



# Viola

## Stretching and Warming Up your Body

by Coca Bochonko

The importance of taking care of your body as a musician is something that is frequently overlooked I think. As I am sitting here pecking away with one hand due to the pain in my wrist, this seems like a good topic to address.

In the last few weeks I have been doing a lot of playing and have managed to overdo it. I'm having a pain in the pinky side of my left wrist. In order to help this heal and prevent further problems I have been doing a number of things that I think might be of help or interest to others. Of course, if you are having pain from playing it is very important that you talk to someone knowledgeable about the body (i.e. a doctor or physical therapist). I'm no expert. These are just my personal experiences and observations.

First as preventative measures, get your blood flowing and stretch out your muscles. I've been starting with some deep breathing, some slow and relaxed, some more energetic — you might feel

weird or foolish but it sure gets things going. Then I've been doing some shoulder shrugs and arm twirls (from the shoulder) both forwards and backwards. I follow this with shaking out my arms and flexing my fingers. Then, since my wrist is my trouble spot, I stretch my arms up towards the ceiling, gently, palms facing up, fingers facing each other doing lots of deep breathing.

While I'm playing I try to be very in tune with what is going on in my left wrist area. The biggest problem for most people is the tendency to push to wrist out (towards the scroll) when reaching for a fourth finger. For some reason this is an automatic reaction even though it pulls the hand out of position and makes the reach bigger. Keeping the wrist in line with the rest of the arm is very important, especially for violists, since we are on bigger instruments.

It's also very important to take breaks while practicing and during rehearsals.

During rehearsals it seems more difficult to take breaks, but take advantage of any extended rests or while the conductor is talking to relax your whole body and to shake out your arms and hands. While you're practicing, it's good to take ten minutes off for every hour. You can do this as five minutes every half hour if you like. This is good for your mental stamina as well as physical.

Taking care of yourself is essential. Always make sure you have enough room to play, that you have a clear line of sight to the conductor without contorting yourself and take the time to stretch and warm up your body before you play.

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