

SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS FOR IMPROVING YOUR STRING SOUND

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I. SEATING

Rotate chairs: have two seating arrangements, one by ability and one by the “buddy system” allowing strong players to help weaker players and second part players to play first parts

Circle: if you are fortunate enough to have a flat room, seat the students in a circle and teach from the middle, allowing access to all of their hand positions for easy correction. This seating arrangement also allows you to hear the ensemble better when no one is hiding behind anyone.

Small ensembles: seat in a half circle for rehearsal and performances

Cello/Bass in middle: if you have a small cello/bass section and a large violin/viola section, seat the celli/basses in the middle

Experiment with different seating arrangements for better sound

II. FULL SOUND

Double-stops/ open strings: have students play double-stops of their choice for eight quarter notes each as loud as they can (with good sound of course) using the entire bow or different styles of bowing and go through the cycle of double-stops.

Straws: to help students from sliding onto the fingerboard, or to fix crooked bow syndrome, use straws in f-holes of violin/ violas. For bass/cello, you might need something bigger e.g.: rolled-up piece of paper

Bow placement on strings: generally the lower the string, the closer you need to be to the fingerboard for a good forte sound. The higher the string, the closer to the bridge. Larger instruments such as the bass need to have a bow closer to the fingerboard for a good forte

Wipe cloths/dime: wipe off strings regularly for better vibration with cloth or a dime one-way only

III. INTONATION

Follow-me: using a string instrument or piano, utilize follow-me exercises for improving specific intonation problems in the ensemble and for improving ear training. Make sure you keep the same number of beats for each measure you give.

First position exercises: do not under estimate the power of first position exercises and finger patterns

Hand positions: left hand: have the student hold a soda can for cello, basses; water bottles for violins, violas Right hand: bent thumb position—use only tip of thumb to hold bow

IV. CLASS METHOD BOOKS: suggestion for teaching scales and advance positions in a string orchestra

Essentials for Strings...Gerald Anderson

One, two, three octave scales and fingerings for all instruments, multiple rhythms

Strictly Strings Book Three: Orchestra Companion... Dillion, Kjelland, O'Reilly

Third position exercises focusing on the most common seven keys

Muller-Rusch Book 4:

Positions one through four on all instruments

V. INSTRUMENTS

Purchase only shop adjusted instruments

15 1/2 inch violas for middle/high school students

3/4 size basses for high school students, 1/2 or 3/4 size for middle school

Do not throw out, give away, or trade-in old instruments (pre-1970's): fix them if you can—these may be superior to some of the new student instruments you can buy

Re-hair bows every year and make sure the length of hair is correct (a bow that never tightens to the proper level may not be a sign of a weak bow but a sign of too long length of hair)

Save bow screws by pinching frog between fingers while turning

VI. PROPER EQUIPMENT

Shoulder pads: use quality shoulder pads e.g.: Kun, Resonans (1-2 inch) NO SPONGES for older students and full size instruments.... They will probably not be enough support

Chinrests: make sure student is comfortable with the chin rest—if the chinrest falls off, do not over tighten—tight enough is when you can still move it slightly without falling off

Strings: quality strings will make a cheap instrument sound better

Suggestions: Violin: DOMINANT
Viola: DOMINANT
Cello: JAGAR
Bass: many different good brands

Rosin: Hill and Sons Dark for violins, violas, cello - Carlsson for bass

Check bridges for proper side, placement, and height

Put on peg compound on sticky pegs

All bridges, pegs must be fitted for the instrument.... One size does not fit all!

Mutes: clothespins will work as a cheap alternative... just clamp the clothespin to the bridge and you have a nice muted sound!

VII. INSTRUMENTATION

Violin/viola: switch as many violins to viola as possible, even if it is part time.

Method book suggestion: Muller-Rusch Book 1,2,3

Piano/bass: if you have a lot of piano players, don't let them sit around...put them on bass!!!!

Method book suggestion: Muller-Rusch Book 1,2,3

Piano: have a piano player—it will help the strings tune, but make sure the piano is in tune!!!

VIII. TEACHING SPICCATO

Middle balance point of bow: make sure the students are at the middle balance point of the bow (closer to the frog) and not the middle of the bow—Bounce off the string without a sound (windshield wiper) in a slow tempo, gradually increase the speed while getting closer to the string and then move the bow slightly back and forth to make a sound