**Warm Up Exercises and Games for Strings**

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**Developing Rhythm and Pulse**

**Circle Game (Off Instrument)**

Students sit in a circle and pass around a steady pulse through one single hand clap. Once this is mastered a double clap can be added that travels around in the same direction. Students focus on clapping exactly in time as well as being together with the person who has the other rhythm. For a challenge add a stomp with one foot that is passed in the opposite direction around the circle.

**Variations**

Pass a single clap and then add a triplet-working on compound time

Pass a Double clap and then add a triplet-working on 2 against 3

On Instrument-Pass two different rhythms or melodic ideas around a circle

**Changing Rhythm and Pattern**

This is a great game for focus

The leader stands in front of the class and performs 4 movements that are the same to a steady beat. (tapping shoulders 4 times, standing up and sitting down within 4 beats etc.) Students copy the leader immediately after the four beats are complete. While students are copying, the leader moves on to the next four beats with different movements. I find that high school students find this fairly easy but when I switch to two beats it requires much more concentration.

**Variation**

On Instrument-The goal here is to get students to watch and think about bow direction and speed.

Play four beats of a rhythm on an open string. Students repeat the leader’s pattern while the leader moves onto a different bowing pattern on the same open string.

**Developing Leading and Co leading**

**Circle Game**

Students sit in a circle and each student puts up one hand. One student looks directly and locks eyes with one other student in the circle. That student then puts their hand down and locks eyes with one other student. This continues until all students have their hands down and the cycle starts again. Students need to remember who they got the cue from and who they pass the cue to. This should be done to a steady pulse. Once they are confident and can get through the circle without stopping a new gesture (a point, nod etc.) can be added. The new gesture must be to a different student. Hands will have to go up again to determine who gives and takes the gesture. Both gestures can go around at the same time once this is determined.

**On Instrument**

**Games Using Chords**

I use the chords from the scales they are learning and playing to play several games which teach students to play together, listen for balance, blend and intonation as well as working on their ear training and theory.

**Intonation**

Have students play one chord. Get it perfectly in tune and then have students close their eyes. Walk around the room and choose three or four students to play slightly out of tune. These students adjust their pitch. Have students continue playing and see if they can hear and tell who is playing out of tune.

**Find Your Note** (R. Murray Schafer)

Assign each student a note (root, third, fifth or seventh if applicable.) Have students play the chord and walk around the room to others playing the same note. They should all be playing all the time while listening for their pitch. Encourage them to look at faces and not at fingers! Basses may have to plant themselves in one spot because they can’t move. I usually give each bass player a different note and spread them out. Cellos can put their endpins a little higher and stand until they find their group.

**Variation**

One student leaves the classroom and while in the hallway the teacher assigns each student a note. The student returns and puts students in their groups.

**Playing Cadences**

I have students play I, IV and V Chords of the scale they are playing that day in class in the major and related tonic minor. Once we have the chords and are sure about the notes we will be playing I play around with the chords using hand signals. This is great for listening to each other for articulation and for watching the leader. Students come up and lead the class as well.

**Improvisation**

Students can improvise over these chords as well. Have the class come up with a quiet accompaniment pattern using a tonic chord and have students volunteer to play over the chord, when they are finished they nod to the next student to start. Students who have more experience can play over a chord progression.

**More Games for Listening and Focus**

**Composing a Two Bar Composition**

**II: I :II**

Each student plays **one idea** within a two bar phrase that loops itself over and over again. Each idea should be one or two notes, can only occur once and must be played in the exact same spot every time. After a couple of loops the two bars settle into a groove. Once students have perfected the two bars the class can create a 2nd two bar composition that will act as a B section. Students must remember the first section and be watching as the teacher will switch back to the A section at some point. This game is a fun way to teach form.

**AB-Binary**

**ABA-Ternary**

**ABACA-Rondo**

**The Number Composition** (R. Murray Schafer)

Students write the number 1-10 on a sheet of paper. Have them put a square around 3 numbers and choose a sound for those three numbers. The teacher counts off and each student plays their sound on their number. Loop this a few times. Have students put a circle around 3 more numbers and choose a new sound. I would encourage students to choose something that sounds completely different (pizz vs. arco, percussive sound vs. a pitched sound) Finally, ask students to put a triangle around three more numbers and choose one more sound. Perform the piece together.

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

**Games with Scales**

**Movement and Sitting in Different Places**

During warm up with scales I try to encourage students to sit in different places to encourage listening across the orchestra as opposed to just their section or instrument. I love circles, semicircles and often put cellos and basses in the middle in a circle facing out and have upper strings in a circle surrounding them. Upper strings should be standing during scale warm up and I often have them march around in a circle to the beat while they are playing their scales.

**Counting By Zen with the Scale**

This game is adapted from the game Zen Counting where a group of students count from one to ten. Only one person can talk at a time, if two people speak at the same time the group starts over at 1. No one can say two numbers consecutively and no gestures are allowed. I like to do this with eyes closed.

I do the same with the scale. They do this with their eyes closed. Have students play one octave of the scale using the same rules as the number game. They need to listen very carefully to hear if they are playing at the same time as someone else. They also need to play the correct note in tune!! There is no talking. If two students play at the same time it automatically goes back to the first note of the scale.

**Learning to Play By Ear**

**Call and Response**

The teacher plays a short rhythmic idea or a short melody. Students repeat back.

**Fiddle and Folk Tunes**

Students love learning to play by ear through fiddle and folk tunes. I have included a couple of my favourites at the back of this package. Jigs and reels are great to teach bass lines to students and the melodies usually involve several string crossings. The folk tunes are fun to improvise over because the chord changes are fairly easy. I also love waltzes because the melodies are so beautiful and the students can try harmonizing with the tune.

**Stretching**

I have become much more aware of the importance of stretching and exercise over the years and often incorporate this into the class. We often stretch after scales, in the middle of a class or rehearsal when we need a break or at the end of the class. I love shoulder rolls and stretches, neck stretches, spine twists, arm stretches, tendon stretches, moving fingers independently in prayer and back stretches. We usually end our stretch routine with at least two ragdolls.

**Stress Balls**

I have a class set of these. We use them to develop finger strength in the left hand by squeezing them. One great exercise to open up the shoulders is to throw the ball up high with one hand palm facing up and catch it with the other palm facing down. This takes a few tries and should be done in an open space!

R. Murray Schafer Exercises come from his books *Hearsing* and *A Sound Education* (both are books of one page exercises for sound, listening, improv, and composition)