

Here is a list of exercises and ideas I shared during my Play Day, “*Strengthening your Inner Musician with Creative Practice*”. In this time of musical isolation, it’s particularly important for us to take responsibility and actively seek out inspiration in the practice room. I shared exercises in the hopes of expanding the participants’ musical “toolboxes”.

Stretches:

I always begin my practice session with stretches. This not only warms up your muscles for playing, but most importantly, it assists in preventing injury. Hold all stretches for at least 30 seconds and then repeat on the opposing side.

1. Arm stretch: Start standing or sitting tall. Extend your one hand in front of you. Lift your fingertips up so that your palm is facing ahead. Pull your extended fingertips towards you using your opposite hand.
2. Neck stretch: Start standing, and place one hand on your lower back. Take the other hand and place that hand on the opposite side of your head. Gently pull your head toward your shoulder, until you feel a stretch.
3. Shoulder stretch: Start standing. Grab one arm just above your elbow with the other hand. Bring your upper arm in towards your chest.

Warmups:

We warmed up by playing long tones on open strings. I added the element of having the participants do various arm motions with their left hands as we pushed and pulled our bows. Often, I see students tackle a “one-handed” problem without making the connection that you will eventually be using both hands when you play your pieces on the gamba. It doesn’t help to play beautiful open strings with your right hand if your left hand is in a tight fist while you play! Keep both hands relaxed!

Exercises:

“Noodles and trills”:

I do this often, either by playing pieces I am learning in trills (i.e. trilling from note to note), or even simply trilling scales or simple melodies. It can be helpful to do this right after the bow hand warmup (above), if you add it *with the intention* of maintaining a fluid bow stroke as you add the left hand.

“Bow aim”:

We did various exercises that focused on consistently aiming the tip of the bow to hit the same spot as we did various bow strokes. You can even hold your left hand out (palm facing inwards), and “aim” your bow at one specific spot on your hand.

“Rhythm Exercise with Metronome”:

I suggested working with the metronome in a variety of settings to work on steadying your inner pulse. For example, play the same piece three times, with the metronome going at:

1. 120 to the quarter note
2. 60 to the half note
3. 30 to the whole note

“Bow setting”:

We worked on consistently setting the bow on various parts of the bow (tip, middle and frog). Work on going up and down, from the lowest string to the highest string, then back down, working on gracefully setting your bow on the string without it bouncing. Eventually, work your way up to alternating strings and setting points.