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President's Message

It is with a heavy heart that I must inform the membership that the **2006 State Solo Competition** had to be canceled. The auditorium at McDonogh School was reserved and we received several generous donations to fund the prizes. The reason for the cancellation was only three students sent in applications. I know the requirements are daunting. I certainly did not have any students who qualified. But I know there are talented young string players out there. Please think ahead to 2008. The cash prizes can help students with tuition and the chance to compete at the national level is a wonderful opportunity.

I offered the chance for the three applicants to submit recordings to be sent to the National Office for consideration. One student, Peggy Houg, sent a beautiful recording of her harp playing so I sent it on. We wish her the best in the National Competition.

The **Maryland Incorporation** has been completed and the **D.C. Incorporation** is almost done. This has been quite an education for me. I had never dealt with legal matters on this level before. Now we can rest assured our chapter events are insured and we as members are protected.

The **Certificate Program Exams** are in February in Baltimore and the Catholic University exams take place on June 10, 2007. Please send your students! This is an excellent motivational tool. And now, thanks to Lya Stern's tireless efforts, the Certificate Program exams have gone national. Support your local chapter!

Are you concerned about the state of music education? Do you want Congress to support funding for the Arts? You can use **Capwiz** to become an advocate and have your voice heard in Washington and state capitals across the country. **Simply log onto www.astaweb.com and click on the Capwiz button.**

Action alerts and updates are important issues that ASTA wishes to post and have advocates take action on by emailing, faxing, or calling legislators, committees, agencies, or media outlets. Alerts can also be used to keep ASTA advocates up to date on important pieces of legislation or events and news that are important to the organization. By entering the address or just the zip code the system identifies the appropriate recipients and provides a seamless

transaction from the Strings Advocacy Site to the target inbox.

The Elected Officials page allows advocates to search for their federal or state officials by entering their zip code, using the interactive map, or the last name of the legislator.

The Federal Elected Officials page displays photos of the President, the advocate's two Senators and the Representative. This page also shows how those individuals voted on legislation posted by ASTA and provides links to send them a message or visit their bio page. The State Elected Officials page provides the names of the Governor, Senators and Representatives, and links to their bio pages.

The media page may be of the most interest. This page identifies various media outlets (newspapers, political publications, radio stations, TV stations, and more). Take action by sending messages, letters to the editor, or press releases to these organizations. Publicize your studio events or spread the word about a summer camp.

There are many other features available at Capwiz. Take a look and explore what it has to offer. You can do something for string teaching in your community.

On Saturday, March 17, 2007, the Greater Baltimore Suzuki Association will sponsor a **Suzuki Student Workshop** with David Strom. He will work with the students in groups from 12:15 to 5:15 P.M. The workshop will be held in the Fine Arts Center of the Garrison Forest School in Owings Mills, Maryland.

Fee: students \$10, teacher observers \$15. For more information and repertoire list, contact Cindy Swiss: cswiss@mcdonogh.org or 410-889-8325.

Directions to Garrison Forest School: Take Exit 20 North Reisterstown Road from the Baltimore Beltway. At the fifth traffic light turn right on Greenspring Valley Road (the main entrance is closed on the weekends). Take the first left onto Garrison Forrest Road. After one mile turn left into the school driveway at the large sign for Garrison Forest School. The Fine Arts Building is the modern building across the street from the stop sign.

In service to you,
Cindy Swiss

The Courage to Make a Difference

by Ronda Cole

Reprinted with permission from the SAA Journal

In examining the topic of audacity, the juxtaposition of two teaching situations interests me. Both are concerned with the willingness and courage of teachers to act with authority.

Teachers, New and Mature

My young teacher trainees are fine musicians who are gaining early experience as teachers in working with families. Initially, some are reluctant to assert authority because as young teachers they think they may not be seen as authorities by the parents. Or perhaps it is they who do not yet grant themselves authority stature. Sometimes they are disappointed with the progress of their students. If a teacher does not clearly insist upon what needs to be done, she has abdicated her authority. Without authority, a teacher will not be effective and cannot really serve students and their families.

At the other end of the spectrum I see experienced teachers and musicians who are serious about their life's work as Suzuki teachers. At one time they were completely inspired to teach but now they experience some degree of disappointment: the results of their teaching have disappointed their expectations. The vitality and intensity of the interaction with students and level of interest surrounding their study may feel more like an activity than the life-changing education that Suzuki advocated. This was not what they signed on for when they were inspired to become Suzuki teachers.

What happened? The more mature teacher may be experiencing the same missing element as the young graduate student. Their studios now exist with the momentum of the parents and children pushing the pace, sometimes unknowingly limiting the intensity and depth of learning. The sad thing is that neither the student nor the teacher is excited by what is happening.

My graduate student teacher trainees wonder how I can "ask for the moon" from my young students and parents, and insist upon it without contention. From their perspective as young teachers it looks as if I am somehow positioned to ask for these things in the studio while they cannot. They think I possess an authority that they have not earned and cannot grant

themselves. So, predictably, they are disappointed with the results of their teaching. When the teacher leaves a void, the parents will quickly move in to fill that void with their own attitudes and expectations. The teacher should take on the responsibility of being the authority for the families they work with.

The Common Cause

Young teachers are reluctant to behave in a way that could appear to be intrusive, authoritarian, or bossy, for fear of being disliked or even being laughed at. They may fear that the parents will think them audacious. They may be thinking that students will leave and cause them the pain of loss as well as financial hardship. (Who does this youngster of a teacher think she is? She has no children of her own and little teaching experience. Who is she to tell me how I need to run the family's schedule?) What could have been the effectiveness of this young teacher is hobbled by fear. What teachers need to remember is that they are asking for the habits and structure that foster excellence to be established in the home. It is not personal. It is simple. Accomplishment simply takes what it takes. What the teacher asks for is for the student's gain, not the teacher's gain. The teacher is being an advocate for the child. A parent who understands this will not be resistant to the teacher's requests on behalf of her own child.

Mature teachers who did not overcome this reluctance may now be frustrated, teaching in an environment of their own creation. They may feel helpless and stuck teaching in a studio populated by families holding minimal expectations, not consistent with the original, inspired vision of the teacher. Parents who do not know better may be satisfied with mediocrity and casually intermittent effort. It is what they have "asked" for, and now it is their habit and expectation. If the teacher has not behaved as an authority, the families may be listening to the instructions and assignments as if they were a smorgasbord of advice that may be utilized as one of several options, rather than specific assignments to be accomplished by the next lesson. The instructions might include being on time to lessons, listening, concert attendance, attendance at all groups, arriving

prepared with all materials in hand and arriving with an expectant attitude toward the learning that is about to happen in the lesson.

Altering the Course

Changing the momentum of a studio populated with students and parents with low expectations may feel like altering the course of the Mississippi River.

My personal experience with this happened early in my fourth year of teaching. I had taken to heart the “Nurtured By Love” idea, but in a very simplistic way. “Nurturing” and “love” felt all pink and fuzzy to me. I was all sweetness and love but with a growing frustration because my efforts were not yielding the exciting results I had in mind. As a violinist I knew what it took to accomplish the things my students were trying to do but I was not really even asking, much less insisting that these things be done. How could I expect accomplishment, much less excellence? I was at a career decision precipice: “Should I stop trying to be a teacher and just play professionally?” It seemed that either this method did not really work very well or I was simply not very good at it.

At about that time, in the early 1970s, a student joined my studio having moved from Winnetka, Illinois. Winnetka had one of the most mature Suzuki programs in the U.S. The student was in Book Six. At the time, my most advanced student was in Book Four. She put her music on the stand open to Fiocco’s *Allegro*. The first thing I noticed were brackets in several places with indications of 25 times, 35 times, 20 times, etc. It was a wake-up moment for me! Duh!! Of course! This is how I practice. How could I think that anyone could learn skill and ease without adequate repetition? My pink and fuzzy interpretation of “nurtured” and “love” categorized assigned repetition as punitive. I realized that even though my students were Suzuki students and I was traditionally raised, we all needed the same rigors to develop skill and ease. Without them creativity and expression would be unlikely achievements.

At that point, I decided to assign what was really needed for the accomplishments that I intended for my students. I increased the assignments and expectations immediately and intensely. I expected that most everyone would quit and I would have my answer—I would be a performer instead of a teacher. What actually happened was that my students came to life! They were excited; they made beautiful and

rapid progress and wanted more and more. I assigned a lot, experimenting and getting reliable feedback from my ideas because my students actually went home and worked with the assignment. It was here that I first experienced how much a teacher can learn from her students. There was also an exciting shift in parental attitudes, from parents pushing to go on to the next piece to parents who would ask to have more time on the current piece because there was so much more to do! I had shown them so much more than the notes that needed mastering.

Serious Business

Suzuki was kind, fun, and funny—but he was not fooling around. He had no children of his own so perhaps he found it easy to be “unreasonable.” He taught people to reach for an ideal. He was concerned that some children were left by their parents to grow up like weeds. He could not understand parents who were not intent upon raising their children artfully.

Remember that Dr. Suzuki created his approach to teaching children and music in the aftermath of World War II. He identified aspects of humankind such as sensitivity, kindness, communication, humility, patience, and persistence that needed to be fostered in human beings, and he knew that these things could be learned while developing one’s talent. His intent was to make great people. He was not averse to having a result of his teaching be the development of a fine musician, but it was not his primary goal. There are enough great violinists in the world but there are not enough great people.

Changing My Heart

When I first learned of Suzuki, I had come from a very traditional background. My influences had not been unkind but my teacher’s goal was to create a player that was competitive, thick-skinned, and aimed towards a performance career. My training was about making the music beautiful. But there was no purposeful regard for the developing child who plays the music. That was ancillary. My teachers were technically and musically well-informed and well-meaning, but their focus was on my playing, not me, the child.

Just as you are, I was a child destined to touch millions of children and families in my lifetime and hopefully many more after that. What we do in the world will have a long-range effect.

Suzuki kept reminding my traditional mind that

this work is about creating beautiful hearts and a better world. Musically, my traditional ears were offended by the clumsy inaccuracy of beginners, but Suzuki was there to remind me again and again. My instinctive reaction was to say how had it sounded so that the student would be negatively motivated not to do that again! I had to learn to give up negativity without giving up critical judgment. I wondered, if teachers are bound by the Suzuki formula of “very good, but” points, then how can students be moved far enough to approach the exquisite music-making I want to hear?

I have learned that students can pull themselves farther and faster than I can push them. I have learned to endorse what is beautiful and admirable in their playing and demeanor and ask for advancement, perhaps with the wording, “and now you are ready for this.” Suzuki reminded us that every child can be educated but the teacher must find the way. There may be a different way for each child. The teacher and family must create the environment that inspires, entices, celebrates, and respects the child, the parent, and the teacher. Respecting the child includes telling him the truth. It includes talking to him as an intelligent being and not talking down to him. I remember hearing Suzuki say that before teaching a child, he took a moment to rise to the level of the child. Honoring the child’s possibility in the world will embolden the teacher to insist that the parent do what is needed.

A Teacher’s Vision

The teacher should have a vision for each child and allude to it in some way at each lesson. This inspires the child and the parent. The parents and children also need to have a vision of excellence, poise, confidence, skill, and kindness for the child. It is necessary to infuse and acknowledge evidence of the growth of these things in some way during every contact. It is easy to do but we need to remember. Our teaching of the pieces and notes is ancillary. The music will be a wonderful by-product. We can say things like:

- I cannot remember when a student of mine was able to play that measure so cleanly after only a week!
- Wow, hooray, you did it. What a good worker you are! You worked until you changed it into easy. Congratulations! I am proud of you.

- I cannot feel your feelings there. Will you tell me again with your violin? Make your feelings so big that I can feel them over here. Yes, I feel it now. Thank you!
- What great concentration! I think your brains need to breathe for a moment (while we pump her arms).
- And David, I was reminded again of how much I liked you when you spoke to Andrew after he played in class. You were kind and helpful. I wish there were more people in the world like you. You are so special!

The process of working with a child toward musical goals provides the arena for building character and heart. Teach the child using the violin. Suzuki reminded us that opportunity is in the process more than any goal. Process is directed and informed by vision and goals.

Let us say the lesson at hand is focused on intonation:

Studio One: In one teacher’s studio the lesson is one of criticism, embarrassment, shame and fear.

Studio Two: The teacher simply tells the child, “very good, and please practice to play it in tune.” Then the teacher proceeds to “fix” it a couple of times but doesn’t work with it enough to make real progress or create an impression of its importance. Perhaps it is not revisited at the next lesson. The message is: “It would be nice, but you probably can’t/won’t do it anyway,” or “It’s not that important. Maybe someday when you are older you will be able to do it.”

Studio Three: The teacher honestly affirms what was in tune, asks for the next step as a correction or addition, and discovers/creates the beauty of the child even as he struggles to a quality resolution of the task at hand. The formulation of a practice assignment that specifically furthers the work of the lesson supports the importance of the endeavor. His improving intonation, character, persistence and meticulous nature can be acknowledged and created at the same time. The time for accomplishment is now.

We know the teacher in Studio One is not a Suzuki teacher, We know the third one is a Suzuki teacher. But the second teacher may think she is doing what Suzuki intended. She is endorsing things about the child and she is being “nice.” (Being

“nice” is often not really kind.) Without helping the student reach high and really get there, this teacher is creating an environment that has little expectation. The message is that it does not really matter. Crippling physical habits are likely being practiced into habits that may take more years in remediation than in the learning. Suppose that child were the next Midori, retarded in her development by a teacher who let her slop through since she was talented enough to be able to pick out the notes quickly. Suzuki told us that once you have learned all the notes, rhythms, bowings, and dynamics, you are ready to begin to learn the music and the violin with this piece.

Courage and Leadership

Being an effective teacher takes courage and leadership as well as love and good information. It is important that the parents understand when they sign on that, for you, this is much more than music lessons. If they know the philosophy and enroll in your studio then you are aligned from the start. Then a missed D# becomes much more than a note. It is an opportunity to teach human values as well as musical ones. A parent who can see that building musical excellence is also an opportunity to build character, integrity, and heart will not want the teacher glossing over things. Details matter when we say that they do. We teach that honesty matters because we decide that it does.

Being a Suzuki parent is a very demanding role. Parents need strong leadership from the teacher. They need to lean upon and trust the teacher’s authority. I think being the parent is more difficult than being the teacher or the student. Parents, especially non-musician parents, are reluctant to behave with any musical or technical authority. They must be able to repeat the teacher’s lesson and follow the teacher’s instruction in helping their child to practice. The teacher needs to be very clear and detailed and then follow up with the parent each week, further coaching her on what did or did not develop as expected during the week.

Suzuki challenged parents to be strongly involved in developing high character and sensitivity in their children. He asked, “Why did you have children if you did not intend to raise them?” He also said, “Never hurry, never rest.” Mrs. Kataoka said something to the effect that if you hurry your child it is like pulling a flower up by its bud. It may never develop.

A teacher should have high expectations and give full support through detailed instruction, specific practice assignments, and follow-up that will make possible the fulfillment of high expectations. The teacher with high expectations will have families that rise to high expectations. A teacher who does not project high expectations cannot expect exciting results.

Tough Love

Love is not always sweetness and light. Sometimes love is tough. The Sufi monks tell a story about a brother monk who swallowed something that would kill him. The monks gathered around him, let him know he would be missed, spoke to him soothingly and lovingly brought him water and made him comfortable. Then one peaceable monk punched him hard in the stomach until he ejected the deadly item.

Audacity

My wonderful teaching colleague David told me an amazing story of audacious teaching. His teacher came into his home to try to understand what might be inhibiting David’s bowing development. David’s mother suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder. She saves and holds onto almost everything and keeps it in her house. It is difficult even to move around. This was the cause of his bowing anxiety. He did not have room to pull a full bow without hitting something. His teacher had the audacity to insist that emptying the room of all but David’s bed and dresser was necessary for his proper bowing development.

Parental Expectations

- It is helpful for the teacher to understand the parents’ expectations.
- Do they really know about and want the education you offer?
- Are they with you because you’re a violin teacher and they just want their child to learn to play a few tunes?
- Are they so afraid of comments that do not seem to be 100% positive that they want to create the illusion of success?
- Are they “exposing” their child to music and do not want to engage in anything that seems like work?

- Do they personally think work is unpleasant and punishing rather than interesting and engaging?
- When they first experience resistance to practice at home will they rush to the interpretation that their child does not like the violin?
- Have they been told their child is gifted and will he be bored by repetition? They may interpret that to mean he does not need to practice.
- Do they think that since he can pick out pieces easily by ear he should move much faster through the literature?
- Some parents were pushed as children themselves and as a result have decided to support their child only limply. Some parents wish they had been pushed as children and will make up for that with their children.
- Many parents want to save their children from the time wasted in making mistakes and cannot allow their child the time to learn from making a mistake.

All of these things require parent education.

What Stops Us?

As teachers we study partially to lessen our ignorance. But what about our fear? I think fear is an enormous factor for teachers. I look at the young teachers I train. They are reticent to assert themselves with the parents of their young students since they are younger, have little experience, and have no children. They do not grant themselves the authority to ask for what the musician in them knows is needed for good development on the instrument. Or, they feel it is not their place to interrupt the parent who shames or scolds her child. Or they are reluctant to insist that the parent find a way to reserve time for practice and listening. It feels to them like intruding into the private life of a family. So they stay meekly in the background, giving what feels like advice, but not the structure and assignment for which students and parents will be held to account. Parents will ride roughshod over those teachers, basically insisting that the teacher teach in the way the parent would like. If the teacher is not willing to take the leadership role, then most parents will fill in the void, often making the goal for their children the learning of as many pieces as can be picked out by ear in a short time. If the accumulation of repertory is the parent's measure of progress, then the teacher has a lot of teaching to do!

A teacher can ask for difficult changes in parental behavior, provided the parent is informed and inspired by the profound opportunity this education holds for her child. When a parent feels that the teacher is really an advocate for her child's well-being and development, she will willingly do almost anything. The teacher's functioning as an authority may well mean the difference between an experience of mediocrity or an achievement of excellence.

I was first involved in the Talent Education Approach in the late 1960s and was the beneficiary of many inspiring contacts with Suzuki himself. He relentlessly raised the bar for teachers. I do not want to see us lose his purpose and turn his work into just teaching young fingers to play. The purpose of fostering "higher human beings," as he said it, is not ancillary. It is primary. He hammered away at us for years with that concept. I think he knew that because we were all traditionally raised, we would easily regress into being just instrumental music teachers. After all, that was how we had learned—that was our culture and our environment. Also, we were and still are vulnerable to ignorant criticism of traditional colleagues who have not learned and do not understand. I remember how much I needed Suzuki's leadership to be thoughtful about pedagogy and his Talent Education philosophy. I wish for it still. I especially wish my young teacher trainees could have had time with Suzuki. But now it must come from me and be passed to future generations. I need community with my colleagues to remember that I am one of thousands who add up to a movement big enough to make a palpable difference as we participate in writing the history of humankind.



Ronda Cole has been a private Suzuki violin teacher for 30 years. She is active as an SAA Teacher Trainer internationally. At the University of Maryland in College Park, she directs the Master of Music Performance in Violin with Special Emphasis on Suzuki Violin Pedagogy, a two-year-long term and apprenticeship program. Several of Ms. Cole's students have been soloists with major orchestras and have continued as professional players and teachers. Ronda directs the Greater Washington Suzuki Institute in Washington, D.C. She was awarded the ASTA "Citation for Leadership and Excellence." Ms. Cole has taught at many U.S. and international Suzuki events as well as the ASTA International Workshops.

**ASTA MD/DC Chapter
Certificate Program Exams**

Sunday, June 10, 2007

**The Benjamin T. Rome School of Music
Catholic University
Washington, D.C.**

Application Deadline: May 1, 2007

<http://www.asta.net/certificateprogram>

Classified Ads

Do you have
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Take out a
classified ad
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\$10 per ad
Maximum 30 words

ASTA MD/DC Chapter Certificate Program for Strings Application Form

Sunday, June 10, 2007 Catholic University School of Music
Postmark deadline for application: May 1, 2007

Name of student _____ Grade _____ Age _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Instrument _____ Level _____ Check if appropriate: Level B Comments only Honors

Works to be performed:

1. Title _____ Mvt. _____ Composer _____

2. Title _____ Mvt. _____ Composer _____

3. Title _____ Mvt. _____ Composer _____

4. Etude _____ Composer _____

5. Scales and Arpeggios _____

Name of accompanist _____ (write "no accompanist" if none)

Name of teacher _____ Phone _____

(Note: teacher membership in ASTA is required)

Address _____ E-mail _____

Teacher's preferred time for helping as monitor _____

I understand and agree to abide by the rules governing this event.

Teacher's signature _____

Teachers please duplicate applications as needed, one per student.

Collect all fees and application forms.

Write one check to: ASTA MD/DC Chapter, and send to:

Lya Stern, Certificate Program Chair
7012 Hopewood St.
Bethesda, MD 20817
e-mail: Lya@asta.net

The Vibrato Teaching of Paul Rolland

*Notes taken by Lynne Denig
at a pedagogy class in 1976*

I. Types of vibrato:

Experiments of Louis Cheslock have shown that the player must allow movement in at least three joints in order to produce *any* type of vibrato. However, vibrato types can be described as follows:

- a) Finger vibrato.
- b) Wrist vibrato (movement of the hand in the wrist joint).
- c) Arm vibrato (opening and closing of elbow joint in a direct line with the shoulder).
- d) Coordinated vibrato, as taught by Paul Rolland (movement in finger joint, wrist joint, lower arm at an angle to shoulder, involuntary movements of upper arm).

II. Characteristics of an artistic vibrato:

- a) The vibrato is regular. The speed and width of the vibrato movements are reasonably even.
- b) The average speed is about 6 ½ full vibrato cycles per second.
- c) The average width of string vibrato is a quarter tone. The most variable element of the vibrato is the width, which fluctuates according to the dynamics. A wider amplitude is used in loud playing, a narrower one in soft playing.

III. The preliminaries—check the student for:

- a) A relaxed, mobile stance (no tension in knees).
- b) A comfortable and relaxed violin/viola hold (no tension in neck muscles).
- c) Relaxed shoulders.
- d) Freely-swinging left elbow (as student moves across strings).
- e) Good left hand position (correct elevation; correct finger angle; free, mobile, non-gripping left thumb).
- f) Flexibility in finger joints.

IV. Exercises without instrument to develop arm balance. (Look for involuntary rolling motions of upper arm):

- a) Everyday movements:
 - 1) Use an imaginary saltshaker.
 - 2) Clap your hands.

- 3) With palms toward your face, pivot hands left and right.
- 4) Knock on a door.
- 5) Wave “hello.”
- 6) Polish a table or a wall.
- 7) Tap into palm of other hand.

b) Movements using right hand/arm as imaginary violin/viola neck:

(The student always has his imaginary instrument with him! These are fine diversions during TV commercials, bus rides, boring rehearsals...)

- 1) Extend right index finger. Hang left thumb on index finger of right hand. (Feel weight of relaxed left arm!) Pivot in direction of right elbow.
- 2) “Scratch” top of right hand back and forth in direction of right elbow.
- 3) Cling to top of right hand with third finger of left hand. (Don’t press with the finger—instead, feel weight of left arm released into the finger.) Pivot as above. Repeat with second, fourth, and first fingers.
- 4) Cling to right wrist with left thumb. Pivot as above.
- 5) Cling to right arm with left thumb plus any of the four fingers of left hand. Pivot as above.

Teacher does all of these exercises on the student’s hand/arm to give him the physical and visual sense of a vibrato done properly.

V. Vibrato exercises with violin/viola to develop arm balance:

Practice all steps below with the instrument in:

Rest position.
Against right shoulder (shotgun position).
Against right collarbone.
In regular playing position.
(In the latter two, place right hand on top of strings to imitate gravity/the bow).

- a) “Tapping”:
Tap the string with the third finger. Throw the arm in the direction of the bridge and let it bounce back like a ball. (One tap equals one vibrato cycle.) Do this at medium speed at first. Work for evenness

and a feeling of ease. Look for involuntary rolling movements of the upper arm. This is easiest for most students in about fifth position with the thumb at the “throat” of the instrument neck. Repeat in all areas of the fingerboard and with other fingers, one at a time. Practice various rhythms, e.g. Mississippi Hot Dog, for control.

- b) “Polishing”:
Use a small piece of tissue to encourage sliding. Pivot on the thumb and polish a small segment of the string—about a whole step or minor third. Later, a half step.
- c) “Tap and Hold”:
Tap a rhythm pattern. Throw the hand and third finger on the first note of the pattern. Then hold the string lightly with the finger while swinging the hand to the remaining notes of the pattern.
- d) Repeat b) above. Reduce the width of the polishing movement and let the finger cling to the string to produce an actual vibrato. Bow the student’s instrument as he does this. You are sure to get a smile!

VI. Typical vibrato ailments and some cures:

- a) Too wide. Focus attention on the fingertip and slightly increase the finger pressure. Practice pianissimo.
- b) Too narrow. Prescribe big doses of “polishing.” Practice “pivot shifts” (thumb does not move)—half step shifts on the same finger, then whole steps, then a minor third, etc.
- c) Too slow. Hold instrument high and feel left arm support. Pull back with finger in direction of scroll. Feel a tug of the left hand in the direction of the scroll. Time vibrato cycles. Set metronome at quarter=60 and practice “Tapping.” Increase gradually the number of taps from 3–4 per second (soupy!) to 5 (quite passable) to 6–7 per second (like advanced players.) Practice scales and exercises with martelé bowing. (Let the left hand know what the right hand is doing—moving quickly!) Practice vibrato on harmonics again feeling tug of left hand in the direction of the scroll.
- d) Too fast. Ask student to play without vibrato for a while as you search for and alleviate signs of tension elsewhere. Check entire body—stance, left shoulder, thumb, etc. Give the student a visual/physical/aural

model of vibrato on his instrument—you doing the vibrato and he doing the bow. Check left hand positioning carefully—is the hand balanced? Check positioning of the instrument—is the instrument too far to the center of the body? Does the head lean to the right rather than the left causing the violin/viola to be thrown into the hand?

- VII. Exercises to develop control and ability to vary vibrato speed and width:
 - a) Practice a crescendo and diminuendo over 8 beats increasing vibrato width as the dynamic increases.
 - b) Practice one note in three different octaves noting that the vibrato width must become narrower the higher in pitch you go.

Sources:

Book: Paul Rolland and Marla Mutschler, *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*, (1974).

Film: “First Steps in Vibrato Teaching,” one of fourteen films in the series *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*, produced by the University of Illinois String Research Project, Paul Rolland, Director.

Scientific studies of vibrato:

Louis Cheslock, *An Introductory Study of the Violin Vibrato*, Baltimore: Peabody Conservatory, 1931.

Carl Seashore, ed. *The Vibrato*, Iowa City, Iowa: The University of Iowa, 1932.

Lynne Denig is the Past President of VASTA. She is the founder of the Fairfax Youth Orchestras, and runs a private studio in Fairfax, Virginia



From the Maker's Bench

by Gary Frisch

Two articles reprinted with permission from the VASTA Fingerboard, Spring 2005 and Fall 2005

Getting Better Sound From Student Instruments

It's frustrating for teachers to know that many students are building their techniques around the deficiencies of their instruments and bows. Fortunately, there are steps that can be taken to improve student instruments so they can speak freely with reasonable complexity of tone and projection.

I called two colleagues to discuss ways to improve sound. Not surprisingly, their recommendations were very similar:

- Switch to better-grade strings.
- Use a properly functioning bow and good rosin.
- Make sure the instrument is properly set up and tonally adjusted.

Number one on both of their lists was upgrading the strings and replacing them at least once a year. "Good strings are worth the extra cost," says Daniel Foster, luthier from Blacksburg, Virginia. David Lashof, of *Lashof Violins*, Gaithersburg, Maryland, noted that "upgraded strings don't have to be expensive."

In addition to *Dominant* strings, Lashof suggests trying less expensive brands, such as *Pirastro* "Piranito" and "Tonica" for violin and viola; *Pirastro* "Piranito" or *Pirastro* "Chromcor" for cello; and *Corelli* "380S" steel strings for bass. Foster recommends *Pirastro* "Tonica" or *Corelli* "Crystal" for violins. He suggests using the steel core *Pirastro* "Chromcor" for more durability.

Second on the list was the bow. Both makers stressed the importance of using a bow with good playing qualities. Thus, bows must be examined for correct camber and warps, as well being treated to a proper re-hair. There must be a flat ribbon of horsehair (no synthetics), with no hairs of inconsistent thickness or with serious kinks in them in order to get a pure, focused sound. If repair costs are prohibitive, purchasing a modestly priced bow that plays well is the best option. Mr. Lashof also recommends purchasing a good quality rosin, as some factory-supplied brands create a harsh sound.

The interaction of the player, string, and bow create the overtone series that is colored and amplified by the instrument. In addition to good strings and bows, investing in proper setup is the third key to realizing the potential in any instrument. Proper setup enhances comfortable playing, as well as improving sound. In addition to sound, "The mechanical ability to play a tune is very important to kids," commented Foster.

With regard to comfort, Foster places great importance on an often-overlooked aspect of setup: the shape of the scoop that runs the length of the fingerboard. A properly shaped fingerboard scoop helps to lead the hand while shifting and gives clearance on either side of the player's finger for the string to vibrate correctly. The scoop also contributes to a comfortable sense of "cushion" or string resistance under the finger. Gross bumps in the scoop can make for uncertain intonation and shifting, as well as causing buzzes and unclear tone.

Other important string-related aspects of setup that affect sound and comfort include:

- String spacings at the nut and bridge.
- String heights over the fingerboard, and relative to each other at the bridge.
- String angle over the instrument at the bridge.
- String length between the nut and bridge, and between the bridge and tailpiece.

Correct string measurements can improve string crossings, rhythm, projection, response, and, evenness, clarity and depth of sound.

Finally, precise fitting and positioning of the bridge and soundpost can make a marked improvement in the sound, even in thick, heavy student instruments. The bridge and soundpost affect how an instrument resonates, but unfortunately, many factory setups are done in haste, often using bridges made of poor quality wood and soundposts that are jammed into the instrument, often at odd angles and with the tops and bottoms of the posts not conforming to the shape of the inside arches. You can imagine the amount of tone-related adjustments these instruments require!

I will conclude with these suggestions for string teachers:

- Impress parents and students with the importance of proper care and regular maintenance.
- Educate parents and school administrators about using strings, bows, and setup that will best realize the instrument's potential.
- Make it a studio policy that prospective instruments and bows MUST be shown to the teacher for approval before purchasing.
- Always have a professional violin maker handle setup problems and tonal adjustments. Training and experience are essential for correct (and often money-saving) diagnosis, and for ensuring that the job is done right without undue risk to the instrument or bow.

Eliminating Wolf Tones

The term “resonance” refers to the way an object vibrates naturally. Stringed instruments have a number of body and air resonances (also called “eigenmodes” or “modes”) that respond to the overtone series produced by a bowed or plucked note. These resonances give each instrument its distinctive voice—for example dark vs. bright and mellow vs. brilliant—and they enable musicians to project sound and produce a range of tonal colors. Also, an instrument's resonances set limits on dynamic range and quickness.

Better-made instruments tend to resonate freely, while poorly made instruments resonate weakly. As an unfortunate consequence, more resonant instruments are prone to produce wolf tones. A wolf tone is an example of a key body resonance gone wild, consuming more energy from the string than can be replaced by the bow. As violinmaker Tom King notes, “this prominent body resonance occurs at about the same relative place on each instrument: about the second whole step above the open second string. The player can evoke the wolf sound by playing that note on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th string.”

Once the body resonance consumes too much energy from the string, “the string actually stops vibrating momentarily and then begins again in a reverse

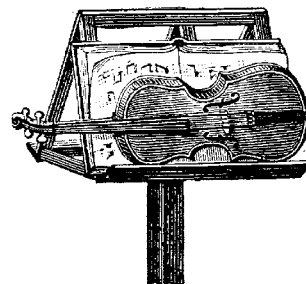
direction. This happens many times a second, causing a stuttering, interrupted sound,” says King. The challenge for the violinmaker (and the frustrated musician) is to find a way to eliminate the wolf tone without compromising the overall tone quality of the instrument. Methods are used to correct wolf tones fall into two categories: increasing the amount of energy put in the string and as King puts it, “reducing the wolf's hunger for energy.” Commonly used approaches include:

- “Playing through” the wolf tone by increasing string energy through increased bow speed or bow pressure, and by finding a suitable sound point. Some players go so far as to purchase heavier or stronger bows to accomplish this.
- Adjusting the sound post to try to move the wolf tone away from a commonly played note.
- Altering the thickness of the fingerboard.
- Changing the string length between the bridge and tailpiece.
- Attaching commercially available “wolf-suppressors” to absorb the wolf's energy.

A number of violinmakers, among them Tom King and David Chrapkiewicz, have been successfully correcting wolfs by matching the tailpiece frequency to those of the instrument and the wolf. Both makers have found that this approach works better than others they have tried, but it takes experience to do it properly. So before you give up on a good instrument, be sure to contact a qualified violinmaker to see if the “hungry wolf” can be suppressed.



Gary Frisch is a violin maker with a shop in Falls Church, Virginia. His ad is on page 17 of this issue.



Copycat

by George Vance

William Blake (you know, “Tiger, tiger, burning bright in the forest of the night...”) scribbled the following in the margin of one of his sketchbooks:

The difference between a great artist and a mediocre artist is that whereas the mediocre artist seems to copy a great deal, the great artist really does copy a great deal.

In olden times before we had recordings to use as models, a music student had to know the rudiments of *solfege* before he could figure out what was indicated by all those black spots and lines on the score (in the ready-made expression “how it goes”). And he would use his voice to master pitch and rhythm and to develop ideas about interpreting phrases. It is still necessary to sing in the shower, not to mention essential to life as breathing. But we have the technology to study a given performance, what was really a snapshot of a few moments in the life of an artist, over and over.

I first experienced the value of playing along with a recording when I went to Japan for a month to study with Shinichi Suzuki. At his school all the students played in the lessons and in the weekly recitals with recordings of artists recommended by Suzuki. For instance, when I was there, many were working on the Tchaikovsky Concerto with a David Oistrakh recording as a model. Occasionally, a visiting teacher from America would drop in for a day to observe and be appalled at the spectacle of adults assiduously copying every nuance and mannerism of Oistrakh’s performance. It seemed somehow not proper, so not creative. (They also were disturbed to hear six or seven violinists playing the Tchaikovsky in unison with the recording at group lesson.)

I happened to have with me a cassette tape of Harold Robinson playing the Antonioti Sonata so when I saw how things were done at the school I began to play along with it. And it was a revelation. Previously I had listened to the recording and had had a lesson on the piece with Hal. I remember him saying among other things, “Your trills have no direction.” No doubt I accepted that bit of information agreeably at the time. But it wasn’t until I began to play along with him that I found out what he meant by trills having direction. And thereby I found out what Suzuki meant when he said that one could have a lesson with a great artist every day in one’s own home.

Playing with a recording is a different kind of lesson than one in which the teacher speaks to the pupil. In the talking lesson the information is more or less absorbed intellectually, more or less transmitted to the muscles, and then out through the bass. In playing along the process is reversed. First the muscles seek out the way to copy what is being heard. When that is accomplished the copyist has insight into the musical imagination of the great artist. And that is an expansion of the student’s musical imagination and his awareness of what the body must do to create varieties of effects (and affects).

My students have the reference recordings of the *Progressive Repertoire* series and Rabbath’s recording of *New Technique, Vol. 1* for this purpose. We don’t consider the work on any piece finished until the stage of playing along, weeks or months after the initial solving of the technicalities of the piece.

As much as I am familiar with the phenomenon by now, I still get a huge kick out of hearing a student

develop the ability to get inside the sound of the recording.

The usual criticism of this idea is that it seems like I am trying to create robots or mere imitators. But if I could do that—for instance make everyone play exactly like Rabbath—I’d be rich and famous, wouldn’t I? In fact, the student is in no danger of losing his personality such as it exists in his developing stages. But he will have a larger bag of tricks for expressing it.

Blake, by the way, learned his lesson when he was apprenticed to an engraver and was sent into Westminster Abbey to make drawings of the statuary. Although you know his name from English class—“What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?”—he thought of himself as a graphic artist. The poems were really captions to the drawings. And he sang them.



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National String Instrument Repair Clinics

July 28–August 1, 2007

Sponsored by the National String Workshop, these clinics provide hands-on experiences for teachers (or anyone) interested in learning more about string instrument repair. All classes take place in the Lowell Center on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, overlooking beautiful Lake Mendota and just a short block from Madison's famous State Street. Participants bring their own projects to work on under the guidance of skilled repair specialists.

Two clinics focus on repair of violin, viola, cello, and bass: Basic/Beginning Repair and Intermediate/Advanced Repair. Our Fretted Instrument Repair Clinic will be offered again in 2007—and back by popular demand, a Bow Repair Clinic. We are very pleased to welcome **Christopher Germain**, master violinmaker, as our clinician for the Intermediate/Advanced Repair Clinic in 2007, along with **Duane Wilcox** (Beginning Repair), **Charles Pinckney** (Bow Repair), and **Wil Bremer** (Fretted Instrument Repair).

Participants earn Continuing Education Units, or optionally, may earn academic credit. See complete information and enrollment form on our website: <http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/lisa/music/nsw.htm>. To request a brochure, e-mail music@dcs.wisc.edu. Please note: enrollment is limited to 15 in each Clinic.



The Lighter Side

“He’d be better off shoveling snow.”
—Richard Strauss on Arnold Schoenberg.

When told that a soloist would need six fingers to perform his concerto, Arnold Schoenberg replied, “I can wait.”

“I would like to hear Elliot Carter’s Fourth String Quartet, if only to discover what a cranky prostate does to one’s polyphony.”
—James Sellars

“Exit in case of Brahms.”
—Philip Hale’s proposed inscription over the doors of Boston Symphony Hall

“Why is it that whenever I hear a piece of music I don’t like, it’s always by Villa-Lobos?”
—Igor Stravinsky

“His music used to be original. Now it’s aboriginal.”
—Sir Ernest Newman on Igor Stravinsky

“If he’d been making shell-cases during the war it might have been better for music.”
—Maurice Ravel on Camille Saint-Saens

“He has an enormously wide repertory. He can conduct anything, provided it’s by Beethoven, Brahms or Wagner. He tried Debussy’s *La Mer* once. It came out as *Das Merde*.”
—Anonymous Orchestra Member on George Szell

Someone commented to Rudolph Bing, manager of the Metropolitan Opera, that George Szell is his own worst enemy. “Not while I’m alive, he isn’t!” said Bing.

“Madam, you have between your legs an instrument capable of giving pleasure to thousands and all you can do is scratch it.”
—Sir Thomas Beecham to a lady cellist.

“After I die, I shall return to earth as a gatekeeper of a bordello and I won’t let any of you enter.”
—Arturo Toscanini to the NBC Orchestra

“We cannot expect you to be with us all the time, but perhaps you could be good enough to keep in touch now and again.”
—Sir Thomas Beecham to a musician during a rehearsal

“Jack Benny played Mendelssohn last night. Mendelssohn lost.”
—Anonymous

The great German conductor Hans von Bülow detested two members of an orchestra, who were named Schultz and Schmidt. Upon being told that Schmidt had died, von Bülow immediately asked, “Und Schultz?”

“Her voice sounded like an eagle being goosed.”
—Ralph Novak on Yoko Ono

“*Parsifal*—the kind of opera that starts at six o’clock and after it has been going three hours, you look at your watch and it says 6:20.”
—David Randolph

“One can’t judge Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin* after a first hearing, and I certainly don’t intend hearing it a second time.”
—Gioacchino Rossini

“I liked the opera very much. Everything but the music.”
—Benjamin Britten on Stravinsky’s *The Rakes’s Progress*

“Her singing reminds me of a cart coming downhill with the brake on.”
—Sir Thomas Beecham on an unidentified soprano in *Die Walkyre*