

Heart strings

A The guitarist

My father played the guitar and the banjo and had learnt both from my grandmother. All my uncles played too. By the time I came along, it was a well-established family tradition. There was just no question about whether I would learn to play an instrument or not and what instrument that would be. I got my first guitar when I was seven. My father bought me a second-hand instrument because they are easier to play and tune. Since that time, I have owned more than twenty guitars. I've sold some of them, lost one and had two stolen, but I've always managed to hang on to that original guitar. I've played it often and looked after it carefully over the years, so it is still in quite good condition. Perhaps one of my children will play it one day.

B The mandolin player

My mother came home from work one evening with a mandolin. I already knew how to play the guitar so it didn't take me long to work out how to play a few chords. I strummed it from time to time, showed it to all my friends and then stuck it behind the sofa where it stayed for several years. In my second term at college, my parents phoned to say they were planning to come and visit me and asked me if there was anything in particular I would like them to bring from home. I don't know why but suddenly I realized I badly wanted the mandolin. So they brought it with them and I've never looked back. Sadly, my mother still hasn't learnt to play an instrument.

C The double bass player

Children didn't normally learn the double bass in the past. The instruments were just too big for tiny fingers and little arms. As a result, most of my friends who play started with the violin but my teacher managed to get me an instrument specially designed for children. It was a tenth the normal size and very cute. Size is always a problem though. We play abroad quite a lot and getting my instrument through security is a real headache. Even getting round town is not easy. Despite all the inconvenience, I love my bass. It's a perfect instrument for someone like me who is rather shy and not really interested in being centre stage. I'd much rather make music with other people.

D The harp player

My parents took me to a concert but from where we were sitting, I couldn't see the strings of the harp. I just saw the hands move through the air and heard these beautiful sounds that took me into another world. Much later, when I started to play myself, I realized that because of the way you sit behind the harp and take its weight on shoulders, you feel every sound as a vibration that passes through your body. It's wonderful. Unfortunately, not all concert music includes a part of the harp, so you don't have as many opportunities to play with others as some musicians do. I think that's a pity.

E The viola player

A lot of people don't even know the difference between a viola and a cello. They just know that they're not violins. I was a bit the same when I was younger because my father was a concert violinist and he really didn't take the viola seriously, so I played violin. When I was studying violin at university I attended a chamber music class with a famous professor. He took a viola out of its case and said, "You will play the viola." I was very reluctant even to touch it but I have fairly long arms and the violin had always been a bit uncomfortable for me. The viola felt much less cramped. I played the first note and said to myself, "My goodness, this is fun!"

You are going to read some information about five musicians and the instruments they play. For questions 1-15 choose from the musicians (A-E). The musicians may be chosen more than once.

Which musician

1. was inspired by seeing someone perform?
2. feels the instrument suits their personality?
3. stopped playing the instrument at one stage?
4. played an adapted version of the instrument?
5. says the instrument suits them physically?
6. still has the first instrument they played?
7. says they have a parent who is not a musician?
8. would like to play in an orchestra more often?
9. feels their instrument is sometimes a nuisance?
10. is one of several generations of musicians?
11. had never seriously considered playing this instrument at first?
12. did not make the decision to play an instrument?
13. did not find it difficult to learn the basics?
14. travels frequently?
15. plays an instrument that was previously owned by someone else?

Bibliography:

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