



What you need to know if you're thinking of buying online

The Australian Music Association and music retailers across Australia are increasingly concerned about the growing number of complaints about unplayable instruments that are being bought on the internet. Of particular concern are the brass & woodwind and stringed instruments where precision of manufacturing is critical, and high tech gear where products can be fake, faulty or are supplied without tech support or upgrades.

Here are some quick tips to help you protect yourself when buying online:

1. **Warranty and customer service:** what warranty is offered and how do they handle complaints or questions? Australia's consumer protection laws are very strong ... but that's not the case in India, China or many of the countries you can buy from online. There is no such thing as an 'international warranty'. Whoever supplies the goods into Australia is responsible for the warranty.
2. **Does the online seller have a street address that you can go to if things go wrong?** Or do they only have a PO Box or an overseas address? If they won't resolve your problem by email or phone, where can you reach them? Australian best practice is that an online seller should provide their ABN (Australian Business Number), physical address, and phone and fax numbers.
3. **How will the instruments be supplied?** Many instruments are like flat-pack furniture - you have to assemble them. So please factor in the cost of set up, especially if you're buying orchestral strings or guitars. A full set up will cost from \$80-\$150, depending on the instrument.
4. **Are you buying more than one instrument?** If so, we strongly recommend you buy just one instrument to test the quality before investing more money into the unknown. We regularly hear of schools that have spent \$6-8,000 only to find they are 'objects resembling instruments' - the trumpet valves are soldered closed, the trombone slide won't, and the violin bridge and tuning pins are so unstable they won't hold the note, and many more horrors.
5. **Buy with a credit card, PayPal or, if you're spending a large sum of money, use an escrow service.** PayPal has some limited ability to recover your money. Your credit card company may assist in helping you recover your money (check with them before you buy). An escrow service is like putting money in trust - you put the money into the escrow account, the supplier sends you the goods and if you're happy with them you direct the escrow firm to release the money. If

not, you return the goods and the escrow service gives you your money back. (Check the terms and conditions of the escrow service before you use it.) If the supplier won't allow you to use an escrow service, then we recommend you walk away. Any reputable company would accept escrow.

6. **Is it a genuine musical instrument or a toy?** Many toys are accurate reproductions of a genuine instrument ... to look at. But the tuning and size of the instrument isn't right and your child won't be able to learn to play on them.
7. **Is it a genuine instrument or fake?** If the price is significantly lower than the same product in a store then be suspicious. Some fakes are great quality, most are not.
8. **Is it a high tech product that normally comes with tech support and/or free upgrades?** If so, unless you buy from an authorised retailer in Australia you won't qualify for that support or those upgrades. You may decide that the price difference is worth not having those services - that's your call. But make an informed choice: check that you are comparing *like with like* when you get an online price.
9. **Check the power supplies.** If you're buying an instrument that plugs in, check what power supply it comes with. Converters can end up costing the difference between the two prices ... and this will also affect the warranty.
10. **Are they members of the Australian Music Association?** If they are, you can rest assured they're a genuine business, with an office or store in Australia. Check them out at www.australianmusic.asn.au under Find a Retailer. We recommend that our members always use our logo on their website and we take strong action against anyone who uses our logo and who isn't a member.

Genuine musical instruments are precision manufactured from quality materials. They have to be. Metal that's too soft will bend. Poorly seasoned wood will bow or crack. Cheap glue won't hold your instrument together for long. That type of quality, expertise and manufacturing equipment costs money. As they say, you get what you pay for.

Genuine musical instruments have come down in price in real terms over the past few years. Manufacturers work hard to deliver a proper instrument at a price that delivers value. And the local music store and local authorised importer invests in warranty, customer service and technical support ... and there are strong laws to ensure they do the right thing by their customers.

Your local music store is here to help you. All you need to do is ask!

For more information go to www.australianmusic.asn.au/buyingonline

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