



CELLO

“Cello Playing is Easy! Part 1: Warm-ups” by Tanya Carey

Book Review by David Holmes

Tanya Carey, the world-renowned cello pedagogue, has undertaken an epic venture for which we cello teachers should be extremely grateful. She is in the process of publishing several books of a 5-volume series that promise to be the most complete series on cello teaching and playing ever undertaken. In addition to the *Warm-ups* book, there are 4 others titled *Scales and Arpeggios*, *Etudes*, *Reading*, and *Repertoire Review-Building*.

Cello Playing is Easy! Part 1: Warm-ups, published in 2007, is based on the premise that, “Warming up your mind and body is crucial to your playing. It helps develop technique, a vocabulary of movement or gesture, and muscle stamina.” To this end, the warm-ups volume is rich with helpful detail on every aspect of playing and teaching the cello, all presented in a progressive, detailed manner. Dr. Carey even provides times on how long each skill should take during a practice, with these varying in length from as little as 3 seconds up to several minutes. She suggests the warm-up part of one’s playing time be 10 minutes for every hour of practice.

One of the most difficult issues we string teachers face (cello *teaching* is hard!) is how to present to our students a daily practice routine that covers the essential cello techniques at their level. This means that how a student’s daily practice is organized is of paramount importance to their

progress and should be determined carefully by the teacher. Dr. Carey has obviously thought deeply about this subject and includes examples of “warm-up planners” for her levels 0 (least advanced) through level 3 (intermediate) in the warm-ups book. She also inserts a whimsical chart created by a student, and a “pick-a-card” method for warm-ups as well. Since she is aware that not all teachers have similar organizational styles, she also provides a brief section titled “What if I Am Not A ‘Planner’ Person?” There are appendices with “Comprehensive Musicianship” lists for 9 technical levels, from the least to the most advanced. She also provides her own “Individual Lesson Tracker” with some in-depth text on how she keeps track of her students’ assignments and their progress. Dr. Carey’s highly detailed approach to teaching is both admirable and a bit daunting. Since her solutions to almost every teaching and playing problem represent a personal, and by definition, unique approach, it can take several readings to get some of the points she is making; the text can seem dense because of the wealth of ideas presented.

Dr. Carey divides the text portion of her book (pages 2-125) into three main designations that are clearly presented in the table of contents: 1) body (B), 2) sound (S), and 3) pitch concepts (PC). She sections each of these headings into subgroups of warm-up routines. For example, under “Sound Concepts (SC),” which involve non-playing bow activities, there are 3 larger divisions: SC-1: Bow Balance Games, SC-2: Tracking, and SC-3: String Crossings. Under the String Crossing subgroup are skills titled: Fishing Pole, Rock and Roll, Handle Bar, and Pivot Bow. To know what each of these names mean and how to do them, one need only go to the text portion, which has the warm-ups clearly presented with bullet points that are further enhanced with many small, clear color pictures of Dr. Carey happily demonstrating each skill. There is a color-coding component to her organization as well. She presents in red capital letters the skills she feels need to be done daily, and presents “etude bonuses” in green, and “bonus repertoire pieces” in purple. In the text there are also occasional pithy comments in red bold-faced type. Examples of these are: “Balance is at every contact point along the bow.” “Listen for ringing notes in everything you play.” “The arm moves the fingers where they need to go; the fingers go up and down.” “You are a linked system.” And, “Sound is the teacher.”

I have been going through Dr. Carey’s warm-ups book and practicing a number of her ideas at the cello. Here are a few suggestions I have gleaned from her book:

- Dr. Carey’s description of left arm weight as a “golden arch” created by the weighted pillars of the elbow



SC-2c Rowboats (2 minutes)

Place your bow on a string. Extend your arm out and bend it back like you are rowing with an oar. The weight of your arm is always balanced on the string. Come to a T for tone. Move the bow one inch towards the tip. Repeat the exercise. Move your bow toward the frog the same way. Repeat the exercise. (Excerpt from page 21 of *Cello Playing is Easy! Part 1: Warm-ups*. Used with Permission)

and fingers was a new idea (to me) for holding the string down. It's a lovely, integrated idea that makes clear how the whole left arm works when playing the cello: just like the arch that holds up a bridge, an arch is created in the lower side of the arm and wrist in response to arm weight distributed between the elbow and fingers.

- To keep a strong tone at the tip, support with the entire back and with the leg muscles. Stand up and play the cello to reconnect to your back muscles; sit down while playing keeping the same body. A tremolo motion from frog to tip and back can re-establish the feel necessary for an easy, full tone throughout the bow.
- When attempting new and challenging things, one can counter the “try-hards” (or working with a level of intensity that causes unnecessary tension) by smiling or standing up and wiggling. I was intrigued to find that smiling really does help! It causes a relaxation in the face and neck muscles and promotes breathing.
- “Bow change motions are rounded, not

straight. The feel of a legato bow stroke is pull, pull.” Use the momentum at the end of one bow stroke to help you coast through the turn.

- Sautillé tips: Have the bow at a slightly oblique angle (frog towards the bridge) and play with flat hair about two inches toward the tip from the balance point. Release the arm weight with a slight raise in the wrist and transfer of the weight to the elbow. Avoid pressing with the index finger. The bow hair should be tightened just enough to help with the bounce. Instead of raising the shoulder, shift the balance of weight of the bow to the middle finger. When there are quick string crossings, keep the bow close to both strings.
- Dr. Carey has nifty vibrato hints, too. Her “Walking Vibrato” trick is to play a 4th finger with consistent vibrato while you tap with the 3rd finger. Let the motion of the vibrato then lead to a transfer to the 3rd finger for an uninterrupted vibrato between fingers. Now tap the 2nd finger, etc. When transferring to a higher finger from a

lower one, tap the higher numbered finger on the next string lower.

“Rubber Arm” involves vibrating with “outrageous” arm positions (arm way high, way low, or too far forward or back) to prove that when vibrato is balanced it can be done in a variety of unusual arm positions.

The above suggestions are just a very small sampling of the many fabulous ideas that are in Tanya Carey's *Cello Playing is Easy! Part 1: Warm-ups*. Her vast teaching experience, remarkable intelligence, and keen organizational skills have come together to produce one of the most useful and comprehensive cello teaching and playing books I've ever read. I'd recommend it to any cello teacher or player. Video clips of Tanya Carey working with her students on the warm-up exercises will be available soon at www.celloplayingiseasy.com. If you have a book you will be able to access the videos for free; if not, people can subscribe to the videos only.

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