

Left hand pizzicato

'Left hand pizzicato has only a very limited right to existence. Above all, it is tonally not free from objection...Its study can only be expected during the boyhood years when pleasure is still derived from such flighty achievements. [Sevcik]...provides plentiful material...with which the youthful violinist may strain both his fingers and intelligence.' Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*, New York 1924, 49.

In left hand pizzicato, a lower finger stops the string while a higher finger plucks it. Two of the qualities of successful left hand pizzicato are 1) clarity: every note is absolutely clear and equal in strength with the others, and 2) machine-like evenness of rhythm.

Whenever possible, when alternating short bow-strokes with left hand pizzicato bounce the bow on the string close to the point, imitating with the bow the sound of the pizzicato.

Stopping the string

Pizzicato is the one of the few areas of playing where the harder the left fingers press the string the better. In normal playing the correct amount of finger pressure is *as much as necessary but as little as possible*.

Excess finger pressure is a common cause of tension in the left hand, and can also contribute towards a tight and closed tone. However, a plucked open string rings for longer than a stopped note because the nut stops the open string so precisely compared to the fleshy pad of the fingertip.

You can get the same ringing effect out of a 'dead' note like B^b. With the instrument sitting on a flat surface, use something with a hard edge (make sure it will not damage the strings) to stop the string instead of your finger. The B^b will then ring for as long as an open string when plucked.

24 Caprices, op. 1 no. 24, Paganini

Practise very slowly, at about one note every five seconds. The lower fingerings indicate the finger that stops the string; the circled numbers indicate the finger that plucks the string.

Very slow

- After playing the first note (B^b) with a short spiccato stroke, leave the fourth finger down on the string and place the third finger A^b underneath it (written as an x-note). Press both fingers as hard as possible for a second or two, then pluck the string with the fourth finger.
- Leave the third finger down on the string and place the second finger G[#] underneath it. Press both fingers as hard as possible, then pluck with the third finger, and so on.

Lift-off action

In some passages, particularly on the E string, it is natural to move the fingers back partly with a movement of the whole hand. At other times it is better if the plucking movement comes from the base knuckle joints, the back of the hand remaining motionless.

The following simple exercise forces each finger to move from the base joints by holding three fingers down while plucking with the remaining finger.

Angle of plucking

Left hand pizzicato on the E string is easier if the elbow is placed more to the left than usual. This brings the base joints down lower, making it very easy to pluck.

On the G string it helps if the elbow is brought a little further in to the centre of the body than usual. This causes the plucking fingers to lift off at an angle that makes them miss the D string. Plucking on the middle strings may require the same position of the elbow as for the G string.

Malaguena, op. 21 no. 1, Sarasate

Rhythm practice

Zigeunerweisen, op. 20 no. 1, Sarasate

Rhythm practice is an extremely effective way to get left hand pizzicato under rhythmic control and to improve co-ordination. Simple two and three note dotted patterns are usually sufficient.

Long-short pattern beginning on the first note of the passage:

Long-short pattern beginning on the second note. Treat the first note as an upbeat:

Three-note patterns, for example quaver and two semiquavers, should be played starting on the first note of the passage, the second note, and the third note.