



# TECHNOLOGY

## Tech in the Practice Room

### 5 iPhone/iPad Apps to Optimize Students' Practice Time

by Joel Salvo

During my days as a student, settling into a practice room was akin to setting up camp. After unpacking my cello, I would empty a tote bag with my tuner, an oversized metronome, some recording gear, and a handful of batteries. If I wanted a video recorder, that of course had to be checked out from the music office and would involve unloading the contents of yet another bag. Students today are able to fit all this practice gear and more into their pocket by way of smartphone and tablet apps. Obviously most students are already tech-savvy enough these days to know this. However, from my experience, what students do not always know is which apps are the most beneficial to their practice. I have sifted through a multitude of music apps and found five which stand out above the rest. Each app goes beyond just space-saving convenience and offers some really exciting features that will help students get the most out of their practice time.

#### ***Pitch* by FrozenApe. Cost: Free**

*Pitch* makes fine tuning easier and allows students to really practice improving their intonation instead of always merely adjusting it. *Pitch* does away with the standard needle gauge and replaces it with a circular meter that displays in large font exactly how many cents above or below a pitch you are playing. No more squinting at a needle and tiny hash marks. When tested in lessons, my students zeroed in on each pitch much more quickly than they ever had before with a standard needle gauge tuner. Fortunately too, *Pitch* has more to offer than just good looks. By far its best feature is that the meter freezes in position well after you have stopped playing a note. With this feature, students can hone their ability to hear the center of a pitch and locate the pitch through muscle memory. In practice, a student puts the tuner out of sight, plays a note, commits to what they believe is in tune, stops playing and checks the tuner to see how close they were to the center of the

pitch. No more will students haphazardly “go fishing” for notes.

#### ***Maestro XL* by Patrick Kelly. Cost 2.99**

*Maestro XL* is the next evolution of the metronome. Of course, students cannot go wrong with even the simplest metronomes. However, what is most exciting about this app is that it functions as both metronome and conductor. *Maestro XL* conducts players by showing a bouncing ball following standard conducting patterns. It boasts a comprehensive selection of simple and compound meters and even allows you to alter the style of the beat pattern between staccato, neutral, or legato. To test their rhythm, students can mute the click of the metronome and glance at *Maestro XL* as they would a conductor. Students can practice to see if what they were counting in their heads aligns with the beat pattern. *Maestro XL* is a must for students who want to improve their ensemble skills and develop a strong internal pulse.

#### ***Decibel 10th* by SkyPaw Co. Ltd. Cost: Free**

*Decibel 10th* was not specifically intended for musical pedagogy, but this app is highly effective for helping students with a variety of essential skills ranging from creating smooth bow changes to controlling dynamics. *Decibel 10th* displays a real-time graph of sound output while playing. You can play a passage, pause the graph, and be able to notice even the subtlest fluctuations in volume. Sustained tone appears as a flat line, so when a student draws the bow and their graph line tilts higher or lower they can see precisely where in the bow they tend to crescendo or diminuendo. Also, any disturbance or unwanted accent appears in the form of a jagged peak on the screen. These peaks appear most frequently at bow changes. In lessons, I observe as students approach *Decibel 10th* as a game to see how small they can make their bow change peaks. Apart from working on technical

aspects of bow control, this app is ideal to help students become aware of phrasing. For example, an arched line on the graph is the result of a beautifully arched phrase. It is amazing to hear the transformation in students' musicianship as soon as they are able to have an objective view of how they shape sound.

#### ***SloMoCam* by Idan Sheerit. Cost: Free**

*SloMoCam* is another app that was not created specifically for musical practice, but should be in every student's (and teacher's!) tool kit. *SloMoCam* is not your typical slow motion camera. Not only does this app slow down a video recording, but it elongates the audio so you still hear everything at original pitch. Most slow motion capture apps either have no sound or slow the frequency of the pitch. As a result, this app puts a spotlight on all of a player's idiosyncrasies that normally pass by during the blink of an eye. You can hear and see which notes are not vibrated in a scale and even count the number of oscillations of vibrato. You can see the shoulders slowly tense and rise up right before a big shift. Out of tune notes that otherwise might have gone unnoticed when heard at regular speed hang on endlessly. Perhaps you have had the experience of pointing out little technical hiccups in a student's playing and getting back the quizical response “Really?” *SloMoCam* gives students the time to observe themselves and gradually become their own teacher during practice.

#### ***MetroCorder* by Fictitious Studios. Cost: \$2.99**

I call *MetroCorder* the all-in-one practice hub. It is a student's go-to if they need to use a tuner with a five-octave-chromatic pitch drone, a metronome, an audio recorder, and practice timer all at the same time. As if that were not enough, *MetroCorder* lets students keep a daily practice journal and logs all their practice time onto a calendar. The student can then view

daily, weekly, monthly, and all-time practice statistics. For teachers who really like to monitor their students practice habits, this app has a button that with one click, the student can export their practice statistics to you in a spreadsheet document. With all its features, I find this app to be incredibly user friendly and *MetroCorder* should quickly become a staple of your student's practice routine. It helps promote consistency in a student's practice schedule, and I believe we

all can agree that consistency is probably the most important key for optimizing practice effectiveness.

*Before arriving in Minnesota, Joel Salvo was part of the musical community in Cleveland, OH for many years where he routinely performed alongside members of the Cleveland Orchestra and Opera Cleveland. In his solo cello debut, he was featured in a live recital broadcast over WCLV Cleveland Classical*

*Radio. In addition to his performance career, Joel is a passionate educator of young musicians. He has worked actively with some of the nation's leading youth ensembles including the Michigan Youth Symphony and the Lakewood Project Youth Rock Orchestra. Most recently, he was appointed professor of cello and bass, and orchestra director at St. Cloud State University. †*