

Trills

The great cellist Pablo Casals described trills as bringing ‘exaltation’ to a note (David Blum, *Casals and the Art of Interpretation*, London 1977, 125). The following are some of the factors which bring technical freedom so that the player can concentrate fully on the musical value of the trill without hindrance.

1

Example

Speed: height of finger

In some ways trills are similar to vibrato. Where vibrato has proportions of speed to width, trills have proportions of speed to height of finger. To vibrate faster, it is usually natural to make the vibrato narrower to lessen the distance the finger moves. To play more notes in a trill, keep the fingers very close to the strings to lessen the distance they have to move up and down.

- Play the trill with such low fingers that they hardly clear the string, and there is ‘fuzz’ in the trill. Gradually use a little higher lift-off until the trill is both very fast and very clean.

Trilling finger hardly raising off the string, so that the trill is pure ‘fuzz’

Raising the finger slightly higher, but still so close to the string that it causes ‘fuzz’

Raising just high enough to clear the string

2

Example

Speed: direction of movement

Trills are also similar to vibrato in that in vibrato there is only one active movement – forward to the in-tune note. A vibrato with an active forward and active backward movement is difficult to do fast.

In trills there is also only one active movement. The finger moves up–up–up–up, not down–down–down–down or down–up–down–up. Trills with an active downward and an active upward movement are difficult to play fast.

- Play trills with the following dotted rhythms. Lift the trilling finger quickly as if the string were hot to touch.

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Play Practise

3

Example

Building the trill one note at a time

Sonatina in A minor, op. 137 no. 2, Schubert
Third movement

f *p*

f *simile*

4

Example

- Use many bows during the pauses, sustaining the sound fully and evenly near the bridge. The aim is to make the string vibrate as widely as possible to give the left fingers as big a task as possible.

- When you then add the fingers, do not alter the stroke in any way as the fingers lift and fall. To isolate the fingers from the bow change, do not change bow and move the fingers at the same time.

Violin Concerto no. 3 in G, K216, Mozart
First movement cadenza (Sam Franko)

Example 5

The musical notation for Example 5 consists of three staves. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with fingerings 1, 3, and 2, and trills marked 'tr'. The second and third staves show complex rhythmic patterns with fingerings and a 'simile' marking.

Adding notes one at a time in tempo

Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, Mozart
First movement

Example 6

The musical notation for Example 6 shows a single staff with a sequence of notes and trills. Fingerings 1, 2, 2, 3, and 1 are indicated. Trills are marked 'tr'.

Play up to tempo with full character and expression but build the trills one note at a time. Begin with dropping and raising the finger only once, and then twice, three times, and so on.

Written out in longer time values for the sake of clarity:

The musical notation for Example 6, showing trills in longer time values. It includes fingerings 4, 2, 4, 2 and is marked 'etc.'.

Timing the rhythm of the turn

42 Etudes ou caprices, Kreutzer
No. 31

Example 7

The musical notation for Example 7 shows a sequence of notes with trills and turns. Fingerings 3, 4, 0, and 2 are indicated. Trills are marked 'tr'. The text '(Upper half, martelé)' is written above the staff. Below the staff, two numbered examples (1) and (2) show different ways to play the turn.

- (1) Leave out the trill and the turn. Play exactly in time.
- (2) Still leaving out the trill, play the turn very 'late' and fast, connecting it to the following note (C), not to the previous note (B).
- (3) Play both the trill and the turn.

Next month's BASICS looks at how to play sautillé.