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President's Message: Encourage Musical Cravings

Like me, I am sure many of you have been following the news, and know that right now represents a historically challenging time for American symphony orchestras. Orchestras with long and storied traditions are facing cuts: cuts in the size of the ensemble, the number of weeks per year, and deep cuts to musician salaries and benefits. At the moment that I write this, two world-class ensembles, The Minnesota Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, have been locked out by their managements, and with that, the cultural life in the Minneapolis region has been significantly diminished.

At the same time, many of us in the string teaching world know that our students are not fluent in the symphonic literature; they do not know the great symphonies and concertos of the past, nor are they aware of the exciting new works being presented on the symphonic stage. While many of our students may use YouTube (which is a truly wonderful resource, especially for familiarizing our students with the great performers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), many of them have not developed a habit of attending live performances, especially performances by great orchestras.

We are lucky enough to live and teach in a region with several world-class symphony orchestras, as well as many other high-quality ensembles. As music teachers, we are in the unique position of being able to simultaneously support our local organizations and

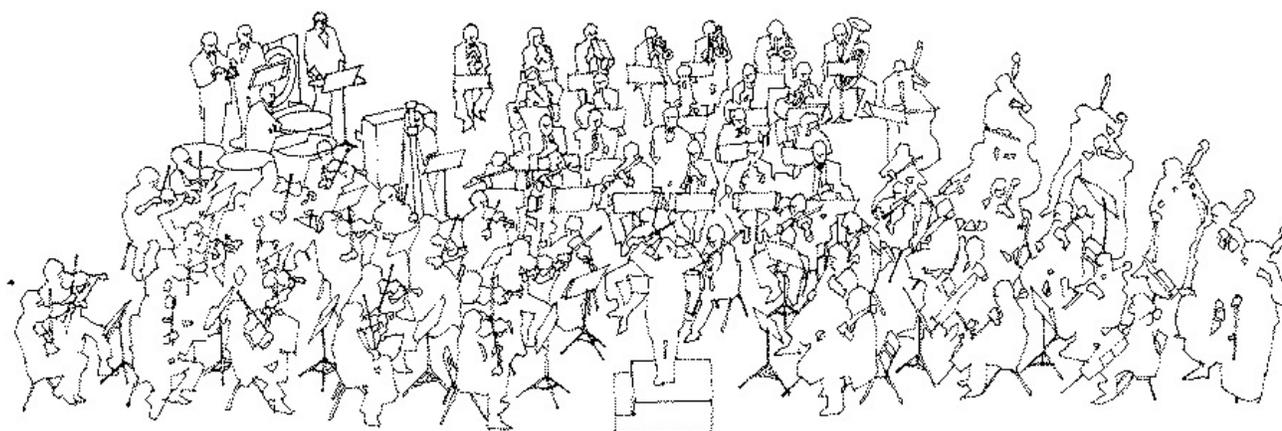
develop the musical literacy of our students and our community. I urge you to be proactive in encouraging your students to go to the orchestra, to help them develop a *craving* for live symphonic music.

There are many ways to do this. Find a concert of interest to you and your studio and gather funds so you can buy a block of seats together. Look through the season brochures and give out a list of recommended performances to your students. Link to the symphony websites from your studio website. In your studio guidelines or teaching syllabus, make sure you state the importance of attending live concerts. Help your students to connect to the great symphonic literature by referencing it as you teach concertos, sonatas, and chamber music. Share with them some of your favorite orchestral performances, and of course, be sure to let them know when you are performing!

You can make a difference in helping to sustain these important cultural institutions by making concert-going a part of your instruction. At the same time, you are ensuring that your students get a well-rounded musical education and develop a lifetime habit of appreciating live orchestral music. It is most definitely a win-win.

Perhaps I will run into you at the next ASTA MD/DC Chapter sponsored event, or perhaps I will see you at the symphony!

Daniel Levitov



2013 ASTA National Conference

February 27–March 2, 2013

Providence, Rhode Island

Don't miss the 2013 Conference in wonderful Providence, Rhode Island. This year's conference offers more than 200 education sessions! The ASTA Conference is the only place where you can get a dedicated, one-of-a-kind experience of top-notch education sessions, evening showcase performances by leading groups, a strings-only exhibit hall featuring products and service, social events and peer-to-peer networking, and performances by orchestras from around the country showcasing promising young talent.

The American String Teachers Association (ASTA) National Conference is held yearly to benefit string teachers, students and performers. Attendees will learn the latest teaching techniques, and gain important information to bring back to their students. This conference not only benefits the person who attends, but will benefit and bring long term results to your school district, studio, university and students. The ASTA conference is the premier place to enhance skills and knowledge of string related topics.

Educational Sessions

General Sessions

Alternative Styles

Chamber Music

Classroom Teacher

Private Studio

University

Guitar

Curriculum Showcase Sessions

Music Industry Showcase

NSPC Sessions

Student Meetings

Most sessions are 60 minutes and cover a wide range of content applicable to string teaching and performance.

Master Classes and Clinicians

Collegiate Level Classes

Violin: Joseph Genualdi, UMKC

Conservatory

Viola: Nokuthula Ngwenyama

Cello: Laurence Lesser, New England

Conservatory

Bass: Jeffrey Turner, Duquesne University

Pre-College Level Classes

Violin: Lynn Ledbetter, Texas State

University

Viola: Marilyn Seelman, Metropolitan Youth

Symphony Orchestra of Atlanta

Cello: Natasha Brofsky, New England

Conservatory

Bass: John Kennedy, Farmington Public

Schools

Multi-Level Classes

Chamber Music: Miró Quartet

Eclectic Styles: Randy Sabien

Guitar: Jonathan Leathwood, University of
Denver

Harp: Jacqueline Bartlett, UNCSA

Evening Events

Wednesday

Town Hall: Make Your Voice Heard

Dessert Social

Thursday

Dine Around Providence

Friday

Miró Quartet

Saturday

Randy Sabien and the Fiddlehead Band,
joined by participants of the Eclectic
Strings Festival

Host Hotel

The Westin Providence

One West Exchange Street

Providence, RI 02903

1-888-627-8449

*Seamlessly connected to the Rhode Island
Convention Center*

**Please visit the national ASTA website for
complete details about the 2013 Conference
and to register!**

www.astaweb.com

ASTA MD/DC Chapter Annual Meeting and Dinner

DATE:

Sunday, March 17, 2013, 6:00 PM

LOCATION:

Mamma Lucia Restaurant
18224 Village Center Drive, Olney, MD 20832

GUEST SPEAKER:

Alan Stepansky
Professor of Cello at Peabody Conservatory
and Manhattan School of Music

The main item on the agenda for this meeting will be voting on the revision to our chapter's bylaws. These additions and changes are printed on the following page. *Please set aside the date and take part in this important activity for your chapter!*

An application form will be available on our website as the event nears.
www.asta.net/eventdetails



Proposed Additions and Changes to ASTA MD/DC Chapter Bylaws

by Matt Tifford, MD/DC Chapter President-Elect

The following changes to the ASTA MD/DC Chapter bylaws were approved by the board at the Fall 2012 board meeting. These changes will be brought to a membership vote at the **Annual Meeting and Dinner on March 17, 2013**. You may read the current bylaws on our website: www.asta.net/stringendo

Proposed new bylaws Article: Communications (Article Number TBD)

Section 1. Weekly eNewsletter. The primary purpose of the eNewsletter is to communicate news about ASTA-sponsored events including those of MD/DC Chapter, sister chapters, and the National Organization. The weekly eNewsletter may also contain:

- Event announcements by sponsoring organizations and businesses, sponsorship being defined as regular advertisers and institutional members.
- Event announcements by individual members. These announcements should not be for events held by or financially benefitting non-sponsoring organizations.

Content for the eNewsletter will be determined by the Executive Committee and communicated via email by the President to the eNewsletter editor by each Sunday for publication on the following Tuesday. Content may also be submitted by the President-Elect or Past-President, provided that the President is Cc'd on the email.

Section 2. ASTA Business Emails. All Board members shall Cc the President, Past-President, and President-Elect on all emails involving ASTA MD/DC Chapter business.

Proposed changes and additions to Article IX – Financial Management

Section 2. Treasurer's Report. The Annual Treasurer's Report shall be submitted at the Annual Business Meeting and shall be *published on the Association website. Hard copies will be available to Association members by written request.* [changes in italics]

Section 4. Annual Budget. The President shall present a budget covering the Association's proposed expenses for the ensuing year to the Executive Committee for its review and approval prior to formal submission and approval by the Association not later than the Annual Business Meeting. A Budget Committee, appointed by the president, should have four members, and include the Secretary/Treasurer.

Section 5. Lack of Budget. If the Association does not have a budget that is approved by the Board of Directors for the ensuing fiscal year upon adjournment of the Annual Business Meeting, all Association expenditures except required expenses will be frozen on June 30th of that year, until the Fall meeting. A special Board meeting may be called by the Executive Committee to approve a budget after the Annual meeting, provided it posts a notice of the meeting on the website and emails the Board of Directors thirty (30) days in advance of the meeting.

Section 6. Non-Budgeted Items. The Executive Committee shall have the authority to authorize payment of individual items not included in the budget, not to exceed \$500 per item, without prior authority of the Association. The Treasurer shall present all such items authorized by the Executive Committee at the next general meeting of the Association as information for that body.

Section 7. Deficit. No budget will be approved by the Executive Committee that will require the Association to end the corresponding fiscal year with a deficit. Any budget requiring the Association to draw from a reserve fund or borrow funds will require a special vote of the Board of Directors in advance of the draw.

MSMTA Conference, January 2013

MARYLAND STATE MUSIC TEACHERS ASSOCIATION (MSMTA) is planning a *full day of activities for string teachers* during their State Conference on January 12 and 13, 2013. The special events for strings will be held on **Sunday, January 13, 2013, from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM**

Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, University of Maryland, College Park.

All area string teachers are invited!

MORNING:

- Rebecca Henry – Violin Master Class
- Alicia Ward – Cello Master Class
- Elizabeth Field and Stephanie Vial, co-directors of The Vivaldi Project and the Institute for Early Music on Modern Instruments, will discuss and demonstrate baroque performance practices, which includes bowing techniques, applications

of vibrato, and principles of phrase structure, as applied to baroque dance forms found in the sonatas and concertos in the Suzuki books, and in the standard performance repertoire.

AFTERNOON:

- Nurit Bar-Joseph – Violin Master Class
- Evelyn Elsing – Cello Master Class
- Rebecca Henry – Lecture on Developing Independent Practice Strategies

Plus, there will be time for chatting over lunch and meeting string teachers from MSTMA, ASTA MDDC, VASTA, and SAGWA.

Application deadline: January 7, 2013 Cost: \$40 for the day (\$45 if after deadline), Students \$12

Download an application from the MSMTA website:
http://www.msmta.org/conference/2013_sched_registration.pdf



World On A String Report

by Dorée Huneven

The first “World on a String” Workshop/ Concert took place on November 3, 2012, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring, and was received with enthusiasm and eagerness to repeat the experience next year. There were over 80 attendees—both adult and children instrumentalists—including players of violin, viola, cello, guitar, and harmonica, as well as one dancer and some pipers and singers! The faculty, representing many traditions of music-making, taught the students in teams of three in a total of twelve music-exploring workshops.

Some highlights: a Greek-Chinese-Irish composition written by the students in one of the workshops and performed in the evening concert; three completely different workshops teaching improvisation—tools for all; a fabulous faculty lunchtime concert;

Twinkle in 6 idioms; a brilliant mash-up of Pachelbel Canon and the rock classic “Final Countdown”; Afro-Peruvian guest drummer/dancers/violinist; a performance of the renowned group “Dovetail” in the final concert. Organizer Andrea Hoag and her large team supervised everything with good will and enthusiastic energy.

This event was a collaboration of ASTA MD/DC Chapter, Freyda’s Hands, The House of Musical Traditions, and included these sponsors: Potters Violins, Gailes’ Violin Shop, and the Mary Kay Friday Fund of the Country Dance and Song Society. Snacks were generously provided by Ten Ren’s Tea Ginseng Co., Inc.

For more information, please visit Freyda’s Hands. <http://www.freydashands.org/woas/home/>



Fiddler Andrea Hoag, guitarist Owen Morrison, and Dancer Nic Gareiss at *World On A String Day*.



Students of all ages, all backgrounds improvising variations on familiar tunes at *World On A String Day*.

Pre-1850 Banjo Tune

Unknown street musician, Elmira, New York



The Keel Row – Highland Fling



The workshop “Ireland to America” showed the stylistic differences (phrasing, bowing, ornaments) between *Keel Row* and *Banjo Tune*, nearly-identical melodies.

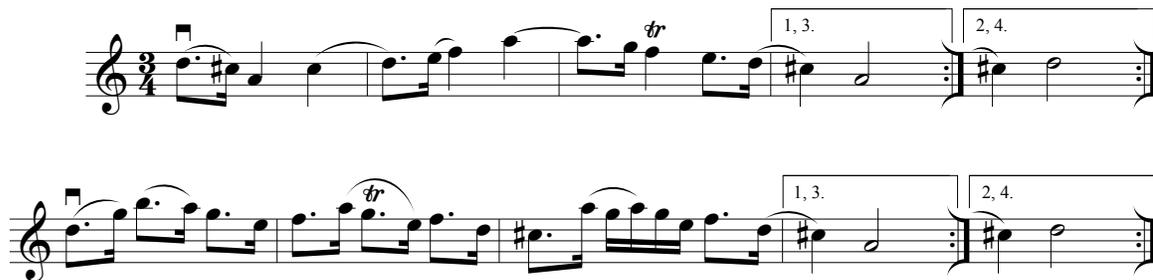
The intermediate/advanced workshop “Lima” explored complex rhythms, including the Swedish tune *Vi fåm föll* in uneven 3/4 time. The beats are unequal in length. It’s counted and danced in three, with the third beat ever so slightly shorter than the other two. For new listeners there’s a mysterious complexity to the rhythm. The threeness often comes as a surprise to the uninitiated! Boda polska is one of the many versions of *polska*, which, depending on the region they come from, are in even or uneven 3/4 time.

Swedish tunes often don’t have names as such, but are referred to by the tradition-bearing fiddler’s name or sometimes by the lyric that’s sung to them. The full lyric for this one (which is in Boda dialect) is *Vi fåm föll, vi fåm föll en liten taskfot till lådig*—We’re going to get, we’re going to get a little baby this spring.

—*Andrea Hoag*

Vi fåm föll

Polska from Boda (Sweden)



The Continuation Project

by Dorée Huneven

I have been teaching violin and viola for more than forty years, and am so happy to write that of the hundreds of students I have taught for a year or more, 95% of them are pursuing music in some way or another. While only a small number of them have chosen to become professional, the rest get together regularly with their friends to play in community orchestras, chamber ensembles, bands, or just for fun. They play classical music, jazz, fiddle, rock; they play for dances, charity events, concerts, house parties, weddings, and many other special events. Violin playing is a linchpin in their lives. And it's all because they never quit playing, even after they stopped taking lessons.

I wish. The preceding paragraph is a total lie, except for the small number who became professional. Here, below, is the truth.

At age 61, I took a good look at the results of those 40+ years of teaching. To my credit, I saw that I could take almost any student, age 4 to adult, and turn him or her into a very competent player. My students had great tone, intonation, posture and technique. They memorized well, did great performances, got into youth orchestras (five concertmasters in younger orchestras!), performed well in competitive situations, and weren't afraid to perform in public. Their progress was usually great, and they were conscientious and diligent workers. There was just one problem: most of them *quit*. This I found appalling, and not the kind of legacy I would choose to leave. I asked myself, "Why, after such a good start, would so many students stop?" I came up with a number of reasons from my long tenure: 1) No desire to keep practicing; 2) No time to practice; 3) Everything became too difficult; 4) Other activities became more important, including new high school/university environments; and 5) Loss of interest. To be honest, in pushing consistent practice and achievement, I myself had also contributed to the desire to quit: 6) A disagreeably demanding teacher.

Aside from wanting to leave a legacy of "continuers" instead of quitters, why would I be interested in trying to change how I taught? After all, the teacher imparts knowledge; what the student does with it is not really the teacher's business, is it? I think it is,

for several reasons: 1) Learning to play an instrument can give an adult a great social life, through playing with others; 2) Playing contributes to positive developments in brain function—particularly in attentiveness, auditory acuity and memory, all of which are very valuable throughout life; 3) Cost—a most unsavory reason, but considering how much money and time is spent on lessons, instruments, materials, transportation, and extras, quitting makes the loss of parents' and children's resources tremendous; and 4) Playing music is wonderful as a solitary activity in many ways, and qualitatively different from listening to music.

What a regretful shame it is to quit playing! Couldn't students be taught how to incorporate music-making into their lives for present and future enjoyment? The key thing that struck me is: to keep playing their instruments, certain things would *have to be taught*. Therefore, I decided to start "The Continuation Project," which is an attempt to create a teaching environment that will encourage and teach children to form their *own* musical communities, and to continue music making through high school, college, career, parenthood, middle and old age. I reasoned that if a student knows how to form a group of friends with whom to play mutually enjoyable music, then there would be a much better chance of wanting to continue to play.

Forming a Musical Community

I decided to use my bi-monthly group lessons to be the heart of learning musical community building. First, the students are divided into four groups according to their playing level. I made sure that there are several children of the same age in each group, so that a very young child or a much older one would not feel conspicuously out of place. Each group is encouraged to establish its own identity through voting on a group name, and choosing outfits for performances. A combination repertoire plan/roster is sent to parents and students as it is updated. Most importantly, students constantly *choose* what they want to play, and under what circumstances. My responsibility is to cleverly provide menus for these choices.

Kinds of Musical Activities and Materials

Because I am the teacher, I take responsibility for “musical preparation.” This includes level-appropriate materials and group lesson activities.

Because I want each student to continue at least some of these activities for life, I aim for a variety. These break into the following:

- **Formal unison playing.** This is right out of Suzuki: take common repertoire and play together for the sheer joy of it. The children listen to music at their level, choose pieces they like, and vote on what they would like to play together. They also choose leaders for each piece. This is, of course, excellent preparation for playing in a 1st or 2nd violin section of an orchestra.
- **Solos.** Performing solos is a timeless skill. Each child chooses a beloved piece, and performs for the group. I plan to extend this to learning how to choose event-appropriate solos, making a recital program, etc. At the private lesson, I work on the solo and stage presence.
- **Chamber music.** I start with the basic duet. I have each group buy a duet book (which I have chosen), stressing that this is the first of their collection, so that whenever violin friends come over, out come the duet books! I help the children to partner up, and each duo chooses one or two favorites. At the group lesson, I teach ensemble skills to everyone; then the pairs go to separate rooms to practice for 5 to 10 minutes, come back, and perform for everyone. At the individual lessons, I coach them further.
- **Jamming.** Thanks to the 2012 O’Connor Method Workshop in Charleston, South Carolina, I see the joy that comes to children with learning how to jam. Indeed, it is the favorite group activity. Within the jam, I teach the “rules,” how to comp, and how to improvise—rhythmically and harmonically. When they jam, they choose everything they do. And, as I am also learning these skills, I essentially teach myself as well.

Take the Group on the Road: Musical Events

Nothing cements a musical community more than performing at some kind of event. I want to show the children and their parents the varieties of venues to choose from, so I give them a list which includes

such things as: house parties, school talent shows, church services, retirement homes, hospitals, busking, special events (weddings, birthday parties, etc.), playing to support a local charity, street fairs, farmers’ markets, etc.

The first event I chose for The Continuation Project was a home concert, an enduringly popular activity, as it also includes food and playtime. A home was volunteered, and parents organized themselves for timing, refreshments, etc. As the year goes on, I will challenge each group to daringly choose more exposed venues, such as busking in front of a public place, like Starbucks.

Behind the Scenes Support: Parents!

To ensure the success of the present groups, I enlist a great deal of help from parents. As they are paying for lessons, organizing practice, etc., their support is vital in helping children want to play on into the future. Most of them had never thought of this before. Now they do. Here is how I involve them. As mentioned previously, each group has a roster, with parents’ names and phone numbers. When I send group emails, they are encouraged to keep the names and addresses so they can write to everyone at once. They choose a “parent rep” who helps to organize events, food, etc. They attend the group lessons so they can speak with each other and make arrangements face-to-face. They will probably need to help out until the teenage years and drivers’ licenses relieve them of most of their responsibilities, except paying for lessons, most likely.

The Continuation Project Expanded

Because I would like The Continuation Project to succeed, I need to enlist the help of interested colleagues, students of my own and other teachers who *have* continued to play, and to do my own research into the myriad musical communities that exist. Therefore, I have created an informal group of my own to help, put them in an email group, and send out monthly progress reports called “The Continuation Project News.” I elicit feedback on my activities, as well as ideas from them. I invite anyone reading this article to email me to become a member of this group. In addition, I am writing a handbook for students, parents and teachers, which will soon be posted on my website. (Please see the end of this article for contact information.)

I perceive that the idea of The Continuation Project will continue to grow, perhaps spawning other articles, a book, videos, and forums. Please stay tuned!

In Conclusion

The Continuation Project has already profoundly changed my teaching. Although the individual lesson continues to be the heart of teaching musicianship, technique and performance skills, it now it becomes a place to teach, support, encourage, and enhance the ideas of musical community and its necessary components of finding already-existing communities,

getting together with friends to form new ones, choosing music, rehearsing, finding venues, and giving performances. And at the very core of this teaching is how I relate to each student: whatever I teach, whatever I utter, I must hold the thought: “I must help you to want to always keep playing!”



Dorée Huneven maintains a private studio in Rockville, Maryland. She is a former president of ASTA MD/DC Chapter, and currently serves as Montgomery County/DC Representative. Please contact her via her website: www.doreehuneven.com



Music, Sports, and Brains

by Lynn Fleming

I will sum this up in one brief sentence: *In playing an instrument, the player receives the benefit of mental agility similar to working out a mathematical problem, plus the additional bonus of the physical discipline of a sport.*

Many have commented on the fact that creativity uses the right side of the brain. I disagree. Creativity is indeed part of performance; however, the tools necessary for fine playing include both physical and mental challenges.

All instruments require similar work. It is the responsibility of a good teacher to guide the student into good practice habits, which include the following:

- Analysis of the music. For the beginner, this could be something fairly simple such as the name of the piece. Next, time and key signatures, tempo markings. For the more advanced player, harmonic analysis is helpful in planning phrasing, fingerings, bowings and other technical components. This analysis is useful whether the student is approaching a scale, an etude or a piece of advanced solo or orchestral repertoire. For the beginner it is always beneficial for the teacher to indicate the *goal* of a particular study.

- Analysis of the physical challenges of the piece of music. Whether it is a fingering issue on piano, shifting or bowing on a stringed instrument, interval leaps in voice or embouchure on brass or woodwinds, there is always a physical component that must be addressed. Again, the teacher should be involved in guiding the student in isolation techniques to help overcome the problems of a given piece of music.
- When we teachers ask our students to work in such a manner so as to concentrate their bodies and minds on a musical problem, just as we do in sports, we should stretch carefully and relax after a good training session.

It is only when the body and mind are working together can we make music that will speak to our hearts.



Double bassist Lynn Fleming is currently on the faculty of several colleges in our area, and has worked extensively with youngsters of all ages. In addition to her private studio, she conducts the FCC String Ensemble, a beginning orchestra for adults. She is director of the McDaniel Orchestra Camp. www.lynnflemingstudios.com



Collegiate Recruitment Reconsidered

CO4s and Building Your Base

by Dr. Jeffrey Howard, University Representative for MD/DC Chapter

It takes many years for any collegiate music department to develop a consistent range of student recruitment. As faculty work to build degree programs, create ensembles, and manage facility space, one cannot rely on an “if you build it they will come” philosophy! As I continue to expand my own recruitment skills, I have found several topics that are essential in all efforts to build your department “brand.” Whether your department is large or small (or is just your individual studio), I hope the following references help you create a plan to reach your recruitment goals.

CO4s. Recruitment, (and in a way “branding”) is central to building a successful music program. For the sake of discussion, I will assume that you already have the faculty and programs that you want, and we can stick with methods of excellent recruitment. There are many ways to recruit, and there are many approaches to recruiting. The following five topic areas (Communication, Online, On-Campus, Off-Campus, and Outreach—CO4s) provide a point of departure as you look for new ways to bring highly qualified students to your programs.

Communication. Communication is at the heart of all recruitment activities. Some basic skills are necessary here. These include responding to email in a timely and proper manner. Remember that your writing skills say a lot about your interests. You need to be both personable and professional to build good relationships. When calling, make an effort to contact people at a time of day that you think is appropriate: not too late and not too early. Build communications early—before your deadlines, so you have time to build trust. And remember to thank people. Everyone wants to be appreciated for their time and efforts!

Online Presence. More and more, a significant online presence will help connect you to prospective students. There are many options here. Initial thoughts include social media such as Facebook and Twitter; web site development—which can include pictures, audio, video, examples of your teaching, biography information, concert schedules, chamber music connections, and scholarships; connections to

music organizations such as ASTA MD/DC Chapter, and open house events where students can meet with the instructor. Private teachers have many options for online content. Posting a “Teaching Philosophy” for example, is often helpful to prospective students and parents. Many public school music directors also have lists of teachers for students to reference. Make sure you are on these lists, and include your web site!

On-Campus Presence. Bringing students to campus is an essential part of the recruitment picture. When paired with opportunities for current students, you can often create a great learning environment. Examples include guest master classes, bringing conferences or special events to campus, creating opportunities for prospective students to visit campus (such as the Senior All State Workshop we hold at Towson), and numerous faculty solo and ensemble concerts. For me, the “Violin Buddy Day” has been a great tool for recruitment. Students come to campus, receive a free 30-minute lesson, and then “shadow” some of our current students by visiting academic classes—master classes, chamber music sessions, music history classes, etc. This is a wonderful way to get a feel for the university. Interdisciplinary events are always a great draw for both current and future students. These can include film productions or dance performances that are accompanied by live music. Multicultural events, such as combining an art exhibit with a jazz combo, are always well received. As these productions unfold, spend time getting the word out. A full house is always a great sign of success!

Off-Campus Presence. There are many ways to build an off-campus reputation that also builds your on-campus student base. I have been involved in a wide variety of activities. These include performing in area chamber and orchestral ensembles, giving solo recitals, performing as a soloist with local and national ensembles, adjudicating for State Solo and Ensemble Festivals, participating in summer festivals and workshops both in-state and out-of-state, and giving sectionals for area youth orchestras. I also think it is important to give back to your community—both musically and in general, so I

encourage teachers to participate in groups such as ASTA MD/DC Chapter, Maryland Orchestra Directors Association (MODA) and Maryland Music Educators Association (MMEA). Be active, be seen, and make a contribution.

Outreach. Bringing music directly to today's youth is another big component of recruitment. Most of the students you play for will not go into music, but the impact we have on music education and music understanding is profound. Go to school for "Career Day" at the elementary level. Play chamber music for high school students. Work with middle school

orchestras before county assessments. We are the best advocates for why music is great. If we believe in it, they will too. And don't forget, outreach includes people of all ages, backgrounds and conditions.

These topic areas provide a wide overview of many pieces of the recruitment puzzle. Some areas have more content, while others require hands-on performing and speaking skills. As always, be prepared to speak well. Be prepared to receive questions. Be prepared to volunteer for things. Taken as a whole, these ideas build a wonderful framework to create an excellent and sustainable music program.



Double Bass: Raising the Standard, Increasing the Respect

by Kerri Shelfo

The double bass: that great big heavy instrument, which intimidates many an orchestra director and scares away any parent without a mini-van. Despite its necessity to filling out an orchestra's sound, there is still a noticeable shortage of school bass players in our string programs. There are a number of factors that deter children from playing the bass and sticking with it in the first place: its size, cost of renting an instrument, limited supply of rental basses, transportation issues, and parents' lack of familiarity. There is the additional issue of school orchestra directors who do not feel comfortable playing or teaching the bass, and thus tending to ignore it in the orchestra. But in a day and age when masters like Edgar Meyer and François Rabbath are raising the standards of bass playing to inconceivable levels, the standards of double bass education must be raised as well, beginning with the public school string programs.

The first question to answer: to begin or not to begin on the bass? There is an age-old debate of whether or not to begin students on viola or to switch them from violin and the familiar arguments of poor tone quality of the smaller instruments and the lack of worthy repertoire are similar to both bass and viola. Yes, smaller student models can lack the sound quality, making it somewhat more difficult to appreciate the breadth of the beauty of these instruments. Yes, the repertoire for both viola and bass is comprised primarily of transcriptions of great works for other instruments. However, these arguments are not justification enough to prevent a student from playing an instrument in which they have a true interest.

As a public school string teacher, I am elated if any beginner is eager to play viola or bass. As a bassist, it is disheartening to stand in front of an ensemble of 16 violins, a few violas and cellos, and *no* basses. The balance is atrocious, the E strings are piercing, and the harmony is completely compromised. Basses are vital to the sound quality of a student orchestra. As already stated, it has always been difficult to recruit bass players for a number of reasons. The cumbersome size is the first deterrent for many

students—and more likely for their parents, who will end up carting it around. Local music stores and school inventories make it much easier to rent a violin than a double bass, based on cost and availability. And the popularity of the instrument cannot begin to rival that of the violin. So, where does that leave us? It leaves us with a large violin choir accompanied by a few straggling violists and cellists who decided to go against the grain.

Many believe that beginning students on bass is nearly impossible. “You can start fifth graders on bass?” I’ve been asked. Absolutely! I began my own training on the bass at the age of eight. Fractional size basses are available. More than ever before, instrument makers now are producing better quality basses in small sizes. The bass is different in tuning, physical setup, fingering patterns, and even bow styles from the other string instruments. Therefore, it makes much more sense to begin students on the bass, rather than switching them from cello, viola, or violin. By beginning our bass players as bass players, we can present the correct positions and technique from the start, instead of modifying what they have already learned on another much smaller member of the string family. In recent years, bass pedagogy has undergone major transformations, thanks to teachers like François Rabbath, Hal Robinson, and George Vance. The new methods of instruction modify posture with stools or bent endpins to distribute the weight of the instrument more comfortably for the bassist. These methods approach the instrument where it is most accessible to students physically, and they have beginners exploring the upper positions immediately. This promotes confidence in shifting and a greater knowledge of the geography of the fingerboard. Fortunately, these methods can be adapted to instruction in the heterogeneous orchestra classroom with a few modifications.

Raising the standards of bass playing within the public school system can help to cultivate a greater respect for the double bass. With all the new pedagogies and approaches to beginning students on bass, there is significant opportunity to expand

the repertoire and the playability of the instrument. Bass virtuoso Gary Karr starts students in thumb position, which gives young bassists the ability to read in treble clef, the dexterity to play quickly, and the facility to play—the *melody*! The Rabbath and Vance techniques start students in third, fourth, and fifth positions. Shifting becomes a fearless conquest when students begin playing in the region of the bass that is the most physically demanding on young students. Even classroom methods like *Artistry in Strings* offer this new approach as an option for bass players. These methodologies raise the expectation of a student bass player from knowing how to “pluck-slap-spin the bass” to demanding a technically advanced player. The standards are being raised

within the world of double bass players. Now it is time to transfer that mentality to our colleagues in the world of middle and upper strings in our school orchestras. Doing so will increase the respect for the bass that it undoubtedly deserves in our programs.



Kerri Shelfo is an orchestra director for Fairfax County Schools in Virginia and has a private bass studio in Alexandria, Virginia. She holds degrees from Ithaca College and the University of Maryland College Park. Her primary research is in the area of providing instrumental music education to special learners and teacher education.



Strings Camp

by Alex Olsen

Stewart's Stellar Strings Super Nova Scale Camp is awesome. All string players can benefit from it. Mrs. Stewart has wonderful teachers come in and teach for violin, viola, and cello. This year she had Dr. Jeff Howard come in and work with us on the violin. Dr. Howard teaches at Towson University and is an excellent teacher and violinist. Throughout the week, we learned several different things from him, including practicing techniques. He also showed us new fingerings for all major and minor scales as well as the tonic arpeggios for each, all in three octaves. These fingerings are very efficient, and to be able to play all three octave scales, you only need to know four different fingerings: one for major scales, one for minor scales, and two for arpeggios. And they aren't tricky to remember either. And surprisingly enough, it was fun practicing the scales in the morning. But that's probably because Dr. Howard is so articulate and easy-going.

Mrs. Stewart also had guest speakers come in throughout the week. She had Mr. Bob Battey, a critic for the Washington Post, and Mrs. Ellen Paul, an exceptional luthier, come in and talk to us. Mr. Battey showed us some recordings of classical players, such as David Oistrakh and Itzhak Perlman. It was cool to watch these famous players, with their flawless performances. Mrs. Paul showed us exactly how a violin is made. It is a very painstaking process; when she works eight hours a day, six days a week, without any interruptions, it takes a month to complete one violin. But in reality, she can only work five hours a day, four days a week, with interruptions (such as re-hairing someone's bow, or fixing their violin). So she cranks out about one violin a year. It's amazing how complex such an instrument can be to make. But all high quality instruments are handmade, so that just makes you appreciate the violin more, once you consider all of the time and effort that was put into making the violin. And once I learned about the excruciatingly detailed process used to refine and finalize the details, I gained even more respect for my instrument, the product of many hours of hard work and concentration.

At the end of each day, we have movement class, taught by Mr. Isiah Johnson. Mr. Johnson teaches rhythmic training at the University of Maryland and has an excellent sense of rhythm. In movement class, we do various rhythm exercises to help improve our counting. My playing has dramatically improved, as rhythm is a very important part of playing the violin. Now it's much easier to feel the rhythm in my body when I play. And then, of course, there's lunch at about noon, and snack after the first hour in the morning. This is when you get to socialize and chat with the viola and cello players. It's a good break, after practicing lots of scales and techniques. This was my third year at scale camp, and, when I compare my playing now to three years ago, it's almost like night and day. My scales and techniques, as well as my posture, have greatly improved. I credit this to all of the great teaching I received at camp. These improvements make it much easier to play my repertoire pieces, and they're also a lot more enjoyable. I'm really looking forward to camp again next year, not only because I learn a lot, but also because it's actually a lot of fun.



Alex Olsen is in the 8th grade at Farquhar Middle School in Olney, MD. He has been playing violin for 4 years.



Benefits of ASTA Membership

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The ASTA eCommunities provide members with an online forum for networking with colleagues, posing questions to peers, or seeking assistance.

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- **State Chapter Membership**

Membership dues include membership in your state chapter. State chapter membership offers many benefits, including local networking, conferences, workshops, newsletters, and more.

- **Conferences**

As an ASTA member, you receive a substantial discount on national conference registration fees. Our annual conference is designed to benefit string professionals representing all levels and styles.

- **Professional Development Programs**

ASTA offers several professional development programs for string educators. These include the Certificate Advancement Program (ASTACAP), as well as access to professional development hours and/or college credit for those attending the national conference.

- **String Industry Council**

The String Industry Council builds a bridge between string teachers and players and corporate America. The Council encourages companies to support the string community, and the String Industry Council Directory serves as a valuable resource to ASTA members. Many Council members also offer discounts to current ASTA members. For more information, visit the String Industry Council section of this site.

- **Advocacy and Outreach**

ASTA members have access to myriad resources designed to strengthen string programs, including a DVD, posters, and complimentary "Why Strings?" brochures. The association also provides tailored letters and emails for string programs requesting assistance. We monitor national arts education issues and keep members informed of important trends and legislation.

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Orchestra Personnel

Conductor

Leaps tall buildings in a single bound.
Is more powerful than a locomotive.
Is faster than a speeding bullet.
Walks on water.
Gives policy to God.

Concertmaster

Leaps short buildings in a single bound.
Is more powerful than a switch engine.
Is just as fast as a speeding bullet.
Walks on water if sea is calm.
Talks with God.

Oboist

Leaps short buildings with a running start and favorable winds.
Is almost as powerful as a switch engine.
Is almost as fast as a speeding bullet.
Walks on water in an indoor swimming pool.
Talks with God if special request is approved.

Trumpet player

Barely clears a quonset hut.
Loses tug-of-war with locomotive.
Can fire a speeding bullet.
Swims well.
Is occasionally addressed by God.

Bassoonist

Makes marks high on wall when trying to clear short buildings.
Is run over by locomotive.
Can sometimes handle a gun without inflicting self-injury.
Dog-paddles.
Talks to animals.

Second violinist

Runs into buildings.
Recognizes locomotives two times out of three.
Is not issued any ammunition.
Can stay afloat with a life jacket.
Talks to walls, argues with self.

Manager

Falls over doorstep when trying to enter buildings.
Says "Look at the choo-choo."
Wets self with water pistol.
Plays in mud puddles.
Loses arguments with self.

Horn player

Lifts buildings and walks under them.
Kicks locomotives off the tracks.
Catches speeding bullets in teeth and eats them.
Freezes water with a single glance.
Is God.