

The Sonata Duo as Learning Experience for Both String Students and Piano Students: Benefits of Peer Group Collaboration

2020 ASTA National Conference

Presenter: Daniel Mason

Assisted by: Dr. Mami Hayashida

Abstract

String Players are often conditioned by their training to regard the literature of sonatas with piano as solo works with accompaniment rather than chamber music. Teaching string instrument and piano duos as collaborations for students of both instruments, at any age and any level has benefits in developing both musical and interpersonal skills.

The literature of duos for stringed instruments with piano is a rich and varied one, offering great pedagogical opportunities to string and piano students alike. Ensemble training for string players has focused upon the orchestral experience, with smaller ensemble opportunities distant runners-up. Sonatas and other duo works with piano are typically introduced as solo recital repertoire, with collaboration by professional “accompanists”; the string students are often required to memorize their parts of sonatas and rarely learn to regard the pianist as an equal (or even “more than equal”) partner. While playing with experienced pianists has its own merits and benefits, the string player is relieved of some of the responsibility for the finished product and rehearsal/coaching time is too brief for the student fully to experience the works as chamber music. In teaching at the university level, the presenters often encounter students with no prior duo experience; it is particularly unusual for a pre-college student to have had the chance to work on a sonata with a friend or sibling. Merging the sounds of string and piano requires skillful listening and imaginative exploration of textures and colors. The aim is to encourage the side-by-side learning of the works so that both players can develop a lifelong love of collaboration.

Benefits

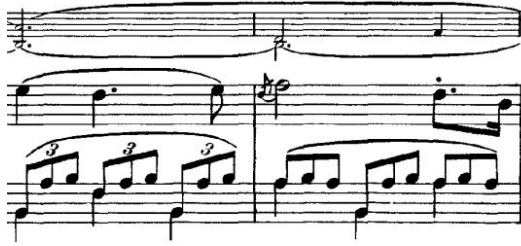
- The duo repertoire provides an ideal opportunity for the younger string player and pianist to learn many specialized ensemble skills and to explore and enjoy the collaborative experience.
- Students have an opportunity to learn the entire score. Understanding how a duo fits together can help develop the prerequisite skills for playing trios, quartets, etc.
- Both students learn to listen while playing and be more aware of the final product
- String students who also study piano could learn to play both instruments in chamber music by playing piano for other string players. Example: Benjamin Britten *Gemini Variations*.

Coaching/teaching young string players and pianists to collaborate effectively

1. **Sustain the sound:** Stringed instruments cannot compete with modern piano in initial attack, but can provide a sustained sound to round out the duo sound and help maintain the line of a phrase.
2. **Tempered intonation matches the piano:** Lowest string checked with same pitch on piano. Tuning in “pure” fifths may result in lowest strings sounding flat.
3. **A minimalist vibrato:** can blend well with piano sound in a unison or polyphonic texture.
4. **Piano at full-stick:** Depending on the pianist, the instrument and the acoustic, full-stick may be best because it is clearer and the string player can hear details better. Also, the open grand piano can serve as an acoustical “shell” for the duo. Note that the modern piano is much more sustained and powerful sounding than the instrument for which repertoire before the late 19th century was written.
5. **A Duo is a Trio:** Since the piano part has two hands, rehearsing with one hand of piano part is often the efficient way to solve ensemble problems. Very often the string part participates with some element in the keyboard part as a unit. In these examples from Beethoven op. 30, no.3/2nd mvt., the violin part and piano left hand together accompany the melody, and can be rehearsed independently to unify shape and match sound:

**Tempo di Minuetto.
ma molto moderato e grazioso.**

The image shows a musical score for a minuet. It consists of two staves: a violin staff on top and a piano accompaniment staff on the bottom. The tempo is marked 'Tempo di Minuetto. ma molto moderato e grazioso.' The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part includes a trill (tr) and a crescendo (cresc.) marking.



6. **Sight lines:** Placement on stage should allow for good visual communication. Violin and viola players should stand next to pianist for best projection and sight lines. Watching a pianist's hand(s) is often an effective way for the string player to gauge intricate timing, e.g., trills and grace notes.
7. **Learning Time:** Give pianists, in general, three times as much time to learn pieces.
8. **Importance of the score:** String players should always have the score in hand even if s/he practices/plays from the part. String teachers should be coaching the group with the score. A tablet and a foot pedal can allow the string player at least to rehearse from the score.
9. **Melody:** For each section, identify who has the melody. That player should "lead".
10. **Recordings:** Both string and piano students should listen to the recordings of the piece ahead of their first rehearsal/lesson to familiarize him/herself with the ensemble partner's part. String players may even try playing his/her part with an online recording of the piano.
11. **Mighty Metronome:** Rehearse with metronome (slowly!). Record.

Collaborating with a Piano Studio

String teacher may need to counter the sense that the participating piano student will be an "accompanist" rather than a chamber ensemble player. Repertoire featuring both instruments equally is the best choice for same-age duos, but equal treatment and equal level are not common in less advanced repertoire.

References

Printed

Hinson, Maurice, and Wesley Roberts. *The Piano in Chamber Ensemble: An Annotated Guide*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Nancy O'Neill Breth, *Beginning and Intermediate Chamber Music with Piano: A Bibliography*, Presented at MTNA Conference, Seattle, 2005 (working on availability)

Breth, Nancy O'Neill. "Adding chamber music to the piano studio." *The American Music Teacher* 60.2 (2010): 16. (available online through ProQuest)

Online

Suggestions for Easy Violin/Piano Duet?: <https://www.violinist.com/discussion/archive/16980/>

“Easy” Violin/Piano Duets:

<https://maestronet.com/forum/index.php?/topic/319856-easy-violinpiano-duets/>

Chamber Music -- Easier (violin/piano) -- scroll down to the section:

http://beststudentviolins.com/sheetmusic.html#vlpiano_duets

Online sheet music shop that sells significantly simplified piano parts: <https://dumb-it-down.com/>

Repertoire Suggestions

Including selections mentioned in sources listed above; some of these works may not be in print currently. If no publisher is given, the work is on IMSLP.

Easiest piano parts

Violin and piano

Lombard, Jo. Three Nocturnes for Violin and Piano, Sundance Music

Johnson, Katherine D, ed. and arr. Accompanying the Violin, Kjos Music Co

Katherine & Hugh Colledge: Stepping Stones, Shooting Stars, Fast Forward

Elgar: Six Very Easy Melodious Exercises in the First Position, Op. 22

Arthur Hartmann: 6 Pieces for violin and piano, op. 28

Max Bisping: Three Easy Sonatinas

Otto Müller: 2 Easy Sonatinas for Violin and Piano, op.65

Ellen Schwindt: Sonatina in F

Poisot and Kontski: Sonatine.

Frederick Hall: Sonatina for the Violin and Piano

Cello and Piano

Lombard, Jo. Three Dances for Cello and Piano, Sundance Music

Viola and piano

Various, ed. Brass. Time Pieces, Vol. 1-3, C. F. Peters (ABRSM).

Intermediate

Violin and Piano

Schubert: Sonatina No. 1, op 137, no. 1

Mozart: Sonatas K. 301, 304

Beethoven, Sonatas No. 4/I; No. 5/I; No. 8/II

Martini: Sonatina, Melantrich

Various, ed. Barber. Solos for Young Violinists, Vol. 1-5, Summy-Birchard.

Cello and Piano

Hindemith, Paul (1895-1963). Three Easy Pieces, Schott (ED 2771)..

Various, arr. Such. Old Masters for Young Players, Schott.

Various, ed. Legg/Gout. First Repertoire for Cello, Bk. 1 to 3, Faber Music.

Various, ed. Mezo. Violoncello Music for Beginners, Editio Musica Budapest.

Various, arr. Moffat. Easy Classics Album, Schott. Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, etc..

Hajdu, Mihaly (1909-1990). Hungarian Children's Songs, Editio Musica Budapest.

Viola and Piano

Various, ed. Wilkinson/Hart. First Repertoire for Viola, Bk. 1 to 3, Faber Music

Various, ed. Barber. Solos for Young Violinists, Vol. 1-5, Summy-Birchard.

Moderately Difficult

Violin and Piano

Sibelius: Sonatina

Kabalevsky: Improvisation, op. 21

Corelli, Arcangelo (1653-1713). ed. Jensen, 12 Sonatas, Op. 5, International Music Co.

Dvorak, Antonin (1841-1904). Five Pieces, [Music Masters Publishing.

Dvorak, Antonin (1841-1904). Sonatina in G, Op. 100, G. Schirmer.

Handel, G. F. (1685-1759). 7 Sonatas, G. Henle.

Various, arr. Nelson. Baroque Violinist: Intermediate Pieces for Violin and Piano, Boosey & Hawkes (HL48011665).

Various, arr. Nelson. Classical Violinist: A Collection of Intermediate Pieces for Violin and Piano, Boosey & Hawkes (HL 48011666).

Various, ed. Nelson. Romantic Violinist for Violin and Piano, Boosey & Hawkes (HL 48011667).

Various, ed. Huws Jones. Unbeaten Tracks: 8 Contemporary Pieces for Violin and Piano, Faber Music.

De Falla, Manuel (1876-1946), arr. Marechal. Suite Populaire Espagnole, Durand (Hal Leonard #50562416).

Cello and Piano

Bazelaire, Paul (1886-1958). Suite Francaise, Schott (SF 7936).

Bennett, Richard Rodney (1936-). 6 Country Dances, Novello.

Bertau, Martin (c. 1700-1771) (formerly attributed to Sammartini). Sonata in G Major, International. Allegro, Grave, Allegro

Bridge, Frank (1879-1941). Two Pieces, Music Masters Publishing.

Couperin, Francois (1668-1733), arr. Bauzelaire. Pieces en Concert, Alphonse Leduc & Cie.

Dvorak, Antonin (1841-1904). Works for Violoncello and Piano, Schott (UT 50244). Waldesruhe, Op. 68 #5 (Klid), Polonaise in A Major, Rondo in G Minor, Op. 94.

Marais, Marin (1656-1728). La Folia; Two Pieces, Schott.

Poulenc, Francis (1899-1963). Suite Francaise, Durand (Hal Leonard #50562172). Originally for piano solo, transcribed by Poulenc.

Romberg, Bernhard (1767-1841). Sonatas International Music Co.

Saint-saens, Camille (1835-1921). Allegro Appassionato, Op. 43 International Music Co.

Shostakovich, Dmitri (1906-1975). Two Pieces, Hal Leonard (#50484145).

Squire, William (1871-1963). Tarantella, Op. 23, Carl Fischer.

Vaughan Williams, Ralph (1872-1958). 6 Studies in English Folksongs, ECS/Galaxy Music Corp. (#1.5124) or Masters Music Co.

Vivaldi, Antonio (1675-1741), arr. Dallapiccola. 6 Sonatas, International. piano parts by Luigi Dallapiccola.

Various. 7 Sonatine Editio Musica Budapest. VARIOUS, arr. Petsik. Easy Concert Pieces, Editio Musica Budapest.

Various, ed. Isserlis. Unbeaten Tracks: 8 Contemporary Pieces for Cello and Piano, Faber Music.

Viola and Piano

Bennett, Richard Rodney (1936-). 6 Country Dances

Purcell, Henry (1659-1695). 8 Pieces for Viola and Piano, International Music Co.

Interesting Challenge

Britten: Gemini Variations (Boosey and Hawkes) for flute, violin, and piano

Presenters

Daniel Mason is currently Professor of Violin and Head of the String Area at the University of Kentucky, and Concertmaster of the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra. He has also been concertmaster of the New Hampshire Music Festival Orchestra and appeared frequently as soloist with orchestra and in recitals and chamber concerts in the United States and abroad. His activities have included live national radio broadcasts from WFMT in Chicago, including the Dame Myra Hess Series, and performances on NPR's Performance Today and at the Kennedy Center in Washington. Mr. Mason was a member of the Jascha Heifetz Master Class and holds degrees from the Ohio State University and the University of Southern California. Mr. Mason has been invited even times to present at the National Conference of the American String Teachers Association, in 2006, 2008, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2020. He has given master classes and performances around the world, including in Korea, China, Brazil, Austria, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Turkey, Cambodia and the Republic of Georgia. Mr. Mason's students have won positions in the Los Angeles Philharmonic (Associate Concertmaster), Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra and others, as well as teaching positions at universities around the nation. He is joined in this presentation by pianist **Mami Hayashida** who was for nine years tenured Professor of Piano at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky. Recipient of the Teacher of the Year award from the Kentucky Music Teachers Association in 2014, she has successfully worked with students of various levels and ages. She holds degrees from Oberlin College/Conservatory, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, and the University of Kentucky.