

Spiccato

Height and length

In spiccato the bow moves in a curved line that ranges from saucer-shaped to U-shaped. The hair touches the string at the very bottom of the curve. The main proportions to consider are height of bounce to length of bow.

The higher the bounce and the less movement along the string, the shorter and crisper the spiccato. The lower the bounce and the more movement along the string, the longer and more rounded the spiccato.

Because the string is soft near the fingerboard and hard near the bridge, the best proportions of height-length are different at each distance from the bridge.

- Begin with short détaché strokes on the string. Gradually let the bow begin to bounce, finally letting the hair leave the string.

Sonata in G, op. 30 no. 3, Beethoven

Example 1

On the string Beginning to come out Long, 'brushed' strokes Short spiccato

Soundpoint

Soundpoint 1 near the bridge — **soundpoint 2** between the bridge and the centre-point — **soundpoint 3** at the centre-point — **soundpoint 4** between the centre-point and the fingerboard — **soundpoint 5** near the fingerboard.

Spiccato nearer the **fingerboard**: lower, shorter, lighter, faster (nearer the middle of the bow)

Spiccato nearer the **bridge**: higher, longer, heavier, slower (nearer the heel of the bow)

- Play a group of notes on soundpoint 5. Experiment with the height, length, pressure, speed, amount of hair, and area of the bow until the tone is pure and ringing.
- Repeat on soundpoint 4. The spiccato will now be very slightly higher, longer, heavier and slower.
- Repeat on soundpoints 3 and 2. On soundpoint 2 the spiccato will be very much higher, longer, heavier and slower than it was on soundpoint 5.

Scherzo (FAE Sonata) Wo02, Brahms

Example 2

Soundpoint 5 Repeat many times Soundpoint 4 Soundpoint 3 Soundpoint 2

p Fast and light *mp* *mf* *f* Slow and heavy

Area of bow

- Experiment in different parts of the bow to find exactly the best place for each individual spiccato passage.
- At each place in the bow experiment with the proportions of height and length of bow to find the best quality and character of spiccato.

Violin Concerto no. 3 in G, K216, Mozart

Example 3 shows a sequence of six musical staves illustrating spiccato passages at different bow positions. The first staff shows the original passage from Mozart's Violin Concerto no. 3 in G, K216. The following five staves show variations of the passage, each with a specific bow position label: 10 centimetres below the middle, 5 centimetres below the middle, Middle of the bow, 5 centimetres above the middle, 10 centimetres above the middle, and 15 centimetres above the middle. Each variation maintains the same rhythmic pattern but changes the vertical placement of the notes on the staff to represent the different bow heights.

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Example

Amount of hair

The best proportions of height–length–soundpoint, and the best place to play in the bow, changes according to how much hair is used.

- Playing on one note, experiment with the proportions of the stroke to find exactly the right combination to produce the right character of spiccato for any particular passage.

Autumn (The Four Seasons), op. 8 no. 3, Vivaldi

Example 4 shows a sequence of musical staves illustrating spiccato passages with varying amounts of hair. The first staff shows the original passage from Vivaldi's Autumn (The Four Seasons), op. 8 no. 3. The following five staves show variations of the passage, each with a specific hair amount label: ...outer edge of hair..., ...more hair..., ...full hair..., ...less hair..., and ...outer edge of hair... again. Below these staves, three labels indicate the bow tilt: Wood of bow tilted towards fingerboard, Wood directly above the string, and Wood tilted towards fingerboard. Each variation maintains the same rhythmic pattern but changes the vertical placement of the notes to represent different hair amounts and bow tilts.

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Example

Play slurred to practise the left hand

The left fingers must be even so that they do not disturb the evenness of the bow stroke.

- Practise spiccato passages slurred to expose and correct any unevenness in the left hand.

Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, Mozart

Example 5 shows a sequence of musical staves illustrating slurred spiccato passages. The first staff shows the original passage from Mozart's Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218. The following five staves show variations of the passage, each with a specific slurring label: 4 0, 4 3, 4 0 3, 4, and 4 4 3. Each variation maintains the same rhythmic pattern but changes the slurring to expose and correct any unevenness in the left hand.

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Example

Next month's BASICS looks at how to play fast and effortless trills.