

the hand up to playing position (Fig. 1-8). Slip the thumb under the neck of the instrument and curve the fingers, placing them on the D string. The sliding of the hand on its palm up the string as described often helps the arm to assume a natural position as the elbow bends and helps to eliminate the bad curve in the left wrist which either too high or too low an elbow will produce.

The ball of the thumb contacts the back of the neck of the cello *opposite second finger* when that finger is on F natural on the D string. It is helpful if the teacher will outline this position for the thumb as shown in Fig. 1-9. This prevents the thumb from pointing upwards or from getting too far around the neck, either of which positions will prevent the fingers from attaining good action on the strings.

STRING BASS

Have the student stand on the E string side of the bass, facing the rib, with the instrument approximately a foot away from him (Fig. 1-10).

The bass is then leaned over to contact his thigh, and the left knee is placed against the bass on the back of the lower bout (Fig. 1-11)

Note: There are several acceptable positions for the left foot and knee. The one given here seems to be practical for the beginner. In some schools of advanced playing, the left knee does not contact the bass at all.

This point of contact of the knee on the bass is very helpful at first. The student's first lesson is to "balance" the bass, to get it to stand alone without the player's hands touching it. This is a necessary skill since the left hand cannot function freely if it is also trying to support the weight of the bass.

The position of the thumb on the neck of the instrument is similar to that for the cello; in half-position the thumb is opposite second finger when that finger is on E-natural on the D string; in first position, opposite F-natural on the D string. Fig. 1-12 shows both markings.



Figure 1-10. Stance at the side of the string bass.



Figure 1-11. Placing of the knee on the back of the bass. (German Bow)



Figure 1-11b. Seated position with knee in the back of the bass. (French Bow)

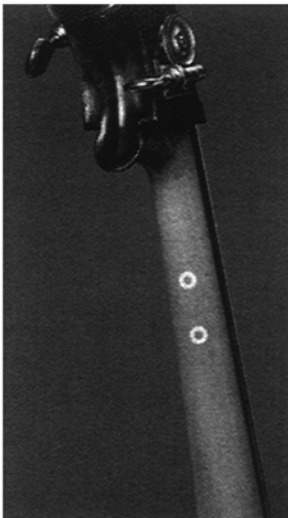


Figure 1-12. Bass neck marked for thumb in half and in first position.

12 BEGINNING THE INSTRUCTION

If the bass is to correlate with the other instruments in the D-major approach, it will have to start in the first position. When the bass is taught individually or in a homogeneous class, it is better to start with the half position. Notice that in moving the hand from half to first position, the thumb drops approximately two inches down the neck.

THE PRELIMINARY EXERCISE FOR CELLO AND BASS

The importance of the following preliminary study for cello and bass cannot be overemphasized. It produces a good left hand position right from the start and will save time in building that hand's technique. It should be required that the cellos and basses perform well these actions before they join in the D-major scale approach which follows shortly.

After the students have correctly placed the thumb and second finger (basses in first position to correlate with the cellos), the other fingers are dropped on the string. In the cello each finger has approximately an inch of vacant space between itself and the neighboring fingers. On the bass, first to second finger is about a two-inch stretch and second to fourth is another two inches. The bass does not use the third finger for playing notes in the lower positions (I through VI). This finger is first used on the octave harmonic half way down the string's length. However, the third finger should fall onto the string whenever the fourth finger drops into place. Arch all fingers; straighten the arm.

For the sake of quick correlation, use the D string on both instruments. After the initial hand position is set, have the basses slip their four fingers straight across to the G string. The exercise now proceeds: All four fingers ON the string, all four fingers OFF the string, raising just barely off and retaining their stretched position so that when they go back on the string they return to the same relative position. Pluck 4 0 4 0 4 0 4 0 many times. The notes sounded will be G and D on the cello and B-natural (first position) and G on the bass—all part of the G-major chord.

Notice that the tendency during the reiteration will be for the cellos to drop the fingers gradually *down* the neck of the instrument until the first finger (instead of the second finger) is opposite the thumb. On the bass, the fingers will gradually lose their spacing and soon all four will be touching each other on the string. Call attention to these errors and insist that they be avoided. Also, check on the *side* of the first finger. It should be entirely free of the neck, not clinging to the side of the latter. When the fingers are off the string, only the tip of the thumb contacts the neck of the instrument. If allowed to go unchecked, this clinging can develop into a very bad habit, especially on bass, preventing a facile technique and good intonation from developing.

If the teacher will start the class by setting up this study for the cellos and basses first, these students can practice this mechanic silently while the teacher

turns her attention to the violins and violas and the correct placing of their hands in the mandolin position. Thereafter all students can pluck their notes together, cellos and basses sounding the 4-0 notes and violins and violas alternating the open D with first finger on the A string (B-natural).

The class may now proceed as a unit on the following studies:

CORRELATING ALL FOUR INSTRUMENTS

Basses slip the fingers over to the A string. All students pluck A A A A, then set the first finger on B and pluck B B B B, A A A A, B B B B, and repeat many times. When this is easy the C-sharp may be added. Cellos will use third finger on the A string, dropping the second finger on the string as the third is placed. Basses will use fourth finger on the A string, dropping the second and third simultaneously. Thus:

A A A A B B B B C-sharp C-sharp C-sharp C-sharp

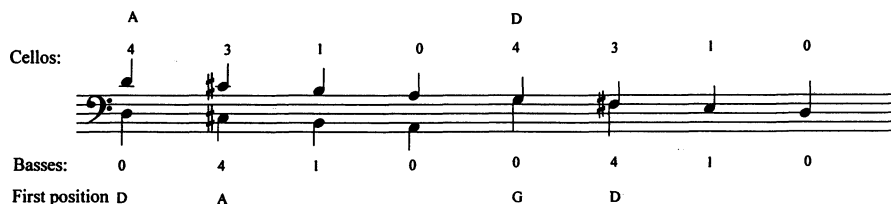
Finally the D is added, basses plucking open D and cellos adding fourth finger; violins and violas place the third finger *close* to the second finger. Be sure the second finger is high enough in pitch.

Transferring all of this to the D string, the foundation is laid for the D-major scale which gradually takes form. (Music Example 1-1 gives the accommodation for the basses without requiring them to shift positions.)



Music Example 1-1.

Having the cellos and basses pluck a descending scale while the violins and violas ascend is also excellent since it starts the low instruments with all four fingers on the string and helps to build a better hand position (Music Example 1-2)



Music Example 1-2.

7. Pluck "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

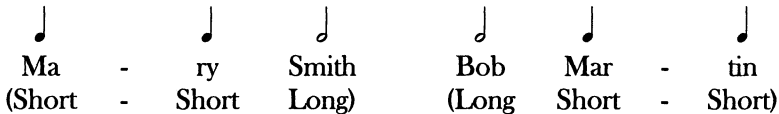
THE FOURTH LESSON

During tuning period. Check the bow-hand of each student after tuning his instrument and have him start bowing after the manner of the preceding lesson. Use the A string. (Start the tuning with a different child each time so that the longest period of playing is gradually passed around.)

Review the bowing exercises of Lesson Three.

Review the plucking exercises of Lessons One and Three.

Add this new facet of rhythmic plucking: Take the name of a child in the class, spoken rhythmically, and pluck the open string in this rhythm, as given in Music Example 2-2.¹



Music Example 2-2.

Setting the instruments into playing position, the rhythms may then be bowed.

THE FIFTH LESSON

During tuning period. Bowing from the middle to the point on violin and viola, and from frog to middle on cello and bass, keeping the bow straight. A string.

Bow the rhythms of the names in Lesson Four using the A string some of the time and the D string part of the time.

Have the violins and violas set the left hand in mandolin position (left wrist straight, thumb forward). Then, with the help of the right hand, raise the instruments into playing position, the left hand remaining as set. All students pluck the D scale in playing position, four plucks to each note, ascending and descending. (See Music Example 1-1 for the string bass fingering.)

Here an effective trick for the violin and viola may be used. Draw an ink line on the fingernails of the left hand, starting in the center of the nail and proceeding downward to the very center of the nail's tip. Have the children place the ink line directly above the string at the point of contact. This helps in set-

¹The author first saw this technique used in a demonstration of rhythms for the elementary school given by Mary Jarman Nelson. The idea is fully developed in the book *Rhythms Today!* by Edna Doll and Mary Jarman Nelson. ©1965 Silver Burdett Company. Used by permission.

ting a good position for the fingers in relation to the string. Mark only first and second fingers.

For plucking in playing position, see that the upper strings have the thumb of the right hand correctly placed along the *side of the fingerboard* and that they are plucking with the index finger. The setting of the thumb in this manner furnishes a point of resistance for the pulling of the string in the plucking action.

Pluck "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" in playing position.

Note: If the violins and violas have a tendency to collapse the left wrist at this time, see that the thumb is forward, opposite where the second finger would be if it were on F-natural on the D string.²

THE SIXTH LESSON

PREPARING FOR READING

By this time the children are getting a feel for the instrument and usually their eyes begin to stray from close observation of their hands. When this happens it is a cue for the teacher to begin training the eyes in a reading process.

Manual habits are not yet firmly enough established to risk having the eyes and mind become fully occupied with reading all of the unfamiliar symbols of the music staff. But they will work effectively at this time on *familiar* symbols. Therefore we introduce the Letter-Number Reading. *Its sole purpose is to get the eyes to function away from the instrument.*

Write the following symbols on the blackboard:

Violins:		Basses:	G
Violas:	D D A A 1 1 <u>A</u>	First position	D D 1 1 4 4 <u>1</u>
Cellos:			
			D
Violins:	D	Basses:	G G 4 4 1 1 <u>D</u>
Violas:	3 3 2 2 1 1 <u>D</u>		
	D		
Cellos:	4 4 3 3 1 1 <u>D</u>		

The string named is plucked as an open string. The number tells what finger to place *on that string* for the next note. When the melody requires that the fin-

²Leopold Auer states: "Try to hold the thumb thrust forward more in the direction of the second and third fingers," and again, speaking of F-natural on the D string, "the thumb is directly opposite." *Violin Playing as I Teach it* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1921,1949), p.34. Galamian also agrees with the forward position of the thumb.