

Chords (1)

Bow balance and contact

In unaccompanied Bach the strings are often thought of as representing the voices in a choir, so that the open E – A – D – G strings are soprano, alto, tenor and bass respectively. To bring out an inner voice, after playing three strings together the bow continues to sustain (for example) the middle string alone.

Use the same approach to practise any chord sequence. This improves the balance and contact of the bow on the different strings, and also improves intonation.

- Play all three strings together and then sustain one string only, then pairs, and finally all three strings.

24 Etudes and Caprices, op. 35, Dont
No. 1

1

Example

- (1) Place the bow on the middle string of the chord. Press the middle string down until you can see the bow-hair contacting the outer strings of the chord.

Play all three strings at once, using only a centimetre of bow at most, and then sustain only one string.

- (2) Play all three strings as before, and then sustain two strings.

- (3) Finally, sustain all three strings at once.

Play as near to the bridge as possible. If the bow is too near the bridge it is difficult to catch all three strings at once; too near the fingerboard the tone may easily be crushed.

Do not allow any break in the sound during the tied note: each tie should sound like a minim. Sustaining the lower string, for example, do not let the hair of the bow momentarily leave the lower string between playing the three strings together and playing the lower string alone.

In the four-string chords in the last bar, miss out the top note and then miss out the bottom note.

Intonation

- Silently put down all the fingers together as chords, but play only one line of the passage at a time – the lower notes, the middle notes, then the top notes.
- Then, continuing to put down all the fingers together as chords, play two strings together – first the lower two strings and then the upper two.

2
Example

Violin Concerto no.1 in G minor, op. 26, Bruch
First movement

The musical score for Example 2 is in G minor, 3/4 time, marked *mfz*. It features a series of chords with fingerings indicated below the notes. The fingerings are: 3 2 2 3 2 3 0 1 0 1; 2 2 2 3 2 3 3 3 3 3; 1 1 1 1 1 1 4 4 4 4.

- (1) Bow only the bottom string. The x-notes show the fingers playing silently on the other strings.
- (2) Bow only the middle string.
- (3) Bow only the top string.
- (4) Bow only the lower two strings.
- (5) Bow only the upper two strings.

The musical score for Example 2 is divided into five variations, each with fingerings indicated below the notes:

- (1) Fingerings: 3 2 2 3 2 3 1 1 1 1
- (2) Fingerings: 3 2 2 3 2 3 1 1 1 1
- (3) Fingerings: 3 2 2 3 2 3 1 1 1 1
- (4) Fingerings: 3 2 2 3 2 3 1 1 1 1
- (5) Fingerings: 3 2 2 3 2 3 1 1 1 1

Isolating specific fingers

- Isolate specific fingers that may be awkward to place and play only those fingers, the others remaining silently on the string.

3
Example

Sonata no. 1 in G minor, BWV1001, J. S. Bach
Fuga

The musical score for Example 3 is in G minor, 3/4 time, marked *f*. It features a series of chords with fingerings indicated below the notes. The fingerings are: 1 2 4 1. There are also '+' symbols above some chords, indicating where to isolate specific fingers.

- At the chords marked '+' play only the first finger, placing the others silently (shown as x-notes):

The musical score for Example 3 is divided into two variations, each with fingerings indicated below the notes:

- (1) Fingerings: 1 2 4 1
- (2) Fingerings: 1 2 4 1

Next month's BASICS looks at sustaining and splitting chords