

# BASICS

## Chords

Three common misconceptions about chord playing are 1) chords must be played near the fingerboard, 2) with a fast bow, and 3) with long strokes.

### Point of contact

Although the strings are flatter nearer the fingerboard, chords do not have to be played there. Thicker, fatter, more powerful chords often need to be played nearer to the bridge. Experiment with different points of contact:

Example 1

Soundpoint 5    Soundpoint 4    Soundpoint 3    Soundpoint 2    Soundpoint 3    Soundpoint 4

Repeat several times

[Soundpoint 5 = near the fingerboard; 4 = between the centre-point and the fingerboard; 3 = centre, between the bridge and the fingerboard; 2 = between the centre-point and the bridge.]

Because the weight of the bow is spread between three strings, you simply need a very large amount of weight when you play a chord on soundpoint 3 or 2.

### Speed of bow

Near the fingerboard, chords can be played with a faster, lighter bow; but as you play nearer and nearer to the bridge, you can play with a slower and more sustained bow. With the right point of contact quite near to the bridge, it is possible to sustain three strings at the same time for several seconds.

In each of the following bars, sustain all three strings together for the full length of the chord:

Example 2

Soundpoint 5    Soundpoint 4    Soundpoint 3    Soundpoint 2

### Length of bow

Although chords sometimes do require a lot of bow, often they can be played with very little bow. You can even play chords with a heavy spiccato stroke at or near the point-of-balance.

In Example 3, one way to approach the chords is to begin slower, to play faster in the middle of the passage, and to slow down at the end. Play the slower chords longer, and the faster chords with a heavy spiccato:

Example 3

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

Long strokes, getting shorter    Heavy spiccato    Long

*mfz*

Fingerings: 3 2 1, 2 1, 2 3 1, 2 3 1, 2 3 1, 0 3 4, 0 3 4, 1 3 4, 1 3 4

Playing the spiccato, use large, slow, heavy curved strokes, aiming for the middle string of each chord.

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## Getting the fingers down in time

One of the things that is often the most tricky about playing a rapid series of chords, is to get all the fingers down on their respective strings and notes at the same time.

Ideally, the fingers are all placed simultaneously. In practice, what often happens is that certain fingers in a chord take longer to get to a particular string than others. This forces the bow to have to wait, and then the tempo and pulse are affected.

Quicken the speed of the fingers by including silent placing exercises in your warm-up routine whenever you are playing anything that has a few awkward chords.

### Silent placing exercise

- Without the bow, practise placing all four fingers together on the strings in a particular formation, and then moving them instantly, and at the same time, to a new formation. Move quickly between one placing and the other.

Example 4

Example beginning with the 'natural' setting of the hand, where the notes seem to lie under the fingers, moving from there to Chord no. 1:

Example 5

- Example beginning with the 'reverse' setting of the hand, where the left forearm has to rotate much further clockwise to help the fingers find their notes, and moving between it and Chord no. 8:

Example 6

This exercise may seem like hard work, but it produces very fast results. After only a little practice you will find patterns soon becoming much easier, even if they seemed impossible the first time you tried them.

Even if they do not soon become easier, the everyday chords that you find in the normal repertoire will feel very much easier after doing these ones.