

# **I Have To Teach What?**

## **Band Director's Guide to Teaching Beginning Strings**

### **2021 Midwest Clinic Outline**

#### **Barbera Secrist Schmedes, Clinician**

This workshop will cover a variety of basic information and techniques designed to give non-string players the tools needed to teach beginning strings.

#### **Equipment Basics--What to look for in:**

- Instruments
- Bows
- Shoulder Rest
- Rosin
- Tuner
- Method Books

#### **Starting to Play**

##### **Guitar Style (Violin/Viola)**

- Instrument Position
- Left Hand & Finger Position
- Right Hand Position **WITHOUT** bow (pizzicato)

##### **Shoulder Position (With Shoulder Rest): Violin and Viola**

- Instrument Position
- Left Hand Finger Position
- Wrist Position
- Elbow Positions
- Right Hand Position using Bow
- Basic Bow Technique
- Position/Speed/Weight of the Bow in relation to volume

#### **Cello: Instrument Position and Bow Hand**

##### **Bass is a whole different thing!!**

- Seated on Stool
- Standing
- Bow Hold

##### **Bowing Techniques You Should Be Able To Demonstrate**

- Balance Point on the Bow
- Double Stops
- Hooked Bows
- Staccato vs. Spiccato
- Tremolo

#### **Shifting**

#### **Vibrato**

#### **Tuning**

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This workshop will cover a variety of basic information and techniques designed to give non-string players the tools needed to teach beginning strings.

#### Equipment Basics for Beginners

**Instrument:** recommend intermediate model (Yamaha, Eastman, Knilling are usually good options)

**Bow:** recommend fusion carbon composite for durability

**Shoulder Rest:** insist on a good quality violin/viola shoulder rest with "feet" that grip the sides of the instrument and fit snugly so it doesn't fall off easily; recommend Kun collapsible

**Rosin:** prefer light (harder and less sticky; good for southern climate); for bass use rosin specifically for basses (Pops Bass Rosin)

**Tuner:** either a clip-on tuner or a tuner with plug outlet for clip-on cord; using a tuner will help students begin ear training; they must learn to recognize proper intonation (in fifths for violin/viola/cello and fourths for bass) on all four open strings

**Method Book:** lots to choose from but I like the teaching sequence in Essential Elements 2000 Book 1 & 2

#### Starting to Play Violin/Viola

##### Guitar Style (No Bow): Violin and Viola

- **Instrument Position:** press back of violin against abdomen, scroll angled slightly up towards left shoulder; bottom side of instrument is placed lightly in lap or right thigh; if standing, the instrument will come more towards right elbow/armpit.
- **Left Hand Position:** thumb is on the side (slightly bent) with just the tip of the thumb going past the fingerboard (some people prefer it lower and/or straighter)
- **Left Finger Position:** Be able to demonstrate finger pattern (space between index and middle finger, middle and ring fingers close together and separation between ring and pinkie fingers). Note: Any one octave violin/viola scale starting on an open string will use this finger pattern (first octave only).
- **Right Hand Position WITHOUT bow (pizzicato):** right hand fingers are on lower side of fingerboard and you use the right thumb (fleshy part) to pluck

In this position, learn first position fingerings, pizzicato on D & A; move on to G and E (violin and bass) and G and C (cello and viola) string first position notes next. Once finger pattern and note names are mastered, show violins/violas how to play in shoulder position using a shoulder rest

##### Shoulder Position (With Shoulder Rest): Violin and Viola

- **Instrument Position:** Instrument should be parallel to the floor extending out from the shoulder; position it so the curve of the shoulder rest curve fits on the left collar bone; SR must make

contact with the shoulder and collar bone to be able to support the instrument; if placed properly you should be able to press down with your chin and keep the instrument upright fairly easily

- **Left Hand Finger Position:** thumb is on the side of the violin neck, left hand fingers are in 3-sided square and placed on the finger tips, pressing the string down onto the fingerboard. Fingernails MUST BE REALLY SHORT
- **Wrist Position:** left wrist is dropped open and away from the neck of the instrument
- **Elbow Position:** as you move to different strings, move your left elbow forward to reach the lower pitched strings better and back to reach higher pitched strings
- **Right Hand Position using Bow:** Right thumb is bent at the knuckle and tip of thumb is lightly placed in the center of "U" of the frog; right index finger is curved over the bow with first knuckle on top; middle two fingers drape lightly over the side of the frog; pinkie rests lightly on top of bow stick above the adjusting screw (don't press)
- **Basic Bow Technique:** Using long, slow strokes move the bow down starting a few inches from the frog all the way to with a few inches of the tip; **wrist** must be flexible (pushes out on the down bow and bends up on the up bow); practice first on the middle two strings then the two outer strings; **elbow** moves up to reach the lower strings (ones on the left) and elbow moves down to reach the higher strings; practice string crossing skill so it's smooth from one string to the next
- **Position/Weight of the Bow** in relation to volume: the harder you press, the louder the sound and vice versa; likewise, the closer to the frog, the louder the sound and vice versa

#### **Bowing Techniques You Should Be Able To Demonstrate**

- **Double Stops:** two strings at same time; angle the bow to touch two strings and press a little harder, but keep the bow moving
- **Hooked Bows:** two or more bows going in the same direction with space (either long or short) between the bow strokes
- **Staccato vs. Spiccato:** staccato stays on the bow for crisper notes and Spiccato bounces and allows the string to continue to vibrate
- **Tremolo:** place the bow in the upper third of the bow near the tip, then work on a smooth, short up and down motion with the bow, staying in the upper end of bow; if you need more volume move toward the middle of the bow, but still in the upper half

**Shifting:** most important thing to remember is to keep the wrist open; practice sliding up and down the neck of the instrument with your left hand in playing position. Usually would expect to get to shifting in mid-second year though basses will shift from the very beginning

**Vibrato:** start this early in the second year, but only AFTER they have developed a good solid sound; for **cello and bass** think of hand position as if they are holding a soda can in their left hand then move forward and back (not sideways); **violin/viola** should be something resembling a wave toward your face either from the wrist or from the elbow

**Transferring this information to Cello:** Much of the information above is very similar for cello. There are minor changes in the bow hold (pinky drapes over the frog with 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fingers); in playing position, as you move the bow to strings on the left, the pitch goes higher rather than lower as it does on violin/viola; Instrument position: top of the back should rest at about heart level, knees just below the C-bout

**Tips for proper Cello hold:**

- To determine where to set the endpin, have beginning students stand, holding the cello in front of them facing forward and the scroll top should be approximately level with their nose. Once they sit, the top of the back of the cello should rest on their chest at about heart level. Depending upon their body type there may be some additional adjustments needed. Once they've determined the right length for their endpin, they should memorize where to set it.

**Bass is a whole different thing!!**

First of all, the strings are pitched in fourth intervals rather than fifths. They will begin shifting almost from day one so good left-hand position is essential to establish immediately.

**Tips for proper Bass hold:**

- **Seated on Stool:** sit on stool, put left foot on bottom ring of stool, right foot on the ground, body at slight angle towards left side of the room so that the instrument is still mostly facing forward or towards the right side of the room; lean the bass against the left knee/leg. Left thumb is on the BACK of the neck (not the side),
- **Standing:** feet about a foot+ apart with left foot a little forward of right foot; weight is mostly on right leg, bend left knee and rest the back of the bass against the left knee for support. Left thumb is on the BACK of the neck (not the side), there should be NO contact of the bass neck and the palm of the left hand, fingers curved, left elbow at just below shoulder height.
- **Bow Hold:** Right elbow almost straight but must be flexible. You'll use a lot less bow length and more weight on the bow with bass. Right thumb placed slightly inside the "U" of the frog, all fingers draped over, but not wrapped around the bow (for French bow).

**Continue DAILY to reinforce the very basics of hand/arm position and smooth, long bowing strokes. Once students master this, they will have no trouble moving forward quickly.**