



# WRITING EDUCATIONAL MUSIC FOR STRINGS

*A How-To Guide for Composers*

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Developed as part of the Norman Burgess Fund, and  
the New Music For Young Musicians Project

Coordinated by the Canadian Music Centre, with the  
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

By Matthew Fava

My first formal music lessons were devoted to the violin. I had an experience that is likely familiar to many student musicians: repertoire defined largely by Baroque and early-Classical composers, and any encounter with a living composer usually meant an arrangement of pop-music. My unstated impression was that the repertoire for violin, and by extension the instrument itself, must have peaked centuries before I was born. How wrong I was! It was simply a matter of looking beyond the standard repertoire to find living composers making exciting and fresh music for the violin and other instruments.

It has been a joy for me to administer the New Music For Young Musicians Project (NMFYM), and the Norman Burgess Fund, over these past two years because it directly challenges the historical and structural barriers that have limited the penetration of contemporary and Canadian works into music education. For several years, the project has been a catalyst for many composers, teachers, and students to work together towards this common goal, thus increasing the relevance and impact of contemporary composition.

From its inception in 2000, NMFYM has been a multifaceted program. Apart from commissioning new works, the project was a place for educators, teachers, and composers to converge and collaborate in realizing new music. This became a professional development opportunity for the composer who gained a thorough grasp of the technique and technical levels for a given instrument or ensemble. As a result, each composer was able to write a piece

that balanced their artistic objectives, while crafting an effective pedagogical resource. It is no surprise that many composers thrived in this environment!

Similarly, the educators who consulted on the pieces rarely had the opportunity to work closely with a living composer and impart their experiences during the development of a piece. In exchange, the educators developed a keen awareness of the artistic intentions of a composer, and by extension new insights into incorporating contemporary repertoire into their studio or classroom.

Most importantly, the students we have worked with through NMFYM have been enthused by the project. Meeting a living composer, and playing (and in certain cases premiering) their music makes that music instantly relevant – it begins to reflect their reality, and connects them with a living art form. Fundamentally, we want to validate new creative voices in music, and it is my greatest hope that students will feel empowered to seek out new music, and explore their own acts of creation.

We have accomplished a great deal through the NMFYM project, and the Norman Burgess Fund, but there is always more to do! This how-to guide is the first-next-step, as we disseminate the lessons and experiences shared during the project to more composers and educators. In particular we want composers to benefit from these lessons, and we hope the guide will stimulate more educational works.

Inside this guide, several educators who have collaborated on Norman Burgess Fund commissioned pieces offer summaries of the various requirements that a composer should consider when writing an educational piece for a particular string instrument, or for string orchestra. What appeals to a young student? How can a piece support a teacher in developing specific techniques? When can you introduce more complex structural elements? These are some of the questions we seek to answer.

There have been a number of teachers and educators who have been champions of new music, and Canadian music in particular; by supporting you the composer, we hope to persuade a great many more of the artistic merit and pedagogical benefits of this music, and thus perpetuate these activities.



# COMPOSING EDUCATIONAL MUSIC: RESEARCH UPDATE

By Bernie W. Andrews

In the early stages of my career when I was heavily involved in teaching and administering music programs, I was often frustrated by the lack of available Canadian repertoire for school ensembles. During my years as a member and vice-chair of the Ontario Regional Council of the Canadian Music Centre (CMC), I became aware of the efforts of the organization to promote Canadian music in education across a very large country. For example, guidelists of Canadian music appropriate for young musicians were produced under the auspices of the John Adaskin Project under the direction of Professor Pat Shand of the University of Toronto, composers created new music for schools in *Creating Music in the Classroom*, teaching resources were disseminated in the *Composter Project*, and student compositions were critiqued by professional composers in *Composer in Electronic Residence*.

It was brought to my attention on several occasions that many composers were unfamiliar with the parameters of educational music. Composers are trained to compose at ever-increasing levels of complexity and seldom have the opportunity to write for young musicians. Indeed, in studies of programs in faculties of music across Ontario which I conducted with Glen Carruthers, Dean of the Faculty of Music at Wilfrid Laurier University, we found that composers are not trained to compose for educational purposes; moreover, there is very limited Canadian repertoire studied and performed in post-secondary institutions. Further, there is limited Canadian repertoire taught in schools; instead, American film music and Western-European transcriptions for concert band and vocal ensembles are more commonly used. These two critical issues – composers' lack of training in educational music and limited Canadian repertoire in education – prompted me to collaborate with CMC staff to apply for funds for commissioning educational music, while also conducting research tracking the experience of participating composers.

Commencing in 2000, several commissioning programs were initiated for CMC composers. Initially, the Canada Council in collaboration with provincial arts agencies commissioned 98 new

educational works as part of the first incarnation of the New Music For Young Musicians (NMFYM) Project. The research component focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the commissioning program. In studies with Ontario-based composers involved in NMFYM, I found that composers employ specific compositional techniques to reinforce different types of music learning, and prior experiences teaching young people are important for creating educational music appropriate for those young people. The adoption of a flexible form allows a composer to adapt more easily to students' needs, and blending atonal and tonal idioms challenges students and retains their attention. Rehearsing new works on-site in classrooms and studios enables composers to effectively assess students' technical proficiency and ensure an appropriate interpretation of a new work. Compositional techniques, such as short pulsating rhythms to refine motor responses and equality of parts to maintain interest, can impact positively on students' musical skill development.

The Norman Burgess Memorial Fund built on the work of NMFYM and began commissioning new string works for educational purposes commencing in 2005. Commissioning activity was expanded in 2007-2008 with support from the Ontario Arts Foundation with funds from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture. At this same time, the Ottawa Catholic Board also commissioned 8 new wind works, adopting a similar model to the NMFYM project.

Throughout this activity, the research component, entitled *New Sounds of Learning: Composing for Young Musicians*, focused on examining the parameters of educational music, and it was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). In this study, I found that the commissions enabled composers to create new music that was suitable for the Canadian context, and broaden their compositional skills. Among the composers, there was a concern about the poor musical quality and limited pedagogical value of much educational music. They also expressed concern about limited amounts of Canadian repertoire and the importance of on-site contact with students when composing for them. None of them had any compositional training in composing for young musicians. For those composing string works, the key factors were the students' abilities, the pedagogical dimension, and musical quality. They pursued an educational commission to raise

students' awareness of contemporary musical techniques and to create new music in areas where there is limited repertoire. The key factors for those composing for winds were technical proficiency, musical challenge, and enjoyment. They emphasized the importance of moderating complexity and creating music appropriate to the students' needs. The research team also discovered that there is limited agreement by music publishers on the levels of difficulty of instrumental ensemble pieces that are commercially available. Consequently, a Music Complexity Chart (MC<sup>2</sup>) was developed to identify the characteristics of each level and of the grades within them.

In 2010, with the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation the CMC commissioned another 15 compositions for young musicians, and the research component, entitled Sound Connections: Composing Educational Music, has focused on the relationship of compositional techniques to musical skill development. With additional commissioning activity in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board we have observed the creation of more than 150 new Canadian works for young musicians since 2000 – an incredible achievement! I am excited about the current research projects, and expect that significant findings will result that will assist composers to create educational music more effectively, and increase Canadian repertoire for school ensembles and private studio instruction.

## A UNIQUE SPARK: NORMAN BURGESS AND THE NMFYM PROJECT

By Joan E. Barrett

When Norman passed away in 2004, friends and colleagues began to consider various ways to commemorate his life and celebrate his passion for music.

Whatever his role, Norman Burgess worked to find the unique spark in each person and help them cultivate and develop their talent. That cultivation required mentorship, guidance, an interactive community receptive to new voices, and spaces for risk taking and experimentation - Norman loved his work at the CMC because the composer community in this country possesses these qualities and occupies these spaces. The CMC became one of several organizations that Norman devoted his time to as a board member, and he found ways to implement collaborative programs that could advance the goals of the CMC while achieving that underlying personal goal of his.

The New Music For young Musicians project, which we celebrate in this guide, continues Norman's mission by bringing together composers and music teachers in order to create new music particularly for instruments and various advancement levels where there is little Canadian repertoire. Of course, the culminating goal is to have composers interact with students and, through the newly commissioned pieces, inspire and engage student players.

Norman had a long standing personal and professional investment in the string family of instruments. This provided the impetus for our focus on commissioning string repertoire through the Norman Burgess Fund, which we have paired with the NMFYM project in order to continue Norman's mission. Over nearly a decade of activity, a diverse range of educational groups have become involved: elementary and high school teachers, private music teachers, community youth orchestras, and specialized schools such as Suzuki programs. Creativity knows no geographical limits, and in keeping with Norman's life journey – beginning with his birthplace on a farm in Northern Saskatchewan, to the halls of Indiana University music school, and the larger cities of Calgary and Toronto – this project is spreading to small centers and large.

As a violin instructor myself, I often point out that music teachers, like composers, can get immensely busy in their own sphere. It can be isolating and frustrating. I have been pleased to get to know more composers and their works as I follow this project. This growing community fits with the mentoring and sharing that supports individual development for students and professionals.

Many instrumental teachers plan a sequence of materials and repertoire that they use with their students. Canadian contemporary music is often absent from this sequence, although this is changing in part due to this project. There are many stages between raw beginner and polished player. Composers are not always familiar with the nuances involved in those various stages, particularly if they are not well versed with a given instrument. This project allows the composer to learn a given instrument in greater depth and for the teacher to ask for help in incorporating music that they need to enhance their curriculum and fit the idiosyncrasies of the instrument. Furthermore, those teachers and their students will have first-hand experience with contemporary repertoire which acts as a launching place to explore and promote new music.

As a violin teacher I constantly have that in mind as I develop young players. With limited time it is frustrating to not have contemporary, Canadian music that is developmentally appropriate and that considers a student's ability, and then contributes to their musical and technical growth. The NYFYM project is growing the body of work that will accomplish that.

As a short anecdote, last year I finished a long day of teaching feeling particularly energized and enthused. I'm an experienced teacher and in love with my work but I asked myself, what was different that day?

Upon reflection I realized that coincidentally I had taught two very different lessons to violin students both working on Christien Ledroit's *Wandering the Threshold of Delirium*, the first piece commissioned by the Norman Burgess Fund. I was also the consulting educator on Ledroit's commission. On that energizing day, one of the students was a teen and the other an adult music teacher working with the Suzuki method. The teen had originally been new to the style and a bit leery, yet was now truly excited by the piece and looking forward to playing it in an upcoming competition. The Suzuki teacher was passionate about contemporary works and was

shortly to perform *Wandering* for a mixed group of adults and students. Both had brought their own perspective on the work and I was energized by the co-creative process as we shaped this fresh work to performance standards.

String music has a tradition that goes back centuries. By immersing ourselves only in that history, students and teachers sometime lose touch with the excitement, freedom and satisfaction of creating their own personal path. We can be pioneers, engaging our ears, hearts and minds into a new soundscape.

# WRITING FOR VIOLIN STUDENTS

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By Daphne Hughes and  
Paule Barsalou



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here are two issues that need to be addressed with regard to providing appropriate, interesting and inspiring compositions for students: we need to create the desire in students to study and perform contemporary Canadian music while assisting teachers in responding to this desire. We need to provide information for composers regarding technical and musical levels of students so that their compositions are challenging enough to be interesting, but reasonably accessible so as to avoid undue frustration.

## Creating the desire

Most young students, even at the beginning of their instrumental study, have internalized a great deal of Baroque, Classical and Romantic music for several years by listening to recordings, concerts, and more advanced student performances but have had considerably fewer opportunities to hear contemporary music in a similar, natural way. Providing easily accessible recordings of 20th and 21st century compositions – both at the elementary and advanced level - for their instruments will mean that the new sounds and rhythms will interest and inspire without intimidating. New music will become a natural part of their experience.

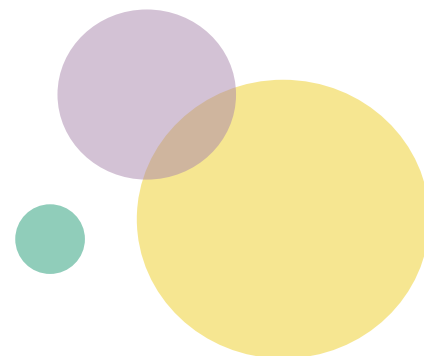
The commissioning of such recordings by the CMC would be a long-term benefit for Canadian composers, teachers and students and an enormous contribution to the entire musical community. At the moment, having the CMCs Centrestreams feature available online through the CMC website is a valuable resource. Centrestreams allows a student, and their teacher, to acquaint themselves with an archived performance of a given piece. Apart from having regular encounters with 20th and 21st century composition, the listening resource can complement a student's engagement with, and study of a new piece.

## COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Christien Ledroit

*Christien Ledroit was the first composer commissioned through the Norman Burgess Fund, and he developed his piece for violin with violinist Joan*

Participating in the New Music For Young Musicians project, and working so closely with a performer/educator, was like an author working with an editor – they take the raw work and help to finish it into a polished piece. It was incredible, and I wish I could do it with every piece I write. This has an immediate impact on how I approach composing, because I realize how much an outside perspective (namely an editor/collaborator) can show me things I would have never noticed about my own creations, and help to realize my original vision and shape it into something more coherent and polished. I would happily participate in the project again, and the experience has inspired me to pursue similar opportunities – I started working with an elementary school band in the fall of 2013 to compose a new piece for them and I will be working with them throughout the entire project.







## The openness of the young to new sounds

The recognition of the role of learning by ear as a pedagogical technique by Suzuki Method teachers, and, increasingly, by so-called “traditional” teachers, has enhanced music teaching over the past few decades. It should be noted that learning by ear is not “rote learning” (mere imitation of an external model) but refers to the internalization of sounds by repetitive listening that allows the students to “listen” to an internalized model of the music they are learning. This often happens in conjunction with the use of a visual model (the written score), especially as students become more advanced.

With this in mind it would be very useful to encourage publishers to provide recordings along with the publication of new compositions. Indeed, there are publishers who provide audio samples for pieces in their catalogue, but as a practice this can be more commonplace.

Young students do not have assumptions about traditional harmonies or rhythms but are refreshingly open to and excited by new ideas, especially if they have heard them before being confronted by the complexity of written symbols. Things like syncopation, off-beats, unexpected accents, non-traditional time signatures, new harmonies, and so on, become easy and natural when they are heard repetitively over time and internalized as part of a total musical experience.

While students exhibit this positive disposition towards new sounds, it is important to limit the number of new skills introduced in each piece. Composers should keep in mind as they are developing educational pieces that as new skills are introduced they need to be used many times until they become a natural, automatic part of the student’s playing. §



## Technical and musical information for a variety of playing levels

The information contained in the Teacher’s Manual for *The Encore Series for Violin & Piano* is a very helpful beginning for this task. The following rubric expands on that material, adding some suggestions that become possible if the ideas presented above (under “Creating the Desire”) are introduced. Skills listed here are cumulative, with each level adding to the skills of the preceding level.

\*The rubric does not account for advanced level players (Suzuki method Vol. 6 and beyond, and Royal Conservatory of Music Grade 5 and beyond). There are no specific restrictions for students at the advanced level.

### NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR VIOLIN

*Wandering the Threshold of Delirium* for solo violin with optional electroacoustics, Christien Ledroit

[Click here to view the score and hear a recording](#)

*Watershed* for violin duo, Alex Eddington

[Click here for catalogue information](#)

# VIOLIN

## Beginning Level

## Elementary Level

## Intermediate Level (A)

## Intermediate Level (B)

(Suzuki Method Vol. 1 up to Suzuki's Etude; RCM most pieces in Introductory Album)

(Suzuki Method Vol.1 complete, Vol. 2 up to Brahms Waltz; RCM Grade 2)

(Suzuki Method Vol. 1-3 complete; Vol. 4 up to Vivaldi a-minor concerto; RCM Grade 2 and 3)

(Suzuki Method Vol. 1-5; RCM Grade 3, 4 and some 5)

### Finger Patterns

A,B,C#,D,E on the A-string and same patterns on the other 3 strings (E,F#,G#,A,B on E-string; D,E,F#,G,A on D-string; G,A,B,C,D on G-string; for violists C,D,E,F,G on C-string)

Random sliding up and down fingerboard (on all strings)

Add C $\flat$  and D $\sharp$  to A-string pattern, and the equivalent on other strings (G $\flat$  and A $\sharp$  on E-string, F $\flat$  and G $\sharp$  on D-string, B $\flat$  and C $\sharp$  on G-string, for violists E $\flat$  and F $\sharp$  on C-string)

All 1st position notes, including, e.g. B $\flat$  and E $\flat$  on the A-string and the equivalent on other strings (F $\flat$  and B $\flat$  on E-string, E $\flat$  or D $\sharp$  and A $\flat$  on D-string, A $\flat$  or G $\sharp$  and D $\flat$  on G-string;

For violists C $\sharp$  or D $\flat$  and G $\flat$  on C-string)

### Note Values

Whole- (but not at a very slow tempo), half-, quarter-, eighth-, sixteenth- (at least 2 repeated on the same pitch)

Add some dotted rhythms; some groups of slurred 16ths

16th-notes with pitch changes, both slurred and separate bows; trills; mordents, etc. simple and compound time

### Double Stops

Mainly with one open string

With both notes fingered; double stops may be played in position, but avoid shifting from one double stop to another

### Bow Technique

Détaché and staccato bow-strokes using fairly small amounts of bow are best for the very early beginner. As skill develops more legato playing and increased amount of bow can be used as well as stopped and smooth slurs.

Add 2- and 4-note slurs; lower half brush stroke with a small lift; accents

Sul tasto, ponticello

### Simple Time Signatures

5/4, 4/4, 3/4 2/4, 4/2, 3/2, 2/2

### Rhythms

Much more variety and complexity can be introduced even at the earliest stages of instruction than tends to be available in many current compositions as long as an aural model (not just a visual written score) is presented to young beginning students.

### Dynamics

Terraced dynamics piano and forte, avoiding cresc./dim. with their necessary gradual changes in bow speed and weight

Crescendo and diminuendo

### Positions

Add some shifting to and from 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions and playing extended sections in these positions

# WRITING FOR VIOLA STUDENTS

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By Catherine Jillings





## Who are you writing for?

**V**ery few parents decide to go looking for a viola teacher for a small child as is common with violin or piano. Students come to the viola by a number of paths. In composing student music for the viola, it is useful to keep these pathways in mind.

Some children do start with viola, some of them in Suzuki viola classes. I have heard from one teacher who finds that children are reluctant to switch and learn a new clef, and so he plays the viola for all potential students to see if they'd start on viola instead of violin; some do. That way they grow up on the clef.

Many professional violists and teachers learned first on the violin and switched as teenagers or university music majors – this might happen because they liked it, they found the violin uncomfortably small for large hands and limbs, or someone needed violists for quartets or orchestras. Many player/teachers feel that it is more pedagogically sound to start on the violin to develop a sense of ease in playing first, before adding the challenges of the greater weight of the viola, the thicker strings and also the greater length of the viola, which places the upper limbs in a more extended position. Some violin teachers believe that all their students should be able to play the viola and read the alto clef to gain an understanding of the inner workings of a piece of music and be versatile, and more employable. In this case, students may devote a semester or two (perhaps entirely) to the viola. Some of these students fall in love with the C string and the middle voice and stay with the viola.

The third group includes students who start on viola in a school string class. They may go on to take private lessons to study seriously, take lessons as an elective in whatever course they are pursuing at university, or come back to it much later as an adult.

These three types of students will have different needs. Most of the second group will skip the beginner and intermediate repertoire. The first group will follow the same general progression of skills as the violinists (outlined in the violin article), but there will be differences. Very young violists have the problem of finding a good sounding small instrument, as the C string tends to sound weak. When the instrument is larger for the body, extended finger patterns and double stops will have to be more

gradually introduced to avoid strain, bad habits and frustration. Fingered octaves and tenths for example are featured in virtuoso violin writing, and there are only a small number of viola virtuosos who choose that repertoire.

The third group of students is unlike the others in a couple of ways. They start out without the advantage of one-to-one teaching, and no matter how skilled the classroom teacher, are unlikely to be as well set up technically. There may be more problems of physical tension and inefficient motion. Also, these students will often be playing inner voices designed to be unimportant and unchallenging. School orchestra materials may be in keys that suit the wind players, so the strings are given accidentals outside of those used in carefully graded Suzuki or conservatory systems, which can lead to haphazard ways of finding notes (string players need to have a strong sense of a basic hand position.) These players rarely get melodies to play, but they are generally very good at keeping up with an ensemble and reading the page markings.

Most repertoire originally for the viola was written in the 20th and 21st century because it was rarely used as a solo instrument until that time. At that point composers started to look to the viola for darker tone colours, and the celebrated Lionel Tertis took up the viola as a soloist. Violists also play transcriptions of works for violin, cello and other instruments in order to increase their repertoire.

## Writing for a given level

There will always be times when a composer is more interested in the artistic content than aiming for a certain level of difficulty; teachers who come across any work will decide when (and whether) to teach it.

If you are writing a piece for a given grade level, I strongly recommend looking at a selection of pieces from that grade before starting. Suzuki viola books tend to be widely available. The RCMT publishes a viola syllabus, but not books by the grade, as it does for violin – however, the syllabus lists publishers for all the music. The technical requirements for a grade are also given. I'm sure teachers would also be happy to lend music to a curious composer. In the Suzuki school especially, the ordering of pieces is aimed at establishing diatonic finger patterns very well before adding chromatic notes or key changes.

The duration of a piece is another important consideration. Young students will need shorter pieces compared to older students. Still, the length of a piece is a factor for older students who are switching to viola; the viola is heavier and the player must be encouraged to notice fatigue and respond by putting down the instrument so that they become stronger, not stiffer, as demands increase. If their favourite piece is very long and tiring they will continue when they should rest. Incorporating rests in the part, and not writing long passages of double-stops will help.

## How to support the teacher

As a composer, you can be mindful of the needs of a teacher during your composition process. Pieces should be such that students want to play them – incorporating attractive melodies and/or rhythms, or interesting sound effects in modern idioms are useful. Early grade pieces should be in keys (or modes or pitch sets) that use the open strings especially as the tonic, for ease of fingering and for pitch references for fingered notes.

Structures should also be very clear to young students. ABA and simple binary forms are good, and rondos can be introduced later. Repetition is encouraging and satisfying. Some teachers like to have both short pieces the student can learn in a week, giving a sense of accomplishment, and longer ones that are more of a project. The longer pieces teach the patience and ability to isolate problems which students need to learn.

There is a place for a few easy pieces which sound impressive – sometimes the child can use these to show off and build confidence in the process. For example, first position broken chords in C and G are resonant and easy to finger using the open string and a finger, or two, on the A and D strings. The teacher can steer the student to a relaxed swing of the right arm. Rocking between the open string and a fingered note on the string above or below can be similarly effective, and useful. Note that the down bow on the lower string is easier and is taught first.

When I discussed Patrick Horn's *Three Little Pieces* (commissioned by the Norman Burgess Fund in 2012) with him, we looked at the grade three and four pieces I had in my collection, and realized that the grade three jazzy pieces were usually 32 measures

and each piece gave a new rhythmic motif to the student, but were otherwise quite straight forward. Patrick's pieces were twice as long, and had five-measure phrases, chromaticism, syncopations and some shifting. Grade four, however, had many pieces as long as Patrick's, with more complicated left hand than his pieces. We concluded that teachers could use his piece as a project to sum up and stretch a little further beyond the ideas a grade three student had learned during the year, whereas older students would enjoy it as a recital piece.

To mitigate the challenges in his first draft, Patrick rewrote one sequence of modulations where the difficulty might deter a teacher from assigning the piece. A few places in one of the pieces, "Rag," had some half-position that was a little awkward. Patrick wrote a simplified version with fewer notes which became the main text, but included the original as an ossia. I suggested that he include fingerings as some of the patterns were new to students, and we gave a choice of first or third position in a number of cases. Teachers are quite happy to scratch out a fingering and put in their own, but having them included can help the teacher save some time.

## Using a piece to help develop a specific technique

Character pieces that explore a single musical or technical idea are very useful. A piece can help the student develop a given technique by giving it an attractive musical motivation. For example, if you want the student to leave the familiar first position, and learn how to slide along the string, you can make a descriptive piece which includes slides as sound effects – if the slide leads to a harmonic or an undetermined pitch, students can enjoy the slide without worrying about being wrong. Sequences of the same pattern starting at different places on the instrument can make the unfamiliar familiar, as long as it is easy to get from one to the other. On the unity/variety scale, lean towards unity - you can use a contrasting B section for interest.

One of my first teachers, Elman Lowe, said the stage just after third position has been introduced is tricky for finding music at the right level of difficulty. Since I spoke to him, new materials have come out, including a method book that begins by teaching third position to keep the finger spacing smaller and

the left arm less extended, but new pieces at this level are always welcome.

One style that is only recently being more widely taught to younger kids is swing. The asymmetries of the motions required to play varied rhythms can lead string players off the path of rhythmic righteousness; pieces with a strong pulse can be a big help to players. I haven't had a chance to teach from either book, but Christopher Norton's *Microjazz (grade 3)* and James Rae's *Play it Cool* are excellent models of how to introduce rhythmic styles. Rae's book comes with a CD and has a paragraph about each style. The viola part is fairly simple over the idiomatic piano part.

And a final thought on introducing syncopation; it is helpful to start the first note of each measure on the beat and keep an even number of bow-strokes in the measure for the sake of simplicity.

## A few comments in addition to those in the violin section:

Conservatory students are first examined on diminished and dominant 7ths in grade four. Scales in double stops of 3rds, 6ths and octaves are first introduced in grade 6 – in half notes at 76 beats to the quarter note.

Scales artificial harmonics are introduced in grade 7. Harmonics are good for learning to keep the bow straight, moving, and at a particular contact point. They can be introduced well before grade 7 on open strings. The lower the frequency of a harmonic on any given string, the easier it is to produce. The first harmonic, the octave, is most resonant, but the second and third have the advantage of being in first, second and third position. The fourth harmonic is too tricky to produce for kids. You can also include artificial harmonics earlier, especially where the hand is already in the desired position, as long as they aren't fast or too plentiful – keeping 1 and 4 in place can lead to tension.

## Making a piece presentable and idiomatic

It is worth reminding composers that although viola music routinely uses treble clef to avoid ledger lines (8va signs being more inconvenient to read than either and not used in printed viola music except for

Aris Carastathis developed his piece for viola while consulting with Catherine Jillings. He shares some thoughts on his experience with the NMFYM project.

### COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Aris Carastathis

*Encounters for viola with the option of piano or guitar accompaniment*

Composing Encounters gave me the opportunity to think carefully about how to write challenging music without stressing the student. Artistic expression was still my first priority but I was always evaluating the practicality of what I was composing considering not only the abilities but also the concentration level and aesthetic impact my music would have on the young musician.

It was great to be able to work with violist Catherine Jillings, who was the educator consultant in this project. I actually developed a better understanding of various challenges viola players may be faced with and I believe I am now in a better position to adapt my composing to various levels of performance ability.

very high harmonics) it is the alto clef that violists learn first and use ordinarily, even if they are switching from violin.


Kids can read boxes of notes meant to be played at will for a certain time. Don't expect them to be able to count time underneath though; any accompanying part should give a clear auditory cue for when it is time to go on, or the accompaniment should be such that the student can be followed.

Some considerations for more advanced writing:

Clarifying one's intentions is important, and made more difficult by players' differing assumptions. One composer I worked with gave a lot of markings – articulations, slurs, some bowing, approximate tempi. This led me to believe I should be strict in my general approach, when he actually wanted more freedom. Yet elsewhere, with the same composer, I felt that two bows were needed on a slurred event, using a smooth bow change, but he preferred keeping the slur and the inevitable reduced volume.

String players have a huge variety of sound envelopes available to us, and you can't notate every nuance of attack, duration and decay. Players may ask whether a line means to connect to the next bow completely, or to play long with a little separation. Such words as legato and pesante should clear that up (and might avoid cluttering the page with signs). In passagework use simile if you show only the first few dots or lines. Is it *f* diminuendo to *mf* or *f* dim to *p*, sub *mf*? Is a dot spiccato or just detached? Specify if markings may raise doubts, and if the outcome matters to you.

Sometimes signs are easier to read than words: for example  $f > p$  on one note. I'm in favour of character words – if the player has a strong differing opinion, they will probably go ahead and do it their way; I would rather see the student challenged to figure out how to make something spooky or tender than fail to find a character at all.

Children can certainly learn to read swing notation; just be sure to write  at the top of every movement or section where required, and mark in any straight sections. Mark all characteristic accents and articulations. If you can do it or can find someone to help you put in bowings that suit the style, all the better; if unsure, leave it for the teacher. In summary, look at some music at the grade level you are aiming for, think of the students you are writing for and what they will enjoy and learn from – whatever style you choose. §

## NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR VIOLA

*Four Songs for Viola and Piano*, Rob Teehan

[Click here to view the score](#)

*Encounters for Viola and Piano*, Aris Carastathis

[Click here to view the score](#)

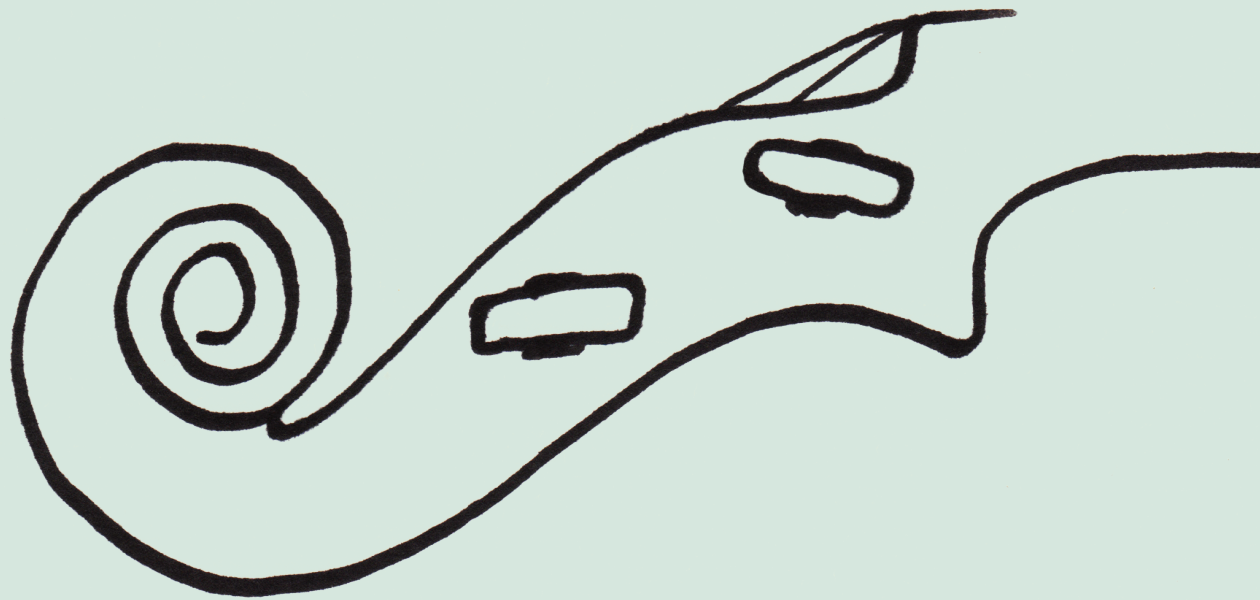
*Encounters for Viola and Guitar*, Aris Carastathis

[Click here to view the score](#)

*Very Near the Edge of a Flat Earth for Viola and Piano*, Rose Bolton

[Click here to view the score and hear a recording](#)

*Three Little Pieces for Viola and Piano*, Patrick Horn



# WRITING FOR CELLO STUDENTS

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By Anthony Bacon







hen writing for cello it is important to consider the cellist you are writing for. The composer needs to determine the technical capabilities of the cellist, create a piece that will meet the limits of the player's technique, and excite the cellist thereby creating the desire to learn. If the cellist is just starting to dabble with new music, it is important to write according to familiar skills; however, composers should insert some new challenges, and it is up to the teacher to guide the student through any new technical hurdles.

Keep in mind that a cellist will study many genres before arriving at 20th and 21st century music -if a cellist is brought up with the Suzuki method this is quite pronounced. A Suzuki student will have mastered various genres, but have played almost nothing containing special techniques or musique concrète instrumental. And so, while the Suzuki method can be a great way to determine the technical proficiency of a cellist through graded books, 'new sounds' must be found elsewhere and taught.

Bear in mind that beginning cellists love pieces and effects that sound like the pop music they are all exposed to. Integrating sounds from rock, hip hop, and other popular forms can immediately catch the attention and ear of the cellist and situate the piece within a graspable medium.

An ideal educational piece for cello would be one that gets the student really excited and teaches them new sounds they did not think were possible on the cello. The piece should aim to show what new music is capable of by relating modernist concepts to the cellist which gets them thinking beyond conventional cello playing. As a teacher, I like to introduce students to pieces that have short movements wherein each part has them attempt a new extended technique (such as ricochet, tremolo, glissando, playing over the bridge, crumb seagull sounds, playing on the tailpiece, cello tapping, Bartok pizzicato, and so on). In this situation, a final blending movement helps unify all the concepts. There are several pieces commissioned through the Norman Burgess Fund that employ this concept.

A piece that sets up the student for new sound exploration is most useful to a teacher. It expands the conventional repertoire and lets the student be free to explore through the use of extended techniques.

There are so many techniques on the cello it is helpful to have a piece that can isolate a couple. Glissandi, for instance is usually taught to beginners at an early

stage when they are learning shifts and vibrato, so this is a fair technique for the beginner. Tapping on the cello is easy, but is rarely attempted, and so this is a technique that should be readily explored - especially since different parts of the cello have different tones when tapped with various hand shapes. For instance, a fist, lightly beating the lower top panel of the cello produces quite a nice bass kick sound, and tapping with the fingertips on the sides of the cello can produce a nice high drum tone. A closed finger tap on the side of the top panel will almost produce the sound of a snare drum.

Another way to produce this sound, is to learn the art of bow 'chopping' which has been gaining much popularity in modern pop music and its various sub genres. A cellist, when exposed to extended techniques, can literally produce all the sounds of a drum kit, minus the crash cymbals and hi hat. Hitting the tailpiece can even mimic cowbell! This is extremely useful later in life for the cellist, as you can use techniques from 'new music' to jam with literally any musician.

Inspiring the student through new sounds is the goal, and if they can identify with it, even better! I was the consulting educator for the Norman Burgess Commission written by Darlene Chepil Reid. In her multi-movement piece (*The Cello Scores!*), rhythmic tapping was effectively used to teach the student

## COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Darlene Chepil-Reid

For *The Cello Scores!*, I had the pleasure of working with cellist Anthony Bacon. Anthony was great to work with because he is not only one of the most relaxed people you will meet but also, Anthony is extremely excited to perform contemporary music that uses interesting sounds and techniques. Anthony has taught many young students and together we devised simple studies in some of the common contemporary techniques that beginning cellists could accomplish easily. We felt that these studies would be fun to play and encourage the young performer to think "outside the box".

drum like sound production on the cello. Tapping on the sides and top of the cello, and playing over the bridge and on the tailpiece and tailpiece wire, were all effectively blended in fun rhythmic compositions for the beginning cellist.

One other thing that composers can consider is that presenting standard notation is not always the most fun for a beginner, and can look daunting. In my experience, a better way is to visually connect the student to the sound. Darlene used this approach in her Norman Burgess Commission. For instance in her movement 'Basket Ball', she used a notated basketball to indicate a bow ricochet or tapping (the choice of technique was up to the cellist). In 'Hockey', she used musical cells and notation layout to mimic that of a hockey game. Using a symbol that visually connects the student with the score can excite them more than merely using standard notation.

Another good idea is to include recordings of the pieces along with the score so that the student can map the visual-spatial aspects of the score with the auditory. A great way to present supportive multimedia would be through a website, with links including a recording, video of performance, a synopsis from the living composer talking about the work, and supportive visual aspects. After all, it is so easy to access this kind of content online, and this is very intuitive even for young children.

By providing guidance to Darlene while she wrote her piece, I was able to draw on my knowledge of what a beginning cellist can learn, but also what fingering patterns would be easy and which would perhaps be too hard. In the end, Darlene created two versions of the final score: one with suggested fingerings, and the other blank. I was also able to provide bowing information, and roman numerals indicating which string to play on. This was useful with some of the more complicated scale patterns found in the movement, 'Soccer.' I was able to suggest possibilities, and impossibilities, and I feel that the collaboration and ideas shared over the course of our several meetings really helped make the project accessible, and extremely fun for a student. §

## Cello rubric for composers

Included here is a guide for composers who wish to better understand what techniques or musical passages are playable for a cellist at a certain level. Depending on what Suzuki Grade the cellist has attained, the composer can better decide what to put in the score. RCM grade levels are also a great guide for composers. Any exam will have pieces that are contemporary in 'List C', and 'pieces composed after 1930.' Depending on the piece and grade, a wide array of extended techniques can be learned.

Although I cannot summarize all the techniques used with each grade in RCM, as I do not have access to all the various scores, I outline Suzuki Method in this Rubric. The Suzuki method may neglect some of the modern techniques of new music, however the method gives all the technique required to perform any genre.

### NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR CELLO

*Dance Set for cello duo*, James Harley

[Click here to view the score](#)

*The Cello Scores! for cello*, Darlene Chepil Reid



CELLO	Bowing	Left Hand	Rhythm	Side Notes
Suzuki 1	Basic Legato Bowing, some short bow strokes with marked staccato, some use of martele, some pizzicato	First Position with some extensions, open string first position scales	4/4, 2/4 and 3/4 time signatures, all note values up to 16th notes at varying tempos	
Suzuki 2	Double up bow spiccato, dotted markings, tenuto passages, some arco to pizzicato	2nd position, D and C (2 octave) major and minor scales, Bb major, G minor (1 octave), plus G major (2 octaves), with corresponding arpeggios for all.	All the above, plus 6/8, triplets	
Suzuki 3	Lots of dynamic changes, spiccato, slurs, accents, more pizzicato	D, G, C, F major and minor (2 octaves) with arpeggios, lots of extensions, lots of 3rd position and 4th position, Trills	Fast 16th's	
Suzuki 4	Big string interval jumps	Higher Positions, Tenor Clef used in Chanson Triste. All scales up to four sharps or flats major and minor 2 octaves. Lots of finger pattern exercises. Double stops and chords used heavily, lots of trills and ornaments	32nd notes used more often, more ornaments	
Suzuki 5	Lots of dotted rhythms	Open double stops, lots of ornamenting, rolled chords (Goltermann Concerto), lots of tenor clef (i.e. Arioso Bach), big octave shifts high into 7th position. All scales are used, with arpeggios in 3 octaves.		Lots of Italian musical markings being used at this point the cellist is confidently able to handle most contemporary technique, if taught by a teacher. Suzuki Method does not include modern music as of yet, so the student must seek it out.
Suzuki 6	Lots of faster passages, linked by long legato bowings	First introduction of thumb position, treble clef is heavily used. All scales are used with arpeggios, double stop scales in 3rds and 6ths should be taught as there are lots of double stops.		
Suzuki 7	Nothing new	Thumb position double stop passages, all scales and arpeggios in 4 octaves should be taught as positions are used in Suzuki.		Harmonics up high are used, although stopped harmonics, harmonic trills, and pizzicato harmonics, have not appeared in the repertoire as of yet.
Suzuki 8	For the first time a virtuosic 'showpiece' appears in Goen's 'Scherzo' Op. 12. The piece uses the Sautillé bowstroke throughout. Ricochet is also used. Pizzicato chords.	Double stops with in Sautillé, thumb position Octaves. More natural harmonics. Glissandi is also used.		
Suzuki 9 & 10		Everything except stopped harmonics, and harmonic trills. The student can play any combination of note patterns at this point. Unfortunately, the method does not include any quartertones, ponticello/tasto, overpressure or distortion.		Irregular time signatures/ rhythms are not present. For this, the student should also use RCM and attain grades via this method as it presents modern music on every test.

# WRITING MUSIC FOR DOUBLE BASS STUDENTS

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By Alex Kotyk



**I**t is an unfortunate reality that music programs within primary and secondary schools are being cut. The scarcity of student-sized  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$  sized double basses not only in schools but also among luthiers in general, means that students begin playing double bass at a much later age than other instruments. As a result, they will often be well behind their peers who have already gone through Suzuki method. Some bassists might also have started on the cello out of necessity, and worked their way up to bass. The standard bass, with a vibrating string length of about 41 inches (compared to the 13 inches of a full-sized violin), is simply unplayable for most young students.

I was first attracted to the bass guitar through rock music, and through that, at age 16, I was introduced to the double bass. This is a very common path to the instrument among my friends and colleagues as well. Although I missed out on a lot of the formal teaching and professional mentorship that my university colleagues received early in their education, my time spent on the bass guitar infused my playing with some of the “pop” sensibilities that my colleagues lack to this day. Playing less “serious” music has allowed me to express myself more comfortably as a performer. I have become more confident playing music in front of an audience because I have been immersed in a setting where taking risks and showing your character is more commonly encouraged on stage. I like to think I’m capable of having a bit more fun than some of my stiffer friends that play “serious” classical music because of my time spent on the bass guitar. I’m sure the students who take this route into the world of double bass would enjoy a piece that is less “serious” and more fun, one that lets them get in touch with their inner rock-star!

While consulting on *Basement Apartments*, composer Monica Pearce and I discussed ways in which a composer might be able to write so that a young double bass student can employ techniques he or she is already familiar with: theatrical gestures such as glissandos, the use of power chords, unorthodox pizzicato techniques such as slapping the bass, or even spinning the bass during a rest! The benefits for a young player of playing a piece that employs these techniques are that the student is encouraged to be creative and to be an enticing performer. Best of all, his or her first experience with contemporary repertoire will be an engaging and positive one. My

first impressions with new works for double bass were alienating, as they were far too scholarly for my young ears. The next generation of bass players has the potential to bring a new audience to classical music, so if composers can instill a sense of joy and promote theatrical playing in young students, they will have done a fine job.

A successful piece will also provide opportunities for the teacher to tackle technical challenges that the instrument presents to the student. The fundamental concept that is important for a beginner to grasp is good sound production, either with the bow or pizzicato. In this sense it is good to limit the amount of shifting that needs to occur with the left hand so that the student’s focus can be on the right. This can mean limiting note choices to those that reside in and around basic hand positions, particularly half-position: the range of the instrument to which we are first accustomed and where we often spend a lot of time. Focusing on this area throughout the exposition of a piece allows the teacher to present the foundational position with which the remaining octave of notes will be played, shifting within blocks of a whole tone that spans half position.

If there is to be rhythmic complexity within a piece, it is best to assign it to basic notes that are in close proximity to each other so as to create an attainable passage for the beginner. Including open strings in a piece is also beneficial for achieving a good concept of sound production. This way, the student can disassociate both hands and devote all the attention to the one making the sound in the first place: the right hand. A piece that has these sorts of note choices allows the teacher to bring attention and clarity to what is arguably the biggest technical challenge their bass student will face. This way, the student will be exposed to the importance of the proper utilization of the weight of the arm: a good bassist’s greatest asset.

Simplifying what happens with the left hand in the beginner’s piece will also allow for a focus on good intonation, a skill which needs particular attention and care throughout a bassist’s career but which needs to be nurtured early to promote healthy muscle memory for years to come. An ideal piece for the bass teacher will have a good tonal centre within which to address intonation. Wild leaps and exotic key areas are best avoided in the beginning of a bassist’s education. Teachers will appreciate pieces that expose students to octaves and harmonics,

which allows them to develop good hand positions that facilitate good intonation. Double stops are best demonstrated by the teacher who has had experience with them. When executed properly, they can be a valuable tool in encouraging good intonation. When students have a healthy tonic from which to find the upper note (particularly if it's an open string or a harmonic) they are able to open up their ears to what will be well-intonated notes.

A successful piece will also allow a teacher to guide their student to develop a sense of musicality. The ideal piece for the beginning double bass exposes students to expressive passages so that they may begin to develop appropriate vibrato. Early familiarity with the wide palette of sounds the bass offers allows a bass student to explore creativity in his or her playing. Teachers can guide their students through the exploration of the following:

- Alternation between pizzicato and arco playing
- Simple passages in the upper thumb position range (passages that don't stray too far from the open G on the first string)
- Varying strokes (legato, tenuto, staccato, spiccato, ties, slurs)
- Trills
- Tremolo
- Collegno
- Ponticello
- Accents

Young bassists like to play loud too! Give them an opportunity to release their inner rock-star, while showing them that they can also have a large dynamic range to work with.

It is helpful to provide clarity within the accompanist's part too. Opening up a bass student's ears is vital early on, especially if the student has had the typical late start. From personal experience, I wish I had had the opportunity early on in my career to be able to open up my ears in an effort to cultivate the notion of dialogue among instruments. I have unpleasant (albeit very educational) memories of pieces falling apart with the accompanist simply because I was never directed to pay attention to the complimentary lines going on while I was playing. Ideally, a beginner's piece has an accompaniment with a very noticeable relationship to what the

bassist is playing. The beginner double bassist then has an early foundational concept of playing effectively with others. This can be achieved through composing exposed parts disassociated with one another, or parts that have a very clear rhythmic emphasis for the student to grasp a hold of. It can be helpful to have the accompanist's vital lines written in on the bassist's score so that students can see where their passages fit in and relate.

A piece of music for beginner bass should have a structure that is easy to recognize and grasp. A piece that is small and simple or repetitive will be more manageable for the beginner student. A piece that is too complex will involve copious exploration and study before the structure can be understood or the piece can even be approached. A bass player already has enough to worry about with all the technical challenges the instrument poses.

An inexperienced bass player will be happy to see a piece that is easy to understand and has a structure that is familiar. They will be able to quickly grasp the form of a short and simple piece, or one that is built from many short repetitions, just as they can easily distinguish between the verses and refrains of any pop song, which was likely their path to the double bass in the first place. The beginner bass player will be able to put together a more credible performance of a piece by understanding the form.

Considering that the beginner bassist will not have the same level of exposure to classical scores as their colleagues, it is a good idea to notate a score that has clarity and that is idiomatic. The ideal piece will have the following:

- Clear markings when the accompanist is and is not playing with the soloist
- Commas for when to retake the bow so as to promote healthy bow distribution
- Clear intention of accents and dynamic changes
- Where to place the bow down so that the bassist can be more comfortable during extended pizzicato passages
- When necessary, where to place the bow at the beginning of a passage (i.e. u.h. for the upper half of the bow and l.h. for the lower)

It was a joy working with Monica Pearce on *Basement Apartments*. I was able to shed light on the technical challenges the double bass presents to the young student. With my explanations of the



limitations of the instrument, particularly those that are exacerbated by the inexperience of the beginner bassist, Monica was able to craft three miniatures that were attainable for a student but that were also lots of fun to play. Through several meetings, I was able to advise Monica on how to bring as much clarity to the score as possible. The beginner bassist benefits from clear instruction in sound production in the score, and I feel Monica has put together a piece that allows for a high level of music-making that is still technically attainable. It is important not to alienate the next generation of young bass players with new music that is too difficult to grasp. Composers today have a great opportunity to write for an instrument with a modest library of solo compositions, and bassists are enthusiastic to see that expansion take place. §

## COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Monica Pearce

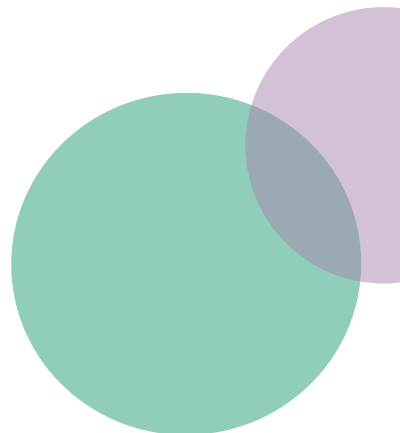
### *Basement Apartments for double bass and piano*

For most composition projects, the composer works alone, with imagination as the main catalyst for musical creation. By the time the rehearsal process has begun, it is often too late for significant changes. With the New Music for Young Musicians program, I had the rare and wonderful opportunity to work with a performer/educator throughout the writing of the work: at the very beginning, after the writing of each movement, and after a full draft to tackle edits. This was not only extremely helpful in fulfilling the pedagogical purposes of the project, but was also very inspiring to the creation.

## NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR DOUBLE BASS

*Basement Apartments for Double Bass and Piano,*  
Monica Pearce

[Click here to view the score](#)





The ever-popular Suzuki school has not yet permeated the consciousness of bass players in this country. Instead, I outline levels, techniques, and corresponding documents that the foremost bass players in the country will give to their students when teaching that technique. These are the books that I have gone through as well, and they serve as a good reference. Techniques and materials are listed in order of increasing difficulty.

DOUBLE BASS	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
Technique	<p>Basic Bowing</p> <p>Basic Left and Right Hand Techniques</p> <p>Portamento, higher octaves, Arpeggios, double-stops, ‘harped’ chords, fast rhythms</p>	<p>Varying Strokes and accents</p> <p>Thumb positions, incorporating aforementioned techniques</p> <p>Harmonics, chromaticism within fast tempos, within a wide range of octaves</p>	<p>More precise and advanced thumb positions, emphasis on intonation Advanced techniques are applied to the entire range of the bass</p> <p>Greater emphasis on expressivity</p>
Reference Material	<p>Robinson – <i>Strokin’</i> (based on the Sevcik School of Bowing Technique): This is a book I have come across later in my studies but I now use it as the first document with my own students. It focuses at first on the most basic elements of sound production but goes into hundreds of different bowing variations later on. The later variations can be employed by an advanced student, but the initial variations are invaluable for the beginner who is focusing on the development of the fundamentals of sound production.</p> <p>Simandl – <i>30 Studies</i>: Thirty studies that get increasingly challenging. This book is good for the beginner or the intermediate student who is developing their left and right hand techniques.</p> <p>Bille – <i>Nuovo Metodo Per Contrabbasso Parte I &amp; II</i>: Foundational studies like the Simandl book, but focus on embellishments, portamento, higher octaves, arpeggios, double-stops, “harped” chords and fast rhythms.</p>	<p>Storch-Hrabe – <i>57 Studies in Two Volumes</i>: Builds upon where the Bille books leave off and focuses on varying strokes and accents.</p> <p>Kreutzer – <i>18 Studies for String Bass</i>: Introduces the intermediate student to thumb position while using all the aforementioned techniques from previous books.</p> <p>Nanny – <i>Enseignement Complet de la Contrebasse: Vingt Etudes De Virtuosite</i></p>	<p>Petracchi – <i>Simplified Higher Technique for Double Bass</i></p> <p>Rabbath – <i>Nouvelle Technique de La Contrebasse</i>: Applies advanced techniques to the entire range of the bass in a way that promotes expressive, musical playing. A wonderful resource that allows the advanced student to realize that the bass’ capabilities are “limitless” and that, according to the master of the bass, the new technique can allow the student to “transcend detail”.</p>



# WRITING FOR GUITAR STUDENTS

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By William Beauvais







s a guitar teacher for some thirty-plus years I have worked at the Royal Conservatory of Music teaching beginners, and at the University

level teaching more advanced students and young professionals. For the former North York Board of Education I co-authored a publication called *Teaching Guitar in the Classroom*. I have also published numerous works for pedagogical use and the concert stage. As a performer and recording artist I have developed repertoire for the guitar that includes dance, spoken word and electronics while extending the traditional chamber music settings.

The big gap in repertoire for guitar is solo music at the beginning stage. The other gap is early/intermediate music for two or three guitars, guitar and flute, or music that accompanies text. Ensemble based music is very suitable for school music programs, especially the “arts based” schools that have a need for new performance material that moves away from the solo tradition.

There is much fine 20th and 21st century guitar music of a pedagogical nature written by composers of international prominence: Leo Brouwer and Carlo Domeniconi for example. In addition, Canadian Claude Gagnon’s *Le Petit Livre Pour Guitare vol. 1 (DZ 11)* is a tremendous collection of pedagogical music. All of this music embraces the lush sound world of simple harmonies while exploring a single technical issue. These compositions engage the student by creating a satisfying musical experience with an economy of means. It is incumbent upon composers to inform themselves of these works and of existing music that is in the CMC collection.

Our youth come to study music with many hours of popular music listening, and of course many hours of music experienced subliminally through television, movies, and online media. Their technical abilities may be limited but there is a high degree of musical sophistication and the composer must write with this in mind. Popular music often contains rhythms that are “more difficult” to notate but have more vitality and live in the body, and are often more easily assimilated than straight quarters and eighths.


As another example, music with dissonance can be surprising for students, but when combined with poetry, the need for a greater range of tonal expression becomes obvious. Certain movie music contains much dissonance in support of the narrative. For students who shy away from these

## COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Andrew Staniland

*Composer of Night Spirit Suite for guitar*

A good educational piece is engaging and precisely the correct level of difficulty – no more, no less. Some composers are very good at this medium, however with experience and perspective, I am not convinced that every composer can do well in the medium. Being a good composer at a professional level does not indicate ability or potential to write for young musicians. The life experience of a master musician is an unmatched resource. All composers need editors. Always. Interestingly most of the things I have learned in writing for young musicians are widely applicable. Just because professional collaborators can indeed play nearly anything you write, it does not, or it should not, lead a composer to ignore or forsake good writing practice. Virtuoso music must also be idiomatic, and strike that magic balance between artistic integrity and technical playability.



sounds, the use of various narrative devices - poetry, spoken word or even the idea of a movie - helps bridge the aesthetic gap.

The most interesting project I have undertaken with regards to composition and education was *Canonvary Chorales (I & 2)*: the student as creator. My private guitar students were given models to use in composing their own music. Each student was required to prepare manuscripts for publishing and also to polish the music for performance. The students listened very differently compared to normal recitals; instead of sitting in judgement they listened with eager ears to what others had done with the same model. There were canons, arpeggio pieces, and programmatic works displaying a surprising array of dissonance and rhythmic complexity.

Music education is inseparable from my practice, and I am excited to participate in the New Music For Young Musicians project. Composers who are not familiar with the guitar can gain useful perspectives through discussion with experienced performers and educators. In my teaching studio it is vital to cultivate a lively mind, and a sense of alertness that allows maximum transmission of information. The first ten minutes of a lesson is vital to communicating new information, and it is best to work and think hard during that time. Musical works that encompass the joy of movement on an instrument are a recent and valuable asset to any pedagogy. Music that does so successfully, frequently becomes a favourite of students. Compositions that develop a single technical issue can be quickly learned and assimilated - in this way skills are added with a simultaneous growth in confidence. When I have used the first ten *Estudios Sencillos* by Leo Brouwer, students maintain interest and develop mental flexibility because the weekly challenges are manageable while the technical challenges are minimal.

Our system of musical pedagogy tends toward solo training, which places a great deal of pressure on the performer. Simple solo pieces with an accompaniment part for the teacher will create a situation that includes shy students, who will be more likely to perform if the experience is a shared one. Composers who can be sensitive to these needs will appeal to both students and teachers. §

### NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR GUITAR

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*Night Spirit Suite, 5 Short Piece for Guitar,*  
Andrew Staniland

[Click here to view the score and hear a recording](#)

*Encounters for Viola and Guitar,* Aris Carastathis

[Click here to view the score](#)

# GUITAR

## Beginning & Elementary Level

## Elementary Level

## Intermediate Level

### Use of Left Hand

Moveable patterns like holding one shape and moving it vertically and horizontally on/along the neck

Use of one finger as an anchor

Use of parallel patterns

Slurs with the following fingers 1-2 ; 1-3; 2-4

Natural harmonics at the 12th, and 7th frets

Moving fingers in contrary motion

Compound slurs 1- and 2-4

Use of artificial harmonics

Alternative scales with slurs ie diminished, whole tone, phrygian

Introduction of simple barre chords

Glissandi and portamentos

Chords involving all 4 left hand fingers

### Use of Right Hand

Arpeggios of various patterns exploring uneven metres

Use of thumb to carry the melody

Use of chords – all fingers playing simultaneously

Staccato and accents

Use of ponticello and sul tasto

Very basic tremolo

Increased use of dynamic and articulation as specified

More complex tremolo

Pizzicato (right hand muting)

### Musical Issues

Phrases of different lengths

Music exploring textures

Exploring basic dynamics (loud and soft)

Introducing dissonance

Tempo changes, fermatas and breath marks

Increased variety of phrase lengths

Make use of parallel intervals ie 10ths; 9ths; 7ths

Compound time signatures and time signature changes

Simple canon (Brouwer Estudio Sencillo 8)

Scordatura or retuning of a single string

### Reference Material

The first volume of *Estudios Sencillos* by Leo Brouwer (ME7997 / HL50562479) and the first five Preludes from *24 Preludes* by Carlo Domeniconi (Edition Margaux MB.EM6002) provide ideal models for composers. These works take simple physical or musical patterns and develop them for about one minute. Using lots of open strings, and various arpeggio patterns with the right hand, allows much interesting music to be developed. Use of some higher positions is encouraged to create familiarity with all areas of the instrument from the very early stages.

Continued development of musical and physical patterns with works getting a bit longer—up to two minutes.

Musical development along the lines of the second volume of *Estudios Sencillos* (6 – 10) works should average about 2 minutes, and contain numerous position changes. Claude Gagnon's *Le Petit Livre Pour Guitare vol. 1* (Les Production D'Oz DZ 11) is also a tremendous model.

# COMPOSING FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS: STRING ORCHESTRA

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By Deborah Pady





Composing for youth ensembles certainly has its unique and rewarding challenges. As a high school strings teacher, I must constantly weigh a number of variables when choosing repertoire for my ensembles. Can they handle the techniques required? Does the piece challenge students that are more advanced while not leaving the less experienced students floundering? Is there enough interest for the different instrument sections (or will the basses be sitting around watching while I spend ages working on a multitude of challenging violin passages)? The list goes on. It is always exciting to discover new music that meets those needs, because it lets you know that you can commence on a journey with your students that will be both positive and rewarding. In order to most effectively compose for younger performers, it is important to understand the challenges that youth orchestras and school orchestras face and as a result, the choices that directors make when selecting repertoire. It is also helpful to note that many of the factors discussed below may also relate to community ensembles and can be useful as a guide when composing for amateur adult performers.

## Youth orchestras in the real world

Youth orchestras must juggle a number of realities that impact why they are drawn to particular repertoire. Understanding these hurdles may help to guide you in the composition planning and process.

First and foremost, while all ensembles (amateur or professional) will share an element of varying levels of ability amongst the musicians, this is even more pronounced among student groups. If a school has a Junior Orchestra and a Senior Orchestra, then students are likely grouped together by age, but very rarely specifically by level of experience. Some fourteen year-olds may have been playing for eight years, while others have only been playing for a year or two, or have perhaps just begun. Even if the entire ensemble has been studying for the same length of time, there will still be variation in ability, purely as a result of human nature and how quickly some students grasp musical concepts compared to others. Institutions with smaller music programmes will often see a wider range of both age and ability in one ensemble. Choosing to accommodate the varying levels of ability can add a layer of complexity to the

composition process. However, offering simplified parts, optional advanced parts, or even multiple ways that a piece may be performed will allow for a greater number of ensembles to consider a piece; for example, could either the first violins or the cellos be given the predominant melodic line?

Ensembles can come in many shapes and sizes. Oh, how we always wish we had more violas! Many, if not all youth ensembles, are subject to a numbers game. How many students take up a stringed instrument at school? How many audition for the orchestra? From year to year, the size of the entire ensemble can change, as can the instrumentation. One year I had no basses in an orchestra I was conducting, yet another year I had five basses, but only two cellos. And of course, each year as students graduate while others begin school the ensemble changes accordingly. Many directors routinely find themselves transcribing viola parts into third violin parts, or cello parts into bass parts just to accommodate this likelihood. Some music publishers and composers have anticipated this, and it is one strategy that composers can adopt when writing for string orchestra.

Directors of youth string orchestras also vary in the skills they bring to the job as do their employment demands. While some strings conductors will be string players themselves, others will be brass players, or pianists, or as can be the case in the public school system, a teacher that did their Royal Conservatory exams when they were in high school. Those conductors that are string players very likely have advanced technique on only one instrument and have learned rudimentary performance on the other instruments of the string family through a university Music Education degree, or through necessity on the job and a bit of intuition. In schools, teachers also face additional challenges that come with the job. Teaching theory, composition, music history and ear training over and above instrumental technique and performance is an expectation of the curriculum. Some teachers have their classes perform as an ensemble, while others may only work on repertoire in extra-curricular rehearsals. And of course, some teachers don't only teach music but may teach several other subjects in a yearly schedule.

Then there are the extra-musical challenges. Every youth ensemble, either school-based or community ensemble, is faced with the same reality: students are very busy people. If they are lucky, or motivated



enough to find themselves playing in an orchestra, chances are, that same child is also on the soccer team, the track team, the chess club, or working a part-time job over and above their studies. All of these activities are equally demanding of a student's attention and schedule, and often there will be conflicts with orchestra rehearsals, as well as times of year where individual practice becomes restricted. Compound this with the reality that the majority of youth orchestras rehearse once a week, whether for an hour or several hours, and are working towards preparing at least two or three other pieces of repertoire, you can guarantee that quality rehearsal time is at a premium leading up to any performance. Almost every director also faces the pressure of navigating through a season of multiple performances, and the expectations that an audience of parents and employers may place on the end result. How does this shape an approach to composition?

## Assisting the developing string orchestra

Anything that can be incorporated into the composition process that will assist the musical education of an ensemble would be valuable. Below are some ideas and thoughts to consider, as well as some examples of works that choose unique ways to write for youth orchestras:

## Student engagement

Performance as an end result is most successful when students have been engaged in the process of learning the composition. Captivating students through the style and sounds they produce in final performance is important, but so is ensuring that every section of the ensemble is challenged equally so that they are motivated through the rehearsal process. A fine example of a piece that inspires on many levels is R. Murray Schafer's *Train*. While working on this composition with an orchestra, I found the students were immersed in the rehearsal process, and genuinely excited to perform it. *Train* is written for flexible instrumentation, with strings as the core of the ensemble. Extra-musically, it depicts a train ride across Canada, with stops along the way. The ensemble works together to replicate the sounds of that journey. Each performer is provided

with the full score rather than just their part to read. A combination of traditional and graphic notation, the score is accompanied by a clear introduction and legend so the ensemble can work together to achieve the composer's desires. Their ability to connect with each other through the score helped with analysis of the piece, and allowed them to see how their role connected with others. From a teacher's perspective, the students maintained focus and discipline in the rehearsal because everyone had something to focus on while I was working with others.

## Skill development

Improving a youth string orchestra's skills will be the top priority for every conductor. When composing for youth, determine what skills you can assume for the level of ensemble you are writing, and aim to push them a little further. For example, if the ensemble has been playing for a year, it may be safe to assume that they have a fairly keen grasp of basic bowings (for example, two-note slurs, staccato and maybe hooked bowings). Therefore, you might decide that a goal for your composition would be for them to perform longer slurred passages or start to grasp spiccato, or use a technique such as *col legno*. However, be wary of trying to introduce too many new ideas! Three or four-note slurs may be enough of a challenge with regard to bow technique, again, keeping in mind that the time frame for rehearsal may be minimal. If the learning curve for the conductor and ensemble are too great, confidence and success can be compromised.

Chris Mayo, in his composition *Two for Strings*, demonstrates a keen awareness that multiple ability levels may exist within a string orchestra. He offers parts for each instrument ranging in difficulty, with a flexible mix-and-match approach so that each member of the ensemble can be catered to and equally valued in performance. Elizabeth Raum provides an easy, junior, and advanced version of her *Prairie Jubilee* to allow for any level of orchestra to enjoy her composition. If a careful balance of challenge is achieved in a composition, it motivates students to rise to that challenge without feeling overwhelmed, and to strive for what may be most important to them: sounding good in performance.

## Technical clarity

The more direction you can provide for fingerings and bowings, the better. This will not only assist the educator and the ensembles through the learning process, but will also help ensure you achieve the sound you are looking for. For example, indicating whether to use retakes to the frog of the bow or full bowing for a fortissimo passage would assist any conductor in understanding your desires rather than leaving them to speculate. Providing fingerings can be a great way to assist less experienced ensembles to develop their technique while helping you achieve desired sounds. Clear direction for violinists and violists to use fourth finger or open strings on certain passages is an important start for beginner performers, for example. Marking extensions and shifts are also key for cellists and bassists. If one of your educational goals in a composition is to advance technique, repetition of particular skills is always a great start. American composer and arranger, Sandra Dackow, is a favourite with many educators because of her clarity and intentional editing style that targets and exercises particular techniques.

Contemporary techniques and notation should be clear and when possible, include an explanation. If a conductor has limited performance knowledge of the instruments in front of them, anything beyond the basic techniques can be a scary thing. Any advice or instruction you can provide would always be appreciated. For example, clarify if you would like a glissando to occur on just one string or continue to additional strings, or include a quick note on the notation of false harmonics and how to achieve the right sound.

In summary, compositions written for developing string orchestras are most appreciated when they consider the complexities of educating young musicians. The more confident an ensemble is in being able to achieve the performance goals laid out for them, the more they will grow musically and the greater their success will be. §



In 2008 CMC Associate Composer Abigail Richardson Schulte was commissioned by the Norman Burgess Fund to compose *Labyrinth* for string orchestra. She shares some thoughts on her experience.

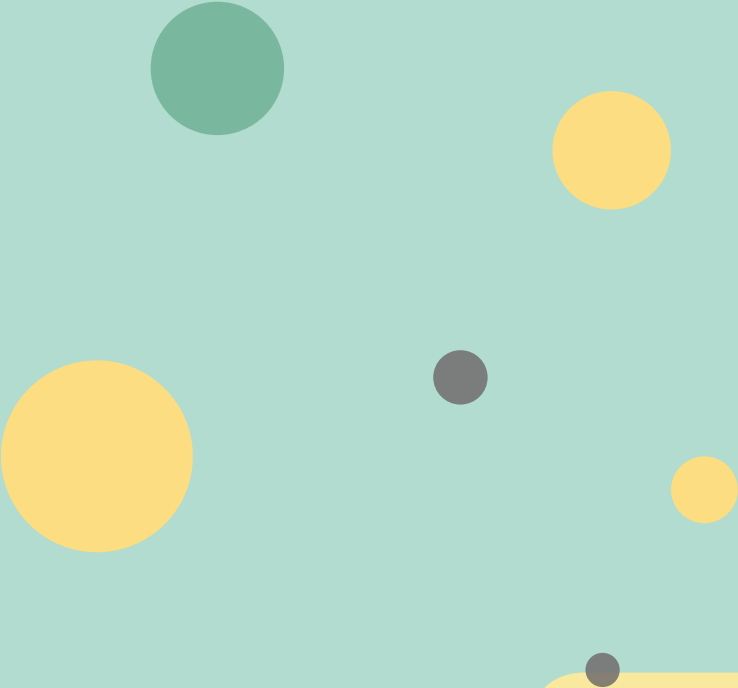
### COMPOSER TESTIMONIAL

From Abigail Richardson-Schulte

I really enjoyed writing for young people and found it beneficial to my overall practice. I began to consider the difficulty of every gesture both individually and in terms of ensemble, (which has certainly helped me in the orchestra world with limited rehearsal time). Being a part of every rehearsal for two weeks, allowed me to witness what it took to teach these students the music. Conductor Michael Schulte demonstrated on his instrument, sang, described, and so on, to make this music come alive. The resulting performances were brilliant, superior in many ways even to professional performances of the same piece. This really showed me what is possible with enthusiastic young people and a skilled educator/interpreter. The ensemble took ownership of the piece and performed it countless times in festivals and concerts, even winning the provincial Kiwanis Festival. I have since had the privilege of writing two other pieces for school ensembles and would do it again in a heartbeat. Students are always so excited to discover new techniques of playing and to participate in a piece written just for them.







## NORMAN BURGESS FUND COMMISSIONS FOR STRING ORCHESTRA

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*3 Folk Tableaux*, John Palmer

[Click here for catalogue information](#)

*Bossa Antiqua*, Kye Marshall

[Click here to view the score and hear a recording](#)

*The Labyrinth*, Abigail Richardson-Schulte

[Click here to hear a recording](#)

*Spring*, Robert Rival

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*Strings Together*, Chan Ka Nin

[Click here to view the score and hear a recording](#)

*Schumann Scenes*, Chris Paul Harman

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*Suite for Strings*, Jan Jarvlepp

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*Two for Strings*, Chris Mayo

[Click here to view the score](#)

## ABOUT NORMAN BURGESS AND THE NORMAN BURGESS FUND

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Norman Burgess studied at the University of Saskatchewan, and completed his doctorate in music education with distinction at Indiana University. Burgess was an active musician, and performed frequently as a soloist, chamber and orchestral player. He also directed numerous ensembles, including the Mount Royal Junior Orchestra and the Calgary Fiddlers.

Late in his life, Norman Burgess was associated with the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, where he consulted on the national examination system, served as the Dean, and founded the RCM Centre for Learning Through the Arts. He also led the formation of a city-wide partnership of arts organizations and school boards in Toronto to collaboratively develop and deliver arts-based curriculum. He also contributed to the governance of many art organizations including the Calgary Philharmonic, the Calgary Youth Orchestra, the Youth and Education Committee of the Toronto Symphony, as well as the Canadian Music Centre.

Musician, educator, administrator, and proud advocate of Canadian music, Norman Burgess dreamed of expanding the repertoire for young string players. The Norman Burgess Memorial Fund makes this vision possible.

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## ABOUT THE CANADIAN MUSIC CENTRE

The Canadian Music Centre exists to stimulate the awareness, appreciation, and performance of Canadian new music by making the music of its Associate Composers available through the Centre's library and archival collections, information resources, and publishing and distribution services.

For more information on our projects, including the Norman Burgess Fund and New Music For Young Musicians, please visit our website:

[www.musiccentre.ca](http://www.musiccentre.ca)

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