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## SIX RULES OF CELLO PLAYING

### Introduction:

*Before you see the sheet with the "Six Rules of Cello Playing", I would like to you to know something about the cellist Derek Simpson, a most important figure in the British cello world during the second half of the twentieth century, and who has been cello professor to some outstanding contemporary cellists.*

Derek Simpson was born in Worksop (Nottinghamshire) in 1928, to musician parents, and started playing the cello at 10 years old. At 19 he moved to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music. In 1952 he won the first Suggia Prize, which gave him the chance to study in Paris for a year, with the famous cellist Pierre Fournier. On his return to England, Simpson soon got work both for the Brighton Philharmonic, the London Chamber Orchestra, and as a solo performer. Concerto engagements and regular broadcast recitals soon beckoned, meaning that Simpson was by now starting to enjoy a highly successful solo career, but in June 1956 his professional life took a decisive turn when he was invited to succeed John Moore as cellist of the Aeolian String Quartet. He was to remain in the ensemble until it was disbanded 25 years later. Another significant appointment followed in 1959 when his friend Yehudi Menuhin asked him to be the first principal cello of his newly founded Bath Festival Orchestra.

Although he remained much in demand as a soloist, it became apparent in the 1960s that Simpson was the ideal cellist for the Aeolian Quartet, and his unobtrusive but elegant playing graces their many recordings of the period, including a celebrated account of the Schubert Quintet. Simpson's playing can also be heard on the Beatles' single *Eleanor Rigby*.

In 1970 Simpson's great friend Emmanuel Hurwitz joined the quartet as leader, and the group embarked on a project to record the complete Haydn string quartets, a mammoth undertaking that took six years to complete. The resulting performances are marked by great wit and verve, and remain a landmark in recording history.

For four decades a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, Simpson was an inspiring teacher. Kind but firm with his students (who adored him) and strict on matters of technique, he also had a wicked, but not malicious, sense of humour. This you will probably ascertain with the following page – his "Six Rules of cello playing". In my classes with him (Royal Academy of Music) these very aspects often were present in his thoughts, and indeed he often told me that one day he would write a book about cello playing (alas, he never ever got around to bringing it into fruition). The following 'rules' might seem at first almost amusing, and ... well ... stating the 'obvious', but if one stops to think about each one in real detail there is a whole world of possibilities to improve one's cello technique – simply, when practising, concentrate on each one in turn!

David Johnstone

# SIX RULES OF CELLO PLAYING

Derek Simpson

THE CELLO IS EASY - WE MAKE THE PROBLEMS

PURITY OF INTONATION IS VITAL

It is no use being musical if it's unbearable to listen to.

GOOD RHYTHM IS ESSENTIAL

It is no use being musical in the wrong place.

THE LEFT HAND SHIFTS ALWAYS IN GLISSANDO

Even a semitone shift with the same finger is in the nature of a glissando. In a leap the hand should be in tune in the air.

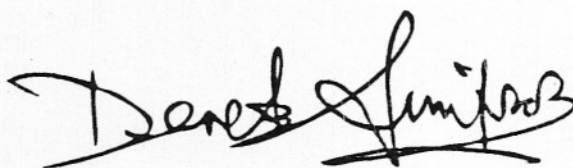
THE BOW OPERATES ALWAYS AS IF ON OPEN STRINGS

The bow arm must be oblivious of the left hand problems except for the point of contact change in the higher positions. Simple rule - as the left hand gets nearer the bridge, so must the bow.

PRACTISE THE THINGS YOU CANNOT DO

A student with lovely vibrato practises slow tunes and another born with quick fingers works at only fast passages.

CRAZY!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Derek Simpson' in a cursive, flowing style.

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