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Stringing Along

Newsletter of the Nebraska Chapter of American String Teachers Association

SPRING 2014

WWW.NEASTA.ORG



Erin Aguirre, Nebraska ASTA President

Dear Colleagues,
On May 15, I will officially hand over the reins to Nissa. As I look back on the past two years, the highlight has definitely been meeting so many of you – devoted, inspiring, and passionate string educators. Nebraska is small, but the quality of our teachers and programs is absolutely top notch. We have a lot to cele-

President's Message

brate: there are thriving string programs and orchestras in all parts of our state, the college/university programs are INCREDIBLE, private studios are bursting at the seams, students have new and exciting opportunities every year, we have a fabulous fiddle/eclectic styles community, Nebraska educators serve as presenters and guest conductors all over the country, teachers take classes and at-

tend workshops to gain even more expertise on string education. And THIS JUST IN: Nebraska ASTA is joining forces with Omaha Area Youth Orchestras in advocacy – planting seeds to start new school string programs!! Give yourselves a pat on the back, and have a wonderful summer! Thanks for all you do for string teaching in Nebraska!

Erin Aguirre

Priority Pyramid

by JoAnna Cochenet

We all search for a system that works. Not only does it need to work for the students, but it also needs to work for us, in theory and in implementation. I am sure this will sound familiar: *I have tried various ways to 'get through' to my students, sometimes it is successful and other times it was not. How can I teach this piece of music? Is the music too hard for them?*

The methods available to us as string players and as musicians are mostly fine. Though unless we are a purist of one form or another, it can be hard to stay consistent when trying to blend methods or systems based on students' individual needs. I was trying to find a way to demonstrate and explain things to their individual understanding; something that would be consistent and with effective results fairly quickly and that I would not need to recreate every time I transferred it to another student. What I had come up with was something which made success within short reach and increased confidence more quickly, and rarely if at all having to fix poor habits developed within a piece of music. It gives the teacher, student, and parents not only a rubric, but a clear way to discover strengths and deficiencies.

My students and I have been able to use the process and isolate problem spots in and out of the music. Not only have I approached this as a string player and teacher, but as someone who analyzes scores. Score study opens up a way to comprehend a piece of music more in depth, and develops analytical processes that can be used to resolve any sorts of issues in rehearsals or practice. Information is better understood and retained when such a process is utilized. Any technique on the instrument is solidified during the actual practice of this system, as each level focuses on specific technical goals.

The process makes sense. It is applicable to practically every student regardless of age, level, or ability. It isolates and discovers strengths and deficiencies, and develops strong musical technique. It shows the teacher and the student the progress made and the progress yet to achieve. It is something easily memorable, easy to retain for the present and future, and transferable. It can show a student how to run guided and effective practice sessions. Thus, I have come up with the *Priority Pyramid*.

Teacher: *How would you build a pyramid. From the top, down, or from the bottom, up?*

Student: *From the bottom going up.*

Teacher: *Of course. Otherwise there is nothing to hold up the pyramid! First you must create the structure and form which is stable, and this is a lot of hard work, and then you must build on top of it to reach your peak. If there is structural weakness, you will discover and fix it along the way before it becomes damaging to the whole.*

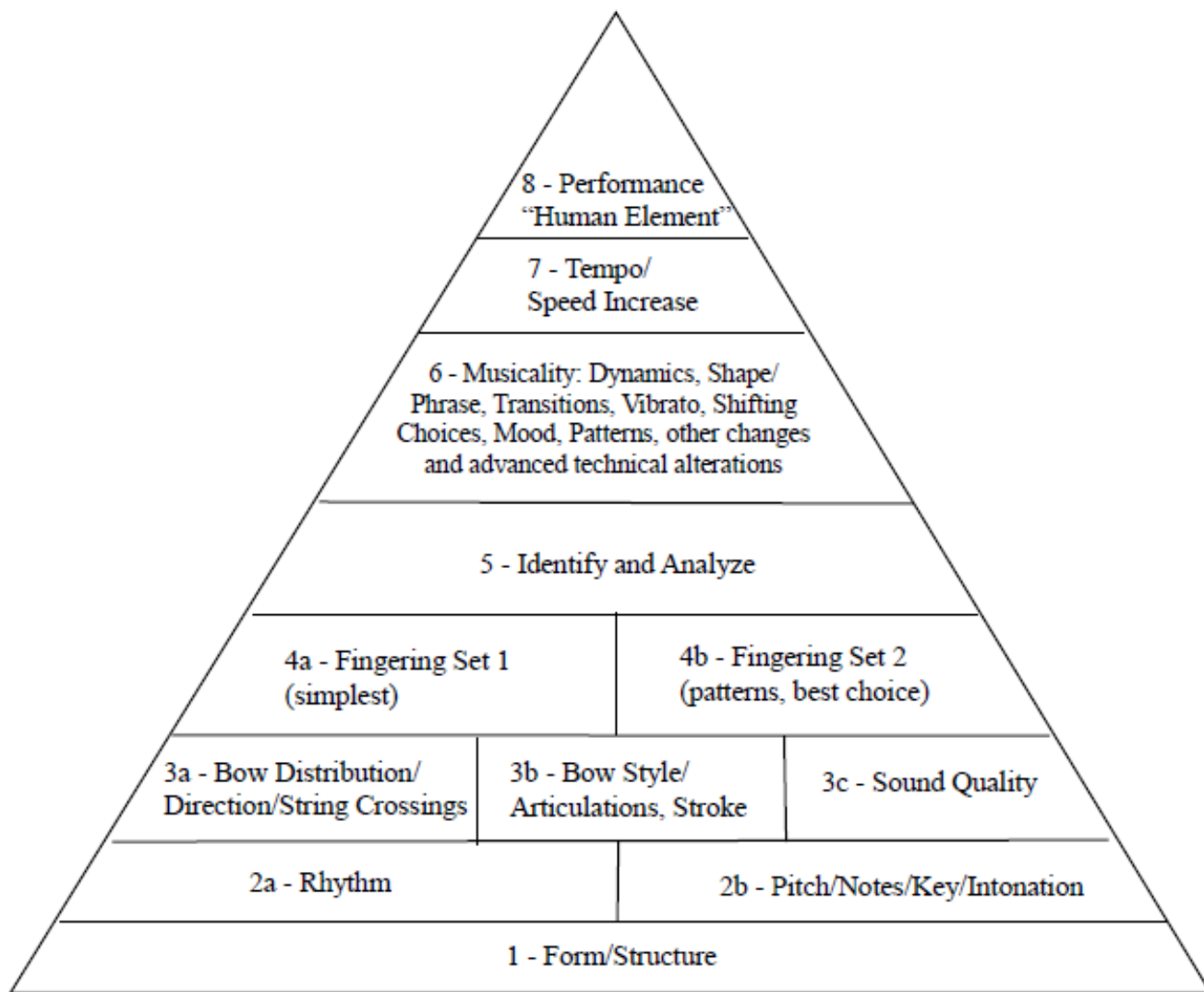
In this process of study, both students and teacher are able to diagnose or prevent any issues in the piece or in general practice/technique by separating things and breaking them down. It may seem militaristic at first to the student, until they realize they can pay better attention to exactly what they are working on in that instant, and can attend to it, and usually with greater success. This produces a better quality practice session and they can know the instant results at each step. By spending only several minutes on each level or part of a level, they have saved and invested in a quality practice session of 20 minutes rather than "running through" their piece multiple times in 5 or 30 minutes, with little to no progress made and probably with bad habits included. Once they hear this deal, they are usually hooked, or at least willing to try.

Diagram on next page

Priority Pyramid

Build a pyramid from the bottom up (not the reverse).

Using the music, isolate each individual section of the pyramid starting from the bottom going upwards, and from left to right. Take a moderately slow tempo when doing this kind of practice in order to focus on the specific task at hand. First, work on the individual segment of the pyramid on small portions of the music until it is correct, then start to combine the sections on one level before moving to the next level. Once graduated to the next level, do the same process there, and adding the previous level to the new one. If there is a trouble spot, it will be clear at which level and which problem to diagnose and resolve, if any. It is better to break down the music in smaller segments to do this process, because more will be retained and practiced multiple times, and the accuracy will be higher. Then larger sections can be combined as well, either by repeating the entire process, or by simply piecing the parts together. I call the level with just rhythm or just pitch “Naked Notes” because the music has literally been stripped down to bare nothing at the beginning.



Instruction on following page



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Process order using each level of the pyramid from bottom to top:

1 (understanding the structure of the piece and important transition spots, etc)

2a (without pitches or on open string)

2b (without rhythm)

2a + 2b

2 + 1

3a

3b

3a + 3b

3a + 3b + 3c

3 + 2 + 1

4a

4b

4 + 3 + 2 + 1

5 (analyze the music in terms of finding arpeggios, scales, sequences, checkpoint notes, harmonies, etc; checking for comprehension and developing full understanding of the piece/theory)

5 + 4, etc...

6 (adding interpretive elements)

6 + 5, etc...

7 (finding goal tempi, slowly increasing speed with more practice and combining of larger sections)

8 (final layer is the performance product and bringing the music to life for the student, teacher, and preparing for an audience)

Originally, I had created a slightly simpler version. Over the course of using the system, I have discovered the best way it seems to work when breaking down the music before rebuilding and have made the adjustments to the pyramid to reflect that.



Listen to the future

Omaha Area Youth Orchestra Upcoming Concerts and Events

May 2014

5/4 Youth Symphony Concert with
 the Omaha Symphony Chamber Orchestra

Auditions for the 2014-2015 season begin in April.
 Register through the OAYO website, www.oayo.org.

For more information on concerts or auditions:
 visit www.oayo.org or call 402.238.2044

