

KASTA Newsletter

Spring 2016, Vol 15(2)



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President's Corner



Dear KASTA Members,

Greetings! I hope this letter finds you well. Some of you are enjoying a few moments of rest before gearing up for another school year, others are off to various camps and summer classes both as teachers and students, and others still are beginning those valuable summer lessons. Thank you for the countless hours you devote to your students and our profession!

I would like to take a moment to extend my heartfelt congratulations to those of you who are retiring, leaving Kansas, or have accepted new teaching positions! Every new adventure seems to offer new opportunity for growth, and I hope you are looking forward to the many new challenges lying ahead of you. Also, thank you to Eric Crawford and Brigid Mayer for their past leadership. Eric is transitioning into his role as Past-President, while Brigid and her husband, Mac, are off to a new state. I cannot thank them enough for the work they have done for Kansas string teachers and students!

Thank you to Mike Harbaugh, Karen Chapman, Jacob Dakon, Ken Hakoda and others for their work with KASTA. If you are reading this, you are aware of the awesome job Jacob is doing with the newsletter. If you have submitted items for publication, Thank You! If you have not yet, I encourage you to do so. There are so many great ideas out there just waiting to be shared!

As string teachers, we face many challenges in addition to the challenges of teaching and learning our instruments. While I know we should stay informed and advocate for our programs and for music, I also believe the strongest advocacy statement we can make is creating and growing strong musicians. As I step into this leadership role, I will be working to support the efforts of Kansas String Teachers in creating stronger musicians in their students. How can KASTA help you create stronger musicians? How can you help KASTA support others in this endeavor? I truly believe by working together and building each other up, we can continue to help our students become the best. Thank you for your help in this endeavor!

Thank you for the opportunity to serve. I am looking forward to the challenges lying ahead!

Sincerely,

Henry O. Littich

President, KASTA

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For access to previous issues, see <http://kastanewsletter.weebly.com>
To contribute, send materials to Jacob Dakon, jmdakon@ku.edu



Congratulations to our 2016 KASTA Award Winners!



Cheryl Lundberg

2016 KASTA Hall of Fame Inductee

Orchestra Director in the Gardner-Edgerton Public Schools



Frances Oare

2016 KASTA Certificate of Merit

Orchestra Director in the Wichita Public Schools



Mariah Barnett

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Everything you Need to Know about Teaching Low 2nd Finger

Lauren E. Rigby, University of Kansas

One of the most important skills we, as string educators, teach our beginning-level violin and viola players is the movement from high to low 2nd finger in the left hand. How else are we going to play pieces in G and C Major, both of which are common keys in beginning string repertoire? At first, this movement may appear simple to teach. After all, you just put 2nd finger closer to 1st finger; it's easy. As I have found, however, failing to introduce low 2nd finger in small, sequential steps can potentially destabilize the left-hand shape and negatively impact intonation, leaving some students confused and frustrated. It certainly left me feeling as though I needed to start over, and I don't think I'm alone in feeling this way. Given our proclivity to take the low 2nd-finger movement for granted, it could be argued that many new teachers may not be properly sequencing their introduction to low 2nd finger. In this article, I offer a series of incremental, pedagogically sound steps that I believe can guide teachers through the introduction of low 2nd finger and result in satisfied, capable, and intonationally accurate violin and viola students.

Two of the biggest hurdles students face when learning 2nd finger placement are conceptually understanding different finger patterns on the instrument and then applying these finger patterns to the instrument. The choice of which hurdle to address first is yours to make; I prefer conceptualization. Up to this point, students have played D-Major using the 1st-finger pattern (i.e., 1-23-4). Use this to your advantage. The 1st-finger pattern provides a great starting point for introducing low 2nd finger. To assist students in conceptualizing finger patterns, I explain that our hand usually falls into one of four shapes when we play the instrument (i.e., 1-23-4, 12-3-4, 1-2-3-4, and 1-2-34) and that we can create a visual 'map' for each shape showing which fingers touch and which fingers are spaced apart, thereby showing the spacings within each hand shape. These

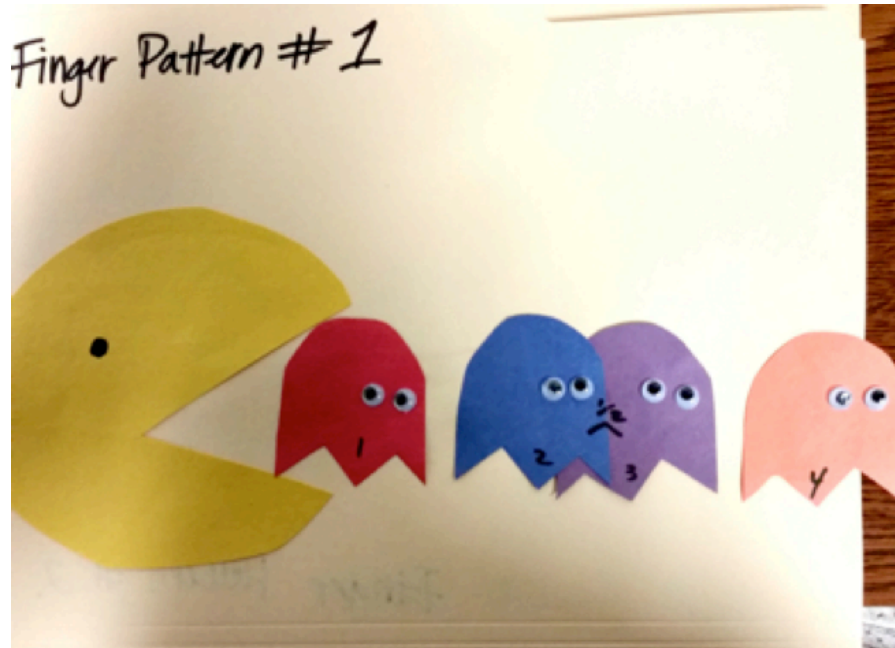
'maps' take the form of hand turkeys similar to the ones they may have created around Thanksgiving when they were younger. Students are required to indicate the half step where fingers touch and label the fingers. Other than that, I allow them to be as creative as they wish.



After conceptualizing the 1st and 2nd finger patterns, it is time to apply these ideas to the instrument. Students already know what the 1st-finger pattern feels like because they have practiced it thoroughly in the key of D Major. By creating hand turkeys, they also understand what the 2nd finger pattern is supposed to look like and which fingers should be touching when they use it.

Here are nine steps that I use to applying knowledge of low 2nd finger to the instrument.

Step 1) *1st finger to low 2nd finger*. Students must also be able to apply finger patterns to their instruments. Fortunately, 1st finger provides a clear point of contact



for low 2nd finger. Instruct students to place 1st finger on the D or A string. Ask them to place 2nd finger down against 1st finger, so that the two fingers are touching. Check every student's hand frame to ensure it has not changed and that 2nd finger is touching 1st finger. Practice this activity repeatedly to solidify this movement into muscle memory. In addition, ask students to watch their fingers, thus visually committing its placement to memory, kinesthetically practicing the movement, and tactilely feeling the sensation of 1st and 2nd finger touching.

Step 2) *High to low 2nd finger*: Instruct students to place 1st finger and high 2nd finger. Model for students how to slide high 2nd finger back until it is touching 1st finger. The pressure of the finger has to be released before it can slide back, but do not allow the finger to come off the string; rather, it glides effortlessly on top of the string until pressure is reapplied. Also ensure that the 2nd finger is actually sliding backwards and not collapsing at the top (distal) joint.

Step 3) *Ping-Pong*: The goal of ping-pong is to practice moving between high and low 2nd finger. Place 1st and 3rd finger accurately on the fingerboard and let the 2nd finger hover above the string. Set 2nd finger in either the low or high position; then, lift and set it in the opposite position. The 2nd finger bounces between the low and high positions (e.g., F-natural to F-sharp) by lifting

up from base joint (metacarpophalangeal joint) while avoiding the common fault of collapsing the top (distal) joint in an attempt to slide.

Step 4) *Chromatic sequences*: Students have now practiced setting low 2nd finger. They have also learned how to move chromatically from 'high to low 2nd finger' and '1st finger to low 2nd finger.' Now, extend the chromatic sequence to include 3rd finger and the open string using the following exercise: 0-1-L2-H2-3 and 3-H2-L2-1-0.

Step 5) *Whole steps and small skips*: Start by moving directly from 3rd finger to low 2nd finger. Shortly thereafter, add 0 to L2, and 4 to L2. All of these intervals can be practiced as a short warm-up with many variations in rhythm on all strings using a rote call and response format.

Step 6) *Adjacent open strings*: You have now introduced all of the one-string movements in the low 2 sequence. The next step involves horizontal movements: playing an interval between notes on adjacent string and the low 2nd finger. The easiest way to begin these larger leaps is between an adjacent open string and low 2 (e.g., open A and F-natural on the D string). Remind your students to place 1st and 2nd finger down together when moving between these notes. 1st finger provides a tactile reminder of the placement of low 2nd finger, which will result in more accurate intonation of 2nd finger.

Step 7) *Adjacent fingered notes*: After the adjacent open string, play the adjacent 1st finger with the low 2nd finger (B- to F-natural), adjacent 3rd finger to low 2nd finger (D to F-natural), and adjacent 4th finger to low 2nd finger (E to F natural). For all of the adjacent intervals, it is important that students keep their fingers down when moving between the two pitches; if we are working on B on the A-string to F natural (adjacent 1 to low 2), B should stay down when the student places and plays F natural. F natural will remain down when the student switches back to B.

Step 8) *Adjacent high to low 2nd finger*: The last horizontal movement to incorporate is a high 2nd finger to a low 2nd finger on an adjacent string. In this interval, 1st finger is again the reference point for placing L2. Instruct students to place 1st finger and high 2nd finger. Then hop 2nd finger to the adjacent string, and place it against 1st finger so that it is in the low 2nd finger position. The important point here is having 1st finger set on the string and hopping 2nd finger between strings. Do not allow your students to collapse or flatten their 2nd finger when crossing the string. Although barring 2nd finger across strings is useful in more advanced technique, such technique should be avoided here to preserve students' left-hand frame.

Step 9) G and C Major scales: The final step is playing low 2nd finger in a G and C Major scale, given that these scales are often used in beginning strings literature. Both of these scales require students to use a modified block fingering approach when descending. A fully blocked fingering would require students to place 1, L2, and 3 down together at once, but in a modified block fingering, 2nd finger hovers above the string while 1 and 3 are placed on the string. When moving from the note open A to 3rd finger G on the D string, students should already have their hand-shape set up to play the next note, F natural. While playing open A, have students place 1st and 3rd fingers down on the D string. The 2nd finger should remain slightly elevated about the string. By using a modified block fingering where the 2nd finger hovers, students can be ready to play either a high or low placement of 2nd finger. In a C or G Major scale, we would be placing a low 2nd finger, but practicing this modified block fingering will prepare students for both 2nd-finger placements. Alternatively,

your students may use independent fingering, in which one finger goes down at a time.

To a new teacher or one who does not come from a string playing background, teaching low 2nd finger may not seem like a skill that would require much time to teach. On its own, placing 2nd finger in a different location may not appear very difficult. The challenge, however, is teaching your students to conceptually understand and then demonstrate the differences between finger patterns. Through the sequence I have outlined, students will become more acquainted with the location of low 2nd finger, the movements necessary for approaching and leaving low 2nd finger, and the use of low 2nd finger in the context of a scale. Additionally, students will end up well equipped to use low 2nd finger in any circumstance they may encounter, without adversely affecting their intonation or posture.

1. The whole step is characterized by the dash (1-2), the half step by no space (23)



Lauren E. Rigby is a graduate student at the University of Kansas studying string pedagogy. She previously taught elementary school strings for Alamo Heights ISD in San Antonio, TX. Lauren holds a Bachelor's degree in Music Education from Trinity University.

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Thinking Holistically about Teaching B-Flat

Jacob M. Dakon, University of Kansas

Upon reading the title of this article, you're probably wondering, "Why would this guy spend time writing about that?" In response, I say, "Because few people have!" B-flat on the violin and viola, has, in a manner of speaking, become dogmatic, in that we just expect it to happen. We tell our students, "reach your first finger back until it hits the nut," and then hope for the best. Fortunately, this method usually works, and there is little else we need to do. However, what if it doesn't work? What then? I have found that if a problem occurs, it is usually because students don't understand the relationship between B-flat and it's neighboring pitches. Herein, I discuss this issue and offer suggestion using what I call the 'holistic' approach to chromatic alternations.

Holistic Approach

Viewing something holistically means that all of the system's component parts are seen as a whole, rather than as individuals. Applying this concept to the fingerboard looks something like this: Tonality is a system. Within tonality, there are scales, such as F-major. The pitch, B-flat, is a component part of this tonal scale; however, to understand and perform B-flat correctly, we also need to tactilely and aurally understand its relationship to G-, A-, B-, and C-natural as well. When students don't understand these relationships, they usually can't play B-flat correctly in even the simplest of scalar passages. This is why most method books address B-flat in relation to B, A, and C natural almost immediately after teaching students to play B-flat.

Taking this approach one step further, we also have to teach students how B-flat relates to pitches on both adjacent strings. In other words, students must learn how B-flat relates to A-, G-, F-, and E-natural on the D-string, or, for violins, F-sharp, G- and A-natural

on the E-string. Thus, teaching B-flat using a holistic approach requires to steps:

- 1) Teach students the sound of and physical motion required to play B-flat, and
- 2) Teach students the aural and tactile relationships between B-flat and pitches on the same and adjacent strings.

Teaching B-flat

Strong evidence has surfaced over the past couple decades regarding the neurological links between vocal learning, aural awareness, and motor planning, thus lending considerable validity to the old adage, 'If they can sing it, they can play it.' Subsequently, have your students listen to and sing with a B-flat alone and in small melodic contexts, such as those found in folk songs. The more aware your students are of B-flat as an aural pitch, the more likely they are to play B-flat in tune.

Once students are relatively familiar with the sound of B-flat, go through the following exercises to develop their motoric abilities.

- 1) Place their C- and B-natural on the A string.
- 2) Without playing, keep the C-natural down on the fingerboard and reach the index finger back to the nut. Repeatedly move the index finger from B-natural to B-flat. Tapping the pitches in various rhythmic patterns is also helpful.
- 3) Add the bow. Play | C | B | C | Bb | in various rhythmic patterns, with each pitch receiving one full measure of beats (see Figure 1). I like to start with the

A

VIOLIN I

VIOLA

VIOLONCELLO

CONTRABASS

B

VLN. I

VLA.

VC.

CB.

C

VLN. I

VLA.

VC.

CB.

following patterns, as the half- and quarter-rests offer students a chance to move their index finger without having to move the bow at the same time. Feel free to use your own combination of rhythms.

4) Again with the bow, play | B | Bb | B | Bb | followed by | A | Bb | A | Bb | in various rhythmic patterns, with each pitch receiving one full measure of beats.

5) Create your own combinations of B-flat and A, B, C-natural. The more variations you use, the better-equipped students will become.

Understanding other B-flat relationships

The next step is to teach students the aural and tactile relationships between B-flat and pitches on the same and adjacent strings. First, a note about intonation: When teaching intervallic relationships with B-flat, I like to drone the tonic and dominant scale degrees of the scale in question, or some other relevant pitch consistently. For example, when students are learning to play G and B-flat, I drone G or D. When learning F-natural and B-flat, I drone D or B-flat. My goal is to create within my students an aural awareness of intervallic relationships. Be creative. It takes a bit of time, but eventually you will find that students start to adjust their intonation upon recognizing the intervallic relationships.

To avoid having to talk through every intervallic relationship, I have listed my sequence in the attached score. On the score, you will see three stanzas labeled A, B, and C. Stanza A contains exercises on the A string; Stanza B, the A and D string; and Stanza C, the A and violin E strings. Again, each of these patterns merely suggests an intervallic relationship. Each relationship should be repeated using a variety of rhythmic patterns, with each pitch receiving one full measure of beats during the initial stages of training. To help you use these exercises in your classes, I have also included

parts.

In Stanza A, there are a couple things worth noting. First, you will see that the C-sharp to B-flat is introduced. I feel this interval holds considerable importance, despite being left out of most method books. Second, I also introduce the fourth-finger E to B-flat interval. You will notice the grace note 'D' is present to support fourth-finger E. To teach this, I begin by playing this measure as three quartet notes (E-D-B), followed by a dotted-quarter, eighth, quarter rhythm. I then have students play it as written, and finally I get rid of the grace note. You will also notice that the cello and bass play A instead of E to avoid shifting.

In stanza B, I begin with the G to B-flat, because this interval establishes a solid hand frame. I then go down the scale in half steps. Keeping the B-flat down while progressing down the scale is recommended. In measure four of stanza B, you may choose to play either a second finger or first finger on the E-natural. I recommend starting with the first-finger option and then using the second-finger option. It is, however, extremely important that students are able to demonstrate both fingerings.

In stanza C, the violins practice playing B-flat in relation to notes on the E string. As before, alternative notes within the chord have been provided for other instruments (see m. 2). Keeping the B-flat down while playing on the E-string is recommended, although not required.

The idea here is simple: Exhaustively address every option that students will encounter when playing the B-flat. In doing so, your students will understand B-flat more holistically, and be prepared for any basic B-flat passage that comes their way. When you are done, apply the same concept to other chromatic alterations, such as E-flat and A-flat. How you decide to present this information is up to you. I would recommend teaching it after students are familiar with D, G, and C major, and after cellos have discussed extensions. These patterns may be developed over the



Figure 1. Initial basic B-flat training rhythms

course of several days or weeks. Also feel free to add your own sense of creativity into this exercise.

1. Marc R. Dickey, "A Review of Research on Modeling in Music Teaching and Learning," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 113 (1992): 27-40; Karen G. Frewen, "Effects of Familiarity with a Melody Prior to Instruction on Children's Piano Performance Accuracy," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 57:4 (2010): 320-333; Aniruddh D. Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).



Jacob M. Dakon, is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at the University of Kansas, where he directs the string education program. His research interests include string pedagogy, memorization, self-regulation, and social identity.



Reading Session Olathe North High School August 13, 2016 @ 9 AM

JW Pepper will be holding an orchestra reading session at Olathe North High School, on Saturday, August 13th. The event is open to all strings teachers. Snacks will be provided. For more information, contact Cecily Mahan at <cmahanon@olatheschools.org>

VIOLIN I

Violin I musical score consisting of three systems, each with a boxed letter label (A, B, C) in the first measure. The music is written in treble clef with a 2/4 time signature. System A (measures 1-6) includes fingerings: 1 1, 0 1, 2 1, 3 1, 2 1, 4 3 1. System B (measures 7-11) includes fingerings: 3 1, 2 1, 2 1, 1(2) 1, 1 1. System C (measures 12-16) includes fingerings: 3 1, # 2 1, # 2 1, # 1(2) 1, # 1 1. The score features various accidentals (flats, sharps) and repeat signs.

CONTRABASS

Contrabass musical score consisting of three systems, each with a boxed letter label (A, B, C) in the first measure. The music is written in bass clef with a 2/4 time signature. System A (measures 1-6) includes fingerings: 4 2, 1 2, 4 1, 4 b-1, # 4 b-1, (1) b. System B (measures 7-11) includes fingerings: 0 2, 4 2, 2 2, 1 2, 1 b 4. System C (measures 12-16) includes fingerings: 1 2, # 1 b 4, 0 b 2(4), # 4 b 2, 2 b 2. The score features various accidentals (flats, sharps) and repeat signs.

VIOLONCELLO

A

7 **B**

12 **C**

VIOLA

A

7 **B**

12 **C**

Interested in submitting your ideas to the KASTA Newsletter?

We welcome your thoughts. Please submit all materials and query letters to:

Jacob M. Dakon, editor | Email: jmdakon@ku.edu

Submissions to the KASTA Newsletter should be of interest to string musicians and educators or members of the community with a stake in string education. Our audience consists of K-12 school string and orchestra educators, non-collegiate and collegiate studio teachers, music education professors, students, conductors, performers, and other interested parties.

Our Mission

The KASTA Newsletter is a tri-annual publication of the Kansas Chapter of the American String Teachers Association. Our mission is to promote communication and a sense community between collegiate, pre-service, and professional string educators throughout the state of Kansas by disseminating critical thought and opinion through discussion of string-specific topics. These include, but are not limited to:

- Articles examining pedagogical, curricular, and other educational perspectives;
- Articles that highlight a program's noteworthy experiences;
- Articles examining psychological perspectives pertaining to music and human behavior;
- Historical accounts of Kansas music programs or related material;
- Students' creative or music-educational writings;
- Research abstracts or reports that suggest direct application to instructional environments;
- Reviews (e.g., books, music, research); and
- Rebuttals and letters that promote healthy and progressive discussion.

We believe that sharing knowledge and skills is one of the primary means of advancing string education. Such advancements, we hope, will continue to enhance educational experiences for all Kansan music students and teachers, past, present, and future.

Length & Format:

Article submissions may be 250 to 3,000 words maximum. Three thousand words are equivalent to 6–9 typed, double-spaced pages. Musical examples, sidebars, references, tables may constitute the equivalent of one or two pages in addition to the text. Articles should be in either APA or Chicago format.

Articles may not promote products or commercial programs. An author may mention his/her studio, school or ensemble only in the context of one example among many. Mentioning programs or products should be solely for the sake of example to highlight a point in the article.

Given copyright restrictions, please do not submit works that have been previously published in other newsletters or journals without written permission from the entity in possession of the copyright.