

the STRETCH ZONE

For Advanced and Curious Players

Welcome to the STRETCH ZONE

This space is for those of you who feel ready (or just wildly curious) to go a bit deeper.

Whether you're an experienced player looking to refine and reimagine your technique, or someone simply hungry for nuance and challenge, [the Stretch Zone is here to meet you where you are—and gently nudge you further.](#)

Each month, we'll expand on the foundational ideas presented in the technique exercise(s) and explore how they can evolve at a more advanced level. You might find layered technical work, interpretive perspectives, or small details that unlock big shifts.

The goal isn't perfection—it's expansion.

Precision with freedom.

Effort with ease.

Curiosity that never stops unfolding.

How to use this section:

STEP 01: Start with the main technique exercise to establish your foundation for the month.

STEP 02: Then, visit the STRETCH ZONE when you're ready to deepen, experiment, or add complexity to what you've already begun.

Think of it as an invitation—not a requirement—to stretch your:

Technique,

Thinking, and

Artistic voice a little further each time you visit ^{the} STRETCH ZONE

I'm so glad you're here.

Let's stretch,

Sophie



the STRETCH ZONE

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[STRETCH ZONE A DEMONSTRATION VIDEO]

Time stamps are in the description area to allow you to go directly where you want.

STRETCH ZONE A

EXERCISES FOR GOOD SET UP IN THE LEFT ARM & LEFT HAND

1. For a **good basic left hand and arm position set up** (make repeated check ins)*:

~Left hand should look and feel as if you are **holding a ball/orange** (this is true for both hands)

~**Rounded fingers** (“tall” fingers)

~Hand should be **fairly “square on”** in relation to the fingerboard (there is a very slight backwards slant in the hand)

~**Loose thumb**, no squeezing!

~Thumb lightly touches the **middle of the back of the cello neck** (or a little to the A string side*)

~Thumb should be positioned **opposite the 2nd finger** (or between 1st and 2nd fingers) (**PHOTO I**)

~**Flat wrist** (**PHOTO L**)

~Hand **“hangs downwards”** from fingerboard with gravity (vs squeezing fingerboard between thumb and fingers). Think of a monkeybar sensation in the hand and arms (**PHOTOS I & L**)

~Arm and elbow should feel somewhat “suspended” in mid-air (**elbow not too low!**)

*When the thumb is too far “under” the neck (towards the C string side), it inevitably drags the elbow too low

2. For **not squeezing upwards with the thumb**:

Lightly tap the thumb on the back of the neck as you play a simple pattern in a single position (eg. 1-2-3-4 in 1st position on any string, or a one octave scale) (See **Video Demonstration**)

3. For **familiarization with specific hand positions**:

Play any single note (your choice of finger and position). See how accurately you can refind it when you take your hand completely off the fingerboard (outstretch the arm away from the cello) and then return it to the same place. Repeat, paying careful attention to the way the arm, hand and finger feel when you are in exactly in tune. (See **Video Demonstration**)

Suggestion: try starting with the 1st finger in 4th position on the D string (ie. playing an A), or the 1st finger in 1st position on the A string (ie. playing a B)

4. For practicing the degree of **stretch across the back of the left hand needed in 1st position**:

Find 1st position (carefully check the intonation of each finger in turn), paying attention to the feeling of a rather pronounced stretch across the back of the hand, and in particular between the 2nd and 3rd fingers (**PHOTOS I, J & K**)

5. For practising **leading shifts with the shoulder, and increasing familiarization with the entire length of the fingerboard**:

Trace hand up & down fingerboard, leading with the shoulder (See **Video Demonstration**)

6. To **encourage a light touch in the left hand, as well as lightly rounded fingers**:

Try the “light touch” harmonics exercises given on page 22 (See **Video Demonstration**)



PHOTO I: correct position.
Fingers are evenly spaced apart



PHOTO J: bad position.
Fingers are too close together



PHOTO K: bad position. Not
enough stretch between 2nd & 3rd
fingers, so uneven spacing



PHOTO L: Flat wrist, hand hangs down, elbow well-positioned



LIGHT TOUCH NATURAL HARMONICS

Essential Tips for Harmonics:

- 1) Finger must be in EXACTLY the right spot
- 2) light touch
- 3) Fast bow
- 4) Near the bridge

INTRODUCTION TO NATURAL HARMONICS IN UPPER 2ND

The musical notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains four measures of music, each starting with a natural harmonic. The notes are: G2 (marked with finger 1), A2 (marked with finger 2), B2 (marked with finger 4), and C3 (marked with finger 1). The bottom staff is in treble clef and shows the 'sounding pitch' for each harmonic: G3, A3, B3, and C4. Roman numerals I, II, III, and IV are placed below the first four notes of the top staff.

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

The musical notation is in 4/4 time and consists of two systems. Each system has a bass staff and a treble staff. The bass staff shows the fingering for the notes: 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1. The treble staff shows the 'sounding pitch' for each note. The melody is: G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4.



the
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[STRETCH ZONE B DEMONSTRATION VIDEO]

Time stamps are in the description area to allow you to go directly where you want.

STRETCH ZONE B

FORM AND POSTURE-RELATED EXERCISES FOR MORE EFFORTLESS PLAYING & DEEPER TONE

Breathing Exercise

Disclaimer: when we don't breathe freely, or even worse, hold our breath, we inevitably create tension throughout our bodies. To play freely and with most control we need to be physically as relaxed as possible. Breathing is an integral part of this relaxation. Aim for a fuller, deeper breath (vs quick and shallow)

- **For increasing power and connecting the feeling of full lungs and openness in the upper half of the bow:**

Playing full bows, inhale for the Down bow and exhale for the Up bow (at point of bow change). Careful to sustain the tone at the point. Lungs will be full at the tip, opening the chest. At the tip, feel the weight in your hand (keeping your shoulder low). At the frog, balance the tip. (See [Video Demonstration](#))

Optional: This exercise can also be applied to just the upper half of the bow

Finding Counter Pressure Exercises

- **For Deeper Tone Connection (as recommended by Lynn Harrell):**

Making sure your feet are both firmly grounded, move your endpin an inch or so further away from you. Use this extra space to move your torso forwards into the cello. This slight forward inclination of the torso enables an increase in power from the torso and back. (See [Video Demonstration](#))

- **For a Free and More Powerful Sound:**

Bring the cello a little higher on the chest. If you don't want to change your endpin position, you can also achieve this result by just pushing the chest up and out. This slight change of position of the chest brings the cello "up" against the downwards weight of the bow, creating counter pressure for the bow to push against, resulting in more sound. (See [Video Demonstration](#))

(the opposite to this—which we should try to avoid—is pushing down on the cello without any feeling of counter pressure)



BERCEUSE (LULLABY)
-FRANZ SCHUBERT

On the following page, you will find Schubert's calming "Berceuse" (Wiegenlied, D.498). I invite you to consider great posture, and to experiment with slight changes to your form and set up as you play this timeless classic.

Some possible considerations for Posture and Form as you play the Berceuse:

- **Low, broad shoulders**
- **Endpin length**
- **Cello angle**
- **Three contact points**
- **Free, deep breathing from the diaphragm**
- **Allow the ground and chair to support you**
- **Rooted feet**
- **Slight forward inclination in torso**
- **Counter-pressure between string and bow**
- **Balance and comfort level**
- **Bow hold**
- **Loose thumbs**
- **Loose jaw**
- **Left hand finger spacing**
- **Rounded fingers**
- **Light touch**



REPERTOIRE
APPLICATION

Berceuse (Wiegenlied, D.498)

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

Moderato
♩ = 70

p

5

mf

9

13

pp

17

mf *p*



REPERTOIRE
APPLICATION

REFLECTION ...

HOW DOES FOCUSING ON POSTURE AND FORM IMPACT YOUR PLAYING?

WHICH SLIGHT CHANGES TO POSTURE AND FORM DO YOU FIND TO BE MOST HELPFUL TO YOU AT THIS POINT IN YOUR CELLO JOURNEY?

NOTES AND REFLECTIONS:

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LISTENING & INSPIRATION

THE FOLLOWING RECORDINGS ARE SUGGESTED TO ENCOURAGE LISTENING SKILLS, AND TO DEEPEN MUSICALITY.

As you listen, note the differences in each cellist's body type, set up, and sound.

What do you notice, like or dislike about each cellist's approach?

This kind of critical observations and listening is a great exercise; feel free to explore other recordings too!

1 Berceuse (Wiegenlied, D.498)

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

-Janos Starker, Kodaly Solo Sonata, Mvmt III: [\[LINK\]](#)
(short endpin, cello vertical and rather angled to right with the A string side up, light touch in left hand for wonderful agility, general effortlessnes)

~Mstislv Rostropovich, Bach Prelude from Suite No.1 in G Major: [\[LINK\]](#)
(longer endpin, flatter cello angle, string sense of couterpressure)

~Zara Nelson Lalo Cello Concerto, Mvmt II (Intermezzo): [\[LINK\]](#)
(shorter endpin, more vertical cello, close to bridge much of the time)

~Miklos Perenyi, Brahms Cello Sonata No.2, Mvmt I: [\[LINK\]](#)
(slightly longer endpin, forwards inclination, scroll rather high off shoulder)

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT EACH OF THESE ARTISTS' SET UP AND SOUND?



INTEGRATION & CLOSING REFLECTION



01 WHAT CHANGED IN YOUR AWARENESS OR SKILL THIS MONTH?

02 HOW WILL YOU CARRY THIS INTO YOUR NEXT PRACTICE CYCLE OR REPERTOIRE?

03 SET 1-2 GOALS FOR REVIEW OR NEXT EXPLORATION



NOTES & OBSERVATIONS



WHAT WERE YOUR BEST PRACTICE OR A-HA MOMENTS AND HOW CAN YOU INCORPORATE THIS INTO FUTURE PRACTICE SESSIONS?

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WHAT AREA(S) DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON AND IMPROVE?

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CLOSING

As we wrap up this month's Practice Companion, take a moment to notice the subtle shifts you've created.

By refining your posture and form—your balance, alignment, and ease—you've strengthened the foundation that supports every sound you make.

In your warm-ups, your technical work, and the pieces you're shaping, that new sense of grounding is already taking root—showing up as freer movement and a more resonant, connected tone.

Keep returning to that awareness.

Your body is your first instrument,

Your alignment is your support,

And **your comfort is the doorway to your most natural sound.**

A NOTE FROM SOPHIE:

I believe that playing –and practising –the cello should be a joyous thing. Too often, I hear cellists expressing frustration with their playing and practising, unsure how to move forwards and focus their attention. It is my sincere hope that the PRACTICE ROOM gives you the tools to lean into your practice with intentionality and reflection, at your own pace (which, if you're anything like me, should probably be a little slower). Quality always over quantity...

We all need to make space for ourselves to experiment without judgment (perhaps with a little humour, tho ;)) and to embrace the journey. I hope you enjoy the PRACTICE ROOM experience as much as I have enjoyed –and continue to enjoy, with your help –creating it.

Happy Cello-ing!

Sophie





WHAT'S NEXT

This month every intentional note, question, and breakthrough you experienced is part of something lasting.



If you're ready to keep going, I'd love to have you join us for another month of grounded, thoughtful discovery inside the PRACTICE ROOM.

Let's keep building together —
one focus,
one phrase,
one step at a time.

Thank you!

[\[Join the next session here\]](#)



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This curated space is here to support and enrich your monthly practice.

Here, you'll find practical tools, helpful guides, and gentle reminders to help you move forward with clarity and confidence.

Return to these resources as often as you need — they're here to grow with you as you shape your musical journey.

1. Your Monthly Practice Companion

These resources are here to support you every month, no matter the focus. From a structured daily practice plan to helpful notes on play-along videos, these tools are designed to give you clarity, consistency, and confidence in your practice:

- A GUIDE TO OPENING MEASURES –Your Monthly Practice Companion [Page 35](#)
- HOW TO USE YOUR PRACTICE COMPANION [\[ACCESS IT HERE\]](#)
- DAILY PRACTICE TRACKER [Page 4](#)

2. Additional Resources for Rhythm

These rhythm-focused tools go beyond this month's core material and are here to deepen your rhythmic awareness across any companion:

- WHAT IS SUBDIVISION? [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- WHAT ARE SPEECH CUES? [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- TIME SIGNATURES/METERS [Page 36](#)

3. Additional Resources for Intonation

- [AN INTRODUCTION TO FINGERBOARD GEOGRAPHY \(1st to 4th POSITIONS\)](#) [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- [FINGERBOARD GEOGRAPHY CHART](#) [\[Access It Here\]](#)
- [RINGING TONE CHART](#) [\[Access It Here\]](#)



PROGRESS TRACKING

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

QUESTIONS TO BRING TO Q&A:

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A GUIDE TO OPENING MEASURES PRACTICE COMPANION

I'd like to take a moment to summarize the essence of "Opening Measures," what it offers, as well as a suggestion of a sample daily practice plan.

To start, this is YOUR guide and YOUR practice time, so please feel free to tweak my suggestions or even go in a different direction if that feels right to you.

I highly recommend regular note taking to help you organize your thoughts and practice experience. This will also give your own personalized source of reference material for the future.

Whatever path we each choose, it's important to keep our goals in mind, while staying open to ongoing slight course correction --just like Apollo 11 as it ventured towards the moon!

"Opening Measures" is designed to allow YOU to be at the steering wheel, with a helping hand in terms of...

- **mindset and body preparation** (opening reflection, tips for body awareness and tone connection)
- **practice content and structure** (two core methods to improve rhythm and pulse internalization with exercises and drills in progressive difficulty and optional tempo tracking)
- **mindfulness reminders** (a practice calendar, spaces for notes, observations, reflections, aha moments, and questions)
- **inspiration** (listening integration, quotes from famous cellists and musicians)
- **a companion cellist guide** --that's me! 😊 (lots of play along videos at different tempi --as well as "playing along" with the videos, these are also a great opportunity to observe other aspects of playing that can help, like set up, use of the bow and LH, and entire body, while playing...)



TIME SIGNATURES/METERS

In western music, pieces are typically written with a time signature, dividing the composition into a number of measures. There are two kinds of time signatures or “meters;” simple and compound meters.

Simple meters are those in which the main beat is divisible by 2. The most common examples are 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4. The bottom number represents the beat (a quarter note, which is divided by 2 to create two eighth notes). The top number represents the number of beats per measure. So there are 2 quarter note beats in 2/4, 3 quarter note beats in 3/4 and 4 quarter note beats in 4/4.

Compound meters are those in which the main beat is divisible by 3. The most common examples are 6/8, 9/8, and 12/8. For these examples, the beat is a dotted eighth note (which is divided by 3 to create three eighth notes). So there are 2 dotted quarter note beats in 6/8, 3 dotted quarter note beats in 9/8, and 4 dotted quarter note beats in 12/8.

Metrical hierarchy

Within each measure, there is a basic hierarchical importance or “stress” given to the placement of each beat, as below (relative hierarchical stress is represented through the number of lines under each beat number, more lines indicates a stronger beat with more emphasis):

SIMPLE METERS (one beat is a quarter note)

2/4: 1 2

3/4: 1 2 3

4/4: 1 2 3 4

Beats listed in order of importance (stress)

- 1, 2
- 1, 2, 3
- 1, 3, 2, 4

COMPOUND METERS (one beat is a dotted quarter note)

6/8: 1 2

9/8: 1 2 3

12/8: 1 2 3 4

- 1, 2
- 1, 2, 3
- 1, 3, 2, 4