

Week 1

Back to Basics Bow Workshop

Monday's Assignment:

1. Locate your A.O. joint by taking two index fingers, finding your mastoid bones (the boney protrusions behind your ears) – your A.O. joint is where your index fingers would intersect. Do few nods and notice the range of motion.
2. Standing with feet in a V shape, shoulder distance apart. Ankles, hips, knees soft. Do the pinky – sternum test. Pinky on the belly button, and thumb on sternum. Did you have to adjust your alignment?
3. Do the Case Walk (or march in place) – did you adjust your alignment after lifting the case over your head? If you find this helpful, you can even try this before practicing your other repertoire!
4. Try the fire drill.
5. Uncurling 10x or Yoga that incorporates this.
6. Diaphragmatic breathing – Take at least 5 breath cycles (count your exhales – can you exhale fully?). Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, and exhale all the way for at least 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, repeat.

Journal Questions:

Did you have to do some adjusting to your alignment? If so, are there habits you might adjust in order to have a healthier carriage? Do you normally play with an open chest and open back? What about your neck when you're playing the violin - are you bending it forward, to the side, or holding any tension? How is your breathing throughout the day? What are three wins you had today? (Sometimes I have to dig deep for these! That's okay!)

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Tuesday's Assignment:

1. Do the pinky sternum test. You can try uncurling or the case walk as well before trying today's assignments.
2. Take off any shoulder pads/rests that you might be using. In rest position, 4 fingers in 4th position on your lowest string, take your right index finger around the bout to find the button. While nodding yes, and marching in place, guide the violin to your collarbone. The button should find its place against your neck. Is this different from how you normally place your violin?
3. While your violin is still in playing position, does your nod complete a full yes before resting on the chinrest? Or do you have to nod further than you normally would, indicating a chinrest that might warrant more height? Or does your nod fall short of a full yes, indicating a chinrest that's too tall?
4. Pinky strumming exercises – See music: PinkyStrumViolin or PinkyStrumViola

Journal Questions:

Nodding a full yes without your shoulder rest - does it meet your chinrest naturally? If not, is your chinrest too high or too low? Does your set up allow for a free left shoulder in the pinky strumming exercise? If not, what can you experiment with in order to free the left shoulder? (Note: My instrument and pad don't touch my left shoulder at all! You might have heard that soloists like Heifetz, Pincas Zuckerman, and Augustin Hadelich, use(d) a sponge underneath their shirts!) What are three wins you had today?

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Wednesday's Assignment:

1. Practice making the Franco-Belgian bow hold on a pencil with natural spacing using all three ways demonstrated:
 - a. Arm dangling at your side
 - b. Opening a (Very) Loose, Soft, Fist
 - c. Hand set on a flat surface
 - d. Repeat with your bow
 - e. Check for –
 - i. Relaxed bent thumb, contacting pencil or bow only at the tip
 - ii. Thumb and first joint of middle finger across from one another to create the axis of our bow hold
 - iii. Curved pinky on top of pencil or with nail hooked onto inside ridge of the bow
 - iv. First finger set lightly on the middle phalange of index finger.
2. Bow exercises - keep checking for a loose bow hold, curved pinky and thumb. Hold only as much as you need to keep the bow from dropping. Try with a pencil first, then try with a bow.
 - a. Rocket
 - b. Side to side
 - c. Elevator
 - d. Around the Face
 - e. Stirring the Pot
 - f. Rolling the pencil (only do this with a pencil for now)

Journal Questions:

Do you already have a standard, balanced Franco-Belgian bow hold? If not, how is yours different and how might you have had to adjust in order to accommodate your version? (Try the Franco-Belgian bow hold for a few weeks! If it doesn't sound great, you can always go back.) Do you normally have a loose, soft bow hold? If not, how can you develop this habit? What are three wins you had today?

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Thursday's Assignment:

1. Spider Crawl Up and Down the Bow 2x
2. Fle Fi Fro (Flexible Fingers at the Frog) Variations
 - a. Without a bow or a pencil, make a (very) loose, soft fist. Then “splash” water from your fingers. Then go back to your (very) loose, soft fist. “Splash” water from your fingers. 8x
 - b. With a pencil: Start your elevator on the 5th floor. 4x
 - i. Keep your pencil perpendicular to the floor as you descend to the basement.
 - ii. Go back to the 5th floor – still keeping pencil perpendicular to the ground.
 - iii. Keep pencil perpendicular to floor as you rise to the 10th floor.
 - iv. Keep pencil perpendicular as you ascend to the 11th floor with the help of wrist and fingers.
 - v. Try this with a bow as well 3x
 - c. Pencil parallel to the ground.
3. Flying pizz
 - a. In rest position, find your violin hold with fingers in 4th position on the lowest string. Ankles, Knees, Hips soft – chest open, back open.
 - i. Nod head from AO joint, march in place. Bring right index finger around to the button. Guide violin to your collarbone, button to your neck.
 - ii. Keep LG fingers hovered over the fingerboard in “middle” position with thumb in the nook. LH elevated.
 - b. Touch inner corner of right thumb to fingerboard. Rest index finger on A string (violins)/D string (violas).
 - c. Keeping ankles, knees, hips loose, aiming for in front of your belly button, release the string by initiating motion from the elbow. As you release, allow gravity to propel your arm down. Allow your arm to float back to the string.
 - d. The shape you create with your right hand will be circular/elliptical.
 - e. Did you experience bilateral motion? Your violin and right hand would be moving in opposite directions.
 - i. If not, try just swaying from weight on both feet to more weight on the left foot.
 - ii. You can also start with small pizz. circles and get bigger.
 - iii. Try putting the two motions together. Keep in mind that the weight transfer to the left foot is initiated by the right elbow.
4. Barcarolle – Flying Pizz.
 - a. Notes for Violin and Viola: D A A D | D A A D
 - b. See video

Journal Questions:

Which Fle-Fi-Fro version was the easiest for you? How can you use this version as a starting point to apply to the other Fle-Fi-Fro versions? Did sympathetic body motion occur naturally when you tried the flying pizz? If not, where do you think you might have been holding some static tension? Why? What are three wins you had today?

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Friday's Assignment:

1. Pinky strums middle, high, low 5x
2. Flying Pizz 10x
3. Rocking and Rolling (tap your bow fingers before you start) hooked onto LH pinky and then at the middle of the bow beginning on the A or D string.
4. Mark the balance point if needed.
5. Short strokes at the balance point – no more than 1 inch in length. Explore with free rhythm. Try some Suzuki rhythms – Mississippi Hot Dog, Run Pony Stop Pony, Ice Cream Shh Cone, Mississippi Alligator.
 - a. This motion from the shoulder joint initiated by the upper arm will serve as the basis for all subsequent strokes.
6. Pick two other motions from previous days to practice today!

Journal Questions:

Did you discover or relieve any slight tensions while rocking and rocking? If so, how might this affect your bowing (keeping in mind that we need to offset arc shapes with other arc shapes observed in joints to maintain a straight bow)? Did your short stroke (less than 1 inch in length) naturally initiate from the upper arm? If not, how would that affect your sound during a longer stroke?