

ALL-STATE: STUDIO PEDAGOGY “LEAD THE CHILD”

by RAY SHOWS

Ray Shows was one of our presenters at the August 2022 All-State Teachers Workshop. Watch for similar sessions at our workshop this August.

“I do not see why such a fuss is made about playing the violin; it is so simple. All you need to do is put your finger and your bow in the right place at the right time.” —*Jascha Heifetz*

1. What I have Learned as a Studio Teacher

As a teacher of violinists and violists at the middle school, high school, and college levels, I am tasked with reviewing and listening to young players of diverse experience and expertise. What have I observed? The best playing is coming from students who have received clear instruction as to what they are physically doing on their instrument. As Ivan Galamian once quoted, “*The student who appears clumsy is uncomfortable with their instrument. A player who is uncomfortable is not free to express themselves musically.*”

In quite a few cases, young string players have been done a disservice. Namely, they have been asked to ascend on their instrument with less than complete information about the mechanical procedures required for a successful performance.

What are these missing elements?

- A clear understanding of the tonal palette required for mastering the piece.
- The technical undergirding required to play the work with ease and flexibility.
- Awareness & appreciation of the purpose and intent of the piece—Context.

What is a *tonal palette*? In Spotify parlance, a tonal palette can be codified in terms of color:

- A red palette means that you have mostly energetic songs.
- A pastel palette means you have a combination of energetic and danceable songs.
- A yellow palette indicates that you have songs with high valence (happy, cheerful songs).
- An orange palette indicates that you have danceable songs.

While this is wistfully useful and easy to remember, a tonal palette is simply **sound production**. Sound is vibration and getting the instrument to vibrate beyond plucking the strings requires proper application of the “magic stick” (your bow) and of course well-

placed left-hand fingers for best resonance.

The *technical undergirding*, an underdeveloped element in many performances I hear, is understanding proper usage of the bow and left-hand fingers, and how much “energy” (thank you Dorothy Delay) to apply to each hand. In terms of the bow, we refer to this as *point of contact*, *bow weight*, and *bow speed*. There are wonderful French school bowing etudes to guide the student. Left-hand technic requires a precise placement and angle of the fingers and hand as well as the accurate gauging of finger pressure and release. The best template or undergirding here can be achieved through scale and arpeggio practice—steps and ladders. Applied with smooth and silent shifting (there are exceptions), the results are transcendent!

The most overlooked area of teaching in my opinion is *context*. What I mean: *The purpose and history behind the composition*. Sometimes the actual impetus of the work is shrouded in mystery. A deep and methodical study and performance of a work will always reveal the story and meaning intended for the listener. Students should always know who the composer of their piece is, where the composer studied and worked, who/what their influences were, and who their teachers were. Once they have this knowledge, reveal to them the work’s intent. Is it a sonata that is expanding or solidifying the canon? Is it a concerto designed to allow the instrument to challenge the orchestra—David versus Goliath? Or is the work a clever show piece that encourages the player to demonstrate facility and flair?

I recently enjoyed reading Prof. Maureen Yuen’s recent article *A guide to choosing repertoire for auditions* in *American String Teacher* (May 2022),

Technique such as scales, arpeggios, études, and exercises need to be assigned alongside the repertoire, so that students learn to navigate the fingerboard, develop left-hand facility, improve tone production, and execute various bow strokes and articula-

tions, including smooth bow changes. If anything, the technique assigned should exceed what is required for the repertoire—this allows for more focus on musical details and expression. Students will only be successful moving from the Vivaldi *A Minor Concerto, RV 356* to the Lalo *Symphonie Espagnole* in the space of two years if they have the time, dedication, and focus to develop the necessary technique. — Maureen Yuen

2. What I Teach at Every Lesson

I teach **Scale & Arpeggio patterns**—every lesson!

- Interval relativity awareness (whole & ½ steps, perfect intervals, playing up and across strings)
- Step on the *Scales*, and climb those *Ladders* (Arpeggios are sequences of notes forming a chord)
- Fluid movements around the fingerboard (shifting, extensions, glissandi)

I teach **Etudes** by the book—every lesson!

- Mazas Bks 1 & 2 is where I start things.
- Schradieck & Ševčík Op.1, Op.2, Op.8 (shifts), Op.9 (double stops)
- Kreutzer *42 Studies*
- Dont Op.35 & Rode *24 Caprices*
- Double stops and chords (Trott, Kreutzer #24, #32-39)
- Level appropriate repertoire (Solo Bach, Concertos, Show Pieces, Paganini, Ysaÿe)

I teach **Context**. I share the history of the works they are preparing for performance and encourage them to look deeper into its provenance and how it was premiered to audiences. It is important to me that they be able to answer questions about the piece beyond the notes and slurs.

Because no two players are the same, no two lesson tactics are the same. Some pedagogy points to keep at the front of pre-lesson preparation to develop a better string player are...

1. Matching the Repertoire to the Player (selection is derived from players' character, style, and technical ability). "Wisdom" here is finding and creating an accessible studio syllabus from which to teach and play with your students.
2. Show *what* and *how* to practice the passagework in repertoire, etudes and scales. Student accountability should be measured. *Require a lesson notebook*: "What you measure, you manage." *Make them practice slowly!*
3. Help them research and understand the works' provenance and place in the literature—Context

3. Some Lesson Detail on Kreutzer

In my quest to become a better player and teacher I dedicated time this summer to researching expertise on teaching etudes—specifically the Kreutzer *42 Studies* of which my last teacher Roman Totenberg was particularly fond. A useful book to seek out is **Benjamin Cutter: *How to Study Kreutzer*** (Aug 8, 1902). In this book Mr. Cutter emphasizes the fundamental strokes necessary to master the violin and bow and how to apply them to all 42 Kreutzer etudes. He gives a great deal of well-deserved credit to the French master artist teacher Lambert Massart and his approach to playing well. Massart even created a series of 412 variations for K2. You can find this at IMSLP for your practicing enjoyment!

Fundamental French School Bow Strokes

- a. Forearm bowing
- b. Grand Détaché (quick whole arm)
- c. Hand Bowing: legato *p* dynamic ON the string
- d. Saltato (thrown strokes)
- e. Hand Staccato: firm clean-cut tone

Cutter provides in-depth teaching practice methods for each etude in the book. *Very* useful to me in my lessons. The opening introduction begins, "The purpose of the writer is to present a handbook which shall make clear the mechanical procedures which the student of Kreutzer... is obliged to consider." — Benjamin Cutter

Another interesting study is **Sylvia Gholson: *Proximal Positioning: A strategy of Practice in Violin Pedagogy***. Here is a sample paragraph near the end of the dissertation:

"A final facilitative strategy by D. Delay was the use of metaphor. A dominant metaphor used in practice served as an operator for other goal-directed tasks, and, as such, essentially functioned as a tool. One such means for musical interpretation was the metaphorical handling of the concept of energy. In brief, using the energy metaphor consisted of categorizing musical referents as manifestations of "energy," which allowed musical experiences and perceptions to be compared in general quantitative terms such as "more than/less than," "faster/slower," "louder/softer," and "higher/lower." In one lesson, for example, DeLay elicited comments from a student on manipulating possible "energy sources" such as such as faster vibrato, sharper articulations, and higher overtones (achieved playing closer to the bridge)" — Sylvia Gholson (*Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol. 46, No. 4, Winter, 1998, pp. 535-545)

4. Interesting Pedagogy Resources

The Nature of Expertise (Duke & Simmons). *The Nature of Expertise: 19 Common Elements* (2006) is a rich and well annotated

analysis of the teaching points of 3 diverse experts—Oboist Richard Kilmer, violist Donald McInnes, and pianist Nelita True. The authors identify 19 elements of instruction that were "prominent features" shared by all three master teachers. This first resource article later became a published book by Robert Duke and Amy Simmons: *Intelligent Music Teaching: Essays on the Core Principles of Effective Instruction*. Distinguished Teaching Prof. Duke is also a clinical prof at Dell Medical School at UT Austin. Colleague Amy Simmons is a Senior Lecturer at UT Austin.

Editorial Book Review: "... Teachers will benefit immediately from his applications to the studio and classroom of the 'expansive, rich body of data that illuminates the processes of knowledge acquisition and skill development.' Duke's educational beliefs and prejudices are well-supported throughout the collection. He believes a music lesson can, and should, be as carefully planned as a military maneuver with goals clearly identified, strategy precisely outlined, and tactics minutely executed. He then proceeds to describe those goals, strategies, and tactics in as distinct and disciplined a manner as he would expect of any teacher under his guidance. ... His essays on 'Sequencing Instruction' and 'Transfer' alone make this book essential reading for my graduate assistants and pedagogy classes. But to enjoy the essays like individual dishes on a buffet, obscures what I believe is the book's fundamental ritornello: remember that what you're teaching is not necessarily what the student is learning..."

Ruth Ray: *Studying the Violin (Nov-Dec 1968) in American Music Teacher*. Slow Practice. "All intelligent practice seeks to develop and maintain muscular control."

Dr. Robin Kay Deverich: *Violin Pedagogy (violinonline.com)*
An Overview of Violin Pedagogy with an Emphasis on Amateur Violinists.

Elizabeth Green: *Violin Pedagogy (Jan-Feb 1961) in American Music Teacher*. Keen observations about left-hand 1st finger elevation.

Violin Masterclass: The Sassmannshaus Tradition for Violin Playing. Long respected resource for fundamentals on the violin.

Daniel Kurganov BEST PRACTICE Masterclass Series. 28 creative and thoughtful videos by this fine teacher in Boston. His topics are wide ranging and comprehensive.

Aleksey Yanshinov: 6 Intonation Studies (medium difficulty—all etudes in first position). Kurganov video introduces *Etude No.1* and offers a broad array of teaching techniques in just one etude.

Colombian-American violinist Ray Shows is an accomplished Chamber Musician and Arts Innovator with over three decades of creative experience performing, teaching, and administrating classical chamber programs and events. A McKnight performing artist award winner with the Artaria String Quartet, Ray is active in the chamber music community across the country both as a performer and teacher and is in demand as a professional resource for chamber musicians and music educators. He co-directs the Artaria Chamber Music School and is the founder and director of the nationally recognized Saint Paul String Quartet Competition. In 2010 he was honored with the MNSOTA Master Teacher: Studio award. ♪