

## It's String Thing

It gives me great pleasure to write as a guest. I was asked to put down a few ideas for Directors heading to Festival with their string groups. So, where to start? First a gentle reminder. It's a busy time with many pressures.

I say to Director's of all performing groups: **Be Positive. Be Constructive. Be Compassionate.**

You've worked diligently on intonation, rhythm and style. How is the spirit- the energy of your group? Let me help you review the basics of string tone. After checking that everyone has the same correct bowings in their part, focus on expressing tone color with the bow. For forte passages use a faster bow, a flat bow, closer to the bridge. Pull an energetic full bow. Especially on an up bow students need to be reminded to go all the way to the frog (but only to the top of the winding on the bow.) With this bow speed and length comes a brighter sound. For piano passages turn the bow stick toward the scroll (everyone) to use less bow hair. Bow from the middle to the tip, closer to the fingerboard with less bow speed. Whisper the music. Glancing down as students play will tell you how you can unify your sound by careful bow distribution. My friend Richard Meyer, a clarinetist, has always said, "Strings are easier to teach; you can see exactly what they are doing by watching their bow and fingers." Also remember to remind students to work on using a continuous vibrato and varying the speed to suit the dynamic (for those who know vibrato.) Check that everyone has rosin on their bow.

For energy to happen students must have a good posture. Do your upper strings stand for warmups? This reinforces good posture and allows students to pull that long forte bow as part of warmups. Another posture tip- when it's time to sit down have them back up so the back of their leg touches the chair. At a signal from you they sit down, keeping their back straight. Magic! Everyone is sitting up straight. Remind students to adjust music stands at Festival so they are looking up from their stand to the Director, scrolls facing their music, above the lip of the music stand. Violins, violas: left foot on the floor- nose, bridge, elbow, foot in line. Celli- keep both feet flat on the floor, sit at the edge of the chair, the C peg at the level of the left ear. Basses- be sure your f holes are facing the audience. This is why I prefer putting my basses behind the violas or across the back of the string orchestra.

I'd also like Directors to ponder the concept of "Vivid Imagery" as you prepare for Festival. Tell your students what you see and hear in the music you are playing. Ask them what they hear- what imagery comes to mind? What is the music saying to you and to your students? Be creative. Tell a story. It's a challenge and it's fun. Talk about the composers of your Festival pieces. Do some research. When did they write it? Why did they write it? What were some of the influences on their life? If possible play recordings.

Close to Festival give a mini- concert for another music class. Let each student be an adjudicator with a simplified adjudication sheet. Ask band members to adjudicate the orchestra (in an auditorium setting) and ask orchestra members to adjudicate the band, preferably on another day. Or use a variation of this appropriate to your school and situation. Spend some time talking through the judge's sheet with all students, reminding them of the adjudicator's responsibility to make helpful suggestions. You will be pleased how observant they are.

See you at Festival. Relax and enjoy the music. You've earned that privilege.

."..... to love what you do and feel that it matters .... how could anything be more fun?....."