

Iowa String Teachers Association

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Happy New Year,

The new year is off and running. As I write this we have had three "Snow" days, are experiencing our second late start in as many days, and tomorrow is looking bleak. All typical Iowa weather events, but it does make it difficult to get things going again after the holidays. I hope your new year is off to a better start than mine.

On the bright side, however, I have been able to get quite a lot of work done preparing for the ISTA Conference. Make plans now to attend. A registration form is in this edition of the journal and will be posted on the web site. The dates are May 13-15, 2005 at the Hotel Fort Des Moines, the first twin conference being held in conjunction with our colleagues in the Iowa Bandmasters Association. There will be something for everyone. We will have sessions by Bob Phillips, Cathy Morris, Tracey Rush, Alan Greiner and others. There will be two New Music Reading Sessions, one for strings only and one for full orchestra. All reading sessions will include works by Iowa composers so make sure to bring an instrument and join us. There will be several concerts including those by ISTA Honor Orchestras and the Dubuque Community String Orchestra. There will be chamber music by The Belfry Cello Trio and others. A round table discussion for studio teachers will be offered again this year. Julia Trahan, our President-elect, did a great job of organizing the last one, and will again be "in charge" as well as serving as moderator. We will have a technology session presented by Sibelius Music, sponsored by J.W. Pepper. In addition to all of this "great stuff", we will have exhibitors including West Music, Griggs Music, J.W. Pepper, and others.

If you haven't already done so, consider nominating someone you know as the ISTA Teacher of the year. Information and form is included in this journal and on the web site (www.iowasta.org). There are many great teachers out there. It's time to recognize them!

Due to the holidays and the weather issues, the deadline for applications and performance CDs for the ISTA Honor Orchestra will be extended to February 21, 2005. Information and forms are included in this journal and are also on the web site.

I hope the weather improves, we don't have school until July and you have a happy and successful New Year.

Sincerely,
Martin Clancey, President

education. Nominees for this award should epitomize every facet of excellence in string teaching in Iowa. The ISTA Executive Board will select the award recipient(s) from the nominations submitted.

The requirements for entering a nominee:

- The nominator and/or the nominee must be a current member of ISTA with NSOA
- The nominee must be actively teaching at the time of the award
- The nominee must have completed a minimum of three years of teaching experience
- A candidate may receive the award only once

If you wish to nominate more than one person, simply copy the form for additional nominations. You may nominate a teacher in a private studio or a teacher in a school setting. The award will be presented at the ISTA membership meeting during the 2005 ISTA Convention in Des Moines.

*ISTA Teacher of the Year
Award Nomination*

Nominee Information:

Name: _____

School/Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone: _____

Attach a short summary of the reason for the nomination

The criterion considered in determining the award recipient is grounded in the premise that an outstanding string music educator demonstrates continued contributions to the field of music education. Specific criteria to address in your summary may include, but not be limited to the following:

- Evidence of teaching excellence
- Quality of music-making
- Evidence of program development
- Impact on students
- Evidence of professional growth and involvement

You are welcome to submit an additional letter of recommendation from another source.

Person Submitting Form:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Check the area(s) of teaching that applies to the nominee:

_____ Private Studio _____ School teacher

Send to: Martin Clancey, 1243 20th St. SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404
String Teachers Q & A

Q: How do you teach students to associate letter names of notes with the pitches they are playing on their instruments? I think my students are too dependent on the finger numbers, and "high" or "low" (in relation to the placement of the 2nd finger, especially!)

A: From Jerry Henry

It takes me about thirty minutes to teach students how our musical system works. When I work with beginners I do it on the 2nd day of class. I teach them the following things. We use the letters A-G to represent musical pitches. Our musical system is based on half steps. I explain that because of the different sizes of our instruments different finger patterns are used to create the half steps and whole steps on each instrument and then I proceed to take a moment with each instrument to show them how to make a half or whole step on their instrument. I then draw a set of stair-steps on the board and call it a half step stairway. I start with A and using the natural notes put the appropriate letter on each step with empty steps between letters if a whole step is needed until I get back to A at the top of the steps. I explain what sharps and flats do to notes and show using the stairway how A# would be a half step higher than A and how B flat would be a half step lower than B, and how A# and B flat would be the same pitch and found on the same step and therefore in the same place on the instrument. If I'm feeling good I show them F flat and E sharp too.

I then have the students examine their instruments which have been taped with tapes at the whole step (major second) and at the perfect fourth (3rd finger spot for those of you who only work with violinists and/or violists) I ask some combination of the following questions in the following ways and help students arrive at the correct answers if they are having trouble. "What do you think happens when you put fingers down on the string? So, if you put a finger on that first tape do you think the note will be higher or lower than the open string? So, if you put a finger down on that first tape on the D string, what note do you think you might be playing? Do you see some space behind the tape, back towards the nut? What note do you think that might be? Get your instrument in playing position and show me how you think you might play E on your D string. How far is it from E to F? Show me how you think you might play F on your D string. What do sharps do to notes? Show me how you think you might play F#? What would come after F# in our half step scale? Show me how you might play G. Could you play G with a different finger? Would it still be G? Let's try it. Pick a different finger and put it where the note G is. Does it sound the same? Try another finger. Can anyone think of another way to play G? Nope, your G string is a lower pitch even though it has the same letter name. We call that an octave, but I wonder if there is another way to play the very same pitch? If nobody can figure it out I play the harmonic G on the G string and then the G, and invariably get, "But they don't sound the same." Then I play a solid G at the same spot and talk about timbre. Then I ask, "How many of you think you can figure out the notes on the A string?" If I have time I let them work with a partner to figure them out, or ask them to go home and figure them out for our next lesson. From then on virtually all of my terminology is centered on letter names and the relative distance of either a half or whole step from the previous note.

Take some time to review the above paragraph and think about what a 2nd day beginner understands about our musical system and how it relates to their instrument with that thirty-minute demo lecture. I didn't ever use a specific finger number, and not once did I mention high or low anything. Do I use finger numbers? Sure, but not the first time. I also make sure I use finger numbers in the following way. "Put your first finger on E on the D string." I always associate any finger I say with a letter name and the only finger number I find very useful in class is the first. "Now violins and violas put your 2nd finger on F#, cellos use your third finger for F#, and basses use your fourth for F#" That seems so much harder than saying, "Play F#," which also seems more efficient than, "Violins and violas play high 2nd on the D string, cellos play 3rd finger and basses play 4th."

Since I don't use the terms high or low, I don't get the question is it high or low from my students, but when I get that question from other students I ask the following set of questions. "What is the letter name of the note? Is it flat, sharp, or natural? How do you know? Then where do you put it?" If you would like a real shock try this set of questions the next time one of your students plays a C# instead of a C. Many will not be able to tell you the note name without a great deal of thinking. Many will guess at whether it is flat, sharp, or natural which is why the third question is so important. Even if they can answer the first three questions, some will be confused about where the finger is supposed to go. If this is the case I do not tell them where it goes. I write out my half-step stairway, put the notes on the steps and we figure out how far it is from A to B and then B to C. I make sure to follow up by asking them to find another B on their instrument and to tell me how far it is from B to C at that point. Then I show them another B and C and ask how far it is. Finally I go way up the fingerboard and ask if it's the same up there.

So you didn't do that stair-step lecture when you started, and you used too many finger numbers and not enough letter names, and all your kids are used to high and low terminology and are pretty foggy on the letter names, but you've decided that it would be pretty neat to say, "Everyone start on the F in measure four," and have everyone in the right place playing F natural in a matter of moments, but you don't know what to do.

I'd pull out the same stair-step lecture, but I would apply it to all the strings and what I call the C Major drill. Work through with your students the natural notes on each string using the terms half step and whole step. "We'll start on the G string. How far is it from G to A? How far from A to B?" and so on. I use five notes for each string. The G string would be G, A, B, C, D. Violins and Violas use 4th finger D while I have my cellos shift to 4th position and basses shift to 3rd positions and stay on the same string. Shifting to 3rd position for the cellos would be more logical, but for this drill I want them playing all the naturals they can in first position before shifting. Once the students learn the drill one way, you can ask any instrument to add shifting in any way you like. I play the pattern up and down three times and then go to another string. This solves where the natural notes are so that when you ask the questions about what note it is and where it is on the fingerboard they have a basis from which to work. If you ask those four questions often enough, most students will eventually be able to answer them. When the students have mastered this concept in first position, they will be able to transfer this knowledge when they begin shifting, as well.

From the Editor:

Have a question, or an idea to share?
Send it to me for publication in the next journal!
Send your questions, ideas, topics, or articles to:

Julia Trahan
trahanj@uni.edu

or

703 W. Main Street
Steamboat Rock IA 50672

All entries may be edited for space/content.

Announcement:

***University of Northern Iowa
String Chamber Music Festival
Friday, March 4, 2005***

Student chamber ensembles (high school, junior high/middle school) are invited to participate in the 2005 UNI String Festival. The day will include coachings with UNI string faculty (Fred Halgedahl, violin; Julia Trahan, viola; Jonathan Chenoweth, cello; Joseph Klapper, bass; Rebecca Burkhardt, orchestra conductor) and guest artist, violist Anibal Dos Santos (principal violist, Orquesta Filarmonica de Bogota). Students will also have supervised rehearsals, with UNI string students, a performance and mock judging (in preparation for solo & ensemble festival) with written comments, and will attend a chamber music performance by UNI string faculty, and a performance by the UNI Chamber Orchestra with viola soloists Julia Trahan and Anibal Dos Santos.

For more information or to register, please call Julia Trahan at 319-273-3074, or e-mail trahanj@uni.edu.

***UNI School of Music to host
Internationally known viola soloist
Patricia McCarty***

Patricia McCarty will conduct a master class for viola students at the University of Northern Iowa on Friday, April 15, 2005. She will also perform in a recital with pianist Eric Larson (North Carolina School of the Arts), to include music of Brahms, Benjamin, Michael Kimber, Telemann, and more. The recital will be Friday evening April 15, 2005, at 8:00 PM in the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center's Davis Hall. The concert is free and open to the public.

Students/teachers wishing to attend the master class should contact Dr. Julia Trahan for additional information regarding time and location.

Announcement:

**Central College String Festival
Thursday February 17, 2005**

Dr. Mark Hartman, Central College Orchestra Director and violin/viola professor, will conduct the 2005 Central College High School Festival. Orchestra High school students throughout the state of Iowa are nominated for the festival by their high school directors to come, learn, and perform. Throughout the day students will work with Dr. Hartman and Central's cello and bass teacher, Dr. Julie Sturm in orchestra rehearsals, sectionals, and a session designed to improve technique and build basic improvisation skills.

The day will culminate in a Festival Concert at 7pm that will feature both the High School Festival Orchestra and the Central College/Community Orchestra. This year the festival concert will include the performance of string orchestra pieces by Vivaldi and Peter Warlock as well as several jazz pieces and the beautiful Appalachia Waltz by Mark O'Connor. Those that are adventurous will even have opportunities to try their hand at taking improvised jazz solos!

Contact the Central College Music Office at 641.628.5236 or email Sue Cerwinski at cerwinkes@central.edu or Mark Hartman at hartmanm@central.edu for more information. Last minute registrations will be accepted, but may not be able to get the music prior to the festival.

Learning to Play Jazz on String Instruments – Opening the Door to the Alternative Universe

By Mark Hartman

The world of bowed stringed instruments is undergoing a tremendous change. Members of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) acknowledged the changing tides in March of 2003 when the alternative styles track was officially included in the conference venue. This meant that not only were conference attendees treated to performances and workshops by many of America's top jazz and fiddle players, but also that students were invited to join in by competing in the first alternative styles competition. For years ASTA has promoted a student competition so that top young classical string players could be recognized for their hard work and talent and thus receive a helpful push in their careers. Now the same opportunity is being offered to fiddle players who play Irish, bluegrass, old-time, jazz, and even Scandinavian styles. The door to this alternative universe has been flung wide open and string players all over America have been invited in!

Ok, so what if you are interested in teaching your students to play jazz? If this is such an open door, what if your background has been exclusively in the Western European tradition and has not prepared you to play or teach jazz? Can you rely on teaching the same concepts that you learned and applied to Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven? What are some of the differences between jazz string performance practice and standard string practice?

In the jazz string world, as in the classical world, concepts of sound continue to evolve. Early jazz violinists like Stephane Grappelli and Joe Venuti used very personal concepts of sound that nevertheless borrowed from a classical concept. Stuff Smith, on the other hand, borrowed his sounds from the wind and brass players and from the blues. Later, in the 60s and early 70s Jean-Luc Ponty changed everything by modeling his sound on players like Miles Davis and John Coltrane. He played with no vibrato, a steely control of the bow to create a variety of timbres, and used slides of various sorts to contribute to expression. In the 80s the Turtle Island String Quartet began to play jazz with a chamber music sound that emphasized lightness in the bow and a more eclectic approach to expression and repertoire. Others like John Blake have found ways to show that one can use vibrato in a way that suits the singing nature of the violin and still sounds like modern jazz.

Basic Principles

So where does this leave the aspiring string improviser? First of all, listening is a must for building a stylistic concept. A few things, however, stand out as one looks at how most of the current jazz string players create a jazz sound:

1. A sparing use of vibrato. A continuous vibrato tends to give a string instrument a classical, conservatory sound. Jazz players often use vibrato at the end of a note instead of all the way through. Another possibility is to make it slower or less obvious. The bottom line is that just like Baroque violinists, jazz violinists use vibrato for expression, but usually not consistently all the time.

2. A light bow stroke. Part of this is physics. When you take out the vibrato, heavy bow strokes tend to sound strident. In addition, one can find more nuance in a lighter stroke, making the bow an equal partner with the left hand in creating expression.

3. Finding a groove. Jazz is a rhythmic music and good jazz has a groove, whether that means swing, or whether that means a more Latin, straight eighth note approach. Regardless of the type of groove, the player must realize that everything is subservient to the overall rhythmic feel. A soloist can play in front or behind the beat, but the beat is still the center around which everything happens.

4. Jazz articulation is widely varied. This is how jazz players create interest. Some notes are louder, some softer, some punchy, some seductive and gentle. In fast tempos players tend to create swing eighth notes as much by emphasizing the off-beat notes as by playing uneven notes. Nothing sounds quite as unhip as a soloist trying to create swinging eighth notes by using a strict triplet division of the beat. On this subject the best advice that can be given is to acquire recordings of good jazz and listen and imitate!

Useful Jazz Methods for Strings

So what if in spite of your willingness to try jazz your background has been exclusively in the Western European tradition and you need more information than these general stylistic guidelines. How can you and your students get started, particularly in jazz, the subject of this article? Thirty years ago there were no methods or books that spoke to the problem of how to learn jazz on string instruments. Players that wanted to learn had to learn by ear or else delve into books written for non-string instruments. The good news is that there are now many books and methods to choose from. I'm going to list and comment briefly on two methods that are useful for introducing jazz to beginning and intermediate heterogeneous string classes.

Bob Phillips/ Randy Sabien – Jazz Philharmonic

<http://www.randysabien.com/learning.html>

Jazz Philharmonic is modeled after Bob Phillips' successful series "Fiddlers Philharmonic" (published by Alfred). Both method books start at an elementary level and move up incrementally. While they can be used by studio teachers, they are intended for use in heterogeneous school string programs. The book comes with a CD that includes excellent modeling of solo fragments for students to imitate as well as rhythm section accompaniments that can be used for practice and performance of the pieces in the book. Jazz Philharmonic is a great resource for the school string teacher looking for a way to

introduce jazz improvisation to their classes. Not only that, but it gives you enough help that you can always keep one step ahead of the kids!

Martin Norgaard – Jazz Fiddle Wizard and Jazz Fiddle Wizard Jr., Jazz Viola Jr., and Jazz Cello Jr. (Mel Bay) <http://www.jazzfiddlewizard.com>

Jazz Fiddle/Viola/Cello Wizard Jr. is designed for beginning to intermediate middle and high school string players and was created in the tradition of Jazz Fiddle Wizard, Norgaard's college level string improvisation method. It is a sequentially arranged introduction to the role of rhythm, call and response, articulation, scales, and chord changes in jazz improvisation. The exercises are turned into catchy tunes arranged to work in any configuration of string groups using these books.

The series contains piano accompaniment parts as well as a CD that provides a full rhythm section accompaniment for every exercise and tune as well as excellent performances of more than 50 sample exercises and improvised solos that model sound and style. This is a pedagogically sound and thorough method for teaching string players to improvise in the style of modern jazz that doesn't miss a thorough grounding in the basics. If you're new to this style of music you might even work through Jazz Fiddle Wizard yourself while leading your students through Jazz Fiddle Wizard Jr.

These two methods are particularly good for heterogenous string classes. Also check out "Jazz Improvisation Made Easy" by John Blake Jr. and Jody Harmon for a great method that works well with the Suzuki approach and "Jazz Explorations and Expressions" (for treble or bass clef), by David Baker, a more advanced book that is part method and part scale book. For more information on these two books and a wide variety of jazz teaching materials go to www.jazzbooks.com, run by Jamey Aebersold. Particularly useful are the jazz play-a-longs. Look for Jamey's recommended order of study. For more information on finding more non-classical compositions, arrangements, recordings, and videos, check out <http://www.stringscentral.com/web/frames.main.html>

Listening

So if listening is so foundational, who should you listen to? This question used to be easy to answer and hard to actually do. In other words there were far fewer jazz violin players and many of their recordings were out of print. Now, however, some of the older recordings are being reissued and there are currently more jazz string players now than at any previous time. I will list a few of my favorite players and categorize them by time period. Space dictates that I leave out many great players, but this should get you started:

Early styles: Joe Venuti, Stephane Grappelli, Stuff Smith, Svend Asmussen, Eddie South

Transition (60s-70s): Jean-Luc Ponty (if you can get it, "Sunday Walk" was seminal), Zbigniew Seifert (see the album "Violin" by Oregon)

Post-transition to current: John Blake, Turtle Island String Quartet, Darol Anger, Sarah Caldwell. Mark O'Connor plays wonderful, hot swing, taking Grappelli to the next generation. Jean-Luc Ponty plays fusion instead of jazz, but still provides a modal for improvising violinists to aspire to.

These players are only a drop in the proverbial bucket. For more information on many more players and other aspects of the jazz violin world check out Mark Chung's Jazz Strings Homepage at: shoko.calarts.edu/~chung/jazzviolin.html or John Kuzmich's excellent article for SBO at: <http://www.sbomagazine.com/sbomag/jan02/technology.html>.

Happy improvising!

In our Next Issue:

Studio Teachers' Forum: Michael Kimber on Intonation
Report on the 2nd Annual ISTA Conference
and much more!