

ALL-STATE — AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BORNOFF APPROACH

presented by Debbie Lyle — reported by Faith Farr

Debbie Lyle is the Executive Director of the Foundation for the Advancement of String Education—FASE, Inc., a non-profit created in 1978 by Dr. George Bornoff. There is a wealth of information available on the FASE.org website, including free downloads. They offer a variety of teacher training events, some free and on-line in addition to the in-person summer workshop.

“Beginners can do MORE!”

Bornoff never wrote a method book, because each teacher needs to choose the pace that is appropriate for their homogeneous or heterogeneous class. Bornoff’s goal was to develop a school music program that would provide students with technique from beginner through advanced without the need for supplemental private lessons. All four strings are used from the beginning. There is very little use of “pre exercises” like instrument boxes or dowel stick bows. The Bornoff goal is to have students excited about playing in the first 5 hours of instruction.

A new-to-me idea was the Open String Cycle, which Bornoff uses for everything from first lesson open string pizz through advanced skills. For viola and cello, the Open String Cycle is C string, G string, D string, A string, A string again, D string, G string, C string. For violin and bass, the Open String Cycle is G, D, A, E, E, A, D, G. In a heterogeneous class, sometimes everyone starts together and plays in fifths; sometimes the C strings start, then everyone plays for G, D, A, then E strings only twice, then A, D, G for everyone, ending with C strings. The Open String Cycle promotes concentration, attention and endurance. If the task is pizz the open string 4 times, then only one time through the Cycle is 32 pizz notes. The teacher can demonstrate to get the class started at a tempo, and then walk among the students to do individual correction. And it’s not at all boring to do it again maybe with only 3 pizz, or at a different tempo, because it was only one Cycle. And the Cycle is long enough that students can change their attention from their individual performance to awareness of the ensemble.

Bornoff starts with big picture and moves to refinement. When the bow is introduced, it is with large motions, full bow. Refinement will follow. At the end of a Cycle, students can give a quick self assessment on how they did: thumb up/sideways/down.

Early refinement of bow strokes includes détaché with whole bow, half bow and combinations such as | ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ | lower half, whole bow, upper half, whole bow. Spiccato is a “stopped détaché” and spiccato at the frog is a brush stroke.

When notation is introduced, it should always be symbols for something the students already know. Once they have learned whole and half bow by demonstration, ♪ and ♪♪ can be introduced as their symbols.

For left hand, Bornoff uses finger patterns, focusing first on the spatial feel of the hand shape, and then sound, and finally the words to name/describe the pattern. In a heterogeneous class, left hand is introduced with open and finger 1. Everyone performs a Cycle playing for instance o o 1 1 o o 1 1. Finger numbers could be on the board. Playing in unison for the whole cycle allows students to refine pitch and coordination between left and right hands.

Bornoff Pattern 1 is the minor pattern: o 1 2. The simplicity is that everyone—violin, viola, cello, bass—uses finger 2! Bornoff

Pattern 2 is major: o 1 2 for violin and viola, o 1 3 for cello; o 1 4 for bass. Pattern 2 is introduced at the same time or soon after Pattern 1 and gives great opportunities for “compare and contrast.” Pattern 1 might be described in words as: minor, 1 & 2 touch, low 2, sad, whole-half. Because Patterns 1 and 2 are introduced together, violin and viola students may get finger 2 better in tune because they know from the outset there are two places finger 2 can go.

Left hand skills and bowing skills are developed separately, in alternation. After some left-hand work, it might be time to introduce bowing refinement, using the Open String Cycle. The second bowing Debbie showed us was spiccato, an off the string scoop for all instrument, near the frog. The beginning motion is the whole arm that adds and releases weight into the string. Wrist and finger motion for spiccato will be added later as a refinement. We did the Open String Cycle with 16 spiccato per string, counting 1234 2234 3234 4234. Count out loud, or count in your head so you can stop at the correct time! After the Open String Cycle of 16 bounces, we did a Cycle of Pattern 2 (major) with 3 bounces per finger. Each new bowing is introduced in a similar way—with a Cycle on an easy finger pattern.

Stopped bow staccato is taught with a weighted stop, not a release, in order to build full sound at the tip on a full bow. Doing full bow with 2, 3, and 4 stops per bow is introduced in the same lesson so that students can first get the idea of dividing the bow into even sections. Refinement will come later to 6, 8, 9, 12 (three groups of 4), 12 (4 groups of 3) and 16 stops per bow.

Hot Cross Buns (major) and *Burnt Cross Buns* (minor) are learned together. Debbie showed us an example of diagram reading. The new technique is the bow lift and set at the quarter rest. Students need to say the fingers and point to the page. Then they need to say the fingers and finger silently—with eyeballs on the page! *Hot Cross Buns* uses spiccato bounces on the eighth notes. *Burnt Cross Buns* is slower and uses tenuto eighths, slightly separated but not bounced.



Au Claire de la Lune uses different bow speeds. All notes are full bow. As students have already done a lot of stopped bow with 2 and 3 per bow, the steady slow bow has been prepared. In diagram reading, say the words for the bow speed:



Recognizing that this is the Bornoff “Approach,” Debbie encouraged us throughout the presentation to “Bornoff-ize” the material we are already using. I tried it when I introduced *Witches’ Dance* to a student. I showed him the bowing for the first two measures on open D. After a few tries to get the idea, we did an Open String Cycle. Then we did the bowing on each pitch of the one-octave D scale, and G scale. Then it seemed secure, so we tried every spot in the piece that needs that bowing. It worked! A big success.

Faith Farr has served as editor of this magazine since 1996. ♪