



VIOLIN

The Path of Meaningful Progress

by Sally O'Reilly

When a child begins to study a string instrument, we evaluate progress in many ways — a good position, increased concentration, and the ability to pull a pure sound on open strings with a straight bow. These three accomplishments comprise the first part of what should become a broad-based foundation that will support many productive years of learning.

We know that the most solid structure in our world is the pyramid. It is broad at the base and narrow at the top. It cannot be overturned. If we approach the building of a strong, fool-proof technic and solid musicianship with the image of a pyramid in mind, we will cast the concept of “progress” in a very different light. “Progress” will not only be measured in degrees of advancement, but also in measures of depth and breadth.

Learning one solo piece after another, without the necessary technical and reading materials that should accompany them, compromises the long-term vision of a fully-equipped instrumentalist who possesses all three tools essential for survival, i.e., a comprehensive knowledge of technic (the “how to’s”), strong reading skills, and musicianship. These tools make up the foundation an instrumentalist needs — one that can be

readily transferred from solo work to solo work, providing a real “launching pad” for every piece the student learns. Without this depth of knowledge, the student approaches each increasingly advanced work from zero or close to it. This condition actually hinders progress and can become so frustrating to a serious student that he may abandon his desire to play the instrument totally.

All of a student’s skills will not necessarily be at the same level. Usually solo pieces represent the highest level of a student’s achievement. Technical studies, i.e., etudes, scales, arpeggios, bowing, and double-stops, are slightly lower. Reading, while often below performance and technical levels, is crucial to a student’s ability to cover new material, including orchestra and chamber music parts. If a talented student has ambition to be an orchestral musician, he must have the reading skills that allow him to learn an entire concert’s worth of orchestra parts in one week. University faculty members are often expected to participate in chamber music with colleagues, often on short notice. The ability to read and prepare quickly is not only beneficial, it can make the difference between achieving tenure and finding oneself looking for a job. For those of us who teach at the preparatory level,

we must be careful to see the big picture and keep in mind the ultimate goals our students may eventually have, equipping them as best we can for a truly successful future in our profession.

Students with excellent ears automatically rely on them because, let’s face it, music *is* an aural art form. Having ears that grasp music quickly is a blessing, but if the visual component is neglected and the aural component dominates the learning process overwhelmingly, it can be a curse. As teachers, it is our responsibility to provide the materials that allow the student’s abilities to develop fully rather than narrowly.

Janos Starker emphasizes that memorization of music is based on a tri-pod. We memorize with three senses, aural, visual, and tactile. Each sense needs to be addressed, maintained, and respected. While students gain aspects of technic through pieces, information received in this way is random and is no substitute for an organized, thorough pedagogical approach. The great pedagogues who wrote scale systems, double-stop studies, and etudes for both right arm and left hand, gave enormous thought to progression of difficulty and the order in which information is best given. A course of study that abbreviates such information, or eliminates it altogether, short-changes the student and can render him defenseless in our highly competitive music world.

During almost half a century of teaching at all levels, I have found a supplementary system that works for my students. It provides substance to their diet of repertoire. I offer it here simply as a guide and am fully aware that other early methods such as Dofflein or Muller Rusch could be substituted for Herfurth (*Tune a Day*) and Applebaum (*String Builder*). Each of us must find material that suits our individual teaching styles. The most important thing is that we find it and use it to our students’ benefit.

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Violin Technical Studies: Beginner to Collegiate

Compiled by Sally O'Reilly

<i>Tune a Day I</i> <i>String Builder I</i>	Sevcik <i>Op. 8</i> Sevcik <i>Op. 2, #1</i> , cont'd Kayser or Sitt <i>Etudes</i>	Kreutzer Flesch (thirds) Tartini <i>Art of Bowing</i>
<i>Tune a Day II</i> <i>Fiddle Rhythms</i> Maia Bang I	Mazas <i>Etudes</i> Sevcik <i>Op. 8</i> , cont'd Sevcik <i>Op. 2, #2</i> Flesch <i>Scales</i> (1 octave) Schradieck <i>Technic Bk. 1</i>	Rode Flesch (octaves) Gaviniés Flesch (fingered octaves)
Maia Bang II <i>Fiddle Magic</i> Wohlfahrt (1 st position)	Dont <i>Op. 37</i> Flesch <i>Scales</i> (3 octaves) Sevcik <i>Op. 9</i> Schradieck, cont'd. Sevcik <i>Op. 2, #2</i> , cont'd	Dont Flesch (tenths) Beriot <i>Concert Etudes</i> Flesch (harmonics)
Maia Bang III Hrimaly <i>Scales</i> Sevcik <i>Op. 2, #1</i> <i>Fiddle Magic</i> , cont'd. Wohlfahrt (3 rd position)	Fiorillo Flesch (sixths) Sevcik <i>Op. 3</i>	Paganini <i>Caprices</i> Wieniawski <i>Etudes Caprices</i> Vieuxtemps <i>Etudes</i>