



# ROUND LAKE

## BANDS



## Parents Guide to Purchasing a Band Instrument

### Basic Information about Instruments & Quality Brands

Band instruments are marketed in three grades of quality: (1) beginner, (2) intermediate, and (3) professional models. Most so-called “intermediate” grade instruments are really “beginner” instruments with no more than a few modest cosmetic improvements such as a better case or silver-plating. None of these improvements really add much to the actual playing quality of the instrument, but do add to the cost. Examples of truly “intermediate” quality improvements (and worthy of paying more money for) would be such things as a solid silver head joint for a flute or clarinets with a body made of real grenadilla wood rather than plastic (which also is often referred to as “resin” or “composition” material). As far as professional instruments go, price is a good indicator of a truly professional grade instrument. Professional instruments cost from a thousand to several thousands of dollars more than the same instrument in a beginner grade.

Most saxophones, trumpets, and trombones do not come in a true “intermediate” grade. The marginal differences between those marketed as “beginner” and those marketed as “intermediate” make very little real difference in their playing response or tone quality. The real difference in instrument quality is noticed when you step up to a “professional” instrument. These are the “tools” that working musicians use to earn a living, and do play considerably better, but, as I mentioned before, can cost thousands of dollars more than the “beginner” grade instrument. Contact your band director if you are considering purchasing a “professional” grade instrument to discuss the pros and cons as they pertain to your specific student.

The following band instrument brands are ones that are recommended by many successful band programs and reputable instrument dealers. Only beginner and intermediate instrument brands appear here. A list that would include professional instruments would include additional brand names that would be discussed between director and family should the need arise.

- **FLUTE** - Yamaha or Gemeinhardt
- **OBOE** - Yamaha, Selmer, or Fox
- **BASSOON** - Fox
- **CLARINET** - LeBlanc, Buffet, Selmer, or Yamaha
- **SAXOPHONE** - Yamaha, Selmer, Keilwerth, or Jupiter
- **TRUMPETS** - Bach, Conn, Yamaha, Jupiter, or Getzen
- **FRENCH HORN** - Holton, Yamaha, or Conn
- **TROMBONE** - Bach, King, Conn, Yamaha, or Getzen
- **BARITONE** - Yamaha
- **TUBA** - Yamaha, Miraphone

Regardless of the brand selected:

1. **FLUTES** should have open holes (“French style”), with hole plugs and an inline “G” key. If you can afford it, it is best if it is solid silver throughout (head joint, body, and foot joint). The more silver there is in a flute, the better its tone and response, however, the more silver there is in a flute, the higher its price. Buy as much solid silver as you can afford. If a flute with a solid silver head joint doesn’t fit your budget, make sure that the entire flute is silver-plated, and not nickel-plated. A low “B” foot joint is an advanced feature that you might consider spending the extra money for, if you are purchasing an all (head joint, body, and foot joint) solid silver flute. It is definitely not worth it for a silver-plated flute, and probably not worth it for one with only a solid silver head joint.
2. **CLARINETS** should be made of genuine grenadilla wood (i.e., no plastic, “resin”, or “composition” clarinets). The formal title of the common clarinet is the “soprano clarinet” which should help if you run into the issue of soprano vs. bass clarinet while searching.
3. **ALTO SAXOPHONE or TENOR SAXOPHONE?** - The saxophone most commonly used in band is the alto saxophone. The tenor saxophone, which is still a rental RLAS instrument, is a little larger, and is lower pitched, than the alto. The key arrangement, where you place your fingers, and the basic playing technique are the same for all saxophones. If you can play any one type of saxophone, alto or tenor, you should be able to play all types of saxophones (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, or bass), provided you can adjust to the size difference. Music for any kind of saxophone can be practiced on the alto because of the commonalities throughout this particular instrument family.
4. **TRUMPET or CORNET?** We strongly recommend trumpets. There are bigger selections of them and will be available at any music store. Cornets are easier to hold for very small beginners. However, they are less practical as a long term investment for older students. Playing technique and fingerings (“button” arrangement) are the same for both, therefore if a student can play one, they can also play the other. Even if a student were to start on cornet they probably would want to change to trumpet in the future because it is more versatile and is suited to many more performing opportunities than cornet (marching band, jazz band, brass ensembles, solo work, etc.).
5. An “F attachment” for **TROMBONES** is a highly recommended (but not required) option sought after by most advanced trombone players. This option almost doubles the price of a beginner trombone, but is a tremendous aid to playing.
6. **INSTRUMENTS FOR MARCHING BAND** - We do not expect you to purchase a separate instrument for marching; however, if you do think you will be participating in marching band and playing **TRUMPET, SAXOPHONE, or TROMBONE**, we recommend that you get a silver instrument. Silver instruments will match the school instruments on the field and present a unified look amongst the ensemble. If you play **CLARINET**, we recommend that you hold onto your beginner plastic clarinet, but play with a superior mouthpiece. We do not want you to take your wood clarinet out on the field and possibly have it warp due to unexpected weather conditions. **Sousaphones (marching tubas), Baritones, and Mellophones (marching french horns)** will always be provided by the school for those students in marching band.

To ensure that you get the most for your money, your band director needs to inspect any used or new instrument not listed in the brand names above. Any instrument (new or used) purchased from a music store or an individual should be purchased with the clear understanding that after being evaluated it may be returned if found unsatisfactory.

## Percussion Kits

Percussion instruments (drums, xylophone, etc.) and some sticks and mallets are provided by the district for student use. All percussion students are strongly encouraged to get a percussion combination kit so they can practice at home. Good brands for percussion kits include Ludwig, Pearl, Vic Firth, and Yamaha. A percussion kit will contain at least the following:

- Bell kit
- Practice pad
- Folding stand for both instruments
- Snare drum sticks
- Plastic bell mallets
- Case to carry all equipment (some come with wheels and/or backpack straps)

The percussion kit should stay at home and the student will use school percussion equipment during class and events. The sticks and mallets should travel between school and home so the student can use their own equipment when they are able to do so. Percussion students should continue purchasing relevant sticks and mallets throughout their time in the band program. A separate list of percussion purchase recommendations will be provided to percussion students.

## Purchasing from a Music Store

Music stores have a variety of instrument rental plans and buyer options that include one, or more, “rent-to-own” plans. This means that the amount paid in rental fees accumulates over time and eventually the instrument becomes the property of the renter. Inquire about specific details at each music store. Also, ask about a “rental return” instrument, or a good used instrument. The quality of a “rental return” is usually excellent, and the quality of a used one ranges from satisfactory to very good, depending upon the amount you want to spend. Either one will offer an opportunity to save some money. Some music stores will apply the entire amount paid on your child’s first instrument to a better, or “step-up”, instrument when they are ready to advance.

When comparing dealer prices, you should always be careful to refer to the same brands, model numbers, and options (larger case, silver-plating, case cover, etc.) As with many other consumer products, some brands of band instruments are always more (or less) expensive than other brands. A comparison of different brands of the same instrument based solely on price may lead to a false comparison of quality. Shopping around at various dealers is the best way to be assured of the best price. For the last two decades, Round Lake has used Music & Arts for our instrument purchases, repair, and supply needs. We would highly recommend them to anyone looking into purchasing their own instrument.

## **Purchasing from an Individual**

A used trumpet or trombone purchased from an individual will typically be satisfactory if it has been well maintained with good preventive maintenance. Used flutes, clarinets, or saxophones, on the other hand, might need costly repairs (even if they have been well taken care of), if it has been several years since they have been played. You might have to pay more than a hundred dollars for a complete overhaul on these instruments if they are more than three years old, and have never been overhauled.

## **Purchasing from Non-Music Stores or Websites**

Some stores are selling band instruments now that have never sold band instruments in the past. They do not have a service department, therefore, are not in a position to service what they sell, and what they sell is not recommended by most reputable band directors. Parts for these instruments are almost nonexistent, and the quality of the materials used in their construction is suspect. Manufacturing techniques, by the companies that produce these inexpensive imports, lag far behind those of the companies that manufacture the recommended brands listed above. Because of these factors, when these instruments need repair, there are no shops that will be able to provide the necessary materials.

Overall, students find these instruments harder to play, extremely difficult to keep in tune, and not very durable. The old adage, "You get what you pay for", is so true concerning musical instruments. The prices of these cheap imported instruments are far below (in some cases, 50%, or less) of what the mainline brands sell for. It just makes sense that the quality of these instruments has to suffer to sell them at those ridiculously low prices. This is not a complete indictment on all imported musical instruments. Many of the world's finest musical instruments are imported, including some that are on our list of recommended brands. The difference is that these recommended companies adhere to very high industry standards and produce instruments that are truly outstanding and long-lasting.

Any two instruments might look the same, but they are not the same quality. It would be far better to get a used instrument of one of the recommended brands, than to get one of the inexpensive imports from one of these stores that are not equipped to provide the repair service, professional product knowledge, band books, and other band supplies your child will need. Just because an instrument is new, there is no guarantee that it will play well. Even if one of these stores offers to replace it for free, another new instrument of the same kind will need adjusting and fine tuning by a skilled repair technician, which they do not have. Therefore, purchasing instruments from these types of stores is not recommended.

You should avoid purchasing instruments online. You should always tryout an instrument prior to purchasing. If you wish to purchase reeds or mouthpieces through Amazon, they are a trusted vendor. However, we do not recommend purchasing those items through other wholesaler internet stores unless is it a music specific website.

## Detailed List of Instruments by Make & Model

Instrument	Brand	Model	Mouthpiece	Standard	Notes
Flute	Jupiter	CEF551	N/A	Student	
	Yamaha	481H	N/A	Professional	
	Yamaha	581H	N/A	Professional	
	Yamaha	684H	N/A	Professional	
Oboe	Fox	333	N/A	Student	
	Yamaha	211	N/A	Student	
	Fox	400	N/A	Professional	
	Loree	(as specified)	N/A	Professional	
Bassoon	Fox	41	Fox CVX Bocal	Student	
	Fox	222	Fox CVX Bocal	Professional	
	Fox	220	Fox CVX Bocal	Professional	
Clarinet	Selmer	CL300	Vandoren M13	Student	
	Yamaha	YCL220	Vandoren M13	Student	
	Buffet	R-13	Vandoren 5RV Lyre	Professional	
Alto Sax	Buffet	BC8101	Selmer C*	Student	
	Yamaha	YAS62II	Selmer C*	Professional	
Tenor Sax	Yamaha	YTS23	Selmer C*	Student	
	Yamaha	YTS62II	Selmer C*	Professional	
	Yamaha	YTS875EX	Selmer C*	Professional	
Trumpet	King	601	Bach 5C	Student	
	Yamaha	YTR2335	Bach 5C	Student	
	Bach	Strad 37/180	Bach 3C	Professional	
	Yamaha	Xeno	Bach 3C	Professional	
French Horn	Holton	179	Schilke 27/29	Intermediate	
	Yamaha	Geyer wrap	Schilke 27/29	Professional	
Trombone	Jupiter	636 series	Bach 6.5 AL	Student	
	Eastman	ETB432/430	Bach 6.5 AL	Student	F attachment
	Yamaha	YSL448G	Bach 6.5 AL	Student	F attachment
	Bach	42BO	Schilke 51	Professional	
	Edwards		Schilke 51	Professional	
Euphonium	Yamaha	YEP321	Bach 6.5 AL	Intermediate	
	Willson		Bach 6.5 AL	Professional	
Tuba	St. Petersburg	N202	Bach 18	Intermediate	
	Miraphone	191	Bach 18	Professional	