

Johannes Palaschko: 18 Elementary Studies, Op. 51

by Mark Pfannschmidt

Almost completely unknown today, Johannes Palaschko's compositions are musically rewarding for teachers and students alike. First published in 1911 by Steingraber in Leipzig, his 18 Elementary Studies for the Violin, Op. 51 were composed to be played entirely in first position. Having studied violin with Joseph Joachim and composition with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, Palaschko's music clearly exhibits characteristics typical of German Romanticism. His etudes are full of interpretive clues, aiding the progressing violin or viola student to become a better musical detective. A wealth of material for developing skills in ASTA CAP Levels 3 to 5 is found here; they also make great sight reading material for the more advanced student.

Pedagogical practices have changed dramatically in the century since these works were first published. Today's violin students generally begin the study of positions and off the string bow strokes much earlier, which better prepares them for the opportunities provided by youth orchestras. Since there are many elementary and intermediate level student **violists** today, these etudes have also been transposed and put into alto clef for viola.

These etudes are musically engaging, and the artistic level of these etudes helps students to see why technical development is so important. These etudes present opportunities in the following areas:

1. **Musicality.** These short works provide a wealth of characters, which are often apparent. Learning to convey differing moods excites the student's imagination. Individual students require varying approaches from the teacher. Some of these paths to reach the creative side of the brain:

- **Colors** – be specific: smoky blue, sky blue, deep blue, baby blue
- **Descriptive Words** – innocent, exuberant, mischievous, stern playful
- **Pictures or movie scenes** – "picking flowers for Mommy" (innocent), "a knight in shining armor riding to battle" (powerful)
- **Foods** – chocolate (rich, dark), cotton candy (sweet, light, airy), Jell-O (fun, jiggly)

2. **Musical Fingering.** These etudes were first published in 1911 when good strings had gut cores. The brighter color of modern strings with metal and synthetic cores obviates the change of position to bring warmth and richness to the sound. Fingering has been carefully chosen to assist dynamic shading and tone color. For the student with limited experience playing above first position, these studies can be initially

learned in first position. Once the transition has been made to playing these pieces in position, it soon becomes apparent that positions not only make some passages technically easier (by minimizing string crossings or awkward reaches), but also expand the palette of colors available for musical expression.

3. **Bow control.** Palaschko has written very specific articulation markings, giving us further clues in solving our musical puzzle. Characters are created by the use of a broad range of bow strokes. These works are well-designed for developing and solidifying bow technique; their musicality makes mastery of the bow more enjoyable. The following questions can help in this endeavor:

- **Speed:** How can bow speed help to shape the phrase? Should it be constant? varied?
- **Distribution:** How much of the bow should you use? Should you use more bow on the faster notes?
- **Placement:** Should these notes be at the frog? the tip? the middle?
- **Weight:** Does the mood of the music call for a heavier or lighter stroke?
- **Articulation:** How short should the staccato strokes be? on or off the string? light or accented?
- **Contact Point:** Does the stroke change with the dynamic? from section to section? Does the contact point change? Should the sound be fuzzy or focused?

4. **Intonation and Accuracy.** A characteristic of music of the Romantic era is chromaticism. Eight of these studies are in minor keys. Frequent use of redundant or *courtesy* accidentals helps to clarify the composer's intentions and prevent mistakes. The melodic richness of these etudes provides ample opportunity for refining inner hearing, expanding mental awareness of fingerboard geography, and developing greater flexibility of the left hand and fingers. Understanding the resolution tendency of a chromatic note helps students to refine their skill in melodic intonation.

5. **Dynamics.** Palaschko is also quite particular about dynamic markings. While this does not preclude subtleties of shading not specifically in the score, dynamics are imperative in determining and creating the intended musical effect. Softer dynamics call for more subtle colors, while louder dynamics call for richer hues. At times, dynamics are also an important consideration when choosing a fingering.

Using the violin version of the first etude as an example (click [here](#)), we can see specific applications of these broad categories:

1. **Musicality.** Andante quasi moderato should be interpreted to mean not particularly slow, faster than Andante. It is helpful to think of this piece with two beats per measure (half note = 58). If the tempo is slower, the piece seems to die a slow death.

The longer note values and slurs clearly convey the lyrical quality. The dynamics call for a hushed mood overall with a touch of bold color at the two places marked *f*. The overall character could be described as warm and tender, or a muted green, or the light just before sunrise, or cup of hot chocolate on a cold winter day.

2. **Musical fingering.** The long note values of this example make it especially useful for teaching or refining vibrato. The use of third position in several places minimizes string crossings and open strings, resulting in a warmer tone quality. In m. 4, shifting to third position avoids the open string (Palaschko's original fingering) and delays the string crossing to the peak of the crescendo, where it enhances the shape of the phrase. The shift at m. 27 creates expressive warmth, avoids the open string (Palaschko's fingering), and keeps the slurs on one string. In addition, the fifth in m. 30 is made easier with the greater mobility of the first finger. By waiting to use the highest string for the peak of the phrase in m. 35, the resulting color emphasizes the climax of the piece. In the closing phrase, the use of third position avoids open strings, making it easier to create the extremely soft dynamic.

3. **Bow control.** This etude presents an opportunity to refine the basics of bow control. Bow speed, weight and contact point all work together to create varying shades of color. When compared to mm. 41-42, the addition of flats in mm. 45-46 demonstrates how a skilled composer uses chromatic alteration to create surprise and variety. Enjoy the moment as each student carefully disappears at the end of this etude and experiences the magic of controlling a soft dynamic well, possibly for the first time.

4. **Intonation.** When I first edited these studies, I shifted to 3rd finger on the G# in m. 13, using the half step to hide the shift. In my experience of teaching this etude, I found this type of shift to be quite difficult for students relatively new to shifting, so I changed the fingering for the revision, which creates a contracted hand position in 3rd position, with half-steps between 4-3 and 2-1. The Ab and Eb in mm. 45-46 can be less familiar to students at this level. Hearing them in relation to G and D, respectively, can give the student a tool to use in similar passages. Point out the redundant natural sign in m. 49 and ask why it is there. This provides an opportunity to review the rules of accidentals. Palaschko does not leave any doubt about his intentions, but uses the redundant natural (courtesy accidental) to make it clear he no longer wishes to change the E to an Eb.

5. **Dynamics.** This is an excellent example of the benefit of a dynamic plan. The *p* at the beginning must be meaty enough so that there is contrast in the *pp* with the *morendo* at the end, yet leave plenty of room for audible crescendos and diminuendos. While the fingerings are a distinct aid, there is no substitute for refined control of the bow. Be sure to point out *morendo* ("dying") at the end, making sure

the student knows that means get gradually softer *and* slower. The *riten.* at the end means suddenly slower (as opposed to *ritard* or *rallentando*). This is an intensification of the slowing from the *morendo*.

The viola version of etude #14 shows different skills (Click [here](#) for example).

1. **Musicality.** This etude in C minor is a study in contrasts and there are some important clues to discover. The articulation contrasts between the staccato passages and the slurred *dolce* sections are fairly obvious, but it is important to note that the return of the A section at m. 57 is *pp*. If the opening is timid in character, the return might be sneaky (and thus have more energy with less sound). The B section at m. 21 is in the relative major (Eb), while the return of B at m. 77 stays in the tonic (Cm).

2. **Musical fingering.** The return of A at m. 57 uses 3rd position for the dynamic, avoiding the brilliance of the top string and having a few harmonics to add interest. NB: The open D in m. 56 is original, keeping all of the descending melodic notes on the downbeats on the same string.

3. **Bow control.** This was almost certainly originally conceived to be played with a martelé stroke. Today's students should use either a collé or spiccato stroke with this piece, using a shorter stroke at m. 57 for contrast. A lifted stroke also facilitates shifting, which can be accomplished surreptitiously while the bow is off the string. There are opportunities to teach or review common notational conventions:

- m. 2 – The tenuto marking indicates that this note is not staccato (i. e., there is no missing dot), rather than that it should be held for full value (try it both ways and see)
- m. 4 – The slurred descending second is a sigh; use most of the bow on the first note
- m. 5 – Lift after the slur and before the third eighth note, the connection should be between the first two notes only
- m. 7 – Do not lift after the slur, because it interrupts the line; since these notes are twice the speed of the slurred notes in m. 5, lifting after the slur would create a "hiccup" effect
- m. 20 – The last note is a pickup to the phrase beginning in m. 21, and should be legato, setting up the new mood of the section from the first note
- m. 24 – The last note in this measure is the end of the phrase and should not be connected to the new phrase which follows
- m. 36 – The slur indicating the hook is to show that both strokes are in the same bow, but the first note is the end of one phrase and the second note is the pickup to the new phrase. This is a common problem that students face: the two notes in this measure are visually connected by the slurred notation of the hook,

yet a thinking musician will not make the mistake of putting these two notes into the same phrase

- This etude ends up-bow, which follows Palaschko's original marking. This is unusual, but it works much better than slurring the last 4 measures together (not enough bow), or breaking the first slur at m. 90 (too much bow).

4. **Intonation.** The key is the first intonation challenge. All those flats! Melodic variation is common in Palaschko's works and challenges accuracy and intonation. Some examples:

- compare m. 21 and 25 (also m. 37 and 41) – the Eb becomes E natural
- m. 40 and 44 – The G becomes A natural
- mm. 29-32 and 45-48 – There are many differences here; what do the accidentals do? (They change the passage from Eb Major to C minor)
- mm. 53-56 – The descending melodic line has chromatic changes

5. **Dynamics.** The dynamic range of this etude is again a challenge. Some of the solutions for dynamic problems have already been discussed. From m. 83 to the end, care must be taken to not get too soft too soon, and not to get stuck at the tip. The ability to quickly float the up-bow to the vicinity of the frog without a bump is critically important here.

To purchase a copy of this work, go to the Publishing page of this website. It is available for either violin or viola.