

Releasing the left hand (2)

There should be an immediate give as soon as a finger stops a note on the string. The hand tightens if the finger action is 'stop-press' rather than 'stop-release'.

A useful analogy is the binary code used in computers, where all information is reduced to numbers made up of ones and zeros – either 'on' or 'off'. Similarly, the actions of the left hand could be expressed as a string of digits, '1' representing a muscle in use (i.e. contracted) and '0' representing the same muscle released.

In some passages the sequence would be '10101010', i.e. every action immediately followed by a release before another action. In other passages it would more be a matter of releasing *often enough*, as in '10111011110'. But if the number reads '11111111' for too long, tension may be unavoidable.

Stop-release

- Practising by exaggeration play a phrase very slowly, each note separated by a pause. During the pause release the string and the bow pressure, the finger resting on the surface of the string as if to play a harmonic.

1

Example

Roumanian Folk Dances, Bartok-Szekely
No. 4

molto espr.

Release the string, the finger staying lightly on the string as though playing a harmonic

2

Example

Sonatina no. 3 in G minor, op. 137, Schubert
Fourth movement

f

Release the string

etc.

Build up from *pp*

- Play through a phrase or passage *pp* to influence the left hand to be soft and relaxed, the fingers light on the string and effortless.
- Repeat *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f* and *ff*. As the the bow weight increases keep the same feeling of lightness and ease that you had when playing *pp*.

3

Example

The musical score for Example 3 consists of three staves of music in G major, 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. It features a series of notes with a dynamic marking of *f* *espress.* and a slur. The second staff is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "Soft, relaxed left hand". The third staff is marked *mf*, *f*, and *ff* and includes the instruction "Same relaxed hand as when playing *pp*". Fingerings (1, 2, 3) and bowings (V) are indicated throughout the score.

Independence: light left hand, heavy right hand

When the bow plays heavily into the string the left hand finger pressure should remain light, i.e. *as much finger pressure as necessary for a pure tone but as little as possible.*

- Practising by exaggeration, play a phrase or passage very heavily with the bow, but at the same time so lightly with the fingers (as though playing harmonics), that the sound produced is pure scratch.
- Relax the left hand and fingers completely. You need only the slightest muscular activity to place the fingers lightly on the surface of the string. Check the thumb, base joints of the fingers, wrist and upper arm, to make sure that every area is working with minimum effort.
- Repeat several times, playing *f* with the bow throughout, each time stopping the string slightly more. Continue until the tone is still large but now entirely pure, the fingers stopping the string with the least possible finger pressure throughout.

4

Example

The musical score for Example 4 consists of four staves of music in E minor, 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. It features a series of notes with a dynamic marking of *con forza* and a slur. The second, third, and fourth staves are each marked *f* and show different bowing techniques (1, 2, 3, 4) indicated by numbers and 'X' marks. Fingerings (1, 2, 3) and bowings (V) are indicated throughout the score.

- (1) Quarter press. Since most of these notes are not natural harmonics, playing *f* with the bow should produce a loud whistling, scratching and scraping sound.
- (2) Half press.
- (3) Three-quarters press.
- (4) Properly sounding, but the strings hardly touching the fingerboard.