

PATH TO EFFORTLESSNESS:  
MAURICIO FUKS' PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE ART OF VIOLIN PLAYING

BY

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*To my mom, Baekhee Kim*

## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to Professor Mauricio Fuks. This document could not have been written without his tremendous trust in me as the content of the document in its entirety is solely based on my own experiences as his student and assistant. Naturally, I make no claim to be comprehensive. I am also deeply thankful to him for encouraging and challenging me to grow as a performer, teacher, and most importantly, as a person throughout the process of my academic program.

After a long day of teaching, Prof. Fuks often spoke to me about his philosophy on violin teaching. His words revealed his genuine care for students and intense passion for their growth as violinists. But what fascinated and inspired me the most during our countless conversations was and still remains to be his great interest in the growth of the students as human beings. He says,

“At the end of the day every violinist will play with more or less technique, with more or less talent. But you see, the truth is that no violinist can escape from playing who he/she is...I want each of my students to discover his/her inner self through the instrument. Now, the process may be intimidating at first since they will find good things as well as not so pleasant things about themselves. But unless they are brave enough to look deep inside and find their inner selves, they cannot become genuine artists. External development without internal growth is futile, and being honest with one’s own self is the first step to true artistry...I am happy when my ex-students tell me things are going well for them, that with my help their career is going well. But I am happiest and truly satisfied when they tell me they have grown as human beings through the process of violin study with me. Then I feel I have done something worthwhile.”

These words stayed with me, and I cherish them in all my endeavors as a performer and teacher. *Muchas Gracias, Maestro.*

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Minjung Cho

Path to Effortlessness:

Mauricio Fuks' pedagogical perspectives

on the art of violin playing

For Mauricio Fuks, Rudy Professor of Violin at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, effortlessness in violin playing has more implications than mere technical facility. It is the aesthetic ideal and the essence of the finest artisanship that may lead to true artistic freedom in playing. The concept of effortlessness in Professor Fuks' teaching practice involves the paradoxical project of making an effort to play effortlessly, to obtain a degree of violin mastery in which playing is full of intensity and free of needless tension, and to achieve the technical virtuosity as nonchalance or *Sprezzatura*, an essential foundation in one's endeavor to reach the highest level of artistry. His meticulous yet plainly elucidated instructions on the physiology of violin playing and its relationship to the mental process not only eradicate any hindrance to attaining technical effortlessness but also reveal the path to self-discovery and artistic identity. My project in this document is to describe how Professor Fuks' teaching brings this technical and aesthetical ideal about.

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## Introduction

In this document I discuss Professor Mauricio Fuks' distinctive perspectives and methods in violin teaching. Professor Fuks' teaching emphasis lies in the understanding of and the sensitivity to our body parts' interconnectedness and interdependency, and subsequently, nurturing of the kinesthetic awareness to the body's wholeness in playing. The idea of body's wholeness for playing is evident in his teaching concepts; for instance, his idea of pelvic bowing, the bowing initiated from the lower body, is to achieve physical effortlessness, technical efficiency and aesthetic elegance in the bow mastery through the whole body's cooperation. Or, his emphasis on one's conscious awareness, the heightened self-observation skill, as an essential means to enhance the physical and mental effortlessness in playing implies one's wholeness in both physical and mental perspectives. Artistically, he draws a distinction between internally motivated works and externally motivated ones. He thinks that students often give too much attention to the external fluency and exactitude in playing and neglect the emotional, contextual and interpretative work that may be internally motivated. He believes the reflective work on one's own emotions and feelings to be the foundation for discovering one's unique inner voice in playing.

Professor Fuks develops his unique pedagogy most prominently from two sources, his experiences with his own music teachers and his study of Moshé Feldenkrais' somatic education. As a young violinist, Mauricio Fuks studies under Ylia Fidlon, Leopold Auer's pupil, whose creative and adaptive teaching

approaches shaped his playing in his early days in Uruguay; later he studied with Joseph Fuchs at Juilliard, a pupil of Franz Kneisel, who broadened his understanding in styles and colors, and also in the chamber music literature; Ivan Galamian, a pupil of Konstantin Mostras and Lucien Capet, who helped him perfect the bow mastery and instilled in him scientific and systematic approaches to violin technique; and Jascha Heifetz at the University of Southern California, whose concentration of energy, elegance and expressive power in playing mesmerized and inspired him in his quest for greater heights in the artistry of violin playing and teaching. Yehudi Menuhin, who recognized Fuks' exceptional talent as a teacher and supported his pedagogical emphasis on the physical as well as technical aspects of violin playing, inspired him to take his teaching further.

Fuks' encounters with Moshe Feldenkreis' approach to kinesthetic awareness and his own practice of the Feldenkreis method gave him a deeper understanding of the physiology of violin playing. Having spent more than five years studying with Professor Fuks and observing and assisting in his classes I feel compelled to document his unique perspectives and methods in violin pedagogy.

The document is divided into four chapters. In Chapter I, "'Hard work is a job badly done.': Understanding Bodily Process," I look at the underlying concepts, fundamentals of bodily process, and distinctive perspectives and methods Professor Fuks employs to attain physical facility and mental flexibility in violin playing. Chapter II, "Right- and Left-hand Basics," presents the violin techniques Mauricio Fuks instills in his students as indispensable basics of playing. Chapter III, "'To

become an artist, one must become a great artisan first,” presents Mauricio Fuks’ pedagogical insights into various technical and artistic issues essential to a musician’s growth as an artist. In chapter IV, “Finding One’s Inner Voice: Discovery of the Self,” I look how Professor Fuks teaches his students to find their “inner voice” and project what he calls their “outer voice,” the violin. Fuks’ infusion of the physiology of playing into the aesthetic and artistic ideal in violin playing eliminates technical hindrances to effortlessness and opens the path to the fully embodied playing that allows the violinist find his/her unique artistry.



## Chapter I “Hard work is a job badly done.”: Understanding Bodily Process

- i. Underlying concepts: interconnectedness and conscious awareness

One’s body is an entity assembled of interdependent and interconnected parts that perform the body’s functions uniquely. Thus every movement and position employed for playing violin not only engages the more obvious and visible body parts that are in action, but also the rest of the body parts that seemingly appear uninvolved, whether its involvement holds positive or negative, significant or minuscule implications for the quality of one’s playing. The concept of physical interconnectedness implies that the effectiveness of the intended actions for playing violin depends on the activities of the whole body, at both conscious and unconscious levels, in the process of playing. The idea of the body’s interconnectedness, and the subsequent concept of body’s ‘oneness’, or ‘wholeness’ for playing violin underline Mauricio Fuks’ distinctive perspectives on the physiology of violin playing and are greatly emphasized in his teaching process. He believes that understanding the complexity of the body’s interconnectedness and its interplay with the quality of one’s playing demands acute and conscious awareness, as well as substantial knowledge and insight into the mechanics of violin playing. The conscious awareness, the heightened self-observation skill Fuks cultivates, is a vital tool for students to detect and observe their own

physical, mental and emotional activities in the process of playing. It nurtures their ability to effectively discriminate the activities that are beneficial for playing from the needless and even harmful ones, providing increased objectivity, knowledge and insight into the playing as well as into the self reflected in the playing. Therefore, enhancing one's awareness and sensitivity by eliminating needless physical effort and mental tension in the process of playing is among the top priorities in his teaching process.

Fuks has observed that many students who possess great potential and talent attempt to manage difficulties in playing with their instinctive abilities alone. As a result, when challenging problems arise in playing, be they technical or artistic, the lack of awareness and knowledge often creates mental inflexibilities in them, debilitating their ability to detect and deal with the challenges. As a consequence, they end up working on the superficial level, trying to eliminate the symptoms on surface of the playing, involuntarily neglecting deeper roots that cause them. They rely on their willpower and effort to tackle challenges instead, with earnest repetitions, while failing to identify the core of the problems. This type of working, although it may be effective up to a certain level of playing, eventually will impede students, even the most talented ones, from gaining the more refined knowledge and ability that are necessary to develop and improve further, while the accumulation of unconstructive motions in their muscle memory may develop into compulsive habits that may be easily lead to physical injuries. Although their instinctive abilities may manage some of the challenges, unless supported by

conscious awareness and accurate knowledge, they become physically and mentally vulnerable when faced with more complex and subtle challenges. Furthermore, inconsistency in executions may occur frequently because of the lack of accurate knowledge and awareness of the intended actions. A teacher who lacked such knowledge would be unable to deliver clear instructions on the mechanical process of the required actions.

Fuks has also observed that these deficiencies in students' work process lead to inevitably poor outcomes in playing, despite the earnest effort and willpower they invest in it. As a consequence, feelings of frustration and disappointment emerge in them, and they come to doubt and distrust in their own ability. The negativities accumulate and form mental insecurities and rigidities in them, which greatly afflict and even damage their own self-confidence and thus hinder their further technical and musical development. Mauricio Fuks therefore considers increasing one's awareness indispensable not only to enhance the efficiency for attaining the desired results in playing, but also to restore any negatively perceived notion of self, and ultimately to help improving one's own self-esteem. Thus for him, the concept of interconnectedness not only concerns the physical aspects of violin playing but also the mental and emotional aspects, expanding its implication for and relevance to the complex yet fascinating art of violin playing.

For Fuks, observing body motions is crucial to diagnose not only physical problems in playing but also mental and emotional involvement in it. The



unconsciously formed bodily tension in one's playing may be created by physical means alone, and/or by mental and emotional problems that manifest in physical forms. For instance, an unbalanced standing with tense legs while playing could be an indication of a mere physical habit, but might be an indication of a mental tension affecting the body, and manifested in it as well. A violin hold with a tightly pressed jaw or a raised left shoulder could be an indication of mere excess physical tension, but also may be a sign of mental discomfort, as the tight violin hold becomes an instinctive reaction, acting as a security blanket, to the emotions such as insecurity, fear and anxiety that may emerge in performing in public. Physical habits may influence and reflect mental conditions, as the reverse may occur as well. Thus conscious awareness of these intricate occurrences becomes a subtle, but essential tool for accurate and efficient learning and improving one's playing, and more importantly, oneself.

For Mauricio Fuks, effectively minimizing and inhibiting of the unnecessary effort and tension in the playing, whether physical, mental or emotional, is the essential ability to be acquired by students who desire further growth in their artistic endeavor to achieve both technical and artistic purity and refinement. His keen intuition and sensibility in diagnosing the distinctive causes of the surface problems, based on thorough knowledge of the mechanics and physiology of violin playing, his sharply critical and analytical mind, combined with decades of experience as a teacher, and his genuine curiosity and interest in human development and improvement in general, present students profoundly new

perspectives on the art of violin playing, widening their options for improvements, as they learn more about both instrument and themselves.

Mauricio Fuks has observed that young violinists often employ excessive mental and physical effort for playing and involuntarily hinder the effective flow of their expressive energy through the body and the instrument. Their energy is often dispersed as bodily tension and rigidity, instead of being converted to a pure expressive force, thus creating common barriers that deter many talented violinists from growing into great artisans and artists. For instance, many players translate power and brilliance in playing to greater physical efforts, often with excessive and rigid bodily movements, creating forcefulness and aggressiveness in the sound. The result is often a visual display of (mimicked) power that actually does not carry the expressive force and brilliance in the actual sound and performance; in fact, the quality of the sound becomes tense and harsh on account of the excessive physical effort employed. Because of the student's inability to distinguish the subtle differences between the sensations of "feeling strong" and "delivering the feeling of strength" in one's own execution, the problem may be incurable. As one works harder with excessive effort, she or he gives the false feeling of power to the body and mind, while the actual quality of playing gets poorer due to the physical rigidities. Thus, it is very common to observe the students, who believe that more work (more effort) equals better results in the performance, perform more poorly the harder they try.

In seeking out the most effortless and optimal position and movement, customized according to each student's physical and mental dispositions, Mauricio Fuks' intention is to discover the way to play "with minimum of effort to achieve the maximum of results," the motto embedded in every step of his teaching method, be it technical or artistic. For Fuks, effortless in violin playing entails one's whole body and mind working in the most efficient way through one's heightened awareness, sensitivity and objectivity, in order to enhance the ease in playing violin by dispersing the work of the most burdened body parts through the rest of body's interconnected parts, thereby maximizing the pure and concentrated expressive force with minimized effort. Thus the student experiences the increasing ease and comfort, and consequently the joy, in playing.

ii. Foundation: centeredness in standing

With the majority of his new students, Mauricio Fuks begins his lessons with balanced standing. As one's body works as 'one' or 'whole' for playing the instrument, establishing centeredness and balance in standing is a foundational process for effortless playing; the more stable and centered one stands, Fuks tells them, the less effort and work are required. He recommends standing evenly balanced on firm yet flexible legs that function as steady columns supporting the trunk of one's body, as the position that enhances drawing energy from the ground

up, and its effective flow throughout the body. He points out that the importance of balanced standing tends to be neglected in today's teaching, and often is not properly addressed or dealt with.

As Fuks observes, many players cope with imbalance in standing by excessive bodily movements or localized rigidities in body parts, instead of establishing a centered posture with equal weight distributions in both legs. Notoriously, the narrowing of the leg spread and locking of the knees occur most commonly in unbalanced standing. While the former restricts the space for stable movements for playing and thus forces one to lean excessively on one side of the body and/or walk back and forth to compensate the loss of balance, resulting in uneven sound projection for listeners, the latter stiffens the whole lower body, burdening the upper body with all the work required for playing.

The impact of these actions is subtle and may not be apparent to the players, but Mauricio Fuks notes that the accumulations of the burden may become the source of further difficulties and restrictions in the playing. As he says,

Obviously, the posture required for playing the violin – the violin lifted against gravity, the twist of left arm, and the bow involvement and so on, is not easy. Therefore, the student should not cause more burdens with positions and movements that trigger imbalance and stiffness. He or she should seek positions and movements that support and enhance ease and comfort in playing. For instance, knee locking instantly paralyses the lower body from waist

down, causing extra load to the upper body. Furthermore, it hinders the natural flow of one's energy throughout the body and its flexibility in execution. No body parts should be locked while playing the violin, since what one does with one part of body affects the rest. As for the knees, they are to be slightly bent, acting like shock absorbers, compensating the pressure and tension we apply for playing.

To make the point further, he often uses the example of professional boxers. "Observe professional boxers in the ring, ready for a match. Imagine them standing with their knees locked, the legs narrowly spread and leaning on one side of the body. Would they be able to deliver a punch with powerful force? The answer is, of course, no. So the same goes for playing the violin. One may not be able to create the maximum energy and force in the playing without the foundation of balance and centeredness in standing."

Fuks also points out that one's mental tension often creates physical stiffness causing imbalanced standing as well. For instance, when students encounter a difficult passage or section in a performance, some of them instantaneously stiffen their legs involuntarily, and their leg spread becomes even narrower as part of their compulsive physical reactions due to their mental tension and insecurity over the particular passage. These physical reactions certainly may occur in different forms. Some students gradually rotate the body away from the audience, some lean the upper body extremely far forward or downward, the common thread between involuntary and compulsive actions still being the mental

tension reflected in them. Mental tension over the difficulty triggers physical rigidity, then the physical rigidity worsens the performance of the passage, and the poor performance intensifies the mental tension; as a result, a vicious cycle settles in. Thus, detecting one's own mental and physical processes with conscious awareness becomes the first step for breaking the vicious cycle of the compulsive actions and reactions.

To break the cycle, Fuks recommends that students first try to consciously stand balanced and maintain the posture throughout the difficult passage. As they experience initial discomfort for not giving into their habitual reactions, they become acutely aware of and may clearly detect their body's compulsive tendency. The discomfort experienced in the process is quite common, as habitual reactions get blocked with conscious awareness, creating sensations of unfamiliarity. In fact, it is this mindfulness about the new physical activity that heightens the conscious awareness, as they attempt to maintain the centered and balanced physical position throughout the challenging passage. The heightened awareness then creates a better environment for clear thinking and improves their ability to assess and control the actions. As a result, the students are given opportunities to seek more conscious and coherent approaches to solving the technical issues.

The optimal standing posture for playing the violin, Mauricio Fuks suggests, consists of a firmly balanced leg spread that is a bit wider than one's shoulder width, evenly supporting the weight of a well-centered upper body with its limbs and ribs effortlessly hanging off the spine, and the knees slightly bent so that they function

as shock absorbers. He recommends practicing the standing posture without holding the violin, solely focusing on the sensation of centeredness and balance. Here, it is crucial to position one's body in such a stable and centered way that, even if someone pushed one's body from any direction, one would not easily lose the centeredness or fall down. This way, one gains greater space for movements without compensating the balance and centeredness in body.

It is also important to be acutely aware and feel the upper body completely at rest; the sensation of the upper body sitting comfortably on the lower body, as if sitting on a chair. Acquiring the sensation of comfort and ease is the key in this process, which then would serve as the foundation for effortless playing. Just as with any old habits, feeling this sensation once may be easy, but holding on to this new habit requires conscious work over a considerable period of time. The ultimate goal is to fully embed balanced standing in one's body at the habitual and instinctive level that eventually would not require conscious work any longer. To this end, Mauricio Fuks assigns exercises with exaggerated leg spread. To assure this extremely wide leg spread while practicing, Fuks marks the feet position on a piece of newspaper spread under one's feet and has the student stand on that position for the entire practice. This is to prevent students from instinctively returning to the imbalanced standing while practicing.

Old habits do not go away easily, they usually come right back as soon as one is distracted. Even if one remembers standing balanced in the beginning of a practice session, as soon as other issues in playing get one's attention, the habitual

position, the status quo, most likely returns. Thus, having the wide leg spread marked on the newspaper and maintaining the exaggerated leg spread during the hour of practice will help one stay conscious, even if one's attention is to address other issues. Furthermore, as one now is to fluctuate between wider leg spreads, one may eventually find the balanced standing a new normal, forming it as a new habit.

### iii. Calm upper body; lifting of violin and breathing

The process of lifting the violin before resting it on the left shoulder area, as a preparation prior to the actual playing, may seem very trivial, and one might even wonder whether it is worth discussing. But examining this initial process may expose any unnecessary extra effort and tension that one may unconsciously create in the body, more specifically in the upper limbs, prior to the actual performance. Mauricio Fuks observed that many students habitually raise their rib cages and shoulder (the left side, more prominently) in the process of lifting of the violin, and continue the extra effort and rigidity in upper limbs throughout the actual performance. This involuntary and unconscious action of added effort, the needless raising of the upper limbs, often is strongly embedded in one's body as habitual and mechanical occurrences, and as he observes commonly gets aggravated in students by a more intrinsic activity in one's organism, which is one's breathing.



The usual breathing, shallow breathing, causes upper chest expansion promoting the raising of the upper limbs, aggravating the involuntary and needless effort of lifting one's upper limbs. Together with the unnecessary effort of lifting the limbs, they add an extra physical burden on the player, considerably diminishing one's flexibility, elasticity and freedom in playing. He acknowledges that it is often quite challenging for students to detect these subtle activities in their body, since these are extremely intrinsic and habitual activities and may only be dismantled by acute conscious awareness and heightened sensitivity combined with one's patience in the remedial work. He says that primarily, it is the inhaling part of the shallow breathing that causes the upward movement of the upper chest and limbs, which incidentally has an equally damaging effect in the common action of taking a 'deep' breath right before placing the bow on the violin for playing. Therefore, Mauricio Fuks first assigns an exercise involving the opposite activities to stimulate one's conscious awareness; slowly lifting the violin while exhaling deeply. The exhalation effectively discourages the lifting of the upper limbs, as the simultaneous actions, the combination of upper limb lifting and shallow inhalation, are now blocked, and as a consequence, the habitual lifting of the upper limbs become acutely apparent and even somewhat unnatural to one.

The same deep exhaling action, replacing the 'deep' breath (i.e. shallow inhalation) one habitually takes right before paying, may be exercised at the right hand (bow) motion approaching the violin. These exercises with exhalation immediately create discomfort in students as they consciously do the opposite of what they would habitually and instinctively do. At the same time, they become

acutely aware of their habitual tendencies, and thus are able to easily detect and observe these activities, facilitating their attempts to apply the new conscious actions until they become familiar with the effortless physical sensations. He recommends slowly repeating the lifting motions with deep exhalation; both the motion of lifting the violin and the right hand motion approaching the violin as a preparation for playing, first without the violin or the bow, to solely focus on the physical sensations. Once the detection of both the physical and habitual tendency and the newly acquired calmness in the upper limbs is successful with these exercises, he incorporates the better breathing process that does not aggravate the upper chest expansion, which is the deep breathing, also called the diaphragmatic breathing.

The deep breathing focuses on the use of diaphragm and lower abdomen, and its lateral expansion does not involve the raising of the upper limbs. It also helps one create a more calm and relaxed upper body with its increased oxygen flow and thus promotes effortless motions for playing, and ultimately decreases unnecessary tensions and rigidities in one's body and performance. Mauricio Fuks assigns exercises combining the deep breathing with the motions of the previous exercises, standing balanced with the strong sensation of centeredness while the violin is held down with the left hand. Fuks tells the student to breathe deeply and slowly a few times with diaphragm and lower abdomen to become acutely aware of the calmness of the upper limbs. Then, keeping the strong sensation of calmness in the upper body, he has them gently and slowly lift the violin to a playing position

while exhaling deeply, again keeping the upper body completely calm and uninvolved.

The similar exercise may be done with the right hand motion approaching the violin as a preparation for playing, again being acutely aware of the ribcage and shoulder girdle (more attention to the right side this time) completely uninvolved in the motion; without the bow first, then with. “Try to imagine and feel strongly that your upper body is getting pulled down and melting away, as you lift the arms up. The feeling in the trunk of the body and the feeling on the arms should be the opposite” he adds. One should repeat the procedure slowly, with heightened sensitivity and awareness, and patiently keep practicing it until the conscious motions take over the instinctive ones. Once that is achieved, the conscious exhaling in the process of lifting the violin (or at the right hand motion approaching the violin) eventually becomes unnecessary, as one becomes familiar and at ease with the sensation of calm and uninvolved upper body in the process, and the comforting sensation of effortlessness permeates in the process.

#### iv. On basic violin hold

Violin hold is a very personal matter to tackle, since every violinist’s physical disposition is particular, and has been always a changing and evolving matter historically. But examining one’s violin hold is undoubtedly a crucial

process for achieving effortless in playing, as it involves such centric and intimate contact points between violin and body, besides one's hand and fingers, such as the jaw, neck, shoulder and upper chest area. I will discuss the most foundational and common ground Mauricio Fuks underlines on the subject.

First of all, he emphasizes that the violin should never be held or grabbed tightly, but must be rested effortlessly on the body. Too often, one's notion of a violin hold is incorrect. The 'resting' of the violin, the correct notion of violin hold, which bears associations with such positive sensations as comfort, ease, calmness and effortless, is often replaced by the notion of 'holding' or 'grabbing' the violin with the connotations such as tightness, struggle, forcefulness and insecurity. Regardless the use of shoulder rest, there are only two basic points of support for an effortless violin hold; the collar bone area (specifically the area of sunken space between the left collar bone and the neck) on which to rest the center end of the violin's lower block, and the part between the thumb and the index fingers on which to rest the neck of the violin.

When the violin is rested on these two support points only, one should be able to move the neck of the violin side to side horizontally and rotate it slightly left to right with ease and without fear of the violin slipping in any direction. (For those who use the shoulder rest, they are first to make sure that these two spots alone are sufficient to stabilize the violin hold; and then add the third support point with the shoulder rest without altering the resting sensation of the basic position, and making sure no additional shoulder, neck or jaw pressure applied.) Here, it is

crucial to keep the left arm supporting the violin as relaxed as possible, with the minimal effort of the bicep muscles to keep it lifted, while making sure to inhibit needless effort and tension from other limbs in the area, especially the lifting of ribcage. The two points – the collar bone area and the part between the two fingers – are the only essential support points for violin hold. Once this is clear, one should be able to realize that the common errors in violin hold – the lifting of the left shoulder, the jaw pressing and the neck squeezing – are unnecessary efforts that create physical tension and burden an effortless violin hold. And although the contact points other than these two spots could serve as auxiliary support points (not ‘grabbing’ points) for certain technical needs depending on the particularity of one’s physical disposition, by default, they are not, and should not be the primary support points.

v. Tight violin hold: a false sense of security

Tightness in violin hold is mainly caused by excessive physical pressure on the contact points between the violin and the body. It is a very common and strongly habitual activity in playing, and once embedded in one’s muscle memory, getting rid of it requires a great deal of remedial work. As I have already discussed in the previous section, one’s incorrect notion of violin hold may be one of the

main causes of the initial tightness, which then develops into compulsive physical habit.

Mauricio Fuks observes that there are other elements that trigger and aggravate the tightness in violin hold as well, namely, one's occurrent sensations in playing. The lack of confidence in certain techniques or musical contents, and the subsequent uneasy sensations in performing in public, such as feelings of vulnerability, exposure and insecurity, heighten one's physical and mental discomfort, desensitizing the player and even paralyzing the flexibility of movements. The tight violin hold functions as one's instinctive reaction to these anxieties by seeking safety and security to these sensations, which forces one compulsively to maintain the physical rigidity despite the consequences one may suffer from it. Mauricio Fuks often uses an example of the infants' instinctive reaction to explain the behavior; "Place something, like a pencil, on the palm of an infant. He/she most likely would hold it as tight as possible with the little hand. This instinctive action is derived from the intrinsic human need to feel secure and safe. We, the adults, tend to do the same thing; holding tight to something, whether materialized or abstract, to feel safe and secure." Tight violin hold may stem from the same root, the need to feel secure in the midst of the uneasy sensations. But the sensation of security provided by the tight hold is a false one, he contends. Instead of providing the security, it greatly confines one's technical, mental and emotional flexibility and freedom in playing. "In fact, one needs to do the opposite; to learn to let go of the need to feel safe and secure. And welcome vulnerability to ultimately achieve the true freedom in playing."

Mauricio Fuks assigns an exercise to decrease the tightness: play a first position study, such as the study *No. 1* from Schradiek's School of Violin playing book I, while keeping the jaw completely removed from the chinrest and supporting the violin solely on the collar bone area and the left hand. The exercise immediately removes any upper body surface one may pressure the violin against, and once one sheds the initial awkwardness of the posture, the instant relief in the body becomes apparent.

Another exercise is to gently rotate the neck side to side (180 degrees) while the violin is supported only on the collar bone area and left hand, without any sort of additional effort from the upper body. If the violin is correctly and effortlessly held, one should be able to do this action with no hindrances. If there are physical interferences, such as the raised left limbs, jaw pressure or neck squeezing, one will not be able to turn the head to the left completely, as the chin rest will block the turn in the middle. This exercise of turning the head side to side may be applied to the practice of studies and pieces as well, to stay consciously aware of the effortlessness in violin hold and to maintain it. To go further, one may try to simply open the mouth, talk, sing and even walk while playing; and to maximize the sensation of comfort one may do these exercises while resting the violin at lower position than usual, around the chest area, a technique many gypsy or baroque *viola da braccio* players would employ.

#### vi. Holding the violin high up

Most teachers recommend holding violin high up, pointing its scroll higher than the shoulder height. There are several reasons behind this recommendation, among them the enhanced ability of the left hand to shift to higher positions (as the gravity helps the left hand move downward) and the help in keeping the bow from slipping to the fingerboard (also gravity at work), and finally, a more dignified appearance to the performance. But often, the focus on the outer appearance tends to neglect the appropriate inner body functions and sensations to support the posture effectively. Mauricio Fuks observed that many rely on the left arm and/or ribcage to lift the instrument higher. The additional effort from these parts ends up fighting against the opposite downward pressure- the left fingers on the fingerboard, the bow pressure and the gravity itself. As a consequence, the burden on the body only increases as one tries to maintain the posture throughout a performance.

Mauricio Fuks takes a more natural and effortless approach to the matter, teaching his students to employ the lateral expansion of the rib cage and chest by filling their lungs with air and thus straightening their spine and shoulders. One may observe the violin automatically getting lifted by the opening of the chest and the straightening of the spine. These physical actions allow a better posture for the violin hold with no additional effort to create enhanced surface for the bow arm weight to effectively lean on, and also promote the better flow of oxygen into the body, increasing the sensation of comfort and effortlessness.



vii. Dealing with tension; multi-tasking

One of the common initial reactions in students when performing technically challenging passages is to get excessively tense, and thus to go into an instant panic mode, paralyzing the mind and causing the loss of mental control, which then leads to the subsequent loss of physical control. Mauricio Fuks often employs an unorthodox method when the panic from excess tension occurs in one's performance during a lesson; asking random questions such as, "What did you have for breakfast this morning?" or "Could you name your favorite breakfast items?" in the midst of one's playing. One is to answer the random question while continuing to play the passage. Although the question seems quite random, this method challenges students to execute two unrelated tasks at the same time, altering the panic status to increase one's awareness in order to observe both conscious and impulsive activities. As the physical tension in the jaw area eases automatically (by movements for talking) and the mind withdraws excessive mental tension to focus on the utterly trivial tasks (such as remembering and speaking of the breakfast items), one realizes that the initial physical and mental efforts were excessive, and quite unnecessary. By distracting the mental state of panic with different tasks, one is able to remove the excessive tension and gradually regain mental control to effectively seek and find the solutions for the improvement of the particular passage.



## Chapter II Right- and Left-hand Basics

### Part 1. Right-hand: Basic bow mechanism

Once the foundational body posture for playing is established, Mauricio Fuks moves on to focus on the right hand technique, the bowing. He calls the bow “one’s lung and breathing” and believes that eighty percent of violin playing depends on one’s mastery of bowing. He meticulously goes over the basics of right hand and bow functions to make sure each of his students possesses thorough understanding of mechanics of bow artistry.

#### i. Basic bow hold and suppleness

For beginners and those students with a poor bow hold, Mauricio Fuks thoroughly explains the essential basics of bow hold. He firmly believes that without possessing a solid understanding in technique one cannot reach a level of ultimate purity and refinement in the art of violin playing. One detects a sense of reverence in his meticulous explanations of even the most basic principles of violin technique. For the basic bow hold he has the student first make a ring shape with the thumb and the middle finger of the right hand. The ring is the foundation of

bow hold. Next, he has the student transfer the ring shape to the frog of the bow (specifically, the space between the nut and the pad of the bow) while lightly holding the tip of the bow with left fingers (the tip pointed up), simulating the weightless status of the bow when placed and rested on the string. Then he has the student gently place the rest of the fingers of the right hand on the frog naturally and effortlessly, without artificial spaces between fingers, or additional stretch or contraction. Since the left fingers are holding the bow at the tip, the fingers of the right hand may be gently ‘placed’ on the stick, not ‘holding’ or ‘grabbing’ the bow. The pinkie should be placed not on the top of the bow, but on the next facet toward one’s body, to prevent it from slipping, and keep the bow slightly tilted when playing. Next, he has the student let go of the left hand from the stick, while maintaining the right hand hold. Here, the sensation of light placement in the left fingers should be maintained. Then the student places the violin on the playing position, and rests the middle of the bow on the A string. The same light sensation of the fingers should continue since the bow’s weight is now resting on the string.

Another exercise to increase the sensitivity of the fingers is the crawling of the fingers on the whole stick. The student holds the bow vertically while pointing the tip up, and then lets the fingers on the bow crawl from the frog to the tip and the back to the frog. The whole procedure should be done making sure students feel the lightness of the fingers. Mauricio Fuks always emphasizes; “holding a bow should feel like holding a feather. And the fingers on the bow should serve as channels for the flow of the right arm’s natural weight.” Too often, students grab the bow with

the fingers and use the finger pressure to get power in the sound, and as a result, the sound lacks resonance and purity and reflects the tension and rigidity of the bow hold. The stiffness in the fingers also causes the tightening of the whole right arm, thus hindering execution of the variety of bow strokes. And the localized and continued effort in the fingers easily makes them vulnerable to injuries. Supple fingers, he reiterates, which allow the transmission of natural arm weight to the bow, are indispensable to achieve beautiful, resonant, powerful yet unforced sound.

#### ii. Right hand shape

The shape of the bow hand should be both elegant and as natural as possible. Mauricio Fuks suggests a simple experiment to determine this. Stand relaxed and let the whole arm naturally hang from the shoulder, and the hand shape from that position, without tension or additional effort, is the ideal basic bow hand shape. While keeping this beautifully round shape on the stick, one is not to collapse the fingers completely making a claw-like hand shape. Students often confuse a supple hand with a completely collapsed one that forces them to grab the bow with the joints and creates jerkiness at the bow changes as one has to artificially spread the fingers out. The fingers need be loose to be 'flexible', not to 'collapse,' which produces scratchy sound and hinders the fingers from balancing the bow flexibly. Any unnatural shape, such as a pronounced and artificial space between fingers,

especially index finger and the rest of the fingers, is to be discouraged. Once the fingers are placed on the bow, Mauricio Fuks asks one to tap each of the four fingers a few times separately before resting them comfortably on the bow one by one. This is to ensure the suppleness of the fingers, as well as to allow each finger to find the most comfortable place on the stick naturally.

### iii. Finger function exercises

To increase one's sensitivity to the functions of the fingers, Mauricio Fuks employs open A string exercises bowing with the combinations of two fingers at a time: thumb & finger 1 (index), and thumb & finger 2. After that, he employs three-finger bowing: thumb and finger 1-2, thumb and finger 2-3, thumb and finger 3-4, and finally thumb and finger 1-4. Then he has them use the combination of thumb and finger 1-2-4, thumb and finger 1-3-4, with thumb and finger 2-3-4 to follow. These exercises are assigned for students to feel the functions of each finger with heightened sensitivity.

### iv. Bowing concepts

Starting with the systematic open A string exercises Mauricio Fuks goes over the mechanics of the bowing in detail. The essential concepts in bowing, with its vertical and horizontal implications, such as pendulum motion, employment of natural arm weight, use of gravity, pronation (inward rotation of forearm) and supination (outward rotation of forearm) functions, lemniscate (a figure eight shaped curve positioned horizontally, often referred as symbol of infinity) motion, and pull-and-push (*tirer et pousser*) concept, are thoroughly and methodically explained and employed in the open A string exercises. The open A string exercises consist of the bow divided into four parts, employing one continuous motion of a down-and-up (and up-and-down) bow movement for each part of the bow. It is extremely important to insert a break before and after each motion, he instructs, for students to plan the next motion, to assess the outcome, and apply any corrections to the motion to come, so that each movement may be a conscious movement. He emphasizes the importance of mental involvedness in the execution of the exercises. If one does not get mentally tired after the exercises, they are done wrongly.

One is to repeat each division (quarters, halves and whole bows) in both directions (starting up and also down). Each execution should be measured systematically, each quarter bow about 63-67 bpm (prox.), starting with upper half bow (the easiest part of the bow, thus the more effective in absorbing the new concepts), then upper quarter, middle half and middle quarters, lower half and lower quarters and then finally the whole bow in order. His main goal in the open A string exercises is to achieve effortless bowing technique with the cooperation of the whole body, which lessens localized movements that create rigidity, together

with the appropriate arm and finger functions. The cooperation of the whole body in bowing may be one of the most original concept Mauricio Fuks introduces to the bow artistry, which employs hip and pelvis movements in bowing, and whose discussion is to follow in the next section.

#### v. Bowing with pelvis/hip

Mauricio Fuks' most unique and distinctive concept for bow artistry is the incorporation of pelvic movements for achieving fluid, elegant and effortless bowing. He recounts that Heifetz employed a subtle pelvis movement for bowing, successfully minimizing, if not completely inhibiting, any unnecessary and excessive upper bodily effort and tension that could cause rigidities in bowing, while maximizing the concentrated power and elegance evident in his playing. Any violinist knows the basic rule of bowing, 'bowing straight', which technically means bowing perpendicular to the strings and parallel to the bridge to produce decent sound on the instrument.

While the outward visual concept of 'bowing straight' is well addressed in teaching violin, the actual perception, inner sensation and mechanism of the motion, and the assessment of its expense and the compromise it forces on the body are not, and therefore understanding of the efficient and effortless execution of 'bowing straight' is often neglected. Mauricio Fuks perhaps is one of the pedagogues who



deal with these issues. Based on the concept of the body's wholeness and its interconnectedness for playing, he recommends that students initiate the action of bowing in the lower body, the part commonly neglected in bow technique. When one bows from the frog to the tip without deliberate and conscious "straight bowing," he demonstrates, the bow naturally slips to the right side of the body, away from the violin, as the bow nears the tip. It is an effortless and natural motion, as the right arm moves to the right side of the body where it belongs and is in the most natural and comfortable position. In bowing practice, this naturalness and comfort are commonly compromised in the interest of 'bowing straight.'

In down-bowing the upper quarter of the bow to the tip one is to consciously make some sort of additional effort to bow straight, either by stretching the forearm towards the violin or the right shoulder forward, depending on the length of one's arm and one's adapted motions. In any case, while the unnatural motions of the arm and shoulder achieve 'bowing straight,' they also cause rigidity in bowing by compromising the naturalness of body. One can also easily lose the centeredness of body as these localized motions promote the forward leaning of the upper body. The excessive opening of the right forearm towards the violin often causes the locking of the elbow joint creating inflexible bowing, and the subsequent pressure built on the tip of the bow and on the index finger results rough bow changes, producing uneven and tense sound (often an unintended crescendo toward the tip). Mauricio Fuks therefore introduces pelvic movements for efficient and economic bowing, which involve the whole body movement to eliminate these hindrances and to disperse the localized effort, increasing flexibility in bowing.

As one bows a down-bow, one is to slightly rotate the hip/pelvis area towards the violin in the last quarter of the bow, and to rotate back to the original position while up-bowing. The key foundation is maintaining one's sensation of centeredness and comfort at all time, while bowing at any part of the bow. The movements are very minimal, almost impossible to detect visually, but the sensation in the player is evident as any additional efforts or stretches become unnecessary. As one's whole body is slightly rotated towards the violin (the violin itself is to be stayed in the same position during the movement, not rotating with the pelvis movement), one is immediately free to bow the upper quarter with no need for additional extension or stretch of upper body parts. The sensation is exactly same as in bowing of the middle part.

Mauricio Fuks says, "It is the hip/pelvis that moves the bow, which increases fluidity of the bowing by removing unnecessary rigidities otherwise." For the muscle memory, he recommends the open A string exercises and modified scale exercises, with slightly exaggerated rotating motions during the practice. The bowing of the upper quarter of the bow especially becomes easy due to the curving motion of the pelvis, which prevents one's elbow joint from becoming stretched or locked. The essential purpose of the movement is to protect the centeredness and naturalness of the body posture by incorporating the lower body into the task, enhancing the sensation of comfort and ease while minimizing additional effort and rigidity in bowing motions.

## vi. Lemniscate bowing

In bowing, every motion is to be perceived curved. The act of ‘bowing straight’ may appear to be straight visually and conceptually, while one’s perception and sensation of its execution may not. Rather than focusing on the visual aspect of it, Mauricio Fuks suggests a subtle sensation of a lemniscate figure for bowing (a very thin 8 shape positioned horizontally), which yields elegance and smoothness as well as natural straightness of bowing. To get the perpendicular angle at the frog, one needs to ‘feel’ that the end of the tension screw is pointing ‘in’ slightly towards the body, on the side opposite the violin’s scroll. Interestingly, the subtle sensation of the curve motion at the frog results the perpendicularity between the bow and the bridge. (If one feels the tension screw is pointing straight, parallel to the bridge, most probably the angle between the two is actually wider than 90 degrees, so the bowing won’t be straight in this part.) As the bow moves down, one is to make a gradual, thin and slight curve (curve-in) motion to start making a lemniscate shape to about the middle of the bow. As the bow moves past the middle, one needs to make a curve-out motion, pointing the screw ever so slightly towards the scroll of the violin. The motion is combined with the subtle rotation of the hip/pelvis towards the violin, which together create a harmonious curve promoting flexibility and elegance in bowing.

At the bow change on the tip, one is to make a slight half-circle motion from left to right, that is, from the side of the scroll to the side of body, with the

rotation of the pelvis to the original position. This subtle half-circle motion greatly enhances smooth bow change, as the lower body involvement creates more calmness in one's bow arm and hand, decreasing their motion, and one perceives the bow change as a curved rather than a straight line. At up bow from the tip, one is to slightly point the tip of the bow towards the scroll of the violin, thus making a curve-in motion to the middle of the bow, completing the lemniscate figure. Fuks emphasizes that the motion, although essential, is a very subtle one, and although one may exaggerate the motion in the initial stage of learning, as soon as the concept is grasped, the exaggeration naturally is discouraged.

vii. Pendulum motion in bowing

Pendulum motion in bowing is greatly emphasized in Mauricio Fuks' teaching. It is the essence of bowing technique that is to be addressed in any level of playing, as one's sound quality in all bow techniques is mainly based on it. It is about balancing the natural arm weight and employing of gravity in bowing, through which one may achieve purity, resonance and power in sound. As one bows, the strings vibrate side to side creating vibration that transmits to the bridge, sound post and then the whole body of the violin, which eventually project to the air as sound. Thus, applying pendulum motion in bowing is the most effective way to support and enhance the side-to-side vibration of the strings for better projection of

the sound. If a player perceived bowing as a straight line, the rigid bow movement would interfere with the strings' vibration, hindering the resonance and thus producing tight sound, which would then greatly interfere with the aesthetic and artistic aspect of the sound. In the simplest analogy, it is just like ringing a huge round bell; one needs to apply a curve motion before and after hitting the bell with a stick, so that the bell may ring resonantly. If one hits the bell vertically and/or stops the stick on the bell, the resonance reduces and dies immediately, while the sound is harsh.

Mauricio Fuks draws attention to the shape of the bridge, a downward curve. If one bows following the shape of the bridge, the sound travels down, blocking the resonance, and fail to be projected to the air, which often triggers one to press the bow even more, and as a consequence, the sound gets even more rigid. While applying weight on the strings to produce power in sound is essential, one should find a way not to stop the resonance of the sound. One needs to locate the best contact point for power and resonance and employ the flexible spring actions of the right hand and arm, and bow following the opposite shape of the bridge curve. In this way the center of the sound gets the weight of the arm, and the beginning and the end of the sound are not approached vertically. Here, both the right arm and finger functions are equally important for the pendulum action. The right elbow height balances the necessary weight in each part of the bow for the pendulum motion. On the frog, there is naturally occurring excess weight from the whole arm and the hand for the proximity to the string. Therefore, the elbow is positioned low and relaxed, with no additional lifting of it, while the baby finger balances and

controls the excess weight. Lifting of elbow at the frog would create excess arm weight that crushes the sound (causing the index finger pressure), and the discomfort from it discourages students from using the lower part of the bow.

Uneasiness in using the lower part of the bow is a very common occurrence in students, as the supination of the right hand is prevented by the lifted elbow. Mauricio Fuks recommends “follow through” exercises to address the problem. First, one is to start to up-bow from the middle of the bow to the frog. When the frog is approached, one is to continue the bowing motion past the frog of the bow, rotating the forearm outwardly (supination) until the left side of the forearm touches the strings. Once forearm touches the strings, let it rest on the string in that position. The second exercise starts out the same, but this time, one is to stop the bow right at the frog, and then completely collapse the hand on the strings. The third exercise is to bow past the frog, and place the tip of the tension screw on left-body side of the violin. All these exercises are to increase the sensation of supination technique at the frog, which enables students to use the lower part of the bow freely, and employ pendulum motion more effectively at the frog.

In bowing down, one starts to lose the excess natural weight of the hand and arm at about the middle of the bow, and is gradually to employ higher elbow position towards the tip of the bow, to add arm weight through the index finger area (pronation position), in order to employ the effective weight distribution. In bowing up, the elbow and hand gradually goes from pronation position to the original supination near the frog. The pendulum motion should be employed in every part of

the bow and most of the bow strokes (unless artistic reasons demand otherwise) with the natural gravity and the effective manipulation of arm and finger functions to enhance the resonance of the sound.

viii. Pull and Push (*tirer et pousser*) concept

It is very common to observe students unevenly distributing the weight of the arm depending on the direction of the bow. Students generally employ more weight on down bow and less on the up bow because they perceive the down bow as downward motion working with the gravity and the up bow as an upward motion working against the gravity. Thus, instead of the concept of “down and up” bow, he encourages “pull and push” concept of the bow, emphasizing the functions and impulses of the bow hand, which then may help the equal employment of the weight of the bow in both directions. The ‘Pull & Push’ concept also emphasizes the horizontality of the bowing, rather than the verticality of “down and up”, making the pendulum bowing conceptually easier to grasp for students. For a more effective and efficient use of the natural arm weight in each direction, one is to hold the violin in such a position that the strings are as horizontal as possible, so the bow may easily be able to touch the strings perpendicularly, employing the natural gravity in both directions equally, while minimizing any additional physical effort otherwise implied.

#### ix. Bow arm height

The height of the right arm should be decided by whether one is able to flexibly and effectively employ pendulum motion with bow on any given string and any given part of the bow. For the appropriate height, Mauricio Fuks asks students to raise the right arm as high as possible in a motionless playing position (the middle part of the bow on the string), then lower it as low as possible, then finally allow the arm to be loose and instinctively find comfortable mid-height by itself.

#### x. On bending wrist

For the natural flow of the arm weight to the string, one is to keep the forearm and the wrist in one line as much as possible avoiding any artificial bending of the wrist. Artificial bending of the wrist blocks the flow of the arm weight to the bow, and accumulates its pressure in the wrist, which may become vulnerable to injuries. Exaggerated wrist bending towards the back of the hand (wrist extension shape) forms a collapsed (claw-like) hand shape creating tense sound. The excessive bending of wrist inward (wrist flexion shape), on the other hand, may interfere with the bow change at the frog, as the consequent wrist



dropping at the bow change creates jerkiness and unevenness in sound. (Some players maintain the wrist flexion shape at the bow change to avoid the wrist drop, with lifted hand and elbow at the frog. This type of bowing with high elbow is observable in players who prefer high elbow position and deeper index finger position to create bigger sound, though it compromises flexibility)

#### xi. Forearm and elbow in bowing

Mauricio Fuks explains that from the frog to about the middle of the bow, it is the elbow that moves the bow (elbow moving away from the violin to the right side of the body). Then, from the middle to the tip of the bow, it is the forearm that moves the bow (the opening motion of the forearm) while the elbow stays calm. He observes that many students continue to use the elbow for bowing the upper half of the bow, which blocks the opening of the forearm, making the bow movement rigid and heavy. Fuks assigns an exercise to deal with the problem: stand in the playing position while touching the outer part of the right elbow on the wall, which prevents the elbow moving to the right and back of the body, and play the upper half of the bow in the position focusing on the sensation of opening the forearm alone, without involvement of the elbow.

xii. String crossing

The elbow and the hand should move consecutively to execute smooth string crossings. Their otherwise simultaneous movement would create big and heavy motions that cause roughness in the process. From the lower to higher string, it is the elbow that leads (anticipates) the string crossing. At the crossing the elbow is to be ever so slightly lowered to prepare the move, which results in the consecutive following of the hand and the bow (if the wrist were to lead the upward crossing, it would be awkwardly bent toward the back of the hand, creating the wrist extension shape). From the higher to lower string, it is the wrist that leads (anticipates) the string crossing. This time the elbow stays calm initially, and the wrist (hand) is ever so slightly lifted for the string crossing, which results in the following of the bow and elbow (again, the opposite motion will create the awkward wrist extension shape this time).

Mauricio Fuks uses Study *No. 7* from the Kreutzer 42 studies for violin solo to demonstrate this procedure in slow motion. For instance, for the string crossing from G string to E string, one is to play the G string note and stop the bow where the note ends, still maintaining the bow arm position. Then, in the stopped position, one is to slightly lower the elbow, which results the natural consecutive following of the hand and the bow. Then, as the bow (hand) arrives and stops on the E string, one completes the crossing, and is ready for playing the next note. From E string to G string, on the other hand, one is to play the E string, and again stop the bow

where the note ends, keeping the bow arm position. Then, in that still position, one is to slightly lift the hand and the wrist, which results the natural consecutive following of the elbow, until the bow arrives and stops on the G string, then the crossing is complete, and one is ready for playing the next note.

For faster string crossings, such as in Caprice *no. 2* from Paganini Caprices op.1 and *Perpetuo Mobile* by Novacek one needs to find the arm position that is about middle between two strings, so that the elbow is calm and loose, positioned like an anchor, so the forearm and the wrist may flexibly move the supple hand with minimized vertical motions. It is also very important to keep the sensation of balance in the bow fingers during the execution of string crossings, whether slurred or detached, to keep smoothness in the sound.

### xiii. Bow rolling (*Roulé* bowing)

The rolling of the bow, *Roulé* bowing, is executed by the thumb and the middle fingers lightly placed on the bow, allowing one to flexibly roll/rotate the bow. Fuks explains that the technique gives one the option of choosing the amount of bow hair by changing (rolling) the angle of the bow for producing diverse colors and densities in the sound. It facilitates string crossing and the execution of broken chords in faster *tempi* as well. The rolling (rotating) of the bow allows swift bow

motions with less involvement of the wrist and arm, preventing heavier and rougher movements otherwise created in the fast passages.

xiv.        Playing chords without breaking

For playing chords of three or four notes without breaking them into two (such as in *Caprice No. 14* from Paganini caprices Op. 1 and *Etude No. 1* from Dont *Etude & Caprice*, Op. 35), Mauricio Fuks recommends that his students find the contact (sounding) point that is flexible, which is usually slightly closer to the finger board. (If the chord is on the first position, it is likely to be closer to the fingerboard, whereas in higher positions it requires the bow to move slightly away from it.) Also one's bow arm needs to target the middle note(s) of the chord, he explains, for the better distribution of the arm weight on the strings. Once the contact point is located, one is to focus on the horizontality of the bow movement applying the pendulum motion, since any vertical approach may easily break the sound of the chords, especially at the beginning of it.

xv.        Smoothing out string crossing in double-stop scales

When one plays upward double-stop scales that involve string crossings, at the very last moment of playing the last double-stop before string crossing, one is to play only the upper note of the double-stop, so that this brief one note playing may create smoothness in the following string crossing and the shift (technically, it becomes one string crossing and one finger shift instead). Accordingly, for a downward double-stop scale, one is to play only the bottom note of the double-stop at the very last moment right before the string crossing until one reaches the next two notes. One may slowly exercise the procedure step by step, making sure of the smooth right-hand crossing and the swift left-hand shifting.

xvi. Verifying legato in multiple note slur

To play a multiple note slur in a string for creating legato effect, many students unintentionally employ a *portato*-like stroke with the right hand. As they stop and release the left fingers for playing the sequence of multiple notes, the right hand also pulses the bow at the each change of the fingers, creating an involuntary and unwanted *portato* stroke in the bow, and thus the intended legato effect in the slur becomes ineffective. Fuks shows a simple exercise to deal with the problem play the sequence of notes on one string with the left hand while bowing on another open string at the same time; the left hand plays in one string and the right hand bows another open string simultaneously. If the open string sounds like *portato*

stroke in the process, one is to work on seamless legato in the open string with the left hand sequence played in the other string, until one acquires the legato sensation in the right hand regardless the left finger movements.

## Part 2. Left-hand Basics

Effortlessness in left hand technique is greatly emphasized in Mauricio Fuks' teaching. The left-hand facility combined with fine intonation, articulation and fluidity provide a solid foundation for players to further their artistic endeavors with increased effectiveness. For Fuks, despite his emphasis on the physical and technical aspects of playing, the ultimate goal for any technical enhancement lies not in achieving the technical perfection itself but in increasing one's capacity for effectively substantiating and thus conveying the many layers of emotions and feelings in their purest forms, which may not be facilitated without one's refined technique.

### i. Effortlessness in the left hand

Mauricio Fuks observes that excess tension/pressure in the left hand is one of the most common problems found in the students. Tight grabbing of the neck of the violin greatly diminishes the fingers' dexterity to move with ease. He assigns

Study *No. 1* from Schradieck's School of Violin Playing, Book. 1, to deal with the excess tension, requiring the student to play it applying only one fourth of the pressure (almost harmonics pressure) one would normally employ for playing, starting at a slow tempo and systematically moving to faster *tempi* (with use of metronome for evenness). The decreased finger pressure in the exercise instantly allows enhanced sensitivity to the whole hand and discourages the left thumb from grabbing the neck of the violin. (The tension in the left thumb is often the primary reason for the left hand rigidity. The more pressure there is in the thumb pushing the violin up, the more effort there will be in the rest of the fingers pressing it down, and thus the two opposite pressures work against each other, increasing the excess effort. To decrease the tension in the thumb, one may play the same Study *No. 1* consciously moving the left thumb, rotating it or just removing it from the neck of the violin occasionally, to check its suppleness, and doing the same with the rest of the fingers). While playing the study with harmonic pressure, one is not to be concerned with the sound quality, but rather focus on the sensation of suppleness and lightness in the left finger movements.

Fuks also observes that mental tension often causes the left-hand rigidity. As one attempts to play the exercise in a fast tempo, the instant rigidity in the left hand occurs. It is often due to one's mental insecurity, as one perceives "faster" movement as "difficult" movement, and the rigidity occurs in the hand as a response. As Fuks says,

Mind is often a very tricky thing. One needs to remember that what actually moves the fingers are not the fingers themselves but the brain, one's own mind. If one has negative mental attachment to certain techniques or passages, such as "this passage is too difficult" or "I am not capable of playing with this technique," that automatically blocks one's mental ability to find suitable ways to deal with the actual task. And this mental rigidity is mirrored in physical tension. Therefore, the actual ability to solve any physical and technical difficulties (whether perceived or existing) in the playing derives not from one's inherent physical ability alone, nor from one's willpower and zealous effort, but simply from one's mental flexibility on the given tasks. The key, therefore, is to increase mental effortlessness, which alters any negative perceptions and rigidities on any given tasks.

Mauricio Fuks encourages students to exercise the inverse relationships: the faster the exercise, the more suppleness in the body, and the more busyness in the passage the more laziness in the mind.

#### ii. Wrist flexion and extension

Mauricio Fuks recommends a simple experiment to establish a more natural and effortless left-hand shape in students: he has students to place the left elbow on



a flat surface with the palm of the hand facing one's body and the forearm slightly leaning to the other side, the same basic left arm position one would employ for playing the violin. The naturally bent (by gravity) wrist position towards the back of the hand, the wrist flexion shape (not to be confused the wrist flexion of the bow hand that is positioned on the opposite side, its palm facing down) is the most effortless and optimal hand position in this setting. After trying the wrist flexion position, one then may simply bend the wrist to the other side in the same position, creating wrist extension shape. One may notice that the additional effort and tension occur in the back of the wrist and the hand in this position. Fuks therefore suggests the naturally occurring wrist flexion shape as the basic left hand position (not a constant shape, of course) for playing, to maintain the naturalness and effortlessness in the left hand, which stabilizes one's intonation better than the wrist extension shape (the edge of finger tips would stop the notes in the extension shape, which tends to push up the pitch and thus commonly causes sharp intonation).

### iii. Basic hand positions and finger independence exercise

Mauricio Fuks presents the two basic positions of the left hand: Ab F D B (fingered 1,2,3,4, major 6<sup>th</sup> relationship between each note, the lowest Ab stopped with the finger 1 on G string in the first position, F with finger 2 on D string, D with finger 3 on A string, and finally B-4 on E string), and D G C F (fingered 4,3,2,1,

perfect 4<sup>th</sup> relationship between each, the lowest D stopped with finger 4 on G string in the first position, G-3 on D, C-2 on A, and finally F-1 on E). These two basic positions then are used for the exercises to increase the independency of the fingers; while stopping all the four notes in either of the positions above (AbFDB and DGCF), apply repeated lifting and dropping motions to each finger consecutively, starting 1, 2,3 and finally 4. Still keeping all the notes stopped, do the same repetitions, this time with two fingers moving at a time, with the combination of fingers 1 and 3, 2 and 4, 1 and 4, and 2 and 3 consecutively. Finally, three finger combinations are to follow, 1, 2 and 3, 2, 3 and 4, 1, 3 and 4, 1, 2 and 4, simultaneously lifting and dropping.

#### iv. Frame and proximity

Mauricio Fuks recommends making “frames” with the left hand to enhance the fingers’ readiness to anticipate the notes in advance. The hand is to be positioned for playing a sequence of consecutive notes, which eliminates the need to alter the hand shape for playing each individual note of the sequence; the hand frame provides reference points for the fingers to easily locate right pitch (if one moved the hand for each note, the lack of reference points would result in poor intonation, adding unnecessary hand movements). In the fast passages he recommends that the palm of the left hand become more parallel to the neck of the

violin, rather than facing one's body, increasing the proximity between the fingers and the fingerboard. This close and parallel position enhances facility and readiness of the fingers, especially for fast passages.

#### v. Left arm hanging and elbow rotation

Mauricio Fuks explains that the hanging sensation of the left arm is designed to avoid any of its excessive effort that may work against gravity, and to enhance the flexibility in elbow rotations. He explains that one needs to feel the left arm hanging from the neck of the violin as if hanging from a branch of a tree. To maximize the hanging sensation one may rest the violin in the shoulder area and gently place the scroll of the violin on a flat surface (or gently place the scroll against a wall) that is about the same altitude as one's shoulders, and let the whole left arm hang from the neck of the violin. And then one may gently rotate the left elbow side to side while keeping the sensation of hanging. The elbow rotations are crucial for creating better intonation as well. One may simply verify its importance by playing a two octave scale in the first position from the lowest G. Play the scale while maintaining the elbow position for G string (slightly rotated to the right side of the violin) throughout the scale.

By the time one gets to the E string, one will notice that the hand shape and the frame become greatly compromised, and all the notes get stopped by different

fingertip surfaces, resulting in poor intonation. Now play the upward scale again, focusing on keeping the hand shape and frame in each string as well as stopping each note with similar fingertip surfaces of each finger. One will notice that the elbow starts to move slightly from the right side of the violin to the left side. To establish the elbow position in one string, one may stop all four fingers on the string and allow the arm to hang. On G string, the elbow gets positioned slightly toward the right side of the instrument (the degree of the rotation varies depending on one's arm, hand and finger sizes and lengths) and as the fingers move to the other strings, the elbow gradually rotates to the other side. Here, it is important to remember that the elbow is to anticipate the finger movements. For instance, when playing one octave A major scale from the lowest A on the G string in the first position, one is to maintain the frame and elbow position during the notes A, B, C#, then on D, stopped with the fourth finger, one is to rotate the elbow to the position for the next D string (slightly to the left side). The same anticipation occurs on downward scale. For instance, from the top note A on D string, stopped with the fourth finger in the first position, through G# and F#, one is to keep the elbow position with the hand frame, then on E, stopped with the first finger, one is to rotate the elbow to the position for the G string. The general guideline here is for the elbow to anticipate the finger movements and hand frames. When shifting in one string though, the elbow stays calm, and only starts to rotate above the fifth position.

## vi. Shifting

Shifts should not be heard, Mauricio Fuks insists, unless there is an artistic intention behind. The fingers' excessive pressure, often generated by the tension in the thumb, combined with wrong shifting technique produces jerkiness and heaviness in the sound. Shifting ought to be done with harmonic pressure of the fingers to create smoothness in the motions and avoid unintended shifting sounds. He emphasizes that it is the finger stopping the note prior to the shifting that leads and executes the shifting. Many students do the opposite, shifting with the finger of the note after the shifting, resulting heaviness and unintended *glissando* sound. For example, to shift from the first position to the third position, let's say a half step move from C# to D on the A string using the fingering 2-1 (C# stopped with finger 2 to D stopping with the finger 1), it is finger 2, the second finger, that executes the shifting, not finger 1. The last moment before shifting to the next position, the second finger stopping C# decreases the finger pressure to a harmonic pressure, and without losing touch with the string, moves the hand up to the third position until finger 1, the first finger, stops the note D. Likewise, the opposite downward shift from finger 1-2, the half step D to back C# from the third position to the first position on A string (D stopped with finger 1 to C# stopped with finger 2) is executed by the finger 1. The last moment before the shifting, finger 1 (stopping the note D), employs harmonic pressure, and still touching the string, shifts back to the first position until finger 2, the second finger, replaces the first finger and stops C#

in the first position. This shifting procedure is to be practiced slowly. In the actual performances shifting should be executed swiftly, so that the process itself is inaudible due to the harmonic pressure of the finger and the speed of the shifting.

vii. Distances, not positions

Mauricio Fuks recommends that students consider the fingerboard in terms of distances rather than positions for executing shifting and also for choosing fingerings. When one regards the fingerboard in terms of positions only, the capacity of one's fingers and hand to extend and contract become restricted by the rigid systematic approach, decreasing creative and adaptive options for fingering and shifting according to one's technical and artistic needs. Mentally, some students tend to perceive the positions in terms of a hierarchy of difficulties – the 'higher' the position, the more difficult – thus creating a negative notion of verticality. On the other hand, considering the fingerboard in terms of distances helps students think horizontally. The high positions become actually close to body, and closeness implies familiarity and comfort. Thus a more positive notion is created. In the same way, if one is to make a position change, for instance, from the first position to the seventh, the mere concept of 'one to seven' creates a huge leap mentally, and thus the negative notion 'difficult'. But if one is to merely consider the horizontal distance of the leap, the triviality of the given leap's distance becomes instantly

obvious. For choosing fingerings, he often uses the analogy ‘octopus versus frog’. He suggests that students move their hand and fingers more like the tentacles of octopus, easily extending and contracting, thus increasing elasticity and diminishing unnecessary rigid and clumsy movements with position changes. He discourages fingerings that act more like the frog’s legs, jumping from one position to the other, creating jerky and abrupt movements.

#### viii. Articulation and fingertip

Mauricio Fuks tells students that one is to choose the different surfaces of the fingertip according to the musical context. When playing lyrical passages, one may employ a more flattened fingertip, using more meat of the fingertip (he calls it the pancake shape) to create warmth in sound and broader vibrato. When playing fast passages, one is to employ more angled fingertip with its edge, with less meat of the fingertip (he calls this the toothpick shape) to create precision and better articulation in the left hand. Obviously, the degree of angles one may apply varies according to the thickness of one’s fingertip. For enhancing left-finger articulation in certain passages, he recommends practicing them with left-hand pizzicato.

### ix. Vibrato

Mauricio Fuks often quotes Henryk Szeryng's definition of vibrato: a natural reaction to the falling of a finger on the fingerboard, causing vertical oscillations of its knuckle (specifically, the knuckle between the distal and intermediate phalanges, also called distal joint). The knuckles are therefore the natural initiators of vibrato, and the hand and the arm's consequent movements following the knuckles' oscillation. Thus vibrato is primarily vertical movement, initiated by the knuckles, and not horizontal movement, as one might easily assume from its external appearance. On the other hand, the vibrato initiated by hand or forearm's side-to-side movement may be considered oscillation with additional effort, as it implies tension in the knuckles and thus artificial shaking of the hand or arm. Thus, he emphasizes that it is essential to possess loose and flexible knuckles to create a natural and effortless vibrato.

To enhance the flexibility of the knuckles, Fuks assigns these exercises: place a finger on the finger board gently stopping a note (generally on the third position in A string for ease in the hand) and collapse the finger completely by flattening the knuckle with harmonic pressure, then bring the knuckle back up without alteration of the note's pitch. Repeat the motion for each finger slowly and rhythmically measured; start from two collapses in a whole bow, then systematically increase the frequency of the motion until it becomes effortless vibrato. Once the knuckle is loose, one is able to decide the width and speed of the motions to create different *vibrati*. For warm and lyrical passages, one could choose



wider knuckle oscillation with more flattening of the knuckle, while for a continuous vibrato in fast passages one could employ narrower oscillation. Fuks recommends that natural vibrato be consistently present and generally continuous in playing to create the *cantilena* effect with the bow, unless artistic intentions demand otherwise. There are three common technical situations that may automatically hinder continuous vibrato: during the change of fingers, the shifting, and the string crossing. In these places one is to consciously keep the vibrato constant for continuous singing effect.



Chapter III “To become an artist, one must become a great artisan first.”

Mauricio Fuks believes that one needs to strive to acquire the highest technical command over the instrument to ultimately reach artistic freedom. He says, “Some people mistake me as a technical teacher because of my pedagogical emphasis on the technical thoroughness, facility and refinement, and for the necessary discipline and rigor I require from the students to achieve them. But you see, what they overlook is that without the complete technical mastery one simply cannot arrive at the level of artistry in which one may express all that is within him/her freely and effortlessly. To my mind, there is no other way. Technical mastery, figuratively speaking, is the gateway to the promised land.”

When the students establish in their bodies the essential basics and foundational techniques for playing, Mauricio Fuks assigns various studies and short pieces according to each student’s need and ability for further development. The essential studies he generally assigns to most of his students are Schradieck’s School of Violin Playing Book I, Kreutzer’s 42 Studies and Dont’s Etudes and Caprices, Op. 35, along with scales and arpeggios by Galamian, the double-stop scales and the harmonic scales and double stops. He often applies variations and modifications on each study, to improve certain techniques and increase facility in their executions. The goal

in studying and playing all these studies is not to complete the studies themselves but always to tackle specific technical targets for improvement.

The variations and modifications he applies in the studies are numerous, as he takes adaptive and creative teaching approaches according to each student's needs and abilities. Studies of Rode, Gaviniès and Wieniawski's Etudes-Caprices, Op.18 and L'École moderne, op.10 are also among the studies assigned to younger students. Fuks also enjoys assigning miniatures and short character pieces by Kreisler, Sarasate, Bazzini, Novacek, Dvorak, Wieniawsky among others, to cultivate artistic eloquences along with the virtuosity, as these pieces capture densely expressed impressions and concentrated emotions. Early Mozart violin sonatas, Handel sonatas Op.1, Leclair sonatas, Beethoven Romances Op.40 and 50 are assigned for stylistic and structural development for young students as preparation for the major works. Longer Pieces by Vitali, Ernst, Wieniawsky, Chausson, Vieuxtemps and Paganini are assigned to more technically advanced young students as they move on to the major violin concertos, sonatas and pieces for solo violin and with accompaniment, along with Bach solo works.

- i. Phrase design with bow

When one begins working on a new piece, Mauricio Fuks recommends first practicing it without vibrato. Along with the work on intonation, the purpose in working *sin vib.* is to focus solely on the bow to design phrases with the right hand and to find suitable tones, colors, bow strokes, bowings, bow distributions and bow divisions for each phrase. He emphasizes that there is an ideal place in the bow for any given phrase or passage, and one's mission is experiment with the bow to find the ideal spot for the intended expressions and colors. For instance, there is an ideal place for a healthy and round *spiccato* stroke in one's bow, and he encourages one to play the stroke in different parts of the bow to locate the particular place. Likewise, if one is searching for a more crispy-sounding *spiccato* stroke, rather than the round one, then the place for round *spiccato* is obviously no more ideal. He notes that Heifetz purposely used the somewhat awkward upper part of the bow to create a *spiccato* stroke that made a distinctly crisper sound.

Another object of working without vibrato is to achieve purity and quality of the sound without masking it with vibrato. He explains, "You need to have a clean face, so that applying any make-up may enhance the appearance. In the same way, the pure sound quality should be present before vibrato may be added for enhancement of expression and projection." Once the good sound quality is established considering the three foundational elements – bow's speed, weight and sounding point – one may then focus on delivering different colors, dynamics, nuances and articulations with the bow for the given phrases, still without the vibrato.

## ii. Feeling vs. Delivering the feeling

It is common to observe that some students play a piece, evidently feeling its sentiments in their heart but failing to actually deliver them through the instrument. In many cases this is due to one's deceiving sensation of 'feeling' the music while lacking the objective ears to listen and the actual means to substantiate the desired outcome. Since one 'feels' the music, one is deceived and led to believe that the sentiments are being delivered through the instrument to the audience, while overlooking the fact that the feelings should be translated into the sonic language through appropriate instrumental techniques.

Some may argue that feeling is the primary matter of importance in playing, and that technique, as the subordinate matter to feeling, would somehow follow feeling's lead. If one's feelings were strong enough, the technique would submit to them. Although this sounds convincing and most inspiring, one also needs to remember that playing violin, or playing any instrument, involves not only sentiments but also science, and may not escape being under certain rules of physiology and mechanics in violin playing. For instance, even if one is feeling the warmest sentiments while playing the most amorous phrase, if not equipped with proper technique to actually create the warmth in the sound, the sentiments remain in one's heart but may not be transmitted to the sound effectively.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, even

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Anya Royce tells what the great mime artist Marcel Marceau once said to her regarding the importance of technique: "Feeling without technique is worth nothing." see Royce, Anya Peterson. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural*

if one is feeling a huge *crescendo* while bowing an up bow stroke, if the proper bow distribution or the gradual change of sounding point and bow speed is not taken into account, the *crescendo* may only exist in one's feeling, not in the actual outcome.

Fuks thus considers emotions and techniques inseparable and of equal importance. Feeling and technique are not matters of hierarchy but of mutual necessity: the more subtlety and depth in the sentiments, the greater the necessity for better and finer techniques. Anya Royce speaks about this in terms of discipline or economy,<sup>2</sup> that the increasing emotion requires increased control in technique. That is, the greater the emotion, the greater the self-discipline must be.<sup>3</sup> The words of the poet Yusef Koumenyaku spoken in a panel presentation at Indiana University confirm the indispensability of technique, or artisanship: "Craft makes passion possible rather than sentimentality from untutored emotions."<sup>4</sup>

Feeling the music and understanding its context with one's soul and heart should certainly precede anything else one might take into account when working on a new piece of music. After the internalization of the music the mental planning for the desired outcome may take place according to the phrase contours and structures, and also according to one's own imagination and creativity. And finally,

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*Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p25

<sup>2</sup> Anya Peterson Royce. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p29

<sup>3</sup> Polish stage director Jerzy Grotowski said, "The more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say, the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign." See Royce, Anya Peterson. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p29

<sup>4</sup> Anya Peterson Royce. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p25

the process of the substantiation of the emotional contents and mental structures should materialize in actual playing. This process should be supported by objective listening, strong inner rhythmic pulses, accurate knowledge of the necessary physical motions and their technical precision for the intended sentiments and structural plan. The student also should experiment with diverse and subtle bow and left hand inflections to actualize the expressions and interpretations they intend to deliver.

Above all, it's one's own ears that remain the most crucial element in all these procedures; the ears that listen to oneself intensely, sensitively and objectively, and thus may assess the actual outcome in sound without deceiving one's own mind. When all these elements come together, one may ultimately match the initial sentiments with the final outcome, embodied in and delivered through the sound of the instrument.

### iii. Studying pieces

Mauricio Fuks encourages students to study a given piece of music as closely as possible. Along with understanding its context, studying its composer and familiarizing oneself with his/her musical language, one is also generally expected to study the whole piece with the score, preferably with the manuscript (when available) or the most reliable *urtext* versions of the given piece. The



purpose of studying the *urtext* version is to infer composers' original intentions of the piece from its least contaminated sources (*urtext*), without the interferences of the editors on dynamics and tempo markings, and especially for the violin parts, the bowing and fingering markings. Additional dynamics and tempo markings by the editors, regardless their artistic credibility, may interfere with the composer's original intentions, and thus one's own artistic choices based on them, as these may represent and reflect the editors' own interpretations and their personal preferences. The pre-marked bowings and fingerings are designed to suit the editors' particular physical dispositions and artistic interpretations and may not work best for other players. The interpretative markings also may discourage one from working with critical approaches, and thus hinder the development of independent thinking and the nurturing of one's individual uniqueness.

If a piece includes piano or orchestral accompaniment, one is expected to practice it with the score only, as soon as fingerings and bowings are tackled in the violin part. Practicing with the score provides one the better understanding of harmony, structure, texture and contours of the particular piece, which becomes the essential foundation of further interpretative work. Fuks rarely gives his own fingerings and bowings before students get to experiment on their own, unless the students do not yet possess the ability to do so. He often provides various fingerings and bowings for students to try, presenting the reasoning behind these options, so that the students may learn the process itself and eventually find the suitable ones by their own. He opposes the uniformed bowings and fingerings (and thus the usual practice of lending the student the teacher's own score with

fingerings and bowings). As for the dynamics and *tempi*, he allows each student to seek and form one's own artistic decisions before presenting his own approaches and artistic preferences for their consideration.

#### iv. Efficient practicing

Efficiency in practicing is a subject that Mauricio Fuks emphasizes greatly for each student. So many students spend miserable hours in practice rooms, unable to effectively improve their playing, or more importantly, to simply enjoy the process of practicing itself. There are a few reasons for not being able to enjoy the practice (thus ineffective in improvement), among them are one's misplaced motivation behind practicing and the lack of mental knowledge and flexibility to do it effectively. The sheer pleasure of playing, the satisfying experience of making music, should be what motivates one to gladly commit to the disciplined yet creative work process. But often, students are driven by competitive surroundings that promote a rigidity of mind. One's focus and goal in practicing then may easily shift from 'making music' to 'making no mistakes,' from 'communicating to others' to 'proving to others,' from 'satisfaction in creative activity' to 'satisfaction in approvals of others.'

He explains that when the goal in practicing is blurred and the rigidity settles in the mind, one's creativity and flexibility get greatly suppressed in the

process, and futile physical repetitions fill in the void. He recommends that students consider the practice room a laboratory, a place filled with exciting experiments, and try to nurture a mindset that resembles that of a scientist. The practice room is a fascinating place, where one crafts and experiments in attempts to resurrect the soul, the emotional and intellectual contents of a given piece of music, which involves the complex science of the music and the instrument, combined with intricate implications of one's physiological and emotional dispositions. Considering all these elements concerning the art of violin playing, mere physical repetitions have no place in the practice room.

Fuks thinks that after a half an hour of practice, one ought to feel the mental fatigue, and if the only fatigue one feels is physical, then one is practicing wrongly. He often laments that students are too passive in practice rooms. Many rely on their teachers' remarks for correcting and improving the playing, thus not taking responsibility in their work and not developing self-reliance. He explains that when one is in a practice room, he/she should always take two roles; the player and the listener (or teacher). As one practices, one is to constantly assess what is produced, and creatively seek solutions to improve the playing.

Fuks strongly discourages students from practicing hours without interruptions. The long hours may damage one's body, and more importantly, may cause mental exhaustion. And when the physical repetitions occur without mental involvement, it may cause great harm to one's playing. Once wrong motions get embedded in the muscle memory, extra mental and physical effort will become

necessary to get rid of them. He also emphasizes the importance of organization for effectiveness in practicing. He explains that one needs to have very concrete and specific goals for a given practice session. Generally, one needs at least 3 hours of practice a day, rotating diverse studies and pieces that nurture and challenge one's playing in many different aspects. He compares the need for diversity in materials to the need for diversity in nutrition; "one needs to consume diverse produce to get different nutrients for body health. In the same way, to maintain technical and artistic health in playing one needs to play diverse works-the rotations of scales and etudes, Bach, Paganini, Ysaÿe, and the works of different periods and styles."

If one is given an hour of practice, he/she is to make conscious decisions on how to spend the hour, what to practice, what exactly to improve in a particular piece in the given hour. If one is working on a large-scale work like a concerto or sonata, he recommends not to practice from the beginning to the end each time one works on the piece. It is very helpful to sectionalize it and assess the most challenging parts, and start working those sections first. When one works on intonation, he recommends not practicing with full force or vibrato, which may distort the intonations and hinder one from intently listening to the purity of intonation. For memorization of pieces, he recommends that one imagine playing the whole piece mentally, without the instrument or score, but with the required left and right hand playing motions involved.

A few days before actual performance, he discourages spending too much effort practicing with full force, but rather recommends practicing and playing

through the whole piece softly, but with full mental and emotional engagements, to heighten sensitivity, and to create and nurture a meditative and calm state for playing, while saving the energy for the real performance. When one plays works with accompaniment or chamber music works, he recommends practicing with the partners on togetherness; practicing together with physical closeness to feel each other's musical ideas with frequent eye contacts, and also, practicing the opposite way, facing away from each other without any eye contact or physical closeness, until they may feel the music same way without the need to look at each other. When faced with difficult passages, he always emphasizes the mental effortlessness, the maintaining of a cool mind. "The head cool as a cucumber," to quote him directly. As difficult sections approach, one is to relax the mind, as if going on a vacation, so that the body may become supple for the execution of the passage. For fast running passages, in addition to various rhythmic and bowing applications, he suggests students practice them by making random stops at various points, and by slowing down the last few notes of the passage to prevent the common impulse to accelerate near the end. As one is able to choose to play and stop at any point of the passage, one gains the total control of the passage.



## Chapter IV Finding One's Inner Voice: The Discovery of the Self

Mauricio Fuks observes that too many young students are overly preoccupied with the external aspect of playing, i.e. playing perfectly without mistake, and often lack the artistic interest to endeavor to seek a personal voice and find their own originality in the playing. They are eager to work for flawless execution of a given piece, to achieve the fluent surface in performance, while giving little consideration to the internal work of learning and knowing the core of its communicator, the inner self. While they are extremely attentive to the external appearance and exactitude of the music, they rarely look deep down inside themselves to understand the unique concoction of many facets and layers of their own emotions that could be brought up and reflected in the playing. The work on one's inner self is mostly disregarded in violin teaching, and as a result, countless good and decent instrumentalists are produced, but it is very rare to find young musicians with strong individuality and uniqueness in their sound and interpretations.

Perhaps it is the curriculums and systems in academia that create such competitive surroundings and uninformed mindsets that push students to strive like athletes in a race, to achieve flawless execution to stand out as 'better' players than others, rather than developing their own artistry through reflective works on the deepest inner being. Frankly, the word *artistry* seems to have very little meaning and importance in today's

academia as a result. Regardless, Mauricio Fuks always attempts to push students beyond the context of the given surroundings and environments, encouraging them to seek and find their own inner voice and more importantly, find themselves through the inner work with the instrument, thus getting a step closer to own their unique artistry.

i. Finding one's inner voice

As was mentioned previously, the external flawlessness and exactitude in execution seem to be the main purpose in playing for many aspiring students, and thus the quest to find one's own voice in the art of violin playing seems almost like an unnecessary luxury. But without a personal voice, he explains, students end up singing and imitating someone else's song, making someone else's music, disconnected from their own innermost beings and their personal voices. They would manufacture emotions in the playing, rather than internally experiencing and living the emotions empathetically. As a result, although the playing may sound 'good and nice,' the statements made in the music make little impact due to the lack of authenticity from a personal voice. At its best, it would sound like a good imitation of something already heard somewhere else.



On the other hand, the process of learning and knowing the inner self, and thus finding one's inner voice in playing involves vulnerability, honesty and even for some, bravery. Most students would rather invest effort to enhance the exterior of the playing, which, compared to looking deep inside one's own self, may seem a much more concrete, secure and uncomplicated process for successful performance. But if one is after true artistry, the process of learning and knowing of one's own self is inevitable, since spontaneous and creative activities may surface only when one's deepest being is brought up in the playing. He therefore challenges young students not to be afraid to look deep down inside to find their inner voice in playing, even if that means not getting the quick fix for their next exam and auditions.

The students, even those with high level of playing, who are not familiar with the inner work and have not been nurtured in this manner, may feel inadequate and perplexed at the beginning of the process. They may feel discomfort in looking inside themselves and finding the facets of emotions, and even more, in exposing and expressing them through the playing. Mauricio Fuks explains that the feelings of discomfort and the intimidation occurring in the process are quite natural, since the internal work in playing could not be more different than the external work they are used to. There is no measurement or categorization that would validate or invalidate their inner emotions as correct, incorrect, perfect, acceptable and right or otherwise, as there is for the external work. Finding one's inner voice is indeed a field filled with uncertainty, he says. He compares it to exploring a beautiful field yet to be discovered; "One does not absolutely need to go to find it. In fact, one will

do just fine without exploring it. But consider this. If one does decide to go there, he/she will find beautiful and fragrant flowers never before seen, the nice little ponds and hills that are so intriguing, the landscapes that one never imagined to see before.” As Fuks says,

Once one decides to look inside oneself and explore the landscape of the emotions, it will be very uncomfortable in the beginning, simply because it’s unknown, and because the exposure brings feeling of vulnerability. One will find things that one likes, but also things that one does not want to face or care for. But little by little, one will start to accept the whole self, the good and the bad, the raw emotions and sentiments, just the way he/she is and feels honestly. Being honest with oneself is the first step for true artistry. The true artistic statements that resonate with the rest of humanity come from one’s authenticity, and that’s what ultimately makes perfection in the art of violin playing.

#### ii. Feeling the music in the guts

To find one’s inner voice, Mauricio Fuks tells students that one needs to immerse oneself in the given music, and live the music internally. To go further, one not only must internalize the music in one’s mind and heart, but deeper down in one’s guts, the physical center of the self where the most central muscles reside.

All else, the conscious work on the music, the mental analysis, structural and aesthetic plans, physical executions, the intentionality and the layers of sentiments, should come together, serving and balancing one's own deep gut emotions and feelings.

The work of balancing certainly is not an easy task: some students are inclined to approach the music more intellectually, and often too much consciousness becomes the stumbling block for them to internalize the music in their guts; others are overly conscious about themselves in playing, creating the gap between their mental abstraction of the performance and their actual performance. At the other extreme, the lack of consciousness results the unrefined and disorganized playing, which then may not convince the listeners. The successful development overall is only achieved when one knows one's own self enough to trust his/her own gut feelings and emotions, so that while working consciously and intellectually, one never gets alienated or detached from them. This subtle balance between the conscious work and the instinctive work is certainly not easy to grasp or maintain, and one needs constantly to attempt to bring these elements together harmoniously in their art of playing the violin.

### iii. Unity between the inner voice and the outer voice

Once one has internalized the music, Mauricio Fuks asks students to sing it out loud, from their guts, from the lower abdomen. He explains that singing from the heart is not deep enough; one needs to go deeper, feeling the music in the guts to connect with the whole self. It does not matter whether the singing is in tune or pleasant, as long as it is connected to the soul, the innermost being of the self, through the center of one's physical body, one's gut.

Once one is comfortable singing from the gut, Mauricio Fuks asks students to connect and match the internal singing with the external playing; "The bow should become your lung, your breathing. Try to connect your bow with the lung, the singing with your playing, until your outer voice (the violin) matches your inner voice." During this stage one may combine the conscious and intellectual work of matching the inner voice with the outer voice of the violin.

He also recommends students to attempt to produce sounds that move their own souls. To this end, he suggests one to hold a note and stretch its duration as long as it takes until his/her sound becomes fully connected to the inner self and to the character of the given piece of music. In return, the internalized sounds bring utter pleasure and pure satisfaction to one. When one is able to move his/her own soul through playing, the synergy created by the intimacy between the instrument and one's own being allows one to take a step further to deepen and enrich his/her own artistry.

He tells that even the finest violinists often perform music disconnected from their own gut emotions, and their playing, while pleasant, then may not carry

the emotional impact to move and touch the audience. Thus, the distinction between the fine instrumentalists and fine artists may be established. And that distinction comes from whether the emotional inflections the musicians employ in the playing are derived from one's gut, the authentic and deepest source of the innermost being, or from one's external instrumental craftiness that is not necessarily connected to one's inner self.

After all the conscious works based on the gut emotions are done, and one has the complete control over the given piece of music by mastering all the required techniques, he/she may work on letting go of the control and letting the music happen in the performance. One is to set his/her inner self free by giving up the control, so that the spontaneity and creativity may abound in the playing, and ultimately to allow the music to speak for itself. This step, the letting go of the control, ironically can only work when there is absolute control in the playing. This paradoxical phenomenon may remain one of the most challenging steps for any professionally trained players, considering their whole life's hard work and sacrifice to master the art and obtain the complete control over the instrument, and having to let go of them ultimately. Therefore, it is the ultimate stage of effortlessness in the artistry of violin playing and the aesthetic ideal Mauricio Fuks envisions in his students; the player, the self and the ego, altogether dissipate in the performance, and only the music itself remains. Anya Royce calls this "embodiment of transparency, the highest level in the artistry of all the performing

arts<sup>5</sup>... the highest level of artistry achieves a transparency in performance such that the audience and the piece come together as if the performer were not there."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Anya Peterson Royce. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p80-83

<sup>6</sup> Anya Peterson Royce. *Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*. (Walnut Creek, CA AltaMira Press, 2004), p24

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### **Solo performances with orchestras**

Madrid Symphony Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Korean Symphony Orchestra,  
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### **Media Collaborations**

Minjung has performed for the following radio and television stations: Radio Suisse  
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