

Fast fingers

The ability to drop and raise the fingers very fast, even though the tempo of those notes may be slow, is one of the great 'secrets' of technique and the solution to many different problems.

In *forte* passages the bow causes the strings to vibrate widely: the fingers must lift and drop very fast in order to create each new string length as quickly as possible.

If the fingers move too slowly there may be 'fuzz' caused by the string momentarily vibrating against the finger as the finger touches or leaves the string.

In separate-bow passages, co-ordination also may suffer when the fingers move too slowly, and this causes further instances of fuzz at the beginning of notes.

With a slow left hand action you either have to play with a small tone in order that it be clean (slow fingers do not cause so much fuzz when the strings are vibrating less); or to play with a larger tone but with many blemishes in the sound.

As well as helping the tone to be cleaner, fast fingers make fast passages feel slower:

- The faster the finger drops on to the string or raises from it, the *later* the dropping or raising must begin.
- The later the finger drops or raises, the *longer* the time between each finger action.
- The longer the time between each action, the *slower* the passage feels.

Warm-up exercise: fast lift-off

The muscles in the left fingers can be likened to a spring: raising a finger is like pulling or stretching the spring apart, dropping a finger is like releasing the spring. The dropping action should generally be fast (unless playing *piano* or *dolce*), but because the lift-off action is pulling against a resistance it should feel *faster* to equalise the two actions of lifting and dropping.

This simple exercise builds up the speed of the lift off. It is also an excellent exercise for moving the fingers from the base joints:

1
Example

Keep three fingers lightly held down on the E string. Pluck the G and D strings together with the remaining finger, pulling the finger back fast from the base joint.

- Pluck very fast throughout, pausing after each pluck. It is easier (and natural) to pluck fast when the note is *f*, but for the purposes of the exercise continue to pluck at the same fast speed despite the diminuendo.
- Wait between plucking: place the finger on the G and D strings, wait, pluck; place, wait, pluck; place, wait, etc.
- In the first three bars position the hand to favour the fourth finger so that it is curved, relaxed and comfortable. Then reach back with the other fingers without disturbing the shape of the fourth finger.

Slow tempo, fast fingers

- Play through any moderate-to-fast phrase, passage or section at a very slow tempo, while dropping and lifting the fingers very fast.
- Wait until the last possible moment before moving each finger – keep the finger still for so long that waiting just another instant would cause the note to be late; then lift or drop extremely fast.

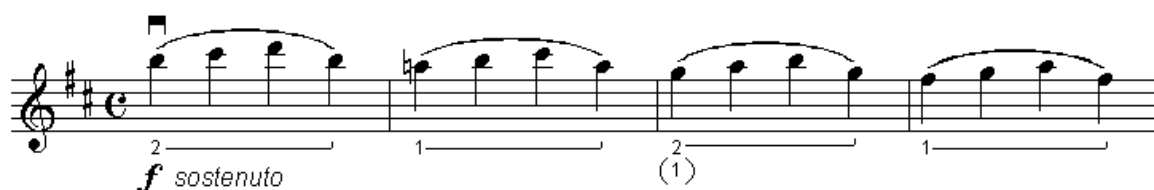
Violin Concerto no. 4 in D, K218, Mozart
First movement

2

Example



- Play very slowly. Lift and drop the fingers exaggeratedly quickly:



Listen to the ‘ping’ as the fingers drop on to, or lift from, the string. Producing a ping with the left fingers, while not used in *dolce* or legato passages, is one of the keys to clarity, articulation and precision.

There are two things you have to do to produce a ping:

- (1) Play with a ringing tone, (*mp* to *ff*), the string vibrating widely and evenly.
 - (2) Lift and drop the fingers very fast. They need to be fast (rather than heavy) so that the string changes from one length to another as quickly as possible.
- Use fast spiccato or *sautillé* as a further practice method to gain the feeling of moving the fingers fast, at the last possible moment. The fingers have to lift and drop very fast to co-ordinate with the bow:

