



# VIOLA

## Problem Solvers—New Materials

by Annette Caruthers

Every now and then, a student presents a new problem, and I have to go looking for different materials. My pedagogy background included Suzuki Teacher Training and I taught in the Suzuki department of the MacPhail Center, but many of the students I have as beginners lately are older than most Suzuki program beginners; and most students really love something they can play with a CD or with someone else.

*New Directions for Strings* is a comprehensive method book published by the FJH Music Company Inc. ([www.fjhmusic.com](http://www.fjhmusic.com)) that I really like. It has attractive use of color, tips for caring for the viola, a brief history of viola playing, introduces each hand separately at first, with melodies students will already know. Often you will find the notation, “Memorize this piece,” which I love because once something is memorized we can use it to work on posture issues that may have come up, and to increase the student’s repertoire. There are tips for improvisation, basic theory, etc. to meet the National Standards that have been recently developed for string teaching. Really great are the two CDs it comes with so students can hear what they are playing and play along.

Often students want to play with a friend or sibling who also plays, but sometimes they’re not at the same level of ability. *Strings Extraordinaire!* by Robert S. Frost, published by Neil Kjos Music Company was developed exactly for this problem. Each duet in the book has an easy accompaniment part. Michael Kimber ([kimbermichael@qwest.net](mailto:kimbermichael@qwest.net)) also has a *Suite in Baroque Style* for two violas that can be played as a solo only playing the top line, or duet with

the second easier part added. Group lessons could also use these materials!

Brand new in 2008 is the *String Player’s Guide to the Orchestra* by Susan C. Brown, published by Alfred Publishing Co, Inc. (<http://alfred.com>). I am using this book with a student who plays solos and etudes on a fairly high level, but still has difficulty sight-reading. I think she has not internalized enough of the rhythmic patterns that only seem to come in orchestral music. The book has scales in the key needed for an excerpt, using the motives and bowing styles of the composition. Then come studies with patterns that are used in the excerpt, to prepare technically, and then the actual excerpts, taken from standard orchestral repertoire by Mozart, Beethoven, Britten, Tchaikovsky, etc. Orchestra teachers might really love this item, as it appears to be designed for orchestra and individual use.

I think all of these items could be used by orchestra directors or private teachers. We all have issues dealing with students of varying levels, or needing a new approach to catch someone’s attention, and/or develop reading and technical skills. I love it that new books are still being published, and seem to be designed to appeal to today’s students.

*Annette Caruthers is a violist, and teacher of violin and viola in the Twin Cities. A former member of the Minnesota Orchestra and Utah Symphony, former Principal Violist of the Minnesota Opera Orchestra, she is now teaching full-time from studios in St. Louis Park and Southwest Minneapolis. [annettemusician@gmail.com](mailto:annettemusician@gmail.com)* ♪