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Opinion: Playing with accompanists early on

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Piano accompaniment is too often treated as an afterthought in teaching. Violinist Sendi Vartanovi argues that string students learn more effectively when collaboration begins from day one





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During more than ten years of teaching violin to children of different ages and levels, I have observed the same moment countless times: a student walks into a first rehearsal with piano accompaniment feeling confident, having practised for weeks. Yet within the first few bars, they realise that mastering the violin part alone does not prepare them for a successful performance.



Notes that felt comfortable in individual practice can suddenly become more challenging; not because the student knows the piece less well, but because their attention is no longer focused solely on the violin. For the first time, they are making music with someone else.

When a piece includes accompaniment, rehearsing with it should become part of the learning process from the start. Early rehearsals with piano are one of the most valuable tools for developing violinists who listen more deeply, communicate more effectively, and perform with greater confidence.

The piano also helps students understand a piece more deeply. Harmonic progressions reveal where phrases are leading, where tension builds, and where it resolves. Students begin to think in complete musical phrases, which makes their performances more expressive and convincing.

One of the most important changes after introducing piano accompaniment is the student's approach to intonation. Rather than adjusting their pitch only in relation to their own sound, they begin listening to how each note fits within the harmony and blends with the piano. This shift encourages students to refine their way of listening and, over time, develop more accurate intonation and a deeper understanding of harmony.

Rehearsing with accompaniment also transforms a student's sense of rhythm. The piano provides them with a stable rhythmic framework while allowing them to shape phrases and respond naturally to another musician.

Equally important is the development of listening skills. Young violinists naturally focus most of their attention on producing their own sound. Playing with accompaniment teaches them to listen beyond themselves: to the harmony, phrasing, balance, and musical intentions of another performer.

This also changes the way students respond in performance. When something unexpected happens, such

as a missed note or an insecure shift, they learn not to stop or lose focus, but to listen, reconnect with the piano, and continue the musical conversation. These moments teach students one of the most valuable performance skills: how to recover naturally without losing the flow of the music.

My goal as a teacher is to help students become musicians, and introducing accompaniment early is one of the most effective ways to do that. For this reason, I often play the piano myself during lessons.

A remarkable benefit of accompaniment is perhaps less often discussed: how it significantly increases motivation. Once students hear the complete musical picture, they become more connected to the piece they are learning. Music that once seemed primarily technical suddenly has meaning, direction and emotional purpose. Students begin to understand what they are working towards, and as a result, they often learn more efficiently and become more willing to refine difficult passages.

Technical exercises will always remain an essential part of violin study. However, rehearsing with the piano should be viewed as an essential part of learning the piece itself. When accompaniment is introduced early, students begin to understand what performance actually is: listening, responding, shaping, and sharing music in real time.

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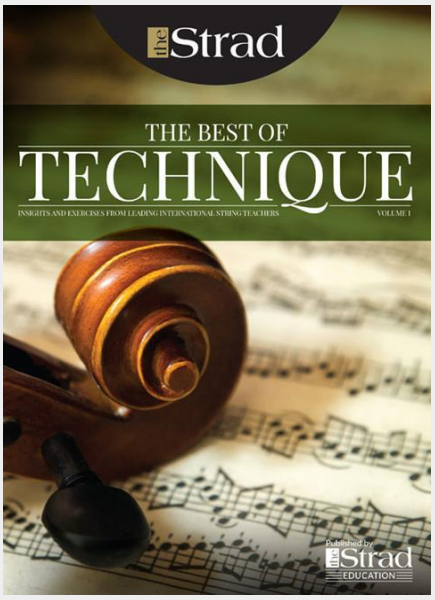
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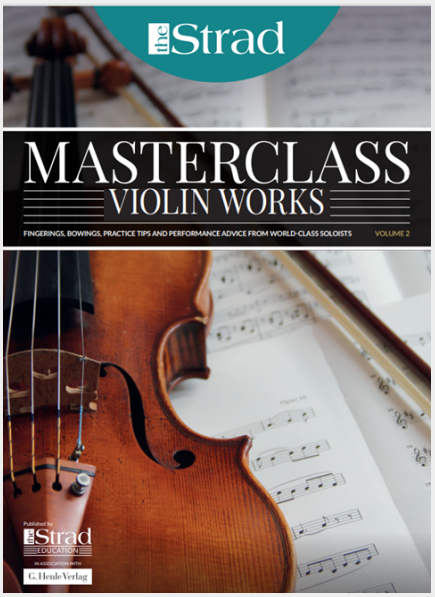
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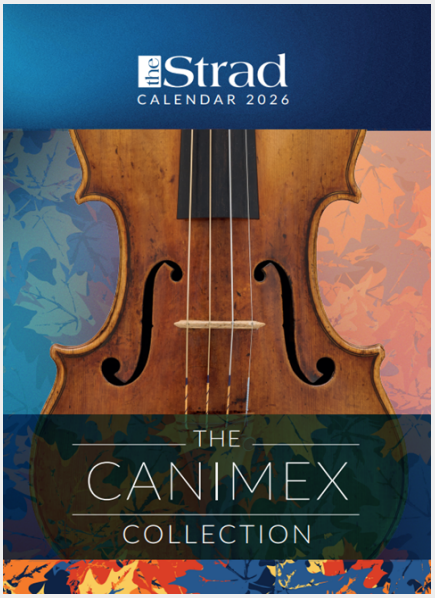
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