

Phil Holland's

DIVERTIMENTO DUETS

VOLUME

2

TEACHER'S NOTES



Phil Holland Publications

INTRODUCTION

I hope these teacher's notes will be useful and helpful for any teacher intending to use Divertimento Duets as a violin teaching manual. A parent may also find these notes useful as they help to give an insight into the learning process.

The pieces introduce very gradually new aspects of violin technique and musicianship and each successive volume will build on the technique learned in the previous volume.

The choice of not including teacher's notes in the book, choosing instead to offer them as a free download, is twofold; firstly I wanted the book to be visually engaging and something that a child or even an adult can love looking at, so I did not want too much text cluttering up the page and detracting from the illustrations. Secondly, if you ever lose the notes or they become dog-eared over time, you may come to the site and re-download the notes and MP3s as many times as you like

Divertimento Duets Volume 2 is a gradual and natural progression from Volume 1. It helps to consolidate what the student has learned in Volume 1 and gradually adds new aspects of learning the violin.

The core values discussed in Volume 1 are still applicable to Volume 2 so if you haven't already downloaded the Teacher's Notes for Volume 1 and you would like to do so, please go ahead. You can download these notes as many times as you need them; if you want to back them up onto your various devices, if you lose them, or if you just want a spare copy.

I feel that it is very important to help the student master each step gradually and not be in a hurry to move on.

A stable left hand which leads to excellent intonation, a good fluid bow arm and the ability to listen to and understand the music that they are playing are all things that lead to a good technique that will stand the student in good stead for years to come.

It can take years to un-do technique that has not been learned properly, so encouraging the student to really master these basic principles at the start is very important.

Volume 2 is all in first position. It consolidates the first finger pattern 1 2 3 (second and third fingers close, as in G, D and A major 1 octave scales) and introduces the second finger pattern 1 2 3 (first and second fingers close). It introduces new rhythms in the form of dotted notes and simple syncopation. In volume 1 we have already encountered 4/4, 3/4 and also 6/8 time. In Volume 2, I have introduced 5/4 time. I have also introduced simple open string double stopping and some dynamics.

ANNOTATIONS IN THE BOOK

Any annotations in the book are minimal.

The book is designed to be visually appealing to the eye of the beginner (more often than not this is a child, but beginners of all ages will appreciate the clean, uncluttered appearance of the book with its engaging illustrations). For this reason the teacher's notes are separate.

At the bottom of the pieces I have indicated where something is introduced for the very first time (for example: double stopping, dotted notes etc) and occasionally what the general focus of the piece is, to make it easier for the teacher to see at a glance.

The MP3 recordings are available to download and these may help the student at home to remember how the piece should sound; helping for example to reinforce specific rhythms that they may be struggling with and helping to consolidate a sense of intonation and general musicianship.

INDICATED BOWINGS

Unless otherwise specified, bowings are to be played as they come naturally, starting on a down bow at the beginning of each piece.

I have indicated down bows only where they are necessary after a retake.

DYNAMICS

I have also added a few very simple dynamics. I feel that introducing dynamics too early can lead to the student forgetting all the important principles of an excellent bow arm.

A beginner will often automatically feel that playing loudly equates to putting pressure on the bow and will inevitably forget about fluidity of movement.

Inversely, they will feel that playing very quietly must involve tickling the bow across the strings, yet again forgetting about the fluidity of their bow arm. This is the reason why I have not introduced it until now. I have only added dynamics in pieces where I feel the dynamic adds something intrinsically to the piece. Otherwise, I have left it blank for the teacher's discretion.

I would still advise the student to learn the piece initially without dynamics, adding them when the piece is flowing in a confident manner with the correct technique, rhythm and phrasing and always reminding them that whatever dynamic they are attempting, the bow should always flow and undue pressure should be avoided. Understanding how to adjust the natural weight of the arm with correct posture and fluid movements should help a student in approaching dynamics without compromising a correct bowing technique.

BREATHING / GIVING THE LEAD

By now, the student will have learned how to follow your lead when starting a piece of music and this could be the point at which you pass the baton and teach the student to give the lead to you. With young children and beginner violinists of all ages it is paramount to encourage them to breathe and remind them when they forget. In this way, everything they play has fluidity and comes alive from the very first note.

Especially in a group situation, breathing is fundamentally important. A group that inhales and exhales together on the upbeat and first note will play as one and have instant musical cohesion. I ask my pupils to remember to do this at home when practising as well.

Many beginners when practising at home will just launch into a piece with no thought of the speed or feel of the piece and this has a detrimental effect on how they play it.

Some of my younger students like to line up their soft toys and pretend they are giving them the lead to join them in playing.

One of my most used words during lessons is probably “breathe”.

I feel it cannot be stressed enough and that as teachers we should pass this on to our students.

Music is not alive unless it is breathing.

SOME BASIC GUIDELINES

As in Volume 1, I feel that emphasis on the physical aspect of playing the instrument is paramount in the development of a good technique. As such, if a pupil is still struggling with reading the music and needs the occasional bit of help by writing in a fingering, I feel that this helps them relax and focus on making music. Anything that helps them focus on listening to themselves and others and developing their technique is a positive thing in my opinion. It promotes greater fluidity of expression and better musicianship as well as greater attention to the technical aspects of playing.

I have not put the fingerings in myself as not all students need them written in. It can also be a useful exercise at the beginning to ask students to put the fingerings in themselves when they need them (in pencil, so that when the fingering is no longer needed they can rub it out). That way they are looking at the note on the stave and working out which finger or open string the note corresponds to. This will help them in developing their music-reading abilities. If the fingerings are already put there for them, they will have no need to look at the note and their reading abilities will not progress.

Generally I like to teach by breaking a piece down into musical phrases; for the purposes of these pieces 4-bar phrases are the norm. If a student is struggling with a particular section, it can be broken down further by extrapolating a single bar, finger pattern or rhythm.

Again, as in Volume 1, I never give an indication of specific speed for each piece. I prefer to give an indication of the spirit in which the piece should be approached. Speed alone will not make a piece of music sound lively; indeed it can have the opposite effect, making it sound simply messy. I feel it is important to stress to your students how the piece should make them feel. They should then attempt to play it with style and feeling at whatever speed allows them to do this correctly from a technical standpoint.

Once again, as I mentioned in Volume 1, the student should learn both parts of each duet. They are specifically written to be of roughly equal difficulty in order that you may do this and often each part poses a different challenge. I feel that learning both parts helps them to understand and listen to the music better, rather than just focusing on their own part. It also means that the student has 46 pieces to learn, rather than 23.

Each student develops at their own speed, so I do not feel that there should be any pressure to achieve goals within a strict timescale. In Volume 2, as in Volume 1, the teacher should use their own discretion as to when a student is ready to use the full bow (as opposed to the upper half of the bow only) and when a student is ready to use the 4th finger when appropriate (as opposed to the open string) within the context of a piece. I have specifically not given suggestions as to where a 4th finger will be appropriate as I feel this should be approached as and when the teacher feels it is the right time for each individual student.

MP3 RECORDINGS OF THESE PIECES

As you have downloaded these teacher's notes, you have probably also downloaded the MP3 recordings of the pieces in this book.

I have tried to play these in a way that helps the student understand the spirit and style in which they should be played. They should not worry initially about the tempo of the pieces. Slow and steady is the ground rule when learning a piece to start with to make sure that technique and intonation are not being sacrificed for the sake of speed. However, once the student is confident with each piece, the recording gives an idea of the tempo that they can aim for. I have avoided vibrato and used mainly open strings to let the student hear that with good intonation and bow work, they can make any piece sound lovely and that these are attainable goals.

The recordings are intended to help the beginner violinist learn the pieces in the books. I would suggest to a student that they listen to them from time to time just for fun, especially if they are sitting and resting, without seeing it as a chore or part of their practice. In this way they are subliminally letting the music enter into their awareness, gradually reinforcing phrasing and intonation while hopefully enjoying the process. If they feel like it they can also listen with the book open in front of them so that they can follow the part they are learning. Above all, listening to these pieces should be a relaxing, pleasurable experience that helps the student get closer to the violin and its sound.

I would suggest that it is best to listen to the MP3 recordings of the Divertimento Duets with headphones in order to properly hear the stereo effect which helps to differentiate violin 1 from violin 2.

They are not really intended as "play-along" recordings although if the student has learned their part well and wants to try playing along, they can certainly have a go.

SWINGING ON THE SWINGS

I have opened with this piece. It introduces new challenges (dotted notes and open string double-stopping) so I have kept the notes fairly simple using the first finger pattern.

Another challenge of this piece is the fact that the two parts do not always follow the same rhythm so the student should feel comfortable and confident playing one part before attempting it as a duet. By breaking the piece down for practise purposes into smaller sections (single bars/four bar sections) this should be fairly straightforward. As regards the second part in particular, the two bars of open string double-stopping can be approached immediately or not according to the discretion of the teacher.

In a group situation you may prefer to assign each child to the top or bottom note and not introduce the double-stop straight away. I would definitely ask the student to play it initially using only the bottom note (in this case the A string) in order to feel the flow of the piece. I would then extrapolate the concept of the double-stop and practise that separately until they feel confident. Many students when attempting a double-stop for the first time tend to subconsciously put more pressure on the bow and use a less fluid movement.

Playing double-stops is all about finding the right balance and height of the bow arm. If the balance is correct then they should be able to draw their bow in exactly the same way that they do for every other note, paying attention to a fluid movement and applying no undue pressure. I tell my students not to worry if in the context of playing the whole piece, the double-stop is not perfect to start with as long as the fluidity of movement is not interrupted. They will gradually get more comfortable with the double-stop throughout the book.

In fact, fluidity of movement is key for this piece. It should have a gentle swinging feel throughout.

TIN SOLDIERS

Introducing triplets and (in the second part) also introducing the second finger pattern 12 3. I advise encouraging a strong confident movement in the upper half of the bow; a lightly 'detache' stroke for the crotchets and an energetic triplet will give the piece the right feel. If the student is struggling with the concept of the triplet rhythmically, it can be useful to use a 3 syllable word. I find myself thinking of Ernst Toch's "Geographical Fugue" where he uses place names for triplets such as Malaga and Canada, but any word that works for you and your students is good.

WALKING IN MY WELLIES

Here we encounter again the second finger pattern (this time in the first part). For this reason I have kept the piece fairly simple so that the student may concentrate on the new position for the second finger and really listen carefully to their intonation. Similar to Brontosaurus Walk in Volume 1 we are concentrating also on steady retakes. If the retakes in Volume 1 were performed slowly using only the upper half of the bow, here I would suggest progressing to whole bows using a large, fluid, circular movement and reminding the student to breathe which helps with fluidity of movement.

THE UNICORN

Here I have introduced accidentals for the first time which means the student must keep their wits about them to remember when the 2nd finger is close to the 1st and when it is close to the 3rd. Another aspect of this piece is introducing (if you feel the student is ready) what I call "spanning the fifth"; the first finger passing from the D to the A string without lifting it up and re-placing it. This can make the intonation slightly difficult until they have got the knack of it. Some beginners will unwittingly try to do this by shifting their left elbow to the left, which is not only unnecessary but leads to poor hand and finger positioning.

ARRAN

Here we focus principally on slurring, using whole bows and concentrating on a fluid, straight movement of the bow at all times. When playing this as a duet, the student may struggle rhythmically initially as the two parts often move at different times.

WALKING THE DOG

Here, instead of re-taking the bow, we practise leaving a rest between bow strokes without re-taking. The most important thing here is to allow each note to finish naturally. Often a beginner will stop the note mechanically giving it a strangled sound. Gentle fluid movements are important. Here we are using a combination of the 1st and 2nd finger patterns. I would encourage playing a steady G major scale in 2 octaves before starting the piece.

PADDLING IN PUDDLES

The first part of this piece challenges the coordination between right and left hand to achieve a clean sound in the fast passages. I suggest playing it at a steady pace to start with and gradually building on the speed of the piece when the student is ready. I like to stress to my students that it is always better to play (and practise) slightly more slowly with precision and a lively feel; rushing before they are ready will just result in a scrappy sound and they will often find themselves tripping up, making mistakes and having to stop and start all over again.

This is the first piece where I have chosen to introduce dynamics. The nature of the piece lends itself perfectly to this new development. I have chosen however to offer a limited dynamic shift from forte to mezzoforte rather than anything more extreme; just introducing the student very gently to the idea of modifying their dynamics. I have also introduced a hairpin crescendo.

LOTUS FLOWERS

The pentatonic nature of this piece gives the student's ear something new and challenging and the intervals between the 2 parts (lots of 4ths and 5ths) will make them listen to their intonation very carefully indeed. I have introduced dynamics here as well and also a slight rallentando at the end of the piece.

AILSA

This is a fairly simple piece but the second part will have to watch out for rhythmic patterns, sometimes short/long (crotchet/minim) and sometimes long/short (minim/crotchet).

SNAKES AND LADDERS

The first and second parts should try and pass the scale patterns to each other seamlessly, so that it sounds as if only one violin is playing the rising and falling scale patterns. It can be a useful exercise to ask the student to only play the quavers so that they can really listen and understand how the scale is being passed between the parts. In this way they can work consciously towards making it sound as smooth as possible.

As with Paddling in Puddles a clean coordinated sound is fundamental, so steady practise, gradually increasing the speed over time, should be encouraged.

HIDE AND SEEK

We are gradually increasing speed and the ability to coordinate cleanly between right and left hand. However, slow steady practise should always be encouraged in order to build up the speed gradually with precision and a clean sound. The tortoise and the hare is a good analogy in these cases.

Once again, dynamics have been suggested.

PASS THE PARCEL

Each of the parts sounds like a melody in its own right and played together they sound quite intricate, the dotted rhythms dovetailing between the 2 parts throughout the piece, so it is very important that the student learns to listen carefully and feel the rhythm and flow of the piece.

The dotted rhythms have been deliberately written as separate bows. It may be a challenge for some students to focus on playing the rhythmic pattern with separate bows while avoiding angular or jerky movements.

CAT'S CRADLE

Once again there is a lot of dovetailing and passing of rhythms between the parts.

The student should be becoming more and more aware of how the parts in each duet complement and complete each other. This heightens their awareness of both their own playing and that of their duo partner. Dynamics have been suggested and I have also included a hairpin crescendo.

A SUMMER'S DANCE

Open string double-stopping is the most important new aspect of this piece. Both parts alternate in taking the melody and the accompaniment. Open string double-stopping is, I feel, a very important thing to learn early on.

In the very first piece (see Swinging on the Swings) I introduced the concept briefly. The most important thing when teaching this technique is to remind the student not to put more pressure on the bow and to continue using a fluid movement. I would definitely get them to practise the double-stopped open strings separately from the rest of the piece until they are confident, initially choosing any two strings and repeating, focusing on the bow arm, before they try the piece as written; a strong, confident, fluid motion to be encouraged at all times.

Once again, as the nature of the piece lends itself so perfectly, dynamics have been used, although I would advise learning the piece first without focusing on the dynamics, especially considering the added difficulty of the double-stopping.

THE BLACKBIRD

Both parts are extremely melodic; this uses both the slurred and separate bowings associated with the typical crotchet/quaver rhythmic pattern of 6/8 time. The student should be encouraged to feel the gentle swing of this time signature.

DIVERTIMENTO JIG

As the title suggests, this is a jig and should feel light and dance-like. I would encourage the student to try this in the middle of the bow encouraging the feel of a loose wrist.

A SECRET GARDEN

This is a waltz in E minor and has a melancholy feel; long fluid bow strokes and not too fast. In the second part, bars 18-21 it is a good idea to remind the student to keep the 3rd and 1st fingers down throughout this passage; not only does this make for a cleaner sound and better intonation, it also helps the left hand to maintain a correct position. At the end of bar 16 the second part should listen to and watch the first part very carefully to avoid anticipating the down beat of bar 17.

SYNCOPATION SALLY

Introducing syncopation, this is a firm favourite amongst my students.

The second part keeps the 4/4 rhythm going with a firm, confident bow stroke. The first part has the syncopated rhythmic pattern.

The trick to making this sound lively is not the speed at which it is played but rather the liveliness of the bowing and its rhythmic precision. The two players should feel the syncopated rhythm bouncing off the steady crotchets of the second part.

THE CAROUSEL

A lot of arpeggio patterns are used here, especially in the second part.

With a lot of string crossing (especially in the second part) the student should remember to use a very fluid bow stroke to avoid sounding jerky and disjointed.

The whole piece should aim to sound very elegant and graceful.

SKIPPING

(See footnotes for A Summer's Dance)

There are a lot of similarities with A Summer's Dance, but here the open string double-stopping is in the second part only. The 2 parts meet up on the second page for 8 bars and then the second part takes over the double-stopping once again until the end of the piece.

PENTANGLE

I have introduced 5/4 time using simple notes (in the first part) and simple open string double-stopping (in the second part). I feel it is a good idea to introduce beginners to more interesting and complex time signatures, as long as the notes are simple enough.

I like to get them to clap with me before attempting the piece so that they get comfortable with the 123 12 rhythm, feeling the piece in 2 uneven beats rather than five single beats.

The second part emphasises the uneven 2-beat bars, while the first part plays all 5 beats in each bar. In this way, the first part helps the second part count while the second part helps the first part feel the 2-beat rhythm of 5/4 time.

THE ELVES' DANCE

This is in B Minor but playful, in 6/8 time. I always try to encourage the student to feel the natural swinging rhythm of 6/8 time.

PIRATE'S GOLD

The final piece in Volume 2, this introduces an upbeat.

There are various difficulties in this piece; the slurring should be carefully executed (sometimes the 2 quavers are slurred and sometimes they are not).

Intonation could be tricky where spanning the fifth occurs and the speed should be built on gradually not attempted straight away, to ensure a clean, uncluttered sound.

When performing the repeat, the first violin part finishes on an up bow and then has another up bow to start again. The Up/Up bow stroke should be extrapolated and practised until it is confident before trying to play it within the context of the piece.

