

# SEVEN SYMMETRIES FOR SOUND AND SAFETY: a workshop for violin and viola teachers and students

By Pamela Ryan

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**Purpose: Learn to feel symmetries between the right and left sides of the body to optimize balance and release tension while improving tone and minimizing injury in playing the violin or viola.**

Today's agenda: we will try these ideas out together while playing air viola or violin.

To begin, keep these points in mind:

- Muscles work in pairs using **reciprocal inhibition** meaning that one side is active while the other is relaxed. (Fig. 1)
- A **kinetic chain** is a set of muscles working together in a typical pattern.
- Work on feeling and habituating to the **new normal** that optimizes your muscle use.

**These Seven Symmetries apply to both right and left sides of the body:**

- 1) Stand evenly on both feet with head balanced and face centered. Imagine an anatomy picture in profile and think of a plumb line from your ear to your feet, passing through the hips. Stand against a wall: heels, butt, shoulder blades and head touch wall. You may feel that you are leaning back and that your arms fall further back than usual.
- 2) Feel that your arms hang from your shoulders and do this when arms are up in playing position. Keep your ears far away from your shoulders and gently press your shoulder blades flat against your back, so that as your back feels wider, the chest opens. This is a way to use reciprocal inhibition to create a kinetic chain of an open chest with shoulders hanging down. This is your new normal!
- 3) Liberate your armpits. Use infraspinatus (armpit muscle) actively, instead of deltoids and trapezius (shoulders) to increase energy in the horizontal plane for better tone and intonation (Fig. 2). This is a better kinetic chain of motion because it keeps you from rolling up and forward. If your arms are free to move then you are not going to try to play the viola with your spine.
- 4) Use of supination and pronation of both forearms and how to use these in alternation to avoid over use. Remember "soups up" to keep these terms clear in your mind. Twist only from the elbow, again to prevent a bad kinetic chain leading to twisting the spine.
- 5) Keep wrists flat to avoid tendonitis and carpal tunnel injury.
- 6) Cultivate freedom of the thumbs, especially staying loose from the thumb base knuckle near the wrist. Use finger base knuckle flattening to replace tendency to grasp. This helps to stop a wasteful use of muscles called opposition that tires out the muscles because they are working against each other. Again you will need to feel a new normal because you may be used to grasping.
- 7) Curl fingers. Learn to use the fingers in alternating active and passive mode. Active mode lifts the fingers and allows arm to drop: wind up by curling your fingers and flattening at the base knuckles.

**Puppetmaster Activity** to promote body awareness:

Pam (and helpers) guide you to experience the seven symmetries using a thera-band (thera-band.com) or elastic jump rope with handles as an imaginary air violin or viola.

Try shifting and bowing toward the bridge. Please feel free to ask questions and to experiment! Enjoy and have fun!

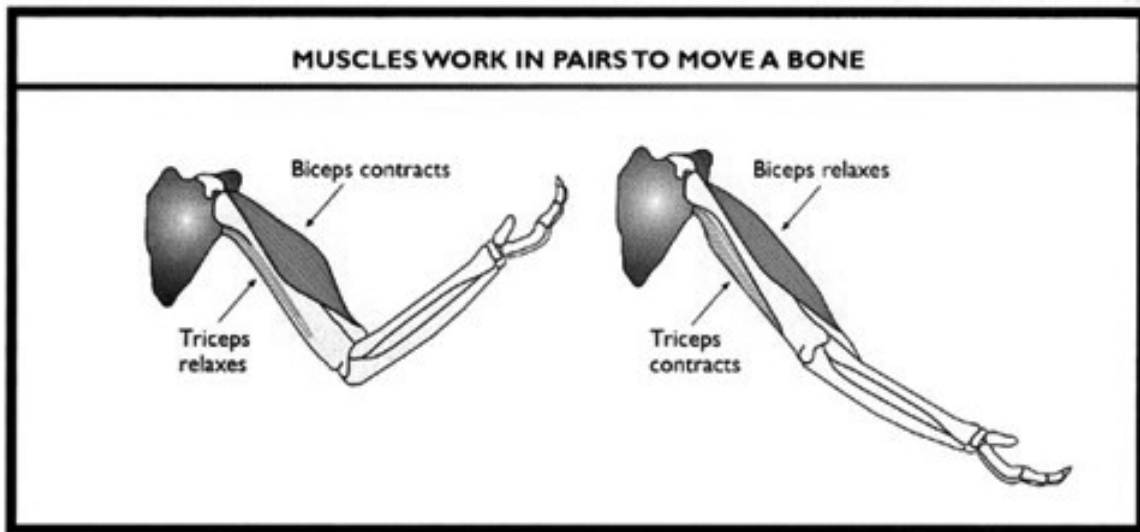


Fig. 1 [http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/adulted/lessons/lesson47\\_pic.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/adulted/lessons/lesson47_pic.html)

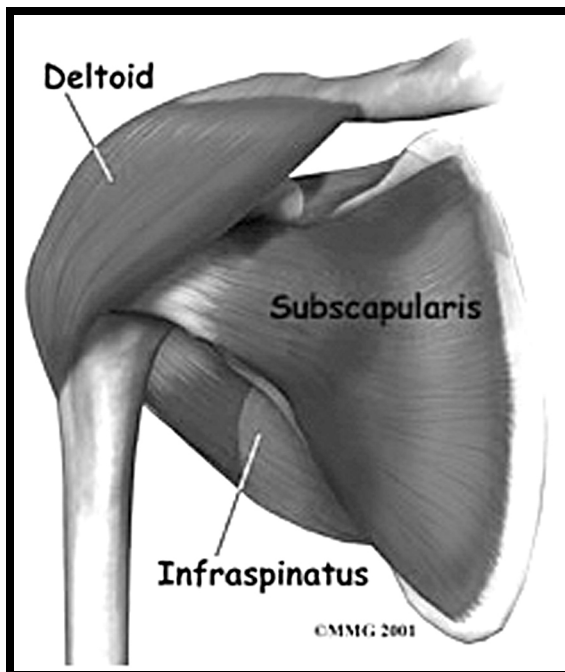


Fig. 2

Heartfelt thanks to Brett Pace, LMT, Elyse Dalabakis, and Ashley Hagadorn for adding greatly to this presentation.

**Pamela Ryan** is professor of viola at The Florida State University College of Music. She will perform the Bartok Concerto with the Thailand Philharmonic in June of 2014. Her article on viola caprices was published in the *Journal of the American Viola Society* in December 2013. Her Seven Symmetries videos <http://youtu.be/TJ299dH8SPA>, <http://youtu.be/YcyWdoAiiHk> <http://youtu.be/Ep5OF-R8Q5g>, and Viola caprice videos are on her YouTube channel Pam Ryan Viola (which has had over 34,000 views).