

Shifting in thirds

Three key points to watch in playing thirds:

- 1 Position the hand slightly more in favour of the upper finger of each third than the lower finger, and reach back with the lower finger. Do not base the hand position on the lower finger, stretching the upper finger forward. This greatly reduces the reach of the fingers and can cause tension.
- 2 To play a double-stop at the same volume as a single-stop you have to play twice as heavily with the bow, since the weight is distributed between two points instead of one. However, there is no difference for the left hand between playing a double-stop or a single-stop — in both cases the finger pressure should be as little as possible. Many violinists suffer from left hand tension in double-stops, particularly in shifting, simply because of using double finger-pressure as well as double bow-pressure.
- 3 Many players particularly feel tension in the fourth finger. Attempts to relax the finger may not succeed. The key to unlocking the fourth finger is actually the first finger: if the fourth finger feels tight relax the base knuckle joint of the first finger and the fourth finger will immediately release.

Exercise 1

Exercise 1 consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. It features a sequence of eighth-note pairs (double-stops) with various fingerings: 2-4, 1-3, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 2-1, 2-4, 2-4, 1-3, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 2-1, 2-4. The second staff continues the sequence with similar fingerings and includes some notes marked with an 'x' to indicate ghosting.

- 1 First play through as written (see example below). Play *forte* with an evenly sustained tone, and a light left hand. The lower bowing gives the correct co-ordination for separate-bow shifts.
- 2 ‘Ghost’ the semiquavers — play them using as little bow and as little pressure as possible, and harmonic-like finger pressure. These notes are written as x-notes.
- 3 Play without the semiquavers, joining the double-stops together as though there were no shifts.

This musical notation shows a single staff with three numbered sections. Section 1 includes fingerings 2-4, 1-3, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 2-1, 2-4. Section 2 includes 2-4, 1-3, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 2-1, 2-4. Section 3 includes 2-4, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 1-3, 2-4. Some notes in sections 2 and 3 are marked with an 'x'.

Play in a variety of keys to cover different tone-semitone possibilities.

Exercise 2

Exercise 2 consists of two staves of music. The first staff starts with a tempo marking of ♩ = 50-60. It features a sequence of eighth-note pairs with fingerings: 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3, 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3, 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3, 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3. The second staff continues with fingerings: 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 1-3, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-4, 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3, 2-1, 2-1, 4-3, 4-3.

Using a metronome, play the patterns in a variety of keys to cover different tone-semitone possibilities. Also play on the other strings and in other positions.

Exercise 3

Slur one or two bows to a bar, and also play separate bows. Begin with overlapping bowing:

Slow to medium tempo

(Continue up the string)

Exercise 4

Play *forte*, keeping the bow sustained and deep in the string. Keep the left fingers light.

A
D
E

Play through the sequence as written, from beginning to end. Also practice one bar at a time as follows, playing with the metronome:

$\text{♩} = 60$

Exercises such as these are very useful either as quick warm-up exercises or for building technique. Play a simple scale in thirds; play these exercises for twenty minutes, and then repeat the scale. You may find that it now feels much easier, and has improved far more than the same amount of practice on the scale itself would have achieved.

Next month's BASICS features four more simple but effective exercises for thirds.