

## A Daily Warm-up

Many excellent technique books exist. I recommend heartily three in particular:

- \*Christopher Bunting, *A Portfolio of Cello Exercises* (2 volumes: Part I and II) (Sangeeta Publications)
- \*Fritz Magg, *Cello Exercises* (Mobart Music Publications)
- \*Janos Starker, *An Organized Method of String Playing* (Peer International)

The series of exercises that follows draws heavily from these sources. In addition I include several unpublished exercises begged, borrowed and stolen from former teachers and colleagues.

Choose one or more exercises each day from each of the following areas of technical exploration.

### Holding the Bow

The bow hold must be at once strong and supple, firm and free. Differing gradations of support in the bow hold will be necessary to produce a wide volume range and to achieve comfort in any part of the bow, from frog to tip. Each individual finger plays its own role (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>: power; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>: balance) in a sophisticated bow technique. Flexibility and flow in all fourteen knuckles of the right hand is crucial to creating a beautiful and articulated sound.

1. Magg, Ch. A, pg 1
2. Bunting, I, pg 2 *Bow Games*
3. Bunting, II, pg 2 *The Bow off the String*
4. "Pull-ups": Hold the bow with the hair parallel to the ground, the tip resting on the back of the left hand. Without altering the tilt of the bow hair, pull the bow up into the palm of the hand, then return to the starting position. The thumb should flex and elongate along with the other fingers. (8-12x)

### Open Strings

Questions to ask while working on tone quality:

- a) Is your sound firm, clear, pure, consistent throughout?
- b) Does your bow retain a constant contact point?
- c) Is your bow weight and speed even throughout the stroke?
- d) Does your thumb squeeze the stick, or is it free?
- e) Does the beginning of your stroke speak easily, or do you hear a scratch or fluff?

In string crossings, observe your bow angle and arm elevation. Play with smooth, prepared arm motions and supple finger action as you cross from string to string.

1. Magg, Ch B, pgs 2-9 (the best collection of bow exercises I know!)
2. Bunting, I, pgs 2-3 *Daily Bowing Practice*
3. Bunting, I, pg 6-7 *Bowing Patterns*
4. Bunting, I, pgs 8-9 *Spiccato Work-out*
5. Bunting, II, pg 3 *Right-Arm Choreography*
6. Bunting, II, pgs 8-9 *String Crossing Exercises*
7. Bunting, II, pg 16 *A Few Spiccati*
8. Bunting, II, pg 17 *Bow Control-Accents*

## Left Hand Warm-up

Each finger of the left hand must be strong, flexible, and independent of its neighbors. Work to maintain a C-curve profile, thinking of the base knuckles as the capstone arch of the hand. Pay particular attention to the thumb, which should rest easily on the back of the neck, and which can never be allowed to strangle the poor piece of wood.

Starker used the term “the living hand” to describe a technique in which only the playing finger is in playing tension. Magg suggested the metaphor of “corks”: four corks float in a pail of water... push one down... what happens to it when a new one is pushed down?

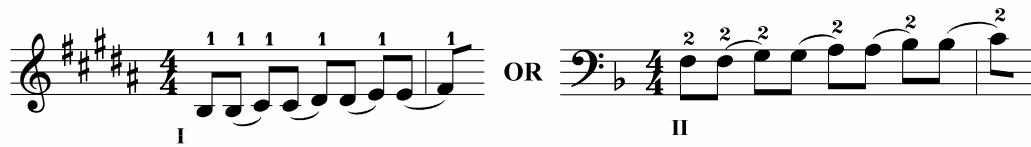
1. Bunting, I, pg 4 *Left Hand Work-out*
2. “Walking” exercise:

The image displays three staves of musical notation for a left hand warm-up exercise. Each staff is in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings 1, 2, 1, 2 and the word "Simile" below. The second staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings 2, 3, 2, 3 and the word "Simile" below. The third staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings 3, 4, 3, 4 and the word "Simile" below. Each staff ends with a double bar line.

Whole step excursions (1-3, 2-4) and even the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> (1-4) may also be explored.

When thoroughly warmed up, you might want to play this exercise a second time, with an explosive vibrato on every note.

3. "Ladders/Snakes":



a) "Ladders" are one-octave scales played with one finger. e.g.:

Use all 4 fingers. Be creative in your scale selection: major, minor, whole-tone, chromatic scales are all worth exploring. Move from note to note with a firm and free sweep in the entire left arm.

b) "Snakes" slink up and down the fingerboard as follows: choose a starting pitch, then shift on the same finger up a certain interval and down a certain smaller interval; continue the pattern as far as you can, then reverse the intervals and return to your starting pitch. To illustrate, here is a snake consisting of a P4 up and a M3 down:



Use all 4 fingers. Your arm should act like a paintbrush, moving warmly up and down the string. Choose different intervals each day.

4. 4-3-1-0 exercise:

Choose a string and position, and play the descending diatonic 4-3-1-0 pattern. For instance, on the D string, in first position, you would play G-F#-E-D.

- a) very slowly, 2 notes/ bow, each note exactly half the bow length
- b) twice as fast, 4 notes/ bow, each note exactly 1/4 the bow length
- c) twice as fast, 8 notes/ bow,
- d) twice as fast, 16 notes/ bow,
- e) continue to double the speed and number of notes as possible

Do the same exercise with the following finger patterns:

4-3-1-3

4-2-1-0

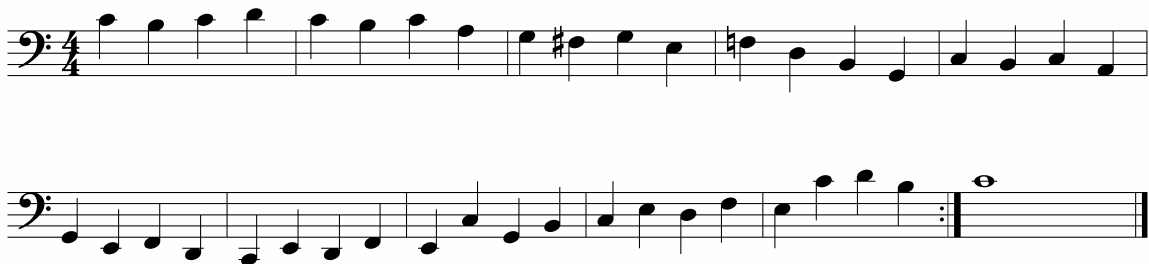
4-2-1-2

5. 4-3-2-1 exercise:

Play the descending chromatic pattern in each successive position from 1/2 up to 4 1/2 position.

- a) On the C string, play very slowly (WB/ note or 2 slurred) with a free and warm vibrato, to loosen up the fingers.
- b) On the G string, slur 4, paying particular attention to the even transfer of weight from finger to finger. Only the playing finger is in playing tension!
- c) On the D string, slur 8, paying particular attention to the even transfer of weight from finger to finger. Only the playing finger is in playing tension!
- d) On the A string, slur 16 (4 groups of 4 in each position) with a rapid, yet even machine-gun like articulation. Try it without the bow to hear if your fingers are producing an audible left hand pizzicato, then add the bow.

6. Feuillard 32: (Feuillard *Daily Exercises* (Schott 1117)) is another excellent compilation of cello exercises.)



Play the passage 6 times as follows:

- 1) 2 slurred, no vibrato

Sink deeply into the heart of each note with full weight of your arm, then release to prepare the next note.

quarter note = 40 (very slow)

- 2) 4 slurred, continuous, even vibrato

Transfer weight cleanly from finger to finger (good "corks").

quarter note = 80

- 3) Dotted rhythm: , 4 slurred.

Play with a wide, free vibrato on the long note, finger "flick" on the short one.

Play with a true legato, not allowing the left hand to upset the smooth bow.

quarter note = 100

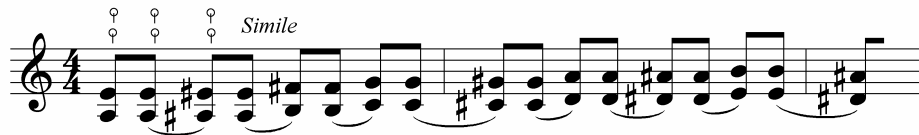
- 4) Reverse dotted rhythm: , same as 3)

- 5) 8 slurred, continuous, even vibrato (one "squiggle" per note possible?)  
Transfer weight cleanly from finger to finger (good "corks").  
half note = 100.
- 6) Separate bows, on the string, mid-bow, as fast as possible.  
Can you repeat the line 4 times without "tying up"?

### Thumb Position Placement Exercises

The left thumb should be placed across two strings, the left wrist more or less straight, and the left arm high enough to accommodate this address. These exercises are designed to build the independent strength of the thumb.

1. Magg, Ch D, pg 11-12
2. Magg, pg 66 *An Independent Thumb*
3. Bunting, II, pg 10 *Octaves* (1,2)
4. "Fifths":



At first, reinforce your thumb by placing your index finger on top of the thumb. Later, ball your hand into a loose fist as you move up and down the string.

### Left Hand Strengtheners

Double stop practice builds a strong, accurate hand. Work for clean and even lifting of the fingers rather than indiscriminate banging, striking of the string. Play mp with a light, clear bow always. Know your limit-- stop when it starts to hurt!

1. Magg, pg. 65
2. Bunting, I, pg 10 *Cortot*
3. Starker pgs. 7-8, 16, 19-20 (Get to know this method book in its entirety!)

### Thumb Position Geography Lessons

1. Magg, Ch G, pgs. 23-33
2. Magg, pgs. 67-68
3. Bunting, II, pgs. 12-13 *Daily Double Stopping Ritual*
4. Bunting, II, pg 10 *Octaves* (3,4)
5. Starker, pg 23
6. Starker, pgs. 31-32

7. Starker (unpublished): scales and 3rds in successive major scale patterns:

Continue up an octave.

### Shifting

1. Starker pgs 33-4
2. Bunting, I, pg. 13, *A Study*
3. Bunting, II, pg. 4, *Shifting 2*
4. Bunting, II, pg. 5, *Winter Skating*
5. Bunting, II, pg. 6, *Various Portamenti*
6. Starker (unpublished): Octave shift exercise:

- a)  $\square \vee \square \vee$  one beat per bow
- b)  $\vee \square \vee \square$  one beat per bow
- c)  $\square \vee$  slurring 2 beats per bow
- d)  $\vee \square$  slurring 2 beats per bow

## Scales

Practicing scales daily with attention and care can lead to a first-rate cello technique. Choose a key you will be visiting later in your practice session (your piece or etude). Play scales with a particular sound in your ear, e.g., Beethoven nobility or Brahms richness or Miles Davis coolness.

- a) Slowly for intonation and a beautiful tone. 1, 2, or 3 notes per bow.
- b) At a moderate tempo for fluency and suppleness of left hand action.  
Slur 4, 5, 6, or 7.
- c) At a fast pace for speed. Slur 1, 2, 3, or 4 octaves.
- d) At a fast pace for coordination between right and left hands.  
One note per bow, on the string, mid-bow, as fast as possible.
- e) If there are any bow strokes (martele, spiccato, etc) you are working on, here is a good place to practice them!

Practice scales 4 octaves when they start on the C string, only 3 when they start on the G.

## Arpeggios

- a) separate bows slowly
- b) slur 3 with the following rhythmic patterns:
  - 1) long-short-short
  - 2) short-long-short
  - 3) short-short-long
  - 4) even
- c) slur 6
- d) slur 12
- e) separate bows: light, fast, deft

Finish your scale/arpeggio practice with an emphatic 4-string chord in the key of the day!