

YOUNG PERSION'S GUIDE

There is no shortage of accessories designed to make teaching children both effective and fun, as **MAGGIE WILLIAMS** finds

YOU ONLY GET ONE CHANCE TO START THE right way with a very young pupil, no matter which member of the stringed instrument family they have set their heart upon mastering. Creating a learning environment that engages as well as challenges is an important part of getting off on the right foot.

To help in that quest, there are plenty of accessories around designed to appeal to children, while still supporting the serious business of musical study.

ANY COLOUR BUT BLACK

Coloured accessories are, of course, not just of interest to children. However, the lure of a pink bow or a green music stand is likely to be at its peak among the under-tens. Most of the accessories here serve exactly the same purpose as their grey, brown or black counterparts, and use the same or similar components, so bright colours don't mean a reduction in quality.

Supersensitive Clarity's Spectrum range of coloured hydrocarbon rosins is available for all bowed instruments, including winter and summer bass varieties. For those wishing to coordinate their rosin with their shoulder rests, look no further than **Everest's spring collection** for 4/4-sized violins only, in a collection of ten colours. The shoulder rests have a one-piece body with adjustable legs and a neoprene foam covering, with colours painted on using a durable baked paint.

Shoulder rests and rosins are all very well, but they are generally hidden from view. Not so **Glasser's bows**, which offer violinists and viola players of all ages the opportunity to own a fibreglass stick with a nickel grip in one of nine



A rainbow of bow hair from Glasser's bows



Coloured rosin from Supersensitive



bright shades. The rainbow effect can be further enhanced with coloured bow hair, in a range of six shades – there's even the option to combine two or three colours together.

If a gold bow with blue, yellow and purple hair leaves any part of the spectrum uncovered, then the shortfall can be completed with some **coloured bowstoppers**. Like most of the other accessories in this section, there's more than colour to a bowstopper. These simple devices clip on to the bow, restricting movement between upper and lower points, and hence promoting better bow control.

Supersensitive Clarity Spectrum rosin around \$17

www.supersensitive.com/rosin.html

Everest shoulder rest around £20

www.everestshoulderrest.com/Shoulder-Rest

Glasser Bows and bow hair from \$112

<http://beststudentviolins.com/GlasserBows.html>

Bowstoppers - pack of two around \$15

www.bowstopper.com

ANIMAL MAGIC

There's a carnival of animals out there for the aspiring child virtuoso. From **Wittner's Taktell animal-shaped metronomes** to more string-specific accoutrements such as shoulder rests, zoologically themed accessories are likely to appeal to the very youngest players upwards.

Things4Strings' range of bow hold trainers for violin, viola and cello use animals – frogs and fish for violins and violas and the superbly named Cellophant for the cello – to help train young hand muscles and encourage correct grip. The two-part set for violin and viola comprises a frog and a fish that can be positioned on the bow grip according to the size of the player's hand. The fish helps with the alignment of the index and middle fingers, and the frog offers support to the ring and little fingers, angling the latter on the frog's back. The Cellophant encourages correct positioning, with the thumb nestling in the elephant's trunk.

Although it may not boast an animal theme, the **Broadbent Doodlebow** also seeks to develop a correct bow grip. It builds on the age-old idea of using a pencil when practising hand position, but Broadbent has developed that into a simple plastic tool shaped like a bow grip. It is still about the size of a pencil, making it easy to carry around in even the smallest of violin cases.

Frogs crop up again with the **Magic Frog hand strengthener** from Enterprising Rabbit. This is suitable for age five up to ▶

CHILDREN'S ACCESSORIES



The Cellophant is designed to help young cellists achieve a good bow hold

Animal-themed accessories are likely to appeal to the very youngest players upwards



Enterprising Rabbit's Magic Frog helps to strengthen both young and old hands



young adults. The Magic Frog comes with great promises attached – by slotting your digits into its five finger chambers, you will achieve stronger wrists, better vibrato and improved thumb flexibility, and will be encouraged towards weighted rather than pressed fingers. All this and an organza pouch to keep it in.

Enterprising Rabbit also offers a range of **animal-shaped shoulder rests** that compete with the Cellophant for animal-related pun of the month. The piscine Shostakofish and bruin Stradabearius are merely the tip of the iceberg. In addition to a clever name, each shoulder rest includes a brace of leather straps to ensure a correct fit for any size of violin or viola, wrapping around the button. An additional band holds the shoulder rest on to the edge of the instrument.

Wittner Taktell animal metronomes (penguin, owl, cat): from around \$90
www.wittner-gmbh.de

Things4strings cellophant and frog-fish sets: around \$30
www.things4strings.com

Broadbent Doodlebow: around £4
<http://doodlebow.com>

Enterprising Rabbit Magic Frog and Fiddle Friends Magic Frog: \$8.95

Fiddle Friends: around \$20
www.enterprisingrabbit.com

FINE FINGERS

Once the Magic Frog has worked its charms in strengthening and warming up young fingers, all that remains is to position them in the correct place on the fingerboard. Using tape to help beginners (young and old) get to grips with positioning and intonation is hardly a new innovation, but that basic approach has now evolved into full-length laminates that can be applied to the whole fingerboard.

D'Addario's Fingerboard Appliqué is one of the more subtle interpretations. It comes in two versions – optic, which adds subtle fret markings in gold to give visual guidelines for finger placement, and tactile, which provides a subtle feeling

of frets on the fingerboard but is practically invisible to the untrained eye. It is available for 1/2-size violins upwards.

First Frets fingerboard markers are along very similar lines, in this case incorporating a version for the cello as well. The approach isn't quite as subtle as the D'Addario version – here the markers are in unmistakable primary colours, which won't concern younger learners but might prove a little garish for the older beginner. The cello version is available from 1/8-sized instruments upwards and the violin equivalent begins at a 1/16-sized instrument, requiring the most delicate of touches to ensure it is positioned correctly.

D'Addario Fingerboard Appliqué: from \$15
www.daddario.com

First Frets: violin from around \$3; cello from £4.50
www.musicroom.com

DOUBLE BASS

YOUNG DOUBLE BASSISTS are far less well served than their violin counterparts when it comes to animals, coloured merchandise and stringed instrument-specific learning aids such as finger positioning guides. One exception is the **Yorke Mini Bass Kit** which brings together not only a 1/8-sized mini bass instrument set-up with flexible core strings, but also an appropriately sized, soft-cover, wooden stool; a French bow; an endpin location board; rosin; and a copy of the widely used *Bass is Best!* learning method from Yorke Music. It is suitable for children from the age of six upwards.

In addition, as we've seen above, there's no shortage of penguin-shaped metronomes, coloured music stands and child-friendly practice devices to ensure that the aspiring young bassist has a healthy dose of fun. ■

Yorke Mini Bass Kit: approximately £1,000 for 1/8 size, £1,200 for 1/4 size. www.stentor-music.com