
BASICS

Scales and arpeggios 1

When a scale is played very well the three main aspects of playing – pitch, sound and rhythm – are all even. Playing scales greatly improves overall playing because by learning how to play a scale well the evenness of all the playing increases.

Pitch Any particular note in the scale or arpeggio must not be sharper in the first octave, flatter in the second octave, sharper in the third octave, and so on.

The intervals between the notes must be even, e.g. the whole-tone between the first and second notes of the major scale must not be wider or narrower than the whole-tone between the second and third notes.

Sound The sound must be even, so that no note is played louder or softer than another – in particular, before or after a change of string, a change of bow or a change of position.

Rhythm Each degree of the scale must be played with absolute regularity, without the rhythm being disturbed by changes of string, bow or position.

Rhythm and accent practice

These are two of the most essential practice methods to achieve evenness in scales and other passage work. By finding out how to play the rhythms or accents cleanly and easily, every aspect of co-ordination and control is noticeably improved, and often after only the smallest amount of work.

Every different rhythm or accent pattern is useful. Begin with the basic dotted patterns:

Example

Example

Playing scales as music

A better feel comes into the muscles when we play musically and with inspiration, compared to when we play coolly mechanically. Instead of thinking of the notes in isolation, hear a harmony with each note of the scale and play expressively, bringing out each note's musical importance:

Example

BASICS

Sarasate: Zigeunerweisen, op. 20 no. 1



Example

You may hear the natural harmonies and inner tensions of the scale clashing against Sarasate's insistent D-F-B chord:



Other chords may be imagined; but having once thought of the notes with a harmony in mind there is an immediate new feeling of control and ease when playing the passage up to tempo again.

A common approach to technical passages like this is: 'I can't think about the music yet – I'm still trying to play the notes!' The irony is that in the end it is only by forgetting about the notes and the fingers, and by concentrating on *playing the music*, that the technique comes in the first place.

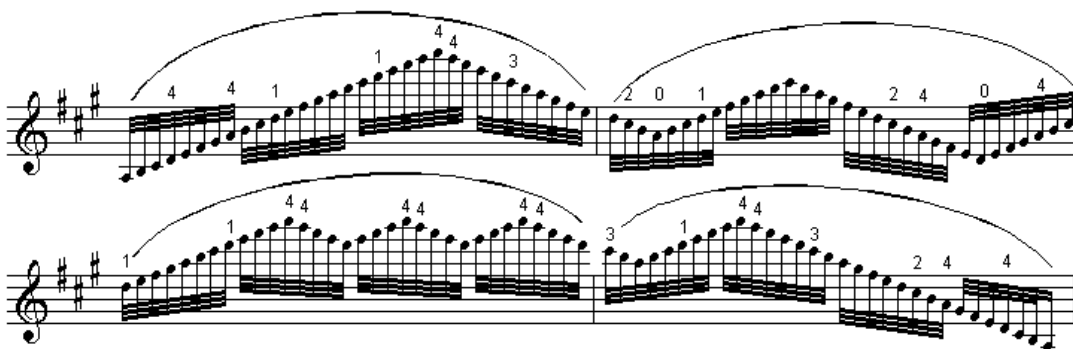
Improvising

An enjoyable way to practise scales or arpeggios is to play the notes in any consecutive order you like, making it up as you go along. Run up and down at a slow, medium or fast tempo. Aim for evenness of pitch, sound and rhythm, and a relaxed and easy feel in the hand.

Vary the dynamics: sometimes getting louder going up and softer coming down, sometimes the other way round.

There are two ways to finger the improvisations:

- 1 Keep strictly to the fingerings that you would use for the normal scale or arpeggio.
- 2 Make the fingerings up as you go along. Do whatever comes naturally, without thinking about your fingers. Listen closely to the sound and concentrate on the expressiveness and evenness of the scale.



Example



Example

Afterwards the normal scale or arpeggio will feel surprisingly much more controlled and secure.