

Symphony Snippets – Bowings
Asheville Symphony E-Newsletter – March 2004

Did you know that string musicians not only have to know the music, but also have to know when to move their bows up and down? Each piece of music performed by the Symphony is choreographed to make the performance not only pleasing to the ear, but also pleasing to the eye.

The Concertmaster marks each piece of music with “bowings,” marks that indicate when to move the bow up and down throughout each piece of music. The Symphony Librarian forwards the music marked with these bowings to each string section principal (first chair), so they can match their section’s bowings with that of the Concertmaster. That way, all the bows in each section move together, making the performance appear seamless.

Rarely, a Conductor will choose not to have a piece bowed, allowing each string musician to play the piece freely. This is referred to as “free-bowing.” The Conductor for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Robert Spano, chose this approach for Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, which was performed last year.

“The music generated by the orchestra was magnificent,” commented Steve Hageman, Executive Director of the Asheville Symphony, who was present at the performance. “It is a stunning, emotional piece of music. The free-bowing allowed the musicians to put their heart and soul into the music. However, the free-bowing was so distracting, I had to close my eyes in order to enjoy the performance.”

Watch for the bowings at the next concert!