

Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum

The Midwest Clinic, 2005 presents:
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The term "alternative strings" was coined by the American String Teachers' first alternative strings committee. It was our job to design an alternative string festival component for the 2003 conference. Since we launched that first festival (and again in 2004, 2005, and 2006), this term has been incorporated into a publishing category and is used to describe popular, fiddle, and world styles.

Why include other styles? How many other styles are there?

There are over 30 alternative string styles. Offering a diverse program in music acknowledges and reflects the fact that American is a melting pot of cultures and that each geographic region reflects musical contributions from these cultures. In addition, each genre provides new teaching points: repetitive string crossing; learning by ear; new left- and right-hand techniques; varying orientations to rhythmic phrasing and underlying grooves; improvisation; distinctly different scale types and approaches to ornamentation, and more.

American Folk (5) bluegrass, Cajun, Franco-American, old-time, Western Swing	Jazz (5) blues, swing, bebop, modern, fusion	Contemporary (3) Hip Hop, pop, rock	World (15) Afro-Cuban, Arabic, Bossa Nova, Cape Breton, East Indian (Carnatic and Hindustani), Flamenco, Greek, Gypsy, Irish, Klezmer, Mexican (Tierra Caliente and Mariachi), Scandinavian (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Finnish), Scottish, Shetland Island, & Tango
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How can I teach techniques and styles with no prior experience?

Invite your classes to join you in an exploration of an array of exciting new techniques and styles. We have had great success with this approach, and zero loss of respect for the teacher.

Are there left and right-hand techniques that I need to be aware of?

There are distinctly different left- and right-hand techniques necessary to play in a style-appropriate manner. Many of these differences can be identified through pressure, speed of motion, ornamentation, and bow-strokes particular to each style. See JulieLyonn.com>Free Downloads for STRAD Magazine articles that address this issue.

Are fiddle, world, and popular styles inferior to classical music?

Each style offers a different perspective on musicianship, and therefore introduces new abilities to the player. Some styles actually require knowledge of rhythms, techniques, or theory equal to and even greater than classical.

With this many styles, how do I decide what to focus on?

Try playing a CD of a different style each time the students walk into your classroom and take note of the style(s) they respond to with the most enthusiasm; or invite an alternative style clinician in to demonstrate and teach a number of styles. See stringscentral.com for a complete list of alternative style clinicians.

How do I fit other styles into an already full schedule?

You can start by adding one alternative string piece to the season's concert. You can also use alternative string-derived warm-ups to prepare your students. See "Creative Band and Orchestra" for over 100 ideas.

How can I develop new playing and teaching skills?

There are many fiddle camps (such as International School for Fiddling, Pittsburgh Fiddle and Jazz Camp, Mark O'Connor Fiddle Camp, and American String Teachers' yearly Alternative String Festival (see astaweb.com for details re: the 2006 conference)). There are also a number of websites, magazines, and instructional books and videos available today to help you create an inclusive curriculum:

Alfred Music: <http://www.alfred.com> for alternative style books and orchestral scores

Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum - book with complete annotated bibliography and discography, history, stylistic description, bio's on the major players and more

Fiddler Magazine: (<http://www.fiddler.com>) for articles on fiddling

Homespun Tapes: <http://www.homespuntapes> (1-800-33-TAPES) for instructional videos

IAJE String Caucus: (<http://www.jazzstringcaucus.org/>) for jazz string bibliography/discography

Mel Bay Publications: (<http://www.melbay.com>) for alternative string books

Stringscentral.com: for a complete listing of alternative string clinicians, solo & orchestral alternative string charts, books, CDs, and videos

Strings Magazine: (<http://www.strings.com>) for articles on classical and alternative strings