

Chords (2)

Splitting the chord: bow division

The lower strings of a split chord should usually be played with much less bow than the upper strings. For example, on a long down-bow split chord starting at the heel the top of a chord should usually begin at, or a little below, the point-of-balance.

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

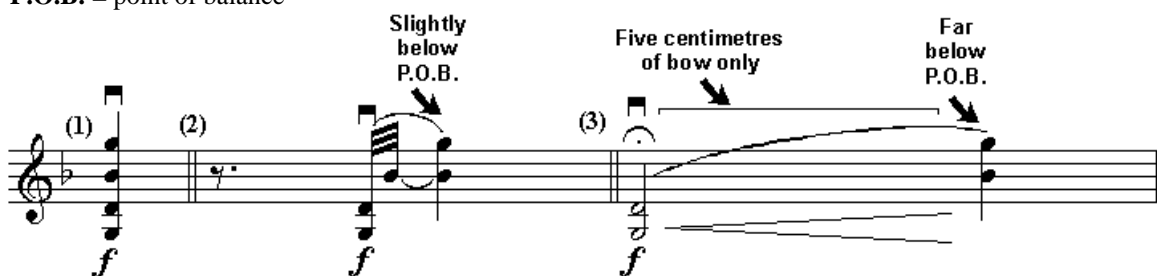
1

Example



- Practise saving bow on the base of the chord by exaggeration: use only five centimetres, arriving at the top of the chord well below the point-of-balance.
- Despite using so little bow on the bottom of the chord, play a long pause. Sustain the bow deeply and evenly in the string and with a pure tone. Play into the elasticity of the wood of the bow, hair, and string.

P.O.B. = point of balance



- (1) As written
- (2) As often played on modern instruments. (On period instruments it would probably be arpeggiated.)
- (3) Practice method

Non-split chords: sustaining

- Sustain three strings together for the whole length of bow, down-bow and up. Afterwards the normal length, or the normal splitting of the chord, will seem very easy.

Sonata in C minor, op. 30 no. 2, Beethoven
First movement

2

Example



These chords are usually played as 'three-two' chords – three strings played together for about ten centimetres, and then only the upper two strings for the rest of the chord. To the listener this sounds like three strings throughout but most of the chord is actually only two strings, sounding approximately as follows:



- Before playing the chords as three-two chords, practise sounding all three strings together:



- Build up to the long, sustained chord at the end of the sequence little by little. Start with the shortest possible stroke and gradually add more and more length until using almost the whole length of the bow.
 - 1 Place the bow on the string near the heel. Press the middle of the three strings down until you can see the bow-hair contacting the outer strings of the chord.
To gain more power spread the fingers slightly further apart on the bow. Move the first finger (and possibly the second finger) slightly further away from the thumb (i.e. in the direction of the point).
 - 2 Play the three strings together with the shortest possible stroke, throwing the chord out like a pizzicato. Listen to the chord ring after the stroke.
 - 3 Play the chord slightly longer, e.g. three centimetres long. Then ten centimetres, fifteen, twenty, and so on until playing almost a whole bow, sustaining all three strings evenly from the beginning of the chord to the end.
- Throughout this practice method hold the wood of the bow down towards the hair, without releasing, during the whole length of each stroke. Because the weight of the bow is divided between three strings you need almost triple the weight that you would use for a normal *f* on one string alone.
- Play as close to the bridge as possible, at least at the middle point between the bridge and the fingerboard. The nearer the bridge the better (so that you can play deeply into the strings without crushing the tone), but the harder it is to catch all three strings at once.

Non-split chords: building in stages

- Build the chord gradually. Begin with all the strings played simultaneously and then move to a three–two or three–two–one chord.

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

3

Example

- (1) Play all three strings together, sustaining the bottom string equally with the top string.
Move from three strings to only two, sustaining the top two strings as an ordinary double stop.
- (2) Play all three strings together.
Move from three strings to two.
Move from three strings, to two, to only the top string.
Gradually speed up the three–two–one chord:

