



# FIDDLE

## Improvising from the Beginning Jazz String Curriculum for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade String Orchestra Part 2: Melody and Chord Progression

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Learn how to improvise from the ground up, and build a strong foundation of rhythm, melody, harmony and form. In a series of articles on basic instruction you can give to your 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade beginning orchestra students, we will be learning how to play accompaniment parts while half the group practices improvisation all at once. This will be a safe place for you and your students to experiment for the first time with spontaneous composition. You will be able to model this for your students, one step at a time. This table of contents lists the series of lesson plans that will come out, one topic in each String Notes magazine article:

- Sound and Silence
- Melody and Chord Progression
- Long and Short Melodies
- Rhythm
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- Ornamentation of Melody and Rhythm
- Melody Notes outside of the Chord
- Preparing for Harmonic Change
- Chord Tones
- Guide Tone Lines
- Ornamentation of Guide Tone Lines
- Harmonic Progression

### Melody and Melodic Guide

A familiar tune can be used from the beginning string repertoire, e.g. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Mary Had a Little Lamb*, *Go Tell Aunt Rhody*, *Are you Sleeping*, *Long Long Ago*, or for more advanced students, *Over the Rainbow*, etc. Use easy songs that the student knows rather than a new melody.

First, learn the melody.

- 1) Do each phrase rubato, playing each pitch very slowly. Look at the shape of the melody.
- 2) Memorize each phrase shape.
- 3) Then experiment with different rhythms with each phrase.
- 4) Combine the phrases with different rhythms, still observing the shape of the melody; e.g. *Long Long Ago* starts like climbing a mountain (2 measures), diving down a waterfall (1 measure), getting up, and doing it all over again (1 measure).

*Long Long Ago* (ABA Form)

Once you have memorized a melody, it functions in your musical mind as a guide when you improvise. The melody is like a road map on a familiar path. Through the journey of the form and harmonic progression of the song, the melody helps guide you. As Hal Crook says:

“This is an important advantage to have *before* trying to solo on a tune since it greatly reduces the chances of losing your place while improvising. And if you do get lost, finding your place in a song’s form will be much easier if you can hear the song’s melody while listening to the harmony (which is often outlined or implied by the melody).

The following procedure emphasizes visual as well as aural practice and can be used to memorize song melodies:

- 1) Rewrite each phrase of the song’s melody using closed notes without stems, i.e. simply notate the actual sequence of pitch levels in the melody without assigning rhythmic values. (Choose a song with a simple melody for now. Save busy active melodies for later.)
- 2) While reading the rhythmically adjusted version of the melody, i.e. playing it by eye, play the first melodic phrase (or just a portion if it is lengthy) out of tempo (rubato), four or five consecutive times.
- 3) Play the same melodic phrase four or five more times, rubato without reading the music i.e. playing it by ear and memory, glancing at the music only when necessary.”

### Chord Progression

Learning a chord progression for a song is just as important as learning the melody. Apply the same steps that you did for learning the melody until you know the chords by memory.

*Long Long Ago* Chord Progression:

D	D	A	D	
D	D	A A <sup>7</sup>	D	
A	A <sup>7</sup> D	A	A <sup>7</sup> D	
D	D	A A <sup>7</sup>	D	

See the music examples for written out notes.

First, learn the chord fingerings. Then focus more on keeping the *rhythm* than playing all of the notes!!!

Improvise on the chord progression to *Long Long Ago* by thinking the melody but not playing it. Be sure you know the chords as well as you know the melody. When you know the chords, you can improvise by adding notes that are within the chord. D chord notes are: D, F<sup>♯</sup>, A. A chord notes are: A, C<sup>♯</sup>, E. Add a couple of changes in the melody or rhythm. Keep it simple at first and experiment.

Teachers: The best way to improvise on the chord progression

is one soloist at a time. Have the entire class strum with violins and violas playing guitar style. Hum the melody for the soloist to help them keep their place! The soloist is the only person who uses their bow. When they are done soloing, they look to the person next to them and nod to let them know it is their turn. At first, it is easier for each soloist to play through the entire melody. Later on soloists can trade 4s, which means every 4 measures there is a new soloist.

Soloists: When trading 4-measure phrases, don't start at the beginning every time as the class may be in the middle of the song. You need to improvise exactly where the rest of the class is in the melody and chord progression.

In our next article we will look at Long and Short Melodies. Stay tuned!

*Cristina Seaborn has produced an instructional video for fiddling Anyone Can Play Country Fiddle (Mel Bay), CDs entitled Inside the Heart of a Musician, Seaborn Breeze, and Spirit Wind, and many arrangements for string orchestra of fiddle music, jazz, Celtic, Cajun, and original. ♪*

#### Easy chords to Long Long Ago

Violin and viola play guitar style (to strum, use your thumb or back of fingernails).

#### Advanced chords to Long Long Ago

Violin and viola play guitar style (to strum, use your thumb or back of fingernails).

#### Advanced bass line to Long Long Ago