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String Recommendations During Extensive Home Practice

From our friend at Pirastro, Ed Mingo

During these strange days of quarantine, cancelled concerts, and online music lessons many musicians are asking which strings are better for playing at home. Many of the strings used by professional musicians today are specifically made to fill larger concert halls and help the strings cut over a horn section. While these strings are fantastic for professional performance at a symphony hall they can overpower smaller rooms in a big city apartment. When choosing strings for extended at-home practicing or online performances, we suggest looking strings with the following types of construction.

Lower Tension - Most string manufactures now list their string tensions on their websites. Choosing a set that is marked medium but has a lower tension than another brands medium is a good way to go. For example if a players is playing a higher tension string such as Evah Pirazzi the lower tension Obligato set that is also marked medium is a nice option. Lower tension strings do not project out as much and tend to fill smaller rooms in a more pleasing way.

Core Materials - Changing core material is another option, for example if a player is using a brighter sounding steel core switching to a warmer sounding synthetic core string may help. We have also seen many professional musicians trying gut core strings for the first time in many years in place of their synthetic core strings. Please be aware, when switching to a different core material the bow response will be different and may take a little time getting used to.

Winding Materials - Some string brands also have options for outer winding materials within the set. Precious metals such as silver, gold, or tungsten are denser and provide a warmer tone with more projection. For example many violin string sets give players the option to choose between a silver and aluminum D strings. Choosing the lower density aluminum D string will provide the player with a more open less projecting tone that is better suited for a smaller room.

E String Options - Simply switching E strings is another quick way to cut down on projection. Many professional violinist enjoy using heavy gauge, gold plated, or platinum plated E strings which are made to project more. Switching to a medium .26 gauge E string from a heavier .27 gauge E reduces the tension on the violin by up to 13% and will reduce volume. If the player is using an E string plated with a precious metal, switching to a tin plated or even a wound E string will help even more.

When making any of the above changes please be sure the nut and bridge slots on your instrument are wide enough to accommodate the new strings.

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