

All-State: *Sound Innovations* (new method series) by Bob Phillips

presented by Bob Phillips — reported by Denise McLellan

Music publishers have utilized advances in technology to make available a new method series *Sound Innovations*. Teachers may choose a standard edition or customize their students' learning materials in the method series before placing it in their hands.

Time-tested instruction is based on the expertise of the authors and feedback from music teachers. The pedagogy follows state and national music standards and is presented in a clear uncluttered format. The books are organized into six levels to provide benchmarks of progress, goals with the exercises, and key concepts.

The *Standard Edition* includes a master class DVD that can be used throughout the year with topics ranging from setting up the instrument, playing techniques, and samples of performance. There is also an MP3 CD with recordings of every line in the student book with both a melody track, and accompaniment track. A Tempo Changer program lets the track be sped up or slowed down. The method is available on the SmartMusic program with free access to the first 100 lines of music.

The *Director's Choice Edition* includes everything in the standard edition and offers opportunity to customize the method at Alfred.com/soundinnovations. This includes personalizing the cover and the introductory page with the name of your school group or possibly an advocacy letter of introduction signed by an administrator of your choice. Pedagogy preferences for arco/pizzicato technique, pitch direction, optional note names can be chosen as well as adding enrichment pages after each level. Tune selection by genre or preferred individual tunes will reflect the teachers' experiences and preferences. Price determines the amount of customization by the teacher and includes customization of the CD to match the method developed.

The beginning pages of Book I include a brief instrument history and a clear photo representation of a violin and bow with the parts labeled in detail. Pictures depicted throughout the book are black and white drawings with instrument or bow figures in blue. Notation information is presented initially on one page for easy reference so that songs don't seem cluttered.

Level 1 is titled: *Sound Beginnings*. New notes are presented in clearly labeled sections. Illustrations clearly show levels of the

bow and give the vocabulary for bow work in bold print. It also describes bowing lanes (the center lane). The *Can-Can* is written clearly, and in quarter and half notes which reads much easier than the duet version in *Essential Elements* written with eighth and quarter notes. Counting is clearly



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explained with notation under the notes in some exercises. Opportunity for student self-assessment is provided with a check off box listing skills like playing position, bow hold, left-hand placement, bowing levels, counting quarter, half, and eighth notes, and playing the D scale.

Level 2 is titled: *Sound Fundamentals*. A helpful illustration labels the different parts of the bow and gives short one-measure examples to try using them. Duets are presented explaining harmony and with tempo markings. Definitions of a chord and an arpeggio are highlighted. There are three G-string practice pages. Presentation of hooked bowing, slurs, whole steps, half steps, accidentals (C and F naturals) follow. The second assessment check off for students lists: correct bow division, playing in different tempos, playing G-string notes, staccato and tenuto, slurred and hooked bowing, and playing C natural and F natural.

Level 3 is titled: *Sound Musicianship* and begins with showing three bowing lanes including piano lane (near the fingerboard), forte lane (near the bridge), and mezzo forte lane (center). Dynamics are explained and included on each exercise thereafter. Improvisation, rehearsal marks, conducting patterns, subdivision of long notes and rests are among the concepts also presented in level three.

Level 4 is labeled: *Sound Techniques*. The

E-string notes are introduced with diagrams for each note. The C-string notes for violas and cellos are introduced and violins and basses can play along and review.

Level 5 is labeled: *Sound Development*. Eighth rests at the beginning or end of a beat, and dotted quarter notes with eighths are clearly explained. Double stops, crescendo, decrescendo, ritardando, and fermata are introduced.

Level 6 is called: *Sound Performance*. Orchestra arrangement explanation, listening etiquette, blues, pentatonic scale, composing, and performing a solo are included. A comprehensive glossary is provided at the back of the book, as well as a full page fingering chart diagram of 1st position.

Common teaching tunes are used throughout the method book with a total of 185 numbered exercises or tunes. There is no doubt the opportunity to add enrichment pages for technique, history, theory, ensembles, etc. after each level provides a buffet of additional materials for study.

Teachers can create a customized method book and then place an order for them. In reviewing the book options online for use with our students the following options were chosen:

- The front cover identifies the school, and the group specifically. There will be a letter of introduction on the inside printed on the cover page from the directors, with names. Pizzicato was chosen for the option for starting with either arco or pizzicato. Letter names in the note heads will appear for six pages. Starting with descending patterns to promote good left hand shape was another option chosen.
- There are optional substitutions offered for some of the tunes in the book. An example of this was the tune *Sweet Betsy from Pike* that had a repeated pattern of slurring on two notes with one note following. *Iroquois Lullaby* allows the student to use an even bow speed on the down-bow and the up-bow. This was chosen instead in order to wait until players were more mature to handle uneven bow speed.

The accompaniments on the CD seemed enjoyable and easy to follow. The

tempo changer was easy to use with the CD in the computer. The DVD had clips for each new concept presented. I am excited to present the new books to the students; I was not previously acquainted with the series. Since I teach elementary strings, grades four and five, I am most interested

in the first two books.

Book II is more of a topical book and the skills taught in the book can be presented in any order depending on the student needs. When a new rhythm is presented it is with a familiar key. When a new key is introduced it is with a familiar

rhythm. There is no customization online for this book.

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