

Workshops for Violin and Viola players

By Rosa Welker

Tips for everyday's practice

Start your practice by an exercise just for your bow technique and one just for your left hand.
For example:

- Butterfly
- 3-Chords' exercise on open strings

And focus on your posture, gestures of your body, muscles, movements and sound.

Then play a scale slowly first to warm up your body and then make it something funny, such as with rhythms, slurs, or by playing with the open string above or under (any other idea?). After enjoy time with your instrument! Play what you like: pieces, improvisations, pop songs...

Why do we play scales?

- Warm-up your body and muscles (so we avoid injuries)
- Settle slowly left and right hands together
- Intonation: check every note with your instrument (Open G with 3rd finger on D because it is also a G, also 2nd finger on A, or watch your A string vibrating while you play your 1st finger on G)
- When one finger during your scale is down on your fingerboard, watch your bow and your posture: Is it straight? Do you use your whole bow? Are my shoulders down?
- Sound: Enjoy you playing music!

Junior's workshops

Posture

The first Four steps:

1. Instrument in the air, tap the button
2. Instrument on our shoulder, feel the button in your neck, sleep on your violin by leading your head, caress your throat (if you cannot, that means that you hold your violin as a baby's napkin)
3. Your nose, bridge and head of your instrument should be in a same line. Your instrument should be stable
4. Put the foot under your instrument a bit forward, chest up, and move your hips so that the body is released and free to play!

[We played Stepping Stones by plugging every string twice from the lower one to the highest and back. The aim was to pluck strings with a nice posture and let our instruments ring.]

Bow technique

Some gestures that I showed by holding just the bow in front of me in the air:

- Bend your thumb under the bow and at its place between the wood and hair's bow
- Pinkie on the bow
- Rabbit's posture: the two middle fingers are next to each other, the 1st finger a bit separated and the pinkie on bow's wooden part. The middle fingers make the teeth of the rabbit and they eat the carrot that is your thumb. The 1st finger and pinkie make rabbit's ears. Tap gently your bow by lifting one finger after another.

Exercises:

- Wrists' Kisses: hold the bow horizontally in front of you; left hand at the tip of the bow and right hand on the frog. Our hands move slowly from each side towards each other by 'walking' along the bow. Use the tips of your fingers.
- Windscreen wipers: feel the change of weight in your fingers.
- Shower: Hold your bow vertically and watch your right hand how he holds your bow (be careful of your thumb, is it bent?). Shake your bow under your arms, in your back, on the top of head, clean your teeth AND watch again your hand if it didn't change its posture.
- Seven stages: Play one string alone and then with the next to it, from the lowest string to highest (G, G+D, D, D+A, A, A+E, E). First twice every string and then once. Watch your elbow! It should move for every stage. (Picture of a waiter with a plate full of wine glasses = Comparison with your right arm while playing).
- 3-Chords' exercise: several different bowings on three strings. For example:
 - o G+D down-bow, D+A up-bow
 - o Same but slurred: G+D and D+A down-bow, D+A and G+D up-bow
 - o The two exercises above but not in double stops: G, D down-bow and D, A up AND G, D, A in a down-bow and A, D, G up-bow.

Left hand

Swing your left arm under your instrument and feel your thumb sliding on the wood. Your whole **left arm** should be free and release. Your instrument does not move. Put your **thumb** under the fingerboard and in front of your 2nd finger or 1st finger. Be care of your **wrist**! Is it straight? Are your **fingers** above your fingerboard?

[We played four times Open D and four times E (1st finger). The same on the A string. And then a song called 'Frères Jacques' in French... But you knew it already!]

Butterfly: put your finger as in 1st position, towards violin's head. Open your hand and palm; all your fingers should be straight in the air. Close in the same time the wings by dropping your fingers on the fingerboard. First just close your hand, after try to aim as in the 1st position with all knuckles above the fingerboard and on one string.

Instrument and bow together

Rolland's exercise:

Rolland is a famous string instrument pedagogue... For your interest! Take your bow and instrument, hold them down next to your legs, bring everything up, without effort put your

violin on your shoulder and play twice an open string. And then bring everything down again. Repeat this exercise several time to take your instrument easily, in a simple way, and make it comfortable on your body.

I like chocolate's exercise:

Say what you like to eat in a rhythm, choose a string and play the same rhythm while saying the sentence again. You can choose another string, say another food that you like, mix with two strings while playing the whole sentence...

Hoe down or 'Chocolate and Candies':

Piece on every open string with different rhythms. Congratulations to have learned this piece by heart in a so little time! I had a lot of fun by playing with you this piece. The score is in the appendices.

G-Major scale:

First sing D E F sharp, and then play on the D-string with a high 2nd finger (which will go next to your 3rd finger, next to a G then). Sing again and compare with the notes you just played. Do they sound the same? Listen to your intonation. Think about a colour, a feeling (happy), nature (sun shine).

Then sing D, E, F natural and play by closing the scissors (which is the space between 1st and 2nd finger). So 1st and 2nd fingers are next to each other. Sing again and listen to your violin. Link with a feeling (sadness) or nature (rain). Mix these suites of three notes (with F sharp or F natural). Try the same suite of notes on other strings!

G-Major scale begins on the Open G-string and our scissors (1st and 2nd fingers) are open for the two first strings (G and D). After close the scissors on A and E strings. Can you play the scale from your lowest string? And then from the highest G on the E string?

Senior's workshops

Some exercises done together are described in the Junior's workshop text, here above.

Left hand

Dexterity: Drop strongly one finger on one string. Count 1, 2, 3 and lift your finger on 4, in tempo. Just after dropping your finger strongly, release.

Glissando: Play 1st finger on D string and 3rd finger, as E - G and G - E. Then play E with your 1st finger, lift your thumb, slide your 1st finger gently (in a smooth glissando), ear a nice slow glissando till the G, where your 3rd finger had to be before. When you reach the right note, put your thumb again under your violin. Play G, and then slide back to E.

Try this exercise on every string. And then change the interval! Slide a forth tomorrow or a fifth...

Vibrato: Take your violin as a guitar. Wash your strings with one finger, and after another one. Knock your violin's head as comparison to a door. Watch what your arm is doing, how your wrist stays straight but moves grace to the pulse from your left elbow. Look your fingers and their knuckles if they are free to move (are they unlocked?). Then start to bring your violin on your shoulder by keeping doing this gesture of sliding on your fingerboard. Once your violin on your shoulder, slide with big movements and reduce in small gestures till you

slide a third, then a second then put slightly some weight with your finger and keep moving in the same direction. Important: the movements of your arm and fingers have to be in the same direction as your string! Try to unlock everything from your shoulder blades to your finger's knuckles. Feel it, release everything you can your body. The pulse of your vibrato should be from your left elbow and it makes your hand moving.

There are three types of vibrato: fingers, wrist and arm. Put one finger on one string; watch that the knuckles are above the fingerboard and up (like Swiss mountains). Then slide your finger toward your violin's head, lay your finger down on the string, knuckles bind themselves. It helps if you do not press too much the string with your finger (weight brings stressed vibrato) and if you play with the 'meat' of your finger (flat fingers on the fingerboard). Repeat the movement with every finger: knuckles up and down (in string's direction). Then let's see what that makes, play with your bow! Look your arm's movement in a mirror!

Then try to vibrate with a tempo. Hear your vibrato and sing its rhythm. It will help you to control it.

Continued vibrato: remember the story of a relay sprinter when he gives the baton to the next sprinter. Both run before and after. Our fingers should also give the relay. When the first finger has its knuckle up the next finger starts also with its knuckle up and then lay down and keeps the vibrato going.

Vibrato's exercises:

- At school, in the bus, at table, move your knuckles of each finger (up and down) to unlock your fingers!
- Vibrates one finger on eight notes, triplets, sixteenth, quintuplets, and sextuplets. The best is to exercise with the metronome on 60 as quarter note.
- For continued vibrato, practice with slurs: In one down-bow, vibrates in eight notes with the 1st and 2nd finger. Then up-bow, 2nd and 3rd, and 3rd and 4th down-bow. And backwards.

You can find in the appendices some pictures of our knuckles while vibrating and a page with some vibrato's exercises. There is also a book good for vibrato called *Viva Vibrato!*

Bow technique

Hold your bow with a strong right hand.

Exercise: Put your bow at the frog, try to move your string without sounding it. Then let it go, release, play a note, and stop again. Repeat that four times in one bow: 4x down and 4x up.

We did a session with several bow technique by speaking about amount of bow, place, part, hair, pressure, speed for détaché, legato, spiccato, sautillé, martelé, staccato, ricochet, battuto, con legno. We also spoke about accents (dotted, Sforzando, hard accent...).

Instrument and bow together

Let's find every common note on our violin! For example all the G's, and then all the A's (1st on G, Open A-string, 3rd finger on E-string) and so on. See your string (as A-string) vibrates when you play a 1st finger on G. And find all the other common notes we have!

For FUN!

Body Percussion:

The score is in the appendices. Try again in little groups!

Improvisation:

Some players play a G-Major chord. At least two persons and one play G and D and the other one a B (natural). And the third player improvises, lets his heart speaking in music by playing some notes of the G-Major scale on his instrument. Let your mind and ears go!