

Belmont Academy String Quartet
Critical Musicianship Topic: Harmony (tuning and embracing dissonant intervals)

Teaching students how to “get notes in tune” is always somewhat of a challenge, since it is primarily an experiential phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to give students an opportunity to *feel* the difference between “in tune” and “out of tune.” This is especially true when a student is primarily practicing by themselves, or in a large ensemble setting. Chamber music offers a unique opportunity for students to negotiate intonation, and therefore begin to understand the experience of tuning in a more advanced manner.

Many students find that, though they can easily feel when perfect intervals are acceptably in tune, it is more challenging in the context of 3rds, 6ths, or chord extensions. The two selected pieces offer opportunities to practice tuning dissonant intervals, with the goal of strengthening the Critical Musical concept of harmony and intonation.

The piece by Antonio Vivaldi begins with a minor second interval (F# and G) in the first and second violins. The contrapuntal nature of this work offers an opportunity for students to learn how to *dig in* to dissonance and also utilize it as an opportunity to exemplify dynamic phrasing.

Misty features chords with typical jazz extensions (altered 9ths, 11ths, etc.) which many students find challenging to aurally integrate at first. This is partially due to the highly diatonic nature of educational music and modern popular music as a whole. Similar to Vivaldi's *Sinfonia "Al Santo Sepolcro"*, this piece can be used as a springboard into a variety of conversations surrounding dissonant harmony. Note here; this arrangement is not public domain, and I therefore can not attach the actual sheet music without voiding the copyrights of the arranger. It can be found at <https://www.sheetmusicplus.com/title/misty-digital-sheet-music/20329902>

In the high school quartet which I teach, I have found it somewhat difficult to adequately pace our meetings when studying two pieces of such a radically different era. However, I believe there is value in playing music which requires your students to change styles drastically. Additionally, the nature of this lesson focusing on one aspect of critical musicianship can help show your students that- at the end of the day- music is a system in which most of the fundamentals remain the same across many styles.

Sinfonia "Al Santo Sepolcro"

A. Vivaldi

Adagio molto

Violino 1

Violino 2

Viola

Violoncello
Basso

8

15

p *pp*

p *pp*

p *pp*