



Sponsored By SHAR Music  
SHAR has an extensive line of instruments and bows for all levels of players, plus the largest selection of accessories, music, and strings available—all at very competitive prices with free shipping on most orders. Visit us at sharmusic.com.

# TEEN STRINGS

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

TIP SHEET No 15



ROGER RICH

## Stretching Your Boundaries

“For us, it’s no problem to switch into any genre or style. It’s one of our greatest weapons. We can collaborate with a hip-hop artist or a rock artist as easily as we can perform with a symphony orchestra, or play a classical piece accompanied by piano. That’s our best tool, our flexibility. In this day and age, when everything is changing so fast all the time in the music industry, it’s a blessing to be able to do many different things.”

—Cellist Luka Sulic of 2CELLOS

### 3 KEYS TO CONQUERING UPPER-POSITION ANXIETIES

#### 1. FOCUS ON THE WHOLE BODY

One significant barrier to upper-position proficiency is illogical positioning of the entire body, not just the left hand and arm. The player, whether he or she is standing or sitting, should take care that the overall stance is balanced and relaxed. The left arm’s trajectory needs to carry the fingers from the neck position over the “cusp” of the body of the instrument into the upper position without too much repositioning. Therefore, violinists and violists should make sure the arm isn’t clamping to the side of the body. By the same token, cellists and bassists should avoid a “sagging” left arm that will necessitate a rapid jolt upward as they approach thumb position—it should feel easy and flowing to draw the thumb out from under the neck and into the upper positions.

#### 2. FIND YOUR OPTIMAL HAND SHAPING

Every player needs to find his or her individual sense of optimal hand shaping for the upper position. If you hang your arms and hands down by your sides, you’ll notice that your fingers automatically take on a loosely curled shape. As you form a hand shape on your instrument, try to keep it as similar as possible to this relaxed posture. Some players find it useful to have a teacher or friend take photographs of the hand’s natural shapes from several angles as they try to translate it onto the instrument.

#### 3. KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BOW

As soon as stance and hand shaping are working well, the next step on the way to confidence in the upper position is to reinforce the left hand’s good work with appropriate bowing technique. A central >>>



## Luthier David Rivinus Fights Injuries with Unorthodox Instruments



The musicians gathered around. The instrument case opened. Then all was pandemonium. “Some of them screamed,” recalls luthier David Rivinus. “A couple ran off the stage. A few uttered expletives. And some people were just stunned into silence.”

The year was 1993, and Rivinus had just unveiled a new viola to members of a Canadian regional orchestra. But this was no ordinary instrument. It was a radical, lopsided new design—a prototype of an ergonomic viola that took more than a year of experimentation. Rivinus was there at the invitation of one of the orchestra’s principal violists—a petite woman in her 40s. She was starting to feel the effects of a long career playing what may be the string world’s most awkward instrument. “She told me, ‘I’m not injured yet, but I can see the writing on the wall,’” Rivinus says. The violist

asked Rivinus to make an instrument that was comfortable to play but still had the power to reach the back of the hall. “I told her, ‘I can try, but it may not look like a traditional viola,’” he says. “That turned out to be the understatement of the year.”

Today, decades after that disastrous debut, the 67-year-old Rivinus’ provocative approach has achieved success. The luthier—who is based in Portland, Oregon—has now sold almost 100 ergonomic instruments. When he took aim at an ergonomic viola, he was forced to set tradition aside. The luthier fought through design challenges and negative reactions to the viola’s unorthodox appearance. He gradually and incrementally found his way to a model that minimizes strain and maximizes sound.

—Patrick Sullivan

point in my book, *Cello Practice, Cello Performance*, is that all techniques are both-handed techniques, and nowhere is this more apparent than when playing in the upper position. Bowing technique is different for notes played high up on the string than for notes that are closer to the nut, principally because the string is now “shortened.” Because of this, it’s necessary to play close to the bridge, with appropriate adjustments in arm weight (heavier) and bow speed (slower) to pull a resonant tone from the instrument.

Daily scales practice of one-octave scales in the highest register, using one full bow-stroke per note, will help reinforce this technique. Use continuous vibrato and pull the bow as slowly as possible while maintaining your best tone.

—Miranda Wilson

## ARE VIOLINS & FIDDLES SET-UP DIFFERENTLY?

**Q:** I normally play bluegrass, old time, and Celtic music, but had a hard time blending with the other musicians when I tried playing classical music with some friends. Someone said it was because my violin was probably setup for fiddle, not classical. What’s the difference? —Catelyn Tully

**A:** ‘Fiddle,’ in the American tradition, used to be what folks without classical training did with bowed instruments, from the dance music of Irish immigrants to the roots of jazz and blues in the South. In terms of instruments, the difference these days between a classical and fiddle setup is mainly in the strings. Homegrown accessories, like rattlesnake rattles and soundpost twine aside, violins and luthiers are too prevalent for another instrument entirely to have emerged from our fiddling tradition. But mostly, fiddle players prefer steel strings, and classical players use strings with a synthetic core. Steel strings are stark—less warm than modern classical strings. A fiddler needs to cut through a sight more foot-stomping and bar noise than chamber musicians do.

—Christopher Jacoby

## DID YOU KNOW?

Havergal Brian’s *Symphony No. 1*, the “Gothic,” requires over 800 musicians to perform, including 82 string players.



# sharmusic.com

800.248.SHAR (7427)



Serving the string community since 1962