

## All-State: Paul Rolland Actions in Group and Private Instruction

presented by Elizabeth Ericksen — reported by Brenda Radloff, Joe Berns, Michael Sloane

Elizabeth Ericksen studied with Paul Rolland in the 1970s. He was a groundbreaking string teacher who emphasized teaching action in string playing—keep everything moving without tension. Tightness prevents vibrato from manifesting itself properly, and the bow arm from drawing straight across the strings. Rolland analyzed every aspect of violin playing and came up with fun activities for students to do with their instruments to achieve perfect posture and sound. By teaching free movement, the fundamentals of advanced playing techniques can be taught to beginning players. His ideas can be done in either group lessons, or private instruction.

The first thing that is done with students is to put a dot or finger tape on the fingerboard marking first and third finger for violin and viola (first and fourth for cello.). A dot is also put on the octave. For violin/viola instrument placement, the students are taught to do the “Statue of Liberty.” This involves holding the instrument high into the air. Hold the neck where the fingerboard meets the body of the instrument—don’t just have the students hold the neck more in the middle. Then, you put the right finger on the button, and bring the instrument towards you while still holding it with the right hand. Then tuck the instrument under the chin. Be sure to keep the left wrist straight. Then, students take their left hand and slide up to the octave dot, and there they strum the string with their pinky. For cellos, students are seated and hold the neck of the instrument out in front. Bring the instrument into the body. They can also slide up to the octave dot.

Liz talked about fun activities to have the kids do to practice their posture. She had little balls for putting on the violin and viola on the G and D string to check horizontal placement of the instrument. The objective was to keep the balls on the string. It requires good posture to achieve this! We asked what kind of balls would work. Ping-pong balls work, or, take a paddle toy that has a string with a ball and remove the ball. The size and texture of the ball is perfect.

This activity would be good with junior high kids, who tend to slouch toward the floor. Maybe make a game out of it, with the winner getting to keep their ball. For cellos, she had a little stuffed animal to put on the left arm. Students are to be able to keep the animal from falling. These would be fun activities kids would want to practice at home. This is very important in the early stages of learning a new instrument when students begin to realize that it takes patience and hard work at home. More fun means more practice means more retention in orchestra class.

Next is the “shuttle game.” Start by taking a marker and make a line at the base of the first finger on the left hand. With the instrument in playing position, slide the hand back and forth, using the line as a reference point. Don’t tell the kids that this is the beginning of vibrato! Cellos can do this as well. You can add plucking the string with the pinky when they get to the octave. Rhythms can be added, using the “my turn, your turn” approach. Next, add finger taps. The finger must have an instant rebound—do not let them just slam the fingers down. When they are ready, have the student take a cloth and do “polishing the strings.” They will slide up and down the fingerboard with the cloth under their finger.

To work on lateral finger movement across strings, she recommended alternating pizzicati with any given left-hand finger on the lowest and highest strings. She emphasized natural movement in which the elbow follows the hand.

For the right hand, you can have them do “flying pizzicato.” This is where they strum the string and follow through and make a circle. This will help strengthen their arm and give them the feeling for when they use the bow.

The early bow hold can be done at the balance point if desired. You can make a pinky house for the pinky, or just put a corn pad on. If you don’t know how to make a pinky house, you can google it and find some videos. Making one of these for every student might be time consuming,

but would be worth the time invested, as it would seem fun to have this contraption on the bow. Very helpful was the information given on the placement of the right thumb and its perpendicular position as the bow is drawn away from the violin, and the release of the thumb as the bow is moved up closer to the frog. Additionally practical was the following suggestion: “If you look between the horsehair and the stick, and can see the end of the fingerboard, then you’ll know the bow is straight.”

To teach students how to “shadow bow,” give them an empty toilet paper roll. For violins and violas, hold the roll on the left shoulder with the left hand. Put the bow through the roll and practice bowing, keeping the bow straight and bending the elbow. Cello students can hold the roll in front of them, to simulate the cello placement. Another idea for helping students to get the feel for the bow placement is to use an empty egg carton. They can even practice holding this under their chin.

Another activity is “rocking the boat.” This is where you put the bow on the string and rock back and forth.

One final exercise was the “wandering bow,” designed to help students keep their bows straight and fix crooked bows. It consisted of repeated back-and-forth strokes using 3-6” of bow, all the while letting the bow wander to the tip, to the frog, to the middle, the balance point, the upper 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc. Students can then focus on maintaining straightness and getting a solid tone. You can walk around and give directions (tip—middle—frog) while you observe the students.

“Helicopter” is where you place and lift the bow from the frog to the tip. Check that the pinky is curved and not straight. Rebounds can be done next. Start at the frog and gradually add the rest of the bow. You can do slurs from open to third finger, to open to harmonic.

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