Violin and Viola Grounding

Left hand preparation is so important in preparing for exams and general technical comfort.

Young violinists and violists have difficult coordination issues to deal with from the start and a major area of concern is left hand balance. Even these days when so much pedagogic knowledge is available, one still finds candidates presenting with poor left hand posture and little idea of ‘framing’ the fingers.

Setting the hand with even balance between the fingers is a high priority for the development of good intonation. The 1st finger grip which is so strongly supported by the thumb can have the effect of disabling the left hand and by the time the shortest weakest finger gets to go down, it is so compromised by the tension in the hand that it is often out of tune, lacking in tonal quality and has reduced facility.

Within the exercises in the technical workbook there are plenty of opportunities to help set the left hand, i.e. 1st grade Ex 3 (ii). This starts with the 4th finger and is a good opportunity to set the hand well. Encourage finding the note without recourse to the 1st finger (check with open E if necessary) and let the thumb take a more central supporting role. In Fourth grade Ex 3, set the E & G first then find the C & E so that the weaker end of the hand can be more evenly supported. This would be the same for Ex 7. (b) in that whenever the 4th finger comes second in a group of notes, the mind set isn’t 1st finger plus the rest.

In level 2, the sautille exercise in sixth grade presents the 4th finger first and is also another opportunity to encourage a balanced hand. Similarly, the one string scale sequence could be practised in reverse i.e. starting halfway through the bar at the top of the scale to initially set the hand shape in the higher position after which the scale could be played as written. This would encourage an understanding of hand shape and again help to break the reliance on the 1st finger. Playing a scale with the third and fourth finger (and under slurs to promote ease of shifting) helps to promote a stronger sense of these fingers within the hand rather than an extension out of the stronger part of the hand.

It is important that teachers develop their own exercises as well for left hand development but it is essential that the focus is fourth finger oriented as soon as possible in early training. (For those interested in seeing the ultimate in left hand balance, google Novacek Perpetuum Mobile with Henryk Szeryng where especially towards the end the camera focuses on the left hand for a long period.)

Associate Professor Keith Crellin OAM
AMEB Strings Advisor

AMEB Returns to Elder

Following 3 years of Metropolitan Public Centre examinations being held in the University of Adelaide’s Schulz Building they are poised to commence a phased relocation to Elder Hall from the September Session 3 this year. There will be just two more weekends in 2010 when the AMEB will use Schulz.

Readers will recall that while various Metropolitan Public Centres have been used in the past, the Elder Hall complex was the home of the AMEB’s public centre examinations for a great many years. In particular teachers will remember that its spacious studios and good quality grand and upright pianos are ideally suited to the AMEB’s examination work. Therefore I am delighted that these are now available to the AMEB so that it can continue its efforts to improve its educational services.

Readers may also be interested to know that the benefits of the upcoming move will flow through to the Elder Conservatorium’s Saturday Junior Access Centre. This has been expanding its teaching rapidly and now caters for the music education of more than 100 children each week.

With the AMEB’s move to Elder Hall, the Elder Conservatorium’s facilities in Schulz Building will now be available to provide much needed additional accommodation for this vibrant community of young.

Successful Swing Demands Careful Counting

One of the challenges facing classical music teachers teaching jazz and popular styles represented in the AMEB syllabi is the interpretation of swing quavers for an authentic swing feel.

The traditional method is to treat the as approximately (it varies with tempo). This is often indicated near the tempo indication:

Meticulous counting in the swing feel is essential: count as

This counting will also aid accuracy of the syncopated rhythms. Of equal importance is the articulation – running quavers generally legato, staccato crisp. With practice and time the feel should become more relaxed and natural.

An invaluable technological aid available with many publications is backing tracks on CD or midi file. Slowing tracks down with midi or software for CD such as The Amazing Slow Downer is useful in the early learning stages.

Have the student play along with the demonstration part audible until fluent – then with just the backing. This accelerates learning, improves sight-reading and leads to more security with time, rhythm and technique, enhanced musicianship and ultimately – more enjoyable music-making.

Kerin Bailey – AMEB examiner and composer of the Jazzin’ Around and Jazz Incorporated series of music. Also Rhythm Unravelled – recommended for further study of rhythm, articulation and jazz style.