

CREATING A CLEAR PULSE FOR YOUNG ENSEMBLES
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Accurate rhythmic coordination is as important as proper hand and body posture and intonation. Without a concrete sense of rhythmical coordination, a developing student will be severely disadvantaged in any type of ensemble situation. There are many important skills that need to create a solid sense of rhythmic flow.

1. Count aloud or in one's head.
2. Understand the beat's/main pulse's potential rhythmical subdivisions. Be able to conceptualize the main pulse at any tempo.
3. Consistent subdivision of the main pulse into the smallest unit in the phrase
4. Keep the pulse steady.
5. Know when to stay directly on the beat, or sometimes in front or behind it.
6. Even smooth bow strokes (speed, pressure and length) to calculate and perform these rhythmic impulses without unwanted involuntary movements.
7. Carefully articulate the bow articulation/direction change as to allow interlocking cog like precision with the other players.
8. Maintain clear communication/eye contact with the other players.
9. Rely on a conductor or leader to lead the phrase articulations.

Today's discussion will examine and illustrate some of the fundamental rhythmic and ensemble problems and solutions needed in some of the developing student ensemble repertoire.

I. **BEGINNING CELLO CHOIR PIECES (Suzuki book level 1)**

A. **Coordinating quarter note melodies**

The **basic unit of measure** for most pieces is the quarter note. Children's ensembles are usually composed in very simple 2/4 3/4 or 4/4 meters.

The FRENCH FOLK SONG (Fransk Folk Sang Edition) melody is composed in 3/4 time with the first 3 measures of each 4 measure phrase pulsing out quarter notes and ending with a dotted-half note. The melody of this piece is very basic rhythmically and is accessible for children as young as 4 or 5.

1. Even smooth bows (speed, length and apportionment)
2. Slight articulation on each beat
3. Consistent subdividing of the quarter note into eighth notes

This will keep the pulse clear and enable the student to achieve rhythmic and bowing synchronization.

Problem # 1, "Playing too freely": Elementary level students typically play only approximately what they hear without keeping a strict tempo. This will disrupt the pulse of the piece as the underlying accompaniment figures consist of eighth and quarter note subdivisions that provide a strong unchanging "drum beat". The Solo line players will need to feel this "drumbeat and make sure that their sense of lyricism doesn't sway them away from the rhythmic undercurrent.

The underlying harmony parts (Fransk Folksang Edition) are what make the ensemble of this piece difficult.

1. The bass part subdivides into 1/8 and 1/4 notes in the first measure propelling or delaying the pulse.
2. The middle harmony part consists of 1/2 and 1/4 notes.

Although the two harmony parts are rhythmically separate and don't intertwine with each other with rhythmic intricacy, it is important for them to be steady so that the melody has a controlled tempo to link into when it enters at measure.

Solution: The speed of the second quarter note in the first harmony part actually controls the tempo of the piece. If it is too slow it forces the piece to drag, or rush if it is played too quickly.

Easy doesn't always mean easy: French Folk Song has been the most difficult piece of all to coordinate and was by far the least challenging rhythmically and technically.

B. Coordinating eighth note subdivisions in the melodic lines

The next rhythmic idea a beginning cellist must understand, is how to subdivide 1/4 notes into 1/8 notes and multiply 1/4 notes into dotted 1/4 notes, and play them with rhythmic precision

EXAMPLES:

1. **Minuet No 2 (Bach):** Composed/transcribed for a duet, has a basic 1+2+3+ count. The eight notes pass to and from the melody and harmony line and the rhythmic juxtaposition of these two parts is quite simple. It requires the two parts to carefully listen to the opening 2 measure passage as to connect their eighth note figures together.

Give more length of bow to each eighth note, rather than short staccato/scratchy bow strokes at the frog. It will help keep the eighth note pulse steady and defined and have less of a chance to rush uncontrollably.

2. **Long, Long Ago (T. H. Bayly)** poses a slightly greater challenge for students as it is written for cello quartet. There are four distinct parts that interlock with one another. Each has separate distinct rhythmic/melodic patterns.
 - a. Two “couplets” that depend on a clear eighth note pulse
 - i. Melody and counter melody
 - ii. Variation of the melody and a repeating eight note rhythmic pulse creating a C major pedal.

The most difficult besides counting is to coordinate and watch each others’ bow stroke so that all parts change strictly the beat.

3. **Chorus from “Judas Maccabeus” (Handel)** combines aspects from the last 3 works.
 - a. Two issues:
 - i. The parts move somewhat simultaneously, usually 2 parts will move together and the 3rd will rest or support.
 - ii. The eighth notes interlock with one another and connect forming an elision (one phrase ends and another begins on the same beat), increasing the need for rhythmic security.

Bowing each of these pieces is basically very easy as long as each member uses a legato bow stroke. If the bow arm is stiff and brittle, the basic legato tone and bow articulations will not sound even and not in

synchronization with each other. The bow arm should be tension free and move with circular legato motion. Both pieces offer the beginning student a nice opportunity to play chamber music at an early level.

II. INTERMEDIATE CELLO CHOIR (Suzuki book Level 3-4)

A. Placing the smallest note into the largest note (16th notes)

1. Allegro Moderato

- a. Requires careful execution of bow stroke due
- b. The degree of tightness of ensemble needs to be perfect or the piece will rush uncontrollably and the tightness ensemble will dissolve.
- c. The most successful style of stroke we is a long staccato bow stroke.
- d. The length of bow gives fullness and clarity to the sound and beat and the staccato gives it definition.
- e. The RUSHING difficulty here is not the rushing of the 1/8 notes initially, it's the rushing of the 1/4 notes which causes the eight notes to rush.

To counteract the rushing, pull back the running 1/4 notes and be slightly **behind** the beat in the introduction. The controlled placement of the quarter notes in the first 2 measures will control the tendency to rush in this piece

Overall, the technical demands of these works are minimal, but a stable tempo is dependant on the steadiness and concentration of each member regardless of the technical demand. Communication and constant listening of each member's part is of utmost importance. Without it, it will fall apart in no time.

2. Concerto for 4 Cellos (Telemann)

- a. This piece presents an even greater difficulty
 - i. Note values are shorter and need to be crisper, tighter and in synch with each other like cogs in a clock.
 - ii. String crossings have to be coordinated with a particular bow speed and pressure into the string in order to speak clearly.

The first finger on the bow hand needs to negotiate careful contact with the bow into the string so that the 1/16th notes will maintain evenness and clarity. This is best done in the middle of the bow

III. ADVANCED CELLO CHOIR (Suzuki book 4 and beyond)

A. Complex rhythm, subdivisions and ensemble coordination

1. Prelude to a Deum

Ensemble issues:

- a. One part has dotted 1/4 notes plus 1/8 notes while others change notes on the quarter note and/or have running 1/8 note passages with rests interspersed.
- b. Coordinate pulse and tone clarity by pulling the ENTIRE BOW length for the 1/4 notes and fill the beat with as much sound, then rearticulating with a LONG STACCATO sound for the next note.
- c. When each player's concept of the quarter note timing and bow length is identical, the other subdivisions regardless of how "congested" the ensemble texture may be, will usually be in control.

2. Legend (Tchaikovsky)

- a. Main difficulty is communicating at phrase beginnings and endings.
- b. The rhythms in this piece are simple but because there are so many breaks between sections, the ensemble issue at hand is communication and timing with the leader of the group so that entrances are together

3. Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring (J. S. Bach)

- a. Duplet against triplet 1/8 notes
- b. Dotted 1/8 + 1/16th against triplets.
- c. Count the appropriate rests and enter confidently
- d. Solo part entrance.
 - i. Count 8 measures of triplets and enter correctly

4. Yesterday (John Lennon)

- a. Greatest difficulty was counting syncopations.

Ironically, these 2 works are by far the most rhythmically difficult of the works discussed, yet were more easily coordinated than French Folk Song.