

# Images and Imagination

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Welcome to “Images and Imagination”. As the name suggests, this is a series of worksheets concerned with concepts and perceptions.

It is for young violinists and viola pupils being taught in groups, and covers eight aspects of musicianship and string technique.

Our ability to learn some later skill is so often affected by the way we were originally introduced to a topic. For example, within weeks of starting, my beginners’ classes would be bowing D and A half-way harmonics to accompany my playing, say “Lavender’s Blue”. The *resonance* of the violin is emphasised, the freedom of both left and right arms is encouraged; but beyond that comes the more general perception that the whole fingerboard is there to be used, not just the bottom few inches.

Of the eight topics selected here, only two are primarily technical, **Spiccato** and **Across the String Slurring** (Paul Rolland’s *buoyant elbow*). Each has three short pieces to be introduced individually over whatever period of time the teacher judges appropriate.

There are three **Rhythm Catch** sheets, again to be introduced over a period, perhaps even over a year or two. My pupils loved these sheets, and as a regular five-minute warm-up to the lesson they were hard to beat. My own pupils would typically have been learning for about a year when rhythm sheet one was first introduced, which is also when I would introduce the three **Creative Writing** sheets, leading up to their second Christmas.

The two sheets called **Feeling the Harmony** are a development of the rhythm sheets, and in my own scheme of things came rather later. Paul Rolland did try to introduce the idea earlier, if I remember correctly; but I found year three suitable for most children.

One of the beauties of the Rhythm and Harmony sheets is that they do allow the teacher to stretch the abler pupils in the group, while also catering for the slower pupils, within the same piece.

The **Pentatonic Exploration** sheet offers a way of introducing both the pentatonic scale and also improvisation, while finally **Positions** and the **Treble/Alto Switch** pack continue to develop the perception of reading first introduced in the creative writing sheets.

All my young pupils were introduced to alto clef in the second year, not to encourage them to become violists (though some did, happily) but to widen further their concept of notation, which in the vast majority of cases then meant they coped much more easily with the reading when position work was introduced.

There are sixteen pages in all, grouped under eight headings. All the pages have been well and truly tested over many years, though not in today’s glorious colour! They first appeared under the title “Images and Imagination” for an ESTA conference in London in July 1986, and in their present layout for an in-service course in 1993.

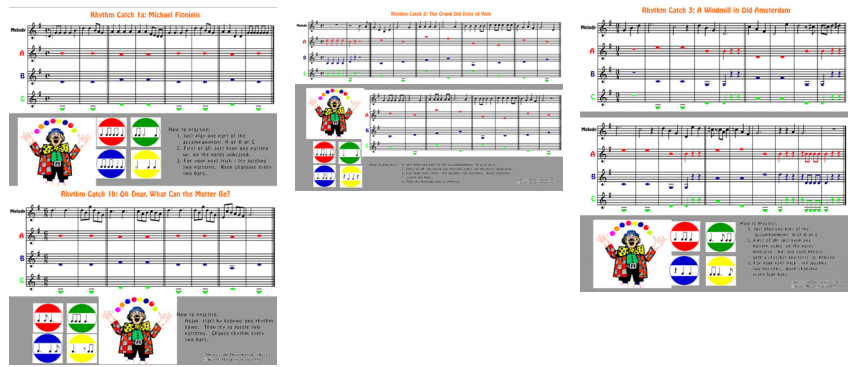
I hope you find something here of interest, and that it will spark your own new ideas on how to put across our message. These sheets themselves still need an imaginative teacher to bring them to life - but if you are reading this, that is hardly a problem!

The teaching notes are grouped under eight headings:

Rhythm Catch p.3  
Spiccato - Tap! p.3  
Slurs p.4  
Positions p.4  
Harmony p.5  
Creative Writing p.5  
Pentatonic p.6  
Treble-Alto p.6

Although a version of each page does accompany the notes, these are not intended for printing.

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## Rhythm Catch Sheets, 1 - 3

Obviously rhythm work will not be limited to these three sheets; but they can provide valuable supplementary material. They are fun to perform, and are a good way to get a lesson started, or bring it to a stimulating close. They also have a secondary value in that good tuning is encouraged through the resonance of the chords, while the repeated notes encourage a free bowing action.

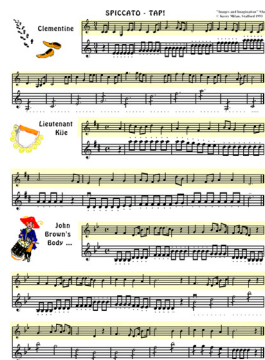
*Keep it simple at the beginning* - from “Michael Finnigin” choose just one rhythm for the whole class, and divide into three parts, A B and C, adding the teacher’s melody line only later.

Do this with different rhythms, then allocate different rhythms to the different parts.

Step three is then to try juggling two rhythms, changing every two bars, at the double bar lines.

Sheet two comes some time later. Note that the individual parts have their own technical point to focus upon - part A for example encouraging what I call “walking fingers”, 3 to 1 to 3 to 1 etc. without using the second finger. For teachers who have already introduced the half-way harmonics, part 3 could also provide useful revision for some pupils.

Sheet three, which again may be introduced some good time later, varies the format slightly, with the switch occurring every four bars, and with two beats’ rest to gather one’s thoughts! As with all these sheets, the experience of the previous lessons paves the way, and there is real fun - and benefit - to be had from playing and at the same time thinking ahead of the rhythm to come.



## Spiccato - Tap! - one sheet

These are the three short exercises with which I introduced spiccato, spread out over a couple of terms during the third year (or fourth, with some groups).

Spiccato is fairly easy on one string; but string crossings do tend to disturb the regularity of the stroke, and also there is quite a change in sensation between the E and G string arm levels.

The first accompaniment, to *Clementine*, again encourages the “walking fingers” action (the pianist’s legato touch) which is also a useful violin habit on occasion. High fliers can later be encouraged to try the melody itself spiccato.

The steady “jingle” accompaniment to *Lieutenant Kije* looks innocuous; but it usually proves a good test of synchronisation.

The spiccato arpeggios for *John Brown’s Body* emphasise the changing arm level again, and invoking an image of the regular drum tap does help to keep the playing steady. As with the other two pieces, pupils can divide to play both parts, providing further variety to the lesson.

## SLURS - the buoyant elbow! - two sheets

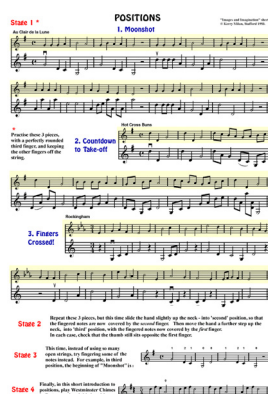


Paul Rolland died in 1978, his book written (with Martha Mutscher) in 1974, *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*, making a profound impression not just on me but upon a whole generation of string teachers.

The main emphasis of his research programme was its offer of a shift in emphasis from ‘the teaching of notes and tunes’ to the teaching of basic concepts and ideas. One of these concepts was the ‘*buoyant elbow*’ and there are three exercises here, with accompanying melody lines, to focus on this arm action. Not that these studies alone will convey anything of his message; they are helpful supplementary practice material to be used over a period of a year or more.

The first piece needs to be well prepared, starting with plenty of open string practice, then just picking out individual sections to work on. When the second piece is first introduced, have the children play each bar two or three times, perhaps for several weeks. The third piece is even more demanding, and the sound is likely to be more jerky because of course the bow actually does ‘jump’ at the string crossings, rather than ‘re-cycling’ itself as in the clockwise action.

It may not be worth pointing out to the children, but in a slurred arpeggio across the four strings the bow length is physically some six centimetres more when played down bow, rather than up. No wonder pupils tend to run out of bow when starting scales with an up stroke!



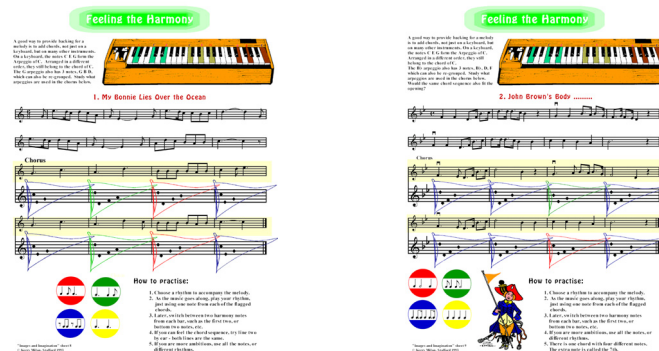
## Positions - one sheet.

Although I introduced the half-way harmonics very early on (within weeks), actual position work was delayed quite a lot later than Rolland originally envisaged, and then with a special four-page pack of which this Positions sheet was the first page. The main concept though is fully covered here, and there is no shortage of practice material for 2nd and 3rd positions.

The sheet explains itself - stage one though must be perfectly in tune, with just the 3rd finger covering the stopped notes, the teacher playing the actual melodies.

I have used this approach with thousands of children, and I do not recall ever having a problem getting them to move up their hands one step, so that the notes are now covered by the second finger - or later by the first finger. The focus is on the tuning, not the finger.

Stage three takes them one small but logical step further on, replacing some of the open notes with stopped ones - after that it is just a matter of sufficient practice!



## Feeling the Harmony - two sheets.

These two sheets are an attempt to introduce the idea of chord structure, and provide a framework for some basic improvisation within a group situation.

They build upon the children's earlier experience with the **rhythm catch** sheets. Some pupils will quite happily just pick out the bottom, or middle, note and a basic rhythm; but if you are lucky one or two pupils will surprise you. Encourage them.

**Creative Music Writing: 1**

Try out this tune, starting on the open D string.

The notes in use will be .

Now try playing on one of the other strings.

If you play on the A string, what notes will be needed? Play the tune on the other string too. Maybe you know the song.

Now make up your own tune (about 16 notes), using the A string or the D string. You may use and notes.

Write in this circle (note name)

Now play the piece on your instrument, and give it a name

☆ ☆

This time, make up a tune on one of the other strings. (Use notes too, if you wish.)

Write in this circle (note name)

This piece is called .

Now play the music on your instrument.

"Thank you for playing!" "Good!"

**Creative Music Writing: 2**

Can you work out this well-known tune (perhaps starting on the open D string) before playing it on your instrument.

The notes in use will be .

Now try playing on one of the other strings.

If you start on open G, what other notes will be needed? Play the tune on the other string too. Any problems?

Now make up your own tune (about 16 notes), choosing the set of five notes you like best for the music.

You may use and notes.

Write in this circle (note name)

This new piece is called .

Now learn to play the music on your instrument.

☆ ☆

This time, make up a tune using a different set of five notes.

Write in this circle (note name)

The title of this piece is .

Now make sure you can play what you have written.

"Thank you for playing!" "Good!"

**Creative Music Writing: 3**

Can you work out this famous tune (starting on the open D or open A string), before playing it. Because of the high note, we need an extra line.

I underneath the notes below, write the names of the other notes used in this piece. If the bottom note is A, then do the same starting on D.

.

Now make up your own tune (about 16 notes), choosing the set of notes you like best for the music.

Write in this circle (note name)

...and now practice your composition.

Finally, can you recognise this well-known tune that starts all five lines for its notes?

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Practice this card, and try drawing some treble clefs!

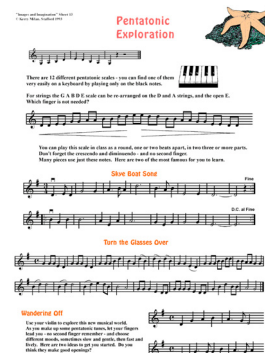
"Thank you for playing!" "Good!"

## Creative Music Writing - 3 sheets.

Unlike the other sets, these three sheets are intended to be introduced one after the other. They have two main purposes, one to stimulate the children's interest in creating their own musical sound patterns, the other (unstated) to encourage the idea of notational relationships, rather than the notion that one note or finger is for ever associated with one particular line or space.

At its simplest, this idea is encouraged by having the pupils extend their composition by repeating it on higher or lower strings. I agree that to do justice to these lessons, with nine or ten children in a class life for the teacher can be very hectic!

I do not think that it matters that some children will produce patterns mainly for their visual shape. They can still provide useful talking points - and the teacher can always ask permission to make changes, perhaps to get nearer to what the child intended!



## Pentatonic Exploration - one sheet

This sheet serves two purposes, one providing an introduction to the pentatonic scale, the other in encouraging improvisation.

It is fairly self-explanatory, the 'scale' in canon a good starting point.

To encourage improvisation (within the limits of our scale) have the pupils extemporise an answering phrase to one of the teacher's, matching or contrasting its mood etc., and then passing on to another pupil, with the teacher finally bringing the piece to a close. The two opening phrases printed at the foot of the page are from *Daisies are our Silver* and *Auld Lang Syne*.



## Treble/Alto Switchback - 3 sheets

As mentioned in the introduction, all my violin pupils were introduced to the alto clef fairly early on, during their second year of playing. The treble/alto switch sheets are a natural progression from the thinking behind the Creative Music Writing sheets, and they continue to develop the perception of the different staves as being, as indeed they are, just small sections of a larger overall picture.

This method of introducing the alto clef gives pupils a better understanding of the whole concept of music notation, and helps dispel any misconceptions that middle line always equals first finger etc - a valuable perception later on when position work is introduced.

Many youngsters will know treble and descant recorder fingerings, young horn players can cope with several transpositions, and young pianists manage to read two clefs simultaneously, so think positively!

The opening scale exactly mirrors the logo's sweep, and the following pieces have been carefully chosen to encourage a mental comparison of their two halves. Most children will grasp the logic without difficulty; but when they do have a mental block it is well worth persevering, if only because I always found that the same children would also find it difficult to come to terms with the different fingerings required for position work.

Unlike the creative writing sheets, these are not intended to be used one straight after the other, but spread out over a period of a year or more. As with a similar tenor/bass set, they were first introduced in 1985 through the STRAD magazine, and had reached as far as Australia, long before the world wide web was even a dream to most of us. My intention then was not to produce a mass of specialist viola players; but if the world does have a few more dedicated violists as a result of this initiative I shall be very happy.