
BASICS

- Before placing the finger on the string, or moving it across to another string, or whatever the movement of the finger, keep the finger still for as long as possible before moving; then go so fast that there is only a blur as the finger moves.

If you practise like this for only a short while, when you play normally again you will notice a striking difference. Even better, the gain in facility remains in everything else you play.

Metronome exercise for fast drop and lift-off

This exercise makes the fingers drop and lift with ever-faster speed and precision of timing.



- Set the metronome to click in quavers.
- Practise every possible pair of fingers: 01 – 02 – 03 – 04; 12 – 13 – 14; 23 – 24; 34.
- Practise on each string.

Heifetz exercise

Dorothy DeLay used to say that if you were sitting on a tram in San Francisco in the 1960's you might well find yourself sitting opposite somebody carrying a violin case; and if they had a violin case it would be quite likely that they would be sitting there making a curious forwards-and-backwards movement with the fingers of their left hand.

If so, you would know that they were on their way to their violin lesson with Jascha Heifetz, since this is an exercise he would have taught them, and that they were using every available moment to practise and to stay warmed up.

- Begin with the fingers in a neutral, middle position, neither forward or back (Fig. a).
- Then pull the fingers back very suddenly (Fig. b), pause with them in the pulled-back position, and then push them forwards again very suddenly (Fig. c). Pulling back uses all the lift-off muscles; pushing forward uses all the drop muscles.

One situation in which the Heifetz exercise becomes a life-saver, is when you have to perform in a venue which is very cold, such as an insufficiently-heated church in winter or in the open air. However cold your fingers are, thirty seconds of the Heifetz exercise can be enough to make you feel perfectly ready to play. Important points to watch out for:

- Keep the fingers together, more or less touching each other
- Keep them curved throughout.
- Keep the forearm and the back of the hand in a straight line. The hand should not move with the fingers.
- Keep the hand as relaxed as possible throughout. When the fingers are pulled back, the muscles doing the pulling contract. With the muscles in a state of contraction, the hand and fingers will never be able to feel 'relaxed' in the sense of 'floppy'. Neither will they be 'springy'. However, there is an obvious difference between the feeling of the muscles being active, and the feeling of them being tense.



(a) Begin with the fingers in a neutral, middle position, neither forward or back



(b) Pulling back uses all the lift-off muscles



(c) Pushing forwards uses all the drop muscles