
BASICS

Bouncing the bow

Many players have a thought at the back of their mind, that playing *on* the string is easy and playing *off* the string is difficult.

This idea may go all the way back to their very first experiences of playing the violin at an elementary level. At that time, playing on the string seems very straightforward:



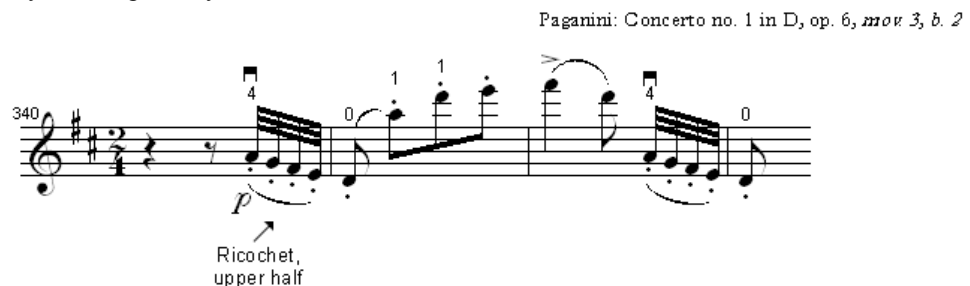
For the beginner, playing the same notes *spiccato* may seem more difficult to control:



Sautillé seems an advanced, difficult stroke:



Ricochet may look impossibly 'advanced':



Yet actually the most important aspect of these bowings is that the bow *wants* to bounce. You can demonstrate this very easily:

Feel the springiness of the wood of the bow (Fig. a), the hair (Fig. b) and the string (Fig. c).

When any of the three are stretched, all that they want to do is to spring back into their state of least tension.

Push the wood of the bow down to touch the hair, and then suddenly let go (Fig. d). The bow does not remain sitting on the string as a dead weight, but springs up out of the string and begins to bounce.

Despite the appearance of virtuosic brilliance, if Paganini had written *legato*, instead of ricochet, the passage would actually have been more 'difficult' – because then you would have to 'do' something with the bow to keep it solidly in the string, instead of letting it 'play itself':

The thing to concentrate on is the speed (length) of bow.



BASICS

The bow hold does not matter

It goes without saying, that changing what you do with the fingers on the bow may affect the *spiccato* stroke in some way or other; but the bow hand and fingers should not be the first thing you think about.

Do you need to be taught how to bounce a ball? Of course not. If you throw a ball at a wall, do you know the angle at which it is going to bounce off the wall? Of course you do.

In the same way, you do not need to be taught how to bounce a bow on the string.

You can prove this very easily by playing *spiccato* while holding the bow in your fist, instead of with a proper bow hold.

- Holding the bow in the middle of your fist (Fig. e), play *spiccato* in various parts of the bow.
- Experiment with longer and shorter strokes; faster and slower; higher and lower bounce; higher and lower in the bow.
- At each place in the bow play a perfectly good, clean *spiccato* simply by moving the bow with your arm and guiding the bouncing of the hair on the string with natural instinct.

Once it is clear that even when holding the bow in your fist you can play a perfect *spiccato*, playing it with a normal bow hold seems very easy.

Experimenting with a 'fist bow hold' is often a solution if a student gets a mental block about playing *spiccato*. If nothing seems to help, and they still find the stroke awkward however they hold or move the bow, using a ridiculous bow hold can solve the problem entirely.

