

The chin and chin rest

The head is a key area to keep disassociated from all other left and right hand actions. Habitually pressing the chin down hard into the chin rest can lead to severe, all-over tension, spreading down from the neck and shoulders into the arms and back. Except for isolated moments, for example during certain descending shifts, the weight of the head resting into the chin rest is normally enough to hold the violin in place, without any need to 'clamp' the violin in place.

How to place the chin on the chin rest

This is a striking example of how a tiny, subtle, almost invisible change in the way we do something on the violin can bring about a huge difference in result.

- 1 Place the violin on the shoulder without yet dropping the head on to the chin rest.
- 2 'Lengthen' the neck: feel the back of the top of the head seeming to rise. Feel the back lengthening at the same time.
- 3 While continuing to lengthen the neck rotate the head sideways until the chin is above the chin rest.
- 4 Drop the head, without pressing, on to the chin rest.

This produces exceptional benefits of ease and freedom. The way *not* to place the chin on the chin rest, which can easily produce immediate and on-going tension, is as follows:

- 1 Place the violin on the shoulder.
- 2 Rotate and drop the head at the same time, moving 'diagonally' into the chin rest.

Playing without the chin on the chin rest

- Practise without the chin on the chin rest. Choose phrases or short passages that stay in one position, or which have ascending shifts only. The benefits of practising a few selected passages in this way carries over into all other passages:



- Resting the violin on the collarbone, with clear space between your chin and the chin rest, learn how to play the phrase or passage without any reaction whatsoever in your head, neck and shoulders.
- Then play the phrase with the violin in its normal position, resting the weight of the head lightly into the chin rest. Keep the same feeling of uninvolvedness and release as you had before.

Position of the chin rest

Some chin rests are designed to be positioned directly above the tail piece, while others sit to the left of the tail-piece. The best choice of chin rest depends on the length of your arms, because how you hold the instrument affects how easily you can bow at the point (while keeping the bow parallel with the bridge). At the point the ideal is that the right arm ends up neither entirely straight, nor too 'square' at the elbow.

The shorter your arms and fingers, the *higher* on the shoulder the violin is placed, i.e. the chin is positioned nearer to, or directly above, the tail-piece.

The longer your arms and fingers, the *lower* on the shoulder the violin is placed, i.e. the chin is positioned on the left side of the instrument.

Next month's BASICS features an exercise that immediately improves tone production.