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TEEN STRINGS

IDEAS, NEWS & FUN FOR STUDENTS OF VIOLIN, VIOLA, CELLO, BASS & FIDDLE

TIP SHEET No 11

3 WAYS TO BOW LIKE A FIDDLER

1. LET GRAVITY BE YOUR GUIDE:

Learning to control the effects of gravity is important. If you play with a fairly relaxed right hand, and you should in fiddle music, then you can see how the down-stroke is really the power stroke. There's more natural strength in pulling (down-stroke) than pushing (up-stroke). For an example of this technique, watch the YouTube video of Clark Kessinger's "Sally Ann Johnson."

2. DEVELOP YOUR MUSCLE MEMORY

Here are a few exercises you can try to feel the shape and movement of the bow, and to hear what a difference these three bowing techniques make in the tone and feel of the music, making a tune sound "old-time."

CIRCULAR MOTION: Try this: On an open string, play a down-stroke so that the bow makes a downward arc, like the bottom half of a circle counter-clockwise as you look at it. Continue into an up-stroke that is the top half of the circle—so now one down-up movement of the bow is not straight back and forth, but a complete circle.

A straight stroke puts the "bite" at the beginning of each note because of the abrupt change in direction. With the circular motion, that little bit of edge goes away, and any emphasis in the note moves from the beginning to the middle. This adds whole lot of swing.

SELF REFLECTION

"What interests me is the kind of playing that does not ask, but demands that people listen, and I can identify that right away . . . Now what goes on in my head, how I reach a conclusion, that I cannot tell you or anybody else. It's mine to know, it's within my own psyche, it's based on my life. All of us listen to some degree in the mirror of our own minds.

—Violinist and pedagogue Isaac Stern, SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1994



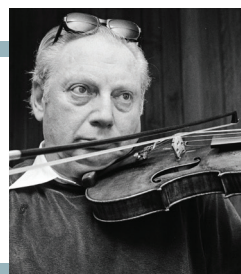
FIGURE-8 MOTION: Now try playing straight back and forth, but let half of the down-stroke be half of a figure-8 on its side, like drawing a backward letter "S," and the up-stroke being just the opposite. You'll get a different kind of accent from this, but both the circular and figure-8 shapes add a pulse to the stroke that couldn't be there any other way.

FULCRUM PULSES: Start by moving the bow straight back and forth on the single D-string. Go for a smooth motion and an even sound across the entire stroke. Now, with each stroke in each direction, change the angle of the bow, let it kind of drop, so that it picks up the A-string for a split second. The goal is to keep the D-string note smooth and to its full value while the A-string note pulses.

3. DECIPHER RECORDED WORKS

Of course, practicing bow movements is a long way away from using them in tunes. But having these techniques in your hands will help you to identify them on recordings and to learn to use them. Listening to and analyzing old recordings can be a source of some of the greatest lessons.

—Bruce Molsky



ARTS & CRAFTS!

9 TIPS ON COMPOSING YOUR OWN CADENZAS AND VARIATIONS

The word "cadenza" means "to stop" and the simplest cadenza is merely a fermata, or hold, on the last note of a phrase before the resolution of the harmony. The soloist holds the note in a dramatic fashion, and then cues the accompaniment to join in for the final chord. Over the centuries, this stopping point in the music evolved into an opportunity for the soloist to improvise on the preceding thematic material. I've identified nine basic techniques you can use to create a cadenza and/or variations on a theme.

1. OCTAVE TRANSPOSITION:

Simply state the theme, but play the second half either an octave higher or an octave lower.

2. ORNAMENTATION:

Add trills, turns, grace notes, and mordents as the spirit moves you.

3. MAJOR/MINOR SHIFT:

If the theme is in a major key, repeat it in a minor key. Likewise, if the theme is in a minor key, repeat it in a major key.

4. TEMPO/ARTICULATION

VARIATION: If the theme is quick, repeat it at a slower



DOUBLE TAKE

4 TIPS ON NAVIGATING TRICKY DOUBLE-STOPS

PREPARATION

First and foremost relax, relax, relax. Any tension in your left hand will quickly tie it up and cramps are sure to follow. Take frequent breaks. If your hand gets tired, stop playing or work on something else and come back to the double-stops later. In the beginning, several very short practice sessions are much more effective than one long session that ends in cramps and aches. As you build up strength and endurance, you can practice for longer periods. Also, make sure your left elbow is far enough forward. This will help your fingers reach the fingerboard more easily.

BOW CONTROL

You don't need any extra pressure with your bow to play two strings at the same time. Make sure your bow is positioned evenly between the two strings you want to play. Then experiment with how little pressure you can get away with and still make both strings ring clearly. Start with open strings to get comfortable. Work on achieving a beautiful, focused tone quality. Use whole bows. Keep your bow hand relaxed and keep track of how you must adjust it to maintain a focused sound in different parts of the bow.

PRACTICE TECHNIQUES

Start by playing a D major scale, but play the D and the A strings at the same time. The trick here is to keep your fingers curled up on the D string so the A

string will still ring. Arch your fingers over the A string and touch the fingerboard only with the very tips of your fingers. Playing the open A with your fourth finger on the D string is the most difficult part. Pull your elbow forward just a bit more for this double-stop and keep your left hand relaxed. Pay close attention to intonation.

IN CONTEXT

Now comes the fun part: working on a passage of double-stops in the context of real music. First play only the bottom part of the double-stop, and ignore the top part completely. Use the same fingering, bowing, and dynamics you will use when you are playing all the notes. Play slowly and pay attention to your intonation. Don't go on to the next note until the one you're playing is really in tune.

After you get the bottom line in tune and it feels comfortable, use the same approach with the top line. Once you've got that down, play the bottom line again, but finger the top line at the same time without bowing it. Then play the top line and finger the bottom line in the same manner. After you can play each line independently while fingering the other part, it's time to put them together. Relax and go slowly, one double-stop at a time. If your hand gets tired, take a break, shake it out, and come back to it later.

—Mimi Rabson

DID YOU KNOW?

Legendary jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli recorded a solo on the title track of Pink Floyd's 1975 album *Wish You Were Here*. Though his contribution wasn't audible in the original mix and he wasn't credited, the solo can be heard on subsequent remastered editions.

tempo. If the original theme is indicated as legato, repeat it with staccato articulation.

5. ARPEGGIOS AND SCALE

MOTION: Fill in the theme with linking scale runs and arpeggios. Take care that your scales and arpeggios fit the harmony.

6. RHYTHMIC VARIATION: If the theme is in duple meter, repeat it with triplet figures. This works especially well when applied to the scale and arpeggio technique.

7. CHORDS AND DOUBLE-STOPS: Check the accompaniment for proper harmony and add chords and double-stops.

8. FUGATO/CANON: State the theme in the solo line and have the accompaniment enter a half-bar or a whole measure later in imitation. You may need to alter the solo line to keep the harmony consistent between the solo and accompaniment lines. Imitation and fugue are standard development techniques, but they are the most difficult to master of the techniques suggested here.

9. REPETITION OF MOTIVIC

CELLS: Take one small snippet of the theme and repeat it over and over as a flourish. To add interest, you can speed up, slow down, crescendo, or decrescendo as you play through the figure.

—Richard S. Bridges





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