


## Clinic — One-Minute Warmups

presented by Ingrid Koller and Mary Sorlie — reported by Faith Farr

Mary Sorlie and Ingrid Koller began their presentation on warmups for beginning ensembles by asking the clinic attendees questions:

- As a teacher, what is it that makes a beginning orchestra fun? We said: watching light bulbs come on; the first time doing a round; putting the first piece together.
- As a teacher, what is it that prevents or hinders a beginning orchestra from being fun? We said: chaos; some are ready to move on and others are lost.
- As a student, what is it that makes a beginning orchestra fun? We said: connecting with the teacher; playing the instrument (not learning theory!)
- As a student, what is it that prevents or hinders beginning orchestra from being fun? We said: not getting success immediately; the teacher is too talky; no connection with friends or to teacher.
- Every teacher's dream is for students to have a solid technical and musical foundation. What does your dream orchestra look like? Sound like? Participants showed a wonderful ready position—everyone sitting up straight, balanced, alert, watching the conductor.
- What is does your reality orchestra look like? Sound like? Participants showed a great variety of slouchy positions, not ready to play.

Mary reminded us that students do *not* go to orchestra to improve their test scores or to get into college. Students want to make music and have fun with their friends. She asked what our experience with orchestra warmups had been and teacher participants suggested: open strings; a scale with different bowings written on the board; “I play / you play” with no talking. One suggestion was “I play / you play” only backwards! Or if I play forte, you play piano. Or you play, but leave out the F#.

Mary explained that the average human attention span is only 8.25 seconds(!) and the ability to focus (different from attention span) is about 2 minutes. *One-Minute Warmups* are designed to focus on one specific technical or musical element, with the least amount of instruction given. For instance, if you are rehearsing Richard Meyer's *Dragonhunter* and the  rhythm is new, you'll need a rhythm warmup. If you're rehearsing a piece where high C# is problematic, you'll need a pitch warmup. These warmups appeal to a variety of learning styles and are designed to be fun. Fun does not mean chaos. If students understand the goal, they will succeed.

In addition to playing, the warmups include singing, call and response, body awareness (students bump into things; they need to develop awareness of space) and spoken word. The topics covered in *One-Minute Warmups* are Posture; Bow direction; Dynamics; Ensemble (Where's the Beat?); Rhythm Fun (What's on Your Pizza?); Grab and Go—Finger Bow; Bowing Styles; Major and Minor; Mixed Meter; Slurring; String Crossings; Do Re Mi (It's All About Mi!). These warmups are intended to be used a la carte, depending on what your goals are for each rehearsal. Pick and choose as needed! Piano parts are optional. Mary and Ingrid then lead us through five warmups as examples of the material they have developed.

### Posture / Spoken Word

Starting each rehearsal with good posture and positions is essential in working with beginning orchestras. In *The Posture Song*, students will be able to focus on body awareness prior to playing. *The Posture Song* is spoken (not sung) to a clave beat. The students are expected to perform the actions as they speak. (If some students don't do the actions, try “opposite song” where students are expected to perform the opposite action to what they speak.)

My feet on the floor, I'm on the edge of my seat.  
Sitting up tall so I don't miss a beat.  
My instrument's ready, my arms are in place.  
Gonna make a big sound to fill all of this space.  
Bow fingers loose like cooked spaghetti.  
Everything's set and now I'm ready.  
Brain - check - Feet - check -  
Instrument - check - Bow - check -  
Now we're ready - (stomp) Let's go!

### Rhythm or What's on Your Pizza?

In this warmup, students will be able to differentiate, demonstrate and create various rhythm patterns. Begin by having your students think of their favorite pizza ingredients. Maybe write on the board or just remember things like cheese, pepperoni, pie, pizza, anchovy—each word will become a rhythm in a call and response game. The leader speaks the words, the class responds repeating the words, the leader plays the rhythm, the class plays. For instance, in  $\frac{4}{4}$  using open D as the playing note:

Pie, pie, pie, pie					
Pie, pie, pizza, pizza					
Cheese please					

Once the leader has given some examples, there is an ad lib section where students in the class can call out words for the group to copy.

### Dynamics

This warmup is a 40-measure 4-part chorale composed by Ingrid and Mary that requires students to demonstrate different dynamic levels within and between phrases, as well as between the different string sections. This warmup can also be used for tone production and uniform bow changes. The second time attendees played through, we were instructed to show the dynamics physically. Violinists and violists sit for *mp*, come halfway to standing for *mf* and standing fully for *f*. Cellists lean forward for *f* if they can't stand up. We found that dynamics were much more successful in the phrases where different instruments had different dynamics. We heard as well as saw as the *f* passage moved from instrument to instrument as the rest of the orchestra was *mp*.

The dynamics warm up required use of the whole bow. Mary Sorlie said, “My definition of a whole bow is frog to tip. What's your definition? Show me!” It can be challenging to get upper string students to move past the square truly to the frog of the bow. Teenage students especially may start to shrink with self-consciousness. Mary showed you are at the frog of the violin bow when you can

move finger 1 from the bow hold and touch the A string of the violin. To help students “over correct,” have them hold the bow at the balance point, and then play an up-bow until the ferrule bumps the string. Their bow arm will be past where they need to be with a normal bow hold at the frog. Going “too far” can help them understand where “far enough” is.

Mary then did a fun bow placement exercise saying “frog” or “tip” or “down” or “up” and having students do instant bow placement without playing. “Down” means place at the frog; “up” means place at the tip. The teacher calls the word and does the bow placement . . . and hilarity ensues as the tempo speeds up and the teacher sometimes does the opposite to what the word says.

### Mixed Meter

When preparing for a mixed meter piece such as *M to the Third Power* by Carol Nuñez, *Terra Nova* by Richard Meyer, or any piece with  $\frac{6}{8}$  and  $\frac{2}{4}$ —it’s good to prepare the new rhythms with easy notes. We played a mixed meter warmup composed by Ingrid and Mary. With combinations of  $\frac{4}{4}$ ,  $\frac{2}{4}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and a few measures of  $\frac{1}{4}$  at the end—cello pitches were open D and open A. Each time signature lasted only one or two measures. In the first section, cello notes were only on the down-beats—so counting rests was essential. In the middle section, the rhythm was steady quarters with accents at the beginning of each measure. To give variety to rehearsing the accents we were asked to stand or lean on each accent; stomp on the accents; or do body percussion instead of playing—stomp the accents and just tap the normal notes; or stomp and air bow; or half play and the other half raise their hand when they hear an accent. *Count to Ten* by Alex Shapiro (for band or orchestra) was

recommended to give similar experiences; one group can count out loud while another group plays.

### Major and Minor

This is a call-and-response experience that uses singing as well as playing. This warmup is best done by rote, rather than watching the music. Through singing then playing students will develop audiation, and the ability to match their fingers to their singing.

Using the lyrics “I’m so happy” “This is major” and “I’m so sad now” “This is minor” the pitches on the D string are D E F# E and D E F# E. The teacher sings; the students echo. The teacher plays what was sung; the students echo. “Happy sad” F# F# F# ♯. “Major minor” F# F# F# F#. After singing and playing the sequence on the D string, repeat on the G string.

*Ingrid Koller is a freelance violist, violin and viola instructor, and composer in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. For 19 years, Ingrid was a co-director of the Early Bird String Academy, a before-school orchestra program in North Saint Paul, Minnesota. You can find out more information about One-Minute Warmups at [ingridkoller.com](http://ingridkoller.com).*

*Mary Sorlie conducts the GTCYS Philharmonia East and West orchestras and serves as the GTCYS Harmony Artistic Director and Lead violin Teaching Artist. As a studio violin and viola teacher, Mary enjoys teaching students of all ages and abilities and was awarded the 2011 MNSOTA Master Teacher: Studio Award.*

*Faith Farr has been editor of this magazine since 1996. ♯*