

Right Hand Technique Practice – Sharon Gilchrist

Here is what I do for my typical Right Hand Technique Practice and is how I usually start my practice each day.

I would start with the Right Hand Warm Up followed by the Tremolo Exercise I detailed in the previous emails.

The Right Hand Warm Up helps get rid of bad posture/tension in the right hand and helps people get used to using their forearms to find the strings. It does not teach tone or volume.

The Tremolo Exercise will help you teach the muscles in the wrist to move in the smallest motion possible and yet be very articulate and intentional while doing so. It will also help you learn not to let the tip of the pick dive in between sets of strings - even a little bit!

The Rest Stroke is where you can develop your biggest, fastest tone.

In a piece of music, it can mostly likely only be used on quarter notes or half-notes at slower tempos.

In other words, you can't use rest strokes on a fiddle tune per se, but it is still a great exercise in developing one's tone.

Keep rest strokes in your practice for at least a month to see what you learn from them. I find I continually learn more and more after doing them for years now. They are like gold!

In order to get the benefit of the rest stroke into regular speed playing, I detail two other exercises below - "Presses" and using the G-Major Scale as an exercise which brings together technique from all the exercises we went over - using the forearm to take you string to string, getting a fat tone on shorter pick strokes, keeping the pick on the surfaces of the strings, not swinging past the string and getting your up stroke as loud as your down stroke (again, that is made easier by being out on the surface of the string).

REST STROKES -

Play about 10-20 rest strokes on each open string - do this for both down strokes and up strokes.

1 - Concentrate on making sure to catch the foremost front edge of the top string - in other words, do not let the pick dive past the edge of the string even a little bit.

2 - On the down strokes, make sure the pick is angled down (folding down over the strings somewhat strongly - I call this the "rooftop angle" - meaning it looks like the edge of the roof hanging down over the side of a house - the side of the house is your strings in this case. For up strokes, you will turn the pick in the opposite direction with still a pretty severe/strong angle.

3 - Once you catch the front edge of the string, get the angle set and then turn/rotate your wrist just a little bit you should catch the 2nd string in the pair. Next, stop the swing of your pick by resting your pick on the next string over.

4 - Once you get the hang of this, you can add a little press from the thumb (down stroke) or first finger (up stroke) to help focus the tone and bring out more volume.

PRESSES:

Because the Rest Stroke is too big and takes too much time to use in regular alternating picking, this next exercise helps us make the rest stroke smaller, while still maintaining tone by hitting two strings on both the down stroke and the up stroke. It also forces us to re-find the front edge of the strings on each stroke. This helps us learn the touch we need to prevent digging the pick in past the edge of the strings allowing us to keep the pick on the tops of the strings.

On presses, you simply shorten the Rest Stroke (you don't have to rest on the next string over) and quicken it.

Try to keep feeling the string through your thumb for down strokes or through the index finger for up strokes to see if you are hitting both strings. Hit the open string repeatedly. You can move the pick up and down one string from the bridge all the way up to the 12th fret. This makes a "moving target" out of the string. If you can keep the pick striking down on the front edge of the string in stead of digging past it while moving around on the string, you are really learning the touch for staying out on the surfaces of the strings.

Do this for both down strokes and up strokes.

G MAJOR SCALE:

Now we are going to try to minimize the stroke one step further and go into alternating down and up strokes while still maintaining good tone and making sure the forearm is carrying us from string to string.

Play a G Major Scale with open strings, hitting each note of the scale 8 times.

You may practice it this way for a month. It doesn't matter how long you stay on 8 strokes per note.

Stay there until your down and up strokes are equally as loud as each other, stay there until you are able to leave all 3 fingers down by the time you get to the ring finger note.

Stay there until you can play the scale ascending and descending seeing that the forearm is carrying you from string to string.

Make sure the pick is not digging in past the surface of the strings.

And make sure the pick is not swinging past the string on the down or up stroke - this means you should feel the string beneath your pick the entire time!!

Once you can do this, play each note of the scale 4 times, then 2 times, then 1 time per note. We are aiming to get good right hand technique set here while we slowly add in the left hand.