



# VIOLIN

## Building a Rich Violin Tone - “Sticky-Style with a Smile” (Using Paul Rolland’s Methods)

by Ann Anderson

Building a beautiful tone must begin immediately for the beginning student when the bow is introduced. The Suzuki method books include “Tonalization” exercises that are excellent. For the teacher who does not use the Suzuki books, warm-ups for the bow hand are as essential as the playing of scales to center in on pitches.

That said, I must begin with the basic problem of setting the violin on the shoulder to enable the student to play a “straight” bow on the string without the bow sliding. I worked with Paul Rolland in Gmunden, Austria on developing the violin set-up. (The UMD library has the complete tapes of Paul Rolland’s teaching techniques. Come up to Duluth to see the tapes.)

The “Statue of Liberty” gesture works well for beginners: extend the violin out from the body, look at the back of the violin, bring the end pin to the neck and move the violin to the left shoulder. For very young students he recommended using a rolled up washcloth on the shoulder. Other students may wish to have a shoulder rest. Of course, the chin rest is an issue as well. Some prefer centered chin rests; others prefer the side approach.

The beginning set-up for every violinist is extremely important, before the exercises of bow control can begin.

### First step for beginners:

I have a bag of cardboard toilet tubes for the students to hold in the left hand, while bowing through the tube. Make sure the edges don’t snag the bow. Masking tape will help on the edges. Say your rhythms and play your rhythms. This is an easy time to check the right hand fingers on the bow. Don’t forget to check the thumb! Pretend you are holding a ball.

Mr. Rolland was clever with teaching rhythms using phrases such as: “High Fiddle, Low Fiddle,” “Jingle Bells” and “Dad’s Old Fashioned Root Beer.” My

favorite at this season is, “I like apple pie.” (Second phrase starts up-bow.) Ask the students to make up a phrase. These can be used with pizzicato as well as the bow. The students must say the rhythms, not just the teacher. Make the exercise fun.

Placing the bow on the strings is easy if you extend the forearm parallel with the violin. Start with the middle section of the bow and pull down to the tip. Play only in the upper half of the bow. (Open and close the arm.) Problem: the upper right arm moves. Keep it still. Only open and close the forearm.

The most difficult part of the bowing process is getting to the lower part of the bow. The upper part of the arm must move down. Not too much, not too little, just right. The “Goldilocks” idea. Avoid locking the wrist. It must not be bent at a severe angle. Just moving the arm and wrist without the bow is a good idea. Wave the arm in the air, or use the analogy of painting a canvas or the wall. I do hold the student’s hand to draw a nice clear sound.

### For the moderate to advanced student:

The beginning set-up of the bow is one problem, but the teacher must also work with the older student and continue to develop tone. I find that many students come to me playing scales but with no knowledge of the various bow styles.

Establish a routine of bow styles to be used with one-octave scales, two-octave scales and three-octave scales. You must teach major *and* minor scales. (I’m a big advocate of teaching the three minor scales just as a part of the student’s theory: natural, harmonic and melodic scales.)

Now we come to the “sticky” part. *Bowings on the String*

Detaché: Turn the wrist slightly to the left and gently “grab” the string with the bow. Don’t let the bow skid on top of the string. (And...the bow must not slide at

an angle on the string—it must run in the same track; this is an upper arm problem.) Use the exercise of rotating the hand to the left and to the right to work on balance. Down-bow weight on the index finger, Up-bow weight reverses.

Paul Rolland’s exercise for playing the bow in a relaxed manner started with playing on the A and D strings together—down-bow—draw a “smile” and swing the arm up at the tip, leaving the tip of the bow on the string. As you draw the up-bow, lift the bow off the strings and curl your fingers at the frog. It’s really neat how this concept loosens up a stiff arm and hand. More advanced students have improved their bowing with this elementary move.

Staccato: If developing the “sticky” bow is not successful for the detaché, move to the staccato bowing. Pressure first and release. “Take a bite out of the string.” I also use slurred staccato bowing: two, three and four notes—up-bow and down-bow.

Martelé: For all of us Galamian students, we will never forget playing Kreutzer’s *Etude No. 7* with the octaves. Pressure—release. Start with the upper half of the bow and eventually stretch out the bow to a Grand Martelé.

I have made up an orange book marker for the students from my *Practice Smart Kit* to place in their music as a reminder of the varieties of bowings. The other section is *Bowings off the String*—spiccato, sautillé, ricochet, spring bow arpeggio.

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