Guide notes

Guide notes are a secure way to find the correct note or hand position at the beginning of a phrase or after a rest. The fingers are placed silently, often rapidly, in order to move to a different area of the fingerboard.

There are always many different ways to reach a particular note, and each player will have their own preferred ‘route’. The examples given below are intended only to illustrate the principle.

Suppose that Bruch had written this passage as follows:

This would be straightforward to play, but it amounts to the same thing if you finger the extra A – D silently:

(1) Play the guide notes as though they were part of the passage.

(2) Place the finger on the first guide note without playing it (written as an x–note), and then play on.

(3) Place both guide notes without playing them, and play the ‘destination note’ only.

(4) Place the guide notes like fast grace notes, without playing them, and then begin the passage.

- Practise as in Example 1.
(1) Practise the shift to the guide note. Begin slowly and gradually speed up to as fast a tempo as possible.

(2) Practise going to the F in the context of playing the double stop.

(3) Play straight from one double stop to another, using the first finger F as a guide but without playing it.

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Practise all the guide notes, using a B to help find the C.

Begin slowly and gradually speed up to as fast a tempo as possible.

(2) Place the finger on the first guide note without playing it (written as an x–note), and then play on; then the first two notes, and so on.

(3) Place the first and third fingers together as a ‘block’ (as though playing a double stop on one string), without playing them. Then find and play the fourth finger G.

(4) Place the guide notes like fast grace notes, without playing them.

When you have to go to a note very quickly it is often not possible to use guide notes. Then it is a question of memorizing the feel of the hand position:

Using this fingering the top G is an extension. The shift is to second finger D in 5th position. Practise going to the D alone. Memorise the feeling of the hand position.

(2) Practise going to the D in the context of playing an extension fourth finger G. The hand position may feel slightly different.

(3) Remembering the feeling of the hand position, place the second finger D on the string without playing it, and continue into the passage.

Next month’s BASICS looks at how to shift to a harmonic