

# Are You Sure Your Musical Instruments Are Adequately Insured?

*Nora Post*

One size doesn't fit all when it comes to the right insurance for your musical instruments. Everyone's situation is different, and no one wants to find out the hard way that they are not adequately covered in the event of a claim. By way of full disclosure, I am a musician, not an insurance professional. I do, however, have familiarity with insurance issues—especially with what can go wrong. I have appraised hundreds of instruments in my oboe business, and have dealt with insurance companies for many years concerning damage issues and repairs, claim issues involving instruments that have been in floods, fires, etc. For musicians considering an insurance policy for the first time, my initial suggestion would be to ask a lot of questions *before* purchasing a policy. For those who are already insured, it might be time to read the fine print on your policy, as unexciting as that idea might be.

I was inspired to look into this because of a story about a very recent damage claim that was certified twice as a total loss. The claim was denied by a major insurance company until the owner fought back *hard*. Most people would probably not have the tenacity to raise holy hell, but this person did, and the claim was finally covered after the president of the insurance company stepped in personally. This is what it took to get a claim covered that should have been covered in the first place. That story made me realize that most of us probably aren't asking the questions we need to ask to prevent this from happening to us. And if I seem a bit jaundiced about the subject of insurance, it's only because I tend to see what goes wrong, not what goes right. I see what owners hope never to experience, and I have seen quite a bit of it.

## What Option is Right for Me?

### *Homeowner's Insurance*

For non-professional use, adding your instruments to your homeowner's insurance may adequately cover your needs. However, the most important thing to know is that you should have separate coverage for your instruments. This is called a personal articles floater, endorsement, or rider (depending on which term a company uses). For this separate coverage to be added to your policy you will usually be required to provide either a bill of sale if the instrument is new, or an appraisal if it is used. An instrument manufacturer, dealer, music store, or repairer can generally write an appraisal for you. There is usually a small fee for an appraisal, although not always. It is illegal to appraise an instrument that the appraiser has not seen personally, so if you are planning on having your instruments appraised, be sure to have your instruments with you. And no matter what insurer you use, be sure to ask how often appraisals need to be updated. No one wants to find out they aren't covered because their appraisal is older than what the insurer will currently

accept. That just happened to a customer of mine with a Howarth XL oboe. Don't let it happen to you!

If you have a personal articles floater for your instruments that is attached to your homeowner's policy and you have a claim, you should expect to be covered. If you do not have a personal articles floater, it could be your word against the insurance company that you even owned an instrument in the first place. The home of a friend of mine was just broken into, and some very valuable jewelry was stolen, worth about \$20,000. She submitted the police report to her insurance company, but nothing was insured separately with an appraisal. The insurance company offered her a settlement of \$1,000 which was exactly the amount of her deductible. Brilliant. Another friend's home was burglarized, and his insurer would not cover the claim because the owner did not have photos of each item that was stolen. A customer called recently for help with his son's Rigoutat oboe, which had been in their house when it burned to the ground in a tragic fire. The father didn't have the oboe separately insured with a personal articles floater, so the insurance company found an old (unplayable) Rigoutat oboe on an online auction site for a few hundred dollars, and that is what the insurer purchased to settle the claim. The father told me that after the terrible trauma of the fire, now he spends his days fighting with his insurance company.

There is an annual premium for a personal articles floater each year, above and beyond the cost of your homeowner's invoice. Think of it as your instrument's separate insurance policy. Once again, ask a lot of questions. In the event of a claim, does your homeowner's company pay the stated insured value listed on your policy? Or does your insurer have the right to buy a replacement of their choice for you? As the policyholder, do you have any say in this decision? What (if any) is your deductible? Remember that most claims adjusters for homeowner's policies are not experts in musical instruments. They simply can't have the depth of experience that an insurer who has dealt exclusively with musical instruments for decades would have.

Most important of all: *anyone who uses an instrument professionally is not covered by their homeowner's policy, whether they have a personal articles floater or not.* If you generate any income at all from concerts, rehearsals, or teaching, or if you have a private studio of students, this is considered professional use, and homeowner's insurance does not cover musical instruments used professionally. Even if you have just two private students, you will need a policy for professional musicians. Insurers investigate before they pay claims, so you don't want to take a chance on something like this.

### *If I lend out an instrument and there is damage or a loss, am I covered?*

In most cases, yes. But not one of the insurers I have spoken to recommends lending out your instruments. Depending on what has happened, this can be the end of friendships or even lead to litigation. You can expect your premium to go up when you have a claim. That will be on you, not the friend who lost or damaged your instrument. I remember a case where an oboe teacher lent out one of his oboes to a student for over a year. He did this out of the kindness of his heart. The student damaged the oboe, and his family refused to pay for the repairs, claiming their son

could not possibly have damaged the oboe. In the end, none of them were speaking to one another. At least I had the oboe right here and could return it to the owner after some extensive repair work that he ended up paying for himself. As they say, no good deed goes unpunished.

Yes, you are usually covered if you lend out an instrument. But ask. After all the stories I have heard, though, I would never do it myself, and I recommend against it.

### *Musical Instrument Policies*

The safest route for most musicians is to purchase a musical instrument policy from a reputable company that specializes in musical instrument insurance. With this kind of coverage in place, whether you are using an instrument professionally or not, you should be covered. For professionals who need insurance, this is the way to go. Ask questions because every company is different. Some companies are fine with large damage claims, others are more likely to want you to purchase a new instrument. How much influence do you have in the decision to repair or replace if it comes to that?

Most companies offer online quotes, so it's quite easy to see what your costs might be. Deductibles vary, too, from about \$100 per claim to \$250, depending on the company. The advantage of dealing with a musical instrument insurance company is that they have years of experience working with musicians, and they understand what we are talking about. A damaged Heckel bassoon is very different from a dinged-up rear bumper on my car. I recently priced out several policies with different insurers and found that the premiums with some (but not all) musical instrument insurers are comparable to the premium for a personal articles floater on a homeowner's policy. But do ask, since no two insurers are the same, and premiums vary from company to company, of course.

### *How Do I Know How Good My Insurance Company Is?*

Until you have a claim, you can't be 100% sure how good any insurance company is. And by then it may be too late. The online reviews of musical instrument insurers are for the most part written by people who pay their premiums every year and have never had a claim. They comment about how nice the customer service is. But the rubber meets the road when you have a claim, and there aren't a lot of reviews out there about that experience. At least not that I have seen. There are some, of course, but not enough, given how important this is for every policyholder.

## **Companies to Consider**

The companies listed here are companies I have directly called and talked to, some at considerable length. I am sure there are other fine companies that I am not aware of, so this brief listing is in no way exhaustive. Players are encouraged to take it from here with their own research, emails, and calls. So, this is a preliminary listing of some excellent companies that have a lot to offer. Each has a very informative website. The websites give a good idea of the priorities and reputations of each company.

### *Anderson Musical Instrument Insurance Solutions, LLC*

Anderson was one of the companies on my list, and I was very impressed. They are endorsed by Steinway, and they have insured the Boston Symphony for thirty-two years. They also insure the Seattle Symphony, and they were the insurers of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra when Hurricane Katrina struck. There is a testimonial on the Anderson website written by the timpanist and personnel administrator of the orchestra. He discusses how Anderson handled the claim. In terms of size, Anderson is about twice the size of Clarion Insurance, another well-known musical instrument insurer.

In the event of a claim, Anderson pays the full stated value of the policy. Their deductible is \$100.00. They issue policies with values from \$2,000 to \$2,000,000. I priced them out for coverage on \$70,000, and they came in about \$100.00 less than Clarion, and at exactly what my homeowner's personal articles floater would have cost.

What I like about Anderson is that they are very strong in damage claims. They insure many high-end string instruments, plus members of the American Harp Society. Harps generally don't get stolen, but the necks can and do break. I admire Anderson's willingness to work with owners on damage claims. I like giving the owners that option.

Anderson Musical Instrument Insurance Solutions, LLC

[www.Anderson-group.com](http://www.Anderson-group.com)

[service@anderson-group.com](mailto:service@anderson-group.com)

781.834.1700

### *Music Pro*

Music Pro was new to me, and I discovered that they insure over 10,000 musicians. They have two programs, the Standard and Classical programs. All of this is through the Hanover Insurance Group. The Classical program is less expensive than the Standard program because, according to Music Pro, classical musicians have fewer claims than, for example, jazz or rock musicians playing in a club. It makes sense. Music Pro has been around since 2000. They are co-owned by ASCAP (the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) and Sterling Insurance. This came about because Music Pro was the insurer for Local 802, the musician's union of New York. Music Pro is endorsed by MENC, BMI, ASCAP, and Local 802. Their premiums are about the same as Anderson's, and their deductible is \$100.00 (again, the same as Anderson's).

[www.musicproinsurance.com](http://www.musicproinsurance.com)

800.687.4277

### *Clarion Musical Instrument Insurance*

Clarion is well-known to many of us. I have known them personally for almost forty years. They are recognized by the College Music Society, the International Tuba Euphonium Society, the New

England Conservatory of Music, Chamber Music America, the American Recorder Society, the International Trombone Society, and so many others.

As I write this in 2024, their premiums have gotten higher than some of the other companies I priced out, and their deductible is \$250 per claim, as opposed to \$100 with Anderson or Music Pro. The coverage appears to be about the same, but of course, this can change at any time—another good reason to read the fine print on your policy and make some calls.

[www.clarionins.com](http://www.clarionins.com)  
[clarion@clarionins.com](mailto:clarion@clarionins.com)

800. VIVALDI  
631.435.4500

### *USAA Insurance*

USAA is only available to the military and their families. They have always had an excellent reputation. They offer homeowner's insurance, but they also have a product called "Valuable Personal Property" insurance that covers musical instruments for non-professional use. There is no deductible, which is a nice plus. They insure for full replacement cost. They also work with other insurers to insure for business and commercial use, and musical instruments used professionally could be covered there. But you have to ask if you have instruments that you use professionally. If USAA interests you, call them and see what they can do for you.

[www.usaa.com](http://www.usaa.com)  
800.531.USAA  
210.531.USAA

## Final Comments

Other very fine companies insure musical instruments in addition to those I have listed here. In my own business, for example, I have seen Chubb and Travelers Insurance pay for damage claims through homeowner's policies that amazed me in a very positive way. So, my comments here are based upon my own experience in the oboe business for nearly forty years—everything from one Lorée oboe that was run over in a parking lot *twice* to instruments caught in fires and floods—plus talking to insurers and exploring their websites. Since I can't guarantee 100% accuracy, that is the perfect excuse for you to take it from here with your own research, make some calls, talk to people, and find the best fit for your unique needs. We pay insurance premiums every year and it's so important to have the peace of mind that comes from knowing that you are covered in the event of a claim. That frees up a lot of mental energy for more enjoyable activities like finally using all the cookbooks you bought during COVID-19, or taking your new puppy to PetSmart to check out every single squeaky toy together.