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Q. What suggestions would you make as to just how to hold the violin or viola?

A. There are various ways to teach the holding of the instrument all of which can produce good results. At the very beginning, some teachers favor the guitar position. The player's physique, the length of the arm, and the height of the neck are to be carefully considered. Here are some basic principles.

The violin might well rest on the collar bone midway between the front of the body and the left shoulder, and held as high as the upper lip with the tip of the nose in line with the scroll.

The side of the first finger contacts the neck of the violin or viola a bit above the base knuckle. The thumb contacts the neck slightly above the first crease, more toward the tip of the thumb. Since this is a variable, the thumb may contact the neck at the crease or slightly above or below, depending on the size of the thumb.

The thumb may be placed about one or one-half inch from the nut or the end of the neck. There must always be an open space between the thumb and the first finger under the neck.

The hand and forearm should form a reasonably straight line. The heel (or the palm of the hand) should not be permitted to contact the underside of the neck.

The left elbow is placed under the violin so that the elbow joint is approximately under the center of the violin. Let us call this the neutral position. This varies somewhat, depending upon the size of the left arm and the string that is being played.

Q. What is the best way for a player to stand while playing the violin or viola?

A. The feet should be about ten to twelve inches apart. The performer should be able to balance the weight between both legs and should be able to transfer the body weight from one foot to the other.

I do object to having all the weight placed on the same foot at all times. If a choice must be made, however, the weight should be on the left foot rather than on the right foot. Many teachers, in fact, suggest that the weight should be applied to the left foot and the right foot be slightly forward.

Q. Do you permit the violin to rest on the shoulder when holding the instrument?

A. Many artists do. The violin is then held with the head and the shoulder. Beginning students may find it easier to hold the violin in this way.

Q. Is there another way?

A. Yes, where the violin is balanced between the collar bone and the jaw bone with the head applying a light pressure. This head pressure is applied lightly only when shifts are made. When one remains in the position or if one holds a long note in any one position, head pressure should be practically eliminated.

Q. Which method is more successful when teaching young children?

A. Most young beginners might be better off supporting the instrument with the head and shoulder. Many players, however, are very successful by having the violin rest on the collar bone, with the left hand assuming a bit more of the responsibility in holding or balancing the violin or viola.

Q. Do you approve of the shoulder pad?

A. Here, opinions are divided. Some of my close friends, teachers and famous soloists do not approve of any shoulder pad at all, not even for students with long necks, feeling that they can learn to balance the violin between the collar bone and the jaw.

Vibrato

To develop a rich, warm vibrato consider adopting the following procedures:

1. Practice any scale, holding each note for five seconds, then four seconds, then three seconds, then two, and then one second.
2. Vibrate by oscillating five times to the five-second note, then five times to the four-second note, then five times to the three-second note, then five times to the two-second note, then five times to the one-second note.

Eventually, oscillate approximately five times to each note that is one second in duration. That may well be considered a good speed for the development of a fine vibrato.

Neglected Notes

Here, we have a series of notes that are likely to be neglected on a string instrument during a performance:

1. the note after a three- or four-voice chord that is played very loudly;
2. in groups of four sixteenth notes the fourth note is likely to be neglected;
3. in rapid détaché passages that involve triplets, the second note of each triplet is often neglected;
4. in arpeggios that involve triplets on three strings, the first note of every other triplet is apt to be neglected because it occurs on the up-bow;
5. in a four string arpeggio which involves four notes, it is the second of each group that is apt to be neglected;
6. the note before a shift and the note after the shift;
7. there is a tendency to neglect using vibrato on significant notes that are played with the fourth finger; it may be advisable to use more of the fleshy pad while not allowing the first knuckle of the fourth finger to collapse;
8. if we play a series of notes in one down-bow, the notes closer to the tip tend to be neglected and may lack the quality of brilliance because of lack of bow weight;
9. in détaché passages, the first and last notes of various rhythmic groups are frequently neglected; (to counteract that tendency, practice passage similar to the following, accenting the notes that are marked);



10. There are two occasions when notes must be held for their full value because there is a tendency to shorten them slightly.
 - a. before a string change or skipping of strings,
 - b. before a shift.

Interpretation

- Ask students to sing or hum all phrases, where possible. This will aid in identifying the various phrases and in understanding the emotional message.
- In the performance of a work, logic must prevail, but there must be contrasts so that there is freedom within unity. A great artist must know how to handle restrictions. In the interpretation of works by Beethoven, there are more guidelines than with other composers, particularly Mozart. However, within these guidelines, there are greater restrictions, but the need for freedom is also greater.