



CELLO

Pandemic Projects

Teresa Richardson

As the pandemic has upended our lives, I find myself at home, craving variety and inspiration. How about writing a column? Sure, I'll take a stab at it!

Perhaps the greatest asset to our survival as a human race is our remarkable ability to adapt. And during this pandemic, we are adapting to a different lifestyle which continues to evolve. It is extremely stressful, and I regularly think about how we do not give ourselves enough credit for managing to stay afloat during these crazy times. Adaptation for me has meant prioritizing self-care, thinking creatively, and finding ways to mentally engage. And this is precisely how I ended up here, outside of my comfort zone, writing a column. Here are a few of my latest projects toward those goals.

After my gigs dried up, I needed a reason to practice. My fellow North Star Cello Academy teachers, David Holmes, and my husband, Will Richardson, began a Popper challenge to maintain our chops. One of us polishes a Popper etude, records a video playing it, and sends it to the other two. As it turns out, accountability and wonderfully specific compliments are effective motivation for practicing fiendishly difficult etudes! Having a friend who will reliably listen to these recordings, look past the out-of-tune notes, and write a thoughtful response has been invaluable. Since I did not learn enough Popper as a student, this has been a perfect opportunity for me to learn new Poppers so that I can teach them to my students.

One positive thing that has resulted from expanded online offerings is the easy connection to learning opportunities outside our locale. My longtime friend, Dr. Meredith Blecha-Wells, cello professor at Oklahoma State University, gave a two-session workshop for our cello academy students via Zoom. She first taught an advanced technique class for our sixteen students in Suzuki Book 7 and higher. I was curious to see how technique would be addressed in an online group setting. Most of the class was taught with the students muted, but visible. She screen-shared her handout so that the students did not have

to print it ahead of time to be able to participate. Meredith talked through exercises in seven categories (vibrato, agility, shifting, thumb position, double stops, bow development, and scales/arpeggios), and had students play along with her as a group while they remained muted. Then she asked questions and checked in periodically with individuals. It was an efficient way to relay a large amount of information and get students thinking about different ways to address technique during warmups.

Meredith also gave a masterclass. I love watching another teacher teach my students! It was fascinating how she approached an ongoing issue from a different angle or focused on a technical aspect that I had overlooked. Meredith's quick pace and impressive concentration had the students completely engaged. I noticed that, the week after the Zoom classes, all who observed or participated were motivated to do some self-examination of technical points. One of Will's students came to his next lesson exhibiting improved vibrato simply from independently working on the vibrato exercise from the handout. And I felt inspired to "up my game" in every lesson I taught. The whole experience was wonderfully healthy and enlightening for everyone!

I also wanted to share with you my recent exploration of scale method books. Up until now, I have been using Klengel *Technical Studies* until students are able to play scales and arpeggios in three and four octaves by memory using the universal fingering. When they reach this point, I keep them on a continuous cycle of hearing a major scale and its relative minor and corresponding arpeggios in each lesson. We work around the circle of fifths and ramp up the number of scales as MYS or GTCYS auditions approach. Students who can play a scale in any key with ease are given the extra challenge of coming up with a different bowing or rhythm each week. But I currently have three students who need a new challenge.

I decided to do a comparison of scale method books so that I could choose one

for these students to use to make their lives more difficult (ha!). The contenders were Mark Yampolsky *Violoncello Technique*, The *Ivan Galamian Scale System for Violoncello Volume 1* arranged and edited by Hans Jorgen Jensen, and Carl Flesch *Scale System for Violoncello*.

Flesch: I like how the book begins with a succinct exercise which includes scales, arpeggios, thirds, and chromatic scales. There is a chapter for each key, which could be helpful for intonation considering the frequency of return to the tonic. The book even includes a scale, arpeggio, and thirds in artificial harmonics. I especially like the charming, one-line "sound" ditty in harmonics at the conclusion of each chapter, which is different every time. One thing I found to be awkward was the liberal use of fourth finger in thumb position, which I assume resulted from the book's violin origins. I have a dinky pinky! I also thought that the exercises in thirds, sixths and octaves went on far too long. Overall, I found the Flesch to be difficult and awkward, maybe a better choice for college music majors. I did not want to pick a book that would cause burnout and self-loathing, which is how I felt after practicing these exercises, so I moved on.

Yampolsky: My friend and colleague, Christy Libbus, agreed with me regarding the highlight of this method—the scale in chords. It makes the scale sound like grand, stately music and is a lot of fun! This book is organized like Flesch, with a chapter for each key. I like Yampolsky's inclusion of tenths, triads with inversions, and how thirds and sixths are written in both melodic and harmonic intervals. There is a scale written as a combination of both natural and artificial harmonics that made me smile to play. I appreciate the abundance of variants included for each exercise, as well as how there are different bowings and rhythms in each chapter. I would have liked more types of arpeggios; other than major and minor, only the subdominant and dominant seventh are present. And the C Major chapter is the longest (sixteen exercises), with the more

difficult keys having only nine to twelve exercises. You will have to do your E Flat Minor arpeggio in octaves by ear!

Galamian: While I could tell the Flesch was transcribed from violin, the Galamian overall feels more comfortably adapted to cello, with one exception. The chapters with scales and arpeggios in one position are straining on the hand, as Hans Jorgensen warns in the preface. This book feels very thorough and is so long that it is divided into volumes. Volume I contains scale and arpeggio exercises and contains a booklet insert devoted solely to bowing and rhythm patterns, and Volume II contains double and multiple stop exercises. My review here is of Volume I only.

The Galamian book is organized by type of exercise rather than key. The goal stated in the preface is to master the pattern by practicing the whole chapter, playing in all keys. The book begins with scales in two octaves, making it accessible for less advanced players. I appreciate how the

many arpeggio types are all identified. I found the bowing and rhythm pattern booklet to be so engaging and enjoyable that I will never warm up with only a plain, separate, whole note scale again! There are code numbers at the beginning of each chapter, suggesting certain bowing and rhythm patterns. The absence of note stems facilitates the use of different bowings and rhythms. I love the inclusion of whole tone scales, scales on one string, and one-finger or two-finger or three-finger scales. One of my favorite parts of this book is the last chapter, in which there are non-traditional scales and arpeggios constructed out of interval patterns. It made my brain hurt, in a good way!

If you can guess by my reviews that I chose to have my students start working from the Galamian, you are correct! There are some nice things about the Yampolsky that the Galamian Volume I does not contain, but overall, I simply find myself enjoying the Galamian more. And it

contains so much content that I am eager to continue my study of the book. It is time to order Volume II.

The Popper challenge, the Zoom workshop, and the scale method book comparison were all projects that helped me feel invigorated as a cello teacher during a pandemic. And writing a column? It was a pleasure, and a welcome diversion. I recommend it!

Teresa Richardson, cellist, is Assistant Principal of the Minnesota Opera and teaches at North Star Cello Academy. She previously taught at MacPhail Center for Music, St. Joseph's School of Music, University of St. Thomas, and University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Teresa earned Master of Music and Bachelor of Music degrees in cello performance from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, where she graduated with high distinction. †