

# Widening the left hand

One of the most important aspects of the left hand is the way it can be balanced to favour different fingers. While large hands may be able to be based on the first finger with the other fingers still able to reach up to their notes without strain, medium and small-sized hands gain in range if the hand *widens* at the base knuckle joints. This is achieved by basing the hand position a little more on the upper fingers and *reaching back* with the lower fingers.

Without the instrument hold the left hand in front of you in playing position, the fingers naturally curved. Keeping the second, third and fourth fingers almost touching, move the first finger back (away from you), so that a V-shaped space opens between the base joints of the first and second fingers. The same, though less, widening is possible between the other pairs of fingers.

The crucial thing is to avoid positioning the hand entirely to favour the first finger, the first and second fingers squeezing together and the third and fourth fingers having almost to straighten to reach their notes.

Large hands or small, from time to time practise passages with the hand based entirely on the fourth finger while reaching the lower three fingers back to their notes. This produces a feeling of great openness and liberation in the hand when returning afterwards to a normal hand position. Basing the hand on the upper finger is also the key to playing thirds and fingered octaves.

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## Warm-up exercise to widen the hand

- Hold the fourth finger down on the D string without playing it.
- Position the hand to favour the fourth finger so that it is curved, relaxed and comfortable.
- Reach back with the other fingers without disturbing the shape or balance of the fourth finger.
- Widen at the base joints by placing the fourth finger very slightly more on the side of the finger furthest from the thumb; place the first finger very slightly more on the side of the finger closest to the thumb.

The musical notation consists of four staves of music in G major, 2/4 time. The first staff is marked with a 'D' and a '4' above the first measure, and an 'A' and a '1' above the second measure. The music features a sequence of eighth notes with slurs and ties, illustrating hand widening and relaxation.

## Thirds and fingered octaves

Playing thirds or fingered octaves, the hand position is based more on the third and fourth fingers than usual, the lower fingers reaching back. If the hand is based on the first and second fingers it is more difficult for the upper fingers to reach, and the hand can become tense.

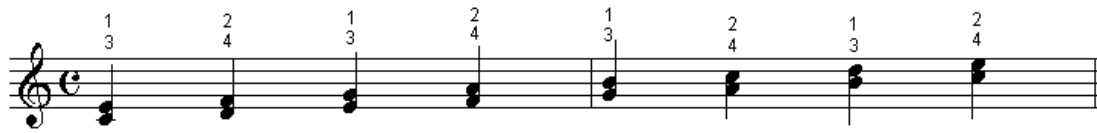
Examples 1 and 2 show how to build the correct hand position into any passage of thirds.

Set the hand position for each third or fingered octave individually.

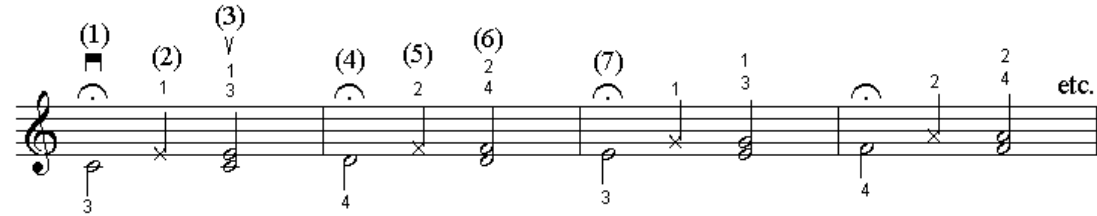
- Place the upper finger first, positioning the hand so that the finger is curved, relaxed and comfortable.
- Then place the lower finger by extending back.
- While placing the lower finger, as far as possible do not alter the shape of the upper finger, or change the way the hand is balanced on the upper finger.

1

Example



- Play slowly, without keeping to any particular pulse:



- (1) Place the third finger on the string. Position the hand to favour the third finger so that it is rounded and relaxed, without having to stretch up to the note.

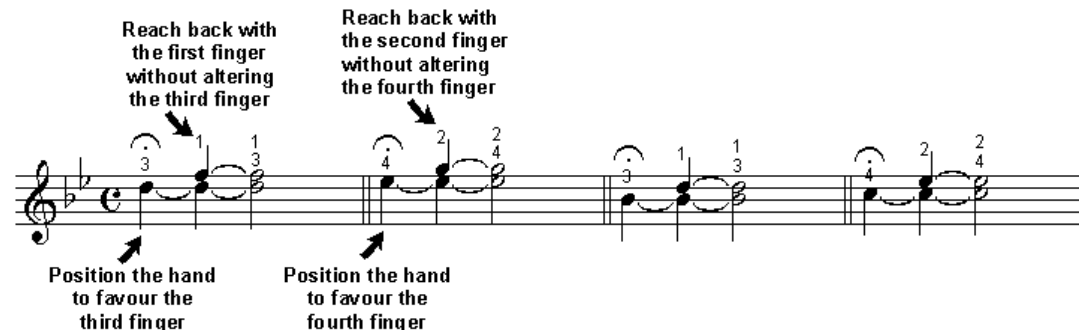
Keep the space open between the base of the thumb and the first finger.

- (2) While playing the third finger, silently place the first finger on its note (written as an x-note) *without altering the shape of the third finger*.
- (3) Play the double-stop.
- (4) Place the fourth finger on the string, and then remove the third and first fingers from the string. Position the hand to favour the fourth finger, so that the tip of the finger is on the string and the finger is rounded and relaxed.
- (5) Reach back with the second finger *without altering the shape of the fourth finger*.
- (6) Play the double-stop.
- (7) Shift up to the new third finger, and continue in the same way.

Sonata in G minor ('Dido abandonata'), Tartini  
First movement

2

Example



Next month's BASICS returns to intonation with a time-saving warm-up exercise.