

Speeding up with the metronome

Galamian was once asked which practice method, out of all the different ways of practising, would he consider to be the very best if he could choose only one. He replied: 'Playing through at half speed, because it gives you time to think.'

Gradually speeding up from a slow tempo to a fast one, using a metronome, is an interesting and effective way to approach this. You can use it for mastering individual phrases or complete passages, or even for playing through entire movements.

Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20 No. 1, Sarasate
Allegro molto vivace



In this passage from Zigeunerweisen, the starting tempo for speeding-up might be ♩ = 80. Practise the passage at that slow tempo until:

- 1 Every finger falls easily in tune
- 2 Every note is clean
- 3 Every note is rhythmically exact and regular
- 4 The passage feels physically comfortable and easy to play

Then increase the metronome to the next speed – practise it again until in tune, clean, in time, and feeling easy – and so on.

If you cannot play the passage 'perfectly' at any particular tempo, it does not necessarily mean that you should not go on to the next tempo. It may be better to continue speeding up anyway, so that when you return to a slower tempo it then feels much easier at that speed than it did originally, and you can now play it better anyway.

There are many different ways to speed up with the metronome. For example:

- 1 Start at a slow, comfortable tempo, and speed up in such small steps that you do not notice the difference. In the example from Zigeunerweisen, the metronome speeds could be as follows:
 - ♩ = 80, 84, 88, 92, 96, etc., then:
 - ♩ = 60, 63, 66, 69, 72, etc., then:
 - ♩ = 60, 63, 66, 69, 72, etc.
- 2 Five steps forward, two steps back: increase by 5, then decrease by 2, then increase by 5, etc.
 - ♩ = 60, 76, 66, 84, 72, etc.
- 3 Start at a medium tempo, then increase by, say, 5 if you play it very well, decrease by 5 if you make any mistake of pitch/sound/rhythm/ease.
- 4 Alternate slow and fast while gradually increasing the tempo:
 - ♩ = 80, ♩ = 80 — ♩ = 84, ♩ = 84 — ♩ = 88, ♩ = 88 — ♩ = 92, ♩ = 92 — ♩ = 96, ♩ = 96, etc.

The ideal is to continue speeding up until you can play a passage faster than you need to.

Next month's BASICS returns to shifting, including how to shift long distances with complete confidence.