

Lesson 6: Phrasing - Slides and Grace Notes

The previous lessons developed a tonal vocabulary. The vocabulary is inspired by note choices used by Gypsy jazz musicians independent of instrument. To really sound like a Gypsy jazz violinist one has to study the style. This is best done by listening and imitating specific licks. A few principles, however, can be extracted from the playing of specific musicians such as Stephane Grappelli and Eddie South. As mentioned in lesson 1, the most common bowing is the jazz slur, where eighth notes are slurred from the off-beat to the following beat. Specific slurs are not notated in most exercises, as they can be played with a variety of bowings. Slides and grace notes are an exception and are nearly always slurred.

The slide:

Slides can either be slow or quick. The speed determines whether the slide has a discernable beginning and end pitch, and how the slide is played and notated.

Slow Slides and the "Blue Note":

Slower slides most often have distinct beginning and ending pitches and are played in time. The fourth and the fifth scale degree are often approached from the flatted fifth (the "blue note"). Here are some examples:



Track 21: Exercise 6.1: Slow slides: The following etude contains several slow slides. Both the beginning and end pitches of the slide are notated and the slide itself is indicated by a line connecting the two notes. Listen to the CD and try to time the slide exactly. Slur the slides as notated. You may add other bowings.

Quick Slides: The Scoop and the Fall-off:

On faster slides only the beginning or ending pitches are played in time, and only one end of the slide has a distinct pitch center. On the scoop, a note is approached from below with a quick slide up to the actual pitch. The final pitch should be reached at the time the note occurs rhythmically. The fall-off occurs at the very end of a note. In both instances, scoop and fall-off, regular finger pressure is only applied on the main note. The slide note only features a pitch change but also a quick timbre change as finger pressure is gradually applied (scoop) or reduced (fall-off).



Track 22: Exercise 6.2: Quick slide etude: All the slides in the following exercise are played quickly up to (scoop) or from (fall-off) a note. In both instances only the pitch of the main note should be identifiable.

The exercise consists of four staves of music in treble clef. The first staff has four measures with notes and accidentals, and chord labels Am6, Am6, Dm6, and Dm6 above them. The second staff has four measures with notes and accidentals, and chord labels E7, Am6, and Am6 above them. The third staff has four measures with notes and accidentals, and chord labels Dm6, Dm6, Am6, and Am6 above them. The fourth staff has four measures with notes and accidentals, and chord labels E7, E7, Am6, and Am6 above them. The notes include various rhythmic values and accidentals, and the slides are indicated by diagonal lines.

Grace Notes:

Swing and Gypsy jazz players very often ornament their lines with grace notes. Specifically on violin, these notes add an "elegance" to the playing that is very characteristic of the style.

The image shows a single staff of music in treble clef with three measures. Each measure contains a main note with a grace note (a smaller note) attached to it. The first measure has a grace note on a higher pitch, the second on a lower pitch, and the third on a higher pitch. The notes are connected by a slur.



Track 23: Exercise 6.3: Grace note etude: The following exercise contains several types of grace notes. Add your own bowings except for the grace notes that should be slurred.

Lesson 1-6 Summary:

Pos 2 (acorde 7)
15 (acorde 6)

You should now be ready to really jam on the two tracks that feature the Gypsy jazz progression, track 2 and track 15. Track 2 is easier because the chords are all 7th chords and the A natural minor scale fits the entire progression. While blanketing, you could start using some of the slides and grace notes covered above.

On both tracks you can add the major 3rd (G sharp) of the E7 chord (see lesson 2) but it is not strictly necessary. The main requirement for adding the G sharp on the E7 chord is knowing when the E7 occurs. In other words, you must be able to identify while listening to the CD where the E7 chord occurs in the 16 measure chord progression. Both lesson 2 and the following lessons should help you learn to identify where you are in the chord progression. Once you have accomplished this, you can start using arpeggios in your improvisations. The arpeggios should be the same as the chords on the back-up track (m7 on track 2 and m6 on track 15).

Once you are sure you can improvise using the correct arpeggios, you can start adding minor 6 chords and using track 15 (see lesson 4). This means that technically you would have to change scales between the Am6 chord and the Dm6 chord: use A dorian minor on the Am6 chord (switch the note F to an F sharp) and D dorian minor on the Dm6 chord (that's the scale you've used until now). *cambia*

As you get more proficient with the arpeggios, you can start adding chromatic approach notes. Be aware that chromatic fingering can be problematic on the violin and requires substantial amounts of practice. You are now ready to improvise in any Gypsy Jazz jam session if they call the tune Minor Swing.

Good luck!