A FLEXIBLE LEFT HAND-
Breaking the D major Straightjacket
Gabriel A. Villasurda

I. BASICS: Three ways left hand fingers move
   A. ON-OFF the string to shorten/lengthen string.
   B. LEFT-RIGHT to different strings
   C. FORWARD-BACK to make sharps and flats.

THE 5 PRONG APPROACH TO TEACHING
Teach everything five ways:
1. Auditory: it sounds like _____
2. Visual: it looks like_____
3. Kinesthetic: it feels like_____
4. Name: we call it _____
5. Connection: it relates to _____

II. STARTING POINTS for locating left hand- by feel
   A. VN/VA: location of base knuckle of index finger plus thumb
   B. C/B: Thumb

III. ORIENTATION OF FINGERS
   A. Violin/Viola
      1. Fingernail of index faces bridge
      2. Only corner of finger touches string
      3. Corner closer to thumb
      4. Allows slide to/away from bridge
      5. Index knuckles form 3 sides of a rectangle
      6. Look for the letter "Y"
   B. Cello/Bass:
      1. 2nd right over thumb
      2. Thumb curved and a bit on top corner
      3. Tall finger aims 90 degrees to string
      4. Base of index well away from instrument neck
      5. index BEHIND thumb
      6. index leans towards scroll
      7. 3 and 4 spaced
      8. All fingers make a ROMAN BRIDGE arch or BANANA curve
      9. Spacing of fingers: index -eyebrow, 2nd - nose. 3rd- top lip. 4th - hollow of chin
     10. Spacing and thumb: same as football hold

IV. FINGER GYMNASITICS
   A. The ON-OFF motion
      1. Touch corner of each finger on the pad of the thumb
      2. Rub a grain of sand between index and thumb
      3. Orient finger as above
      4. Tap down crisply but without undue tension
      5. Raise up crisply, but limit height--no flying fingers
6. Tap and raise each finger rapidly
7. Do sequences: 1234, 4321, 1324, 4231, etc.
8. "Dancing fingers" exercise.
   a. Use "Arm Cello" or real fingerboard
   b. Start by "Dancing" any finger on/off any single string
   c. Limit lift so fingers maintain shape
9. "Pop-up" fingers
   a. Use "Arm Cello" or real fingerboard
   b. Place all fingers on same string
   c. Raise any single finger on demand
   d. Ring finger hardest.

B. The FRONT-BACK motion
1. Index back/forth
   a. Rest 1 and 2 both on thumb pad, touching
   b. Keep 2nd in place
   c. Withdraw index backward
   d. Keep 1st knuckles 90 degrees
   e. Look for letter "Y"
   f. See how far back is possible while maintaining shape
2. Second back/forth
   a. Rest 1 & 2 both on thumb pad, touching
   b. Keep 1st in place with square knuckles
   c. Extend 2nd forward until straight
   d. Return to the thumb
   e. Do not allow 2nd to point to ceiling
3. 3rd (ring) finger back/forth
   a. Rest 2 & 3 on thumb, touching
   b. Keep 2 in place, corner touching thumb
   c. Extend 3rd finger until knuckles straighten
   d. Return to the thumb
   e. "Boink" nose without moving arm or wrist--only finger
4. Pinky back/forth
   a. Rest 3 & 4 on thumb
   b. Keep 3 in place, maintain curve
   c. Extend pinky forward until straight, then return
5. Combination moves--move 2 fingers
   a. Start with three fingers on thumb
   d. Keep center finger in place, move outer fingers.
   c. Difficult but important

C. For the LEFT-RIGHT motion of the fingers
1. Leapfrogs
   a. Hold left thumb with right hand
   b. Leapfrog the index finger from the pad side to the nail side of
   the thumb, over the top
   c. Repeat using 2nd, 3rd or 4th fingers
2. Orbits
   a. Hold thumb with right hand
   b. Orbit the thumb with any single finger
   c. Reverse the direction of the orbit
3. Fingerboard leaps--left and right
   a. Instrument in playing position--no bow
   b. Jump any single finger from thinnest string to thickest string
   c. Left elbow has to be in the right place
4. Walking fingers--One and Three (C/B use 4 instead of 3)
   a. "lead off" unused finger towards new destination
   b. Removed "used" fingers early to prepare next sideways move

5. Can use 2-4, 1-4, or any combination of fingers
6. Compare this movement of fingers to walking--one foot stays in place while the other foot relocates to a new spot.

D. Combining FRONT-BACK with LEFT-RIGHT
   1. Alternate high/low (natural/flat) for any single finger as fingers "walk" from string to string.

   2. Cellos can extend and non-extend
   3. Basses can pivot and return to normal

IV. LISTENING EXERCISES- Listen & copy

A. Frame, then fill in the missing note
1. Do not put down any kind of C until notified
2. Leader can notify either by name (C# or C natural) or by sound.
3. Basses: Play the high D in III pos, pivot back for the B, play the C# with 2 or the C natural with 1

B. Match Tetrachords (Four note scales-starting open)

| 1. Major: | Do Re Mi.Fa |
| 2. Dorian: | Re Mi.Fa Sol |
| 3. Locrian: | Ti.Do Re Mi.Fa |
| 4. Lydian: | Fa Sol La Ti |

C. Mix tetrachords:
1. Two patterns on one string: Major up, Dorian down

2. Different patterns on different strings

D. Morph known tunes into other modes.
E. Start a known tune on a different finger; requires a different pattern

V. THE PIVOT PROBLEM
A. On violin/viola, the base of the index finger is the pivot point when fingers change strings.
B. The reach to locations on the thicker strings requires an extra stretch.
VI. GOOD LEFT HAND CHOREOGRAPHY; could you recognize good or bad choreography in the execution of these exercises?

VII. CULMINATING TECHNIQUE: Chromatic scale the range of first position

1. Teach by rote with chart
2. Repeat each pitch multiple times; gradually reduce to once
3. Do 3, 5, 7 note segments and reverse.
4. Then go fast

VIII. ADVANCED TECHNIQUE: Diminished arpeggios
IX. CONCLUSIONS

A. Use the Finger Gymnastics exercises from day one.
B. Move out of D major early on [October].
C. Teach the Finger Patterns by rote first
D. Check for “extra baggage” fingers—fingers you don’t need.
E. Remove a finger to allow time to prepare for a move. Mobility depends on PROCESS.
F. Check hand positions; the “right” ones WORK BEST.
G. Check for tension in arms & hands that limit mobility.
H. Teach multiple scales including chromatics to require all the “black” and “white” keys— the whole computer keyboard.
I. Choose orchestra repertoire that escapes D major.
J. Don’t neglect the SOUND and FEEL modes of learning.

X. Go to www.stringskills.com for additional materials including

A. Fingerboard maps
B. midi files supporting Finger Patterns
C. Major and Minor One Octave Scales from 3 Sharps to 4 Flats with midi files
D. Everything is FREE and Not under copyright. Duplicate at will.

Gabriel Villasurda <gabevill@pathwaynet.com>