

PEDAGOGY TALK SESSION

presented by Tanya Remenikova — reported by Elizabeth Ericksen

Tanya Remenikova gave an interesting and absorbing presentation to about ten teachers at her Pedagogy Talk Session on January 17. She began her session by talking a little about her training in Russia and early years in the United States. The Russian approach was “Draconian.” You were “kicked out” of a studio if you made the same mistake two lessons in a row. She came to the University of Minnesota from Russia and went through a difficult period of adjustment. She had to learn how to combine what she knew with a more encouraging approach. Here, she has learned to be patient and feels this is an improvement. She feels very lucky, because she has good students and she loves teaching. She likes to share what she knows.



the elbow and thumb in the correct position. The teacher and student can make up chromatic tunes using 1-2-3-4 in half steps. You can do these tunes in any position. All this can be done with pizzicato. The first tune she teaches is *Hot Cross Buns*, using the fingering 3 1 0–, 3 1 0–, 0000 IIII, 3 1 0–. Tanya advocates a loose thumb and strong fingers. Practice placing fingers without the thumb; if the strings are too high this takes too much work and if too low, the strings buzz. Extensions are accomplished by reaching back with the 1st finger. If a student cannot reach, it is OK to rotate. In the forward extension from ½ position the student can check 4th finger with the open string below.

Bow Hold

Tanya suggests starting with a pencil or chopstick because they are light and easier to hold. When placing the hand on the bow, place the inner edge of the thumb in the cave between the leather and the frog. The 2nd finger is opposite the thumb and pointing toward the metal; the rest of the fingers fall into place on the side of the bow. This includes the pinky, which is not on top like on the violin or viola bow hold. When setting the bow hold, hold the bow with the left hand so the right hand does not get tense. She recommends the book *Playing the String Game* by Phyllis Young, which has lot of games designed to teach proper bow hold and left hand position.

Early Bow Strokes

Use only open strings at the beginning. Set the bow on the string. Let the string hold the bow; the pinky is not needed. Have the student hold the bow with the left hand, and set the right hand in good bow hold position. Place the bow at the frog, middle, and then tip, still holding the bow with the left hand. At the frog, the elbow is at a 90° angle; in the middle, the elbow opens up. Start bowing in the middle of the bow, using the left hand to direct the bow so that it stays parallel to the bridge. Play open

string duets with the teacher. Later, let go of the left hand and bow as usual.

Advanced Bowing

When changing the bow, Tanya equates *finger flex* with the image of a painter with a brush with bristles going back and forth. With flat hair or angled hair, the stick is turned toward the player; make sure to keep the wrist flat.

In teaching *bow distribution*, some early exercises involve dividing up the bow:

- Whole Bow ½ ½ (point), Whole Bow ½ ½ (frog)
- Zig Zag: starting at the frog and ending at the tip ♩ ♩ ♩—⅔ (fast bow), ⅓ (slow bow), ⅔ (fast bow)

Sautillé: Start with two strings, very short strokes; play *detaché* on the string with a light bow hold with involvement of the wrist. Then use the motion of the string crossing but only on one string. Another image is of a stirring motion with some wrist involvement. Have the students explore where the best *sautillé* is for each individual stick. Some good exercises and pieces for *sautillé*: scales playing each note four times, Van Goens *Scherzo*, Goltermann *Etude Caprice*.

Method and Technique Books

- Louis Potter, *Art of Cello Playing*. This is a very methodical book; be sure to supplement it with another book with some nice tunes in it.
- Grant, various books in different positions. Tanya especially recommends the thumb position book
- Sevcik, *Op. 2* (bowing) and *Op. 8* (shifting). These are boring, but cover every bowing and shifting combination you will ever encounter.

Teaching Tips

- Tanya thinks it is very important to constantly check the thumb to make sure it is loose. This is difficult to do in a class situation, but she suggests finding a way to incorporate regularly checking the thumb as part of the class.
- Beginning and remedial students often need work on consistency of bow speed and on correct bow changes.

Beginnings

A good beginning is *very important*. Good posture and a good bow arm and left arm are the foundation of everything a cellist does. The cello should be the appropriate size for the student. When standing next to the cello (without an end pin), the scroll should not be higher than the chest. Feet should be flat on the floor, with the left foot forward and the right foot back a bit. The lower bouts are at knee level, with the corners on the knees. The cello is turned slightly to the right with the scroll right behind the left ear. She advocates teaching breathing exercises from the beginning to help prevent tension in the neck and shoulders. Always start a practice session with these exercises.

Left Hand Position

Use pizzicato when starting work on the left hand. Don't let the thumb press too hard. Repeatedly touch the thumb to check that it is loose. The shape of the left hand can be taught by having students hold a small ball with the elbow in a position so the wrist is straight. The left thumb touches the neck on the inside edge of the thumb. Fingers on a cello are more perpendicular to the fingerboard than they are on the violin. If you start in 4th position, it is easier to get

- In the private studio, include the parent as an ally. She advocates two 45-minute lessons a week for beginners with very detailed assignments on how to practice. She also recommends parent involvement in tuning the instrument even in a school situation.
- To work on mistakes, she has her students make a photocopy of their music and then she uses three colors for mistakes. The first week is marked in one color, the second week in

another. If the mistake gets marked a third week, she gets “upset.”

Tanya pays careful attention to Intonation, Rhythm, and Tone Production. She tries to inspire her students to be discriminating in these areas for themselves.

Tanya Remenikova has inspired critical acclaim during her 40-year international performing career. Professor and chamber music coach on the faculty at the University

of Minnesota School of Music, Tanya has attracted students from all over the world. Elizabeth Ericksen is a Lecturer in Music at Carleton College and teaches violin and viola at MacPhail Center. She coaches string quartets in the Augsburg College Suzuki Talent Education program. In the summer, she directs and coaches the Sartory String Quartet Institute, a 2-week day camp for talented young string players sponsored by MacPhail. She is now in her fourth year with Ensemble L'Autunno. †