

Alternative Styles Teacher Training Manual

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**This manual has been coordinated with the text,
Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum
and with resources that can be found at
JulieLyonn.com**

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Introduction

Changing the Quality of Experience

Our students will definitely benefit from being exposed to the musical imagination of the world. But some orchestra directors assume that the inclusion of electrics or alternative string styles will automatically generate higher levels of motivation and appreciation. This is not necessarily so. Sometimes—but not always—change can take time. There is a mind-set from classical pedagogy that creates a fear of mistakes, an “eyes first-ears second” mental hierarchy, and an inability to play without being told exactly what to play note by note via sheet music. It may even take time to adjust to hearing and creating sounds that are new to them, or catching onto how they can create their own music. What transformation are we looking for? This is a question that would be useful to answer before you even get started. Here are some possible answers:

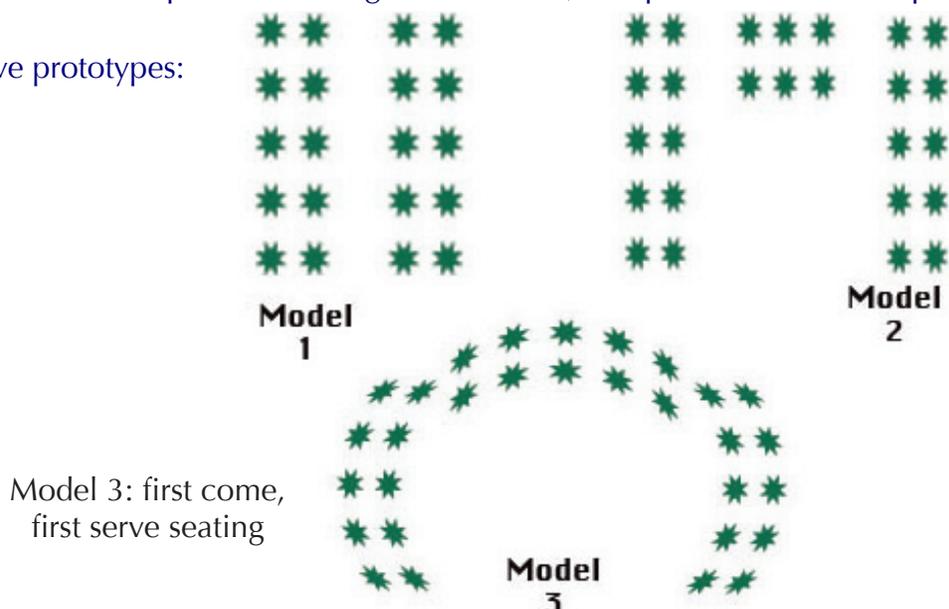
Students who are...

- comfortable stepping in and out of leadership and being members of a team
- equally adept at reading and improvising
- equally adept at learning through their ears as well as their eyes
- well versed in a number of styles (repertoire as well as appropriate left- and right-hand techniques)
- comfortable with more than one seating arrangement
- comfortable playing as a soloist as well as within a group
- capable of playing acoustic as well as electric and knowledgeable about the use of special effects
- trained to compose, create variations on melodies, and interpret repertoire

Seating Arrangements

Changing the seating arrangement can have a huge impact on student participation. The ability to hear and see one another will stimulate new levels of interaction and foster a stronger team effort. The old archetype was based on the concept that there was one person who knew everything and was in charge, and the seating was designed to create hierarchy among the players, and place the best closest to the conductor. This (often) male-centric model emulated a “King and his subjects” prototype. While this model has worked well for professional classical orchestras — otherwise it would have been changed a long time ago — it tends to lower self-esteem in student orchestras, turns art into competition, prevents sections from hearing one another’s parts or relating to each other, and prevents the development of a democratic leadership.

Here are some alternative prototypes:



Resources

I have created as many resource materials as possible to help you along your way. At my web site, JulieLynn.com, you will find a section called **ResourceCentral** that cites most of the major alternative string books, CDs, DVDs, and many pro-audio suggestions. Another section, called “String Player’s Corner,” provides information on amplification, among other topics. In the section “Free Downloads,” you can access the articles I wrote for STRAD magazine. There is also information and free accompaniments for rock string exercises in the section labeled “Rock Strings Lesson Plans.”

At the site, StringsCentral.com, you will find a full listing of alternative style presenters (name, specialty, and geographic area) as well as access to alternative string compositions. For a complete listing of world styles and discographies/annotated bibliography, see **Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum**

There are also a number of websites, magazines, and instructional books and videos available today to help you create an inclusive curriculum:

Alfred Music: See books by Bob Phillips, Randy Sabien at <http://www.alfred.com> (also check out their extensive and ever-growing alternative style orchestra scores)

IAJE String Caucus: (<http://www.jazzstringcaucus.org/>) for jazz string bibliography/discography

Fiddler Magazine: (<http://www.fiddler.com>) for articles on fiddling

Homespun Tapes: <http://www.homespuntapes> (1-800-33-TAPES) for instructional videos

Mel Bay Publications: (<http://www.melbay.com>) for alternative string books

Stringscentral.com: for solo & orchestral alternative string charts, books, CDs, and videos

Strings Magazine: (<http://www.strings.com>) for articles on classical and alternative strings; see Teen Strings for articles pertinent to younger players

Breaking out of Hierarchy

You have an opportunity to guide your students clear of some of the pitfalls of hierarchical thinking many of us were exposed to through our classical teachers when we were young:

- the (misinformed) hierarchy of style

— once you and your students learn about—for example—the complex rhythms and scales from regions like India or the intricacies of jazz, than the classic music of Western Europe will takes its rightful place **alongside** the classic musics of every region of the world

- the (anti-educational) hierarchy of seating

— twenty-year-old studies have already proven that a child who chronically sits in the back of the room doesn’t pay attention as well and tends to have lower self-esteem. Shouldn’t we be busy teaching individual value by constantly rotating seating rather than judging and then making resulting statements about value?

- the hierarchical paradigm that positions the teacher as an all-knowing superior—it’s absolutely effective to learn alongside of your students and let them know that this is the case. They will gain, rather than lose, respect for your willingness to experiment and learn from and with them.

Getting Started

Choosing Styles for your Students

Since there are over thirty string styles available to teach, you can try using one of the following guidelines to help you choose styles appropriate to the needs of each of your string classes.

Geographic guidelines

You might get started by choosing a style that was created or fostered in your geographic area. Consult the following list of styles to help you decide. I have included a name next to each style. The artist named exemplifies that style but isn't necessarily the best or only artist for that genre. This is just to help you get started:

American Folk (5)

bluegrass (Brad Leftwich)
Cajun (Micheal Doucet)
Franco-American (Donna Hebert)
old-time (Bruce Molsky)
Western Swing (Randy Elmore)

Jazz (4)

Blues (Lonnie Johnson)
Swing (Joe Venuti)
Bebop (Elek Bacsik)
Modern (John Blake, Jr.)

Contemporary (3)

Hip Hop (Miri Ben Ari)
pop music (Lorenza Ponce)
rock (Mark Wood)

World (15)

Afro-Cuban (Latin Violin by Sam Bardfeld)
Arabic (Simone Shaheen)
Bossa Nova (Stan Getz on sax)
Cape Breton (Natalie McMaster)
East Indian: Carnatic (T. N. Krishnan) and Hindustani (L. Subramaniam)
Flamenco (Faiçal Kourrich Lebrijano)
Greek (Kyriakos Gouventas)
Gypsy (Roby Lakatos)
Irish (Martin Hayes, Liz Carroll)
Klezmer (The Klezmatics with Alicia Svigals)
Mexican: Tierra Caliente (Juan Reynoso) and Mariachi (Laura Sobrino)
Scandinavian: Swedish (Bjorn Stabi), Norwegian (Karen Solgård), Danish (Harald Haugaard), and Finnish (Tero Hyväluoma)
Scottish (Alasdair Fraser)
Shetland Island (Aly Bain)
Tango (Jose "Pepino" Bonano with Juan "Pacho" Maglio or Yo Yo Ma)

Student interest

Bring CDs or videos to class and give your students an opportunity to choose for themselves. You can also download tunes from iTunes and play them through a classroom computer or burn them onto audio CD. (see "Audio Support and Equipment.")

Your skills

If you have trained in or have a passion for a particular style, it might be more comfortable to start with that style—however limited or basic your level of expertise may be—because your enthusiasm for the style will naturally be conveyed to your students. It's surprising how many students can teach well, if you are open to their input.

Creating a Lesson Plan

You can fulfill at least five of the ten National Standards for American Music Education through stylistically inclusive string teaching: See pages 21 - 24 in *Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman for details. Adding one alternative string piece to the season's concert immediately justifies the use of classroom time to introduce new teaching and rehearsal techniques.

Most styles created by other cultures, were taught aurally and preserved via memory, not notation. Subtle differences in right- and left-hand touch on the instrument necessitate careful listening. To successfully convey the intricacies of each style, it's advised that you strengthen student listening skills—something classical training often doesn't achieve due to the emphasis on using sheet music as the "driver at the wheel" rather than the ears. To provide your students with a whole-brain approach to learning, you can rotate through the following practice techniques when working on a new style:

- **auditory learning**

Using call and response, you can lead, (or you can choose a student leader) to teach melodic and/or rhythmic phrases from the melody of choice, eventually progressing into whole melodies. Isolate rhythmic phrases from listening examples through call and response before combining with left-hand melodic lines. Since the rhythmic center is located in a different sector of the brain than pitch, ear training that focuses exclusively on rhythms applied to an open string or single pitch will help strengthen the rhythmic center of the brain. You can also use software (like Slow Jam, Transcriber, or Peak) to slow down a recorded selection, and challenge your students to find and play genre-specific ornaments.

- **contextual theory**

Discuss elements that help define the style, such as how the melody moves within the framework of the key; how the chords used to accompany the melody are similar to or different from other styles; unique rhythmic characteristics; and any other defining characteristics, such as ornamentation typical of that genre.

- **authentic audio examples**

Using CDs, videos, and or downloads from iTunes, make sure your classes have an opportunity to listen to traditional players authentic to the style(s) you focus on across the year.

(See *Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum*, page 27, for listening criteria)

- **multi-cultural teaching**

Make sure to present each piece or genre within a historic/cultural context, providing names and dates visually and aurally, with as full an overview of the culture that generated the style as possible.

- **cross-over learning techniques**

The above techniques can also be applied to teaching a classical piece of music. For instance, you can base a whole lesson plan on the fact that most fiddlers and world musicians learn their melodies and harmonies by ear, not by eye. Try choosing a fiddle or jazz tune and research other versions of it on CD or in a publication and then teach several versions of the first few measures by ear, passing out music for it afterwards and discussing the difference between aural versus notated learning. As a class, study the variations developed on the melody. These variations are actually a form of improvisation. The students can learn a great deal about how to choose a few notes and vary them by using slight changes in rhythmic setting, the order of the notes, or the addition of ornaments. Choose a melodic passage from their classical repertoire and challenge them to apply what they have learned from this presentation to a phrase from a classical piece in their repertoire.

Teaching Techniques

Most fiddle styles involve unison group playing with a high number of repetitions of the melody; the rhythmic/harmonic accompaniment is supplied by the rhythm section, usually consisting of instruments like guitar, mandolin, banjo, and bass, depending on the style. This high level of repetition can help support good intonation and a feeling of security and confidence through playing as a group. Jazz tunes provide us with the opportunity to teach our students about how to individualize interpretations of the melody and how to create variations on it.

There are a number of excellent books that offer repertoire (see JuliLyonn.com > *Resourcecentral* > books and videos), but you will need a program like Finale to notate and then transpose into viola and bass clef if you plan to use sheet music to teach tunes.

You can borrow from Cajun fiddling, which uses a technique called “seconding,” that calls on a certain number of players in the group to create bowed rhythms and harmony lines. The only notated examples we have of this, can be found in the Homespun Tapes video by Cajun fiddler Michael Doucet, *Learning Cajun Fiddle*. Challenge your students to invent accompanying lines after listening to examples of how this is done.

You can also create your own parts by creating style-appropriate rhythmic lines based on the chord changes. Listen to the rhythm section, and borrow rhythms and harmony lines from them.

Make sure if you use “made for orchestra” arrangements of fiddle and jazz tunes by various publishers, that you check on the traditional key for that tune, as these arrangements tend to transpose them for the sake of the orchestra. This is something that would never occur in the fiddle tradition itself. Whatever key that tune was originally created in, was handed down fiddler to fiddler for decades on up to centuries in that original key. While these arrangements are excellent tools for orchestra, you and your students should know how the tune has been altered so that if your students go to a jam session, they won’t be shocked and surprised.

Choosing Repertoire

Can you imagine an American school that only teaches Western European history and geography? Well, that’s what Americans have been doing in string education for hundreds of years! To find repertoire, *The Fiddlers Fakebook* and *Jazz Fake Books* provide hundreds of tunes to choose from. You can try typing the name of the tune into the iTunes search engine to find recorded source material for each tune and download three or four recorded examples. It is recommended when teaching a new tune to play several recorded versions of that tune for the students to give them a sense of how each artist has personalized the tune.

For repertoire from other regions of the world, there’s a lot of material available for Celtic styles such as Irish, Scottish, Cape Breton, and Shetland Island, with slowly expanding access to materials for other styles. At present, the demand for materials far exceeds availability. Keep checking for new materials if they aren’t currently available. You may need to learn melodies off of CDs and teach them by ear, including the accompaniments.

Suggested Resources:

Alfred Publications is the leader in the field for alternative style string orchestral scores and its Philharmonic series (Jazz Philharmonic, Fiddler Philharmonic, and Mariachi Philharmonic) will provide you with a great deal of material for lesson plans. Other publications ripe with lesson plans include *Mel Bay’s Jazz Fiddle Wizard* by Martin Norgaard, and *12 Rock Strings Lesson Plans* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman available as a pdf download from JuliLyonn.com. *Homespun Tapes* has created a number of instructional videos as well. Check their websites from time to time for new materials, if you don’t find what you’re looking for today.

Getting the Most Out of an Alternative String Styles Guest Presenter

Finding a Clinician

Before you start your search for a guest presenter, make sure that you have chosen a point of focus — whether it's a style-based approach, improvisation, composition, amplification, or a mixture. You can hire an alternative styles string presenter to work with your students and then follow through on the guest presenter's presentation by either reviewing their presentation or building on it. You can draw upon commercially available printed and/or video materials that address that style as well as contribute your own teaching ideas.

Make sure you query the presenter of choice re: prior experience (if they don't have a known track record), as to what their goals are, whether or not they feel that they can meet your goals, and whether or not they have worked with your age group before. These questions can help save you from possible disappointment or clue you in as to how you can better prepare them to work with your students. Some presenters teach by performing for young people and talking about the style, while others are highly participatory presenters. Some have a protocol based on a book they have written or scores they have developed, while others base their presentation on a less structured viewpoint.

Go to stringscentral.com and click on "clinicians" to find a presenter that will meet your program's needs.

Logistics

When negotiating a fee, factor in the time the presenter will spend preparing for his or her residency in your school (are they presenting an already-formulated presentation, or will they be designing something specific to your needs?), the number of days involved (including travel days), and how many different topics they will cover once there. Will the residency culminate in a final concert? Will they be performing with your students? These are all conditions that should influence the total fee.

Once you have selected a presenter and agreed upon a date and price, it's time to handle the logistics. To make sure you protect your presenter's energies and health, query him or her as to preferences re: food, overnight accommodations and equipment needs. Make reservations and then double-check flights and/or driving directions with them before booking anything. Provide them with phone numbers, addresses, the name and location of whoever will pick them up at the airport, and so on at least 3 weeks in advance. Make sure that you double-check all hotel/airline bookings a week before their arrival. Let your presenter know when they can expect to be paid.

Co-creating a Residency

Here are a few suggestions:

- Allow enough time for travel delays, breaks to eat, and discussion time in between sessions so that if anything isn't working, you can assess and re-strategize with the presenter.
- Allow travel time to and from meals, in addition to ordering and eating. If you have assigned this task to a parent, make sure you select a parent that is known for punctuality.
- Make sure you have discussed the presenter's dietary needs and located appropriate food sources before they arrive.
- Encourage your presenter to create a balance between explaining and doing across the day.
- Alert the presenter to any problematic individuals, learning disabilities, topics already covered and areas you or your students are weak and strong in.
- Discuss how you can follow up on their presentation.
- Make sure you have some parents or teaching aides on hand to help facilitate the day(s) so that the presenter is free to focus on their presentation rather than disciplinary or logistical problems.

Residency Check-List

In the months leading up to the residency...

- Establish date
- Agree on schedule and topics
- Determine fee
- Tell presenter when they can expect to be paid (day of? 30 days?)
- Process W9 immediately to facilitate payment
- Book their hotel and travel (or send driving directions)
- Provide appropriate phone numbers and addresses
- Determine dietary needs and research appropriate local food venues
- Line up adequate students and/or parent support staff
- Query re: equipment needs
- Prepare students and presenter re: what they can expect and what you expect

In the week(s) leading up to the residency...

- Publicize the date to generate a buzz, by sending out press releases to local papers and creating a flyer for students, faculty, and parents that explains the benefits, provides information about how this has been useful to building interest in the size of the string program in other school districts, the bio of the presenter, etc.
- Arrange pick-up and drop-off
- Walk through the day mentally in their shoes to make sure you didn't miss anything
- Create a program for the concert (if you've included one in the event) and double-check it with the presenter before you finalize it and make copies
- If you are planning to record the concert, double-check copyright/licensing agreements with your presenter
- Double-check disciplinary and logistical support before the residency (there should be someone in the space with them and the students at all times, so that if you have to run out and handle something, you're covered)
- Double-check handouts and music prior to their arrival
- Double-check equipment and payment prior to their arrival
- Buy bottled water for their stay and have it readily available to them throughout the day(s)
- Follow up by asking presenter for feedback/suggestions/follow-through and provide them with feedback re: what was and wasn't successful so that they can learn, too

Right and Left-Hand Techniques

Those of us immersed in non-classical genres can always tell a “nuevo-alty” from a veteran immediately. There are two clues: inappropriate use of vibrato in genres that temper or do not call for that ornament, and a bow that remains glued to the string without fluctuation in speed and/or pressure except the singing tone typical of classical repertoire. Since vibrato invites right-hand continuity, the two tendencies often walk hand in hand.

Most alternative string styles require a tempestuous relationship between both the bow and the string as well as left-hand pressure and the string. While there are a few classical bowings that require changes in pressure—such as martele and spicatto—these bowings tend to be applied to marching rhythms (quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenths) over entire passages of music. The left and right hands are coordinated in unison, evoking a uniform sound from the instrument. Compare the classical tendency towards symmetry and agreement between the two hands, to alternative styles that call for a wide mixture of rhythms and effects within a given musical phrase. For instance, accents placed in surprising places within the measure; varied types of movement on and off the string in either hand; asymmetrical repetitions of the bow applied to string crossing, and so on. In fact, the timing of the rich alternation between inferred or ghosted pitches and accented notes within many world styles helps shape each genre’s unique groove, contributing vast tonal and textural variations.

Pressure, whether it is from the left hand or the right hand, should be by choice rather than driven by an auto-reflex—no matter what the style. Think of the realm of possibilities that can emerge when you develop the ability to vary touch however and whenever you choose. The notes of some phrases may ring out like a flock of birds all flying at the same pace and spiraling in concert. In other phrases you will be able to individuate notes to help move that musical phrase into contrasting emotional and genre-specific environments.

Fiddle and Jazz Bowings

While music notation can help interpret style by conveying which notes within the phrase should be slurred or accentuated, many alternative string scores actually omit this pertinent information. It is assumed that only the melody need be conveyed, and that the player is already conversant with the stylistic intricacies of the genre. This is, in part, due to the fact that fiddle and jazz styles are rooted in an aural tradition, and because the visual road map would be too cumbersome if notation attempted to convey stylistic details. Therefore, the learning/teaching of all genres must be supplemented with recorded examples.

To familiarize yourself with the following bow strokes, refer to the DVD *Techniques for the Contemporary String Player* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman and to *Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman. For more details on bowings, you can download the free article *Fiddle and Jazz Bowings* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman and published by STRAD magazine at JulieLyonn.com > [downloads](#).

Here are eight bowings that are central to fiddle and jazz genres,

- Old-time and Bluegrass bowings like the shuffle stroke and the double shuffle

- Bowed treble or Irish triplet

- Swing bowing for jazz

- Asymmetrical (see paradiddles on page 10) for Latin, East Indian, and other regions of the world

- Single Direction (repetitive, rhythmic bows all on an upbow or downbow)

- Clipped

- Surged, accentuated (known as “banana peel” in Scandinavian fiddling)

Paradiddles

1. 2. 3. 4.

1. 2. 3. 4.

1. 2. 3. 4.

This block contains the first four paradiddles. Each is shown in three staves: treble clef, bass clef, and bass clef. The first staff of each set has a circled number (1-4) above it. The notes are quarter notes in a steady eighth-note rhythm.

5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

5. 6. 7. 8. 9.

This block contains paradiddles 5 through 9. Each is shown in three staves: treble clef, bass clef, and bass clef. The first staff of each set has a circled number (5-9) above it. Paradiddles 5-9 include a quarter rest in the final measure of the treble and bass clef staves.

10. 11. 12.

10. 11. 12.

10. 11. 12.

This block contains the final three paradiddles. Each is shown in three staves: treble clef, bass clef, and bass clef. The first staff of each set has a circled number (10-12) above it. Paradiddles 10-12 include a half rest in the final measure of the treble and bass clef staves.

Shaping the Style

The organic “feel” or “groove” of a style emanates from three crucial elements: phrasing, rhythmic subtext, and ornamentation. Let’s take a more in-depth look at each of these elements.

Left-Hand Ornaments

Each style you present to your students will call for its own unique approach to ornamentation through techniques like grace notes, turns, rolls, slides, trills, and various types of vibrato. You don’t have to provide all of the answers. Challenge your students to figure out the subtle elements of the style. This presents them with the challenging opportunity to develop their listening skills more accurately by learning the bare bones of the melody first (by ear or from sheet music) and then studying recordings from that style to figure out how to ornament the melody.

Phrasing

When we speak of phrasing, we are referring to how we color and shape each melodic statement through varied note-to-note transitions, textures, and dynamics. The symbols used to describe dynamics and specific bow techniques in classical literature tend to invite even pressure from both hands, except when creating a crescendo (swell) or decrescendo (fade). Many alternative string styles were originated integral to the accompaniment of local dance forms. The rhythmic use of the bow evolved to drive the dancer’s feet and propel him or her through space.

Most alternative scores or tune-books do not include any indication as to how to phrase in a manner appropriate to the style. It is assumed that the player will already be familiar with the nuances of the style and that each artist will shape the melody according to their own individual taste with stylistically appropriate bowings, ornamentation, and chromatic passing tones. Minute modulations in pressure, volume and motion along with varied entrances and exits all call upon the player to innovate and initiate sound on every note rather than homogenizing bow strokes for entire lines. Physically, this requires constant fluctuation in pressure, speed, on- and off-the-string motion, and strategically placed inflections (accents).

Shaping the Rhythmic Subtext

To feel and create a groove, one must listen for the subtext. Players actually have to train their ears to move beyond the melody, ornamentation, mode or scale-type, tonal center, harmonic motion, and structure to the heartbeat of the music, or the water that runs underground. In more literal terms, each style has a pulse that can rarely be found in the actual notated rhythmic figures, but flows continuously underneath. It is always felt by players who have cultivated this skill, and it is always present, even during rests and held notes. For instance, there is a constant triplet feel underlying swing music, a shuffle stroke under old time, a shuffle stroke with slightly different accentuation beneath Cajun, and so on.

Train your students to listen to the rhythm section carefully, because the accompanying instruments will always provide the rhythmic subtext for the genre. Listen for where accents fall and the spots in the phrase where the bow speeds up or slows down. These elements help disclose the essence of the style.

Resource Materials

For more details, you can download the free articles *The Art of the Slide*, *Vibrato in Alternative String Styles*, and *Right and Left-Hand Touch* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman and published by STRAD magazine at JulieLyonn.com > [downloads](#)

String Groove: Rhythmic Explorations For Bowed Strings (DVD) taught by Darol Anger with Casey Driessen and Rushad Eggleston. Distributed by Homespun Tapes.

Rhythmizing the Bow (DVD) taught by Julie Lyonn Lieberman. Distributed by Hal Leonard.

Improvisation

Most classically trained musicians, when they hear the word “improvisation,” think of jazz. The art of improvisation existed long before the evolution of blues, swing, and jazz in American music. Improvisation is integral to many forms of music throughout the world.

As improvisation is incorporated into the daily lesson plan, students will experience a new relationship to themselves and to music: they will feel the pride and sense of self associated with craftsmanship born out of ownership of one’s own music-making experience. Let’s transition from teaching students to only be able to play their instrument when they are spoon-fed dots on paper through their eyes, to being able to make music anywhere, anytime, with anyone, in any style!

There are a number of techniques that have been employed as a foundation for improvisation and composition:

- 1) Drone: a held pitch used as accompaniment
- 2) Ostinato: a short, repeating rhythmic phrase offered by the teacher or created by the students
- 3) Ornamentation: some cultures approach improvisation on their melodies by embellishing the notes in unique ways
- 4) Village Layering: the creation of a short melodic/rhythmic phrase by each individual that links together to create a whole, cyclical musical piece
- 5) Textural: the exploration of “non-traditional” sounds on your instrument
- 6) Soundstories: the use of images or stories to stimulate musical improvisation
- 7) Chord changes: harmonic motion used as a basis for improvisation

Improvisation can...

- Free the eyes and open the ears
- Stimulate and expand ensemble interaction
- Build self-esteem
- Stimulate original thinking, creative problem solving, and risk-taking
- Provide students with an authentic experience on his or her instrument
- Satisfy the National Standards for music education (particularly National Standard number three... improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments)

Structures

Styles like Irish, Scottish, Cajun, and old-time, exercise improvisation through the ornamentation of the melody. You can even use a phrase from a classical piece currently in the schedule, and challenge students to embellish the melody using left- and right-hand techniques they have learned from other styles. There is an opportunity through improvisation on fiddle tunes, to teach four- and eight-bar phrasing, and to help students create improvised lines that imitate the format of that fiddle tunes worldwide follow: state a question, give an answer. Bluegrass, Texas Swing, blues, rock and jazz require knowledge of the key or chord changes, as well as the parameters specific to each style.

Be very careful about how you start a beginner improviser in the jazz style. The style is complex and can be intimidating. Ironically, the student will experience the same level of angst about making mistakes that we’ve already thrust upon them in their classical studies. They will not be able to enjoy the discovery of their creativity, and miss out on the most important part of the experience. Try the following steps to introduce them to jazz in a sequential, safe manner.

Harmonic Building Blocks

Here are some sequential steps you can take towards creating familiarity with improvisation over chord changes:

- 1) Choose a key and use warm-up patterns to familiarize your students with the notes in that key (see *Improvising Violin* by Julie Lyonn Lieberman).
- 2) Invite half the players to hold a drone on the tonic while the other half experiments with improvisational ideas. Then switch sides.
- 3) Create a 4-bar accompaniment in your chosen key that dedicates one measure to each of the following chords: I IV V I. For instance, if you've chosen the key of D, then there will be a D chord for 4 beats, a G chord for 4 beats, an A chord for 4 beats, returning to D for the last 4 beats. (see *Band in a Box* in the section below titled "Equipment for Your Classroom" or go to JulieLyonn.com > **12 Rock Strings Lesson Plans** to download accompaniments.)
- 4) Walk your students through some warm-up steps before challenging them to improvise over the chord sequence: hold the root note for each chord for 4 beats; hold the root and major third for 2 beats each; then the root, third, and fifth, and then the root, third, fifth, and sixth. The beauty of soloing over this sequence, is that each student can just use the scale for the key, or they can arpeggiate and create interesting lines using the notes of each chord.

References:

Jazz Fiddle Wizard by Martin Norgaard teaching improvisational patterns and principles while using tunes and chords from standard jazz repertoire

Jazz Improvisation Made Easy by John Blake, Jr. presents a user-friendly play-along method that teaches jazz improvisation through step-by-step instructions.

Jazz Philharmonic by Randy Sabien and Bob Phillips presents original tunes with interchangeable parts, backgrounds, bass lines, and solos. Any combination of string instruments will work using this format. Beginning improvisation is handled with preparatory rhythms, scales, and call-and-response.

Improvising Violin by Julie Lyonn Lieberman for improvisation in American styles

The Contemporary Violinist by Julie Lyonn Lieberman for bowings, ornamentation, and improvisation in 16 styles

The Creative Band and Orchestra by Julie Lyonn Lieberman for over one-hundred games and techniques designed to introduce improvisation without the boundaries of style.

Equipment for Your Classroom

There are a few tools that will help you enormously, as you extend your journey into improvisation and alternative string styles. If you can't figure out how to use them, ask a student and they will show you in 30 seconds!

- 1) *Band in a Box by PG Music* is an inexpensive program for your computer that will enable you to generate accompaniments in hundreds of styles. You can use the computer speakers, wire the computer through your sound system, and/or wire it through a MIDI box that generates more accurate-sounding instruments and then send the accompaniments out through your sound system.
- 2) *iTunes* is available through <http://www.apple.com/itunes/download/> and provides you with quick and easy access to millions of recordings in any style you desire. You do not have to have an iPod to use your downloads. Apple will give you the software (although many computers arrive with this software program already installed) that will enable you to play the downloads right from your computer, or burn them to CD.

3) Strings that provide a smooth surface for slide technique and other alternative style techniques can be very helpful. D'Addario's strings, **Helicore** strings provide a quick response, a smooth glass-like surface rather than wound, and break in, in a few minutes

4) Less time wasted tuning: Knilling sells a wonderful option to the traditional wooden pegs that tend to slip in dry, cold climates and are hard to turn (particularly on smaller-sized instruments). The **Perfection Pegs** provide a new solution to this age-old problem and will save you tons of time and effort tuning your students' instruments. Many rental companies are willing to switch their instruments' pegs to these lightweight, slip-proof pegs. To read more, go to: <http://knilling.com>

Amplification

Our students live in a world filled with technology. As inexplicable as it may seem to us, statistics show that most students when provided with a room full of electric instruments, will play for hours and far prefer hearing themselves amplified to acoustic.

Some programs purchase a quartet of electrics and use them for the soloists or in combination with the acoustic orchestra. Special effects can be added in. See JulieLynn.com > [Resourcecentral](#) > [proaudio](#) to read about the Zoom and Digitech effects units. For access to an overview of everything you will need to know, the companies involved, and more, go to JulieLynn.com > [The String Players' Corner](#) > [Amplification](#)

Building Community Support

Without the support and understanding of your community (students, parents, and administration), the introduction of alternative string styles into the classroom curriculum can get off to a slow start or fail.

In some schools, change can be slow until everyone catches on, because they may not even understand what you're trying to do until the evidence is out in the open. In other schools, we've seen stylistically inclusive string programs that have stimulated a huge jump in numbers and great excitement. Often, students, fellow faculty and administration and parents need examples of why this would be beneficial. Here are some techniques you can use to convince them:

1) Attitudes

In *Alternative Strings: The New Curriculum*, I discuss attitudes that formed over the centuries based on ethnic bias, and their effect on permissible scales and compositional techniques versus the forbidden. The music that America imported from Western Europe—as magnificent as it is—was designed through power struggles, an attitude influenced by class and racial bias, and reflects a taste in music that does not embrace the world. Our classrooms are filled with students from many cultural backgrounds. Including music from different cultures embodies the founding principles of our country, provides students with a taste of styles created in their own backyards, and opens their ears and technique to a bountiful harvest.

Teachers, parents, and students have unconsciously subscribed to myths and hierarchical definitions of music. These attitudes have been fattened by stereotypes of self-taught hillbilly fiddlers, drugged out jazz musicians who play jazz because they can't do any better and other nonsense. Many individuals still believe that you can't possibly have excellent technique or be a great musician unless you play classical music. While this is not true, we have to prove the point to them. The websites I've provided below can help. You can send the flyer on page 17 home with your students pointing them and their families to the internet or to recordings in order to familiarize themselves with the high level of technique these players are using.

2) Query your students

Make sure your students are fully on board before you introduce a new style by playing a number of recordings for them. Watch their reactions closely and start with the style(s) that excite them the most. This will ensure a higher level of interest. You can then gradually introduce sounds that are more foreign to them. Avoid making the mistake of assuming that they will automatically like a particular style due to their ethnic background, age, or even listening tastes.

3) Advance-Promotion

Educating the community in advance so that they understand what you are doing and why, can help generate support. If you link a piece of music to a specific event in your town, to a sports game, to a topic being studied in history, you can often generate a higher level of acceptance and support because it will make sense contextually. In the meantime, everyone is inadvertently conditioned to accept and expect the unusual.

4) Post-Promotion

Follow-up after a performance by disseminating a recording of the concert, pursuing press coverage, or making a video of the performance, can help generate pride in the students' accomplishment. There may be a class in your school or at a local college or university outside the music department that would be interested in taking this on as a project, so that it's off your shoulders. Just the act of videotaping or recording their concert can change their attitudes during rehearsals.

In the case of advance- or post-promotion, showing other school's accomplishments always helps. Here are some examples:

<http://www.thelakewoodproject.net>

<http://www.salinefiddlers.com/>

<http://www.calgaryfiddlers.com/>

<http://homepage.mac.com/cms1960/MARIACHI.html>

You can also explain each piece -- the culture and history -- before it is performed at the concert. Educating your audience as to the styles' assets promotes acceptance through understanding.

Alternative String Styles Handout

Students throughout America are learning to...

Fiddle in after-school clubs...Play in rock orchestras, rock bands, jazz ensembles and Mariachi groups. They are performing at major sports games, opening for celebrities at local theatres, playing on television, at Disneyland, and more! Check it out for yourself:

<http://www.thelakewoodproject.net>

<http://www.salinefiddlers.com/>

<http://www.calgaryfiddlers.com/>

<http://homepage.mac.com/cms1960/MARIACHI.html>

Here are some resources that can help you build your skills:

Go to JulieLynn.com and click on Resourcecentral to see books, DVDs, and CDs by historic and contemporary string players. There's even a section called ProAudio that will tell you about software and electronics that string players can use. You can click on **Books or DVDs** to see titles by Julie Lynn Lieberman such as:

Rockin' Out with Blues Fiddle by Julie Lynn Lieberman (Instructional book and CD)

The Contemporary Violinist (Book and CD)

Improvising Violin by Julie Lynn Lieberman (Instructional book)

Techniques for the Contemporary String Player by Julie Lynn Lieberman (DVD)

Other Important Websites:

Antonio Pontarelli (teen rock violinist) www.antoniomusic.com

Tracy Silverman (violinist) www.tracysilverman.com

Mark Wood (violinist and inventor of the Viper violin) www.woodviolins.com

Mark Knight (violinist) <http://www.madfiddler.co.uk/main.html>

Sugarcane Harris (violinist) www.sugarcane-harris.com

Papa John Creach (violinist) <http://www.airplane.freemove.co.uk/creach.htm>

Scarlet Rivera (violinist) www.scarletrivera.com

Matt Turner (cellist) <http://www.improvcellist.com/>

Von Cello (cellist) <http://www.voncello.com/index.htm>

Alfred Music: See books by Bob Phillips, Randy Sabien at <http://www.alfred.com> (also check out their extensive and ever-growing alternative style orchestra scores)

IAJE String Caucus: (<http://www.jazzstringcaucus.org/>) for jazz string bibliography/discography

Fiddler Magazine: (<http://www.fiddler.com>) for articles on fiddling

Homespun Tapes: <http://www.homespuntapes> (1-800-33-TAPES) for instructional videos

Mel Bay Publications: (<http://www.melbay.com>) for alternative string books

Stringscentral.com: for solo & orchestral alternative string charts, books, CDs, and videos

Strings Magazine: (<http://www.strings.com>) for articles on classical and alternative strings