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PREFACE

All string teachers must find an effective and efficient pedagogy to guide a student through the complexities of playing with accurate and tension-free left hand and bowing techniques. Knowing the proper order of developing technical and musical skills and knowing how to teach these essentials is necessary to bring excellent results. Positive outcomes are obtained when the teaching approach is well organized and properly sequenced.

The first step is to select an attractive repertoire that is sequential according to keys, range, rhythms, bowings, articulations, string crossings, form, etc. Each piece is selected to introduce new technical and musical ideas as well as repeating these from previous ones.

The next step is to find ways to work out any new techniques or problems in a piece by selecting related materials such as special exercises, mini-exercises, scales and etudes. Each piece contributes in a special way. Students not only solve the immediate difficulties in a piece, but with this intense study, gain solid techniques.

It is very important to teach the student to be a proficient “practicer.” With this ability, the student is able to diagnose the problem of an awkward passage, how to practice to remedy it, and what type of exercise or related material to use to help solve it; also how to structure the general practice routine. The teaching and learning process has now reached its optimum level bringing quicker and more satisfactory results.

This text presents ways to organize an interesting and productive pedagogy that develops left hand and bowing techniques from beginning (Grade 1) through intermediate levels (Grade 5). Explanations and illustrations on each technical obstacle in the repertoire are analyzed and worked out to obtain fluent playing through the use of related material. Reviewing and refining earlier pieces leads to mastery and establishes an excellent playing foundation for new pieces.

The text is designed for both private studio and classroom string teachers.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: The Preparatory Period.

This section presents a step-by-step approach to teaching the basic bow hold and bowing movements for flexible and tension-free playing. It starts with simple strokes using scale patterns and short familiar songs executed with silent bowing motions (e.g. bowing over left shoulder). Meanwhile, playing posture, left hand position and finger patterns/placements are taught. Pizzicato is used to focus on proper finger placements (intonation) using the same scale patterns and songs. When each hand is functioning well, they are brought together. Special exercises working out each technique are included with explanations and illustrations. A Dalcroze eurhythmic program suggests ways to develop and internalize aural and rhythmic skills. These musical concepts are then applied to the scale patterns, preparatory songs and “Twinkle” rhythms. This interrelates the mental and physical aspects resulting in an effective way to teach and learn. The preparatory period develops technical and musical playing skills which serve as a prelude to the Suzuki Volume 1 repertoire. Listening to the Suzuki recordings while studying the pieces is encouraged. The student hears and absorbs the melody, tone quality, rhythm, articulations and musical form of this music that is to be learned.

CHAPTER 2: Exercises in Developing Control and Flexibility in the Bow Hold and in Bowing Movements.

Special bow hold exercises are introduced to help develop strength, control and flexible movements in fingers, wrist and arm. This includes teaching the physical motions when playing in each part of the bow, crossing strings, round bow motion (lift and reset) and refined finger and wrist action when changing bow strokes.

CHAPTER 3: Developing Left Hand and Finger Dexterity from Beginning Movements to Advanced Trills.

Exercises concentrate on proper finger action to perform tension-free, flexible movements. They start with simple quarter note exercises and work toward 16 slurred notes to a bow. An excellent preparation for playing perpetual motions and trills.

CHAPTER 4: Interrelating Repertoire with Mini-Exercises, Scales and Etudes.

As a student begins to work on a new piece, technical and musical problems may occur. These are extracted and studied separately, analyzed and practiced with simple mini-exercises and scales. At a more advanced level, etudes are also used to improve and strengthen techniques. The problems are worked out systematically. This not only improves the weak areas but adds to the general playing ability.

CHAPTER 5: The Scale: Building Techniques and Musical Skills.

This section presents ways to use the scale in the daily practice schedule when working out problems in the pieces. A problem indicates that a particular technique needs to be studied and strengthened. The diatonic scale is the least complex way to work these out. This chapter also demonstrates the many different technical and musical skills that can be achieved with the scale.

CHAPTER 6: Teaching Change of Position.

To prepare for this important and complex technique, a series of simple exercises can be started in Suzuki Volume 1 (e.g. “Allegretto”). These help to acquire the proper combination of physical movements for accurate and tension-free shifting. Also included are principles of proper shifting that can be applied to intermediate and advanced repertoire.

CHAPTER 7: Teaching the Vibrato from Beginning to Advanced Levels.

Preliminary vibrato exercises can be started in Suzuki Volume 1 (e.g. “Gavotte”). This chapter takes a student from the beginning stage to a fully developed vibrato and its application to repertoire.

CHAPTER 8: Bowing Articulations.

Definitions of bowing articulations with related markings are included. Explains how each is executed with application to musical examples.

CHAPTER 9: Teaching and Practicing.

Suggestions are presented in creating an approach to teaching, teaching students how to practice and a rote to note reading program. Also included: designing a daily practice schedule, pedagogical games to motivate students and social development activities.

CHAPTER 10: Playing Double Stops and Chords.

Presents ways to develop accurate interval relationships. Addresses special bowing techniques for producing a good tone quality playing double stops and 3-4 note chords.

CHAPTER 11: Private Studio and Classroom String Teaching Programs: Alternatives.

Teaching curriculums for the private and classroom string teachers are presented. A listing of repertoire (solo pieces) coordinated with the string method books and ensemble/orchestra music is enclosed. To develop note reading, a pre-reading program is included starting with eurhythmic activities which teach the musical concepts of rhythm, pitch and meter. This secures intonation and rhythmic playing as well as accelerates note reading. The string method book is often used to develop reading notes, rhythm, keys, positions, change of position, articulations, etc. **Quick Steps To Note Reading** is another source of teaching the essentials of note reading.

CHAPTER 12: Keeping Interest Alive (Motivating Students).

How to get an interesting start and teaching a student to become a productive “practicer.” Also, making music with others using group instruction and ensemble playing.

CHAPTER 13: Learning Music Through Musical Form.

Defines and illustrates the structure of form (e.g. phrases, sentences). Examples of learning music using form from selected pieces in Volumes 1 and 2 of the Suzuki Violin School.

CHAPTER 14: Creating an Effective Pedagogy.

Identifies the contents of an interesting and productive teaching program. What is good teaching and how it is developed. Includes a description of various schools of pedagogy and how these can assist in constructing one's own approach to teaching.

RESOURCE A: The Dalcroze Influence on String Pedagogy

B: Pizzicato Playing

C: Chinrests, Shoulder Pads and Rests

D: Parts of the Violin and Bow

E: Glossary of Terms Used in text

REFERENCES

COMMENTS:

This text is basically an eclectic approach and applies teaching principles and concepts from renowned past and present pedagogues as well as personal teaching experiences. It relates how various instructional ideas can be studied and adapted to form an interesting pedagogy by utilizing a wide range of resources. How these are consolidated is discussed in Chapter 14: Creating an Effective Pedagogy. The ideas presented can be incorporated into any method or can serve as a complete method and teaching guide. It is designed for private studio and classroom string teachers.

The Suzuki repertoire is used in this text as an example of a well organized and interesting collection of pieces used to build technical and musical playing skills. Related general exercises, mini-exercises, scales and etudes assist in working out technical and musical problems in the pieces. Examples with explanations are presented from beginning through intermediate levels applying this interrelated material. Suzuki-trained students and students from other rote pedagogies may use this text but delay etude study until reading abilities have been achieved. However, mini-exercises, general exercises and scales can be used to develop techniques in pieces. These can all be taught by rote.

Short etudes are included while studying Suzuki Volume 1 pieces for those who are readers. The use of the etude and when it should be introduced is determined by the teacher. Etudes play an extremely important part in developing and strengthening techniques.

The Suzuki pieces in parentheses indicate when a particular exercise can be studied.

CHAPTER 1

THE PREPARATORY PERIOD

I. INTRODUCTION: AN EXPLANATION OF THE FIRST STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The left hand and bowing techniques must function well individually before they can be brought together. Each hand operates differently, yet the two hands must be able to work together in order to deliver a satisfactory musical and technical performance. Learning to play the violin is an extremely complex activity. With this in mind, it is better to start with simple tasks and gradually add new techniques in proper order, working with hands separately. Each hand should be working correctly, be well controlled and free of tension. It may take several weeks before each hand reaches a correct and comfortable level. Only when this level is achieved should the left hand and bow hand be combined. The successful playing of repertoire can be attained more quickly and accurately with this approach than if the two hands are brought together from the very beginning.

A mental/physical relationship is essential in developing any type of complex skill. To achieve this, take a simple understandable task, practice it until it functions properly and then add the next step. The conscious and deliberate practice of this simple task repeated several times can bring it into an automatic response. If carefully studied and sequenced, a complex skill can be readily achieved with this step-by-step procedure.

It is recommended that the beginning stage also contain a pedagogy that develops musical learning and integrate it with skill development. Musical learning is defined here in terms of aural skills (ear training) and rhythm development which is used to guide the movement of left hand and bowing actions. A rote approach is used at this beginning level so that all the attention can be placed on integrating musical and technical skills. Simple and familiar songs with limited range and rhythms are used. Singing and walking (and/or clapping) and matching the notes and rhythms of the songs first before playing them on the instrument establishes the musical structure. Resource A explains how Dalcroze eurhythmic activities can be implemented. The physical/mechanical aspect follows with the ear helping to guide the fingers. Pizzicato playing is suggested at first to focus on left hand position and proper finger placement. A finger measurement system is highly recommended in this early period, that is, keeping fingers down whenever possible, especially when larger intervals are involved. Meanwhile, special attention is given to the bow hold and bowing action. Bowing these early songs over the left shoulder (silent bowing) integrates proper bowing action of wrist, hand and forearm with the rhythms of these songs. Each hand is mentally, musically and physically developed separately using the same repertoire. When each is functioning properly, the bow is placed on the string, with left hand and bow working together. Scale patterns are used to outline the range and rhythms of songs and to aid in coordinating left hand and bowing.

The foundation of all this technical and musical achievement is through a Dalcroze aural and rhythmic internal development program. Simple solo pieces, special exercises, mini-exercises and scale patterns are used in this early period to assist the young student in learning basic playing skills. The student is now prepared to proceed into Suzuki Volume 1 repertoire with left hand and bowing techniques working together in a very proficient manner with an excellent intrinsic development of aural and rhythmic qualities.

II. DEVELOPING BASIC BOWING MOVEMENTS

This section includes a detailed and sequential approach for developing beginning bowing techniques in the preparatory period. Early songs, exercises and related scale patterns are used to establish a flexible bow hold and proper bowing action.

CHAPTER 5

THE SCALE: BUILDING TECHNICAL AND MUSICAL SKILLS

The renowned violin pedagogue Ivan Galamian states: “The scales have been studied ever since the violin has been played. Their importance lies in the fact that they can serve as a vehicle for the development of a larger number of technical skills in either left or right hand. Scales build intonation and establish the frame of the hand; their applicability for the study of all bowings, of tone quality, of bow division, of dynamics, and of vibrato is almost endless.”¹

The scale, like the etude, has become an important part of the daily practice schedule and a vital resource for developing techniques and musicianship. Galamian indicates the many benefits that can be derived from scale studies: practicing crescendos, decrescendos, tempos, vibrato intensities as well as bowing rhythms, articulations, position study and shifting. All of these solidify skills required for successful performance of repertoire.

I. SCALE STUDIES: DEVELOPING BOWINGS, RHYTHMS, ARTICULATIONS

Daily scale schedule should include these techniques from both current and previous pieces. The keys and range of scales and pieces should match. The teacher should determine a practice plan for the student selecting from the repertoire the bowings, rhythms and articulations to be studied using the scale. If selecting specific bowings (e.g. staccato, détaché, martelé, bow division), for instance, the teacher should illustrate and explain to the student which parts of the bow arm and amount of bow to use for each stroke. The student then “teaches-back” what the teacher said by demonstrating and explaining each bowing to make sure all is correct. The student maintains a mental focus on the proper physical movement and action of each of these techniques and plays tension-free. The teacher can feel confident that home practice will be correctly performed.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF BOWINGS, RHYTHMS AND ARTICULATIONS FROM “PRE-TWINKLE” THROUGH VOLUME 1

When viewing the list in Section B one can see the enormous gain in technical growth when extracting bowing, rhythms and articulations from repertoire and studying them on a scale. Just as pieces appear in sequential order according to level of difficulty, so do the techniques required to play them. Many staccato articulations, for instance, are repeated, but may have different rhythm patterns or are to be played in different parts of the bow. The simple scale serves as a means to work out complex bowing in a new piece. Techniques are learned and the piece progresses at a faster rate. It is impressive to see what and how much can be accomplished by the end of Volume 1 using this coordinated plan between scales and repertoire.

A. “Pre-Twinkle”

For example, in the early “pre-Twinkle” songs, there are two different rhythms and bowings (e.g. ♩ and ♪ rhythms; ♩ staccato and ♩ détaché bowings). The range consists of four notes or half of the A major scale. Practice these first on this four-note pattern to study finger relationships, tonality, the rhythms and bowing articulations. When these basics in both hands are functioning well, playing the songs with good intonation, tone quality and proper rhythms and bowings will result.