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SUMMER 2011 NEWSLETTER

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

3rd August 2011

Well the Good Ole' USA has stepped back from the brink of disaster, but were they in time to stop the next threatened Slump. We have already got the jitters in Eurozone, which even though we aren't in the Euro will still cause us major problems, least of all with the Banks, who surprise, surprise have, through greed, jumped into the Euro market to so say make money, only to have it all potentially go wrong again. Who will pick up the tab this time, I bet it will be us. All this doom and gloom has of course affected the Music Industry quite hard, with a very large number of closures, although not fortunately in the Violin related sector. The Internet presence, in particular for the Guitar and keyboard areas, has undermined the profitability of that part of the Music retail business. It is a headache for all REAL RETAILERS as we have to factor in the cost and overheads of Premises, wages, VAT and taxes, which the Internet businesses do not necessarily have. In fact some of the string internet sellers work from home, so they don't really hold any stock. They rely on Wholesalers delivering to them the next day, which of course may not happen, so deliveries can be protracted. Not as good as us of course, because 99 times out 100, your orders from us arrive the next day from our huge stocks. This also means that as internet sellers will charge your card on placement of the order, they actually buy the strings with your money! Instant profit or what!

There is another area of extreme concern, and this is an area that I have been warning about for a couple of years. This is FAKE STRINGS!!! In particular Thomastik Dominant, Thomastik Vision and Pirastro Obligato. There are probably loads of others but to date I haven't seen them. These fake strings come in packaging which looks identical to the genuine article, and the silks on the ends of the strings also match the originals. They however do not sound, or play like the strings that they are imitating, in fact those that I have seen have in fact had steel cores not synthetic materials as the originals. I am not aware of any fake strings being supplied by any of the established retail businesses, as generally we would all only purchase from the Importers. Thomastik only has one UK importer and Pirastro only has 3 UK Importers, so it is fairly safe to purchase strings from established retailers. It is a fact that currently there are Internet sellers who are currently selling Thomastik Dominant strings at less than the Trade Price. Therefore either these people are subsidising their string sales, which would be commercial suicide or they have not been legally obtained. They can only be coming from somewhere other than the Authorised suppliers, which means that their source is irregular, and likely, Fake.

This has presented us and I guess other established retailers with a dilemma and that is string returns. The Violin string manufacturers have always adopted a bit of a strange idea when it comes to accepting that strings could ever be faulty; the fact is, as far as they are concerned, they are never faulty. Reality stipulates that however good a product is, there will be the occasional faulty item, and I am sure that the Trading Standards Department would agree. Therefore we at JPB have always accepted back the odd returned string, although if it happens more than a

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couple of times (say breaking or unravelling over the top nut) we are likely to suggest that the instrument may have a sharp edge somewhere, or the string groove be in need of lubricating with a soft pencil.

Our generous replacement policy has therefore potentially created us with a problem, which is now rearing its ugly head. Players are hunting around to buy strings as cheaply as possible from wherever they can, not surprising as money is tight, however on receiving the strings they are finding that they do not sound right, or sometimes are dead. So what to do, the Internet supplier offers no warranties, and certainly not returns, The Trading Standards Department cannot help, in fact purchasing through the Internet has always been a 'BUYER BEWARE' situation, whatever legislation may either have been or might be enacted. All legislation relates to 'Bricks and Mortar' businesses not back street dealers. So how does the player resolve it; Ah purchase another set from an established retailer like JPB, and then a few days after receiving them, phone up and complain that the strings are defective. We, because we have always operated a fairly relaxed exchange policy, have almost without question replaced them, although it would be unlikely that a whole set would be duff. Whilst we have been caught out a few times, we have now adopted a new approach. In future, ALL strings supplied by us will be identified with 'Smart Water'. I cannot say how, as otherwise it could compromise our security, however it does mean that any returns will be assessed firstly by scanning for our unique Smart Water identity. If the Scanner reports that the item did not come from us, we will firstly advise the customer, and then recommend that the Authorities be informed. We are 90% sure that the strings come from China, as we got some supplied on Instruments we purchased direct from a Chinese manufacturer who had reportedly strung the instruments with Dominants!

We do keep records of all orders, with stock information, and we will always be supportive should there be any problems with items we supply. Sadly on the occasion that strings are returned to us, when they have been purchased from somewhere else that does not have such a comprehensive string return policy, we are unable to help. I appreciate that this is not the norm, but we do get upset if we are asked to sort out someone else's problems. This is very much the danger of using Internet retailers where you have little or no comeback should the goods prove to be faulty or fake.

In conclusion, if something appears to be cheap, it almost certainly is a Fake product. We try to be as competitive as realistically a responsible retailer can be, so if prices offered are cheaper than ours, I personally would be VERY VERY WARY!!!

I have suggested to the Manufacturers that unique identifiers, like holograms be used to reduce the faking, but they have said that realistically the fakers are sophisticated enough to be able to get around that, so it seems that another security measure needs to be adopted. Our Smart water system relates only to us as this system uses a unique and one off identifier.

I cannot stress too strongly, that if you want to get support you need, deal with reputable dealers, who have a shop front, and are thus constrained by the Sale of Goods Act, Trading Standards and Consumer Protection Legislation. How many websites of internet seller's have a stated and legitimate business address? Many are run from peoples back rooms / garages, and to them Returned goods are not an option. It is like using a builder whose van doesn't have their home address or a Land line Telephone Number!

I am sorry to have harped on so much about this dodgy practice, but you need to be aware.

We are here to help and provide a service and we intend being around for a long time, but that can only happen if you use us!

Anyway to continue, we really have been very pleased with this Summer, sales have been good, in fact approaching the usual for the time of year, although mainly on larger items. Strings and consumable sales are much lower than usual, and as we still are maintaining our low prices, I guess that to some extent this is due to the above. We have been notified of several largish increases in string prices, so I suggest not leaving it too long. Pirastro went up on 1st August, the others will be just behind. We will hold our prices as long as the stock lasts, although the need to have fresh Gut strings precluded us increasing our stock holding to take advantage of the old prices.

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