

Energize Your String Program with an Electric String Quartet

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Electric instruments can help energize your string program. It is a way to bring fun to the forefront and invite your students to experiment with composition and arranging. The coolness factor will attract new students to it that otherwise might not consider bowed orchestral instruments. The kids who call it *Dorkestra* won't be saying that for long when they see and hear electric instruments.

Those of us who have not touched electronic instruments since high school are intimidated by the unfamiliar. But it is a very short learning curve to make a start with electrics, and then you can add what you like. Additionally, practically all the knowledge and technology developed for other electric instruments can be used with electric bowed instruments. You can easily get students with this knowledge to help you with your program- and perhaps to attract students who play guitar to your program!

Sometimes I am asked why a classically trained violin maker has electric instruments for sale in his shop. First of all, many of my clients were asking me for them or buying them and asking me for help making them more playable.

Secondly, I am concerned about the future of education, especially string education. Music lovers as well as musicians are created by music educators, and without strong string programs in schools, every professional musician is out of a job. I believe electric strings can strengthen traditional string programs.

Thirdly, the sterling quality and reputation of Yamaha made representing their instruments an easy choice. They are the only company with matched quartets in different price ranges, all of them guaranteed for **5 years**, an unbelievable number when you consider 30 days is standard for most electronic goods. Their proactive stance with regard to string education stance made it even easier.

How Can My School Afford It?

Don't think an electric quartet needs to bust your music budget- many districts will accept an electric quartet through the technology budget. District technology grants for computers are usually in the \$25,000 range. A fraction of that sum will get a Yamaha quartet and all accessories.

Find out if there is any possibility of this and you can get new instruments without impacting your music budget.

Make sure to ask if your school or district has any grant-writing staff. My staff and Yamaha will help you write a grant proposal if you have nobody else to help you.

You can search online for grants- crowdfunding, Donorschoose.org or approach local corporations, large banks or Target stores. http://midatlanticarts.org/resources/art_links/funding.html has a list of funding possibilities

There are also funds available through the National Endowment for the Arts to states and counties- my experience as a volunteer helping distribute government funds is that the process is very time intensive and very competitive and usually favor disadvantaged schools. Approaching local organizations or creating your own fundraising event to appeal to local businesses and families may be more effective.

Yamaha Instruments

All Yamaha instruments, acoustic as well as electric, are covered by a 5 year warranty. The quality which this represents makes Yamaha the choice of the budget-conscious as well as those for whom price is no object.

All Yamaha instruments feature dual jacks for amplifiers and earbuds/headphones, used for practice and also to monitor sound during Music Lab class or performance (full information about the music lab below). You can also plug in a cd player or I-pod and play along with your favorite songs. My personal favorite feature- I can play along with any song I like an nobody can hear me until I am ready to be heard! And every student I have had in my shop- shy or otherwise- likes this too!

Silent Strings Instruments- for Silent Practice with acoustic feel and playability, but not plugging into an amplifier. The newest addition to the line, the SV-150 has revolutionary features. All the electronics have been removed from the body to lighten the weight and allow more built-in functions, including a metronome, tone effects (distortion, echo, reverb, etc., 24 in total). Best of all, it has the capacity to allow you to load music MIDI files into the controller that allow you to play along for practice or performance. And it even lets you slow down the playback while maintaining the pitch for practice. Additionally Yamaha is developing their own content for downloads, but you can download any music files through your computer onto this instrument. You can see a video demo at <http://youtube.com/watch?v=KP00gmknPQ>

Studio Solidbody Instruments- these instruments are designed with dual pickups which can still be used for silent practice but can also be plugged into large amplifiers.

Both of these instrument families can be worked on by any violin maker, utilizing standard pegs, bridges, strings, tailpieces, chinrests, and shoulder rests.

Electric Violin- The 5-String EV is for rocking out and is designed more like an electric guitar, with individual equalizers on each string. While it was primarily designed to have the power to play in a rock band, many schools like it because it has a 5th string and can double as a viola.

Yamaha does not make small amplifiers but they do make more sophisticated sound systems. For individual practice and performance in class we can recommend several different brands that are very affordable.

Benefits of Yamaha Electric Instruments

- Easy to get started- buy a quartet for a small sum and add components
- Electric quartets produce a quality of sound equal to acoustic instruments costing much more money
- Using the Yamaha Silent Lab one teacher can run 4 chamber groups simultaneously; teacher can monitor each student individually. Note: students only hear themselves unless extra electronics are purchased.
- Yamaha 5-year guarantee with fast, reliable service if needed, unlike smaller manufacturers who can become overwhelmed and keep instruments for months
 - One violinist of the Yamaha quartet spoke of very long delays in getting an instrument back from another maker.
 - Any electronic manufacturer will accept a 3% failure rate so despite their best efforts components do fail. But Yamaha will back up all components in their products.
- Weather proof instruments that never crack from dryness or need seams glued

- Super-reliable instruments made of properly- seasoned woods and peerless craftsmanship
 - Stable necks and pegs that require minimal maintenance and will not warp, nor need to be adjusted after going through heating seasons
 - Instruments are set-up with maple bridges, ebony pegs, and fingerboard, thus can be adjusted by any luthier using standard tools and techniques
 - Standard strings of your choice can be used.

- Start with an electric quartet in HS or MS
 - Kids can compete to be in the Electric Quartet
 - Bring the quartet to the recruitment days in Elementary school.
 - The 5-string can be purchased in place of a viola and used as either violin or viola
 - Schools purchasing a quartet will be eligible for an improvisation workshop featuring visiting Yamaha artists.
 - Students can play many available arrangements as well as learn to arrange their own pop music for string quartet