



# CHAMBER MUSIC

## These Are A Few Of My Favorite Things!

by Tom Rosenberg

I have had this really crazy recurring dream that goes something like this...I see Julie Andrews and the von Trapp family kids...only instead of a bunch of scared looking kids in a bedroom during a thunderstorm, they are all in my basement music studio with string instruments and looking like a dazed and confused string quartet. Are you with me so far??? OK...now for the really weird part! From seemingly out of the air, a wonderful orchestra starts to play a familiar 4-bar intro in  $\frac{3}{4}$  from *The Sound of Music*, and Julie Andrews starts to sing that oh-so-familiar tune...*except* there are new lyrics....

*Know-ing just one sim-ple great math equa-tion.....  
And that a rest is no time to be la-zin'.....  
Know-ing your Prhy-thms and daring to sing.....  
These Are A Few Of My Fav-Or-Ite Things!!*

Four more bars of interlude, then the next verse...

*Why are there three 8ths in ev-ry full quar-ter?...  
Use-ing a met-ro-nome keeps things in or-der....  
Why do most en-tran-ces start from the string?...  
These Are A Few Of My Fav-Or-Ite Things!!*

OK...by this point I usually wake up in a cold sweat and screaming, "No...no...not again," (or something like that), knowing I have had that horrible recurring nightmare.

Here is the irony though. I basically say those things to my students nearly everyday, and *not* in a dream. Those things really are some of my favorite things to talk about to all of my students, but especially to my chamber music students.

### Knowing just one simple great math equation....

Well, actually it is a sort of combination of words and math and has two versions: one for pessimists and one for optimists. Here they are:

**D + K = S** or **D - K = F**

**D** stands for *Dedication* and *Determination*.

**K** stands for *Knowledge*

**S** stands for *Success!!*

**F** stands for *Frustration!!*

If you know what to do and how to do it, with enough dedication and determination, (and sometimes a bit of luck!), you will likely have success (**D + K = S**). So as this applies to practicing and rehearsing, if you work hard and practice or rehearse intelligently, efficiently, and know good techniques and how to apply them, you will greatly increase your chances to attain your short-term and long-term goals. Or conversely, you could practice 6 hours a day, but if you don't know that your bow hold and left hand positions need correcting, that you are holding the instrument in a faulty manner, and how to correct those problems (**D - K = F**), you are

likely to meet with much Frustration!!

### And that a rest is no time to be lazin'...

I detest the term "rest." It causes so much trouble. Because we have all been told from the beginning that those symbols we see in the music are rests, it seems only natural to relax mentally and physically when we see one! It is amazing how many times the only time musicians make a noticeable error is when they are "resting." I tell students that a "rest" is not a rest, and in fact is the exact opposite of a rest called an *AUS*. An *AUS* is an **A**ctive **U**nit of **S**ilence. Here are some of the things that happen during a "rest"—breathing, thinking of the next note, preparing the left hand, preparing the bow, counting, subdividing, listening to what is going on around you, making eye contact, etc., etc.! That "rest" is no time to relax. It is an *AUS*!

### Know-ing your Prhy-thms...

Prhythms are what I call pitches and rhythms that each player must know in order for the piece to fit together. These are the basic building blocks of the piece and the individual parts, but not necessarily the inflections, bow directions, bow strokes, dynamics and other important musical elements. However, especially in a chamber music group, everyone has to do at least the basic work to learn their prhythms or a coaching and/or a rehearsal will grind to a halt. It is a polite and shorthand way for saying, "At the very least, for the benefit of everyone else in the group, please learn your part immediately!"

### and daring to sing...

My guess is that there is possibly no music teacher, coach or conductor who does not sing in a lesson, coaching or rehearsal at least occasionally. Students need to do the same, both figuratively and literally. They need to make their instruments sing, but I think they also need to be comfortable enough to actually sing to each other, and even with each other. It is amazing how efficient a little singing can be in a rehearsal. Once students overcome their self-consciousness about it, singing helps them hear natural inflection for them to imitate, often causes them to move more naturally, hear the entire piece better, know who has what where, and often is a fun change of pace that can lead to lots of laughter.

### Why are there three 8ths in ev-ry full quar-ter?...

My students all know this one. Before you brush it off as crazy, listen to how many times a student (or professionals too) will start a note exactly in the correct place, but will let it end in an arbitrary manner. The classic case involves quarter notes. We are all taught to think that there are 2 eighth notes in a quarter note. But, if the player thinks of only 2 eighth notes to be in that quarter note, they often release the note when they get to that second eighth note, thus actually playing just an eighth note instead of a full-valued quarter note. But to play a *full* quarter note, you have to also think of a

third eighth note...the one that begins the next beat and thus ends the previous quarter note. I wonder how many times I have said to a student, "I really believe the composer knew the difference between an eighth note and a quarter note and would have written an eighth note there if that is what he or she wanted...they wrote a quarter note, so *please* play a quarter note!" And that explains why (even though it sounds like I am crazy) I teach that there are 3 eighth notes in every full quarter.

### **Use-ing a met-ro-nome keeps things in or-der....**

One of the greatest time savers and tools for success is the metronome. When used cleverly and regularly, it not only helps build inner rhythm, it helps train the fingers and bow to work cleanly, efficiently and in sync with each other. And with the newer metronomes that play several octaves of pitches, they greatly help with intonation too. If all members of the group have the same target tempos and practice their individual parts with the metronome to work with those tempos, many elements involved in putting

a piece together will happen more quickly. This is amplified when a group has limited rehearsal time, which is often the case with student groups.

### **Why do most en-tran-ces start from the string....**

Playing at a high level in a chamber music group requires many things, including precision. When it comes to playing exactly together and starting notes exactly together with others, it is *almost always* necessary to start things from the string. It is true both for arco and pizzicato entrances. I learned this lesson from Raphael Hillyer, violist for many years of the Juilliard Quartet who believed there were no exceptions to this rule. With only rare exceptions, he was right! Feeling the string the instant before it needs to start moving will help two or more members of the group play exactly together. It eliminates the probability that two or more players trying to drop the bow onto the string will do so from different distances above the string. When those distances are not exactly the same, small differences will occur as to when each player gets the string

to start moving. If all the bows start from the string, then they are guaranteed to be all starting from exactly the same place. There are certainly times that notes must start from above the string, such as when a ricochet bowing is called for. A clear example of that is in the slow movement of the *Fifth Bartok Quartet*. In those cases, a great deal of rehearsal time and energy is needed to insure those strokes start from exactly the same height, or the bows will bounce at different speeds and at different volumes.

Cue the music!

*When the group fights, When they don't sing,  
When their rhythm's bad,  
I simply just tell them my favorite things,  
And when they improve...I'm glad!*

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