

# Bowing: upper arm

## Bowing from the elbow in the lower half

In the lower half of the bow you can gain great stability and control by feeling the elbow *moving at the same speed* as the frog of the bow. Feel the elbow moving on its path through the air, and the frog of the bow moving on its path, travelling together as one unit. Control the bow not from the hand and fingers but from the elbow.

In the lowest three or four centimetres of the bow (i.e. at the extreme heel), there is no opening-and-closing movement of the forearm at the elbow. All the movement of the bow comes from the upper arm only (which is called the elbow movement here). Feel the elbow leading that upper arm movement.

Playing at the point-of-balance there is some opening-and-closing of the forearm, and near the middle of the bow there is much more. Nevertheless, in many passages you can still have this feeling of moving the bow with the elbow, rather than with the hand, almost up to the middle of the bow.

Example

Sonata no. 3 in D minor, op. 108, Brahms  
First movement

to make each attack feel the elbow moving at the same speed as the frog of the bow

- Exaggerate the movement of the upper arm by playing these down-bows without any forearm movement at all, attacking the string from the air.

Before playing each stroke, note the angle formed at the elbow between the upper arm and the forearm. Do not alter this angle as you move the bow to the string. It does not matter if, for now, the bow goes slightly crooked to the bridge.

- Control the strokes from the elbow, feeling it and the frog of the bow moving together at the same speed.
- Then put all other forearm, hand and finger movements back in to the stroke as required, but still feel the elbow moving at the same speed as the frog.

Note: Feeling the elbow and the frog moving at the same speed does not apply if there is a lot of vertical upper arm movement in the lower half of the bow, i.e. gradually raising the elbow on the up-bow when approaching the heel, lowering the elbow just before or at the bow change. This vertical movement of the elbow causes the elbow and the frog of the bow to move at different speeds to each other.

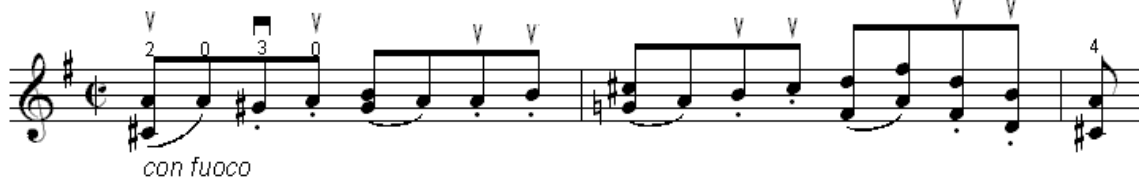
The connection between the elbow and the frog applies whenever the elbow stays more or less on the same level as the bow when playing in the lower half.

Example

Bolero, op. 51 no. 3, Hubay

At each down-bow in Example 2 begin the stroke close to the heel. Feel the elbow moving at the same speed as the frog of the bow. Control the speed of bow with the speed of the elbow.

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



Example

- From the third note of Example 3 exaggerate the movement of the upper arm by playing without any forearm movement. ‘Kick’ each separate-bow note, powering the stroke from the elbow.

### Bowing from the elbow in the upper half

Playing in the upper half, many bow strokes appear to consist only of the forearm movement when in fact they are being powered from the upper arm. Sometimes the upper arm does remain ‘quiet’, while all the movement takes place only in the forearm; but just as often the forearm movement actually originates in the upper arm. The upper arm movement in turn originates in the back.

The feeling of this whole-arm movement is that as the forearm opens on the down-bow the elbow moves back, and on the up-bow the elbow moves forwards. If you can see the upper arm moving it is probably too much; yet the difference between an invisible ‘push’ from the upper arm, and bowing only from the forearm, is striking. Powering the strokes from the upper arm produces a feeling of exceptional freedom and effortless power.

- As in the lower half, a simple way to get the feel of the upper arm is to use no forearm whatsoever.
- Note the angle at the elbow when playing just above the middle of the bow: probably around 90°. Keep that angle the same – i.e. do not move the forearm, only the upper arm – as you play a few strokes down-bow and up. Naturally the bow will go crooked to the bridge on each stroke but this does not matter.
- Then reduce the backwards-and-forwards movement of the upper arm to an invisible amount and add to it the normal opening-and-closing of the forearm at the elbow.
- Feel the slight, invisible motion of the upper arm sending an impulse up into the forearm, injecting extra power and momentum into the stroke.

42 Etudes ou caprices, Kreutzer  
No. 8



Example



‘lock’ the forearm at the right angle and move the bow with the upper arm only

forearm movement part-powered by an invisible impulse from the upper arm

Violin Concerto no. 3 in G, K216, Mozart  
First movement



Example <sub>b</sub>

Example 5 is played off the string, or partly off, slightly below the middle of the bow. Even if played on the string in the upper half, you can still direct each stroke from the upper arm rather than from the forearm.

- Exaggerate the movement of the upper arm by playing without any forearm movement. Play very slowly, moving the upper arm back on each down-bow, forwards on each up-bow.