

# KASTA Newsletter

Volume 11, Issue 3



Rebecca Tast , Editor

kasta.org

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Everybody loves change.

Change is on its way here in Kansas. The KMEA board is seriously considering redistricting. This doesn't much affect our colleagues in the western part of the state but it will bring a huge change to the Northeast District. I will keep you posted as this event evolves.



Do you have a new string teacher in your district? I would like to challenge each member of our organization to make sure each new string teacher in Kansas becomes an active member of KASTA. Tell them the benefits of being a member and talk about how we can help each other.

We are all busy starting the new school year. Get out there and get some new kids started on a lifetime of learning to play a string instrument!

Karen McGhee-Hensel  
kmcgheehensel2010@yahoo.com

# Tension: A String Players Worst Enemy, Tips for Upper String Players

Matt Means, Assistant Professor of Music, Fort Hays State University

I have long held the belief that the instruments we play and teach are some of the most difficult ones to master. Upper string players, especially, are faced with the challenge of an instrument and bow position that is phenomenally unnatural. How many times in our lives are we called upon to hold our arms and hands in such a position, often for many hours at a time!?

As young beginners our limbs, joints, and digits are inherently looser and more flexible. In an effort to feel a sense of stability and structure with a violin or viola beginners often will over-press, over-grip, or over-(fill in the blank) in an attempt to feel a sense of control.

Unfortunately, as the student progresses, these small habits become ingrained and, as the student is asked to learn progressively more difficult repertoire, these habits become more and more detrimental. Too much tension in a rendition of “French Folk Song” can easily be dismissed as enthusiasm or some other charming quality from a young child. Too much tension in chords during a solo Bach Fugue can mean the difference between success and esteem-destroying dissatisfaction in a graduate school audition or recital!

Though every physical body is different and every person comes to the instrument with different tension habits and tendencies, I have observed in many students (including MYSELF!) certain common physical locations where tension tends to want to congregate. Below I list a “TOP 10” list of such places, in random order. Both private teachers and classroom teachers can utilize this guide in assessing student progress. Remember: you can ALWAYS hear tension in playing, even if you cannot SEE the student. And, conversely, you can always hear the LACK of tension in playing, even if you cannot see the student!



## RIGHT HEMISPHERE:

1. Right thumb and first finger: All too often spiccato evenness suffers at the hand of an inflexible thumb and an over-pronated (over-pressing) first finger. The base joint/knuckle of the first finger, especially, tends to lock and lack elasticity. Remember to tell students that right hand knuckles must RECEIVE information (from the vibrations and springiness of the bow stick and hair) as much as CONTROL activity or action. Indeed, there are very few (if any) instances in which all fourteen (or even a subset) right hand knuckles should be tight or tense. Energy must always be able to travel freely through these knuckles.
2. Right wrist joint: It is much easier for the wrist joint to be tight if the wrist sits too high, which is another common malady. If the wrist sits even with or below the base knuckles of the right hand all sorts of tonal improvements will result, fluidity will be easier, and a variety of bow strokes will be possible.
3. Shoulder joint: The vast majority of all bow strokes should feel led and directed by the upper arm, which is a unit comprised of the elbow, tricep/bicep, shoulder joint, and back shoulder blade. While this zone need not be in visibly excessive motion, it is the unit that serves as the rudder of the bowing ship- it helps guide, direct, and initiate bow movements. If the shoulder joint is frozen, stiff, or tight, it destabilizes this unit and forces control/operation to the wrist and fingers, which are units too small to be given such important direction. Sautille and colle are virtually the only two bow strokes which relegate the larger upper arm unit to a secondary role, and even in these strokes there can never be tension higher up in the arm.

## BODY:

4. **MOUTH!!!!:** The most important part of our bodies that harbors tension, even more than the arms, is in our lungs and is related to BREATHING. It is a natural human tendency to hold or stop breathing when approaching a difficult passage in music, because this physical reaction to stress or perceived threat has been programmed as part of our 'fight or flight' response. To un-train this response takes work, daily attention, and conscientious thought. Breathing through the mouth while playing is always more preferable to nasal breathing because it activates a larger resonating chamber in your body and is not naturally aligned with the kind of fast, panicked, panting-style breathing that tends to happen in stressful situations. Moreover, mouth breathing produces the most stress-relieving and cathartic exhalations. I challenge you and your students to play a difficult passage and see if you tend to hold your breath during it. If you do, then dedicating time daily to physically exhaling during especially challenging shifts, runs, and bow accents will help re-program your body. Holding the breath while playing naturally tenses up the shoulders and arm joints! Exhaling through the mouth produces the opposite effect.
5. **Neck:** Another nasty habit we have is to look down when encountering a hard passage, shift, or technique. This often results in a hunched over body position, strained back neck muscles, and a clenched jaw. Any body position that causes our scrolls to point down causes this. When playing difficult passages I encourage students to look up, open up the space in front of their bodies vertically by feeling like their scrolls go up to meet their bows (rather than the opposite), and keep breathing. The hunched body position/strained neck muscle/clenched jaw triumvirate is dangerous combination that almost always results in pain and difficulty playing later in life.
6. **Knees:** When standing and playing it is also habitual to lock the knee joints when encountering difficult passages. Doing this results in lower-body immobility and sets the upper body parts up for tension as well. To address this, encourage students to walk, in either in place or around, while playing. Another great way to defuse this is ask students to raise and lower their bodies from the knees slowly as a practice method while playing a passage comfortably. In general, the balance in our bodies should be free to shift gently and continually while we play, back-and-forth from foot to foot, if necessary. And locked body stance produces tension.

## LEFT HEMISPHERE:

7. **Thumb:** Both thumbs tend to over-press and clench. If the left thumb does this the result is almost always uncomfortable and jerky shifts, decreased vibrato fluidity, and lessened elasticity in the palm of the hand. The thumb should basically touch the instrument as lightly as possible. While it serves an important role as a reference point and guide when shifting, especially to 5<sup>th</sup> position and beyond, it must have the flexibility to remain fluid. Experiment with different thumb positions – the greatest degree of comfort may be achieved with a thumb position that is higher or lower, farther back or slightly more forward. Every hand shape is different and there are no absolutes, especially for the advanced player. The most important consideration is that the thumb does not overpress.

8. Left Hand Finger Pressures: It is almost universal among upper string players that we tend to use way too much left hand finger pressure into our strings. While different finger pressures need to be employed, depending on the musical context, the general, basic pressure level should be as light as possible. To test this, I often have students play four repetitions of a given note (make it easy- in first position), with the first set of 4 repetitions being at what I call left hand finger pressure '0' (that is, barely in contact with the string). I ask them to add pressure gradually, so that the last four repetitions of the note are at what they consider to be left hand finger pressure level '10' (pressing as hard into the fingerboard as possible). What this exercise usually produces is the reality that we need, on average, to use a left hand finger pressure of only in the 3-5 range to produce a good sound; all too often our baseline pressure level is 6-8. Moreover, higher position playing allows for even lighter left hand finger pressures. Very high up on the e-string, for example, we can use a left hand finger pressure at almost harmonic-lightness of touch and still get a good sound. Think of how much easier high position work can be if our fingers only need to lightly touch the string!
9. Left Hand Finger Pressures, Part 2: Of course, there are times when the music may require us to accentuate a note, either from a dropping action in our fingers from our base knuckles, or via vibrato, that generates a higher left hand finger pressure. This being the reality, it is important to remember that the left finger must remain SPRINGY and ALWAYS rebound out of the string after applying the initial impulse. Lack of coordination, ease, and success in fast left hand passagework (or even slow sections where a continuous vibrato is desired) is often caused by RETAINED left hand finger pressure, where each finger is not allowed to bounce away from the fingerboard after the initial drop. Remember that each note in a fast passage should be practiced in a manner that results in a '0' level of left hand finger pressure by the end of the note! Thus, we can apply force if necessary as long as we RELEASE that force and allow the finger to spring away from the fingerboard, like a trampoline.
10. Elbow: Though so basic it may resemble stating the obvious, it bears mentioning that left elbow fluidity is crucial to shifting accuracy and vibrato comfort. The ability of the elbow to move easily from left to right is key to enabling the hand and fingers to move comfortably to higher positions. But beyond this the left elbow must also act as a 'predictor' of new positions that are to be traveled to. If the hand is going to be traveling from first to 7<sup>th</sup> position, for example, the left elbow needs to be at the 7<sup>th</sup> position location/angle/placement PRIOR TO the shift, if only a millisecond beforehand. Asking the fingers and wrist to travel a great distance on the fingerboard without the guidance and rudder of the elbow is like asking the right wrist and fingers to execute all of our myriad bow strokes without the leverage, support, and assistance of our upper arms/shoulders.

Though not complete, by any stretch of the imagination, the above gives some tips that will enable your students to play and express themselves with more freedom, enjoyment, and confidence. Remember: a student at complete physical ease with their instrument will be a more consistent player. A more consistent player will be a more confident player. And a more confident player will be a happier player!



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# Echoes from Our Orchestras Past

Larry R. Williams

Half a century ago there was a perpetual “Battle of the high school orchestras” in Kansas. The two competitors were the Wichita East High School and the Winfield High School Orchestras. These were full symphonic orchestras that numbered from 85 to 110 players who performed original works from the standard symphony repertoire.

East High, with Kenneth Thompson at the helm, battled for Wichita supremacy with F. Robert Hollowell’s Wichita North Orchestra. North had a good orchestra, but it was never as big and powerful as East. The real challenger for “Kansas Best Orchestra” was the Winfield High School Orchestra directed by Earl Dungan and later Howard Halgedahl.

These orchestras played for MENC conferences, for Kansas State Teacher’s Conventions and many times at KMEA. But it was at State Music Contests every spring that the annual “Battle” took place. The packed hall was waiting to hear both orchestras on the same day. Audiences were much like state tournament crowds, standing room only and very loud in support of their orchestras.

During the 50’s, the Hodges’ and the Williams’ sons were sitting in the Winfield crowd, trying to listen for something wrong when East High performed. When Winfield High took the stage, the East High crowd including the Harrell boys, Jacque Dillon, Jay Decker and Janice Hupp, among many others, listened critically for Winfield miscues. It was a great competition! This orchestra rivalry did not begin or end in the 50’s, but went on for another decade.

There were also good big orchestras many years before. In the twenty preceding years, Wichita had strong orchestras under the batons of Raymond Hunt, Duff Middleton, and Art Harrell. In Winfield, the noted conductor of those days was Paul Painter.

Most of us did not know there was another excellent large symphony orchestra at Wyandotte High School under the direction of R. A. Samuelson. However, the orchestras never met because of the distance factor in those days, and KC area schools had their own competitions. There may also have been other big orchestras in the state during these years, but not of these sizes and abilities. Topeka and Lawrence may have been close.

Which Kansas orchestras are in the “Battle of the Orchestras” today? Is it yours? If not, maybe it can be!

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## 2013 KMEA All-State Orchestra Edited String Excerpts

**Violin and Viola** [www.k-state.edu/music/cooper](http://www.k-state.edu/music/cooper)

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# 26th Annual Kansas ASTA Middle Level Statewide Orchestra

Michael Harbaugh

The Kansas Chapter of the American String Teachers' Association presented the 26<sup>th</sup> annual KASTA Middle Level State-Wide Orchestra on Saturday, April 21, 2012 at 3:00 PM in the Commons Area of the Hutchinson Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Attendance Center. Ninty-One students representing 18 Middle Schools rehearsed during the day concluding with the performance. Dr. Jeremy Starr of Emporia State University served as clinician conductor for this event.

Middle Schools and teachers participating in this event included Beloit Jr. High School, Michael Harbaugh; Hays Felten Middle School, Nathan Mark; Hays Kennedy Middle School, Joan Crull; Hutchinson Middle School 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Center and 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Center, Jay Hawkins; Smoky Valley Middle School, Henry Littich; Lawrence South Middle School, Lori McKinney; Maize Middle School and Maize South Middle School, Dory Jones; Manhattan Eisenhower Middle School and Manhattan Anthony Middle School, Nathan McClendon; McPherson Middle School, Russell Kahle; Salina Lakewood Middle School, Lindsay Modin; Wichita Hadley Middle School, Amanda Swenson; Wichita Brooks Middle School, Marcia Hatfield; Wichita Robinson Middle School, Laura Carpenter and a homeschool student from Stockton.

The orchestra performed "Serenade for Strings" by Leyden, "Barcarolle" by Offenbach arranged by Dackow, and "Wildwood Flower" arranged by Clebanoff.

The KASTA Middle Level Orchestra has met in Hutchinson since 1987 under the inspiration of Bruce Boyd. Michael Harbaugh serves as chair for this event, Jay Hawkins is the local coordinator and Lindsay Modin is a planning committee member.

The 27<sup>th</sup> annual KASTA Middle Level Orchestra is scheduled for Saturday, April 20, 2013. Dr. Wesley DeSpain of Derby Public Schools and Friends University will serve as clinician conductor. The music selections will be "Concerto in D Major (from Clavier Concerto No. 3)" by Bach / Isaac published by Alfred; "On A Hymnsong of Phillip Bliss" by Holsinger published by TRN; "American Landscape" by Newbold published by FJH; and "Symphony No. 2 'Finale' for Full Orchestra" by Tchaikosky arranged by Dackow.

Additional details and the application form are available on the KASTA website year round.



**Kansas State University  
All-State Excerpt Clinic  
for High School  
Violin and Cello Students**

Saturday, September 29

1:30-3:30 p.m.

Cora Cooper, violin

David Littrell, cello

To register and for more information,  
contact Cora Cooper at  
[corac@k-state.edu](mailto:corac@k-state.edu)



# Camp Allegro Highlights

Laura Black

Camp Allegro Wichita, a day camp for students age 4-23, had a very successful summer this past June 2012. This was our first year to include college students as well as students age 4 through high school. The camp is for musicians of all levels, including those who don't even play an instrument yet. We have an advanced orchestra conducted by Dr. Mark Laycock and Professor Jacquelyn Dillon and a beginning orchestra conducted by Professor Jacquelyn Dillon and Quinn Lake. There are also chamber ensembles for strings, winds, percussion, and piano. Additional camp activities include guitar, art, photography, and more. Laura Hammes Black is the Artistic Director and Strings Coordinator of Camp Allegro Wichita and Jeff and Kathy Luttrell are Co-Directors. Nancy Trier-Metzger is the Executive Director and can be reached at [campallegrowichita@gmail.com](mailto:campallegrowichita@gmail.com). This year we also had Hal Grossman, Violin Faculty member of the University of Oklahoma, with us as a guest artist. He worked with college and advanced middle school and high school violinists, as well as giving a masterclass for younger violinists. The camp dates for next summer are June 24-28, 2013, with extended dates for advanced students.



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Give your students a learning experience like never before with the second-annual Joyful Noise Music and Prairie Family Camp presented by Symphony in the Flint Hills and Camp Wood YMCA.

On Saturday, September 29, 2012, members of the Emporia Symphony Orchestra, along with other recording artists and instructors, will conduct music workshops in strings, bluegrass, guitar, brass, percussion, woodwinds, voice and improvisation for all ages and musical abilities. Between music classes, participants can enjoy prairie activities such as nature walks led by Audubon of Kansas and horseback riding in the hills.

Throughout the day, participants may sign up to perform on small stages around camp for additional experience. All participants will perform together at 6 p.m. The finale of the daylong camp features a Twilight Prairie Concert performed by the Emporia Symphony Orchestra with Grammy-award winner Eugene Friesen and conducted by Jeremy Starr.

The cost for Joyful Noise is \$58 a person and includes all of the daylong music workshops, prairie activities, instrument rental, three meals and a T-shirt. The event begins at 8:30 a.m. on September 29 and the public is invited to attend the Twilight Prairie Concert at 7 p.m. for free and can purchase a chuck wagon dinner for \$12. Dinner begins at 5 p.m.

For more information or to register as a musician, visit [www.joyfulnoisecamp.org](http://www.joyfulnoisecamp.org), email [ymca@campwood.org](mailto:ymca@campwood.org) or call 620-273-8641. Arrangements can be made for a weekend stay.

# ***2012 String Romp***

***October 5-7***

**This is the 30<sup>th</sup> year for the annual String Romp held at the Rock Springs 4H Center near Junction City. This camp has educated and excited area music students for almost three decades. Students are challenged with new exciting music, in a camp setting. While making life long music friends, students have many activities such as: horseback riding, talent show, movie night, instrument care, bond fire & s'mores.**

**The camp address is Rt. 1 Box 55, Junction City, KS 66441. Camp telephone numbers are: (785)257-3221 (office) and (785)257-3395 (dinning hall).**

**Total cost for the camp is \$120.00 for students and \$130.00 for adults.**

- **The cost covers all meals, lodging, orchestra sessions, and horseback riding**
- **A deposit is due by Sept. 14 of \$50.00 to hold your spot for students and adults**
- **New camp sweat shirts will be available this year but must be paid with the deposit. They are \$25.00 each.**

**Students must have a sponsoring teacher or parent in attendance at the camp at all times.**

**Top string teachers from all over Kansas will be assisting, performing, and leading mini-sessions on technique and other topics. This is a great opportunity for students to increase their skills, learn new techniques, and make friends state-wide, some of whom they will see throughout their high school years in festivals and clinic groups.**

**Talent Show!!!--- Each year the Saturday Night Talent Show proves to be a highlight. Students - use your talents to come up with some serious dance routines, magic acts, and other performances. Plan now and come prepared to participate.**

**For more information contact Laura Carpenter: [lcarpenter@usd259.net](mailto:lcarpenter@usd259.net)**







## **Baker University Orchestra 2012 Fall Performances**

Sunday, October 7 at 3:30 in McKibbin Recital Hall - BU Chamber String Orchestra

Tuesday, November 13 at 7:30 in Rice Auditorium – BU Symphonic Orchestra and Symphonic Winds

Sunday, December 2 at 4:00 & 7:30 P.M. at First United Methodist Church in Baldwin City – BU choirs, orchestra, and selected chamber ensembles

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### **WSU Symphony Orchestra**

#### **Season Repertoire**

#### **Fall 2012**

Thursday, September 20/Miller Concert Hall

Michael Powell, trombone, tenor trombone, American Brass Quintet

Haydn: Symphony No. 87 in A Major

Eric Ewazen: Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra

Sibelius: Symphony No. 3 in C Major

October 18-21/Miller Concert Hall

WSU Opera

Gilbert and Sullivan: The Pirates of Penzance

Tuesday, October 30/Miller Concert Hall

Fall Pops Concert

Repertoire TBA

Thursday, December 6/Miller Concert Hall

Leonid Shukaev, cello, faculty artist

Mason Bates: White Lies for Lomax

Tchaikovsky: Variations on a Rococo Theme

Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique

## Emporia Symphony Orchestra:

Saturday, September 29, 2012, 7 pm, Camp Wood YMCA in Elmdale, KS  
Twilight Concert featuring Grammy award-winning cellist, Eugene Friesen;  
finale event for the "Joyful Noise: A Music and Prairie Family Camp", [www.joyfulnoisecamp.org](http://www.joyfulnoisecamp.org)

Tuesday, November 6, 2012, 7:30 pm, Albert Taylor Hall in Plum Hall Masterworks concert #1

Sunday, December 2, 2012, 3 pm, Albert Taylor Hall in Plum Hall Joint Christmas concert with ESU/  
community choirs

## Emporia State University Chamber Orchestra:

Friday, October 5, 2012, 7:30 pm, Heath Recital Hall in Beach Hall  
Saturday, November 17, 2012, 7:30 pm, Heath Recital Hall in Beach Hall



## The University of Kansas Symphony Orchestra

September 21, 2012, 7:30pm - School of Music Collage Concert at Lied Center  
Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from West Side Story—excerpt

September 25, 2012, 7:30pm - Concert at Lied Center David Neely, conductor  
Tchaikovsky: Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture  
Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from West Side Story  
Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet Suite No. 2

October 26, 2012, 7:30pm - Halloween Concert at Lied Center: "Tricksters"  
David Neely and Carlos Espinosa, conductors Vince Gnojek, soloist  
Chadwick: 'Hobgoblin' from Symphonic Sketches  
Goldsmith: Suite from the film Poltergeist  
Dvorak: The Noon Witch (Polednice) Op. 108  
J. Williams: Escapade (piece for alto saxophone and orchestra based on  
themes from the motion picture Catch Me If You Can)  
R. Strauss: Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks

November 13, 2012 - Bernstein Festival concert at Helzberg Hall (Scholarship Concert)  
David Neely and Paul Tucker, Conductors

December 12, 2012 -KU Vespers at Lied Center  
Mozart: excerpt from Exultate, jubilate  
Chadwick: Noël from Symphonic Sketches  
Additional repertoire TBA



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**Orchestra**

**2012-2013 Season McCain Auditorium 7:30 p.m.**

David Littrell, conductor

[www.ksu.edu/orchestra](http://www.ksu.edu/orchestra)

**Tuesday, September 11**

Rossini • Overture to *La Cenerentola*  
Mozart • Symphony No. 35 "Haffner"  
Rimsky-Korsakov • *Russian Easter Overture*

**Tuesday, October 16**

Debussy • *Sarabande* • arr. Bryce Craig  
Two Concerto Contest Winners  
Brahms • Symphony No. 2

**Tuesday, November 29**

von Weber • Overture to *Oberon*  
Roy Harris • Symphony No. 3 in One Movement  
Beethoven • "Triple" Concerto •  
Kristin Mortenson, violin; David Littrell, cello,  
Sławomir Dobrzanski, piano;  
Paul Hunt, conductor

**Thursday-Friday-Saturday, March 7-8-9 Opera**

Mozart • *The Marriage of Figaro*

**Tuesday, April 23**

*An Evening of Rodgers & Hammerstein Classics*  
Great Songs from *Oklahoma!* *State Fair*,  
*Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *The*  
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