

Martelé Magic

The secret to a great string sound

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“[Martelé] is one of the most fundamental of all strokes, and its mastery will benefit the right hand technique well beyond the limit of this particular bowing.” — Ivan Galamian

The martelé stroke is the most important bow stroke for developing a violist’s sound. The execution of this stroke consists of the two fundamental motions of bowing: weight and release. By employing these motions via the martelé stroke, students gain a deeper understanding of proper sound production and much more. Here are some ideas about the martelé stroke and general bowing techniques that will help your students in finding the ideal viola sound.

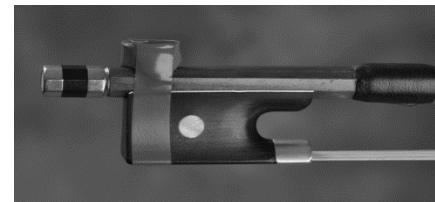
General Setup

Principles of tension-free setup

- Instrument sizing (three ways to measure)
- Viola balanced between collarbone and left hand
- Loose neck/no excess pressure from head
 - Freedom especially on right side of neck
- Relaxed and free shoulders

Setup exercises

- High-dot
- Magic X
- Statue of Liberty pose



Front View of the “Pinky House”

Bow Setup

Preliminary bow hand setup and bow balance

- “OK” sign / Bunny ears
- Using a pencil
- Pinky House
- Suzuki beginner bow hold
- Natural hanging hand position
- Sliding with the bow upside down

** All of these are more easily done with the bow pointing up vertically—holding the bow horizontally is more challenging to balance for beginning students.*

Arm setup and positioning

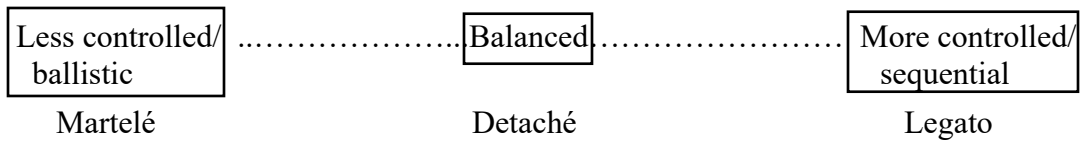
- Freedom in ball and socket joint
- Silent string crossings, bow circles (releases)
- Mark middle of bow
- Upper arm vs. forearm
 - Forearm motion in the upper half of the bow
 - Upper arm motion in the lower half of the bow
- Arm shapes: triangle, square, point

Sound Production

- **Three Factors**
 - Contact point
 - Speed
 - Weight
- the string vibrates horizontally, and the bow encourages this vibration
- too much vertical weight stifles this vibration
- the martelé stroke teaches students to allow the string to ring

Bow Strokes

- Three main strokes: martelé, détaché, and legato



Martelé

Qualities:

- Distinct beginning and end
- Speaks instantly
- Ringing tone
- 2 parts: **grab and release**
- “Martelé is a pizzicato of the bow”
 - Bow activates the string first, then allows it to ring
- “Hammer” stroke

Physical motions:

- Arm motion (not hand or fingers)
- Grab of string—arm weight, felt through index finger
- Release—open swinging of arm
 - Produces ringing tone, allows string to vibrate
 - “Zoom” feeling

Martelé Exercises

- AEA song – rolling arm, upper half, forearm
- Twinkle rhythms
- Upper half scales: 1 octave, invent rhythms
- World’s Shortest Note!
- Wiggle strings

From *Sound Innovations: Sound development for intermediate string orchestra*, by Bob Phillips and Kirk Moss. Alfred Music Publishing, 2012.

57 **LEARNING TO PLAY MARTELÉ**—During each rest, wiggle the string back and forth using flexible fingers on the bow. Use the martelé stroke on each quarter note.

Variety of Bow Strokes: *Allegro*, from Suzuki Violin School, Volume 1

Martelé Detaché

dolce *rit*

Legato

Telemann, Viola Concerto: II

- More nuanced variety of strokes
- Quick transitions
- Sustained martelé

Martelé Detaché

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M Legato Martelé

Sound Production on Lower Strings:

Telemann, Viola Concerto: IV

- Martelé for C-string clarity
- Bring out lower melody
- Contrast to upper part

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Multiple Martelé strokes per bow

- Stopped bows
- Same sound on each note, no matter how many martelés per bow
- Accurate bow divisions
- Left hand/ right hand coordination: Finger Before Bow (FBB) technique
- Play with scales

Schradiéck: The School of Violin Technics, Book I



Martelé for Prepared String Crossings

- Practice with stopped bows
- Two ways to change strings: 1) stop bow on old string, roll; 2) finish stroke on new string

Vieuxtemps, Henry: Sonata for viola and piano, op. 36. Mvt I: mm. 174 – 186



Instant Sound

J.S. Bach – Suite in G, BWV 1007: Courante



Other benefits of practicing martelé:

- Ringing intonation
 - Ring-tone exercise: 4x martelé bows on each ring tone in first position
 - Ring-tone: fingered note that is same as open string
 - 9 total in first position (plus one “bonus”)
 - Order of fingers: all 3rd fingers, 4th, 2nd, 1st
 - Repeat in other positions

- Physical release
 - Head and neck
 - Left shoulder
 - Right hand fingers
 - Martelé Cycle

- Vibrato/Shifting
 - Release of bow corresponds to release motion of vibrato
 - “Left Hand Martelé”
 - sustain bow, release finger for fuzz sound; vibrate during fuzz
 - experiment with different length of sound vs. fuzz

- Reinforces preparation mindset
- Instant activation of the string → instant presence of sound

Further reading and citations:

Galamian, Ivan. *Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Shar Production Company, 1985.

Phillips, Bob and Moss, Kirk. *Sound Innovations: Sound development for intermediate string orchestra*. Alfred Music Publishing, 2012.

Rolland, Paul. *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*. Urbana: Illinois String Research Associates, 1974. (DVD also available (2008) from www.paulrolland.net)

Zweig, Mimi. *String Pedagogy*. DVD. Bloomington, IN: Mimi Zweig StringPedagogy, 2007. Now available for free at www.stringpedagogy.com, 2015