



# CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

## COLLEGE OF PERFORMING ARTS

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### Hall-Musco Conservatory of Music

#### De-Mystifying the Viola for Non-Alto-Clef Engineers

##### I. Posture

- A. Spine, Neck and Shoulders are different for violists than violin
- B. The weight of the instrument creates different issues for us and especially younger players
- C. Think Alexander technique alignment

##### II. Holding the instrument

- A. Cantilever principle of weight support (Rolland etc.)
- B. NO holding of instrument with left arm/shoulder etc.
- C. NO holding of instrument with left thumb
  - 1. Restricts vibrato, shifting, speed of motion and creates potential physiological distress
- D. Use the weight of the head-not the pinching of the neck/shoulder to hold the instrument as much as possible
- E. Bridge support analogy

##### III. Left hand/wrist positioning

- A. DM gimmick for setup
- B. 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> finger flexibility issues
- C. Strain on wrist leading to other medical issues
- D. Limits on speed of finger motion
- E. Finger pressure/opposing thumb

#### IV. Vibrato

- A. Arm
- B. Hand
- C. Finger
- D. Don't call it "wrist" vibrato if possible---
- E. Exercises for building
  1. Heel of hand on bouts
  2. Waving
  3. First position lightly with finger sliding
  4. Start with 2<sup>nd</sup> finger for ease of hand rotation
  5. Independent finger placement on string-no clamp with thumb or wrist isometric
  6. Metronome slow, number of waving motions
  7. Maximum vs. minimum finger pressure parabola

#### V. Bow arm

- A. Right shoulder should remain "Unshrugged"-Galamian <sup>1</sup>
- B. Three Becker axioms
  1. Weight of the bow's ability to rest on the string
  2. Ability of the fingers to flex
  3. Ability of the forearm to open and close
- C. Weight vs. Pressure due to size proportions etc.
  1. Primrose note
- D. Bow grip-turn bow upside down gimmick <sup>2</sup>
- E. Role of fingers in spiccato?
  1. React or Cause
- F. Remember "flexible firmness" with fingers for good bow contact.

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<sup>1</sup> Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching, Ivan Galamian; Shar Products Co., Ann Arbor MI

<sup>2</sup> The Suzuki Violinist, William Starr; Summy-Burchard Music, Miami FL

1. We pick up fragile things all day long and our fingers flex move, etc. cell phones, coffee cups, and china cups
2. Students pick up a bow and it's a vise gripped C clamp
3. Have students practice flexing fingers using a pencil that they're not afraid to drop!! Then apply to bow.

## VI. Etudes

### A. I teach out of the Carl Flesch system. Why?

1. Fingerboard knowledge
2. Future sight-reading ability (Gerle) <sup>3</sup>
3. These can be started with relatively young people even the three octave versions and arpeggios.

### B. Schradieck Book I for left hand #5 is fantastic for aligning the left hand in a wonderful position (it also takes some of the strain out of low second finger, high third finger)

### C. The usual suspects Kayser, Kreutzer but also Campagnoli Caprices are wonderful performance works for older students.

1. Kayser 9 using only the fingers to move the bow is a real wakeup call for the right hand fingers and gets past the locked position to locked position concerns of practicing "*collee*" strokes.
2. Kayser 5 is in 6/8 for the same stroke work
3. Early students can benefit from #1 and 3 in various parts
4. Kreutzer 8 for string crossings and working all parts of the bow for ease of playing

## VII. The "Fun" of the viola

### A. Sitting in the middle of all those harmonies OMG

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<sup>3</sup> The Art of Practising the Violin, Robert Gerle; Stainer and Bell, London

- B. The beautiful deep mahogany sound of the instrument
- C. Every Brahms Symphony
- D. CHAMBER MUSIC!!
- E. Contributing to the overall result without necessarily being the start (have them play quartets and try to make the 1<sup>st</sup> violin phrase more effective with what they are doing for instance)  
So if you're always paying more attention to your 1<sup>st</sup> violins and not expecting the inner voices to mentally "play the phrase" with your solo lines-winds etc.-you're missing a wealth fantastic sound contribution
- F. Violists are fun, crazy people with interest in a broad variety of subjects. Get to know them. Science seems to interest many. Sam Rhodes, Rafael Hillyer for instance.
- G. Violists love to find out information about composers, music, and world events. Put them to work researching for your orchestra. Let them present those results to their colleagues and get a "spotlight" moment.

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