

## Teaching Musicality through Tone Production: Expanding your Students' Sound Palette

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### Clinic Synopsis:

The development of the right hand for improved tone is critically important to musicality in string playing. This session will focus on strategies to train and relax the string student's bow hand to enable more musical performances. By providing exercises that target a player's smaller-to-larger muscle groups, teachers will be able to help enable students to succeed at higher level bowing skills which are often synonymous with advanced playing and musicality. In addition, this session will also look at ways to get students to engage and produce more musical results, by looking closely at the bow arm/hand as a tool for artistic sound production. Visit this session to discover progressive strategies to develop your students' tone and its expressive opportunities.

### Posture & Position:

- Posture and good position are key!
- Where is their center of gravity? Must be forward and free to move comfortably.
- Natural motion- check your watch, we don't walk around with all this tension that we typically see in the right/left hand.
- Look for natural checkpoints for straight, relaxed bow movement:
  - ◆ Violin/Viola: gooseneck, box, V
  - ◆ Cello/Bass: zombie, armpit, elbow, or pendulum movement. NO SHOULDER!

**Experiment:** Squeeze fist/tense all muscles, now try and move from the elbow.

**Bow arm/hand MUST BE RELAXED! So relaxed that they almost Let go.**

### Exercises for relaxation & finger movement:

- Isolate arm motions (must be able to get from big to small muscle groups):
  - ◆ shoulder, elbow, wrist, fingers. All have to work together seamlessly.
- Activate wrist (away from bow at first):
  - ◆ Knock
  - ◆ Hold wrist- up and down & circles
  - ◆ Waves (with bow, Support stick with left hand), up and down
  - ◆ Waves (with added finger motion- may need to wait on this)
  - ◆ Flick (move to instrument) move only from wrist/fingers (can hold forearm)
- Activate fingers:
  - ◆ Finger lifting (can they lift 1234, 4321, 1432, etc.)
  - ◆ Spider crawl
  - ◆ Rock & roll (on the bridge, start on lowest for upper, highest for lower, students roll bow down from fingers)
  - ◆ Teeter Totter (vertical & tipped to the left)
  - ◆ Touchdowns (move from only fingers, start curved and relaxed, then allow end screw to touchdown into the palm)

→ Activate wrist & fingers:

- ◆ Bow tip circles (hold bow vertically, create a larger circle that moves smaller and smaller- moving from wrist to just fingers- circle a beach ball, a basketball, a baseball, a dime).
- ◆ Finger pull-ups (hold bow at the tip, use finger motion to move up and down)

**Watch for tension, must always be relaxed!**

*Words to help release tension- hand like a boiled noodle, hold a pine cone (imagine holding a pine cone or delicate object)*

It is also helpful for them to feel the difference between a tense hand vs. relaxed hand.

### **Articulation:**

*Note: before anything else, students should be able to get a consistent bow speed, and be able to plan out their bow distribution.*

3 parts of the note:

- Beginning , Middle, & *End*- students usually stop monitoring the sound at the end of the note, but getting them to listen for it is key, especially in slower music and longer notes.

Using syllables to give reference to the sound.

Accent- "Tah," "Kah"

Staccato- "tut," "dut"

Legato- "dah," "wah" "lah"

Having a visual also helps (see handout)

Performing articulation:

→ Staccato/Accents: Thumb Squeezes

- ◆ Feel the spring of the string- like a trampoline.
- ◆ They need to squeeze the stick into the hair.
- ◆ Practice stop moving the bow- no squeeze at the end (CRUNCH).

→ Spiccato: Relaxed 16ths is the precursor. Bow hand must be balanced and relaxed!

- ◆ Long bows (quarter notes) to short, fast bows (16ths), need to be flexible in fingers while moving from the forearm, NOT the shoulder.
- ◆ Set & Lift- start slow at the frog, grab and then lift off the string, increase speed (feeling becomes a dropping motion -make sure to move towards balance point).
- ◆ Drop & Dribble- rotate bow to a vertical position, then allow to drop and dribble- do this in the upper half of the bow)
  - Who can make the dribble last the longest? They must be relaxed!
- ◆ Rhythmic taps- in middle of the bow (same motion as drop & dribble)
- ◆ Bounce then play- bounce a few times, then activate the elbow for sound (practice down & up bow)
- ◆ ∞ loop, Slow way down have students catch at the frog, then tip, gradually increase speed and settle in around the balance point until they bounce (idea of catching the string from different sides).

→ Legato:

- ◆ Feel resistance, like when you move your hand under water.
- ◆ Wrist leads, fingers follow. Fingers must be flexible and relaxed!
- ◆ Slow bow down at the change.
- ◆ Make notes touch

→ Collé: Syncopated music!

- ◆ From fingers!
- ◆ See finger exercises above- students must move only from fingers, flicking the bow down (fingers out) and up (fingers in).

**Phrasing & shape:** Exploring colors, breathing life into the notes.

*"It's all in the way music moves - we must never forget that music is movement, always going somewhere, shifting and changing, and flowing, from one note to another; and that movement can tell us more about the way we feel than a million words can."* - Leonard Bernstein

Phrasing and shape come from variations of speed, contact point/angle, pressure/weight. Pressure/weight is often overused by students, so it is important to focus on bow speed and contact point.

Strategies for using the whole bow:

- Circle pizzicato- pluck string and make a large circle.
- Connect the dots (set frog, middle, tip)
- Bow circles (both down & up)
- Bow pulses- slurred staccato (6, 8, 12, 16 counts in one direction)

Dynamic Experiments:

### 1. Dynamic Options in $\frac{4}{4}$ Time

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The image displays three staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, each containing four measures of exercises labeled a through l. The notation includes various bowing techniques such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). Exercise 'a' starts with a 'p' marking and a 'V' above the first note. Exercises 'b' through 'l' show different rhythmic patterns and bowing directions, with some measures featuring slurs and others having accents or dynamic changes.

Reminders:

- Slower bow works best to maintain volume closer to the bridge, faster bow works best to maintain volume over the fingerboard.
- Pacing phrasing of 4 bars ( 2 bars of crescendo-2 bars of decrescendo) or more can be tricky and will require practice for younger groups- chorales work great for this.
- Students should be able to alter all variables to maintain a good tone (practicing bow distribution exercises- we especially see this problem in 3/4 time- half note - quarter note), before creating contrast with dynamics.

Resources:

Dr. Michael Hopkins- String Technique Channel has TONS of useful teaching videos.

Dr. Jim Kjelland- Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function

Dr. Bob Gillespe- Advanced Technique for Strings

Dr. Chris Selby- Habits of a Successful String Musician