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The 3 B's: Beautiful Bow Arms for Beginners: Setting the right tone from the beginning

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Better Bow Hands Start with Preparation

Preparing the Hand

Preparing the hand placement with weight	• Hold 1st finger of left hand up horizontally VL/VA right hand facing floor, C/B right hand facing body. • Hang right hand fingers on that finger and flop with hanging thumb. • Right arm comes from above. • Do throw ups and drop. • VL/VA - tip of little finger sets on the fingernail. • C/B - little finger touches fingernail
Preparing the thumb	• Thumb taps on 2nd joint of left hand 1st finger. • Make a spyglass with right hand. • VL/VA thumb and 2nd, C/B thumb and 2nd/3rd. • VL/VA wave goodbye sideways. C/B wave up and down
Forming the hand	• Do a hand throw up and tap thumb on second joint of left hand finger. • VL/VA - point left hand up and let right hand cantor down. Reset left hand parallel to the floor. • C/B lower left hand in front of tummy and set right hand.
Preparing the hand on the bow	• Do throw ups and thumb taps on the bow while holding the bow with the left hand.
Preparing for flexibility	• Do a hand throw up • Squeeze the left hand 1st finger with 10 lbs then relax to 1. • Now do it with the bow. • Slide the hand up and down the stick while holding with the left hand.

Better Bow Hands Built with Basics

Fingers Count - Finger Function

The finger down under - the thumb	Make a telescope with thumb and 2nd finger
Sticking together - the thumb/second finger	Hold the bow with just thumb and second finger
Going along for the ride - the third finger	Even second fingers have friends
Lean on me - the first finger	Put the rabbit ear down
Point/counterpoint - the fourth finger	Put the other rabbit ear down

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 4, Activities 8 - 9

Where's the Rabbit - Setting up the Bow

Making a rabbit	As in Pic. A, B (String Explorer Page 4)
The Rabbit finds the Frog	As in Pic. C, D, E, F (String Explorer Page 4)
Rabbit check points: Thumb, Second, Third, First, Fourth Fingers	As in Pic. G,H,I, J, K, L (String Explorer Page 4)

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 4, Activities 8 - 9

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Picking up the Bow - the Forgotten Step

Two hands - one bow	Put your left hand at the tip and your right at the frog
One hand - one bow - Point/counterpoint	Use two hand pick - up and let left hand go
One hand and a stand	Place right hand on the bow, balance, then pick up vertically
Putting the bow on the string	Bring the bow in for a landing from above
Balancing the hand	• Keep the bow parallel to floor with the thumb and second finger • Roll the bow using only thumb and second finger • Crawl up/down a vertically held stick like a spider • Crawl up/down a horizontal stick held at frog then tip • Hold bow at balance point and see - saw

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 4, Activities 11 - 12

Mathematics of the Bow - Angles Count

Row, Row, Row Your Bow - tracking your success	In the middle of the bow, row it up and back. Stop the bow when it is parallel to the bridge. "Row, row, row your boat gently on the string. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, don't make a chicken wing."
Coming in for a landing - where does the elbow go	• Bring the bow in for a landing from above • Without the bow reach up and scratch rosin off any string with 1st finger. • With bow in hand scratch string with 1st finger and pull to middle. Arm will be parallel to floor

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 4, Activities 11 - 12

Better Bow Arms Can Be Built from the Beginning

Tiré/Poussé - Pull/Push-Down/Up

Preparing the hand	• Use your hand like paint brush on a flat surface. Notice the curving and straightening of the fingers • With a partner - pull an up and down bow using your left hand 1st finger as the bow. Keep the left hand stationary.
Preparing the bow arm motion	• Put 1st finger of left hand in right arm elbow crook. Open and close the gate. Now do it parallel to the floor. • Flop hand on dowel. VL/VA put on left shoulder and bow. C/B put on lap and bow. • Put dowel in tube and use tube to slide on dowel. • Slide up and down the bow while holding with left hand.
Preparing the bow arm	• Pull the bow down without the 1st finger on • Push the bow up without the 4th finger on • Have a partner hold the bow in position while the player moves their hand up and down the bow • Pull a short down bow on the D. Stop and lower hand almost to A, then play up bow in a circle motion
Preparing the Detaché	• Place a straw in the f hole and then bow. • Place cloths pins on and bow. Gradually move the pins.

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 17, No. 67, Ode to Joy

Finding the Edge - Putting Weight into the Bow

Finding the weight	Hold the student's elbow and ask them to give you the weight of their arm
10 to 1 Scale	Put 10 lbs. of weight in bow and work down to 0
Starting the note	Start with differing amounts of weight 2,4,6,8
Vary the attack and the stroke	Start with 8 and release to 4 through the stroke
Vary the attack point	Start the attack in different parts of the bow

Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 37, No. 122, Great Gate of Kiev

Bow Geometry - Triangle, Square, Point

Square	Near the middle, form a right angle with your right arm
Point	Go to the point of bow (Only as far as your arm will allow)
Triangle	Near the frog form a triangle with your right arm

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 21, No. 96, Chester

Changing Directions

Connecting up and down bows	• Play a D down, stop and drop the hand until the bow touches the A string, then play up. • Play a D down, stop and drop the hand until the bow *almost* touches the A string, then play up. • Play down/up on the D string with a circle motion • With an imaginary sail on your hand blow a gentle breeze to keep the hand moving down and up. • Practice parking the bow (non - accented stop) • Close your eyes and listen for the bow change

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 27, No. 118, New World Symphony

Speed, Weight, Placement

Placement	• Establish sound points or bowing lanes 1-5 (1bridge - 5 fingerboard) • Sound points drive weight and speed
Weight	• Amount of weight allowed to transfer into the string • Playing in lanes 1-5, vary the weight • Play in lanes 1-5 with consistent weight and vary the speed
Speed	• How fast the bow travels- 0 to 65 mph • Play at 1-5 with varying speeds • Play at 1-5 with consistent speed and vary the weight

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 22, Brandenburg Concerto No. 5

Developing Dynamics

MF	In bowing lane 3 don't add or take away weight. Don't think
F	In bowing lane 3 let weight fall into the bow
FF	In bowing lane 3 let more weight fall into the bow
MP	In bowing lane 3 lift weight out of the bow
P	In bowing lane 3 lift more weight out of the bow

Tone

Resonance	• Pluck the string and listen to the ring then play a detaché stroke • Pull the bow at the frog and lift quickly and listen for the ring • Keep the width of the vibrating string the same throughout the bow. • Pull the string back without letting it vibrate • Pull the string until it clicks and stops • Pull the string until it clicks over and over.

Example: String Explorer Book 1, Page 25, No. 109, Swingin' Pizz.

String Crossings

Preparing the cross the string	Hook tip with the left hand 1st finger. Move up and down with arm, wrist, and fingers. Place left hand 1st finger in the middle of the bow and rock. Place bow on bridge and rock and roll on four strings, then three, then two.
The seven levels of the bow	Find the following levels: G, GD, D, DA, A, AE, E
Changing to a higher string	Lead with hand
Changing to a lower string	Lead with arm

Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 33, No. 121, Irish Washerwoman

Attack Strokes

Detaché	The paintbrush stroke. Speed and weight is even throughout the stroke.
Martelé (slow)	Accented at the beginning of the stroke
Martelé (fast)	Accented at the beginning of the stroke with a hard stop
Collé	A stroke initiated by straightening the fingers to go down and curving the fingers to go up.
Spiccato	A natural bouncing of the bow hair. Lift the weight out of the detaché stroke. The bounce is more length than height. Play Detache and slowly lift the weight out of the bow.
Sautillé	The stick bounces, not the hair. Use circle string crossings then play circles on one string and let go.

Detaché - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 8, No. 31, Minuet
Martelé (slow) - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 24, No. 98, March in D
Martelé (fast) - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 16, Violin Concerto
Collé - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 37, No. 124, Exploring Spiccato (Change for Collé)
Spiccato - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 37, No. 125, Farandole
Sautillé - Example: String Explorer Book 2, Page 46, Use any scale

QUOTES:

Valborg Leland, The Dounis Principles of Violin Playing, p. 13-14.

1. The Balanced Hold

(a)First in importance is to find the central feeling of balance. This lies in the "centre of the hold" The centre of the hold must be between the thumb and the middle finger. They work together and are opposite each other on the bow. The two weaker fingers (third and fourth) at one side of the centre hold furnish a balance with the strong first finger on the other side (two against one). They must be strong, flexible, and always on the bow. . . . .

(b) Second in importance is to find the exact spot on the middle finger and thumb which contacts the bow. The right side of the thumb cushion holds the upper edge of the frog and should feel as though it is anchored there. The middle finger holds the stick somewhere near the tip cushion and never beyond the first joint. . . . . .

- The position of the other fingers on the bow. . . . .

(a)After you have found the centre hold, let the other three fingers drop on the stick wherever they fall naturally.
(b) Then tilt the hand in the direction of the tip of the bow until a firm contact of the first finger on the bow is established. This slanting position is the fundamental position for all bowing. It is your "normal hold" from which all other hand positions on the bow are derived.

- Developing the clinging feeling of the fingers on the stick.

The fingers must cling firmly to the stick at their points of contact with it. The finger must feel rooted to the bow as though they are part of the stick. The clinging hold is an important requisite for a sonorous tone. The grip of the fingers on the bow is always a clinging one, firm but not tense.

Simon Fischer, Basics, p. 1-2.
Thumb counter pressure is sometimes very little, and at other times much more, depending on the amount of pressure into the string, and which part of the bow is used. . . . The thumb and second finger are the centre of the bow hold. The second finger needs to sit very slightly to the left of the thumb. . . . A bow hold with the thumb between the second and third fingers can cause tension in the base of the thumb.

Ivan Galamian, Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching, p.45-46.
The basic grip as given here permits the flexibility of the hand to develop rather quickly, because it is *a natural* position of the hand. This manner of holding the bow is designed chiefly to release the springs of the hand and fingers so that the bow can settle deeper into the strings. It is the best grip for the achievement of fullness and roundness of sound.

To set this basic position, take the bow in the left hand, pointing it vertically upward with the hair facing the player. With the right hand, form a circle by placing the tip of the thumb against the second finger. . . . Bring this circle over to the bow, not directly at right angles but from slightly above. . . . Open the circle a little and insert the bow-stick so that the thumb contacts the stick and the frog. . . . In doing all of this, the thumb should retain the same position in relation to the second finger that it had in the forming of the initial circle. This means that, above all, it has to retain its easy, natural, outward curve and has to keep the inner edge of its tip turned toward the second finger. . .

The second finger will be curved over the stick opposite the thumb and will contact the stick at the joint nearest the nail. The third finger reaches over the frog. . . .

The fourth finger is placed on the stick rather close to the third finger. The section of the stick immediately above the frog is always of octagonal construction, even when the stick itself is round. In placing the fourth finger, its tip rests not directly on top of the stick but instead on the inner side of the octagon, contacting the flat surface just next to the top. . . . The first finger is placed at a slight distance from the second finger and contacts the stick of the bow a little on the nail side of the middle joint. . . .

The *correct* bow grip must be a comfortable one: all fingers are curved in a natural, relaxed way: no single joint (knuckle) is stiffened; and the correctly resulting flexibility must allow all of the natural springs in the fingers and the hand to function easily and well.

Julie Lyonn Lieberman, You Are Your Instrument, p. 35.
When we learn to play an instrument our teachers show us the "correct" way to hold it as well as how to stand or sit. There is an overwhelming tendency to try to maintain that correct position at all times. This restricts sensory awareness, feedback from the muscles, and oxygen intake. The strenuous demands of playing the music well, in combination with a static posture, do not support a quality experience, the optimum use of the body, or the creation of beautifully fluid music.

References and Resources

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