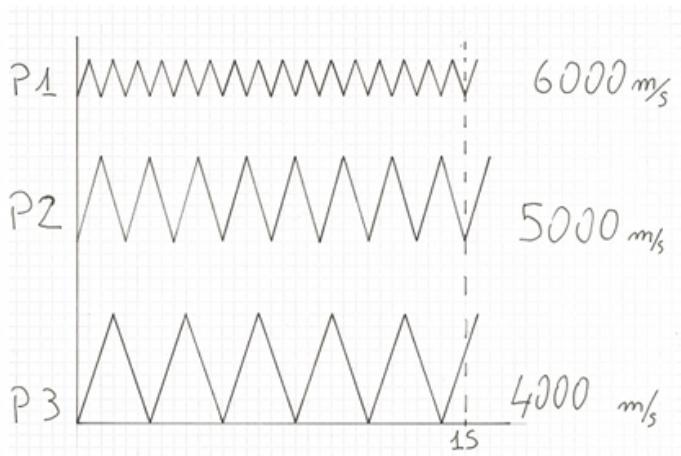
But how to determine with objectivity and some scientific precision the quality of a given bow? Is there a way that we can reduce some of the guess work involved in evaluating the potential tonal properties of a bow?

Contemporary bow makers use an electronic device called the Lucchi meter to measure the time needed for sound waves to travel through a piece of wood. As a matter of fact, pernambuco wood is sold referencing a Lucchi number.

In the picture below, we see Giovanni Lucchi and his Lucchi meter. The device ultrasonically “pings” the wood between two sensors, and then using a simple formula of length divided by time, gives a reading on sound speed propagation. This velocity parameter is expressed in meters per second (m/s).



All things being equal, the higher the velocity of sound, the better. The “stiffer” or “tenser” the wood fibers, the quicker sound is transmitted—this corresponds to a narrower and more regular stick vibrations. See the simple graphic representation below of three different sound velocities. See that as the sound velocity decreases, the vibrations become less frequent and sharper. The more frequent and narrower frequency of P1 allows for a clearer and more defined sound. Of course, sound velocity is just one key parameter to take into account when selecting a bow. We list a number of other factors to take into account in *How Does One Select a Bow?*



If you are testing bows, and want to measure the velocity of sound of your bows, just contact us at contact@stringsfortomorrow.com.

How do you find/select bow makers?

We find bow makers the same way we find instrument makers. We simply look around, go down lists of the members of bow making associations, attend fairs, and when we find one that we like, we jump in a car and go visit them.

How do you price bows?

Here too we do our best to price consistently. We are aware that bows from certain areas or makers carry a premium. That is ok with us, as we know that customers are well aware of this. Using sound velocity as a kind of objective check, we do run screens to make sure that there are no inconsistencies in pricing.

Special Orders

Do you do special orders?

We love to do special orders, particularly in areas where we do not hold inventory. So for instance, if you are looking for a bass, just let us know. We know of a number of good instrument makers. Or, interested a BAM case? We are happy to do a special order, and you can be assured that it will be a competitive offer.

Schools / Community Organizations

Do you have special instrument discounts for schools?

We do. We offer all schools a 10% discount on instruments.

Do you do bulk orders?

We love bulk orders, and will do our best to make a very competitive quote.

Appointments

How do we setup an appointment?

Simply go to our website, click on the "Setup an Appointment" tab, fill in the appointment setup form, send it off, and we will be in touch.

Outer Island Orders

What about us who live on the outer island?

If you live on the outer island, we will work with you (and your teacher) to find the violin, viola, or cello that exactly meets your needs.

Mainland Orders

Do you ship to the mainland?

We ship anywhere. If someone is interested in one of our instruments, we will ship.

Helping Our Community

How do we apply for a free instrument?

Simply go to our website, click on the “Tell Us Your Story” tab, download the form, fill it in and return to yourstory@stringsfortomorrow.com. Remember, just one form per school/community organization.

How do you decide which organization gets an instrument?

Generally by need. The greater the need, the greater the chances of receiving an instrument.