

Shifting

part

e

'ghosting'

Some of the exercises in this section use 'ghost' notes, which are played as follows:

Lighten the finger as though playing a harmonic.

Use the least bow pressure.

Use the least length of bow.

Arm movement

Low positions (up to 4th): the hand moves up and down the neck without the elbow having to move left or right.

The hand should not move 'around' the shoulder, otherwise the elbow is forced to move too far in to the centre of the body. The elbow should move to the right only as far as necessary – as little as possible.

High positions (8th onwards): shifts are made more with the hand moving from the wrist, with almost no arm movement.

When shifting from high or middle positions to low positions, the elbow must move to the left again. Figs. 47a and 47b show a one-octave shift from first finger A in 8th position down to the first finger in 1st position. Note how the elbow is more to the left in Fig. 47b, and how it has got 'stuck' in a position too far to the right in Fig. 47c.



First finger A, 8th position



First finger A, 1st position



Having descended from 8th position, the elbow has remained too far to the right

Fig. 47

204

Exercise 1

Bar 1 Move the hand up and down the neck without moving the elbow to left or right.

Bar 2 Move the elbow to the right when ascending, and to the left again when descending. Move the hand 'up and over' the shoulder of the violin, supported on the thumb (Fig. 47a).

Bar 3 Keep the arm still, with the elbow positioned to the right (just as far right as necessary). Move the hand from the wrist.



Repeat on the other strings. On the E string, position the elbow well to the left in the lower positions. In the high positions, move the elbow to the right only as far as necessary.

205

Exercise 2

Having separated the arm movement into three parts in Exercise 204, put all three together by playing two-octave shifts on one string.

- Feel the different movements smoothly joined together – only the hand/forearm moving in the lower positions; the elbow moving to the right in the middle positions; mainly moving with the hand alone in the upper positions.
- Descending, make sure that the upper arm returns to its normal position under the violin, i.e., not too far to the right (Figs. 47b and 47c).



Play the same shifts on each string.

206

Leading the shift**Thumb preparation**

There are various rules governing when the finger/hand/arm moves before the thumb, or when the thumb moves first. The exact action depends on the size of the hand and the length of

the thumb, the actual notes and the speed of the shift, but in the most general terms:

- 1 1st or 2nd position to higher: thumb and hand together.
- 2 3rd position to higher: the thumb sometimes slightly precedes the hand.
- 3 3rd, 4th or 5th position to 1st: the thumb precedes the hand.
- 4 6th position and higher down to 1st: the thumb, hand and arm together in one single movement.
- 5 Higher position down to 3rd: keep the thumb in place while shifting, then move the thumb into the new position.

A simple way to discover the natural use of the thumb without having to think about 'rules' is to play without a shoulder rest. The thumb is then forced to make exactly the right movements at the right time. When the shoulder rest is put back on, the thumb 'remembers' the same movements.

Slow
sul A

- Without a shoulder rest, play arpeggios on one string, as in the Ševčík sequence above. The thumb must now always support the violin, and therefore automatically makes correctly timed movements of preparation and support.
- Play very slowly, noticing where the thumb instinctively wants to move to, and when it wants to move.
- Do not clamp the violin between the chin and shoulder (do not raise the shoulder). Simply rest the instrument on the collar bone, and relax the weight of the head into the chin rest. Using some padding underneath the violin does not affect the exercise.
- Start the arpeggio sequence in different positions to cover all possibilities.

Practice method

Play through whole pieces without a shoulder rest (always making sure that the shoulder does not come up to try to clamp the violin in place). Practise the difficult shifting passages until the thumb/finger/hand/arm all operate smoothly *without the scroll moving*. When the shoulder rest is put back on, the thumb remembers the same actions. You will probably find that many passages have to be played very slowly.

Fingers leading

The impulse for the shift often comes from the finger rather than the hand or arm, with the hand (and then the arm) *following*. 'Aim' with the fingertip into the new note. In these exercises the timing is exaggerated, the finger moving on its own followed by the thumb, hand and arm.

Exercise 1

□ = Square finger ◇ = extended finger¹

In the first bar move only the finger, keeping the hand in first position. Do not move the thumb. In the second bar shift normally from position to position.

- In the first bar begin with the finger square, extend the finger to the upper note, change it back into a square to return to the lower note. Take care to move only the finger, not the hand.
- In the second bar shift normally with the hand/arm, but still make the very smallest amount of the finger movement as in the first bar. In every shift, aim with the fingertip into the new note.

on each string.

¹ See *Square and extended*, page 113

Exercise 2

- To make each shift, only move the finger. At the arrow move the thumb, hand and arm into new position.
 → = move the thumb up (towards the bridge) ← = move the thumb back (towards the scroll)
- Time the movements in a regular rhythm: finger–thumb–finger–thumb, etc.

Play on each string.

About slow arrival speed

In long shifts (and very often in shorter shifts as well),¹ the shift does not move at one single speed. One of the secrets of great accuracy is to shift fast to *somewhere just below the arrival note*, and then to continue more slowly into the arrival note itself. Singers typically reach notes in the same way, the key point being that you must never go too far and then come down into the arrival note. One of the chief advantages of slow arrival speed is that it does not matter where you shift to – a little higher, a little lower – so long as you ‘arrive’ a little below the actual arrival note and then move more slowly into it.

Very often the slow arrival speed is not noticeable at all. Sometimes it is audible, as in singing, and is used as part of the expression of the passage (although this is completely different to an actual slide or *portamento*).

In these exercises the slow arrival speed is written into each shift as an extra note a semitone below the arrival note. The dotted rhythm forces the speed of the shift to be fast–slow.

Practice method

Sonata no. 3 in D minor, op. 108, mov. I
Brahms

¹ For example, every shift in the octave variation (Variation 3) of Paganini Caprice no.24 (24 Caprices op.1) requires a slow arrival speed. Even the semitone shift from A to G[♯] feels more comfortable and accurate after practising it with a fast–slow shift.

One-finger exercises

- While playing with one finger keep all the unused fingers relaxed and uninvolved, above or near to the string.
- When playing with just the first finger, sometimes practise with the fourth finger silently down on an adjacent string (as lightly as a harmonic); or keep the first finger down when playing with just the fourth finger.

low arrival speed

Exercise 1

209

$\text{♩} = 70$ *simile*

First play each section through as written (see example below). Play *f* with an evenly sustained tone, and with a light left hand. Shift to the dotted eighth-notes (quavers) *quickly*, shift to the half-notes (minims) *slowly*.

Repeat the section, ghosting the dotted eighth-notes.¹

Play without the dotted eighth-notes, but still with fast shifts that slow down into the arrival note.

(1) *slow* *slow* (2) *slow* *slow* (3)

Other fingers and positions

Play the sequence on the other strings in various octaves, continuing up the string as high as possible.

sul G sul D sul E

¹ See *Ghosting*, page 145

Exercise 2

- 1 First play through the whole sequence as written, playing all the notes with equal tone (see exercise below). Shift to the eighth-notes (quavers) *quickly*, shift to the dotted quarter-notes (crotchets).
- 2 Then play through, ghosting the eighth-notes.
- 3 Play through without the eighth-notes, but still with a fast shift that slows down into the approach.

Other fingers and positions

Play the sequence on the other strings in various octaves: