



might have been in danger of losing its momentum, Siow's tale takes on a darker edge as she suffers a series of setbacks and losses, including a serious car accident that leaves her with a badly broken left arm, and forces her to rebuild her playing from scratch. The breezy delivery that sometimes feels a little intense in the earlier chapters takes on a real poignancy as she manages to describe these emotionally challenging times without the slightest hint of feeling sorry for herself.

As an insight into the life of an accomplished performer it's a compelling read, but Siow's gifts as a teacher – she is now professor of violin at the College of Charleston, North Carolina – mean that *From Clementi to Carnegie* also offers much by way of inspiration to young performers, including a three-page survival guide packed with advice under headings such as 'Be super-prepared,' 'Don't be shy'

and 'Commit your dreams to paper.' Early on Siow cites her naivety as her secret weapon, but here she does herself a disservice. What spills out of these pages is an infectious mix of passion, virtuosity and Siow's sheer determination.

CATHERINE NELSON

**How to Master Firm Staccato
Up and Down in Three Lessons**
Alexander Shonert

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In this short book Russian violinist and pedagogue Alexander Shonert lays out his theory of harnessing the *chi* energy, often employed in martial arts contexts, to the bow. As he points out, the bow is not a sword; nevertheless the natural physiological principles he describes form a distinctive and convincing philosophy of violin technique as the

utilising of natural energies by active mental visualisation.

Staccato is the subject of this first book in what is intended as a series (which may eventually encompass vibrato, shifting, intonation and left-hand technique, the spine, performance anxiety and spirituality). Shonert gives a series of 21 exercises designed to enable readers – not only violinists but also violists and cellists – to achieve 'exceptional results in a short time with minimum training'.

Although staccato is the primary focus, Shonert claims that following his method will also improve flexibility in bow changing, as well as tonal resonance, by increasing the sense of freedom in the bow hold and movements of the hand and fingers. Clearly and confidently expressed, accompanied by pictures to illustrate some of the techniques, his principles will be useful to serious students and pedagogues alike.

Shonert is not shy of emphasising his own abilities and includes many heartfelt testimonies to the success of his approach, but this is not a criticism. Rather, it is admirable that he is willing to use his own phenomenal playing ability to illustrate his theories, and to share his skill with colleagues in an open fashion. Whether it is possible to 'catch' a working up-bow and down-bow staccato from the written word alone may be debatable: as Shonert himself acknowledges, any glitches in the learning process would be best sorted out in person or even explored online.

PHILIPPA BUNTING



A lively and likeable writer:
Siow Lee Chin in performance