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TEEN STRINGS

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

TIP SHEET No 13

PASSION PROJECT



“There are as many ways to awaken passion as there are people because it’s so individual and you can’t just say, ‘I want passion!’ It’s something that happens I think when people are using all of themselves. What makes people remember something forever? What happens I think is, when you are maximally open to something, and you meet a different world, you will maximize the moments with that passion.”

—Cellist Yo-Yo Ma

5 TIPS ON EMBRACING SCALE EXERCISES

1. MIX THINGS UP

Start with one-, two-, and three-octave scales in the most commonly seen foundation keys of C, D, A, G, and B-flat, and add A-flat, B, D-flat, E-flat, and E. Then you can also practice them in thirds, sixths, octaves, and harmonics and vary your rhythm, tempo, and bowings. Change the key every day or every week to make yourself play all over the fingerboard.

2. PURPOSEFULLY USE SCALES TO IMPROVE YOUR TECHNIQUE

Start with just one note to a bow and then progress to two and then four to a bow. Besides improving your comfort level on all four strings, you can also learn the “in-between” string levels needed in double-stops: When it’s time to move to the next string, play the notes on either side of the string change as a double-stop before proceeding to the higher string. For instance, in first position, play fourth finger D and first finger E together before moving on to F. If you do this at the other string crossings as well, you’re learning seven string levels and not just four.

3. SHIFTING USE

Guide finger to shift during scale practice. If you’re shifting with your first finger, play the note the first finger is on before making the shift. For example, in a three-octave G major scale, remain in first position until you’re on the E

string ready to shift to first finger A. Before you shift from second finger G, play first finger F-sharp and keep it down to shift up to the A. And coming down the E string, shift from first finger C down to fourth finger B, but play first finger F-sharp before you actually play the B. Practicing your shifts in your scales using guide fingers will stabilize your left hand and help you learn where you’re shifting to. Once you’re comfortable, repeat the shift back and forth to teach your hand to expand and contract.

4. INTERVALS SCALES

Intervals scales offer many ways to practice your thirds, sixths, and octaves both broken and double-stopped. Start with broken intervals before double-stops. Place fingers individually to map out the finger pattern first. For G major in thirds, for example, on the G string start with second finger B and then open string D before playing them together, keeping the B down. Then play open D, first finger E, second finger B, and third finger C, anchoring all fingers down on the map, and then play the C-E double-stop.

5. BOWINGS CHANGE

Switch up your bowings not only for the sake of variety, but also to practice your technique. The change can be as simple as starting a scale or arpeggio on an up bow. Or, try different patterns, such as two slurred notes followed by two separate notes. Then play your scale with other bowing techniques, such as spiccato, sautillé, up-bow and down-bow staccato, and ricochet bouncing.

—Louise Lee



HANG LOOSE!

4 TIPS ON HOW TO HOLD A VIOLIN OR VIOLA WITHOUT TENSING UP

1. POSITION FOR SUCCESS

In playing position, with the left elbow at roughly 90 degrees, notice the natural positioning of your forearm, hand, and fingers. You should be able to trace a straight line from elbow through the center of the underside of your forearm and on through your middle finger as well as along the edge of your forearm, from the elbow to the pinkie knuckle. Notice the natural curl of your fingers. Finally, see the scooped space between the thumb and the base of the index finger. You'll be suspending the neck of your instrument in this space. Now try resting the index and middle fingers of your right hand between this gap. Touch them lightly to the line where your index finger meets your palm and the corresponding spot on the thumb right across from it. Once you overcome any automatic tendency to grip, do the same with your instrument.

2. BALANCING ACT

Fear of dropping your violin or viola is a prime cause for left-hand tension and was likely planted the first time you held it. Though you became confident holding it within a few weeks, that initial fear may still be showing up in your playing. To help erase this fear, without your shoulder rest if you use one, hang your instrument by its neck in your left hand and practice lightly "tossing" your instrument up onto your collarbone. The faster you toss the lighter your instrument will feel, and, according to pedagogue Kato

Havas, the quicker it will feel as though "the violin is an extension of your [body] and not a cumbersome burden." Next, balance the instrument between your collarbone and left thumb. Take a walk around the room, talk, turn around, and get used to the idea that your instrument really isn't going anywhere.

3. SHOULDER & CHIN RESTS

If you grip your instrument between your thumb and index finger, experience pain in your neck or shoulder, or find that your wrist tends to collapse flat around the neck, you may not have the support you need from your chin and/or shoulder rest. Start with a good-fitting chin rest. This will allow the weight of your head to secure your instrument to your collarbone. Your perfect chin rest should look like a mold of your jawline, rarely like the one that first came with your instrument. Next, if you choose to use a shoulder rest, find one that can conform to your body rather than one that requires you to conform to it. Consider either a soft pad or a bar-type shoulder rest with a metal structure that can be bent to suit your anatomy.

4. MANAGE THE TOUGH SPOTS

Even with a great instrument hold, fear of a tough spot in the music or a challenging technique can cause you to tense up. Identify these problem areas, physically make a note of them in your sheet music, and practice playing them without tension. This may require slowing down, isolating and practicing the precise cause of the issue, like a shift or a tricky fingering, or, simply overcoming the habit of reacting to fear.

— *Laurel Thomsen*

4 TIPS ON MASTERING MARTELÉ

1. MAKE IT CRACK!

Place your bow near the balance point in preparation for a down bow. Lean into the stick and at the precise moment you begin to open your elbow, release your finger pressure. Imagine your hand rotating out and away from you as the bow releases out of the string. Bring the bow to a complete stop on the string and similarly prepare for the up bow. Again, lean in, then release as you close your elbow. Focus on listening for a distinctive "crack" at the beginning of each bow.

2. SEPARATE THE PRESSURE & STROKE MOTIONS

If you find that you are releasing too late, first realize that learning martelé requires some of the crunchy sound so many detest in poor string playing. Because you want just a tiny piece of this sound as your beginning accent, when learning, it's better that you have a bit too much than none at all. If you're getting an overly crunchy start, begin your practice sequence as described above, separating the pressure and stroke motions completely.

3. CONCENTRATE ON THE QUALITY OF THE ARTICULATION

If you're having trouble creating evenness between the sound of your down-bow and up-bow martelé, it might be that you're too focused on creating the individual strokes and isolated motions. While this is understandable in the beginning, you need to learn to listen as a whole to the quality of your articulation across entire phrases, no matter the type or combination of stroke(s). Learn to concentrate on the ongoing sound of your martelé. One should not be able to identify your down-bow and up-bow.

4. LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

Stephen Clapp, violin professor and dean emeritus at the Juilliard School until his death in 2014, reminded students that "the most important element of the martelé stroke is the silence, while the most notable characteristic is the pinch." Between these two, you have a wide palette of percussive expression.

—LT

DID YOU KNOW?

If you had to guess, how many pieces of wood do you think make up a single violin? Spoiler alert: It's more than just the front, back, and sides. An average violin is made up of more than 70 individual pieces of wood.



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