



Cello

Is It Worth The Effort?

by David Carter

Surely one of the most gratifying moments for a teacher is when a student begins to approach a level of effortlessness. It is at that moment that a higher level of enjoyment can begin: when artistry emerges from mere effort. I can remember, as a high school cellist, hearing and seeing Robert Jamieson play for the first time and marveling at what little effort he seemed to use when playing. What I didn't realize at that time was that ease of playing was possible at almost every level. I've found the following examples and illustrations helpful with my own students.

The famous Hungarian violinist Paul Rolland produced, among other things, a series of films called *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*. This series, though certainly dated, is so pedagogically sound that it is well worth the effort and time spent watching. Rolland covered many aspects of string playing in the series, which documents a group of young string players (mostly violinists) through their first several years of study. A particularly memorable moment shows Rolland tapping on the top of a U-shaped piece of wood with a hard object. Tap, tap, tap; one motion, one sound. He is accompanying a young violinist playing an off string bowing — bounce, bounce, bounce; one motion, one sound. This single motion can be economical when the arm returns to its original position without additional effort. It will then be ready for the next note. Then Rolland taps in the middle of the wood: tap-tap, tap-tap, tap-tap; one motion, *two* sounds. The basic concept of rebound is introduced in this manner: first the young violinist impels every motion in a fast passage, then uses the rebound motion (one motion, *two* notes) to create the feeling of ease. This kind of stroke is perfect for the Example 1 passage from Haydn's

Cello Concerto in C, 1st movement.

Recognizing rebound as an important string technique is closely related to a rhythmic idea: feeling different rhythmic units while playing. I recall Janos Starker demonstrating this idea with Popper *High School #6*: the more notes played per impulse the better it sounds! Feeling quarter note units is an improvement over eighth note units, half notes over quarters, etc. You are essentially grouping larger and larger numbers of notes together. Is this a technical concept, a musical concept, or a unity of both? I don't really know, and it really doesn't matter how it is categorized; it is simply important. This grouping of notes is also effective in Example 2, again from the *Concerto in C* by Haydn. One must not get "stuck" on the shift to third position but rather play through it to the top of the scale. *One* musical gesture should feel like *one* technical gesture as well, even if it takes several shifts to execute.

Certain bowings need that effortless quality as well. A good example

is the *Prelude* to Bach's *Third Cello Suite*. With the Example 3 bowing it is tempting to micromanage each string crossing, rather than letting the arm play through each string level and feel the larger motion.

Similarly, the *Prelude* to the *G Major Suite*, with the Example 4 bowing, should be felt as a stone being thrown into a pond; there is the big initial splash (1st 3 notes), then the series of ripples (next 5 notes). The arm makes a large gesture for the splash, and then balances lightly between the A and D strings for the ripples.

Effortlessness, paradoxically, is hard to achieve. It is, however, so vital to students of all levels that one would have to say, yes, it is well worth the effort.

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Example 1: Haydn *Concerto in C*, mvt 1.
rebound stroke



Example 2: Haydn *Concerto in C*, mvt 1.
large rhythmic gesture



Example 3: Bach *Suite #3 in C*, *Prelude*
large motion string crossings



Example 4: Bach *Suite #1 in G*, *Prelude*
large motion string crossings