



Teaching Intonation Creatively for String Orchestra

Kirk Moss, PhD

Music & Theatre Department Chair, University of Northwestern – St. Paul

Former National President, American String Teachers Association

E-mail: kdross@unwsp.edu

“The problem isn’t being out of tune, it’s not knowing you are out of tune.”

Body Platform

- Lengthened
- Balanced
- Functional instrument placement

Left-hand Format

- Instrument position and angles
- Thumb placement functional
- Fingers curved and flexible
- Elbow (arm) placement
- Finger patterns
- Finger independence
- Chromatic movement
- Pizzicato – firm fingers
- Cello extensions
- Shifting

Characteristic Tone

- Bow placement/lane
- Bow arm & hand weight
- Bow speed

Tuning the Open Strings

- Instrument “Executive Skills” (ASTA Curriculum)
- Talk less; sing more
- Peg manipulation
- Cello & Bass harmonics
- Pure tone or Complex tone
- Identifying intervals (internalize P5th) – Bob Culver routine
- “Upper 6 inches of bow” and “Softer than your neighbor”
- Self, peer, and teacher evaluation

Aural Skills Development (learning to audiate)

- Make friends with your general music teacher
- Echo/sing pitches: note names, solfège, scale degree, neutral syllable, finger numbers, and more
- Echo/play pitches – pizzicato then arco
- Echo/sing/play tonal patterns – in major and minor
- Echo/sing/play simple folk songs in chunks
- Sing/play simple folk songs – switch them from major to minor or minor to major

- Learn songs aurally and play from memory
- Do all of the above with harmonic backgrounds (Band-in-a-Box, GarageBand, SmartMusic)
- Model/demonstrate new string techniques aurally

Bridging the Notation Gap Using Known Pitches, Tonal Patterns, and Simple Songs

- Notation/reading may contribute to intonation problems
- Imitate: Echo/respond to aural pitches, tonal patterns, and simple songs chunked
- Associate: Look and echo/respond to pitches, tonal patterns, and simple songs chunked, while seeing flashcards and hearing model in a call-and-response pattern routine
- Look and Say/Play: Read pitches, tonal patterns, and simple songs from notation flashcards

Pitch References and Tuners

- Open string drones
- Double stops
- The Tuning CD by Richard Schwartz (Amazon, \$10 mp3)
- Cello Drones (<http://www.navarrorivermusic.com>, \$10 CD)
- Clip-on Tuners (D'Addario, Intelli, Korg, Shar, Snark, etc.)
- Apps (\$4)
 - Cleartune
 - TonalEnergy
 - Tunable
 - nTune: Violin (free)
- SmartMusic

The Concept of Beats (physics videos on YouTube)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M72kQuIGKk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRpN9uLiouI>

Warm-up Intonation Exercises for Middle School and High School Students

- Intervals
- Moving chord tones
- Layered tuning and balance
- Diatonic harmony
- Shifting chord qualities
- Scales with drone
- Chromatic scales
- Chorales

The World of Creativity

- Taqsim: Arabic/Turkish classical form, usually improvised
 - Drone
 - Measured
 - Unmeasured
 - Specific pitch classes
 - One pitch class

String players' motto: "It's better to play sharp than out of tune."