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## Margaret Rowell: Pedagogical Approach and Teaching Style

Robert-Christian Sanchez

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MARGARET ROWELL: PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AND TEACHING STYLE

by

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Bachelor of Music, Honors  
University of Central Florida, 2012

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## DEDICATION

To Arman, Mom, and Dad, for the countless years of love, support, and enthusiastic belief in me. May every action I take continue to honor the sacrifices that our family made for me. I hope I make you proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document would not have been possible without the introduction to Margaret Rowell through my former professor, Scott Kluksdahl, the gracious trust of Rowell's former students with their stories and experiences, and the phenomenal generosity of Ms. Stacey Krim at the University of North Carolina Greensboro Cello Archives. And to Dr. Gail V. Barnes for her patience, guidance, kindness, and Herculean efforts to get me across the finish line – I can never thank you enough.

## ABSTRACT

While there are numerous biographical details about Margaret Avery Rowell's life, few details exist about her pedagogy. The current researcher interviewed and subsequently analyzed transcripts from eight of Rowell's former students to reconstruct her pedagogical approach and teaching style. The researcher's questions were: 1) How did Rowell structure individual lessons and student development? 2) What were the recurring concepts within Rowell's principles? 3) What exercises did Rowell use to teach her principles? 4) What personal and pedagogical qualities made Rowell an effective teacher and influence on her students?

Based on the interviews, Rowell tailored her approach to each student without following a set method. Rowell used nature and the world around her as a masterclass as she evolved as a pedagogue. Paramount to Rowell's approach was an intense care and interest for her students, an element that made her a dynamic teacher.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Margaret Avery Rowell (1900-1995) was a cellist and pedagogue from Redlands, California. A consummate performer and chamber musician, Rowell performed with the Arion Trio for several years, until Rowell experienced a three-year bout with tuberculosis from 1927 to 1930. After Rowell's recovery, she continued performing for a time, and began teaching cello in the Berkeley area, eventually serving on the faculties of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (1968-1982), the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, Mills College, and San Francisco State University ("Margaret A. Rowell, Cellist," 1995).<sup>1</sup> Rowell founded the California Cello Club in the early 1950s, through which she invited and hosted masterclasses with the leading soloists of her time. These included Pablo Casals, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Zara Nelsova, amongst others. Margaret Rowell's teaching was well-respected, with students and even professional soloists seeking her out for insight into their playing. While Rowell's teaching prowess is well-documented, literature referencing detailed descriptions of her concepts are scarce.

In June of 1971, Rowell (1972) delivered a paper for the Music Teachers' Association of California at its Sixty-First Annual Convention. In her opening statement,

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<sup>1</sup> Obituary for Margaret Rowell in the New York Times

she shared the belief that all students, whether exceptionally talented or not, deserve a fundamentally sound start to the instrument. Rowell explained her observations of great cellists such as Pablo Casals, Alwin Schroeder, and Gregor Piatigorsky. She also discussed freedom of the “brain-ear” and fingertip in creating a natural connection to the music-making without direct awareness of the body motion. Rowell discussed her five basic principles: “Balance and Poise,” “Taking the Whole Before the Parts,” “Going from the Known to the Unknown,” “Strength and Flexibility,” and “Making an Art, not Just a Craft.”

Rowell included these principles in her 1972 interview with Phyllis Young, but now adding “Rhythm” to her principles (Young, 1985a). Rowell believed that one should teach rhythm from the start on open strings. Rowell would often teach this principle by mirroring the rhythm of the student’s name and asking the student to join. Rowell modeled both “Rhythm and Poise” and “Making an Art, Not Just a Craft” through her approach to the first lesson, adding Edith Otis’ *First Book of Study-Pieces for Violoncello* (1920), which used the open strings of a cello with piano accompaniment. By using Otis’ study pieces from the first lesson, Rowell encouraged musicality and phrasing through a mini chamber performance with the piano along with set rhythmic patterns. From the beginning, Rowell’s focus was broader than setting up technique, and at once connected the technique with musical intention.

Irene Sharp (1995) supplied more insight into Rowell’s teaching. Sharp studied and served as a longtime assistant to Rowell, starting her studies in 1958 and assisting her until Rowell’s death in 1995. Sharp described Rowell’s teaching using imagery and direct physical contact to reach the student internally, focusing on the physical sensations of

creating an expressive tone and beautiful phrase. Rowell often concentrated on creating simplicity, using one-finger scales to set up a direct relationship between the “brain-ear” and the finger. Most importantly, Sharp described Rowell’s teaching as always in a state of flux, undergoing self-examination, and searching for simplicity. In addition, Rowell often sought out doctors, chemists, and other artists to explore and incorporate concepts related to cello pedagogy and its connection to nature. Sharp emphasized Rowell’s clear commitment, teaching her basic principles to other educators with the hope that they would instill these in their students.

In Nicholas Anderson’s (2001) essay, he describes his “Breakthrough Sessions” that delved into the teaching of Rowell. Anderson described ideas from Rowell, including freedom of the spine, the back as a power source, a focus on the arms for freedom of the hands, and understanding a sense of positive and negative energy. While Anderson explains the physical sensations that underlie Rowell’s principles, he supplies no concrete examples or exercises showing the teaching or application of these concepts.

While the principles outlined by Rowell and others supply a conceptual framework for her pedagogy, they do not describe concrete or pragmatic techniques to experience or teach these principles. The current researcher proposes to consolidate Rowell’s ideas with techniques and exercises collected from her students. The current researcher aims to present these principles in an organized way that will include tangible examples for each principle for cellists and teachers of cellists. The researcher will use interviews with former students of Rowell for the purpose of examining Rowell’s pedagogical approach and teaching style. The researcher’s questions are: 1) How did Rowell structure individual lessons and student development? 2) What were the recurring

concepts within Rowell's principles? 3) What exercises did Rowell use to teach her principles? 4) What personal and pedagogical qualities made Rowell an effective teacher and influence on her students?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In *Prelude to String Playing*, a paper delivered for the Music Teachers' Association of California at its sixty-first annual convention, Rowell (1972) makes the first known mention of her basic principles, which at the time were "Balance and Poise," "Taking the Whole Before the Parts," "Going from the Known to the Unknown," "Strength and Flexibility," and "Making an Art, not Just a Craft." Rowell describes Balance and Poise as a feeling of centeredness through the spine and skull of the player, and down through the fingerboard of the cello. Rowell elaborates on Taking the Whole Before the Parts as a belief that students should have an idea of where each piece and exercise fits into the greater whole of their playing, giving even small actions meaning in the learning process. Going from the Known to the Unknown relates to intonation from this article, with Rowell mentioning her belief that intonation issues are either a result of poor hearing or inner tension, and one-finger scales as a diagnostic tool to find either. Rowell emphasizes the use of harmonics and open strings to aid those with "poor hearing" and refers to the tune "Joy to the World" as an intonation exercise with a descending scale, perfect fifth, and return up the octave.

In *Reflections*, an article published in the *American String Teacher*, Rowell (1977) continues to describe her ongoing search for greater simplicity and mentions observations of cello 'geniuses' like Casals and Schroeder. Rowell's belief was that 'geniuses' had a more simple and natural approach to the instrument, with no interference

between the ‘brain-ear’ and their fingertips. In this article, Rowell first mentions her “Ultimate Principle of Simplicity and Ultimate Simplicities: beautiful tone, live rhythm, clear intonation, and musical understanding.”

The published transcripts from a lengthy interview, *Margaret Avery Rowell, master teacher of cellists, and humble student of nature: An interview*, Rowell & Riess (1984) included her biography, some mention of her teaching, and interactions with other scientists, doctors, and artists. Rowell indicates an influence by Alexander Technique and mentions her basic principles again with the addition of Rhythm. There are few concrete representations of her techniques or exercises, but Rowell does reference the cello part to *Prelude to String Playing* (1971) with Paul Rolland, stating her belief that many of her ideas were taken out of context not well-represented.

In Phyllis Young’s (1985a) interview of Margaret Rowell, *Cello Forum: Margaret Rowell’s Basic Principles* published in *American String Teacher*, the basic principles emerge and evolve again, finalizing at six: “Rhythm,” “Balance and Poise,” “The Whole Before the Parts,” “Going from the Known to the Unknown,” “Strength through Flexibility,” and “Cello Playing as an Art, not just a Craft.” Of the reviewed literature, this interview is the best representation of any concrete exercises or examples we have from Rowell’s teaching. Rowell names Rhythm as the most important of these principles, suggesting an exercise to use during the very first lesson using the intrinsic rhythm of a student’s name on an open string to teach it. For the principle Whole Before the Parts, Rowell proposes having the student slide around the fingerboard at first with the hand and fingers as a unit on the inside of the string rather than being stuck in first position. Rowell reemphasizes the focus on intonation with Going from the Known to the

Unknown, recommending students matching stopped pitches with harmonics to clarify pitch. Rowell also makes use of Edith Otis' *First Book of Study-Pieces for Violoncello* (1920) to encourage musicality from the first lesson, a facet of Cello Playing as an Art, not just a Craft.

In a later interview published in *American String Teacher* with Phyllis Young (1985b) entitled *Cello Forum: Margaret Rowell's "Playing from the Inside Out."* during the same year as *Margaret Rowell's Basic Principles*, Rowell elaborates on the use of the back as the main power source for cello playing and mentions the concept of the 'bear hug' for balance on the instrument. Rowell revisits the basic principles along with her study of the 'naturals' at the instrument in developing her principles.

In an article serving as a memorial for her former teacher entitled *Margaret Rowell's Teaching*, Irene Sharp (1995) reflects on the life and personality of Rowell while emphasizing her focus on teaching the feeling of producing an expressive tone, using imagery and direct physical contact. Sharp mentions many examples of Rowell teaching away from the instrument, making use of household objects as examples. While Sharp mentions the terms 'bear hugs,' 'bird wings,' 'blobs,' 'baby clutches,' 'cling to the string,' and 'knuckle-knocks,' she does not provide instructions or examples of what each term relates to, or how to use each concept.

Nicholas Anderson (2001) promoted Rowell's pedagogy through his online website post *Breakthrough Sessions*. In the session information, Anderson alludes to some of the physical sensations Rowell referenced in her teaching, but similarly to Sharp (1995), does not provide instructions or examples of each concept. Anderson mentions the concepts of playing with the back, playing from the inside out, and Rowell's

investigations of many famous cellists. The metaphor of the back as a power source recurs, with tension viewed as a disruption of that power. Anderson indicates that Rowell's teachings are rooted in physical sensations, which are hard to put on paper, stating that "developing the material requires it being physically transmitted by touch from one person to another." As mentioned by Anderson, Rowell used a very physical approach to her pedagogy. When incorporating Rowell's approach into current practice, teachers may want to adapt around changes and contemporary knowledge around topics such as consent to physical touch, childhood trauma, and children on the spectrum.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Selection of Participants**

The participants of this research study (and years of study with Rowell) were Bai-Chi Chen (1972-1976), Bonnie Hampton (1943-1950), Stephen Harrison. (1971-1974), Scott Kluksdahl, Emil Miland (1977-1978), Matthew Owens (early 1970s and intermittently throughout his professional career), Irene Sharp (1958-1961), and Barbara Wampner. (1965-1969). All are former students of Rowell, selected through purposive sampling and from a wide span of Rowell's teaching career. Each participant completed an interview and answered follow-up questions via phone call, Skype conversation, or e-mail. The researcher used the same question bank for each participant.

The researcher sent transcribed interviews for member checks before continuing with within- and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2018). The researcher examined transcripts for common themes and teaching techniques with the intent of compiling a sequential approach to Rowell's pedagogy. Of all the participants, Bonnie Hampton studied with Rowell the earliest and kept a relationship with her the longest. As a result, the researcher will use Hampton's transcripts as a connecting thread or omniscient narrator to add context to the other interviews, and to help organize the pedagogical ideas. Using Hampton's transcripts also provides the opportunity to track the evolution of Rowell's teaching style over time.

## **Development of Questionnaire**

The current researcher developed the questionnaire with *a priori* categories of techniques modeled after the ASTA String Curriculum (Benham et al., 2011). The researcher aimed to collect and organize a detailed breadth of Rowell's pedagogy by using the comprehensive structure of the ASTA String Curriculum. The researcher took the categories of Body Format, Left-Hand Skills, and Right-Arm Skills into account to gather as much of Rowell's pedagogical approach as possible. In addition, the current researcher incorporated targeted questions designed to clarify previous mentions of techniques or terminology used by Rowell in the literature.

### ***A priori categories of techniques (ASTA)***

- I. Body Format
  - a. Posture
- II. Left-Hand Skills
  - a. Initial finger placement
  - b. Vibrato
  - c. Positions
- III. Right-Arm Approach
  - a. Setup
  - b. Tone

### ***Interview procedure***

The researcher started each interview with casual conversation designed to put the interviewee at ease. During the interview, the researcher would present questions to guide the conversation. He used the Apple Voice Memos app to record each interview, and then

saved these to online storage. He then transcribed each interview, with transcripts and consent forms e-mailed to participants for member checks.

### **Question Bank**

1. How were you introduced to Rowell?
2. How old were you when you first started studies with Rowell?
3. How long and throughout which years did you study with Rowell?
4. What is your professional occupation?
5. Do you instruct cello students?
6. Have you taken part in Suzuki teacher training?
7. Did Rowell ever speak about picking up the cello again after her bout with tuberculosis? If so, what challenges did she find, and how did she navigate them?
8. How long would your lessons with Rowell last?
9. Was there a set structure for every lesson?
10. Can you describe a typical lesson?
11. How often would Rowell play cello in your lessons?
12. What were some major themes or principles that appeared from your lessons with Rowell?
13. What factors do you think contributed to her teaching philosophy and ability?
14. Did you select your repertoire, did Rowell choose your repertoire for you, or was it a combination of both?
15. Was there a set sequence of repertoire and etudes that Rowell would follow?
16. Can you explain Rowell's approach to instrument setup? The left hand? The right?

17. What was Rowell's teaching style? Was she kind, stern, calm, energetic, etc.?
18. In what ways would Rowell encourage your growth as a cellist?
19. Did you ever have conversations with Rowell outside of cello? Can you describe her relationships with her students?
20. If you currently instruct cello students, have you incorporated any of her themes and principles into your teaching? If so, which ones?
21. Are there any of Rowell's ideas or principles that you disagree with and have not incorporated into your teaching?
22. What do you remember most about Rowell?

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **How did Rowell structure individual lessons and student development?**

Each interviewee made clear that Rowell did not have a set “method,” instead she took an integrated approach that tailored to each student, and each lesson structure was completely unexpected and unrecognizable from the last. Bonnie Hampton described memories from her early lessons:

...One just never knew exactly what was going to happen. Often, what she would do, of course, we would have lessons up in her home, and you would come in and she'd let you warm up a little bit, but she'd go out to the kitchen to do something. And it was very interesting. Often the entry point of a lesson was what you were warming up with, or just fiddling around with or something. And then she'd be hearing what was happening, she would hear something that either she felt needed working on, and so and that would be often the entry point into the lesson...I don't think she had a ‘method’ as I, as I would call a method, you know that you do things always this way. I would say that she had at her disposal, the imagination, and the creativity and the knowledge of the aspects of teaching that all of this was available to her at any given time. And then she would get us what we were what we needed at that time. In other words, what was going to help us forward?

Scott Kluksdahl recounted similarly unpredictable lessons:

Look, I went to her when I was a sophomore in high school. I had three years with her in the house. And you never knew what you were going to get. Because the lessons were not one hour. They were not two hours. They would just go! You know, I think I would show up at for three o'clock. No, it would have been a four o'clock lesson. And I would be going out the door at seven. And I remember being you know, sometimes she was in a rush, and I would only have an hour and forty-five minutes!

Interviewees described Rowell's approach as very physical, and often incorporated warm-ups based around relating the cello to the student's body. Stephen Harrison explored elements of this approach:

I mean, I think she hoped for a structure. I think she was very committed to an approach to the string and approach to the left hand that was very based on circles. So that we did a lot of a lot of circular bowing, and a lot of things like one finger scales and shifting exercises, all of which I still use. And I think it's been adapted by great many people. But I use them a lot. And so, she would do that. So, there were there were sort of...it was the sort of warm-up kind of things that you would see singers do, right? Where you know, we met to relate yourself to the cello and then get to work, rather than just you know diving into an etude. Yeah. And she introduced me to Klengel technical studies book two, she got me involved in music that wasn't strictly only Baroque, or you know, kind of tonal music that would be easy to follow. I think we did Hindemith early on...what else

would we do early on? It's so funny because pieces don't come to mind that much.

I mean, I did...yeah, I remember doing Shostakovich Sonata a little bit with her.

Although no two interviewees described the exact same lesson structure and approach, a pattern appeared from each participant which consisted of the typical lesson divided into two portions, the “technical work” and repertoire. Bonnie Hampton elaborated:

And she would have some of these various books so that there was the technical, as she would say, the technical work, she said we had to ‘eat our vegetables.’ That was our technical work, and then we'd have to have our pieces and so on.

Of the technical and repertoire portions of the lesson, it was clear that technique always connected to a musical purpose, and there was overlap between the technical and musical work. Bonnie Hampton explained:

...The idea of technique being connected with musical purpose was very much there. It wasn't separate, in other words, technique was not separated from playing the music. That was a clear ‘why we were doing the finger exercises’ and ‘why we were, you know, getting clarity of our left hand and potentially the liveliness in the spring of the left hand’ and all those kinds of things.

Technique was not limited to etudes and scales, as Hampton continued:

...Based on the needs of the music one was working on. Because one did learn technique very much through the needs of the piece one was learning.

### **What were the recurring concepts within Rowell's principles?**

All interviewees mentioned a strong connection between Rowell's cello pedagogy and her appreciation and understanding of nature. Emil Miland mentioned this connection:

I remember putting the cello down with Margaret and she was taking me over to her library, bringing down a book to show me an artist's rendering of trees. But not just trees with pretty leaves on them and all that, but it showed the artists doing that but also just the trees...about the leaves and the structure of the limbs. The beauty and balance found in nature. She was famous for her birds; she loved the birds. And she talked about birds with your bow arm and how we can 'fly.'

Rowell would regularly quote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to distill this connection between nature and cello playing:

Have you ever thought...about whatever man builds...all his calculations...all the nights spent over working drafts and blueprints, invariably culminate in the production of a thing whose sole and guiding principle is the ultimate principle of simplicity? It is as if there were a natural law which ordained that to achieve this end, to refine the curve of a piece of furniture...or the fuselage of an airplane, until gradually it partakes of the elementary purity of the curve of the human breast...there must be experimentations of several generations of craftsmen. In any thing at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away... (Saint-Exupéry, 1965)

Stephen Harrison also mentioned Rowell's emphasis on connection to nature and the freedom of the body:

It's basically saying that whatever you're doing on the instrument, you're doing somewhere in your life, and I can, I can show you where in life it relates to the instrument. Now, you know, obviously you must do the work with those things and the technical concepts were crucial to her to moving into the musical part, right? Because if you couldn't do those things, she didn't think you could make the music and I think that that's fair to say that if the foundation isn't free and you're not going to make free music.

Multiple interviewees mentioned Rowell relating the concept of a free body to singers, a thought encapsulated by Irene Sharp:

...She was thinking playing the cello was like singing. That's what you had to do. You had to make it sing. And you had to make it say something and you must figure that out.

Numerous interviewees spoke of a focus on circular shapes and “scoops,” to which Stephen Harrison expounded:

...She gave me the idea, you know, she had this idea that there was there was no horizontal motion, it was always some kind of a circle. Scoop. And so, you always have that concept whenever you approach the instrument. Right. And it was, it really was so important in terms of being able to look at it being able to feel something and say, ‘No, this isn't right.’ Even if, even if you hadn't yet achieved what was right. You could tell that your approach was not natural. I don't think, you know, she wasn't one of these people who said, we've got to do this, this, this, this, this, and then you get to do this. I think there may have been a system. I don't remember being aware of it.

Rowell mentioned the use of a “baby clutch” during lessons with the interviewees, which Stephen Harrison illuminated:

...She was energetic, very energetic and there were people, big people, small people, it didn't matter, people who came out of her lessons bruised because she was because she was so physical, about your relationship to the instrument. She'd come up and grab your arm and grab your fingers or grab your back, or she was...one of her big things was that she used to say, 'I can't, I shouldn't be able to pull you off.' So, while you were playing, she would come over and grab your forearm and pull your arm backwards, you know, like toward your back. Because if your leverage was in your back, she'd never be able to pull you off. But if you were squeezing with your thumb should be able to pull you off. So, she'd come over and pull your arm all the time to say, 'I shouldn't be able to pull you off.' And so, if you were squeezing the instrument like crazy trying to avoid being pulled off, you come out bruised. And inevitably, she pulled you off...the baby grip. If the power is coming from your back, 'I'll never be able to pull you off.' If the power is coming from squeezing, 'I'm going to be able to pull you off in a second, and it doesn't matter how strong you are.'

Bai-Chi Chen also mentioned this pulling exercise, and mention the use of a “handshake” exercise to work on the same concepts with students:

And the left hand is like, you know, she would shake your hand and if you try to squeeze anything, then she would try to pull away. And if you squeeze harder, that tension makes it very easy for her to pull away. Okay, but if you if you if you just shake your hand and, you know, the easy to pull away. But if you just shake

your hand and keep it comfortable, if you try to get away from her, you can't get away from her, right. So that's the same idea of your left hand on the on the neck of the fingerboard, okay? That you feel if you squeeze your hand, you know, or if you play with a lot of tension, it'll come away. She would just sneak up on you and try to pull your hand away. A few times my hand got pulled away from the neck. Too tight.

Scott Kluksdahl mentioned the incorporation of the natural world, baby clutches, and scoops in his lessons as well:

It was always joyous going up to her front door, you would knock, you didn't walk in. And she would answer. 'Oh, it's so wonderful to see you wonderful!' And always the baby clutch. Right? And always the finger went out and you had to do that and that was the price of admission. And then upon entry she would often show you something: a fiddlehead fern, a photo, a picture of a seagull or something. Just kind of, you know, how does that relate to cello playing? You know, the scroll of the fiddlehead ferns or the bird's wings. And then at some point she would say 'Now, I can't wait to hear you play! Get out that cello!' It was always the starting with one finger scales starting with what Margaret called circles. 'Oh, do some scoops!'

Matthew Owens described some of Rowell's principles and elaborated on how she would teach them:

Balance...it starts with sitting in the chair, and feeling the two bones that you sit on, your sitting bones and feeling your foot right through the floor, on each side. And being able to shift your balance, from side to side, right through the center of

your body, like your spine is like the mast of a ship, and it's moving to the right and to the left, connected with your sitting bones connected with your feet. So that you are rooted in the ground, and you are rooted in the chair.

Bonnie Hampton mentioned many of the concepts and connections that Rowell mentioned often:

I think, well, a beautiful sound and how one produces a beautiful sound. And the elements. In other words, the total elements to make a beautiful sound, you also need to be very free, so that you're working, in a free sort of sense to releasing the sound out of the instrument. And then how once vibrato connected with that and having the freedom also to have a beautiful vibrato, obviously, and as one plays, the purity in the center of the note, the intonation. That was, you know, that had to be very connected with a beautiful sound. So having the ear-hand as she called it, the ear-hand connection, so that you were hearing what you were intending to do, you didn't just have yourself fixed in knowing that the note was there and put down the next finger, it's going to be the next note. No, the ear had to be the guide. And then of course, a very live and very nice kind of rhythmic sense and developing that and the sense of having the music needing that sense of live rhythm. These are concepts, I think, well, concept of the total instrument being...obviously we learned the positions, those were all part of the early performing, you know, the formal structure bringing the cello, you learn different positions and the shifting, and thumb position, of course, but also the idea that the cello is one large position. In other words, you can put your hand anywhere on the instrument, and know, and that was even early in those different concepts of how

the fingerboard is divided into, can be divided by natural harmonics. And in the half and the quarter and in, you know, fourths, and in thirds, and then fifths eventually, and those.

### **What exercises did Rowell use to teach her principles?**

Bonnie Hampton studied with Rowell from her early years and returned to her as a colleague in Rowell's later years. Of the technical exercises Hampton remembered:

...She liked of course, the Klengel books and scales. And, I remember Klengel Book 1, of course, that's the scales. And then later, Book 2 and then Book 3, and then 3 was the arpeggios, of course. And also, some of those, and then Werner, I remember Werner and, she had a black book, I don't know if it was one of those which is no longer in use. I've never seen it since those early days.

Scott Kluksdahl made mention of similar resources:

She would listen to Galamian scales, and then came the Etude, and it was always a Popper. Margaret was strict with me...it was one Popper a week, and I memorized instantaneously. So that was the expectation. We didn't go through all forty, she didn't see the use of it.

Stephen Harrison also mentioned the Klengel books, and included mention of the Ševčík variations:

So, it was very important that the technique be in a certain place to make music. But at the same time, it wasn't like she said, okay, you must do Ševčík although she was very big on the Ševčík 40 variations, really very big on that.

Rowell famously had a "bag of tricks" or small toys that she would use to illustrate concepts for her students. Bai-Chi Chen mentioned these tools in her interview:

So, you heard about the bag of tricks, right? And you said toys in her bag, right?

Yes. Right. She had suction cups, and she'll pull out these little bicycles, you know, things like that to demonstrate concepts. Perfect for me because I didn't speak much English.

While all interviewees made clear that Rowell did not have a set method or sequence, there were certain components of cello playing that she held at her core. Scott Kluksdahl expanded upon this:

...There were basic non-negotiables. If you pressed your sound, or if your shoulders were raised, you know, she would be all over that. And the thing about a lesson with Margaret that you had to sit down and play for her...you didn't come with questions, you know, you were expected to play. You play and you listen. She was a robust cellist, and she expected her students to be robust. There was no tiptoeing around.

**What personal and pedagogical qualities made Rowell an effective teacher and influence on her students?**

By most accounts, Rowell commanded an encyclopedic understanding of cello pedagogy. While Rowell shared an understanding of the intricacies and sequencing of scales, etudes, and repertoire with her students, every cellist the author interviewed seemed to place that secondary to the relationships she built with them. As Emil Miland recalled:

She had a big banner that someone made for her out of felt...but what I remembered were that there was the planet earth and all these different hands around the planet in every different color...and that banner showed me how

Margaret was so loving towards every person as a human race. You know, she said she didn't teach the cello, she taught the human being.

Every interviewee recollected Rowell's "I do not teach the cello, I teach the human being," and in one of the only public recordings available of Rowell, she restated this idea.

The positive and encouraging aspect of Rowell's teaching was also a critical part to each cellist's development. Each interviewee mentioned the endless amount of positivity and support given by Rowell. As Bonnie Hampton explained:

I would play for her to take her something, so to speak. And I was the one that always came away with a gift, because it was just her presence, and her comments, and her positive enthusiasm about things was so infectious and so encouraging. And this was, I would say it was such a strong part of her personality. I mean, there were times when in lessons, maybe something was just not very good. You know, that certainly can happen. But she wouldn't say it wasn't very good. She would just say: 'Wow, that's wonderful. That's wonderful. Now, let's find out how to make it really better!' It was always a very positive, life-giving energy that she was projecting forward. Everything was possible, we just had to figure out how to do it and work for it. She was very clear about the fact that some things you just had to work hard to get it. She was very clear about that.

Stephen Harrison also mentioned Rowell's passion and care:

She gave a love of teaching from the moment you walked in the room. And so, the presence I'm left with her is of a beautiful person who was doing exactly

what she was meant to do, which was shaping young people, making young people feel safe and comfortable, and loved, and going on a journey, a separate journey with each one of them, not trying to force each one of them into the exact same journey. And that's kind of where I think she was a magical teacher.

Bonnie Hampton described Rowell as someone with a magnetic personality, unending curiosity, and infectious warmth:

She was constantly learning from everyone. And, and incorporating many, many ideas, and she was a very...curious person, I would say someone reaching out to new ideas...She was just fun to be around. Because she, she loved things. And she loved people. And she loved cello. And she loved music.

Stephen Harrison elaborated more on the idea of Rowell as a teacher that deeply connected with her students:

She was a phenomenal lady, because, she had a what I would say about Margaret more than anything else is that as of all of my teachers, her spirit is the one I will try to channel the most when I'm my best as a teacher, which is to say...you know her famous line which is 'I don't teach the cello, I teach the cellist.'.. And that she really related to you as a person and she was the kind of person who had props and things, and everything was about forming an image of something that you could relate to, that would then apply to play the instrument. And I think she saw the world in terms of opportunities to find images that you can relate to teach the cello, really.

The earlier quote from Harrison's transcript touches upon Rowell's principle of "Going from the Known to the Unknown," using her understanding of each student to connect to

imagery which would capture the interest of a student, and then transferring that imagery to direct applications on the cello. At the basis of all the imagery and relational teaching from Rowell was an intense love and desire to connect with her students. At the end of each interview, the author asked each interviewee “What do you remember most about Margaret Rowell?” Without fail, each participant responded with the same sentiments, best expressed by Bai-Chi Chen:

I remember how much she loved teaching and people. I know she loved me, I have many letters from her after I left...I want to end with a quote by Maya Angelou: “At the end of the day, people won’t remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel.” Margaret made me feel loved, she believed in me, she cared for me more than she cared about my cello playing, I owe her everything I know about teaching and playing. Maya Angelou’s words are what I live by, Margaret’s spirit is always with me when I teach.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.

#### **How did Rowell structure individual lessons and student development?**

Based on the interview transcriptions, no two lessons with Rowell were alike. After an energetic greeting and a check on the ‘baby clutch’ upon entrance, Rowell would often converse with students about a multitude of various subjects that eventually related back to cello. At times, a student would warm up for their lesson while Rowell searched for an item, and the entry point to the lesson would come from something her ear gravitated towards from the other room.

Lessons were frequently long, and rarely occupying the standard one-hour time slot that is familiar to many applied lesson teachers, with Rowell employing a myriad of strategies to help a student learn a concept. While lessons could vary greatly in topics covered and time, they usually occurred in two parts, split between technical work (with Rowell frequently mentioning that students needed to “eat their vegetables,”) and repertoire. During the technical work portion of the lesson, students would often use one-finger scales, add-a-note scales, thirds, sixths, Schroeder Foundation Studies, the Galamian Scale System (adapted for cello), Popper Etudes, Klengel Technical Studies, Werner Practical Method, and Ševčík Variations with Rowell.

In the way that no two lessons were alike, no two students shared a set path of etudes and repertoire. Rowell focused on student areas of strength to connect and reinforce difficult concepts. While the literature on Rowell’s basic principles typically

designates her principle of “Going from the Known to the Unknown” to intonation, one could easily expand the concept to her pedagogical method: frequently using concepts the student excels at to explore new topics.

Rowell’s expertise with relational learning and consistent assessment of her students’ strengths allowed her to effectively choose repertoire that addressed areas of growth. While she regularly used certain etude books and repertoire choices, no set sequence emerged from the transcripts. Rowell’s primary technical focus was teaching ‘transportation’ on the instrument, or rather ensuring that students had freedom of movement and a beautiful sound. Lessons focused on teaching the sensation of producing a quality tone as opposed to a set method.

### **What were the recurring concepts within Rowell’s principles?**

Across all interviews, every participant mentioned Rowell’s intense curiosity and interest with nature. To Rowell, the natural world was a masterclass waiting to be applied to cello playing. Rowell would regularly show students pictures of bird wings, fiddlehead ferns, and various other shapes and forms to connect to the study of cello.

Rowell’s interest with nature went far beyond the animal and plant kingdom and included intense observations and inquiry of cellists she deemed “naturals,” including Rostropovich, Piatigorsky, and Casals. Indeed, Rowell’s observation of natural cellists lead to the development of her “great simplicities of cello,” which she used as general guiding principles to orient students to a more natural approach to the instrument. Aside from nature and the great “naturals” of the cello, Rowell was profoundly interested in science and medicine, and always curious about research and its incorporation with cello. Rowell had a deep interest in Abby Whiteside, a pianist and revolutionary pedagogue,

worked with D.C. Dounis, an influential violinist and pedagogue, and had frequent conversations with medical doctors, which all deeply informed her teaching. Rowell's interest in the groundbreaking pedagogy of Dounis and Whiteside aligns with her holistic and physical approach to the instrument. Rowell's curiosity also extended to other pedagogues, such as Shinichi Suzuki and Paul Rolland.

Rowell's teaching focused on the sensation of producing a beautiful sound from the instrument, rather than technical sequencing. She often described the back as the powerhouse or energy source, with any interruption due to tension in the body as an interference of power to the instrument. Students recalled Rowell teaching them to 'search' for a quality sound and recoiling to a 'pressed' sound to the point where she would not hesitate to take students back to basics with their bow arm. Participants fondly recalled Rowell hanging her arms from their shoulders or even trying to pull their left hand away from the fingerboard to make sure that they had a sense of freedom and cling to the instrument.

### **What exercises did Rowell use to teach her principles?**

All participants emphasized that Rowell's pedagogy was a constantly evolving approach based around basic principles, rather than a fixed method. While the difference in terminology may seem slight, it is important nonetheless, as it reinforces the flexibility in Rowell's teaching. Rather than a method, a more accurate representation of Rowell's approach may be a wheel-and-spoke model. While Rowell developed and outlined her principles, she had no set sequence of exercises and repertoire for the development of her students. Each of the exercises outlined were used as tools to develop each principle and can be used interchangeably depending on the needs of each student. In the wheel-and-

spoke framework, each of Rowell's principles can be a starting point using the student's area of strength. Rowell had an endless supply of exercises and descriptions that she could draw upon to reinforce an area of growth using connections from the area of strength to travel to and from other principles in the model. Rowell's constant assessment and willingness to return to the most basic concepts lends itself to the iterative nature of a wheel-and-spoke model rather than a static and linear sequence of etudes and repertoire.

### ***Rhythm***

For Rowell's youngest students, she would often have students perform the inherent rhythm of their names on the open strings of their cellos. By having students identify and perform these rhythms, Rowell encouraged her students to connect speech and rhythm, and to make connections with other naturally occurring rhythms around them. Rowell would often employ Edith Otis' *First Book of Study-Pieces for Violoncello* (1920), which included some harmonized songs with piano accompaniment which exclusively used open strings in the cello part. By using this type of resource, students contextualized and performed with a lively rhythm from the onset of their study through a mini chamber music performance.

### ***Balance and Poise***

Rowell regularly referred to the back as source of all power for cello playing and viewed any tension or poor body format as a disruption of power to the instrument. Rowell's focus on her students' posture has direct connection to her knowledge of Abby Whiteside, with notable similarities between Rowell's "Basic Principles" and Whiteside's "Indispensables of Piano Playing." Concepts such as the 'bear hug' through which students would wrap their arms around the cello to feel a centeredness around the

instrument run in parallel to the holistic view of Whiteside. Rowell would also encourage students to find balance in their bow arms, having students use their right thumb to hold the bow at the balance point and move in gentle circles. In one of the few written pedagogical descriptions, Rowell describes this exercise in further detail:

Holding the bow with our left hand, facing it so if we were going to play with it, we slide our right thumb under it, testing, until we find its center balance. (This is nearer the frog, incidentally, than we usually suppose.) Then we make circles with the bow, moving our arm from the shoulder. Our bow may tip, like airplane wings, from one side to the other, but it must retain that magic center balance point. Then we gently let our clinging fingers — with the thumb opposite them— hold this seemingly weightless bow at its center. We enter into our string with circles getting a, deep, free, ringing tone. This should be the first tone a beginner gets, and the ability to get it should never leave him. Then we hold the bow with our regular hold at the frog and feel the balanced weight on each inch of the bow. Later it is also fun to turn the bow around, hold it by its tip, and see how much weight we are supplying when we are playing at the tip. (Rowell, 1972)

### ***Taking the Whole Before the Parts***

The principle of Taking the Whole Before the Parts also connects to the piano pedagogy of Abby Whiteside, in that every exercise and repertoire selection was holistically integrated into the needs of each student. Rowell explained the purpose of each exercise in detail and how it connected to their music so that students were active participants in the learning process. By sharing the connection of each exercise, Rowell also helped her students develop their pedagogical ability, a theme that all participants

shared to some extent. Rowell not only taught her students cello technique but also taught her students how to communicate technique to others, explaining why many of her students became sought-after pedagogues as well.

### ***Going from the Known to the Unknown***

The principle of Going from the Known into the Unknown refers to mainly to intonation. For this principle, Rowell frequently employed one-finger scales to focus student's ears on the intervals between each pitch of the scale.

#### **Figure 1**

*One-Finger C Major Scale Using Second Finger*



The one-finger scale can start on any finger or note and can employ a slow tempo. The glissando from note to note should be slow so that the cellist can carefully listen to each interval for precise intonation. Rowell also emphasized the use of harmonics as a tuning tool to make sure that all notes were carefully tuned by matching stopped pitches with harmonics. By incorporating both intervallic training and a focus on harmonics, Rowell simultaneously strengthened tone through resonance.

### ***Strength Through Flexibility***

Rowell often referred to a handshake as the “price of admission” into a lesson, through which she expected a soft but strong hand with flexible joints, demonstrating this principle before the student even picked up their instrument. Rowell often used a rubber lizard in her ‘bag of tricks’ to demonstrate flexibility and referred to the baby clutch in

this principle. One of the techniques employed by Rowell to demonstrate this principle would be to frequently try to pull a student's left hand off the fingerboard while they played. If the hand was tense and squeezing, Rowell could easily snatch the student's arm away from the neck of the instrument. If the student's fingers were flexible, she would be unable to wrestle away the arm. Rowell would also sometimes grab a book and challenge a student try to pull it from her hand to demonstrate the same concept, a technique that may be more practical in a contemporary cello studio.

### ***Cello Playing as an Art, not just a Craft***

All interviewees described a culture in Rowell's studio that went beyond technical exercises and difficult repertoire. Rowell made sure that all students attended musical concerts, travelled to museums and art galleries, and were aware of the world around them. The principle of Cello Playing as an Art, not just a Craft comes from Rowell's desire to create an artist, and not just a technician. Rowell viewed expanding her students' world views as part of her teaching responsibilities, prioritizing music-making that is informed by life experiences over sheer technical prowess.

### **What personal and pedagogical qualities made Rowell an effective teacher and influence on her students?**

The current researcher used findings from Duke & Simmons (2006) as a theoretical construct for further understanding Rowell's effective teaching. Based on all transcripts, including excerpts presented in Chapter 4, Rowell demonstrated the following qualities:

- The repertoire assigned to students is well within their technical capabilities; no student is struggling with the notes of the piece.
- The teachers demand a consistent standard of sound quality from their students.

- The teachers clearly remember students' work in past lessons and frequently draw comparisons between present and past, pointing out both positive and negative differences.
- The teachers are tenacious in working to accomplish lesson targets, having students repeat target passages until performance is accurate (i.e., consistent with the target goal).
- Any flaws in fundamental technique are immediately addressed; no performance trials with incorrect technique are allowed to continue.
- Lessons proceed at an intense, rapid pace.
- The pace of the lessons is interrupted from time to time with what seem to be "intuitively timed" breaks, during which the teachers give an extended demonstration or tell a story.
- Performance technique is described in terms of the effect that physical motion creates in the sound produced.
- Technical feedback is given in terms of creating an interpretive effect.

Of all nineteen categories identified by the Duke & Simmons (2006) study, the participants of the current study regularly mentioned nine in relation to Rowell's teaching. While many mention Rowell as a master teacher, the use of this empirical evidence based upon the transcripts from this validates and supports that idea.

Rowell heavily invested in the lives of her students, forming lifelong friendships with them even after they moved on from her studio. Rowell frequently took her students on trips to art galleries, poetry readings, and concerts, to foster an appreciation and understanding of the arts. As a strict but enthusiastic teacher Rowell earned her students' complete trust, making sure to mentor each, teaching her students how to teach, and even coaching lessons with her students' students.

As mentioned previously, Rowell frequently focused on student strengths to bolster areas of growth, eschewing a sequenced methodology for an approach that used exercises, etudes, and repertoire to aid in filling technical gaps through musical integration. As an eager student of nature, it is only fitting that Rowell cultivated the

musical seeds within her students, making sure to give the exact nutrients each needed to grow.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

It is impossible to encapsulate the life's work and pedagogical framework of Rowell in one document. As a result, the author of the current study proposes future research to continue and expand upon the preservation Rowell's concepts and exercises, particularly regarding the research question "What exercises did Rowell use to teach her principles?". The author of the current study intends to collate exercises developed by Rowell and include a section that details the exercises developed by her students that incorporated and reflected her teaching.

### **Applications for Teachers**

As mentioned countless times by Rowell's students during the interviews for this study, the pedagogy of Margaret Rowell was an approach, never a method. While Rowell had certain non-negotiables that she described as her principles, she was constantly evolving in response to her curiosity about the world around her. This sense of inquisitiveness is invaluable to applied teachers, particularly in response to the various one-size-fits-all systems employed by many well-meaning educators. The brilliance of Rowell's pedagogy came from the understanding she gained through the relationships she cultivated with her students, allowing her to find each student's strength and connect it to areas of growth. While it is a mistake to assume that Rowell did not have any sort of structure for her pedagogy, it was highly adaptive and student-centered.

Rowell used the world around her to constantly develop connections for her students. Rowell's vivid imagery and sometimes whimsical explanations elegantly described many of the concepts for her students and created lasting connections. Rowell focused on describing the physical sensations of playing the instrument rather than describing the process in a clinical or systemic manner. An applied teacher could easily adapt Rowell's use of vivid imagery or connections to the world of the student to their practice and include a focus on what creating a beautiful sound on the instrument 'feels' like. By shifting the focus from technique-driven drills, a student-centered approach based on the process of creating a beautiful sound emerges, all which stem from the musical gesture.

Rowell focused greatly on the rudiments of cello playing, with several students recalling her 'bringing them back to square one' if they showed any sign of tension or less-than-solid grasp of fundamentals. Applied teachers often feel the pressure of cycling students through repertoire, so much so that they often leave substantial gaps in the technical abilities of the student. Rowell understood that without the solid foundation of fundamentals on the cello, and as a result 'transportation' on the instrument, any fast cycles of repertoire would hinder the development of the student. Applied teachers could integrate Rowell's approach through cautious repertoire selections and by remaining vigilant about fundamentals for their student. Teachers can constantly reassess the repertoire of their student ensuring the selections do not come at the expense of student posture, intonation, rhythmic understanding, and sound production capabilities for any gaps.

Most central to Rowell's pedagogy is the deep and caring relationships she cultivated with her students. Rowell took a genuine interest in each of her students' lives, regardless of their playing ability or background. Not only did Rowell share her interests with her students, but she genuinely listened to and supported her students' interests as well. Rowell mentored her students, helped introduce them to important connections, fostered a deep appreciation for the arts, and shared a sense of awe and wonder with her students that had a profoundly lasting impact. The author of this study believes that the most important application based on the life and pedagogy of Margaret Rowell is her intentional fostering of genuine relationships with students regardless of their musical or technical ability, tapping into their potential, and using knowledge of her students to constantly assess and adapt to their needs. Applied teachers can take the opportunity to get to know their students as people and make connections to their interests. Rowell promoted a sense of community and collaboration within her studio by setting a positive example, which is something that modern applied teachers can replicate in their own voices. The interviewees of the current study did not always easily remember the techniques Rowell used in their lessons, but all of them described her profound kindness and love for them. It is clear from the participants of this study that Rowell did not teach the cello, she taught the human being.

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