

On Practicing

From your mind to your fingers



Vision: Having a vision is seeing the big picture, the whole piece, which will allow you to define your performance possibilities.

Strategies: Once you have made your performance decisions it is necessary to formulate a strategy that will guide you towards the realization of your vision.

Tactics: Tactics are the steps you take to implement everyday strategies in your practicing which lead you to your performance vision.

Understanding the three areas of learning

1- Physical

Learning what physical skills (left hand and right hand) are needed to excel at the violin

2- Technical

Learning how to organize through scales (Yost) and etudes then how to project that information into pieces and concertos

3- Mental

Understanding how to develop a strong mental self to take advantage of the physical and technical skills you have acquired

Beginning to learn Solo Repertoire

Always start by gaining a perspective on the work you are about to study through listening to different performances, either through recordings, DVD's or YouTube. Do listen with the orchestral score in hand when possible (you may download quite a few from IMSLP) and piano scores with sonatas. Once you have started to learn the notes, etc... cease to listen. Nothing is gained by simply copying another artists interpretation.

Preparatory work

(1) Notes/Fingerings - Work extremely hard to locate the sound of every note and know the corresponding fingering.

(2) Rhythms/Bowings - Work extremely hard to know the rhythms (break them down using the Starer method when necessary) and their corresponding bowings.

This work will not be perfectly in tune or clean but will serve as the basic groundwork for all future work. This preparatory learning process for the movement should not take more than 2-4 days.

Detailed Work

All of this work is done with the idea of going from the top to the bottom or in a manner similar to a funnel. When you practice funneling, you focus on getting a general framework, or overview of the piece, before working on the details. When you understand the general concepts first, the details make more sense. Rather than disconnected bits of information to memorize, the material fits together within the overall framework of the work. Seeing how the smaller details relate to one another, you process the information more deeply (which helps you store, and later retrieve, it from your long term memory).

(1) Shaping Phrases / Designing Phrases - A phrase is, the smallest musical unit which conveys a more or less complete musical thought. Phrases vary in length and are terminated at a cadence. The student must be able to recognize the phrasing in their piece to allow for a coherent organizational strategy.

(2) Memorizing - After having broken down the work into sections and then phrases, the work of learning or memorizing should be started. Here repetitive practice is used to both learn a phrase and memorize it at the same time.

(3) The Process of Refining - It is during this work that a vertical strategy is the most useful. Creative incremental learning tools need to be developed and initiated. The metronome is now a welcomed tool!

Performance preparation

Performance practicing: Towards the end of every practice session at least one full run through of the work studied should occur; two would be better. By doing this the student will have a clearer understanding of where they are on their "goal" timeline.

Concentration is that place where you are totally and exclusively focused on what you are doing at the time. This state of mind is what is needed to be developed and put into your practice attitude.

Mental practicing: Mental Rehearsal is the imaginary rehearsal of a physical skill without physical movement, using your visual (seeing), aural (hearing) and kinesthetic (feeling / touch) senses to create or recreate a performance experience similar to the event itself. Visualizing the performance venue and imagining oneself performing in it is a very strong way to begin understanding the stress one might encounter during the performance.

Four abilities needed for effective practicing ...

- The ability to set goals and the audacity to push beyond them.
- The ability to imagine what you are about to do and know how you are going to do it.
- The ability to maintain your focus despite any distractions that may be surround you.
- The ability to work with or around the ever changing nature of the challenge at hand.

Areas Of Concentration

(This is based on five hours daily. Use the percentages to understand how to do this within your time limits.)

Basics (10% of total time)

- This should include Yost, Dounis, Schradieck, Vibrato exercises and/or any other exercises leading to a better form.

These exercises should be viewed as work towards long term projects (projects from 3-12 months or more) and should be practiced in 8 minute segments

Scales (15% of total time)

- Flesch scales altered to make 24 notes and arpeggios
Understand scales through patterns
Galamian Rhythms and Bow exercises
Work with scale excerpts from current concerto or solo piece

One must remember that scale practice should have a practical application to ones study of solo works. Fingerings in particular should mirror this work, in other words should be the same. For more advanced students the scales should be 'scale passages' taken from the standard repertoire of concertos.

Etudes / Paganini (25% of total time)

Reasons for Etude study:

- Focus on the study of a particular mechanical skill
- Learning how to organize, use form to help in breaking down the piece into phrases and then motive
- Etudes should be viewed as small musical pieces that have a particular technical challenge.
- One should work towards finding out if the acquired skill works in this musical area.

PAGANINI Caprices study order: 13 / 20 / 16 / 5 / 2 / 14 / 1 / 17 / 9 / 6 / 4 / 15 /
7 ~ 24

Concerto / Solo Piece (25% of total time) *see Student Work List*

Concerto such as Wieniawski, Mendelssohn, etc.

Solo piece such as Ravel's Tzigane, Sarasate's Ziguenerweisen...

Bach / Sonata (25% of total time)

Bach Sonatas and Partitas study order: Partita no.3 – Gigue / Partita no.1 – Double (2nd) / Partita no.2 – Allemande / Sonata no.1 – Presto / Partita no.3 – Prelude / Partita no.3 – Gavotte / Sonata no.3 – Largo / Sonata no.2 Grave / Fugue / Sonata no.1 – Adagio / Fugue / Partita no.2 – Chaconne etc...

Violin / Piano sonatas such as Beethoven, Brahms or Debussy.