



Violin

Using the *Whole Whole* Bow

by Elizabeth Ericksen

One aspect of string performance that distinguishes truly beautiful playing from lackluster is the ability to use the entire bow. With the skill to play anywhere in the bow, performers have many more colors, dynamics and techniques at their disposal to create varied and musical performances.

On the violin it is usually easiest to play at the balance point of the bow and this is a good place to start beginners. After students have a good start on their bow hold, the teacher can introduce exercises that prepare students for playing in different parts of the bow. The helicopter game is fun and helpful. Students lift the bow straight up in the air, keeping the pinky curved, coming down on different parts of the bow. After “landing” have the students check their bow hold. I encourage my students to check for tension by tapping their pinky at the tip or their first finger at the frog. Another useful exercise is to place the bow on the bridge rocking the bow back and forth from high string to low to high. Constantly check the bow hold, tapping fingers to promote looseness.

The difficulty with extending the bow stroke beyond the middle of the bow is that the feeling in the hand changes as the player moves to different parts of the bow. At the frog, curve the fingers more and support the weight of the bow with the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers. At the

frog the first finger is very loose. As the bow passes the balance point, the weight of the bow transfers over to the 1st and 2nd fingers. At the tip, extend the fingers more and keep the 3rd and 4th fingers loose. Continue to check the bow hold in the various parts of the bow.

The only way to get students used to using the entire bow is to *use* the whole bow (or the “*whole whole* bow” as I say to my students). Students seem to have the most difficulty playing at the frog. The fun pictures and brevity of the exercises in *Fiddle Magic* by Sally O’Reilly make it a good book for beginners. A number of the studies introduce the use of the whole bow and playing at the frog or tip. After this, I suggest using Wohlfahrt *Foundation Studies Book 1*. Take the suggestions for WB (whole bow), LH (lower half), UH (upper half), Fr (frog), and Pt (point) and insist that students use the extremities of the bow. Do not pass them until they learn the notes *and* bowings. Continue to check the looseness of the bow hold.

It is a good idea to continue work on bow strokes throughout students’ study. Kayser *Etude #1* (in the Whistler *Preparing for Kreutzer*) and Kreutzer #2 (Galamian edition) have many bowings that students can practice. In addition, the Sevcik books Op. 2 and 3 are comprehensive bowing studies. Remember also, that as children sprout up, their bow

holds and bow strokes will change as the feel of the bow changes. You will need to monitor their bow holds so that bad habits do not develop. A good bow hold and control of the bow require regular attention. Do your students a favor and work on it every week.

Building lovely bow strokes takes a long time. You need to *constantly* encourage your students to use the extremities of the bow. As they grow, regularly check their bow holds and bow strokes so that peculiar habits do not appear. Over time, students become comfortable in all parts of the bow and then have the tools with which to make music. They can make choices based on the type of sound they want to produce, rather than on their technical limitations.

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