

# Preface

Dear Quartet Beginners,

Chamber music is great! You will soon realize how nice it is to play together with others. It is not all about who plays the best, but each person taking responsibility for the whole and contributing to its success.

Even though you may certainly have heard a lot from your teachers or from experienced chamber musicians, I would like to give you some tips in the form of a concise overview, for it is important that you also practice without guidance from time to time. You will be able to express your musical ideas even more persuasively if they come from you yourselves.

- **Musical Conception:** Develop it together, trace the character of your pieces, discover climaxes, think about tempo and articulation. Inform yourselves also about the composers and their periods, for the interpretation of a piece especially depends upon that. While the music of Romanticism demands an intense vibrato, large crescendi and decrescendi, high registers, glissandi and rubati, you should not play the music of Bach and Mozart and their respective contemporaries that way.
- With a few exceptions there are no **fingerings** in the music. Its choice depends primarily on a player's technical capabilities and taste, as well as on the period in which a music piece was composed (see the section *Musical Conception*). Criteria for good fingering are in particular musical and tonal considerations, in addition to playability. The building of musical phrases, the preference for special timbres in certain places, the use or avoidance of glissandi and wrong accentuation is, for example, closely related to the choice of fingering. If these fingerings are good, they help enormously in mastering a piece. So make sure that you take the time to settle them first at home before the first rehearsal. Great importance is attached in particular to the **string-playing position**. Use all positions equally, including the half and the second and preferably shift at semitones. Avoid several position shifts in quick succession and shifting during rapid notes if other fingering options are available.  
Both changes in position as well as strings in the case of tied notes can quickly lead to poor accentuation. Here you have to evaluate. Therefore, it is recommended that you try different fingerings for several days in order to find the best variant.
- **Good Bowings** are just as important as good fingerings; in ensemble playing, they should also be as consistent as possible. That's why they are precisely delineated in this volume. Equally important is an appropriate articulation for each piece. Think about what the articulation points might mean, for often there are several options.
- **Practice:** Always come to rehearsals well prepared and take technical exercises seriously at home as well as in rehearsals. They are prerequisite for harmoniously making music

together. You can also go much deeper into the music when you are no longer struggling with technical difficulties.

Practice often in various ensemble groupings, in order to improve articulation, bow position, tone, dynamics, and coordinated ensemble playing as well as intonation.

Play through your pieces at the outset only very seldom, otherwise you'll risk automating mistakes. Stop immediately if your playing is not clean or your ensemble is not playing together, and practice the passage. Single out difficult passages, keep practicing them slowly, and gradually increase the tempo, using a metronome. Practicing in different rhythms sometimes makes sense as well (for example, playing as dotted a series of even eighth notes). Of course, once you have better control of the difficult spots, you should often play through your pieces completely. You will have then practiced many technical details, now it's all about the musical shaping. To play a piece through also needs to be learned, for it requires attention and concentration from the first note to the last.

- **Singing:** Your voice is the most natural instrument, and by singing you can learn a lot from yourselves. So, sing your part often in your vocal range at home and listen to yourselves carefully. Pay attention to breathing, melody phrasing and emphases. Try to "sing" on your instrument as well.
- **Listening:** Train yourselves above all to listen carefully, each of you to yourself, while playing, for how can you improve anything that you do not even notice? Check that what you are playing matches your idea, especially focus on the sound and intonation. Also listen carefully when you have rests, because you can certainly learn a lot from your ensemble partners. One may be particularly good at bowing, another may play very rhythmically or musically. Let them know when you like something; everyone likes to be praised. Criticize without offending, but also learn to deal with criticism. Close your eyes sometimes while listening, because you will hear better if you are not distracted by external impressions. Go together to concerts featuring well-known string quartets. You can really learn much from them by watching and listening.
- **Commitment:** Inspire your audience with your music; make music with commitment and daring. To do this you must exaggerate like actors in the theater: On stage, these speak much more clearly than in everyday life, otherwise the audience is not engaged. How much more does that apply to the music, wanting to captivate even without words!
- **Stay in touch with each other:** Keep the music stands low and close together! Do not bury yourselves in your own parts, but listen, see, and feel what is going on around you. Try to feel together and agree on where you want to breathe together. Imagine blending into becoming a single instrument.
- **Dynamics:** Clarify which part leads in which passage, and fine-tune it accordingly. Even if all have the same dynamics, the melody part(s) should come to the fore, while mere accompaniment should step back. Counterpunctual parts are

also often very important, for they make a piece more interesting and multifaceted.

Composers in the Baroque period, incidentally, seldom added dynamic markings. This information not only became more frequent in the course of music history, but also increasingly more detailed. Since included in *Four Strings* are pieces from several centuries, you can easily keep track of this.

- **Tempo:** Metronome markings are given only for pieces with frequent tempo changes. The tempo question is part of music analysis so that once you've grasped the character of a music piece you'll quickly find its suitable tempo. This also depends a bit on what happens in the individual parts. At too fast a tempo, the details are hard to play nicely; at too slow a tempo, however, the music lines easily tend to "fall apart." Be sure to keep to the tempo agreed upon, which is not always easy. In pieces with tempo changes, it is important that the lead player accurately imagine the new tempo before cuing it.
- **Ensemble warm-ups:** Athletes need a warm-up before training. You should also warm up at the start of each rehearsal for about 10 minutes, not, in fact, with your current pieces, but with **easy warm-up pieces**, such as the first pieces in this volume and/or with a scale. Practice them with alternating practice emphases. You can then call on the acquired skills in your pieces.

### Practice Emphases

- Everyone should learn to give and take **on cues** and to start jointly and with great precision following the cue motion. One of you gives the signal by making an upward motion with his/her instrument while inhaling and a downward motion while exhaling. This is where the others are to come in. Only if the player-in-charge succeeds in accurately transmitting his idea of tempo to the cue motion can the others pick up this tempo and start precisely. It is important for all of you to breathe together.
- Practice also playing the **endings**, letting the last notes fade away, and holding the tension before bringing your instruments down. Even the final tone is part of the music!
- Practice **controlling the bow approaches** to the string in order to train precise starts.
- Good **intonation** is one of the most important prerequisites for any ensemble playing. Play your warm-up piece softly, slowly, and without vibrato. Stop on impure chords and correct them.

- **Bow technique:** In order to achieve uniformity in bow divisions, kinds of bowing and in the sound, it is useful to practice scales in all possible variations. Besides the types of bowing and a good bow division, the focus should be on practicing different bowing speeds. These arise upon variously playing longer notes of different length that are not tied, often leading to wrong accentuation, above all, when the shorter tone must be unaccented. Compensate the faster bowing speed by playing the shorter tones more lightly and closer to the fingerboard.
- There is relatively little in the **supplemental original literature** that is about the same level of difficulty as the pieces in this volume. I recommend that you only approach the original pieces listed below when you are on the last of the volume's pieces. Above all, do not underestimate Mozart. Even if the minuets are not difficult, you need a subtlety and ease in bowing, to be achieved only when you can play the score "in your sleep!"

### Leopold Jansa (1795–1875)

*Drei leichte Streichquartette* [Three Easy String Quartets]  
op. 51 no. 1

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Minuets from the quartets in G major K. 80, C major K. 170, E flat major K. 171, G major K. 156

### Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

*Andante festivo*, version for string quartet (1922)

### Francesco Maria Veracini (1690–1768)

*Fugue for string quartet*

Aachen, Summer 2019

Eva-Maria Neumann

### Please note:

The tips in the partbooks are intended specifically for the respective part, whereas the text *On the Pieces* (also available for download on [www.breitkopf.com](http://www.breitkopf.com)), contains general musical clues for the individual pieces. Tips and clues complement each other and should receive an equal amount of attention of both teachers and players.