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.

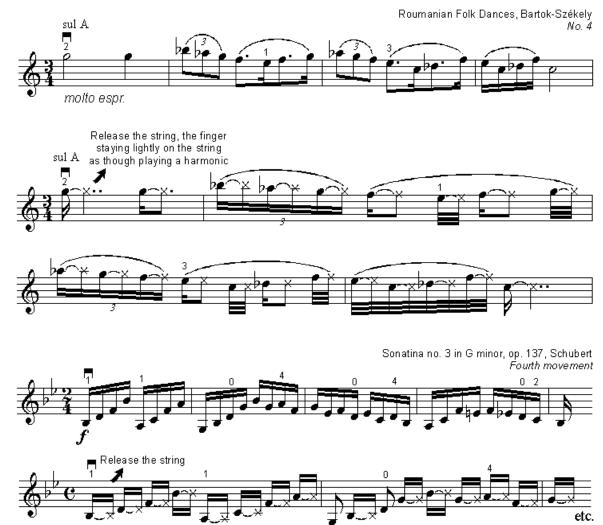
Stop-release

Example

2

Example

• 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.



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.

Example

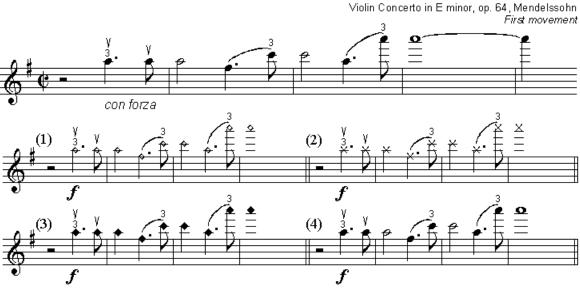
Example



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.



- (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.

Next month's BASICS looks at one of the great secrets of how to play fast: placing the fingers in blocks