

Some Principles for String Players to Observe in Orchestra Playing

By Dr. Cliff Colnot

Plan the use of the bow to accomplish what must be done musically. Do not indiscriminately and automatically use a full bow on every note. Do not *crescendo* on every up-bow or accent on every down-bow. Do not let changes of bow create changes in the original articulation. Be aware of the balance between bow pressure and bow speed. When moving toward the tip, increase the bow pressure to sustain the sound. Keep the bow moving through rests; do not choke off the sound with sudden stops.

To create a sustained musical line, begin one tone where the last leaves off. Just as wind players must be sure to sustain the sound through a *legato* phrase, string players must not let a change of bow disrupt the melodic line by suddenly playing louder or softer. String players need to be sure to play the last note in a *diminuendo* softer than the preceding one when there is a change of bow. Do not accent the last note of passages that continue in other sections; pass the line from one section or instrument to another. Do not land heavily on the last note of cadences.

Nourish the sound from beginning to end. Start *vibrato* before moving the bow and continue to vibrate after the bow leaves the string. Do not play some notes with *vibrato* and some without when continuity of expression must be maintained. Practice transferring *vibrato* so that it does not stop for finger changes, shifts, and string crossings.

Don't play the part in isolation. Determine who has thematic material (most important in the hierarchy) and who has accompaniment. Listen to motor rhythms, repeated note values that constitute a metronome other parts must fit with. Listen for other instruments that are playing the same music and fit with them.

Don't be a soloist competing to be heard. Focused sounds that project are fine when one must be heard as an individual, but fuzzy, airy, less focused sounds blend more effectively collectively. In soft passages, the player who can hear his or her own sound is playing too loud.

Remember that dynamics are relative. Adjust dynamics up or down one dynamic level depending on the relative importance of the part. Exaggerate dynamic contrasts so that the composition is not performed in varying shades of *mezzo-forte*.

Fit in harmonically. It helps to know what note of the chord one is playing in the harmony and whether one is playing in unison or octaves with other voices. PLAYING LOWER OCTAVES AT LEAST ONE DYNAMIC LOUDER HELPS THE BALANCE AND THE PITCH OF THE UPPER OCTAVES.

Look ahead, memorize, and look up. Buffer upcoming measures in your memory and look up for visual cues. When there is a structural turn or "corner" in the music, especially when accompanied by a *retard* or an *accelerando*, watch the conductor. Watch the principal players at the front of the sections and play in the same part of the bow, with the same stroke. Semi-memorize passages when practicing in preparation for rehearsal, looking at the music briefly, then looking away and playing.