



CELLO

Spiccato and Sautillé Ideas, Part 2

by David Holmes

This is my second installment on ways to develop spiccato and sautillé with cello students. Instead of a text in paragraph form, here is a more concise outline to a presentation I gave in May of 2014 at the Suzuki National Conference in Minneapolis. The broader topics are: Steps to Spiccato, Pre-Sautillé, Bow Finger Flexibility Exercises, Sautillé, Ideas from Books, and YouTube Videos.

Steps to Spiccato

Spiccato Starter:

- Down-bow circles at the balance point on the D-string or G-string. Feel the trampoline bounce of the bow. Vary the size and speed of the circles. Get a ringing sound.
- Check for balanced bow hold, with active back of hand.
- Do up bow circles, same as above.
- Go down and up with an easy bounce of the bow using the whole arm, still at the balance point.
- Vary the shapes of bounces: “V” shapes, smile shapes, larger and smaller circles or ovals. Land on the string with more force and bounce high, land softly and bounce gently.
- Play Suzuki Book 1 *Twinkle Variation D* (♩♩♩♩ ♩♩♩♩) with spiccato followed by *Perpetual Motion* and *Etude*.
- Practice many string crossings for evenness and control. Check that the whole arm is changing levels from string to string.
- Vary speed and dynamics of spiccato strokes.
- As students progress, chamber and orchestral music provide excellent opportunities to refine spiccato (Haydn, Mozart, etc.)

Pre-Sautillé

- Practice Suzuki Book 1 *Perpetual Motion* doubles: the whole arm creates the notes with a relaxed motion using the detached bow stroke in the balance point to middle of bow.
- Early Suzuki book 3: introduce slow “ribits” (♩ ♩) on *Twinkle Variation D*. Focus is on the elbow joint opening in the middle of the bow, but with the upper arm staying involved and loose as well. This is the beginning of “bongo” or “buy one note, get one for free.” The down-bow is active and the up-bow is a passive return—like a swinging door with a spring. Watch for loose shoulders and soft bow thumbs.
- Suzuki Book 3 *Scherzo*: continue to refine “ribits” as they get smaller and quicker, but with the same looseness in the arm and hand.
- Practice single “ribits” (♩ ♩), working one’s way up to double “ribits” (♩♩ ♩ ♩), and quadruple “ribits” (♩♩♩♩ ♩ ♩).

Bow Finger Flexibility Exercises

- Stage lifts: hold out bow hand without the bow and with a straight wrist. Point relaxed fingers at a 90-degree angle down from the hand. Lift the finger joint closest to the hand up to wrist level, and then extend other two joints out to wrist level.

Reverse and repeat.

- Pinky Presses: place pinky on top of bow (violin bow hold pinky). With the bow in horizontal airborne position, pinky pushes down on top of bow (tip rises) and slowly lets bow return to horizontal position. Important not to move the hand when doing pinky presses.
- Collé: Pull up a pencil into hand without curling under the last two digits of the fingers (they lift straight up). If the pencil doesn’t roll in the hand it is correct. Thumb goes from pointing down to parallel to the ground when the fingers are lifted. Thumb never squeezes but is active.
- Collé on the cello. Rest the arm against the cello at the frog with the bow heavily on the G-string. Start with long (extended) fingers and pull an up-bow to shorter, curved fingers. Be sure to engage the pinky and ring finger in this process (back of the hand) while reducing the use of the first and second finger. The arm and hand do not move. The sound is sticky and firm. Check that the bow hold is soft but intact after each motion. Shoulders stay soft and loose. Do down and up collé on G-string. Add up-bow circles with collé, returning to starting position via an airborne down-bow (this strengthens the back of the hand). Add up-bow G to down-bow D and back.
- Collé *Twinkle Theme* on the G-string.

Sautillé Ideas

Sautillé Warmups:

- Take your bow arm without the bow. Shake the hand up and down by moving your arm vigorously. Shake the arm back and forth. Shake the arm in clockwise and counter clockwise circles. With a slight pronation, do the same. Reach the arm out away from the body, then closer to the body. Does the shake feel easier in some positions than in others?

Helpful Hints for Sautillé Stroke:

- Play in the middle of the bow (couple of inches past balance point).
- Use flat hair for more stick bounce.
- Avoid pushing with 1st finger; balance on middle fingers instead.
- Shoulders low, square, and loose.
- Try a clockwise motion of the arm and hand. (Down-bow on higher string side, up-bow on the lower string side.)
- Try a slightly skewed bow stroke: down-bow out, up-bow in.
- Experiment with small changes in wrist or elbow level to get

the sautillé to work.

- Experiment with how much weight is going into the hair.
- Slight pronation of arm (looking at a wrist watch position) helps keep the bow in the string.
- The upper arm is part of sautillé and must remain tension-free. See if there is a feeling of upper arm “jiggle” when doing sautillé.
- Start very slowly with just two notes at a time while checking for continued ease. Gradually build up to more notes at a time.
- Jump starting sautillé idea: start with larger detaché notes in the middle of the bow and gradually reduce the size until the sautillé kicks in.
- Open strings, *Twinkle D*, *Perpetual Motion*, and *Scherzo* are all good for the starting sautillé stroke.

Ideas from Books

Christopher Bunting: *Essay on the Craft of Cello Playing, Volume 1*. Sangeeta Publications, Cambridge University Press 1982, 2000.

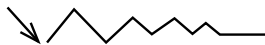
Spiccato, via the ricochet. Bunting calls his approach to spiccato “unorthodox” since it starts with the ricochet. (pg. 42)

Points to consider before ricochet:

- The angle of the bow hairs in relation to the string: Bunting thinks a slight tilt is better than flat hair.
- The angle of the bow bounce to the string: the faster the speed the more acute the angle of the bouncing bow to the string. Example:






- Drop bow from above the string (“10:30” clock position) and drop down to the string (9:00 position). Throw the bow to the string vigorously to create ricochet: Keep the same point of contact.



- After successfully getting the bow to ricochet with no discernible rhythm add controlled rhythm: e.g. 4 sixteenth notes. Then add down and up-bow ricochet and finally connecting the down and up-bow ricochet.

Tanya Carey: *Cello Playing is Easy Part 1: Warm-ups*. CareyWorks, Inc., distributed by Shar Products, 2007.

Perhaps the most comprehensive exploration of the spiccato/sautillé bow strokes in print (pp. 52-67). Extremely detailed and brimming with helpful ideas. Here are a few of the many points she discusses.

- Preparatory motions: “Shake It” (p. 52) gets at the arm motion without the bow by “shaking water off your hand, moving the arm in clockwise and counter clockwise circles, waving bye-bye, and doing same in wrist watch position.”
- Ms. Carey teaches two forms of spiccato: the “smile arc”  and the clockwise circle  with the down bow touching the higher string side and the up bow touching the lower string side. The arc is for slower spiccato and the clockwise circle is for a faster spiccato. The sautillé is a clockwise flattened oval shape . Eventually, practice going from the two spiccato strokes to the sautillé stroke and back. Ms. Carey points out in bold print that these “bouncy” strokes all use the whole arm.

Other helpful hints from Ms. Carey:

- Keep joints free and build endurance by starting with two only notes at time.
- Get a “ti-ki” sound with the bow.
- The whole arm is used in staccato and spiccato strokes.
- The sautillé sound comes from the shaking arm with the follow through in the wrist and fingers.
- Sautillé is a rebound bowing, as in bouncing a ball, or a door with a spring. The down-bow is active and the up-bow is passive.

Phyllis Young: *Playing the String Game*, Shar Products, 1978, ninth edition, 2009.

- *Pre-spiccato: no. 70: The Trampoline*: Student finds the magic spot on bow and drops it onto the string so it bounces straight back up with the tip and frog staying on the same horizontal level.
- *Spiccato: no. 71: A Real Bouncer*: get the swinging motion of the arm with a pencil in the hand, first in the air and then by hitting a table top at the bottom of the arc. Feel like you are outlining the bottom of a plate. Vary the height and speed of the arc motion

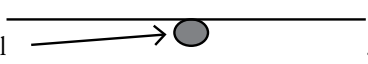
Shinichi Suzuki’s spiccato ideas:

I saw a film of Suzuki teaching teachers how to teach spiccato. He utilized down-bow and up-bow circle bows that land at the balance point and spring up into another circle. Many down-bow circles (I call these “full moons”) with varying sizes (the bigger the circle the heavier the bow lands and vice versa). After many circles in both directions comes the natural spiccato without the circles. I have had much success with this idea. Less hair landing on the string (more tilt) produces a more brush stroke sound. The flatter the hair the springier the bow becomes and the shorter and bouncier the notes get.

Spiccato And Sautillé on YouTube

A brief annotated reference

- Jared Ballance (9:57) gives clear, thorough examples of bow arm circle motions that can be a prelude to sautillé. Using separate bows and a slow tempo on Piatti *Caprice No. 1*, he utilizes circle motions in both directions and in all parts of the bow. He demonstrates that circles can be done with the arm, wrist and fingers, or combinations of arm sections. JB teaches that sautillé involves an up and down motion of the wrist.
- Abigail McHugh-Grifa (4:51) offers helpful ideas on using bow finger motion to prepare for sautillé. With a simple down-bow on open D paired with up on open G at the frog, she gets at the circular motion of the sautillé stroke, and emphasizes passive and flexible bow fingers that move because of the drag of the bow against the string.
- Paul Katz calls spiccato “controlled” and sautillé “uncontrolled.” He uses the whole arm for spiccato and the forearm for sautillé and demonstrates going from spiccato to sautillé and back. His sautillé seems to be of the forearm type.
- Steven Doane (2:32) tells his students that sautillé must “bounce the stick, not the hair.” He stresses practicing sautillé notes in pairs and fours to get control. On spiccato, he mentions releasing the up-bow note when notes are in pairs. He likes to use Popper #1 for a triplet spiccato pattern.
- David Finkel (2:36) uses an interesting non-cello example—a

limber straight stick with a pencil under it at the stick's midpoint. Stick . He pushes down the tip of the stick, which the pencil causes to bounce back up. This, he says, is what happens to the bow in the sautillé stroke. He then demonstrates sautillé on the cello and points out that the bow hand moves in a counter clockwise motion.

- Jaime Fiske (The Cello Professor) has a useful video of him teaching his sautillé ideas to a student. One nifty thing is that he teaches a student who is obviously not already proficient at sautillé, which gives his ideas more credibility as she improves

in this 15-minute video. He emphasizes practicing with a floppy wrist and a 45-degree forearm warm up away from the cello. He teaches the 45-degree motion as down and to the right and back.

I hope you find these ideas useful!

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. ‡