

Intonation Tools

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Developing accurate intonation is a life-long endeavor for string players.

Good intonation depends...."mainly on the sense of touch in combination with the guidance of the ear". Galamian

Matching with piano

- Play each note of a scale, etude or piece on the piano and have the student adjust the finger to match the pitch

This is an essential skill because

- In many early pieces, the piano right hand doubles the melody
- Most string repertoire has piano accompaniment so listening to piano pitch and harmony must be cultivated

Common concern: THE PIANO IS OUT OF TUNE!!

- Up to a certain point, even an out of tune piano will get the student closer to being in tune
- Even when the piano is out of tune the student needs to match it as best they can in performance, so this needs to be practiced.

Singing

- Develops the "inner ear"
- Have the student sing a problematic interval or small group of notes then play on the instrument
- While leaving the instrument in playing position, alternate between singing and playing (be sure the singing is in tune before playing by checking with piano or through teacher modeling)

Listening for sympathetic vibrations

- Begin with notes that match or are an octave above open strings
- Add notes in other octaves that match open strings
- Eventually listen for the "ring" on all notes
- Small instruments and those of lesser quality will produce weaker sympathetic vibrations

Matching open strings

- Begin with the octave above the open string
- Gradually add notes that form a consonant interval with the open string (only after the student is proficient at the first step)
- Eventually include notes that form a dissonant interval with the open string (only after the student is proficient at the second step)

Checking with adjacent notes (This is an advanced skill due to the coordination of adjusting two fingered notes)

- This practice can give a deeper understanding of underlying harmony.
- Pay special attention to perfect intervals (4ths, 5ths, 8vas)

Listening for combination tones when playing doublestops

- Explain this acoustical phenomenon to your student
- Use this skill when matching with open strings or adjacent notes
- Use this skill when tuning printed doublestops
- This requires acute listening on the part of teacher and student

Scale degree function

- Begin by helping students understand the job of leading tones
- Check that the 3rd of a key is placed so that major or minor mode is clear
- Check that tonic is consistent
- Check that the dominant has a good relationship to tonic even if those notes don't occur consecutively
- Expand to understanding the function of other scale degrees to support good intonation

Practicing with an electronic tuner or drone

- The teacher can prepare the student for this experience by sustaining the tonic, the root of a chord or other appropriate pitch for the student to tune to
- Use of a tuner is only appropriate after the student has developed all of the intonation practice skills listed above to a high level
- Begin by setting the tuner to reproduce the tonic, expand to the root of the chord in a given section, then various members of the chord or various scale degrees

“Target practice”

- Once the ear has been trained to hear a pitch or interval correctly, set a goal for “landing” a finger in tune (5x total, 3x in a row for example)
- Landing and adjusting is useful to a point, then left hand accuracy needs to become a priority

Teach your students the vocabulary to go along with the skills!