



VIOLIN

And We're Off...Off the String That Is!

by Ann Anderson

I developed five multi-colored “Book Markers” for my students years ago and they’re still viable as reminders for the students to center their attention each day on a different technical problem as they practice their scales, etudes and repertoire. In the Winter 2010/11 issue of *String Notes*, I wrote about developing a rich violin tone with my orange colored *Bow Stroke Marker* with various bowings *On The String*: detaché, staccato, slurred staccato and martelé. Included in my book marker are also four bowings *Off The String*: spiccato, sautillé, ricochet, and the spring bow arpeggio.

Rarely do I find my college violinists and violists have any knowledge of the off the string bowings. Teaching the various bowings, particularly the off the string bowings, is sometimes a difficult project and is easily avoided in favor of learning a new scale or a new piece with the detaché bow.

Use the first ten minutes of your student lessons with warm-up routines on *Open Strings* without music. Start with the bow in the upper-half of the bow and extend the bow to the frog using rhythms and phrases. Too many students play in the upper-half of the bow all the time, but if the warm-up routine concentrates on the bow with no musical pages or notes to distract, good bowing habits using the full bow will be developed.

On The String bowings are the start, but now continue your bow control teaching with *Off The String* variations. Spiccato is a necessary technique. Last night I used spiccato with slight variations as we accompanied our guests for a Pops Concert with ABBA. It’s a necessary stroke.

If lessons are not prepared for the week, I challenge teachers to get creative to excite

your students into practicing something for fun the following week. Who knows, they might even practice the assigned lesson. Use a variety of bowings with familiar tunes.

A string teacher in the Detroit area where I was teaching used current pop songs as a part of her instructions. The students were assigned a scale or an etude. With the successful completion of the assignment, their reward was to play a popular tune. Her string program was thriving and the students were enthused and excited about their instruments. (Have you considered writing out popular music to supplement your violin books?) How about teaching the *Ashokan Farewell* or the *Irish Washerwoman*?

With the *spiccato* stroke, start the students with full, flat hair first, then roll the bow over using partial hair for a brushed stroke. Experiment with the bow using the lower half. What sound do you want? What articulation do you like? Move the bow in different parts of the lower half to find the sound you and the student like and where control is the easiest. Every bow is different; every student’s approach is different. Fritz Kreisler’s *Rigaudon* is a possible suggestion for working the detaché and the spiccato bowings.

Sautillé is not hard. Start bowing on two strings, e.g. D and A. Bow down-bow on the D and up-bow on the A. Rotate the wrist using very little arm. Find the spot on the bow that bounces (lower half) and increase your speed. The right hand pressure on the bow must be light (don’t push the thumb into the stick) and the fingers must be flexible. The execution is just a small motion. Draw an egg! The right hand motion must be circular at a fast speed. Edmund Severn’s *Perpetual Motion* is an

easy piece.

Ricochet is a thrown stroke. Don’t try to control the stroke immediately. Just throw the bow on the string (in the middle) and let it bounce many times. Then start to catch it. Bounce twice, bounce three times and catch the stroke on an up-bow. Experiment with the speed of the bow bounce... faster in the upper half...slower as you move to the lower half. The *William Tell Overture* comes to mind, of course.

The *Spring Bow Arpeggio* is the most difficult stroke to master and is used in more advanced violin literature (e.g. Mendelssohn’s violin concerto in the cadenza section of the first movement). Still, it is an intriguing bow to play with chords, G major, g minor. Try this in one of your creative teaching moments. Several techniques have been used in teaching this stroke: accenting the first stroke or dropping the bow as if using a ricochet stroke. Again, the right hand must not clutch the bow. Light thumb pressure. Use the “wet noodle” approach as a starter.

I remember trying to console a young student at Galamian’s Meadowmount camp. He told me he auditioned on the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto for the camp. However, as he cried over his supper, he told me Mr. Galamian was only letting him play various bowings on *Open Strings*. He was devastated.

However, the right hand has to have some special attention without the left hand. *Open Strings Are Great. —Have Fun With The Bow!*

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