

IT IS a brave act to enter a crowded market, but this is just what Worcestershire-based string teacher Georgia Vale has done by launching a series of tutor books for beginner violinists.

The series, called *Hey Presto!*, draws on Vale's own childhood memories of learning instruments. She has particularly fond recollections of the Schaum piano series: 'One piece, *The Pelican*, was such a favourite of mine that the page fell out of the book!'

However, none of the violin tutor books she used in those early days had the same impact, and when Vale started teaching she felt that not much had changed. 'I searched high and low for the right material – books that would speak directly to children. But I never quite found what I wanted.'

So Vale went about creating the *Hey Presto!* series, carefully reproducing the things she loved as a child and adding a few ideas of her own. Not based on a particular teaching method, the books' features include quizzes, quirky characters, lyrics, note charts, concert pieces and certificates.

An intriguing feature is the attention to the psychology of learning. One character, Poco the Frog, voices fears pupils might have about aspects of playing, thereby neutralising them and bringing to the fore some of what Vale calls the 'mind games involved in playing an instrument'. The series currently consists of Bronze and Silver books with supporting CDs and separate piano accompaniment books, and six theory workbooks. Gold and Platinum books are still in preparation, being trialled with pupils to get the best fit of repertoire.

Vale began the piano at five and the violin at seven, venturing on to the viola in the last years of conservatoire. A pupil of Simon Fischer at Guildhall School of Music and drama, she later studied in Utrecht and in adult life completed a Chinese degree at Oxford.

Vale has taught in a range of environments



Georgia Vale

Hey Presto!

Georgia Vale has just launched her own series of violin tutor books. She tells **Philippa Bunting** about the experience

for over 20 years, and her current teaching practice is mainly private, consisting of about 30 pupils from age four to adult. She teaches in a converted garage and runs a string group on Saturdays in a local school, for which she writes all the music. Her teaching room, she confesses, is a bit chaotic, with 'ideas everywhere – huge piles of manuscript paper and works in progress'.

The series is also supported by a website, which Vale set up herself, a process she describes as 'considerably harder than the Chinese degree!' Again, she ventured alone.

Writing the books and creating the music, which for her flows so easily, is clearly a process Vale has enjoyed hugely. Her next task is to get some coverage for the series in a market dominated by the major publishers and retail outlets. She currently sells the books herself – the website includes an online shopping function – but is now beginning to place them with shops and put together a marketing strategy.

Back in her teaching studio, Vale continues to generate imaginative ways of helping pupils through their first steps with the violin. Brain the Clever Bear sits waiting to perform his benign inspections, granting a star for

anything over a nine, and Pupil Lily, for one, approves: 'If you want to learn the violin, get *Hey Presto!*'



www.heyprestostings.com

Launching your own tutor books? Here are Georgia's top business tips

1. Get yourself a good website, with plenty of sample pages and audio tracks to help market your books
2. If you want to set up a website yourself, check out Wordpress – it's easy to use and Google-friendly
3. Before you decide on a price, talk to retailers and ask them what trade discount they would expect
4. Ask other teachers to trial the books – you'll get valuable feedback and you'll be marketing at the same time
5. Be prepared for unexpected costs, especially acquiring ISBN numbers and converting them into barcodes

