

Warm-ups and Cool Downs

by Faith Farr

The first session at the annual MNSOTA clinic was Mark Kausch's *Warm-ups and Cool Downs*. Mark began with the overview that most teachers have adopted — let's not "play through the pain." Let's teach students a physical approach to playing. Like athletes, gymnasts and dancers, musicians need to take care of their bodies. Mark showed us how.

Mark began his presentation by leading us through some finger and hand warm ups that he promised would take 30 minutes off that warm-up scale drill. The idea is to make your hands limber before you play. (For the purpose of this description, there are three bones in the fingers: the nail bone, the middle bone, and the bone at the base of the finger. There are three joints in the fingers: the nail joint, the main joint and the palm joint. I hope you can figure out what I mean!)

Finger curls

Hold your hands in front of you, palm down with your fingers stretched out straight. One at a time, bend each finger at the main joint to form an "L" while keeping the other fingers straight and still.

Finger uncurls

With your palms up, curl all your fingers towards your palm so that the finger tip touches close to the palm joint. (Only the nail joint and main joint will be bent. Do not make a fist; keep the bone at the base of the finger flat with the back of your hand.) Now turn your hands over and one at a time, uncurl each finger to point it straight out while keeping the other fingers curled.

Uncurling develops the opening muscles of the fingers which are so crucial for trill strength. Since most of our every-day hand use involves the closing / grasping / holding muscles, extra practice to develop the opening muscles is helpful. You will notice how much work third finger needs to be made independent of finger 2.

Opening muscles can be strengthened isometrically by pushing each finger against the thumb as if you are about to shoot a marble or flick water

off your finger.

Hand / Wrist Stretch

To stretch the wrist, extend your fingers and use the other hand to gently pull back them back.

Windmills

For shoulders and neck, Mark recommends windmills. Stand up and swing your arms together over head and around as if you are doing the butterfly swimming stroke. Do backwards windmills — like the reverse butterfly. For the best diagonal stretch of the middle of your back (you know that stiff place you love to have someone to rub for you), do windmills in the opposite direction — one arm forward and one arm back. Attempting this provoked a lot of laughter. It's tricky the first time but is well worth the effort to master. Begin with both arms stretched out in front of you at shoulder level. Now drop one arm down to begin its circle and lift the other one up. If you do it right, you will be able to brush the fingers of your hands together in front of you each time you come around. If one arm glitches, you will end up doing the forward or backward crawl — arms on opposite sides of the circle but moving in the same direction. Naturally, once you master the opposite direction windmill, you should practice to switch which arm goes forward!

Side leans and Toe Touches

Lower back can be strengthened by side leans and toe touches. For a side lean, extend your arms straight over head and lean to one side to stretch the side muscles. Although it is easiest to balance with your feet apart, you will get more strengthening if you keep your feet together.

For a variation on toe touches, keep your feet wide apart and your knees straight. Clasp your arms together behind your back, and lean forward from the waist as far as possible. Lift your hands

towards the ceiling. Follow this forward stretch with a backward stretch to balance the opposing muscles.

Upward and Downward Dog

The Upward and Downward Dog mimic the head-to-toe whole body stretch that we all envy in our dogs or cats. From a standing position, stretch your arms over head, then touch your



Mark Kausch demonstrates isometric finger exercises.

toes. Put your hands on the floor and step back with your feet to get into position to do a push-up. Keep your arms straight, lower your hips towards the floor and stretch your head up and back to arch your back as strongly as possible. This is the upward dog. Now lower your head between your arms, and lift your hips into the air keeping your arms and legs straight. This upside-down V shape is the downward dog. Marvelous full body stretching can be achieved by flowing as smoothly as possible from the upward dog to the downward dog and back again.

The Tree Pose

To develop concentration, Mark recommends the Tree Pose. Stand on one foot. Place your other foot against your knee with the bent knee pointing to the side. Put your hands together at chest level and point your elbows out.

Look at a single spot on the floor and try not to fall over. For more advanced work on balance and concentration, stretch your arms overhead and look up at a single point on the ceiling. For the very advanced, close your eyes and maintain the tree pose.

Mark said that many of his stretching routines come from yoga and that inexpensive books are available with diagrams to help you understand what to do. Mark's presentation was certainly an invigorating start to the day.

Faith Farr teaches cello at MacPhail Center for the Arts and at her home studio in St. Paul. She received the Master Teacher Award from MNASTA in 1996. She is a member of the MNSOTA board and serves as editor for this magazine. ‡