

Clinic - Sevcik for Cello

presented by Tanya Remenikova — reported by David Holmes

Teachers who attended the MNSOTA luncheon on Thursday, October 15, were fortunate to hear a presentation by Tanya Remenikova, the esteemed University of Minnesota cello professor. Remenikova is well known in the Twin Cities as both a brilliant performer and teacher. As an aspiring cellist, she attended the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, graduating in 1969. She studied with Mstislav Rostropovich and immigrated to the United States in 1972. She won the Cassado International Cello Competition in 1979 and received the Master Teacher: Studio Award from MNSOTA in 2007.

Remenikova discussed two staples of left hand and bow technique by Sevcik: his Opus 8 shifting tome, *Changing the Positions* (transcribed for cello by Orlando Cole), and his Opus 3, *40 Variations* (arranged for cello by L. R. Feuillard). It was a delight to learn teaching tips from a seasoned teacher and a treat to hear her playing demonstrations.

Sevcik was not one to leave any stone unturned in his pursuit of technical comprehensiveness. In the Opus 8, *Changing the Positions*, there are 56 left hand exercises. All are in C major and are in common time, except for #46 in $\frac{6}{8}$ time. These exercises consist mostly of sixteenth and eighth notes and all have 2 beats slurred. This means that the issues of releasing left hand weight and modifying bow pressure and speed while shifting are important considerations. (Ms. Remenikova calls this a “very sensitive thing” that requires a lot care.) Each Opus 8 exercise completes a pattern, starting with the C-string and working up through the A-string. Almost all possible shifts from one position to another are covered. For instance, exercise numbers 8-15 cover 1st to 3rd and 2nd to 4th, etc. Orlando Cole’s cello transcription has 1st through 7th position up through exercise 31, when it starts to venture into thumb position from numbers 32-56. Once you’ve done those 56 exercises in C major, you can do them all again in F# major!

Professor Remenikova suggested customizing any of the Opus 8 exercises to fit a student’s particular needs. For instance, instead of going to 7th position, one could limit an exercise to 1st through 4th positions or limit the number of strings one plays the exercise on. In other words, they are infinitely modifiable. She recommended contracting the hand prior to an ascending shift from a 3rd or 4th finger to a 1st finger so that the length of the shift is shortened. Remenikova also noted that Opus 8 has many helpful finger substitution shifts. Here is an example of a typical opus 8 exercise:



As useful as Opus 8 is, the Opus 3 *Forty Variations* seems like a cornucopia of musical treasures by comparison. After all, the bow, not the left hand, is the king of musical expression. Familiarizing oneself with the bow terms Sevcik uses is an important first step. For example, o.H. means “upper half bow-length” and u.H. (strangely enough) means “lower half bow-length.” G stands for whole bow and Sp for playing at the tip. The table of contents has all the bowing markings in several languages including English. It helps to brush up on your German and remember o.H (Obere Hälfte “over half”), u.H (Untere Hälfte “under half”), Ganzer and Spitze.

Remenikova pointed out that Opus 3 is not just technical exercises, but that each variation has a musical intent or character. The theme is simple and open to several possible fingerings. In Variation 1, Ms. Remenikova has a nifty trick where the bow hold “flips” out of position during the eighth rests and returns to normal for the next eighth note. She emphasized focusing on the bow being “held” by the string.



Bow “flip”

In Variation 4, Ms. Remenikova focuses on the loose bow arm needed to do the retake down and up bows.



Variation 6 has a forte detaché bowing followed by a piano spiccato stroke, excellent for quick, controlled bow stroke and dynamic changes.



Remenikova enjoys teaching the lilting sicilienne bowing of Variation 9.



Variation 14 is a nice way to teach up bow staccato.



Ms. Remenikova said that students really enjoy the ricochet

bowings in Variation 26:

Var. 26. Allegro moderato. $\text{♩} = 104.$

The musical notation is a single line of bass clef music in 4/4 time. It begins with a dynamic marking of *f* and a note on G. Below the note is the instruction *Sp.* (spiccato). The first measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter rest, and then a quarter note G. The second measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The third measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The fourth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The fifth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The sixth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The seventh measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The eighth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The ninth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The tenth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The eleventh measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The twelfth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The thirteenth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The fourteenth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The fifteenth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The sixteenth measure contains a quarter note G, followed by a quarter note G, and then a quarter note G. The notation includes various bowing techniques: *f* G., *Sp.*, G., G., and Fr. with fingerings 1, 2, 3, 4, and 1 indicated above the notes.

It was exciting to become acquainted with the Sevcik, Opus 3 bow variations. I have not used them in my teaching, but I hope to start including them in the future. Both the Opus 8 and Opus 3 are very important contributions to the technical tools we need as teachers, and I am grateful for Tanya Remenikova's introduction to them.

Dr. David Holmes is a former faculty member at the Augsburg College Suzuki Program and has been a guest clinician at over 40 Suzuki institutes in 9 states. He has presented lectures on group class teaching and on spiccato and sautillé at the SAA national conference. David was an adjunct faculty member at St. Cloud State University for two years, where he taught cello and performed with the St. Cloud State University Piano Trio. An active performer and free lance cellist in the Twin Cities, David is cellist in the Northern Lights String Quartet, is an artist member of Thursday Musical, and has been principal cellist of the Minnetonka and Bloomington Symphonies as well as a member of the Minnesota Opera Orchestra. He teaches out of his home in St. Louis Park. †