

Cello Circle: Irene Sharp

- Today we'll discuss left hand technique
- "You have to be lazy to play the cello!" - Irene Sharp
- Least effort possible
 - Influenced by Margaret Rowell and 30+ years of Alexander Technique
- Left hand fingers shorten and lengthen the string
 - No need to press string to the fingerboard
 - Fingerboard isn't even necessary
 - Instead, cling to the inside of the string with the finger pad and pull left
 - Coat hook demo
 - Look for robe hooks at the hardware store, if you want to experiment with this yourself
 - How does this work with the left hand?
 - Make a hook
 - Not too tight a hook, want to see fingernails
 - Put fleshy part of finger pad on inside of the string
 - Pull to the left and check for "sticky," "suction," or "magnetic" sensation
 - No other muscles are engaged between the first joint and the shoulder blade
 - Knuckles flat at base of fingers
 - First introduced using octave D harmonic followed by 4th finger D on A string
 - No pushing!
 - Usually resolves buckling of hyperflexible joints
 - If someone insists on pushing, ask them to avoid touching the fingerboard as much as possible
 - Good cling = good resonance
 - If sound is unclear, check cling before tweaking the bow

- Practice pizzicato and listen for the ring
- Left hand never plays softly
- My discovery: easier to feel cling on thicker C string or edge of fingerboard
- All fingers down
 - Much less effort than pushing, so we can take advantage of economizing finger motion
- Thumb can cling too!
 - Hook by the nail and pull left
 - Same “suction/magnetic” sensation
- Changing strings
 - Slide fingers to next string, don’t lift
- Extensions in upper positions
 - Bring base of the fingers toward the fingerboard
 - Flatten knuckles further
- Playing fifths
 - 1st, 2nd, and 3rd finger:
 - Cling lower note as normal
 - Collapse distal finger joint
 - Cling with pad and skin just above joint
 - 4th finger: “karate chop” at an angle to the fingerboard
- Shifting
 - “The arm is for transportation”
 - “The arm knows what to do”
 - Map of motor cortex from Margaret
 - Shift initiated from forearm above wrist
 - Higher in pitch is lower in space: gravity

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- Fingers stay “on the track” on the inside of the string
 - Introduced using ski jumps, knuckle knocks, sirens, and slap bass
 - “Don’t drop my expensive Kleenex” exercise to avoid lifting 1st finger during shift
- Descending shift back to 1st or half position: elbow comes forward, never behind
- Renie introduces 3 octave scales early on to get students used to the whole fingerboard
 - When ready to study shifting in more detail introducing 4th position “The Case of the Disappearing Note” : Feuillard method No. 21 and 22
- Shifting to thumb
 - Pass thumb under similar to piano technique
- Double stops
 - No more effort than single notes
 - Practice starting with all fingers on one string, then keep the same cling and level of effort when moving the fingers to more strings
- Trills
 - Bat the string
- Vibrato
 - Good cling and balanced hand makes vibrato almost happen by itself
 - Initiated from wrist
- Right hand Velcro and scoop
 - Arm is light: bird wings, “give elbow to the floor”
 - “Ask nicely, not ‘you will do this!’”
 - Each bow stroke starts from underneath the previous stroke
 - Renie’s chalkboard drawing
 - Encourages arm to return to side without lifting shoulder
 - Hair retraces its path

- More expressive than straight stroke of unrelenting volume
- Focus on the point where the hair touches the string
 - That's where the sound is initiated
 - Don't watch the hand
 - Wrap hair in Kleenex and practice bowing holding onto the hair to feel the hair at work
- Play on one hair "M.V.H. - the Most Valuable Hair"
 - Less resistance allows string to speak freely
- "Horsehair is horsehair"
 - Can Velcro the hair to the string anywhere along the bow
- String crossings
 - "Long/short"
 - Transfer cling from one string to the next
 - A string is lower in space than D string
 - Let tip fall over to the A string
 - Practice changing with hair on bridge
 - Hand moving nearer and away
- "Bicycle fingers"
 - Much more efficient for small strokes
 - Toy bicycle -> down and up pizz.
 - Initiated from 1st finger; others go along for the ride
 - Strokes still curved! "Draw the world's smallest 'U's"
- Expression
 - Balanced use of the body
 - No extraneous motions
 - Head bobs

- Left elbow waving
- Must be able to hear musical thoughts, not see them
- Use of video
 - All lessons recorded
 - Teacher records pieces live so student becomes used to idea of live performance
 - Listen, play, listen, play, play
- Other tools
 - Adhesive dots on fingerboard instead of tapes
 - Makes it possible to get fingers and shifts right the first time
 - “What you learn first is what sticks”
 - Dots fall off eventually—replace if student still needs them
 - Pencil mark also works
 - Recommended for players of all levels
 - “Watchdog” to build awareness of shoulder hiking
 - Mirror behind student to watch shoulders and back