

Tips from the Top, by Peggy and Dixie

1. Take care of your equipment

Playing viola is perilous activity. Involves tremendously expensive but flimsy equipment, held in myriad of awkward positions. This is reason why strongly advisable to build practice-fort made of soft furnishings. This way when viola and bow drops occur (is normal for this to happen several times in each practice session...) viola will not become broken as protected by fort.

As well as fort, is good idea to get professional to be in charge of maintenance and repairs of equipment rather than to do by guessing. For example, if...hypothetically...bow went mouldy, would be very bad idea to wash with water and fairy liquid (grapefruit scent). Could cause hair to become twisty and perpetually damp. Dampness very sad feeling for bow, twisty hair detrimental to crispy articulation, and grapefruit decidedly unprofessional smell for bow.

2. Trust no-one

When music shop located far away, alto clef baffling anyway, and dedication to learning instrument with any integrity wavering at best, will be tempting to learn music by copying children on YouTube. This is proven to be **terrible idea**. YouTube children owe you nothing. Doesn't matter to them if they play wrong notes, at wrong speed, and don't know how to do articulation. Shortcut method will lead to crushing disappointment and shame when weeks later, on examination of actual notes realise that everything learnt is all wrong and have to start again. Better to face music.

3. Fake it 'til you make it

While shortcuts in learning notes not strictly advisable, other shortcuts no problem at all and can yield magnificent results. For example if trying to master particular technique correctly is proving too time consuming, is commendable to invent new way of playing viola to achieve desired effect. Good example is Dixie-style "Vibrato" which is counterfeit technique involving combination of wiggling fingers about and taking them on and off string, but very quickly - is invisible to naked eye and sounds terrific and professional, and even experts will not be able to hear difference between it and real, legitimate vibrato.

Same advice applicable to learning alto clef, which is ridiculous and mysterious phenomenon. Is perfectly acceptable to follow basic shapes of music and make up plausible melody that is pleasing to ears. 87% of audiences won't notice, except when performing at viola congress or event, when statistic rises to 89%.

4. Comparison is the thief of joy

When on quest to master viola very quickly is best to disregard what is considered to be "normal" and "accomplished" playing, as is all very subjective and possible to be really marvellous violist even if condemned by experts as big joke. Great artistry not achieved by unhealthy comparisons with others and experts will eat words after achievement of illustrious grade 5.

5. Quit while you're ahead

Self-explanatory yet vitally, crucially important advice. Much like gambling, is better to go out in blaze of viola-glory than to get into risky territory. (Grade 6 forbidden territory as has double stops. 11-week career enough.)

Peggy Nolan and Dixie the Viola

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