

Teachers' Handbook - Introduction

If you are reading this introduction and you have a copy of the "Teachers' Handbook" then it is likely that you are teaching:

- Individual students on violin, viola, cello or double bass
- Small beginner groups - violin, viola, cello, double bass or mixed
- Large string classes - up to 30 students on violin, viola, cello, double bass or mixed
- Small or large beginner string ensembles

What makes the "Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method" unique and motivational is that it will work very well in all of the above teaching situations and will especially work with mixed groups, classes and even ensembles with all types of stringed instruments. You may notice that there is a lack of pieces on 'E' string in the violin book and 'C' string in the viola and cello books but this has been done on purpose so that the keys and pieces are all compatible in the class teaching and ensemble situations - in levels 2, 3 & 4 of this teaching method, all the strings will be included and keys such as Eb, Bb and associated minor keys will be taught.

It is the author's experience that other teaching methods concentrate only on keys such as D major, A major etc and avoid flat keys but this creates problems for the strings student later when playing in school orchestras etc and restricts the choice of repertoire. Other teaching methods also concentrate on certain Baroque and early Classical composers. This music is very good quality repertoire for beginning musicians but limits the students' early musical experiences. The repertoire in the "Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method" includes music in the styles of:

- Country & Western Music
- Blues
- Jazz
- Music of Other Cultures

as well as Baroque, Classical and Romantic music. The most important thing that a teacher can do for a beginning student is to pass on an excitement about all styles of music and have the student realise that he/she can not only perform music in all of these styles but to listen to great music across a range of styles and cultures and then to create their own music through 'organising sounds.'

Already, I have some very positive feedback from teachers who have tried this method in all of the teaching situations listed above and these teachers have even realised the possibilities of many of the pieces in their beginning ensembles. I have also received some constructive comments and I appreciate this very much, as it will help me to better plan the following levels. One point I would like to make about the "Fiddlin' Phil Philosophy" and about this "Teachers' Handbook" is the flexibility that it provides to your existing teaching methods - Here is a constructive comment that made me think about what to include in this book: " I do not agree that you should start the students with the bow immediately."

Straight away, I searched through the violin book to see where I had made this suggestion - then it occurred to me that I have not in fact specified when to start the use of the bow at all. This is for a very good reason - you (The people reading & using this method) are all very fine teachers or else you would not be searching for innovative teaching methods and new repertoire. You all have different ideas on how to start students to use the bow, when to change position, when and how to teach vibrato etc.

So I am not specifying to you as teachers when and how you teach these things. This "Teachers' Handbook" has a smorgasbord of suggested lesson plans, theory worksheets (which you may photocopy and give to students - or even use as an OHP) and a CD which as well as the backing tracks also has a selection of original strings music across a range of genres and styles to include in your lessons. You do not need to teach these lessons in sequence or even use all of the ideas. I have included 2 different approaches to teaching the fingers and notes on each string - you do not need to use one or the other - or you can use both ideas if you like.

The "Teachers' Handbook" along with the "Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method" provides teaching and learning experiences in:

- Performing
- Listening to and Understanding Music in a range of Genres & Styles
- Organising Sounds - or Creating Music

As mentioned at the start of this introduction; this teaching method is useful for teaching individual students, small groups and even large classes, but I have used this method and a few other teachers I know have used this method, across their instrumental programs and also in the school's class music teaching program.

Many schools and teachers do not connect what goes on in the music classroom with their instrumental and ensembles programs but to ignore this connection is to deny the students a very exciting range of music making. We so often just focus on teaching technical skills as 'string teachers' but you should not limit the musical creativity of your students to only playing the right notes with the right technique - though this is important as well.

Lastly - enjoy your teaching to the maximum, so that your students may feel and experience the excitement, not just of string playing, but "Music Making."

Phil Rooke (Fiddlin' Phil)

The suggested lesson plans on the following pages are reproduced as a 'Word' document on the CD ROM so that you can modify the plans for your own instrumental or class teaching program - the format matches many syllabus requirements in Australian and International Music Syllabi. For class music teachers, this can in fact form the basis of your teaching program.

The theory worksheets in this book can be photocopied for class use and are also on the CD ROM as pdf files so that you can print and use them with the suggested teaching program and listening examples on the audio CD

When you have a copy of the "Teachers' Handbook" this licences you to make OHP's of the performance pieces in any of the Student Workbooks. This is particularly helpful if you are teaching large classes of 30 violins for example, as 30 students can much more easily read the music on an OHP than having 15 or more music stands in your classroom - the Student Workbooks are not reproduced on the CD ROM for copyright reasons.

Suggested Lesson Plans for the Instrumental & Class Music Teacher

Some more features of the "Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method" - you will note that most pieces in the student book have 2 or 3 different parts. For example - in the 'Sonata in A', as well as the simple open 'A' string part, the melody is notated below. If you are teaching a large class or even a small group, you may encounter a student with previous experience or learns more quickly than they can proceed to play the melody part whilst the others play the open strings.

Likewise, pieces such as "Eine Kleine Nachtmusic", "Autumn" or "Windy Day Concerto" feature ensemble and open string parts, so that if you are teaching a large class and some students struggle with the melody part, they can still play the open strings part and feel a sense of achievement - no child should feel they have failed. In some class music syllabi, you can list this in your teaching program as "extension and modification" to cater to children with various levels of learning ability.

If you are teaching a large class or classes of mixed instruments or even many small groups, then you can use a clever mix of melody, ensemble & open string parts to make a string ensemble and you will have a ready supply of ensemble repertoire.

Teaching programs in many syllabi can be concept based or context based - this means that each lesson can be based on the acquisition of skills and the understanding of musical concepts such as rhythm, pitch and texture (concept based) through the learning experiences of "Performance, Composition and Listening" OR each lesson can be based around a topic or context such as "Music of Other Cultures" or "Classical Music" or "Jazz & Blues" and then teach the concepts and skills of music again through the learning experiences of: "Performing, Composing & Listening" but based around common topics or genres of music.

This might all sound a bit complex but basically, a music program can be concept based or topic/context based.

The teaching program that is set out here is concept/skills based so that it is easily adaptable to either an instrumental program and/or a class music program, though because it is also presented in electronic format, you can change the topics and pieces and group them together - eg "Autumn" and "Pachelbel's Canon" can go together as a unit on Baroque Music or La Bamba and Cotton Eyed Joe can go together in the topic of "Music of Other Cultures" - or you might be happy to leave this teaching program roughly in its current format and just change the Heading: "The Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method" to your own school name/music department.

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| Context | | The Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method Lesson 1 - Open Strings and Note Values | | |
|--|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Learning Experiences | Performing | Learn the open strings of the instrument and perform the Open Strings exercise on Page 10 - preferably pizzicato (track 2 on the CD) - It is suggested that they pizzicato in rest position. Make certain that students watch each note on the OHP or book as they play. Learn the note values for Minim, Crotchet and pairs of Quavers. Pizzicato the Open String Part for 'Sonata on A' | | |
| | Organizing Sounds | Students can improvise on 'A' string using Minim, Crotchet and Quavers to the backing for 'Sonata on A' | | |
| | Listening | Track 9 on the Backing CD "Beginner String Blues" See if they can list the instruments and pick out the open string part as well as the melody. | | |
| Concepts/ Elements of Music | | Duration | Pitch | Structure |
| | | Recognition and use of Minim, Crotchet and pairs of quavers | Learning to recognize and play the open strings | Listening - 12 bar blues Performing - Introduction to |
| Add Board of Studies Outcomes or your syllabus outcomes/frameworks in this row | | | | |
| Performance & Listening Repertoire | | "Sonata on 'A'" Beginner String Blues | Introduction to Open Strings - Track 2 on the CD | Beginner String Blues |
| Reference: Track 9 on CD, pages 10 & 11 in student books | | | | |

| Context | | The Fiddlin' Phil Strings Method Lesson 2 - Open Strings and Note Values - cont. | | |
|---|-------------------|--|--|---|
| Learning Experiences | Performing | Revise "Introduction to Strings" Play the open strings to the backing track at the beginning of each lesson Revise Sonata on 'A' Learn "Gigue on 'G'" - this is in 6/8 but it works well if you just play the backing track and teach students long and short notes Learn "Waltz on 'D'" - this teaches 3/4 time as well as reinforcing note values. NOTE - THE TEACHER MAY STILL SPECIFY PIZZICATO | | |
| | Organizing Sounds | Improvise on 'D' string in 3/4 time using the note values of crotchet, minim and pairs of quavers. Worksheet on Time Signatures and "Note Values 1" | | |
| | Listening | Track # 45 on the listening CD - "Si Bheag Si Moore" - a Celtic melody in 3/4 time - identify instruments and conduct the piece in 3/4 - could also add some percussion such as Tambour and improvise a rhythmic ostinato | | |
| Concepts/ Elements of Music | | Duration | Pitch | Texture |
| | | Time signatures - 2/4, 3/4 & 4/4 Note values - crotchet, minim & quavers | Revise the open strings | Listening - "Si Bheag, Si Moore" list the instruments in a graphic score. |
| Add Board of Studies Outcomes or your syllabus outcomes/frameworks in this row | | | | |
| Performance & Listening Repertoire | | Sonata on 'A' Gigue on 'G' Waltz on 'D' Si Bheag, Si Moore | Introduction to Open Strings - Track 2 on the CD | "Si Bheag, Si Moore" - Celtic Melody in 3/4 time |
| Reference: Track 45 on Listening CD, Pages 10 - 13 in Student Books, Worksheets - pages 19 - 23 | | | | |