

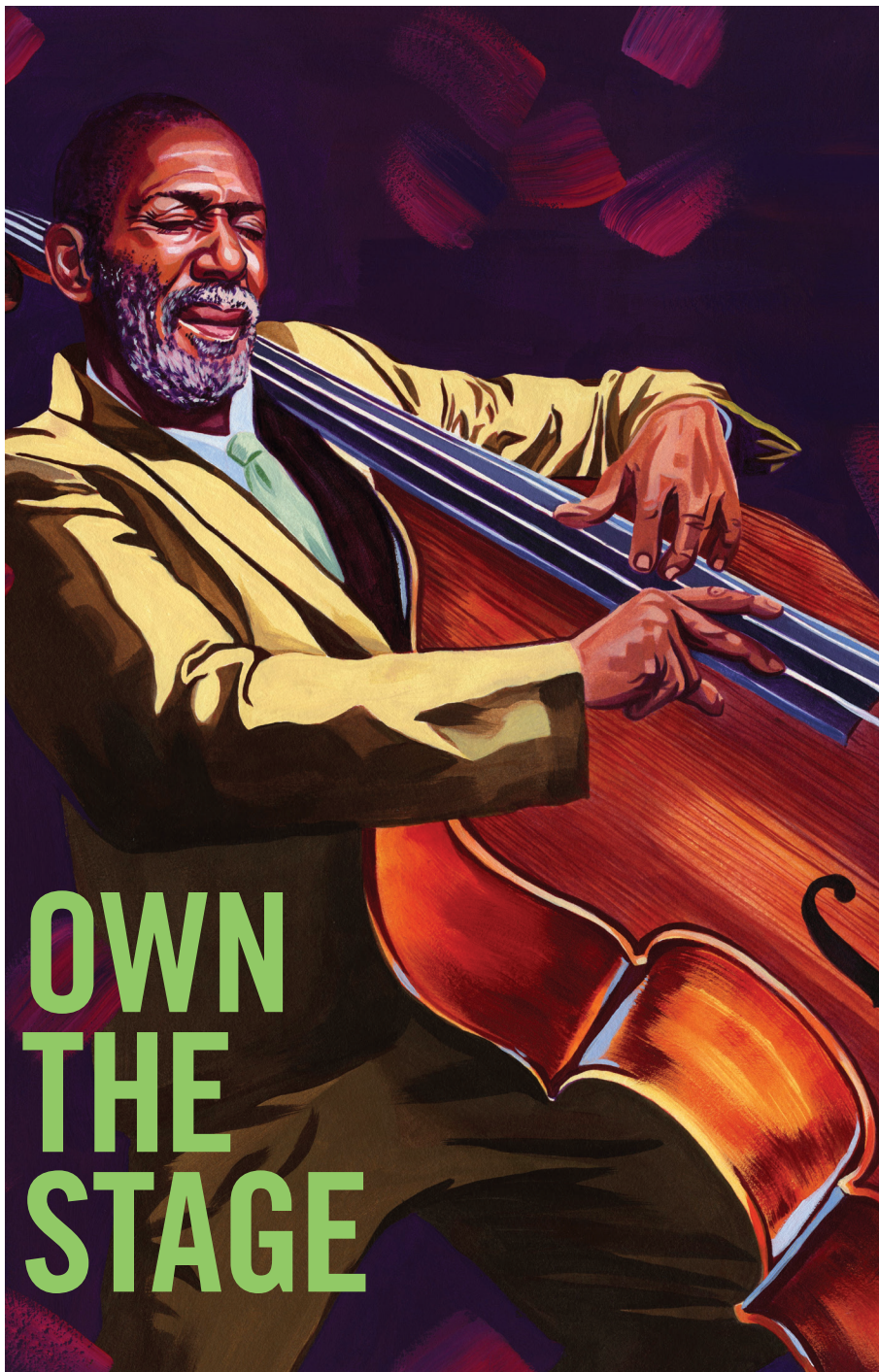


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TEEN STRINGS

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

TIP SHEET No 14



OLIVIA WISE

3 TIPS FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY STRING PLAYER

The past three decades have seen a seismic shift in the string world. The general public's increased awareness of electric bowed stringed instruments used by mainstream artists, the multitude of emerging string camps focusing on eclectic styles, and more conservatories offering string programs in non-classical genres have all changed the game.

As an active electric and acoustic violinist, and contractor in New York for 20 years, I see a new era of career opportunities emerging for string players. You can still make a living teaching, playing in orchestras, and chamber music, but here are three starter tips to help make you more employable and thrive in this new, ever-changing landscape:

1. LEARN TO IMPROVISE & READ LEAD SHEETS

Often, producers and artists will hand you a lead sheet and expect you to come up with your own parts on the spot. Being able to read lead sheets and chord charts is essential. Learning to improvise, especially over moving chord changes, will carry over into everything else you play. It will open up opportunities to play a wide variety of gigs. Take lessons, find as many playing opportunities as possible, and don't be afraid to sound bad at first. I also recommend attending string camps by Mark Wood, Mark O'Connor, Christian Howes, Mike Block, Julie Lyon Lieberman, and others to pick up these skills.

2. IMMERSE YOURSELF IN NEW STYLES

Learn as many different styles as you can. Focus on one genre for an extended period of time, immerse yourself in the music of its masters, and memorize five songs a >>>

"I trust me to come up with something that's going to work. [Laughs.] Actually, I trust that I belong there. And that makes me not nervous about being there."

—Bassist Ron Carter on finding confidence onstage



VIOLINIST LEE ENGLAND JR. ON PLAYING WRESTLER SHINSUKE NAKAMURA'S ENTRANCE MUSIC—LIVE



LARRY WRIGHT

"I'm not gonna lie," Lee England Jr. insists, "it hit me when I got to soundcheck: This is a really big deal. I did get a little nervous. I'd played at the Barclays Center before, but this wasn't halftime in an NBA game. This was one of the main attractions. So I talked with Triple-H [the ring name for Paul Levesque, Vince McMahon's son-in-law and a top WWE executive]. He told me, 'We want you to do whatever you want for the first part of the entrance. It's all yours. It's your time to shine.'"

That's just what England wanted to hear. He had already picked out attire that seemed appropriate to the occasion—boots and a military-style jacket as an homage to one of his early heroes, Jimi Hendrix. He also decided to stash his bow in a quiver slung behind his back,

so that he could whip it out like an archer grabbing an arrow.

Nothing, though, had prepared him for the moment when he took his first steps into the arena. "There were 16,000-plus fans out there and they were all quiet," he marvels. "You could hear a pin drop. Nobody knew what was about to happen. When I pulled the bow up from my back, I could feel all this anxiety, like, 'What's he about to do?' Then when the music started, I just zoned out. It was like, 'This is gonna be over before you know it, so enjoy the moment.' I had my part down so cold that when Nakamura came out I decided to play with what was going on, like, 'I'm gonna dance around! I'm part of this show!'"

—Bob Doerschuk

week in that genre. You can't show up to a jazz gig playing with classical vibrato, or playing chromatic bebop licks with a country band. Explore different musical dialects and know when each one is appropriate.

3. PLUG IN

While knowing how to play both violin and viola is valuable, it is becoming equally advantageous to be able to amplify your instrument and play electric. The fastest way to do this is to invest in a pickup.

There are two kinds of pickups: removable and permanent. A permanent pickup consists of a transducer, which is installed in place of your bridge and connected to a wire leading to a 1/4" jack, which you can connect to an amplifier through a 1/4" cable. If you are concerned about this affecting your acoustic tone, consider a removable pickup. These consist of a wire leading to an input jack, but instead of a bridge transducer, the pickup can be found in a clip that attaches to your bridge, or a band that wraps around your instrument.

Once you've chosen a pickup, a pre-amp is crucial. This enables you to finetune the frequencies of your sound, acting as a buffer between your instrument and the PA system or amplifier. You can get a decent pickup/pre-amp combination for around \$300.

—Joe Deninzon

3 Reasons You Stumble through Fast Passages

Without proper coordination training, playing fast passages can create a feeling of the two hands "chasing each other"—and getting tangled up in the process. In my experience, there are three main reasons for this common problem:

1. Focusing primarily on the left hand instead of the bow
2. Over-articulating with the left-hand fingers during separate bows
3. Thinking of the passage as a blurb of notes, rather than visualizing it as a collection of small rhythmic patterns

—Grigory Kalinovsky

DID YOU KNOW?

As one scientist put it, cooking down the resin to make violin varnish can result in a "self-sustaining exothermic reaction." Or, in plain English, it can blow sky high. And, on rare occasion, it has. If you want to make your own violin varnish, the best place to start is online—at fire safety sites.

—James N. McKean



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