
BASICS

Energy

Increasing or decreasing energy in violin playing was one of Dorothy DeLay's favourite themes. She said that she first began to think about energy when, as a student, she played the Mozart G major Concerto to her teacher:

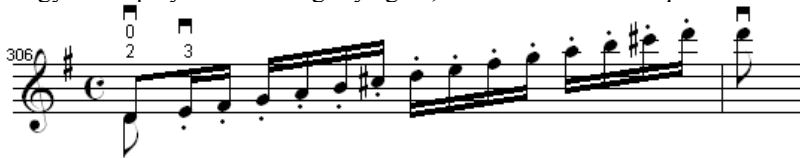
Mozart: Concerto no. 3 in G, K216, *mov. I*, b. 78

Example ①



At this point her teacher stopped her and suggested she play the ascending scale with 'more energy'. She played it again but more loudly. He stopped her again. "No, no, not louder," he said, "just with more energy." She played it more lightly again, but this time with a *spiccato* stroke:

Example ②



He stopped her. "No, no, not *spiccato* – just with more energy." She played it again, but now with a more accented stroke:

Example ③



"No, no, not accented – just with more energy," he said again. So she played it again, this time faster. "No, no," he said, "not faster – just with more energy."

And so it went on. In telling the story, Miss DeLay would be laughing by now. The question is, what gives more energy to the playing, and what gives less energy? The following is a partial list:

More energy

- Faster tempo
- Louder
- Heavier
- Nearer bridge
- Heavier bow weight
- Faster bow speed
- More accented strokes
- Longer strokes
- More hair
- First finger (right hand) closer to thumb
- Right knuckles flatter
- Right hand more leaning on to first finger
- Faster vibrato
- Wider vibrato
- More percussive left fingers
- Faster drop and lift-off
- Sharper sharps, flatter flats
- Faster shifts

Less energy

- Slower tempo
- Softer
- Lighter
- Nearer fingerboard
- Lighter bow weight
- Slower bow speed
- Less accented strokes
- Shorter strokes
- Less hair
- First finger further from thumb
- Knuckles more raised
- Right hand leaning more towards fourth finger
- Slower vibrato
- Narrower vibrato
- Less percussive fingers
- Slower drop and lift-off
- Tempered tuning
- Slower shifts

BASICS

Sometimes the headings sit equally well in either column. It all depends on the music and the context. For example, you could be playing longer strokes, and increase the energy by making them gradually shorter:

Example 4

On the other hand, it could just as easily be that you are playing shorter strokes, and increase the energy by making them gradually longer:

Example 5

PLAYING WITH MORE ACCENT

It is very important not to try to increase energy by using volume alone.

Playing louder works only so far, because although you can immediately gain more energy, and then play still louder and gain even more energy, you very soon reach a ceiling of maximum volume where you simply cannot play any louder. The sound quickly becomes crushed.

When you reach that ceiling, or before getting there, you have to do something else to increase the energy, and one of the very first things to add is accent:

Example 6

Example 7

At the third bar the strokes can begin quite smoothly, but you cannot use increasing bow weight alone to make the crescendo and the climax. The moment you add a 'heavier-lighter' weight pattern to the stroke, instead of playing with equal weight from the beginning of the stroke to the end, and add a 'faster-slower' speed pattern, an enormous amount of new energy comes into the passage. By the time you get to the notes marked '+' the strokes are much more accented, with even more energy coming from making the vibrato more accented as well (fast-slow and wide-narrow patterns), using more bow, nearer the bridge, and so on.

It is common to hear students using all the factors, all at the same time, that give the least energy, i.e. playing a concerto with the bow constantly too near the fingerboard, using little bow, without sufficient accent or emphasis, with slow fingers, playing the piece at a slow tempo, with a slow, wide vibrato, with too-low ♯'s and too-high b's, and so on.

The moment you look at playing from the point of view of energy, it becomes very easy to raise it onto an entirely new level of excitement, interest, and engagement, very quickly.