

Fast passages: clarity

Every note in a fast passage must be clear. The following practice methods are a few quick ways to build clarity and evenness so that every note speaks clearly and equally with the others.

Separate bows – staccato – accented legato

Practise slurred phrases or passages in the following three ways:

- 1 Separate bows.
- 2 Staccato. Begin slowly, 'biting' the beginning of each note individually. Gradually speed up.
- 3 Accented legato. Slightly accent each note within a basically legato stroke.

Example 1

Concerto No. 3 in G, K216, Mozart
First movement, bar 60

332

f *p* *f* *p*

Separate bows Staccato Accented legato

Example 2

Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26, Bruch
Second movement, bar 52

As written Separate bows

f

Staccato Accented legato

Timing the shift: miss out the note before the shift

Shifts that arrive late in a fast passage may not only be unclear, but may upset the rhythm and clarity of the notes that follow. Miss out the note before the shift to feel the exact moment, within the tempo and rhythmic pulse, when the shifting finger must arrive on its note.

Example 1

Concerto No. 5 in A major, K219, Mozart
First movement, bar 74

(Upper half)

Example 2

Concerto, Op. 35, Tchaikowski
First movement, bar 60

Finger accents for rhythmic stability

To strengthen exactness of rhythm, establish rhythmic 'aiming-points' for the left hand by using finger accents.

Example 1

Concerto in E minor, Op. 64, Mendelssohn
Third movement, bar 663

Drop each third finger with a little extra speed and percussive force (shown as '+'). The underlying rhythm created by these finger accents is:

161

Finger the passage without the bow, feeling the rhythmic aiming-points.

Example 2

Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26, Bruch
First movement, bar 88

Lift and drop the fingers marked '+' with extra speed and suddenness. The + notes give the following rhythmic structure to the phrase:

021

LIFT DROP LIFT DROP DROP DROP

Next month's BASICS looks at using the metronome to speed up fast passages.