

## All Bow Strokes Start on the String

True or False?

Only a few years into my high school orchestra teaching career I was having some conflict with some of my more advanced players. This was rather disturbing since I was a pretty young teacher and a lowly bass player. Did I not know something about string technique? The problem was related to the bow. After a little research I realized these students all played in the in the local citywide youth symphony. The conductor of this group was a friend of mind, a supporter of my program and my teaching. He even helped me get a job at the college where he was the conductor as an adjunct double bass instructor and even hired me to teach at some summer string teacher workshops. This other conductor and I actually lived in the same neighborhood.

The bow issue was over “off the string” playing and when to take the bow off the string. The students we shared were throwing or dropping the bow to the string for spiccato. Some started way above the string. This was completely wrong to my string training. The only two bow strokes that you would drop or throw the bow to the string in my training are Col Legno and Ricochet, neither which are all that common in orchestra playing. How could the other conductor not agree with my training and what do I do about this? I am was just a young school music orchestra teacher and he was the MAESTRO, college and youth symphony director.

Well, it took me while to think how I was going to handle this situation. Surprisingly and so timely an article showed up in the American String Teacher Association magazine. It was written by the concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra (my favorite professional string section) and I believe the title was “In Philadelphia we start all bow strokes on the String”. Wow, now I had the ammunition to take on this other conductor.

I contacted this maestro and we met at a Chinese place for lunch not far from our homes. We had a nice talk about the students we shared and the music scene in our area. After while I brought up the issue of the bow and spiccato. He explained to me how he had seen some professional string quartet attack the string from well above and how he liked that sound. I was confused at first and thought there might a place for this in certain types of music or in string quartet. I started to explain that in a large orchestra how hard this would be to get them to play well together. I then asked if he had seen this article in the ASTA magazine for their concertmaster. He had not seen this article but I had it with me and just looking at the title of the article he knew his defense was weak. As our lunch finished I told him he can run his orchestra as he liked but my high school will be doing our best to emulate those Philly folks.