

the dulcet tones of musical prodigies



I am sure I'm not alone in having fantasies of my children growing up to be sensitive, artistic and intelligent, facing a wonderful future paved with scholarships and Oxbridge firsts. As a mere sideline, he or she would also be a talented musician. Who knows – perhaps a Young Musician Of The Year?

Consequently, the book *Selecting The Right Instrument For Your Child* could not fail to appeal, with its claim that all children are musical, and if they fail it is only because they're encouraged to learn the wrong instrument. It focuses on analysing your child to choose his ideal instrument.

If the book is to work for you, some raw honesty is called for! Who wants to believe: "Does not need an agile brain... many slightly over-weight children, who do not have a lot of spare energy, are very happy on the tuba."

Visions of my son writing his first concerto age five *à la Mozart* faded fast as I read that children should not start too young. In fact, the author suggests waiting until your child is fluent at reading, writing and mental arithmetic.

For me, the violin and its relatives were

vision of a lank-haired, heavy metal freak. I consulted the book. Percussion. Horrors! It was indeed describing my son! "Hyperactive – one who is still wide awake at midnight... a child who fidgets... thin and wiry... butterfly attitude of flitting from one activity to another."

What about the noise? "Oh that's OK Mummy, we practise on cushions." Not, apparently, the couch cushions either, but special, silent, practice-pad cushions.

Almost immediately the clamour started for a proper drum kit. Searching wildly for an

Everyone has to come to his house to practise!" That wasn't in the book!

Number two child, after a visit to Scotland, suggested that what he'd really like to learn were the bagpipes. He then moved onto the idea of playing the saxophone, courtesy of Lisa Simpson. Saved again by the book, which says "few children start to play before age 12 or 13 when the playing position is comfortable." It also suggested that it would suit children who are "happy, well balanced and gregarious." So, perhaps not ideal.

However, he had the bug, and as his older brother was now allowed – nay, encouraged – to create noise which can be heard two streets away, he was not to be put off.

Perhaps the oboe for a child who is "determined, tightlipped and stubborn?" No, he wanted to be louder. Brass. Which one? Tenor Horn. "For gentle children who do not want to dominate the tune, but are peaceful..." This sounded promising.

Alas, he was guided by the music teacher toward the trombone because, as the book says "the mouthpiece requires more fleshy

Percussion. Horrors! It was indeed describing my son! "Hyperactive – one who is still wide awake at midnight... a child who fidgets... thin and wiry... butterfly attitude of flitting from one activity to another"

lips." However, I personally like to feel that it is because "most trombonists are bright and quick-witted... artistic and sensitive." Oh well, we can live in hope. At least the exercise builds up the lips – so his future girlfriends will thank me, if no one else will.

Quite coincidentally, as I was still engrossed in the first chapter, my oldest son, Alasdair, came home from school, begging to be allowed to learn the drums. Apparently the peripatetic percussion teacher had performed in assembly, trying to drum up (ha!) some extra business, and several young boys were at that moment cajoling their unhappy parents into signing up for a year or more of extra expense.

My fantasy of my son as a freshly scrubbed, bow-tied cellist faded to be replaced by the

acceptable way of saying "No", I promised that when he achieved Grade 2, he could have a drum kit, little believing that the cushion would be attractive enough to sustain his interest for that long.

Grade 1 came and went with unnerving swiftness, and it wasn't long before I was chauffeuring him to his Grade 2 exam. There I found a room full of boys, all fidgeting, twitching, drumming with their fingers – a room full of Alasdairs. The book does not lie!

He left the exam room beaming with success and we found ourselves making room for the instrument from hell. During the purchase I was warned by the mother of a teenager, "Don't let your child be the drummer in the band!

lips." However, I personally like to feel that it is because "most trombonists are bright and quick-witted... artistic and sensitive." Oh well, we can live in hope. At least the exercise builds up the lips – so his future girlfriends will thank me, if no one else will.

As to the youngest? She dresses up as Kylie Minogue and jigs around in time to her brother's drumming. She too has reached the magical age of reading and writing and, therefore, starting an instrument. Dare I tell you what she has chosen? The violin. I'm moving out.

Before you read the book, consider this; are your neighbours the types to serve restraining orders on you? Forget Young Musicians – think *Popstars*, and brace yourself ■