



# CHAMBER MUSIC

## Hey... Wake up!! That is NOT a rest!

By Tom Rosenberg

*"Billy... Billy!!... WAKE UP BILLY!!!" Billy's eyes snapped open and his head popped up. He suddenly realized he was holding his violin. "Hub?... Oh yeah...", he said groggily. "Sorry about that... I had an eighth rest in my music so I stopped for a rest."*

OK, so maybe I am exaggerating a bit, but a version of the above episode happens far too often in orchestra and chamber music rehearsals, and dare I say...concerts. I believe the term "rest" is one of the worst words we routinely use when describing something we see on the page of music in front of us. Really, just about the last thing that one should do during a rest is rest! I would argue that most of the time, when a rest is in the music, what should occur is exactly the opposite of what we would normally think.

For the sake of demonstrating, consider a half bar rest at the end of a  $\frac{4}{4}$  bar in the cello part of an Allegro movement of a string quartet. Here are just some of the things that should be happening during that rest of perhaps one second or less:

- Careful listening
- Preparing the left hand for the next note
- Preparing the bow for the next note
- Thinking about the character, articulation, vibrato and volume of the next note
- Looking at a colleague with whom you are about to play perfectly
- Sub-dividing for rhythmic accuracy
- Breathing musically and using body language to prepare for the next entrance

Does that sound like resting to you? And yet, it is amazing how often the instant a rest is seen, it is somehow a signal not to do any of the things listed above. It is amazing how quickly a bow can end up in a lap, a violin taken away from playing position, a cellist's hand come off the fingerboard, etc.

I use another term when teaching and coaching when it comes to a rest. It is called an AUS, not a REST. An AUS is a made up

word that stands for: **A**ctive **U**nit of **S**ilence. I learned this from a percussion player in the Philadelphia Orchestra. It is a great concept, and at least removes the idea of resting when one is seen in the music. Even an AUS of several measures (or much more) should not cause resting. Especially in a solo or chamber work, if the player seems to become disengaged during the time they are not actually playing, it has a detrimental effect on the performance.

Here is another reason a long rest is not a rest. How many times have you as a performer, or have you observed your students, come in wrong after a rest? I believe one reason this happens so often is that the moment one sees all those empty measures, the tendency is to shut down, or let your brain momentarily rest! Because the beginning of the rest caused a momentary shutdown, counting and/or listening at the beginning of the rest did not occur. Then you might start wondering, "Am I in measure 4 or 5 of this rest, and what beat is the group on now?" Before you know it, what should be the simplest thing to do well on the entire page turns into an embarrassing mistake.

For very short rests, another great term to replace the word rest with is *breath*. As in, "...don't be late coming in after the eighth *breath*!" By using this term, it helps the student realize that they need to breathe musically during the rest to give a musical motion when coming in after the rest. The beginning of a rest is also most often the end of the note that precedes it, and therefore the bow release point of that note. (There are exceptions to this rule, such as when the note is shortened by a dot over it, often referred to as a staccato marking.) If two or more members of a group have a series of quarter notes with quarter beat rests in between, it will help them all start

and release together if they all breathe on those rests.

I often try to get students to understand the role breathing has in controlling their cueing and the character they will play with when entering after a rest. They often need to be told which beat or part of the beat to breathe on during a rest to help themselves or a colleague come in correctly. A great example of this is the opening of the "American" Quartet, Opus 96 by Dvorak. To the listener and to the other members of the group, the 1<sup>st</sup> violin can seem to start playing on the downbeat, when, in fact, it enters on the off-beat. The result can sound confusing to both the rest of the group and the audience, as there won't seem to be enough beats in the bar. The low F eighth note in the cello will sound like it is on the start of the fourth beat instead of as a pickup to the next downbeat.

However, with proper breathing, it sounds right. As shown in the example below, if the 1<sup>st</sup> violin gives a good preparation breath on the first beat, the 2<sup>nd</sup> violin a good preparation breath on the third beat, and the cellist a good preparation breath on the fourth beat, the cello whole note F will seem to be in its correct place on the downbeat. I usually have the quartet practice this without playing their instruments to get it to feel right. Once that is done, the notes are added back in. On the second measure, the violist can count three quarter beats, breathe on the fourth beat and come in with confidence and comfort on the downbeat of the third measure with the beautiful viola melody that starts this great masterpiece.

It is plain to see from this article that the term rest is so ubiquitous that it can't truly be replaced in a practical way. Honestly, I do use the term rest in lessons and coachings. But I also use the term AUS

with all of my students. Once they learn not to rest during the rests, I can safely start again using the term *rest*. But, in teaching, the concept of the rest *not* being a rest is extremely important, and a topic often overlooked.

*Tom Rosenberg teaches chamber music and cello from his home in Saint Paul and at several local colleges. His students are frequent prize-winners and many have performed on NPR's "From the Top" program. His performing career includes being a member of several different chamber ensembles and a substitute performing with the Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Since 1981, he has been Artistic Director of the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition for which he was a co-recipient of the 2007 Indiana Governor's Arts Award. A three-time Naumburg Chamber Music Award finalist, he also is a recipient of the McKnight Performing Artist fellowship, the "Master Studio Teacher Award" from MNSOTA in 2004, and the "Arts Educator of the Year" by the Michigan-Indiana Arts Council. [www.tomrosenbergmusic.com](http://www.tomrosenbergmusic.com). †*

4 Vln 4 Vln Vcl Rhythm of Breaths in M. 1

## Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96 ("The American")

### I.

Allegro ma non troppo. M.M. ♩ = 112.

Violine I.

Violine II.

Bratsche.

Violoncell.